Wilson Reading System in a Replacement Literacy Class

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Table of Contents

Context

Nine years in the classroom and two distinctly different teaching positions is only the tip of the iceberg if I had to explain my teaching experience. Even though I taught for four years at the high school level, changing to my current fifth grade middle school position brought more changes and challenges than I anticipated. During my first four years in the profession, one of my responsibilities was to teach literacy in a resource room setting. Currently, I continue to teach literacy in a resource room setting, now called a replacement class. However, the requirements of what I have to teach in my literacy classes have changed. The biggest alteration did not come about until my second year at my current district. The difference that was implemented was to teach a decoding and encoding (spelling) program titled Wilson Reading System (Wilson). Since adopting Wilson Reading System, I struggle to manage the program in a small group setting with a breadth of student ability. Now after three and a half years of attempting to effectively make this program work in my literacy classes, I ask myself, "How do I effectively manage Wilson Reading System in a replacement literacy class?"

Wilson Reading System is a multisensory, organized and sequential decoding and encoding program for individuals in upper elementary grades through adult years. Individuals who have a language-based learning disability were the original target participants of Wilson. However, any individual experiencing difficulty with reading or spelling could benefit from instruction using this program. Twelve steps are broken down into, on average, five substeps to complete the reading program. Each substep is taught using a ten-part lesson plan. Student mastery of a substep is met when a student correctly reads 95% and spells 75%-85% of the fifteen words presented. In addition to mastership of each substep, the amount of time that is dedicated to Wilson instruction determines how fast a student will progress through the program.

Obviously, the more time that is dedicated to the program, the faster a participant will meet completion. Time dedication can be difficult, especially if there are multiple students in one class setting needing Wilson and the students are on different steps. After teaching the sound structure of the English language (phonemic awareness), the goal of Wilson is to teach individuals the structure of words; words are made up of syllables. Learning the structure of words and how to break down words into syllables, students hopefully learn how to decode and encode with ease.

In my district, Wilson is delivered to students who are receiving support through the Department of Special Services during their replacement literacy class.   At this time, there is no other placement option for students receiving special services who need Wilson. Students are also placed in a replacement class when it is felt that their disability will affect their progress in a general education setting. Typically students are placed in a pull-out literacy class due to a range of reasons, not just for Wilson instruction. Special education classes are small in student numbers; no more than twelve students can be enrolled in the class. Law states that an instructional assistant is needed when a class consists of ten or more students.

There are two literacy classes that I teach. However, I approached my teacher research question using only one of the classes. The class I chose consists of five students. Within the past three years, all five students have been given the Wechsler Intelligence Scale for Children-IV, which assessed their cognitive ability. Reviewing my students' scores on this test produced the following results: four are functioning in the low average range of intelligence and one has a current intellectual functioning in the average range. At the beginning of this school year, I assessed the approximate reading grade level of each student. The assessments showed: two students were reading at the second grade reading level, one was reading at the third grade level and two students were reading at the mid third grade reading level. Furthermore, four of the five

replacement literacy students earned a score on the New Jersey Assessment of Skills and Knowledge (NJ ASK) language arts component that fell within the partially proficient range. Students earned scores twenty to forty-three points below proficiency. Of the 143 fifth graders enrolled in my district's middle school, only fourteen earned a score within the partially proficient range. The students in my replacement literacy class possess reading skills below fifth grade level.

At my middle school, literacy is scheduled as a block class, which consists of two consecutive school periods for the duration of 84 minutes. This type of scheduling was implemented seven years ago when the district grew in enrollment and literacy teachers thought more would be accomplished if reading and writing were taught in a longer uninterrupted period. If no additional language arts and reading skills needed to be taught during literacy, block scheduling would provide a sufficient amount of time for an entire Wilson lesson to be taught.

How do I effectively manage Wilson Reading System in a replacement literacy class is relevant and pressing to me for numerous reasons. The initial reason is that I am not always given a choice on what program I need to incorporate into my replacement literacy class. As a special education teacher, there are protective laws that direct my teaching. Three and a half years ago, my district's previous Director of Special Services pursued implementing Wilson at the middle and high school levels. The director felt that there were numerous students receiving support through the Department of Special Services that had inhibiting gaps in their ability to read. Therefore, my director sent all nine middle and high school replacement literacy teachers to the two-day Introductory Wilson Reading System Overview Workshop and purchased complete kits for each teacher. In addition, any fourth grade student that had a language based disability or struggled with reading had Wilson written into their Individualized Education Program (IEP) upon entering fifth grade at the middle school. Since Wilson was specifically

written into certain students' IEPs, a legal document, I am required to provide decoding and encoding instruction using Wilson. Currently, all of my replacement literacy students have Wilson written into their IEPs. It is not only a legal responsibility, but also a personal responsibility; I do not want my students to go through their education without proper reading skills. I could only hope that implementing the program in my literacy classes will have a positive impact on my students' reading abilities.

Not given a choice on what program I have to offer lends itself to another reason why how I effectively manage Wilson in a small group setting is a relevant question. Using Wilson in my district's replacement literacy classes is here for the longevity. Not only is Wilson Reading System implemented at the middle and high school, but Wilson is also implemented at the elementary level. Wilson Fundations, a program similar to Wilson Reading System, is for learners in kindergarten through third grade. Students receiving special services at my district's elementary level receive decoding instruction using Fundations. Since there has been no discussion regarding adopting a new program, I have to continue using Wilson in my literacy classes.

