

## **Final Project: Focus on Joey's Reading Comprehension**

**By Melissa Thompson**

### **I. Background and Reason for Project**

The student I chose to focus my case study on is a seventh grade boy named Joey. Joey struggles academically in all of his core subject classes. According to Joey's Individual Education Plan (IEP) his test scores show that he is below 10% of the students in his age range. On the "Aimswest Reading Maze" his total raw score of 12 was below 10% of children his age. Broken down test scores showed his oral reading fluency was below 10%, his letter word recognition was at 6% and his word recognition count was below the twenty- five percentile range. The IEP states, "his difficulty with fluency and decoding words are impacting his comprehension and the ability to understand the words he reads." These test scores put him at a high fourth to low fifth grade reading level as a seventh grader (**Standard I**). Joey works closely with a special education teacher in my classroom that sometimes accommodates and modifies the math assignments given in class. I can see Joey's frustrations in class with assignments especially story problems that require reading and comprehending. He also struggles when it comes to taking notes in class. When working with Joey I see that he puts forth good effort and is attentive but his ability to read and comprehend material gets in the way of his academic success and learning. Therefore, I worked on comprehension with Joey and focused on various strategies that might help him in my class as well as his other academic core classes.

## **II. Characteristics of the student**

Joey is one of a few bilingual speaking students in the school that I teach at. He is very fluent with the English language but his bilingual background might be another reason why Joey struggles so much in reading. Joey has a brother that is a year older than him. The boys live with their mom who is a single parent. Joey's dad lives out of state and mom is raising the two boys on her own. Joey does not get a lot of help on schoolwork and academics at home and relies primarily on the teachers and the special education teacher to guide him academically. Since his mom is not fluent in English I'm sure she feels insecure and limited with the ability to help Joey academically. Joey is a student who qualifies for free and reduced lunch at our school. He often wears the same clothes to school day after day. Originally, Joey attended school in Detroit until third grade where it is indicated that academic difficulty was evident in kindergarten where he qualified for speech and language services. In fifth grade Joey started receiving teacher consultant services for reading and writing support. By the end of sixth grade, a full evaluation was conducted to determine eligibility for full special education services. Joey showed significant deficiencies in developmental abilities for a child of his age and qualify for services in reading and math. The subject that Joey gets most of his special education services and academic support in is Language Arts: Reading. However, he does get special education support in my math class along with his other core subject classes.

## **III. Classroom Climate**

In my math class there is a lot of guided instruction, which helps Joey, understand the concepts taught in class. The daily routine of my math class consists of students starting

with daily math warm-ups that have of five questions that review concepts students should have seen before. Then student check the previous nights homework and I answer questions students might have. After checking homework students then take notes on new concepts that involve guided instruction with me explaining and showing examples of what students need to know. Students then practice independently by doing similar problems that I covered in class. Most of the time Joey starts his daily warm-ups but when he gets to a problem that he does not understand he stops working on the problem and does not try to problem solve on his own. He does not think or access his prior knowledge of what he might already know to help him solve the problem. If myself or the special education teacher notice Joey is bogged down we intervene with re-explanation and clarification to get him back on track. This intervention occurs daily for Joey. Joey is not a risk-taker in class when it comes to solving math problems. When he gets guided back in the right direction through adult supervision of what he needs to know, he will put some effort into solving the problems. When Joey is really stuck on a problem and does not understand he is good about speaking up and asking questions. Joey is interested in doing well and feels comfortable in the learning environment and the adults are interested and care about his progress (**Standard IV**).

#### **IV. Instructional Challenges / Schooling History.**

Since Joey comes from a bilingual Spanish speaking background vocabulary, reading and reading comprehension are his main struggles. In Joey's IEP some of his goals throughout the year have been to "respond correctly to comprehension questions after reading instructional level text" at a fourth grade reading level. Another goal is to "be able to read and understand fifth grade level words" and "increase his reading fluency

rate to 80 wpm (words per minute).” Looking at Joey’s progress report it shows growth as he can read 70% of the fifth grade QRI list and is reading fluently at 76 words per minute and comprehends at the fifth grade reading level with 100% accuracy. With guidance from teachers at school and one-on-one academic support Joey is making progress in his struggling areas of reading. In my math class Joey’s fourth – fifth grade reading level puts him at a disadvantage in comprehending the seventh grade math curriculum. During daily warm-ups, note taking and independent work the reading is a challenge for Joey. Despite the adult interventions and additional special education support Joey’s understanding of the math concepts is below grade level (**Standard II**).

