

## Literacy Case Study

### Section 1.

When one thinks of literacy, reading is often the first thing that comes to mind. Although reading is an essential part of development, writing is of equal importance and can often be overlooked. Written expression is a skill that has been an essential part of the human race and culture for thousands of years. It is also a complex craft that serves many fundamental purposes outside of school like, writing notes or lists, and communicating through letters. Many educators believe that students who are skilled writers, will also be skilled readers. Perhaps this is why many teachers of young children begin literacy instruction with writing rather than reading. "The process of writing helps children understand written language and prepares them for reading and understanding the writing of others" (Morrow & Gambrell, 2015, p.290). Not only does one's ability in writing affect reading, it also contributes to oral language and speech development, overall communication skills, and fine motor skills. "Writing involves the hand, eye, and both sides of the brain as one makes connections and constructs meaning. It requires knowing the conventions of grammar, spelling, punctuation, and form. It involves small-muscle development and eye-hand coordination to form letters, words, and paragraphs with a pen, pencil or keyboard. It requires having a vocabulary that permits effective self-expression and communication" (Morrow & Gambrell, 2015, p. 289-290). This study will focus on one first grade student, who will be called Ross, and his ability to successfully transfer his thoughts into writing. This is something that he struggles with at school daily and I believe if I can understand more about

abilities I will be able to better support his writing development. In turn, he will see more success not just in writing, but in reading as well.

## Section 2.

To best understand this study, it is important to build background knowledge of the student involved, Ross. I have known Ross since he started school in kindergarten, as he was in my multi-grade level team building group. He was adopted as an infant and is the only child of divorced parents who share custody of him. Now he is seven years old and is a first grade student in my class of 24. Ross displays challenging behavior daily, and has difficulties staying on task, appropriately interacting with his peers, and managing his impulsivities. We work on his self-confidence daily, as he frequently compares himself and his abilities to his peers, and displays a lot of negative self-talk. He has been diagnosed with ADHD and takes medicine several times throughout the day to help support his learning. Ross is a very inquisitive student and takes pride in the knowledge he has. He loves to ask questions and discover new things about the world. Science is his favorite subject and the topic he likes to learn about the most is animals.

During his time as a first grader, there are concerns with his growth in both reading and writing. In September, 2019 he entered first grade reading at a DRA level 2 (benchmark is 4), he then tested at a 4 (benchmark is 6) in November, 2019, and most recently in January 2020 he tested at a 6 (benchmark is 10). Although there is growth, Ross fails to utilize different reading strategies when he comes to words he does not know and was picked up as a second round reading recovery student in February. When it comes to writing, Ross is reluctant to

participate without one-on-one support from an adult. When evaluating his independently produced writing, it mostly is made up of words with incorrect beginning/middle/end sounds, and inconsistent spacing between words. Ross's writing is often not grammatically correct, and at times he is unable to read and understand what he has produced moments after it is written. In a persuasive piece he completed in February about changing the name of our school he wrote, "This name for the skol is for gt is losooiin".

### Section 3.a)

Writer's workshop is one of Ross's least favorite parts of the day. Therefore I began this study by administering the Writing Attitudes Survey. I read the questions aloud to him and he circled the picture that most appropriately matched his feelings toward a question. For example, one of the questions asked, "How would you feel writing about something you did in science?", and Ross circled the picture of Garfield with a smile and a thumbs up. The purpose of this survey was to gain more knowledge about the aspects he likes and dislikes about writing and insights on what might motivate him. The second assessment administered was the Written Expression-Curriculum-Based Measurement (WE-CBM). This assessment measures three aspects involving written expression abilities in a timed writing prompt task; Total Words Written (TWW), Correct Writing Sequences (CWS), and Words Spelled Correctly (WSC). According to Kelly Powell-Smith and Mark Shinn (2004), the CWS refers to "two adjacent writing units that are correct between the context that is written"(p. 11). The words in the sequence have to be mechanically, semantically, and syntactically correct. Both the TWW and the WSC are straight

forward in counting the total written words as well as correctly spelled words written in the allotted assessment time. The purpose of implementing this assessment with Ross is to break down his ability to successfully express his thoughts through writing into concise and numerical data.

### Section 3. b)

As stated before, the first assessment I implemented with Ross was the Writing Attitudes Survey. I read to him the questions that asked about how he felt about different aspects of writing. He then circled the picture that matched how he felt. The pictures included Garfield with a thumbs up and a smile, Garfield with just a thumbs up and no smile, Garfield with a frown, and Garfield with an angry face and smoke coming out of his ears. There were a total of 28 questions that I asked one morning in early March when it was just him and I in the classroom. In adherence to his behavior plan, Ross enters the classroom before the bell rings to unpack his things and complete a calming activity before the rest of the students come in and begin their day. He enjoys this one-on-one time so I knew it would be a good time to administer this assessment and he would be more willing to think about each question and answer honestly.

