

Literacy Learner Analysis Project

Michigan State University TE 846

Amanda Stowe

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Brief Background and Reason for Focus Project

Working at an International School in Luxembourg (ISL) I work with many English Language Learners. Although there are many programs at the school that help the students become more literate in the English language, I want to do my part in the classroom. For this project I have chosen to work with a little girl named Dea. Dea is in K1 and is in her first year at the ISL. She is 4 years old and for her age has very great literacy skills in her native language, which is Italian. When it comes to English she has very limited use and understanding of the language. This is the case for both speaking, reading and also comprehension. I chose to do a case study on Dea because she seems very bright but is just not grasping the English language. As research suggests that “phonological awareness skills developed in the native language may be instrumental to the development of second language phonological awareness” (Morrow & Gambrell, 2011, p. 122), I believe that Dea just needs extra focus and attention on letter recognition, word comprehension, phonics and phonemic awareness in English.

Home and Family

Dea was born in Palermo, Italy. She is four years old and her family has just moved to Luxembourg this past August. Her family that is in Luxembourg with her consists of her mother, father and two twin older brothers who are in the third grade. The family made the move to Luxembourg because her father got transferred from his job to run a new sector of his company in Luxembourg City. While Dea has her family with her in Luxembourg, it pales in comparison to the family she is use to being surrounded by in her hometown of Palermo. Palermo is in

Sicily and the way of life there is family first. This applies to work, school, play, jobs, friends, and food. Dea's mother, father and brothers are very supportive and they are very close knit, but they are missing the influence of grandma, grandpa, aunts, uncles and cousins being intertwined into their daily lives.

Speaking to her mother and father I have learned that Dea is very advanced when it comes to her literacy levels in Italian for her age. They contribute this to the fact that she has been so engaged with the family and it was a "learning environment" for her well before she was even thinking about learning. This learning was all done in Italian and now that she is at the ISL she is working to find these same literacy levels and understanding with the English language. Her mother speaks good English but prefers Italian, and her father is very literate in English as this is the language he uses for his business ventures. Her two brothers are also just beginning to learn English as Dea is. Although the older people in her family know English I have learned that Italian is what was always spoken and used in Dea's four years of life until she arrived at the International School.

Dea is a very bright, very determined little girl. Even though her communication is limited in English at this point I can still see the desire and curiosity she has in speaking, reading and comprehending this language. Morrow and Gambrell explain that "the boundaries that are set in one's first language are the same that one applies when processing phonemes in a second language, at least during the initial stages of second language development" (2011, pp. 122-123). Since Dea has found the boundaries and literacy success for her age in her native language, I think she will be able to apply this when learning the letters, sounds, and comprehension of the English language. Her parents are also very on board with helping Dea and her two brothers

learn, understand and apply the English language so they do not feel lost in the new school they are attending and new country they are living in.

Emotional Climate

Dea is very curious and motivated when it comes to the English language. She has a wonderful demeanor because I know it is not easy at times when she is constantly being instructed in English without understanding a lot of what is being said in the classroom. Throughout the day she still finds a way to be engaged in the classroom and also a way to interact with students and the teachers. She has a limited vocabulary in the English language and will many times speak in Italian and try to find a picture or point when she is trying to explain something in English that she doesn't yet know how to say.

A lot of patience and modeling is needed in the classroom and when working with Dea. It is very important to keep her motivated and help her every way possible to not become frustrated, or to start feeling embarrassed about her levels of English (Samuels & Farstrup, 2011, p.280). During the lessons given, Dea seemed to bounce back and forth between Italian and English. She is most comfortable and confident when speaking Italian and when she is unsure of something in English she reverts to Italian.

As the lessons progressed and she saw herself correctly recognize letters, sounds and words she seemed more confident with English and less Italian was spoken. Morrow and Gambrell (2011) explain that "confidence, which is belief in your capacity, is tied intimately to success" (p.178). As Dea saw herself succeed in the English language she had more confidence to try to continue speaking the letters, words and sounds presented in the lessons, without switching her language back to Italian. She also carried this confidence with her back into the

classroom and also on the playground where she made many more attempts to speak English with other children.

Literacy History

Dea is able to read and comprehend Italian-language text. She has been able to read simple texts in Italian since she was in pre-school. Even before she was reading she loved books and being read to by members of her family in Italy. Since she has been in Luxembourg she still enjoys books and is always looking at them, but her ability to read and comprehend these books has changed. She gravitates towards bright and vivid picture books that can help her understand the story through the use of pictures. Her favorite books at the moment are *Brown Bear Brown Bear What do you See?* and *The Very Hungry Caterpillar* by Eric Carle.

