

Term Project: Developing a Struggling Reader

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TE 846

The guiding thought throughout this case study is a quote from Louisa Moats illustrating the importance of reading and early intervention in every child's life. In the article *Teaching Reading Is Rocket Science* Moats (1999) wrote:

Reading is the fundamental skill upon which all formal education depends. Research now shows that a child who doesn't learn the reading basics early is unlikely to learn them at all. Any child who doesn't learn to read early and well will not easily master other skills and knowledge, and is unlikely to ever flourish in school or in life. (pg. 5)

First and foremost this is a case study on reading intervention, but since reading is the foundation for all schooling and school prepares us for life, this is not just about reading intervention. It is also a launching off point for the life of a child. It is hard to imagine that at 4, 5, or 6 years old, the skills developed in a child will determine the course of their entire life, however, early intervention in reading really is of crucial importance for life's successes.

Background on BR as a learner (Standard III and IV):

To begin discussion of this study I will start with providing relevant background knowledge of student BR, who is the student that I did reading interventions with in this study. BR is a 6-year-old first grade boy in my class, who is a struggling reader. BR is a Caucasian student with a primary language of English. According to standard reading assessments at the beginning of the school year BR was reading at a DRA (Developmental Reading Assessment) level A. This is considered to be below grade level for a student entering the first grade. BR is considered to be below grade level not only in his DRA score, but also in other foundational reading skills. His letter and sound ID knowledge and his phonemic awareness skills were below grade level as he entered first grade and have prevented further reading growth in other skill areas. BR currently is a Tier 2 student, in terms of our districts RTI framework model. Since

BR is a Tier 2 student, in addition to weekly classroom reading instruction, he receives additional reading interventions from our reading specialist two times a week for about 45 minutes. He also receives one-on-one reinforcement lessons from other paraprofessionals in the building.

At the beginning of the year BR had a great deal of challenges in terms of academics, behavior, motivation, and self-confidence. After speaking with his mother at the beginning of the year and his previous teacher I gained a great deal of insight on BR as a learner in the past. However, I was shocked because what I heard from here did not seem at all like the child I had come to know in the first few weeks of school. Last year, due to a clash of personalities with his teacher and his struggle with academics, he hated coming to school. His mother told me that she would have to fight with him everyday to get out of the car and walk into the building. She was having a hard time at home getting him to do anything that resembled school work including, reading, writing, math and any other academic subjects.

According to his kindergarten teacher he also was a constant disruption and behavior problem as a student last year in the classroom. His kindergarten teacher said that he would run away from her and hide under a desk when he got in trouble, frustrated, or didn't want to work. He was constantly physical with other students, distracted often, and not on task. She told me that BR avoided work in any way that he could, was unfocused during whole group and small group lessons, and was generally a very challenging child to teach.

I believe BR became a struggling reader due a combination of factors that include his dislike of school, his behavior problems in school, and the initial deficits in the basic building blocks of reading and phonemic awareness that he entered school with. According to the Michigan Literacy Progress Profile assessments, which I will refer to through the rest of the

document as MLPP assessments (MISDELC, 2003), BR entered kindergarten at risk in phonemic awareness skills, concepts of print, and phonics skills and was exited from kindergarten still at risk in those areas. Skills such as concepts of print, rhyming, segmenting, blending, letter identification, and sound identification, were the skills the BR began and ended kindergarten below grade level in. These initial deficits paired with his behavior problems and lack of academic motivation caused BR to continue to fall behind. This information paints a picture of the child that walked through my door on the first day of school. However, the child that walked in my door a few weeks later was a completely different child.

As I began the year with BR I did not have previous knowledge of BR as a student. I knew he was low academically and noted as a behavior problem by his kindergarten teacher, however, I had not spoken with his teacher or his mother yet. I wanted to get to know BR myself first. The child that walked through my door on the first day of school was nervous, had low self confidence academically, was quiet to adults but not towards his peers, and was unwilling to take on a challenge or academic task. His first reaction before he would even write his name on a paper was “I need help”. I could tell from his body language and facial expressions that he did not like school, did not want to be there, and was already counting down the minutes until the dismissal bell. Each day even before lunch he had already asked me at least four times when it was time to go home. I knew that my first job with BR would be to instill self-confidence, to focus on his strengths, and draw his focus away from his perceived weakness. I knew that I needed to make this child want to come to school, to see the value of learning, and to see himself as someone who could learn. Hamre and Pianta wrote, “The benefits of emotional support were stronger than the benefits of excellent pedagogy for cognitive learning in beginning reading” (Hamre & Pianta, 2005). Knowing that establishing a positive relationship with BR first and

setting him up emotionally for learning was crucial, this became my initial task before I would even begin to dive into the intensive lessons on academics.

