

Literacy Case Study

As I got to know my students in the beginning of the school year I noticed that one student, J (pseudonym), would need extra support that was differentiated to meet his needs, especially when working with literacy skills and strategies. In the study below I discuss this specific student during 6 mini lessons and analyze, describe, and reflect on those lessons which focused on improving his literacy skills, spelling specifically.

In order to understand the study below, I share background information on the student being studied in the following paragraphs. As I began thinking of a student to work with for this case study, I quickly thought of J. Not just for his clear struggle during whole group learning, but also for his optimism and desire to learn and grow. J is eleven years old in a 5th grade inclusive classroom. Unfortunately, J is reading multiple reading levels below grade level expectations, currently at an M (Fountas & Pinnell) where the expectation is to end the year around a U. J is a Latino boy who speaks primarily Spanish at home and only English at school. He (upon testing from our Bilingual Psychologist) has recently been labeled as having a learning disability, specifically with retention. He is an EL student and has received EL services since he came to our school in 1st grade. He continues to receive one-on-one reading services with our reading specialist in addition to receiving EL services full time (1 hour a day, every day of the week). We are currently working on getting his IEP finalized after our many domain meetings with the team.

This particular student faces many instructional challenges, and has for years. He has been one in which our school administration and teachers have tried to work toward getting an

IEP for him; however, it was always pushed aside as people thought it was strictly a language barrier. He continues to test in the 1st percentile on most of the standardized tests and makes little growth (using MAP and his EL assessment) each year. In regards to instruction, J needs often breaks and always needs differentiated materials. J is reading well below reading level and needs support with vocabulary for basic words, which makes reading content specific subjects very difficult for him. J has continued to struggle in most subjects, however, is optimistic and has desire to learn and do well. He has shown a history of struggling in all academic subjects, but has always been a joy to work with.

For the case study lessons J and I worked in our classroom, during our reading/literacy block, one-on-one, in the back of the classroom, while other students were working on their independent reading practice. Our classroom setting allows for independence and cooperation in regards to all students and their work. It is my belief that because my students are in 5th grade, and on their way to transitioning to middle school, they should be capable to work with autonomy while having the capacity to incorporate choice and collaboration whenever warranted. My classroom is set up in large table groups rather than rows, so that students are able to share their thoughts and ideas easily and so they are able to work in groups collaboratively. Students often feel rewarded for taking risks, and feel they are able to do so, especially in writing, for example: students share their writing with peers and with the class so they can receive constructive feedback as often as possible. J continues to work well with others and is able to interact in socially appropriate ways with his peers. J has shown tremendous growth socially and emotionally since the beginning of the year, and I believe this is because of the nurturing and safe environment that he is in while working on learning.

Because of this student's difficulty within literacy I chose to do the Spelling Inventory from Words Their Way, a Close reading exercise, and a Maze reading exercise trying to filter through literacy skills and to find one or two to focus on for my strategic instruction with J. After administering all three tests I noticed that he still needs support in spelling, reading, writing, and when using vocabulary. His spelling inventory showed that he still needs support with vowel sounds and inflected endings of words. Of 62 feature sounds in the inventory, he was able to correctly use 41, showing that about 33% of his spelling was still lacking (Appendix 1). This was not a surprise to me because J's ability to spell words correctly plays a role in his decoding, which is essential to reading, and with which he struggles significantly. In regards to the Close reading, this student was reading a 540 Lexiled piece. He was able to complete this activity with relative ease, filling in 22/45 words correctly (Close and Maze). This puts him within the high 3rd grade reading level, approximately (which is where I also have him reading for my latest Fountas and Pinnell assessment). For the Maze reading he was instructional at a lexile of approximately 880. He had 14 errors computing to 70% accuracy (Close and Maze). Again, this puts his reading within the higher 3rd grade range (even 4th grade), which is still unfortunately 2 grades below grade level. This is drastic improvement from the beginning of the year, as he was originally reading at an end of 1st grade reading level.

Although I had administered those assessments, I only used the Words Their Way Spelling Inventory for my lessons (Appendix 1). This was because my initial idea for the lessons was not specific enough toward one objective. This is also because I felt that with this student's difficulties with retention, it would be unfair to teach vocabulary, spelling, and writing in just a few short weeks and expect dramatic results. I realized that the ability to spell supports student's comprehension overall, and that doing my lessons based on spelling instruction will only

strengthen his comprehension and give him the skills needed to feel more confident in literacy. I also focused my project on spelling because research proves that teachers noticed “better performance on reading tasks such as oral reading, silent reading comprehension, and other reading-related measures in addition to spelling” for students after they have received spelling instruction (Bear et. Al., 2012, p.20).

