**Analysis: Tutoring at BrightPath**

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**Abstract**

Given my inexperience in education, I am surprised that my current teaching language is not as bad as I thought. I can communicate my meanings across, point out the mistakes my tutoring student has made, and teach him sounds that he hasn’t learned before. I am still working on the phonological awareness part of reading for my student since he still has certain aspects of a word that he doesn’t recognize as fast, like the “sh” sound. I also used a lot of specific cues to find out exactly which sounds he is having trouble with so that I can teach him the sounds he doesn’t know and not waste time trying to teach all the sounds English has. My tutoring student also seems to understand the purpose of prints, so I think he needs some support on learning certain sounds and, later, familiarizing himself with the words and having fewer miscues when reading.

**Analysis: Tutoring at BrightPath**

This semester, I got my first experience of teaching through tutoring. After completing my foremost tutoring at BrightPath Tutors and revisiting the audio of my session, I have realized that I still have a long way to go in my teaching career and that I have a lot of tone or wording issues. I also realize that I do know a little about teaching, and my lesson is not as bad as I thought it would be before the semester started. This paper will address the problems that I found out when revisiting the tutoring session audio and the things I have learned from the tutorings.

In the tutoring sessions, my first problem was that my tone was often problematic, which could have and probably had caused my tutoring student to be confused about what was expected of him. When I was instructing my tutoring student to read the story *Pete the Cat: Too Cool for School*, I switched the lesson plan from me reading the story, which is the original plan and written on the PowerPoint slides, to let the student read the story himself, since he seems fluent when he read the ice-breaker questions at the beginning of class. However, when I asked him to read the story, my tone rose at the end of the sentence (Xu, 2021). Thus, my sentence sounds more like a problem than an instruction. When the student read about Pete and his polka-dot socks, he was unsure about his pronunciation of “polka.” When I confirmed that his pronunciation was indeed correct, I also sounded unconfident in my pronunciation (Xu, 2021). Although I was trying to verify his pronunciation, it sounded as if I was throwing the question back at him, which probably made my tutoring student confused, as shown by his 1-2 second hesitation before reading the following lines. I think my habit of raising my tone at the end of my sentences is because I am often unsure about what I am teaching, not necessarily because I don’t know the correct answer. In conclusion, I should modify my tone and sound more professional by getting rid of the raised tone. At the same time, I should also develop confidence in reading, and thus making sure that I don’t confuse the student even more by making all my statements sound like questions.

The course readings emphasized that the learning process must be “directed and controlled by the teacher” (Cambourne, 1995). Previously, I have been translating the word “direct” as providing individualized practices for the student. However, I now realize that giving clear instructions also requires the teacher to give out information confidently. If the teacher gave out an uncertain instruction, the student would be confused and, more likely than not, decide not to follow the instructions given. Thus, the instruction cannot even be counted as directions since the student doesn’t know what to do. In this sense, uncertain instruction has the same effect as no directions and is something that we should strive to avoid as teachers. I should present my instructions more confidently to clear the student to know what to do.

For my language in general, I am surprised that I am often unclear with my instructions, even when I thought I was clear. During the ice-breaker session, I asked the student to read one of the ice-breaker questions (Xu, 2021). However, the student misunderstood my question and read the introduction of the slides. Eventually, after two failed attempts, I managed to point him to the question that I intended him to read. Later, when the student was struggling with the word “toad,” I was unclear in pointing out his mistake to him (Xu, 2021). I kept repeating that he was adding the letter *r* in the word without thinking that he might not know the sound of the letter r. If I had pointed out by saying that he had inserted an “rrrrr” sound into the word, my instructions would’ve probably been clearer for my student to understand. After giving the same instruction twice, I should have realized that my instruction is not worded in the best way possible, and I should have explained myself differently. Instead, I thought he didn’t hear me over his classmates’ voices in the background and restated my instructions. This mistake confused both sides, and although I managed to teach him how to say “toad” correctly, we missed an excellent learning opportunity. This event taught me that my instructions could be confusing, even when I thought they were clear. I should be careful of assuming things about my student and provide the clearest instruction possible.

I also noticed that my current teaching language is that I only gave specific cues during the session, which might have constrained my student’s achievement. When my tutoring student read *Pete the Cat: Too Cool for School*, he had trouble with the word “grumpy” (Xu, 2021). To help him read the word, I asked him, “what does the letter *g* sound like?” and checked that he understood the letter-sound association (Xu, 2021). Then, I asked the same question for each letter and ensured that he knew all the letter sounds in “grumpy,” which he did. After that, I asked my student to blend the sounds, and he managed to pronounce “grumpy” correctly. Although the given specific cues are successful, I have given no general cues in the entire session. Looking back, I feel like I should’ve included some general cues when my tutoring student encountered the second or third word that he didn't recognize. General cues, unlike specific cues, push the student to think about the possible methods he could include in decoding, whether it be chunking or using sight words (Clark, 2004). When I employ specific cues, the student no longer needs to think about the strategies he can use since he can follow the steps I provided. If I have used general cues, however, the student would have to analyze the word himself and determine which methods would help him determine the sound of the word. While the specific cues may be more useful when the child first starts to read, repeatedly using specific cues may be detrimental because the student would rely on others, instead of himself, when reading, which is the opposite of what we want to do as teachers. In conclusion, I have implemented too many specific cues in my sessions, and, in doing so, I might have constrained my student when he could have reached a higher level of reading. In the following sessions, I will work on giving more general cues to my tutoring student.

