



Teaching to the Strengths of the Different Learner

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Case Study: McKenzie

I. Introduction

McKenzie is a nine year old student in the fourth grade. McKenzie is small in stature. She is agreeable and cooperative. She is known for her compassionate nature and is dedicated in both her friendships and her desire to succeed in school.

McKenzie attended a preschool with a solid learning environment. Her physical development was typical but her language development was slow. Her first grade teacher quickly noticed that McKenzie was having difficulty processing information. She was unable to read simple readers, could not recall simple sight words and her print was difficult to decipher. Her reversals were significant and she had a remarkable ability to mirror write. She was quickly falling behind her peers and she was aware of her difficulties. The classroom teacher recommended intervention.

McKenzie has excellent relationships with her peers. She is warm, kind and affectionate. She gets along well with her family. McKenzie's father is identified as dyslexic. He experiences great difficulty in reading and writing. However, he is a successful businessman with many successful inventions credited to him. They are a very caring and warm family.

McKenzie's parents were referred to the Kingston School District for formalized testing. Her mother took it upon herself to extensively read, research and explore the issues of dyslexia as they pertain to the district policies and privately. She was aware that New York State (and the Kingston School District) would require a significant discrepancy between ability and achievement in order to recommend services to a first grade student. The parents chose not to pursue formalized testing either with the school district or privately. They were satisfied and

comfortable with the first grade teacher's evaluation and recommendations as well as their own knowledge of dyslexia.

An informal screening was administered to determine if McKenzie had the necessary pre-reading skills. A phonologic awareness assessment record, letter recognition screening and concept recognition were administered. McKenzie was successfully able to identify rhyming pairs but experienced difficulty generating rhyming words. She could successfully count words in sentences, segment words into syllables and segment simple words into sounds. She knew her alphabet; yet her reversals were significant even while she viewed letters in their upper-case form. Her mother was anxious to provide McKenzie with what was needed to help her achieve success and wanted services in place as soon as possible. With this information, it was recommended that McKenzie begin Basic Language Skills Book I.

II. Methods and Results:

McKenzie's teaching situation was four days per week at my home-office. She was seen in a one-on-one setting from 7:30-8:30 a.m. The lesson took place prior to McKenzie's school-day. She was six years old when services began in April 2002. She was later joined by a classmate.

McKenzie willingly attends our lessons. She appreciates the specific procedures and techniques. She appreciates the reading chart so she can see her progress throughout the lesson. She particularly enjoys the introduction of new letters through the Multisensory Letter Introduction, especially the feely bag and riddle. McKenzie recognizes the improvement in her reading abilities but continues to be concerned that she is behind her friends in her reading ability.

Mastery Check III

The Specific Mastery Check III results and analysis and prescriptive teaching plan are as follows. In the area of handwriting, McKenzie continues to make slow but steady progress. On Mastery Check III, she had difficulty with the formation of letters b,w,o. She still prefers to write in print in school.

McKenzie's reading is smooth and fluent. She is proud of her reading abilities. On mastery check III, McKenzie had 2 errors. In sentence reading, she initially read accurately but changed the word "herded" into "hurried." She substituted the word "the" for "a." She had nine errors in spelling. She was having consistent difficulty with r-controlled words. In the grammar she had 100% accuracy.

My prescriptive plan is as follows. In cursive handwriting McKenzie had a weakness in the formation of bridge letters. She needs to secure bridge letter formations and the joining of letters. We will review the formation of bridge letters within trace and copy.

In reading McKenzie will continue the progression of lessons in Basic Language Skills. I have found warm up activities to be very helpful to McKenzie. When she does warm-ups she has less errors when reading text.

McKenzie's spelling has consistently presented itself as an area of weakness. She needs additional review in the spelling of r-controlled words. In isolation within the spelling deck she has good recall, but difficulty presents itself within word writing. When presenting r-controlled words I will cue her with the key word for assistance in order to raise her awareness and encourage success. In addition, we will review the Rabbit Rule and the Doubling Rule. She will continue to progress through multisensory grammar.