Using Wilson, I feel that I struggle every year with effectively and efficiently managing the program in a small group setting. As with any teacher, every school year a new and very different group of students enters through the classroom door. With each year I find myself adapting my Wilson management skills depending on my students' abilities. Some of the challenges I have faced include: as many as nine students in a class who need specific individualized programming, groups of students at different Wilson levels in the same class, no instructional assistant to assist students not receiving Wilson instruction while I worked with students receiving Wilson instruction and finding sufficient time to fit meaningful Wilson instruction into a literacy block. In the past I had never documented management strategies that

worked or did not work. Nor have I jotted down management ideas or decoding activities that popped into my head at the most random moments. Through teacher research, a new focus on how I effectively manage Wilson Reading System in my replacement literacy class will lead me to better understand myself as a teacher and the extent of student learning using Wilson.

This school year found the special services department with a new director. From our new director came a question centered on how each special education teacher is going to raise the NJ ASK language arts scores of the students in our replacement literacy classes to proficiency. As previously mentioned, my literacy students are below grade level readers and four of the five students are functioning in the low average range of intelligence. Couple below grade level reading ability with low average cognitive ability and it is evident that raising the NJ ASK scores to proficiency will not be an easy feat. Wilson is a program designed to improve decoding ability and my goal, as a teacher, is to provide an educational setting directed towards improving the weaker skills my students possess. Among my students, the ability to decode hinders their success with reading. Therefore Wilson is an important program to include in my replacement literacy classes. It provides my students instruction and reinforcement in less proficient areas with intentions of raising their scores on the NJ ASK.

Finally I feel that decoding skills are necessary skills to possess. Knowing that one educational program does not fit every student, I maintain the belief that having the knowledge of phonics and instruction on how to decode words offers students strategies to assist with reading. From a personal standpoint, I have firsthand experience with the difficulties and emotions that one experiences as a struggling reader.   It was not until later in my education that I was classified with a learning disability. Testing indicated that I had significant difficulties in basic reading skills and reading comprehension; I was many years below grade level in the identified areas. The psychologist who performed the testing felt that my difficulties with

phonics was affecting the rate at which I read and my ability to comprehend what I read. This inability to decode words caused great anxiety for me throughout the school day. As I sat in class, I was fearful that the teacher would call on me to read out loud. I never followed along with the readings, because I was always skimming ahead to look for words I couldn't read and panicking that I would have to read these unknown words. Even today, although my reading skills have drastically improved with the assistance of phonics instruction, I still do not feel that I am an exceptionally strong reader. Therefore, my question is important because a phonics intervention at a young age may help learners experience educational success sooner rather than later. With the necessary decoding skills, students will be able to read material presented and experience more confidence while doing so.

My research will lead me to understand how I effectively manage Wilson and how I could improve my effectiveness in instruction. With my understanding, changes will evolve that will better assist my students with reading and consequently, in other areas of the curriculum.

Literature Review

Among the students placed in a replacement class setting are students receiving support for a reading disability. In the literacy classes that I teach, my students are lacking basic reading skills. Among my responsibilities is to provide my students instruction in reading skills, which includes decoding skills. Decoding skills stem from instruction in phonics, or letter and sound relationships. For my students, this instruction is provided using Wilson Reading System.

Reading is not a simple process. Language requires the use of four lobes in the human brain: frontal, parietal, occipital and temporal (Hudson, High, & Al Otaiba, 2007). Each lobe plays an important, yet different role in language. In addition, Hudson et al. (2007) stated that two other systems located in the brain are important for language: the parietotemporal and occipitotemporal system. Each mentioned lobe and system play an important role in language and, when not functioning properly, can affect a student's reading. To complicate the process of reading further, studies have shown that individuals with a reading disability have less gray matter in the brain. Gray matter allows for the processing of information. Less gray matter could lead to difficulties processing sound structure, which leads to a reading disability (Booth and Burman, 2001, as cited in Hudson et al. 2007). The process of reading is complex, and I am unable to even scratch the surface about the intricacies of the brain and its role in reading. Considering the anatomy of the human brain and what is involved in order to read, it is no wonder why an individual can struggle with reading. Changing the structure of the brain is impossible; however, I can provide my students the opportunity to improve specific reading skills through practice.

What can be done to assist with reading is that teachers can provide students with instruction in phonemic awareness and phonics. It is recommended that students who struggle

with reading or learning how to read be provided with an intensive and systematic program that teaches them exactly how to read (Hudson, High & Al Otaiba, 2007). As previously stated, I provide my students with intensive instruction in phonics using Wilson. Wilson is just one of the numerous programs on the market directed towards teachers who work with students who lack basic reading skills.

Barbara Wilson, the developer of Wilson, along with Janet O'Connor conducted research on the effectiveness of Wilson in special education pullout programs. In their research, one hundred twenty-eight students in grades 5-12 who were classified for a reading disability received instruction in Wilson for one year. Wilson and O'Connor (1995) reported that the participants showed an average gain of 4.6 years with word attack skills. Not only did their ability to decode words improve, but there was also an average gain of 1.6 years in reading comprehension. Their findings support using Wilson in my replacement literacy class.

