WHAT’S HOT IN LITERACY

2012 YEARBOOK

A Combined Yearbook of the Specialized Literacy Professionals and Texas Association for Literacy Education (TALE)

Editors

Jack Cassidy        Stephanie Grote-Garcia
Elda Martinez       Roberto Garcia

OCTOBER 2012
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Preface

What’s Hot in Literacy

Dr. Jack Cassidy
Millersville University, PA

In 1996, when I first conceived the “What’s Hot, What’s Not in Literacy” survey, I would never have predicted that the column would still be popular well into the second decade of the new millennium. Two other testaments to the survey’s success are the Kendall Hunt book, Literacy Trends and Issues: What’s Hot (Cassidy & Grote-Garcia, 2012) and this 2012 yearbook, What’s Hot in Literacy, a collection of some of the papers presented at the first “What’s Hot, What’s Not in Literacy” summit held at the University of the Incarnate Word (UIW) in San Antonio on February 3rd and 4th, 2012. The conference attracted over 200 educators from around the country and included keynote addresses by P. David Pearson, University of California- Berkeley; Jerry Johns, Northern Illinois University; and Karen Bromley, University of Binghamton, NY. The success of the conference and the publication of this yearbook owe much to the hard work of Dr. Stephanie Grote-Garcia, an assistant professor at UIW and the treasurer of the Texas Association for Literacy Education (TALE). The publication of the yearbook, like the conference, was a joint effort of the Specialized Literacy Professionals, an IRA Special Interest Group (SIG) and the Texas Association for Literacy Education (TALE). Although the conference drew many presenters and subsequently many submitted chapters, a panel of national reviewers selected only about two thirds of them for inclusion in this volume. The papers from the conference that are included in this volume are organized in four sections: the future; non-fiction texts and disciplinary literacy; reading comprehension; and literacy professionals.

The Future

Although most of this volume deals with the issues currently receiving attention, the first chapter of this book looks at “The Future of Reading and Writing.” Dr. Karen Bromley, a SUNY Distinguished Professor at the University of Binghamton, a former IRA Board member, and a prolific author of articles and books, authors the chapter and imagines a world in which pens, pencils and paper would be obsolete and speech would replace most writing. This paper was actually the closing keynote address of the February summit.

Non-fiction Texts and Disciplinary Literacy

The three chapters in this section all deal with informational/non-fiction texts and integrating literacy with the content areas. As most of the authors in these chapters suggest, the attention now being paid to the Common Core State Standards has served to highlight the importance of non-fiction texts and disciplinary literacy. The authors of chapter two suggest ways to engage elementary students in writing by using and studying the construction of non-fiction texts. In chapter three, Bukowiecki suggests different non-fiction sources and strategies to enhance content-area learning. Chapter four highlights the
need to integrate the teacher preparation in social studies with language arts methods. Again, the importance of the Common Core State Standards is stressed.

**Reading Comprehension**

The overwhelming majority of literacy leaders from around the country would agree that the topic of comprehension is well deserving of the attention it is currently receiving. They would also probably agree that comprehension is crucial in all aspects of literacy. All three chapters in this section deal with means of enhancing comprehension for various populations. Some of the strategies discussed include using: digital audio recordings, graphic novels, graphic organizers, conceptual annotations, and reformulated texts. Most of these strategies are relatively new additions to the lexicon of comprehension methods available to teachers.

**Literacy Professionals**

The first chapter in this section actually replicates the What’s Hot survey by interviewing classroom teachers and school district leaders instead of literacy leaders from around the country. The next chapter in this section deals with the role of the reading specialist/literacy coach in implementing response to intervention strategies. Finally, the last two chapters deal with supporting and preparing the literacy coach. Unfortunately, the topic of literacy coaches/reading specialists is receiving less attention in the field — primarily due to cutbacks in educational funding at the local, state and federal levels. However, literacy leaders generally agree that this topic is one that should be “very hot.” Perhaps, improvements in the global economy will restore many of these positions.

**Some Final Words**

This volume should provide, teachers, staff developers and teacher educators a wonderful resource to support student learning. The topics covered are ones currently receiving attention in the field of literacy or ones that should be receiving attention. Again, special kudos must go to Dr. Stephanie Grote-Garcia, who was the organizing force behind this volume and the conference on which it is based.

---

*Jack Cassidy*

Past President, Texas Association for Literacy Education (TALE)
Past President, International Reading Association
Past President, College Reading Association/Association of Literacy Educators and Researchers
References

Chapter One

The Future of Reading and Writing

Karen Bromley
Binghamton University, NY

Abstract

What does the future hold for readers and writers? Picture a new world where language and literacy are different from what most of us have known in our lifetimes. Included here, is a brief history of reading and writing and a discussion of how digital text has quietly evolved, become a “hot” topic, and threatens to replace traditional notions of what it means to be literate.

The focus of the “Literacy Summit” was “What’s Hot in Literacy for 2012?” Thus it made sense to conclude the two day conference with the future of reading and writing. The ideas I share in this chapter come from my perspective as a digital immigrant, not a digital native. I did not grow up in the digital world and do not feel totally comfortable in it. However, I have slowly learned about digital literacy and feel that I have a foot in both the world of traditional literacy and the world of electronic literacy, where I assume many of you find yourselves as well.

A few years ago I wrote about the impact of technology on writing, but I did not predict the future of reading and writing (Bromley, 2006, 2008). Here, briefly I will extend that earlier work to offer three ideas that explore the future of both reading and writing.

Idea 1: Pens, Pencils, and Paper Will Be Collectors’ Items.

Think for a moment about the history of photography. Today’s iPhone and digital camera are a far cry from the Camera Obscura, Brownie Box, Polaroid, or Single-Lens Reflect cameras. Throughout history, reading and writing have also undergone an evolution. About 50,000 to 100,000 years ago, our ancestors “wrote” with drawings on cave walls. Much later, Sumerians invented cuneiform, the first written language inscribed on clay tablets. Then, Egyptians created hieroglyphics, a picture alphabet written on papyrus. Greeks and Romans later inscribed their alphabets on scrolls and wax tablets. Chinese used carved blocks of wood for printing on paper in 200 BC. In 1000 AD, Chinese invented movable clay type and later Koreans invented movable metal type. Then, Gutenberg’s mechanical press led to steam-powered presses in Europe, with monotype and linotype presses coming later.

This chapter is adapted from Bromley, K. (2010). Picture a world without pens, pencils, and paper: The unanticipated future of reading and writing. Journal of College Reading and Learning, 41(1), 97-108.
Quill pens, pencils, ink pens, ball point pens, and felt tip markers were developed and later typewriters and computer keyboards. In the 1980’s, laser printers and personal computers supported desktop publishing. Today, reading and writing are digital events that include word processing, email, blogging, Twittering, and text messaging on the Internet, cell phones, iPhones, and PDA’s (Leu, Kinzer, Coiro, & Cammack, 2004; Malloy & Gambrell, 2007).

So, the future absence of pens, pencils, and paper should not be a surprise when we see the history of reading and writing. These changes are reflected in the vocabulary associated with literacy, e.g., pen, pencil, journal, typewriter, cursive and manuscript, book, magazine, etc., word processor, MSWord, IM, PDA, Blackberry, email, web, keyboarding, cursor, blog, weblog, podcast, blogosphere, hypertext, e-book, e-zine, cyberspace, Twitter. Think about how your reading and writing life has changed. Do you use email more than (or at least as often) as snail mail? Do you own a smartphone, tablet, or iPad that connects to the Internet? Clearly, reading and writing are not static practices. Literacy is like photography in its evolution.

Digital text has invaded our world and found a solid place in its future. According to Zickuhr and Smith (2012), 88% of American adults have a cell phone, 57% have a laptop, 19% own an e-book reader, and 19% have a tablet computer; about six in 10 adults (63%) go online wirelessly with one of those devices. But, publishers are fighting this trend toward digital reading. The text of two advertisements in Smithsonian Magazine (2010) suggests this attempt to reverse the shift to electronic literacy; “Paper because it will be remembered longer on paper” and “Will the Internet kill magazines? Did instant coffee kill coffee?”

Computer programs are replacing people in the newsroom. At Thompson Financial, a US news service, computers automatically generate news stories, e.g., reporting that a company did better or worse than expected (Van Duyn, 2006). How long does it take to generate these stories? After a company makes results public, it takes .03 of a second for the story to be generated. Reuters also does this and Bloomberg is not far behind. This shift to electronic creation of print will occur more often with the advent of “super broadband” (Lasica, 2005) that will be 100 times faster than today’s internet services. Super broadband makes digital text much more quickly and easily accessible to all.

So, picture a world without pens, pencils, and paper, where we download not only Sudoku, crossword puzzles, and recipes, but also magazines, newspapers, books, and other printed materials using the keypad of a Kindle, smartphone, iPad, or PDA. As evidence of this, recently publishers of the Christian Science Monitor and US News and World Report announced that they have given up their paper presence to go entirely online. In this world every K-16 student will have a laptop or wireless device for reading and writing because we no longer live with generation X… this generation is generation text, and who knows about generation next?

Idea 2: Electronic Communication Will Be a Collaborative, Social Activity.

How many of you read on a Kindle or a Nook? How many belong to Facebook or use Youtube? Many of us routinely read electronic maps on navigation systems in our cars and golf carts. In some churches, we read the words to hymns from a screen, not a hymnbook. We read and write electronically to shop, order food and prescriptions, and pay bills on the Internet. So, think about a world where our offices and homes are paper-free and we spend more time in social cyber-networking. In fact, President
Obama regularly uses his *Blackberry* and gives a weekly video message on *Youtube*, a change from previous weekly presidential addresses given on the radio. In the future, we may read all our magazines, journal articles, and books online, and send and receive all our correspondence electronically. A solitary trip to the library to leaf through a paper copy of a magazine or journal will not happen. We will lose the opportunity to discover things we weren’t intentionally searching for as we browse a paper text. We will be *mouse-potatoes*, as well as the *couch-potatoes* some of us are now.

Picture a world where the community of readers and writers expands dramatically. Today with a mouse click we can collaborate with others and reply online to authors. For example, a colleague told me recently she has received more responses to an article she published in an online journal than to any other article she published previously in a paper journal. Feedback from an expanded audience makes tremendous possibilities for dialogue, collaboration, and the generation of new knowledge. In fact, today we can use *Google docs* and other software programs and applications to write a report or book with a colleague who we may never see. We can create text and upload it to “the cloud” and then a distant colleague can revise it.

However, the ability to connect quickly with each other has other outcomes. For example, we may experience mental stress and sensory overload as we are bombarded by more electronic input. Or, this sensory overload may cause us to deliberately ignore possibilities as we read more narrowly so as not to be overwhelmed by the possibilities of online print. We shouldn’t overlook the physical strain connected with digital reading and writing either. For example, eye strain, hunched shoulders, angled necks, sore wrists, tendinitis, inflamed thumbs, and carpel tunnel syndrome.

In this new world we will read mostly e-books. Today, along with the *Kindle, Project Gutenberg* (2012) and *World e-Book Library* are making hundreds of thousands of scanned books available on the Internet. Google has already scanned seven million books and plans to make millions more available to Web users (Trachtenberg & Vascellaro, 2008) and other internet providers are digitizing more library books. Google’s agreement with publishers will establish a registry that enables publishers and authors to receive payment when we use these titles online. In fact Rainie, Zickuhr, Purcell, Madden, and Brenner (2012) report that 21% of Americans have read an e-book. My local library reports that ebook borrowing is up 200% in the last six months (Binghamton Press, 2011). The increasing availability of e-content is prompting some of us to read more than in the past and to prefer buying books to borrowing them.

In this new world, libraries, books, magazines, newspapers, and even television must be prepared to undergo drastic makeovers. And, indeed many of them have by changing the type and style of information and access they provide. Many libraries now provide “Information Commons” where patrons use computers to search library holdings and the Internet. Magazines, newspapers, and television have changed the style and type of writing they feature by adding blogs and interactive sites to engage users. People have created their own blogs where they do not follow anything traditional, but create their own venues and genres.

What will happen to all the written text we have produced and will produce? The electronic information we create is fragile. It exists as “magnetic pulses or microscopic pits on a disk” (Carlson, 2004, p.A27). Documents saved in the 1980’s on a floppy disk may be unreadable now, but Emily Dickinson’s poetry locked away in a box for decades can be found, read, and reproduced. New
technology will require new ways of preservation. Future historians will need to know how to use software programs and machines that no longer exist, or all that information archived there will be lost.

**Idea 3: Speech Will Replace Most Writing.**

A decade ago, Sperber (2002) predicted “the revolution in information and communication technology may soon turn writing into a relic of the past” (p. 2). He believed that with the speech-to-print capability of computers, speech would displace the activity of writing. He said, “Once it [is] possible to bypass writing, many people may come to realize what a source of discomfort it always was to them” (p. 20). In fact, writing by hand and keyboarding can be awkward and uncomfortable for some of us and result in some of the physical characteristics mentioned previously. Additionally, most of us can speak faster and more easily than we can handwrite or type on a keyboard.

Using speech recognition software to convert talk to electronic print will be much quicker than handwriting or keyboarding because we speak more quickly than we write. This software will free us from the physical tension of writing and it will be easier once we are over the awkwardness of speaking into a machine. However, reading computer encoded, digital print and hypertext will still be necessary, and we will need to be competent, creative, cyber-savvy users.

We may all soon use speech-to-text conversion programs with our laptops, iPhones, cell phones, PDA’s, and other newly invented writing devices. The evolution of speech-recognition software like Dragon Naturally Speaking 9.0 will make talk our new form of electronic writing. This software program is “three times faster than typing and 99 times more accurate” (Nuance Communication, 2008). In the future, we can be sure there will be even more programs of this type with even better improvements.

Picture a world where writing no longer involves our fingers touching a keyboard. Picture a world where our voices activate and produce digital print. Speech-to-text software will reproduce unwanted oral output like “um,” “ah,” and “like, you know” and we will need to edit these utterances out of our writing. Picture a world where students use speech-to-print programs to take high stakes tests electronically. The need for thinking skills will outweigh the need for skills in handwriting or keyboarding. However, thinking while using speech-to-text writing will be difficult and we will need to understand this new process and be able to teach it well.

