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# The effect of daily "sustained silent reading" in improving fluency, word recognition, and reading comprehension skills for mild cognitive impaired students

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THE EFFECT OF DAILY "SUSTAINED SILENT READING" IN IMPROVING  
FLUENCY, WORD RECOGNITION, AND READING COMPREHENSION SKILLS  
FOR MILD COGNITIVE IMPAIRED STUDENTS

by  
Elizabeth Kandabarow

A Thesis

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the  
Master of Arts Degree  
of  
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at  
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## ABSTRACT

Elizabeth Kandabarow

### THE EFFECT OF DAILY "SUSTAINED SILENT READING" IN IMPROVING FLUENCY, WORD RECOGNITION, AND READING COMPREHENSION SKILLS FOR MILD COGNITIVELY IMPAIRED STUDENTS

2002/2003

Dr. Stanley Urban

Master of Arts in Learning Disabilities

This study evaluated the effectiveness of Sustained Silent Reading (SSR) when used daily with Mild Cognitive Impaired students. The purpose of the study was to measure strengths, deficits, and gains in fluency, word recognition, and reading comprehension abilities through pre and post-test procedures. Seven intermediate level students between the reading levels of two and three participated in this study. The experimental group consisted of four students, and the control group consisted of three students. The treatment group participated in Sustained Silent Reading (SSR). Forms A and B of the Jerry John's Basic Reading Inventory were administered to the students. Form B was administered to students before they participated in Sustained Silent Reading (SSR). Form A was administered after they participated in SSR for approximately 15-20 minutes a day, at least four times a week, over a five-month duration. There were no meaningful gains noted in reading ability among students that participated in the SSR program. Post-test results show there were no meaningful differences in achievement between the treatment and comparison group.

MINI-ABSTRACT

Elizabeth Kandabarow

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## CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

### *Background*

Wilder and Gibb (2002) report:

Reading may be the most discussed topic in American education today. The Nation's Report Card on the reading skills of fourth graders for the year 2000 states that 63% of the students read at the basic skills level, and only 32% read at the proficient or expected level (Donahue, Finnegan, Lutkus, Allen, & Campbell, 2001). These students are unlikely to catch up in their skills in the normal flow of elementary school curriculum. The literature reports that first-grade students with reading difficulties will most likely remain poor readers (Torgesen, 1998), and 74% of third graders who are behind in reading still have difficulties in the ninth grade (Lyon, 1995). Of concern to special educators are those children who have disabilities that make learning to read especially difficult. It is estimated that 80% of students with learning disabilities struggle with reading (Lyon, 1995).

Americans place an importance on educating its youth to become productive members of society. Reading is the key to being a productive citizen. Reading is evident within all domains of society such as employment, education, community recreation, etc. Educational institutions place great emphasis on teaching children how to read. Whether the subject is Physical Education, Music, Mathematics, Art, or Science; reading is an integral part of all learning domains. Unfortunately, children who have difficulty reading

will encounter many obstacles as they grow and integrate into society. However, many individuals learn to cope with such difficulties and acclimate themselves to societal expectations.

Many children with cognitive difficulties and additional learning disabilities struggle with the reading process. They may simply give up or develop a fear of striving for success. “Struggling readers have histories of academic failure and, believing they cannot succeed, they avoid engaging in tasks that might improve their skill levels” (Coley & Hoffman, 1990). Therefore, for children with learning disabilities, the reading process must be the least threatening as possible. Beneficial to students with learning disabilities is empowerment in choosing literature at an appropriate level to read on a daily, consistent basis.

#### *Statement of the Problem*

The purpose of this study is to evaluate the effectiveness of Sustained Silent Reading when used daily with Mild Cognitive Impaired students and to measure strengths, deficits, and gains in fluency, word recognition, and reading comprehension abilities.

