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Educ 340
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Reader Case Study

Introduction to Emergent Reader

Ayla Cashdollar is the subject of this reader case study. Ayla will turn five years old in July. At present, she attends morning preschool two times a week. The preschool focuses on playing, creativity in music and art, pre-literacy skills, and social skills. The preschool loosely follows thematic units. For example, they visited an apple orchard in the fall, created artwork related to apples, read several fiction and nonfiction books about apples, and ate apple snacks.

This connection between background knowledge and literacy fits well with Ayla's experiences at home. Ayla's parents are native English speakers in their early thirties. They graduated from college (father: masters degree; mother: bachelors degree), and they both work in a college setting. They read novels and the newspaper, so Ayla sees that reading a lifelong, useful, pleasurable activity. Her parents naturally fill normal daily activities with reading and writing opportunities. Ayla's parents read bedtime stories to her and her sister each night and at other times when asked. Ayla draws elaborate pictures. She can write her name on paper and on the sidewalk with chalk.

Others in Ayla's life also contribute to her extensive exposure to concepts of print and the importance of literacy. Her grandmas teach in public schools. Her older sister Kambree is 6 ½ and attends first grade in public school. Kambree reads aloud to Ayla, but Ayla often grows impatient because her sister does not read as fluently as her parents and grandparents!

Ayla seems to have positive feelings about reading and writing. She loves to choose her own books at the library, especially books from the *I Spy* series, books that make noises, *Fancy Nancy*, and *The Paper Bad Princess*.

Assessments

Besides informal assessments noted during the interviews with Ayla and her parents, the researcher conducted three formal assessments. First, Ayla took the CAP assessment, created by Marie Clay. Of the 20 questions, Ayla answered 12 questions correctly without hints. Her incorrect answers were fairly close to being correct. For example, when asked, “Where does it tell the story?” she pointed to the pictures instead of the words. In truth, for a beginning reader, pictures *do* carry much of the story. When asked to identify a capital letter, she pointed to a lowercase letter. She called a period a *dot*. These findings show that she notices many aspects of print and books, but does not know all the correct labels.

For the second assessment, the researcher administered a letter identification exercise. Ayla correctly identified all capital letters and all but five lowercase letters. The problematic lowercase letters included *p* and *q*, *b* and *d*. She also confused *i* with *j* and *t* with *j*, but the serif font might be to blame. When asked, “Which sound does each letter make?” Ayla scored about half of the sounds correctly. She understood the question, but she kept reverting back to *naming* the letter instead of saying its sound.

The third assessment tested parts of Ayla’s phonological awareness. The researcher showed pictures of three objects consisting of three phonemes (e.g., toad, peach, pig). Ayla pointed to the two words that began with the same initial sound. She scored perfectly on this section. The researcher rearranged the same colorful pictures and asked Ayla to identify rhyming pairs, which she did with 100% accuracy.

Taken together, the assessments suggest that Ayla is an emergent reader. She is interested in reading, knows the parts of a book and can identify all the letter names and some of the letter sounds, and she is phonemically aware to a degree that is consistent with her age. She knows

which direction to write, she can write her first name in capital letters, but she cannot yet write high frequency words or sentences.

Activities

During the first activity session, the researcher began with short computer games found at literactive.com. The activities there proved to match Ayla's ability exactly, and maybe turned out to be a little too easy. She found matching letters, matching initial sounds, and rhyming pairs. She matched sight words and built three-letter words by selecting the correct letter (showing that she *does* know her letter sounds if she is tested in context).

Next, Ayla played a non-computer game that involved drawing cards and matching one aspect of the picture with another picture (e.g., same initial sound, color, or shape). This was really too easy for Ayla, but was a fun review for her, and it helped her stay positive about her literacy sessions.

Since it was clear that Ayla was comfortable writing her own first name, the researcher asked Ayla to create her name out of

play dough (see figure at right) for the second activity session. When asked to make letters for her last name, Ayla resisted. Although he could write and identify the letter C, she could not answer the question, "What is the first



letter in your last name?" Maybe asking her to visualize the word was too difficult. In any case, the researcher set a goal for Ayla to be able to tell people that her last name began with the letter C. Throughout the play dough letter making session, the researcher quizzed Ayla: "Now what is

the first letter of your last name?” Ayla learned quickly and retained this knowledge in subsequent sessions.

A game of Bingo gave Ayla a chance to practice identifying her lowercase letters. Since automatic recognition frees the reader to focus more on meaning, the researcher tried to maintain a fast pace during the Bingo game. Ayla enjoyed this challenge and responded quickly to the questions and hints.

A variation of Scrabble allowed Ayla to show off her knowledge of capital letters and



spell familiar words (see figure at left). Ayla spelled words typical of an emergent reader:

dog, cat, mom, dad, Ayla,

Kambree and *go*. She ran out of

ideas for words about the time

she lost interest. The researcher

did not correct Ayla’s backward

Ds in *DAD* because the error did

not interfere with Ayla’s reading or letter identification. When she wrote the letter *D* on paper, she shaped it correctly.

The third activity session occurred less than a week after the second. To bring the Leo Lionni book *Swimmy* to life, and to allow Ayla to stop and think about the text in front of her, the researcher built a few activities around that book. After discussing fish, including a goldfish right there on Ayla’s kitchen table, the researcher read *Swimmy* aloud and paused to ask questions throughout. This think aloud technique might be new to Ayla, or perhaps the book moved too slowly for her, or the researcher belabored the questions. For whatever reason, Ayla did not like

to talk through the book. After finishing *Swimmy*, the researcher and Ayla simulated what Swimmy did in the story: they made a large fish out of small goldfish crackers. Hopefully, Ayla saw that books can spawn extension activities and inspire creative thinking and problem solving.

Ayla surprised the researcher at the last activity session by reading aloud several very short decodable books from the *Biscuit* series. The researcher had not realized that Ayla could read or had memorized any books. This accomplishment shows that readers do not always learn skills in perfect linear order. Also, they don't always volunteer information about their abilities when they are first asked. Ayla's confusing her *bs* and *ds* did not stop her from correctly recognizing and learning entire words that contain those letters.

The Future

Taken together, all observations suggest that Ayla will become a successful beginning reader. Ayla's parent should provide her with more books like the *Biscuit* series, because they are obviously helping transition from the emergent to the beginning stage. Ayla has excellent phonemic awareness, so the researcher would like to see Ayla start working on beginning phonics skills so she can make good guesses about unfamiliar words. Hopefully, Ayla will grow more comfortable talking through a story (maybe not during the *first* reading) and hearing the person reading to her think aloud about what is happening. These activities will build the skills that will prepare Ayla to begin kindergarten successfully and develop a love of reading.

Literacy Sessions with Ayla Cashdollar

Date	Activity	Minutes Spent
Thursday, March 17	Interview with Ayla and her mother	60
Thursday, March 24	Assessment: Marie Clay's CAP Letter identification Recognizing rhyme Writing	60
Thursday, April 7	Computer games at literactive.com—matching letters, matching initial sounds, rhyming, matching sight words, build 3-letter words by adding 1 st letter Played Caribou board game (initial sounds, colors, shapes) Read 2 Berenstain Bears books	60
Friday, April 15	Letter bingo, variation of Scrabble, spell full name in play dough	60
Wednesday, April 20	Read <i>Swimmy</i> and made larger fish out of small goldfish crackers	30
Friday, April 29	Ayla read aloud <i>Biscuit</i> decodable readers	30
Total		5 hours

Signature of Parent _____

(see printout)