Throughout the lessons I used formative assessments as a guide for our next lesson. For example, the pre assessment Words Their Way Spelling Inventory (Appendix 1) that I gave was informative but then also proved beneficial as J and I went back through and made corrections. This led me to devise my next lesson plan for the following day and week. After the second lesson on –ed endings I had J re-spell words on the Words Their Way Inventory and used their feature guide as a way to determine where else J would need instruction. This formative assessment (Appendix 3) showed me that vowels would certainly be the next topic I would instruct (short, long, and diphthongs) during our second week of one-on-one instruction time.

The goals chosen for these lessons were based on the Common Core State Standards expectations for spelling for grade 5 using our school district’s spelling curriculum (Words Their Way, Bear et. al.). Although this standard is quite broad, I felt it encompassed the words that J and I would work on allowing him to spell grade level appropriate words after working together and practice. These goals were chosen so that I could meet J at a level where he could work instructionally with explicit instruction of word spelling and study. Meeting J’s level of spelling was necessary, just as Morris and Gaffney (2011) explain that “as teachers, we have to take readers with learning-disabilities where they are and move them along as far as we can in the time that is available...Teaching...well above his instructional level would only have invited frustration and confusion, and may have led him to withdraw from the act of reading” (p.339).

My goal was to instruct J and provide him with spelling strategies at his instructional level allowing him to apply them to his spelling in the near future. I believe that instructing J with these goals will allow him to apply his spelling strategies when working with 5th grade words and vocabulary, and may boost his comprehension and fluency. Bear et. Al. (2012) explain that “the study of word features must match the level of word knowledge of the learner. Word study is not a one-size-fits-all program” (p.8). Working on spelling at J’s level will allow him to focus on reading and writing without stopping or looking up words in the dictionary, leaving cognitive energy for comprehension of the text. J reads approximately 60 words per minute (and by this time he should be reading about 110-150 WPM according to Rasinski 2004, (p.9)), and struggles with decoding words and vocabulary. I recognized that decoding and spelling words effect fluency, which is why spelling became my main goal with this student.

I chose to teach using the guided release model as I wanted to first show J what we would work with and how to properly say or spell those words, then give him the guided and then independent time to practice. Throughout the lesson I was modeling my thoughts and verbalizing the sounds for J to hear. I gave immediate direct feedback on multiple activities so J was able to self-assess whether he needed to check his work or change an answer.

In the first lesson I used direct instruction of the –ed ending, along with posters and hands-on activities, allowing J to be involved and engaged. During the first lesson J and I looked at a poster (Appendix 2) using sentences to show the past tense using –ed and he said, “I know it’s in the past because it says yesterday”. We moved to our next activity, looking at the –ed anchor chart, with the old people. I knew that a visual was going to help J make a connection to the past so I added, “J, I chose to make this poster with old people because they have lived in the past, a lot of what they have done happened already”. “When I think of –ed I think of old and in the

past”. He seemed to enjoy the poster and laughed when I told him this. I gave him a base word (verb) and added –ed to it (play→ played) and wrote those on the chart. My giving the base verb and then showing how adding the –ed ending allowed him to create multiple words with the –ed ending, following the given pattern (Appendix 2). Next we worked on a guided word sort with words that have the –ed ending. I explained that these words that have the –ed ending can have 3 different sounds: /t/d/ed/. I sounded each one out for him, really annunciating the sounds they make. We used the provided words and said them out loud so that he could decipher between their ending sounds. After we practiced sorting through -ed words that have the 3 different sounds we started to work on a worksheet for independent practice. He and I discussed how his sorting looked, and used each word in a sentence so that he could hear the different sounds and remember that the –ed means it already happened. I then had J do a Blind Writing Sort as a formative assessment so that I could better understand next steps, or understand if I would have to re-teach this same lesson and content. I wrote the three different sounds at the top of the paper and drew columns to show him it would be time for him to listen to some words and then write them in the correct column according to how their ending sounds (/t/d/ed/). Lastly, I asked J to reflect on the lesson. I asked him to do a fist to five (our self-assessment in class that we use often) on whether he felt confident hearing words that have –ed and knowing they already happened. He said he felt confident and showed me a 4 of 5. I then asked him if he felt he could hear the different sounds that the –ed ending makes. He said, “I learned the different sounds. I feel like I could do this but I’d need a little more help”. I let him know that he and I would meet again on Thursday to continue his learning about –ed ending words. This lesson was aligned in a gradual release structure so that J would be able to apply his learning after seeing the concepts and strategies modeled for him and after practicing each skill.

