

This is a transcript of the T/TAC William and Mary podcast *Instructional Consultation for Student and Teacher Growth* (2010).

[MUSIC: T/TAC William and Mary Podcast Intro]

Fritz: Good morning! Today I'm joined by Meaghan Sekinger, the IC team facilitator here at an elementary school in Stafford County. Good morning Meaghan!

Meaghan: Good morning Fritz!

Fritz: How are ya?

Meaghan: Great!

Fritz: Good, good. Umm, so you're the facilitator here for the IC team, instructional consultation team, at the school. I was wondering if you could just give us a quick little overview of ICT.

Meaghan: Well ICT stands for the Instructional Consultation Team and as the facilitator, I run and kind of organize the team. Umm, as the facilitator, one of my main jobs is to train and work with a team of teachers in my school in the ICT problem solving process. Umm, so we have a core group of teachers in this school that know how to analyze student needs and help teachers with strategies in place that help teachers and students be more successful. So there's an ICT problem solving process that we follow...

Fritz: Mhmm.

Meaghan: ...and the teacher requests assistance, and either myself or a team member works collaboratively with that teacher to identify the student's needs, their strengths, and where they are, and we put a strategy in place. The classroom teacher is the person that puts that strategy into place. So that is kind of a distinction is that we're not a pull-out program, but a collaborative inclusive model where students needs are being met with their classroom teacher or whichever teacher requests that assistance.

Fritz: Great. And then you all also, once the strategy is in place, you all use data to track to measure the effectiveness of the strategy, or that it is effective.

Meaghan: Yeah, it is a very data-driven process and we're really looking for, umm, you know, responsiveness because the strategy could be research-based, but if it is not evidence-based in terms of how the student is responding, it might not be the right strategy for that student.

Fritz: Okay. Great, great. And so what we're going to do today - we are looking at a case that you had last year with your IC team and just sort of walk through the process, but you know, more in terms of the case that you had last year and really that problem-solving process to look a lot at the problem ID where you're trying to identify what's going on and then finding the right strategy for the student. So if you just sort of want to introduce the case that you had last year.

Meaghan: Okay. Alright. Well I had a first grade teacher right after winter break contract with ICT. She filled out a request for assistance and I was the team member that was available to work with her.

Fritz: Okay.

Meaghan: Umm, we worked basically from January through June. We ended up focusing on math.

Fritz: Okay. So how did you all come to focus on math?

Meaghan: Well we started with contracting, which is an opportunity for the teacher to learn about what ICT is - that it is, you know, a collaborative process that the teacher is the one that's going to be implementing the strategy - just to give the teacher an opportunity to really learn more about the process and see if it's something that they're willing to do. Umm, because it is a time commitment, and she was more than willing to help with that, and so after I explained that process we moved into the second step, which is called initial problem ID.

Fritz: Okay.

Meaghan: And problem ID really is, you know, that's the biggest chunk of time. Umm, but it is really the most valuable aspect, at least that's my opinion, of the problem-solving process. And we basically met in that, in problem ID, for about four or five sessions.

Fritz: Mhmm.

Meaghan: During that time we talked about the problem and then we did some instructional assessments together to narrow another concern.

Fritz: Okay, great, and can you tell me a little bit more about the instructional assessments? You know, who's there, sort of what your goal is, what you're looking at when you're doing those assessments.

Meaghan: Sure. The instructional assessment is something that we do collaboratively, so I don't take the student into a little room, do an assessment, and then report back.

Fritz: Right. Ha.

Meaghan: Umm, I work with the teacher and the student. And so, in initial problem ID after the teacher talked to me about her initial concerns, we decided that we were going to do an instructional assessment in reading, even though many of her concerns were focused on math and writing. The reason why we did that was she had some concerns with attention, and the instructional assessment in reading looks at listening comprehension...

Fritz: Mhmm.

Meaghan: ...and we wanted to rule that out first...

Fritz: Sure.

Meaghan: ...before we really looked at anything else...

Fritz: Okay.

Meaghan: ...and really give you a great opportunity for that. So umm, we used grade level material. There's no kit that I bring in.