#### *Research Question*

In order to accomplish the purpose of this study, the following research question will be answered. Research question 1: will a program of Sustained Silent Reading integrated into Language Arts instruction with a group of intermediate level Mild Cognitive Impaired students improve reading fluency? Research question 2: will a program of Sustained Silent Reading integrated into Language Arts instruction with a group of intermediate level Mild Cognitive Impaired students improve word recognition? Research question 3: will a program of Sustained Silent Reading integrated into

Language Arts instruction with a group of intermediate level Mild Cognitive Impaired students improve reading comprehension?

*Definitions*

Sustained Silent Reading: “Occurs in classrooms where children are given time, a wide selection of books, and encouragement to read. The teacher sets aside a period of time each day, usually from fifteen to thirty minutes” (Burns, Roe, & Smith, p. 315, 2002).

Mild Cognitive Impairment: “Corresponds to ‘educable’ and means a level of cognitive development and adaptive behavior in home, school and community settings that are mildly below age expectations with respect to all of the following:

1. The quality and rate of learning;
2. The use of symbols for the interpretation of information and the solution of problems;and
3. Performance on an individually administered test of intelligence that falls within the range of two to three standard deviations below the mean” (New Jersey Administrative Code, Title 6A, Chapter 14, Special Education, June 5, 2000).

Jerry Johns Basic Reading Inventory: A criterion-reference (functional) reading assessment which identifies strengths and deficits in word fluency, sight word recognition, and comprehension abilities.

Independent Reading Level: “The level at which a student reads fluently with excellent comprehension” (Johns, 8<sup>th</sup> ed., p. 7, 2001).

Instructional Reading Level: “ The level at which the student can make maximum progress in reading with teacher guidance” (Johns, 2001).

Frustration Level: “ The level at which the student is unable to pronounce many of the words and/or is unable to comprehend the material satisfactorily” (Johns, 2001).

Individualized Education Plan: A legal document which states the child’s “present levels of educational performance” (Lewis & McLoughlin, p. 44, 2001).

### *Delimitations*

The results of this study should be generalized with caution. The sample selected was small and represent a convenience group that was accessible to the researcher. Also, the length of the training period was limited to five months which may not have been sufficient for this sample to profit maximally from the training. Finally, the students may have improved to some degree, but this would not be reflected in a norm based measure.

## CHAPTER II: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

### *Prevalence and Characteristics*

“Individuals classified as mentally retarded represent 11.4% of the students ages 6-21 served under IDEA” (Mastropieri, Scruggs, 2000, p. 85). The most common features associated with cognitive impairment include slower pace of learning, lack of age-appropriate adaptive behavior and social skills, and below-average language and academic skills. Although individuals with mental retardation have difficulty learning the basic skills of reading, writing, and mathematics, individuals with mild cognitive delays are very capable of learning with appropriate instruction. Modeling skills proves to be an effective instructional technique. Gunning (2000) reports that: “Book selection and the use of decoding, comprehension, study, and writing skills have to be modeled carefully and continually” (p. 469).

### *Sustained Silent Reading*

It is important to utilize and integrate a variety of instructional methods when teaching reading. Especially important for learning disabled students is to enable them to feel successful, independent, and motivated. “Two uses of literature are particularly effective with students who have reading difficulties” (Burns, Roe, Smith, 2002, p. 507), one being Sustained Silent Reading (SSR). Burns, Roe, and Smith (2002) also report: “Sustained Silent Reading (SSR) enables them to choose familiar, predictable, or high-interest books that are easy to read. The opportunity for students to select their material makes SSR motivational for students” (p. 507 & 508).

The entire practice of Sustained Silent Reading (SSR) is based on the belief that motivation, self-selection, interest, modeling, and time spent reading will contribute to student reading achievement.

Sustained Silent Reading (SSR) has been incorporated into reading instruction in United States classrooms for over 25 years. Within this time period research has proven that SSR programs develop better attitudes toward reading, and improve overall reading performance. Gardiner (2001) reports: children “read more books, read faster, develop reading comprehension, and remember more vocabulary” (p. 32).

