

Erica Lewis Final Case Study

Reading comprehension is very beneficial to have a firm grasp of as a student begins their high school careers. Without a solid background in comprehension it is often more difficult to get through high school classes and can even be detrimental to the student who is struggling. “Good reading skills are essential for success in school” (Maheady, 2006). The lack of comprehension can stem from a variety of different sources but the end result is that a student could be turned off to reading or even school in general because of their struggle to understand what is expected of them. In this case study, Elizabeth and Thomas are both struggling readers who need help with comprehension but in different ways. Both students are ninth graders in U.S. history at the school I teach at.

Thomas struggles as a reader with comprehension of words. He has to sound out a majority of the words in reading assignments. Thomas is low motivational because he understands verbally what is expected of him but does very poorly in written assignments and reading assignments. He sometimes chooses not to do the items because the assignment is asking for a lot of written comprehension. When he does turn in assignments the sentence structure is confusing and his ideas are all over the place. I believe that this stems from the original statement that he has to sound out a majority of words in reading. With this being said, it is probably very hard sometimes for Thomas to understand what the assignment is asking of him. He struggles to decode the instructional words and then automatically shuts down because he does not know what the assignment entails. Yet, when you talk to Thomas about the topic he understands enough to verbalize what he understands. He participates a lot when there are class discussions and I think this is the case because he can get his point across without writing it out. For example, one activity

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asked students to look over a variety of advertisements from the 1950's that suggested Americans during that time should be conformists and take advantage of the new modern technologies. When Thomas turned in his description sheet on the few advertisements he had looked at, it was very hard to understand what ideas were being expressed. He was asked to describe the advertisement in detail and in another column discuss how it reinforced the ideas that were common during the 1950's. Both the description and the reinforcement columns were usually one or two words total. But, after the students were finished, we discussed as a class the implications of the advertisements and Thomas was one of the only people to identify correctly most of the themes that the advertisements were suggesting.

Thomas currently receives services through a 504 Plan and is part of the school's pilot for Response to Intervention. He meets with the RTI program five days a week after school for one hour each day. Since he has started this program there has been an improvement in his homework completion and he has been turning in more assignments that are longer writing tasks. Response to intervention (RTI) is very helpful to students like Thomas and others that need extra attention to details in their homework. The program at the schools meets for an hour after school everyday of the week. The students can work on any assignments for any class as long as they are working. They do not need to go if all missing work is turned in. According to Frank Gresham, "Response to intervention can be defined as the change in behavior or performance as a function of an intervention" (Gersham, 1991). Students who receive RTI have initial baseline data taken and the RTI is the means to an end result to improve that same data at the end of the year. In this case, Thomas has missing assignments and the RTI he receives is in the

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hopes that he can get one on one attention to eliminate missing work while improving his study and classroom habits. After the written survey at home, I learned that he does not get a lot of support with reading. He owns very few books and the books that he does own are magazines and comic books. This is better than nothing to read at home because at least Thomas is getting exposed to some reading materials. His father is not part of his life and his mother works often in order to make ends meet. During Thomas's 504 meeting, his mother was very aware of his progress in school and supportive of any actions needed, hence why Thomas is in the after school RTI program. The indication I received from his mother is that if she were available more then she would be able to help Thomas succeed better in school. The attention Thomas receives at the program after school is better than taking things home with him because there is no one to help him at home because of his mother's work schedule. At the after school program Thomas works on study skills and has one on one help for comprehending the tasks being asked in assignments. He also works towards making up missing work assignments in all classes he has and focuses on getting those assignments returned to the teacher in a timely manner.

When the class reads primary sources or texts, the students will often "popcorn" which means they read an amount that they feel comfortable and then "popcorn" by calling on a new person to read. Even though Thomas struggles as a reader he does not make a big deal about being selected. He reads about a paragraph and then stops after the paragraph is completed. Thomas has difficulty decoding what each word says, causing him to sound out even small words. This makes him a slow reader. For example, Thomas had to read the following paragraph during "popcorn" in class and he struggled

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with the words “fulfill,” “require,” and “equitable.” He also pronounced “FDR” wrong and instead said “RFD.” This indicated that Thomas might struggle with dyslexia that is not listed in his 504 plan. The passage he had to read was:

The Great Society was Johnson’s vision of the more perfect and equitable society the United States could and should become. According to Bill Moyers, who served as Johnson’s press secretary, Johnson admired Franklin Roosevelt and wanted to fulfill FDR’s mission. To do that would require a program that would be on the same large scale as the New Deal. (Appleby, 2006)

The passage was not difficult being only three sentences but it took Thomas almost a full minute to read because he had to sound out words and take his time to ensure that he was reading to the class correctly.

In class Thomas works well with other students but as an individual he often becomes off task. He is not disruptive in class but I believe that being in a group gives him more understanding of what is being read rather than if he was reading it on his own as an individual. Because of this need for extra support for Thomas I assigned him a partner for every reading activity regardless of the type of reading activity it involved. The student and Thomas sit next to each other in class. Thomas’s partner is an achieving student that was willing to help. In most paired reading improvement models, “teams or partners...[are assigned] using either random or ability-based assignment procedures” (Maheady, 2006). Maybe programs that improve reading ability adhere to types of pairing whether it is random or ability based. In this case, all students that need help are assigned to an excelling or achieving student. I talked to the two students after class to discuss the arrangement and both thought it would be a good idea.

