

LITERACY LEARNER ANALYSIS: A CASE STUDY

Mike Bucata

Michigan State University

TE 846

I. Brief Background and Reason for Project Focus

The ability to comprehend and understand meaning from appropriate texts at the secondary level is imperative in regards to reaching success in meaningful learning of appropriate subject matter. In my experience teaching and substitute teaching at the secondary level, students who either don't comprehend or possess the tools that make comprehension of reading texts successful often struggle during learning tasks than those students who display of firm command of reading comprehension. In my experience teaching at the secondary level and social studies content, literacy has never been a major focus considering most students displaying the ability to read and analyze a wide range of diverse texts. However, there is always room for improvement and for the continuing mastery of vocabulary and meaning of text. Therefore, I want to focus this study on being able to teach a student how to be strategic that will help improve his reading comprehension ability.

Almasi and Hart encourage a perspective on reading comprehension strategies that they refer to as the "transformational view" which emphasizes the importance of teaching strategies in a manner that enables students to become strategic(256). In other words, it is not all the teacher's prompting of what strategies to use and when, but the student's ability to pull from their own strategies that they embody as they read. Rather than focusing on strategies that teachers often use to improve comprehension, the goal is to attempt to teach readers to be strategic by creating a learning environment that promotes independent strategies freely chosen by the reader himself. In other words, instead of focusing on the individual skills that make comprehension better, create an environment where the student is both strategic and reflective of his own self. This idea is based on Almasi's strategy instruction model(2003) which include

LITERACY LEARNER ANALYSIS: A CASE STUDY

cultivating a learning environment that highlights the following key ingredients as a means of cultivating a culture that values the learning process: (1) context, (2) agency/metacognition, and (3) scaffolding(258). The whole reasoning why I want this project to focus on the transformational view of reading comprehension strategies instruction is because I believe this method can be better applied and prove just as effective or more than other perspectives because it constitutes knowledge through embracing multiple ways of knowing which is created and attained by the reader himself. Also, differentiated instruction is supported in this transformational view. The student is empowered to know when and how to use certain strategies to best meet their needs within a given context. Since, for example, the social studies content comes in many different context styles, this is crucial. As a result, learning for improved reading comprehension is not focused on an end-product by itself, but rather as a process.

II. Home and Family

The student I have selected for my project is currently a junior in high school. He is a sixteen year old male and his pseudonym is David. He is currently a junior in high school. As a substitute teacher, I do not have access to his current tested reading level. Relevant characteristics of David include he is a member of the human race and he is a native English speaker with native English speaking parents. He does not currently receive special education services or supports to my knowledge. He has no history of disabilities to my knowledge. When asked if he reads anything at home, he replied that he “hardly ever reads other than school work”. He sometimes buys and reads magazine about cars or sports, but doesn’t read many articles just “looks at the pictures.” I asked him if he knew of any literacy issues with his parents and he responded “I don’t know for sure but I don’t think so.”

III. Emotional Climate

Being a substitute teacher at David's high school does not afford to give me any insight for the climate of his current classrooms. Just from interacting with him and engaging in questions and answers, I can take away that David does not typically enjoy reading. This observation and presumption seems to be based on interest and motivational factors rather than his abilities or inabilities reading. When I asked him about whether he had to read in any classes, he explained that he often is required to read aloud in class with the other students, especially in English class. When I asked him if he enjoyed reading aloud in front of the class he responded that he "hated it, and didn't understand why they always had to read aloud in class." Therefore, he struggles to be engaged in reading aloud and doesn't seem to care why he has to read in class.

IV. Literacy History

David does not possess any learning disabilities that are known. Again, being a substitute teacher I do not have access or any special insight to instructional challenges that David may encounter in the classroom. He didn't volunteer any special challenges or a history of challenges either. His mother and father both have a high school education but did not attend college. His mother works at an administrative assistant for a trucking company and has enjoyed that career for over twenty years. His father is employed as a truck driver and also has been employed in his career for over twenty years. Neither parent has a background in reading books leisurely, though both administrative work and driving involves daily reading and writing in their respected careers of employment. David cannot recall if his parents read to him frequently as a child. However, he did say that he had "quite a few" children's books when he was younger and said that his parents and probably other relatives bought him those books when he was younger. Last, when discussing with David about reading in school at both the elementary and middle

LITERACY LEARNER ANALYSIS: A CASE STUDY

school levels, he replied that other than books they read as a class in middle school, he remembered reading for the *Book It!* program at Pizza Hut where if he read a book and did a book report, he received a free pizza from Pizza Hut in elementary grades. His motivation and interest seemed to be fueled by getting a free pizza so he did not mind reading then.

