Theses and Dissertations

1-12-2018

What happens when multi-disabled students are presented with functional sight words in the real world opposed to the classroom?

Jennifer Nicole Roselli
Rowan University

WHAT HAPPENS WHEN MULTI-DISABLED STUDENTS ARE PRESENTED WITH FUNCTIONAL SIGHT WORDS IN THE REAL WORLD OPPOSED TO THE CLASSROOM?

by

Jennifer Nicole Roselli

A Thesis

Submitted to the
Department of Language, Literacy, and Sociocultural Education
College of Education
In partial fulfillment of the requirement
For the degree of
Master of Arts in Reading Education
at
Rowan University
December 13, 2017

Thesis Chair: Dr. Susan Browne

Acknowledgments

I would like to express my appreciation to my students. These individuals that I get to call my students are more than just that, they are like my family. I could not have done this research without them. They have taught me so much and each day I better myself as a teacher because of them. The world is such a better place with the smiles of each and every one of you. You all make me so proud!

Abstract

Jennifer Nicole Roselli
WHAT HAPPENS WHEN MULTI-DISABLED STUDENTS ARE PRESENTED
WITH FUNCTIONAL SIGHT WORDS IN THE REAL WORLD OPPOSED TO THE
CLASSROOM?
2017-2018
Dr. Susan Browne
Master of Arts in Reading Education

The purpose of this study is to document how students with learning disabilities

use vocabulary outside of the classroom and more specifically the importance of

functional sight word recognition. This study will support how functional reading

instruction can benefit students with learning disabilities by promoting independence. It

will also recognize the importance of choosing instruction to best prepare students for

their futures outside of school.

Table of Contents

Table of Contents (Continued)

List of Figures

List of Tables

Chapter 1

Introduction

As I work with my students during English centers I begin to wonder how many of them fully understand the purpose of word recognition. Working with students who have multiple disabilities can be quite the challenge especially when it comes to reading. Most of my students have severe learning disabilities and speech impediments on top of that. They struggle with comprehension and reading out of a book. I focus on word recognition because it is the most functional way of teaching reading to such struggling readers who are over 18 years old. I find in my day to day instruction that students are often just reading the word with no real connection or purpose for it. From this point I decided that I needed to figure out a more meaningful way to teach word recognition that would give students purpose and prepare them for the real world.

The Edmark Reading Program is a program for all ages that involves repetitive word recognition which is beneficial for students with cognitive disabilities. The reading program offers many different types of series depending on the student's age, needs, and abilities. I needed to use the Edmark curriculum in a way that students would understand it's purpose outside of the classroom. The functional word series has been most beneficial for my students simply because it focuses on common words found in the real world. Last year I worked on work/job words with my students. This was somewhat difficult at times because many of the words in the curriculum were a little too complex for my students and words were not easily found in the community to create connections. This year I decided to use the restaurant/fast food word series because it

pertained more to my students and trips we plan through our Community Based

Instruction (CBI) curriculum.

My hope with using this new word series was that students would be more

motivated and have higher interests in the words and their connections to the real

world. My students work best when given opportunities to make connections and

understand how instruction affects their own lives. With this series students will be able

to interpret sight words that are around them every day and understand their

purpose. Working with students at such a low learning level and who are almost adults,

understanding their community and making connection is one of the more important

lessons to be learned.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this study is to document how students use vocabulary outside of

the classroom and also support the importance of functional sight word recognition for

students with learning disabilities. My students are low functioning learners, so this

study is significant in the fact that it records student progress and gives instruction for

these students a purpose. Students in my classroom are almost adults and will be entering

the real world in two years. This study will support how functional reading instruction

can benefit students with learning disabilities. For students who struggle with reading

and comprehension at the high school level it is important to recognize the type of

instruction that will most benefit them outside of school and create more independence

with their own lives.

School-based literacy or curriculums are not always sufficient when it comes to

students with special needs. When working in a high school and having students that

read at a first grade level it is impossible to use the same types of literacy that is being used at the general education level. Students with learning disabilities should have differentiated instruction to meet their specific needs. "For adults with intellectual disability who might not possess a high level of proficiency in school-based literacy, it is important to develop understandings about their everyday literacy uses for such practices to be recognized as being socially and culturally significant" (Morgan, 2011, p. 112). Teachers in this position need to realize that instruction should focus on students' everyday literacies and not so much on what the curriculum of the school entails. In order for adults with intellectual disabilities to be successful they need to understand how to use literacy in their everyday lives.

Morgan and colleagues (2011) argued that literacy must be broadened when pertaining to students with special needs. "Broadening the conceptualization of literacy for this group may lead to; a better understanding of what constitutes literacy for adults with intellectual disability; a greater recognition of their value as literate members of society; a broader use of descriptive, qualitative methods of literacy assessment; and an informed pedagogy comprising literacy instruction that is meaningful and relevant in the lives of learners with intellectual disability" (Morgan, 2011, p. 112). When looking at the bigger picture the best way to help adults with intellectual disabilities is to concentrate their instruction on how literacy will be used after their schooling. Questions that teachers need to consider are; will my students be attending college? Will my students be able to hold part time jobs? Will my students live home with their parents for the remainder of their lives? All these types of questions are what special education teachers at the secondary level should be thinking about when planning their instruction.

At the secondary level it is extremely important that students with disabilities gain as much independence as possible. When taking into account my own students in my classroom I already know that none of my students will be attending college. There are a few students that will be able to hold part time jobs, as long as their parents are able to provide them with transportation, and there are some students that may continue to live home with their parents and help out around the house. When considering the students in my classroom and where their futures lie I try my best to create instruction that best suits their lives and creates more independence for them. When it comes to literacy my main goal is to keep instruction functional and purposeful. Alberto and colleagues argue that often word selection lacks logic beyond its immediate environment. This means that students are not receiving instruction of sight words that will be useful in their future. When educators are simply using lists of single words to instruct word recognition, there is no connection with the words to either other text or the environment around them (Alberto, 2013, p. 333). Instead of simply going off words in a story I try to base sight word instruction off of words that students will see in their everyday lives. I want my students to be able to leave my classroom and understand the words and literature that is all around them.

This research will help other teachers in my position. It is not always easy teaching students with special needs at the secondary level. The secondary level of schooling and even more the 18-21 program in their school district is their last stop before entering the real world. The last 4-6 years of schooling are significant in the fact that this may be their last few years of learning what they need to know and before being on their own. With this research I hope to prove the importance of considering students'

futures and understanding that literacy should have a functional focus. Students at this level of schooling need purpose to the lessons taught and comprehension of how this instruction will help them in the real world. This study will help to support these ideologies and hopefully improve instruction for all students/adults with intellectual disabilities.

Statement of Research Problem and Question

The problem that will be investigated for this study is how effective functional sight word instruction is inside and outside of the classroom. When students with intellectual disabilities reach this level of education there is a significant amount of panic. Parents and teachers begin to plan where exactly these students will end up after high school. More extensively this project will focus on students' ability to use sight words in a functional way outside of the school setting to promote independence and prepare them for their futures. What happens when multi-disabled students are presented with functional sight words in the real world opposed to the classroom? How can a change of setting affect a student's response? When can one tell whether students are memorizing words or truly know their meaning? How much independence can students gain by preparing in the classroom before going out in the community?

Story of the Question

I work with multiply disabled students in an 18-21 self-contained classroom. My students all range on learning levels of K-1. They are not strong readers and at this point in their lives I have decided to aim my teaching more towards functional sight words that they will need to know for everyday life. This past year I worked on sight words with the Edmark Functional Work/Job series. Some of the words in this curriculum were a little

bit difficult for my students to understand and when considering their futures, the words were sometimes irrelevant. I liked the curriculum and I did feel that my students benefitted from its repetition and resources that went along with each sight word.

I decided that for this school year and with working on my research I was going to use the same curriculum, but this time the restaurant/fast food word series. Through our program students go on community outings at least 2-3 times a month. With these outings we try to take students to restaurants or fast food places whenever we can to create more independence for students. I began to think about the curriculum and how the words would affect students during CBI (community based instruction) trips. The restaurant/fast food words would be a lot more relevant for students to learn over the work/job words. I felt that with the research I needed to conduct, the new word series, and CBI trips that I would really be able to reflect on my own instruction and find out whether this instruction is truly working in a functional way.

