How Does the use of Word Walls in an Intermediate Classroom Affect the Spelling of Students with Learning Disabilities?

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How does the use of word walls in an intermediate classroom affect the spelling of students with learning disabilities?

by

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August 2007

A thesis submitted to the
Department of Education and Human Development of the
State University of New York College at Brockport
In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Science in Education
How does the use of the word wall in an intermediate classroom affect the spelling of students with learning disabilities?

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Abstract

This study explored the use of word walls in an intermediate classroom with students who receive special education services. The students are classified as “learning disabled” or “other health impaired.” The study was conducted on five students in a fifth grade classroom who received consultant teacher support for one hour a day, five days a week.

The students were asked to complete a pre and post survey questionnaire on their feelings toward spelling. They were given a quick-write journal in which they wrote for ten uninterrupted minutes. Also, students’ completed short narrative writing pieces. The researcher kept a daily log, reflecting on the students work and attitudes. Students were introduced to a word wall after baseline data had been collected.

The following questions were addressed during the research: Could a word wall be of benefit to students in an intermediate classroom who have learning disabilities? How would students utilize the word wall in their writing pieces? Do they eventually retain the spelling in their long term memory?

Results of the research show that word walls were beneficial to the students who participated in this study. The students utilized the word walls on a daily basis and started to retain correct spellings in their long term memory.
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Chapter 1

Introduction

I was sitting with my 5th graders at the back table working on their reports about Pompeii. I could see the frustration in Samantha’s eyes as she tried to spell the word *children*. She threw her pencil on the table and yelled, “I’m not doing this anymore!” I tried to calm her, but she was too frustrated and she needed a break. I realized then that my students need something that they can use with their writing to make the process less frustrating. I thought for a little while about what my younger students use to help them spell unknown words. It came to me when I was working with my 1st graders; a word wall. They can use it to help them spell those difficult words. After using the word wall for one day my students wanted to write with me again. They had felt some success with the word wall, and did not need to ask me how to spell basic sight words. The word was right there in front of them.

More than half the words in the English language are not spelled the way that they sound and require the writer to draw on visual memory cues (Graves & Kittle, 2005). Many of my students have a learning disability which is when they are functioning well below their expected ability level in one or more academic areas. My students with learning disabilities struggle even more with spelling because they still struggle with letter sound recognition. They use the phonological strategy to stretch out words. They hear most of the sounds, but they
are not able to put a correct letter with the sound. I want to make the process of writing enjoyable for my students. They have the tendency to write boring or weak stories because they are not able to spell more elaborate words. However, when they tell me their story out loud it is full of great details. Moreover, when they go to write it down they change the story completely because they can not spell all of the words.

Research Question

In thinking about my students' struggles I asked my self the questions: Could a word wall be of benefit to students in an intermediate classroom who have a learning disability? How would students utilize the word wall in their writing piece? Do they eventually retain the spelling into their long term memory? These questions are important to me because I want my students to feel successful in what ever they write. Every day they are put down by their peers because they need extra help with their work. I want them to be able to have resources available to help them feel successful in their school work.

Purpose of Study

The purpose of my research is to examine the use of word walls in an intermediate classroom. Do the students utilize the word walls as a reference in their writing for spelling unknown words and do they still ask me how to spell words that they do not find on the wall? The word then will be added to the word
wall for later use, so that the words may become stored in their long term memory.

Word walls are a large collection of words posted in plan view of all students in a classroom. The word wall consists of all twenty-six letters of the alphabet, letters are placed in ABC order. Under each letter are the high frequency sight words selected from the Dolch word list (Appendix B). New words are added as needed by the requests from the students (Walton, 2000). The Dolch word list is a list of high frequency words used throughout a lifetime of everyday reading and writing divided by grade one, two and three (Walton, 2000).

The research will be conducted in a fifth grade general education classroom with five special education students. The research will be conducted on the special education students only. Three to four times a week the students will be asked to write in a journal for ten uninterrupted minutes on a given topic or a topic of their choice. The students will also be working on short narratives on topics given by the teacher. The students will follow the writing process while completing their short narratives which includes completing a graphic organizer, rough draft and final copy. The word wall will be available to the students as a reference to help with spelling. A student survey will be given pre and post the research to evaluate how the students feel about writing and spelling. A journal will be kept by the teacher reflecting on how the students are working and the strengths and weaknesses observed in the research.
Word walls are beneficial to younger students in helping with the process of spelling (Walton, 2000). I hope that they are also useful to intermediate students who are struggling with spelling while they are writing.
Chapter 2

Literature Review

Many people have done research on spelling and the use of word walls. Research has shown positive impacts of giving direct instruction and the use of visual aids in assisting in the spelling process. The spelling process consists of scribbling, writing only beginning letter sound, all the sounds heard in a word, and conventional spelling. Many strategies are modeled and practiced while teaching spelling: sounding out the word, word sorts, invented spelling and copying correct spelling.

Process of Spelling

Graves and Kittle (2005) stated that spelling and intelligence are not related. Even the brightest child could be a poor speller. Spelling is a skill that is learned through practice. Research has shown that spelling is a developmental process (Beers, 2003). Words should be learned in context, they need to be used in sentences and frequently used in writing (Ediger, 2000). The more a word is practiced, the more likely it will be stored into long term memory for later retrieval.

