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TE846- Term Project

"Those who read well are likely to read more, thus setting an upward spiral into motion."
(Cunningham, Stanovich, 1998, pg. 15). Learning to read is a complex skill that needs to be
developed as early as possible, and nourished throughout a child's education. Not all students
will develop the skill of reading as naturally or as easily as others, and some will need extra
instructional opportunities to become truly successful. The ultimate goal of reading is to
comprehend and gain meaning from what you read, but to gain meaning from reading students
must not just develop certain comprehension strategies such as inferring, questioning and
synthesizing. They must also develop strong phonological awareness at an early age to promote
the development of decoding strategies, and learn to read fluently, so their reading does not
impede with the meaning of the passage. Students develop the skills of decoding and fluency at
different times, and no two students are going to be exactly the same. In my study, I will describe
two very different learners both possessing reading strengths and weaknesses in different areas. I
will describe, analyze, and reflect upon the time I spent with each student, and the different
strategies I used to help increase their reading proficiency in the areas of decoding and fluency to
ultimately improve their reading comprehension.

To create better understanding of my case study, I will begin by describing each student
and the focus of their reading instruction. My first student's name is Colin. He is a 5 and 10
month old Caucasian boy, living in Rochester, Michigan. Colin attended two years of preschool,
during which time his teachers identified normal developmental abilities, and social skills. Colin
attended Kindergarten in the 2010-11 school year, and reportedly excelled at math and science
and was average to slightly below average in reading and writing. Having an August birthday,

Colin was just old enough to enter kindergarten in 2010 and his mother has considered retention at times. She stated, "due to his young age, he struggled a bit with appropriate behaviors and tended to act out in class and on the bus, but by the end of last school year his teachers had noticed a big improvement in this behavior. We originally considered having him repeat kindergarten, mainly due to his age, but his teachers recommended promoting him to first grade". According to Colin's kindergarten teacher, he "tended to struggle the most with reading, and didn't show much interest in this area. He really enjoyed and succeeded at math and science, and anything that incorporated hands-on learning. He seemed to lack interest in tasks like drawing, reading, and writing. Colin had a strong imagination and enjoyed learning through play (in kindergarten). He often made up his own stories when looking at the pictures of a book and resisted reading the words on the page, especially if he did not know them from memory". While casually listening to Colin read (before beginning the case study) I noticed that he struggled to decode unknown words, and relied heavily on figuring out words by looking at pictures as well as guessing.

Based on what I learned about Colin from his parents and teacher, my original prediction was that Colin lacked decoding strategies, which impacted his reading accuracy, ultimately affecting his reading comprehension. To be certain, I began by assessing his reading skills using the Fountas and Pinell Reading Assessment kit. There are many different systems to use when assessing a child's reading level, but I prefer this system because it is easy to use and provides clear immediate feedback on not only reading accuracy, but fluency, and comprehension all in one test. Before analyzing the results of Colin's pre assessment, I will describe the test to give some basic understanding on its purpose and structure. The purpose of the Fountas and Pinell Reading Assessment is to determine an appropriate instructional and independent reading level

for each individual reader. This is done by calculating rates of error, accuracy, self correction, fluency and comprehension of a given text. This test not only determines the student's reading level, but will guide the teacher in providing explicit instruction in the strategies the student needs to improve reading abilities (www.readinga-z.com, 2011).

Before assessing a student's reading, it is important to make them feel comfortable in the setting, so they can perform their best. For Colin, I chose to work with him at his house in his family study. This room has a desk that Colin uses for school work and a couch that he reads with his parents on. He sees his parents work there on a daily basis and knows the rules and routines of that room. I also knew there would be no interruptions, something important to keep in mind when working with an easily distractible, five year old boy. Since I don't work with Colin on a regular basis, I was worried that he would be nervous on my first visit so I asked him some questions about his day before presenting him with the test. I was also very clear about what the test was for, telling him I was going to have him read a book aloud to me, while I take notes on his reading to see how much he knows. I told him he could have all the time he needed and let him know that I would be asking him some questions about what he read as soon as he finishes. Colin began right away and did not seem nervous or uncomfortable during the test. His pre-assessment results (attached, document #1) show that he is reading instructionally at a level B. This level is on grade level for kindergarten (age 4-6) and considered to be at the early emergent reader stage. "In this stage of reading, children are just beginning to understand the basic concept of book and print. They are learning to recognize and name both upper and lower case letters and developing phonological awareness skills such as recognizing phonemes, syllables and rhymes. They are beginning to learn sound/symbol relationships, and are able to

read (most) consonant vowel consonant (CVC) and high frequency words" (www.readinga-z.com, 2011).

