

Inquiry Five: The Entire Process and the Post Assessment

“I can...” statement

The focus of this unit was taught during word study, which is a half hour lesson each day dedicated to learning to recognize words on sight and spelling words by listening to how they sound. Therefore, the focus of the unit is as follows: “I can read and spell words combining my phonemic awareness and phonics skills.” The skills developed in this “I can” statement are ones that I will continue to teach throughout the year.

My second grade class is separated for Word Study, and I teach the higher level students, that is, the students who are at the strategic level and above. The rationale for this is that these students have the skills needed to be pushed to benchmark level and beyond, while the lower students need more intensive instruction. Therefore, the “lowest” focus student in my group is not very low, but is at the strategic level.

Where my students were at the beginning of the unit

My first focus student is Kelsey, and she is my higher student. She earned full points on the first part of the spelling/word study assessment given during the first few days of school; this part assessed students’ letter-name spelling skills. The second part of the assessment focused on within word pattern spelling, and Kelsey earned 28 out of 50 points, the highest in the class. Both of her scores demonstrate to me that Kelsey is beyond the letter-name level in spelling and is well into the within word pattern level. She has an excellent ability to connect phonemic awareness and phonics.

Samantha is my middle level focus student. She scored 44 out of 50 on the letter-name part of the spelling/word study pre-assessment, which was about in the middle of my group; she only scored 4 out of 50 on the within word pattern part. She is a student whom I believe can quickly review letter-name spelling and move on to within word pattern spelling, especially now that we have started word study lessons that really focus on relating phonemic awareness and phonics.

Danny is my lower focus student, and his word study assessment placed him at the lower-middle of the class. He is still a letter-name speller. He is a decent reader who is almost at benchmark level, but he has trouble translating this skill into writing and spelling. He also has some trouble with pronouncing his words correctly, which, I believe, hinders his spelling skills. Danny has some behavior and focus problems that I believe take away from his real potential as well. I see his great potential, and I believe he can be challenged to perform at an even higher level. With some extra review on letter-name spelling, Danny has the potential to perform at benchmark and soon become a within word pattern speller.

What I taught and how

During this unit, I taught students to think about how to spell words by listening to each sound and connecting those sounds to letters. Although my ultimate goal is for students to easily read and spell all parts of the word, for this particular unit, I mostly focused on words with beginning consonant blends. The blends we focused on were sk-, sn-, sp-, st-/cl- fl-, cr-, fr-/d-, r-, dr-.

Students practiced listening to the sounds in words through several different activities. On Monday I assessed the group on the previous week's words to see what they retained over the weekend. During this assessment, I carefully announced each word, said it several times, and said it in sentence to give it context. I dictated 12 words, one sentence using two of the studied words, and six sight words, which students should know right away. These include the, of, and, was, etc. After the assessment, I introduced the new sounds we studied for the week. We sorted word cards that had the consonant blends we were studying into their particular categories. On Tuesday students each had to come up with a different way, besides the initial consonant blends, to sort the same words we sorted together the day before.

On Wednesday, we did word building, which consists of mixed up letters that eventually form a mystery word. Each student got a letter strip with those letters on it and cut it up. As I guided them through on the board with magnet letters, they manipulated their letters along with me, making many smaller words until we built up to the mystery word. They wrote down each word in their notebooks. This activity allows students to see and hear the similarities between words that are related in one way or another.

On Thursday, students did a word hunt. They looked in their Reader's Workshop books to find as many words as they could that begin with the consonant blends we were studying and wrote them in their notebooks. On Friday, we did a blind word sort. These particular ones focused on vowels. I gave students several categories to write in their notebooks, such as long i, long o, and long u. Then I said words with those long vowels in them, and students wrote them down in the correct categories. This activity relies heavily on phonemic awareness.

