**Describe the student**

LC is a 14 years old, African American female. She is labeled as having a severe cognitive disability which impedes her ability to accomplish grade level work. As a result, she spends the majority of her day in a self-contained life skills classroom. I would describe her as a pleasant young lady, full of energy and very interested and excited about learning. She enjoys helping others and has good relationships with her peers and teachers. She is verbal and can independently express and handle her self-care needs.

**Present Level of performance**

In talking with her teacher, I learned that her disability affects her in the following ways:

* Low achievement in most or all academic areas (e.g. reading, mathematics, written expression)
* Difficulties with learning new concepts
* Learns more slowly than do other students
* Difficulty with working and long term memory tasks
* Is unable to remember information from one day to the next
* Has difficulty reading, comprehending and summarizing what has been read
* Struggles with abstract thinking

LC is substantially below grade level in her reading skills. According to her IEP, she does not fully understand nor is she able to apply the alphabetic principle. For instance, she is unable to recognize and name some of the letters of the alphabet and their corresponding sounds. In addition, she clearly has deficits in the development of her phoneme awareness skills which not only interferes with her ability to read, but it also has a negative effect on her reading achievement. While phoneme awareness is necessary for adequate reading development, she must also develop phonics concepts and begin to apply these skills fluently in text.

IEP goal statement (as written in current IEP): Student will improve phonetic and vocabulary skills with 80% accuracy over the course of the school year.

Standard(s)/Elements aligned to goal:

* Student will be able to identify all 26 letters of the alphabet and their corresponding sound(s).
* Student will be able to identify and write the first 25 sight words.
* Student will be able to say consonant-vowel-consonant sounds and blend sounds to make words.
* Student will be listen to two or three phonemes when they are read aloud and tell the number of sounds heard, whether they are the same or different and the order.
* Match all consonant sounds to appropriate letters.

**Pre-assessment**

I realized that if the overall goal was to increase her reading skills to at least 80% accuracy than I needed to focus on the specific skills that I felt would have the most lasting and substantial influence in the short amount of time that I would be working with her. I learned in ED 408 that students must master the beginning skills such as identifying letters and sounds before they could develop to more advanced abilities such as reading fluently.

So in order for me to get a true understanding of her reading ability, I administered several assessments designed to measure her current level of skill and areas of need. However, before I executed any assessments, I spent the first two sessions informally gauging the student’s ability and learning more about her and her interests. So, I brought different books that we read together and did fun activities to establish a mutually respectful relationship of trust.

I realized that it was very important to use assessments that would allow me to recognize her progress over time with each specific skill. Utilizing the input from the teacher, information that I learned in the first two sessions and the individualized data from her IEP, I decided to give her four different assessments each aimed at evaluating a precise skill area.

I wanted to disguise the pre and post assessments as more of a game instead of a test so I made sure they were simple yet challenging, skill appropriate yet fun. Plus, I added the component of self-competition to it as a means of motivating her to try to beat her score each time we met.

Timed ABC assessment

In order to see if she knew the upper and lowercase letters of the alphabet both in and out of order, I had her do two different task. The first assignment, I had her to put the uppercase letters of the alphabet in order as fast as she could while I timed her. The second part of the assessment, I used a sheet with lowercase letters randomly placed on it and asked her to point to each letter and tell me the name of each letter and its corresponding sound.

In the pre-assessment, it took LC 5 minutes and 39 seconds to put the lowercase letters in order. Yet many of the letters were out of place. For instance, she had trouble distinguishing between the lowercase d, b, p and q plus, she put the n before the m. For the second part of the assessment, she was able to point to each letter, both uppercase and lowercase, and name its corresponding sound 100% correctly.

Sight Word Assessment

For this assessment, I used flashcards with each of the first 25 sight words on them. I asked her to identify each word. Afterwards, I asked her to write each word as I said it. She was able to decode all 25 of the sight words yet she was only about to spell 16 of them correctly.

