



School Level Evaluation Report - The PAL Program

Goal/Aim of Project:

The aim of the project, as an integral part of the whole school literacy plan, is to support a group of 'at risk' students in Years 4 and 5. These students have not yet attained reading levels (fluency and decoding) that allow them to successfully access year level curriculum independently. A strategic, intensive intervention program aims to increase reading fluency by facilitating decoding skills, together with encoding skills for spelling, using learned strategies.

Resources Involved:

The PAL Program (Phonological Awareness for Literacy Program produced by the University of Queensland's Speech and Audiology Department) is the mechanism by which this intensive, strategic intervention is delivered to selected Year 4 and 5 students (19 students from Year 4/5). Two learning support teachers deliver the program to small groups of students (2 to 3) who have been identified as having similar needs. Parents of these students are informed as to the nature of the program and their commitment if their child is to participate.

After the initial program purchase costs, preparation of materials and PD, staffing is the primary cost. Classroom teachers are integral to the program as they support and reinforce gains during the intervention and work co-operatively post-intervention to ensure transfer of targeted skills learned to classroom literacy learning. Teacher PD in the PAL Program has also been encompassed during 2005.

Activities Undertaken:

Intervention is delivered in an activity based, cognitive behavioural approach on a withdrawal basis (students need an environment free from distraction and noise to ensure accurate listening and time for verbalising strategies). Transfer of skills occurs

within the classroom environment. PD occurred initially as in-service in the program by UQ staff. Ongoing discussion and evaluation as to the effectiveness of the program and efficacy of delivery are integral in ensuring the best outcomes for each student (matching learning styles and strengths).

Student Outcomes:

Outcomes are measured using pre and post testing using the Neale Analysis of Reading Ability, The Diagnostic Reading Freedom Assessment, South Australian Spelling Test and nonsense word spelling (draft writing samples are also collected). See attached table for individual data for 2005.

Student learning gains have been assessed as follows:

- More efficient, strategic decoding in reading.
- Increased reading fluency rates.
- Increased levels of comprehension.
- Increased student motivation to read independently (parent feedback).
- Teacher feedback - students completing reading based tasks more quickly and confidently in the classroom.
- Increased student confidence/self-esteem. Students were no longer seeing themselves as 'dumb'.
- Post completion of the program (Year 5) transfer of skills to spelling has begun to occur (this requires significant explicit practise and transfer to writing tasks).

Teacher Learning Outcomes:

The support teachers have gained invaluable knowledge about reading and spelling content, strategies and skills, together with how students learn, remember, make meaning and successfully transfer new learning.

Classroom teachers are using the same metalinguistic language as the PAL Program in the classroom which assists the support students to consolidate and to transfer, together with more explicit, metacognitive instruction which benefits all learners. The PAL knowledge has empowered involved staff and is now being incorporated into the new spelling program for the Junior School.

What Worked and Why?

- Delivery in small groups of two or three enabled the teachers to constantly check and monitor each student's progress and competencies, especially with high levels of auditory analysis and verbalising strategies. One 45 minute to one hour session per week rather than shorter, more frequent sessions gave more time to consolidate prior learning and to introduce new learning. The age of the students allows for them to concentrate for this length of time effectively. In addition, the activities are varied and fast moving to maintain interest.
- Time spent assisting transfer of skills learned to classroom literacy tasks is vital if the students are to independently use the learned strategies for literacy learning (assessed by longitudinal assessment as the students moved into Year 6 and 7).
- The two level approach meant that students would complete the first two sections of the program (Level 1 – Simple syllables and words. Level 2 – Complex syllables and words) in Year 4, having time to consolidate and transfer learned skills. In Year 5 students revise and consolidate Level 2 and complete Section 3 (Multisyllabic words) of the program. From our experience we have found that the Year 5 students are developmentally more ready to take on more responsibility for their learning and as such more competently verbalise their learning needs and more independently use the learned decoding and encoding strategies.
- Including parents in the program from the beginning, making them aware of the nature of the program, their support and commitment, together with the importance of the program for their child's literacy learning and ability to successfully access Year level curriculum, particularly why it is so hard for these children to learn to read fluently. Initially parents were hesitant about their children missing classroom learning or having to play 'catch up' (which of course is negotiated).
- Delivery of the program by a support teacher rather than a support teacher aide means that the program is more flexible and more able to adjust to the needs of the child. Teacher aides are able to assist with skills drill and practise type activities.

- If the school timetable and curriculum allowed, a more intensive approach would be preferable (2 to 3 45 minute sessions per week for one/two term/s in Year 4 and again in Year 5).
- The program is also successful because it is simple and straightforward. It is easy for the children to remember, make sense of and to be able to use on their own in the classroom.
- Transfer of skills to classroom tasks increased when teachers were more knowledgeable in the program. Gains were more widespread than the support students.