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Sitting next to each other allows for the two of them to discuss quietly without too much attention from the rest of the students. I did not want Thomas to feel singled out and a few other students have partners as well that they sit next to for additional support. The student helps him with questions about homework, gives him someone to verbalize his answers to when I am not available to help, and enables Thomas to write his thoughts more clearly after bouncing them off his partner.

Another strategy that I have implemented to my entire class but especially seems to help Thomas is called a think aloud. It is a reading apprenticeship strategy that helps students think about what they are reading. “Readers [should] ask questions of the text as they read. Sometimes readers ask clarifying questions, and sometimes they ask speculative or pondering questions” (Woods, 2009). One student reads a passage or excerpt out loud. While they are reading they “think out loud” as well. The other person is looking at a copy of text and writing down what that person is thinking. For example, a student might question “I do not know what that word means” or “Why was that last sentence important?” The partner who wrote down their thoughts then has a turn to read and think out loud as well. Together now the pair has two sets of thoughts and the expectation is that between the two people they can help each other decode confusing words or figure out the questions they had. After the pair goes through and finds any ideas or words they are still unsure of and has the chance to ask the class or teacher at the end. The students are exposed to the passage or text now two times and have discussed it three times; once with themselves out loud, once with their partner, and once as a class for the uncertainties. The students do not really like this activity because it takes them a lot of effort to think about what they are reading and share those thoughts out loud but I

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have shown them how it helps them to retain and comprehend difficult passages. This type of procedure should just “be a supplement...[to] teacher led instruction. For the most part, the programs are used in place of other instructional arrangement (e.g., independent seatwork) (Maheady, 2006). This model is similar to programs such as *The Juniper Gardens Children’s Project* known as CWPT. In this project students act as tutors and tutees to each other. Usually the excelling student goes first in the share activity to model what the struggling reader should expect. Then the struggling reading can mimic the excelling reader (Maheady, 2006). The struggler can decode the words on the page based on what they heard and also based on the questions or thoughts that the excelling student had. In the think out loud activity, I allow either student to go first because they are both looking at the text at the same while discussing provoking items or confusions they have with the reading.

For Thomas or any other struggling reader this activity works very well. The student gets to practice reading, hear their own thoughts, hear the thoughts of others, and hear the other person read the passage as well. Then the student is exposed to the words he or she could not pronounce or sounds out because their partner is reading the passage as well. This also helps the second reader because they can prepare themselves for the words that they might have struggled with previous to hearing the words spoken by their partner.

This technique has greatly helped Thomas in his academic understanding. He appears to be reading slightly better with the help of a partner and the use of the think out loud activity. I will not have conclusive data until Thomas retakes the SRI test at school at the end of the school year. Tests are administered the week before finals to select

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groups of students such as special educational students and students who receive other services or supports. I asked if Thomas could be tested prior to that date but administration did not want to pull the student out of the classroom more than they had to.

Elizabeth struggles with a similar decoding problem that hinders her from completing tasks in a timely or accurate manner. Elizabeth also does not have support at home. Her mother at conferences basically said that they gave up on her because she did so poorly in previous school years even though this is her first year of high school. Unlike Thomas, however Elizabeth does not verbalize her thoughts in a positive manner. She also demonstrates poor reading comprehension and can barely sound out words to figure out what their meaning is. When she reads out loud and is asked to summarize what she just read, Elizabeth can not do this and usually will state that she does not know. Her writing is very low level with poor sentence structure as well as she has many spelling errors that are taught in lower elementary levels. These errors are not typical of other 9th graders in her grade or class. Because of this low comprehension level and lack of skills she needs to complete written assignments, she often chooses not to turn in the assignment. For example in a short response about World War II, Elizabeth's response had many errors and made little sense. The question was "In what ways did Hitler exploit Germany's economic problems to blame the Jews?"

The germans had problems with the jews. they blaemd them for the problems. Hitler wasent happy cause the jews were taeking all the money and left none for the germans.

Her response is typical of what she normally writes. When asked to expand on her ideas out loud she can not go passed what she has already told you. It seems like Elizabeth

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might have a problem not only with spelling and comprehension but that she has trouble retaining information because of the problem decoding. Elizabeth spells words as if she was sounding them out.

Her situation varies from Thomas because she can not verbalize what the idea is and has even worse spelling and grammar. This hinders her in understanding the material and building on the subject. Elizabeth does not qualify for a 504 or IEP but there is definitely a lack of reading confidence and ability that has been overlooked for the last eight years she has been in school. She is unable to go to the after school intervention program because of ride arrangements.