The remaining lesson that week focused on –ed inflected endings (see Transcription of Case Study Lessons and Case Study Lesson Plan 1). During this lesson I really tried to model the different sounds that the –ed ending makes and have J listen to the sounds and then produce them himself as a way to scaffold his learning. Overall J did well on the formative and summative assessments of –ed ending words and their sounds (assessments done the first and second lesson- appendices 2 and 3). The first formative assessment he placed each word in the correct column independently 100% of the time, (7/7 words correctly placed). Unfortunately, 3/7 words were spelled incorrectly, however, the –ed ending sound that we focused on had the proper ending. The second formative assessment he placed 7/8 words in the correct column (with 87% accuracy). The misplaced word was missed, and he independently decided to place it in the correct column after hearing himself say the word out loud. Lastly, the summative assessment had multiple spelling errors, however, when looking at the –ed ending words, J spelled them correctly with little guidance. Both “marched” and “jumped” had the correct –ed ending, which was what I was looking for, showing that he was reaching that goal of sorting and studying –ed ending words. Many of the words had incorrect vowel or vowel combinations, which began my planning and goal setting for the next one-on-one lesson.

The next week I planned to meet with J three times a week to focus on differentiating between short and long vowel sounds. This was because of his initial Words Their Way Spelling Inventory (Appendix 1) and the formative assessment given on the 7th (Appendix 3). As I began the lessons on vowels, I quickly realized that J had little prior knowledge of vowels, their different sounds, and how to incorporate them to make words according to spelling rules. When asked what a vowel was J said, “it is a letter that is a, e, or o.” I smiled and said, “yes, but aren’t you forgetting some?” and then reminded him that I and U are also vowels. This was evidence

that using posters, visuals, and scaffolding would be beneficial for J to make connections to sounds and words that he has heard previously. During the lesson J was prompted to sort through words and decipher between their vowel sounds after having listened to and finding words with short vowel sounds. With support, J did so with relative ease, and was able to self-assess and make corrections to his work while reflecting on what he had sorted through (see appendix 4 and Transcription of Case Study Lessons). J was also able to make corrections and changes to his work after reflecting on vowel sounds during the Bling Writing Sort (Appendix 4). The end of the lesson was especially helpful allowing J to practice reading/viewing pictures/words and saying the short vowel sounds associated with that word or depiction. J was interested, motivated to play and learn, and was eager to allow his competitive side shine through. . He asked, “Can we go back and play more?” and absolutely loved the game. After the game I asked him, “How do you feel about the short vowel sounds? Give me a fist to five to show me your new learning,” and he gave me a smile and a five.

For the second vowel lesson, specifically focusing on long vowel sounds, J again had visuals to help him make a connection to words with those sounds and was asked to produce those long vowel sounds after I had modeled them. He said, “this is a lot easier because you just say U, unicorn” compared to short vowel sounds. I told him one way to help hear those vowel sounds is to make them, so I had him make each long vowel sound 3 times out loud “ā, ā, ā”. Next I asked J to find some examples to write on our transparent sheet that have the long vowel sounds and he used his strategy of finding words around the room to help (he was unable to find words that were not posted around the room, so I assisted). Our next activity was to highlight the words in a sort that have the long vowel sounds (Sort 11- Words Their Way- see WTW attachment). One of the words I asked him to clarify his reasoning for highlighting was the word

tide. Before he was able to explain why he chose that word for a long vowel word he asked what a tide was. This reminded me that J lacks vocabulary, especially content specific vocabulary, and that this spelling lesson along with vocabulary lessons would continue to help his literacy skills toward greater comprehension in the long run. He and I took the time to discuss what a tide was and then moved forward. As I glanced through the list I noticed that he was missing one word so I asked “is there one more on the list that we might have missed?” He replied, “I don’t know”. I told him that he had to use his knowledge of the long vowels and “say them out loud to check”. As he read the words out loud he got to the word “these” but said it “this”. I realized that he was unsure of that vowel sound and explained that the word is pronounced “thēse”. “Oh” he said, and then highlighted it. Again, this reminded me that he lacks vocabulary and orthographic and phonemic awareness, and that even sight words were something that he needs focused instruction on how to remember and read them. Throughout this lesson many literacy skills that a 5th grade student may be expected to have mastered proved to be difficult for him. For example: punctuation after sentences, phonemic awareness within words, fluency when reading sight words, and basic vocabulary that can be depicted in picture form (see Appendix 5). J was able to self-assess his work during the formative assessment and was able to apply his learning of long and short vowel sounds during a vowel game that he was eager to play.

