Fun with Fluency:

Research inquiry with student fluency ability

Amanda Silebi

Elementary Education Intern, Hillsborough County

University of South Florida

amandasilebi@mail.usf.edu

**Background**

 The Elementary School is a Title One school, meaning that a portion of the school’s students are considered low-income according to the federal census. This school is located within a suburban community and contains approximately seven hundred students. The school has a relatively large number of deaf/hearing-impaired students (almost 50) and a handful of blind/vision impaired students. The school implements a program called P.R.I.D.E time, which is their name for the Response to Intervention (RtI process). The school also offers ESOL or ELL students specialized instruction with a specialist at certain points throughout the school day. This specialized instruction provides additional support for students and enriches their home culture. The third grade class that the focus student (Emily) is in contains a total of thirty-three students. The demographics of this class is majority White (accounting for 38%) and Hispanic (28%), the other ethnicities include Asian or Pacific Islander, African American, and Multi-racial. Over 75% of the class is receiving free or reduced lunch and are considered to maintain a low or middle socioeconomic status. Emily is a third grade, Caucasian female student at the age of nine. She is currently going through the process to be screened ESE and becoming staffed. She is considered below level in all subjects and is receiving tier three interventions. Her tier two intervention is fluency phrases, and her tier three intervention is a small comprehension group (that takes place during P.R.I.D.E. time, with the ESE teacher).

 The problem that lead to my inquiry were Emily’s inability to properly read and understand the text. While working with her in a small group, I realized that she struggled reading each word and was not able to fluently read a passage or sentence. The intervention of fluency phrases had already been implemented. I was able to take this intervention and complete it with her. While administering the running record, I thought that the issue may not be fluency (which was the cause of my original inquiry and continues to be) but it may be her phonics. When given the test of phonemic awareness, she was able to properly pronounce each sound in almost all of the words. This caused me to return to my original inquiry of fluency and how it influences a student’s reading ability and comprehension. Therefore, the purpose of my inquiry was to assist Emily in developing her fluency so that she is able to better understand reading and writing. With this in mind, I evaluated how I could further assist Emily in developing her reading fluency

**Literature Connections**

           The article, *Comedy Hour: Using Audio Files of Joke Recitations to Improve Elementary Students’ Fluency* by Emily Mitchell, Kristin T. Rearden, and Dawn Stacy explores the influences of teacher modeling, self-rehearsal, and audiotape analysis to measure the changes in fluency of three struggling students. This intervention was implemented to improve oral fluency and reading skills. The three-second grade students were pulled aside for four weeks, ten minutes four days. Fluency is vital for success in all core instructional content. This study was implemented to determine the effects of repeated joke recitations on the students’ automaticity. The study determined that this intervention caused a decrease in reading fluency or time durations. This indicates an increase in automaticity and accuracy, and a decrease in pausing techniques.

           *Including Fathers in the Picture: A Meta-Analysis of Parental Involvement and Students’ Academic Achievement* by Sung won Kim and Nancy E. Hill discusses the research conducted on the correlation between parent involvement and student achievement; specifically the difference between the involvement of fathers and mothers. It is evident through the research that parent involvement is positively associated with student achievement. The mothers mean level if involvement was consistently higher than that of the fathers during the study. This article investigates the relative strength of the association between parent involvements in education and compares fathers versus mothers. There is a positive relation between parental involvement in education and achievement for both fathers and mothers. The article suggests and supports that the difference between father and mother involvement and student achievement is not significant.

           The article, *Increasing Reading Comprehension and Engagement Through Concept-Oriented Reading Instruction* by John T. Guthrie, Allan Wigfield, Pedro Barbosa, Kathleen C. Perencevich, Ana Taboada, Marcia H. Davis, Nicole T. Scafiddi, and Stephen Tonks, is based on an engagement perspective of reading development. The authors investigated how motivational support and strategy instruction influence reading outcomes. Concept-Oriented Reading Instruction (CORI) contains five motivational practices and six cognitive strategies for reading comprehension. CORI is an instructional program that merges reading strategy instruction, conceptual knowledge in science, and support for student motivation. There were two studies conducted to measure the process of concept-oriented reading instruction and student comprehension. The first study emphasized Strategy Instruction (SI) and did not include motivational support, while the second study compared CORI to SI and to a traditional instruction group (TI).

After reading the articles, I had the opportunity to explore further interventions or ideas that will promote academic achievement for my focus student(s). The articles selected included promoting parent involvement (and exploring father versus mother influences), increase student fluency skills, and promote comprehension skills. These articles will allow me to better assist my focus student in further developing literacy skills by providing a different aspect of successful strategies and interventions. In addition to assisting me with one of my focus students in particular the articles will also assist me in furthering my ability to help my other two focus students. These articles have supported my thoughts on altering my strategies away from parental involvement and concentrate on fluency/comprehension.

