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SPED 505 – Spring 2019

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Teaching Students with Learning and Behavioural Problems

**Research Based Action Plan**

**How Can I Address my Students' Inattentiveness During Reading Instruction?**

SPED 505 Teaching Students with Learning and Behavioural Problems

Spring 2019      Submitted by: Susan Dodd-Williams

## **Problem and the People/Introduction**

I had the pleasure of meeting Hailey in July of 2018 when she came for a two-week Kindergarten orientation. I had previously heard about her from her Nursery School teacher who had taught Hailey for two years she expressed some concerns about her behaviour. She said that at the nursery they noticed that she had quite a limited attention span but had not quite known how to approach her mother and share what they had observed since she was just a toddler. At the time which she began attending my school I had actually forgotten the name of the student and did not remember who it was until when I began to witness how inattentive she could be and how easily distracted she was. It was then that I could recall that I had been told about her. Hailey is 4 years old and she has a two-year-old brother who attends the same nursery and apparently, he displays some of the same characteristics of his sister.

I have taught Hailey since September and she will remain in Kindergarten until June 2019. She has settled quite well into school life. She enjoys playing and sometimes is content to play alone. She participates in classroom routines and for the most part will obey the class rules. She experiences great difficulty remaining focused on her work. She works well with memorizing subject matter, however, expressing this through writing or drawing is very challenging for her. Her fine motor and directional skills need to be strengthened in order to improve her letter formation and drawing ability. Unfortunately, she does not focus or pay attention long enough to see the letter formation or how to do simple pictures to represent her words. It would also be beneficial for her to choose a hand of preference for holding her crayon instead of switching from one to the other throughout the task as her focus begins to wane.

I called Hailey's mom in for a conference early in November and made her aware of what I had been noticing in terms of her inattentiveness. Her mom said she has also noticed how

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inattentive Hailey is and asked if I thought her daughter may have ADHD. I told her that I am not qualified to make that sort of a decision because it would require a medical diagnosis, I suggested that she ask the Pediatrician to provide a reference. I did however express to her mother that I really do not consider Hailey to be hyperactive considering that she does not tend to leave her seat or wander around or even out of the classroom.

Hailey obviously has some challenges to try to overcome throughout the school year. I decided that the main concern for this research-based action plan will be to address her lack of attention during reading class. This affects her level of fluency and comprehension, for example, she will start to read a short story from her class reader, and at the slightest sound or movement she becomes totally distracted and if not encouraged to get back to the reading task she will simply move on to something totally different.

The American Psychological Association's Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders provides information about the characteristics of students with ADD and ADHD.

The characteristics most common for students with ADD and difficulty with reading are: often failing to give close attention to details, often does not seem to listen when spoken to directly, often has difficulty organizing tasks and activities, and is often easily distracted by extraneous stimuli. (Reading Rockets).

Hailey seems to display all of the common characteristics of ADD, hence she became the best candidate for this Action Plan. The literature which I am reviewing will provide the necessary guidance and strategies to be used to allow her a more positive and supportive experience.

Friend (2011) points out that, some students who are above average intelligence such as Hailey may have a learning disability in the area of cognition. The characteristic of attention is included whereby these students may experience "extraordinary difficulty attending to only the

important stimuli in their environments,” allowing them to be captivated by other objects surrounding them or other sounds becoming just as noticeable as the voice of the teacher and their attention then switches to another stimulus. (p.133).

Improvement in other areas may be significantly impacted if Hailey can be guided to learn the skills to becoming more focused on her reading task. An article in Reading Rockets states that, “children must be able to focus their attention in order to decode words, maintain reading fluency, and understand what they read,” mastering these attributes therefore contributes to successful reading. Similarly, Vaughn and Bos (2012), purport that students require adequate attention skills to focus on the words in order to become a fluent reader. They say “fluency is the ability to read a text at an appropriate rate, accurately and with expression” (p.234), the authors also reminded educators that the ultimate goal for reading was to acquire knowledge as well as for the sheer enjoyment of doing so. Students who are incapable of remaining focussed or attentive to the text forfeit the purpose of reading. It is therefore of vital importance that students are equipped with the necessary skills and that accommodations are made to aid students in becoming more attentive to their reading tasks through the implementation of various strategies.

