

Reflection Paper

Subject: Special Education – Decoding/Encoding **Grade:** 5th

Module 4: Assessment for Active Learning : Teacher implements instruction in order to engage students in rigorous and relevant learning and to promote their curiosity about the world at large by:

Selected Indicator: Supporting students' progress by communicating academic and behavioral performance expectations and results with students, their families and other educators.

Goal:

I will learn to use my assessment data to show growth and communicate progress of my students' learning on an ongoing basis to students' teams of teachers and parents. As a result, my students will learn to apply mastered skills and concepts in various settings. (Indicator #5)

Initial Summary:

At the current moment, I am teaching a group of four 5th grade students' basic decoding skills. The group meets for 45 minutes, 5 days a week to strengthen their basic reading skills and the application of these skills as they complete an Orton-Gillingham approach using the Wilson Reading System. After reviewing the performance indicators with my mentor, I realized that my data collection to show student progress for these students only occurred during specific times throughout the school year. As a special education teacher, it is my job to collect data for students' annual reviews, and annotations for progress report dates and report cards. I share this data and communicate student progress to parents and teachers at parent conferences and planning and placement team meetings (PPT's). Not only am I using assessments to annotate their goals and objectives on IEP's, but I am also using a variety of assessment procedures to clarify what concepts students are able to demonstrate an understanding of, and which concepts they still need support with. As I am assessing student progress more often, I have not been sharing this data with students' teams, the people who work closely with my students on a daily basis, and have been waiting for conferences or PPT's to share this information. After discussions with parents and colleagues, I realize that my current practice could be improved by sharing assessment data more frequently through progress monitoring reports and at team meetings. It is my hope, as this data is shared more frequently, that not only will students' teams be frequently informed of students' progress, but my students would also benefit as the skills that they have mastered and are currently being taught in my classroom could be supported in the general education classroom and with related service providers.

Reflection:

At the start of this module, I analyzed my current practice of data collection for a group of four students to which I provide daily reading instruction. I reflected on how I communicate to students' teams based upon the CCT Performance Profile. Although I have been collecting data regularly in order to annotate goals and objectives on student IEP's and provide teachers with data for report cards, I felt that I was using this data for only those reasons, and not using it to guide my instruction.

In order to assess my current practice, I began by researching effective ways to improve my data collection and communicate it to parents and professionals involved with my students. I read the article, "Reporting to Parents and Families" (Lunenburg, 2010) where he stated, "Informing parents and family of a student's

progress in school is an important function of school personnel." I reflected on my methods for reporting progress and related it to IEP annotations at the end of each marking period. Lunenburg referred to several methods of reporting progress as being, "new approaches":

Percentage Method: This method is difficult to use as grades are based on a scale of 0-100 (with many points along the scale).

Letter Method: The method in which students are rated with a letter between A and F and guidelines are based upon percentages.

Descriptive Method: The method in which letters or conferences with parents are used in place of or along side of percentages and letter grades to better inform parents of what percent or letter grade means with open-ended information.

While all of these methods have been used with my students, I felt that reviewing progress with students' teams could best fit into the category of the descriptive method. With this information, I began to report on progress and data from assessments once a month through progress monitoring reports, rather than annotating goals and objectives at the end of each marking period. I used percentages to show progression towards mastery of a skill, and how well the students were able to retain skills that they had been exposed to. Percentages were supported by a written explanation of what the data meant in relation to the skills that have been taught and mastered at that point.

I shared the progress monitoring documents with families and teachers who honored me with contradicting feedback. While colleagues praised the reports and the information shared, parents replied with questions and requested clarification. A month later when updating the reports, I used the information that parents requested and planned for possible questions. It became clear to me what I needed to do when one parent's concerns were focused on a lack of accommodations for their child in the general education curriculum. At this point I felt that improving my methods for collecting and communicating data wasn't the area in which I needed to grow in. Rather, I found through researching and implementing my plan that collaborating with teachers to provide students with appropriate programs was the area in which I needed to set a goal for in order to grow as a professional.

In order to achieve my goal of collaborating with teachers to provide students with appropriate programs, I involved myself in new learning opportunities. Initially, I began to establish stronger communication with colleagues to ensure that my students' would be supported with accommodations as well as paraprofessional and teacher guidance to support decoding and encoding skills across the curriculum. I had scheduled monthly team meetings for teachers and parents to communicate progress and concerns; however, it seemed to me that these meetings were becoming less effective as several members did not attend them regularly. With frequent reminders about the meetings, I felt as if I were struggling with effectively communicating with classroom teachers.