**Methods/Procedures**

 To gain insight into my wondering, I assisted by CT in implementing an intervention that will assist Emily with her fluency skills. After completing observations, and discussing with my CT, it was established that Emily’s main area of struggle is fluency, and that it affects her comprehension. The intervention that was implemented is fluency phrases. During this strategy, the student reads quick phrases such as “they are there,” or “to go to.” When implementing this strategy with Emily, she was required to read as many phrases as possible in a one-minute time frame.

I collected data in order to better understand Emily’s current fluency. This data included field notes, test scores, and student work. The assessments administered to Emily included a running record, test of phonemic awareness, and spelling inventory. In addition to this data, there was additional data collected to track her progress in furthering her fluency skills. This additional data can be classified as field notes and observations.

All the collected data assisted me in developing a clear picture of my students’ academic ability. I was able to analyze the fluency phrases by evaluating where Emily was at the beginning of the intervention and how she is performing now. The running record indicates that Emily is reading at a 14, two grades below the targeted reading level of a third grade student. While reading the text Emily made a total of eleven errors (through 149 words). After using a running record to assess Emily’s reading fluency and comprehension, I gave her the Test of Phonemic Awareness to evaluate whether or not the issue was deeper then fluency. Emily was given the Primary Spelling Inventory (PSI), which is most often used in the assessment of kindergarten or other emergent readers (Bear, 2000, p. 315). During this assessment she was able to spell ten out of twenty-six of the words correctly. By analyzing each feature of this list of words, it revealed that Emily is in the early within word pattern phase.

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Date | Data Collection strategies | What I’m Looking For/How It Relates to My Wondering | I’m Noticing/ Data Analysis and Claims | Next Steps/Plan To Try |
| **1/21/16** | Observations | Student involvement –  | The student is often not involved or does not pay attention. CT reports that she believes that the student does not “know what is going on” Example: CT asks the class to turn to page 154 in the GO! Math textbook. The student sits there staring at the teacher with a blank stare – either partner or teacher usually assists her in opening to the correct page  | Next I would like to observe the student when in small groups (reading groups – P.R.I.D.E. time group – lunch? – art) |
| **1/28/16** | Observations  | Ability to complete fluency phrases  | I was able to “administer” the students’ fluency phrases (tier three intervention) – the activity consists of the student repeating phrases such as “go over there”. Each time the phrase is said correctly, it is put in the “yes” pile and if it is said incorrectly it is places in the “no” pile. \*\*\*Data coming soon! | Retrieve photos of fluency phrases data – change to jokes? (Refer to articles)  |
| **2/4/16** | Observations – Test scores  | Today I am not looking for anything specific – PLC (data chat) meeting  | Although the student went home early, and I could not make any formal observations on her involvement/ability today, I was able to attend a data chat meeting. The meeting was on mathematics test scores (Form One and Form Two). The average percent correct for the Elementary School was Form One 44.64%, and Form Two 51.72%Focus student: Form One 6.67% correct with a raw score of 2, and Form Two 30% correct with a raw score of 9 | Although the Form One and Two scores were useful, it does not really relate to my wondering. A test score that would assist in furthering my wondering is the FAIR score – Scores coming soon!  |
| **2/11/16** | Observations – Teacher interview  | Any information that the CT can tell me  | Learned a great deal about the focus student! *Refer to interview for specific details.* | Observe the student during P.R.I.D.E. time (intensive reading group) – ask CT about changing the fluency phrases to jokes OR about an additional time to have the student rehearse jokes (refer to articles – enhance fluency) |
| **2/18/16** | Observatios – Running Record  | Through the running record, I am looking to establish Emily’s fluency, reading level, and comprehension skills. | Reading level of text read: 14 (two grades below the targeted reading level for third grade). Administered one-on-one during silent reading time so there were no distractions. Emily read the text containing a total of 149 words in one minute and fifty-one seconds and committed with eleven errors. By evaluating and establishing the words correct per minute, Emily’s fluency is below grade level. Prominent trends during Emily’s reading were visual errors. These errors usually occurred when she used visual information such as beginning sounds, familiar word endings or chunks, etc. Emily struggled with retelling the story after completion. Additionally it was evident that she was struggling with the text (although appropriate to her reading level) and appeared to be disengaged with text. The observation suggested that she was unable to read accurately and understand what she had just read.  | Administer the Test of Phonemic Awareness to evaluate whether or not Emily has the ability to sound things out (relates to fluency/comprehension and spelling ability. |
| **2/25/16** | Test of Phonemic Awareness  | Emily’s ability to properly sound out. | The Test of Phonemic Awareness revealed that Emily is able to properly sound out words (in relation to phonemes). *Please refer to actual assessment.* | The Elementary Spelling Inventory (Primary Spelling Inventory if necessary) |
| **3/3/16** | Spelling Inventories  | Emily’s ability to spell (relates to phonemic ability – above).  | There were two spelling inventories administered to the student. The first was the Elementary Spelling Inventory (ESI); this assessment revealed that Emily is in the middle letter-name alphabetic stage. During the ESI assessment, Emily was able to spell three out of twenty-five words correctly. These results indicate that she is not at the Elementary spelling level, the average for the third grade. Following this assessment, Emily was given the Primary Spelling Inventory (PSI), which is most often used in the assessment of kindergarten or other emergent readers (Bear, 2000, p. 315). During this assessment she was able to spell ten out of twenty-six of the words correctly. Through analyzing each feature of this list of words, it revealed that Emily is in the early within word pattern phase. Through combining both spelling stages and then taking the average, it is evident that Emily is in the late letter name-alphabetic spelling stage.  | Continue implementing the fluency phrases – acquire/collect actual data. (Data has been collected, but I have not been keeping a copy of it). |
| **3/10/16** | Fluency Phrases Data  | Exhibit all data that has been acquired through fluency phrases. | Emily’s fluency has improved slightly until this point. *Please refer to fluency phrases data.* | Continue implementing the fluency phrases. Acquire data from Istation. |
| **3/24/16** | Student was absent. |  |  |  |
| **3/31/16** | FSA testing  |  |  |  |

