

Sabrina Shisler

## **Final Project: Case Study of a Literacy Learner**

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

The focus of my case study is Zack, a fifteen year old Caucasian male who is about to enter his sophomore year of high school. Zack is the son of my hair dresser. His mother would talk about Zack's struggles with his freshman year of high school. She thought that he would be sent to the Alternative high school in our district because he was failing or close to failing all of his classes this year. He finished the year failing only one class, Algebra. Zack was a member of the challenge program. The challenge program was established to assist students that are at risk of failing and could possibly be sent to the Alternative building in order to join the credit recovery program. There is a challenge program coordinator that meets with each student in the program to discuss his/her progress report in order to make a plan to raise low grades. The challenge program coordinator keeps in contact with both the student and the parents in order to accomplish what is needed for the student to achieve high enough grades to pass all of his/her classes.

I would hear about Zack's struggles in school and wonder if there was anything I could do to help. When I read this project description, I immediately thought of Zack as a potential case study. It was a bonus that Zack was a freshman last year, which means that he took the STAR reading test that was given to all freshmen. This allowed me to have access to data that shows Zack's reading level, which I would not have had if I had chosen a student I have encountered in class. I teach juniors and seniors, who have not been given the STAR reading test.

## **II. Home and Family**

Zack's parents are recently divorced, so he splits time between his mother and father's places of residence. I have never met his father, but his mother is involved in his schooling and seems supportive. As an only child, Zack has not had the pleasure of having brothers and sisters who could possibly supply added support for his success. I am not sure how much schooling Zack's father has completed, but his mother graduated high school and went to a cosmetology school. It does not seem like Zack is surrounded by people that engage in highly literate behavior. I do not think that his mother reads very often based on my attempts to discuss books I have been reading during hair cuts. Again, I cannot definitively say what his home life is like at his father's. Because of the recent divorce, Zack's home life has gone through drastic changes that may be affecting his performance in school.

## **III. Emotional Climate**

Because of his parents' recent divorce, Zack may be struggling emotionally to understand the dynamics of his home life. This emotional struggle could be having a detrimental influence on Zack's success in his classes. Based off Zack's responses to the reading interest inventory that was given during the second lesson, Zack does not seem motivated to read in his free time. His lack of interest in school is demonstrated by his excessive absences and tardies. I have not actually had Zack in class, but I can access his attendance record online. According to those records, Zack had a total of 124 absences and tardies last year. Many of those absences were unexcused, which means that he was in all likelihood skipping. Zack seems capable of being successful in school, but lacks the motivation to put in the effort.

#### **IV. Literacy History**

Even though I have not had Zack as a student in class, I can see from his records that he is diagnosed as special education. I do not have access to his IEP, but his mother told me that he has worked with the special education department and his English teacher to develop methods to improve his writing skills. Zack's STAR reading results can be viewed as Artifact 1. The results show that he is reading at almost an eleventh grade level. This was the first year that the STAR program was used in our district, so I do not have data showing if Zack has only recently started to read above grade level or if he has always been ahead of most of his peers in respect to reading ability. His mother does not always use proper grammar, so he may have problems expressing his thoughts using correct grammar. Since Zack struggles more with writing than reading, I decided to focus one lesson on writing and the other on motivation to read.

#### **V. Summary of Test Results**

In the first lesson, I tested Zack on his ability to organize his thoughts before writing a persuasive essay. I gave Zack an ACT writing prompt and asked him to write down any thoughts he had about how he would respond to the prompt. He had five minutes to organize his thoughts on paper. The second test given in the first lesson was set up the same way as the first test, but I gave Zack a different prompt. This second test occurred after I had discussed and shown Zack various methods that could be used to more effectively prepare to write his persuasive essay. The reasoning behind these tests is given in the "rationale/background" section for lesson plan 1. The tests given during the second lesson consist of the reading interest inventory, three learning goals he will set,

and the determination of a reading source Zack would utilize more often. The reasoning behind these tests is given in the “rationale/background” section for lesson plan 2.

