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4/24/10
Teaching Project

Dipesh and Allison

Introduction: My Decoding Struggles

While I was in school and even now I loved to read. I could pick up any book and read it. I was one of those students in the classroom that would whip out their book during any free moment and start to read; my mind completely focused on the story. However, when my teachers asked for a volunteer to read a passage out loud, I would sink very low in my seat and look in the other direction. Ironically, though, my comprehension was grade level and I could read in my mind the words on the page, when I had to pronounce the words out loud I struggled. Sure, I could get the high frequency words and words I have seen and *heard* before; but for the words that were unfamiliar I hated seeing those come up. Those few times I had to read out loud, my eyes would scan the words coming up to help prepare me for what was coming. If I saw a word that I knew I could not pronounce correctly, my heart would start to beat so loudly I swear those sitting next to me could hear it. My mind would then be so focused on that word that I could not even comprehend what I was reading. God forbid the teacher would ask me to summarize what I just read. Then when I would get that horrible word I would just mumble something incomprehensible and not even take the time to even *try* to sound that pesky word out. I swear this was a phobia and ironically it is something that I still worry over. This reading deficiency even played a part in

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why I picked upper elementary and middle school to teach to—I would not have to teach anyone to read. Well, how wrong was I? Students in the 5th and 6th grade still need help with reading and ironically, I am responsible for helping them. However, after taking this class and reading information on how to teach students to decode words I have a better understanding of how to break words down. I know the rules and the tricks now, which makes me a better reader and also a better teacher of reading. I don't know if I missed the day that taught the tricks of reading or if my school's teaching method was teaching the whole word—memorization. Whatever the case may have been I did not know the rules of decoding and this made it hard for me to pronounce multisyllabic words that I have never seen before.

My Lesson in the Making

Currently, I am the sixth grade Ohio Achievement Assessment Intervention Specialist Tutor. Even though I am suppose to be offering help for students that struggle both in reading and math, I basically work in reading. I follow the SOAR to SUCCESS curriculum that puts more of a focus on building comprehension through reading strategies like: questioning, predicting, clarifying, and summarizing. Even though most of my students are fluent in reading and really do need to build their comprehension skills, there are a few that have fluency issues. Therefore, I wanted to create a lesson that could help the few students I have that have decoding issues read better. As I was reading through the articles on

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decoding I went back and forth between doing a lesson on affixed words and doing a lesson on syllabication. I was leaning towards a lesson on syllabication rules (there are six of them) because as I read the background on each rule it helped me with some of my fears about reading big words. However, I was still hesitant on developing my lesson on a syllable rule because research has proven that teaching syllabication rules does not affectively help children learn to read because the rules of one syllable words do not always apply to larger words (Cunningham, pg 190). Yet, these rules were helping me grasp how to properly decode words and even though I would not solely rely on just the syllabication rules I would want my students to still be aware of them. I think of it the same way as a math teacher may teach a math problem: offer your students multiple ways to solve a problem and hopefully one of the ways will be a method they latch on to. So, for teaching struggling readers, why not share with them mini-lessons on multiple decoding rules so they have a broader picture of what is going on as they read. As quoted by Cunningham, Shefelbine stated:

Directly teaching students how to pronounce and identify syllable units and then showing them how such units work in polysyllabic words appears to be a worthwhile component of syllabication instruction and should help reduce or remediate this source of reading difficulty among intermediate students. (pg. 201).

Eventually, I decided to focus my lesson on closed and open syllables because I felt it would benefit my two focus students the most. Going into the lesson I knew that it would not be the magical wand to take away all of their reading struggles

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but I knew that if this lesson was taught with other lessons throughout the year my

students will begin to get better with decoding bigger words.

