A Literacy Case Study:

Assessment and Instruction of Comprehension and Fluency

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TE 846 - Accommodating Differences in Literacy Learners

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CASE STUDY of 6th Grader "Sarah"

Description & Background:

When I first began planning for this project, I knew that I wanted to choose one of my special education students in need of additional literacy support as my focus. Sure, it may have been easier to implement lessons and see more growth in a "normally developing" student, but I wanted to target a student that I felt would benefit the most from working one on one with someone in the area of literacy. "Children who are not proficient readers by the end of 3rd grade are likely to continue to be poor readers for the rest of their lives, profoundly limiting their employability and quality of life" (PowerPoint: Phonics Instruction). With this weighing on my mind, I ultimately settled upon "Sarah." (Standard I)

Sarah is a 6th grade student in my social studies class this year. In my building we team teach, so I have gotten to know her pretty well as more than just a social studies learner. She is also in my STAR (Student Teacher Affective Relations) class, which is similar to "homeroom." Sarah is 12 years old. She is labeled LD (Learning Disabled) in the areas of Reading Fluency, Basic Reading Skills, and Written Expression. Additional information in her IEP states that Sarah employs good word choice and ideas in writing, but struggles with being able to write a clear and cohesive paragraph due to difficulty using correct conventions such as spelling, punctuation, and paragraphing. "The compositions written by students with learning disabilities are fraught with more spelling, capitalization, and punctuation errors than those written by their typically developing peers" (Troia & Graham, 2003, p. 78). This would be an accurate description of Sarah's written works.

Sarah spends approximately 20% of her school week in the special education LRC Lab classroom (which equates to one class period per day), and 80% of her school week in general

education classrooms supported by accommodations. Some of Sarah's accommodations / supplementary aids include: extended time on writing assignments and tests, using books on CD in language arts (but must be following along in text), tests may be taken in a separate setting and may be read aloud or have words pronounced, use of graphic organizers for written assignments, spelling not graded for any writing assignments unless spelling is being specifically assessed, and any other additional accommodations that teachers feel would help support Sarah to be successful. (Standards I, V, and VI)

In addition to her learning disability, Sarah is also dealing with a few minor medical conditions. She has been diagnosed with ADD and takes medication to help with focus, although I would never have thought that on my own had I not read it in her IEP at the beginning of the year. To me she see seems very focused and attentive in class, but perhaps I have never seen her off of her medication. She also occasionally suffers from anxiety, usually stress-induced, but this is rare. Lastly, Sarah is also dealing with a medical condition called Irlen Syndrome. Irlen Syndrome is a "perceptual processing disorder" in the brain, not an optical problem. In Sarah's words, having Irlens "is hard sometimes because the white paper has a lot of glare. It's just too bright" and "sometimes the words are kind of blurry or move around a little" when she's trying to read them. To help counteract this problem, we make sure to copy Sarah's assignments onto colored paper rather than white whenever possible. She also has her own colored/tinted plastic overlays to put over the pages of her textbook or other white materials we may be using in class. Irlens, in addition to her learning disability and attention deficits, makes reading especially challenging for Sarah. (Standards III, IV, V, and VI)

In my subjective opinion, Sarah is a kind, cooperative, and friendly child who works hard and generally wants to do well. She knows she has to work harder than many of the other

students, but she doesn't let it get her down. Lately she is also starting to self-advocate too, which is great. Additionally, Sarah often tries to be independently responsible, but she struggles with organization at times. She is more a verbal learner than visual, and needs structured routines and a class set up that fosters organization. Clear deadlines and consequences seem to help with her focus and self-motivation. (Standards III, IV, and V)

Pre-Assessments:

When I first asked Sarah if she would be willing to spend a few days eating lunch with me and helping me with a reading project for my college class, she was more than willing to help, and seemed to feel special that I had chosen her to be the one to help me. In fact she told me that this was not the first time she'd helped a teacher with a college reading project! She said she'd helped one of her elementary teachers with something that sounded similar, and she even asked me if she'd be getting a "report" at the end like she did with that teacher. I thought this was funny, but I am curious to this day as to what the "other college reading project" that she helped with might have been.

At our first meeting, I informed Sarah that I'd like to interview her like a reporter and ask her some questions about reading and what she thought about it. She liked this idea. I told her this was just for fun and to help me get to know her better as a reader, and that she could be honest because there were no wrong answers. I proceeded to give her two reading interest/attitude surveys. First we took the "Elementary Reading Attitude Survey" (**Artifacts 4-4.3**). Since Sarah is more an auditory than a visual learner, we first discussed how we thought Garfield felt in each of the pictures based on his body language and expressions. We settled upon the words "Awesome," "Good," Okay," and "Terrible," and I wrote them above each of the Garfield pictures to make his emotions more explicit. Next, I read each question aloud to her

like an interview, and she proceeded to ponder each question carefully and then circle the choice she felt best fit her. To be honest, I think this survey may have been too general for her. Often times she had difficulty making a choice, so she circled two answers together or wrote in a comment such as, "It depends on the kind of book." For instance, two questions **(Artifact 4.2)** asked her how she felt about reading and learning from school books. She looked up at me like there was a mistake in the question. Then she said, "Well we read about a lot of different stuff. It mostly depends on what we're reading about." I thought this was a valid point! I told her to think about the things she could remember that we've read so far in science, social studies, and language arts, and make her choices for those two questions that way. That plan seemed fine with her. (Standards I, III, IV, and V)

Next, just so that I could get a little bit more of a background on her interests as well as her reading attitude, I gave her the "Sample Reading Interest/Attitude Survey" **(Artifacts 5 – 5.1)**. I only did certain sections of this survey that didn't seem redundant after taking the first one. Also, I didn't want her to feel overloaded with questions on our first day meeting together. For this survey I read each activity to her and she circled it if she liked to do it, underlined it if she was interested in trying it, and left it blank if she did not do it and had no interest in trying it. I learned a lot about Sarah when we got to section D **(Artifact 5)**. I learned that she really likes gardening, and is good at it because her mom is a landscape designer. I also learned that when she grows up she'd like to be a chef. She said she really likes cooking and baking, and might want to go to "cooking school" one day. (Standards I, III, IV, and V)