Fritz: Okay. So you use what's in front of them in the classroom.

Meaghan: It is. It is the curriculum material. The reason why we do that - we really want to see and take the time to get a little snapshot of really how this student is responding to the material that they see on a day-to-day basis.

Fritz: Mhmm.

Meaghan: Umm, and that's actually very meaningful for the teacher and it's often that the teacher will have this ah-ha moment while working with the student with that classroom material. Either they realize it's way too easy or it's very difficult, and that can account for some of the inconsistency in their performance and things like that.

Fritz: Sure. Okay. So you did the reading one and I guess the student did okay in terms of the reading assessment? You were able to rule out listening...

Meaghan: Yeah.

Fritz: ...comprehension as one of the concerns?

Meaghan: Yeah. The student was actually doing pretty well, and she had already identified reading as a concern that she was already working with in her classroom.

Fritz: Okay.

Meaghan: So it kind of confirmed, but really helped her know that what she was - the intervention she had put in place, was right on target.

Fritz: Okay.

Meaghan: Umm, so there was a lot of kind of confirmation in that. Uhh, but listening comprehension wasn't a big concern, so we kind of wanted to move past that and into what her real concerns were.

Fritz: Okay. That's interesting. You know, so she was comfortable in addressing any concerns she had about reading and it was great to confirm that what she had done was working.

Meaghan: Absolutely.

Fritz: And so then you all moved into math. What does that look like?

Meaghan: Well instructional assessment in math is a little different. Umm, and the reason why is because in reading there is a process that you're looking through, but the thing that makes them all the same - that all the instructional assessments, is that you're looking at the dimensions of that topic, so in math we're really looking at the dimensions of math.

Fritz: Mhmm.

Meaghan: For example, numbers, numeration, operations, and computation are kind of most typically the dimensions that students, especially in the primary grades, have concerns with. And so the first thing we did is I sat down with just her and we reviewed some math samples.

Fritz: Okay.

Meaghan: And we looked at some of his math skills. That really kind of helped us get a sense of where he was and what he already knew and could do. In January, you know, just counting numbers was something that was tricky. You know, asking him to count starting from one he could go up to ten, but once you got near the 20's it was a little bit more difficult.

Fritz: Okay.

Meaghan: And some concepts he was having a little trouble with. Umm, he knew what the word "equal" meant, but he didn't know the word "same".

Fritz: Okay.

Meaghan: Okay, so we're looking at really, umm, is there some vocabulary things that we need to be working on? His conservation of number was developing and was pretty good, but there were times when he wasn't able to identify that. And so we really looked at a lot of work samples to start. After we looked at the samples, you know, we really asked those questions. You know, what does the student know? What do they do? How do they think? And you know, what do we know about what they do when they're unsure? And that was kind of hard for her to know that just by looking at the work samples.

Fritz: Sure.

Meaghan: And then after that we kind of decided to come up with a few problems on our own that we would work with the student on to see if we could narrow in our concern a little bit more. Umm, because we knew counting was tricky and you know, understanding some math concepts was a little tricky, and so we actually worked together to come up with a few math problems that we would then work with him on.

Fritz: And so those problems you came up with were ones that would really allow you to explore the areas that you thought might be of concern?

Meaghan: Absolutely. Our biggest concern at that time was, you know, number sense.

Fritz: Okay.

Meaghan: And so we came up with a couple of questions that we thought kind of would maybe give us a little bit more information about that...

Fritz: Sure.

Meaghan: ...and also help us know a little bit more about how he approaches unknowns because it's harder to figure that out just by looking at a student work sample.

Fritz: Those samples can give you an idea of where to go, but actually working with the student - so then you and the teacher sat down with the student and looked at those problems. What did you find there?

Meaghan: Umm, well we were looking at making - we were kind of looking at number trains early on. Number trains is a great way to umm, it's kind of like a precursor to addition where you give a student a number and you say, "Can you make six, a train of six, using blocks?" So it is very concrete, manipulative-driven. You know, I modeled first how to make five using two different numbers with two different colors.

Fritz: Mhmm.