**Findings**

As a result of analyzing my data, three important things that I learned include:

* That a student engagement level increases with tasks that require high levels of attention.
* In order to enhance student achievement, an educator must use proper assessments and create interventions.
* Assessments are important in establishing the students’ academic ability.

The students’ engagement level increases with a task that requires high levels of attention. This statement relates directly to the intervention of fluency phrases that Emily is currently receiving/practicing. This task requires that the students attempt to compete against themselves. This type of competition enhances her attention level and allows her the opportunity to become more involved with the task. Emily is always enthusiastic about beating her previous score. This observation was made during the implementation of the intervention. In addition to the specific task of fluency phrases, higher level cognitive demands tasks also enhance students’ levels of attention and increase the benefit to the student.

In order to enhance student achievement, an educator must use proper assessments and create interventions. This learning statement directly relates to my inquiry because in order to assist in implementing the intervention of fluency phrases, I needed to administer multiple assessments. In order to enhance student achievement, interventions are an important component and allow the educator to observe improvements and effectiveness.

Assessments are important in establishing and base-lining a student’s ability. Throughout the inquiry process, I have had the opportunity to administer and evaluate multiple assessments (including the running record, spelling inventory, and test of phonemic awareness). By administering and evaluating these assessments, I had the opportunity to see where Emily’s academic skills are and evaluate where she is academically rather than in comparison to her peers. This allowed me to better assist in creating and implementing an appropriate intervention to further her academic ability.

**Conclusion**

 After completing this inquiry I have learned multiple things about my students and myself as an educator. I learned how to administer and evaluate assessments, and how important these can be in further assisting my students. Additionally, I learned that my students were able to achieve success and improve their academic standing when adequate interventions were made. Since my inquiry was on fluency, all of my findings related to Language Arts (reading and writing). These findings indicated that fluency is a very important skill that the student to comprehend what is being read.

 Through this inquiry, I have made multiple changes in my practice. I have had the opportunity to work one-on-one and see the benefits of explicit instruction/interventions. The changes that I have made to my educational practices include implementing explicit interventions. This inquiry has uncovered multiple new wonderings. How can I further assist my focus student in developing her phonemic awareness (which relates to her fluency ability)? How can educators get better involvement from parents? And how does the student feel? Overall this inquiry provided me a wealth of experience and information that will assist me in furthering my abilities as an educator.

**References**

Guthrie, J. T., Wigfield, A., Barbosa, P., Perencevich, K. C., Taboada, A., Davis, M. H., & ... Tonks, S. (2004). Increasing Reading Comprehension and Engagement Through Concept-Oriented Reading Instruction. *Journal Of Educational Psychology*, *96*(3), 403-423. doi:10.1037/0022-0663.96.3.403

Kim, S. w., & Hill, N. E. (2015). Including Fathers in the Picture: A Meta-Analysis of Parental Involvement and Students' Academic Achievement. *Journal Of Educational Psychology*, *107*(4), 919-934.

Mitchell, E. e., Rearden, K. k., & Stacy, D. d. (2011). Comedy Hour: Using Audio Files of Joke Recitations to Improve Elementary Students' Fluency. *Current Issues In Education*, *14*(2), 1-8.