It was easy enough to see that students knew the words from the previous Edmark job/work word series, however, I do not believe that they would leave the classroom and understand where some of those words would be found at in the real world. I began to think about the importance of functional sight words and how I wanted to understand whether students would recognize the words outside of the classroom too. I decided that with this research I wanted to document all that students learned within the classroom and how it affected them on a CBI trip. Students are often so used to an adult ordering for them or helping them read a menu. The research I am conducting will help me to understand whether students comprehend the purpose for functional literacy and can use it outside of the classroom.

Organization of the Paper

The rest of this paper highlights the qualitative exploration of my research question. Chapter two will review and examine current and historical research that has been concluded on sight word recognition for students with special needs, the importance of authentic experiences, and preparing students for the real world. Chapter three is an explanation of the participants, location of study, research design, and all procedures that will be followed throughout the study. Chapter four will review and analyze the final data sources used throughout the study. Chapter five will conclude the entire study by reporting summary of findings, implications for the study, and finally limitations to the study.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

"For adults with intellectual disability who might not possess a high level of proficiency in school-based literacy, it is important to develop understandings about their everyday literacy uses to be recognized as being socially and culturally significant" (Morgan, 2011, p. 112). This quote from Morgan and Moni's research, *Broadening Conceptualization of Literacy in the Lives of Adults with Intellectual Disability,* reminds me a great deal of the students I work with. Literacy does not come easy for students or adults with intellectual disabilities. When they enter the age of high school it is time to start thinking realistically in terms to their disabilities and what they will need to know in the real world. These are the thoughts and hardships I have come to that have led me to my research topic: What happens when multi-disabled students are presented with functional sight words in the real world opposed to the classroom? How can a change of setting affect a student's response? When can one tell whether students are memorizing words or truly know their meaning? How much independence can students gain by preparing in the classroom before going out in the community?

Literacy Instruction to Support Adults with Special Needs

When beginning my research, I found that there were several different studies conducted in regards to teaching literacy to special needs students. Though, I did not find research quite as similar to my own, I did find studies that correlated with literacy instruction for students with disabilities. Most often teachers expect that adolescents should know how to read; however, this is not always the case with students who have severe disabilities.

According to Sanzo 2011, students should have multisensory activities when it comes to learning literacy (Sanzo, 2011, p. 4). Sanzo's research found that this type of literacy was not being used in the specific district that was being observed, which greatly affected adolescents with special needs. Students were entering secondary settings without the basic skills needed to be able to read. A survey was created by the district reading specialist to find out what types of reading programs were used for special education students throughout the entire district. Teachers, assistant principals, and principals were asked to take the survey.

She found through their responses that there was much confusion surrounding what special education remedial programs were promoted within the district (Sanzo, 2011). Discrepancies found between all parties were that they did not know how programs should be enacted, what specific difference existed between programs, what differences exist between programs that *teach* reading and *support* or supplement good reading instruction, what the differences are between reading *settings* and reading *programs*, what the differences are between the *content* of a reading programs and the *delivery*, and what a general definition of remedial reading might be (Sanzo, 2011). Students with learning disabilities need consistency and differentiated instruction to meet their needs. When curriculums and reading programs are inconsistent it is difficult for struggling readers to reach their full potential, especially when they are not receiving the support they need from early ages.

More often than not special education students do not receive the early intervention needed which then affects their ability to read all the way up to their secondary level of schooling. When students do not receive the foundational skills

needed for literacy, but also have learning disabilities it is difficult for them to reach their appropriate grade level instruction (Bhat, 2003). According to Bhat 2003 "because phonological awareness has a strong correlation with reading success, it seems evident that deficits in phonological awareness would be linked to reading problems" (Bhat, 2003, p. 73). This study was conducted to determine if students with learning disabilities, identified as having phonological awareness deficits, could improve phonological awareness skills after instruction, and if these skills could impact word recognition skills (Bhat, 2003). This study correlates with my own students in my research as they also have learning disabilities along with phonological awareness deficits.

There were forty students involved in this study who were split into two different groups, but both groups received the same type of phonological awareness instruction. The instructional piece of this study was provided on a one-on-one basis for students in each group. The instruction took place over a span of four weeks, three days per week, and two lessons each day. Instructors used direct instruction procedures, for each skill the instructor would model the correct response and provide feedback as students practice the skill (Bhat, 2003). Results found that this instruction did improve phonological awareness skills for both groups of students. When students were given the post tests they scored higher in phonological awareness skills than they had in the pre-test. However, there was not an improvement on word recognition skills from the pre to posttest. These significant improvements gave proof that more explicit and one to one type instruction can benefit students with learning disabilities and their phonological awareness skills. My students are very similar to the ones in this study. Most of them struggle with phonological awareness skills affecting their ability to read. Explicit, small

group instruction is really where I see the most improvements with my own students' reading skills.

Incorporating technology into literacy can be beneficial in literacy instruction for special needs students, especially those that vary in learning levels. Kennedy and Deshler 2010 were two researchers looking to find out more about incorporating technology into literacy instruction for students with learning disabilities (LD) of all ages. Throughout their research in Literacy Instruction, Kennedy and Deshler felt that teachers needed guidelines of how technology could be incorporated in their literacy instruction. Kennedy and Deshler researched different types of frameworks that would assist teachers in finding the most useful and appropriate technology that could be incorporated into literacy instruction. One example of a framework they believed in was the "TECH" framework designed by King-Sears and Evmenova (2007). The acronym TECH derives from the following explanation; "This frameworks focus was: Target the students' needs and the learning outcomes; Examine the technology choices, then decide what to use; Create opportunities to integrate technology with other instructional activities; and Handle the implementation, and monitor the impact on the students' learning" (Kennedy & Deshler, 2010, p. 291).

This research proved that when technology is chosen with a focus it can have great benefits to student learning especially those with learning disabilities. When technology is integrated into a classroom it needs to have a purpose and students have to understand that purpose. Kennedy and Deshler have concluded their own research, but continue to have their own questions and hope for more research related to multimedia literacy learning for students with learning disabilities (Kennedy & Deshler, 2010).

Differentiated Functional Literacy Instruction

Students with learning disabilities are often categorized as non-readers. Paul A. Alberto and his colleagues; Laura D. Fredrick, Dawn H. Davis, and Rebecca E. Waugh researched the role of sight word literacy and the functionality it provides for students with learning disabilities. Alberto and colleagues decided to conduct this study to find out how relevant sight word literacy is for students with disabilities and best ways of practice (Alberto, 2013). Alberto and colleagues argue that often word selection lacks logic beyond its immediate environment. This means that students are not receiving instruction of sight words that will be useful in their future. When educators are simply using lists of single words to instruct word recognition, there is no connection with the words to either other text or the environment around them (Alberto, 2013).

Students need to understand the purpose of why they are learning the words that are being taught. If connections are not being made than it is pointless for students to continue memorizing and reading simple sight words (Alberto, 2013). "The data presented in this study substantiate the effectiveness of the Sight-Word Component of the Integrated Learning Curriculum (ILC) in teaching students with Moderate to Severe Intellectual Disabilities (MSID) to read individual words and connected text phrases and to follow directions from written text. This program differentiates itself from other basal reading programs in that students are learning to read text and complete a task. The focus of this program on reading and completing related tasks provides a true functional outcome of literacy for this population" (Alberto, 2013, p. 349). Giving students opportunities to work with sight words in a variety of ways helps them to fully understand the word, its purpose, and its meaning.

In a study conducted by Laura D. Fredrick along with colleagues; Paul A.

Alberto, Dawn H. Davis, and Rebecca E. Waugh, researched the benefits of teaching

phonics to students with moderate intellectual disabilities. "For students with Moderate

Intellectual Disabilities (MoID), generalizable word analysis skills also can be considered

a functional form of literacy because mastery of word-analysis skills allows greater

access to community resources thereby increasing functional independence" (Fredrick,

2013, p. 49). Authors of this research recognized the importance of functionality in terms

of word analysis skills for students with MoID. Their study was conducted with 5

students with MoID. All students were in self-contained classrooms and were given two

levels of instruction; first Initial Phonics and then Functional Phonics (Fredrick, 2013).

