# Reading for a Purpose

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## Introduction

Reading comprehension standards met by third grade students are an increasing concern. Greater numbers of students are being identified in need of the improving scores on district, state, and national standardized exams. Identifying researched based methods that solve this problem have not been identified. Struggling students need targeted support. While developing an Action Research Project in literacy, I will be working on completing my Masters of Education attending Northwest Christian University, while teaching a third grade class at Veneta Elementary School. Reflecting on the course studies and past experiences, ideas develop to combine curriculum design and instructional technology in a differentiated manners to meet student needs. *Reading For A Purpose* is an extended goal of this investigation, research, practice, and evaluation that create new approaches with a twist. Utilizing prior studies and projects will enhance my plan to improve literacy skills.

Three main goals will be focused on to aid third grade students in establishing reasons to read, building skills and strategies, and improving comprehension, These goals are life-time essentials. Incorporating the theories and activities proposed will be created into lesson plans. They will include intervention strategies that are modeled for students by students, staff, and families. All are needed to implement this research. The integration of aligned goals that support the increase of student comprehension and the results should demonstrate this accomplishment. Meeting expectations for individual student's progress and class average gains. Remaining on track with ideals is a challenge challenge to achieve Common Core State Standards and Benchmark goals and still give students the best education possible. The literature reviewed contains many common philosophies but shares several conflicting perspectives. Much research is available on the topic of comprehension and the concerns about trends that concentrate on fluency as a primary concern first and foremost. Note the decline in comprehension achievement. Nearly all of my findings state the need for student success in school and beyond, rely on the ability to comprehend written language. A majority of those

involved in Education agree on these main ideas but have some varying strategies in realizing these accomplishment. The direct instruction or scripted curriculum models often leave out the professional judgment of the teacher that prevent connections to a student' personal needs. Research is conflicting, with regard to the positive and negative effects using various curriculum models. Whole language approaches seem to be in battle with mandated alignments between grade levels. Whole language often builds literacy achievement using novels and nonfiction sources for students. Many teachers having taught over twenty years state, 'one stand alone' program has not been undeniably proven to be the most successful in its approach. This becomes very evident when our schools are analyzing new curriculum adoptions nearly every seven years to remain current in research based curriculum that meets set literacy standards.

There are vast reasons for the need to be literate. History states the major changes in literacy after the printing press made the printed word more accessible to a larger population. Once written word became a common tool of communication for the general population, not just for the financially or socially elite, world-wide literacy rates dramatically increased. New standards and goals are continually being developed to meet the needs and demands of our society. The literature I reviewed, with respect to timelines of statements, verifies that improvements are being made in the identification and support for student comprehension success and is an ongoing concern.

The findings of this research and programs utilized in local schools can lead to the implementation of differentiate instruction theories using technology can increase student comprehension abilities and self-confidence, which will more likely benefit the life-long learning goals set for our students.

In reviewing researched based literature and journals, and in reflecting on interventions implemented, I think linking technology to student challenges will prove very beneficial in recording student comprehension with more accuracy. As I have collaborated on with colleagues in multiple districts over the past twenty-four years, I am seeking to implement my action research to verify that enhancing reading comprehension with technology based interventions both in lessons can improve in student comprehension. With students emerging as independent readers in third grade, I want to find valuable supports that allow students to reach attainable and marked growth toward academic success by strengthening reading comprehension in the present and in their future.

## My Proposed Action Research Questions

**Primary Proposed Research Question**: How do tools and strategies affect student achievement in reading comprehension using differentiated instruction with technology enhancements?

**Secondary Proposed Research Question**: What strategies can students use to make the greatest impact on increasing their reading comprehension and recorded performance results?

## Abstract

Reading has been the core focus of all academics and continues to be, even in this incredible era of the 21st Century in which our global society is infused with technology. Our world has reached amazing literacy rates within our population. As this has occurred, higher academic standards are set for students by leading countries. In the United States, increasing Reading Comprehension standards is a focal point today and much research is an ongoing focus by private and public entities.