V. Tests Given and Summary of Test Results

For the pre-test I chose to give a an Informal Reading Inventory or Qualitative Reading Inventory that measures fluency, and oral reading accuracy of a reading passage from a United States History Textbook. This passage is appropriate for grades 9-12. While David read, I completed the Reading Accuracy and Reading Fluency assessment form found on http://www.readingrockets.org/firstyear/assessment_oral.pdf. I recorded errors including omissions, substitutions, and insertions as well. After the reading and accuracy testing, I gave a post-test checking for understanding and comprehension through asking both implicit and explicit questions about the content and also by asking open-ending questions about the vocabulary and wrote those answers down. I chose this specific pre-test showing reading fluency and accuracy to gauge David's quantitative reading level so I could understand if his reading rate affected his comprehension ability. Likewise, for post-test, I chose to ask qualitative questions to gauge whether or not David was understanding not only the vocabulary of the passage but the specific content by whether or not he could make summarize and/or make connections to what he was reading. Being that my overall objective is to help transform readers to be strategic in order to improve comprehension, I felt that my both my pre-test and my post-test would give me a good first indication on how to approach and direct my efforts in how to teach a student to be more strategic in terms of reading comprehension.

LITERACY LEARNER ANALYSIS: A CASE STUDY

For the pre-test I chose to do an Oral Reading Accuracy Assessment. When David began reading the introduction to the chapter aloud, I began to record the errors and/or behaviors and page number. I also took a stop watch and timed how long he took to read each section of the chapter. Before I had already counted the number of words in each section to be able to calculate words correct per minute or WCPM, just to get a feel for reading speed. The chapter included an introductory section and three sections of reading. The text itself is a textbook titled “The American Revolution: Roles of African Americans.” The titles of each of the sections include “The War Begins”, “The Battles of Lexington and Concord”, “The Battle of Bunker Hill”, and “A Continental Army.”

Results of the Oral Reading Accuracy Assessment included David reading “The War Begins”, which contained 136 words in 1:25 with only three errors which totaled about 98% with about 94 words correct per minute(WCPM) rating. The second section of the chapter, “The Battles of Lexington and Concord, David read 224 words in 2:00 with only one error for 99.5% accuracy and 112 WCPM score. For “The Battle of Bunker Hill”, David read 338 words in 2:59 with three errors for 99% accuracy. His WCPM was 112. For the final section of the chapter “A Continental Army,” David read 596 words in 5:11 with only four errors giving him a 99% accuracy rating. His WCPM was 114.

Based on these results, this text had an “easy” rating for David scoring above 95% in his accuracy for all passages. Also, his reading rate was fairly good averaging 108 words correct per minute. These results show that David definitely has strengths in both in reading rate and fluency, at least from a phonics perspective anyway. However, for this pre-test, comprehension wasn’t measured. It was in my post-test assessment that comprehension was gauged through some implicit and explicit questions and vocabulary questions.

LITERACY LEARNER ANALYSIS: A CASE STUDY

For the post-test, I asked implicit and explicit questions after each section and open-ended questions about vocabulary to assess comprehension of the text after he had immediately read it. I will list below the questions I asked for each question and his answers as I wrote them down.

“The War Begins”

1. What or who are the Redcoats? *The British Soldiers*
2. What or who were the Minutemen? *Guys who fought the British*
3. Why were they called the Minutemen? *I don't know*
4. What is a musket? *I don't remember*

“The Battle of Lexington and Concord”

1. What is Lexington and Concord? *Places where they fought*
2. What battle came first, Lexington or Concord? *Lexington*
3. Who won the battle at Concord? *The British*
4. What is a patriot? *The Americans*
5. What is the Revolution? *The war*

“The Battle of Bunker Hill”

1. What was Bunker Hill? *The hill where they fought*
2. What is a militia? *I don't know*
3. What are trenches? *Ditches*
4. Why were trenches used? *I don't know*
5. Who retreated from the battle? *The British*
6. Why was Bunker Hill an important battle? *We beat the British*
7. After the battle of Bunker Hill, how do you think the Minutemen felt about African Americans in their units? *They liked them, they helped win the battle.*

“A Continental Army”

LITERACY LEARNER ANALYSIS: A CASE STUDY

1. How is the Continental Army different from the militia? *I don't know*
2. Were all African Americans allowed to fight? *Yes*
3. Which states, if any, did not allow African Americans to fight? *None, they all were asked to fight.*
4. What is a regiment? *I don't know*
5. Were African Americans treated as fair as the colonists? *Yes*
6. What were some of the support jobs that African Americans had during the war? *They helped them fight against the British.*