What my students learned

The two weekly assessments I gave (for the sk-, sn-, sp-, and st- words and the cl-, fl-, cr- and fr- words) clearly showed that most of my students understood and retained the knowledge of these consonant blends. The whole group got most of these blends correct; some of my middle and higher students got them all correct. Although many students got some of the vowels wrong, many wrote letters that corresponded with the correct vowel sounds, but it was the wrong letter for that particular word. For example, one student spelled "skis" as "skeys," which I thought was an excellent use of her schema. That said, I was happy that they are hearing the correct sounds. That tells me they have developed and are continuing to develop good phonemic awareness and phonics skills. (See rubric and graph at the end for data.)

Incorporating different kinds of word sorts into the lessons each week helped my students understand that, based on the different letters and sounds that make up words, the words we study can be sorted in multiple ways. This realization is evident from students' discoveries they wrote down and shared with the class. For example, some students saw, with my assistance, that the words could be sorted by different vowel sounds, middle consonants, or rhyming words. Sorting words in multiple ways was a difficult concept for my students, but these lessons exposed them further to the sounds that make up the words, and familiarized them with the spellings. The word building lesson combines several tools to help students understand words and the sounds that blend together to make them. The combination of moving the letters to create words, seeing the words written down, and hearing them said aloud take spelling a step further by using the several different parts of the brain needed for these skills.

What I learned from teaching this unit and rethinking it

While teaching this unit, I learned that implementing the core values we came up with at the beginning of the semester really helped my students make strides in their word study skills. Using active and engaging lessons, my students were more responsive. Differentiating instruction using visual, oral/aural, and kinesthetic elements in the lessons benefitted individual students. Using assessments to inform instruction helped me to know when I could move on and when I needed to review with a specific student or the whole group. Lastly, modeling and scaffolding has substantially helped my students improve their phonemic awareness and phonics skills to the point where they are capable of doing some of this work on their own.

Appendix 1

Student Name: Kelsey
I Can statements for this student: “I can read and spell words combining my phonemic awareness and phonics skills.”
Progress reported on I Can statements (have data available): Kelsey has spelled every single word right on each assessment and has scored the highest in the class each time. She is a within word pattern speller. She is the best speller in the class and continually earns 100% on her assessments.
Other observations about this student relevant to literacy learning: Kelsey is also an excellent and avid reader, which I am sure, gives her a great advantage in spelling as she is exposed to many more words in print than some of the lower students.
Instructional adaptations or differentiation recommendations (be able to support these with your data): During the open word sort, I gave the opportunity for students who wanted it to find their own way of sorting the words we studied instead of doing it as a group, gearing this option towards my higher students. I also held higher expectations for Kelsey on the assessment and kept that in mind as I graded her and looked for improvement.
Next steps in literacy learning for this student/future planning recommendations: I would like to continue challenging Kelsey by allowing for more freedom during word sorts, and I believe she will be challenged more as we start to get into more complicated spelling patterns and long vowels once we finish reviewing advanced letter name spelling.

Student Name: Samantha
I Can statements for this student: “I can read and spell words combining my phonemic awareness and phonics skills.”
Progress reported on I Can statements (have data available): Samantha scored low on the first post-assessment, but has greatly improved since then; she has an easier time with consonants than with vowels. She was making consistent mistakes, but now has corrected herself more and is an emerging WW speller.
Other observations about this student relevant to literacy learning: Samantha has just begun reading at grade level. She becoming an excellent reader, and encountering more and more words in text will help improve her spelling skills even more. She likes to read, and I know she is self-motivated when it comes to learning in literacy and other subjects.

Instructional adaptations or differentiation recommendations (be able to support these with your data):

Samantha is a student who needs the extra little push to get up to benchmark level, and she is well on her way. Using multiple tools geared toward multiple senses, such as visual and aural aids, will give Samantha the extra support she needs. She is a great listener and has shown that her attentiveness and listening skills have really aided in improving her assessment scores, as she went from 47% to 100%.

Next steps in literacy learning for this student/future planning recommendations:

Samantha will continue needing oral/aural elements to the word study lessons so that she can implement her good listening skills. Continue to have high expectations for Samantha because she is very capable of achieving at a high level.