As I undertook this self-confidence challenge in the first week of school I used a lot of positive praise with BR in terms of academics and behavior to begin instilling in him the idea that I will be looking at his strengths, not pointing out his weaknesses. As Morrow and Gambrell point out, “the real dilemma is that lower-achieving students often exaggerate their limitations. Believing they are worse than they really are” (Morrow & Gambrell, 2001, pg. 179). BR was a child who believed his abilities were worse than they were, and due to this it was important to instantly build BR’s confidence and have him use what he does know and focus on that instead of dwelling on what he does not know.

One area in literacy that was extremely frustrating and challenging for BR was writing. I began instilling confidence here believing that if I tackle the hardest area first, the other areas would follow. Each day during writing time he would say, “I can’t write”, “I don’t know how”, “I can’t spell that” and give up. I would ask personal questions about him to get an idea, his face lit up with a smile when he found out I was interested in him and his stories. This was the first step for him in his confidence. Then when he would say “I can’t write,” I would break it down and have him start small, with his name, and then a picture and then a word to label it. He enjoyed the idea that I was not asking him to write a whole sentence, something he saw as a task he would never complete. Then, when he would say “I can’t spell” or “how do you spell that” I would help him segment the sounds and ask what letter he thought. Right or wrong when he gave a letter I would smile and say “if that’s what you hear write it”. For BR knowing that I was not looking for a certain letter, and not looking for him to be right or wrong allowed him the freedom to try.

After a few weeks of specifically focusing on confidence building in writing, he began to step out and accept challenges in other academic areas. He began to walk in the door with a smile on his face each morning. BR also began getting started on his writing without hesitation, avoidance, or the look of dread on his face. After speaking with his mother at our Meet the Teacher Night I knew something was starting to work. She came up to me and said, “I don’t know how you did it or what you did, but thank you. BR is happy, he likes you, and he actually wants to come to school”. After hearing this and the way BR was last year and his opinion of school I had high hopes of a successful year of reading for BR.

Since BR had started to discover the positive that school can hold, I knew it was time that I could continue building his confidence in the areas of reading. I did this by introducing new activities to him based on the letters and sounds he currently knew, and the phonemic awareness strengths he had. Also, in my lessons I planned to combine new skills, sounds, or letters with previously mastered ones, so that he can see his success in each lesson as we continue to build upon skills. I referred to him as a reader and taught him that great readers are not the people that know all the words, they are the ones that persevere until they figure the words out.

I also worked on teaching BR to enjoy reading. During my literacy block students have an opportunity for a great deal of choice. They have choice in the books they put in their book box. They have the choice of how they will read each day and whom they will read with. According to Morrow and Gambrell “the most widespread recommendation for motivation is providing choices” (Morrow & Gambrell, 2011, pg.187). BR enjoys having a great deal of choice during my literacy block as he has the ability to choose the books he reads, the way he reads, if he will read to self, read to a partner, listen to reading, or work on words, and who he

will complete those tasks with. All of these things set the stage for the academic interventions that would begin.

Now, as a student I see BR as a very social, fun, and silly student. He has a great personality and really is a good-hearted kid. He has come to really enjoy school this year. As a student BR can be very chatty in class, is often unfocused, and is distracted easily by things and others around him. However, he is also willing to work hard, willing to try new things, and motivated by positive praise. Now that BR has a new found confidence in himself and motivation to do well in school, I can now intensively focus on building his reading skills so he can make big gains now and maybe even leave first grade reading at grade level. Since BR is a first grade student, I know that this year and the improvements he makes, or does not make, will have insurmountable effects on the rest of his academic career. As Connie Juel wrote, “...children who were unsuccessful readers in first grade remained poor readers in fourth grade” (Juel, 1998). This is a crucial year to develop reading skills for BR’s future.

