



St. Joseph's School

Greville Street

South Murwillumbah 2484

Phone: 0266721867

Fax: 0266725017

Email: sjpmbah@lism.catholic.edu.au

Website: sjpmbah.lism.catholic.edu.au

ABN: 84 750 237 371

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RE: Programme success

Dear Barry,

I would like to thank you for you allocating of an extra 10hours to our Learning Support Budget for 2008. The successes outlined below may help with your decision to continue this much needed addition to our funds for 2009.

In February of 2008 we introduced Dr Craig Wright's Programme: Understanding Words. Craig initially supported the development of his programme; sitting in on withdrawal sessions, providing feedback to myself and our two teacher aides, Melissa Fraser and Cheree Sharp, as well as informing the parents of effective reading strategies and how they could best support their children. We liaised regularly, discussing any modifications needed to suit the learning needs and limited abilities of my year 1 target group.

The programme was implemented as 40 minute sessions four times a week; Group A with 3 children and Group B with 4 children. Of these 7 children 4 are receiving Integration funding: (1 x cognition and 3x Language disorder 4 x code D). The two groups were withdrawn for intensive instruction from 8.50- 9.40am. This time coincided with Guided Reading Instruction within my Year 1 classroom. When the children returned to class we continued with 25minutes of Jolly Phonics instruction followed by Writing, Grammar and Oral Language Development until 11.00am.

Before the intervention the progress in the target group was minimal, their letter/ sound awareness was very limited, they were assessed as dictated text, and they were unable to record corresponding letters for sounds, therefore, unable to construct a simple sentence. Craig conducted pre-testing of these children to enable instruction to be matched to their particular needs.

Our very skilled and professional teacher's aides prepared for each session making notes and reviewing the required script in order implement the programme as Dr Wright intended. The final 10 minutes of each session was allocated to reading decodable text such as A-Z Readers and Ficzroy Readers. The children were able to take home "familiar readers" each day, supporting the home school partnership. Not all children read nightly while some read very occasionally at home.

We also implemented "Understanding Words" with Group C (2x year 5 and 1x year 4), one of these students was an Integrated child. These children have both been pre-tested and post-tested, results are pleasing.

Post-tests have also been conducted with both the Year 1 control group and with Groups 1, 2 and 3. Craig will forward his analysis of data highlighting the children's accelerated development of skills and strategies.

I have attached my own November Waddington's testing results for both reading and spelling. Each child in the class has made considerable gains. The target group have acquired skills needed to further extend their reading development enabling them to function more effectively with all aspects of classroom literacy.

When comparing "Understanding Words" to other intervention programmes such as Reading Recovery, I believe "Understanding Words" is both more successful and much more cost effective. Essentially "Understanding Words", from my 8 years of teaching Reading Recovery, places greater emphasis on key areas of reading instruction overlooked in the Reading Recovery Programme. "Understanding Words" develops the application of alphabetic knowledge, applies principles of synthetic phonics and develops ever increasing difficulty in text, with text passages practising the decoding skill developed. The programme also has regular teaching of high frequency (non-decodable) words. "Understanding Words" is best linked with sequenced decodable readers in the beginning stages of reading development instead of continuous text, where an over reliance on picture cues, semantic cues and syntactic cues are often encouraged and are indeed an emphasised part of Reading Recovery teaching practise.

"Understanding Words" takes the "guess work" or "prediction" out of learning to read, providing the student with all the essential tools and strategies needed to become an efficient and flexible reader. "Understanding Words" supports its reading passages with scripted comprehension questions and applies activities for development and application of spelling and grammatical conventions. This link ensures that there is a transfer of reading knowledge to the development of writing and spelling skills.

We propose to implement this programme in 2009 continuing with our current year 1 target group and also introduce the programme to another 7 children as they enter year 1 next year. An injection of 10 hours would be allocated productively utilising "Understanding Words" so as to achieve maximum success with our struggling readers in stage 1. We are participating in the current Reading Review Process and we hope to outline our success with this programme.

Yours sincerely,
Deborah Walker
Year 1 and Learning Support Teacher.