The results of this study found that the direct instruction and repetition of skills

improved each participant's word analysis skills. "Historically teachers may have "given

up" before students received sufficient systematic repetition to facilitate learning, leading

to the generally accepted assumption that students with MoID cannot learn phonics"

(Fredrick, 2013, p. 61). When students with special needs are given systematic explicit

instruction that is tiered to their level of knowledge; they have the opportunity to better

understand what is being asked of them. Students with MoID need to understand the

purpose of word analysis skills and how they are needed in the real world. This helps

students to better generalize and understand the meaning of word analysis skills which in

turn promotes independence for all students with special needs.

Though much research on literacy for students with learning disabilities has

focused on phonological awareness and word recognition; Jill H. Allor along with

colleagues Patricia G. Mathes, Kyle J. Roberts, Francesca G. Jones, & Tammi M.

Champlin researched how those skills could create better reading comprehension for students with moderate intellectual disabilities (Allor, 2010). The purpose of their study was to analyze the effectiveness of a carefully crafted, comprehensive reading intervention built on behavioral principles for students with moderate intellectual disabilities (Allor, 2010). This study examined five students with intellectual disabilities over a span of one and a half years. Results from this research found that reading intervention did in fact improve overall literacy skills for students with intellectual disabilities (Allor, 2010). Allor and colleagues concluded that;

> "Students with moderate intellectual disabilities can learn basic reading skills given consistent, explicit, and comprehensive reading instruction over a long period of time. Success requires that we apply key instructional features that have been proven effective with struggling readers, as well as techniques known to be effective with students with intellectual disabilities" (Allor, 2010, p. 19).

Students with intellectual disabilities, no matter what instructional level, can improve literacy skills when given explicit, comprehensive reading instruction over a long period of time. When instruction is explicit and comprehensive over a students' entire educational career, those skills will carry over into adulthood. Individuals with intellectual disabilities need consistence in order to create more independence and high levels of literacy skills. When given the correct type of instruction these students can do a lot more than simply recognize words.

Authentic Learning Experiences

Once students with intellectual disabilities reach the high school level teachers must take into consideration what their lives may look like after high school. Most

students will end up with part time jobs or live in community homes where they will need to develop more independence overall. At the high school level and up until students turn 21 they receive Community Based Instruction (CBI) services within their schooling. The purpose of these services or courses are to give students opportunities to explore the world outside of school and receive the training they will need for their future. CBI is an important component of transition planning. Dr. Russell Dubberly researched how Community-Based Instruction effect transition plans for students with Intellectual Disabilities. Transition plans are created for students with disabilities who are aging out of high school and in need of a plan outside of school. These plans can relate to vocations, independent living, or even community preparation (Dubberly, 2012).

Dubberly's study was based on a student-focused questionnaire to gain understanding of high school students with intellectual disabilities who participate in CBI (Dubberly, 2012). Dubberly found that students were positive about their current CBI experiences. Students that Dubberly surveyed were ages 16-22. He asked them 5 different research questions pertaining to CBI. Through student responses Dubberly found that students were satisfied with their CBI program in general. Students also viewed CBI as an activity which is highly correlated with their self-esteem and ability to demonstrate self-determination (Dubberly, 2012). They agreed that CBI builds on their independent functioning and social skills. Overall, students seemed happy with their program and felt that they were receiving the help they needed to be independent and dependable adults. Often students with intellectual disabilities want to feel that they have a purpose. They like to feel included and as close to normalcy as possible. Preparing

these students for life after high school is something that really benefits them most. They get the most out of instruction when it focuses on the functional skills they truly need.

According to Michelle F. Morgan and colleagues; Monica Cuskelly, and Karen B. Moni."For adults with intellectual disability who might not possess a high level of proficiency in school-based literacy, it is important to develop understandings about their everyday literacy uses for such practices to be recognized as being socially and culturally significant" (Morgan, 2011, p. 112). Morgan and colleagues wrote this paper in an argument to broaden conceptualization of literacy for adults with intellectual disabilities. Their argument was that school-based conceptualizations of literacy and proficiency are often determined through grade level standardized testing (Morgan, 2011). This type of school-based literacy is not always beneficial to students with intellectual disabilities.

Their argument of literacy as it pertains to students with intellectual disabilities was described as:

> "Broadening the conceptualization of literacy for this group may lead to; a better understanding of what constitutes literacy for adults with intellectual disability; a greater recognition of their value as literate members of society; a broader use of descriptive, qualitative methods of literacy assessment; and an informed pedagogy comprising literacy instruction that is meaningful and relevant in the lives of learners with intellectual disability" (Morgan, 2011, p. 112).

It is important that research is conducted to find out the everyday literacy of adults with intellectual disabilities. Students with intellectual disabilities are often clumped into learning school-based literacy that is used by the school

district. Standardized, baseline tests are not sufficient when it comes to students with intellectual disabilities (Morgan, 2011). When students with intellectual disabilities are identified by their scores or academic performances in school-based literacy they can be easily categorized as illiterate compared to other students of their age. "It is important to explore the everyday literacy of individual adults with intellectual disability to document and understand what constitutes literacy for them in their worlds while also identifying their literacy strengths and identities" (Morgan, 2011, p.118).

In order for students with intellectual disabilities to be seen as literate citizens their everyday life has to be taken into consideration. Students and adults with intellectual disabilities need to experience authentic literacy instruction to understand the purpose and meaning to literacy as it pertain to themselves. When literacy is taught in an individualized manner according to the purpose of that person and their disability it becomes more meaningful in their adult lives.

Conclusion

After looking over all of this research collectively, I have found some really beneficial connections to my own research project. Working with students who have intellectual disabilities and are at the high school level there are certain components to instruction that must be addressed. The level and type of literacy that is relevant to students with disabilities at the high school level is one of the components. The second component is looking at literacy in a functional way in order to build independence. Lastly, all instruction even literacy needs to be addressed in a functional way, so that students can be more independent outside of school. All of these components and the research discussed in this chapter relate to my own students and the

research I am currently conducting. My hope is that my own study will add to the

research I have already found on the topic and that I can better understand techniques and

instruction that best benefits my own students.

Chapter 3

Context

Community

This study took place in East Mulligan High School is located in South Jersey. East Mulligan is a rural area with much farm land. At the 2015 United States Census, there were 4, 377 residents living in East Mulligan. The racial makeup of this town is as follows; 84.1% White, 7.4% Black, 4.1% Hispanic, 3.7% Asian, and .7% Multiracial. The median household income was $101, 469 with 1,559 households in the area. Poverty rate in East Mulligan was 4.41%. East Mulligan was and still is known to be a predominately White area of middle to upper working class.

School

The study site serves 1,632 students, 49% female and 51% male. Of this population 86.8% of students are White, 3.4% Hispanic, 3.5% Asian, 5.1% Black, and 1.1% Multiracial. There are 109 full-time teachers at East Mulligan and student-teacher ratio per classroom is 15:1. The average graduation rate at East Mulligan High School from 2011-2015 was 95% of students. Student performance and achievement rates at East Mulligan are significantly high for the state of New Jersey. Students from East Mulligan receive an average score of 1042 on SATs which is significantly high.

14% of students at East Mulligan are identified as having Learning Disabilities. East Mulligan High School offers resource, inclusion, and self-contained classes for special needs students. The high school alone has 4 self-contained classes, 2 for students in grades 9-11 and 2 for students in the 18-21 program. Students are separated by classes according to their learning levels and abilities, each program has a

higher or lower level class. Students in these classes work on both typical subject areas as well as functional skills such as independent living and work readiness. Once students enter the 18-21 program much of the academic become career and independence oriented.

Classroom

Students participating in this study are in an 18-21 multiply disabled self-contained classroom. This classroom consists of 8 students, 1 teacher, 1 classroom aide, and 1 personal aide. Classes taught in this classroom are; Independent Living, English, Math, Career Development, Work Readiness, and Community Based Instruction. The purpose of this program is to educate students and create opportunities of independence and employability. Students in the classroom work on functional skills in both Math and English. They have jobs around the school such as; wiping down tables in the cafeteria, working in the school library, and shredding documents in the office. The purpose of these jobs are to create independence and good work ethic.