CVC assessment

For this assessment, I asked her read the first two rows of cvc words on the sheet but I asked her to say each sound in the word. She was able to correctly identify 8 of the 10. I then read the same words back to her and asked her to spell them. She was able to spell 5 out of the 10 correctly.

**Baseline**

These assessments confirmed that LC does have the reading issues outlined in her IEP and in conversations with her teacher. I was personally able to see that she struggles to decode and encode words. I also learned that she knows the alphabet song yet doesn’t necessarily know the letters of the alphabet.

On the other hand, I did learn that she’s able to identify each uppercase letter of the alphabet out of order and its corresponding sound. Yet when I asked her to spell the words from the cvc list, she struggled. The same was true for the sight words. She was able to decode the words but not able to spell them.

**Goal**

So, I decided to focus on providing her explicit instruction twice per week for 30 minutes each session focused on:

* Helping her be able to put 100% of the lowercase letters of the alphabet in order in less than 5 minutes.
* Increasing the number of sight words that she was able to spell to 20 out of the 25.
* Increase the number of cvc words she was able to spell to 5 out of 10.

**Week 1**

I decided to start the session by having her put the letters of the alphabet in order. I did tell her that I would time her and that her goal each week would be to beat her previous time. I allowed her to take her time and put them in order. After she said she was done, I stopped the timer. Then I asked her to read the letters in the order that she had them. I told her to point to each letter as she read. When we got to a letter that was out of order, I asked her if this was right and then I gave her an opportunity to correct it. Finally, I instructed her to follow my finger as I pointed to each letter in order then randomly.

Next, we worked on lesson #3 to increase her phonemic awareness. My hope was that the activity would help her improve her ability to identify each letter, its sounds and use the letters to make various words. So, I gave her the letters a, b, l, s, and t each made on an individual piece of an index cards. First, I asked her to name the letter and say its corresponding sound. Next, I gave her clues and asked her to blend the letters to make different words. Then, I reviewed all the words with her with using flashcards made with index cards featuring each of the words. Finally, I told her to put the words in order according to the sound of the first letter.

I wanted to make sure to include an activity that focused specifically on helping her to increase the number of sight words she was able to spell. However, I decided to focus only on 10 words each week and to make sure I included the nine that she missed on the assessment. So before we left, I reviewed 10 of the sight words with her using flashcards by asking her to say the word as I held up the card. Then, I asked her to spell them on the whiteboard. After she completed the list, we reviewed it together and I made sure she knew how to spell each of the words correctly.

For homework, I gave her all four of the words she missed to work on at home. I wrote each of the words on a blank paper and gave her the following directions: First, say the word then say each letter as you spell it and then say the word again. I told her to write each word 10 times. I encouraged her to do it every day. Plus, I told her if she gets stuck, she should ask her mom or her older brother for help.

In this session, it took her more time, 5 minutes and 58 seconds, to put the letters in order but this time she actually put the p and q in the correct spot. I noticed that she was able to sing the alphabet song but didn’t have one-to-one match with the letters which is why I decided to have her point to each letter as she said it and reviewed the alphabet with her by including intentional breaks so that she would recognize the each letter. She also was able to spell 4 out of the 10 words correctly.

**Week 2**

We started out with the timed alphabet activity. Next, I introduced lesson #4 where we focused on the letters a, d, h, n and s. This week I included a new activity that I named Sight Word Bingo. To play, I gave her a blank bingo board that I made and cut up pieces of index cards. I explained that I would say a sight word and she should spell it correctly on her piece of index paper. If she got it right, she could put it on her board. Of course, the goal of the game was to make a bingo. Then, I had her spell the same 10 sight words on the whiteboard and we reviewed each one like before. Before we left, I made a list of the 5 words she missed and again encouraged her to practice.