"When we talk about reading motivations we refer to (1) interest, (2) dedication, and (3) confidence" (Marrow & Gambrell, 2011, p. 178). Overall, I was glad to see that most of Sarah's survey answers showed that she genuinely enjoys reading, appears dedicated to learning and

improving, and doesn't appear to have any negative attitudes towards reading. The only adverse response Sarah gave was in regards to reading aloud. She did make it clear that she is not comfortable reading out loud in class, and would prefer not to have to do it. That leads me to believe she is lacking the "confidence" component of Morrow and Gambrell's equation. One thing that I found interesting when reviewing her surveys was how she often transferred her answers to other people. For instance, when I asked her if she collects anything **(Artifact 5.1)** she responded with, "My mom collects salt and pepper shakers," rather than simply saying no. Similarly, when I asked her what the best book she ever read was, she quoted a book that was read to her rather than one she herself had read. She said she liked it best because "the person who read it had a lot of expression." This hit home for me because it ties directly in with her fluency deficit. Clearly when she reads books to herself she doesn't "hear them" the same way as when they are read to her. I have to admit, this made me sad, and I was glad that fluency was something that I had chosen for us to work on together. (Standards I and III)

We did not move on to any pre-testing that day. We finished our lunches and chatted about her interests on the survey. My priority was to make sure she was comfortable working one on one with me, and not overwhelm her on our first day together. "Vital to the classroom is the quality of teacher-student relationships. When teachers emphasize positive interpersonal relationships, student motivation increases. Believing that their teachers think they are important, students participate more socially in the classroom" (Marrow & Gambrell, 2011, p. 178). I wanted to be sure I had established this before moving on to testing and instruction. (Standard IV)

From my in-class observations and experiences working with Sarah this year, I knew that I was most interested in assessing and providing instruction for her in the areas of

comprehension and fluency, as these are two areas she really struggles in. I ran my decision by my team language arts and special education teachers, and they agreed that Sarah would most definitely benefit from additional support in those areas. The next time I met with Sarah was "pre-test day." Prior to this day I had reviewed a very recent QRI (Qualitative Reading Inventory) reading screener that Sarah had just taken (given by another teacher) as part of a district-wide initiative to identify at-risk readers mid-year **(Artifacts 1-1.2)**. It was a 6th grade passage, and Sarah scored a 3 out of 8, which put her at "frustration" level. I also noted that Sarah got every single "implicit" question wrong, so clearly this would be something to be addressed in our instruction. For my personal pre and post comprehension testing of Sarah I decided to go with CARS (Comprehensive Assessment of Reading Strategies) assessments. "Unfortunately, scores on most comprehension assessments do not tell us why a reader is struggling" (Samuels & Farstrup, 2011, p. 79). However, CARS assessments do! That is one of the reasons I like them better than QRIs. I feel that not only are they less subjective, but they also help me to identify specific comprehension areas that a student may be struggling in by recognizing patterns in the types of questions they answer incorrectly. Since she scored at frustration level on the 6th grade QRI passage, I chose to give her a 5th, 4th, and 3rd grade CARS screener **(Artifacts 2.1-2.9)**. (It should be noted that Sarah did not know the levels of any of the passages as she was completing them. I added that information later to add to the clarity of the artifacts.) These three CARS assessments served two purposes for me; one, they helped me to identify her current instructional and independent comprehension levels, and two, they allowed me to look for and identify patterns in the types of questions she consistently got wrong so that I could target my instruction accordingly. After I scored her assessments, I compiled the information onto a rubric to better view and compare her results **(Artifact 2)**. In my district, a

child must score a 9 or above on a CARS assessment to be considered "at grade level" or "independent." Since Sarah leveled out at a 3rd grade level passage, I decided that I would use 4th grade material, her instructional level, for our lessons together. At this time I also made the decision that I would be doing two comprehension lessons instead of just one. I made this decision because I noticed that she consistently got questions incorrect regarding "cause and effect" and "finding word meaning in context," regardless of the grade level of the text (**Artifact 2**). "Comprehension is critical to successful reading" (Marrow & Gambrell, 2011, p. 178), so I wanted to make sure I provided instruction in both of those areas. These results make sense in conjunction with her QRI results, since cause and effect relationships and finding word meaning in context are both "implicit" skills. (Standards I, II, III, and VI)

The day after the CARS assessments I assessed Sarah on her fluency. Per her IEP and the fact that she clearly mentioned on her surveys that she is not comfortable reading aloud, I knew that this was going to be difficult for her. I had Sarah do a brief one minute AIMSweb fluency pre-assessment with me during STAR class (**Artifact 3**). Prior to giving the assessment, I asked Sarah if she was currently working on fluency in Lab (her LRC class period). She said yes, they work on it every day and then she graphs how she's doing on a chart in her folder. Next I asked her if she knew what "fluency" meant and if she could explain it to me. "When considering fluency, it is important that teachers keep in mind that to be comprehensive, fluency instruction needs to address both the automaticity component and the prosody component" (Samuels & Farstrup, 2011, p. 96). I wanted to see if Sarah knew this as well, or if she thought, as our class readings suggested many people do, that fluency was just "fast reading." To my delight she said, "It's like reading all the words on the page quickly without getting them wrong,

but it has to be, like, flowing, and have expression too." What a great answer! (Standards I, II, and III)

Sarah ended up reading 65 words in one minute, but made 10 errors, so her final score was 55 wcpm. In my district, the 6th grade fluency benchmark for winter is 149 wcpm (**Artifact 12**). The upcoming benchmark for 6th grade fluency in spring is 161 wcpm, so this is definitely an area I want to target for improvement with Sarah. (Standards II and III)

Lesson 1: "Cause and Effect"

The great thing about the CARS assessments is that they go hand-in-hand with the STARS (Strategies to Achieve Reading Success) program. The STARS program provides lessons targeting reading comprehension strategy instruction specific to each of the types of questions asked on the CARS assessments. "In the typical classroom, assigned tasks overwhelmingly emphasize copying, remembering and recalling with a few tasks assigned that engage students in thinking about what they've read" (Applegate & Applegate, 2010, p. 229). In some small ways the STARS program does that too, but for the most part I feel it teaches students strategies and then provides for them to practice the strategies they've learned across a variety of different texts. This teaches the student to *be a strategist* rather than to simply memorize a strategy. (Standard V)