Speech can speed up the entire writing process. Thirty years ago I wrote my first article for a professional journal using a pencil and yellow legal pad. I revised it many times, drawing arrows, inserting new text, cutting, and pasting segments into the manuscript. I retyped it many times on my typewriter as well. After this long process, it took eight months to learn the piece was accepted with revisions, two months to complete the revisions, and ten more months before it was finally in print. The entire process could have been much faster if I had used speech recognition software. At any rate, using my word processor today is quicker and easier than the pencil and yellow pad, and submitting a manuscript online is accepted practice today. The contrast between writing 30 years ago and today is sobering, and the possibilities new technology holds for the future are amazing.
Classroom Implications

What does this shift from traditional reading and writing to digital literacy mean for teachers? First, it will be important to teach critical visual literacy to all students including those who struggle with learning. The images and sounds of hypertext are sometimes easier and more interesting to read, they also require special skills (Leu et al., 2004; Malloy & Gambrell, 2007). Those special skills include accessing, selecting, reading and evaluating the pictures, sounds, print, sources and format of electronic documents. Second, teachers will need to encourage and recognize multimedia and digital creations as valid demonstrations of literacy. Teaching multimedia literacy will need to be a routine part of the general education requirement in all schools. Third, we will need to intentionally teach students about what constitutes plagiarism. The “cut and paste” option of word processors makes the possibility of plagiarism from the Internet more of a probability than it has been in the past. Fourth, we need to be sensitive to students’ out-of-school literacies; their use of electronic reading and writing and the collaboration and knowledge sharing they do outside school and better connect it to their in-school literacies.

Final Thoughts

Picture a world where reading and writing do not remain static. As they have evolved throughout history, they will continue their transformation into new entities that are beyond our imagining. Surely, objects like pens, pencils, and paper soon will disappear. Surely, more reading and writing will be electronic, collaborative, and social. Surely, writing will occur more often through speech. Surely, reading and writing will present us with new challenges as we learn it and teach it. But, what haven’t we anticipated and what will be “hot” in reading and writing for 2020?
References


Chapter Two

Motivating and Engaging K-5 Writers:
Teaching the Construction of Nonfiction Texts

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Abstract

As attention to the instruction of nonfiction writing intensifies in educational settings, educators need instructional strategies that inspire and engage elementary students as they envision and create nonfiction texts. In this chapter, the most up-to-date writing research for young writers is explored in accordance with the rigor and demands of today's teaching environment. To highlight the uniqueness of nonfiction texts, the subgenres of nonfiction are addressed individually. Important to the construction of nonfiction texts is explicit instruction on the distinct structures and features of this genre, as well as the use of mentor texts as models of the author's craft; models that illuminate the reading-writing connection. Additionally, strategies designed to increase motivation are discussed, empowering students to develop agency and independence in their writing.

Identified as one of the “eight most critical literacy topics in the current professional environment” by Cassidy and Loveless (2011), the topic of informational nonfiction texts has recently begun to receive much attention (p. 16). Additionally, research on writing instruction for elementary students indicates the need for teachers to understand how to teach the numerous and unique genres of writing. Addressing the particular challenges of nonfiction writing construction, Dorfman and Cappelli (2009) argued, "It makes sense if we want our students to write good nonfiction, we need to immerse them in the work of good nonfiction authors" (p. 3).

Teachers of young writers have clamored for research-based strategies for teaching the numerous subgenres of nonfiction writing as well as ways to motivate and engage students throughout the writing
process. This chapter addresses the most up-to-date writing research for teaching primary writers in accordance with the rigor and demands of today's teaching environment. Important to the construction of nonfiction texts is explicit instruction on the unique structures and features of this genre, as well as the use of mentor texts as models of the author's craft; models that illuminate the reading-writing connection. Additionally, strategies designed to increase motivation are discussed, empowering students to develop agency and independence.

Uniqueness of Nonfiction Reading and Writing

Nonfiction reading and writing are broad encompassing genres that must be taught with authentic purpose. Kletzien and Dreher (2004) pointed out that as adults we primarily read and write informational texts. Informational texts that engage young learners need to be a central part of every learner’s school experience beginning in preschool (Purcell-Gates, Duke, & Martineau, 2007). Stead (2002) questioned the rationale for an overemphasis on narrative writing in the primary grades, instead calling for teachers and students alike to become more familiar with all the different writing genres and how they work. Only recently in our schools are we seeing an intentional instructional shift from fiction reading and writing to nonfiction reading and writing. However, simply exposing our students to nonfiction texts and nonfiction writing prompts is not enough. Both Casbergue and Plauché (2003) spoke to this, stating, “when children read and write expository texts without the knowledge they need, their reading comprehension and writing development is hampered” (p. 286). It’s time to move from exposure to nonfiction reading and writing in the classroom toward opportunities for the application of nonfiction reading comprehension through nonfiction writing.

So, how do we impart the knowledge to which Casbergue and Plauché referred? According to Stead and Hoyt (2011), we need to begin by teaching our students “to gain control over the unique structures, language, and visual features that comprise the heart of nonfiction texts” (p. 2). Turning our attention to the “uniqueness” of these text types fosters the understanding of the purpose of nonfiction texts and what it means to be an author of nonfiction.

Nonfiction Text Types

According to the Common Core State Standards (2010), “students must read widely and deeply from among a broad range of high-quality, increasingly challenging literary and informational texts” (p. 10). Equally important, students must be able to transfer what they have read into written products of understanding. Knowing that each piece of nonfiction writing is written for a specific purpose helps students approach their own writing with intent. Stead and Hoyt (2011) categorized the primary purposes of nonfiction writing as the following: to inform, to instruct, to narrate, to persuade, and to respond. Correlated to an author’s purpose for writing, they composed a comprehensive list of text types organized by purpose which are condensed and listed in Table 1.

Stead (2002) summed up the importance of explicitly teaching children the purpose for and the ways in which to write the various text types when he posited the following: “If we want children to become able writers for many different purposes, we need to dive deep and give our children
comprehensive learning engagements so that they can develop deeper understanding about how different text types work” (p. 14).

Table 1

*Nonfiction Writing Purposes and Text Types*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Purpose</th>
<th>Text Types</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Inform</td>
<td>Explanatory report, informational report, descriptive report, observations log, news article, question-and-answer, poem, photo with captions, sign, letter, list, e-mail message, note, postcard, interview, speech, presentation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instruct</td>
<td>Recipe, science experiment, instructions, manual, directions, instructions, health procedure, safety procedure, itinerary, schedule, rules, steps in a process, map with directions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Narrate</td>
<td>Personal narrative, narrative nonfiction, eye-witness account, news article, magazine article, nonfiction storyboard, autobiography, biography, diary, journal, historical account, photo essay, observational log, retell, narrative poetry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Persuade</td>
<td>Letter, advertisement, poster, essay, brochure, book review, movie review, speech, debate, poem, argument</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respond</td>
<td>Analytical analysis, evaluative analysis, reflective analysis, critical review, author study, character study, essay answer, test prompt response, note, letter, e-mail</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note:* Purpose and Text Types are from Stead and Hoyt (2011).

**Features of Nonfiction Texts**

In addition to teaching purpose and text types, the features specific to a particular text must also be taught. Duke, Caughlan, Juzwik, and Martin (2011) pointed out that “teaching genre features explicitly can also help develop students’ ability to think about texts as text—what some call *authors’ craft* or *metatextuality*” (p. 17). They further argued that “writing strategies are often taught as though they apply equally to all texts or all strategies work equally well for most texts, but this is not the case” (p. 18). For example, teaching the writing of procedural texts, these authors explained, should vary in many crucial ways from teaching the writing of personal narratives. According to these researchers, it's
no longer just about teaching "composition", what's important is the composition "of what for what" (p. 6).

The purpose, type of text, and the nature of the information all influence the organizational structure an author chooses for a text. Kristo and Bamford (2004) listed the organizational structures of nonfiction as the following: enumerative, chronological, sequential, compare-contrast, question-answer, cause-effect, and narrative. These scholars asserted that after students have determined the purpose of their writing, they then must decide how to organize their writing. For students to make that determination, they should consider the type of information they are using for their text, how the information could be chunked or divided up, and what kind of organization would be best for the readers of their writing.

**Mentor Texts**

How do the authors of nonfiction texts begin writing about a topic? How do they decide what to write about and how to organize their writing? How can teachers model through mini-lessons the key components of writing instruction in light of the expectations for nonfiction writing for students at each grade level? Dorfman and Cappelli (2009) posit that the first step for any nonfiction writer is to form an essential question. Finding texts that model this first step helps young writers grasp how writing topics are chosen. A couple of mentor texts recommended by Dorfman and Cappelli in which even the title reveals the origin of the ideas for each book are Kaner's (1999) *Animal Defenses: How Animals Protect Themselves* and Gehman's (2007) *Hummingbirds: Tiny but Mighty*.

Mentor texts are also models for the many different text features specific to nonfiction texts. According to Stead and Hoyt (2011), nonfiction text features serve two purposes—to visually communicate information and to draw attention to important concepts and ideas. Visual communication of information is accomplished through photographs, diagrams, illustrations, graphs, charts, tables, storyboards, flow charts and arrows. Young writers first notice these features in the work of others. Then, as they construct their own nonfiction texts, they learn to consider which visual features they could add to increase understanding of their own texts. The other purpose of nonfiction text features, to draw attention to important concepts and ideas, is accomplished through titles, bold words, headings, subheadings, tables of contents, captions, indexes, and glossaries.

Teacher-created texts can also serve as mentor texts, intentionally created as models for the various types of nonfiction writing. Through modeling and using teacher-created nonfiction writing, students can, according to Portalupi and Fletcher (2001), “uncover the experiential knowledge they already possess” (p. 9). Stead and Hoyt (2011) suggested teachers conduct focused mini-lessons in which they create on-the-spot mentor texts of particular forms of nonfiction writing. During each mini-lesson, the teacher should accompany the writing of the text with a think-aloud, allowing students to both see and hear the writing process. This mentor text then becomes a part of the fabric of the classroom, allowing reflection and revisiting by the teacher and students alike. Additionally, teachers can create models of visual texts for students during their mini-lessons, once again accompanying the writing by thinking aloud about both the construction of and purpose for the visual text.

Using the personal stories of authors' struggles with their own writing is another way of mentoring our young authors with the words of familiar authors. Knowing that well-known authors such
as Jon Scieszka also consider the task of writing to be hard work, a task he compares to "ditch-digging," informs students that they are not alone with the difficulty of getting words on paper. Cruz (2008) suggested putting up a classroom bulletin board of quotes and tips from all kinds of authors to help students find inspiration to persevere when the task seems overwhelming.

Motivation

When asked how they motivate students to write, Fletcher and Portalupi (2001) responded, “There’s no magic answer, and it’s a fact that certain kids will stubbornly resist the invitation to write. But it starts by giving them regular time, real choice, and your genuine interest in what they put down on paper” (p. 24). In her 2008 book for teachers, A Quick Guide to Reaching Struggling Writers, Cruz explored strategies teachers can use to address the causes behind the six most common statements made by students who lack motivation to write. Strategies for addressing motivation issues with young writers are categorized according to these frequently recurring statements. According to Cruz, those common statements are as follows:

"'I'm not a good writer.'
'My hand hurts.'
'I don't know how to spell.'
'I don't have anything to write about.'
'I never get to write anything I want to write.'
'T'm done.'" (Cruz, 2008, p. xii)

Of particular relevance to the writing of nonfiction texts are the issues related to generating ideas and choice.

As all teachers of young writers know, many students find generating and developing a topic to write about very challenging. In order for many students to believe they truly have something to write about, teachers need to teach students numerous strategies for originating topics and ideas (Cruz, 2008). One strategy for generating writing topics is to have students develop personal lists of things they are familiar with, such as places, people, and objects, in order to give them a starting point for writing which draws on their own experiences. Another strategy ties back to the previous section on mentor texts, as students can get ideas for their own writing by reading the writing of others. What's important here is that students gain independence by knowing ways they can get "unstuck" when writing.

Classrooms that support quality nonfiction writing instruction give students ample opportunity to "bring their passion, knowledge, quirky humor, and authentic voice to this kind of writing” (Portalupi & Fletcher, 2001, p. 2). Many of our young writers struggle because they feel they aren't given choice or allowed voice when they write. Hill and Ekey (2010) stated, “Our decisions about what to teach will be based on our curriculum and standards, the focus for our unit of study, and what we know about each individual writer” (p. 12). While knowledge of the different forms of writing is essential, so is student agency. Decisions concerning what to write and what form that writing will take should not always rest solely with the teacher.
Conclusion

Current research on writing instruction for elementary students indicates the need for teachers to understand how to teach the unique genres of writing. Through consistent and explicit instruction, students can become accomplished nonfiction writers by having teachers who "marinate" them in the various types and constructions of nonfiction texts (Kristo & Bamford, 2004, p. 266). Mentor texts, whether by well-known authors or self-created by the teacher, serve as exemplars of the craft and components of nonfiction writing. Stead and Hoyt (2011) argued that success for students in school and beyond relies on their ability to create and navigate nonfiction texts with purpose and comfort. Teachers of young writers need to be very familiar with the uniqueness of and the opportunities presented by the creation of nonfiction texts.
References


Chapter Three

Using Varied Nonfiction Sources and Different Literacy Strategies for Content-Area Learning

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Abstract

In this article, the importance of including different nonfiction sources and varied literacy techniques in content-area instruction is discussed. First, a definition of nonfiction is presented. Next, selected strategies for activating students’ prior knowledge; promoting an understanding of topic-specific vocabulary; encouraging text discussions and questions; and responding to nonfiction reading by means of writing, the creative arts, and extended research are presented. Interspersed throughout this article are three sample activities that are specific to a nonfiction text for implementation in a language arts/social studies, mathematics, or science class. It is emphasized in this article that nonfiction “can provide students with authentic reading experiences that connect with their lives and expand background knowledge needed to understand core content-area concepts” (Olness, 2007, p. 5).

In the introduction of the Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts and Literacy in History/Social Studies, Science, and Technical Subjects (Council of Chief State School Officers and the National Governors Association, 2010), the authors state that students (Kindergarten-12th grade) should have multiple opportunities in all content subjects to “actively seek the wide, deep, and thoughtful engagement with high-quality literary and informational text that builds knowledge, enlarges experience, and broadens world views” (p. 3). Thus, the inclusion of varied literary genres and different literacy strategies in all content areas (i.e., literature, science, social studies, and mathematics) has become a hot topic in education for 2012. Educators are seeking optimal text suggestions and instructional techniques that will facilitate students’ reading, writing, and discussion of varied content knowledge in order to foster deep understanding of the topics being studied. Teachers can “help students become independent learners by creating a classroom culture that devotes time, concern, and energy toward explicit instruction of how tasks might be accomplished and why certain strategies might be effective for certain tasks” (Anders & Guzzetti, 2005, p. 68).

In this article, the importance of including different nonfiction sources and varied literacy techniques in content-area instruction is discussed. First, a definition of nonfiction is presented. Next, selected strategies for activating students’ prior knowledge; promoting an understanding of topic-specific vocabulary; encouraging text discussions and questions; and responding to nonfiction reading by means of writing, the creative arts, and extended research are presented. Interspersed throughout this
article are three sample activities that are specific to a nonfiction text for implementation in a language arts/social studies, mathematics, or science class. It is emphasized in this article that nonfiction “can provide students with authentic reading experiences that connect with their lives and expand background knowledge needed to understand core content area concepts” (Olness, 2007, p. 5).