Based on the results from the post-test questions, David was about half right in his answers about retelling the text. However, when it came to most of the vocabulary questions, he either could not give the correct definition or gave a vague answer that was out of context to the story. This leads me to believe that although David's reading rate and phonics were pretty good, his comprehension of the text was vague at best. This information tells me that David needs some instruction to build contextual vocabulary to better comprehend what is read in the text although he could read orally at above a 95% accuracy rate. Therefore, I want to plan to plan instruction around pre-teaching of content specific vocabulary first and foremost. Also, his recall of chronological order of events leads me to give him some work with graphic organizers, possibly a timeline, and do some short summarizations of sections of the chapter after rereading.

LITERACY LEARNER ANALYSIS: A CASE STUDY

VI. Lesson Plan Matrix

Lesson Foci/Date	Objectives	Instructional materials	On-going assessment
Vocabulary Lesson Monday March 18, 2013	<p>Student will display understanding of meaning of terms and specific vocabulary and be able to use them in sentences referring to context.</p> <p>CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.11-12.4 Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including figurative, connotative, and technical meanings; analyze how an author uses and refines the meaning of a key term or terms over the course of a text</p>	<p>We will begin with a 15 vocabulary word lesson using words from the text. This includes worksheets where the student will see the word used in a sentence and match up what they think the meaning is from the list of definitions. After we will review and use each word in sentences written by the student.</p>	<p>Using the worksheet results and feedback from discussion to gauge understanding and meaning.</p>

Lesson Foci/Date	Objectives	Instructional materials	On-going assessment
Thursday March 28, 2013	<p>Student will summarize and make connections to the text through a chronological order of events.</p> <p>CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.11-12.2 Determine two or more central ideas of a text and analyze their development over the course of the text, including how they interact and build on one another to provide a complex analysis; provide an objective summary of the text.</p> <p>CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.11-12.3 Analyze a complex set of ideas or sequence of events and explain how specific individuals, ideas, or events interact and develop over the course of the text.</p>	<p>Timeline graphic organizer connecting events in chronological order.</p> <p>Short summaries explaining relationships of people and events that build upon each other.</p>	<p>Results on graphic organizers and re-reading of the text with accompanying summaries of each section.</p>

VII. Reflections

Although reading fluency may be performed at an acceptable level, vocabulary and reading comprehension along with summarization skills can be lacking. As D. Ray Reutzel states, “When used to inform instructional decision making, assessment influences classroom teachers’ instructional choices and, in the very best sense of the phrase, assessment drives instruction!”(Morrow & Gabrell, 416). With this in mind, assessing the data from both pre and post-assessments in this study, David struggled both in the areas of vocabulary and reading comprehension and the ability to summarize what he had just read. “Because of its fundamental importance to reading overall, assessment of vocabulary knowledge is informative both for explaining current reading skills and for predicting future reading achievement. Furthermore, as vocabulary interventions have been shown to increase reading comprehension skills, vocabulary instruction should be considered an essential component of any reading curriculum.”(Adlof, Perfetti, & Catts). Because he showed adequate fluency as a reader, I believed David needed to focus on the processes used in reading in order to improve his comprehension. This explicit instruction needed three key processes that allowed me to explain, model, and scaffold the processes to successfully reach appropriate comprehension of the content.

In both lessons, direct instruction was utilized in order to improve both vocabulary comprehension of the content and the ability to summarize and connect ideas, events, and people to achieve understanding. First I explained how in order to improve comprehension, we had to learn meaning of specific words that David did not understand. By modeling thinking out loud when reading content and making note of words that were unfamiliar, it can help David stop and

LITERACY LEARNER ANALYSIS: A CASE STUDY

think about the word in question. I would do this by reading the same text and stopping at words that I may not know the meaning of, and writing it down on a separate piece of paper to go back and look up either through context used in the sentence or by checking the text's glossary. This modeling helps show the student how to differentiate words that he may not understand meaning from and use that thinking to figure out how to do it on their own. Prior to the lesson I made a list of words he did not already know through analysis of the post-assessment and I also made a list of other words to assist learning background knowledge to start the scaffolding process allowing him to begin to take ownership and apply this same modeling concept to independently apply this strategy.