As for my teaching styles, I always believe it is vital for the teacher to acknowledge that the student is reading the words correctly, especially when the student is unconfident in his reading skills. Thus, I try to include confirmative head nods and “good jobs” in the session. When my tutoring student first sounded unsure, I let him finish decoding the word and give me a “guess.” Then, if he had gotten the word correctly, I would give a head nod and verbally congratulate him on getting the correct pronunciation, pointing out that reading is not that hard and he is more compatible than he thought. For example, when my student encountered the word “polka,” I waited until he read the word, even if he sounded hesitant, and then congratulated him on correctly pronouncing the word (Xu, 2021). If my student got the word wrong, I would prompt him by asking him to think about the sounds of the letters and blend the sounds. Then, after he finally gets the word, I would ask him to reread the entire sentence and congratulate him on advancing. Conclusively, I believe that praise is an excellent tool for teaching, and I am trying to incorporate as many praises as possible into my tutoring sessions.

Aside from the problems I’ve mentioned, I realized that I have a habit of starting my questions with “can you…” and “do you want to…” (Xu, 2021). While these sentences are appropriate in normal-day life, they are not in the best format for a teacher. Although the student can understand my expectation to read a particular sentence, I can hear that the student hesitated before reading the sentences when I went back and listened to my recordings. My questions, along with my raised tone, give off a feeling that I don’t know what to do with my student, even when I have already planned out my lesson. This problem is rooted in my speaking habits. To address this problem, I would need to think before speaking and make sure that I am conscious of the words jumping out of my mouth constantly. Consequently, I will write a script ahead of time, listing all the questions I plan to ask. I will also highlight a question format for myself, making sure that I can look at something while I speak, thus minimizing the number of words I need to improvise at the spot. When I am unprepared, I tend to make more mistakes. Therefore, I will make sure that I am more familiar with my PowerPoint slides, even to the point of memorizing them if I need to. In short, my language as I taught my student is often uncertain, and I will work on solving this problem by being more aware of my speech.

Although I have many problems I need to work on, I have also learned from the classes and the tutoring sessions I’ve already done. I realized that literacy, in a sense, is just like basketball. When one first hears about all the rules and exceptions involved, one might think that this is not very easy and takes a lot of effort to learn. However, when put on the court, some of the rules seem like instinct: they flow. Sometimes, you need someone to push you into the game. Consequently, we should give the student a chance to take his risks in reading a word, whether he read it correctly or not. Usually, I am always that person that loves to finish people’s thoughts for them and likes to talk. However, in my tutoring sessions, I’ve learned to let the student think about what he is planning to say and how he will express himself. I also realized from my tutoring sessions that my current teaching language is not as bad as I imagined. I still manage to get my points across, and my praises can help excite my student for reading. I am helping my student recognize sounds, such as the “sh” sound, which is an accomplishment. Reading is a long staircase; one can’t simply jump and land on the very top. The important thing is to make progress. As for my problems, I will write down hints for myself, whether in the teaching notes in the PowerPoint or on a notecard on my desk, and make sure they are somewhere that I can see and thus be aware of these problems. Hopefully, by the end of next week, I will be able to keep my issues in mind without any notes for myself, and my goal for the next three weeks is to change my teaching habits and stay aware of my problems.