Nonfiction Defined

“Nonfiction is the literature of fact – or the product of an author’s inquiry, research, and writing. Its primary purposes are to provide information, explain, argue, and/or demonstrate” (Kristo & Bamford, 2004, p. 12). The nonfiction genre consists of various literary types such as picture books, trade books, primary sources, brochures, manuals, photo essays, how-to books, almanacs, world record books, newspapers, magazines, biographies/autobiographies, and the Internet (Pike & Mumper, 2004). Some nonfiction books are dense with factual text and contain some illustrations, photographs, and diagrams to support the text. Others are replete with multiple photographs and illustrations that provide as much information as do the author’s words. No matter which format the nonfiction writer chooses to represent the content, nonfiction supports students’ learning to read from texts other than the narrative genre, and thus, facilitates the pupils’ reading to learn new content.

Unlike narrative texts that follow a predictable story grammar format (i.e., setting; characters; problem; plot; resolution; beginning, middle, and end), nonfiction texts are arranged by different organizational structures. These organizational formats include enumeration, sequential, chronological, compare-contrast, cause-effect, question-answer, and narrative. Since students may be unfamiliar with the varied organizational structures found in informational texts, it is often necessary for the instructor to directly teach the different structural formats employed by nonfiction authors in order for the students to acquire a deep understanding of the information presented. Optimal instruction followed by direct practice by the students may consist of the pupils exploring and reading various nonfiction, with the teacher guiding the pupils to recognize the specific structure employed in the text. Additionally, students should be taught to recognize certain words that signal a particular text structure. Common text structures and associated signal words include the following: sequencing (until, before, after); compare-contrast (however, similarly, likewise); cause-effect (since, thus, because); question-answer (how, when, what); and problem-solution (one reason for that, a solution, a problem) (Dole, 1997 as cited in Harvey, 1998). When students recognize a certain structural format in nonfiction, they are able to more easily process and recall the information.

In addition to the different organizational patterns found in nonfiction, these books also contain a variety of features that are unique to informational publications. These nonfiction text elements include access features (e.g., table of contents, introduction, headings); features for determining accuracy (e.g., copyright data, biographical information, acknowledgements); and visual information (e.g., illustrations, photographs, diagrams, graphs, tables, maps) (Kristo & Bamford, 2004). Students need to be explicitly taught how to employ the various print and visual components of an informational source in order to gain a complete and in-depth understanding of the content. Thus, as teachers are instructing students how to use the various nonfiction text characteristics to access information, the pupils should be provided with guided practice in recognizing and using varied text features located in different nonfiction books.
Sample Activities to Activate Prior Knowledge of the Content Subject

Learning to effectively read a nonfiction text is important in understanding the information located in the source. Successful reading and comprehension of nonfiction depends on various pre-reading techniques that prepare students for the reading task. These prior reading activities begin with students initially exploring the book to discover different features unique to nonfiction that allow the text and its information to become accessible to the reader. Following this introductory examination of the text’s distinctive characteristics, the students should be provided with varied exercises to activate their prior knowledge of and experience with the book’s content. Three effective prior knowledge activation techniques are the KWL Procedure (Ogle, 1986) in which the students brainstorm what they know (K), what they would like to learn (W), and after reading, what they learned (L); a Quick Write in which the pupil writes for 3-5 minutes everything he/she knows about a topic; and Think-Pair-Share in which students respond to teacher-posed questions first individually, then with a partner, and finally with the whole class.

Although these prior knowledge strategies are not new, by conducting these activities before reading, the instructor can discover what the students already know about the information contained in the text, and any misconceptions the pupils have regarding the topic. The teacher also can plan subsequent instruction that needs to take place in order to ensure successful comprehension of the text type and subject.

Sample Techniques to Acquire Word Knowledge

In addition to including specific activities to evoke students’ prior experiences and knowledge regarding the topic of the nonfiction text, teachers should include varied exercises that focus on new, unique, and sometimes challenging terms and concepts the students will be encountering in their reading. When a pupil demonstrates difficulty comprehending a text, and word recognition is not the reason for the difficulty, then often the problem is caused by lack of familiarity with a particular term. Therefore, there are different strategies the instructor can introduce to the class to help focus the students’ attention on specific terms/concepts that are located within the nonfiction text, and that are paramount to the pupils’ comprehension of the content. These techniques can be directly taught by the teacher and practiced by the students before, during, and after reading. The List-Group-Label Procedure (Wood, 2001), in which students categorize words that represent the same concept; the creation of individual word banks of novel words; and the comparison of concepts by means of a Venn Diagram are relevant activities that can be employed to instill understanding of new words and concepts. A Word/Concept Map (Schwartz & Raphael, 1985) is a most relevant vocabulary strategy to be used in science learning as exemplified in Figure 1.

While these techniques were developed several years ago, they are still effective for aiding students’ understanding of complex terms and concepts found in nonfiction. From observing the students in the classroom or from recent assessments conducted by the instructor, the teacher can decide which activity to use, and how many words to include in the practice based on the complexity of the
text, the age/grade level of the students, the pupils’ prior knowledge/experiences with the content, and the reading abilities of the students.

**Activities to Promote Questions and Discussion**

In addition to including prior knowledge and vocabulary activities in content-area lessons, instructors need to provide a classroom environment that encourages learners to become actively involved in the texts they are reading. When students are active readers, they question the author’s background and research, purpose for writing the text, point of view toward the book’s content, style of writing, and choice of words. They also become metacognitive readers as they inquire about their own thinking and reading, especially when the text does not make sense to them. Pupils need to be directly taught how to engage in text reading and not to be passive receivers of information. Through teacher modeling of think-alouds in which instructors demonstrate their own thinking and text interactions as they are reading, the students discover the value of critically reading and analyzing a text. Questions the pupils pose to themselves when reading silently, ask each other during text discussions, and exchange with the instructor during teacher/student discourse allow the pupils to delve deeply into the text and to increase their reading comprehension.

There are different types of questioning and discussion procedures in which students can participate as they read and interact with nonfiction. These various strategies can be employed before, during, and after reading and, depending upon the particular activity, involve individual queries or partner, small-group, or whole-class interactions. Question of the Day in which students are invited to develop questions to guide the day’s reading and discussion; Key Questions (Stephens & Brown, 2005)
in which pupils discuss information in the text by using the questions: *Who? What? When? Where? How?* and *I Wonder Why?* (Manzo, 1969) in which the teacher models and the students practice wondering about the new information being learned are examples of effective discussion/questioning techniques. In the following example, students practice asking and answering Thick and Thin Questions (Harvey & Goudvis, 2007) during a mathematics lesson.

**Figure 2. Examples of Thick and Thin Questions.**

![Diagram showing examples of thin and thick questions](image)

**Figure 2.** After reading the nonfiction picture book, *Growing Patterns: Fibonacci Numbers in Nature* (Campbell, 2010), the students wrote *thin* and *thick* questions that can be employed to discuss this text. A *thin* question is one asked to clarify information learned as the students are reading. A *thick* question requires more thoughtful answers and often begins with *Why? How come? I wonder?* The students then discussed the text, using their *thin* and *thick* questions.

**Response Techniques to Nonfiction**

Once students have read and discussed a nonfiction text, there are various avenues of response to this reading. First, pupils can respond to the book by means of writing. Writing allows for thoughtful reflection of the reading experience. When students write, they often use the text they just read as a model for their own writing. Sample written response techniques include composing exit slips in which pupils respond and summarize the day’s reading, dialogue journals in which students personally respond to the reading, content-related picture books in which pupils describe the text content through illustrations and words, and learning logs in which students share their own interpretations regarding the information presented in the text.

Additionally, responses to reading by means of the creative arts allow pupils to practice multiple intelligences such as linguistic, logical-mathematical, visual-spatial, kinesthetic, musical, intrapersonal, interpersonal (Gardner, 1983). There are varied response avenues involving the creative arts. First, students can create a poster reflecting the key information found in the nonfiction text. Second, they can
reenact a particular event or process presented in the book. Third, they can scribe and present a rap song to represent the key information learned from their reading.

Finally, students can conclude their reading of nonfiction through extended research regarding the same topic as the book and by sharing their research with others. An example of a research-based response activity is the I-Search Paper (Macrorie, 1988). Using various print and electronic sources, pupils conduct further research and present this research in an I-Search paper, which includes prior knowledge regarding the topic, a rationale for researching the topic, a description of the research sources used, and a discussion regarding what the student learned about this topic.

Whether students respond to this nonfiction reading through writing, the creative arts, or extended research, the teacher should provide different response forms from which the pupil can choose. In this way, the student should have true ownership of the particular activity.

**Final Thoughts**

Throughout this article, the value of including varied nonfiction sources and different literacy strategies in content area instruction has been discussed. “A nonfiction book…has many layers….They reveal different aspects of the topic and different levels of meaning” (Giblin, 2009, p. 37). It is the educator’s responsibility to guide his/her students to uncover these multiple layers of information found in nonfiction and content-related textbooks in order for these literacy experiences to be as accessible and rewarding as possible for all learners.
References


A Case for Integrating Language Arts Methods with Social Studies Methods in a Teacher Preparation Program

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Abstract

The case for integrating language arts methods with social studies methods in a pre-service teacher education program is discussed. Moreover, there is evidence that schools are fragmenting the language arts in order to teach students the necessary skills to pass state-mandated tests. Fragmenting the language arts in this way precludes the deep study of important and meaningful topics. With the new Common Core State Standards Initiative, many individuals believe that it is time to assist pre-service teachers with understanding the benefits of using the language arts as tools to learn across all content areas. Both the National Council for Social Studies (NCSS) and the International Reading Association (IRA) standards support such integration.

Much has been written about how the language arts are tools for learning across all subject areas (Allington & Cunningham, 2007; Fountas & Pinnell, 2001; Routman, 2003). Yet schools are not necessarily places where the language arts are being used to develop young minds to think deeply about the world. Frank Smith (1986), for example, points out that, “Tests must be administered; instruction must be directed towards the tests, the ‘language arts’ are arbitrarily and artificially fragmented” (p. 190).

The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB, 2002) has exacerbated the fragmentation of curriculum. The fear of not meeting Annual Yearly Progress (AYP) has caused many teachers and administrators to implement draconian policies. Jonathan Kozol (2007) writes that some fifth-grade teachers in New York set aside all other lessons for two hours each day to drill children for the test. They do these practices three months prior to the exam. Moreover, in Atlanta, schools have been intentionally constructed with no playgrounds, so that no time can be wasted on things that do not raise test scores. In other school districts standardized exams are now administered to children in their kindergarten year in order to get them ready for the tests.

Allington and Cunningham (2007) lament that “for many years, literacy instruction in elementary schools has focused on skills and largely ignored knowledge, particularly deep knowledge of
topics” (p. 53). They further add, “The knowledge part of the curriculum, usually found in the subjects of science and social studies, are almost ignored in the primary grades of these schools” (Allington & Cunningham, 2007, p.53). Equally disturbing is what has been happening to social studies instruction in American schools since NCLB was enacted in 2001.

**Social Studies is Being Left Behind**

It has been widely documented that social studies instruction has been doing a Houdini act in American elementary schools since the passing of the No Child Left Behind legislation in 2001 (Bogle & Ellis, 2009; Burroughs, Groce & Webeck, 2005; Center for Education Policy, 2008; VanFossen, 2005). Now, ten years after the federal government began mandating annual assessments in only math and reading, social studies as well as science continues to be marginalized in many schools, particularly in those having difficulty meeting their AYP (Bogle & Ellis, 2009). Schools are feeling increased pressure to raise their test scores; therefore, subjects that are tested tend to be where most schools focus the bulk of their attention.

The Center on Education Policy (CEP, 2008) conducted a comprehensive five-year study to look at changes in the depth and frequency of curriculum and instruction since the enactment of the No Child Left Behind legislation. They found that almost 62% of reporting school districts had both increased instructional time for math and communication arts, and had decreased time for other subjects. During the time this study was being conducted, we surveyed elementary principals in 45 states and had similar findings (Bogle & Ellis, 2009). Clearly, social studies instruction is being reduced and replaced by increased instruction in language arts and math as well as instruction in test preparation.

**Social Studies is Vitally Important**

What’s so wrong reducing the amount of instruction time in social studies? We would argue, plenty. Aside from the fact that the curriculum continues to narrow and even more schools are unable to meet their AYP, we are now facing huge numbers of American children entering high school who have been taught very little about history, economics, geography or citizenship. These children are our future and they will be the ones expected to carry on the democratic traditions of our government to the next generation. Perhaps Gayle Thieman, former president for the National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS) summed it up the best when she said, “Democracy is not a natural state, it has to be taught; it just doesn’t happen. Just because you were born in a democracy doesn’t mean you’re going to die in a democracy” (as cited in Wiebe, 2008, para. 7).

Teaching of social studies is vital. American citizenship guarantees certain fundamental rights, but along with those rights come duties and responsibilities. We must prepare young people for their citizenship responsibilities and we cannot afford to leave it out. Given the facts that there is a fragmentation of the language arts coupled with reduced time for social studies instruction, it seems unlikely that the integration of the language arts with social studies will become the norm. However, a national movement—the Common Core State Standards Initiative (CCSS, 2010)—has been gathering steam and offers us hope.
The Common Core State Standards Initiative

Most states (45 of 50) in the United States have adopted the Common Core State Standards (CCSS, 2010). Moreover, the CCSS are predicated on integrating the English Language Arts with subject-matter knowledge, as captured in the following statement: “reading, writing, speaking, listening, and language as well as in mathematics . . . serve as the backbone of the present document” (CCSS, 2010, p. 3). The CCSS, for example, emphasize reading as the tool for learning about knowledge in the content areas—“By reading texts in history/social studies, science, and other disciplines, students build a foundation of knowledge in these fields that will also give them the background to be better readers in all content areas” (CCSS, 2010, p. 10).

Elementary-grade standards also link the language arts with content knowledge. Second grade students are expected to read and comprehend “informational texts, including history/social studies, science, and technical texts, in the grades 2-3” (CCSS, 2010, p. 13).

Aligning with Standards

We argue that the curriculum standards adopted by the National Council for Social Studies (NCSS) in 1994 can easily be aligned with the CCSS. These standards included the following essential skills: 1) acquire information and manipulate data, 2) develop and present policies, arguments, and stories, 3) construct new knowledge, and 4) participate in groups (p. 8).

To develop the first essential skill (i.e., acquire information and manipulate data), teachers need to increase students’ skills in reading, studying, searching for information, using social science technical vocabulary and methods, and using computers and other electronic media. This could align with CCSS for English Language Arts 1, 7, & 10 featured below.

1. Read closely to determine what the text says explicitly and to make logical inferences from it; cite specific textual evidence when writing or speaking to support conclusions drawn from the text.

7. Integrate and evaluate content presented in diverse media and formats, including visually and quantitatively, as well as in words.