Standard I and V: Lesson Plan Development and Literacy Research

My first step in creating lessons for BR was to assess his reading skills in, phonemic awareness skills, concepts of print, and phonics knowledge. I started with the foundational reading skills because “phonemic awareness is one of the best predictors of success in learning to read” (Ehri & Nunes, 2002). To do so I used the MLPP (Michigan Literacy Progress Profile) tests for phonemic awareness skills, and letter and sound identification (MISDELC, 2003). The MLPP assessments are a combination of separate assessments that measure the five pillars of literacy, which are given to students in a one-on-one fashion. I gave the phonemic awareness tests on rhyme, onset and rime, phoneme blending, and phoneme segmenting and then the letter

identification and letter sound identification tests. These assessments ask students to tell if a word rhymes with another word, to supply a word to rhyme with a word given, to blend onset and rime of a word together, to blend three and four phonemes into a word, and to segment a word into its individual phonemes. In each section there are eight questions given to the student. The letter identification and sound identification assessment tests students in the area of phonics. The student is first asked to identify twenty-six uppercase letters and twenty-eight lowercase letters. There are twenty-eight lowercase letters to account for the two different ways the letter “a” and “g” are typically seen in print. The next step of this assessment is for the child to point to the lowercase letters on the paper and to say the sound they make. The answers are recorded on a scoring document.

I chose these assessments because they are research based assessments that give accurate information regarding the specific fundamental skills I am looking at. The assessments themselves are also scaffolded as they give examples as the teacher models the task, this allows for guided practice, and finally the assessment is on an individual basis for students much like independent practice. These are short tests done one-on-one which is more developmentally appropriate for first grade students and these specific skills and allow for information to be gathered through observations about confidence in skills and automaticity.

Since phonemic awareness and phonics are fundamental skills for reading development, it was crucial to assess these areas first to see what skills are mastered and which ones are not. From my preassessment I learned that BR had strengths in terms of phonemic awareness since he was able to rhyme, blend onset and rimes, and segment sounds in words 100% of the time. He was unable to successfully blend three or four phonemes together to create a word. In the blending portion of the test in which students are asked to blend three or four phonemes together

to create a word, BR was able to do this 2/8 times or 25% of the time (artifact 1). This showed me that he had strengths in manipulating parts of words with rhymes and onset and rime. He was also able to segment words into their separate sounds. Since blending and segmenting are closely related skills, I knew that I could use his phoneme segmenting strength and his onset and rime blending ability to aid in his phoneme blending mastery.

In letter identification and letter sound identification pre assessment BR was able to identify 45/54 letters, 83% of the letters, and 13/26 sounds, 50% of the sounds (artifact 2). His strengths were that he was able to identify 22/26 uppercase letters. Since uppercase letters and lowercase letters sometimes share formation similarities, this was a strength to build upon. In terms of letter sound identification, BR was still working on mastering vowel sounds and letter sounds less commonly used (x, y, q, v etc). He had a good foundation of basic consonant sounds to begin working with and to establish connections to. BR knew 11/21 consonant sounds and he knew 2/5 vowel sounds. The vowel sounds he knew were *a* and *o*, which are two very common vowel sounds. Allington and Baker wrote, “research illustrates that mastering phonics skills has a positive correlation with reading success in early childhood (as cited in Morrow & Gambrell, 2011, pg 75). Knowing this information and that letter sounds are a basic building block for the rest of phonics instruction, it is important to develop all the letter sounds immediately. The basic sounds of letters must be mastered before other word phonics patterns can be taught such as diagraphs, blends, long vowels, etc.

Using the information from the preassessments I decided that the two main areas of concern and need for mastery for BR’s reading success were letter sound identification and phoneme blending. The National Reading Panel Report in 2000 found that “phonemic awareness is a precursor to learning phonics, and it is important for children to engage in

activities that promote the skill” (NICHD, 2000). Using reading research and comparing it with the Michigan Grade Level Content Expectations for first grade students, I was able to determine the two main lesson goals. The English language arts GLCE’s for first grade readers in the state of Michigan in terms of phonemic awareness and phonics are as follows:

R.WS.01.01 demonstrate phonemic awareness by the wide range of sound manipulation competencies including sound blending and deletion.

R.WS.01.02 recognize that words are composed of sounds blended together and carry meaning.

R.WS.01.03 understand the alphabetic principle, that sounds in words are expressed by the letters of the alphabet.