Since Sarah struggled most in the areas of "cause and effect" and "finding word meaning in context," I decided to use materials from the corresponding 4th grade (her instructional level) STARS lessons that best addressed those two areas. The first lesson we did together focused on "cause and effect" relationships (**Lesson 1, p. 26-28**). It was broken down into the areas of modeled instruction, guided instruction, modeled practice, guided practice, and finally

independent practice. It took Sarah and I a little less than two lunch periods together to complete this lesson. First, I thanked her for taking the pre-assessments for me, and told her they really helped me a lot in getting to know her as a reader and not just as a social studies learner. Next I told her I noticed a pattern when I was scoring them, and that it looked to me like she had trouble with questions about understanding cause and effect and finding the meanings of words when the passage doesn't come right out and tell you what a word means. She immediately said, "Yeah, the meaning ones are really hard if it doesn't say it in there." I then told her that I picked two lessons for us to do together that I thought would help her understand those types of questions a little bit better, and hopefully make them easier for her to answer the next time she came across them. (Standards I, III, IV, V, and VI)

I then gave Sarah the purple student work packet that I'd put together to go with this lesson **(Artifacts 6-6.8)**. I began by introducing the strategy, and discussing with Sarah what "cause and effect" means. (See Lesson 1, p. 26-28 for a more detailed script of this lesson.) Next, I modeled a sample cause and effect sentence. Then we practiced answering questions one and two on **Artifact 6** together. Question one asked Sarah to consider what would happen if you overslept on a school day. Sarah had no problems identifying that "you would be late to school." However, she struggled with putting the cause into words in the second question which instructed her to write why you would be late to school. Sarah first responded with, "Because you normally have more time," even though the answer was clearly stated in the question above. After some discussion with me, she concluded that you would normally have more time <u>because</u> you normally wouldn't over sleep, so the cause was really that you overslept. She had no problems on the following page **(Artifact 6.1)**, using the graphic organizer to identify the effect from a short paragraph. On the next page **(Artifact 6.2)** Sarah and I went over the "What to

Know" box at the top of the page and then covered the answers at the bottom of the page. We did a choral reading of this passage, and then attempted to identify "what happened" or the effect, and "why it happened" or the cause. Sarah did very well here and answered both questions correctly. For **Artifact 6.3**, Sarah read the passage on her own aloud and then attempted the questions. She appeared to be guessing at first, but got both questions correct when I asked her to look back at the passage and show me <u>where</u> she found her answers. Similarly on the next page **(Artifact 6.4)**, Sarah and I read through the "Review" box at the top of the page. Then she read the poem aloud to me, identified the answers in the text, and marked what she thought to be the correct answers on her sheet. After that we flipped over the page to reveal an answer key detailing *why* each response on the previous page was right or wrong. Though Sarah got both questions right, we still went over and discussed each of these together **(Artifact 6.5)**. As a last guided practice opportunity, Sarah and I read and discussed the "More to Know" box at the top of the page before completing cause and effect questions for the "April Fool's Day" passage **(Artifact 6.6)**. She struggled a bit more on this one. I think the repetitive phrasing and author's non-chronological order style of writing threw her off a bit. In my opinion she does much better when the cause is stated immediately before or immediately after the effect. (Standards I, III, IV, V, and VI)

The last part of the lesson that Sarah completed was the independent practice **(Artifacts 6.7-6.8)**. I did not sit with her for this part except to go over the directions at the top with her, though I did tell her that if she wasn't sure about a question or needed help, just to ask. When she was finished I reviewed her independent practice sheets. I noticed that when she wasn't specifically instructed to do so, she did not circle or underline any of the clues in the text that helped her to identify the correct answers. However, she still got all but one answer correct, so I

was hopeful this would be reflected in her post-assessment following our lessons. (Note: You may notice that nearly all Sarah's student work contains all the correct answers. That is because we mostly completed the lesson packet together, talked through each question, etc. before she chose a final answer. It is not because she initially got every question right without one on one teacher support.) (Standards IV, V, and VI)

Lesson 2: "Finding Word Meaning in Context"

It was clear from the results of Sarah's CARS pre-assessments that she has a lot of difficulty inferring the meaning of unknown words in a text. This is most likely because "students with LD experience difficulty spontaneously deriving meaning from mere exposure to words or incidental learning" (PowerPoint: Vocabulary Instruction and Assessment). Therefore, the second comprehension lesson I completed with Sarah focused on "finding word meaning in context" **(Lesson 2, p. 29-31)**. This lesson also took two lunch periods to complete. Each of the STARS lessons follows a very similar format, so by now, Sarah had a good feel for the "flow" and organization of this type of lesson. It too was broken down into modeled instruction, guided instruction, modeled practice, guided practice, and ended with independent practice. I again began by introducing the strategy, this time explaining that good readers know that they can find word meanings in a text by using other words or phrases in the reading passage as clues. Next, I gave Sarah the corresponding blue student work packet to be used with this lesson **(Artifacts 7-7.8)**. (Standards I, III, V, and VI)

On the first page **(Artifact 7)**, we read together and discussed what it means to "find meaning from context." I asked Sarah is she had ever heard her mom or dad say a word she didn't know, but that she was able to figure out, based on how they used it. She said she thought she had, but I didn't get the impression that she was too sure what I meant, so I gave her an

example. "Pretend you are at the grocery store and you ask someone who works there where to find the bananas. The worker tells you, 'They're on the next aisle adjacent to this one.' We might not know what adjacent means, but we can figure out that it might mean 'next to' because of the way the worker said the bananas were on the 'next' aisle. This seemed to help her. (Standards IV and V)