What Works Clearinghouse (WWC) also conducted a survey evaluating the effectiveness of Wilson. They used a self-modified version of Wilson; they omitted some of the components of the program. Interestingly, I utilize Wilson in the same manner that WWC did to execute their research with certain steps of the program excluded from instruction. Even with the omitted components, WWC reported a significant gain in students' ability to identify words and decode unfamiliar words (WWC, 2007). Unfortunately, the study did not indicate exactly how much gain was made. The decoding improvement showed in WWC's study also supports the effectiveness of implementing Wilson in my replacement literacy class.

Looking at the research conducted by both parties proves that Wilson is a beneficial program to implement with students who have reading disabilities. I find it astonishing that being provided with instruction using Wilson produces such significant gain in word attack

skills. To me, the word attack gain reported is unbelievable. Considering how far below grade level my students are in reading, providing decoding instruction using Wilson will drastically improve their ability to read material presented in the fifth grade curriculum. Although being able to accurately sound out words is important, being able to comprehend what is read is necessary. What good is being able to read every word if you cannot understand what you read? I feel that in spite of the gain the studies show in comprehension, it is not as pronounced as the progress made in decoding. Obviously, if a student can decode words their comprehension will increase to an extent. However, Wilson is not a program that teaches reading comprehension skills. Therefore, in order for students to experience the most success in reading, there needs to be a blending of skills taught during a literacy class.

Wilson and O'Connor (1995) stated that one of the two necessary components to Wilson's effectiveness is sufficient teacher training when implementing a phonics program. My only training in Wilson, besides reading numerous publications about the program and having hands-on experience providing instruction for several years with the program, is the two-day Introductory Wilson Reading System Overview Workshop provided by a trained Wilson instructor. I feel that my experience with implementing Wilson Reading System is sufficient and should not have a negative impact on my students' ability to gain appropriate reading skills.

After reading what has been researched, I am feeling pretty good about myself as a teacher. I am providing my students, who have reading difficulties, with a program that is classified as an intensive phonics instruction program; I am doing the right thing. Not only will students with a reading disability struggle with reading, but also there are other attributes common among struggling readers. Struggling readers could experience the feelings of anxiety, anger and depression. In addition, they may experience difficulties with social relationships and family problems related to their disability (Ryan & International Dyslexia Association, 2004). I

could only hypothesize that these feelings and difficulties hinder the process of developing appropriate reading skills even when these students are provided with intensive phonic training. Classroom management for a teacher therefore should extent beyond reading instruction; it also should include assisting students develop strategies to experience success in their academic and personal worlds.

Not all research supports an intensive reading program geared towards phonics instruction for every struggling reader. A report found that after first grade, phonics instruction does not improve a struggling reader's ability to read better (National Reading Panel, 2000, as cited in Ivey & Brown, 2004). It is questionable to me that the cutoff for phonics instruction is the age of six or seven. If a first grader is not developmentally ready when they are presented skills in phonemic awareness and decoding, does this mean they missed their window of opportunity to learn necessary decoding skills? I do not feel this is true in all cases; I did not learn decoding skills until my adult life. Therefore, to dismiss decoding instruction after first grade seems as if it would eventually lead to greater reading deficits.

Ivey and Baker (2004) suggested that in lieu of phonics instruction, teachers of struggling middle school readers should provide students texts at their independent reading level, model the thinking that takes place during reading to build understanding and study word structures that are specifically in students' texts. As stated in Ivey and Baker (2004), older students who receive intensive phonics instruction become less willing to read. As a teacher, the last thing I want to do is dissolve my middle school students' interests in reading. They suggest that older struggling readers need to be offered a choice in reading material. Teachers should present reading material that covers a breadth of genres and topics at the reading level of each student. Baker (2002) supports interventions for adolescents beyond intense instruction in phonics. She feels choice of reading material is important in developing student interest in reading. I feel that special

education teachers should provide students with instruction in decoding and the opportunity to choose from teacher-selected individual reading level books.

The curriculum in my replacement literacy class involves a combination of both phonetic training and having the students read books at an independent level. In addition to students having a choice in what independent book they would like to read, the class reads books together. While doing this, I model good reading skills and provide guidance so my students become better readers. To me, this seems to be the most logical curriculum to provide for my replacement literacy students, although time and classroom management play a role in its effectiveness.

Alarmingly, the research that I located involving struggling readers supports one of two options: an intensive phonics program or direct reading instruction using independent reading level books. I have found no studies, to date, that support the implementation of both types of instruction for becoming a better reader. Where is the research that provides not only evidence of a merged reading program but also how to implement such a program in a small group setting with a range of student ability? Information on management skills for a combined reading program would be beneficial to my teaching.

Methodology

Over the eight weeks that I collected data, my journal entries became the most critical

data source. Since my research question focused on how I effectively manage a specific reading

program, the best way to keep data regarding my management techniques was to keep a personal

journal. I needed to keep accurate and detailed accounts of what was taking place during any

time I provided Wilson instruction. Furthermore, it was important that I immediately began

journaling. If I started journaling further into my data collection period, I would not have

gathered as much data to analyze and my findings may have been difficult to identify. I would

bring my journal to the table where Wilson instruction takes place, also known to my students as

"The Back Table". Keeping my journal at the Wilson table allowed me to easily jot down

students' comments, my observations of the lessons or any thoughts that came to mind, which

would have been forgotten unless I wrote them down.