Meaghan: We were using reds and blues. Then I said, "Can you make a tower using...?" You know, it was actually very difficult for him to kind of build the number five and the number six using those cubes. And so we kind of - we were talking about alright, "If you can make it one way, can you make it a different way?" after we showed him, and he built a whole other number. He built a train of nine instead of five, even though five was the number we were working with. You know, we really kind of paused there...

Fritz: Okay.

Meaghan: ...and took a step back because we were kind of surprised that this was even difficult for him.

Fritz: Okay.

Meaghan: So where we went after that - we started working, we started working with, you know - understanding what was a seven, kind of more looking at did he understand what you know, seven meant.

Fritz: Okay.

Meaghan: Okay, if you looked at the number seven - because we would say, "We're making five" and he built a train of nine. You know, "What is five?"

Fritz: Right.

Meaghan: You know, what does that number mean? We took a step back and really looked at - okay, you know, where is this student right now versus, you know, where he thought he was...

Fritz: Mhmm.

Meaghan: ...even based on the work he had been doing. The teacher kind of had an ah-ha moment, you know, that even the work samples that she had provided take a really long time for the student to do. You know, he's often found sitting at his desk and we had this attention concern, which is the first concern, which is one of the reasons why we looked at the instructional assessment in reading to see...

Fritz: Okay.

Meaghan: ...and you know, it wasn't really that he couldn't repeat what the teacher was asking him to do or that he wasn't paying attention. He really didn't have the skills to do what she was asking him to do.

Fritz: The math that was going on in the classroom - wow. Okay.

Meaghan: And so we had to take it way back, and we started actually just working on the concept of numbers zero through ten and really understanding what the value was behind that. Umm, could he just make four? "Could you show me what four looks like?" And it was hard for him to count out four blocks to show us four...

Fritz: Gotcha.

Meaghan: ...and so when working with that student - and you know, the teacher was very concerned about how she was going to be able to meet his needs when she had this, you know, ah-ha with him. We had the student, you know, go back to his classroom, and her and I actually worked together after we did the instructional assessment. That was really a meaningful time to really talk about, you know, how we could help the student.

Fritz: Okay, and so umm, what did you all come up with and how did you I guess decide on a strategy to implement?

Meaghan: Well umm, we really - we definitely narrowed in on the concern that was numbers and numeration. I actually went online to William and Mary's ICAT website where you talk about ICT and you have strategies there for math.

Fritz: Okay.

Meaghan: That was kind of one place I wanted to start just to see what strategies were available. We looked at dot cards, which was one of the strategies that's on your website.

Fritz: Okay.

Meaghan: We really looked at, you know - his trouble was like he has this symbol, which is the number four, and then this quantity, which is the number four, and he's not making a connection. So he can count zero through ten, but just because a student can recite that doesn't really mean that they know what the value of four is.

Fritz: He could give you the numbers in order, but actually knowing what they meant was...

Meaghan: Right. Umm, and so if you said - and we kind of confirmed that by estimating. We'd throw out three and say, "How many of these do you think are there?" And he'd say, "Twenty." Okay so then, you know, he's not even having this kind of intuitive level where what numbers really represent. The dot cards for us were actually really helpful, and we started with numeral match where we would give him three numerals. We'd started low like two, three, and five. Then he had to count the dot cards: one, two, three, and making the connection that the last number he counted was the value and linking that with the numeral.

Fritz: Okay.

Meaghan: So we thought that was, you know, a good place to start. Umm, then we actually worked on number chains as well which was using just the dot cards - putting numbers, putting dot cards in order from least to greatest. Three is smaller than five. Five is smaller than seven. So he was kind of working with these dot cards a little bit more. A little later on we actually introduced the touch math.

Fritz: Okay.

Meaghan: Umm, and that - touch math is a kind of a hands-on way to work with numerals, and there's the number one and it's written number one and then there's one dot on the top, and if it's three then there's going to be three dots somewhere on it, so you're connecting the quantity with the numeral. He seemed to really respond well to that.

Fritz: Cool, so it sounds like you were taking the time and this whole problem identification and assessment to do some teaching too, and make sure that you had a way that was beneficial, where the student was responding to the instruction.