#### **V. Assessments**

The initial assessments I used to determine Joey’s needs came from his Individual Education Plan (IEP) scores which used the

- AIMSweb Reading Maze (raw score = 12) below 10%.
- Oral Reading Fluency, below 10%.
- Kaufman Test of Educational Achievement,
  - Letter and Word Recognition, standard score = 77, 6<sup>th</sup> percentile.

When working with Joey, I used the “Read Naturally” program that requires students to do a pre-assessment and a post-assessment for each learning activity.

For the first pre-assessment I gave Joey was a short article about a lizard called the “Hellbender” which was at a fifth grade reading level. Joey’s first response to the article was “I have never heard of a Hellbender before” I explained to him that we are going to be reading about a “Hellbender” and I gave Joey some prior knowledge so he could understand what kind of animal he was going to be reading about. The article by Ely

and Lea Kozminsky, states the importance of prior knowledge as it “influences the meaning that a student constructs from the text,” (Kozminsky, E. & Kozminski, L., 2001, pg. 188) and helps build understanding of what they are reading. We then reviewed key vocabulary words and their definition as presented on the “Read Naturally” short story selection. In the article, “Teaching Meaning Vocabulary Productive Approaches for Poor Readers,” they emphasize the importance of “engaging poor readers in active vocabulary discussions” as a strategy to overcome the gap of word meaning and improve the comprehension of poor readers (Shahl, S. A., & Shiel, T. G., 1992, pg. 223). From our discussion and the keywords that we reviewed Joey then had to make a prediction on what he was going to be reading about. His written prediction was short, containing only seven words with spelling and punctuation errors. The second pre-assessment I used was called an “ABC Taxonomy” Joey was going to be reading about Tyrannosaurus and using an “ABC Taxonomy” chart Joey had to write down a word that would fit every letter focusing around Tyrannosaurus dinosaurs, what they were like and what they did. The pre-assessments gave me good background knowledge of what Joey already knew about the topic he was going to be reading about (**Standard III**).

Post assessments for the two above learning activities were conducted. The first learning activity that I assigned Joey was a summative assessment that had him answering four multiple choice comprehension questions about an animal called the “Hellbender.” After Joey answered the four multiple choice questions he had to write a sentence explaining to me why or why not a “hellbender” would be a good pet based off of what he read. Another formative assessment I did with Joey in this specific article evaluated Joey’s fluency. After a minute of reading the “Hellbender” short story the first

time he read at a fluency of 87 words at the fifth grade reading level. He then read the same story again and the second time with a fluency of greater than 102 words after one minute. He then read the story a third time and this time he just focused on the actual story and comprehending what the story was about. He struggled with a few words like “survives” and “though.” His score from the multiple-choice test was a three out of four, which is seventy five percent. This score is average and shows me that even reading the story three times Joey struggled with comprehension. With the same short story after answering the four multiple-choice questions Joey had to explain why a hellbender would or would not make a good pet. His written responses to the question were vague and the sentence did not start with a capital letter and end with a period. He also struggled with correct spelling using the words “stinks” and “slimy.” Overall, the assessments showed me that Joey still needs to keep working on comprehension strategies and his writing was below grade level.

For the second learning activity, I gave Joey another short story at the fifth grade reading level about the dinosaur, Tyrannosaurus. As a formative assessment I had Joey read the story out loud and had explain to me what the short story was about. As a summative assessment I gave Joey a graphic organizer that had a chart at the top with three boxes that were labeled with numbers one, two and three. Each labeled box had three bullets where he had to fill out three, one or two words that described what was happening in each paragraph. From the graphic organizer chart at the top Joey then needed to write a summary below the chart based on what wrote down for his bullet points for each paragraph. Joey did a good job referencing back to bullet points. His summary was five sentences long. The sentences had capital letters and complete

thoughts, his spelling also good and punctuation was appropriate for this selections which was at a fifth grade reading level. The graphic organizer worked as guide to help Joey plan the direction of how to write his summary. In the article “Effective Writing Instruction Across the Grades: What Every Educational Consultant Should Know” it elaborated on the importance of “planning, revising, and editing” as strategies to improve writing (Graham, S., Troia, G.A., 2003, pg. 80). They also state when students have a purpose for their writing they find more success. The graphic organizer helped Joey organize his thoughts, pull out key points from the selection and comprehend so that he could share his knowledge in writing. I found this lesson and activity more helpful for Joey as he seemed to have more success with comprehension with this strategy. It really broke down key components for each paragraph in manageable parts for a student like Joey who struggles (**Standard V & VI**).