The first test showed that Zack lacked pre-writing skills that would help him write an effective persuasive essay that responded to the ACT writing prompt. As shown in Artifact 2, he just jotted down six ideas about why certain websites should not be blocked. He did not write down any thoughts that could support his ideas. According to the ACT Persuasive Essay Grading Rubric, Artifact 6, in order to obtain the highest score, students should evaluate the counterargument to the position that the student has taken. Zack did not show in his notes that he even considered the counterargument.

The second test was the second attempt at organizing his thoughts about how to respond to an ACT writing prompt. After showing him some different methods that could be used to pre-write, he did much better. His results from the second test can be seen as Artifact 3. He greatly improved his organization by giving supporting notions for each of his ideas that would back-up his position. Zack included the counterargument in this second test. He showed great improvement in this second test. I would fear the clarity of writing that he would use to actually formulate his persuasive response, but effective pre-writing is an important first step to writing a quality essay (Graham, 2007).

The third test, which was given during the second lesson, was the reading interest inventory, Artifact 4. Zack identified his interests in and out of school. These interests were important in his determination of what he would read more often in his free time. The inventory also helped me to establish conversation with Zack about school. He expressed interest in many sports, but especially baseball. Zack was also interested in

video and computer games, watching television, and listening to music. Many of these interests can be used to connect to concepts encountered in most disciplines in school.

The fourth test was the self-determination of three learning goals, which is shown as Artifact 5. Zack wrote down three goals he had after we discussed the importance of taking responsibility for his own learning. A part of taking responsibility involves setting goals for oneself. Zack wrote down three goals he had after I gave an example of the goal-setting process I went through in order to obtain my masters degree in the allotted time I have. His first two goals are important for his academic life, but the third one strayed from being a learning goal. He wants to make the varsity baseball team, which I thought was an admirable goal, so I decided to let him keep that as a learning goal. I discussed the importance strong academics have on an athlete and that he would not be able to achieve his third goal if he does not accomplish his second goal of passing all of his classes.

## **VI. Lesson Plans**

**Lesson 1:** Writing – to prepare for the ACT

**Subject:** Literacy/ ACT Preparation

**Grade Level:** High School (could work for middle school)

**Date:** July 22, 2011

**Duration:** approximately 20 minutes

**Lesson Objective:** To prepare the student for the writing section of the ACT by presenting the scoring guidelines and exploring the student's organizational techniques.

**State Standards:**

**CE 1.1.2** – Know and use a variety of prewriting strategies to generate, focus, and organize ideas (e.g., free writing, clustering/mapping, talking with others, brainstorming, outlining, developing graphic organizers, taking notes, summarizing, paraphrasing).

**CE 1.3.5** – From the outset, identify and assess audience expectations and needs; consider the rhetorical effects of style, form, and content based on that assessment; and adapt communication strategies appropriately and effectively.

**Materials:** Writing prompts, Sample Scoring Guide for ACT Writing, Pen/Pencil, and Paper

**Resources:** High School Content Expectations- English Language Arts by Michigan Department of Education (2006)

ACT Persuasive Essay Rubric (2006)

ACT Writing Test: Sample Essays (2011)

**Rationale/ Background:** According to Graham and Perin, “most contexts of life (school, the workplace, and the community) call for some level of writing skill, and each context makes overlapping, but not identical, demands” (Graham, 2007, p. 9). This quote shows the importance of adaptation of writing skills to a new situation. The use of strategies such as planning and evaluating, are important in order to “accomplish a variety of goals, such as writing a report or expressing an opinion with the support of evidence” (Graham, 2007, p. 9). Pre-writing engages students in activities that aid them in organizing their ideas before they write a first draft, which “improves the quality of their writing” (Graham, 2007, p. 18). Since the student I chose for these lessons struggles with writing, I thought that a good place to start to improve his writing is organizing his thoughts better with pre-writing strategies.

**Opening:** I will start by introducing the importance of the ACT. If the student is not familiar with the writing section, I will briefly explain that it requires students to write an essay in response to a prompt. Students have thirty minutes to compose their responses. I will present the student with the following prompt, “The Children’s Internet Protection Act (CIPA) requires all school libraries receiving certain federal funds to install and use blocking software to prevent students from viewing material considered “harmful to minors.” However, some studies conclude that blocking software in schools damages educational opportunities for students, both by blocking access to Web pages that are directly related to the state-mandated curriculums and by restricting broader inquiries of both students and teachers. In your view, should the schools block access to certain Internet Web sites?”, then ask him to write down any thoughts he has about what he would write. I would make sure he does not just start writing; I want him to think about what he would write first. I will give him five minutes to write down his thoughts.