Teaching Dipesh

Background

I knew from the beginning of this course that Dipesh would be my first focus student. Out of all my students, Dipesh struggles the most with decoding. Dipesh is a 6th grade student and his parents are from India. He is fluent in English. My first impression of Dipesh is he is very forgetful. His reading group meets with me during lunch and he is constantly forgetting his lunchbox, jacket, or any other items he may bring to reading group. He is also very friendly and participates completely during reading group and offers his ideas and thoughts about the books we are reading at the time. When I hear him read out loud he has problems decoding words reach lowers his fluency and also inhibits his comprehension of what he is reading. It takes him so long to read something and he spends all of his energy decoding he can not listen to what he is reading. Dipesh, for the most part, does not recognize patterns in words to help him with his pronunciation; which is a characteristic of successful decoding. "Successful decoding occurs when the brain recognizes a familiar spelling pattern or, if the pattern itself is not familiar, searches through its store of words with similar patterns (Cunningham, pg 197). For example, in the beginning of the year Dipesh had to read the word "plight" and struggled at decoding it. Since there was that

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extra sound in the beginning, the /p/, Dipesh was at a loss as to how to pronounce it. He could not recognize the /ght/ pattern. However, what pushed me to focus my time on closed and open syllables was when Dipesh was trying to pronounce “silly”. Instead of making the /i/ a short sound, Dipesh kept on trying to say the /i/ as a long sound. When I was going through possible lessons the closed syllable stuck out because I could relate this rule to Dipesh’s struggle with decoding “silly” and the other times Dipesh struggled with words. One positive attribute of Dipesh’s reading is his willingness to take the time and slowly pronounce each word to the best of his ability. A skill I lacked growing up but one that he possesses. As a teacher, I want to give Dipesh the skills he needs to help him tackle those larger words, so will not lose that dedication to decoding.

The Lesson

I wanted to make Dipesh as comfortable as possible during the lesson, so he can have a safe environment to learn in. Dipesh is very motivated to learn and very enthusiastic about becoming a better reading. During reading group I am always patient and when a student is trying to pronounce a word and another student loses patience and blurts the word out I always remind them that doing that is not helping but hurting the students who is trying to read the word. I want my students to feel comfortable with knowing they do not have to know every word and how it is pronounced. If they come to a word they do not know, it is fine. I am going to give them the tools and skills to be able to decode that word. I know

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that to motivate my students to read well I can not view their failure to pronounce a word as a negative problem and pity them for it then they will become less motivated because they will think they are a failure themselves (Linnenbrink, pg 317). I began the lesson reminding Dipesh what the definition of a syllable was and asking him to give me words with one syllable and then words with multiple syllables. During previous reading groups, I already touch based with my students on what a syllable was, so I was confident that Dipesh knew. Then I moved on to explaining that there were six syllabication rules that, if known, could assist him on being able to pronounce words that are bigger. As I went over this concept Dipesh I could tell Dipesh was listening closely and seem engaged in the lesson so far. I then went on to tell him that the most common syllable rule was the Closed Syllable rule. I proceeded to write the words: napkin, rabbit, and tablet on the board. I asked him to write the words on his paper and break them into their syllables. I monitored to make sure that he correctly divided the words into syllables. I then pointed to the word, "Napkin" and asked him what he noticed about the /a/ sound in that word. Did the /a/ sound long or short. In which he asked, "What does that mean?" So I clarified and said, "Does the /a/ say its name like in "Name." Or is the /a/ a short sound, does not say its name." I then had Dipesh say the word out loud and he responded that the /a/ was a short sound. I then asked him what the /i/ sounded like and Dipesh said its sound was short. I then went through the other two words: rabbit and tablet and Dipesh correctly

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identified the short sound from each vowel. I then asked him what he noticed about the vowel in each word, after much prodding Dipesh came to the realization that the vowel was surrounded by the other letters. Since it took me a longer time to get Dipesh to notice that, I noted that I should introduce the open syllable right after the closed syllable in the future to see if the idea catches on faster. I then told Dipesh that I was going to write some nonsense words on the board. I told him nonsense words were just made up words that followed the different rules; they allow us to fully understand if the rule has been learned. I wrote, Lug, Mug, Mag, Dag, Sig, and Sog on the board and had Dipesh read each one to me. I observed that Dipesh read each word correctly and then moved onto the open syllable rule.

