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Student Background and Assessment

**Part I. Introduction to Focal Student**

 Indianapolis Public schools tend to have a relatively bad reputation from an outside perspective. Generally, the complaints have to do with a lack of money, structure, and the overall dynamic of an inner city school. Shortridge Magnet High School for Law and Public Policy, however, offers an elevated experience for students with clean behavior records and interest in student government. This school fosters students from seventh grade through high school, and this disparity is evident when walking through the hallways as tiny kids with huge backpacks scurry from class to class followed by seven foot senior athletes. IPS as a whole hosts over 50% African American students, and just under 25% of Hispanic and White students. There is a small percentage of multi-racial students and barely any American Indians and Asians. Over 75% of the student population receives free lunch and at least another 15% receive reduced lunch (ips.k12.in.us). These staggering numbers exemplify the socioeconomic situation that most of the students in IPS grow up in.

 The student that I have had the opportunity to tutor, Jeremy, is an African American seventh grader at Shortridge High. Looking in, Jeremy is a fairly typical student of Shortridge and IPS in general. When assessing the data provided by the school, I took note that he is in the special education program and receives help from aids in a few of his classes. According to his failing grades in four of these classes as well as the extremely low grades in the others, it is clear that these aids are not providing substantial enough help for him to keep up. His SRI scores explain his grades as he can only read at a first or second grade level while taking seventh grade classes. Because he is so far behind in reading, every subject grows harder and harder as content literacy becomes a necessity.

 From my brief tutoring sessions with Jeremy, his shyness has made conversation seemingly one-sided. I generally ask questions with no avail until I provide probing questions or ideas on how to respond. After an initial interview and tutoring session, the only interest that Jeremy repeatedly admits to have is football. However, football season has not started yet, and he has never played on an official team before. I am also concerned that because of his failing grades, he will not even be eligible to play. Nevertheless, using football as a motivating factor in his education as well as a starting point for lesson planning, I have a lot of avenues to work with. In addition to football, another interest I could glean from Jeremy was television. In combination with football, this also provides interesting and engaging options for lesson plans. In the future, I would like to try and dig deeper into Jeremy’s interests, but I think that my position as an outside tutor with a limited number of sessions inhibited Jeremy from opening up to me. Further casual conversation in later weeks informed me that Jeremy has a few siblings, and after Halloween weekend, he told me that he had a sleep over with some of his friends and, but did not go trick or treating. At school, I never noticed him interacting with peers and this may have been because of his small size or his current stage of cognitive and emotional development. But I was happy to learn that he had friends outside of school to help him develop socially.

 I think that Jeremy does have potential to do a lot better in the classroom. He does want to do well in order to make his parents happy, but the daily homework and the classwork tend to be overwhelming. I think that more than anything, Jeremy needs to establish competence. In one of my lessons, I had Jeremy read football plays aloud. He had no trouble sounding out most of the words, but he could barely remember what he had just read. He told me that this “fake reading” was the problem that he has in all of his classes. This was an issue I remember having when I was younger, and it is one of the toughest obstacles to overcome when gaining content literacy. Without remembering the basics of a reading, meaning making is essentially impossible. I only received this students SRI score, so it is hard to do a full data analysis of his areas of strengths and weaknesses. But knowing he is very far behind in reading gives me a basis and reason to work with reading comprehension. Challenging his content literacy skills with reading comprehension practice will significantly help him in every one of his classes.

 By talking to Jeremy and seeing the test results that I have, I am wondering how his disability is specifically hurting his performance in the classroom. I have reason to believe that he has a hard time concentrating and this makes it hard for him to internalize readings. I think reading practice in different formats and modes of delivery could significantly help his critical literacy skills. In lessons that I asked Jeremy to cross Gardner’s multiple intellegences by drawing, writing or acting, I noticed that he made more connections and excelled. Meeting with Jeremy once a week made me question what his home life was like and how that was specifically helping/hurting his educational development. Now that Jeremy is marked as a Special Education student multiple grade levels below his peers in testing and current classes, I wonder if his teachers will be able embrace his talents, or they will continue to teach him the bare minimum towards the test.

**Part II: The Intervention Plan**

Before I ever met Jeremy, his SRI scores and grades informed me that he is very far behind. When I finally met him and did an initial interview, I could tell that his failures and shortcomings in the past had damaged his competence and willingness to take risks. Now, he is recognized on the attendance list as special education and aids constantly help him complete the minimum requirements in every class. Jeremy lost his natural curiosity and desire to problem-solve because teachers expect so little from him. This is why I wanted to make our tutoring session about what he wanted to learn, giving him motivation to engage. I constructed an entire unit of lesson plans around football as a sport from player’s, fan’s and film maker’s points of view. Each of my lessons sought to challenge Jeremy to reach for reading standards 1 and 2 (Word Recognition, Fluency, and Vocabulary Development and Comprehension and Analysis of Nonfiction and Informational Text) while also asking him to respond to questions that help him self-assess, meet standards 4 and 6 (Writing Processes and Features and English Language Conventions) and provide me with data to tailor further lessons. Because we have so few tutoring sessions, I employed exit slips after each lesson to gauge the effectiveness of the lesson and give me reasons to change my methods or keep them the same.

 One of my lessons asked Jeremy to read passages about filming football, and then draw representations of what he read while giving a verbal description. Before reading, we watched some football clips and discussed how they worked. This lesson uses questioning and summarizing strategies that “build metacognitive awareness by teaching [him] what to do before, during, and after the reading” (Fisher and Frey 12). But also seeks to make him cross Gardner’s multiple intellegences by drawing a representation after reading a description. In doing so, I noticed that he was good at drawing and he actually excelled on this lesson because it challenged him to think in a different way and make connections. Knowing that visual representation helped him make sense of reading, I continued to use this method.

 I planned another lesson that talks about common injuries in football and the pads that prevent them. Again, I had him draw, but this time he was drawing football pads on a human figure depicting the different muscle groups and bones. This lesson really asks him to challenge his abilities in Standard 1 because all of the content uses specialized vocabulary about anatomy and injuries. He could engage his past knowledge about football pads to inform his reading on what they protect, but he will have to make inferences based on the text surrounding unfamiliar words. The human figure will be a great graphic representation to help him along and give him a place to illustrate what he is learning, but then, writing sentences that integrate new words will truly test his ability to make sense of the new information.

 Even though all of these football lessons related to Jeremy’s interests, I wanted him to engage with a text by making text to self connections in a more personal way. First, I had him respond to interview questions originally asked to the Colt’s quarterback. After he talked through and completed writing responses, he read through the quarterback’s answers. Reading an interview was especially helpful because it had a very conversational tone. From there, I had him fill out a chart that illuminated the similarities and differences between his experience with football and the quarterback’s. Charts and graphic organizers repeatedly helped my student conceptualize ideas, so using these strategies while also asking him to make text to self connections employed multiple methods that have been proven to work.

 After tutoring my student for a number of weeks and seeing him engage with all of my lessons, I really wonder if my instruction will help him in class or standardized tests in the future. I am afraid that the short time that Jeremy spent with personalized reading comprehension instruction was not consistent enough to make significant progress. Because there were so few sessions, I could create every lesson about football, but I wonder how I would be able to engage him in content that does not interest him. Does his level of competence force him to shut down and struggle at the beginning steps of reading and writing because he does not care about the content? How can teachers effectively support a student like Jeremy without smothering him, marking him as special education and destroying any hope for the establishment of competence?