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Anna Dispensa

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Introduction

Dr. Seuss once wrote, “The more that you read, the more things you will know. The more you learn, the more places you’ll go.” I was introduced to this quote as a child, and it has been engrained in my mind ever since. As a child, I merely enjoyed this quotation due to its sound as well as my love for reading. Over the years, although this component still remains true, my understanding of this quotation has altered. From my college experience thus far, I have ascertained the importance of literacy to education. I have realized that literacy is the bread and butter of being able to learn. Due to this, early literacy learning is crucial to a student’s future success. Students should be immersed in all aspects of literacy beginning in elementary school in order to develop their literacy skills and strategies. As an elementary school teacher, I will be responsible for teaching students reading and writing strategies. As a literacy teacher, I will be responsible for teaching all students regardless of their level and helping them to develop these extremely important literacy skills. Obviously, because no two children are alike, I will be using many different teaching strategies in order to differentiate instruction and ultimately help to meet the needs of the students so that they can be successful.

Background Information

Although I have not yet had my own classroom, I have been working with students at local elementary schools in order to start teaching literacy, specifically reading to these students. This experience has been invaluable, as it has helped me to develop my teaching strategies in regards to literacy as well as has helped the students to develop these literacy skills. More specifically, I have been working with a small group of second grade students at Longfellow Elementary School in Rock Island Illinois. In order to assist these students in developing their literacy skills, I have carried out Reading Running Records based upon their predetermined DRA reading levels. After analyzing these records, the students were placed in appropriate groups. The guided reading strategy will be used throughout this experience. While guided reading is not the only strategy that will be implemented throughout this experience, it is the main strategy in which the students will be engaged with in order to immerse the students in different types of literature as well as help them to build upon their strengths and improve upon their weaknesses. My ultimate goal is to assist each of my small groups in development of their literacy strategies and skills including but not limited to being able to think within, beyond, and about a text as well as write about a text.

My small group contains three students. After conducting the reading running record assessment, the text showed to be a Level J independent for two of the students and a Level L hard for one of the students. Within this group, there were many strengths as well as some components in which the students could improve upon. In terms of strengths, all of the students in this group were able to read with accuracy rates of ninety-eight percent or higher. Clearly, due to the fact that the students made very few meaning, structural, or visual errors, it is evident that they are able to self-correct and are showing signs that they are beginning to understand how to monitor their reading. Also, all of the students scored relatively well on comprehension for the within the text questions showing that they understand the basic principles of what they are reading.

While these were the major strengths of the entire group, once again, there were also individual strengths within the group. More specifically, Student A excelled in regards to writing and comprehension. In terms of writing, they were able to write the basic answer to the written question using a key detail from the text to support their understanding. In terms of comprehension, they were able to answer the within the text questions as well as some of the beyond the text and about the text questions with no difficulty. Student B also excelled in regards to writing but also was very strong in regards to their comprehension and self-correction ratio. In terms of writing,

they were able to write a clear and concise sentence using understanding from the text to answer the written question as well as draw a picture aligned with their response. In terms of comprehension, they were able to answer the within the text questions as well as some of the beyond the text and about the text questions easily. In terms of self-corrections, they had a 1:1 self-correction ratio showing that they were monitoring and thus correcting while reading. In addition to Student B's high correction rate, Student C also had a high self-correction ratio of 1:2. Once again, from this, it is evident that Student C was monitoring and thus correcting while reading. Student C also excelled in regards to their fluency. They had very good phrasing throughout as well as maintained a consistent rate and incorporated intonation, and punctuation. From this, it was apparent that they are beginning to integrate the six dimensions of fluency together.

Even though the students all displayed many strengths, once again, there were also some group and individual weaknesses in which the students could improve upon. For the group as a whole, all of the students struggled to answer at least one of the questions presented in the beyond the text and about the text sections. Also, although none of the students made very many mistakes, the mistakes that they did make were visual in nature. More specifically, there were visual errors related to decoding and only using the first letter of a word to decode the word and ignoring the endings of words. These visual mistakes impeded the students' comprehension and fluency and impacted their ability to answer the beyond the text and about the text questions.