I read the first question on the modeled instruction sheet (**Artifact 7**) aloud to Sarah. It instructed her to write down what she thought the word "quench" meant. There was no context to help her, simply the word quench. She glanced up at me with a concerned look. I assured her that's it was just a guess, and it was completely okay if she had no idea. The only thing she could come up with was that it "sounds like something French," so that's what we wrote down. The next question put the new word into context: "A cold glass of water will *quench* my thirst." It asked her again to explain what quench meant. Now she seemed more confident. She said, "I think it means 'help.'" I asked her to circle the clue words in the sentence that made her think that, and she circled cold, water, and thirst. We talked about how "help" was a very good guess, because if you replace the word "quench" with the word "help," the sentence still makes sense. (Standards I and IV)

The first page went very smoothly, but Sarah struggled a bit more on the next one (**Artifact 7.1**). On this page she was asked to determine what the word "feat" meant. We went step by step through the page together and I even used the adaptation section of my lesson for additional support (See the Adaptations section of Lesson 2, p. 31 for more scripted details), but the best answer I could get from her was that "feat" must mean "a deed or a win that's hard." Eventually I let her know she was on the right track, but explained that "feat" means an act of

great strength of skill. So she really was on the right track in terms of a feat being something that's "hard." (Standards V and VI)

The rest of the packet followed the exact same format as our last lesson. In the guided instruction section **(Artifacts 7.2-7.3)**, we covered the answers at the bottom, did a choral reading of the very brief passage, and tried to determine what the meaning of the word "ailing" was. Here Sarah accurately determined that it meant you were sick. I think the picture that accompanied the passage also helped a lot. Next we read a more substantial passage without a picture. For the questions, I asked Sarah to go back and circle the word in the text that we were being asked to define, "clarity." The word popped up in the passage at least four times, and I was wondering if that would throw her off, but it seemed to help. She got both of the questions correct on her own. Similarly, Sarah did very well on the next page **(Artifact 7.4-7.5)**, but I think she already knew what the words in question, "habitat and unique," meant. So she may have simply gotten the questions right because she didn't need to use the context to help her. At this point I noted that, though I chose to use 4th grade materials with her due to her pretesting, it might be a better idea to use a 5th or 6th grade STARS lesson with more challenging words if this pattern continued. Ultimately I decided to keep with the 4th grade lesson as most of the rest of the terms proved to be both unknown to Sarah and challenging, such as: turbulent, intrigued, wrath, scaling, etc. For our last guided practice sheet **(Artifact 7.6)**, Sarah and I began by reading the "More to Know" box at the top of the page. We discussed what synonyms and antonyms are (which she already knew) and how they can help us to figure out what unknown words mean in a passage. When completing this sheet she initially got two out of four wrong. Number 5 she got wrong because she misread the question and chose a synonym answer when the question asked for an antonym, but number six was genuinely hard for her to comprehend.

Question six stated, "In paragraph 2, which word gives a clue to the meaning of the word *swirled*?" The choices were: around, rolled, surrounded, and whipping. The correct answer was "around," but Sarah marked "surrounded." When I asked her why she'd picked that one, she said, "Because the storm was all around the light house, so it was surrounding it." She was correct in saying this, but she hadn't looked back in the passage to see which one was actually used; she just picked the synonym she happened to think fit the best in her own opinion. The ironic thing is that, in her explanation to me (see in blue above), she actually used the correct answer: "around." Once we looked back at the passage and Sarah understood that the question was really asking what word did the author use, not what word did she think was best, she changed her answer to "around." In my opinion Sarah has the most difficulty when the words she has to choose from are very similar. For example, if they all make sense in some respect, than it's very difficult for her to choose which one is the best choice. She told me that her strategy is replacing the word with what she thinks it means, and if the sentence still makes sense, then that's probably what it means. This strategy works well until you get to a phrase like, "the storm swirled," and then "rolled," "surrounded," and "whipped" all sound like viable correct answers. I can see why this particular strategy proves to be so challenging for her. (Standards I, III, IV, and V)

Lastly Sarah completed the independent practice section of the student handout packet **(Artifacts 7.7-7.8)**. As with the previous lesson I did not sit with her for this part except to go over the directions and "Test Tips" at the top of the page with her. This one took her a bit longer than the "cause and effect" independent practice, but she said she didn't have any questions and didn't need help when I checked on her. When she was finished I again reviewed her answers. I was glad to see that, this time, she did circle and/or underline a few things, so I know she was

looking back at the passage before answering the questions. On the first sheet **(Artifact 7.7)**, Sarah got one of two wrong, but again I completely understand why. The question asks her to tell what "intrigued" means. Sarah chose "amused," but the correct answer was "fascinated." "Fascinated" was a better choice, but looking back at the passage I think "amused" was also a very relevant and applicable choice for her to make. On the second sheet **(Artifact 7.8)**, Sarah answered both questions correctly. (Standards I, III, V, and VI)

Lesson 3: "Fluency"

In regards to fluency, Samuels and Farstrup explain that "what we need are instructional methods that aim to improve students' word-recognition automaticity and, at the same time, their prosody – in both oral and silent reading" (Samuels & Farstrup, 2011, p. 100). I chose to use the HELPS (Helping Early Literacy with Practice Strategies) program for my fluency instruction with Sarah because I feel it does just that. Sarah and I worked on fluency lessons together every day in STAR class for one week **(Lesson 3, p. 32-34)**. It should be noted that five days of fluency practice is not nearly enough to see big gains in fluency, but in addition to working with me Sarah was also continuing to work on a daily basis in her LRC classroom with our special education teacher, Mrs. Rossi, towards her specific IEP goals pertaining to fluency. (Standard I, II, III, V, and VI)

The first day we met to work on fluency I gave Sarah an "upper-level" HELPS fluency reading passage **(Artifacts 8-8.2)**. (HELPS does not level their passages by specific grades like AIMSweb does.) Before working on fluency instruction with Sarah I consulted with her special education teacher, Mrs. Rossi, to get her opinion on whether I was using the appropriate level of fluency passages for her. Additionally, I had administered her fluency pre-assessment with a 6th grade passage. Mrs. Rossi said that currently Sarah is both practicing with and being assessed

with AIMSweb 6th grade fluency passages, and she is showing growth throughout the year, so that I should continue to use 6th grade level materials as far as fluency is concerned, even though for comprehension instruction a lower grade level would be more beneficial. (Standards I, II, III, and V)