For the open syllable introduction I wrote the following words on the board: Open, go, and she and I asked Dipesh, “We just learned what a closed syllable was. A syllable that has a vowel closed-in. Now what do you think an open syllable may be?” Dipesh replied that it looks like it, “would be a syllable that is not surrounded by consonants.” I had Dipesh say each of the words I wrote down and asked him if the vowel sound was long or short. Dipesh said, “Long” and I asked, “How can you tell it is long?” (To make sure we remembered the difference between long and short and not just guessing) and he said, “because the vowel says its name.” I then asked for him to give me an example of the vowel saying its name and he said, “In Go the /o/ says oh!” I remember thinking after questions whether or not I am just giving a really basic lesson and if this could

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really help someone in 6th grade. I of course kept on going. My next step was to write up the following nonsense words: Cu, Pro, Ma, Ba, and Pre and reminded him to use the Open Syllable rule to say these words. Dipesh said all of them correctly with the exception of “ma” and “Ba”. Dipesh said both of these with the short sound. Which of course would make sense because we use “ma” as a shortened version of Mom and “ba” has a sheep sound. I then pointed to “ma” and said, “By following the rule of an open syllable, what is that rule again?” I then realized that I never stated the exact rule and thought that would help. Dipesh then said, “When a vowel is not surrounded by another letter then it makes its name.” I then clarified, “Correct, when a vowel in a syllable is not followed by a consonant then it will be long—it will say its name. So knowing that how would you pronounce (pointed to Ma) and pronounce (pointed to Ba). The second time around Dipesh said those two words correctly. Since, I only taught this lesson with Dipesh (the rest of the group was practicing for the OAAs the following week) I did not do the group work as planned in the lesson. I then decided to give him a mini-assessment on this skill to see if he fully grasped it.

Closed and Open Post Assessment (Dipesh)

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Word	Long Vowel	Short Vowel		Needed To
Campus		/a/	/u/	Correct
Open	/o/	/e/		Correct
Submit		/u/	/i/	Correct
*Robot		/o/	/o/	Miscue
Student	/u/	/e/		Correct
*Disgust	/i/	/u/		Miscue
Apron	/a/	/o/		Correct
Relax	/e/	/a/		Correct
Beyond	/e/	/o/		Correct
*Depend		/e/ /e/		Miscue
*May		/a/		Miscue

For the most part, Dipesh did pretty well. The words should have been familiar to him but I did not want to choose harder words. If I were to continue on the lessons I would slowly add on larger and larger words. For “robot” Dipesh at first put divided it into the syllables “rob” and “ot” which made me think about teaching a lesson on syllabication division rules and wondered if that should be a prerequisite to these lessons. I stopped Dipesh and had him listen to how he was pronouncing that word and if it was a word he heard before. When he said “rob-ot” again he thought about it and then changed it to “ro-bot”. So, he heard how he

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was pronouncing it and then realized it should have been “ro-bot”. Then when he went to pronounce “disgust” he started to segment it as “di-gust” and wanted to leave out the first /s/. I then instructed Dipesh to really look at each letter and instructed him to segment the word into syllables first. He drew a line in-between the s and g and then pronounced it correctly. The next word, “depend” I noticed that he again divided the word up into the wrong syllables “dep” “end”. I had him say the word again and listen to how it sounded to him. Then I asked him draw a line between the syllables. It took him a while and then he segmented it into “de” “pend”. Lastly, with “may” he was following the closed syllable rule and gave /a/ the short sound but, of course, in this case the /a/ made a long sound. I reminded him that /y/ could sometimes be known as a vowel and in this case the /a/ made a long sound.