She also has these books in Italian which will help her to transfer names and meaning to the words she sees in the English version of these books. Claude Goldenberg (2008) stated that "teaching students reading skills in their first language promotes higher levels of reading achievement in English" (p.691). As Dea already has reading and literacy skills in her native language it is recommended that she continue to read and practice these skills. Literacy language instruction in both Italian and English will help Dea to gain higher levels of literacy in both languages (Goldenberg, C., 2008, p.692).

I believe that even though Dea speaks and comprehends very little English, her ability to do so will improve with her mastery of phonics and phonemic awareness. Goldenberg (2008) explains that "even a student who speaks no English might be able to learn the sounds of the language, how to segment words into smaller units (e.g. phonemes), how to associate sounds with letters, and how letters/sounds combine to form words" (p.689). Dea is very young and

learning English phonics is very important to her English literacy development. She can sing the alphabet song every morning with her class but still needs to work on the recognition of each letter and also the "alphabetic principle-the idea that letters stand for sounds and that sounds can be encoded in letters" (Goldenberg, C., 2008, p.689). When Dea is able to do the above mentioned I believe it will greatly help her in her literacy development, even if it is before she is fully grasping the English language.

Tests Given and Summary of Results

“In order to learn to read in English, ELL’s, like native speakers, must develop phonological awareness (PA)” (Morrow & Gambrell, 2011, p. 121). To assess knowledge of Dea’s phonics an alphabet recognition chart was used. This chart contains the 26 letters of the alphabet in upper case and also in lower case. This assessment moved a step further as it is equally important for Dea to know the sounds the letters make and not just the names of the letters. Once the letters have been identified Dea was asked what sound the letters make. Morrow and Gambrell (2011) explain that when learning to read this awareness of letters and the sounds they make is crucial to reading success (p.200). This survey of her alphabet recognition and also the recognition of sounds the letters make will help to assess where she is in regards to her phonemics awareness.

The alphabet recognition chart that Dea used contained a sheet with uppercase letters in random order and also a sheet with lowercase letters in random order (Appendix A). Dea was sat by herself in a quiet setting where she could best concentrate. She was required to name each of the letters on both the uppercase and lower case sheets when the letter was presented to her. There was a window card that was used to block out all the other letters except for the one that

Dea was in the process of naming. After the naming of the letters assessment was completed the same letter sheets were shown to Dea and this time she was asked to identify the sound that each letter makes. This was only done with the lower case letter sheet and she was not asked to identify the sounds twice. The results are provided below.

Alphabet Recognition and Sound Survey	
Alphabet Recognition First lesson	
<u>Score</u>	<u>Skill Assessed</u>
14/26	Letter Names-Uppercase
16/26	Letter Names-Lowercase
14/26	Letter Sounds
Alphabet Recognition Second Lesson	
<u>Score</u>	<u>Skill Assessed</u>
19/26	Letter Names-Uppercase
21/26	Letter Names-Lowercase
17/26	Letter Sounds

The exact same assessment was given to Dea on a Monday and on a Friday of the same week. I want Dea to be able to master the letters of the English alphabet and be able to recognize and pronounce all 26 of the letters. Her improvement from her first lesson to her second lesson was an increase in recognizing 5 letters and pronouncing three. To master these phonics I believe it is something Dea is going to have to continue to review and practice outside of just the school setting. At the end of August she could barely pronounce or recognize any of the English language. The results of Dea's assessments show the need for continued work with phonemes and exposure to the sounds they make so that she can continue to improve on the mastery of her

phonics.

The second assessment I will use with Dea will work on her knowledge of words, putting letters together to make words, and understanding that these letters that make words have meaning. It will consist of flashcards of letters that can be put together to make Consonant-Vowel-Consonant (CVC) words. This assessment also aided in comprehension of the words she learned by the use of pictures to explain a word. It is my hope that in addition to understanding that letters make words, and recognizing what letters make these words that Dea will also increase her vocabulary and comprehension of the words used in this assessment.