Upon receiving the reading fluency passage, I asked Sarah to read the title and make some predictions as to what it might be about, in order to activate her prior knowledge on the topic. Next we set the timer and Sarah did a cold read of the passage **(Artifact 8)**. After the minute was up we wrote down her score, then went over, pointed out, and practiced saying correctly any of the words she got wrong. We also read the passage all the way through, untimed, and practiced repeated readings of any parts of the passage where expression or phrasing proved to be challenging for her. The HELPS program suggests that students do a retell upon completing the passage. Though I do think this is beneficial, I did not do this with Sarah. I felt she was already working hard with me on comprehension lessons, and an additional daily retell seemed to me a bit much to add. Additionally, she was already working on fluency (with retells) on a daily basis in Lab class with Mrs. Rossi. (Standards I, III, and V)

On all of the subsequent fluency days, we first did a hot read of the passage from the day before, corrected any new or repeated errors, practiced any difficult phrases, and then went on to a new passage following the format listed in the paragraph above (or scripted in more detail in Lesson 3, p. 32-34). Every day Sarah got to see and compare her cold read score to her improved hot read score. I offered her the option to graph her progress so she could see how well she was doing, but she said she'd rather not as she's already doing that in Mrs. Rossi's class. However, she did provide me with one of her completed fluency graphs that she worked

on with Mrs. Rossi. She said I could include it with my project if I wanted to "in case my college teacher wants to know how it works" (**Artifact 11**). (Standards IV and V)

During my fluency lessons with Sarah there were a few things I took note of. One was that Sarah rarely made the same error twice. Once we corrected a word, she typically said it correctly after that. I was impressed by this, as it usually takes kids much more repetition than that to retain a new word. I wonder if she would still get the word correct if she came across it in a book or other source, or if she just got it right because she memorized that, in this particular passage, that's the right word? Second I noticed that, though her cold read scores did not always increase throughout the week: 76, 56, 58, 61, and 71, her hot reads were always better than her cold reads in all fluency areas: speed, number of correct words, and prosody. The last thing I noticed was the inconsistency in the types of errors Sarah makes. It's not always "hard words" that she gets wrong. Sometime she substitutes "a" for "an" or "the" for "these" and doesn't catch it or self-correct. I also took note of the fact she had almost no omissions. Nearly all of her errors consisted of misidentifying or making up words. (Standards I and III)

Post Assessments:

Since Sarah was independent at a 3rd grade level and instructional at a 4th grade level, I targeted all her comprehension lessons toward her instructional level. For her post comprehension assessments I'd decided to do the same. I chose to assess her with, again, three different CARS passages, but this time all at the 4th grade level (**Artifacts 9.1-9.9**). My hope was that she would now score "independent" at the 4th grade level, and specifically (hopefully) get more of the implicit "cause and effect" and "finding word meaning in context" questions correct. Again, when Sarah was given the three 4th grade CARS passages and corresponding comprehension questions she did not know what specific grade level(s) they pertained to.

Following Sarah's completion of the CARS post assessments I again compiled her responses onto a rubric allowing me to see patterns in her errors as well as identify her current instructional, independent, or frustration comprehension levels **(Artifact 9)**.   As previously mentioned, in my district a child must score a 9 or above on a CARS assessment to be considered "at grade level" or "independent." I was so excited to see that Sarah scored "independent" at the 4th grade level in two of the three assessments! I think she could have scored "independent" on all three, but perhaps was getting tired near the end and "wanted to be done." The reason I think this is because she got all four of the last questions wrong on the *Pony Express* passage, and that's the passage she completed last. It could also be that she didn't have as much prior knowledge on the Pony Express as she did the other two pieces, but knowing Sarah and all the work, effort, and time she'd been putting in with me, I think she was probably just getting tired and unfocused so she bubbled in her best guesses without actually looking back at the text and reading it over carefully. I also noted that, just as she did in the independent practice sections of our lessons, she did not highlight or underline where she found her answers even though I gave her a highlighter and told her, if it helped, to highlight as she read or when she found an answer like we'd practiced. In her defense though, I did see her looking back at the texts quite a bit when answering the questions, even if she did choose not to write on them. (Standards I, II, III, V, and VI)

In terms of our implicit areas of focus, "cause and effect" and "finding word meaning in context," I was so proud of how well Sarah did! Each of the three passages had one comprehension question that focused on the above specific skills, so there were three total "cause and effect" questions and three total "finding word meaning in context" questions. For both types of questions Sarah answered two out of three of them correctly. I was expecting to see this

kind of improvement with the "cause and effect" questions because she did so well on that lesson with me; but honestly I expected her to maybe answer just one of the "meaning making" questions correctly on her own, because she had a much harder time with that lesson and needed more support from me there than she did on Lesson 1. (Standards I and III)

The last post assessment I gave Sarah was in Fluency. "Most poor readers, regardless of age, exhibit slow and inaccurate word recognition…which often hampers comprehension" (PowerPoint: Phonics Instruction). This is the case with Sarah, so I was really hoping to see growth in this area. I again used an AIMSweb 6th grade passage, which was approximately the same level we'd been working with in our lessons. Sarah's Fluency scores were probably her most impressive. Her pre-assessment score was 55 wcpm. Her post assessment score was 75 wcpm. She actually read 79 words, but had 4 errors (**Artifact 10**). Again, that is nowhere near the 6th grade benchmark for spring which is 161 wcpm. However, in reviewing Sarah's IEP goal for fluency it states that Sarah's personal goal for fluency is that she reach 67 wcpm by the end of the 4th quarter. She has already surpassed that, and the 4th quarter has just started! Clearly I can't take credit for this, as I only worked with Sarah on fluency consistently for a week and Mrs. Rossi works with her on fluency on a daily basis, but I am so proud of how hard she is working and the great gains she is making! (Standards I, II, III, IV, and V)

Additional Reflections:

Most of my reflections have been imbedded throughout this case study where I've felt they were most relevant, rather than inserted here at the end. However I do have a few final thoughts and summations. This assignment, though challenging, was a really great experience for me. Working with Sarah reminded me how much I used to love teaching elementary reading

and seeing the looks on my student's faces when everything began to click and come together, and suddenly all of their hard work felt worth it.