To assist with journal organization, I marked a plus sign for any part of a journal entry

that indicated a positive event, finding or thought regarding a lesson. Vice versa, I would mark a

minus sign for any event, finding or thought that was negative regarding a lesson. Another mark

I used was a star, which was put next to any narrative that explained a change to the lesson or

thought I had regarding Wilson instruction. During data analysis these symbols guided me when

identifying themes in my data.

Another data source that I used was student interviews. Individual student interviews

were conducted during the second week of my data collection period and additional shorter

interviews were held intermittently throughout the remaining weeks of data collection. Due to

the time commitment of each interview, one student was interviewed per day. At times, an

interview was not conducted during the literacy block; rather the interview took place during a

student's activity period, a shortened unstructured period where students remain in their

homerooms. During student interviews, I recorded the students' responses on an AlphaSmart, a

portable electronic means of storing text. I interviewed each student using the same interview

questions. (See Appendix C for questions asked during student interviews.) Interviews were

then downloaded from the AlphaSmart, printed from a computer and stapled into my journal.

Shorter student interviews were less structured and were usually initiated from a question

associated with a specific lesson or thought I had during a lesson. I felt the most informative

way to receive answers to my questions or thoughts would be through student feedback. Shorter

interview questions and responses were hand-written in my journal with the date, student and

response. Student feedback was a valuable source of data collection because it reflected student

learning and attitude towards Wilson.

Teacher interviews were also a source of data collection. I interviewed another middle

school replacement literacy teacher who uses Wilson in her class, a middle school general

education teacher who provides Wilson instruction to a selected number of non-classified

students who were identified as having decoding difficulties, a high school replacement literacy

teacher and the fourth grade elementary school special education teacher. I met with each of the

teacher interviewees and stapled their responses into my journal. (See Appendix D for questions

asked.)

Venn diagrams were the last data source that I used. The Venn diagrams compared and

contrasted each of the ten parts of a Wilson lesson, as written in the Wilson Reading System

manual, and how I actually teach each part of the lesson. Keeping track of the lesson similarities

and differences revealed interesting findings regarding how and why I manage Wilson in my

literacy class in the manner that I do.

After the eight-week period, I analyzed the collected data. The process of analyzing

initially began during the data collection period. Mainly I reviewed each source and added

additional comments. During the first few weeks after my data collection was completed, I

would set aside a period of uninterrupted time to review what I collected. With a highlighter in

hand, I would highlight anything that I found to be interesting, surprising or thought provoking.

My data was reviewed entirely on different occasions. After I was finished highlighting, I went

through and reread my highlighted notes several times. From rereading the highlighted data

several times, I began to form codes. When my codes were identified, I used brainstorming

webs to begin to plot out each section of my teacher research report and identify connections

within the data.

Findings and Implications

Flexibility in grouping and scheduling are important considerations with Wilson instruction. On 10/8/07 I wrote in my journal, "The gap in levels (between the students) is becoming clearer." Therefore, due to students' decoding abilities and the amount of repetition needed, two Wilson groups were required in my replacement literacy class. I needed to ensure grouping that provided a learning environment at the appropriate pace for each student. In order for Wilson to work in a replacement class, I needed to be flexible when designing groups and take the time to properly group students.

Furthermore, I needed to be flexible when scheduling instructional time with each group. To have a meaningful lesson where students were given sufficient time to practice the skill introduced, I could not work with both groups during the same day. Instead, I developed a schedule of alternating the days that I worked with each Wilson group. Since the boys required more repetition and practice, I provided them with decoding instruction on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays. On the other hand, the girls quickly grasped the skill taught at each substep. Therefore, I provided the girls with direct Wilson instruction on Tuesdays and Thursdays.

Undoubtedly interruptions arose that disrupted my scheduling procedure. Flexibility with managing unexpected changes was important. For instance, if a student was absent on their day of Wilson instruction, I needed to have an alternative plan. Since my Wilson groups are small in number, it made more sense to have the entire group present for a lesson. When the group I was scheduled to work with had a missing member, I had two options: switch days and work with the other group or skip Wilson instruction for the day. I found when lesson planning, I needed to be prepared with an alternative plan in the event that there is a student absent. Flexibility with scheduling instruction time was necessary.

Flexibility was also needed in other situations. Periodically, my students needed assistance in their general education classes with research reports that required significant amounts of reading and writing. Both areas propose a challenge to my students. In order to help my students with these projects, I would set aside time during literacy to assist with the necessary reading and writing. After all, reading and writing are skills taught during a literacy class. However, as I wrote in my journal on 12/14/07, "Ironically, I allowed time during literacy to help the students with their science projects. I did this because they couldn't read the content, but I was taking away their time to work on a reading program that would improve their ability to read the content." What became evident to me was that there might not always be time during a class period for Wilson instruction. Furthermore, I realized that Wilson should not be the priority of a replacement literacy class. There are numerous skills that need to be covered in any literacy class. Time needs to allow for instruction in all skill areas, not just in one program.

The issue of flexibility surfaced again with the structure of a Wilson lesson. "The amount of time that needs to be dedicated to each substep will take longer than I thought" (journal entry, October 8, 2007). The manner in which I taught a lesson needed to be broken down into smaller segments and reinforced over a longer period of time. My students struggled with mastering each substep in the recommended timeframe outlined in the Wilson Reading System Instructor Manual. The structure of a Wilson lesson must take into account additional time students require at each substep and how much time is available for instruction during a class period.