Consonant-Vowel-Consonant (CVC) flashcards and word mats were used for the second assessment to see whether Dea understood that the letters she is learning make words, and what these words are. Dea was again in a quiet area and was given flashcards that individually had letters on them and parts of a picture. She was told a CVC word and asked to make the word with the flashcards she was given. This was done for 15 words. For example she was asked to make the word “bus” using her letter flashcards. These flashcards will create a picture of a bus when she correctly puts “b-u-s” together. She was able to ask for a repeat of the word when she needed it.

She was then given a word mat and asked to make the word with the letters. She had the picture to look at for reference for the word. Fifteen total words were given to her and each word had a picture reference (Appendix B). For example a picture of a bus was given to her on the word mat and she was to recognize what a bus was and find the letters to make this word. There were 3 empty boxes next to the picture so that Dea could see the word was made of 3 letters. The middle box (vowel) was in red while the beginning and end (consonant) were in

black. The tile letters used to create the word were also color coordinated the same way

(Appendix C). Dea was not assessed on her knowing consonant and vowels in this assessment.

The results for the 15 CVC words she was assessed on are provided below.

Creating CVC Words Assessment	C=CORRECT	IC=INCORRECT	
<p><u>List of CVC words</u></p> <p><u>Lesson 2-</u></p> <p><u>October 22,2012</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • mom • bus • kid • dad • dog • cat • ten • bag • sun • pig • fox • bug • jet • rat • car 	<p><u>Score with Flashcards</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • mom-C • bus -IC • kid-IC • dad-C • dog-C • cat-C • ten-IC • bag-IC • sun-C • pig-C • fox-IC • bug-IC • jet-IC • rat-C • car-C <p>TOTAL 8/15</p>	<p><u>Score with Word Mats</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • mom-C • bus-C • kid-IC • dad-C • dog-C • cat-IC • ten-IC • bag-IC • sun-IC • pig-C • fox-IC • bug-IC • jet-IC • rat-C • car-IC <p>TOTAL 6/15</p>	<p><u>Pronunciation of</u></p> <p><u>Words</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • mom-C • bus-IC • kid-C • dad-C • dog-C • cat-C • ten-IC • bag-C • sun-IC • pig-C • fox-IC • bug-IC • jet-IC • rat-C • car-C <p>TOTAL 9/15</p>

<u>List of CVC words</u>		<u>Score With Word</u>	<u>Pronunciation of</u>
<u>Lesson 2-</u>	<u>Score with Flashcards</u>	<u>Mats</u>	<u>Words</u>
<p><u>October 26,2012</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • mom • bus • kid • dad • dog • cat • ten • bag • sun • pig • fox • bug • jet • rat • car 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • mom-C • bus -C • kid-IC • dad-C • dog-C • cat-C • ten-IC • bag-IC • sun-C • pig-C • fox-C • bug-C • jet-IC • rat-C 15. car-C <p>TOTAL 11/15</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • mom-C • bus-C • kid-IC • dad-C • dog-C • cat-C • ten-IC • bag-IC • sun-C • pig-C • fox-IC • bug-C • jet-IC • rat-C • car-IC <p>TOTAL 9/15</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • mom-C • bus-C • kid-C • dad-C • dog-C • cat-C • ten-IC • bag-C • sun-IC • pig-C • fox-IC • bug-C • jet-C • rat-C • car-C <p>TOTAL 12/15</p>

Three letter words (CVC words) are ideal for English language learners who are ready to practice sounding out simple vocabulary. The photos used in association with the words were to aide Dea in her recognition of the words. These words included animals and other age appropriate, friendly words. The same exact lesson and assessment was given to Dea on a Monday and Friday of the same week. This assessment shows that Dea was able to start comprehending that letters make words. After her first lesson the assessment shows that she was able to create only about half of the CVC words, as well as pronounce them. I have to take into account that this may be because she recognized a picture, or it was a familiar word she already

had knowledge of from school or her family.

After the second assessment which occurred a week later Dea seemed much more comfortable and confident with the letters as she created the words. She also may have been more familiar with the pictures that she had seen earlier in the week during the first assessment. Dea was able to increase her ability to recognize letters and create words with both the flashcards and word mats. She also increased her pronunciation of the words which means she is beginning to comprehend what word she is saying, what letters make those words, and what the word means. She is still not at the mastery levels of letter recognition and creating words so I think that she will need to continue to practice and review not only these 15 words, but a continuing amount of vocabulary and words that will help aide her in her English language literacy.