I met with my administrators and established a set day and time for classroom teachers and the special education staff for fifth grade to discuss how to support students in the classroom and create accommodations and modifications for them to support skills taught in the resource room to the curriculum. For the first few weeks, one of three classroom teachers as well as one paraprofessional attended regularly. After a month, the attendance of the paraprofessional and classroom teacher became inconsistent, and eventually meetings were replaced with e-mails. With e-mail being the source of communication, I sent frequent reminders to everyone involved with special education students in the fifth grade in hopes to recruit and involve more professionals. The reminders provided to be useful for only one

teacher and a paraprofessional who began attending the meetings regularly again.

My mentor and I met to brainstorm strategies for effective communication. I researched articles in educational journals and revisited a college text titled, The Inclusive Classroom: Strategies for Effective Instruction (Mastropieri and Scruggs, 2004). I read the chapter called *Collaboration; Partnerships and Procedures* to learn new methods of communication with classroom teachers. Through this text, I discovered a form that appeared to be a simpler way of summarizing meeting discussions. The communication summary sheet briefly and clearly described which student the plan of action was for, the date it was generated, who participated in the meeting, goals for the student, solution steps to be implemented and who would monitor progress and on what date.

This I felt was a step in the right direction; however, I needed the team on board with meeting regularly and following through with accommodations for students in the classroom. After several unsuccessful attempts of involving the whole team in my meetings, it was recommended during a PPT to amend a student's IEP to include weekly curriculum meetings involving all members of the team (classroom teachers, paraprofessionals, special education teachers, and speech pathologists). Now stated in a legally binding contract, my administrators helped in the process to ensure that all members of the team understood the importance of their attendance and expectations of participating in these weekly meetings.

When I introduced the communication summary sheet, I knew immediately from teacher feedback that the information and expectations of all members was being communicated and reviewed, however the goals and recommendations listed for the students were not being followed through with by all members.

As I communicated with speech pathologists, we discussed that their involvement with these meetings had been very informative and helpful as they had begun to include more curriculum based language and vocabulary into their sessions with students. One speech pathologist noted that she had seen an improvement during their scheduled push in time with understanding mathematical language and the student's ability to read a set of directions and rephrase directions in her own language to demonstrate an understanding.

Classroom teachers continued to inform me that they would not be able to spend the amount of time needed to implement the goals and recommendations discussed at our meetings as they each had 24 other students who required support. I realized that I had strived to achieve what I needed by communicating progress with teachers through meetings and communication summary sheets; however their attitude towards the role they play in the team could not be changed. To guarantee that students' skills would be supported in the classroom, I needed to rely on the paraprofessionals to provide support, share their observations and assist me by collecting data.

I collaborated with the district special education reading specialist to review the curriculum being taught in the classroom and generated a list of ideas, accommodations and modifications that would be appropriate and easy to use with students when receiving instruction in the classroom. As two of the four students were pulled out of the classroom for reading comprehension support while their peers were receiving instruction for word study in the classroom, we discussed the possibility of providing these students with a modified word study program based on the decoding skills being taught in the resource room. This alternate word study program would have been supported by the paraprofessional. We drafted lesson plans for the paraprofessional to follow and activities for homework that would reinforce the skills that are learned when students receive direct instruction for decoding skills in the resource room.

When I presented the plan at the next meeting, it was immediately rejected by the classroom teacher, paraprofessional working in that classroom and another special education teacher. It was explicitly explained to me that the parents of the child who attends my small group for decoding instruction requested that word study be eliminated from their child's program as the student was attending small group instruction to improve and support her decoding and encoding skills. The special education teacher (the case manager for this specific child) elaborated that by adding an additional piece of homework for the student to complete would add to the child's already high levels of stress as memory and recall of daily lessons already affects her ability to complete her current homework load. I explained to the team that my four students have been receiving instruction for 4.5 months and that I had seen an improvement of their skills in the resource room. I discussed the benefits of supporting and monitoring their skills in the classroom and the necessity of being proactive as the students begin to generalize the skills and use them across the curriculum in order to prepare for an increase in reading assignments and more difficult text in middle school. No one disagreed with this argument; however several members of the team felt that supporting their learning through an alternate word study program was not the answer.