### **Research Question**

#### **How can I address my students’ inattentiveness during reading instruction?**

Based on my observation of Hailey, I found that she is unable to remain focused on a task long enough to complete it. Having researched various articles about attention, Reading Rockets states that, “attention problems can range from mild trouble focusing to severe difficulty maintaining or focusing attention (called ADD, or Attention Deficit Disorder). Some attention problems may involve a high degree of activity or impulsivity (called ADHD, or Attention Deficit with Hyperactivity Disorder).” I do not perceive Hailey as having hyperactive behaviour, I see her

as having extreme issues with her attention and ability to remain focused on the task which she is engaged in, even when it is pleasurable, like playing with her toys.

During this Action Plan it is my intention to research and implement various reading strategies which will begin a work-in-progress for addressing Hailey's inattentiveness. I believe that if she can gain more focus on her reading task then she would be well on the way to improving in other subject areas also.

### **Baseline/Situational Analysis**

Since September Hailey was tested with various Kindergarten concepts such as the eight basic colours, ten shapes, identification of numbers zero to ten, recognition of capital letters and common letters Aa-Zz and also the pure sound of each letter. She excelled in all these areas and the results and dates of mastery are all documented on her ongoing *Student Assessment form* which was used to provide information for her end of term Report Card in December.

After successfully completing the basic concepts she was given reading words which we call *flashcards*. The students are placed in small groups and they receive about four words which we talk about, play games with then use in oral sentences. The words are taken home in a *flashcard container* and parents receive guidelines on how to assist their child to memorize the flashcards using '**the look and say method.**' After completing that task, more words were given until 14 words were learnt which we put together to form short sentences. After mastering this task, we moved on to a *Reading Sheet* with 10 sentences comprised of the 14 memorized words. Hailey took some time to read the sentences, questions were asked to check for comprehension.

A lack of focus caused her to lag behind as the other students in the reading group forged on ahead. After completing the reading sheet, the process continued with reading the first story from the Introductory reader. This also involved much reading over, although she knew the

words, she was far too easily distracted and the story lost all meaning. The next wordlist had 16 words and the process continued until completing the second half of the Introductory Book. Once again Hailey completed the task however, she was now further back from her reading group, progressing at her own pace. She continued learning and receiving flashcards and transitioned to the next reader. (Refer to the photo reference for italicized words.)

### **Data Collection Plan/Progress Monitoring**

During the Data Collection or Progress Monitoring period I plan to observe and document Hailey's performance as I employ various strategies to assist her ability to focus more on her reading task. I plan to create an environment conducive to her becoming more attentive.

Hailey had completed the 30-word class reader; New Ibis Reader Infant Introductory Book prior to going on Christmas holidays, however I felt that having had a three-week break from school it would be best to start off by reviewing a previous challenge before starting the new reader.

#### **Day 1- Tuesday January 8<sup>th</sup> 2019**

The students were doing after playtime cool down exercises and preparing to go to P.E. class. I used this opportunity to spend 10 minutes with Hailey to do some reading. We discussed the pictures and I asked a few questions to check that she had the gist of the story. We began to read in our usual way where I would touch and guide her along each line of words. Within line 1 she stopped on the fourth word and looked around and required re-focus. She paused again, line 3 on the second word. A few more stops to look around were made during the 8-line passage.

The second time reading over, I introduced Hailey to the window focus card. I showed her how it could be used to let one sentence at a time 'peep out' at her so she could read it. This held her attention a little longer than the first time because it was easier to re-focus her to 'look

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through the window.’ She paused for assistance with words she had forgotten but did not ask random questions or just look around. I asked if she liked the window card, and she said she did.

### **Day 2- Wednesday January 9<sup>th</sup> 2019**

Today I used the quiet time while the girls were preparing to go to Music class. We used the window card to start off and it was somewhat similar where Hailey would pause sometimes for a word which she had forgotten. I would tell her the forgotten word and she would repeat it then read over the sentence. She was better able to manipulate the window card and pull it down at the end of a sentence to start a new one. She didn’t even get distracted and play with the card.

### **Day 3- Thursday January 10<sup>th</sup> 2019**

I gave instructions to the Teachers Assistant to monitor the class with their individual seatwork. I took Hailey for about 15 minutes to try the Modeling Strategy with her. I told her that I was going to take a turn to read. I touched the words while I read the passage placing emphasis on intonation and expression while the characters in the story spoke. At first, Hailey followed my fingers on the words and then she stopped to look in my face while I was reading. She was very quiet and she was smiling. When I finished, I explained that I had to practice reading a lot to be able to do that. I did not have her read to me at this time, I just wanted her to process that the class reader is similar to story books which teachers and parents read to children and that they sound so much more exciting when they are read in this way.