Elizabeth received the same treatment that Thomas did. She was assigned an excellent volunteer student to sit next to who was able to help her. Along with decoding words, Elizabeth gets help with making sure her writing is edited for errors. There are more people besides just Elizabeth and Thomas that have mentors in the classroom as well. Elizabeth benefits really well from group activities such as jigsaws. This is where students in groups of five or six, each read different articles pertaining to a specific topic. After they spend about ten minutes reading and taking notes, the students then meet with all the people that read the same article as them. This is known as their expert group, where the students can become an expert on their article. This part really helps Elizabeth because if she does not quite understand what the article is about she can learn from her peers. They spend about ten minutes discussing what their article was about and why it was significant. Lastly, the original group reconvenes and shares out about their article to the entire group. When Elizabeth reports to her home group, she seems more confident

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in what she is sharing because she does not have to worry about what her text means. This confidence allows her to excel in activities like the jigsaw.

Both Elizabeth and Thomas have benefitted from having a reading mentor. Their grades prior to the student mentor were both failing. After receiving aid from a mentor, both students are not receiving in the “C” range. This is a great improvement compared to how they are doing in other classes well. Elizabeth went from a 42 percent in history to a 71 percent while Thomas has gone from a 55 percent to a 76 percent. Out of 6 classes both students are only passing two classes and this would have only been one class had they not gotten mentors in history. Between the mentors and activities such as jigsaws and pair shares, these two students really have improved in class grade wise. The true test will be at the end of May when the two students are able to retake their reading aptitude test. I hope to see a change or improvement in their test scores.

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Reading Survey questions:

1. How often do you read after school?

E- 2 hours a week online, T- 3 hours a week

2. Is the reading school related or for fun?

E- All school related, T- Both but I read comic books and magazines when it isn't school related.

3. What other activities besides reading do you do during your free time?

E- Talk on the phone and watch movies, T- Play video games

4. Does your house have access to reading materials?

E- Magazines and newspapers but I don't read the news. T- My mom reads some books sometimes and we have lots of magazines.

5. What are those reading materials?

E- Said in 4, T- Some books I don't like, magazines, and comic books.

6. How often do other people in your family read?

E- Not a lot, T- My mom reads sometimes after dinner.

7. Do you enjoy reading if it is not school related?

E- Yes but it can't be too long, T- If I'm not playing video games.

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Jigsaw Lesson:

This activity usually takes one whole class period.

- Pick five articles that are either similar or all relate somehow. In one activity, I had two articles on Mussolini, two on Hitler, and two on Stalin. The jigsaw focused on the rise of dictators.
- Have students pick groups of six to be in. Once they are in their groups have everyone within the group number off 1-6.
- Pass out the articles so that all the number ones read the same article and so on.
- Allow the students ten to 15 minutes to read silently while the students make comments or mark up their article.
- At this point, allow all the number ones and so on to convene together about the same article they read. This becomes their expert group where they can become an expert on their reading. Allow ten minutes so each student has time to give their input and understand what the article or reading was about.
- Lastly, have the students go back to their original group where there are numbers 1-6.
- Each student will report about their article while the rest of the group fills out a chart or graphic organizer where they can have all the information about the rise of dictators in one location.

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Pair Share:

This activity takes about 25 minutes.

- Students read the following passage about Elvis Presley by John Larder. As student one reads, they are allowed to comment on anything they are reading. They can ask questions about the text, vocabulary, confusing words, and anything else they might find relevant. They can even use prior knowledge to try to explain parts of the passage.

Passage:

There is nothing to be said against Elvis- and many people have said it- except that when placed in front of a microphone, he behaves like an outboard motor...Nonetheless, we all watched with interest last week when one of our number, Steve Allen, made a public attempt to neutralize, calm, or de-twitch Elvis Presley, the lively singer.

Allen did this, one assumes, in what he personally considers the best interest of civilization...Civilization today is sharply divided into two schools which cannot stand the sight of each other. One school, Allen's believes in underplaying, or underbidding, or waiting 'em out. The other, Presley's, is committed to the strategy of open defiance, of confusing them, of yelling them down. The hips and the Adam's apple must be quicker than the eye.

When Allen made his move last week to mute and frustrate Presley he was nervous, like a man trying to embalm a firecracker. Presley was distraught, like Huckleberry Finn, when the widow put him in a store suit and told him not to gap or scratch.

Allen's ethics were questionable from the start. He fouled Presley by dressing him like a corpse, in white tie and tails. This is a costume often seen on star performers at funerals, but only when the deceased has specifically requested it in his will. Elvis made no such request- or for that matter, no will...(Appleby, 2006)

- While student one is reading, student two is annotating what person one is saying while they follow along.
- When student one finishes, student two reads and shares out loud what their thoughts are. Student one annotates the comments student two made.

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- After both students in the pair have shared their thoughts, the pair goes through to try to answer both students confusing concepts or unsure vocabulary words, etc. This allows for most unclear things to be hammered out by either of the two students. The idea is that between two students they should be able to figure out what one or the other is confused about.
- Lastly, if there are any other questions that the pair can not answer together they are able to ask as a whole class to the teacher. I will either ask other students to identify the answer or will explain it myself.

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