Colin read this reading passage (level B) with 95% accuracy, and satisfactory comprehension. He only self corrected his mistakes at a ratio of 1:4, which tells me he is only moderately monitoring his reading. I found this pre-assessment particularly helpful when working with Colin because I was able to identify whether his mistakes and self-corrections were based on meaning, syntax or visual cues, which further guided my instruction. I noticed that the majority of self corrections were made using the meaning of the text. This means that he was able to accurately self correct his reading by thinking about the story background, information from pictures, or using the meaning of the sentence. I also noticed that Colin did not use syntax or visual cues to decode unknown words in his reading. After analyzing Colin's pre assessment, I began to plan for the lesson. I decided that his biggest area of weakness was decoding, making that the focus of my lesson.

The following day I met with Colin again at his house to teach a lesson on decoding. To do this I used a word sort (attached, document #2) from the book "Words Their Way" by: Donald R. Bear. To make Colin feel comfortable during the lesson, I told him that we were going to play a game using words. Some of the words would be familiar and some would be new. I encouraged him to do his very best when reading new words and reminded him to ask questions throughout the lesson if needed. I began the word sort with an easier list of short vowel words to make sure he felt successful at the beginning. I know that students are often discouraged when learning something new if they don't feel successful at the beginning and I wanted to prevent this from occurring with Colin. The first set of words I gave Colin worked with "short a" and "short i" CVC words, such as cat and it. I presented Colin with a set of flashcards containing these

words and I had him separate them into two piles, "no rules" I said. I wanted to see if he could notice a pattern without any guidance. The first time he began by just sorting them according to the number of letters in the word (his math brain clearly at work). I complimented him on this creative strategy and then showed him another way to sort the words, by arranging the "I" words in one pile and the "a" words in a separate pile, spreading them out so the words could be read aloud as we went. He quickly caught on to this and finished sorting the cards correctly. Next we went through and read the words aloud, letting Colin read as many as he wanted and was able to read independently. I made sure to emphasize the vowel in each word, and asked him if he knew any other words that made the same sound. He used rhyming and came up with three real words that weren't in the word sort: "hat", "mit", and "fat" and one nonsense word: "jit". After that brief warm up we proceeded to the lesson. I told him the lesson would be slightly more challenging because it worked with the "short o" and "long o" sounds, so the letters are the same but the sounds would be different. Before giving him the sort I reminded Colin of the sound that "short o" and "long o" makes. I told him that long vowel words always "Say their name" and sometimes have an "e" at the end, for example: "rose", and "vote", or they might have an "oa", such as "goat" or "coat". I showed him a few examples of each, using the word cards, and had him make the "short o/long o" sounds out loud with me several times. Next we looked at a few examples of "short o" words from the sort and I modeled how I would decode them if I didn't know how to read it. I took a small piece of paper and covered the word, sliding the paper from left to right, revealing one letter at a time. While doing this I showed him the sound that each letter makes and taught him how to blend the sounds together. For example, when given the word hop, I covered the "op" and made the "huh" sound, followed by revealing the "short o" and saying "ah", and finally the "p" sound. After the whole word was uncovered I blended all the