Student Name: Danny

I Can statements for this student:

"I can read and spell words combining my phonemic awareness and phonics skills."

Progress reported on I Can statements (have data available):

Danny scored low on the first and third post-assessment and in the middle on the second one compared with the rest of the class. He has made strides toward becoming a WW speller, but is still in the LN stage. He is very consistent in the mistakes he makes. For example, he spells any words with the sk blend in them as sck. He also spells the dr- affricate with a /j/ sound, spelling "drum" as "gerum." Even though he makes these common mistakes, he spells them the same every time, which is good progress in that he hears the same sounds every time. The biggest thing to work on with Danny is focusing and listening so that he can learn from these mistakes while I teach and see the correct way to spell the words we study each week.

Other observations about this student relevant to literacy learning:

Danny has just recently begun reading at grade level in his reading group. His decoding skills are good, but his fluency is a little slower. He also needs to be motivated to read sometimes, as he will make excuses for why he "can't" read or doesn't want to. If he can be motivated to read more, this will also improve his spelling skills as well, since he will be exposed to more print.

Instructional adaptations or differentiation recommendations (be able to support these with your data):

Incorporating some more active or kinesthetic parts to the lessons helped Danny stay a little more engaged. I also worked with him individually on one assessment to see if forcing him to focus with all of my attention on him would help him perform better, and it did, but his overall performance did not improve because of his lack of attention during lessons.

Next steps in literacy learning for this student/future planning recommendations:

Continuing with active/kinesthetic elements in the lessons may help Danny stay somewhat engaged. Although working with him on an individual basis improved his assessment score one time, it is impossible for me or any other teacher to constantly give him one-on-one attention. Therefore, constant reminders about paying attention and constantly involving him somehow in the lesson may help him learn more during word study.

Appendix 2

Many things went well during this unit, which is encouraging for my students and me. The closed word sort went well both times. The part that I like most about the word sort is that everyone gets a chance to participate when they come up to put a word card on the board. That aspect of the lesson is good for the students because it gets them moving a little bit, and they get a boost of confidence as their classmates give them thumbs up if they place the card correctly. Students seem to be a little more engaged when I make a big deal about giving thumbs up; in fact, some of them started raising all their fingers and toes and giving “infinity thumbs up!”

The make-a-word, or word building, activity also went very well. This lesson is my favorite for word study because my students are the most engaged during word building. They are very involved in helping me make the words, and I can see them thinking hard as I start moving letters around. They get really excited when they figure out the mystery word, and I think that is a big motivator in making the smaller words because they know they will eventually get to the mystery word.

It is also clear from the weekly assessments that most of my students have a good understanding of the consonant blends we studied over the two weeks. One reason that I believe my students were successful in this is that I planned a variety of activities throughout the week that looked at different ways to focus on the way a word looks and sounds. Doing different kinds of word sorts and building words are activities that require both differentiation and scaffolding. During make-a-word, I modeled my thinking process while manipulating letters to form different words. Eventually, as my students develop an increased knowledge of words, they will be able to think through the activity the same way that I did and do it on their own. This and the word sorts are also differentiated, especially for some of my lower students who need something a little more active and/or hands-on to help keep them focused. All of these learning activities helped students reach the learning objective of reading and spelling words using phonemic awareness and phonics skills. In addition to the lessons planned, the materials I used with these activities made them more engaging and active. Using letter strips for word building, individual word cards for the sorts, and flash cards for practicing sight words especially helped visual and kinesthetic learners reach the learning objective. Using these materials was also a good way to differentiate the lessons.

