

Case study of Amelia, a five-year-old reader who enjoys reading at home

by Felicity Holt-Goldsmith

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Amelia* is a middle ability pupil in a mixed ability class of thirty one children, with a ratio of eighteen boys and eleven girls. The school is average size for a primary school and most of the pupils are drawn from the immediate neighbourhood. When I met Amelia she was graded at Level 1c for her reading, slightly below average for the class. The school endeavours to provide an atmosphere where the enjoyment of reading is promoted and nurtured. Children have reading books from the Oxford Reading Scheme which they take home every day and home and school links are made through reading journals. There is also a selection of books in the classroom and the school is in the process of renovating the library.

Comprehension

To try and gain an understanding of Amelia as a reader I undertook a reading conference and made observations of her reading in a range of different contexts. However, the limited amount of time spent at the placement means that only a speculative analysis can be made. Amelia was still learning to decode but she was able to utilise higher order reading skills such as comprehension. She was an able meaning maker and engaged with a variety of texts. In terms of The Simple View of Reading (Rose, 2006: 40) she would be placed in the section of 'poor word recognition; good comprehension' although her skills of decoding words improved quite significantly even during the short time I was at the school. Cain (2010) argues that to understand a text's meaning a reader needs to establish local and global coherence. Local coherence is described as the ability to make links between adjacent sentences and global coherence is described as the ability to make sense of a text as a whole and relate this to personal experiences (p. 52). Amelia was able

to understand the narrative of a story and could relate stories to her own life and other texts. During the reading conference I asked her about a book that she had read a few weeks ago; she was able to retell the story in great detail and described which parts were her favourite. There was also evidence that Amelia was able to engage with the meanings of individual words. For example, when reading aloud to me she read the word 'buggy' and said that 'pram' could be used as an alternative. It would be important to encourage this interest in the meanings of words in order for Amelia to progress with her comprehension skills. As Cain (2010) suggests, vocabulary knowledge is strongly associated with good reading comprehension.

Phonics and other strategies

Amelia was still learning to decode and used a number of different strategies. She used her knowledge of phonics as one way to decode words. She would split a word up into individual phonemes and then blend these together to read the word aloud. She often used her finger to cover up parts of the word in order to try and make this process easier. However, for some words she did not use this strategy. She struggled to read the word 'children' and said that it was too difficult to sound out because it was too long. However, when we read a different book the week after she did not have any trouble reading this word. She explained that she was able to read it because she recognised it and not because she sounded it out, suggesting that she read it from sight. Amelia did use her knowledge of phonics to read although this strategy was used in addition to others. On several occasions she looked at the pictures before attempting to read the text and would subsequently make predictions of what was going to happen in the story. She was also receptive to learning new reading strategies. When she struggled to read the word 'snowball' I suggested she split it into two words that she may recognise: 'snow' and 'ball'. The next week we read the same book again and she used the same strategy. Amelia's use of different reading strategies appeared to be effective and it would be important to encourage her to continue to use a variety of strategies in order for her reading to progress.

Taking it further

Amelia is an enthusiastic reader and enjoys reading at home. She reads to her mother and father on a daily basis and explained that her father reads to her and her sister every night before bed. It appeared that her home life fosters a positive attitude to reading and this was arguably beneficial to her reading progress. Clark (2011) has found that there is a positive relationship between the number of books a child has at home and their reading attainment level. Goouch and Lambirth (2011) also suggest that children who read at home would have a head start at school 'with their knowledge of how stories work, patterns and tunes in stories, the relationship between illustration and print as well as some clear information about print drawn from reading and re-reading favourite tales' (p. 8). As previously discussed Amelia seemed to be an able meaning maker and this could partly be due to the fact that reading is a part of her daily routine at home.

It would be crucial to encourage Amelia's enthusiasm and enjoyment of reading in order for her reading to progress further. Ofsted reports have consistently argued for a greater emphasis on reading for pleasure within the taught curriculum in both primary and secondary schools (Ofsted, 2012: 42). Amelia enjoys reading books about animals and it would be important to consider her interests and try and incorporate this when suggesting reading books. Lockwood (2008) argues that it is important to discuss children's reading choices and reflect this when updating book stocks. This would be a way of promoting reading for pleasure not only for Amelia but for all the children in the class.

In conclusion, Amelia appeared to have good comprehension skills and her ability to decode was developing. She engaged with texts and was able to express opinions on books that she had read. She used her knowledge of phonics to decode words but did not rely on this strategy alone. Amelia enjoys reading and reads in a variety of different contexts. It would be crucial to encourage this positive attitude to reading in order for her reading to develop further. This could be done in various ways, including ensuring that her interests were reflected in the books that were available to read in the classroom. It would also be important to provide choice and to demonstrate the joy of reading by reading stories together as a class. Trying to promote reading for pleasure would be beneficial not only for Amelia but for all the children in the class.

* *A pseudonym*

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