10. Read and comprehend complex literary and informational texts independently and proficiently. (CCSS, 2010, p. 35)

The second essential skill (i.e., develop and present policies, arguments, and stories), can be developed by, increasing students’ ability in using the writing process and classifying, interpreting, analyzing, summarizing, evaluating, and presenting information in well-reasoned ways that support better decision making for individuals and society. This could align with CCSS for English Language Arts 1, 2, & 3.
1. Read closely to determine what the text says explicitly and to make logical inferences from it; cite specific textual evidence when writing or speaking to support conclusions drawn from the text.

2. Determine central ideas or themes of a text and analyze their development: summarize the key supporting details and ideas.

3. Analyze how and why individuals, events, and ideas develop and interact over the course of a text. (CCSS, 2010, p. 3)

The third essential skill (i.e., construct new knowledge), can be developed by helping students conceptualize unfamiliar categories of information. Teachers can also assist students in establishing cause/effect relationships, determining the validity of information and arguments, and developing a new story, model, narrative, picture, or chart. These skills add to students’ understanding of an event, idea, or persons while also meeting criteria of valid social studies research. This could align with CCSS for English Language Arts 4, 5, & 6, which are listed below.

4. Interpret words and phrases as they are used in a text, including determining technical, connotative, and figurative meanings, and analyze how specific word choices shape meaning or tone.

5. Analyze the structure of texts, including how specific sentences, paragraphs, and larger portions of the text (e.g. a section, chapter, scene, or stanza) relate to each other and the whole.

6. Assess how point of view or purpose shapes the content and style of a text. (CCSS, 2010, p. 3)

Finally, the fourth essential skill (i.e., participate in groups), can be developed by helping students express reasoned personal convictions and recognize ethical responsibilities in groups. Students be capable of participate in negotiating conflicts and differences, maintaining an individual position because of its ethical basis, and fulfill responsibilities associated with citizenship in a democratic republic.

The International Reading Association (IRA) Standards for Reading Professionals also offer hope in achieving the goal of integrating the language arts with social studies. The IRA Standards for Reading Professionals (2010), for example, state that “candidates create a literary environment that fosters reading and writing by integrating foundational knowledge, instructional practices, approaches and methods, curriculum materials, and the appropriate use of assessments” (p. 40).
Conclusion

With both the IRA and NCSS advocating the integration of the language arts when teaching social studies, we feel justified to offer a combined methods course in our teacher preparation program to show future teachers both the importance of integration of the language arts with social studies and give them the skills that will enable them to do so. We also encourage other teacher preparation programs to do the same.

We realize, however, that even with the CCSS and the support from our learned societies, we still face an uphill battle. The classrooms where our teacher candidates go for their field experiences are still not places where integration is the norm. Rather, administrators and teachers, fearing repercussions from poor test scores, continue to fragment the language arts and diminish the importance of social studies. But for us to focus only on the difficulty and ignore the need is neither ethical nor satisfying. What is the future of social studies instruction?
References


Chapter Five

Reading While Listening: Improving Struggling Adolescent Readers’ Comprehension Through the Use of Digital Audio Recordings

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Abstract

Although educators have utilized a host of strategies aimed at improving comprehension at all grade levels, reading while listening (RWL) has not received much attention recently. Based on the premise that reading comprehension is related to inner speech, investigators sought to compare the effects of RWL versus silent reading on the comprehension performance of students enrolled in a 10th grade high school English course. Students read portions of a novel alternating between reading while listening and reading silently, taking assessments following the culmination of each instructional modality. Results indicated that RWL not only produced a statistically significant reading improvement over silent reading in the comprehension performance of the entire sample, but also an even greater improvement in the comprehension performance of struggling readers, thus providing the foundation for reading professionals to incorporate RWL in their instruction to scaffold students’ comprehension abilities.

Students are expected to transition from "learning to read" to "reading to learn" (Chall, 1983); they move from learning how to decode written text to extracting information from written text. This transition is generally expected to occur somewhere in the mid to upper elementary school grades (typically between 3rd and 5th grade) as students are asked to begin reading content-area textbooks in various subjects in addition to the fiction and non-fiction texts they may have already encountered during language arts instruction. Students are then expected to read both content-area textbooks and literary works at an ever-increasing level of independence; the idea being that by the middle school grades, students will read grade-level texts without the need of assistance from the teacher. In addition, it is expected or presumed that students' reading abilities will improve every year to match the increasingly complex reading requirements of content-area textbooks and literary works.

Unfortunately, this idea of all students reading both content-area textbooks and literary works independently and at grade level has not reached fruition (Cassidy & Ortlieb, 2011). Indeed, the gap in reading ability between students coming from low socioeconomic status (SES) and minority
backgrounds and those coming from non-minority and middle to upper SES backgrounds has prompted massive attempts to correct this discrepancy, most notably the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) of 2001. Despite over a decade of legislative efforts and curriculum reform, only nominal progress has been made in "closing the gap" in reading ability with fewer than 10% of the states showing any significant narrowing of the gap between low SES/minority students and their non-minority/higher SES peers (National Center for Educational Statistics [NCES], 2009). Indeed, by the time students reach high school age, nearly 70% are still not considered proficient in reading, even though they may have performed well on state-level tests in reading in previous years (NCES, 2009). Moreover, the same data indicate that state level tests are not well aligned with national level tests since large improvements in many state level test scores are not reflected by similar performance gains in national test scores in those states. Evidence that this problem is not corrected at the high school level is demonstrated by data showing that almost 50% of entering college students need to take some form of remedial class (NCES, 2005), and the latest data indicate that in 2009, over 60% of high school seniors scored below the proficient level in reading (NAEP, 2009).

Although educators have been exposed to a variety of strategies aimed at improving comprehension of their students, some methods may have been overlooked. Reading of a text while simultaneously listening to an audio recording of that same text, often referred to as reading while listening (RWL), is one such method of scaffolding reading instruction that has been used in various environments and has demonstrated some success for struggling readers.

**Theoretical Framework**

The theoretical basis for examining RWL as a method of scaffolding reading achievement dates back to Huey (1968) who posited that reading comprehension was related to "inner speech." In addition, it has long been theorized that listening comprehension and reading comprehension share a conceptual framework or set of processes (Berger & Perfetti, 1977; Fries, 1963; Gibson & Levin, 1975; Goldman, 1976; Goodman, 1966; Kintsch & Kozminsly, 1977; Sticht, Beck, Hauke, Kleiman, & James, 1974; Thorndike, 1973). Theoretical bases such as these have led researchers to investigate the effects of RWL on various elements of reading achievement.

Studies report positive effects of RWL on reading achievement in several areas of reading such as decoding, fluency, and comprehension (Carbo, 1981; Chomsky, 1976; Durkin, 1989; Edwards, 1970; Reitsma, 1988; Schneeburg, 1977; Shany & Biemiller, 1995). Of importance to this particular study are results showing effects on comprehension, particularly for less proficient readers in the primary grades (Edwards, 1970; Schneeburg, 1977; Shany & Biemiller, 1995). Older students may also benefit from instruction in some of the same skills that are correlated with reading achievement in younger students. Although differences exist between readers of various ages, educators should not ignore opportunities to develop skills for adolescent reading success. For example, a recent study of participants in an adult basic education class found that RWL had a positive effect on fluency improvement (Winn, Skinner, Oliver, Hale, & Ziegler, 2006), which has been shown to highly correlate with reading achievement in younger students.
Investigators of this study sought to determine whether RWL could be utilized to scaffold adolescent reading comprehension. The purposes of the study were to examine: 1) the effects of RWL on comprehension as compared to silent reading, 2) specific effects on subgroups of students within the sample (i.e., more proficient vs. less proficient readers), and 3) student perceptions of RWL compared to silent reading.

Methods

Participants

Adolescent students at a public high school in South Texas who were enrolled in two sections of a standard sophomore (10th Grade) English course participated in this study. Each section of the course contained 24 students and the same instructor taught both sections of the class. The participants’ reading ability varied widely from those who read significantly below grade level to those who read at the college level. Reading ability was evenly distributed across both sections of the class, as a comparison of the two classes’ mean reading scores on the state-wide reading test yielded no statistically significant difference in mean reading performance. Testing occurred towards the end of the year (May), and many activities were taking place in the school at this time. For this reason, not all students were present for the entire three days of testing. However, if a student was present for at least a full class period, his or her data was included in the analysis.

Materials

The materials used in the study consisted of copies of the book *The Old Man and the Sea* (Hemingway, 1952), a professional audio recording of that book read aloud by Charlton Heston, and comprehension questions created by a team of university researchers. This book was selected based on the following criteria: 1) the reading level was accessible to the students; 2) the audio recording was of high quality; and 3) the students were familiar with the context for the story based on its setting (a coastal community) and the cultural heritage of the main characters (Hispanic). The comprehension instrument consisted of six question sets, one for each section of the book used in this study. Each of these sections was approximately 17-19 pages in length, which corresponded to approximately 20 minutes of time on the audio recording per section. The number of questions varied from six to eight, depending on the density of the section in the novel. Though most questions were related to recall (explicit), inferential questions were also included to provide a holistic portrayal of students’ comprehension abilities. A survey was also issued to elicit participatory adolescent students’ perceptions of RWL and the use of audio recordings for reading.

Procedures

Data were collected on three occasions. On the first day, students in the morning section of the sophomore English course read the first section of the book along with the audio recording (RWL). When the first section was completed, students closed their books and answered the subsequent
questions. The teacher collected student responses and instructed them to read the second section silently at their own pace and close their books when finished. As each student completed the silent reading, s/he was supplied the comprehension questions that accompanied that section of the book.

To control for order and text/question difficulty effects, the afternoon section of the sophomore English course silently read the first section of the book. Just as in the morning class, students signaled their completion of the reading by closing their books, and they were given the questions that accompanied that section of the book. After all students completed the questions accompanying the silent reading, they read the second section of the book along with the audio recording (RWL) and answered its questions.

On the second day of data collection, the same procedures were used except that the order in which the material was read in each of the two classes was switched from that of the previous day: the morning class began reading the third section of the book silently followed by reading the fourth section using RWL; the afternoon class began by using RWL with the third section of the book followed by reading the fourth section silently. On the final day of data collection, the same procedures were used except the order reverted back to that of the first day.

Questions were constructed in a short-answer format. In turn, two instructors were required to read all answers and reach a consensus about what constituted a complete versus partial answer. A full point was given for a complete answer, half of one point was given for a partial answer, and zero points were awarded for incorrect responses or unanswered questions. After scoring the answer sheets, researchers converted the scores to percentages.

**Results**

**Comprehension**

To compare the results of silent reading with RWL, a silent reading and RWL score pair was entered for each instance of a student taking both versions of the test on a given day. A total of 110 ($N = 110$) score pairs were recorded for the three days of testing. Paired sample $t$-tests were used to compare reading while listening to silent reading. To determine the effect of RWL on struggling readers’ comprehension, the researchers categorized struggling readers as those readers who scored below 50% on the silent reading portion of the measurement instrument, yielding a comparable distribution between the struggling readers ($n = 53$) and proficient readers ($n = 57$). Descriptive statistics of participatory 10th graders are summarized in Table 1.

Because three separate $t$-tests were used to analyze the data, a Bonferonni correction was applied to the alpha level (.05/3 = .017). For the entire sample, there was statistically significant improvement in students’ performance using RWL ($M = 57.3$, $SD = 2.24$) over silent reading ($M = 48.3$, $SD = 2.23$, $t(109) = 3.74$, $p < .001$, $d = .36$). Since the average number of percentage points for each question varied between 12.5% and approximately 16%, the mean difference of less than nine percentage points translated to an average of less than one more question correct for the RWL modality in the overall sample.
Table 1

Results of Total and Subgroups on Passage Comprehension

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Mean Silent Reading %</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>Mean RWL %</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>48.3%</td>
<td>23.54</td>
<td>57.3%</td>
<td>23.37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proficient</td>
<td>67.7</td>
<td>12.77</td>
<td>65.7</td>
<td>21.96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Struggling</td>
<td>27.5</td>
<td>11.51</td>
<td>48.3</td>
<td>21.60</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

While the Proficient reading group demonstrated no significant difference in reading performance between RWL and silent reading ($t = -.634, p > .017$), the Struggling reading group’s RWL performance ($M = 48.3, SD = 2.97$) exceeded silent reading performance ($M = 27.5, SD = 1.58, t(52) = 7.206, p < .001, d = .99$) with a large effect. This measure of reading comprehension improvement equated to an average of nearly two more questions correct for the Struggling reader group, almost doubling their average comprehension performance.

Survey

In addition to reading performance data, the researchers gathered data on student perceptions of RWL and the use of audio recordings for reading. The 3-point Likert scale survey created by the researchers asked for responses to four statements related to the recording speed, RWL’s effect on comprehension, RWL’s effect on reading enjoyment, and attitude towards using RWL in the future (see Table 2). Of those who felt the recording speed was not OK, 13% thought it was too slow, while 5% thought it was too fast. Although the majority of the students did not believe that RWL helped in their comprehension of the passage, nearly half of the students reported that it made the book more enjoyable and an identical percentage indicated their willingness to use audio recordings in the future.
Table 2

Results of Adolescent Student Perceptions of RWL

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>% Agree</th>
<th>% Neutral</th>
<th>% Disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The recording speed was OK</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>18</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RWL helped my comprehension</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RWL made the reading more enjoyable</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I would like to use RWL in the future</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Discussion

This study confirms results of earlier studies, exemplifying that RWL assists less proficient readers at the adolescent/secondary level. It may be helpful, then, to employ RWL as a strategy to scaffold less proficient readers towards comprehension improvement. In addition, the fact that almost half of the survey respondents indicated that RWL made reading more enjoyable also holds promise. Because the greatest aid to reading proficiency is arguably more reading, and because less proficient readers tend to be those who admittedly do not like reading, the fact that RWL increased the enjoyment of reading for many of these students may lead to increased levels of reading and in turn, improved reading ability. Limitations of the study include convenience sampling and a non-standardized measurement instrument. Nonetheless, the researchers believe that the positive results obtained by less proficient readers during the course of this study justify further investigation into the efficacy of RWL for scaffolding reading comprehension in less proficient adolescent/secondary readers. Recommendations for investigating RWL in the adolescent/secondary environment include using a measurement instrument with enhanced psychometric properties, matching comparison groups more closely on the basis of achievement criteria, and designing longitudinal studies to examine the effects of RWL on overall comprehension achievement.
References


Chapter Six

Graphic Novels in Today’s Elementary Classrooms

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Abstract

Graphic novels appeal to children of all ages and may be especially beneficial to English Language Learners (ELL) and struggling readers. Considering the popularity of graphic novels as something hot in 2012, we advocate the use of graphic novels to help students successfully comprehend, infer, and think critically. The challenge for teachers is to provide young readers the tools they need to understand features unique to graphic novels. This chapter addresses trends in children’s literature, features of graphic novels, and the teacher’s role in utilizing graphic novels in the elementary classroom.