sounds together saying "hop". We practiced a couple "short o" words, followed by some "long o" words. After about 10 minutes of modeling and guided instruction, I felt comfortable giving Colin the directions and allowing him to try on his own. His task was to separate the short vowel from the long vowel words in each sort, saying the words aloud as he places them in each column. After he finished sorting, I went through the list, saying each word aloud again. If I came to a word that was placed in the wrong column I would ask him to listen as I said the word aloud. For example, Colin placed "hope" under the "short o" column with the word "sock" at the top, so I asked him, "Listen as I say the word 'hope'. Listen as I stretch the word apart. 'Huh-oh-p'. Now listen as I say the word at the top of this column, 'sock', 'suh-ah-k' Do you hear the difference between the sound the "o" makes in each word? 'Ohh' and 'ahh' ". Do you want to leave "hope" here or move it to the column that says "soap" at the top?" After this discussion, Colin quickly changed his mind and moved "hope" to the "long o" column and we read the rest of the lists aloud, identifying any rhyming words in each column. During this lesson, Colin was able to identify "long o" and "short o" words by placing them in the correct column. He was also able to decode some of the unfamiliar words independently, showing awareness of letter-sound relationship and phonemic awareness. I was pleased with Colin's ability to use decoding skills while completing a word sort by my side, but I was also concerned that he would not transfer this knowledge to daily reading, especially independent reading, so I decided to analyze using a final assessment.

To assess Colin's understanding of the previous lesson on phonemic awareness and decoding, I gave him two short books, printed off the website www.superteacher.com . This website provides teachers with a large quantity of free classroom resources, such as printable worksheets and books. I often go to this website when looking for supplemental materials for

lessons in my classroom and find it really helpful when tutoring. The first book contained "short o" words (attached, document #3), the second contained "long o" words (attached, document #4). I asked Colin to read the books one at a time for me, while I paid attention to whether or not he used the decoding strategies taught. The short-o book definitely proved to be less challenging than the long-o book because the CVC pattern is usually mastered before other patterns. These books are written using word families and therefore went hand in hand with the word sort lesson, but one criticism I have of them is the illustrations. A reading strategy taught to many young children is to use the pictures in books to help you if you are stuck on a word. Although, this strategy is helpful during the early emergent stages of reading, children need to learn other decoding strategies as well so they can be successful when they eventually read books that do not contain illustrations to use as a crutch. I noticed that once again Colin relied heavily on the illustrations when reading these book, and rarely used the decoding strategies taught in the previous day's lesson. For example, the short o book showed the fox hopping on objects on each page. He was able to identify this pattern early on and quickly read through the book. Not until he got to the sixth page with "my fox hops on a rock." did he pause to determine the word "rock". As he is accustomed to doing, he glanced at the picture, combined with the letter r at the beginning of the word and said "rock!" with enthusiasm. Although this strategy worked in this situation, it does not always prove as successful. For example, the next page says, "I *like* my fox a lot" and shows a boy and his fox with a heart. Again, Colin paused when seeing the word like and looked at the picture of the heart, finally saying "I *love* my fox a lot". Luckily this mistake did not interfere with the meaning of the sentence, but that is not always the case. Although the final assessment did not give me the results I had hoped for, I believe that with more practice Colin will use these decoding strategies more often in his reading. In the future, I will use

flashcards or books with less explicit pictures to assess his learning of word families. According to Cunningham and Stanovich, "It is difficult to overstate the importance of getting children off to an early successful start in reading. We must ensure that students' decoding and word recognition abilities are progressing solidly." (Cunningham, Stanovich, 1998, pg. 15) This was the goal of my lesson with Colin, and is something I will continue to work on with him, and other students like him, in the future.

The second child that I focused on in this study is a 10 year old Hispanic girl named Cinthia from Atlanta, Georgia. Cinthia originally moved to the United States with her family in the first grade at age 7. Spanish is the primary language spoken at home, and English is only spoken at school, so Cinthia rarely received support at home and struggled a lot with homework. Reading has also been very challenging for Cinthia, and has affected her in nearly every subject, including math. Luckily, Cinthia has been receiving extra support from sheltered ESOL classes for the past four years. She finally tested out of the program and was put on the ESOL-monitored list by the end of fourth grade (in 2011). While she is now much more proficient in English, she still struggles with reading as well as math and her grades continue to suffer. According to her teachers, Cinthia was reading at a third grade reading level at the end of her fourth grade year last May. She has developed strong decoding strategies (an intense focus of her ESOL reading classes) but struggles severely with reading fluency and comprehension.