In addition to the group weaknesses, there were also some notable individual weaknesses. More specifically, Student A struggled with fluency, comprehension, and the ability to self-correct. In terms of fluency, they displayed some phrasing within their reading, but there was no expression. They were reading in a very monotonous voice the entire time. In terms of comprehension, they struggled to answer the beyond the text and about the text questions. In terms of self-correcting, Student A presented a 1:6 ratio showing the need for practice with monitoring and correcting. Likewise, Student B also struggled with fluency as well as comprehension. In terms of fluency, they did read with some phrasing and expression, but it was minimal. They could use some practice developing each of the dimensions of fluency and further integrating the six dimensions of fluency together. In terms of comprehension, they struggled to understand the higher level beyond the text and about the text questions. Furthermore, Student C struggled with comprehension and writing. In terms of comprehension, they also struggled to understand and answer any of the questions beyond the text and about the text. In terms of writing, they read the prompt and drew a picture in response to the prompt, but did not actually write anything.

Student C's struggle to understand the higher level questions beyond and about the text may have contributed to this writing deficit.

After examining this group's strengths and weaknesses, I have decided that the students should begin working with a Level K text. Because Student A and Student B were able to independently read the Level J text, and Student C struggled to read the Level L text, it would make sense to move Student A and Student B up in level, and move Student C down in level so that the text is appropriate for all students and can be used to further develop their literacy skills. Once I pinpointed these strengths and weaknesses, I referred to the book *The Continuum of Literacy Learning* by Fountas and Pinnell in order to think about goals and activities that would be beneficial for this group. Some of the goals that I have identified for this group include: demonstrate knowledge of flexible ways to solve words (noticing word parts, noticing endings and prefixes); break down a longer word into syllables in order to decode manageable units; demonstrate phrased, fluent, oral reading; make predictions about the solution to the problem of a story; infer the big ideas or message (theme) of a text; notice and discuss how the writer of a graphic novel has communicated meaning through illustrations and print; and agree or disagree with the ideas in a text (Pinnell, G.S., & Fountas, I.C). Similar to the first group, the major goal in which I want the students within this second group to achieve by the end of the term relates to their ability to read for meaning.

Statement of the Problem and Topic

For this group, the main area of deficit was related to visual errors. The students were making many visual errors, and these visual errors were ultimately impeding their ability to comprehend the text. In order to address and improve upon this deficit, I began with the goals relating to solving words due to the fact that the students struggled to decode words and thus were making visual errors. By providing instruction to the students on how to decode words, my hope was that the students would better be able to decode words and thus use these words to think about the meaning of the text. After this, I transitioned into the goals relating to answering the beyond and about the text questions. My hope was that once I was able to teach the students strategies and skills necessary to read for meaning, they would be able to apply these strategies within their own reading and thus be able to answer these higher-level questions. Throughout the term, once I actually begin to work with the students, I found strategies that were beneficial to helping the students achieve these goals. While I tested out many different strategies, the strategy that I consistently used throughout the term was close reading.

Justification

Before implementing the strategy of close reading, I researched close reading to ensure that it would be appropriate in helping my group of students to achieve and improve upon their deficits. One research article in which I examined was entitled “Close Reading in Elementary Schools” and can be found on page 179 of the November 2012 edition of *The Reading Teacher* journal. The purpose of the study was to examine the literacy strategy of close reading within the elementary school classroom. Up until this point, the article stated that there has been little research focused on close reading in the elementary school classroom, as this strategy is usually implemented in higher grade levels. At the beginning of the article, some of the benefits of close reading are identified including the ability of close reading to allow students to examine deep structures within a text such as organization, vocabulary, key details, arguments, and textual meaning. The article then transitioned into talking about the two main objectives of close reading one being allowing students to “assimilate new textual information with their existing background knowledge and prior experiences to expand their schema,” and the other being allowing students “to build the necessary habits of readers when they engage with a complex piece of text” (Fisher and Frey, 179). Once the article set the stage regarding the strategy of close reading, the framework of the study was unveiled. The research question that the study was based around was the effectiveness of close reading in the elementary school classroom. In order to examine this, the study looked at ten secondary education teachers and the methods in which they used when teaching and using the strategy of close reading within their classrooms. The study found that there were five main features related to close reading that are necessary to use in order to properly carry out this literary strategy. These features include using short passages, using complex texts, limiting frontloading, repeatedly reading the text, focusing on text-dependent questions, and annotating the text.