Meaghan: Mhmm. Yeah, and so we looked at this. The teacher and I, you know, read about this. We thought, you know, let's - but we didn't put the strategy in place right away. We did meet with the student again...

Fritz: Mhmm.

Meaghan: ...to see and he really did respond very well...

Fritz: Great.

Meaghan: ...to that, so this was, you know - we went from zero percent and what we used as our - one of the toughest things I think about math cases is sometimes finding your indicator. What is going to be your weekly assessment?

Fritz: Okay.

Meaghan: If it is addition and subtraction, that's easy. Right?

Fritz: Right.

Meaghan: Umm, but often times the failure to add correctly is more of symptom than the problem.

Fritz: Right.

Meaghan: Okay, so what do you use as your indicator when you're not really working on the process, but you're working on the concept? Okay.

Fritz: Right.

Meaghan: So what we used as our indicator was his ability to put three numbers in order from least to greatest.

Fritz: Okay.

Meaghan: So kind of - we thought that would be a naturally occurring effect of his own kind of internalization of what the numbers represent was to be able to put the numbers in order. And he, umm, was unable to do that completely when we first started.

Fritz: Okay.

Meaghan: And then, umm, after the first week he went up to 60 percent.

Fritz: Oh, great.

Meaghan: Then, he actually managed to return goal in three weeks, but we really wanted to continue this and we had an interim goal that he met. Umm, and there was one day, uhh one time where he actually dipped a little bit and we were trying to figure out, you know, why? He had been making all of this progress and you know, I think any time you do data collection you're always going to have those outliers...

Fritz: Mhmm.

Meaghan: ...and you don't - you know there's a part of you that wants to ignore it because it really doesn't represent the rest, but the other part you - don't want to kind of put it to the side without really thinking about what could be going on...

Fritz: Right.

Meaghan: ...why could this be happening? Umm, and what was happening – it was that one of the classroom paraprofessionals was the one that was giving him the assessment.

Fritz: Okay.

Meaghan: Okay, and he really liked this lady. We asked him, you know, "What happens if you do really well?" You know, and he made the connection that if he did really well, she wouldn't work with him anymore.

Fritz: Ahh. Ha. So he doesn't want this to end.

Meaghan: Ha. He didn't want it to end. There was a little sabotage going on.

Fritz: Okay.

Meaghan: Umm, and so we said - and so actually, that's where the motivational strategy can come into place and we had been doing that - umm, part of ICT when you do your intervention you talk about the intervention and when it's going to happen, who's doing it, and some strategies. We had done that with the intervention, but we realized he needed to have some motivation after, you know, after the assessment was done.

Fritz: Mhmm.

Meaghan: Okay, so we actually - if he did really well, umm, he could have some special adult time. Umm, so that was an incentive for him...

Fritz: Oh okay.

Meaghan: ...to perform well...

Fritz: Great.

Meaghan: ...that, umm, it's not always about just the motivational strategy in the actual intervention.

Fritz: Right.

Meaghan: Okay.

Fritz: And so then, it looks - I'm looking at the graph like the long-term goal...

Meaghan: Mhmm.

Fritz: ...was met as well, so when given these numbers he was successful 100% of the time...

Meaghan: Oh yeah.

Fritz: ...putting them in order.

Meaghan: Yeah.

Fritz: Wow.

Meaghan: And so, umm, we weren't sure. I mean we actually - that ended in like April, so I wanted to know where, you know, where did the teacher want to go and, umm, we - the teacher still wanted to work collaboratively with ICT because she said, "Great, you know, he's met this, but where do I go now?"

Fritz: Right.

Meaghan: You know, and she didn't want to end the case, which was wonderful. Umm, and so then we started looking back - well, okay what was our original - where were we originally looking at?

Fritz: Mhmm.

Meaghan: And we basically, umm, kind of went back and we did another instructional assessment in math and we kind of started like we did before where we looked at work samples and we looked at where he was.

Fritz: Okay.