Even though Sarah is still comprehending at a 4th grade level and reading 86 less words per minute than the average 6th grader, she has still made great gains in terms of her personal growth. She has made a year's worth of growth in her comprehension level in only a few months, and has increased her fluency rate from 55 wcpm to 75 wcpm. According to my district's fluency norms **(Artifact 12)**, 6th graders should be progressing in fluency at a rate of 0.7 words per week. That means in three months' time Sarah's fluency should have increased from 55 wcpm to somewhere around 64 wcpm (.7 x 12 weeks = 8.4), and that would be if she were a "normally developing 6th grader." Slowly she is making gains and closing the gap between her grade level and her current instructional levels, and it feels really great to have been even a small part of that.

One of the things that I think aids Sarah in her continuance to improve is her awareness of her own metacognitive processes. She knows that she is an auditory learner, and has told me as much saying, "I understand better when someone can sit and explain it to me once." Knowing that about Sarah and seeing the results reflected back in her post assessments made me very glad that I chose to use two very explicitly taught comprehension lessons in a one-on-one setting. "Explicit instruction involves teacher modeling, explanation, and think-alouds that help children understand what strategic processes are, how to use them, under what conditions they might be used, and why they might be used" (Marrow & Gambrell, 2011, p. 178). I think this choice and type on instruction really helped to benefit Sarah by playing to her strengths.

Looking back on my fluency lessons with Sarah, I can't help but wonder now to what extent her deficit in spelling is inhibiting her fluency. "Research has shown that good spellers have a stronger grasp of the principles for combining morphographs than poor spellers" (Simonsen & Gunter, 2001, p. 101). Perhaps not being able to spell morphographs accurately lessons the likelihood that she can recognize them quickly and accurately in texts, thereby making it easier and faster to decode new or unfamiliar words. Though her IEP specifically states that spelling not be graded or counted against her, I can't help but think that some spelling instruction or even additional practice with Dolch list flashcards or word family flashcards in conjunction with her daily fluency practice would benefit her even more. Perhaps she'd be interested in continuing to work with me on reading? It would be nice, for both of us I think, to continue our sessions every once in a while, and continue to work on fluency, perhaps spelling, as well as some of the other implicit strategies for comprehension that STARS has to offer.

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Samuels, S. J. & Farstrup, A. E. (Eds.) (2011). *What research has to say about reading
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Simosen, F., & Gunter, L. (2001). Best practices in spelling instruction: A research
summary. *Journal of Direct Instruction*, *1*(2), 97-105.

Additional Resources:

Additional Information about Irlen Syndrome:
http://irlen.com/what-is-irlen-syndrome/
http://www.irlenuk.com/irlen-syndrome-myths-facts.htm

Cars & Stars Book Collection Information:
http://www.curriculumassociates.com/products/detail.aspx?title=CARS-STARS-collections

Common Core State Standards for Language Arts and Literacy:
http://www.corestandards.org/ELA-Literacy/RI/6/

Michigan Department of Education GLCEs:
http://michigan.gov/documents/ELAGLCE_140483_7.pdf

LESSON 1

Lesson 1: Comprehension of Implicit Text, Part 1: "Recognizing Cause & Effect"

Subject: Literacy / Language Arts

Grade Level: 4th Grade (adapted for a 6th Grade LD student)

Date: March 15, 2014

Duration: 25-30 minutes – (fits well into a middle school lunch period or after school)

Lesson Objectives: Students will learn to recognize cause and effect relationships by understanding what happens and why in a reading passage, and identify when test questions are asking them to recognize cause and effect.

GLCEs:
- **R.CM.06.01** connect personal knowledge, experiences, and understanding of the world to themes and perspectives in text through oral and written responses.
- **R.CM.06.03** analyze global themes, universal truths and principles within and across texts to create a deeper understanding by drawing conclusions, making inferences, and synthesizing.
- **R.MT.06.01** self-monitor comprehension when reading or listening to text by automatically applying and discussing the strategies used by mature readers to increase comprehension including: predicting, constructing mental images, visually representing ideas in text, questioning, rereading or listening again if uncertain about meaning, inferring, summarizing, and engaging in interpretive discussions.
- **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.6.1** cite textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text.

Materials: STARS student handout packet, pgs. 38-47 and STARS teacher guide answer key
      (See Artifacts 6 – 6.8 attached)

Resources: STARS (Strategies to Achieve Reading Success) Teacher Guide and Student
      Workbook

Rationale/Background: In this lesson, students will learn to recognize cause and effect relationships by understanding what happens and why in a reading passage through modeled instruction, guided instruction, modeled practice, guided practice, and finally independent practice. Students will have the opportunity to activate their background knowledge about recognizing cause and effect and then learn how to apply this strategy to a short reading passage. They will then practice the strategy by thinking about what happens and why it happens, using any available clue words, to answer questions about a passage. Finally, students will be able to reinforce their understanding of the strategy/concepts by reading a passage, answering questions,

and discussing one on one with the teacher why their answers are correct or incorrect before practicing this strategy independently.

Opening:
- Modeled and Guided Instruction (Handout pages 38-41)
- First introduce the strategy to by telling the student that "Good readers recognize cause and effect in a reading passage by thinking about what happened and why it happened. Whenever you recognize *why* something happened, you a recognizing a cause and its effect."
- Next, model an example by saying, "Suppose you stay up late on a Friday night watching movies with your friend. The next day you feel very tired. Why are you so tired?" Allow the student the opportunity to answer. Guide the student to understand that staying up late was the cause of being tired. Being tired was the effect of staying up late. Cause always leads to effect.
- Give the student a copy of the "cause and effect" student handout packet (see Artifacts 6 – 6.8 attached). Look at pg. 38 and go over the directions at the top together. Sit with the student and support them as needed in completing questions 1 and 2. Skip the partner activity at the bottom of the page. Instead, in the blank space at the bottom, ask the child to write one complete cause and effect sentence of their own. (See the "Adaptations" section of this lesson if this task seems too hard for the student.)
- Flip to handout pg. 39. Read through the directions with the student and then ask the student to read the short passage aloud. Continue completion of this sheet one on one with the student. Read each prompt aloud and see if they can come up with the final effect on their own. (If this is too difficult for them, see the "Adaptations" section of this lesson.)
- Next flip to pg. 40. For this page, first read the "What to Know" box to the student, then read through the passage together with the student. Cover the answers at the bottom and see if the student can accurately identify the cause and effect. Show the answers at the bottom, and discuss why the student's answers were correct/incorrect.
- For pg. 41, direct the student to read the passage and answer the two questions that follow. Stay with the child for this page and provide additional support and guidance as needed. Omit the partner section at the bottom.