### **Day4- Friday January 11<sup>th</sup> 2019**

Today I pulled Hailey aside again while the class was doing a free colouring activity. I did the Modeling Strategy once again. The page had a little girl roller skating in the road and a car was coming so I stopped to do the Think Aloud Technique and I said “Oh no! Carol should not skate in the road she needs to go somewhere else!” Hailey immediately filled in that Carol

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could get hurt by a car and she needs to go somewhere safe. I asked her where Carol could go and she said “Carol should go on a playground.” I told Hailey that we were going to read and find out what Carol’s brother was going to tell Carol to do. I used the window card and placed it over the section where Peter was calling Carol to come to him. Hailey read it very slowly and without expression. Trying the strategy of Repeated Reading, I read it over and asked her to repeat after me. We repeated three times to try to improve her pace and although she did not ask random questions, she kept looking over at the picture to see where Peter was calling Carol to. She eventually said mid-sentence that it didn’t look like a playground. I explained to her that it was not a playground it was actually the sidewalk. We did not complete the page; however, the few minutes were centered around the portion that we did.

### **Day 5- Monday January 14<sup>th</sup> 2019**

Today the T.A. supervised the students with seatwork while Hailey and I went to read again. I am pleased at her willingness to come and try. Today I decided to try the Repeated Reading along with Partner Reading. I was going to be the partner at this time because Hailey is not at a level where she can be left with another young reader to guide her. I read the sentence and had her repeat it with me reading along. I paced it slow enough for her to get it and stepped up the pace just slightly. We repeated like that and sometimes I would drop my voice and see if she would say the word independently. She didn’t though, she stopped and looked at me and waited for me to continue. Then I started to say that it was her turn to read after my turn. She read independently but not very fluently.



## **Literature and Resources**

Hailey's above average testing for her Student Assessment form reflects one of the characteristics on an ADHD summary list. The item describes students as having a production deficit resulting in incomplete work, opposed to an acquisition deficit whereby these students are said to surprise their teachers by the information they actually know. (Friend, 2011. P.164).

Hailey struggles to remain on task to complete her work within the time allotted. She constantly requires gentle reminders to focus on what she is doing to finish it. At the same time, I am pleasantly surprised with all the Kindergarten concepts which Hailey has learnt.

Searching through the Hunter Library search engine I came across a title which caught my attention. I read the article somewhat hoping that it was not as upsetting as the title. I was wrong, it was quite a disturbing article. It is entitled, 'The teacher said I'm thick!' and it was a mini study which took the format of a qualitative interview with participants who had been diagnosed with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder. The article spoke about the experiences they had within a school setting and how they were made to feel. The article seeks to establish that "there is a need for teachers to be more informed about the impact that ADHD can have on a pupil and teachers need to develop positive strategies to support these individuals within the classroom" The research further stipulates that during the teacher training period would be a more effective time for educators to start learning about ADHD as opposed to when they enter the classroom as a professional who is now faced with challenges which they are not prepared for. (Kendall, 2016).

Istraigh (2011), points out a useful support strategy; he made reference to a teacher Joan Brennan who out of concern for her struggling readers implemented the use of Reading Focus Cards in an effort to help her students to focus better. She found that, "the card works to

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promote differentiated instruction by providing students with a different avenue to process and comprehend content and ideas.” They can prove to be a very helpful low-tech, inexpensive solution to readers who may be overwhelmed or distracted by too much text being on the page they are trying to focus on. An advertisement online <https://add.org/product/reading-focus-cards/> emphasizes how these focus cards help challenged readers to improve their attention, fluency, comprehension and retention. The readers eyes are guided from left to right while the eyes are being trained to focus on individual words and text lines and this helps to eliminate distractions on pages which are too wordy for the LD reader.

In an article from Clemson University Reading Recovery some tips were shared for another support strategy called Modeling. In this technique, teachers create effective think-alouds while they are reading a text to students. It helps them to “demonstrate how we arrive at our thinking, as well as the ideas themselves,” (Reading Recovery), this helps to guide students with their own thinking process. Teachers also demonstrate how to record their thinking by modeling writing or drawing pictures of thoughts. Creating and recording the thoughts and documenting them in the form of writing or even drawing for younger children, who cannot express their thoughts with words. This process eventually leads students to paraphrase and summarize their reading which improves the skill of comprehension. The modeling support style engages students into viewing the reading as a shared process rather than the teacher just giving them instructions on what to do.