All activities and assessments performed in this classroom are documented through observations, checklists, and student progress tracking. It is the teacher and the aide's responsibility to keep track of each student's ability to complete given tasks or assignments. Progress is tracked through these methods, so that independence can be tracked and students show the most grow possible at their age and with their learning disabilities.

Students

Students within this classroom are all classified as having multiple disabilities. Students range from ages 17-20 and at learning levels of Kindergarten to 2nd

grade. Most students in this class have very little independence when it comes to completing classwork or activities. The classroom follows a prompt hierarchy in which the teacher and assistants come up with highest to lowest ways of prompting students when it comes to classwork. The goal of this hierarchy is to create as much independence as possible for students.

There are 5 students participating in this study all identified by pseudonyms; Lauren, Sarah, Rob, Tom, and Steve. All students have been in self-contained classes throughout their entire education. Students receive speech therapy both in class and through pull out sessions. All 5 students are pleasant young adults with very few behaviors. They love to please and always put forth their best efforts.

Lauren is 17 years old and classified as multiply disabled. Lauren has just recently entered the 18-21 program. She is a hard worker and always looks to please her teachers. Lauren does best when working in small groups with more one to one attention. Lauren's biggest weakness in the classroom is her ability to read and recognize sight words. Lauren disability hinders her progress of identifying new words. She often needs to be reminded to slow down and sound out each letter. Besides word recognition Lauren benefits from phonemic awareness instruction during English centers. Lauren's goal is to recognize at least 3 high frequency functional words independently. Though she continues to need a lot of prompting, repetition and explicit instruction seems to benefit her.

Sarah is 18 years old and classified as multiply disabled. This is Sarah's second year in the 18-21 program. Sarah likes to read and listen to stories, however, her comprehension is a weakness. Sarah's strengths are her phonemic awareness; she can

sound out letters in unknown words to figure out a word. However, Sarah sometimes will identify the word and not understand what the meaning of the word is. Pictures and prompting best benefit Sarah when learning new functional words. She does best when understanding the purpose for the word and how it would be seen in the real world.

Rob is 19 years old and this is his third year in the 18-21 program. Rob has come a long way with his ability to read and recognize new words. Rob has Down Syndrome along with learning disabilities. Rob is a hard worker and often gets upset when he gets an answer incorrect. When it comes to functional word recognition Rob does well identifying new words and using his phonemic awareness skills to figure out unknown words. The repetition of the Edmark word series helps Rob to memorize and remember new words learned. Though Rob is able to recognize words fairly easily, he does struggle to pick them out on a menu or a page with many other words. This is a skill he needs more prompting and practice with. Rob does best in a small group setting and when given a lot of positive reinforcement.

Tom is also 19 years old and has Down Syndrome. This is Tom's second year in the 18-21 program. Along with Down Syndrome Tom has learning disabilities and at times can be resistant to complete his work. Tom will refuse to complete his reading work, but does best when given options of ways to complete his work. With the Edmark word series Tom does enjoy identifying the restaurant words and finding pictures to go along with the words. Tom loves technology, so incorporating pictures and power points keep him motivated to finish his work. Word recognition in itself can be difficult for Tom. He often needs assistance when learning a new word, however, he does well with

memorizing the word when it is encountered next. Tom does best when working in small groups and receiving one to one attention from a teacher.

Steve is also 19 years old and classified with Down Syndrome and other learning disabilities. Steve is a hard worker and always puts forth his best efforts. However, during English classes Steve can sometimes have trouble concentrating or can become tired while working in centers. Steve needs a lot of prompting to stay on task and complete his work. He loves technology and working on the computer to look up pictures for words, which is a good way of keeping Steve motivated. When it comes to speech Steve has an articulatory impairment and decreased intelligibility, which leads to communication breakdown the classroom. At times Steve will read words accurately, however, his pronunciation of the word can sound foreign to a new listener. Repetition and constant prompting are strategies that best assist Steve in reading and word recognition.

Research Design/Methodology

Qualitative teacher research is the design in which this study is being conducted. According to Cochran and Lytle (2009) "The unique feature of the questions that prompt practitioners' inquiry is that they emanate from neither theory nor practice alone but from critical reflection on the intersections of the two" (pg. 42). Through my own reflections of my instruction as a teacher some of my own questions arose. I began to wonder "How well do my students really understand these sight words?" "Am I giving them enough purpose and meaning in my lessons so that the sight words will be used functionally outside of school?" These are the types of questions that began to shape my research and planning. The purpose of teacher research is to take what we have going on

in our everyday classrooms and better it through the qualitative research we conduct. My

hope is that through this inquiry and teacher research that my questions are answered and

I will be able to better myself as a professional.

Procedure of Study

This study is qualitative teacher research. The purpose of this research is to

analyze what happens when students encounter learned functional sight words outside of

the classroom. This is the second year that I have worked on functional sight words with

my students. My question occurred to me when reflecting on my teaching and student

responses. I wanted to know how much students were memorizing sight words over

actually comprehending the word and its meaning. I realized that in order for functional

words to have any function outside of the classroom, I needed to make sure that students

fully understood the purpose of the word and how it would be used or found outside of

the classroom.

To begin my teacher research, I created a teacher research journal where I

recorded our day to day lessons and student responses during English centers. I set up

my English centers similar to previous years, except this year I kept better data for

classroom observations. In everyday English centers students were split into 3 pairs

according to their learning abilities. Each pair traveled through three different stations,

10 minutes at each station. All stations serve a different purpose, but reinforce the

Edmark Functional Word Series Reading Program. This program is a repetitive word

recognition program that is used to teach the word first and then reinforce it through

various activities in centers. At one station students would learn each word and practice

word identification using the Edmark word recognition component, which was then

documented using student progress sheets for each new word. The next station was where students practiced writing the words or using a flashcard app to practice associating the word with its picture. The last station was where students would reinforce word recognition with practice sheets designed by Edmark or work on their cumulative power points that were made up of the word, picture, and sentence for each function sight word. Activities in each station varied depending on the day, but students knew the daily schedule and were always prepared for the activities given in each station. As a whole these activities worked together to help students gain a better understanding of functional vocabulary through multiple types of literacy.

Data Sources

I used several different sources of data for this study. Because students lack independence when completing their own work, I used teacher observation for much of my data. My data sources were as follows; student progress sheets, picture to word assessments, posttests, completed student worksheets, task analysis sheets, and video recordings. The student progress sheets were completed by myself each day during English centers. I used these sheets to record the date each new word was introduced and any word that students missed during word recognition. The picture to word assessments were used at the end of each lesson, which is ten words. These assessments were used to assess student ability to match the word with appropriate picture. I recorded their responses on the assessments to document their progress.

The posttests were also given at the end of each Edmark lesson. The posttest was a simple list of the ten words learned throughout the lesson, plus words learned in previous lessons. Students had to recognize each word on their own without any help. I

dated and recorded all responses on each student's record sheets. Edmark worksheets that were completed during English centers were also collected and stored in student portfolios to be analyzed for student progress. Lastly, the task analysis sheets and video recordings were used to assess student independence outside of the classroom. When entering a restaurant, the student was graded on a prompt hierarchy using the task analysis. The sheets were utilized to assess how independent students were with identifying functional words on a menu or in the restaurant. The video recordings were used to analyze observations after the restaurant outing. All data sources that were collected were combined into student portfolios which were then analyzed at the end of the study.

Data Analysis

The data that was collected over the course of this study was used to draw conclusions on how well students can connect function words from the classroom to the outside world. The various types of assessments used helped me to understand each student's level of comprehension when it came to functional sight words. I used all types of assessment for to analyze each student's ability to recognize words automatically, associate them with pictures, and their ability to describe each word. I also took the time to review and analyze my teacher research journal. This helped to recognize which lessons students struggled with which created an opportunity to reflect on my own effectiveness when working with students. The video recordings and task analysis sheets were analyzed to assess the level of independence each student was at when navigating a menu and order foods that were taught in class. As a whole all data sources were analyzed with also consideration to each student's needs and abilities. When looking

over the data I made sure to recognize each student's disabilities and how that affected the outcomes. There were enough data sources so that each student could improve in at least one area during the entire study.