The post assessments showed me what tools were most helpful to Joey as he is reading and comprehending text. Working with Joey I found that breaking down the text and using graphic organizers is more beneficial to his learning and understanding than just answering multiple-choice comprehension questions. Joey needs a lot of guidance when it comes to reading and comprehension. He responds well to one on one instruction. His goals for his IEP state that reading and comprehension are areas that he still needs to be working on. His reading is improving since the beginning of the year but Joey still needs a lot of guidance and support to get him reading and comprehending text at his grade level. The information I obtained to plan my instruction with Joey was based on his goals for his progress report on his IEP. I also talked with the special education teacher that he works with to see what stories would be appropriate for his reading level.

## **VI. Instructional Goals**

Instructional goals for Joey as indicated on his IEP are to develop/increase phonetics and to develop/increase reading comprehension. My instructional goals for the lessons I did with Joey were to increase comprehension while providing direct instruction to increase word identification and meaning. Like Gay Ivy stated in the article “Building Comprehension When They’re Still Learning to Read the Words,” I wanted to provide reading material that was suitable for Joey’s reading ability and interest and rich in meaning. These “consideration(s) (are) especially relevant when identifying books for older readers who are significantly behind their grade-level peers in reading” (Ivey, G., 2002, p. 237). I did not want to chose text that was too easy or hard because if the reading was too hard Joey would have struggled tremendously on the words and meaning and would have a hard time comprehending the text. I also wanted to choose lessons that had Joey predicting and inferring what he was going to be reading about and learning. Working with Joey I did see that he learned more from reading the short story about a “Hellbender.” He had more prior knowledge about the “Tyrannosaurus” short story and seemed to comprehend it better and show his understanding through a written summary. My goal was go also have manageable comprehension questions that Joey could answer. For the actual short stories themselves I showed Joey five different topics he could read about and gave him the choice to choose which topic interested him the most. The lessons related to the curriculum and needs of the student because the material was at Joey’s reading level and since he got to choose the story were of high interest to him.

While working with Joey he was attentive and focused on the topic’s he read about. After reading about “Tyrannosaurus” dinosaurs he got excited and we had a conversation



about dinosaurs and how they are extinct and Joey said if they were around he would go to Wyoming or Montana where they lived and see one. After reading about the “Hellbender” in the other short story Joey mentioned to me that he would want a “Hellbender” as a pet because they are a different type of animal not like a typical dog or cat. Giving Joey the option to pick something he was interested in reading about got him more excited about reading and learning about the different topics. It’s important to give students options when it comes to reading especially if reading is a difficult subject for them. By giving Joey a pre and post assessment on the short stories he read, he was able to have a better understanding about the animals and could comprehend key ideas in the readings.

## **VII. Student’s Progress**

I felt that I made a meaningful contribution to Joey’s reading progress. Looking at Joey’s progress report and reading goals on his IEP (Individual Education Plan) it showed areas where Joey struggled and my ultimate goal was to continue working with Joey and provide him with some reading comprehension strategies that will continue his growth in reading and comprehension. From the data on Joey’s progress report I knew reading comprehension was one of his struggles so that is why I decided to focus on reading comprehension strategies. The assessment data show me that Joey was able to use the strategies and tools that I covered with him to show understanding of the material read. By having Joey read short stories and answer multiple choice questions or use a graphic organizer to write down important ideas and summarize from that gave him the idea of what he needs to start doing in order to help improve his reading comprehension. While working with Joey I felt that one-on-one support and guidance was a positive

reinforcement to build up his confidence in reading comprehension. Joey found his own success in reading as I guided him along with way.

### **VIII. Supports and Strategies Used**

The support I did while working with Joey consisted of Joey picking out the short stories he wanted to read and guided direct instruction. By giving Joey ownership of what he wanted to read, motivated and sparked interest in what he was going to be learning about. The guided instruction consisted of helping Joey sound out words that he struggled with and discussing what he read. My efforts were beneficial as Joey was showing understanding with the dialog we had about each reading selection. I was able to model re-reading, reading for understanding and self-monitoring. In Jennifer Cromley's article she states the importance of "one's own thinking during reading (metacognitive monitoring) and strategies that can be taught to help readers monitor, and thereby comprehend better" (Cromley, J. G., 2005, pg. 188). While Joey was reading I gave him positive feedback and if he Joey struggled with answering questions or ideas, I would guide him back to what he read. I gave him cues about where he could find the correct information he needed to answer the questions and write a summary about the reading.