Middle:
- Modeled and Guided Practice (Handout pages 42-44)
- By this point, the student has had a lot of direct, explicit instruction on cause and effect. For handout pg. 42, read through the "Review" box at the top of the page with the student. Have the student read the poem aloud and model for you where how/where they found the answers to the two questions at the bottom of the page. They may underline or highlight the text to help them. Next, flip to pg. 43 and guide the student in checking their own answers. Read through *why* each answer is correct/incorrect.

- Handout pg. 44 is the last guided practice opportunity the student will have before they have to complete the independent practice on their own. Read through the "More to Know" box at the top of the page together, but then allow the student to take the lead for the rest. Have them read the passage aloud (highlighting if they want to). Then have them attempt to show you how to correctly answer each of the questions at the bottom.

Conclusion:
- Independent Practice (Handout pages 46-47)
- As a wrap-up, have the student complete these two slightly longer reading passages and answer the cause and effect questions that follow. Read the "Test Tips" section at the top of pg. 46 with them before they begin. The teacher can also use these independent practice sheets as a progress monitoring tool.

Adaptations and Extensions:
- As an accommodation for handout pg. 38, if the student is having trouble thinking of examples on his/her own, they could complete more simplistic "_____ because _____" sentences instead. For example, they could state an event (I am really tired) and then after the "because," tell why (because I stayed up really late last night).
- For handout pg. 39, if the student is having difficulty completing the sentence in the effect box, reread the last paragraph of the passage with them and ask them, "What will Jake and Marcus have to do _because_ Jake left the map at the last place they stopped to rest?"

Assessment: The effectiveness of this lesson will be assessed in three ways: One, through direct teacher observation during the lesson; two, through checking the independent practice worksheets 46 and 47 for accuracy after the student has completed them on his/her own; and three, by completing a final CARS assessment to assess student growth after all three lessons have been taught independently.

Lesson 2: Comprehension of Implicit Text, Part 2: "Finding Word Meaning in Context"

Subject: Literacy / Language Arts

Grade Level: 4th Grade (adapted for a 6th Grade LD student)

Date: March 18, 2014

Duration: 25-30 minutes – (fits well into a middle school lunch period or after school)

Lesson Objectives: Students will learn to find word meaning in context by using other words or phrases in a reading passage as clues, as well as identify when test questions are asking them to find word meaning in context.

GLCEs:
- **R.CM.06.01** connect personal knowledge, experiences, and understanding of the world to themes and perspectives in text through oral and written responses.
- **R.CM.06.03** analyze global themes, universal truths and principles within and across texts to create a deeper understanding by drawing conclusions, making inferences, and synthesizing.
- **R.MT.06.01** self-monitor comprehension when reading or listening to text by automatically applying and discussing the strategies used by mature readers to increase comprehension including: predicting, constructing mental images, visually representing ideas in text, questioning, rereading or listening again if uncertain about meaning, inferring, summarizing, and engaging in interpretive discussions.
- **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.6.1** cite textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text.

Materials: STARS student handout packet, pgs. 72-81 and STARS teacher guide answer key
(See Artifacts 7 – 7.8 attached)

Resources: STARS (Strategies to Achieve Reading Success) Teacher Guide and Student Workbook

Rationale/Background: In this lesson, students will learn to find word meaning in context by using other words or phrases in a reading passage as clues through modeled instruction, guided instruction, modeled practice, guided practice, and finally independent practice. Students will have the opportunity to activate their background knowledge about finding word meaning in context and then learn how to apply this strategy to a short reading passage. They will then practice the strategy by using context clues to answer questions about the meaning of a word in a passage. Finally, students will be able to reinforce their understanding of the strategy/concepts

by reading a passage, answering questions, and discussing one on one with the teacher why their answers are correct or incorrect before practicing this strategy independently.

Opening:
- Modeled and Guided Instruction (Handout pages 72-75)
- First introduce the strategy to by telling the student that "Good readers know that they can find word meanings in a text by using other words or phrases in the reading passage as clues. Whenever you figure out the meaning of a word without looking in a dictionary, you are finding word meaning in context."
- Next, model an example by saying, "Suppose you are at a grocery store and you ask an employee where to find something. The employee says, 'It's on the next aisle adjacent to this one.' What does the word *adjacent* mean? What clue word helps you to know?" Allow the student the opportunity to answer. Guide the student to understand that *adjacent* means "next to." Since the description the employee gives tells the same thing in two different ways, we can see that *adjacent* probably means something similar to *next*. *Next* is the clue word.
- Give the student a copy of the "finding word meaning in context" student handout packet (see Artifacts 7 – 7.8 attached). Look at pg. 72 and go over the directions at the top together. Sit with the student and support them as needed in completing questions 1 – 3. Omit the partner activity at the bottom of the page.
- Flip to handout pg. 73. Read through the directions with the student and then ask the student to read the short passage aloud. Continue completion of this sheet one on one with the student. Read each prompt aloud and see if they can come up with the final hypothesis on their own as to what the word *feat* might mean. (If this is too difficult for them, see the "Adaptations" section of this lesson.)
- Next flip to pg. 74. For this page, first read the "What to Know" box to the student, then read through the passage together with the student. Cover the answer at the bottom and see if the student can accurately identify the meaning of the word *ailing* from the text. Show the answer at the bottom, and discuss whether the student's answer was correct/ or incorrect and why.
- For pg. 75, direct the student to read the passage and answer the two questions that follow. Stay with the child for this page and provide additional support and guidance as needed. Omit the partner section at the bottom.