Meaghan: And one thing we noticed was, you know, throughout this process we had been kind of talking about other strategies and one thing that I suggested for the student was having a number line on his desk to help him with addition and subtraction problems. Umm, and so then we did a little bit of uhh - we did do an instructional assessment where we came up with some questions to ask him and one thing I did was I showed him a math problem. It was seven plus two equals nine. It was actually written out.

Fritz: Okay.

Meaghan: I asked him if he could tell me what that meant. Umm, and he said oh it means add up or keep going. Okay, and I said, "Can you tell me a little bit more?" And what he said was - that he said that seven plus two equal nine means you put your finger on seven and you count up two to get nine.

Fritz: Okay.

Meaghan: Okay, so we were like, huh. Does this mean that gets that there's seven of something and two and you put it together, and he's just kind of mimicking what he typically does? So, I asked him to show me what that would look like and we were anticipating, umm, especially based on his performance in class where we thought addition, you know, he's really making improvements, that he would take a group of seven and a group of two and combine them together.

Fritz: Right.

Meaghan: And instead, he showed me a group of seven, a group of two, and a group of nine.

Fritz: Okay.

Meaghan: Okay, so umm where that led us was that he - we had fallen into the trap...

Fritz: Ha.

Meaghan: ...again of that he had this process. He had this addition process down, this procedure...

Fritz: Mhmm.

Meaghan: ...but he didn't understand the concept behind it...

Fritz: Right.

Meaghan: ...that the plus really meant bringing together, combining them, combinations of numbers. And so, umm, that was another big ah-ha moment for the teacher because she had been giving him this number line and it was helpful in him solving the process, okay, but he didn't really understand what it meant.

Fritz: Huh.

Meaghan: You know, and so we gave him a couple of addition problems and just kind of basic - and we took away the number line. You know, eight plus one, seven plus two, four plus six, and you can - and you know, part of the instructional assessment when you're looking at problems is analyzing patterns...

Fritz: Right.

Meaghan: ...and results, and you can see here that he really is just umm, choosing - his answer is just one of the numbers in the problem.

Fritz: Right.

Meaghan: Eight plus one is eight, seven plus two is two, four plus six is six, eleven plus five is five - so that really made us think again that, umm, we had gone so far and we had given him this number line, but it really - it really was masking...

Fritz: Still needed to bring this number sense concept to...

Meaghan: Yes.

Fritz: ...a mathematic process.

Meaghan: Yep, yes. He had this process, but that was really - and it was masked. We really didn't see it.

Fritz: Mhmm.

Meaghan: This was actually an issue. So then that was where we actually started working on number trains with him.

Fritz: Okay.

Meaghan: And umm, that's where, you know, you take one number - you're gonna build the number three, and use two different cubes, yellow and red, and "How many different ways can you make the number three?" So he starts learning that umm, you know a number is made up of a combination of other numbers and it really is a precursor and it's kind of visual...

Fritz: Right.

Meaghan: ...so if you make a three with two red blocks and one yellow, that's two plus one equals three and umm, this one - what we ended up working with was his ability, his ability to create all combinations of trains, umm numbers, three through ten and accurately describe those combinations. Okay?

Fritz: Okay.

Meaghan: And the reason why we did three through ten was because he could do two. He know that one plus one was two.

Fritz: Okay.

Meaghan: He had mastered that. The three is where he had started to develop. The reason that we did, umm, not just all the combinations, but describe, was that we really wanted him - we didn't want again, that he would memorize this procedure and not be able to articulate to us...

Fritz: Right.

Meaghan: ...what was going on. And so we created a rubric and let me see here, umm, the rubric kind of - it was on a scale of zero to three and it worked on basically, you know, identify two areas that combinations would have to be created and that there would have to be some type of description going on.

Fritz: Okay.

Meaghan: And basically after three trials, his average was a one on the rubric.

Fritz: Okay.

Meaghan: And then we saw again, kind of an immediate, umm, immediate response to that. And the strategy there was building trains, kind of practicing the assessment.

Fritz: Sure.

Meaghan: And also, umm, using storyboards where you have scenes. You could have a cave or you could have a racetrack and basically we would model a story where there,

umm, there's two cars on the racetrack. Can, you know, - three more go on the racetrack, "How many are there?"