I varied from the recommended format in numerous ways. For example, each meeting day students would say the corresponding sound for each of the five sound cards I showed them, review the decoding rule for the current substep and read words that exemplified the current skill. Also students did not read sentences and paragraphs that follow the substep's rule during

the same class period. In my class, sentences and paragraphs needed to be read separately and during more than one meeting time. Student success with each component determined how the lesson format would be broken down and how much time would be devoted to the skill.

Not only did the format of a Wilson lesson need to deviate from what is stated in the Instructor Manual, but also how each lesson component was taught needed modifications. Wilson is a systematic approach of teaching decoding skills. Over time, the lack of variety becomes routine for the students; routine can lead to boredom. Without variation, my students lost motivation to actively participate in a lesson and put forth their best effort. In a journal entry on 12/2/04 I stated, "I have a hard time motivating the boys." Later on 12/5/07 I continued, "My frustration continues with how to motivate the students." I found that students needed variation in how lessons are taught. From later interviews with other Wilson instructors, I found that I was not the only teacher drifting from the recommended way to teach Wilson. The general education Wilson instructor stated, "I just can't follow what Wilson says. I have to shake it up; otherwise the kids won't work" (interview, 1/21/08).

Modifications are important. One of the first modifications I made was to highlight certain words in the substep based on student vocabulary knowledge and how frequently the word appears in the fifth grade curriculum. For example, in one substep I highlighted the words *contribute* and *recognize* instead of *enfranchise* and *inundate*. The students still have to show reading mastery at each substep, however the list of words are properly adjusted. Henry, a student with a reading disability, stated another benefit to highlighting selected words, "Highlighting the words on the reading sheets is helpful. It makes the words pop out" (student interview, 1/7/08). Providing a highlighted list of words helped the students achieve success at each substep. I also made a modification with how students read sentences during a lesson. Now they randomly chose cards numbered 1-10; each card represents a reading sentence

number. Instead of having to read all sentences, students only practice and read three to four sentences. Henry said, "I hate reading all the sentences. Reading three is okay" (group discussion, 1/22/08). The unpredictability of which sentences each group member will have to read maintains variation for the students. Also, instead of completing Wilson produced worksheets to practice a skill, I designed computer games to reinforce substeps. For one computer game, I wrote sentences that contained a scrambled word. To unscramble, students needed to apply the skill taught in the substep. Students had to read the sentence, use context clues to predict what word correctly completes the sentence and then spell the word correctly. Another game involved sorting words based on the syllable types used to form each word. In response to a question about what activities students enjoyed engaging in during their Wilson group, Molly summed it up best, "I like doing games, because they are more fun. I know we are still reading, but it doesn't feel that way" (student interview, 1/21/08). Students enjoyed variation from the recommended predictable Wilson format. In return, I no longer struggle with motivating my students to put forth effort during instruction time.

Through my research, I was reassured that I was effectively managing Wilson in my replacement literacy class and my students were gaining invaluable decoding skills. All of my students are aware of the benefits offered from Wilson instruction and they are cognizant of their improvement with their ability to decode and encode. Molly shared in a student interview on 1/21/08:

"Last year I got really bad grades. I didn't know anything about decoding. Now I'm getting better grades in all of my classes"

During an interview on 1/7/08, Henry stated:

"When I read, I can try to sound out words. It (Wilson) helps me read fluently. I can actually read a book!"

Sara also stated her gains, "I am getting most hard spelling words correct" (student interview, 1/21/08). Mark shared, "I've gotten better at reading. I don't get stuck on words as much as I use to" (student interview, 1/7/08). Finally, Alex claimed, "I have improved on reading words. I know more words and can break them down" (student interview, 1/7/08). When I asked my students if they wanted to completely stop Wilson instruction, all stated, "NO!"

Just as I modified the program, so did other Wilson teachers. After speaking with the other Wilson teachers in my district, I realized each Wilson teacher incorporates the program into their literacy class in a different manner. Some of the differences I found throughout the district's implementation of Wilson include: only providing instruction periodically, giving quick mini Wilson lessons, selecting only certain steps in the program to teach, using Wilson for encoding only and teaching Wilson one-on-one with a student. Our district lacks consistently when teaching Wilson. The variety of implementation practices supports my findings that a packaged program may have to be modified to best meet the needs of individual students. In addition, teachers need to adapt the program to best fit into their class period.

My students are aware of the benefits Wilson offers them and they enjoy how I manage the program during literacy class. Even though Wilson Reading System outlines a very specific delivery of the program, it is difficult to follow it exactly. I needed to adapt the program so it best fit into my literacy class. The means in which I provide instruction using Wilson is effective and meets the objective of successfully teaching decoding and encoding skills to my students.

Obstacles

Inevitably obstacles surfaced throughout my teacher research. In some situations, the means in which I managed obstacles during the data collection period resulted in a relevant finding. Had the roadblocks not been dealt with in the manner in which I did, my findings would have been different. In other situations, the difficulties that surfaced during my teacher research have only been identified and not completely worked through. The reason some of the struggles have not been worked through is because more information needs to be gathered and I cannot solely solve the obstacle. The unresolved obstacles present challenges in how I think about and manage Wilson in a replacement literacy class.