**Middle:** I will then present a few suggestions as to how he could organize his thoughts more clearly, which could be in an outline, map, or a graphic organizer. During this presentation, I will use his thoughts from the opening to demonstrate how he could organize his thoughts in a way that would better prepare him to write an essay that has a better chance of receiving a high score in the ACT Writing section. I will show him the ACT Persuasive Essay Rubric and explain the important aspects of the essay. Even though this rubric is tailored for the ACT Writing section, I will explain that it is applicable to any opinion or persuasive writing. Since my content area is Chemistry, I will give the example of a research scientist publishing results and how that person would need to back up any conclusions that were made by citing specific data that supports that

conclusion. After this discussion, I will present the student with another sample ACT writing prompt. The instructions will be the same, to write down any thoughts he has about what he would write. This prompt will be “Educators debate extending high school to five years because of increasing demands on students from employers and colleges to participate in extracurricular activities and community service in addition to having high grades. Some educators support extending high school to five years because they think students need more time to achieve all that is expected of them. Other educators do not support extending high school to five years because they think students would lose interest in school and attendance would drop in the fifth year. In your opinion, should high school be extended to five years?” The student will have five minutes to write down his thoughts.

**Conclusion:** After the student has had five minutes to formulate his thoughts, I will comment on how his organization has improved and what he could do to further organize his thoughts. Then I will ask him to look at his thoughts from the two prompts and tell me which one he would prefer to use to write an essay. I will encourage him to give me reasons why he would choose the selected set of thoughts, which should be a good review of the ideas presented in the lesson.

**Possible Adaptations:** If the student has accommodations for the ACT, then those accommodations should be adapted to this lesson.

**Assessment:** Two sheets showing organization of thoughts for ACT prompts

**Lesson 2:** Reading – Taking Responsibility

**Subject:** Literacy/ Reading



**Grade Level:** High School (could work for middle school)

**Date:** July 22, 2011

**Duration:** approximately 20 minutes

**Lesson Objective:** To allow the student to set personal goals for reading in his free time.

The student will take responsibility for his own learning by setting learning goals.

**State Standards:**

**CE 2.3.6** – Reflect on personal understanding of reading, listening, and viewing; set personal learning goals and take responsibility for personal growth

**CE 2.3.2** – Read, view, and/or listen independently to a variety of fiction, nonfiction, and multimedia genres based on student interest and curiosity.

**Materials:** Reading Interest Inventory, Paper and writing utensil for goals

**Resources:** High School Content Expectations- English Language Arts by Michigan Department of Education (2006)

Reading Interest Inventory (Module 2)

Scholastic Book Wizard Website- <http://bookwizard.scholastic.com/tbw/homePage.do>  
(2011-1996)

**Rationale/ Background:** Zack has an above grade-level reading ability of 11.8 based on his STAR reading report he took this past spring as a freshman. The STAR report recommended for him to continue reading in order to improve. Therefore, I thought it was important to figure out his interests so that we could find quality reading materials that appeal to his interests in order to promote intrinsic motivation to continue reading without any outside pressure (CARES). Since Zack was in the challenge program for struggling students last year, it is especially important for him to set personal learning

goals. If he struggles this year like he did last year, he may be sent to the Alternative High School. He needs to learn to take responsibility for himself and one of the first steps in doing so is to set personal goals (MI State Standards).

**Opening:** I will start by giving the student the Reading Interest Inventory.

**Middle:** I am curious about the student's interest in reading books or texts in school, so I will ask questions about school, such as what his favorite book is that he has read as a school assignment. Based off of the interests that he lists, I will ask more probing questions. For example, if he circles quite a few sports that he enjoys but says that he does not read the sports section of the newspaper or sports magazines, I will ask questions about why he does not read those. Since he has an above grade-level reading ability, but is in the challenge program due to low grades, I will ask what he finds the most difficult about school in an attempt to see where the disconnect is between ability and performance.