The scaffolding and differentiation helped many of my students be successful during this unit, but there are some things I will change as I continue teaching word study. First, I have discovered from my readings and my own experiences, that learning vowel sounds and their rules is much more complicated than consonants. At this point, then, I am very satisfied with my students’ progress. However, I also believe that they are very capable of learning the vowel sounds in words at the same time, or at least within the week that I am teaching a particular set of words. Long vowel sounds are more difficult because they have many rules, but my students can definitely sound out words with short vowels. I learned this after I taught my two-week unit and took a different approach to the blind word sort. During the blind sort this time, I used words we had studied that week, instead of random words that did not relate to the ones we studied, and made a category for each short vowel sound. All students got no more than two wrong as far as putting the words in the correct vowel category, and most spelled the words correctly or very close to correct which I believe is better than they would have done had I used random words for

the blind sort. Now I plan to use the words we study each week for this lesson. I think that makes each lesson more meaningful since the closed sort (focusing on consonant blends) and the blind sort (focusing on vowels) are now related given that they use the same words.

I would like to change a few other things besides the blind word sort when teaching word study now. One thing I noticed that kind of surprised me was that many of my students had difficulty spelling the sight words on their assessments. Originally, I thought the word families we study each week would be more difficult. Upon reflection, however, I think that students are more successful with the word families because they recognize the pattern we study during the week. The sight words do not have predictable patterns compared to the word families and consonant blends. Therefore, I would like to spend more time with the sight words each week, working on spelling them aloud and writing them. Perhaps I may dedicate an entire lesson to them each week, and forgo the word hunt, especially as we continue to add more words to our list.

I would also like to rearrange the activities done on Mondays and Tuesdays. Since the formal assessment takes up most of the time during the Monday lessons, I now plan to make that the main focus that day. I will then use the remainder of time to flash the old and new sight word cards and just introduce the new sounds for the week, instead of trying to fit in a closed word sort as well. It is too much, and students started to lose focus toward the end of the lesson. Time permitting, we can try to come up with a few words on our own, using the new sounds of the week, in preparation for Tuesday's lesson, and I would write these on the board. Then on Tuesday, I will just put the category headers up on the board and see if students can sort them by themselves if I tell them the categories; it will be a combination of an open and closed sort. The open sort by itself was too difficult for my students, but a closed sort was too easy, so I think combining them, as described above, would be better suited to their level and within their ZDP.

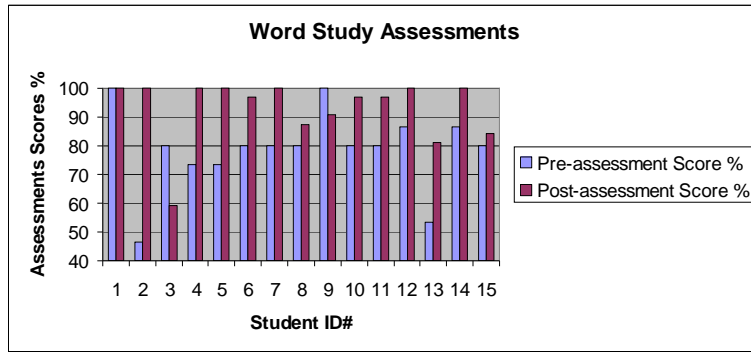
Time management and behavior management directly relate to the lessons described above. During Monday's lesson, we rushed to finish the closed word sort because the assessment took up so much time. Trying to fit so much in to only 30 minutes caused my students to become restless and lose focus toward the end. On Tuesday the open word sort was too difficult for students, and they were disengaged, which led to side conversations, distractedness, and overall, accomplishing little. The only positive thing I got from this lesson was to find out that what I was doing was not working, and that I needed to figure out a different way to do it. It was better to realize that than to go on teaching ineffectively. I learned that not only is a lesson that is too easy or too difficult ineffective, but because of its ineffectiveness, students tend to behave worse because they are not engaged, and they feel the need to find something else to do since they are not paying attention.

Finally, after teaching this unit and reflecting on it, I will include materials from this unit in my professional portfolio. I think this unit and the artifacts I collected from it are good examples of my success in teaching, and also an analysis of my own learning from this experience. It helped me better understand how my students learn, and how each student learns differently. From that, I was able to reflect on how to adjust my teaching to meet different students' needs and how to improve my lesson in general for the whole class. I have evidence of successful teaching, from students' improved scores, and thoughtful reflections on how to improve my teaching and what I learned from this unit. Therefore, I think materials from this unit are excellent examples of what the internship is about and would be informative to anyone interviewing me.