Chapter 4

Introduction

Chapter four presents an analysis of data in response to the research questions that asked: What happens when multi-disabled students are presented with functional sight words in the real world opposed to the classroom? How can a change of setting affect a student's response? When can one tell whether students are memorizing words or truly know their meaning? How much independence can students gain by preparing in the classroom before going out in the community? Over the course of ten weeks' data was collected both in the classroom and during restaurant outings.

The data consists of three primary themes that include; word recognition in the classroom, connections between pictures and words, and finally independence in the community. These themes documented students' knowledge of sight words in and outside of the classroom. There were three types of data collected for each of the five students participating in this study. Two of the data sources included posttests in word recognition and matching sight words to their appropriate pictures to assess word analysis skills and making further meaning of the word by connecting it to a picture. The last data source involved task analysis forms that were used to assess the independence of students finding sight words at a restaurant. The five participants in this study are as follows:

Table 1

Descriptions of Students

Student	Age	Learning Level	Disabilities
Lauren	18	K	Autism

Table 1 (continued)

Student	Age	Learning Level	Disabilities
Sarah	18	1	Autism
Rob	19	1	Down Syndrome
Tom	19	K	Down Syndrome
Steve	19	1	Down Syndrome

Word Recognition in the Classroom

Throughout the course of ten weeks five students worked daily on word recognition skills in the Edmark Functional Word Series Restaurant/Fast Food program. Lessons were conducted each day during English centers. These centers involved students learning the word through Edmark's word recognition lessons. Students then reinforced skills by practicing flashcards with pictures and creating power points with words and pictures in a second center. The third center involved students writing the words through word work activities such as rainbow words, waterfall words, and creating sentences. The three centers took place each day, students would learn 1-2 words a day and continue to practice these words throughout the month until given the post test. Post tests were given at the end of each month. Each test involved ten new words that were taught throughout the month. Throughout this study, students participated in three posttests, as the posttests progressed all words were added. On the first posttest there were ten words to recognize, on the second test there were twenty words to recognize, and on the third test there were thirty words to recognize.

Below is a table of words taught during each month before a post test was given:

Table 2

Sight words for each month

September	October	November
Hamburger	Fish	Tomato
French Fries	Chicken	Onion
Coke	Nuggets	Relish
Onion Rings	Bacon	Hot Dog
Milkshake	Cheese	Bun
Chocolate	Mustard	Chili Dog
Vanilla	Pickles	Submarine
Strawberry	Ketchup	Ham
Sandwich	Mayonnaise	Tuna
Burger	Lettuce	Turkey

Students were given each posttest individually by reading a list of words with only one word exposed at a time. Post test results for each student are as follows:
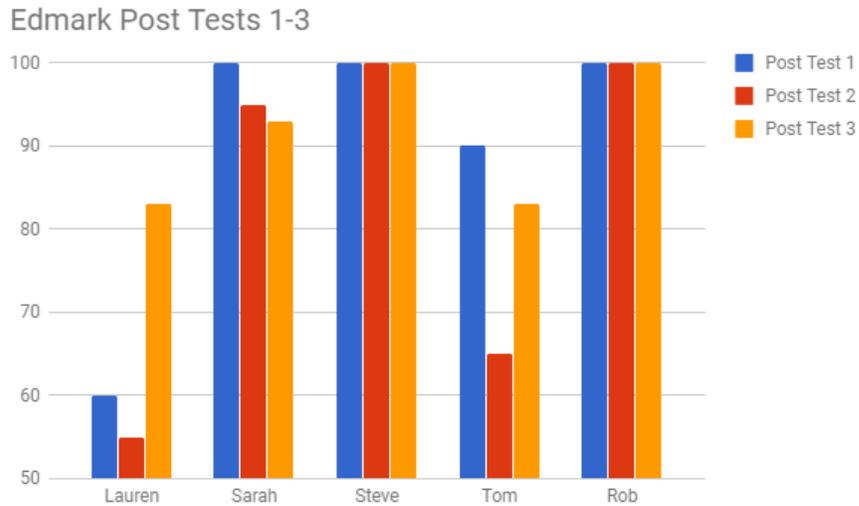
Figure 1. Post test results for each student.

When reviewing results, there was significant variation in the results. Post Test 1 took place at the end of September, words that were assessed are listed in Table 2. There were a total of ten words that students had to read one by one. Lauren struggled greatly with phonemic skills when it came to recognizing and attempting to decode words in the list. For example, she would remember the words from memory but when reading the word "coke" she would read it as "chocolate". Chocolate was another word in the list, but she was not using decoding skills to sound out the word appropriately. Lauren struggled with this concept on most of the words which led to her score of 60%.

After this posttest, instruction for Lauren concentrated on the phonemes of words and recognizing their sounds when segmented. This instruction was conducted during centers, Lauren would have to take her time and break each word down through modeling done by either an aide or myself.

Sarah, Steve, and Rob all scored 100% on Post Test 1. During this posttest all three students were able to read all ten of the words automatically without any type of prompting. These three students have the strongest decoding skills out of all five participants. After this posttest these students continued to learn the next set of words and were given more independent practice. Independent practice involved applying the words to sentences and creating more elaborate PowerPoint pages with sight words, explanations, and pictures; so that students understood a deeper meaning to the word than simply recognizing it.

Tom scored 90% on the first post test. The only word Tom struggled to identify was "onion rings". All other words on the list were read independently, but Tom was not very motivated throughout the assessment. Further instruction for Tom was planned similarly to his classmates. Tom is very fond of working on the computer, so instruction after this posttest incorporated some more computer work with the words learned. This was a way to help Tom become more familiar with words while also motivating him to finish his work.

Posttest 2 took place at the end of October. This test involved the ten words from September and new words of October. Altogether students had to identify a list of twenty words. The increase of words affected some students more than it did others. Steve and Rob scored 100% on this second assessment and were able to read all twenty words

automatically. The increase in words did not affect their ability to recognize both sight

words from previous assessment and new ones from the month of instruction. When

comparing their two scores thus far I really began to notice that even though Steve and

Rob had strong decoding skills, their ability to recall past lessons was also evident. After

this second posttest I continued the same instruction with Steve and Rob. They continued

to apply words to sentences and computer presentations. To continue their instruction, I

also had them begin to look at menus within the classroom and identify words through

the menus instead of strictly through the Edmark curriculum. Because Steve and Rob

had such strong recognition skills in both assessments this instruction was meant to

further their knowledge of sight words and understand the many ways they can be

implemented into activities both inside and outside of the classroom.

Lauren, Sarah, and Tom were affected by the increase of words in the second

posttest compared to the first post test. Each student was affected differently depending

on their own abilities. Lauren seemed to remember more of the recent words that were

taught that month. She was not able to identify any of the words from September that

were given in the first post test. Words she did read correctly during this test were

"nuggets", "bacon", and "chicken". Previous to this assessment we focused so much on

words of October, that Lauren had forgotten words that were taught in September. After

these results more emphasis was given on all words that had been taught those far. All

twenty words were worked into her word work, flash card practice, and writing activities

throughout centers. The purpose these activities were to make Lauren more familiar with

words, even ones that we were not learning at the time.

Sarah missed two words on the second posttest when she had scored 100% on the first posttest. Unlike Lauren, Sarah had difficulty with two of the new words introduced "lettuce" and "mayonnaise". I noticed with these words that Sarah struggled to pronounce them, which affected her recognition of them. Instruction after this assessment involved Sarah taking more time to segment and sound out words. These are skills that Sarah has, but needs the reminders and practice through centers to continue decoding more independently. Tom had a similar reaction to posttest 2 as Lauren. He did well on the new words, but struggled to recognize words from the first post test. Tom also started to become frustrated about half way through the assessment, because he did not feel like reading all of the words. Between not enough practice with words from September and his frustration level, Tom's score decreased greatly. This assessment proved that Tom does not do well when given so many words at once. Instruction after this assessment involved reintroducing those struggle words such as "hamburger", "milkshake", and "french fries" but giving Tom two words at a time to work on throughout each center. This would help Tom to feel less overwhelmed and promote a deeper understanding of all words taught.