For the past five decades considerable research and adopted trends have framed the methods of teaching reading to elementary age students. But as the pendulum of educational mandates change schools adopt the ‘newest’ and ‘best’ practices and the consensus of methods used to meet these goals change. Often politically influenced and/or financially manifested these methods are implemented into our public school systems. New standards are adopted and the core curriculum changes between grade levels. The text book companies are infusing all core subjects into the most recent standards to compete with one another to make the sale.

Technology is often an extra cost in the packages offered and in these budget deficit times, these beneficial add-ons are not often purchased and the accessible by our teachers or students is vacant. Many teachers are left with little time to incorporate supplemental components when differentiating instruction is needed. Thus, limiting the choices by teachers and needs of students to meet mandated expectations with few resources seems unfair. All of our students are unique individuals and one program does not fit all learning styles. Time and energy beyond the typical teaching day, normally well beyond eight hours, is required to locate and implement technology applications for student use. With more and more students in our ‘reasonably sized’ classes there is less and less time for individual student planning of lessons, differentiated interventions, and immediate feedback.

Therefore, and an overview of problem solving strategies need to be targeted for teachers to expose student needs, so that a student can be motivated using feasible sources. Finding subject passions of students can allow them to embrace the content so that they can improve comprehension strategies. Building confidence and courage in students can lead to more strategic use of tools that work for each student’s learning style can increase opportunities throughout their lives.

What remains constant is that we are educating elementary students from kindergarten through fifth grade with the tools and strategies that can empower them for a life-time. In turn, we are creating the foundation for every entity in our society. Since the core subject of reading is integrated in all other subject matters, our language arts skills are incredibly necessary. Each student is valuable and no limitation should impede their ability to make marked gains in their literacy abilities.

## Participants

### The Study Demographics

My study will occur with the students in my Third Grade Class at Veneta Elementary School, Fern Ridge School District. My class has a large percentage of students with low scoring assessments in reading comprehension. I have twenty-nine students: ten girls and nineteen boys currently. Our school has a student population of approximately 360 students from kindergarten through fifth grades. We have two classes of nearly equal size of Third Grade Students. Fifty-nine percent of our students are signed up for the free and reduced breakfast and lunch program. V.E.S. is located west of Eugene, Oregon, in Lane County. There are city, rural, and farm families with students who attend the two elementary schools, one middle school, and one high school. There are five cities (by name) included in our district. I aim to identify six to eight students in the group to include in my action research study.

Veneta Elementary is a Tiltle I school currently. Under this umbrella, consent is not specifically needed for our staff to identify and implement strategic and intensive interventions for students in need. In choosing , a small target group in which to record individal statistics and the ability to correlate the class averages I will obtain a snap shot of the data associated with the interventions I am proposing to use. I am hesitant to establish pre-chosen students for the small

target group with the transient student turnover rates in our school history over the 'Winter Break', as I have already lost one student with a sudden move since I began planning this proposal.

Since we have a rotating group of students receiving stategic and intensive interventions as most needed from the concensus of the Grade Level Team per six week review. This may effect whom I have to work with as those with only Individual Educational Programs for writing only will be students that I would like to include in this study. Some of these students have little parental support. Some parents are struggling with the ability to be of any assistance to their child as it has been stated, "This is too difficult for me, can you show us how to do…". Other parents/guardians are eager to be directed and are unsure how to procede with their knowledge and resources. All students should benefit from the incorporation of the core focus.

## Identification of Reading Comprehension Needs

I will use archived assessments currently available from programs in use at V.E.S. and incorporating a **Likert Scale** assessment designed for my class. Several programs that have archived and recent data that are concurrently being used by V.E.S. will be explain in the following sections under Data Collection.