Children learn how to spell in different stages. The first stage is scribble writing which is made up of letter-like forms. The author is able to immediately read what he/she has written. The next stage is writing the initial consonant for
the entire word. The letter \( c \) is used for the word \textit{cat}. Many major sounds are
omitted from the word. In the third stage, students literally write down all the
letters that they hear. After that the student begins to use conventional patterns,
for example, each syllable has a vowel. He/she begins to rely on visual memory.
The final stage of spelling is the conventional stage, in which visual spelling
patterns are internalized. Consonant and irregular spelling patterns are displayed
(Olson, 2000).

The developmental stages of spelling described by Beers (2003) are
emergence, letter names, within-word patterns, syllable junction, and derivational
constancy. The first stage, emergence, entails a student spelling through the use
of scribbles and pretend writing. In the next stage, letter names, students begin to
use letter sounds to spell out words. The next stage is called within-word
patterns, in which students are using short vowel sounds correctly and attempting
to use long vowel sounds. In the fourth stage, syllable junction, students are
spelling multisyllabic words and adding suffixes correctly the derivational
constancy, students are learning words which are derived from the same root.

There are many strategies utilized to help students learn to spell.
Phonological strategy, “sounding out,” is a common strategy used by students.
This strategy can be problematic for young spellers because correct spelling is not
always achieved (Kwong and Varnhagen, 2005). Invented spelling is highly
correlated with phonemic awareness (Rieben et al., 2005). The relationship
between reading and writing has been a topic of discussion and debate. Rieben’s
and others' theoretical assumption is that learning to spell and learning to read depend on knowledge of the alphabetic system. Invented spelling skills are improved by phonemic awareness instruction were students are taught letters sounds. Even though invented spelling does generate misspellings, making mistakes is part of the learning process and is considered by the constructivist point of view to be productive (Rieben et al., 2005).

Another strategy is copied spelling, also called orthographic spelling. Students copy the word correctly, letter by letter, thus exposing students to correct spelling of words. According to Sipe (2001), during the initial drafting stage, children should focus on getting their ideas written down on paper. The teacher should step back and not interfere with their willingness to write. It is during writing conferences that the teacher should utilize scaffolding in a one-to-one situation. Scaffolding occurs when the teacher gradually withdraws support as the students develop their skills (Walton, 2000). This is the time when the teacher models how to stretch out the words that the child has practiced on his/her own. Having direct, explicit instruction helps a child through the literacy process. Giving him/her guidance is the best way to help him/her bloom into a good writer.

According to Beers (2003) students should connect letter sounds as they write, and sounds to letters as they read. Once we understand this relationship we should be able to know how to teach students to spell and recognize that we are helping with the decoding process, which then helps them learn more about spelling. In the earliest stages of spelling students are lacking the awareness of
letter sound relationships, while in the more advanced stage they are manipulating Latin and Greek prefixes, suffixes, and roots to spell words correctly. When we are aware of what stage a student is in we are able to provide instruction that better suits that student (Beers 2003).

Word Sorts

Joseph and Orlins (2005) looked at the use of word sorts. Word sorts are when one puts words into similar word pattern groups, such as rhyming words. Doing this activity helps students make connections between reading and spelling. When one does not know how to spell a word, but a rhyming word is on the word wall, one can use the word wall as a reference.

Joseph and Orlins (2005) studied the use of word sorts in reading and spelling basic words. Two children were used in this case study. Sara was a second grader who was diagnosed with attention and hyper activity (ADHD) and received special education services in an urban school setting in Central Ohio. Her reading ability was well below average in comparison with her peers. John was a third grader who had difficulty spelling. He scored one standard deviation below the mean on a spelling measure. His spelling performance was well below average.

During the intervention both students were asked to conduct word sorts. Word sorts are when words are grouped by similar word pattern. For example, words that may contain the ai vowel pattern or end in tion. For Sara, three
different sets of words were used. Each set contained ten words. During baseline, Sara was asked to read each word that was written on an index card. Word sort intervention was implemented on one set at a time, until ninety percent accuracy was achieved. She was provided with positive feedback, and encouraged to self correct when a mistake was made. Sara reached mastery level, while maintaining recognition of all three word sets.

John was also given three different sets of words. Each set contained ten words. During baseline, John was read each set of words and they were used in a sentence. He was given a piece of paper to write down his responses. Word sort intervention was implemented on one set of words at a time, until ninety percent accuracy was achieved. During word sort intervention, John was instructed to sort the words that had similar patterns. John made a gradual increase in number of words spelled correctly for set one, but in sets two and three he made an immediate increase in words spelled correctly. Joseph and Orlins found word sorts may help children make connections between reading and spelling.

Their research demonstrates recognition of patterns in words. This positively impacts students’ performance while spelling unfamiliar words by utilizing familiar word patterns. Rhyming patterns help facilitate the ability to spell these new words.

Non-Words

In a related study, Kwong and Varnhagen (2005) researched the ability of children and adults to spell non-words, and what strategies they used to help spell
them. The purpose of the research was to investigate how young children and adults develop automaticity to spelling. Kwong and Varnhagen conducted two experiments. The first one was done with first grade students who were just beginning to learn how to spell. They were at average or above average spelling abilities. The children that participated in the experiment came from middle to upper class neighborhoods. They spelled ten consonant-vowel-consonant non-words. The students heard the non-word, and then it was given in a sentence, next they were told the non-word again. After spelling the words, children were asked what strategies they used. This exercise was repeated three times a week. Each student repeated the exercise until a retrieval rate of eighty percent from memory was reported on two consecutive trials.