According to the National Coalition Against Censorship (NCAC, 2006), graphic novels are one of the fastest growing categories in book sales and in publishing. Graphic novels differ from comics because comics are generally published as magazines, while graphic novels appear in book format. Schwarz (2006) defines graphic novels as “a longer and more artful version of the comic book bound as a ‘real’ book” (p. 58). Graphic novels appeal to expanded audiences and span across all genres. The popularity of graphic novels is attributed to many factors; one factor is that they appeal to the visual learner because they combine images with text to increase comprehension (Hassett & Schieble, 2007). Perhaps another factor in their popularity is that their combination of text and image is similar to that of film. There is interchange between the two as “film technique informs graphic novels and in turn, many filmmakers base their work on comics or graphic novels” (NCAC, 2006, p. 2). This chapter addresses trends in children’s literature, features of graphic novels, and the teacher’s role in utilizing graphic novels in the elementary classroom.

Recent Trends

Due to the rise in popularity of graphic novels, many well-known children’s books, including classics, are now available in graphic novel format (Bickers, 2007). For example, some familiar works that are now available as graphic novels include classics such as Jack London’s Call of the Wild (1903) and Sewell’s Black Beauty (1877). A recent trend in publishing involves best-selling children’s and young adult novels being reproduced in a graphic novel version. Examples include the bestselling novel...
Percy Jackson and the Olympians by Rick Riordan (2005) and Stephanie Meyer’s bestselling novel, Twilight (2005). In addition, the Newbery award winning book, The Tale of Despereaux (DiCamillo, 2003), became available in a graphic novel in 2008. Old favorites are also being reproduced into graphic novels. The Boxcar Children, written by Gertrude Chandler Warner and originally published in 1942, became available in graphic novel form in 2009. Also, in updated graphic novel stories, readers can find characters from old favorites such as the Nancy Drew series and The Hardy Boys series, both originally created by Edward Stratemeyer.

With this new trend in children’s literature come challenges and opportunities for classroom teachers and students of all ages. The challenge for teachers is to ensure young readers are provided the tools they need to understand the unique features of graphic novels. The opportunities for teachers are multiple, as graphic novels can be utilized instructionally in a variety of ways to increase comprehension skills of young readers.

Features of Graphic Novels

While graphic novels are not new forms of text, they have features that are not typical of conventional texts. The unique features of graphic novels call for increased attention from teachers and students in today’s classroom. According to Risko, Walker-Dalhouse, Bridges, and Wilson (2011), graphic novels have images and structures that provide support for navigating texts. Storylines can develop in both the text and illustrations simultaneously. While the text structure is motivational to many readers, elementary students do not automatically recognize ways pictures and text inform each other; therefore, instruction maybe necessary to enhance meaning. Since graphic novels evolved from comic books, the use of panels is implemented similarly. With limited space in panels, efficient readers must be equally attentive to text and pictures. Panels are usually rectangular in shape. Some panels are larger than others to give importance to a particular box, while others may have angled lines strategically placed to show action.

Dialogue in graphic novels is generally integrated through speech bubbles read from top to bottom and left to right within a panel. Panels are read from left to right across the page and top to bottom. Thoughts of characters are similarly displayed; however, they are unique in that the bubble is connected to the character through smaller bubbles symbolic of thought. Narration boxes and captions are generally inserted in a panel as rectangles containing text at the top or bottom of a panel. It is important for students to differentiate between dialogues, thoughts, and captions so that meaning is preserved.

Another graphic novel feature that may need to be explicitly addressed with young readers is the use of color. Colored pictures in graphic novels often indicate particular mood changes in the storyline. In Babymouse: Cupcake Tycoon (Holm & Holm, 2010), the color of pink is used to denote a dream or a flashback. The story begins on pink pages with the main character, Babymouse, in a mansion being served by a butler. When the page color changes from pink to white, the reader finds Babymouse back in school being served lunch in the cafeteria. While this particular series is a popular choice, many children need scaffolding to understand the importance of color to the storylines.

The use of onomatopoeia is a literary device used abundantly in graphic novels. It is not unusual to see words such as BAM! and CRASH! used to express emotion and excitement. As Percy Jackson is
fighting the minotaur in *The Lightning Thief* (Riordan, 2005), onomatopoeia such as *KRRKRACK, CRUNCH, MWOOROOOR, RAAAARRRRR,* and *SNAP* are used along with pictures to show how Percy defeats the minotaur. Since the text is shortened in graphic novels, onomatopoeia provides readers with a sense of adventure that might be otherwise explained in paragraphical form in the original version of the novel.

Informed educators understand the importance of incorporating student interest into instruction. Considering the popularity of graphic novels as *HOT in 2012*, student interest can be exacerbated by providing them with tools to be successful. Teachers can use read-alouds to assist students in reading graphic novels. For example, *Little Detective Blue* (Metzger, 2011) integrates well-known characters from children’s nursery rhymes to explore a new story delivered in graphic form. As the story is read-aloud, teachers can model the directionality of text as well as attention to pictures. *Babymouse* (Holm & Holm, 2010) would be appropriate to share with a small group since the book itself would be difficult to view as a whole group. Use of color to depict mood and setting can be explained so that students are ready to tackle the dialogue as they read and interpret the flashbacks indicated by color. Graphic novels are also available for older elementary students, adolescents, and adults. Teachers of upper elementary students may examine *Percy Jackson and the Lightning Thief* (Riordan, Venditt, Futaki, & Villarrubia, 2010) to point out both the use of onomatopoeia and shapes of panels that affect story comprehension.

**Instructional Uses of Graphic Novels**

Due to their high interest level, graphic novels are recommended as motivating reading material for struggling readers (Schwarz, 2002). Duke, Pearson, Strachan, and Billman (2011) suggest that students’ motivation is enhanced by contexts, materials, and tasks that catch their attention. In addition, they support the idea that motivation is highly correlated to learning and reading comprehension. Other benefits for the struggling reader include shorter text, visual features, and a gradual release from picture books to text-only literature (Gorman, 2003). According to Carter (2007), through the use of graphic novels in the English classroom, educators may move away from a *one size fits all* literacy instruction.

Teachers of English language learners (ELLs) are charged with the task of making content comprehensible (Echevarria, Short, & Vogt, 2008). This may be accomplished through visuals, texts, and assignments that are modified for ELLs (Echevarria & Graves, 1997). Graphic novels provide both a differentiated text and visual support for ELLs. While native English speakers and ELLs may need experiences of and instruction on reading and understanding graphic novels, ELLs are particularly likely to benefit from the combination of limited text and increased visual support through pictures. Another useful tool is the use of speech bubbles that help ELLs determine which character is doing the speaking in the story. ELLs may have difficulty understanding descriptive passages of text whereas the graphic novel *shows* the descriptive elements. Graphic novels enable readers to match pictures with text, and this is useful as a comprehension aid for ELLs.

Graphic novels span many genres and can be included as supplemental reading across the disciplines. Teachers may use a graphic novel such as *Seed, Sprout, Fruit: An Apple Tree Life Cycle* (Knudsen, 2011) when studying plants in science. Historical fiction is available in graphic novel format. The American Heroes series highlights Amelia Earhart in *Free in the Skies* (Burleigh, 2003). In addition, Helfand’s (2011) *The Wright Brothers* provides biographical information about Orville and Wilbur’s

Instructional applications of graphic novels are not limited to struggling readers and English learners. They provide opportunities for higher level thinking appropriate for all learners. For example, teachers can use graphic novels for comparing/contrasting activities. The practice of comparing text to movies is not new in education. Lessons and information on comparing texts to movies is provided on The International Reading Association’s website, http://www.readwritethink.org/. The theory behind the practice is that students are asked to think critically in relationship to the stories they see as they move beyond basic analysis to more sophisticated comparison skills. The same practice can be implemented with the use of graphic novels. Instead of comparing a book to a movie, children can compare a written novel with its graphic counterpart and use critical thinking skills to identify similarities and differences between the original text and the graphic novel version. Students can compare similarities and contrast differences between basic literary elements such as characters, plot, and setting.

Closing Thoughts

Graphic novels are a tool that teachers can use to promote reading. They are available in genres and difficulty levels appropriate for students of various reading abilities, ages, and interests. As educators become more familiar with and encouraging of graphic novels as a way to promote reading, consideration should be given to features, that when understood, can help students successfully comprehend, infer, and think critically.

Struggling readers and ELL may find success with graphic novels because of the embedded context, shorter reading passages, and high interest. However, graphic novels can be used with all learners. They provide opportunities for readers to compare/contrast, analyze, and predict outcomes. Importantly, students are choosing to read graphic novels. Teacher support of this trend motivates students as readers who can make choices about their own learning. While graphic novels have a valuable place on school bookshelves, they may also be a conduit to other pieces of literature children can enjoy.
References


Children’s Books Cited


Chapter Seven

Learning Comprehension through Multisensory Manipulation, Graphic Organizers, and Text Transformation

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Abstract

This chapter discusses three student-generated activities (i.e., multisensory manipulation, graphic organizers, and text transformation). Each of these activities can be used to increase comprehension. As presented in this chapter, multisensory manipulation involves students interacting with confusing text, graphic organizers refer to the organizational tools promoted by Dinah Zike (1992), and text transformation requires students to rewrite learning materials into different genres.

Research has proven that there is more to literacy and learning than simply opening a book and reading the contents (Gee, 1996; Thompson, 2008). As Sam Houston reminded his men before the battle of San Jacinto, “You will remember this battle” (as cited in http://www.quotes.net/), teachers are reminded daily to find active ways for students to read, write, and learn. Because of such importance, this paper explores three student-generated activities—multisensory manipulation, graphic organizers, and text transformation. As presented in this chapter, multisensory manipulation involves students interacting with confusing text, graphic organizers refer to the organizational tools promoted by Dinah Zike (1992), and text transformation requires students to rewrite learning materials into different genres.

Multisensory Manipulation

Learning is dynamic. Learning changes from day to day and from one content area to another (Picciano, 2008). In order to meet the varying needs of students and to increase comprehension, content-area teachers are encouraged to use a multisensory and multimodal approach to instruction (Yandell, 2008). A teacher incorporating multisensory and multiple modalities may give students the opportunity to learn through audio, visual, and linguistic approaches. By creating a learning environment that is
balanced in the modalities that students prefer along with those they need to further develop, the teacher is able to create a challenging, yet comfortable classroom.

Active reading is a multisensory, multimodal approach because students need to use their minds to touch, see, hear, taste, and smell what is happening around them. Active reading strategies such as visualizing, predicting, clarifying, connecting, questioning, and evaluating provide a chance to engage students with text.

One multisensory, multimodal strategy is conceptual annotations (Daniels & Steineke, 2011). Conceptual annotations encourage students to stop, think, and react to text. Readers using conceptual annotations may (a) write brief summaries in the text’s margins; (b) sketch pictures, graphs, or charts to explain difficult concepts; (c) list or number multiple ideas; (d) predict and write possible test questions; (e) note difficult ideas that need clarification by the teacher; and (f) underline key ideas. This activity is another multisensory approach to the text, giving students another chance to interpret the world around them in multiple ways (Freire, 2000).

What should the reader annotate? Figure 1 provides some items and codes that readers may consider while using conceptual annotations to read text. Furthermore, an example of conceptual annotations is displayed in Figure 2.

**Figure 1. Items and Possible Codes that Readers May Use to Annotate**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Definitions</th>
<th>Def. *[ ]</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lists, features, causes, effects,</td>
<td>1.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>characteristics, reasons</td>
<td>2.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Names, dates, events that are key</td>
<td>Underline or circle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Examples of main idea</td>
<td>ex.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good test questions of the passage</td>
<td>T.Q.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Difficult material</td>
<td>??</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 1. Readers may place the codes listed above in their text’s margins as a way to annotate the text. Readers may also develop additional codes.

Text annotation can have several advantages for readers. It can (a) improve concentration and help readers focus on the reading with less distractions, (b) provide an immediate self-check for understanding the text’s key ideas, (c) help readers remember more, (d) assist readers in getting ready for exams, (e) decrease the need to reread chapters for understanding, and (f) assist readers in stating important ideas from the text in their own words.
Figure 2. Example of Conceptual Annotations

Figure 2. The reader of the passage shown above used conceptual annotations as a multisensory, multimodal-reading strategy. The annotations used by the reader are as follows:

- **T** = Translation—underline key words; synonyms of words or popular terms related to the writing
- **O** = Rotation—shift; radical/major change
- **Δ** = Reflection—memory/remembering; pondering; speculation; impression

*Note: The passage used in Figure 2 is from Bromley, K. (2010). Picture a world without pens, pencils, and paper: The unanticipated future of reading and writing. *Journal of College Reading and Learning, 41*(1), 97-108.*

Readers using conceptual annotation as a means to interact with the text can also use sticky-notes to identify important information to use in a discussion group or difficult material to question later. With this approach, readers do not have to stop reading to clarify difficult material, but instead place a reminder within the text as to the location of the difficult material. This type of marking also works well when there are *what-if* or *what-about* questions that arise unintentionally.

**Graphic Organizers**

Dinah Zike (1992), through her creation of manipulatives, has drawn attention to the idea that while children are “bombarded with words during their formative years (birth to twelve years) …it is the words that are demonstrated through actions that form the child” (p. 4). Using student-produced study materials, such as graphic organizers and foldables have shown to increase retention of content learned. In addition, what works for one student, may not work for another. This is why allowing students to choose how they want to remember content gives them power and ownership in their learning.

What are graphic organizers? They are visual displays that help learners comprehend and retain information. When learners gain knowledge of how to use and construct graphic organizers, they become in control of a study strategy which allows them to identify important ideas of a text,
relationships among the ideas and concepts encountered in the text, and where they can find specific information to support more important ideas (National Reading Panel, 2000).

A vast amount of graphic organizers exist which depict relationships in text—word maps, semantic maps, flowcharts, and concept matrices, to name a few. Although there are numerous forms, it is important to remember that what these tools have in common is that they help students interact with and outline texts. “For example, when students read a text with an appropriate graphic organizer in mind, they focus on important ideas and relationships. And when they construct their own graphic organizers, they become actively involved in outlining those ideas and relationships” (Vacca, Vacca, & Mraz, 2011, p. 325). Using these same techniques, teachers can also create a learning environment rich in active learning, increasing the creative thinking of their students as they help empower students’ use of vocabulary and knowledge beyond the first day it is introduced. Figure 3 provides an example of one type of organizer—a diorama set-up.

**Figure 3. An Example of a Diorama Set-Up**

![Diorama Set-Up Image]

Figure 3. In this figure, using Dinah Zike's (1992) pyramid foldable, the differences among the armies at the battle of the Alamo are displayed using a diorama set-up. On the back of the diorama is an example of the Alamo as seen on the bottom picture. On opposing sides of the diorama are differences between the two armies involved in the battle.