## Data Collection

### DIBELS Fluency Evaluations

Some models have been fully embraced recently in Oregon and other states. One of these is the Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS) program, created by Dr. Roland Good and Dr. Ruth Kaminski of the Dynamic Measurement Group, developed with the

University of Oregon in 2003. The 6th Edition of this web-based database is currently available curriculum. The prior versions are used by many schools and districts at this time. This new version is addressing the issues of interventions primarily based on one-minute timings. Note: these programs must be purchased and that creates a concern that the 'newest' programs are not being used. The questions arise are the outdate versions inadequate and not needed due to budget constraints? Can professional techniques adjust for the older version? The comparisons of programs used are issues to ponder but are not the main focus of this research. When districts incorporate other means to 'update' needs in their needs, seven year incorporation of the RTI and DIBELS models purchased and parts of the new editions can be included as budgets allow. Many school districts that piloted these programs noted early on that the 'fluency test' or 'rate' data is just an indicator of students at risk. Districts stating the correlations between the rate at which children read and the likelihood of their ability to comprehend are significant in deeming interventions align with current research. Districts attempting to incorporate a 'ten year' execution of these programs often jumped to drastic interventions or limited development for assessment by using these indicators as the main source for interventions.

In the sixth edition of DIBELS, quicker evaluations are designed to address this concern. The first version has been criticized for its hasty approach using short analysis on key components that impact reading comprehension. Public schools today are in the midst of a very data driven school settings. This came about due to the need to validate goals used to meet *No Child Left Behind Act* of 2001 requirements. Response to Intervention Model (RTI) is often integrated with DIBELS. These systems are incorporated to target those students that are not meeting standards set by grade level requirements. When this data is consolidated then students are identified as needing strategic and intensive interventions. Upon six week intervals a team

that consists of specialists, an administrator, and the classroom teachers design intervention for each student in need. The nice part in conferencing with guardians of students in need is the ability to show statistical data that gives a window into the students reading skills and reading progression over a period of months and years.

**EasyCBM**

EasyCBM is another database with clear statistical support that uses fluency rate assessment indicators and has comprehension evaluation measures that show data; subtopic analytical charts and graphs that indicate areas of concern for individual and class averages. This system can work to support the findings in DIBELS or contrast them, which can support further evaluations for student interventions needed. This program lends itself to incorporation of differentiated instruction analysis to show whether interventions are making an impact on student's ability to demonstrate meeting or exceeding comprehension standards. In many student's cases at V.E.S. the EasyCBM and RTI programs make similar findings along with our Treasures Curriculum and DIBELS assessments. These are likely to be supportive data sources that correlate common and systematic data records.

**DIBELS Dazed Comprehension Component and Title I Differentiated Learning Groups**

Students benefit from whole group instruction at grade level to incorporate the access of subject content and vocabulary that are needed in all subjects in standards based curriculum. This was summarized in most of the literature I reviewed. Several sources stated that the children develop language heard and spoken before they are able to read and write using this vocabulary. As students master the language concepts of grammar and higher order processing skills, such as

the ability to inference and synthesize content, within sequential or grade level materials they cannot fully utilize more advance levels as they read independently.

Students need to spend time reading at their ability level to gain skills for fluency and comprehension success. Students need to have quality modeling using reading skills, time spent practicing independently, and practice reading to others in the classroom and at home. One way to begin to foster literate conversation in your classroom is to consider helping students draw the text-to-self, text-to-text, and text-to-world connections (Keene & Zimmerman, 1997).

The consensus is that students need to read frequently to themselves, with others, and be read to. The more students read the more they advance. When students have a purpose to read or see that reading is an essential component in the lives of others, they will do the same.

There are many students that are identified as unmotivated or reluctant readers. There can be many reasons for this. Some of these students have a variety of learning challenges. They can range from inabilities of being able to track text, maintain concentration, process information, or process language in written form. Research states there can be many reasons for these issues, many of which are not easily identified. Assumptions and unprofessional judgments shouldn't be made as incorrect assessments can derail literacy accomplishments that impact student's futures.

**Scholastic Weekly Reader (Hard Copy and Computer Links)**

Scholastic Weekly Reader (hard copy and online) are improving resources that have integrated a purpose for reading to meet increased academic standards and student preferences of content. This will be my home-to school connected activity used for formative assessment and will be reviewed by logged data analysis component in compiling links to success.