Children reported using different strategies, such as analogical, phonological, and retrieval from long term memory. Phonological strategy is when you sound out the word. Phonological strategy was the most commonly used strategy among the children. Analogy is more difficult for students because it involves comparing the to-be-spelled word with an already known word, for example "cat" starts with the /k/ sound, and so does "cook." Kwong and Varnhagen found that children chose whatever strategy required the least amount of effort while, at the same time, being most likely to achieve the correct response. They also concluded that with repeated practice and exposure to spelling, children become more accurate and efficient in spelling and applying spelling strategies to new words.
The same experiment was done on first-year undergraduate psychology students. They were given complex non-words. Both adults and children used a variety of spelling strategies to complete the tasks. Kwong and Varnhagen found that the process of spelling is universal between adults and children, and that not all people use the same strategies to accomplish the same end result.

This research supports the theory that teachers should model several strategies for spelling. Writing conferences provide an ideal setting for modeling these strategies. When students are given this exposure, they can try to determine what strategies work best for them.

Even though discrepancies exist in the specific terminology of the stages, all researchers believe that spelling is a process that needs to be developed over time. Individuals move through these stages at their own pace and using strategies that work for them. Due to these individual differences, it is important to expose students to a wide variety of strategies so that they may determine what works for them.

Assessing Spelling

Assessing students spelling affords teachers the opportunity to analyze data related to student current spelling abilities, progress and needs. Ediger (2000) addressed the importance of assessing students’ spelling. He said that teachers need to look for patterns in the misspellings upon which to focus their instruction. Instruction should focus on grapheme/phoneme relations, in which students learn
to spell words from the part of the whole. Words should be learned in context; they need to be used in sentences, and used frequently in writing. Drill and practice should be one form of instruction to help build mastery learning. Students should be taught the importance of spelling correctly because it is key in communication.

Figuereido and Varnhagen (2004) investigated the detection and correction of different types of spelling errors. They hypothesized that phonological errors would be the easiest to detect. They believed that students would not be able to detect misspellings of words that they did not know how to spell.

The study was conducted at the University of Alberta as part of a class requirement. Fifty-three first year undergraduate students participated, sixteen male and thirty-seven female. The participating students were considered average to above average spellers. They were split into two groups with equal spelling abilities. Two essays were written with eighteen of the same misspelled words. Three types of errors were made among the words: phonological spelled the way that they sound, orthographic spelled using a word rule, and morphological spelled using the original root of a word. Words with suffixes that could be spelled two different ways were used. The students were given two copies of one of the essays. The first essay was written in the same font. The second essay the misspelled words were bolded. In individual thirty-minute sessions each student was given a questionnaire, along with an essay that needed editing for misspelled words, and finally a standardized spelling test. When the essays were edited, the
participants had to state how they knew the word was spelled incorrectly. If they could not explain, then the experimenter used prompting questions.

The rate of correction for both essays was the same, with no difference between genders. Phonological errors were the most commonly found, while orthographic error detection was greater than morphological. Above average spellers corrected significantly more misspelled words than the average. The strategy that was reported the most for correction of misspelled words was memory retrieval (Figueroedo & Varnhagen, 2004).

Figueroedo and Varnhagen (2004) demonstrated students’ use of memory retrieval to help in their spelling. Students need to practice how to spell words frequently in order to put them into long term memory. Teachers need to model how to sound out words, spelling rules, and roots of words, along with memorizing how to spell specific words. This will help to enable students to use memory retrieval as one of their strategies for spelling.

After spelling is assessed teachers are able to adapt their curriculum to meets the needs of their students. Without such analysis, teachers would continue doing the same thing time after time and students would not learn from their mistakes.

Use of Word Walls

Many believe that word walls are good places to put words that students come across frequently in their reading so that they can utilize it during writing.
Teachers want their students to use new vocabulary in their writing pieces. Making those new words accessible on a word wall is beneficial to the teacher and the students. Students should be involved in their own progress of becoming a better speller; the learning process should be meaningful to them. They should be part of the discussion of what words get placed on the word wall (Ediger, 2005).

Choosing words from books and poetry used in the classroom makes the word wall more meaningful to the student (Walton, 2000). Word walls promote independence for students, they no longer need to ask the teacher how to spell a particular word and irregular spelled words that must be learned by sight are on the word wall as a reference (Walton, 2000).

Word walls are one instructional method that can be utilized effectively with specific instructional strategies to help students scaffold prior knowledge, while teaching such skills as word recognition and spelling (Walton, 2000). As cited in Walton’s research (2000), Pinnell and Fountas believe that having learning activities sequenced around word walls “provide a rich context for active, ongoing learning that meets the needs of many different children” (p. 10). The original idea behind the word wall was that children would become skilled at vocabulary and spelling, and consequently that their writing would improve. Word walls taught students about how words work and fostered independence. They are a reference for students that they can be part of creating (Walton, 2005).

Beers (2003) suggests different ways to make a word wall more meaningful to the students. This is accomplished by having the word wall focus
on specific topics, such as: themes being studied, different genres, or just simply having a list of homonyms accessible to the students.

Walton (2000) conducted a study on word walls. She interviewed three teachers and their first graders on their knowledge of word walls. A total of sixty three students were interviewed. The purpose of her research was to evaluate the use of word walls during spelling of high frequency words, while looking for patterns surrounding the use of word walls among three classrooms of first graders. Walton asked what do first grade children say and know about the use of word walls in the classroom? Other questions asked during the study were: How do students use a word wall as a visual or learning aid? and, How does a teacher’s instruction surrounding word walls influence what students say about word walls?