Lesson Planning Matrix

<u>Lesson Foci/Date</u>	<u>Objectives</u>	<u>Instructional Materials</u>	<u>On-Going Assessment</u>
Lesson 1- October 15, 2012 Lesson 2- October 19, 2012 Alphabet <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recognition • Sound 	1. Student will be able to recognize and say the names of the 26 uppercase letters and also 26 lowercase letters. R.RF.K.01.d. Recognize and name all uppercase and lowercase letters of the alphabet. 2. Student will be able to demonstrate knowledge of the sound individual letters make for all 26 letters of the alphabet. R.RF.K.03.a.	*Upper Case and Lower Case Alphabet Sheets *Window Card so student can view isolated letters when needed.	*Letter checklists *Reassess periodically until child demonstrates knowledge of letter recognition and sound. *Observment in classroom of use of letters and correct sounds.

	<p>Demonstrate basic knowledge of one-to-one letter sound correspondence by producing the primary sound or many of the most frequent sounds for each consonant</p>		
<p>Lesson 2- October 22, 2012 Lesson 2- October 26, 2012</p> <p>Words</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CVC words that create a picture • CVC words with pictures 	<p>1. Student will be able to isolate letters and comprehend that letters create words, and what these words are. They should also be able to pronounce the words they are putting together.</p> <p>2. Student will be able to create and pronounce 12 out of 15 CVC words that create a picture, and 10-15 CVC words with a picture.</p> <p>R.RF. K.1.b. Recognize that spoken words are represented in written language by specific sequences of letters.</p> <p>R.RF.K.2.d. Isolate and pronounce the initial, medial vowel, and final sounds (phonemes) in three phoneme (CVC) words</p>	<p>*CVC word mats with a picture of the word and three square boxes under the picture.</p> <p>*Letter tiles are used by student to create word.</p> <p>*Flash kids flash cards are used for the student to create the same 15 CVC words but these cards create the picture of the word instead of immediately showing it.</p>	<p>*Checklist of CVC words the student has mastered identifying and pronouncing.</p> <p>*Checklist of CVC words the student needs to continue to work on.</p> <p>*Reassess periodically until the child can create all 15 words and pronounce all of them.</p>

Reflections

The fact that Dea showed improvement in the second assessment of each lesson indicates that the instruction did influence and help her literacy development. Before the first lesson she was not that familiar with all the upper case and lower case letters of the English alphabet. This was also the case with her ability to recognize and make words out of these same letters. By the end of the second assessment for each lesson, Dea showed significant improvement in both letter, sound and word recognition.

While Dea did not master these skills in the two lessons, her marked improvement makes me believe that she is on her way to understanding and comprehending the English language. Her ability to pronounce words, and recognize the letters that make these words in her CVC assessment show that the basic foundation of English literacy development is beginning. Dea may not fully understand English yet or have the broadest vocabulary, but the results of these lessons did give me hope that she is starting to comprehend the phonetic building blocks that she will need for her literacy development.

As Dea is very young I did not expect to see her master the skills of reading during limited lessons. Reading comprehension is something that will take time and a great deal of instruction. This reading instruction can take the form of guided readings, or teaching reading strategies but I believe the most important thing for Dea is to experience a rich amount of strategies and instruction based on her individual needs. Morrow and Gambrel (2011) explain that "Talented teachers use their understandings of each of their students characteristics to shape reading instruction, and careful classroom based assessment informs teachers and serves as a basis for this instruction" (p. 323). A balance between instruction, strategies, assessments and

Dea's needs will ultimately provide a learning environment that sets her up for literacy success (Strickland, K., 2005, p.3).

There were many different teaching strategies and techniques I used while implementing these lessons to Dea. One of the main ways I did this was through the use of modeling. This was the case for both the alphabet assessment and CVC word assessment. We practiced the letters of the alphabet and I said them as she found them. We also worked on the sounds that she had trouble pronouncing, and words she had trouble recognizing. Samuels and Farstrup (2011) explained that "despite the use of questions, prompts, and cues, the learner is sometimes not able to answer correctly. In those cases, the teacher resumes cognitive responsibility through direct observation and modeling" (p.374). I believe that this technique of modeling greatly helped Dea improve in each lesson from the first one that took place on Monday to the second one that took place on Friday. When I helped her to understand the names of letters, the sounds they make, and how they make words it helped her better retain the information, or learn what she was being taught in the lesson.