Post Test 3 was a difficult one because of the amount of words being recognized. Thirty words were a lot to read all at once. Lauren made the most improvement on this assessment than any other. She only missed five words out of all thirty; milkshake, burger, chicken, relish, and bun. Throughout the assessment she was recognizing some words that gave her difficulty in the beginning such as "coke" and "chocolate". She was using the decoding skills that were practiced during centers

throughout the assessment. At times Lauren did need reminders to sound words out, but overall she recognized much more than she had in the past assessments.

Sarah and Tom had some difficulty with this assessment especially with the increase of words. Sarah struggled with two of the words on this assessment; "nuggets" and "tuna". All other words Sarah was independent with. It seemed as though Sarah was more distracted than she was confused by the words. When reviewing the words again during centers she was able to recognize them, especially when pictures were involved. Tom had the same difficulty and he missed five words; french fries, coke, relish, bun, and tuna. Words varied from each of the three posttests. When asking Tom to read these words he would respond with "I don't know". It seemed throughout this assessment that he had forgotten the words, because when we reviewed the words again during centers he was able to recognize them through the Edmark lessons. This assessment was just overwhelming for Tom.

Steve and Rob continued to score 100% despite the amount of words given. Both students were independent in reading all words given on the list. Their instruction continued with sight word practice in centers, but also concentrated more on making connections to the words online and in menus. Steve and Rob worked more on writing and using the computer to find places where the sight words could be found. These types of activities were meant to help Steve and Rob make deeper meaning of all sight words in and outside of the classroom.

All three assessments were used to learn more about how students with disabilities react to functional sight words in the classroom. The object of the assessments was to determine how well students understood restaurant words and could

recognize them out of a list or cluster of other words. I found through these assessments that some students such as Steve and Rob have strong decoding skills, so recognizing these sight words was not an issue. Though they could recognize them here in this setting it did not prove that they would understand the words outside of the classroom. The rest of my students; Lauren, Sarah, and Tom needed more assistance when encountering these functional sight words. This did not mean that they could not recognize them outside of the school setting, however, they needed more explicit instruction on recognizing the words through phonemic skills and creating better connections to the words. As a whole, these assessments supported that students could recognize restaurant words in the classroom but it did not assess their overall understanding of the words.

Connecting Pictures to Words

Students in this study are all visual learners. Making connections between sight words and pictures was a data source that helped me to understand their knowledge of making meaning to the word. In our English centers students worked on connecting words and pictures through flashcards, worksheets, Quizlet, and when creating their power points. The flash cards were created out of note cards with the word on one side and picture on the other. The worksheets used during centers were worksheets created through Edmark word series. They were made up of words with definitions or pictures that students had to match appropriately. Quizlet is an app on classroom iPads where student can play matching games with the words, definitions, and pictures. Power points were created in one of the centers were students had to create their own pages with words and pictures to go with them.

In order to assess students' knowledge from the various picture/word lessons described; students were given two different picture to word assessments. These assessments were given twice; once at the end of October and the second at the end of November. Unlike the Edmark posttests that were a part of the curriculum, I created these assessments to understand students' ability to match word to pictures. The assessments were set up on note cards. Picture cards were laid out on the desk with pictures facing up for students to see while students held onto note cards with only the sight words written on them. Students had to match the word to the picture by placing it on top. I recorded their responses using the form (Appendix A). The purpose of these assessments were to indicate how independent students were in making connections between the word to the picture. By assessing this skill, I was able to see whether students understood the meaning of the word beyond simply recognizing it.

The first assessment was given after posttests 1 and 2 at the end of October, this assessment involved twenty words and pictures. The second assessment was given after posttest 3, which involved ten words and pictures. Results from these assessments for each individual student are as follows:
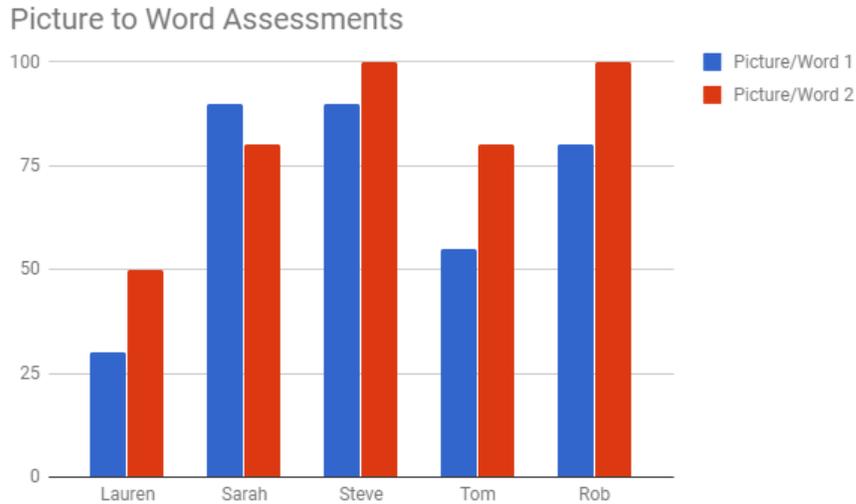
Figure 2. Total words/pictures correct for each student.

As depicted in the chart all students increased picture to word knowledge in the second assessment. Through these assessments I found that fewer words were better. In the first assessment, where there were twenty words and twenty pictures to match, none of my students scored 100%. Twenty words and twenty pictures seemed to be a little overwhelming when students were trying to match the words to the pictures. All twenty picture cards covered the entire picture, as students were reading their sight word card they were struggling to find the appropriate picture on the table because there were so many so close to one another. After this assessment I had each student practice the matching strategy more explicitly during English centers. We reviewed pictures and words to create stronger connections to one another. This helped students to understand the process of matching the words and pictures to better understand what the words mean.

After observing the frustration of the first assessment with too many words and pictures, I created the second assessment with the ten words taught throughout November. In the second assessment, every student improved their scores, except Sarah. Sarah, who is usually one of my stronger readers, mixed up two words; ham and submarine. When asked to go back at the end she was able to self-correct, however, she needed the prompting to do so. Sarah read both words automatically, but was confused by the pictures. The first word she came across was submarine, although she read the word independently she had a hard time figuring out which picture it belonged to. She placed submarine on the picture of ham. When she came to the ham card she read it automatically and then looked to the pictures with some hesitation. From this interaction I could see that Sarah knew the word and what it should look like, but she had already put submarine on top of the picture of ham so she was unsure of where to put ham. Her only other option was to place ham on the submarine picture. I had her go back and look at the two. When I took the two cards off and asked her to resort them, she automatically matched ham correctly and then we reviewed again what a submarine was.   This was an instance where I realized that submarine was not a word in which Sarah understood. She did not know that a submarine should match a picture that looks like a hoagie.

Steve and Rob excelled in this activity and I found with fewer words they were completely independent with matching words to pictures. Tom, who struggles with decoding, was much stronger with identifying the word by referring to the picture. I found this interesting because when the word was separate, such as turkey, he had a hard time reading the word. When the picture turkey was in front of him he matched the word to it without a problem. Tom did this on several occasions throughout both

assessments.   Lauren, who also struggles with decoding, had a tough time with matching words and did need prompting throughout. She knew the pictures and when given hints she could match the correct word, however, her ability to recognize the word on her own was very difficult.

When analyzing each student's progress through these two assessments it is evident that students perform better when given fewer tasks. Results from the second assessment provided insight to students' overall ability to connect the words to their pictures. Because students are visual learners, this assessment indicated that they did understand the words more than simply reading them. When comparing the two assessments and each student's performance the second assessment showed more progress in students' overall independence compared to the first assessment where words and pictures may have been a little too overwhelming. In conclusion, each student made progress in their own way depending on their abilities.

Independence in the Community

As independence is such an important skill for my students to learn, their independence in the community was a vital source of information throughout this study. The students in this study are in an 18-21 self-contained multiply disabled classroom. In this setting students have opportunities to get out in the community at least 1-2 times a month. For this study I recorded their independence levels at three different restaurant settings. The first restaurant outing was at a local diner, the second was at a fast food restaurant, and the third was at a food court. Restaurant outings were used to assess students' independence in recognizing words on a menu that were taught through the Edmark curriculum.