Upon analyzing his responses to each question, I gained some valuable insight into Ross's feelings toward writing. His most frequent response was angry Garfield with smoke coming out of his ears, at 15/28 times or 54%. This did not surprise me because I knew that writing was his least favorite part of the school day. Many of these responses were pertaining to questions about the actual act of writing, or sharing writing. For example, one of the questions was, "How would you feel keeping a journal for the class?". His next highest response was smiling

Garfield making a thumbs up sign. Only 6 questions elicited this response, however. The one that gave me the most information was, "How would you feel about becoming an even better writer than you already are?". Because most of his feelings about writing were negative, the positive answer to this question tells me that Ross would like to be a better writer despite how he feels about it. This gives me hope that he has motivation inside of him that will assist him in working towards his writing goals, and makes me think that perhaps his current attitude about writing could be a result of his low confidence in his abilities. There were 2 questions that Ross did not circle, instead he told me an emotion and I wrote them down. For the question, "How would you feel if you were an author who writes books?" he told me that he would be "scared". For the question, "How would you feel writing an advertisement for something people can buy?" he answered, "embarrassed". His responses to those questions told me almost all I need to know about his attitude about writing. What I understand is that Ross is a student who is aware that his writing abilities are not as high compared to his peers and therefore would be embarrassed for his writing to be so public, like an advertisement, and that he would be scared to be an author because he doesn't see himself as an author already.

The next assessment I administered with Ross was the Written Expression-Curriculum-Based Measurement (WE-CBM). This was done the week after completing the Writing Attitudes Survey during a one-on-one conference time during writer's workshop. Ross had 3 minutes to write a story that continues what was presented in the story starter. I selected a story starter that played on his interests in science, "The missile landed on the moon and...", then he had 1 minute

of thinking time before starting his 3 minutes of writing time. Ross talked and asked questions for most of those 3 minutes as I continued to encourage him to stay focused on his writing. After the time was up he was able to complete 1 partial sentence and is as follows, "IT SEnt ThE ASTRNOTS FLIEN AFT IT HAPIiD PEES Wed". I counted the Total Words Written (TWW) as 10, the Correct Writing Sequences (CWS) as 0 because of the capitalization errors, and the Words Spelled Correctly (WSC) as 4. According to the AIMSweb Growth Table for the 2006-2007 school year, 10 TWW would put Ross around the 13th percentile for the winter. This table also indicates that 0 CWS would place him at the 10th percentile for winter. Based on this data, I feel that Ross has a solid knowledge of spelling first grade sight words correctly, and he has a very thoughtful imagination that produces many amazing story ideas, but he writes in almost all capital letters and at times he fails to hear important beginning/middle/end sounds in words. This makes his writing almost unreadable. For example, he wrote the word "FLIEN" and it was easy for me to interpret it as "flying" because it has most of the sounds and makes sense phonetically. However, he also wrote the word "AFT" and I can only assume he was attempting to write the word "after" but it is hard to know for sure because the ending sound of this word is missing.

#### Section 4.

After analyzing the results of the Writing Attitude Survey and the WE-CBM, I believe that focusing on correct capitalization, and hearing sounds in words (phonemic awareness) will improve the readability of his writing, and therefore the confidence he has in himself as a writer. Because Ross writes in almost all capital

letters, that brought his score down significantly in the CWS category, and working on that skill would help improve the number of CWS in his writing pieces. In order to do that I must focus on the following Common Core State Standards (CCSS) to meet the goals that I have set for Ross. CSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.2.E states, "Spell untaught words phonetically, drawing on phonemic awareness and spelling conventions". This standard should assist in focusing on the ability to segment sounds and spell phonetically. Focusing mostly on lowercase letters will support Ross's goals and so the second standard used is, CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.1.1.A which states, "Print all upper- and lowercase letters". Ross can confidently print all of his uppercase letters, so for purposes of this case study we will be only focusing on lowercase letters. Using these standards and course materials, I designed 2 lessons to address Ross's writing needs and build upon his strengths.

The first lesson will focus on strengthening Ross's phonemic awareness by practicing "stretching out" the sounds of different objects in a guessing game. This lesson came from our course textbook *Best Practices in Literacy Instruction*, where the importance of segmenting was emphasized. Invented spelling is also encouraged for young writers in order to build upon this skill and establish confidence. "As [students] stretch out words, they are segmenting those words into their component sounds. Segmenting is an important-and difficult-phonemic awareness ability that will develop more quickly if children are encouraged to stretch out words while writing" (Morrow & Gambrell, 2015, p. 173-174). The second lesson will focus on getting Ross into the habit of writing in lowercase letters. He already has an alphabet chart in his writing folder, but I think that creating his own lowercase alphabet chart will encourage him to use it as he's

writing and turn writing in lowercase letters into a habit. In the lesson Ross will go on a hunt through magazines for all of the lowercase letters to fill in his chart. Once he has found the letters he will also write an example of that lowercase letter in his own handwriting. This will give him the opportunity to practice finding/identifying lowercase letters, and writing them. The end product will provide him with a resource to use to keep encouraging this writing habit throughout the entire school day.