R.WS.01.04 use structural cues to recognize one-syllable words, blends, and consonant digraphs including: letter-sound, onset and rimes, whole word chunks, word families, digraphs *th, ch, sh*. (MDE, 2011)

I chose these skills because they are the building blocks for all other reading skills. The National Reading Panel (2000) suggests that:

explicit instruction in various elements of phonological awareness, such as rhyming, phonemic segmentation (breaking a word into its phonemic units—*bat* → /buh/aa/tuh/) and phonemic blending (putting the parts together -- /buh/aa/tuh/ → *bat*) pays dividends in the long run in terms of its transference to beginning-reading achievement.

(as cited in Morrow & Gambrek, 2011, pg. 53)

BR needs to learn to blend phonemes in order to decode words. Likewise he needs to automatically identify letters and sounds in order to start decoding words, recognizing sight words, and all other reading tasks that are all based on a basic knowledge of phonics.

Before creating my lesson I did some further research on the topics of phonemic awareness and phonics. Morrow and Gambrell wrote, "...to become good readers and writers, children must learn to decode words. In the beginning stages of learning to read, phonemic awareness is crucial to success" (Morrow & Gambrell, 2011, pg.200). In order to develop educationally sound lessons as well as enticing and motivating activities for BR, I planned to do lessons that would get BR directly involved in the process and would build his love of learning. I wanted to make these sessions fun and game like in nature. Through creating lessons that will scaffold learning, BR will gain motivation and success in reading and will begin a journey to be a life long learner.

Standard II and VI: The Lessons

In the development of my lessons, I began by researching the type of teaching method that would be best for phonemic awareness and phonics instruction. In the article *Critical Elements of Classroom and Small-Group Instruction Promote Reading Success in all Children*, Foorman and Torgesen (2001) wrote:

Recent intervention research with children at risk for reading failure has provided powerfully converging evidence that phonemically explicit interventions are more effective than interventions that are less phonemically explicit. By phonemically explicit, we mean direct, systematic, and comprehensive instruction to build phonemic awareness and phonemic decoding skills (phonics). (pg. 209)

Using this information I determined that a direct instruction method in which learning was scaffolded through the lessons would be best for teaching these goals. I planned lessons on letter sound ID and phoneme blending. Since teaching these skills can be done at the same time I taught these lessons simultaneously. During my literacy block I would pull BR individually twice a day for fifteen minute increments. The first session I worked with BR, it was on phoneme blending, and second session, it was on letter sound identification and an activity called *Making Words* that brought both ideas together. Morrow and Gambrell wrote, “in addition to phonemic awareness, children who are going to learn to read successfully must develop print tracking skills and begin to learn some letter names and sounds” (Morrow and Gambrell, 2011, pg. 200). Using this information I decided that it was better to teach phonemic awareness and phonics at the same time instead of waiting for one to be mastered before moving on to the other.

I will first focus on the set of lessons that I did with BR on phoneme blending (artifact 3). From the preassessment (artifact 1) I knew that BR had mastered the idea of segmenting words into sounds and blending onset sounds (first part of the word) and rime (the end of the word) to create a whole word. Since blending and segmenting are closely related skills, I felt that BR would grasp this skill quickly with specific explicit instruction in this area. To begin each session I used an activity called *Picture Slide*, from the Florida Center for Reading Recovery web site (FCRR, 2008). This site was designed to provide teachers with researched based lessons for students in certain areas of literacy. The activity I chose integrated both blending and segmenting and since segmenting was a strength for BR this activity used his strength to activate knowledge of the skill to be learned. In this way I hoped to continue to build BR’s confidence in himself as a reader.

In the opening of this lesson I would review with BR the ideas of blending and segmenting, what it means to blend and segment and we would practice this with onset and rime, which he was already able to do. In this activity BR got a picture of an object, for example a frog. The pictures are cut up into pieces that correctly represent the amount of phonemes in that word (artifact 4). The picture of a frog was cut up in four pieces for each segmented sound /f/ /r/ /o/ /g/. I began this lesson by modeling the activity for BR and manipulating a few pictures and segmenting the sounds as I moved the pieces apart and then blending the word as I pushed them together. Next, I would give examples of how to blend into the word by doing it correctly and non-examples by just using the first sound then guessing the word. After this BR and I would practice segmenting and blending together as he manipulated the sounds. The final part of this activity was for BR to do this on his own with two-phoneme words and three-phoneme words. Since the answer to the blended sounds was right in front of BR in this part of the lesson, the goal was to teach him the relation between blending and segmenting and to get used to listening to all sounds before saying the word they create. Then he manipulated the picture parts as he manipulated the sounds.