Throughout both lessons my focus was on improving David to become a more strategic reader in order to improve overall comprehension and summarization skills. According to Almasi and Hart, the three key ingredients to support an environment that cultivates strategic and reflective learning are: context, agency/metacognition, and scaffolding (Morrow and Gambrell, 268). Using context as a starting point, I tried to ensure that I created a safe environment where he was free to construct his own meaning from the reading and be able to ask questions when he didn't understand the content being read. Using explicit instruction where I explained, engaged in think-alouds and encouraged David to do the same, and guided his practice by using strategies, I involved David in the entire reading process. Next, by using agency/metacognition, I allowed David to become interactive in the way that he approached reading the text. I would ask questions to help him determine when, where, and how he should be strategic and allowed him to become an active participant while re-reading the text. Some of the strategies focused on were previewing and predicting, activating prior knowledge, clarifying meaning, drawing inferences, self-questioning and thinking aloud, and finally, summarizing and retelling. In

LITERACY LEARNER ANALYSIS: A CASE STUDY

addition, we would stop frequently to allow David to verbalize his thought process during reading as well. Here I would ask which strategies did he use and which ones he could also use in addition to the ones he chose. Last, I began the scaffolding process by allowing David to re-read sections of the text and without giving instruction, listen to David apply his newly acquired strategies in creating his own learning process of how to strategically read and improve his comprehension.

In reflection of my lessons of trying to “transform” David’s level of vocabulary and reading comprehension, I realized that this is an incredibly difficult task considering the limited time and circumstances I had in working with him. While teaching a reader to be strategic in the short-term using a text in which we had re-read multiple times doesn’t necessarily prove that David will be able to perform the strategies effectively and consistently as he did with me. While his comprehension improved through being able to effectively summarize and retell when he hadn’t previously been able to when first reading the text, there is no indication that he can transfer these skills to additional reading in the future. Realizing that I cannot work with David on a regular everyday basis shows how unreliable my efforts may or may have not been on David’s comprehension and strategic reading abilities. I do believe that the one-on-one interaction while providing a safe environment for David to make mistakes and not be afraid to ask “dumb” questions is something that may not be available in the regular classroom setting, therefore possibly nullifying any future progress in comprehension instruction. Furthermore, after I was finished working with David, I think I would have added an additional emphasis on David’s motivation for reading, for without this, I am not sure he would apply by making his own evaluations on his reading comprehension progress and continue to become an independent strategic reader. Without my guidance, I fear that he would not continue being an active

LITERACY LEARNER ANALYSIS: A CASE STUDY

participant in his own metacognitive processes and decisions to help transform his comprehension abilities. If he does not value his own comprehension instruction, how will positive change ever occur? This is a major question I came to ask myself as I reflected how David would improve as a learner and reader. Furthermore, his ability to become more strategic and reflective of his own performance would be compromised by this as well.

As a final note regarding the reflection of this study, I wish that I was in a position to have been David's everyday teacher in order to have a better relationship in regards to his background skills and abilities concerning literacy. I found this study to be very difficult given his age and good reading ability in at least as much at the fluency and reading speed level that he showed. Being able to work with him on only a few occasions, I felt that improving something such as comprehension is rather complicated in such short interactions. I felt that he showed me more interest and motivation than he normally would show in his regular classrooms. I really would have wished I could have taken this course when I was a regular classroom teacher so I could assess and instruct a student with better understanding and still be able to follow-up in his progression to become a better reader.

VIII. Recommendations to Teachers and Parents

After completing this study, several recommendations can be made to both teachers and David's parents regarding vocabulary and reading comprehension. First, it is essential to provide explicit instruction in how to become aware of the processes in which he uses to read. This can be a difficult task considering it requires those working with David to think about the processes that occur in how to read for comprehension and understanding of vocabulary. In order to be successful, three important strategies should be utilized by the instructor. There should be

LITERACY LEARNER ANALYSIS: A CASE STUDY

explanations of the skills and strategies needed, modeling of those same skills and strategies, and last, the instructor should support David through scaffolding those skills and strategies so that he can take ownership of his own newly acquired awareness and begin to apply these strategies independently. It is important when explaining these skills and strategies that David learns when and where they should be used and why it is important. When modeling, David needs to be shown how it is to be done, such as activating prior knowledge, thinking aloud, predicting, drawing inferences, self-questioning and thinking aloud, and summarizing. Furthermore, when scaffolding, David needs to be provided with opportunities to begin to use these processes on his own without assistance from the instructor working with him.