In my 34 years of teaching, statistics would probably show that I perhaps did not recognize the students in my care who had ADHD, and certainly would not have catered for them with any sort of differentiated instruction. The Special Education course at WCU is now equipping educators like myself with the necessary knowledge and skills to provide better

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support for children with ADHD, allowing fewer children to get '*dissed*' with labels such as *disruptive*, *disorganized* and *disobedient*. It is critical for educators to discover a variety of support strategies to allow all students to engage in a positive educational experience.

### **Action Plan/Steps**

After doing much research on ways to address my students' inattentiveness during reading instruction, I have found some strategies to implement within my classroom. These steps should aid with improving attention skills and ameliorating some of the difficulty my student has with maintaining focus and staying on task in particular with reading.

Step1. The use of Reading Focus Cards is not a new phenomenon to me; They are a useful guide because the window in the card establishes an area of focus for the reader while eliminating distractions of too many words on a page and LD students need this tool to guide them. I will make them from cardboard as a start however, when the finances allow, I think I would like to purchase more durable plastic Reading Focus Cards. The ones with colourful windows also seem to be appealing as I saw it mentioned that sometimes the starkness of the white page can be offensive to some readers. I teach all girls, so they may be thrilled with a pink or purple window.

Step 2. The next step would be the Modeling strategy. First, I would read the class reader so that Hailey could become aware of the fluency. I would have post it notes with guide points for my "I wonder" expressions and model how I would think out possibilities within the scope of the story. When possible, the thought process can also use real life connections but ensuring that the student is not led away from the essence of the story or the important details in the text. My questions would be in a conversational tone rather than asking direct questions. After I show how

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I am thinking I would pause allowing opportunity for the student to interject her own thoughts also then I can help to guide her.

Step 3. In the Repeated reading strategy, I would read in an expressive tone in order to engage my young listener. I would encourage her to try to do likewise after I have a turn. This would continue allowing for the pace to flow a little better so that the sentence makes more sense and comprehension skills can be enhanced.

Step 4. Usually in the Partner reading technique, the teacher would do a suitable strategic pairing of students. However, I prefer to be the acting partner for my student. I do not think that at this time Hailey should be working with another student plus the children are only 4 years old, a bit too young to be saddled with ensuring that Hailey's attention is maintained.

### **The Report/Conclusion**

I implemented my action plan in my classroom with the aim of addressing my students' inattentiveness during reading instruction. It proved to be somewhat a painful process watching a child with so much potential struggle through some of her tasks. This opportunity to provide necessary intervention has given me a well needed incentive to continue. It is ultimately the task of the teacher to provide the necessary positive support for each child to be successful in school. I feel I am well on that road to helping Hailey. I certainly cannot report that after just one week of interventions that a miracle took place and that my student improved to the point of catching up with her reading group and now having a dramatic change with her level of attention. On the contrary, Hailey is a work in progress. We still have until June to continue the differentiated instruction which has now begun for her and naturally will be extended to other students who will also benefit from the techniques I am learning about and have tried. Perhaps the miracle is the motivation for me to employ strategies which may become the change for Hailey.

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A really awesome moment in my data gathering progress was when I was modeling the reading of the text to show Hailey how my tone would change and how the words should flow plus how much easier it was to understand when I didn't stop to look around the classroom or ask questions like "What's that noise Mrs. Williams?" During the reading she looked at the words for a while as I was pointing them out. However, when I paused to think aloud and ask an 'I wonder' question, Hailey looked straight up into my face and she was smiling. Aha! I had captured her undivided attention. A humorous thought ran through my head when she looked at me, I imagined her saying, "But Mrs. Williams, if you can read it so well, then why are you pushing me to do it for you?" I asked her if she liked when I read to her like that and she said that she did. I told her that with practice she would be reading like that too. I always tell my class that *"the more you do it the better it gets!"*

In the same way for us educators the more we research the more we learn. The article which I reviewed *"The Teacher said I'm thick"* certainly makes one do some self-reflection. After so many years of teaching, how painful it would be if a former student should confront me and express such sentiments of passed ignorant days. It is not my personality to make unkind statements, however, rolling of the eyes, tone of voice, a sigh or other body language from a frustrated teacher would be quite memorable for any struggling child.