Fritz: Okay.

Meaghan: Umm, you know, working on a real world type of application.

Fritz: Sure. Sure.

Meaghan: Because again, we didn't want to fall into this trap of it's all procedural and there's no connection to really what's going on.

Fritz: Wow and so - responded to this as well, umm, and responded well to what you all were doing. Now, uh, quick question - when the instruction was going on in the classroom, I know that you said the assessment was done by the paraprofessional. The teacher was doing the instruction?

Meaghan: Yes.

Fritz: Okay.

Meaghan: And that really made - when the teacher does the intervention, and sometimes it's very, umm, tempting for teachers to let a paraprofessional do it, umm, but when the teacher does it - when we come together each week to plot our data, and we've got - we plot the data first. I also do the data point first...

Fritz: Okay.

Meaghan: ... and then I ask the teacher how the student responded. You know, there's a lot more meaningful conversation that goes on - both to help the student, but also in terms of the professional growth of the teacher because part of ICT really is to help improve - I think an outcome is teacher efficacy and so having these weekly conversations to talk about how this strategy is helping them become a better teacher, umm, really allows that professional growth to happen.

Fritz: Right.

Meaghan: We see on paper, on our [inaudible], the growth of the student.

Fritz: Mhmm.

Meaghan: What sometimes we don't see is the growth of the teacher.

Fritz: Right.

Meaghan: And when the teacher does the intervention and then every week talks about how that is going, umm, we do see that growth.

Fritz: Sure, and were there other students in the class that she also looked at in terms of this or?

Meaghan: Absolutely.

Fritz: And so there were other students in the class that were doing the same thing.

Meaghan: Yeah, mmmm. Absolutely. And umm, you know, centers-based instruction, umm, can be very beneficial for strategies that are kind of created in ICT as well as other small group type things. Umm, but that is one of the questions that I try to ask after we've established it for a week or two because I like to have the teacher feel comfortable enough with a strategy and then usually, you know, I don't have to prompt. The teacher is the one saying, "You know what? This is going to work for this kid and this this kid..." And that even makes it more valuable.

Fritz: Right. Right.

Meaghan: You know, that it's - that this investment in time, umm, although teachers do whatever it takes to help one student, sometimes it's a little bit more, I don't know, - I guess it's more efficient when it also works for other students.

Fritz: Sure. Sure, so I wanted to go back to, umm, something you and I were talking about before we even turned this on. We were talking about really the importance of that problem ID and instructional assessment stage and how that relates and, umm, - if you don't mind sharing some of what you were talking about.

Meaghan: Okay. Well, umm, I've been the facilitator - this is actually my fourth year and umm, I notice that really once you've spent the time in initial problem ID, narrowing in a concern, and doing those instructional assessments with the student - you know and sometimes that could be two or three sessions with a student.

Fritz: Mhmm.

Meaghan: That you've really - once you have that problem identified, you know, that's more than half the battle. With the instructional assessment piece, when we do multiple snapshots, umm, you're really having an opportunity to confirm what you thought the problem was and to treat it without just giving the teacher a strategy and coming back in six weeks to see if it's going to work. Umm, and so it really is a lot more valuable use of your time because than when you do put the strategy in place, umm, you know, it tends to - I've rarely had a case where the student has not responded to that and we haven't seen it be effective. So you know, identifying the problem is, umm, - I think the - that's the area of professional development that teachers probably didn't have a lot of training in...

Fritz: Mhmm.

Meaghan: ...their coursework and once they are able to go through that process to identify it, often times they know a strategy that's going to work.

Fritz: Right.

Meaghan: And they're going to know a strategy that's going to match, umm, and having that instructional assessment gives you that time to practice that strategy versus, you know, just opening up a book on fluency problems and trying a strategy like repeating readings that really might not be either a good fit or fluency really might not be the problem to begin with.

Fritz: Right. Yeah. Well thank you so much for taking the time to share your case and talk more about instructional consultation teams. Really appreciate it.

Meaghan: Oh, you're welcome. It's my pleasure.

[MUSIC: T/TAC William and Mary Podcast Outro]