What Didn't Work and Why?

- Completing the program in Year 4 was not as effective as the students were not able to more independently transfer skills or take as much responsibility for their learning. We felt that cognitively they were not as ready.
- More frequent short periods of intervention were not as effective. By the time the teacher revised prior learning there was not sufficient time to introduce new learning and to verbalise and practise for understanding.
- Recognition of sounds/prefixes/suffixes was not as effective as repetition until the students were automatic.
- Groups of four students were not as effective as it was more difficult to closely monitor their learning gains.
- Initially, classroom teachers were not inserviced in the program which limited transfer of skills to the classroom.

Planned Ongoing/Follow-up Activities:

- For the program to be ongoing with more staff liaison and inservicing.
- For 2006 to run parent information sessions for interested parents and those of the targeted students. The sessions would impart knowledge and strategies on how to help your 'older child' to decode and encode.
- Offer the program in the intensive mode.



Case Study: Jared's Journey - From being bullied to being admired?

"Everyone kept teasing me, they were bullying me and calling me names. They didn't like me and thought I was dumb."

Towards the end of Year 3, 2003 Jared's classroom teacher requested an assessment and support for Jared's decoding and encoding skills. He had not been considered for support prior to this time and was not overly happy to be tested. However, he was able to clearly verbalise his frustrations and conclude that he must be 'dumb.' Assessment demonstrated that Jared was certainly an intelligent young man with a very specific glitch and a strong visual memory (these strong visual skills had allowed Jared to progress to late Year 3 without his difficulties being recognised). Jared commenced the PAL Program in 2004. He quickly picked up not only the skills and strategies, but also the relevance of the program and how it could help him which enabled him to progress rapidly. This case study documents Jared's progress through the PAL program in Year 5, 2005.

When I began working with Jared at the beginning of the year he was already well into the PAL Program and had made excellent progress in his ability to decode words. At this point his confidence was rising, but his spelling was still significantly below his chronological age and this was an issue for him and his parents. Early testing revealed that although Jared now recognized the long vowel sounds easily, his recall was significantly different. He was only able to correctly recall five of the ten long vowel groupings. A check of his consonant knowledge also revealed that he was unsure of three consonant sounds.

Previously I had been struggling to see why there seemed to be little transfer of the PAL skills and strategies to spelling. I began to realise that if this program was going to make a real impact on spelling acquisition then I needed, not only to teach automaticity in recognition of the long vowel sounds for decoding, but I also needed to teach automatic recall for encoding.

At this point I embarked on a program to make Jared more automatic with his recall of long vowel sound groups. I worked with nonsense words to ensure he had no prior knowledge and was unable

to use his impressive visual skills (which had meant that he was able to cope in the classroom undetected until late grade three, when the teacher began to see problems and ask questions).

Once these early skills were in place I moved on to the multisyllabic section of the PAL Program, which Jared embraced wholeheartedly. He was becoming more confident and was very aware that not only was his reading improving, so was his spelling. He could see the changes happening himself. After lunch each week he would arrive in the support room before I had managed to get there and would be sitting waiting for me – sometimes flicking through his work. (Generally most of the children are picked up from their classrooms at their allotted times, as their days are so full and hectic that they forget to come.) Jared never forgets, even when I have to reschedule his time. He will even come to support when the class are doing special activities that other children wouldn't dream of missing. His attitude to support had changed. "It's fun. This (program) makes it (schoolwork) enjoyable. We do interesting things."

As we moved through the multisyllabic section of the program Jared became totally hooked. For example: The rules for borrower consonants gave him the reason why a 'g' makes a 'j' sound when followed by e, i or y. For the first time he was able to see for himself the reasons why and how we spell the way we do and the fog of uncertainty in spelling was beginning to lift. His reading fluency had improved so much at this stage that he was now becoming an avid reader. His incredible interest in print would also be a great advantage in learning to spell.

It became very clear as I finished the program that it was really necessary to look at lots more multisyllabic words for both reading and spelling in order to transfer the skills and strategies he had learned to classroom tasks. I also needed to put in place some hard and fast strategies for learning spelling words. I used lists of real multisyllabic words that were way out of the children's experience range. They were in effect like nonsense words – the children couldn't use any previous knowledge to help them in their efforts to both read and spell. Jared's confidence just to "have a go" really began to soar. "I like knowing that I can read and spell new words. I love telling my dad the new words I learn when I get home." Through this program Jared's confidence, self-esteem and motivation have flourished. He has also developed a thirst for knowledge and vocabulary.