**Text Transformation for Comprehension**

Dorn and Soffos (2005) insist that reading and writing are more than retelling information; these tasks both involve the ability to interpret what is read and written. Text reformulation, or story recycling, is an additional strategy that promotes comprehension (Feathers, 1993). Through text reformulation, students demonstrate their levels of comprehension by rewriting the assigned material into another genre. This reformulation or story recycling could be through, but not limited to a journal entry, a poem,
a song, a book jacket, news update, or PowerPoint presentation. By reformulating text into a different genre, students are required to not only take note of the content, but to also evaluate the text for important details. In addition to increasing comprehension, text reformulation increases personal creativity, thus promoting another way to increase critical thinking in the individual student.

After reformulating a text, students can present their creative works to their peers. This form of writing or creation for comprehension promotes the social acts of reading and writing, reciprocal in nature, as students share their products. Glenn (2007) argues that having students write to respond and reflect on what they get from the text clearly supports comprehension, giving students an opportunity to focus on what they derive from a text. Debate, disagreement, discussion, and intellectual growth develop from the ability to have conversations and presentations from students to their peers.

Figure 4 provides an example of a comic strip that has been reformulated from an assigned university textbook reading. For this example, future elementary teachers were asked to read a textbook chapter titled, Bringing it All Together through Inquiry: Observing and Assessing Independent Learning (Kristo & Bamford, 2004). The students’ purpose for reading was to identify important details that would guide them in their future classrooms. The undergraduate students then reformulated the text into a new genre to portray the important details. The reformulated text in Figure 4 displays a small section of a student’s recycled text.

Additional reformulated texts from this particular assignment included poems, newspapers, a café menu, and ABC books. Students presented their reformulated texts to their peers and reflective comments were posted as to what the other students thought and gained from the product posted. One student commented how it allowed her to be creative and another student said the process “caused me to slow down” (M. Razzo, personal communication, April 2011). Using this technique at the university level allowed students to experience the possibilities to come in their own future classrooms. Students also formulated the ideal that this strategy can be used at any grade level and for any content, thus making text transformations a reading strategy that can be considered timeless.
Figure 4. Example of a Reformulated Text

Figure 4. An example of a comic strip that has been reformulated from an assigned university textbook reading. For this example, future elementary teachers were asked to read a textbook chapter titled, *Bringing it All Together through Inquiry: Observing and Assessing Independent Learning* (Kristo & Bamford, 2004). The students’ purpose for reading was to identify important details that would guide them in their future classrooms. The undergraduate students then reformulated the text into a new genre to portray the important details.

Closing Thoughts

Duke, Caughlan, Juzwik, and Martin (2012) argue one of the problems with teaching reading and writing is that educators treat all forms of writing and reading as the same. A content area text is not the same as short story text. Reading an email is not the same as reading an article in a professional journal. Reading and writing needs to be taught and practiced in school the same way it is practiced in the real world.

Having students become actively creative in the learning process and using different avenues to express specific points will help them solve problems and to see the possibilities and alternatives in real life stories and situations. Maxine Greene (1995) pushed for releasing the imagination in students through the arts in all subjects. She believed imagination through the arts using content area subject matter would allow students to envision possibilities and realization of human existence in a different light for the real world. Not only will transformation of text assist with learning the subject matter in different subjects, but it will also help students find different possibilities for real-world situations and allow their creativity to harness content comprehension. Becoming active in reading and writing allows students to be dynamic in real-world situations through text transformation, multisensory manipulation and graphic organization.
William Travis said of Texas, “There have been many ideas of what Texas is, what it should become, and we are not all in agreement…” (as cited in http://www.quotes.net/). The same thing can be said of how students learn. The way students learn best is a continuing debate, and allowing them the opportunity of choice in how to produce proof of learning aids in calming the discontent of assignments for checking understanding of content. More importantly, students’ ability to reflect and reformulate content not only provides opportunities for the students to display their strengths, but it also promotes deeper mental acquisition of the content.
References


Chapter Eight

Topics Teachers and District Leaders Think are VERY HOT

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Abstract

This study took the 2010, 2011, and 2012 What’s Hot lists (Cassidy & Cassidy, 2009; Cassidy, Ortlieb, & Shettel, 2010; Cassidy & Loveless, 2011) and compiled the featured literacy practices and concepts into one survey incorporating a likert scale. The survey was then given to teachers and district leaders in northeastern Texas to determine what they believed to be the “hot” issues in their P-12 classrooms and/or districts. The study found a 66% match among the expert’s and participants’ lists. In addition, the data were examined by socioeconomic status (SES), school rankings (exemplary, recommended, and acceptable) and school settings (i.e., rural, suburban, and urban). Findings revealed that the “hot” topics varied in surprising ways.

Purpose of the Study

This study was designed to compare the literacy practices and concepts that literacy experts identified as being “hot” (i.e., the center of current attention), to those that classroom teachers and district leaders identified as the center of attention in their schools. In addition, socioeconomic status (SES), school ranking (i.e., exemplary, recommended, and acceptable), and school settings (i.e., rural, suburban, and urban) were used to examine the data.

The Topics

For over 15 years, Cassidy and others have published a What’s Hot list of literacy topics. “The major purpose of the What’s Hot list has always been to briefly familiarize literacy professionals with issues and concepts that currently are a focus of attention” (Cassidy, 2012, p. 3). Throughout the years, this publication has certainly made an impact on the field of literacy.
How are “hot” practices and concepts identified for the What’s Hot list? Each year the list is slightly modified. Cassidy contacts the 25 literacy leaders who had responded to the list of topics the previous year and asks them to suggest modification, additions, and deletions. Thus, the new survey is formed. He then interviews selected literacy experts who have national or international perspectives on literacy. Each interview begins with Cassidy reading the following:

I am going to mention some literacy practices and concepts that have been the center of attention and/or research in the last ten years. Currently, some of those practices are receiving more and positive attention in the field; and they are a focus of research. In other words they are “hot”. Some of the mentioned practices are enjoying less or negative attention and are not a focus of current research. In other words, they are “not hot”.

I will ask you whether each of the practices is “hot” or “not hot”. A vote for “hot” does not mean that you agree with or favor the particular practice or concept. It merely means that you see it as a focus of current positive attention. Similarly, a vote for “not hot” doesn’t mean that you are not interested in the topic yourself. All of the terms should be applied to literacy instruction. After I ask you whether the topic is “hot” or “not hot”, I will ask you if the topic should be “hot” or should be “not hot”. (Cassidy & Grote-Garcia, 2012, p. 53)

Following the interviews, the data from the experts is tallied. The topics receiving at least a 50% agreement from the experts is identified as “hot”. Topics having at least a 75% agreement are identified as “very hot”, while topics that had a 100% agreement received an “extremely hot” ranking.

The Current Study

The current study took the “very hot” items from the 2010, 2011, and 2012 What’s Hot (Cassidy & Cassidy, 2009; Cassidy, Ortlieb, & Shettel, 2010; Cassidy & Loveless, 2011) and compiled the featured literacy practices and concepts into one survey incorporating a likert scale. The purpose of the new survey was to identify the practices and concepts that classroom teachers and district leaders identified as “very hot” (i.e., the center of attention in their schools). The results were then compared to the original rankings given by the literacy experts (Cassidy & Cassidy, 2009; Cassidy, Ortlieb, & Shettel, 2010; Cassidy, Loveless, 2011).

As seen in Table 1, the experts’ “very hot” issues (Cassidy & Cassidy, 2009; Cassidy, Ortlieb, & Shettel, 2010; Cassidy, Loveless, 2011) are listed for the identified years. Upon further examination of these “very hot” topics, four literacy topics spanned two of the three years (i.e., ESL Learners, high-stakes assessment, literacy coaches, and comprehension), while two literacy topics spanned all three years (i.e., adolescent literacy and response to intervention). In addition, three topics were not duplicated in any year (i.e., early intervention, struggling/striving readers, and core learning/literacy standards).
Table 1

*The “Very Hot” Topics for 2010, 2011, and 2012*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topics</th>
<th>2010</th>
<th>2011</th>
<th>2012</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Adolescent Literacy</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comprehension</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Core Learning/Literacy</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>√</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Standards</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ESL Learners</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Early Intervention</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High Stakes Assessment</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Literacy Coaches</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Response to Intervention</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Struggling/Striving</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

√ Indicates item was identified by the experts as a “very hot” topic.
— Indicates item was not identified by the experts as a “very hot” topic.

**Methods**

**Participants**

The 40 participants in this study were graduate students working on their master or doctoral degrees. There were thirty-six females (90%) and four males (10%). The participants had various jobs in their individual school districts. There were 24 (60%) classroom teachers, four (10%) literacy coaches, two (5%) principals, four (10%) assistant principals and six (15%) district curriculum leaders. The majority of the participants reported that they had been teaching or in the education field for 0-12 years (80%). In addition, 75% of the participants were in the age range of 36-50 years old and they were mainly Caucasian (75%).
Data Collection

The data were collected in a four-step procedure. First, the 2010, 2011, and 2012 What’s Hot lists created by Cassidy and others were combined into one list, which created a 31-item survey instrument. Second, to make the survey a likert-scale instrument, 1-5 was added to each statement, with 1 being not concerned and 5 being strongly concerned. Third, the survey was created as an electronic survey. Fourth, an introductory letter and the survey were emailed to the participants. Participants were given seven days to complete the online survey.

Data Analysis

The results of the survey were placed into SPSS to determine the mean score for each topic listed on the likert-scale survey. Next, as Cassidy determined the “very hot” topics by those that received at least 75% agreement among the experts, it was decided by the researchers that items identified by the participants with a 4.5 mean or higher were to be considered “very hot” topics. Next, the data was examined using three variables: SES settings (i.e., low, middle, and high), rankings of schools (i.e., exemplary, recommended, and acceptable), and school setting (i.e., rural, suburban, urban). After each examination of the data within the variables, the results were compared to the original expert lists.

Results

This section presents the findings of the study. Findings will be presented in the following subsections: Whole group, School ranking, SES, and School setting.

Whole Group

When looking at the data from the whole group, as seen in Table 2, there were six “very hot” topics (i.e., high-stakes assessment, curriculum-based assessment, response to intervention, comprehension, core-/literacy standards, and critical reading and writing). High-stakes assessment, curriculum-based assessment, and response to intervention received a mean score of 4.6 while comprehension, core-/literacy standards, and critical reading and writing received a mean score of 4.5.

The original “very hot” topics identified by Cassidy and others included nine topics for 2009-2011 (see Table 1). However, the participants in this study indicated that six literacy topics were receiving attention in their classrooms or in their school districts (see Table 2). Ultimately, there were four topics that were identified by both the experts and the participants (i.e., comprehension, core learning/literacy standards, high-stakes assessment, and response to intervention).

Additionally, five topics that were deemed “very hot” by the original experts were not identified by the participants (i.e., adolescent literacy, early intervention, ESL learners, Literacy Coaches, and struggling or striving readers). Also, two literacy topics that were not on the original list were determined “very hot” by the participants of this study (i.e., critical reading and writing, and curriculum-based assessment).
### Survey Topics and Mean Scores

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Survey Topic</th>
<th>Mean Score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Adolescent literacy**</td>
<td>4.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adult literacy</td>
<td>2.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comprehension**√</td>
<td>4.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Core learning/literacy standards**√</td>
<td>4.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Critical reading and writing√</td>
<td>4.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Curriculum-based assessment√</td>
<td>4.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Differentiated instruction</td>
<td>4.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disciplinary/content area literacy</td>
<td>4.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Direct/explicit instruction</td>
<td>4.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Early intervention**</td>
<td>4.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English as a second language (ESL)**</td>
<td>3.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fluency</td>
<td>3.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High-stakes assessment**√</td>
<td>4.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Informational/non-fiction texts</td>
<td>4.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intertextuality/reading multiple texts</td>
<td>3.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Literacy coaches/reading coaches**</td>
<td>3.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Literacy and adolescent boys</td>
<td>2.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Motivation/engagement</td>
<td>4.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multicultural literature</td>
<td>3.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New literacies/media literacies</td>
<td>3.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phonemic awareness</td>
<td>3.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phonics</td>
<td>3.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political/policy influences on literacy</td>
<td>3.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preschool literacy instruction</td>
<td>3.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional staff development (inservice)</td>
<td>4.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Response to intervention (RTI)**√</td>
<td>4.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scientific evidence-based reading research and instruction</td>
<td>3.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Struggling/striving readers**</td>
<td>4.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher education for reading (preservice)</td>
<td>3.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Word meaning/vocabulary</td>
<td>3.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing</td>
<td>4.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

** Identifies the experts’ “very hot” topics.

√  Identifies the participants “very hot” topics.

### School Ranking

There are four rankings that Texas’s schools can receive— exemplary, recommended, acceptable, and not acceptable. These rankings are determined by standardized assessment scores. The collected data was analyzed to determine if there was a difference in the identified “very hot” topics
among schools of different rankings. In addition, the topics selected by variable group were then compared to the topics selected by the literacy experts.

Table 3 displays the “very hot” topics identified by the participants at exemplary, recommended, and acceptable schools. As displayed in Table 3, the three variable groups did not share a commonly chosen topic. In addition, the three variable groups also paid attention to very different topics. Participants from recommended schools reported nine “very hot” topics (i.e., adolescent literacy, adult literacy, comprehension, core learning/literacy standards, critical reading and writing, early intervention, high stakes assessment, informational/non-fiction, and response to intervention); six of these topics were on the original expert list (i.e., comprehension, adolescent literacy, core-learning/literacy standards, early intervention, high-stakes assessment, and response to intervention). This is a 60% match. The participants in schools with acceptable rankings reported three “very hot” topics (i.e., adolescent literacy, high stakes assessment, and curriculum-based assessment); two were on the original expert list (i.e., adolescent literacy and high-stakes assessment). This is a 20% match.

Ultimately, there were three “very hot” topics that were common among recommended schools and acceptable schools (i.e., adolescent literacy, comprehension, and high-stakes assessment). In addition, exemplary school participants reported comprehension as being the only “very hot” topic at their schools.

Table 3

Survey Data Organized by School Rankings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Exemplary (n=6)</th>
<th>Recommended (n=20)</th>
<th>Acceptable (n=14)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Adolescent Literacy**</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adult Literacy</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comprehension**</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Core Learning/Literacy Standards**</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Critical Reading and Writing</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Curriculum-based Assessment</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>√</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Early Intervention**</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High Stakes Assessment**</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Informational/Non-fiction</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Response to Intervention**</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

** Indicates the experts “very hot” topics.
√ Indicates the participants “very hot” topics.
— Indicates that the topic was not identified as a “very hot” topics.
School’s Social Economic Status (SES)

SES has shown to be a powerful factor in the learning process (Eggen & Kauchak, 2007). The collected data was analyzed to see if there was a difference in the identified “very hot” topics among schools of different SES and those identified by the experts. As seen in Table 4, there were no topics found to be “very hot” across all three variable groups. However, there are five common topics that are “very hot” in low SES and high SES school districts (i.e., core learning/literacy standards, critical reading and writing, curriculum based assessment, high-stakes assessment, and response to intervention).