### **IX. Critical Moments and Direction of the Lesson**

When working with Joey my first plan was to get reading material through a guided reading program online called "k12reader." I found fourth and fifth grade reading comprehension activities that I thought would be appropriate for where Joey was at in his reading level and what he could handle. I printed two short stores from the website about estimation and the other article was about a mathematician called "Eratosthenes." The

original short stories I picked out were approximately four paragraphs long with five comprehension questions based on the short story. After reading the first short story about the mathematician called “Eratosthenes” Joey struggled tremendously on the words in the story and also could not comprehend the questions being asked. Figuring out that this was too much of a struggle for Joey I talked to the special education teacher that Joey works with, and explained to her his frustrations and challenges with the short story. She looked at the articles and said to me even though the article was at a fourth grade reading level the words would be too hard for Joey to decode and understand. She then showed me another reading program that she used with Joey called “Read Naturally” and explained how it worked. The special education teacher said that Joey could probably handle those short stories better than the ones I had originally picked out. She showed me the fourth grade short stories and the fifth grade ones and explained what the “Read Naturally” program was. Joey could probably handle the fifth grade reading level. She had me take a few articles for Joey to pick out. Joey had been working on a few of the short stories with the special education teacher already and she explained to me that he would know how to do the reading comprehension activities. For each short story the “Read Naturally” program has the student read “review key words,” then “write a prediction” that he thought the short story is going to be about. After writing a prediction the student then reads the short story three times out loud to the teacher. The first time the student reads through the story the teacher calculates how many words a student can read after a minute. The second time the student reads through the story the teacher notices if the student improves their fluency. The last time the student reads through the story they need to comprehend what they are reading. After the third time reading the

short story, the program asks students four multiple-choice questions and a short answer question. The last activity “Read Naturally” has students do is writing a summary about what students read. While working with Joey, my original plan did not work out so I had to go back, regroup, talk to the special education teacher and get new resources.

**X. Evidence of instructional goals**

Working with Joey on his comprehension struggles I saw some improvement but not as much as I had hoped. Even working with support in the general education classrooms and with the special education teacher Joey is making limited progress on his reading skills. Joey he does well working with an adult in a one to one setting and strives when he is not working in a whole classroom of thirty-three students. For Joey to start showing success with reading and comprehension he needs to be actively reading everyday and doing various comprehension strategies with the readings. As Joey’s classroom math teacher, I try to work with Joey every time he is in my classroom, but this is not enough time for what Joey needs academically to truly become successful with his reading struggles. The special education teacher continues to work with Joey on his reading as well. Joey does do well acquiring information through auditory. He is able to comprehend and retell what the main idea of the story is but only at a fifth grade reading level with carefully selected reading pieces.

**XI. Changes and Future Instruction for the student**

Since Joey’s official Individual Education Plan (IEP) was implemented May of 2011, many of these strategies are new to Joey. His first re-evaluate is coming up in May and hopefully growth will be shown between the efforts of the special education

department and collaboration with the general education teachers. I will be sitting in on that meeting and look forward what the other professional that work with Joey have to say. By working with Joey I found that organization and direct instruction on a one-to-one bases are more beneficial to him. Unfortunately our educational system is not set up to accommodate one-on-one time for students who have those needs. I see one hundred eighty students six hours a day and the special education teacher has a case load of thirty students. We are all working together to meet Joey's needs along with many other students.

## **XII. Techniques**

This class has exposed me to a number of techniques that I can apply to my instruction to enhance literacy development. One multi-strategy program that I learned about was the CORI – Concept Oriented Reading Instruction. CORI uses “real-world interactions, student choices, direct instruction in reading strategies” (Cromley, J. G., 2005, pg 197) to support struggling readers. Another technique that I have tried out and plan to implement more frequently is the PALS – Peer Assisted Learning. This is very appropriate to use with middle school students as it incorporates social interactions with a direct learning purpose. In all the readings we covered this term, one startling finding that stood out was recorded in the article “What Reading Does For The Mind.” Numbers showed that the amount of independent reading minutes per day affects one's “reading ability, aspect of verbal intelligence, (and) general knowledge about the world” (Cunningham, A. E., & Stanovich, K. E., 1998, pg.11). For example, students who read 1.3 minutes a day will read 106,000 words per year and students who reads 21.1 minutes a day reads 1,823,000 words a year. The study showed that students who read more have a better vocabulary

development than other students. The article states, that the reading volume “is itself a significant contributor to the development of other aspects of verbal intelligence” (Cunningham, A. E., & Stanovich, K. E., 1998, pg. 12). Therefore students even at an early age, need to be doing more out of school reading to improve their verbal intelligence and knowledge about the world.