While researching other ways to do blending lessons I found that an effective blending game would be "...a simple riddle-guessing game. (Where) the teacher begins the game by naming the category and giving the clue. 'I'm thinking of an animal that lives in the water it is a /f/ /ish/ [or /f/ /i/ /sh/, depending on what level of blending you are working on]" (Morrow & Gambrell, 2011, pg.204). This was a part of the blending lessons that I thought would engage BR, and we would play it after we had worked on the picture slide cards. I would explain the game to him and tell him that now we are going to play a game where he needs to blend sounds together to make a word that will answer my question. I would model for him the process of

blending the stated sounds together. Then we would do examples together as a guided practice. The next step was for him to guess the riddle. I would say “I’m thinking of an animal and it’s a /b/ /ir/ /d/” and BR would guess the animal. If he successfully guessed it he would make a riddle for me. Since he was able to segment sounds, it was possible for him to do this. It was also a motivation for him to get the riddle right. Finally, it was a way for him to see further the connection between the two skills.

My next set of lessons focused on letter sound identification activities (artifact 5). In these lessons I started with a short letter sound song. This is a fun song my students enjoy and it goes over all twenty-six letter names and sounds and with visual pictures that represent the songs words and the letters that go with it the song helps students remember the letters and sounds in a fun way. Example lyrics to the song are “A says “a” ant in an ambulance “a” “a” “a”. This was the opening to my lesson and it was a way to activate his prior knowledge of letters and sounds.

The next part of this lesson was a letter sound picture sorting task that I also found on FCRR called *Brown Bag It* (FCRR, 2008). I gave BR a pile of picture cards and five bags labeled with a letter to sort the pictures (artifact 6). Before we began sorting I would review the letter sounds with BR for each of the five sounds we were focusing on. Next, I would model for BR the process of figuring out the picture, segmenting out the first sound, and the process of determining the letter bag to sort it into. I would model for him what to do when I could not remember the letter and sound. I would review the song in my head to recall the letter sound correspondence, or I would review the other letter options to determine the correct letter sound. Next, BR and I would work together to sort the pictures into the bags. Finally, I would give BR another pile of cards in which he would do independently. In order to focus on his strengths in this lesson and continue to build confidence I chose to design the activity so that three known

letter sounds and two unknown letter sounds were used in each session. This way he can have confidence built as he works with the known sounds and focus on two at a time that he doesn't know. I had previously thought to just introduce one unknown sound at a time, but then I worried that he will get the new sound correct with process of elimination not really connecting the sound to the letter.

In order to combine the ideas of phoneme blending and letter sounds and phonics together I ended each session with a *Making Words* lesson (Cunningham, 2009) (see artifact 5 closing). This was one way to show BR the purpose and connection between the blending and letter sound lessons. I chose lessons that used the new sounds he was learning and previous sounds he had mastered. In a making words lesson, BR got a specific set of paper letters. The goal of each lesson is to build words using those letters. For example, letters might include s, t, a, n, d, and the student will build words that can be created from those letters. Words like an, and, tan, sat, Dan, and stand could be build using those letters. This process involves segmenting sound in words, identifying letters to correspond to those sounds, and blending sounds together to check on the developed word. After we build a word we do something I call "bumpy and smooth". This is when students take their finger and bump it as they say each sound, then they smoothly drag it under the word the blend the entire word. As Morrow and Gambrel (2011) wrote:

Children develop phonemic awareness as they stretch out words and listen for the sounds they hear and the order of those sounds. *Making Words* lessons are an example of a type of instruction called Guided Discovery. In order to truly learn and retain strategies, children must discover them. (pg. 205)

These lessons allow BR to use all the different lessons we are working on and to connect them

together as he has to use blending and letter sounds to create and read words. This is another type of independent practice piece in the set of lessons. Louisa Moats (1998) in the article *Teaching Decoding* wrote:

Systematic programs begin with a limited set of sound-symbol correspondences a few consonants (b, f, h, j, k, m, p, t) and one or two vowels (a, i)—so that words can be built right away. Other consonants and vowels are added gradually to those already known. Vowels may be represented in a different color. Coupled with practice dividing words into phonemes and blending them back into wholes, children can build words with letter cards and play “chaining” games in which one sound is changed at a time to make a new word (*hat, bat, bit, hit, him, hip, hap, map*). The core activity in systematic, explicit decoding instruction is blending single sounds into words. (pg.2)

This is exactly the type of instruction that *Making Words* offers and it shows the ways in which *Making Words* lessons highlights all the different components BR is working on at this time.