For the third vowel lesson, using the knowledge gained from Monday and Wednesday about short and long vowel sounds, J was asked to do a sort (I had intended to help guide him through it but he eagerly and independently began working) to show the difference and his understanding of the vowel sounds within words (Appendix 6). To conclude the very quick meeting on Friday I asked J how he felt about vowels and he replied, “I feel really good about long and short vowels”. Then he asked if we could play another game with vowels. He chose to

play the long vowel dice game with me, and of course, with a smile on his face, won . I chose to simply use this lesson as a review of these two vowel sounds, and not introduce diphthongs because I thought that introducing a new concept, would be too much for J.

The following Monday I did a mini lesson on diphthongs, trying to once again focus on vowels within words since this was an area J struggled with in the initial spelling inventory. I began explaining that we would continue to work one-on-one on spelling and that the day's focus was on spelling words that have two vowels next to each other. To begin, because I know how J is a visual learner, I had him watch a YouTube video (When Two Vowels Go Walking) to understand what happens to the vowel sounds when there are two vowels together. I asked J what he learned and he responded, "That when there are 2 vowels you only hear the first one". Following the video I had him circle the vowel that you hear in words that have diphthongs (Sort 18 Words Their Way- see WTW words). When I asked him for clarification of how to say a word he replied, "I'll use the video...the E speaks up, the A sits back, so it's neat". He was happy to have remembered the video and then worked on writing a sentence incorporating the words with diphthongs. He decided to write a sentence using 3 words rather than 3 separate sentences, so I praised him on his creativity and tenacity when working. Lastly, I did a quick review with J about what he and I had worked on together thus far (-ed endings, short and long vowel sounds, and diphthongs). When I asked J how he felt about our lessons he admitted, "I still need help with spelling", and I agreed to continue to meet with him so we could have him feeling more confident with spelling in our classroom and while working with 5th grade words. Finally I gave J the Words Their Way Elementary Spelling Inventory once again as a way to compare what he was able to spell prior to instruction.

Before sharing his results in the spelling inventory I want to express that I believe that this student made growth and was able to retain the information at hand on a daily basis (compare formative assessments from Appendix 2 and 3, and Appendix 4 and 5). He was even able to recall information from the lesson prior (which he typically is unable to do). J would self-assess himself by saying statements such as, "I feel good about short and long vowel sounds" which gives me this confidence in his growth from these lessons.

I believe that the student met his goals for these lessons, mainly because he was able to produce work with consistency when using -ed inflected endings and deciphering between vowel sounds when doing sorts or hearing words (Appendix 2 and 3). These goals listed are meant to continue to grow and be applied while spelling words within his 5th grade words and work, so this, I believe, is not a finite "mastery" of the goal (since the year is not up), but certainly a step in the right direction. I do believe this is something that I will have to continue to remind J about so that he can apply his learning when writing. He had 100% accuracy with -ed inflected endings on the WTW inventory I gave on the (Appendix 3). He had 57% accuracy with vowel sounds prior to his 3 mini lessons on vowels (Appendix 3). When doing a WTW sort on short vowels he had 80% accuracy before checking his work, and then 100% accuracy after reviewing his work (Appendix 3). When doing a WTW sort deciphering between short and long vowels he had 100% accuracy (Appendix 5 and 6).

After doing a final assessment with J I noticed that spelling is still something that I will need to focus on with him. I noticed that I also need to focus on 5th grade vocabulary and spelling practices for him to continue his growth and overall vocabulary gain. The final assessment using the Words Their Way Elementary Spelling Inventory showed that J was able to spell 38 of the 62 feature sounds (Appendix 7). Unfortunately, that shows that he spelled three

less than what he correctly spelled in the pre-assessment. In the pre-assessment he was able to correctly use 41, showing that about 33% of his spelling was still lacking, after the lessons I did with J and after taking the spelling inventory he showed that he had 61% accuracy, but 39% errors, which is 6% more than before.