Reflection on Dipesh

Before I started the lesson I gave Dipesh a pre-assessment on his word knowledge. The pre-assessment was based on the graded word lists starting at 3rd grade and up until 6th grade (see appendix 1). Dipesh was Instructional level on grades 3 and 4 and Frustration level on the 5th and 6th grade level. I have also monitored Dipesh’s reading fluency throughout the year through Dibel testing and his comprehension progress through the MAZE testing. Below is a chart with his scores.

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Dipesh's Dibel and Maze Scores

	Benchmark #1	Benchmark #2	Benchmark #3	Oct	Feb	March
Dibel	69	75	N/A	81	78	84

	Benchmark #1	Benchmark #2	Benchmark #3	Oct	Feb	March
MAZE	9	18	N/A	20	14	N/A

* Average 6th grade scores should be: DIBELS over 109 and MAZE 18.

For the most part I am happy with both his improvement in reading fluency and comprehension. His February scores show a dip in this progress but this could be an effect of him being away; over the holiday vacation he went to India and missed a few weeks of school outside of Christmas break. Even though there is not a way, presently, that I can determine if my lesson on closed and open syllables will help him improve his fluency and it is too early to tell if it will help him decode words more accurately I still have confidence that if continued to be a part of my lessons then this skill will have a positive effect on helping him in the long run.

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Teaching Allison

Background

Originally I was going to do two lessons for Dipesh and compare the two lessons but in the end I wanted to include Allison because she reminds me of me at that age. Allison lacks confidence in her oral reading skills and her oral reading fluency through Dibel testing is not at grade level (see chart on page___).

Allison's comprehension levels, assessed through MAZE, is currently at grade level. When I observe Allison while reading orally I notice that she does not take the time to decode larger words and she, like I did, would mumble through them without even taking an attempt to decode the word. I find this just the opposite of Dipesh, who will work on decoding a word loyally without any feelings of anxiety—at least none that I can pick up. During one reading group Allison was the only one there which allowed me to really hear her read and talk to her about her reading attitudes. When she skipped over a word, I asked her why she did not stop and try to pronounce it and she said, "I just can't do it and I am embarrassed." From this answer I could tell that Allison lacks confidence in her reading skills and because of past failures she does not have the motivation to try to improve her reading. One of the articles we read in class, *Motivation as an Enabler for Academic Success*, discussed different ways to motivate students that had low self-efficacy on a skill. One of the theories it mentioned was Mastery Goals theory (pg 321). It stated that, "when students are focused on trying to learn and understand

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the material and trying to improve their performance relative to their past

performance, this orientation will help them maintain their self-efficacy in the face of failure, ward off negative affect as anxiety, lessen the probability that they will have distracting thoughts..." (pg. 321). Through this I felt that Allison's main concern was building her confidence in reading and teaching her how to master the decoding process. So, I thought including her on the Closed and Open syllable lesson would give her a tool to help her decode. If she knows the rules of decoding her and gets practice reading out loud she will begin to gain confidence in reading.

Teaching the Lesson to Allison

Before the lesson I made sure that Allison was feeling comfortable. Allison has been one of the students that have not always been consistent on making it to reading group since her group meets after school. Allison always has an excuse as to why she can not make it. She was also one of the students that were hesitant on even joining the group. She does not like anything that sets her apart from her peers. However, through the times she has made it we have developed a very nice relationship and she is beginning to get comfortable tacking large words in front of me.

I began the lesson like I did with Dipesh, going over the definition of a syllable. Then I went into the closed syllable lesson. I went through the same words: napkin, rabbit, and tablet. Allison read each word correctly and did not

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have a problem. I asked her what she noticed about the vowel sound, and whereas Dipesh did not understand what I was asking, Allison quickly answered that the vowels sounds were short. I put up the nonsense words: Lug, Sug, Mag, Sig, Dag, Sog. I told her these words are not real words but help to make sure she understands the rule of closed syllables. During this lesson I got the feeling Allison was getting frustrated because it seemed pretty basic to her. I wondered if I should have given her larger words but since I wanted to build her confidence I wanted to start off small. Before giving her the definition of the closed syllable rule I wanted to introduce the open syllable rule and see if she can develop the rule on her own by comparing the two.