Next, it is recommended that the instructor working with David create an environment that develops and nurtures strategic and reflective learning. This environment is built by focusing on using context, agency/metacognition, and scaffolding to set up a situation where David can use his prior experiences in way that helps him recognize when and how to use the strategies that best meets his needs. In this “safe” environment, David should be allowed to try different ways to create their own understanding of what works the best for him and where there are no “wrong” ways to go about his approach. He should also play an active role in his own reading processes in order to determine when he needs to apply different strategies and get away from being a “passive” reader. Finally, supports for David’s role in determining these strategies should be slowly taken away so that he can progress gradually into using them independently at his own free choice to best meet his needs how he sees fit. By incorporating these recommendations into instruction to improve David’s comprehension, we are hoping to help transform David into an active, independent reader, fully aware of how to improve his own

LITERACY LEARNER ANALYSIS: A CASE STUDY

reading skills. In the end, the ultimate goal is to shift emphasis from teaching strategy to teaching the “student”, where he can become successful on his own.

IX. Appendices

Outline for a Daily Lesson Plan

Date: 3/18/13

Objective(s) for today’s lesson: Student will display understanding of meaning of terms and content specific vocabulary and be able to use them in sentences.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.11-12.4 Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including figurative, connotative, and technical meanings; analyze how an author uses and refines the meaning of a key term or terms over the course of a text

Rationale Understanding content specific vocabulary is crucial to student’s comprehension of not only content but what they are reading and will enhance further built upon knowledge in the future.

Materials & supplies needed: *The American Revolution Text, pen/pencil, dictionary*

- **Procedure:** *I will explain to student why understanding and comprehending vocabulary words will assist in improving comprehension of content in the text. Next I will model how to go through text and underline words that I may not understand while reading. I will then use the glossary and/or dictionary to look up definitions of those words so I understand them all while talking aloud what I was thinking. After I have finished, the student will then re-read and underline those words in which he wasn’t sure of and look them up in the glossary/dictionary just as I had. While he did this I will ask him to talk aloud his rationale.*

Assessment The student’s interactive read aloud and think aloud with me will be the ongoing assessment through the lesson.

--	--

Outline for a Daily Lesson Plan

Date: 3/28/13

Objective(s) for today's lesson: Student will focus on strategies to help increase comprehension of content by previewing and predicting , activating prior knowledge, drawing inferences, self-questioning, thinking aloud, and summarizing the text.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.11-12.2 Determine two or more central ideas of a text and analyze their development over the course of the text, including how they interact and build on one another to provide a complex analysis; provide an objective summary of the text.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.11-12.3 Analyze a complex set of ideas or sequence of events and explain how specific individuals, ideas, or events interact and develop over the course of the text.

Rationale Summarizing and making connections to the text through a chronological order of events is crucial because it helps the student interact with and build on content being read to be able to analyze a complex set of ideas and sequence of events and explain how individuals, ideas, and events relate to each other and develop over the course of the text. Using strategies to increase comprehension will help.

Materials & supplies needed: The American Revolution Text, pen/pencil

<p>• <u>Procedure</u> I will explain to the student that this lesson will give him a chance to try out various ways of acting and thinking while he re-reads content. Building upon the previous lesson of being active and thinking aloud, he will be allowed to decide and create his own ways of asking questions regarding content.</p>	
--	--

LITERACY LEARNER ANALYSIS: A CASE STUDY

<p>Emphasis will be placed on actively seeking understanding through strategies modeled by myself from the previous lesson. Student will verbalize his thought process during reading.</p>	
<p>Assessment Re-reading of the text with accompanying summaries of each section while thinking aloud and interacting with me of his thought processes. Reflections of those thought processes will be assessed to ensure strategic processes are being independently created by the student. Adequate summarizing and retelling of the text will guide whether or not strategy instruction had an impact.</p>	

Bibliography

Duke, Pearson, Strachan, & Billman (2011) “The Essential Elements of Fostering and Teaching Reading Comprehension” (p. 51-93)

Fisher & Frey (2011) “Best Practices in Content-Area Literacy” (p. 343-360)

Harley, Middleton, and Stokes. (1994) *The American Revolution: Voices in African American History*. Cleveland, Ohio. Modern Curriculum Press.

Hirsch (2003) "Reading comprehension requires knowledge-- of words and the world". *American Educator*, 10-29.

Reutzel (2011) in Mandel-Morrow and Gambrell (2011), chapter 17: “Organizing Effective Literacy Instruction: Differentiating Literacy Instruction to Meet Student Needs” (p. 412-435).

<http://www.readingrockets.org>

http://www.readingrockets.org/firstyear/assessment_oral.pdf

<http://www.readingrockets.org/article/91/>