In this session, it took her 5 minutes and 54 seconds to put the alphabet in order and she still had the d, b, p and q out of order. During the phonemic activity, she was able to identify the letters she needed to make the words but not have them in order. For instance, when I asked her to make the word sand she initially made sadn. To help her better understand, I chunked the word for her and isolated the parts that she knew like the word “and” then have her blend the s sound until she was able to say the word as a whole. She was able to spell 5 of the 10 targeted sight words this week.

**Week 3**

We started with the timed alphabet activity again. Once again, she switched the d,b,p and q. However, it did take her a little less time, 5 minutes and 29 seconds, to put them in order. To help her distinguish the b and d, I had her write the letters using chalk on paper. Then, I asked her what her favorite thing was that started with the letter b and d; she said baby and dog. Next, I asked her which one she likes the best a baby or a dog. She said baby so I told her she can remember that the letter b comes first because she likes babies better than dogs. We also drew faces in the letters to make the letters look like a baby or a dog.

Afterwards, I introduced technology by allowing her to play an online sight word bingo. To play, the computer would say one of the 100 sight words then she would have to find the word on the board. The goal was to make a bingo. Finally, I asked her to spell the 10 targeted sight words on the whiteboard. As we always do, we reviewed the words together and I gave her the three she missed plus two other words to work on at home.

I asked her what she enjoyed the most from this session and she said she really liked playing the online sight word game. I noticed that she is able to decode many of the words but she struggles to spell them. She was able to spell 7 out of 10 words right but missed some of the ones she got right last week.

**Week 4**

This time, I decided to let her start off playing the online sight word game. Afterwards, I quizzed her on all 25 of the targeted sight words. Then we did lesson #6. This one focused on the letters c, f, g, r and w. Before we left, I had her do the timed alphabet activity.

She got 16 of the 25 sight words correct. This is the same amount she got right in the pre-assessment. What was interesting is that she was able to spell the words correctly we had focused on the last few weeks but missed some of the words that she got right in the pre-assessment. I was however very excited that she was confident and able to put the b and d in order during the timed alphabet activity and she did it in 4 minutes and 39 seconds! She also had the p and the q in the right place but had the n and the m switched. However, she did struggle with the “sw” and “ng” sounds during our phonemic activity.

**Post-assessment results**

In this last session, my goal was to administer the same assessments that I did with her for the pre-assessment. I was anxious to see if she had made any real gains during our time together.

I was impressed by the fact that she was able to achieve all of the goals that was set forth. She was successfully able to:

1. Put all the letters of the alphabet in order in less than 5 minutes. Not only did she achieve this goal, she did even better than I expected by doing it in only 3 minutes and 19 seconds. Plus, she was able to recognize all of the letters and realize when or if the letters were out of place and self-correct. Not only that, she automatically pointed to each letter as she said it without me reminding her. Graph 3 shows the decrease in the amount of time it took her to put the letters of the alphabet in order.
2. Increase the number of sight words that she was able to spell from 16 to 21. Honestly, I didn’t think she would be able to achieve this goal. I watched each week as she struggled to spell these words. I understand that part of the reason they were harder for her is because they were irregular words. I watched as she would attempt to spell them by sounding them out but words such as ‘said’ or ‘him’ don’t follow the rules. Graph 1 shows a visual progression of her improvement in spelling the 25 targeted sight words over the 6 week period.
3. Increase the number of cvc words she was able to spell to 8 out of 10. I think this was largely due to the phonemic awareness practice we did each session.

One of the key things that I learned through this process is that students, even those with significant cognitive disabilities like LC, can learn how to read through intensive instruction using a variety of different strategies aimed at teaching the fundamental components of reading. Furthermore, I believe that this model for teaching not only works to teach students how to read but can apply to other areas as well. What’s most interesting to me is the level of gains she was able to make in only 6 weeks of meeting with her for 30 minutes twice per week.

**Graph 1**

**This graph shows how she increased her recognition of the letters of the alphabet over the 6 weeks.**

**Graph 2**

**Graph 3**