Task analysis was the form of assessment for rating independence of students at a restaurant outing. The task analysis form used for this data source can be found in Appendix B. The task analysis forms were made up of nine simple steps that students or even anyone would perform while at a restaurant. Students were rated on their performances using a prompt hierarchy: Independent= 0, Gestural= 1, Verbal= 2, Model= 3, Light Physical= 5, and Manual Guidance= 5. The purpose of using task analysis is to gage how many prompts and their intensity a student needs to complete a task. The forms are set up to be used over again for each outing, the goal is that students' scores will decrease in number by the time of their last outing. This shows that the student is gaining more independence with each experience. Results from task analysis assessments are as follows:
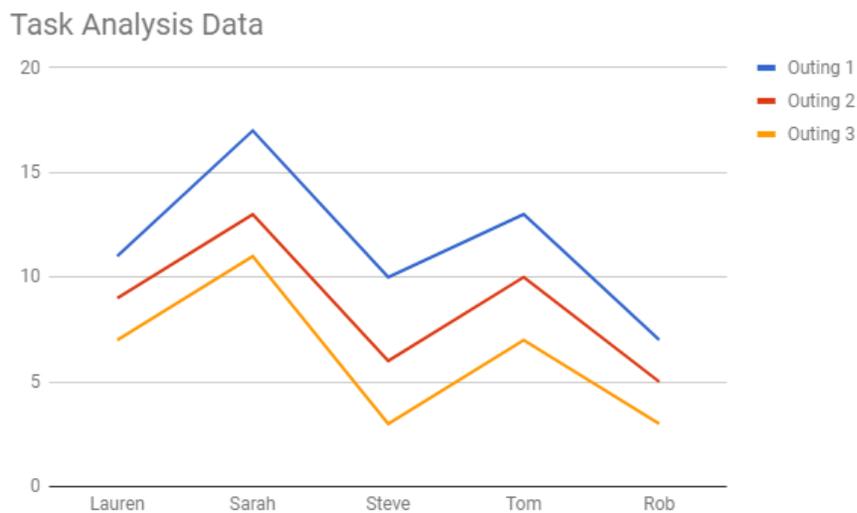

Figure 3. Levels of independence for students during outings.

Depicted in the figure above, each student was assessed on independence at each of the three outings. As anticipated each student did increase their independence from the first outing to the last. None of the students reached complete independence, but prompt levels did decrease with each outing.

Rob and Steve were two of the students who needed more prompting than anticipated. As recorded through other assessments, these students had a strong ability to recognize words in the classroom in a variety of ways. At the first outing Steve scored a total of 10 through the prompt hierarchy and the final outing he scored a total of 3. Rob scored a total of 7 in the first outing and a total of 3 in the last outing. These results indicated that students did increase independence by the end, however, areas in which they both needed the most prompting were identifying sight words and reading them out loud. I found that each restaurant setting we went to the menus were different. This made things difficult for students at times because the menus were overwhelming with all the sections and words on each page. Although Steve and Rob had stronger word analysis skills in the classroom they were not used to the inconsistency of menus and where sight words could be found on them.

The most difficult menu for all students was the menu at the diner during the first outing. Along with this being the first outing, this menu also consisted of much more food and categories that took up several pages of a menu. The following restaurant outings were more of fast food restaurants where menus were smaller and only consisted of lunch. These were the menus that students were more independent in identifying sight words, because the menus consisted of only one category and all food fit on one page opposed to several pages.

42

Tom, Lauren, and Sarah also needed minimal prompting to find the words on the various menus. On the first outing Tom scored a total of 13 and the last outing he scored a total of 7. Tom struggled with three of the skills being assessed; identifying words being asked, pointing to words, and reading them out loud. Along with the struggle to find the words independently Tom was also noncompliant in reading words he knew because he was in a restaurant setting. Tom did not want to be bothered with "work". However, with the proper prompting Tom could recognize words with gestural and verbal prompts. When comparing all of Tom's outings the progress is evident, though not completely independent Tom's overall prompts did decrease by the last outing.

Lauren, who struggles to decode words, scored a total of 11 on the first outing and a total of 7 on the last outing. Though Lauren struggles to identify words in the classroom she does go on many restaurant outings with her own family which helped with her familiarity to different types of menus. Lauren needed the most prompting in reading the word out loud and verbalizing her order to the waitress. Data collected for Lauren during restaurant outings proved that she gained more independence by the end, but continued to need the gestural and verbal prompting to recognize words. Her familiarity to menus assisted in her ability to find the correct sections of the menu, but she would often just point to any word that had the same beginning sound as the word being asking. This assessment shed light on Lauren's independence out in the community, but also her level in which prompting is needed to identify known sight words.

Sarah, who has strong decoding skills, struggled from distractions in the community. In her first outing Sarah scored a total of 17 and the last outing she scored a total of 11. Sarah needed the most prompts out of all five students. When given verbal and model types of prompts she could find the words being asked. It was not a matter of Sarah not knowing the words, she simply needed redirecting to stay on task. These data results showed that Sarah did in fact have the word analysis skills to identify the words being asked, however, she needed constant prompting to stay on task. Sarah did improve on some levels in the last outing and went from needing explicit modeling to gestural and verbal prompts at most.

Overall, each student did decrease in the amount of prompts with each restaurant setting but none of them were able to identify sight words independently on menus. Along with students feeling more comfortable about reading the menus, the sizes of the menus also affected their independence levels. When menus were simpler and fewer words students increased their independence. When the menu was long with many categories, students needed more prompts instructions to identify the section in which the sight word would be found. Even though progress did show for each student there is still a need for more interactions with all types of menus. The real world will not consist of all easy one paged menus. The more exposure students have to sight words and their various forms of text, the more independence they will gain when looking at a menu in any setting.

Chapter 5

Conclusions, Limitations, and Implications

Conclusions

The purpose of this study was to find answers to the question; What happens when multi-disabled students are presented with functional sight words in the real world opposed to the classroom? While being a special education teacher for the past four years a problem that has been consistent is when students with intellectual disabilities reach high school their futures need to start being planned. Many parents begin to worry wonder, "Where will their child go after the 18-21 program? What kind of skills can they gain now before they graduate?" This project investigated how functional sight words could lead to more independence outside of school to prepare students for their futures. Data was collected in and outside of the classroom to understand students' independence levels and how education in the classroom can best benefit them in the real world. The five students in this study were ages 18-20 with learning levels K-1; their participation helped to support the overall research of this study.

In reflecting on this study I can conclude that all students made progress both academically and in levels of independence. Data suggests that repetition and variety of assessments help students to make stronger connections to sight words in and outside of the classroom. "For adults with intellectual disability who might not possess a high level of proficiency in school-based literacy, it is important to develop understandings about their everyday literacy uses to be recognized as being socially and culturally significant" (Morgan, 2011, p. 112). When students with disabilities are given literacy instruction in a functional and relevant way it creates a stronger sense of belonging both socially and

culturally. In this particular study students used the functional literacy from the classroom at a restaurant and their overall independence did improve. Morgan (2011) mentions the importance of students developing understandings of everyday literacies; students in this study did just that. The functional literacy that was taught in the classroom connected to everyday life and literacy in restaurant settings.

Students with intellectual disabilities are often frustrated when it comes to literacy and their overall struggle to read. Instead of focusing on school-based literacy content that may be too difficult for students with disabilities, teachers should take the time to recognize students' strengths and what is most relevant to them now and in their futures. "It is important to explore the everyday literacy of individual adults with intellectual disability to document and understand what constitutes literacy for them in their worlds while also identifying their literacy strengths and identities" (Morgan, 2011, p.118). By focusing literacy instruction on everyday literacies that surround students, we are preparing them for the world outside of school. Students in this study identified with their own literacy strengths and gained a deeper understanding of how literacy is used in everyday life. Making the connections between classroom and the real world helped students to access their own literacy strengths and understand the purpose for instruction in school. This type of instruction not only creates more independence for students, it enhances their confidence and belonging in their community.