Each day that I met with BR I would do two sessions. I would start with the blending lesson and then meet with him again later to do the letter sound lesson and connect it with a *Making Words* lesson. During these lessons I scaffolded BR’s learning in each stage. I used the alphabet sound song to activate prior knowledge as well as relating blending to prior knowledge of segmenting. I began each lesson simple to build confidence and would slowly progress to more difficult blending to challenge BR. I demonstrated the process myself of thinking of how to solve problems or perform tasks through modeling and allowed BR guided practice where he received explicit feedback from me. He was then given the opportunity for independent practice where I was able to see his use of the skills.

Standard VI: Lesson Analysis

In my initial lessons on blending with BR, he was hesitant of the activities. The first two times we met, we focused only on two phoneme words. This was to build a sense of confidence in BR as we were going to move on to harder ideas in the weeks to follow. Since BR was able to blend onset and rime, he was able to be successful in blending two phoneme words with the picture slide and the riddle game. As BR got comfortable with the idea, activities and the order of events, he began to want challenges, he challenged me in riddles, and he began to strive for “the hard ones” as he would say. He would say “Ms. Mellor this is too early lets get to the hard ones”. When using the *Picture Slide* materials in the middle of each lesson, BR was initially stuck on how to blend the three sounds in *fish* together. He would say /fi/ /sh/, instead of the three-phonemes. This was typical in the first few session. He showed hesitation in blending words fluently and relied on the picture to help him through the activity. Since he already knew the final answer, because the picture was on the card, this activity became more of a practice in the way to blend, not actually in blending sounds from memory.

As you can see in artifact 7, at the end of my sessions with BR he was successfully able to manipulate the picture cards to segment and blend the word together 4/4 times. These pictures were two, three, and four-phoneme words. According to this data and information I concluded that the *Picture Slide* activity was an effective tool in teaching BR the technique of blending sounds. In order to determine if it was the picture that aided in this ability or if BR was able to blend the sounds with only verbal games I looked into the data of the *Riddle Game* part of each lesson.

When we began to play the *Riddle Game* BR struggled and would initially say animals that started with the initial sound, but he would not accurately solve the riddle. When I said

/f/o/x/ BR guessed, “fish”. I would repeat the sounds and have him focus on them until the end. Then he would get “fish”. In the beginning of the sessions it was his strategy to use and focus only on the initial sound of the words. As I worked with BR on this and we went through the process of guided practice in which BR got feedback for his answers, he began to succeed in the game after five sessions 8/10 times BR would get the correct word blended. He began to listen to the entire set of sounds before blending. When he began to do this he was able to more successfully get the answer and blend correctly (see artifact 8). As you can also see in artifact 8, which is a video taken towards the end of my blending lessons, BR’s confidence in the game as he played grew. He even segmented the word kangaroo for me to blend together and was able to blend four-phoneme into words. BR enjoyed being challenged and challenging me back with the game and it was a fun activity. He viewed this as a positive time in the lesson and would want to do it every time I met with him, even if it was math time. I even began to overhear BR at indoor recess playing this game with his friends.

According to the preassessment data on blending BR was able to blend accurately 2/8 times (artifact 1). According to the same assessment after all sessions on blending were complete BR was able to blend three and four phonemes together to create a word 100% of the time, 8/8 (artifact 1). According to this data the lessons on blending including the *Picture Slide* activity and the *Riddle Game* were successful intervention lessons for teaching blending of sounds. I will take a further look at how this skill transfers into blending letter sounds together to decode words in the analysis of the *Making Words* activity.