When comparing the variable groups responses, the participants in low SES schools identified six “very hot” topics (i.e., core learning/literacy standards, critical reading and writing, curriculum based assessment, early intervention, high-stakes assessment, and response to intervention). Four of these topics were also on the experts’ list (i.e., core learning/literacy standards, early intervention, high-stakes assessment, and response to intervention). This is a 36% match. The participants in middle SES schools reported two “very hot” topics (i.e., comprehension and professional staff development); one of these topics was also on the experts’ list (i.e., comprehension). This is a 9% match. Lastly, the participants in the high SES schools reported nine “very hot” topics. Five of these topics matched the original experts’ list (i.e., adolescent literacy, comprehension, core learning/literacy standards, high stakes assessment, and response to intervention), which creates a 45% match.

Table 4

Survey Data Organized by School’s SES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Low (n=20)</th>
<th>Middle (n=14)</th>
<th>High (n=6)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Adolescent Literacy **</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>√</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adult Literacy</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>√</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comprehension**</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Core Learning/Literacy Standards**</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>√</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Critical Reading and Writing</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>√</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Curriculum-Based Assessment</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Direct/Explicit Instruction</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>√</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Early Intervention**</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High-Stakes Assessment**</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional Staff Development</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Response to Intervention**</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>√</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

** Indicates the experts “very hot” topics.
√ Indicates the participants “very hot” topics.
— Indicates that the topic was not identified as a “very hot” topics.
School Setting

The collected data was also analyzed to see if there was a difference in the identified “very hot” topics among school settings and those “very hot” topics identified by the experts. As seen in Table 5, there were no “very hot” topics that spanned across all three school settings, and the urban school settings did not identify a topic with a mean of 4.5 or greater; thus, they did not identify any topics as “very hot”. Furthermore, four of the “very hot” topics identified by the suburban schools also received attention by the rural schools (i.e., core learning/literacy standards, critical reading and writing, curriculum based assessment, high stakes assessment, and response to intervention).

How did the topics identified by the variable groups compare to those identified by the experts? The rural participants reported ten “very hot” topics (i.e., core learning/literacy standards, critical reading and writing, curriculum based assessment, direct/explicit instruction, early intervention, fluency, high-stakes assessment, motivation/engagement, professional staff development, and response to intervention), with four being on the experts’ list (i.e., core learning/literacy standards, early intervention, high-stakes assessment, and response to intervention). This is a 36% match. The suburban participants reported five “very hot” topics (i.e., core learning/literacy standards, critical reading and writing, curriculum based assessment, high stakes assessment, and response to intervention), and three of these topics were also on the experts’ list (i.e., core learning/literacy standards, high stakes assessment, and response to intervention). This is a 27% match.

Table 5
Survey Data Organized by School Setting

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Rural (n=14)</th>
<th>Suburban (n=14)</th>
<th>Urban (n=12)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Core Learning/Literacy Standards**</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Critical Reading and Writing</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Curriculum-Based Assessment</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Direct/Explicit Instruction</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Early Intervention**</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fluency</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High-Stakes Assessment**</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Motivation/Engagement</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional Staff Development</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Response to Intervention**</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

** Indicates the experts “very hot” topics.
√ Indicates the participants “very hot” topics.
— Indicates that the topic was not identified as a “very hot” topics.
Discussion

This section summarizes the findings and provides a brief discussion for each of the variable groups (i.e., whole group, school ranking, SES, and school setting).

**Whole Group**

The participants in this study indicated that there were six “very hot” topics in their schools, while the experts indicated that there were nine globally. When looking for similarities in the lists, both groups felt comprehension, core learning/literacy standards, high-stakes assessment, and response to intervention were “very hot” issues. However, when looking at the differences, the participants in the current study listed two categories in addition to those on the experts’ lists (i.e., critical reading and writing, and curriculum-based assessment).

Critical reading and writing are important skills and they have a reciprocal relationship (Stotsky, 1983). That is, reading helps you become a better writer and writing helps you become a better reader. The second topic, curriculum-based assessment provides assessment of a student’s skills and guides individual interventions (Guskey, 2003; McLean, Wolery, & Bailey, 2004). These two topic items were also “very hot” when looking at all three variables (i.e., rankings, SES and setting). This makes sense, as it helps teachers teach, reteach and differentiate instruction.

**School Ranking**

When looking at the data across rankings, the participants identified four topics that were being discussed in their schools, but were not identified by the experts as being discussed globally (i.e., adult literacy, curriculum-based assessment, critical reading and writing, and informational/non-fiction text). It is interesting that the participants, (i.e., educators in P-12 settings) identified adult literacy as “very hot”. One may wonder why P-12 educators would identify adult literacy as a “very hot” topic. We can only theorize for their reasoning at this point. Perhaps, adult literacy is the definitive goal they have for their students and thus, a “very hot” topic on their campus.

Less surprising then adult literacy being identified is that curriculum-based assessment, critical reading and writing, and informational/non-fiction text were identified as “very hot”. Research tells us that learning to read informational/non-fiction text involves the integration of accuracy, fluency, vocabulary, prior knowledge, inferencing, synthesizing, questioning and understanding text features (Fountas, & Pinell, 2001; Hoyt, 2002). Therefore, it is understandable that these three topics were chosen as “very hot” issues.

Perhaps the most interesting and surprising item by school ranking was that acceptable schools did not have comprehension on their list and they appeared to be mostly concerned with assessment. One hopes that they are using the results of these assessments to teach, reteach and differentiate for their students, which is in line with response to intervention and comprehension, even though these topics were not considered “very hot”.

Interestingly, exemplary schools only identified comprehension as “very hot” and this makes sense, as comprehension is the essence of reading (Durkin, 1993) and one of the key components of...
If a student is able to comprehend, they have mastered word recognition and decoding skills (Adams, 1990; Bond & Dykstra, 1967), they have also gained reading fluency (Dowhower, 1991; LaBerge & Samuels, 1974) and sufficient vocabulary knowledge (McKeown, Beck, Omanson, & Pople, 1985).

**Social Economic Status of Schools**

When looking at the data by SES, about half of the topics considered “very hot” were not being discussed globally and therefore not on the experts’ list. There was only one topic, comprehension, which was common among middle and high SES groups. Participants in the high SES schools reported nine “very hot” topics (i.e., adolescent literacy, adult literacy, comprehension, core learning/literacy standards, critical reading and writing, curriculum-based assessment, direct/explicit instruction, high-stakes assessment, and RTI); middle SES participants reported two topics (i.e., comprehension and professional staff development), while low SES reported six (i.e., core learning/literacy standards, critical reading and writing, curriculum-based assessment, early intervention, high-stakes assessment, and RTI). This is surprising considering the SES research (Evans, 2004; Griffith, 2000; O’Connor & Fernandez, 2006), which states that low SES schools typically have more students who struggle. This would lead one to believe that they should have more topics that they are discussing on their campuses. However, this was not the case.

**Setting of Schools**

When looking at the data by settings across schools, four more topics were considered “very hot” that were not on the experts’ list. They were direct/explicit instruction, fluency, motivation, engagement, and professional development. Research has shown that these topics are important in the learning process. For example, direct/explicit instruction is a strategic collection of instructional practices that allow the teacher to focus on the needs of individual students (Rupley, Blair, & Nichols, 2009). Pardo’s article (2004) reports that, *What Every Teacher Needs to Know about Comprehension*, every teacher should “provide explicit instruction of useful comprehension strategies” (p. 277). More specifically, “teachers help students become good readers by teaching how to use the strategies of monitoring, predicting, inferring, questioning, connecting, summarizing, visualizing, and organizing” (Pardo, 2004, p. 277). Direct instruction can be used to build fluency (Rasinski, Homan & Biggs, 2009), the second identified topic. Fluency impacts reading because it is correlated to reading comprehension. LaBerge and Samuels (1974) reported that automaticity in word recognition frees up the reader’s attention for use in comprehension.

What about the other three “very hot” topics identified (i.e., motivation, engagement, and professional development)? Higher motivation leads to more engagement in the reading process; this is important as engaged readers read for understanding (Guthrie & Wigfield, 2000). Reading motivation seems to be associated with the following four key features: access to books in the classroom, opportunities to self-select books, familiarity with books, and social interactions with others about books (Gambrell, 1996). In addition, extensive research has shown that teachers are the most important variable in the classroom and have the greatest impact on student achievement (Goldhaber, 2007;
Gordon, Kane, & Staiger, 2006; Rivkin, Hanushek, & Kain, 2005; Rockoff, 2004); thus professional development for teachers should be a major concern in all school districts (Darling-Hammond, 2005).

Looking at each setting, the rural participants identified ten “very hot” items, the suburban participants identified five, and urban participants didn’t report any. One may initially conclude that the urban setting is not concerned with these topics. However, keep in mind that research has shown that urban schools are struggling (Boyd, Lankford, Loeb, & Wyckoff, 2005; Rumberger & Palardy, 2005). This could lead one to believe that urban schools should have many topics being discussed on their campuses.

**Conclusion**

This study was designed to compare the “very hot” literacy topics identified by literacy experts to those identified by teachers and district leaders. This study demonstrated that a variety of topics are considered “very hot.” In addition, it is believed that even though suburban, rural, low SES, and acceptable schools did not pick comprehension as a “hot” topic, comprehension is intertwined with a variety of the other topics selected. It is this integration of literacy topics within the curriculum that may provide the best results (Kostelnik, Soderman, & Whiren, 2007; Moore, Moore, Cunningham, & Cunningham, 2003). Thus, maybe the exemplary schools have the right idea, as they picked one “very hot” topic, which was comprehension. Perhaps, exemplary schools’ intensive focus on comprehension has allowed them to delve deeply into the essence of reading (Durkin, 1993), rather than working on a surface level.
References


Chapter Nine

The 21st Century Reading Specialist

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Abstract

The purpose of this chapter is to define and describe a new instructional practice model for 21st century reading specialists. The role of the reading specialist has shifted over the past 30 years moving from an orientation of fixing reading difficulties in students to one of leading collaborative school-wide efforts on improving the literacy growth of all students. Much of this change has developed from increased accountability requirements, along with the requirements of Response to Intervention (RTI). This paper explores how 21st century reading specialists can effectively practice as literacy leaders who successfully meet the literacy needs of students and the professional learning needs of teachers. Recommendations for implementing the model are also provided.

The reading specialist has traditionally been seen as a fix-it role, providing remedial help for those students falling behind in classroom literacy expectations. This role was seen as one of promise — a lone reading specialist in the school ensuring all students read at the required levels. However, this traditional role has not produced the expected results (Allington, 2009, p. v). Unless school districts radically rethink how they allocate time and expectations for reading specialists, the old traditional role of pull-out and fix it will continue to produce students falling behind.

Quality classroom instruction, supported by the reading specialist, is emerging as a viable alternative producing the expected achievement results. With increased literacy expectations driven by state achievement tests and budget cuts in the area of professional development for teachers, the potential of the reading specialist as an onsite professional learning provider for faculty is prime for promoting rich literacy teaching in every classroom.

This is not a recent phenomenon. In 1969, the U.S. Commissioner urged educators to organize all possible resources toward eliminating reading deficiencies which existed among more than a quarter of the population (Vogt & Shearer, 2003). By the 1960’s, professional coaching had become a subtle expectation for the role of the reading specialist; a reading specialist was expected to be able to develop
relationships with classroom teachers, parents, administrators and students, and be able to communicate effectively with all these people (Guth & Pratt-Fartro, 2011; Stauffer, 1967). Some states began to differentiate between the reading specialist role and the role of literacy coach or instructional coach, whereas other states redefined the role of the reading specialist. In a national survey by Roller in 2006, 67% of responding coaches reported working closely with classroom teachers, 25% reported they worked with both teachers and students, and less than 2 percent reported they worked only with struggling students (Sailors, 2009, p. 6).

Allington (2009) describes this changing expectation for the reading specialist as “old wine with a new label” going on to state that literacy educators know what to do because we have been successful. In the past five to ten years, we have studies with multiple school districts that have demonstrated that with quality reading instruction and timely intervention, 98% of all children can be reading on level by the end of first or second grade (Guth & Pratt-Fartro, 2011; Allington, 2009). To accomplish this goal, reading specialists and literacy coaches hold the specialized knowledge that works in a reciprocal relationship. They support student achievement while also supporting teachers’ instructional effectiveness (L’Allier, Elish-Piper & Bean, 2010). The International Reading Association also recognized the importance of the changing roles of reading specialists and coaches with its revised standards (IRA, 2010b). These literacy professionals play crucial roles associated with student achievement including, a) assessing the strengths and needs of students, b) supporting classroom teachers in appropriate instruction, c) acting as school-wide resources, and d) leading literacy endeavors through effective communication and collaboration with all stakeholders (IRA, 2010b). The challenge continues to be encouraging all administrators and teachers to expect and provide rigorous and responsive literacy instruction in all classrooms.

Traditional Model vs. New Model

Response to Intervention (RTI), a three-tiered intervention process, is a consistent, yet flexible framework for early and appropriate identification of students experiencing literacy difficulties. In the absence of RTI, students are identified with learning disabilities primarily based on discrepancies between ability (IQ testing) and achievement (test scores and academic performance) (Wixson & Valencia, 2011). Unfortunately, this process does not always involve classroom teachers and reading specialists working together to investigate why students are having difficulties prior to moving ahead with the special education identification testing. With an RTI framework, classroom teachers, ESL teachers, school psychologists and reading specialists collaboratively work to provide a series of increasingly more strategic interventions to determine literacy strengths and challenges exhibited by students in hopes of better meeting those needs with instruction that occurs outside a special education setting (IRA, 2010a). RTI helps promote a shared vision of responsibility for literacy growth of all students among all school staff and faculty. In other words, student learning becomes a collective task. RTI is a “framework to help schools identify and support students before the difficulties they encounter with language and literacy become more serious” (IRA, 2010a, p. 1).

RTI may be school districts’ ticket to re-conceptualizing the role of the reading specialist, viewing the reading specialist more as a collaborative literacy leader than a remedial “fix and return” specialist. The traditional model had teachers working solo in their classrooms and sending the less
capable literacy students to the reading specialist. Often there are too many students needing services; therefore, a paraprofessional may instruct them out of the classroom under the guidance of the specialist. Students then return to the classroom most likely having missed some sort of instruction from the teacher. This movement back and forth between learning environments and being publically separated from peers can often negatively affect a student’s sense of confidence in learning and motivation for reading.

Conversely, the new model has teachers and reading specialists working collaboratively together to plan and deliver the highest quality reading instruction in the classroom environment. Students are no longer being pulled from the classroom and signaled out from their peers. Instead, it’s all hands on deck to provide targeted intensive intervention and striving to accelerate learning of students in Tier Two, with only a small percentage of the population being seen independently by the reading specialist in Tier Three or Tier Four, depending on the configuration of the school district’s RTI plan.