All three classrooms used whole group instruction, small guided reading groups, and at least fifteen minutes of writing each day. Each classroom teacher introduced four or five new word wall words per week.

Walton concluded that teachers needed to provide direct instruction on the use of word walls. Students were able to identify the word wall, while knowing what the purpose of the word wall was. She emphasized that one needs to have a well rounded literacy program because the word wall is only one tool. The first graders felt word walls were helpful in the classroom, and recommended that second grade teachers use them as well.

Students found word walls to be beneficial to their writing. They were able to use them successfully in the classroom with some guidance from the
teacher. Word walls promote independence for students. No longer do students need to ask teachers how to spell a word since they can now use the word wall as a reference. Word walls are one instructional method that can be utilized effectively with specific instructional strategies to help students scaffold prior knowledge, while teaching such skills as word recognition and spelling. Word walls are also helpful in developing vocabulary that would make their work more appealing to the reader. Students also work collaboratively with their teacher and peers on deciding what words, from readings done in class, should be added to the word wall for later use. Although Walton clearly found benefit in the use of word wall, it is important to note that one must have a well rounded literacy program Word walls are only one tool to help students advance.

Strategies to Teach Spelling

Teachers plan implementation of strategies according to students’ developmental processes. As students become more aware of these concepts, teachers present more progressive strategies.

Ediger (2000) stated that teachers should focus on Gardner’s Multiple Intelligence Theory when teaching spelling. Gardner suggest that all students have eight different intelligences, and that in each student one intelligence is stronger than the others. This varies from student to student. Gardner identifies the eight intelligences as the following; visual/spatial, logical/mathematical, verbal/linguistic, musical, intrapersonal, interpersonal, body/kinesthetic, and
naturalistic/science. Students should focus on their strength, which will help them become better spellers. Spelling instruction needs to be engaging and provide quality experiences for students to practice these skills. Students should work in collaborative groups, as well as alone, on their spelling. Students should be involved in their own progress of becoming better spellers. Work needs to be meaningful to the students (Ediger, 2000).

Bhattacharya and Ehri (2004) found in their research that repetition of words helped commit words to memory. The more exposure a student has to a word the more likely it will become part of his/her long term memory. Having a word wall up in the room and correctly spelling the same words repeatedly will store the word into memory correctly.

Summary

Students need a strong understanding of letter recognition to be able to use a word wall. If they are unable to identify some of the sounds that they hear in a word, then they will not be able to identify it on the word wall (Roberts, 2003). Figueredo and Varnhagen (2004) believed that students would not be able to detect misspellings of words that they did not know how to spell. Roberts (2003) also states that students learn better through the use of modeling than through explicit instruction. Students need to see their teacher spell the words correctly and have models up around the room for the instruction to be effective. When words are placed on the wall, they should be cut out along the outline of the word
for additional visual cues (Walton, 2000). Graves and Kittle (2005) stated that having a list of words accessible for students who are less skilled in sound-letter correspondence is effective in helping students with their writing. The more they see the word, the more likely it will be remembered spelled correctly.

The use of word walls have been successful in teaching students to spell. I hope to show that the use of word walls in an intermediate classroom is beneficial to the students and helps reduce frustration while they work. The results will be used to further advance my teaching practices.
Chapter 3

Methods and Procedures

This study was designed to examine the use of word walls in an intermediate classroom with students who have learning disabilities. The role of the researcher was to model and teach students how to use word walls. The use of the word wall was observed during student writing.

The research took place in a fifth grade general education classroom with consultant teacher services in an urban school district in Western New York. The researcher is a consultant teacher for one hour a day, five days a week mid morning. The responsibility of the researcher is to work closely with five students on language arts curriculum. The researcher collaborates daily with the general education teacher about lessons being taught, and what modifications need to be made for the special education students. The research was conducted in an America’s Choice school. The workshop model is used; a ten minute mini lesson, followed by a thirty minute work period and a ten minute closing where students share their work or something they learned. This model is used in all academic areas: reading, writing, and math.

The research was conducted with five of the special education students. The ethnic background of the students is as follows: three African American (Students B and E), one Hispanic (Student A and C) and one Caucasian (Student D). All five students have an Individual Education Plan (IEP) with a classification of Learning Disability, or Other Health Impairment due to some form of
medication they are taking. All five students’ cognitive abilities fall in the low average range. Characteristics of the school include high rates of poverty where students receive free or reduced breakfast and lunch and live in single parent families.

The classroom is set up so that the students work in small groups. They are able to quietly ask each other if they need help on a particular task. During the research students sat together at a group of desks so that the researcher and the students were together and could be easily assisted in their writing process. All of the students in the study were writing between the second and third grade level. The students require quite a bit of support to get their writing finished. The students write for fifteen to twenty minutes a day because they are easily frustrated and give up quickly. The process is stopped before they reach the frustration level so that they will want to continue their writing the following day.

The students and the parents both signed a consent form, stating that they would like to participate in the research (see Appendix A). The research was shared with the students. They were very excited to help with the research. The permission slip was read to them and then they signed it. The consent then was sent home to the parents stating the research would be confidential and no names would be used. All parents signed the consent so that their child could be part of the research. The students’ names were not used in the research, each student was assigned a letter to preserve confidentiality.
Research Question

The research consists of the following questions: Could a word wall benefit students in an intermediate classroom who have a learning disability? How would students utilize the word wall in their writing pieces? Do students eventually commit the spelling into their long term memory? The research was conducted over a six week period.