The next set of lessons were on letter sound ID and connecting letter sounds and blending through *Making Words* (Cunningham, 2009). When BR met with me he had a smile on his face because it was a different interesting way for him to practice this skill other than flashcards,

which his mother previously told me he hates. He was engaged with the bags and cards and eager to get started (artifact 9). After a few sessions he would even try to skip over the opening of the lesson and get right to sorting. The first few times I did this lesson with BR, he had a hard time determining the vowel sounds specifically. In the first few session I would do a lot of modeling for BR and examples. I would also show him how I would use the song and visual pictures references to help myself if I forgot a sound. The song has visual pictures that go along with it and they aid in the remembering of the letters sound. After working further on the letters and their sounds he was able to gain consonant sounds so that he was only working on the vowel sounds as unknown letters. BR would say the picture and really segment out that first sound to determine the location for the card. Later, in the sessions BR would frequently use the letter sound song to remind himself of the letter on the bag and the sound it makes early in the sessions. During the last two sessions, BR no longer used the song as a reference. His letter sound ID was more automatic as he segmented the first sound, he would immediately look for the letter instead of needing to use the song as a recall tool. As the sessions continued I could see his confidence grow as he would say often, “Look how fast I can do this” or “you didn’t give me any hard ones today”. This was a sign of confidence in his letter sound ability that I had not seen previous to these lessons this year. After twenty-five separate sessions (five sessions a week for 5 weeks), and after a reassessment of his letter sound ID BR now knows 25/26 letter sounds. That is a 46% gain from the 13/26 letter sounds he knew before the lessons. BR still struggles with *x* sound and says “ox” as the sound.

Initially BR had a much harder time with the *Making Words* part of this lesson. At first he was able to manipulate the sounds individually, segment them and build the word, but he struggled when blending them together. This made sense because he was still working to

strengthen the skill of blending at the time we were working with letter sound ID. In *Making Words* BR made great progress from beginning of the sessions to the end of the sessions. Now, as I build words with him he is able not only to identify the letters correctly to build the words, but he can also blend the sounds into words (artifact 10). As you can see in artifact 10, BR is successfully able to manipulate the sounds into the words and blend the words together. He does this quickly, with automatic letter recognition. BR does not even segment the sounds out loud anymore as he did in the beginning. It is more of an internal process than self talk and external. BR has caught up in the *Making Words* lessons with the rest of the class. He no longer does them individually with me, he does the lessons the whole group is working on including blends. BR frequently volunteers in the whole class lessons to lead the class in building the words, which shows his confidence has improved in his activity. In the beginning of the year he would sit quietly and rely on others to help him along and needed a lot of individualized attention. As you can see in artifact 10, BR is now able to build words independently, with automaticity, and confidence.

During each lesson I made sure to do things that would ensure BR's success in the activities. All the lessons were scaffolded so that he would see me model the activity, do it with me, get feedback as he tried it himself, and then he could do it independently. I made sure to begin with skills that I knew BR could achieve in blending and mix in letter sounds that he knew in the letter sort activity. I did this because I knew he was still gaining confidence in himself and I wanted him to feel the sense of accomplishment. I also did this to make sure that I did not set BR into a place of frustration concentrating too heavily on his weakness and not his strength.

Another thing I did to aid in BR's success was to set up each session so that it followed a pattern. This way BR knew what was going to happen, what we were working on, and what

things we would do before the session was over. This allowed for a lot of things to happen with ease and a flow to them and I did not have to explain each activity each time we did it. BR began to get used to the activities and focus solely on the new information, new letters, or new amount of phonemes being worked on. Another thing I did to ensure the transfer of blending and letter sound ID, was to connect it with *Making Words*. This was a very important thing to do with BR so that he immediately saw how the two separate skills would help him be a reader, and that they were skills that were used together.

According to the preassessment and post assessment data (artifacts 1 and 2), the reading instruction provided has made a meaningful contribution to BR's reading success. He now has mastered all of the phonemic awareness skills necessary to become a reader. He has the letter sound and letter ID knowledge to automatically recognize 25/26 letter sounds and to manipulate them together to blend words. Also, according to another assessment of reading skills, the DRA, where BR needed to use his knowledge of letter sounds, letter ID and blending to decode words, BR has improved in his DRA level. The DRA now shows that BR has moved from a level A to a level 3 in reading. According to DRA and grade level standards BR is still below reading level, however, in one month he moved from a level A to a 3. This means that he passed the assessments for A, 1, 2, and 3. As a kindergartener BR stayed at a level A from January until June. If BR is able to continue improving at this reading rate over the course of the year he is well on his way to making gains and becoming a grade level reader as he exits first grade. Whether he exits first grade reading at level, or not, he now has the foundational skills necessary to build upon as a reader and improve. BR also has gained confidence in himself, motivation to read, and a love of school that are sure to help him the rest of his journey as a learner.