Despite the fact that Jared had been doing really well at spelling, one day he arrived at my room looking quite down. After enquiring as to what the matter was, Jared explained that he couldn't

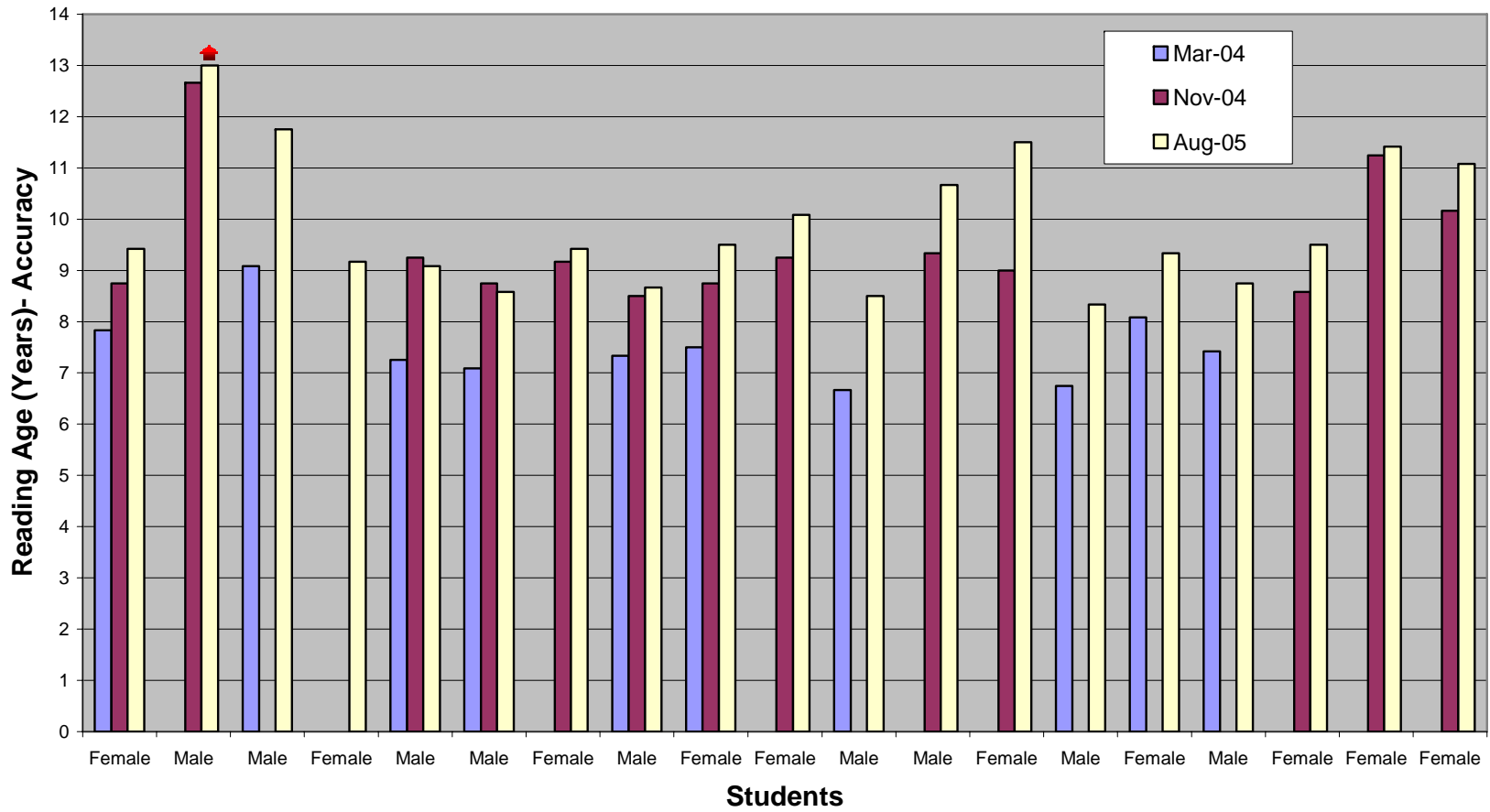
consistently get 20/20 for his weekly spelling tests – sometimes he would get 19! I felt that that was pretty good (especially considering his background), but he then explained that in his classroom children needed a perfect score on two consecutive weeks in order to move to the next level and are then able to learn two extra spelling words a week. Jared could never quite get the perfect score two weeks in a row and was still on 20 words while some of his friends were learning 30 words.

In my efforts to help him achieve his goal and keeping in mind his great visual strengths I devised a simple visual method for learning spelling and a step by step plan adapted from the PAL Program for recall during the test and from this “Rules for Spelling” were born. Jared was very keen to learn these skills and strategies and is now on his way towards his 30 words a week and is very happy about it!