Instruments

All of the students were given a questionnaire consisting of eight questions. The questionnaire included the following questions:

Circle your choice.

1. I try to spell words I know correctly. Yes No
2. I stretch out words I don’t know how to spell. Yes No
3. I need to spell words correctly every time I write. Yes No
4. When I can’t spell a word I ask a friend. Yes No
5. When I can’t spell a word I ask my teacher. Yes No
6. When I can’t spell a word I use a dictionary. Yes No
7. When I can’t spell a word I usually use

________________________

8. When I can’t spell a word I usually feel (circle one choice)
   frustrated   don’t care   sad   annoyed
They were also given journals for doing quick-writes or responses to a story read during reading group. The journal was twenty pieces of lined paper stapled together like a book with a cover that had their names on it.

The researcher kept a spiral notebook in which a reflection was written after each lesson. The following was reflected on: what went well, what should be done differently, what the students did that was surprising, and how the students worked that day.

A word wall was also placed up on the wall in plain view for all students. The word wall was made up of all twenty-six letters of the alphabet with words placed underneath each letter, corresponding to the first letter of the word. The words were taken from the Dolch word list (see Appendix B).

The students' writing topics were chosen together as a group, or the researcher would give them one that was appropriate for the day. Topics included: What do you like to do when it gets warm outside? Where is your favorite place to visit? What subject in school do you like best?

Procedure

The first day of research, the students were given a questionnaire to complete, to get a feel for how they spelled, and what strategies they already possessed for spelling difficult or unknown words. They all sat together at the back table in the classroom and, as a group, the researcher asked them to each
circle yes or no for each question on the questionnaire. If the students needed help reading the questions, they were read to them out loud.

On the second day of the research, the students were introduced to their notebooks where they would be doing their quick-writes. Quick-writes are short narrative pieces that are completed in ten minutes. For this task, the students were told that they had ten minutes to write about what they like to do when it gets warm outside. They did not have access to a word wall at this time. This was done to get a feel for how they spelled. The quick-write notebooks are used several times a week before guided reading.

On the third day of the research, the students wrote a narrative piece on any topic they wanted. The word wall was not available to them at this time. This piece of writing was used as their baseline piece to assess their spelling mistakes. The students were given two days to complete this writing piece; following the writing process they completed a graphic organizer and a rough draft.

After a week, the word wall was introduced. A discussion was held on how the word walls are created and can be utilized. The word wall consisted of all twenty-six letters of the alphabet in alphabetical order. Underneath each letter were words that began with the same letter. For example, the word with would be under the letter w. The words on the word wall were from the DOLCH sight word list for kindergarten, first, second and third grade. The students were familiar with the concept of the word wall because they had used one in lower grades. The researcher and the students discussed if a more complex word they
need was not found on the word wall, that it would be added so that they could have quick access to it in the future.

After the lesson, the students were asked to write me a short narrative about their favorite activity in school this year. They were given about twenty minutes on the first day and then about twenty more minutes the next day to complete the writing piece. They were able to use the word wall to help them spell words they were unsure of how to spell correctly.

Over a six week period, students continued to do quick-writes and to work on their narrative pieces, while following the writing process. Some limitations to the research would be excessive absenteeism of students or if a child gets a change in placement. Currently, one child is being reevaluated for a placement change to a more restricted environment.

Data Analysis

To help answer the research questions: Could a word wall be of benefit to students in an intermediate classroom who have a learning disability? How would students utilize the word wall in their writing piece? Do they eventually retain the spelling in their long term memory? The students work will be analyzed and interpreted. The percentages of spelling errors will be looked at in each piece of writing. The number of words written and the number of words spelled incorrectly will be used to calculate the percentage of words spelled correctly. This will be done for both the baseline piece and the intervention pieces. These
percentages will be used to calculate the students’ average number of words spelled correctly in a given writing piece. The hypothesis is that the students’ percentage of words spelled correctly would increase over time with interventions.

In addition to students’ quick-writes, published work will be collected, that has gone through all stages of the writing process. A journal will be kept of daily reflections. The daily reflections will assess how often the students utilize the word wall to see if they are beginning to learn how to spell the words found on the word wall correctly.

The student questionnaire was given before and after the assessment to see if the students’ ideas of spelling have changed with the use of the interventions and what spelling strategies they utilized most in their writing pieces.

The students’ work and questionnaire will be confidential. Each student will be assigned a letter instead of using his or her name in the findings. Graphs will be developed to show changes in the percentages of baseline pieces and intervention pieces.
Chapter 4

Findings

The purpose of the research was to examine the use of word walls in an intermediate classroom. The following questions were asked during the intervention: Could a word wall be a benefit to students in an intermediate classroom who have a learning disability? How would students utilize the word wall in their writing piece? Do they eventually retain the spelling in their long term memory? Do the students utilize the word wall as a reference in their writing for spelling unknown words? Do they still ask how to spell words that they do not find on the word wall?

The following instruments were used to collect data: a questionnaire consisting of six yes or no questions and two fill in the blanks, a journal for ten minute quick-writes, writing pieces that followed the writing process and a spiral notebook that the researcher kept daily notes in.