McKenzie enjoys the alphabetizing activities. She specifically enjoyed discussing King Midas and his messy treasure problem and the importance of organizing the treasures. She drew an elaborate picture and enjoys organizing herself. In extended reading McKenzie needs to be directed for accuracy. She tends to read quickly and guess. She resists a second reading but the benefits are clear. She is enjoying the change from Primary Phonics to MTA readers. She finds the stories more interesting. In extended writing we are working in Colors and Shapes. She enjoys oral language activities, edits well and is making good progress with card pyramids.

Mastery Check IV

In Mastery Check IV McKenzie's skills have continued to improve. McKenzie's bridge letter formations have improved. She has advanced to trace and copy of words in handwriting. She has better command in spelling r-controlled words. She does a second reading of text without complaint and has greater insight into the passage.

Specific Mastery Check IV results and analysis and prescriptive teaching plan are as follows. McKenzie had 100% accuracy in the area of alphabetizing. She rapidly progressed through the lessons on alphabetizing. We have added multisensory grammar to our lessons. In reading, she had four errors. The difficult words had suffix endings. In her sentence reading, she had one error. In spelling, she had twelve errors. Her spelling deficits are significant and continue to lag behind her success in other areas. McKenzie had 100% accuracy in grammar. McKenzie enjoys multisensory grammar. She is successful and the information transfers successfully to her classroom work. She is ahead of her peers in grammar and is very proud of this fact.

McKenzie's prescriptive plan is to continue to advance in alphabetizing to the third and fourth letters. For reading we will continue the progressions of lessons into Book II and we will include a more frequent review of the suffix deck for reading. McKenzie is reading in MTA Reader 3 *Wishes*. Reading the word lists prior to passage reading is vital for Mackenzie's reading success within the passage. The stories are challenging and the second reading is beneficial.

In spelling we will review the Rabbit Rule and Vce with suffix endings and continue to raise awareness by giving more cues during spelling. We will slow down while using the dictation procedures. She continues to make progress in spelling; her errors continue to be with words and sentences. She will continue to advance in multisensory grammar.

McKenzie continues to make steady progress in handwriting. She still feels print is easier but enjoys the challenge of cursive writing. She is excited that we are working on capital letters. In extended writing, McKenzie appreciates the graphic organizers. We have been working on story summary, 5W's and card pyramids. This information is benefiting McKenzie in her classroom setting.

Developing Metacognitive Skills has been added to McKenzie's lesson. She has completed multisensory grammar with resounding success. Her handwriting abilities are reaching fruition. Her letter formation is excellent and her letters are nicely sized. She still needs to develop greater speed and fluency. It requires a lot of effort on her part but she is quite proud of the results. Her spelling continues to improve from previous mastery checks. However, her reading skills are progressing at a pace beyond her ability to process the multiple spelling rules required.

Mastery Check V

On Mastery Check V McKenzie continues to work hard and accomplish skills. On the dictionary skills check, McKenzie was not able to find the words within the 1 minute time period allotted. However, she was close and found the words in a methodical manner using the guide words. McKenzie had four errors in word reading focusing on open syllables. In reading of sentences she had 2 errors, also open syllables. In spelling she had eight errors. In spelling of sentences she had 7 errors.

The prescriptive teaching plan for McKenzie will include continued speed and fluency practice in handwriting. She needs to gain speed in alphabetizing. To accomplish this we will continue with the missing letter decks and provide additional practice. Her errors in reading require a review of open syllables and syllable division VCV. However, I do not think it will require extensive review. For spelling, we will be using a spelling game, Rule-ette by Arlie Roffman and reviewing the Dropping Rule. We will be editing the sentences from handwriting during spelling.

McKenzie has completed MTA book #5 and began reading passages in Six-Way Paragraphs. They are a challenge but the use of DMS makes them attainable and interesting. Her command of the reading practices is outstanding and she transfers the information into her reading quickly.

In writing, McKenzie has excellent world knowledge and oral language skills. She has good mechanics and sentence structure when aided with a graphic organizer. She recognizes that writing assignments are accomplished with greater speed and accuracy when using the graphic organizers taught within the program.

Mastery Check VI

Specific Mastery Check VI results and analysis, and prescriptive teaching plan are as follows.

In word reading, McKenzie had 3 errors (citrus, divine and decay) and two errors in sentence reading (dilated, heaves). She consistently misread words that were unfamiliar to her. In word spelling she had 7 errors and in sentence spelling she had only one error.