#### *Key Elements of Successful SSR*

In order for sustained silent reading (SSR) to make a positive impact upon students, a few elements must be incorporated. Chow and Chou (2000) found the following: Teachers have the opportunity to demonstrate their interest in and enjoyment of reading by providing a role model of silent reading. In order for SSR to be successful, the teacher has to read and modeling does not finish at the end of the silent reading period. Campbell suggests that teachers should comment upon, and talk about books they read. Students in class will become eager to do the same. It will take over 4 months for an SSR program to show results. According to Redding, the advantage of using trade books is the wide variety of books available to teachers. The importance of wide variety is to ensure that each student will find a book that will interest him/her. Moreover, trade books use real language; not writing designed to fit a specified vocabulary list. A teacher can build on the students' experience with the classroom library by actively encouraging them to seek books from school and public libraries. If we want our adolescent students to grow to appreciate literature, another first step is

allowing them to exert ownership and choose the literature they will read. Allowing students to select their own reading materials will enhance students' motivation to read. Teachers' enthusiasm or lack of interest in reading is easily communicated to students. Creating a quiet, relaxing and non-evaluative environment is also a key element for successful SSR.

Creating a non-threatening learning environment for learning disabled children is an important aspect of reading instruction. For learning disabled students, the joy of reading for leisure will lessen feelings of failure and inadequacy. Studies find that the more children read for enjoyment, they will read better and read more often. Unfortunately, many mild cognitive impaired students may not achieve reading levels higher than third grade. These students may encounter feelings of inadequacy and insecurity, and experience no motivation to pick up a book and read. Therefore, the entire concept behind Sustained Silent Reading, motivation, decreases negative feelings toward the reading process.“ Research clearly shows that the reading of meaningful, connected text results in improved reading achievement (Anderson, Wilson & Fielding, 1988; Anderson, Hiebert, Scott , & Wilkerson, 1985; Elley & Mangubhai, 1983; Taylor, Frye, & Maruyama, 1990)” ( Houghton Mifflin, 1997, p. 1).

## CHAPTER III: DESIGN OF STUDY

### *Method of Sample Selection*

In September 2002, seven Mild Cognitive Impaired Intermediate school students were selected to participate in a Sustained Silent Reading study for a five-month period. This group was divided into a treatment ( N = 4) and comparison group ( N = 3). The treatment sample consists of four students and the comparison sample consists of three students. The reading level of each child selected is not below level 2. Actual reading levels listed are based on data reviewed from children's Individualized Educational Plans.

The sample selected is based upon research which concludes that Sustained Silent Reading (SSR) is more effective when used with students above a first grade reading level. "SSR can be effective with kindergarten and first graders, but it may consist of mostly looking at books and pretend reading, and it tends to be noisier and of shorter duration" (Burns/Roe/Smith, 2002, p. 315). Therefore, the child's Individualized Educational Plan was reviewed to determine actual reading levels.

#### Treatment Group Reading Level

Students 1E-4E: Level 3

#### Comparison Group Reading Levels

Students 1C & 2C : Level 2

Student number 3C: Level.3

The treatment group will participate in the Sustained Silent Reading process. They will read for approximately 10 - 15 minutes four times a week within a five-month trial period. The comparison group will not participate in the Sustained Silent Reading process.

### *Collection of Data*

Both groups were pre-tested with the Jerry John's Basic Reading Inventory Form B October 2002 to identify strengths and deficits in word fluency, sight word recognition, and comprehension abilities. Students orally read passages, and orally completed word recognition and comprehension sections. Students were timed during oral reading sessions.

### *Research Strategy*

In order to determine the effectiveness of the Sustained Silent Reading (SSR) program, the treatment and comparison group will receive a pre-test using the Jerry John's Basic Reading Inventory Form B. A post-test will be administered after five months of training administered to the treatment and comparison group using the Jerry John's Basic Reading Inventory Form A. Visual inspection of the data will allow conclusions to be drawn regarding relative gains of each group.