Various research conducted on literacy for students with disabilities has mostly pointed to a need for practical and relevant instruction. "For students with Moderate Intellectual Disabilities (MoID), generalizable word analysis skills also can be considered a functional form of literacy because mastery of word-analysis skills allows greater

access to community resources thereby increasing functional independence" (Fredrick, 2013, p. 49). Once students reach a certain point of schooling and their disabilities hinder their overall progress, practicality to literacy instruction should take a shift. Word analysis skills should be generalizable allowing students to have a greater access to their community. Students in my classroom are very much dependent on others to find the answers for them. Generalizable word analysis and restaurant outings created opportunities for students to begin depending on themselves and using their own knowledge to answer questions. By shifting literacy instruction to a more functional style, students were given the opportunity to do more for themselves and build on independence in their everyday worlds.

Limitations

The qualitative research conducted throughout this study explored the purpose of functional literacy for students with intellectual disabilities. Results from this study did conclude functional literacy to have a positive impact on students with intellectual disabilities. However, the study was conducted over a course of ten weeks. Students with intellectual disabilities need considerable repetition, explicit instruction, and most of all time. I have been working with the participants in this study for four years now. From my own experiences with these students, I have found that repetition, consistency, and time are needed in order for students to make progress in acquiring new skills. Along with explicit instruction and repetition, students also need more experiences in the real world to forge deeper connections to sight words and increase independence.

Limitations to this study were first and foremost time, but also the inconsistencies of the real world. All restaurants are different and therefore menus also look different. In

order for students to make the most progress in word recognition and independence

outside of the classroom they need to become more familiar with real world

settings. Students learn best with practice. The more time students would have had with

literacy instruction and real world settings; the more progress I would have anticipated to

see.

Implications

While working through this study many new questions and ideas resulted through

data collected, self-reflection, and student responses. As I analyzed each data source I

came to find that there was not one assessment in the various assessments that all

students seemed to excel in. Each individual student excelled in their own ways due to

their own abilities. When thinking about future instruction and where this research could

lead I am struck with the importance of recognizing each single students'

needs. Differentiated instruction is something that all teacher's try to incorporate in their

classrooms, but it is not always that simple. Each student has his or her own strengths

and weaknesses, instruction should be tailored to meet their individual needs.

Students with intellectual disabilities need consistency and relevant

instruction. Through assessments and classroom practices it is important to recognize

where student thrive whether it is through visual learning, community outings, or simply

work done in the classroom. These types of data should be used when creating

instruction for students because more progress will be made when understanding which

weaknesses need the most attention. Understanding a student's needs also helps the

teacher to form appropriate instruction or assessments. Through my own experiences I

found that the assessments I was using were at times too overwhelming and needed to be modified for certain students.

For this particular study I stayed within the curriculum of Edmark, but for further instruction and my own personal research I would make modifications as I saw fit. Following the curriculum did limit the types of words introduced and their relevance to each student's repertoire. For future purposes I feel that appropriate word analysis should be considered by understanding each student's worlds of literacy. To continue supporting the instruction of functional literacy to students with disabilities one must be willing to understand the student's overall abilities and tailor instruction to their particular needs.

To support those with intellectual disabilities it is imperative to keep instruction consistent, explicit, and differentiated. In order for students to continue to make progress in functional vocabulary and gain independence outside of the school setting they need to understand relevance and why they are learning what they are learning. With the appropriate instruction and support students with intellectual disabilities can have more meaningful futures and feel a sense of independence in their own communities.

References

Alberto, P., Waugh, R., Fredrick, L., & Davis, D. (2013). From Initial Phonics to Functional Phonics: Teaching Word Analysis Skills to Students with Moderate Intellectual Disability. *Education and Training in Autism and Developmental Disabilities.* Vol. 48(1), pp. 49-66.

Alberto, P., Waugh, R., Fredrick, L., & Davis, D. (2013). Sight Word Literacy: A Functional-Based Approach for Identification and Comprehension of Individual Words and Connected Text. *Education and Training in Autism and Developmental Disabilities*. Vol. 48(3), pp. 332-350.

Allor, Jill H., Mathes, Patricia G. Roberts, J. Kyle, Jones, Francesca G. & Champlin, Tammi M. (2010). Teaching Students with Moderate Intellectual Disabilities to Read: An Experimental Examination of a Comprehensive Reading Intervention. *Education and Training in Autism and Developmental Disabilities*. Vol. 45(1), pp. 3-22.

Bausch, Linda S. (2001). The Story of Their Lives: Understanding Our Students' Literacy Practices and Events. *Networks, An Online Journal for Teacher Research.* Vol. 4, No 2.

Beckett, K. S. (2013). Paulo Freire and the Concept of Education. *Educational Philosophy and Theory,* 45(1), 49-62.

Bhat, Preetha, Griffin, Cynthia C., & Sindelar, Paul T. (2003). Phonological Awareness Instruction for Middle School Students with Learning Disabilities. *Learning Disability Quarterly.* Vol. 26, No2, pp. 73-87.

Dubberly, R. (2012). Community-Based Instruction as a Component of a Successful Transition Plan for Students with Intellectual Disabilities. *Journal of the American Academy of Special Education Professionals.* Pp. 35-46.

Harris, K., Graham, S., Aitken, A., Barkel, A., Houston, J., & Ray, A. (2017). Teaching Spelling, Writing, and Reading for Writing. *Teaching Exceptional Children.* Vol. 49, No. 4, pp. 262-272.

Johnson, Kelley, Walmsley, Jan, & Wolfe, Marie. (2010). Community, Inclusion, and Belonging. *People with Intellectual Disabilities.* Policy Press at the University of Bristol.

Kennedy, M. & Deshler, D. (2010). Literacy Instruction, Technology, and Students with Learning Disabilities: Research We Have, Research We Need. *Learning Disability Quarterly.* Vol. 33, No. 4, pp. 289-298.

Liu, K., Robinson, Q., & Bruan-Monegan, J. (2016). Pre-Services Teachers Identify Connections between Teaching-learning and Literacy Strategies. *Journal of Education and Training Studies*. Vol. 4, No. 8. Pp. 93-98

Morgan, M., Cuskelly, M., & Moni, K. (2011). Broadening Conceptualization of Literacy in the Lives of Adults with Intellectual Disability. *Research & Practice for Persons with Severe Disabilities*. Vol. 36, No. 3-4, pp. 112-120.

O'Donnell, Barbara Dian & Hitpas, Rebecca. (2010). Two Teachers Learn from Their Students: Examining Teaching, Learning, and the Use of Learning Centers. *Networks, An Online Journal for Teacher Research.* Vol. 12, Issue 2.

Sanzo, K., Clayton, J., & Sherman, W. (2011). Students with Special Needs, Reading Education, and Principles: Bridging the Divide Through Instructional Leadership. *The International Journal of Educational Leadership Preparation*. Vol. 6, No. 1.

Appendix A

Word to Picture Assessment

Student Name:

Date:

Word to Picture Assessment

Directions: use the picture and word cards to match up the correct word with it's picture.

Edmark Words	Automatic	Prompt Level
Tomato		
Onion		
Relish		
Hot Dog		
Bun		
Chili Dog		
Submarine		
Ham		
Tuna		
Turkey		

PROMPT HEIRARCHY:
I = Independent (0)
G = Gestural (1)
V = Verbal (2)
D = Demonstration or Model (3)
LP = Light Physical (4)
MG = Manual Guidance (5)

Appendix B

Task Analysis Form

TASK ANALYSIS FORM

TASK Goal: Student will look at restaurant menu and identify functional sight words taught from English centers.

STUDENT:

CHAINING SEQUENCE:

REINFORCER:

SPECIAL INSTRUCTIONS:

PROMPT HEIRARCHY:
I = Independent (0)
G = Gestural (1)
V = Verbal (2)
D = Demonstration or Model (3)
LP = Light Physical (4)
MG = Manual Guidance (5)

Goal: Performance Score to Trend Towards 0

DATE									
STAFF									
TRIAL TYPE (**P**robe or **T**raining)									

1. Sit down at the table									
2. Open up the menu									
3. Find the lunch section									
4. Identify 2 sight words that teacher asks									
5. Point to the word									
6. Read the word out loud									
7. Select lunch choice									
8. Tell the waiter/waitress order when asked									
9. Eat lunch appropriately									
10.									
TOTAL									
AVERAGE									