I will discuss the importance of setting goals and taking responsibility for completing a task to the best of his ability and on time. Any job that he will have, whether it will be in the medical field or at a fast-food restaurant, requires a task to be performed in a certain amount of time. It is important for him to take responsibility and complete the assignment without having to be reminded to work on it. At a job, a boss will notice if a task is not completed when it is supposed to be, even if he/she did not check on the progress of the task. Homework that is given in school has a purpose, and having a due date prepares the student for joining the work force. The purpose is not just to get the homework done; it is about learning to perform the skills correctly. A surgeon that is set the goal of removing an appendix is not just focusing on getting the appendix

out of the body; he/she has to make sure that none of the other organs are damaged in the removal process. The surgeon has to learn the best method for removal that will minimize patient discomfort. He should think about his homework assignments as preparation for the major event, which is the test, just like the surgeon studied the aspects of the surgery before actually performing it. The surgeon had to set the goal of learning the correct method. I will explain how I set goals in my life. In order to get nine transfer credits from the year of student teaching I did, I need to complete my masters within five years of when I student taught. In order to accomplish the goal of completing my masters within those five years, I needed to schedule my graduate courses accordingly. I set a goal and figured out what I needed to do in order to accomplish that goal.

**Conclusion:** I will then ask him to set three learning goals. I will also have him pick out one reading category to engage in more frequently based off of his interests. This reading could be of a non-fiction or fiction book, newspaper, or magazine. I just want him to read more frequently and it should be about something that interests him so that he will want to read without being urged to do so. In order to pick a book that is in his zone of proximal development, I will give him the Scholastic book wizard resource I found online. This resource allows him to search by topic and grade level. I will discuss his goals with him and his choice of reading material to end the lesson.

**Assessments:** Reading Interest Inventory, Learning Goal Statements

## **VII. Reflections on the Differentiated Literacy Lesson Plans**

For the first lesson, after Zack wrote down his thoughts about how to respond to the ACT prompt, I asked him if he has ever seen an ACT grading rubric. Zack said that

he had seen something very similar to the one I had, but he could not remember that much of it. I took him through the main points that the graders are looking for in a top-quality essay. I explained the importance of pre-writing as a way to organize one's thoughts before the actual essay is written. It only takes a couple of minutes to write an outline or make a chart that will provide a logical sequence to supporting arguments. I showed Zack, using his original ideas from the first essay, that he could make an outline. I took his idea of not having pictures for homework and asked him if any of his other ideas could be used to support this idea. He pointed to his fifth note, "harder to make PP slides", that can be seen in Artifact 2. I asked him to explain more about why that fit, and he said that "there are pictures in PowerPoints". I asked him who else uses PowerPoint presentations in school. He said "teachers". I pointed out that the prompt mentioned teachers, but he did not write any notes about teachers. I showed him how he could break up the support for his position into how not blocking certain websites would benefit both students and teachers.

Next, I showed him the part of the rubric that emphasizes the importance of expressing the counterargument to the position that is taken in the essay. I asked him what the counterargument would be, and he said "blocking certain websites". I asked him which websites he thought people would want blocked. He said "games and probably porn". The way he said porn and the fact that he did say it, made me laugh a little bit, which seemed to make him feel more relaxed. I told him that parents would definitely want "explicit materials" blocked on school computers. I explained that it is important to refute the opposing viewpoint. I led him in the right direction by asking him why it could be bad for students and teachers if some body parts terms were blocked from being

searched. He said because of health class. Some classes, such as health, contain content that when searched on the internet could turn up explicit materials, but are a necessary part of the curriculum.

I then asked Zack to read the second ACT prompt. I gave him five minutes to write down any thoughts he had about the prompt on another sheet of paper. His organization is shown in Artifact 3. His thoughts were much more organized than on the first attempt. He stated his position clearly, then developed two reasons supporting his position and pointed out the counterargument. Zack even came up with a couple of ideas for each supporting argument. I was impressed that he thought about the teachers and supplies that would be needed if high school was increased to five years. I asked him which set of notes would he rather use to write an essay, the ones he made for the first prompt or the ones for the second prompt. He quickly chose the second set of notes. I gave him positive feedback about his improvement and reminded him that it was important for him to use precise language and proper grammar. I told him that this was an important first step toward writing a high-scoring persuasive essay on the ACT.

