

## **TE-846 : Discussion #2**

Since I teach at the High School level, I see very few interventions for a student due to his lack of literacy. A majority of any literacy issues are based on the actual accommodations rather than interventions. Most of the students that have difficulty already know if they are strong or weak readers and have investigated the necessary techniques for them to succeed. I use the word investigated because I have found that there are some students who struggle with reading and writing, but don't put forth the effort. I hear, "When am I ever going to use this?" or "Why do I have to know this?" They just sit there and complain. I'm sure I'm not the only one that hears this. That's where science comes in handy. I might try to perform demonstrations that might have connections to a topic we have discussed or is linked to something that they do care about; Find the hook and reel them in. Motivation is a hard thing to supply in any classroom for any student. Differentiated learners are no different. Some have a lack of motivation due to self-efficacy issues. Linnenbrink and Pintrich link student motivation to self-efficacy in that "their performance capabilities in a particular context or a specific task or domain" (2002, pg 315) have been poor in the past. Students feel that if they have done poorly in the past, they will do so in the present. Some of the techniques that I employ in my classes to help with this issue are based on success and variety. I change up my activities and assessments so I can find out who excels at what. I make it a big deal when my less motivated students step up. A student (call him Seth) with severe ADD/ADHD issues is not satisfied with the D he is receiving in my class. He is a bright student, but loses things the minute he steps out of my door. He forgets everything that is homework related, and when he writes things down, he can't read what he wrote. In an effort to study for the next test he worked night and day to finish his homework and study. When he received one of the highest grades in my three classes, I brought him in a gravity chair to sit in for the class period. Now he has something positive to think about instead of his past difficulties with testing and classwork.

For some students, based on prior assignments and projects, I recognize that the current assignment is challenging for them. They feel as if their literacy difficulties may cause them to produce substandard work. This is something that may take some time to manifest and recognize. For those students, we might engage in discussions of their past work and effort. We discuss what they think they did well on where they think they could improve, and what we could expect of this next assignment. We establish mastery goals that lead to "developing new skills, trying to understand their work, improving their level of competence, or achieving a sense of mastery based on self-referenced standards" (Ames, 1992, pg 262). I try not to base their work on the results of the entire class but the improvement of the skills they have shown so far.

Other students have difficulties with their grasp of the English language. My school district is located in an area where we have a few migrant families. Some of these families are only here seasonally but many have settled in the region and send their children to my school. While I have taught many students with this type of background, two cases stand out. I had an opportunity to teach a male student from Mexico (I will refer to him as Steve), and a female student (Emily) from Guatemala. Both students took the same Earth Science class with me last year, but where in different hours. As class progressed, I found that they both had a limited but adequate grasp of conversational English. I knew right away that my limited amount of Spanish wasn't going to help me with either situation. As class progressed, Steve made friends easily, contributed to class discussions, engaged in numerous personal conversations with me, and rarely had any dealings with the ESL paraprofessional for issues due to lack of work or failures. He maintained a B/C average and I felt that he was actually getting something out of my class. Emily, started much the same as Steve, however, as the trimester progressed, she struggled with reading, she rarely did homework, failed most of the tests, rarely talked to myself or other students, and became more and more withdrawn. I tried my best to help Emily by reading homework and test questions for her, allowing for more time on all her assignments, and basically just tried to talk with her. I was becoming more and more frustrated as my attempts to reach her failed, so I

talked to our ESL paraprofessional. After some evaluations and discussions, Emily's situation became clearer to me. "First language reading skills are related to second-language reading skills, but that children must have first-language literacy in the skill for this relation to exist." (August, 2006, pg 362). Our paraprofessional informed me that Emily is the only one in her family that can speak conversational English and she has extreme difficulty with reading English. I was kind of embarrassed in the fact that I let it go on as long as it did. Furthermore, Emily's literacy in her native language is weak at best also. Her education in Guatemala consisted of a "teacher" coming to her village once a week and writing in the dirt. In comparison, Steve attended schools in Mexico with access to textbooks and had siblings and parents who could read and write in English or Spanish. It was understandable why Emily struggled with school and literacy. Her background knowledge was extremely limited. Emily could be categorized as a "type 3 learner, where she exhibits low levels of performance in all areas due to inadequate learning" (Echevarria and Graves, 2003, pg 29). It wasn't until we went through all the levels of the assessment process which includes "Native-language knowledge, English language knowledge, school experience and academic background, and behavioral patterns" (Echevarria and Graves, 2003, pg 5) that I was able to give Emily the assistance she needed. In retrospect, I wish we could have assessed her earlier to determine her individual needs in all her classes. She has been working on her literacy difficulties in both languages with a bilingual paraprofessional over the summer and from what I have been told, is making great progress and is a much happier student.

The last case I will share is of a OHI student whose impairments were due to a car accident at an early age. I'll call him Simon. Simon had no verbal or emotional filter whatsoever. This sometimes led to laughter, and sometimes to anger. When he shared in conversation in the classroom, I found that he was right on target most of the time. Due to his physical limitations, it took him a long time to write anything down, and he would become very frustrated. During normal class periods I would talk to him constantly, keeping him focused and engaged. He was funny and intelligent. I thought that I could apply the same technique to assessment situations. So when we tested, I would have him do as much as he could by himself, then, I would read the questions to him and I would award him points on the spot. . This technique allowed Simon to ignore his frustrations due to his difficulties and focus on the learning. Although a lot of work, it worked out well for everyone, as long as I could have him whisper his answer and not shout it out to the whole class.