Time is a pivotal element in how I manage Wilson. Obstacles with time constantly present themselves in a Wilson lesson. Not having enough time in a class period to complete a lesson, students requiring a longer amount of time than planned to master a lesson, juggling different Wilson groups within the same class period and foreseen and unforeseen schedule changes were presented as obstacles with time. How I chose to work through the challenges of time are relevant to how Wilson is managed in a replacement literacy class.

In addition, student motivation impacts Wilson in a small group setting. In my journal, I documented the challenges I had with student motivation, more specifically the lack of motivation present in the boys. My challenges and frustrations with motivating the boys led me to stray from the prescribed Wilson lesson format and develop different activities for my students. Without my teacher research, I would have continued to struggle with motivating students and been frustrated by the lack of motivation my students put forth during a Wilson lesson. In addition, my students would have remained bored with the old lesson format and would not experience success at each Wilson substep.

Incorporating Wilson and all other necessary language arts skills that need to be covered as part of my district's literacy curriculum within the timeframe of the class period presents itself as a struggle. If I provide Wilson instruction for an average of thirty minutes each literacy block, that is thirty minutes that my students are missing instruction in other areas of literacy. Over time, thirty minutes a day can add up to a substantial amount of time that my students miss instruction in areas that other fifth grade students are receiving. It is my fear that the accumulated missed time will undoubtedly hold my students further back academically compared to their classmates. With push from administrators to improve students with special needs' scores on the language arts component of the NJ ASK and considering it takes my students a longer period of time to master a task, missing instructional time from areas of language arts is critical for my students. Future changes need to be made so the most effective manner of scheduling my students so they receive Wilson instruction and ample instruction in other language arts areas is provided.

In my literacy class there was only five students. Therefore, there were a limited number of student responses. The amount of information I gained through journaling was probably not as varied as if I was collecting data using a larger population. Not only was the number of students I pulled data from smaller in number, but also the responses the five students offered was not always as detailed. In most cases, a short one-sentence response was given and I needed to ask the student to explain their response further. The lack of elaboration and in depth responses is typical for students in my class.

I wanted to ensure I was getting an accurate picture of my students' views and attitudes regarding Wilson. One way I worked through the obstacle of a smaller number of students and a lack of elaborated responses from my students was to conduct group interviews. Using a group

interview format or discussion allowed the students to expand on classmates' ideas instead of having to generate their own limited responses.

Although not a roadblock in my research, information did present itself that made me question if I am permitted to implement Wilson in my classroom. The general education teacher in my school who provides Wilson instruction for identified general education students shared information from a workshop that she attended. She shared that Wilson Language Training Corporation is tightening the certification requirements for individuals seeking to utilize Wilson in their classroom. The requirements were initiated since there are many individuals across the country that state they provide Wilson instruction and have not been through the proper certification provided by Wilson. With a mandated certification now required and my lack of official training, I fear that I will no longer be permitted to incorporate Wilson in my classroom.

Emerging Questions

The first question I had was how much time allotted to Wilson instruction is sufficient. As a teacher, I need to find the most beneficial routine to incorporate all of the skills that need to be covered in a literacy class. Considering what needs to be covered, as established through the literacy curriculum, and adding Wilson instruction to the list of what needs to be taught, there is a limited amount of time to cover every skill. Wilson Reading System does suggest how a lesson could be broken down when ninety minutes of instructional time is not available. Even so, the lesson is then only reconfigured for a forty-minute period. There is not enough time in a day to permit one group with forty minutes of Wilson instruction. Since I provide Wilson instruction and I want my students to gain decoding skills through the program, I need to know how much time is sufficient without losing the effectiveness of the program. Knowing the minimum amount of time that a student can have Wilson instruction during any given day is important for scheduling purposes.

Additionally, I question how to motivate students to continue to put forth their best effort to improve their decoding and encoding skills through Wilson. Although student motivation did present itself as an obstacle during my beginning research and I was able to find new ways of enticing my students, I am concerned that this motivation will not last for the duration of the Wilson program. Another middle school replacement literacy teacher shared with me that she is having a difficult time not only fitting Wilson into the busy class schedule, but also the students are struggling with the program. She feels that the higher steps of Wilson Reading System are too advanced for her students to understand and her students struggle with retaining the necessary decoding rules. From my experience, when concepts and tasks become challenging for students they do not always put forth effort or have the desire to learn a concept or correctly complete a task. What strategies will keep older students motivated to complete the program

even when concepts become difficult? Regardless, student motivation will impact the success a student gains from Wilson instruction.

On the contrary, maybe strategies will not motivate students. Maybe the students' cognitive functioning levels inhibit the success a student will have with Wilson and how motivated a student will be to apply previously taught decoding skills. Will students with reading disabilities who have a low average intelligence reach a point during Wilson instruction where the concepts introduced are too difficult to understand? At this point what is recommended so a student can continue to receive decoding instruction at the appropriate level?

Through my research, I gathered several important findings regarding Wilson instruction. Also, I documented my thoughts and feelings regarding Wilson instruction in my literacy class. From my documented thoughts and feelings, I implemented many changes with how I manage Wilson Reading System. Will the changes I implemented work every year? Will they only work with certain types of learners? I hope that most of the changes I made will continue to be beneficial for future classes. After all, the changes seemed advantageous for my current students and provided a means for learning decoding skills. At least, the changes I implemented will serve as a resource of possible options to assist with later Wilson instruction. I also cannot help but wonder to what extent will my findings on how I manage Wilson in a replacement literacy class apply to other replacement literacy classes.