I explained the reasoning behind this lesson in the rationale/background section of lesson plan 1 on page 6. Due to the noticeable increase in organization of his thoughts by using the pre-writing strategy of outlining, I think that the lesson was successful. Graham pointed out the importance of pre-writing as a preliminary step to writing an essay (Graham, 2007). I believe that Artifacts 2 and 3 show that Zack made great improvements in pre-writing during this lesson. I understand that this is just a first step toward a high-scoring ACT persuasive essay. Future lessons would focus more on sentence structure and grammar used to express his ideas.

The second lesson started with Zack completing the Reading Interest Inventory. I questioned him on what video games he likes to play, he said Black Ops, an NFL game and a baseball game. I asked him why he does not read in his free time. He said that it “takes too long”. Even though there may be faster methods to get a task completed, that does not always mean it is the best way. I discussed the importance of reading in order to continue to improve both fluency and comprehension. I explained to him what both terms meant, then asked him what he would choose to read in his free time if he had to read something. He thought about it for a little bit then said the sports section of the newspaper. I set him the goal of reading the sports section at least once a week until the beginning of the school year to see how he enjoys it. I expressed the importance that he needs to try to explore the joy of reading so that it does not seem like an assignment to him. I told him about how I read when I was in elementary school, but stopped reading in middle school and early high school in my free time. I was just waiting for the right book to come along. I told Zack about how reading Harry Potter one summer reawakened my excitement about reading. I told him how I believe that everyone can find a book or some other material that they can enjoy reading. I explained how reading the sports section was a way to try to explore what he would enjoy reading. He seemed to accept that, but did not seem too excited about reading still. I accomplished my goal of having him identify something that he could possibly enjoy reading and setting him the task of reading it, but I do not have clear evidence that this is going to instill a desire to read in his free time. Time will tell if this was an effective conversation with Zack.

The next part of the second lesson dealt with goal setting and taking responsibility for one’s own learning. I detailed what I would say in the middle section of lesson plan 2

on page 10. This part of the lesson had me model my goal setting by giving examples from my life. His body language told me that he understood what I was saying. I asked him what one of his goals was when it came to school. He said that he wanted to graduate with his friends. I asked him what he needed to do in order to accomplish his goal. He said that he needed to pass all of his classes. Then I asked him how he planned on passing his classes. He said by doing his homework. I asked him to think of three learning goals he wanted to set for himself. I told him to think about it for a few minutes and to write them down on a sheet of paper. His responses are documented in Artifact 5. I demonstrated the logical thought process used to decide how a goal could be accomplished, then asked him to do the same with guiding questioning. Zack established three goals that he would like to see carried out.

I believe that this lesson was a success because he accomplished my goal for him, which was taking responsibility for his learning by setting learning goals for himself. Even though the third goal was not directly academic, it still related to his academic success. He would not be able to participate as a member of the varsity baseball team if he was failing his classes. I cannot ensure that Zack will utilize the logical thought process we discussed, but he demonstrated this process when I asked about what was needed in order for him to make the varsity baseball team. He said that he would need to improve his release in order to throw the ball further, and that he would need to learn how to hit a curve ball better. This shows that he was able to carry some of the lesson over to a new situation. Hopefully he will do the same when a new situation presents itself.

### **VIII. Recommendations to Teachers and Parents**

I would recommend to Zack's parents and his future teachers to take the time to determine Zack's interests in order to promote intrinsic motivation (CARES). Based off Zack's academic record, he is not self-motivated to learn the material because he enjoys the topic. He had absences from all of his classes, which shows a general apathy toward school, rather than just one subject. If he continues to set goals for himself and takes responsibility for doing the work necessary to pass a class, he has the possibility of being successful in any course. If Zack continues to practice using pre-writing strategies, he has a better chance of writing a quality persuasive essay (Graham, 2007). Once Zack masters pre-writing strategies, I would suggest his English teacher focus on grammar. I did not design the lessons to observe his usage of grammar, but I would guess, based off his mother's grammar, that he may have deficits in that area. In conclusion, the main focus should be increasing Zack's motivation to learn. He seems like a good kid that is capable of learning as long as he feels it is important to learn. When he was close to failing and having to move to the Alternative building, he did what was necessary to pass his classes. CARES stresses the importance of motivation, but it does not mention that it seems to be one of the most difficult ideas to teach someone. Zack needs to gain intrinsic motivation and his parents and teachers can help, but he needs to take responsibility for himself and his learning.