The study further went into detail explaining the ways in which these features of close reading could be modified in order to make them appropriate for elementary school students. One such modification was related to who should be reading the text. In lower elementary grades, the teacher should read the text aloud instead of prompting the students to read it themselves. By reading aloud to the students, the teacher is able to guide the students in looking for certain textual features as well as finding textual evidence related to meaning. In this guiding process, the teacher can also model certain types of thinking and or responses to the text that are necessary in order to engage in the strategy of close reading. Another modification was related to frontloading. In

elementary schools, providing students with introductions to the text or frontloading information so that they are able to understand important features or principles of a text before reading it are encouraged. Despite this, the article suggests that not all texts require frontloading, and when overused, frontloading can take away from a student's ability to solve words and think about their own ideas regarding the text. In order to determine when frontloading should be used in the context of close reading, the article provided three suggestions regarding when frontloading would be beneficial to students. These include when vocabulary terms are used in ways that students may struggle to understand, when frontloading will not give away too much text and still will require students to read the text, and when frontloading does not allow the students to think about their own personal connections right off the bat but rather think about the meaning of the text first followed by their own personal connections.

Another modification that is described within the article was related to the types of questions that should be asked as a result of close reading of a passage. The different types of questions include general understanding questions, key detail questions, vocabulary and text structure questions, author's purpose questions, inferential questions, and opinion and inter-textual questions. After reading about these different types of questions, I was able to see why the article proposed each of these different types of questions. All of these different types of questions address the methods of strategic actions that students should engage with when examining a text. From asking these different types of questions, the students are able to think within, beyond, and about the text ultimately helping them to develop their higher-level thinking skills. The last modification that the article suggests is related to teaching annotation. Because annotation is sometimes regarded as a strategy that is used with upper-level students, the article suggests ways to use and teach annotation within the elementary school classroom. For example, the teacher should use sticky notes with a series of symbols representing different textual reactions as well as ways in which to note certain aspects within a text when engaging their class with close reading. In doing this, the students are able to quickly make annotations, which will help to diminish the interruptions within the flow of their reading. This idea of using sticky notes as a form of annotation was not only introduced within the article, but was also an idea that we discussed within our EDUC 353 course, thus allowing me to see many contexts in which using sticky notes for annotation could be used. Overall, the article concluded that close reading can, indeed, be used effectively in elementary school classrooms as long as it is paired with other instructional practices and modified in order to fit the needs of younger elementary school students.

In addition to this research article, readwritethink.org also provided me with some insightful information in regards to close reading. The website provided a lot of the same information as the research article, yet built upon this with some new ideas. More specifically, the author of the page on close reading, Scott Filkins, not only suggested the benefits of using close reading within the classroom and how to use close reading within the elementary school classroom but also provided examples of how teachers should implement this strategy. Filkins suggested that teachers practice using a text themselves before engaging the students with the text. He discussed how ultimately teachers need to read the text themselves and ask themselves the questions that they plan to ask their students in order to see if a text is really appropriate for close reading. In order for a text to be appropriate, it needs to be complex enough for rereading as well as the section that is to be reread needs to help the students to make a realization about the text as a whole (Filkins). Also, when planning questions based around a text where the strategy of close reading is used, Filkins stresses the importance of asking the students similar questions each time the text is reread. The purpose of this is to see how students thinking changes from the first time they read the text to each of the concurrent times that they close read a section of the text. From this, not only can the teacher see how the students thinking changes, but the students can also see and thus realize the importance of reading a text, or a portion of a text, multiple times in order to really understand the text (Filkins). At the elementary level, this will help students become accustomed to reading a text multiple times, a strategy in which will be very beneficial to them in their future schooling experiences as they encounter more complex texts.

From the analysis of this article on close reading, the analysis of the website on close reading, as well learning about and using close reading within our EDUC 353 literacy class, I am able to understand the principles of close reading, the benefits of close reading, the modifications to close reading that can be used to make it appropriate for elementary school students, as well as how to implement close reading within an elementary school classroom. Due to the knowledge that I have gained on the literary strategy of close reading, I ultimately decided that the implementation of this strategy with my group of students for our EDUC 354 remedial reading clinical would be very beneficial. When planning lessons for my students based around this strategy, I used suggestions from the article, the website, and our class in order to use this strategy effectively. As I planned my lessons, I used my prior and newfound knowledge regarding close reading so that I was able to plan effective lessons for my students that would help them to reach the goals for the term.