## CHAPTER IV: ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION OF DATA

### *Introduction*

In October 2002, a Sustained Silent Reading program which extended for five months was established for middle school students with Mild Cognitive Impairments. This program concluded March 2003. The students' reading levels ranged from level two to level three. The students were given pre and post-tests using the Jerry John's Basic Reading Inventory forms A and B. Form B was used as the pre-test while form A was administered as the post-test. The treatment group participated in the Sustained Silent Reading program.

### *Results*

Table 1 represents data collected from the treatment group.

TABLE 1: Pre-test (Form B) and Post-test (Form A) results of Jerry John's Basic Reading Inventory for treatment group.

Student	Mean Fluency (WPM)	Word Recognition	Comprehension
1 E	Form B: 112 WPM Form A: 72 WPM	<u>Independent Levels:</u> Form B: Primer first second Form A: second third <u>Instructional Levels:</u> Form B: third, fourth Form A: fourth <u>Frustration Level:</u> Form A & B: fifth	Form B: first Form A: fourth Form B: second/ third Form A: fifth
2 E	Form B: 78.5 Form A: 70.5	<u>Independent Level:</u> Form B: primer Form A: first	

Student	Mean Fluency (WPM)	Word Recognition	Comprehension
2E		<u>Instructional Level:</u> Form B: first Form A: second <u>Frustration Level:</u> Form B: third Form A: second	Form A&B: first  Form A&B: second
3E	Form B: 68 WPM Form A: 81 WPM	<u>Independent Levels:</u> Form B: first, second Form A: second, third <u>Instructional Levels:</u> Form A&B: third, fourth, fifth <u>Frustration Level:</u> Form A&B: sixth	Form A&B: second  Form A&B: third, fourth  Form A&B: fifth
4E	Form B: 141 WPM Form A: 110 WPM	<u>Independent Levels:</u> Form B: first, second, third Form A: first, second <u>Instructional Level:</u> Form B: fourth Form A: third <u>Frustration Level:</u> Form B: sixth Form A: fourth	Form A&B: first  Form A&B: second

Table 2 represents data collected from the comparison group.

TABLE 2: Pre-test (Form B) and Post-test (Form A) results of Jerry John's Basic Reading Inventory for comparison group.

Student	Mean Fluency	Word Recognition	Comprehension
1C	Form B: 65.5 WPM Form A: 55 WPM	<u>Independent Levels:</u> Form B: primer Form A: first  <u>Instructional Levels:</u> Form B: first,second third Form A: second <u>Frustration Level:</u> Form B: fourth Form A: third	Form A&B: first   <u>Instructional/ Frustration Level:</u> Form A&B: second
2C	Form B: 71 WPM Form A: 80.6 WPM	<u>Independent Levels:</u> Form B: primer, first Form A: first <u>Frustration Level:</u> Form B: second Form A: third	Form A&B: first   Form A&B: second
3C	Form B: 55.5 WPM Form A: 64 WPM	<u>Independent Level:</u> Form B: second Form A: first <u>Instructional Levels:</u> Form B: first, third Form A: second <u>Frustration Level:</u> Form B: fourth Form A: third	Form A&B: first   Form B: second third Form A: second  Form B: fourth Form A: third

*Summary*

Based on data from the treatment and comparison group, all students revealed inconsistencies in their overall performance with fluency, word recognition, and comprehension skills. The students in the treatment group, those who actually

participated in the Sustained Silent Reading (SSR) program, did not exhibit potential gains across each area assessed. The gains were sporadic in nature. For example, the students may have advanced in their ability to comprehend material, but regressed in their word recognition abilities.