## Section 5.

Literacy is such an important aspect of public education today, it has seemingly taken over all other subject areas. My school district underwent a project last year to teach us teachers how to incorporate often neglected subject areas, like science and social studies, into our required literacy instruction time that seems to increase each year. This strategy can encourage even the most reluctant reader and writer to find enjoyment in literacy. For a student like Ross, who has an especially negative attitude toward writing and low confidence in his abilities, showing him that content knowledge can assist him in becoming a better reader and writer could alter the course of his academic career for the better. Sarah M. Lupo, Alicia Berry, Emma Thacker, Amanda Sawyer, and Joi Merritt discuss the discrepancy between content knowledge and reading ability in their article published in *The Reading Teacher*, "Knowledge is a critical component of literacy instruction. Without knowledge, learners struggle at every stage of the reading process, from decoding to fluency..." (2019, p. 1). I believe that assigning Ross a specific text set, like those described in the article, designed to scaffold his learning



experiences and help him read a grade-level text will boost his confidence and support the skills he needs to become a successful reader and writer in a meaningful way.

I began planning a text set for Ross by selecting a target text, “a challenging content area text” that will be supported by the rest of the texts (Lupo, 2019, p. 5). To pick the target text I thought about a goal I would like him to achieve through engaging in the text set. In order to continue to support his phonological awareness skills in writing, I created a set to help him learn facts about sharks. My logic in this choice is that he would have more success in stretching out the sounds in words that he is familiar with surrounded by a topic he knows a lot about. I settled on sharks because I know he loves learning about science, and animals in particular. The target text I ended up selecting is titled Sharks and is written by Kate Riggs. This book is listed as a DRA level 12, which is slightly above Ross’s reading level at this point in the school year, but I am confident with scaffolding through the other texts in the set, he will be able to read it successfully. I am also confident that after establishing solid content knowledge about sharks, he will be able to stretch out most or all of the sounds as he writes vocabulary words about this animal.

Although I began planning with the target text, that is not how I plan for it to be presented to Ross. I believe it will be most beneficial to begin the text set with the visual text to “help build knowledge needed to access the target text or concepts” (Lupo, 2019, p. 5). In this case is a short video about sharks to pique his interest. I also think it would help Ross to connect the new words he will hear, with a visual representation right from the beginning. That way in his reading and writing he will be decoding words that he does know and has heard before which is

much easier to do than decoding unfamiliar words. The video is by National Geographic Kids and is called *Things You Wanna Know: Sharks*. It is a short informational video with high quality images of the animal in real life, lists off cool facts about sharks, and includes great vocabulary words like “prey” and “eating habits”. After watching this video he could brainstorm things he already knows about sharks, and things he would like to learn.

Next we would move on to the hook text to, “demonstrate the relevance of the concept in the target text to garner students’ interest” (Lupo, 2019, p. 5). I chose this text to be a read aloud book called, *If Sharks Disappeared*, by Lily Williams. This book is perfect because it takes you through a scientific scenario of what would happen to our ecosystem if sharks became extinct. It has a lot of information about sharks, and offers real life reasons why this animal is so important and why we should learn about them. An extension activity to go with this book could be to write an opinion piece about why we need to save sharks. After the hook text, Ross would independently read the informational text to introduce new concepts at a level that is easy for him to read. The Reading A-Z book *Tiger Shark* by, Racheal Rice is at a DRA level 6, about 2 levels below Ross’s instructional level. This book will be easy for him to read, and can offer him new information and exposure to new words about a particular type of shark, and most importantly prepare him to read the target text independently. A possible activity after reading the informational text would be to complete a Venn Diagram comparing and contrasting a tiger shark, with another type of shark.

Throughout this case study, I have assessed one of my students on his writing abilities, identified areas of improvement, planned lessons, and created text

sets to support his skills in literacy. Although there have been some unforeseen circumstances that prohibits me from being able to implement the plans I have made, I still believe that they would have offered support and success to Ross as both a reader and a writer. I have learned a lot about him as a learner and still conclude that developing his ability to hear sounds in words (phonological awareness skills), practicing his lowercase letters, and building up his confidence will open many doors for him. The lessons that I have written, and the text set that has been put together will hopefully be available to him one day and contribute toward his success in literacy for the rest of his academic career.

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