Not only do I know Cinthia from seeing her at the school I work at, and she attends, but I also tutor her in math two days a week during the summer. She is familiar with me as a teacher in her school, as well as her tutor, so I was not worried that she would be nervous during the pre-assessment or lesson, but since we would be working on reading and not math, I wanted to make sure she was comfortable and prepared to do her very best. For this case study I met Cinthia at

the neighborhood library where we usually meet for tutoring. We sat in our normal spot, a big table in a quiet corner of the study section. Before beginning the running record I explained to Cinthia how we would be spending the next few tutoring sessions. The first day would be spent on pre-assessing, so I could get a good understanding of what reading skills we needed to work on. I thought the focus would most likely be fluency due to her previous teacher's input, but I needed a more specific idea of what her strengths and weaknesses in reading were; reasons why the pre-assessment is such an important part of the lesson.

The first pre-assessment I used was an oral reading fluency test. This test helped me to determine how many words per minute she is capable of reading on the type of text she will be presented with at the beginning of 5th grade. The fluency assessment uses a short piece of text (265 words). The teacher gives the student a copy of this text to read, and marks the words read correctly from the passage on another copy, while timing the student with a stop watch. After exactly one minute, the teacher tells the student to stop reading and she marks how many words per minute they read correctly. Depending on the grade level standards, students will be expected to read a certain level at a certain rate. At the beginning of fifth grade, according to Georgia Public Schools, students should be reading at least 120 words per minute at a level S. Using this assessment (attached, document #5) it was determined that Cinthia was only reading 89 words per minute at level S, therefore fluency was something she struggled with as originally predicted. The second pre assessment I gave Cinthia was a running record, again using Fountas and Pinell. She read a level O passage with 96 % accuracy, 60% comprehension, and a fluency rate of 101 WPM (attached, document #6). According to both assessments, the two areas Cinthia struggles with the most are reading fluency and comprehension. It makes sense that she would struggle in both of these areas because, often times slow and choppy reading, similar to Cinthia's, impedes

with the meaning of the text. "Students with learning disabilities often struggle to read fluently
(with speed and accuracy), leading to difficulties in reading comprehension". (Chard, Vaughn,
and Tyler, 2002, pg. 386). Cinthia often spent up to 10 seconds decoding an unfamiliar word,
and after correctly decoding a word she did not go back to reread the entire sentence, so the
meaning of that sentence was often lost.

   I decided to make fluency the focus of Cinthia's lesson since her low rate of 101 wpm on
instructional level text and only 89 wpm on grade level text is clearly interfering with meaning. I
used two activities to help Cinthia improve her reading fluency rate. The first activity is called
Fry's Phrases (attached, document #7). "The words from these phrases come from Dr. Edward
Fry's Instant Word List (High Frequency Words). According to Fry, the first 300 words in the
list represent about 67% of all the words students encounter in their reading"
(http://www.timrasinski.com/presentations/fry_600_instant_phrases.pdf, 1). This was a good
warm up activity for Cinthia, and something she can easily practice independently at home to
continue to improve her reading fluency rate. In preparation for this activity, I cut out the phrases
from list one and pasted them on individual note cards. I began by having Cinthia read each note
card aloud to me, one at a time. If she stumbled or paused on a phrase I said it aloud for her,
pointing to each word as it was read. Afterwards I had her repeat the entire phrase aloud telling
her to carefully mimic the way she heard me read it. Throughout the activity, I put a small tally
on the back of the cards she missed. The objective of this lesson is to have the student read
through the entire list (starting with list #1) without making any mistakes before continuing on to
the next list in the set. The words and phrases get progressively more challenging as the lists go
on, so I made sure to encourage Cinthia along the way to prevent frustration. Many of the words
(especially on list one) are high frequency words, and Cinthia only missed a few on the first list.

Something that she did struggle with was reading the sentence with the correct end punctuation. I had to model how to read a phrase with a question mark many times, as this was something she often overlooked. Although the difference between a question and a statement seems minor, it can often interfere with meaning if read incorrectly, which is why reading fluently is such an important skill.