Results and Summary of Findings

For almost all of my lessons, I used the strategy of close reading. I often started out by having students read a section of a book. Then, I chose a section that was either more difficult for the students, or provided information that was important to the topic of the lesson for the students to close read. While I did not formally assess the students during each lesson, after close reading the section, I always had the students write down their responses in regards to the question being asked. I then went back and analyzed their responses to see whether or not they were improving in their ability to answer the questions and was able to use this data to determine which areas of thinking beyond and about the text the students still need practice with. While at first I was unsure whether or not this approach would work, I found that the students responded very well to this lesson structure. From close reading certain sections, they were really able to focus in on solving specific words, which ultimately helped their comprehension of the texts as a whole. Because the students were able to look at a specific section, they were given the opportunity to slow down and look at specific words within the sections.

Throughout the term, the students really improved upon looking at individual words and being able to decode the entire word using all parts of the word. Once the students were able to do this, they were able to better understand the text. Close reading of texts also provided the students with the opportunity to think more in depth about certain events or ideas within the texts, thus also aiding their comprehension skills and allowing them to engage in thinking beyond and about the text, an area in which they previously struggled.

Overall, all of the students improved on their decoding and comprehension skills. I was able to determine this through observing them reading and decoding words as well as analyzing their oral and written responses to prompts to questions beyond and about the text. Two lessons in particular that stood out were in relation to caterpillars and butterflies. When starting this topic, we first read a big book, which contained many difficult vocabulary terms as well as ideas that were new to the students. During this lesson the students took turns reading the book. Upon first reading the book, we did not stop very often unless the students had a blaring question. After reading the book through the first time, I then chose specific sections of the book containing higher-level vocabulary words for the students to close read. My hopes were that the students would be able to decode these words as well as synthesize the new information that they were learning via the text.

While reading this book, the students were able to use the strategies that we had been working on in terms of decoding words such as breaking words down into syllables to pronounce these words and ultimately correctly

use these words in context. Not only were the students able to say the words, but also they were also able to infer what the words meant based upon the context. A few of these words included chrysalis, metamorphosis, and molting. After inferring what these specific words meant, the students recognized that this was new information to them, and thus they notated this in their notebooks. In addition to this lesson, the next lesson the students were engaged in followed a similar format. For that lesson though, the students were examining an article on caterpillars and butterflies and then close reading a specific section of the article in order to notate new information that they had learned. Again, this article contained some higher-level vocabulary words that the students were able to decode using the strategies that we had worked on. A few of these words included cocoon, predators, prey, and herbivores. The students were able to decode these words as well as infer the meaning of these words and ultimately distinguish this as new information and again notate this in their notebooks.

Overall, clearly, through these lessons, the students were able to use the close reading strategy to decode words as well as think about principles within, beyond, and about the text. I was able to determine that the students improved throughout the term when comparing their work from the beginning of the term versus their work from the end of the term. When focusing on decoding words and synthesizing information at the beginning of the term, the students struggled. More specifically, when examining a text on frogs and toads, my group really struggled to differentiate between information that they already knew and new information. When identifying new information from the text, the students often responded with “I didn’t learn anything,” or “I don’t know what information is new information.” Despite this, towards the end of the term, the students were no longer responding saying they did not know, but instead were able to decode and use the words from the close reading portions of the text and ultimately differentiate between new and known information. From this, it was clear to me that the students were improving upon their ability to decode and ultimately use words to think more in depth about principles beyond and about the text.

After engaging the lessons implementing this strategy over a few weeks, I conducted a final reading running record assessment with them to determine their improvements. After conducting the final reading running record assessment, the text showed to be a Level K independent for two of the students and a Level L independent for another student. Within this final assessment, the students’ improvements could be seen. After engaging the students with guided reading, and specifically the strategy of close reading throughout the term, they greatly improved. Within this group, there were many strengths as well as components in which the students could

improve upon. In terms of strengths, all of the students in this group improved upon their accuracy rate as well as their self-correction rate. In general, the students made less visual errors than the first time showing me that they have improved upon monitoring their reading. The students also were able to answer more of the questions beyond and about the text. All three students improved upon their comprehension and writing scores. This showed me that they are better able to understand what they are reading and ultimately read for meaning. More specifically, within these running record assessments, one student read off as of but self-corrected to off. Likewise, another student read crooked as crook but self-corrected to crooked. In both of these instances, the students showed their ability to go back and solve words by reading words or phrases again in order to solve these words and or phrases. From close reading sections of books and articles throughout the term and really prompting the students to slow down and pay attention to solving words and phrases and using these words and phrases to read for meaning, it is evident that the students are not more attentive to words and phrases and solving words and phrases within their reading to ultimately help them to understand what they are reading.