The percentages of spelling errors will be compared between the baseline and the intervention writing pieces to find the average words spelled correctly. This will be done for both the quick-write journals and the narrative writing pieces (see Appendix C).
Baseline Results

Student A

The student completed the questionnaire with assistance from the researcher, she needed the questions read to her. As a result of the questionnaire, the student stated that she does try to spell words correctly by stretching them out (sounding out all of the sounds), and she also asks a teacher if she does not know how to spell a word correctly. She stated that she does not need to spell every word correctly, she does not ask a friend to help her spell a word and that she does not use a dictionary. When she is unable to spell a word, she usually will look around the room for the word, and she stated that she feels very annoyed when she cannot spell a word correctly in her writing pieces.

The second instrument used was a quick-write journal that the students wrote in for ten minutes. Student A wrote very short, repetitive narratives and did not use a large vocabulary. She chose words that she was able to spell correctly. On average, she misspelled one or two words per writing piece.

The third instrument used consisted of completing a narrative writing piece. In this piece she wrote about her family and cats. She did not add much detail to her writing, so it was lacking a variety of vocabulary. She only used words that she felt confident in spelling correctly. On average, she misspelled two to three words.

The researcher observed Student A completing her quick-writes in five minutes or less. When she was asked to keep writing, she said that she was done.
During her narrative pieces, she would complete them in one sitting of twenty to thirty minutes.

**Student B**

The student completed the questionnaire with assistance from the researcher she was unable to read all of the questions. She stated that she tries to spell words correctly, she stretches out words, and she will ask a friend or a teacher for help to spell an unknown word. She also stated that she does not need to spell every word correctly when she writes and she will not use a dictionary to help her spell unknown words. She stated that she will usually look places to help her spell unknown words. She feels frustrated when she is unable to spell a word correctly.

The second instrument used was a quick-write journal that the students wrote in for ten minutes. Student B wrote short multi-paragraph narratives, averaging ninety-three percent of words spelled correctly.

The third instrument used was a narrative writing piece. She wrote about her god sister’s birthday party. She used a lot of details, describing who was there and what she got for presents. She averaged eighty-six percent of words spelled correctly.

The researcher observed the student getting frustrated when she did not know how to spell a word correctly. She would ask her peers or the teacher for help. She took an average of average three days to complete a short, one or two page narrative.
Student C

The student completed the questionnaire with assistance from the researcher as she was unable to read all of the questions. She stated that she tries to spell all words correctly and tries to stretch out unknown words, but does not need to spell them correctly each time she writes. She also stated that she will ask a friend or a teacher to help her spell unknown words. She stated that she will not use a dictionary if she can't spell a word correctly, and that if she is unable to spell a word she said that she will look for the word in a book or around the room. She feels frustrated when she is unable to spell a word correctly.

The second instrument used was a quick-write journal that the students wrote in for ten minutes. Student C always wanted more time to complete her writing piece as she spent half of her time asking everyone how to spell a word. She averaged ninety percent of her words spelled correctly.

The third instrument used was a narrative writing piece. She wrote about her family. She repeated herself several times in the writing. She did not use a large range of vocabulary. She stuck to words that she felt comfortable spelling. She averaged ninety-two percent of words spelled correctly.

The researcher observed Student C asking for help spelling unknown words. She would look in books for how to correctly spell a word. She would take an average of two days to complete a writing piece that was one page long.
Student D

The student completed the questionnaire with assistance from the researcher as she was unable to read all of the questions. She stated that she tries to spell words correctly, she stretches out words, and she will ask a friend or a teacher for help to spell an unknown word. She does not believe she needs to spell every word correctly when she writes, and she will not use a dictionary to help her spell unknown words. She stated that she will usually look around the room for the words. She feels frustrated when she is unable to spell a word correctly.

The second instrument used was a quick-write journal that she wrote in for ten minutes. She wrote half a page to a full page of text in the allotted time. She averaged eighty percent of her words spelled correctly.

The third instrument used was a narrative writing piece. She wrote about her friend. She spent two twenty-minute sessions working on this piece. She wrote a very vague story, leaving out a lot of the details. She averaged eighty-five percent of the words spelled correctly.

The researcher observed her quietly writing and keeping to herself. She would occasionally look around the room for a word that she was unable to spell. She would use the name tags on the desk to spell her friends’ names.

Student E

The student completed the questionnaire with assistance from the researcher as she was unable to read all of the questions. She stated that she tries
to spell all words correctly and tries to stretch out unknown words, but does not need to spell them correctly each time she writes. She also stated that she will not ask a friend or a teacher to help her spell unknown words, and that she will not use a dictionary if she can’t spell a word correctly. If she is unable to spell a word, she said that she will sound it out. She feels frustrated when she is unable to spell a word correctly.

The second instrument used was a quick-write journal that she wrote in for ten minutes. She wrote short paragraph responses, about half a page in the ten minutes. She averaged ninety-five percent of words spelled correctly. The third instrument used was a narrative writing piece. She wrote about her summer vacation in Florida. She wrote a two page narrative in one twenty-minute session. She wrote a very repetitive story using the same few words over and over, as she felt confident that she knew how to spell them. She made no spelling mistakes in this writing piece.

The researcher observed that Student E is the strongest speller in the group. The other students would rely on her to help them spell. Her writing pieces are very weak in details but she is able to spell basic sight words with out assistance from the teacher. She does have some difficulty with more complex words.