The next lesson I taught Cinthia (a few days later) used repeated readings to encourage fluent reading. "Samuels (1979) recommended repeated readings as an effective way to build reading fluency for struggling readers, one of the by-products of reading the same text repeatedly is that eventually they can read it fluently and accurately, allowing them to consider the meaning of the passage without the burden of decoding" (Ivey, 2002, pg. 239). Cinthia has told me in the past that she enjoys poetry from Shel Silverstein, so I chose two of his poems for this activity, "It's Dark in Here" and "One Inch Tall" (attached, document #8). Both poems are short enough for repeated readings and include rhyming which encourages more fluent reading. To prepare for this activity I transferred both poems to large chart paper using a black marker. I began the activity by reading the first poem aloud, pointing to each word as I read. After each read aloud I asked Cinthia to tell me what she noticed about each poem. In "It's Dark in Here", Cinthia noticed the unusual rhyming pattern. She attempted to name it as ABAB, but then later changed her mind. She was able to identify the rhyming lines and noticed that she heard me emphasize the rhyming words, such as "here", "clear" and "near" as I read the poem. She also pointed out that some lines had a period at the end, while others did not. Cinthia really enjoyed the second poem, "One Inch Tall". She followed along closely as I read it and even correctly identified the rhyming pattern (AABBBC). She pointed to line C and told me it was repeated throughout the poem. Cinthia also noticed that some of the lines were long and some were short making the

rhythm of this poem "cool", as she stated. The purpose of having Cinthia listen and make

observations about the words and phrases of each poem was to help her identify things like

rhyming and punctuation, which often interfere with fluency when not read correctly. Next, I had

Cinthia read each poem aloud with me. Choral readings are another good way to improve

fluency because they help students read at a quick rhythmic pace, while keeping up with the

other students (or in this case, me). In the last part of the activity, I had Cinthia read each poem

aloud to me while I informally assessed her fluency while listening for things like pace, rhyming

and punctuation. After the third repeated reading, Cinthia read each poem fluently without any

mistakes in accuracy. She was able to tell me what each poem was about and answer a few basic

questions as well as some higher level thinking questions. This was a big improvement from the

answers she was able to give me after her running record pre assessment.

After our lessons, Cinthia practiced Fry's Phrases, and she continued to read Shel

Silverstein poetry aloud independently or with a friend daily. This was the biggest difference

between Colin and Cinthia's lessons and one reason why the results of their post assessments

were so different. In the final session of this lesson, exactly one week after giving Cinthia her pre

assessment, I assessed her fluency again, using the same oral reading passage that was given to

her on the first day, to see how much she gained in one week. This time Cinthia read the same

fifth grade level reading passage at 97 (previously 89) words per minute (attached, document

#9). Although Cinthia's fluency is still below average for her age and grade, she gained 8 words

from the few lessons on fluency that I taught her. If Cinthia continues her daily practice of Fry's

Phrases and oral reading of easier text and poetry, she will see even more growth in the area of

fluency, and will also improve reading comprehension along the way.

Colin and Cinthia are two very different children with different reading strengths and weaknesses. Factors such as age, ethnicity, ability, and interests have impacted their reading abilities and will continue to affect their learning throughout their lives. This case study helped me realize how important it is to implement effective reading strategies such as decoding and fluency because ultimately these areas greatly influence comprehension. Through Colin's lesson, I learned the importance of explicit instruction of decoding strategies. It is not enough to simply model a reading skill; rather students need to be taught how to decode words through modeling *and* continued guided practice using a varying amount of activities. I also learned the importance of repeated instruction, especially with younger children. One thing that I will work to improve in the future is giving my students more time to be successful at a skill before assessing them. I did not have as much time with Colin as I did with Cinthia, which I believe is part of the reason he did not show very much growth in decoding from pre to post assessment. Cinthia's lessons taught me the importance of using multiple forms of assessment to get a better understanding of what the student knows or is capable of doing. I also learned the importance of using differentiation in the classroom. What works for one student might not always work for another, so it is important to have many resources for teaching the same standard. I think that part of the reason Cinthia was so successful with increasing her fluency in a short period of time was because she was able to practice fluent reading in more than one way. I will remember what went well and what I need to improve to help guide my reading instruction in the future. Most importantly, I'll remember the importance of explicit instruction of decoding and fluency strategies and the impact they have on reading comprehension.

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