Finally, I question whether my district can even say Wilson Reading System is offered in replacement literacy classes and write in students' Individualized Education Programs that a student will receive Wilson instruction during replacement literacy. With stricter certification policies from Wilson Language Training Corporation, will a change to what reading program is offered in my district need to take place? Currently, all of my district's special education teachers who provide instruction in Wilson are not certified. If my district intends to continue to

offer Wilson Reading System, then Wilson certification may be needed. The need for

certification now leads to who will be financially responsible for paying the fees for teacher

training.

Conclusion

My question regarding Wilson in a replacement literacy class was addressed for several important reasons: my district spent money on providing special education teachers with the complete package to teach the program, Wilson was written in many of my students' IEPs, there was questioning from administrators on how the special education staff is going to increase the language arts NJ ASK scores of students receiving support through our department and I felt that decoding instruction is critical for individuals who are below grade level in reading. The relevance of my question was quite clear to me when I began my research.

Wilson Reading System is proven to be an effective program used to teach individuals decoding and encoding skills. However, in a replacement literacy class there are numerous inhibitors that prevent the complete implementing of the program as outlined in the Instructor Manual. As a teacher who has to provide my students with Wilson instruction, I needed to investigate how I effectively manage the program in my replacement literacy class.

In order for Wilson to be beneficial for me and my students, I needed to make modifications to the program. Although Wilson does not recognize any variations to their program and they claim that in order for instruction to be effective, it must be provided as stated, I found the adaptations to be successful. My students are gaining the necessary decoding and encoding skills and, in the process, they are enjoying Wilson instruction. Many times programs are not the best fit for all classrooms. In these situations, teachers need to spend time with the program and investigate what aspects will work best in their classroom. The entire program is not always necessary. Students can still show gain in the area a program addresses and not complete the entire program. My classroom is proof that I effectively manage a modified version of Wilson Reading System.

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Appendix A

Implementation Plan

The success of implementing Wilson in a replacement literacy class is evident. My

students are aware of the decoding gains they are making and prefer the methods in which I

teach Wilson. I will continue to investigate how I effectively manage Wilson in my replacement

literacy classes. Variations to the program are vital for student motivation and success.

Therefore, I will devote additional time to develop supplemental games and activities to

reinforce each substep of Wilson. Future games will also incorporate more independent review

of decoding skills. It is my hope that the independent exercises can be utilized when a student

completes an assignment during literacy and is waiting for classmates to finish. Also, these

exercises can be used during a student's study skills period. Furthermore, since students are the

individuals completing the tasks, I will ask for their input with activities and games they would

enjoy participating in. Student voice has all ready played a role in my class when a student

thought of a review game to play for a current decoding skill. He and his classmates enjoyed the

game so much that they came to my classroom during their recess time to play it. If students

could choose how to review a skill, they will be more motivated with the program.

As these activities and games are developed I will need to design a method for organizing

them. The Wilson Instructor Manual outlines each subset and specifies the skill taught. At the

top of each substep page, I will write any activities and games that were developed. Also, a

reference sheet of tasks might be helpful. Listing the types of activities and games played on one

sheet will be a quick resource if students need reinforcement with a specific skill.

Since I am not the only Wilson teacher that varies from the program and develops

additional activities for students, I am planning on meeting with the other Wilson teachers. Once

a month my district has a department meeting and a curriculum meeting. During one of these

meeting times, I will ask the appropriate administrator to establish time for all Wilson teachers to meet. At the meeting, we will share how we incorporate Wilson into our classrooms and what we find to be effective instructional strategies. Hearing specifics of how other teachers are implementing a program can serve as a springboard for new ideas in our own classrooms. Due to different class structures and content that needs to be covered throughout the school year, I do not think it is possible for all Wilson teachers to implement the program in the same manner. Some teachers struggle more than others with merging the program into their current curriculum. Having a means to hear ideas of how to effectively incorporate the program will be beneficial to teachers and students.

As a result of my research, during my annual review meeting with the Director of Special Services, I plan on discussing available reading program options. Despite Wilson's effectiveness, I believe that one program does not meet the needs of all students and it only offers instruction in one skill area. I would like to investigate additional reading programs that could be implemented in my district. Just as Wilson was modified in each classroom, maybe components of other reading programs can be adapted to cover a wider range of skills that students need to know. If so, my district will more adequately meet the individual educational needs of all students.

Additionally, at my annual review meeting I would like to propose a possible schedule change for students needing only Wilson instruction and no other support with reading and writing. At times, students require decoding instruction due to a reading disability. In these cases, students have to be placed in a replacement literacy class. The pacing and content of a replacement class does not follow the general education literacy classes. Therefore, if a student only needs Wilson instruction, is able to maintain the pace and can grasp the content of the general education literacy class, the student is not appropriately placed in a pullout literacy class.

Instead, I propose that students who only need Wilson instruction be provided that service during their activity period. Activity period is an instructional free time where students are in their homerooms. This way, students are receiving support for their decoding needs and can be appropriately placed in a general education literacy class.