Nearly all references found that use of ongoing formative and summative assessments are necessary. Most agreed that formative assessments and frequent interactions with students were

most valuable. Finding a reason for reading by students was the critical component. All students have value and have an impact on our society. In maintaining a cohesive, nonjudgmental classroom environment that empowers learners to overcome academic impacting learning challenges can allow for increased self-confidence in students when differentiated instruction is included in lessons.

When students who have writing challenges and have alternative methods to express their reading comprehension skills rather than by handwritten essays more accurate assessments can be obtained. Different methods in achieving reading comprehension goals of independently read material or materials read to a student that processes the information through auditory measures can drastically change the data collected with regard to comprehension skills and abilities. Correct analysis leads to aiding students with the best instructional methods that can be used for their life-long literacy needs.

**Creating Enhancements of Comprehension**

The 21st Century technological advancements are certainly impacting the perceptions of many for the need to read. Making connections with the visuals, content links, and tools to create a reason to share information learned. Correlating design shapes, images, and color coding effects to make text concepts more intense can help store information into memory and aid in recall. But these forms are great aids to instruction and do not replace higher level analysis and communication.

Oregon Assessment of Knowledge and Skills on-line resources set Oregon's current goals and mandates that students must master on summative assessments. In planning to meet or exceed standards students can practice **OAKS Sample Tests** can be found and used as formative assessment tools by schools and families in Oregon.

In my action research, Field Notes and Observational Records will be kept and analyzed. References to researched based data will be correlated. These notes will be based on current Common Core State Standards used in lesson plan designs to ensure students are receiving appropriate curriculum as differentiation is implemented.

Archived Reports will form the baseline data along with the **Inquiry Data from the Likert Scale: Survey Monkey Results**. This will show a connection to or disqualify the strategies used to make marked gains in overcoming discrepancies between fluency rates and comprehension levels. Having a baseline data is the only way data makes sense to me. How else would there be a noted progression or decline or stagnant outcomes? Then the data collected can be analyzed as to how the final data measures up. These data collection strategies will show measurable outcomes as to whether the chosen interventions make a difference in performance or attitude of students. The baseline, mid-point formative assessments (teacher reviewed/student reviewed), and summative assessments will be evident in triangulation of graphic data reports. I am using baseline of information found in the Archived Artifacts with respect to a collection of the same Student Generated: Standardized Tests (DIBELS and EasyCBM) data from an archived time/data correlation to evidence prior to my action research on students.

**Comparing Students Literacy Skills: Fluency v. Comprehension**

It is critical for my audience to understand and have background knowledge that fluency is commonly associated with the ease of reading at a conversational rate, with voice, and expression. When fluent reading can be done by students using corresponding grade level material, students are likely to comprehend well. Even though some students read at a slower rate they can have more understanding than those who read fast and monotonously. Some high rate readers have no comprehension of what they read. A balance of the two or identifying

discrepancies should be made and might lead to student disabilities. If a child can inflect feelings and emotions of the characters in the stories they read aloud they are more likely to develop stronger language skills. Studies show misconceptions of student's comprehension abilities may be creating unnecessary interventions or inappropriate ones.

## Discussion

Those interested in my findings will likely be instructors, cohorts at NCU, parents, and colleagues involved in teaching language arts. These families of these students and staff that work with these students, the Third Grade Class of 2012-2013, should be most eager to see the results of my action research. The community that will work with these students as educators and future employers will likely benefit from the change in trend lines to higher literacy rates and standards met will also benefit from new strategies and skills build from this foundation strengthening in each child.

When students have a purpose they value for reading and desire to meet that purpose comprehension goals are easier to meet. When teachers, parents, and community members are shown to make connections and create enthusiastic relationships that incorporate the reason to read to obtain entertainment and new information they contagiously affect children with these same desires. Children mature by desire to please and the feelings of meeting approval and acceptance is human nature. Then it is our obligation to ensure we involve students and their families to make our students' academic success more than measuring up to assessments. Our focus needs to be on the greater assets of reading well. To obtain an old value of literacy with a new generation connection to embrace the 21st Century realities and opportunities for the upcoming generations we must make time to show the real reasons we read.