I started the open syllable lesson by writing up the following words: Go, she, open. As I was writing I was wondering how Allison was going to react to these easy words. I started off by telling her that the words are easy because I really want her to understand the rule of open syllables that once this rule is learned it can help her when tackling bigger words. Allison read each word and I asked her what the vowel sound was in each syllable. She said, other than the /e/ in “open” all the vowels made their name. I then asked her to look at the words in the Closed section and compare them to the words in the Open section and try to come up with a definition. Allison noticed that the words that made the short vowel sound had letters on both sides of it. I then asked her to tell me what sort of letters they were? Were the letters on both sides of the vowels, vowels or

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consonants? Allison then noticed that they were consonants. Then I asked Allison

what she noticed about the open syllables. She said that the open syllables did not

have a letter after the vowel and that sound was then long. I then asked Allison

what she thought the official definition was.

“The closed syllables are syllables that the vowel makes a short sound. It makes a

short sound because there is a letter after the word. The letter is not a vowel. The

open syllable makes a long sound because there is not letter after the vowel.”

After that I realized that I did not put up the nonsense words that went along with

the open syllables. So I told Allison I was going to put up some words that were

not real and she was to use the rule for the open syllable to pronounce them. I

stressed to her to really use the open syllable rule even if she thinks she knows the

correct saying of the word. I wrote the following words on the board: Cu, Pro, Ma,

Ba, and Pre. As I pointed at each word, Allison pronounced them all correctly

using the open syllable rule. I then gave Allison the post assessment on the lesson.

I told her that I will be giving her words that contain both an open syllable and

closed syllable. I again worried that the words would be too easy for her but knew

that they should be the same as Dipesh’s to accurately compare the lessons.

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Open and Closed Post Assessment (Allison)

Word	Long Vowel	Short Vowel		Needed To
Campus		/a/	/u/	Correct
Open	/o/	/e/		Correct
Submit		/u/	/i/	Correct
*Robot	/o/	/o/		Correct
Student	/u/	/e/		Correct
*Disgust		/u/ /i/		Correct
Apron	/a/	/o/		Correct
Relax	/e/	/a/		Correct
Beyond	/e/	/o/		Correct
*Depend	/e/	/e/		Correct
*May	/a/			Correct

Reflection on Allison

The post assessment for the lesson for Allison went a lot better compared to Dipesh's. Allison knew all the words and could pronounce them without knowing the rules of open and closed syllables. Whereas Dipesh problems deal with actual decoding issues, I feel Allison's problems stem from her lack of confidence in decoding. I know from this that without assessing Allison on larger words I do not know completely if she fully grasps the concept and can apply it to words she

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actually does not know. I would be curious to see how she handles larger words

and if she can apply this rule.

Allison's Dibel and Maze Scores

	Benchmark #1	Benchmark #2	Benchmark #3	Oct	Feb	March
Dibel	101	75	N/A	100		107

	Benchmark #1	Benchmark #2	Benchmark #3	Oct	Feb	March
MAZE	19	31	N/A		26	28

* Average 6th grade scores should be: DIBELS over 109 and MAZE 18.

The Results

Overall, I feel both lessons went well. The students were engaged and even though Allison was a little hesitant on the level of the lesson at first she still participated and was fully active during the lesson. However, just teaching this one lesson, I feel, does not clue me how teaching the rules of syllabication will benefit my struggling readers. I feel that if I were to do this position again next year, I would create a whole unit on syllabication rule, root words, Latin stems, and affixed words, and the division of syllables that I feel would teach the essence of decoding. Like with me, I feel that if I teach the reason behind the madness (the syllabication rules) and show the students how they help then they will see who they can apply that skill to their everyday reading.