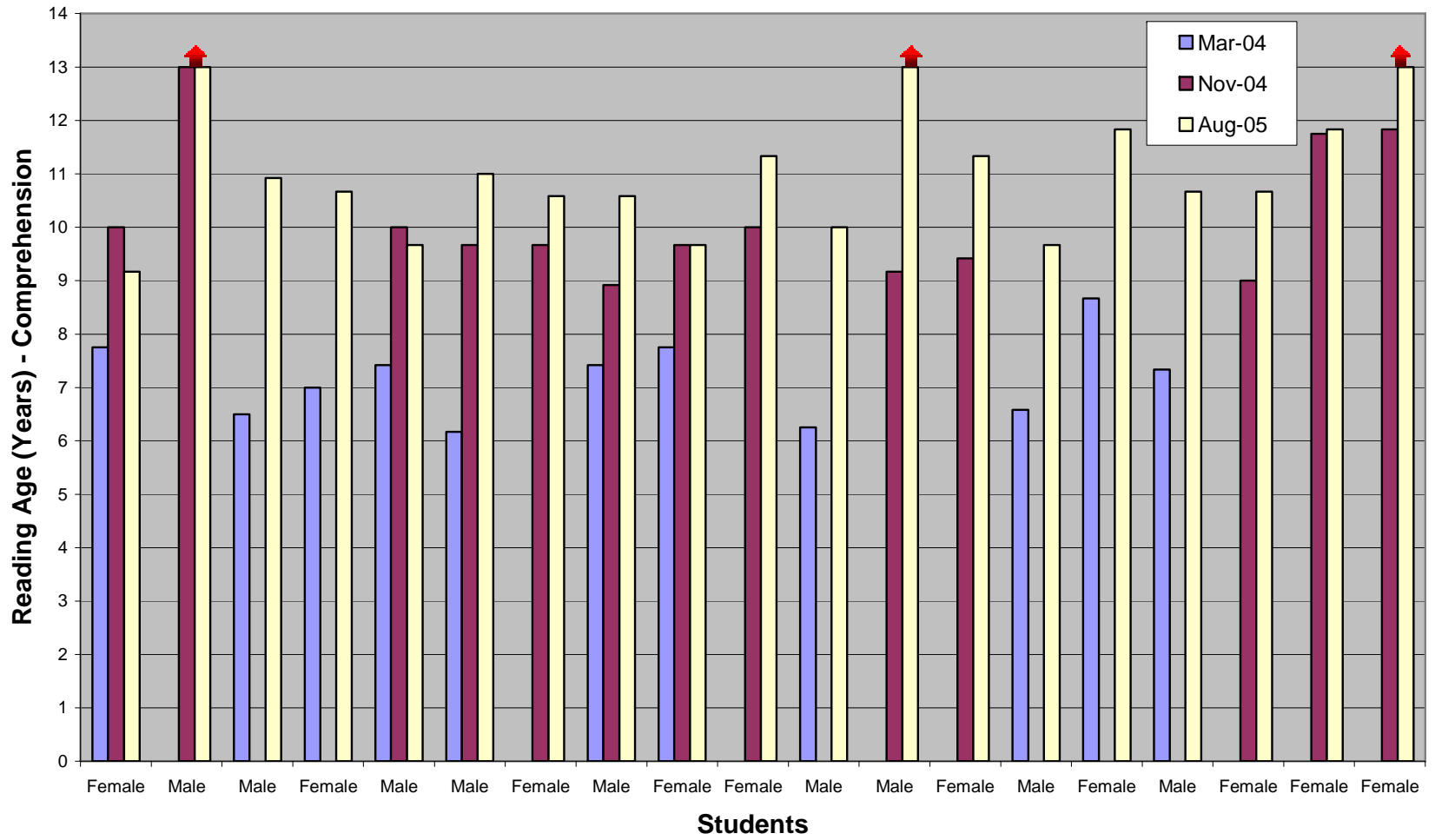
At the end of first semester I called Jared into the support room to tell him that in his report I had written how proud of him I was and how far he had come. He told me he knew that! I also told him that he had done so well that he really didn't need to come to support anymore. I had expected that he would be really happy to go home and give his parents this news, but his reaction floored me. His bottom lip dropped as he told me he didn't want to leave support and that he really wanted to keep coming. “I feel like it's better coming to support because I learn new things that the teacher talks about and the other kids don't know yet. It makes me feel good. I like knowing lots of things.....Now I can use big words and the bullies ask me what they mean, but I don't tell them.”

Needless to say I didn't have the heart to take him out of support and now in Term 4 he's still here and has just informed me that he wants to continue next year! His reason: “I really want to get a scholarship and a good job. I want to stand out and be different.....I want to grow up and be smart so people will admire me.”

Neale Analysis of Reading Accuracy - 2004-2005



Neale Analysis of Reading Comprehension - 2004-2005



South Australian Spelling Test