I returned to the special education reading specialist with this information and we continued to search for strategies to support the students in the regular education classroom. One activity I suggested to the paraprofessionals was to review their writer's notebooks and create a spelling activity using misspelled words where students would have to spell the words syllable by syllable to support their encoding skills in the classroom. To support their decoding skills, I asked that reading material in science and social studies classes be read aloud with a small group of students. Each student took a turn reading aloud the amount they felt comfortable reading and having the paraprofessional listen and record mistakes and/or words that were more difficult to decode for those students.

When working with students in groups in the classroom across the curriculum, paraprofessionals and teachers noted that my students have been using the "scoop and chunk" strategy taught in the resource room to decode new and unfamiliar words that appear in science and social studies curriculum. An observation by a paraprofessional was noted with a student that after decoding a new or unfamiliar word, the student would always reread the sentence a second time, pausing afterwards to consider the meaning of the unfamiliar word. The parents of another student shared at a PPT that they feel their son had become more confident when reading and attempted to teach the "scoop and chunk" strategy and introduced syllable types to his younger brother.

As a result of our efforts, the team decided to update academic assessment information for all students to gain an understanding of what progress had been made in the classroom with the current interventions discussed above. Classroom teachers administered the DRA2 assessments to their students. Through this assessment, I was able to determine their current rate of reading, accuracy and self-correction rates and compare them to data that was taken at the start of the school year. In September, the students were assessed with a text at their instructional level and had read an average of 92 words per minute with 95% accuracy and self-corrected at the rate of 1 of 6 errors. In January, when reassessed with the same level text, the students had read with an average of 104 words per minute with 98% accuracy and self-corrected at a rate of 1 of 3 errors. This data showed that this text was now considered to be their independent level of reading.

The Words Their Way spelling inventory was also used as a helpful tool that measured students encoding skills in isolation. In September, my students were assessed as being in the Early Within Word Pattern stage of spelling which meant that the students were in a transitional phase of spelling from beginning

skills (when reading and writing tasks are laborious for students) to the intermediate stage (when reading and writing is more fluent). When assessed again in January, my students were in the Late Within Word Pattern stage of spelling. My student's scores had improved in digraphs & blends, long vowel patterns, other vowel patterns, with some improvement with syllables and affixes.

Another way to assess my students' skills with the general education curriculum was through close review of a writing prompt administered to all students. From this assessment, I was able to see how students were generalizing encoding skills by seeing a decrease in misspelled words. My students wrote essays with an average of 77 total words and correctly spelled words with 83% accuracy. Errors were due to transposition of letters and limited knowledge of vowel patterns. In January, the students wrote essays with an average of 100 words and correctly spelled 91% of the words correctly. When scoring for word choice, each student improved their score in this area as they attempted to use richer vocabulary and used larger words correctly.

After the team collected and reviewed the data taken in January, we discussed the growth that my students have made and how they have been applying the skills that have been taught in the resource room to the curriculum being taught in the classroom. Moving forward with this data, I have proposed at the team meetings that paraprofessionals and special education teachers continue to be informed of text that students are expected to read across the curriculum. We agreed that the best approach to accommodate these students as they are exposed to increasingly difficult text is to provide pronunciation guides for new vocabulary words. The paraprofessionals and special education teachers have been given vocabulary words that are important for the students to learn as these terms will appear frequently in text. When students are not working with a special education teacher, the paraprofessionals will assist students in a small group when reading text aloud by reviewing the vocabulary words prior to reading by scooping and chunking the word into syllables and reviewing its meaning. As the words appear in text as students read, the paraprofessionals will have students explain and summarize what they have read to check for their understanding. The paraprofessionals have been given communication logs to collect data and note observations and share this information with the fifth grade team. The team will continue to use the communication summary sheet to document the goals for each student and who is responsible for collecting data and monitoring progress towards achieving the students' goals. After we review the communication logs, and data, we will adjust the instruction, accommodations, or modifications based upon the student's response.

As I concluded my work on this module, I reflected on my efforts to collaborate with various members of the team. Collaboration is a team effort which requires all members of the team to participate with the right attitude. Many members of the team remained negative about taking the time to collaborate with special education staff and speech pathologists, even after seeing the progress of students in the classroom. Though I was unable to consistently engage all members of the team for my weekly curriculum meetings, I was able to prepare alternative plans by relying on paraprofessionals to ensure the appropriate supports were in place to support students in the general education curriculum. I will continue to remind and meet with team members regularly and hope that all team members will begin to participate and plan for curriculum accommodations and modifications once again.