Middle:
- Modeled and Guided Practice (Handout pages 76-79)
- By this point, the student has had a lot of direct, explicit instruction on finding word meaning using context clues. For handout pg. 76, read through the "Review" box at the top of the page with the student. Have the student read the ad for a whale tour aloud and model for you how/where they found the answers to the two questions at the bottom of the page. They may underline or highlight the text to help them. Next, flip to pg. 77 and

guide the student in checking their own answers. Read through *why* each answer is correct/incorrect.

- Handout pg. 78 is the last guided practice opportunity the student will have before they have to complete the independent practice on their own. Read through the "More to Know" box at the top of the page together, but then allow the student to take the lead for the rest. Have them read the passage aloud (highlighting if they want to). Then have them attempt to show you how to correctly answer each of the questions at the bottom.

Conclusion:
- Independent Practice (Handout pages 80-81)
- As a wrap-up, have the student complete these two slightly longer reading passages and answer the cause and effect questions that follow. Read the "Test Tips" section at the top of pg. 80 with them before they begin. The teacher can also use these independent practice sheets as a progress monitoring tool.

Adaptations and Extensions:
- To provide additional support for students struggling to use the context on handout pg. 73 to define the word *feat*, have them look back at the chart and take note of the words *giant* and *amazing*. Have them picture/visualize Paul Bunyan cutting down the forest and then ask them, "What kinds of other things do you think a giant like Paul Bunyan could do?" Continue this discussion to help guide them to the conclusion that the word *feat* means "an act of great skill or strength."

Assessment: The effectiveness of this lesson will be assessed in three ways: One, through direct teacher observation during the lesson; two, through checking the independent practice worksheets 80 and 81 for accuracy after the student has completed them on his/her own; and three, by completing a final CARS assessment to assess student growth after all three lessons have been taught independently.

Lesson 3: Fluency

Subject: Literacy / Language Arts

Grade Level: 6th Grade

Date: March 20, 2014

Duration: 5-10 minutes – (repeat daily for best results)

Lesson Objectives: Students will improve upon the speed at which they read words in a passage accurately, the accuracy of their phrasing while reading, as well as their accurate and increased use of expression while reading.

GLCEs:
- **R.WS.06.03** automatically recognize frequently encountered words in print with the number of words that can be read fluently increasing steadily across the school year.
- **R.WS.06.06** fluently read beginning grade-level text and increasingly demanding texts as the year proceeds.

Materials: HELPS student upper-level reading passages, teacher passages, progress monitoring chart, timer, and optional bar graph for student progress monitoring

Resources: HELPS (Helping Early Literacy with Practice Strategies) Program – Teacher Implementation Guide

Rationale/Background: In this lesson, students will participate in both cold and repeated readings of 1 minute passages at their instructional reading level to work on improving the speed at which they read words accurately, the amount of expression they use while reading, and their proper use of phrasing while reading. After each 1 minute cold reading the teacher will first help the student to correctly pronounce any missed words. The teacher will also model how to read difficult phrases from the passage fluently and participate in repeated readings of sections of the passage with the student. Through modeling, repeated readings, and guided practice, the student will become a more fluent reader.

Opening:
- Explain to the student that over the next few days they will be working on improving their fluency. Ask the student if they know what it means to read fluently or with fluency. Give them the opportunity to answer. Explain to them that being a fluent reader means reading the words on the page both quickly and accurately, while also using appropriate phrasing (where and when to pause) and good expression.

- Start by doing a 1 minute repeated reading of yesterday's cold reading. After one minute, compare today's results to the previous day's results. See if their wcpm (words correct per minute) improved and share this information with the student. Go over any words the reader had trouble identifying quickly and correctly. Practice any parts of the passage where the student had difficulty with accurate phrasing and/or expression.
  - **NOTE:** On the first day implementing this lesson skip the above step, as there will not yet be a reading to repeat. Begin with the "Middle" section of the lesson below.

Middle:
- Provide the student with a new reading passage at their instructional level. (Note: As the student progresses in speed, accuracy, and prosody, the teacher may choose to select a more difficult reading passage.)
- Have the student read the title of the piece and make predictions about what they think it might be about (activating their prior knowledge on the topic)
- Set the timer and have the student complete a 1 minute cold read of the new passage. On the teacher passage, mark any errors the student makes while reading. When the timer goes off, put a bracket around the last word the student read. Take note of any parts of the reading where phrasing or expression appeared to be particularly challenging for the student.
- Tell the student how many words they were able to read this time in the one minute allotment. Then tell them how many errors they made, and what their final score was. For example, "You did a great job and read 58 words in one minute. Six words were incorrect, so our final score that we will be graphing today for this cold read is 52 wcpm. Nice work!"

Conclusion:
- Lastly, go over any words with the student that he/she had trouble identifying quickly and correctly in the text. Point them out and practice pronouncing them together.
- Also, practice modeling for the student fluent reading of any parts of the passage where the student had difficulty with accurate phrasing and/or expression. Have the student re-read certain phrases and/or sentences from the passage modeling their expression after yours as additional practice.
- Some students like to chart their fluency progress. As an optional wrap up to the lesson, allow the student time to graph their progress on a bar graph sheet. Have them graph their cold reads in blue and their hot reads in red. Make sure the student graphs the hot read directly after/next to the cold read so he/she can clearly see their improvement. (See Artifact 11 attached)

Adaptations and Extensions:

- Reading passages in the teacher guide vary by level. If a passage at the child's grade level proves to be at their frustration level, teachers can choose a lower leveled passage in which the words may be more at the student's instructional level. Reversely, if a passage at grade level is too easy, harder passages may be selected. Reading passages range from grade 1 to grade 8.
- As an extension, try adding a retell to the lesson after the student finishes a cold read to check for understanding, accuracy in sequencing, and accuracy in recalling details.

Assessment: The effectiveness of this lesson will be assessed by completing a final AIMSweb fluency assessment with the student to measure his/her growth after having completed this lesson 5 times (with assorted reading passages) and participating in daily one-minute cold and hot reads with the LRC teacher.