

Why read?

Segal (1997) describes the case of Laura, a 17-year-old 11th grade student in Israel. Laura speaks English at home with her parents, who are from South Africa, but had serious problems in English writing, especially in spelling, vocabulary and writing style. Segal, Laura's teacher in grade 10, tried a variety of approaches:

"Error correction proved a total failure. Laura tried correcting her own mistakes, tried process writing, and tried just copying words correctly in her notebook. Nothing worked. Laura's compositions were poorly expressed and her vocabulary was weak. We conferenced together and discussed ideas before writing. We made little progress. I gave Laura a list of five useful words to spell each week for six weeks and tested her in an unthreatening way during recess. Laura performed well in the tests in the beginning, but by the end of six weeks she reverted to misspelling the words she had previously spelt correctly." In addition, Laura's mother got her a private tutor, but there was little improvement.

Segal also taught Laura in grade 11. At the beginning of the year, she assigned an essay: "When I came to Laura's composition I stopped still. Before me was an almost perfect essay. There were no spelling mistakes. The paragraphs were clearly marked. Her ideas were well put and she made good sense. Her vocabulary had improved. I was amazed but at the same time uneasy ..."

Segal discovered the reason for Laura's improvement: She had become a reader over the summer. Laura told her, "I never read much before, but this summer I went to the library and I started reading and I just couldn't stop." Laura's performance in grade 11 in English was consistently excellent and her reading habit has continued.

(from "The Comprehension Hypothesis and Second Language Acquisition," Stephen Krashen; In: *Innovation und Tradition im Englischunterricht*, Andreas Bonnet and Peter W. Kahl (Eds.). Stuttgart: Klett Verlag. 2001)