While these were major strengths of the entire group, once again, there were also individual strengths within the group. More specifically, Student A excelled in regards to fluency. While they excelled in other areas as well, their greatest improvement can be seen in fluency. In terms of fluency, they were able to use expression when reading, particularly when paying attention to bolded words and punctuation including question marks and exclamation points. This is an area in which Student A previously struggled, as they did not read with any expression during the first assessment. Student B also excelled in regards to fluency, but their greatest improvement can be seen in regards to their comprehension. In terms of comprehension, they were able to use details beyond what the questions asked for when responding to questions within, beyond, and about the text. This is an area in which they previously struggled with, as they could not answer any of the about the text questions during the first assessment. In addition to these improvements, Student C's greatest improvements can be seen within their comprehension and writing. In terms of comprehension, Student C excelled in their ability to answer questions about the text, an area in which they had previously struggled. In terms of writing, Student C excelled in their ability to answer the question using details from the text to support their answer. Previously, Student C just drew a picture and did not write any response, whereas this time, they wrote a response and drew an appropriate picture to support their response. Overall, once again, through these assessments, the students were able to use the close reading strategy to decode words as well as think about principles within, beyond, and about the text when

answering comprehension questions as well as answering written comprehension questions. I was able to determine that the students improved throughout the term when comparing their assessments from the beginning of the term versus their work from the end of the term.

Conclusions and Reflection

Even though the students all displayed many strengths, once again, there were also some group and individual weaknesses in which the students could improve upon. For the group as a whole, even though the students did improve in regards to answering questions beyond and about the text, all of the students still struggled to answer one of the questions presented in the beyond and about the text sections. Struggling to answer these questions impeded the students' overall comprehension ability.

In addition to the group weaknesses, there were also some notable individual weaknesses. More specifically, Student A and Student B struggled to answer a question about the text relating to analyzing the traits and feelings of a specific character within the text. They were both able to determine that the main character in the text was a good person, but were unable to use details and examples from the text to further describe the main character. Furthermore, Student C struggled to answer a question beyond the text relating to inferring the motive of one of the main characters in the text. Upon asking Student C this question, they reworded the question in their response and were on the right track to answering the question, but were unable to fully develop their answer. As next steps for this group of students, I would continue to focus on certain dimensions beyond and about the text. Even though the students have improved in their ability to engage with features beyond and about the text, there were certain features that we did not have time to examine within our guided reading groups, such as analysis and inferring. So, as next steps for these students, I would choose texts as well as supporting activities that allowed the students to develop their ability to analyze characters as well as make inferences about texts. Through engagement in the suggested activities allowing the students to engage with features beyond and about the text to help them comprehend the text, their ability to comprehend the texts will be greatly increased. Ultimately, this will help the student to increase their literacy skills thus preparing them for being successful in future schooling experiences.

Overall, from assessing the students multiple times as well as creating and implementing guided reading lessons with the students, I have been able to address the students' areas of deficit and ultimately help them to improve upon these areas of deficit and, in the process, their overall literacy skills. While at first I was not sure whether or not the guided reading lessons that I planned for the students was going to work, after researching the strategy of close reading, implementing the strategy within the guided reading lessons, and assessing the students to determine the effectiveness of the strategy, I was able to recognize improvements upon the students' literacy skills. Throughout this experience, I have been able to not only be an elementary teacher, but more specifically be

a literacy teacher. I have recognized how to plan lessons that are applicable for meeting all students' literacy needs regardless of their level and have implemented these lessons to help the students develop their literacy skills. From this experience, I further realize that literacy is ultimately the bread and butter of being able to learn, and, because of this, early literacy learning is crucial to a students' future success. I now know that, as stated by Dr. Seuss, "The more that you read, the more things you will know. The more you learn, the more places you'll go." I ultimately am better able to realize the importance of literacy to education in helping students to read, learn, and as a result, go more places.

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