**Resources**

ACT Writing Test: Sample Essays (2011). ACT Inc.  
<<http://www.actstudent.org/writing/sample/index.html>>

*“Adaptations Are Essential: Early Years Writing”*. CARES.

Graham, S., & Perin, D. (2007). *Writing next: Effective strategies to improve writing of adolescents in middle and high schools--A report to Carnegie Corporation of New York*. Washington, DC: Alliance for Excellent Education.

High School Content Expectations- English Language Arts (2006). Michigan Department of Education.

Persuasive Essay Rubric-ACT. < [http://www.michigan.gov/documents/mde/ELA-ACT\\_Persuasive\\_Essay\\_Analytic\\_Rubric\\_173095\\_7.pdf](http://www.michigan.gov/documents/mde/ELA-ACT_Persuasive_Essay_Analytic_Rubric_173095_7.pdf)>

## Artifact 1

This report presents diagnostic information about the student's general reading skills, based on the student's performance on a STAR Reading test.

Time for First Part: 4 minutes 26 seconds

Time for Second Part: 4 minutes 50 seconds

1173	11.8	57	49-70	10.8		4.9-11.8
<b>SS</b>	<b>GE</b>	<b>PR</b>	<b>PR Range</b>	<b>IRL</b>	<b>Est. ORF</b>	<b>ZPD</b>

This student's Grade Equivalent (GE) score is 11.8. His test performance is therefore comparable to that of an average eleventh grader after the eighth month of the school year. Zachary also achieved a national Percentile Rank (PR) of 57. This score is in the average range and means that Zachary scored greater than 57% of students nationally in the same grade. The PR range indicates that, if this student had taken the STAR Reading test numerous times, most of his scores would likely have fallen between 49 and 70. It reflects the amount of statistical variability in a student's PR score.

These scores indicate that Zachary likely reads for pleasure, information, and academic purposes. He can use indexes, glossaries, and footnotes in textbooks. Zachary likely previews chapters before reading and takes notes while studying. At this level, Zachary needs to continue to read nonfiction materials, classic literature, and the daily news. Zachary also needs to strengthen his ability to read the kinds of materials required in future school and work experiences.

For optimal reading growth, Zachary needs to:

- Maintain a minimum of 30 minutes of guided independent reading practice daily
- Continue recreational reading on a daily basis
- Use self-correction strategies to maintain flexibility in reading for different purposes
- Identify bias, persuasion, and propaganda within text
- Learn strategies for acquiring specialized or technical vocabulary

This student's Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) for independent reading is book level 4.9-11.8. If Accelerated Reader™ reading management software is being used in your classroom or school, Zachary should be encouraged to select books with book levels in the ZPD. These books will provide optimal reading challenge without frustration. The ZPD, however, is approximate. Success at any book level also depends on the student's interest and prior knowledge of a book's content.

The following techniques will also help ensure the student's continued growth in reading:

- Guide reading practice so that Zachary averages at least 85 percent on Accelerated Reader Reading Practice Quizzes.
- Once Zachary is able to maintain an 85% average, encourage him to raise his average to 90% or higher. High averages are associated with the greatest reading gain.
- Use the Accelerated Reader Diagnostic Report and Student Record Report for more detailed information about the student's reading practice.
- Teach Zachary how to select books throughout his ZPD.
- Help Zachary establish a minimum book level, minimum percent correct, and point goals for each marking period.

**Artifact 2**

Essay 1 scan showing Zack's thoughts about essay 1 in the first lesson.

**Artifact 3**

Essay 2 scan showing Zack's thoughts about essay 2 in the first lesson.

**Artifact 4**

Reading Interest Inventory two scans showing Zack's answers to the inventory questions in the second lesson.

**Artifact 5**

Goals scan showing Zack's three learning goals.

**Artifact 6**

ACT Persuasive Essay Grading Rubric used to show Zack what the graders of the ACT are looking for in a persuasive essay.