Word Study Rubric

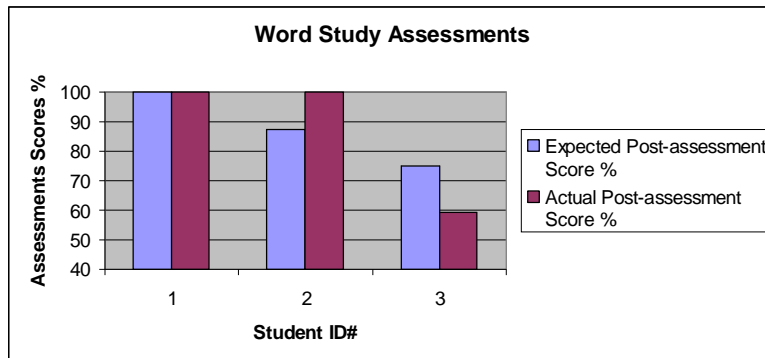
Expectations for Quality (on Post-assessment)

Overall performance (comparing each focus student with the rest of the group, based on the “I can...” statement)	Score of 1: Clearly understands the concept; performs at a satisfactory level.	Score 2: Somewhat understands the concept; performs at a developing level.	Score 3: Does not understand the concept; needs improvement.	Comments
High Student	X			Kelsey has spelled every single word right on each assessment and has scored the highest in the class each time.
Middle Student		X		Samantha scored low on the first post-assessment, but has greatly improved since then; she has an easier time with consonants than with vowels.
Lower Student			X	Danny scored low on the first and third post-assessment and in the middle on the second one compared with the rest of the class.
Individual performance (Based on differentiated instruction and assessments, is the student improving toward the “I can...” statement?)	Score of 1: <i>High</i> —is a within word (WW) pattern speller. <i>Middle</i> —working toward WW. <i>Lower</i> —still a letter name (LN) speller, but mistakes are consistent with each other.	Score of 2: <i>High</i> —some mistakes; emerging WW speller. <i>Middle</i> —advanced LN; consistency in mistakes. <i>Lower</i> —somewhat inconsistent in mistakes.	Score of 3: <i>High</i> —a strong LN speller. <i>Middle</i> —a LN speller. <i>Lower</i> —a weaker LN speller; few tendencies toward inventive spelling.	
High Student	X			Kelsey is a within word pattern speller. She is the best speller in the class.
Middle Student	X			Samantha was making consistent mistakes, but now has corrected herself more and is an emerging WW speller.
Lower Student	X			Danny has made strides toward becoming a WW speller, but is still in the LN stage. He is very consistent in the mistakes he makes.



**Students 1, 2, and 3 are my focus students.*

How I determined these scores: Since we mostly focused on beginning consonant blends, I took the percentage of beginning consonant blend words correct on the pre-assessment and compared it to that of all the post-assessments combined for each respective student.



How I determined these scores:

-Focus Student 1: Since Kelsey got all the beginning consonant blends correct on the pre-assessment, I had high expectations for her on each post-assessments, and she proved me correct.

-Focus Student 2: I knew Samantha's good listening skills would allow her to retain her new knowledge and apply it to each assessment. I thought she would have trouble with her affricates, since she had a lot of trouble with those on the pre-assessment. Taking those points off then, would earn her 87.5%. However, she proved that listening carefully to the sounds and paying careful attention during instruction can improve her scores even more.

-Focus Student 3: I thought Danny would also get the affricates wrong. Additionally, I thought he would get the sk- words wrong, confusing them with sc- words. Thus, he would have earned a 75% on his post-assessment. He actually got the dr- words right, with extra help from me, but he spelled the sk- words sck-. He also proved that his lack of attention and focus greatly hinders his ability to learn, as he spelled all of the cl- and cr- words we studied with a k. Therefore, Danny's actual score was 59%.