After reading several articles for this action plan, I came across a critical message which I would especially like to keep for myself as well as to share with other teachers.

1. "Learn more about ADHD.
2. Have high expectations for the student, but be willing to try new ways of doing things. Be patient. Maximize the student's chances for success." (*National Dissemination Center for Children with Disabilities (NICHCY) (2010).*

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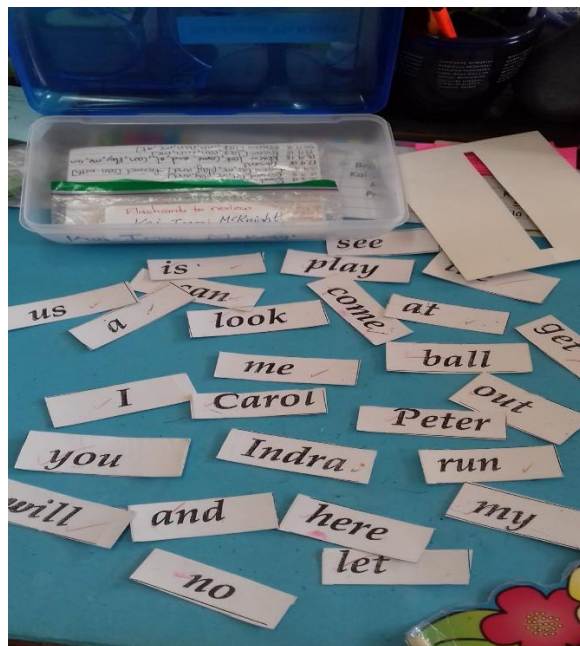
### Photo Reference

FLASH CARD ASSESSMENT SHEET

Name \_\_\_\_\_  
Grade: K/W  
Term: \_\_\_\_\_

27.11.18 - Review [lost] Relearned [lost - find]  
28.11.18 - Review [lost] Relearned [lost - find]  
29.11.18 - Review [lost] Relearned [lost - find]  
Kindergarten p.31 Pages 7-10 review Mummy sheet  
03.12.18 - Absent for testing  
4.12.18 Kindergarten: review Mummy #1-5  
05.12.18 - Review [lost] Relearned Mummy reading sheet #1-5  
6.12.18 Review [lost] Relearned [Daddy - like]  
Kindergarten: Mummy #6-10  
10.12.18 Review [lost] Relearned [Daddy - like] Review Mummy reading sheet  
Christmas - [Kitten for] p.7 David, The lost Ball  
[lost] Daddy - like

Assessment Sheet

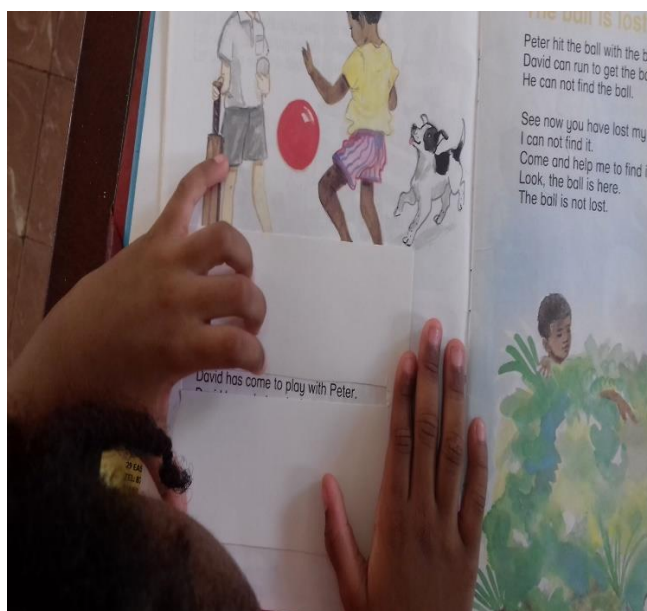


Flashcards and Flashcard Container

Carol and Peter

1. Carol and Peter.
2. Look at Carol and look at Peter.
3. Come here Carol and come here Peter.
4. Carol can play and Peter can play.
5. Carol can run and Peter can run.
6. Come and look at me run and play.
7. Look at me play with Carol.
8. Look at me run with Peter.
9. I can play with Carol and Peter.
10. Carol and Peter can run with me.

Reading Sheet



Using Reading Focus Card