**Intervention Results**

Over a six week period the students were introduced to a word wall and how it is used to help them spell unknown words. All of the words found on the
word wall were introduced to the students. They were told that if a word they
needed was not on the wall that they could ask the teacher for the spelling and the
word would then be added to the wall. All of the students were familiar with the
concept of a word wall because they had used them in previous grades. They were
excited to have the word wall, and wanted to write more often and for longer
periods. Many of the students asked how to spell more complex words, words that
have irregular spelling patterns, words that are multisyllabic, and words with
suffixes.

Student A

After the intervention, the students were asked to complete another
questionnaire. Student A’s responses changed slightly. She stated that she would
still try to spell words correctly, stretch out words she did not know how to spell,
that she did not need to spell words correctly every time she wrote, and that she
would not use a dictionary. She said that she would now ask the teacher to help
spell, along with using the word wall. She stated that she still felt annoyed when
she was unable to spell a word.

Student A made some progress using the interventions, her writing pieces
became longer in content but were still lacking details, she continued to use the
same repetitive lines in her writing.

While writing in the quick-write journal, she took more chances and
attempted some more difficult words. She did utilize the word wall to help her
spell basic sight words. She spelled ninety-seven percent of the words correctly with the use of the word wall.

The narrative writing pieces were longer in length, averaging one and a half pages to two pages. She attempted to use more vocabulary that was found on the wall. She spelled ninety-seven percent of the words correctly with the use of the word wall.

The researcher observed Student A feeling more confident in her writing. She was utilizing the word wall less and less as the intervention continued. She was asking the teacher to help her spell more complex words that were then added to the word wall for later use. She also used rhyming patterns to help her spell unknown words.

Student B

Student B left the class before the intervention was completed. She was placed in a more restricted environment. She went from a consultant classroom to an integrated classroom with a special education teacher all day long.

She was able to only complete one narrative writing piece during the intervention. In that one piece she did show some progress. She spelled eighty-seven percent of the words correctly in her writing piece with the use of the word wall.

Student C

After the intervention was completed, Student C completed a second questionnaire. All of her responses stayed the same, she stated that she would
continue to try to spell words correctly, stretch out words she didn’t know how to spell, she believed she needed to spell words correctly every time she wrote, she would ask a friend or a teacher to help her spell, and stated that she would not use a dictionary to help her spell unknown words. She said that she would now use a word wall to help her spell unknown words, and that she still feels frustrated when she can’t spell a word.

Student C increased her time to complete a writing piece, she no longer asked for more time. She was utilizing the word wall and asking her teacher to help her spell more complex words. She did begin to use a larger variety of vocabulary found on the word wall.

While writing in her quick-write journal, Student C increased the length of the pieces to a full page and also increased the number of words spelled correctly to ninety-four percent.

Her narrative pieces also became longer, averaging one and a half pages to two pages in length. Her spelling mistakes were no longer basic sight words, but more complex words. She averaged ninety-two percent of words spelled correctly.

The researcher observed Student C utilizing the word wall on a daily basis. She would look on the wall for a word before asking the teacher how to spell a particular word. She began to use the word wall less and less during the intervention. She would look for patterns in words to help her spell rhyming words. She was beginning to misspell more complex words and not basic sight words.
Student D

Student D left before the intervention was started. She had moved out of state.

Student E

Student E began to use the word wall to help her spell more complex words. She would ask the teacher how to spell these complex words that would then be added to the wall for later use.

After the intervention student E completed a second questionnaire some of her responses changed, she said that she would continue to try to spell words correctly, she would stretch out words she knew how to spell, and that she needed to spell words correctly every time she writes. She said that now she would ask a friend or a teacher to help her spell a word. She stated that she would still not use a dictionary, but she would use a word wall to help her spell unknown words. She also said that she feels frustrated when she is unable to spell a word correctly.

While writing in her quick-write journal, Student E wrote half page narratives or responses with ninety-eight percent of the words spelled correctly. She used a larger vocabulary and added more details to her writing pieces.

Her narrative pieces increased in length to average two pages of text. She began to use a wide variety of vocabulary and no longer wrote in repetitive
phrases. Her percentage of misspelled words increased to four percent, but she was now misspelling more complex words.

The researcher observed Student E utilizing the word wall on a daily basis. She would ask the teacher how to spell more complex words that were not found on the word wall. Even though her percentages decreased, she still made gains in her writing.

According to the research done, word walls have shown to be effective for students in an intermediate classroom. Students utilized the word wall in their writing everyday and became motivated to use larger and more complex words. This can be attributed to the access to this vocabulary. Students would use the word wall on a daily basis; they would look for rhyming patterns in words to help them spell unknown words. Students also asked the teacher to help them spell words that were not found on a word wall, which would then be added to the wall. Over the six weeks, students began to use the word wall less to spell basic sight words. They began to ask for more complex words to be added to the wall. They were no longer making mistakes on the basic words. Having the visual aide helped them commit the correct spelling to memory.
Chapter 5

Conclusion

After analyzing data collected through each instrument, all the data indicated that the use of word walls could have an impact on students’ correct spelling in their writing. Overall, the students made gains in their spelling abilities. They utilized the word wall in all of their writing pieces. The students’ narratives increased in length with the use of the word wall, as well as their motivation towards writing. The students began to commit basic sight words to their long term memory. They started to utilize the word wall less over time to reference basic sight words and increased their usage for more complex words.