Therefore, the community that I plan to engage in the discussion of my findings will enhance '*Reading For A Purpose'* with my students in one way or another. The more we research, discuss, and intervene, the better education our children will receive.

## Research and Intervention Timeline

I will implement small group and individual instruction to differentiate leaning tools and techniques for the targetted students and with students included in the small groups. I will incorporate trained educational assistants to work with deemed interventions that align with the whole class instruction to meet benchmark goals for third graders. I will add technology to enhance core content of the adopted curriculum. Communication will be made open and frequent between staff and families to reach optimum gains. Increase comprehension skills requires that students are heard and respected but encouraged topushed themselves to reach high and attainable goals.

Upon the findings of the baseline data the details of the interventions will be incorporated with the theories and programs used in V.E.S. The consolidation of data will be included in the statistical findings of this Action Research.

# Proposed Action Research Timeline

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Action Research

Timeline

Activity 6.2

| | **2012-2013** | | **Reading Comprehension** |
|---|---|---|---|
| Weeks | Dates | | Actions |
| D1 | Oct. 22 - Nov. 28 | | Introduction to Research Methods |
| D2 | Oct. 29 - Nov. 4 | | Reflection of Research Methods |
| D3 | Nov. 5 - Nov. 11 | | Identification of Focus Area |
| D4 | Nov. 12 - Nov. 18 | | Literature Review of Focus Area |
| D5 | Nov. 19 - Nov. 25 | * | Outline Plan of Interventions |
| | | * | Identification of Participants |
| | | * | Identify Data Collection Strategies |
| | | | (DIBELS, EasyCBM, Likert Scale) |
| D6 | Nov. 26 - Dec. 2 | * | Review Baseline Data |
| | | * | Plan Overview of Implementation |
| | | | of Intervention Goals |
| | | * | Consult with Grade Level Team |
| | | | and Supervising Principal |
| | | * | Creation of Action Research |
| | | | Timeline |
| D7 | Dec. 3 - Dec. 9 | | Continue Literature Review |
| | | | Addition of References |
| | | | Literature Review on Focus Area |
| D8 | Dec. 10 - Dec. 16 | | Research Proposal Due |
| D= Development in EDUC 507 | | | |

| **Weeks** | **Dates** | **Student Contact Days** | **Actions** | **Data** |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | Phase 1 Intervention | |
| 1 | Jan. 2 - Jan. 6 | 3 | Begin Intervention | Likert Survey |
| 2 | Jan. 7 - Jan. 13 | 5 | Intervention | DIBELS |
| 3 | Jan. 14 - Jan. 20 | 5 | Intervention | EasyCBM |
| 4 | Jan. 21 - Jan. 27 | 5 | Intervention | DIBELS |
| 5 | Jan. 28 - Feb. 1 | 3 | Intervention | EasyCBM |
| 6 | Feb. 4 - Feb. 10 | 5 | Intervention | DIBELS and Likert Survey |

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | 26 | | |
| Phase 2 Intervention | | | | |
| 7 | Feb. 11 - Feb. 17 | 5 | Intervention | EasyCBM |
| 8 | Feb. 18 - Feb. 24 | 3.5 | Intervention | DIBELS |
| 9 | Feb. 25 - Mar. 3 | 5 | Intervention | EasyCBM |
| 10 | Mar. 4 - Mar. 10 | 5 | Intervention | DIBELS |
| 11 | Mar. 11 - Mar. 15 | 5 | Intervention | EasyCBM |
| 12 | Mar. 18 - Mar. 23 | 5 | Make-Up and Data Consolidation | Compiling All Data |
| | | 28.5 | | |
| | | 54.5 | | |

Note: It is likely that during this timeline adjustments may need to be done if there are emergency school closures due to power outages or unforeseen circumstances.

This small group of students will demonstrate learned skills and strategies to students that are meeting/exceeding comprehension standards. I will use technology tools to eleviate learning challenges that may hinder the accurate reports of student comprehension use in the mainstream setting.

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