Reflection of Instruction and Student Learning

After reflecting on the lessons there are some changes I would make in the interventions. Since BR was able to master the idea of blending in fewer sessions the letter sound ID, I would test him sooner in the blending skills and once he was secure I would have met twice a day to focus on the letter sound ID lessons. I think that this would have allowed for more exposure with the letter sound ID and this might help to increase the speed of mastery in these skills.

I also think that I would have broken my lessons up into three different meeting times, not just the two. I think that separating the letter identification lesson into the letter sorting activity and then a separate lesson on *Making Words* in which I opened by reviewing blending and letter ID might have made the focus of attention to the *Making Words* part of the lesson stronger. Although BR was still able to achieve success in this lesson I could tell that at times, when he rushed through words, he might have been losing interest and attention in these areas.

In terms of data collection I would have done additional assessments more frequently to have more data to observe and analyze. Since I did five sessions a week for five weeks it is hard at times to recall exact feedback given and exact student responses. Other than what is recorded on the assessment sheets I wished I had kept more anecdotal records or recorded more artifacts in the beginning, middle, and end of the process to have remembered the exact progression BR went through.

Another thing in the future I would like to include is a peer interaction element to these lessons. Peer tutoring is an effective teaching strategy and I believe the BR could have benefited from this. I would like to have some of the *Making Words* lessons done through peer interaction with a peer that could read the words to him and build with him. The *Riddle Game* is another

area in which BR could have benefited from peer interaction after I noticed him playing it at recess.

From all of this information obtained in the case study I learned a great deal about what worked with BR and what did not. I learned what will work in the future to ensure his success as well. His interventions will not stop here. I began with the letter sound ID for the first twenty-six sounds that relate to alphabetic graphemes. I am going to continue the letter sound ID lessons with the other letter pairs in words that create different sounds that are represented by two letters. Since BR has mastered the basics of the 25/26 letter sounds and blending, according to artifacts 1 and 2, I am going to begin working with BR in this same manner on other letter sounds.

Since all letter sounds have been learned with the exception of “x” I am going to move on to using this song, bag sorting technique, and *Making Words*, to teach the other sounds in language. This will include sounds like th, ew, ar... etc. I will create a letter pair portion of the alphabet song along with visuals and words to remember sounds made by pairs of letters in words. Instead of using the bags however, I will use word sorts that include these letter sounds and he will be able to listen for sounds and glue them in certain letter pair categories. As Moats notes in his article *Teaching Decoding*, sounds should be taught then anchored to graphemes that represent them. Moats wrote:

This mimics the way alphabetic writing was invented. The sound /s/, then, would be associated first with “snake” and the letter *s*, and later with the *ci* and *ce* combinations (*city*, *race*). With an instructional goal of teaching eighty to 120 spellings for forty phonemes, and then moving to syllables and morphemes, teachers can teach the whole system in a comprehensive, clear, logical sequence over several years. (pg.4)

Using this idea now that BR has 25/26 letters to work with and the skill of blending those sounds together, I believe the moving on to teach the other ninety four possible spellings for all forty phonemes as Moats writes will be the next important step in BR's reading development.

The aspects of my reading lesson that demonstrate my newly learned techniques are the ideas that phonemic awareness and phonics can be taught simultaneously and in connection with each other. Although they are separate skills they do not require knowledge of one to do the other in most situations. I learned that phonemic awareness should be taught as students play with words and connect it to phonics, when the student is ready to relevantly see the connection between the two. I also learned that it is important to not simply teach twenty-six letter sounds, but to teach all the sounds in the English language and then teach their representations. For example /th/ is a sound, that should be taught as a sound, then shown in a representation of the graphemes th. Most importantly I learned that the basic reading skills are vital in the development of reading. Even though phonemic awareness does not have anything to do with letters and words as first glimpse it is phonemic awareness that allows for all letter sound manipulation to occur as readers develop

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