As a fifth grade teacher, I always meet with the fourth grade special education teachers to discuss the students I will be providing support for in the following school year. This year I will schedule our meeting before the four grade teachers develop IEPs for the fourth graders advancing to fifth grade. Meeting earlier will allow me the opportunity to discuss how Wilson is written into a students' IEP. Students who will require Wilson instruction due to a reading disability should have it written into their IEP. However, students that do not have reading disabilities but could benefit from Wilson should not have it written in their IEPs. Of course, I will still utilize the program in my replacement literacy class, but it will be implemented due to its effectiveness, not because it was written in a legal document. Also, at the meeting I will share ways I incorporate Wilson in a literacy class. Hopefully, the fourth grade special education teachers can implement some of the same strategies in their pullout reading sessions or when they provide support in the mainstream fourth grade classroom.

Appendix B

Subjectivity

During my early brainstorming of possible questions, I did not consider researching any portion of Wilson. Eventually, Wilson did make my brainstorming list because I incorporate it in my classes, was struggling with different aspects of the program and its use in our district. I just thought the program was something that I had to do, whether I liked it or not, and wondered what could I gain from taking a closer look at Wilson in my classroom. However, what I came to realize was that my struggles and questions of the program were the exact reasons I should research how I effectively use Wilson in my literacy class.

After I settled on my question, I had periods of doubt over the research process. I was not initiating a new element in my classroom and reporting what happens; I was evaluating a program that was all ready utilized in my class. Also, I was unsure of how to approach writing a reflective paper. Over time, additional brainstorming and research my doubts subsided. I realized that my struggles and questions about Wilson in a replacement literacy class could possibly be resolved and answered through a closer look at the program. Furthermore, I could develop additional successful implementation strategies that would be a benefit to my students and me.

During my data collection period, I would frequently read over my journal. Reviewing my journal became important to my decision making process. My feelings and thoughts about each Wilson lesson were recorded. Rereading my entries allowed me to make changes to future Wilson lessons. One of the biggest changes that I made was the variations to the program, especially the games I developed. Without revisiting my journal throughout the data collection period, I would not have recognized my need to change a lesson format or focused on what I could do to improve my overall implementation of Wilson.

As I reviewed my journal and highlighted interesting notes and quotes, codes became clear. The codes of time and activities seemed very evident from initial reviews due to the significant data I recorded on the topics. I thought that keeping the two categories was too broad and they needed to be revised to more specific codes. Therefore, any code related to time or activities was narrowed. Noticing that data regarding time and activities appeared frequently in my data focused my attention to both topics. My thought process was that if two codes were repeated frequently in my journal, than they must be important to my findings. At the end of data analysis, my thoughts about the importance of the codes were validated with my findings.

What I gained most from my teacher research was that I needed to "step out of the box". Over the past few years that I have been utilizing Wilson in my classroom, I never considered adapting the program. The time factor was always adjusted in some form because I could not provide Wilson instruction for the recommended amount of time while my students, who did not need Wilson, were left without teacher instruction or contact. However, even after adjusting the time element, I did not consider modifying the program. As a special education teacher, I have always considered adapting to situations and flexibility to be among my strengths. However, evaluating my past implementation procedures with Wilson, I did not adapt the program to best meet the needs of my students and myself. I concentrated on trying to follow the program exactly how it was outlined in the Instructor Manual and was frustrated when my students were not engaged in the lessons. From reading my journal during my data collection period, I realized that my ways of incorporating Wilson were not the most effective and I needed to make changes. Stepping out of the box resulted in a decrease in my frustration level and an increase in student motivation.

Stepping out of the box, evaluating how I teach Wilson and implementing changes proves that I can be an inventive teacher. It is not uncommon in education to see teachers who have

been teaching for several years and fall into the same routine of teaching the same material in the same way. I value that I am not a teacher who does the same thing throughout the years without taking into account student needs. Adapting Wilson to better meet the needs of my students and myself proves that I am open for change.

After my research, I realized that I do like Wilson. I misinterpreted my frustrations and questions with the program to be dislike for Wilson. Through my research and the changes I made, I do not mind incorporating Wilson into my classes and feel that I can effectively manage the program. The manner in which I have organized the program, which includes: The Back Table, student binders, activities and games are factors for Wilson's success in my class. My students are gaining confidence and improving in their ability to read and spell. Also, they like the program. If the program was unbearable for them, they would not want to continue with it as they stated. As a teacher, I feel success that my students are not resistant to my class and enjoy how I provide instruction. Therefore, the manner in which I provide Wilson instruction is effective and should continue to be implemented in my replacement literacy classes.

Appendix C

Student Interview Questions

- What have you learned from Wilson?

- What is the most difficult part?

- What is most helpful?

- What improvements have you seen in your reading and spelling?

- What do we do that you like more / are more helpful than last year's group?

- What activities do you enjoy doing in our Wilson group?

- What activities do you not enjoy in our Wilson group?

Appendix D

Wilson Teacher Interview Questions

Interview with general education Wilson teacher

- How was Wilson for general education students initiated?

- What determines placement into one of your Wilson groups?

- Share any successes and challenges you experience with the management / structure of your Wilson groups and implementing the program.

Interview questions for special education Wilson teachers

- Describe how Wilson in implemented in your school.

- Share any successes and challenges you experience with the management / structure of your Wilson groups and implementing the program.

- What can be done to improve the implementation of the program?