Students’ motivation towards writing increased greatly, they would ask daily if they could have time to work on their writing pieces. Students continued to ask for more complex vocabulary to be added to the word wall. The writing pieces no longer contained repetitive sentences. The narratives started to become more enjoyable for the reader.

Word walls have been used in successfully in primary classrooms, and have been shown in this research to be successful in intermediate classrooms with students that have learning disabilities. Even though the students made small gains in their correct spelling, their motivation increased, as did their use of more complex vocabulary in their writing. Having a word wall in an intermediate classroom consisting of basic sight words and age appropriate words would be
beneficial to all students in a classroom. It would allow the students to be more independent while they are writing.

Word walls are beneficial to students; they reduce their anxiety when they are writing. They no longer need to worry about spelling every word correctly and feel compelled to use a larger vocabulary in writing tasks. Most of the words that the students need are on the word wall. Teachers should utilize this tool in their classrooms. They are easy to make and they benefit the entire class, not just the individuals who have a learning disability.
Reference list


APPENDICES
Dear Parents,

We have started the year out with a lot of excitement and enthusiasm to learn. I will do my best to ensure that this same attitude continues throughout the year. I have learned a lot about teaching through my 4 years of experience and the master’s classes I have been taking at SUNY Brockport. I am pleased to announce that I am almost finished with my masters, and I will be writing my thesis this semester.

With the writing of my thesis, I will need some help from you and your child. I have completed the necessary research behind many teaching practices and it is now time to conduct a study in my classroom. I will be evaluating correct spelling and the use of word walls in your child’s writing. A word wall is a large collection of words posted in plan view of all students in a classroom. The word wall consist of all twenty six letters of the alphabet, letters are placed in ABC order. Under each letter are the high frequency sight words selected from the Dolch word list. I hope that the use of the word wall will help your child improve his/her writing.

The purpose of this letter is to ask for your permission to use data gathered about your child in my study. All information will remain anonymous and confidential. In addition, I will destroy all information after the completion of my study.

This study is completely voluntary. There will be no penalty for you or your child if you prefer not to participate. I am following the curriculum and teaching as I normally would, so your child will still be required to complete the work in class. However, should you decline, I will not collect data on your child. I will continue to observe your child for educational benefits and NY State standards, but not for my thesis. If you agree to the inclusion or your child’s data, you can ask for the study to end at any time. I will remove your child’s data from my information and destroy it immediately. If at any time you choose to have your child pulled from the study, please indicate this in writing immediately. You do not have to give any reasons for the withdrawal of information.

I will be starting the study as soon as the Institutional Review Board at SUNY Brockport has reviewed my study and given me permission to begin. I will notify you through my newsletter when I begin collecting data. Please complete the form below and return it to school as soon as possible.

Thank you in advance for all your support and efforts to help me gather this beneficial data. This will help me to improve my teaching methods and understand practices that will benefit the students.

If you have any questions please feel free to call me at school 458-3210 or you may call my advisor for this project Dr. Betsy Balzano at 395-5549.

Sincerely,

Renee Dastyck

Child’s Name

Yes, you may collect data on my child to use in your thesis. I understand that I may ask you to pull my child’s data at any time during the study with no penalty.

No, you may not collect data on my child’s behavior to use in your thesis.

Parent/Guardian Signature
# Appendix B

## Dolch Sight Word List

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Dolch Word List
Appendix C

Quick-Write Journal

Narrative Writing Piece
Student Survey

Circle only one answer for each question.

1. I try to spell words I know correctly. Yes No
2. I stretch out words I don’t know how to spell. Yes No
3. I need to spell words correctly every time I write. Yes No
4. When I can’t spell a word I ask a friend. Yes No
5. When I can’t spell a word I ask my teacher. Yes No
6. When I can’t spell a word I use a dictionary. Yes No
7. When I can’t spell a word I usually use ______________________
8. When I can’t spell a word I usually fell (circle one choice)
   frustrated don’t care sad annoyed

Created by,
Renee Dastyck
April 2007
Appendix E

Field Notes

3/15
The students wrote in their quick-write journals today for the first time. A timer was set for ten minutes. All of the students were very excited about getting their own journals to write in. The topic today was what is your favorite thing to do in school. One student got frustrated before even beginning the writing assignment. She did not know what to write about. There were few spelling errors in the writing pieces, but the writings were very short and vague.

3/19
The students started writing their narrative stories today. The girls first completed a graphic organizer with assistance from the teacher. Student B had difficulty spelling; she would change what she wanted to say so that she could spell words correctly. Student C had trouble coming up with ideas she required a lot of prompting from the teacher.

3/30
The word wall was introduced to the students today. All of the words were read together. The teacher explained that if a word is not found on the word wall that it could be added. A narrative piece was started on what we do for Easter. Student C was very hesitant about asking for help finding words on the word wall, while the rest of the students were very excited about using the word wall and not having to always ask how to spell a particular word.

4/2
Today the students read their narratives out loud and as a group we discussed how we could make our writing pieces better. Some of the students had trouble with verb tenses. The students were very excited about the word wall to help them spell basic sight words that they are embarrassed to ask how to spell.

4/23
We started a new narrative today; the students were able to choose their own topic. They are using the word wall more and more each day. They are beginning to learn what words are on the word wall. The writing pieces are still short, but spelling is improving.

5/16
The students are working on editing their writing pieces; they are using the word wall to check for spelling mistakes. The students have made many gains over the past few weeks. They are now asking for help to spell more difficult words and utilizing the word wall less for basic sight words.