Ironically, those who did not participate in the Sustained Silent Reading (SSR) program, except for student 1C, increased in their fluency skills. As noted in Table 2, fluency skills are presented as a potential area of weakness for the comparison group. All students in the treatment group, except student 3E, regressed in their fluency abilities. With regard to comprehension skills, students 2E, 3E, and 4E showed neither an increase or decrease in their ability. However, student 1E increased in his ability to comprehend material by two reading levels. Comprehension skills remained static among the comparison group with no growth occurring. All students, with the exception of student 4E, advanced one reading level in word recognition skills. Student 4E's performance declined by at least one reading level. Student 3C regressed by one grade level in his word recognition abilities. Student 2C's frustration level increased one grade. Student 1C increased one independent grade level, and decreased one frustration grade level.

Therefore, based on data, results in student performance were very inconsistent throughout each skill area assessed. There were obvious discrepancies in gains and deficits amongst each child. Each child did not achieve consistent gains due to the nature of their disability and constraints in the daily school schedule. The mild cognitive impaired population require slow-paced instruction, repetition, and more time to complete tasks. Unfortunately, due to snow days, half-day sessions, assemblies, vacation

days, and illnesses, each child could not engage in a 15-20 minute reading session four times a week within the five-month trial period.

## CHAPTER V: SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, DISCUSSION

### *Summary:*

This study evaluated the effectiveness of Sustained Silent Reading (SSR) when used daily with Mild Cognitive Impaired students. The purpose of the study was to measure strengths, deficits, and gains in fluency, word recognition, and reading comprehension abilities through pre and post-test procedures. Seven intermediate level students between the reading levels of two and three participated in this study. The treatment group consisted of four students, and the comparison group consisted of three students. The treatment group participated in Sustained Silent Reading. Forms A and B of the Jerry John's Basic Reading Inventory were administered to the students. Form B was administered to students before they participated in Sustained Silent Reading (SSR). Form A was administered after they participated in SSR for approximately 15-20 minutes a day, at least four times a week, over a five-month duration. There were no meaningful gains noted in reading ability among students that participated in the SSR program. Post-test results show there were no meaningful differences in achievement between the treatment and comparison group.

### *Conclusions:*

From this study of Mild Cognitive Impaired students and reading ability, it can be concluded that Sustained Silent Reading training was not effective in increasing fluency, word recognition, and reading comprehension abilities consistently across each skill area. Given pre and post-test results, strengths and weaknesses in reading abilities among the treatment and comparison group were also inconsistent and sporadic in nature. The treatment group decreased in their ability to read words with accurate fluency, and

astoundingly the comparison group increased in this ability. Both the treatment and comparison group fluctuated in their ability to recognize words and comprehend material. Therefore, the hypothesis of this study that Sustained Silent Reading (SSR) may improve fluency, word recognition, and reading comprehension abilities of the Mild Cognitive Impaired students who participated is not accepted since there were no meaningful gains noted.

*Discussion:*

Unfortunately, there were obvious discrepancies in gains and deficits among each child evaluated. Each child did not achieve consistent or meaningful gains across each area assessed due to the nature and severity of their disability. In addition, each child did not excel in each skill area due to constraints within their daily school schedule.

According to Burns, Roe, & Smith (2002), children should engage in Sustained Silent Reading (SSR) for at least “fifteen to thirty minutes” a day. (p. 315) Unfortunately, due to snow days, half day sessions, assemblies, and illness, children were lucky if they were able to read for at least ten minutes a day. It was merely impossible to engage in a 15-20 minute reading session four times a week within the five-month trial period. Given the severity and nature of their disability, these students would have benefited from thirty-minute Sustained Silent Reading sessions.

Student Behavior also contributed to poor reading performance. These students have a bad attitude toward reading because they are functioning on significantly low levels for their age. Therefore, on many occasions students refused to read or were not enthusiastic about reading. Since reading is not a top priority in the students’ home environment, it

was difficult for them to make up lost reading time at home. In addition, parental involvement may have also contributed to better reading performance.

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