## **Lesson Plan #1**

**Date:** 3/28/12

**Objectives for today’s lesson:**

The students will be able to...

- Improve fluency and comprehend a short story after reading it three times.
- Successfully answer four multiple choice questions and a short answer response based on the short story read.

**Rationale:**

Being able to identify words and their meaning will help comprehend a story. By recognizing the words, the student can recall many of the actions that took place in a text and reason what happened in the story. By doing this it will make reading more meaningful.

**Materials and supplies needed:**

- The short story, “Hellbender” from the “Read Naturally” program
- Pencil

**Procedures:**

- I am going to start the lesson plan by having Joey read four “review key words” from the short story and discuss their meaning with him.
- After Joey reads the four “review key words” I will then have him do a pre-assessment by writing a prediction about what he thinks the short story is going to be about based on the “review key words.”
- Next, Joey will read the short story called “Hellbender” three times total.
- The first time he reads the short story I will see how many words he can read in one minute.
- The second time Joey reads the short story I will see if he improves his reading fluency to more words in one minute.
- The final time Joey reads the short story through I will be noticing if he actually comprehends the words he reads.
- After reading the text three times I will then have Joey answer four multiple choice questions about the short story he read.
- Lastly, Joey will then answer a short response question about the short story

“hellbender.”

**Closing summary of the lesson:**

- After completing the reading comprehension lesson with Joey I will ask Joey if he learned more about the “Hellbender” animal.
- I will ask Joey if he has any further questions about what he read about.
- I will wrap up the lesson by explaining to Joey that it is important to understand what you read in order to successfully answer questions based on the story.

**Assessment:**

- In this lesson, the summative assessment consists of listening to Joey decode and comprehend the words he reads in the short story.
- I will see that Joey is able to predict what the story might be about based on the “Review Key Word” that he reads out loud to me.
- I am going to see if Joey truly comprehends the material he reads based on answering the four multiple choice questions correctly.
- I will also see that Joey will comprehend the text by correctly answering the short answer question asking him “Why would a hellbender not make a good pet?” If he understands and comprehends what he read, he will be able to confidently answer each question correctly.

## Lesson Plan #2

**Date:** 4/4/12

**Objectives for the lesson:**

The student will be able to...

- Show comprehending of what was read by writing thorough responses in a graphic organizer.
- Write a summary of what the short story was about based on what was filled out in the graphic organizer.
- Have a better understanding of Tyrannosaurus dinosaurs.

**Rationale:**

Being able to comprehend text is important because it will help you write a detailed summary of the text. It will also recall important events that take place in the story.

**Materials:**

- ABC taxonomy worksheet
- The short story, “Tyrannosaurus” from the read naturally program.
- Pencil
- Keyword Notes Worksheet - Graphic Organizer / Summary worksheet.

**Procedures:**

- I am going to start this lesson by having Joey do a pre-assessment by filling out the “ABC Taxonomy” worksheet. The worksheet has all the letters of the alphabet and Joey will need to write a word for every letter that he thinks relates to the Tyrannosaurus dinosaur.
- After Joey fills out the “ABC Taxonomy” worksheet I will give him the short story called “Tyrannosaurus.” The short story is divided into sections that are numbered one, two and three.
- Before reading the short story, similarly to the first lesson, Joey will read the “Review Key Words” and write a prediction about what he thinks the short story is going to be about.
- Next Joey will read the short story to the teacher.
- While Joey is reading the short story he will tune in to important concepts discussed in each paragraph, which is also the numbered section of the reading. Joey will write those important concepts in the graphic organizer.
- After Joey has finished reading the short story called “Tyrannosaurus” and has filled out the graphic organizer he will need to write a summary of what he comprehended from the text and from the words he wrote down in the graphic organizer.

**Closing Summary of the lesson:**

- If Joey comprehends the short story he should successfully be able to write a summary about what he read.
- I will ask Joey if he learned anything new about the Tyrannosaurus dinosaur from the short story.

**Assessment:**

- With the pre-assessment “ABC Taxonomy” I will see what Joey already knows about the Tyrannosaurus dinosaur.
- The summative assessment will consist of Joey being able to recognize words while he is reading as well as comprehend the story while he reads out loud to me.
- If Joey can comprehend the story he will be able to successfully write ideas in the graphic organizers as a summative assessment and will also be able to successfully write a summary about the short story from the ideas he wrote down in the graphic organizer as another summative assessment.

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