The words missed in reading were unfamiliar to McKenzie. Within the sentence reading she searched for words that might fit the content of the sentence and had similar sounds. Prescriptively, we will need to review VCV syllable division. In Book III of Basic Language Skills we will need to continue to review spelling rules and improve McKenzie's visual memory. McKenzie's spelling within sentences has shown more improvement than in word spelling. The "Rule-ette" game gave McKenzie motivation that improved spelling. It raised her awareness of simple errors and reviewed rules when she discovered she could win.

McKenzie's handwriting has significantly improved. She recently wrote an essay on her three families: nuclear, extended and community. Her handwriting was beautiful in her final copy. Her accuracy and speed have improved. She made a card pyramid and presented her information succinctly. Her mechanics in writing were excellent and she showed she could successfully produce a quality piece of writing from start to finish through good editing practices. She was very proud of this paper.

III. Summary

Visual memory for spelling has been a persistent difficulty for McKenzie. Her progress in spelling lags behind her reading abilities. Spelling words in sentences gives her difficulty because she is concentrating on so many tasks at one time. McKenzie needs to spend extra time editing her work.

The most effective practice for remediating spelling has been the game, "Rule-ette." It raised McKenzie's awareness. Also, slowing down the editing process has been important. McKenzie is fully aware that spelling is a continued difficulty.

Up until Book III, handwriting had been a persistent difficulty. However, all of her hard work is paying off in this area. In handwriting, she has had to do a lot of trace and copy. Editing her handwriting for spelling assisted McKenzie greatly. She progressed to smaller and smaller lined paper quite slowly. McKenzie has very good command of cursive handwriting. She writes her essays in cursive. Her writing is accurate and she is very proud of it.

McKenzie has made excellent steady progress in her reading. She is currently reading passages from Six-Way Paragraphs, Middle level. She divides multisyllabic words with ease and reads words with confidence. She is very motivated during reading practices pages. She

recognizes how much they help her. She enjoys finding the patterns in reading. She is reading nearly at grade level. She is fully aware of how well she has progressed and has wonderful confidence in her reading abilities. Grammar has been strength for McKenzie. It was evident that an understanding of grammar assisted McKenzie in her writing.

McKenzie's current academic performance is good. She is doing well in school. She is still learning when to use the various graphic organizers for writing class but will soon master this also. She has developed confidence in her reading but still prefers not to read aloud in class. However, at home she feels comfortable and reads without hesitation.

Her difficulties were strictly academic and were remediated before they interfered with her development. She is a wonderfully well-adjusted child in her social/emotional development.

In my final evaluation I would conclude that McKenzie will continue to excel in her reading abilities. When the program is fully completed, McKenzie will transfer from "learning to read" to "reading to learn". Spelling will continue to be a challenge for her.

It is vitally important that she continue to use her handwriting skills, this skill will give her writing more fluency. McKenzie is fully aware of her dyslexia. She is able to view it as a different learning style and not as a deficit. She is blessed and gifted in so many ways. She has much to contribute and will do so with confidence.

IV. Discussion

McKenzie has greatly benefited from her instruction in Basic Language Skills. Her parents have confidence in the fact that Basic Language Skills has effectively remediated McKenzie's academic difficulties. With the completion of Book III she will have complete knowledge for reading mastery and multisyllabic words. She is continuing to overcome her difficulties with academic language and is gaining mastery and confidence. She is fully aware of her remaining difficulties but also has the knowledge and tools to assist her. When Book III has been completed, I anticipate that she will be a confident and well-rounded reader.

McKenzie has great compassion for people struggling in academic areas. She remains a faithful young lady. However, she is aware that this is her last school year working with me. She has concerns about this. I have expressed my confidence in her abilities.

Teaching McKenzie has been a wonderful learning experience for me.

She has allowed me to join in her success. I feel privileged to share my knowledge of our academic language with such a willing and pleasant student. I believe it has been a rewarding experience for us both.

I have had the opportunity to recognize the great benefits of such a comprehensive program. Basic Language Skills is thorough and enjoyable to teach. The students are treated with respect and taught in a manner that effectively teaches to the “different” learner. We can rejoice in their differences and help them achieve success. McKenzie has a loving and supportive family. They cared enough to determine the best method for teaching McKenzie. This combined with a program such as Basic Language Skills is a recipe for a solid academic future. I have confidence in McKenzie’s future success.