**References**

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**Appendix**

* How does your language actively engage students in literacy learning (note specific examples)? If your language did not successfully engage the student in literacy learning, what did you say that was an **attempt** to engage them?
	+ With each slide of the story that my tutoring student reads, I try to make some comment about it that prompts the student to think about what he just read. For example, when the student read about Pete trying to come up with the clothes he is going to wear to school, I asked my student if he has a specific type of clothes he wears to school. When the student read about Pete in the baseball hat, I asked my student if he likes baseball and does he have any baseball hats.
* Are directions and expectations stated as questions or statements? Are statements worded positively? Provide an example.
	+ My directions were mostly stated as questions, even though I meant them as statements. For example, I asked him “do you want to read the ice-breaker questions” when, in fact, I meant for him to read the questions, so that I know the approximate level of reading he is on. My statements have been mostly positive, since I have included a lot of “good job!” and “you did it!” in my tutoring sessions. For example, when my tutoring student correctly pronounced “Callie”, I was quick to point out that he had the correct pronunciation, even if he sounds very uncertain.
* Note instances where you make connections to student assets, background knowledge and experiences, or interests.
	+ I tried to make connections about the story with what my student said he likes. For example, when Pete’s math teacher talked in the story, I pointed out the math equation on the blackboard, especially since my tutoring student said he likes math. I also pointed out that the equation is written in red, which also happens to be my student’s favorite color.
* What do you say that makes it clear to your student that you are genuinely and carefully listening to their responses? What specific feedback or affirmation do you say?
	+ I tried to give specific feedback whenever the child makes a mistake. For example, when the student gets into the habit of saying “put on your…” in the story, he misread one of the sentences, which begins with “put on the…” I asked him to repeat the sentence and, after he got it right the second time, explained to him why I asked him to repeat the sentence.
* Is your tutoring session introduction clear, introducing the goals and agenda? How could you improve your introduction to your tutoring session?
	+ I would say my introductions were clear, since I gave my expectation of him during the tutoring sessions and asked him to stay in his seat and be responsive. My goals weren’t really clear though, given that I was uncertain about how much we can get through in one class, so that part of my introduction was a mess. However, I think I over-thought the process, and I should’ve just given high goals, even if that might mean that we don’t get to complete all our goals. We should always aim higher in our goals.
* Notice how you bring closure to the session. Do you revisit lesson goals? Do you provide the student with specific feedback regarding how they were successful in the lesson? Do you provide specific and actionable feedback for improvement in the next lesson?
	+ My closure was a total mess. I tried to revisit the things we have talked about during the lesson and point out the things my tutoring student has done well, but I didn’t revisit my lesson goals (again, my lesson goals were a mess…). I also tried to reemphasize the things we have learned during the session, such as revisiting the moral of the story and reminding my student the “sh” sound. I think the main reason for my problem of closure is that I didn’t set enough time for us to have a full closure, so our closure was really rushed. I think, for next time, I will be able to do a better job if I set aside 5 minutes of the class for closure ahead of time.
* What did you say when your student encountered difficulty with word recognition? Explain what you said and provide insight into your thinking at the moment regarding how you decided what to say.
	+ I tried the specific cues, asking the student to sound out the individual letters and then blend the sounds together. Since he has been really proficient in sounding out the words, I assumed that he knows the sounds well. When I realized that he hasn’t learned the combined sounds like “sh”, I tried to teach him that by showing my mouth and explaining how the air is blown through the teeth. I first presented the sound of the syllable, which helped me to determine how the word sounded, and, then, I tried to explain how I sounded in words.
* Describe what prompts or language you **wish** you had used that would have provided more targeted support for your student in automatic word recognition and making meaning.
	+ I wish I had more certainty in my language. I kept reminding myself that I am not a native English speaker at the back of my mind, so my explanations sounded really uncertain. For example, my “uniform” explanation was really uncertain. I realized, after I asked him whether he knows what a uniform is, that I know what the word is without knowing exactly how to explain it. Thus, I was doubting myself as I tried to explain the meaning, and looking back, I can hear the self-doubt in my voice. I also wish that I had remembered to use a photo prompt, so that the student can better understand my explanation even when I am stumbling.
* Did you use general prompts when supporting word recognition? Focused prompts?
	+ I used a lot of focused prompts but didn’t use any general prompts. During the lesson, my first instinct has always been asking my student to name off of the sounds of each letter as I say each letter, just like when my student struggled with the word “toad”. I asked him to sound the letter *t*, the sound for “oa”, and the letter *d*, and then blend the sounds. It just didn’t occur to me that I could’ve used a general prompt and simply asked the student what he thinks is the best method when he encounters a word he doesn’t know.
* How long did you wait for the student to self-correct following a miscue? (Count and take note of the seconds you waited for a student to self-correct.) What do you say when a student does not self-correct?
	+ I always wait until he completes the full sentence, allowing him to first grasp the meaning of the sentence. Observing from the sessions I’ve done, my tutoring student doesn’t self-correct himself, so I usually ask him to repeat the trouble word, and if he still made the same mistake, I would ask him to sound off the individual letters and blend the sounds.
* Describe an instance where you turned your student’s attention to the “big picture” (what does this mean) of reading through your language. What did you say that kept the focus on meaning and comprehension?
	+ At the end of the Pete story, I asked him to reread the last page and pointed out to him that this is the moral of the story. I pointed out that Pete was uncomfortable when he follows everybody’s suggestions and that he doesn’t feel cool when he does that, mentioning that we don’t have to always follow others’ suggestions. Looking back though, I feel like it would have been better if I asked him what was the moral of the story, instead of pointing all the things out. I will work on listening to his opinions next session.