Case Studies of Two Struggling EFL Learners in a Fifth: Grade Balanced Reading Program

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This paper depicts the English literacy learning of two fifth-grade struggling readers in an EFL classroom which embedded skill learning in meaningful language and literacy activities focusing on story books and leveled picture books. Through examining the child readers’ oral reading records and written works, the researchers tried to understand and depict the struggling readers’ literacy development as a code breaker and a meaning maker. Major findings include the following. Firstly, as a code breaker, the struggling readers showed partial graphophonemic knowledge of the English alphabet and both children underwent an approximation process in which they made attempts at breaking the codes of the written language, sometimes mistakenly, and gradually became more competent code-breakers. Secondly, as a meaning maker, the two struggling readers demonstrated a meaning-centered, top-down reading strategy and frequently relied on visual cues and story context to access meanings. They displayed traits of a fluent and engaged reader when reading picture story books or self-created books. However, when they were reading or responding to decontextualized text, such as questions in a written test or exercises in worksheets, their reading performance indicated a much poorer reader. Pedagogical implications for teaching struggling EFL readers are also provided in this study.

Keywords: struggling reader, balanced reading instruction, code-breaker, meaning-maker

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