Although this assessment shows a decline in his spelling, I did ask him what he thought about our lessons and if he feels like a stronger speller because of them. He said, "I feel better about vowels but I still need help with spelling". Also, as the day progressed and we read from our social studies book, he found a word with an -ed at the end and said, "Miss. Mathieson, the -ed tells me it already happened in the past"- proving to me that the first lessons were effective in him gaining understanding in spelling and morphology.

If I was given another opportunity to teach this lesson with the same student I would try to meet with J daily. Although I did meet with him one-on-one 5 days out of 10, I don't think it was enough (uninterrupted) intervention time. I also believe that because I had to go so far back in grade level word sorts he was unable to make the connection to 5th grade words/vocabulary. My lessons throughout the case study vary slightly from what I had originally planned, whether it be the resources used, the order in which I directly taught the spelling, or how long I focused on a topic/skill. I chose to slow down (for example mini lesson 5 being simply a review of long and short vowels) and add or alter the lesson plans due to J's pace and growth throughout the lessons.

Some of the tactics I used to promote active participation were to incorporate pictures and games into the mini lessons. J is particularly fond of playing hands on games, especially when pictures are involved (since he typically has difficulty with reading the words). I believe that

these materials were especially useful in keeping J motivated to learn, but also beneficial because he is a visual learner and without those visuals he may not have been able to make a connection to the learning prior or to the current lesson. I was glad that I used multiple supplemental materials and games because it kept J on his toes and had him working on these skills in multiple ways (spelling words, circling the vowel sounds, creating sentences, saying words orally, etc.).

There were no behavioral issues during these lessons, in fact J was excited to learn and play the vowel games after. He even was motivated to and encouraged to teach the rest of the class the vowel games we played together, and was beaming with excitement to teach his peers.

As I have stated previously, I believe that focusing on 5th grade leveled vocabulary and spelling words may have a stronger impact on this student and his spelling abilities. Duke & Carlisle (2011) explain that: “morphological awareness, measured by knowledge of meanings of words with suffixes, was a stronger predictor of reading comprehension than the ability to read aloud such words; this pattern was evident in the fifth grade not the third grade” which drives my thoughts about incorporating a more morphological based lesson for this student the next time we meet one-on-one (p.214).

J was able to apply his new learning directly after instruction, however, struggled when the summative assessment was given (dropping 6% accuracy) (Appendix 4 shows growth and application of learning, Appendix 7 shows the summative assessment). After conducting these lessons and formative assessments I have recognized that this student will continue to need one-on-one lessons reviewing spelling until the end of the year. I also recognized that allowing games and breaks were beneficial toward J's enthusiasm and desire to keep working with me. Doing this case study, and working so often with J in a one-on-one setting, has led me to believe that I need

to continue using visuals, breaks, and explicit instruction with all of my students, especially those who are EL students like J. I learned from these lessons that I should start to incorporate information from prior grades into my lessons (vocabulary from prior grades for example) and build off them as a way to activate prior knowledge. Activating schema and allowing students to build off what they know will allow students to continuously grow their literacy skills and add to their toolbox of strategies to use when trying to comprehend a text or write an essay.

In general, this student is someone whom I believe will continue to benefit from one-on-one, differentiated instruction in any literacy specific lesson, especially with spelling. Overall, J is working below grade level in spelling and reading. Clear and explicit instructions with visuals and engaging games proved to be beneficial for J's understanding of spelling rules. Modeling skills and strategies and reading aloud also allowed J to better understand the spelling rules at hand. J continues to be a motivated learner and continues to work on his spelling and vocabulary strategies to improve his comprehension while reading.

Resources:

Bear, D. R., Invernizzi, M., Templeton, S., & Johnston, F. R., (2012). Word Study for Phonics, Vocabulary, and Spelling Instruction (pp.1-23). Boston: Pearson.

Darrell Morris & Meghan Gaffney. (February 2011). Building Reading Fluency in a Learning-Disabled Middle School Reader. Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy. 2011 International Reading Association. Volume 54, Issue 5, pages 331–341. DOI: 10.1598/JAAL.54.5.3

Duke, N.K., Carlisle, J. (2011). The Development of Comprehension. Handbook of Reading Research, Volume IV. Routledge.

Rasinski, T. V. Ph.D. (2004). Assessing Reading Fluency. Honolulu, HI. Pacific Resources for Education and Learning. pp.1-28.