While I am pleased with the modeling technique that took place and how it helped Dea learn I do think there are things that I could have done to help her even more. One of the main things I think I should have done was changed my strategy instruction. Everything was explained to Dea in English and only English. I have mentioned that Dea has limited knowledge of English language and I can't help but think maybe I set her up for failure by not also giving her the instructions in Italian. I do not have the Italian language abilities to do this but I could have asked her brothers, parents or someone else in the school that has a stronger knowledge of English to give her the explanation and instruction of the lessons in Italian (Goldberg, 2011, p.

699). By doing this I could have ensured that she fully understood and grasped the intent of the lessons.

I also think that I should have focused more on vocabulary in the CVC word assessment. I wanted to see if Dea understood that letters make words, and what English letters make those words. If I did this lesson again I would want to enhance the words that were taught to her by putting them in more contexts where she could repetitively use them (Goldberg, 2011, p.696). I also think I again could have associated these words with the Italian equivalent. I can't help but wonder if I would have put the Italian word on the back side of the word mats or somewhere she could see have seen it, if it would have helped her in the comprehension of the words? Vocabulary is very important for literacy development and if I had done this and modeled the English equivalent it may have helped her to increase her vocabulary and comprehension of the CVC words.

To ensure that Dea was achieving the lesson objectives I kept track of data through the use of running records, formative assessments, observations and checklists. This has enabled me to reflect on the lessons that were taught to Dea, but more importantly have data that I can use to determine if she is increasing her literacy development and use of phonics. When looking over the data and records from the lessons I noted many times that Dea was very quiet and not responding. Dr. Rebecca Palacios was featured in a webcast on ColorinColorado's website and explained this "silent period" as a time when children are not vocal and just quietly absorbing information like sponges. She also states that this is a time children internalize the structure and sound of a new language (<http://www.colorincolorado.org/webcasts/preschool/>). This made complete sense to me and I can really see Dea absorbing the English language and silently

soaking in as much as she can make sense of.

Recommendations to Teachers and Parents

Dea is a very young student that is at the beginning of her English literacy journey. In order to master the phonics of the English language, and ultimately gain the ability to speak, read and comprehend fluently she will need the support of her teachers and her parents. I believe that she needs to practice letters and sounds as much as possible in order to master these skills. I also believe that she needs to continue to speak in English, read in English and have everything she experiences in Italian to be explained to her in English. This will help develop a broader vocabulary and also help build background knowledge; both are very crucial to reading comprehension.

When discussing phonics programs Morrow and Gambrell (2011) state “There is no research base to support the superiority of any one particular type” (p 201). I think this is very refreshing and exciting information for both Dea's teachers and parents. I would recommend that they explore many different programs and techniques that work best for Dea and her learning needs. I also think it is important that Dea is exposed to as much English as possible. At the school it is all English spoken and learned, but if she could combine this with learning English outside of school it will help her immensely in her success and confidence of the English language.

In addition to speaking English at home and outside of the school, her parents should also take the time to sit and read to Dea in English every night. If her parents could do "read-alouds" and "think-alouds" in regards to the stories they are reading it would really help Dea in her

comprehension. "A focus on reading aloud to children beginning in early childhood will support acquisition of vocabulary, language, and concept knowledge that will in turn support children's comprehension" (Morrow & Gambrell, 2011, p.446). If Dea is able to express to her parents what she is hearing or attempting to read this will aide in her reading comprehension.

One last thing that I think would be very beneficial for Dea's teachers and parents to ensure they are on the same page about her education, is to have discussions about Dea's life outside of the school and the culture in which she comes from. According to Morrow and Gambrell (2011) teachers "should pay particular attention to the type of information that will help us to understand the child's cultural and social world outside of school" (p.441). By doing this I believe it will create an environment where Dea is able to connect and experience success not only at home and at the school, but also between her literacy levels in both Italian and English.

References

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Appendix A

Pre-K Assessment Checklist

Name: _____

Date: _____

Uppercase Letter Recognition

J	Y	C	H	G	M	Q
D	S	A	W	B	X	R
E	K	N	V	F	L	Z
T	U	P	O	I		

Lowercase Letter Recognition








o	g	q	x	p	a	h
b	y	f	r	t	w	k
u	l	d	c	j	m	v
e	z	n	s	i		

Appendix B

name: _____

Spell each word by looking at the picture.

cvc word practice

	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>		<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>		<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>		<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	10	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>

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Appendix C

a	b	c	d	e	f
g	h	i	j	k	l
m	n	o	p	q	r

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s	t	u	v	w	x
y	z				

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