This new 21st century conceptualization of the reading specialist can also be viewed as a literacy leader who focuses on the preventive aspect of high quality reading instruction in every classroom, every day. Moving to a literacy leader model requires a paradigm shift in the minds of all literacy stakeholders. Initially, we need to move from a fix the student orientation, to a prevent reading difficulties orientation. This new mental model takes a more proactive stance by acknowledging the responsibilities of all administrators, teachers, reading specialists, paraprofessionals, parents and the students themselves in providing high-quality, consistent and developmentally appropriate assessment, instruction and resources to students in every content area at every grade level. With the support of the reading specialist as literacy leader across contents, “the expectation is that responsive instruction in Tier 1 will diminish the need for Tier 2 and 3 support for most students” (Brozo, 2011, p. 147; Brozo, 2010).

Next, the new model challenges us to move from a remediation orientation to one of motivation for all students. Consistent with preventing reading difficulties is the often neglected notion of motivation, especially at the early grades (Marinak, Malloy & Gambrell, 2010). Educators and parents assume that young children naturally love books and reading. However, this is not necessarily the case especially in situations where children are lacking access to positive reading role models, time, choice, or appropriately leveled texts (Guth & Pratt-Fartro, 2010). Literacy leaders must ensure that students, teachers and parents understand the interplay between achievement and motivation in reading. When students read more, they become better readers which, in turn, motivate them to read more (Stanovich, 1986).

Finally, in the literacy leader model, the reading specialist needs to be viewed as moving from a case load manager to a leader of all loads. The reading specialist should no longer see only students identified as the most challenged readers in the school as there is room for literacy growth in all students. The 21st century reading specialist should be leading school-wide efforts within individual classrooms to ensure that all students are receiving effective literacy instruction.
Dramatic Shifts in Roles and Responsibilities

To exemplify this paradigm shift, data was collected from 30 reading specialists and literacy coaches over a 13-year span in one suburban school district in a Mid-Atlantic state (Guth & Pratt-Fartro, 2011). Each participant was asked to document time spent on tasks as related to the following responsibilities: pull-out programs, testing and meetings. Results indicate a dramatic shift in responsibilities as exemplified in Figure 1.

As illustrated in Figure 1, the percentage of time spent on tasks related to pull-out programs has decreased by approximately 50% over the course of 13 years. Results related to testing tasks indicate that while the percentage of time spent on testing has remained consistent, specific responsibilities have shifted from completing diagnostic testing of individual students to being responsible for school-wide literacy test administration, compilation and dissemination of results. Additionally, in 1999, no reading specialists indicated time spent in meetings as a majority of their workload, although over the course of data collection, participants have indicated increased responsibilities of attending general meetings related to reading, to most recently attending and facilitating school-wide leadership meetings. These results suggest that demands placed on 21st century reading specialists are shifting to those more aligned with school-wide literacy efforts. Therefore, in moving towards a literacy leader model, new responsibilities and differing roles for the reading specialist are needed.
First, the reading specialist must assist the staff in setting school-wide literacy goals and then educate them in healthy reading practices by providing job-embedded professional learning opportunities specifically related to those goals, as well as to diagnostic, assessment and standardized achievement data. Second, specialists must schedule and monitor regular reading screenings for all students with more in-depth and frequent screening for struggling readers. Third, best practices should be modeled in all classrooms to strengthen the educational immune system of all students, not just those who struggle in reading. Finally, the reading specialist must take the lead on providing the staff with healthy research-based ideas and resources to support literacy growth in every tier of instruction. This outreach extends beyond the school to homes where families can be encouraged to get involved in school-based literacy activities to help learn methods to keep students on a healthy at-home reading course.

**Recommendations for 21st Century Reading Specialists**

The following recommendations will assist our 21st century reading specialists to fulfill these new literacy leader roles and responsibilities as they work to meet the literacy needs of every student every day. First and foremost, scheduling the use of reading specialists’ time needs to be collaboratively determined by administrator and the specialists with the common understanding that it remains flexible enough to meet the needs of teachers and students. Specialist need to have time for regularly scheduled meetings with each grade level within a school. The foci of these meetings may include such target areas as modeling literacy strategies, resource exploration and training, or discussion of diagnostic testing procedures. Reading specialists’ schedules also need to reflect time for in-class modeling of best literacy practices, coaching teachers and working directly with students based on RTI needs. Students may be seen by reading specialists in a small-group setting within a classroom or outside of the classroom for more targeted and specialized individualized instruction. However, if reading specialists are pulling students out of classrooms, we suggest limiting those groups to no more than three per day so that specialists have ample time to fulfill their other responsibilities to the broader school community. For example, reading specialists must have time to develop and implement professional learning opportunities for paraprofessionals and teachers as related to their data-driven specific needs centered on resources, assessment, instruction, and community relations.

Next, 21st century reading specialists must be well-versed in the specific RTI implementation procedures unique to the school so that targeted instruction with students and professional learning with teachers can take place. Reading specialists can coach teachers with strategies focused on the learning needs of students within each tier. For example, a tier one strategy might be in-class modeling with discussion and application to a specific content lesson or support of guided reading and literacy centers. A tier two focus may include coaching on lesson development and study aimed at improving the comprehension of a small group of striving readers. Tier three coaching may include a professional book study with application on how to best meet the needs of students who are two to three years behind in reading grade level expectations.

Finally, in order to achieve school-wide buy-in and collaboration with reading specialists, their responsibilities must be accurately and routinely relayed to school-based employees and external stakeholders. This includes any administrative expectations placed on reading specialists, such as
conducting school-wide needs assessments and walk-throughs, testing administration, lesson observations, and possible evaluative tasks.

The recent adoption of the Common Core Standards and its content expectations will undoubtedly result in even greater variability in student performance calling for differentiated teaching approaches, as characterized by RTI (Wixson & Lipson, 2012) and a literacy leader model. The success of these differentiated approaches depend on a specialized literacy professional leading each charge, to specifically design instruction and learning based on student data, teachers’ expertise and school-wide needs. The time has come for a literacy leader in each school, uniting reading professionals, RTI, and the Common Core expectations. When all school-based staff understand the reading specialist’s roles as one of literacy leader, positive pedagogical changes and increased student learning will occur. Student growth can now be correlated to the amount of time that a reading specialist teaches, co-teaches or coaches in classroom which suggests that instructional practices rather than literacy programs are responsible for increased student achievement (Bean, 2009).
References


Chapter Ten

Literacy Coaches: A Support System for New Teachers

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Abstract

This qualitative study identifies how literacy coaches adapt their coaching to meet the needs of beginning teachers. Data were gathered from 30 literacy coaches serving elementary schools along the U.S. and Mexico border. A thematic analysis of data revealed literacy coaches’ roles uniquely situated them to support new teachers. Five ways in which coaches differentiated their coaching for beginning teachers were identified (i.e., time, types of instructional assistance, professional development, support in areas beyond literacy and affective support). The study suggests that school leaders promote literacy coaches’ role as mentors to accelerate the growth and retention of new teachers.

The need for school systems to retain quality teachers has received much attention in the literature. The hiring, retention, and development of quality teachers have been identified as a strategic priority for school district improvement efforts (Moir, Barlin, Gless, & Miles, 2010). Veteran teachers are no longer a majority in schools across the country. Over 52% of today’s teaching force is made up of teachers with fewer than ten years of experience (Coggins & Peske, 2011). Thirty to fifty percent of beginning teachers leave the profession within five years (Ingersoll, 2003; National Commission on Teaching and America’s Future, 2003). This presents a challenge as new teachers are expected to be as effective in supporting student growth and achievement as their experienced colleagues (Cochran-Smith, 2005).

The Needs of the New Teacher

Beginning teachers do not want to be left on their own to sink or swim in the profession. The Harvard Graduate School of Education conducted a five year qualitative study of 50 new Massachusetts
teachers. The study identified the type of support that new teachers wanted from their campuses. Johnson and Kardos (2003) wrote:

What new teachers want in their induction is an experienced colleague who will take their daily dilemmas seriously, watch them teach and provide feedback, help them develop instructional strategies, model skilled teaching, and share insights about students’ work and lives. (p. 27)

Andrews, Gilbert, and Martin (as cited in Hoover, 2010) also noted new teachers wanted opportunities to work with and learn from experienced peers in a non-evaluative setting. In addition, they report greater satisfaction when support is received from an insider within the organization (Berry, 2011). Stansbury and Zimmerman (2002) describe new teachers as needing support in the following distinct areas: personal and emotional support, solving specific teaching problems, and thinking critically about their own teaching practices.

The Principal’s Role in Supporting New Teachers

Principals, in particular, have been identified as having one of the most vital roles in providing support for the retention and growth of new teachers (Carver, 2003; Moir, 2009a; Roberson & Roberson, 2009; Watkins, 2005). Administrative support for beginning teachers often does not occur. Kardos and Johnson (2007) report that, “many novice teachers today are likely to begin their teaching careers in schools where they must find their own way” (para. 9). Administrative efforts to retain new teachers may be organized around mentoring, and induction programs. Strong (2009) reviewed numerous research studies related to mentoring and induction programs and concluded, “…the more components of induction support teachers report having received …the greater the likelihood they will remain in teaching” (p. 44).

One key component of an induction program is that of mentoring. The use of mentors is seen as a means to build new teacher capacity. Joyce and Calhoun (2010) describe the rationale behind mentoring as, “…. to help new teachers develop 21st century teaching skills for students needing 21st century learning skills and knowledge” (p. 42).

Literacy Coaching

A variation on the supportive theme of mentoring is coaching. Wong and Wong (2008) note that coaches are an important part of the induction process. Coaching provides for continuous, job embedded learning with ongoing support consistent with what research has identified as having an impact on teacher learning (Darling-Hammond & Richardson, 2009; Knight, 2009).

A popular form of coaching is that of the literacy coach. Joyce and Calhoun (2010) describe the purpose of literacy coaches as follows: “The overall goal [of coaching] is to help professionals develop better skills and knowledge, either across the curriculum areas or in a particular one – literacy being the most prominent at the present time” (p.51).
Principals need to understand the role of coaches in working with teachers. Knight (2006) identified factors that principals should consider to increase the impact of coaching. He asserted that coaches should function in a non-evaluative role, build trusting relationships with teachers, and be provided sufficient time to work with teachers in a collaborative setting that allowed for modeling lessons and conducting observations.

In terms of guidance for the literacy coaches’ work, Bean (2007) emphasizes the non-evaluative role of coaches and the importance of coaches not making judgments about teachers’ instruction. L’Allier, Elish-Piper and Bean (2010) emphasize time and collaboration as principles in guiding the work of literacy coaches.

Methods

Although little research has been completed specifically on coaching of novice teachers, Bean and Isler (2008) wrote, “Coaching for these novice teachers is money well spent. With coaching feedback, these young teachers become experts more quickly” (p. 2). The following research looks at the roles of literacy coaches as they relate to newer teachers and the type of differentiated coaching support given to them.

Participants and Setting

Thirty literacy coaches from elementary schools along the border with Mexico participated in the study. At the time of the study, they were working as Reading First Coaches, focused on kindergarten through third-grade classrooms. They worked at schools in which about 34 percent of students were ELLs (English Language Learners) and about 96 percent of students were categorized as economically disadvantaged. Their years of experience in coaching ranged from one to six years, with over half having three or more years of experience. Most of the literacy coaches had extensive experience as teachers before becoming coaches. Of the 26 coaches who answered an online follow-up survey, ten had more than 15 years, ten had between 8 and 15 years, and six had between 4 and 7 years of teaching experience before becoming a coach.

Data Collection

Data came from three sources (i.e., survey, focus group discussion, and an anonymous online survey) to triangulate and validate the findings (Creswell, 2003). The first data were collected in a survey given before a literacy coaches’ meeting. The survey focused on how coaches differentiated their coaching content and style to meet the needs of diverse teachers and students. The following are examples of questions from the survey:

1) How do you adapt your coaching to meet the needs of diverse teachers?
2) What factors do you take into consideration when you coach a teacher?
3) Why do you feel those factors are important?
The survey was anonymous and voluntary but included an optional section at the end, which asked participants to write their names and contact information if they wished to participate in follow-up interviews.

The second source of data was a face-to-face focus group with four coaches in which the researchers followed-up and clarified the responses from the initial survey and reflections. Responses were audio taped and later transcribed.

For the third source of data, the researchers designed an anonymous online survey to collect follow-up data from participants. A link to the survey was sent to the e-mail of all 36 coaches who had been present in the initial meeting. Of those, 26 responded to the survey. Participants were asked open-ended questions about topics such as what they viewed as their most important contributions as coaches and how their coaching differed for new teachers versus experienced teachers.

Data Analysis

A thematic analysis was conducted by focusing on repeated words, phrases and ideas (Grbich, 2007). Researchers searched for patterns in the data and then categorized the data according to the patterns that emerged (Creswell, 2003; Merriam, 1998). Each of the three researchers reviewed the data individually and then met to discuss the patterns that each of them had found and to collapse overlapping areas. The patterns were then categorized by broader themes. Although numerous themes emerged, the ones that are included in this paper address the ways the coaches supported novice teachers.

Results

Literacy coaches’ primary responsibility was to oversee their schools’ reading program in kindergarten through third grade. The results of the study showed that, among other factors, coaches took into consideration the years of experience of teachers when assisting them with reading instruction. The following five patterns emerged as ways the coaches differentiated for less experienced teachers: time, types of instructional assistance, professional development, support in areas beyond literacy, and affective support.

Time

Coaches reported spending more time with less experienced teachers than more experienced teachers. One coach expressed that “less experienced teachers obviously need an abundance of ideas and opportunities to excel.” Another wrote, “when working with new teachers information provided is more explicit and more often.” One participant explained that “new teachers get more specific one-to-one coaching.” Coaches also said that it is important to support new teachers all year long because it takes time before they feel comfortable enough to ask questions.
Instructional Support

In descriptions of how instructional support was provided, coaches modeled and team taught more lessons with newer teachers. A coach explained, “I do more professional development, co-teaching, and modeling. While the experienced teacher just needs to reflect, new teachers need ample time to practice the skills then reflect and they require more direct feedback.” Coaches also helped make arrangements for new teachers to observe in the classrooms of successful veteran teachers. For example, one coach mentioned, “I try to get in with new teachers as much as possible to model or provide opportunities to observe experienced teachers.”

Professional Development

Professional development was tailored for beginning teachers. For example, one coach explained that she provided “refresher trainings for experienced teachers, [compared to] the whole training/presentation for ‘new’ teachers.” Professional development also depended upon the specific instruction previously received in the programs being used at that grade level. One of the participants mentioned that she took into consideration the “years of experience and how long they have been teaching at that grade level and if they have been properly trained.” Literacy coaches provided “individualized professional development to meet the needs of each teacher.”

Beyond Literacy

In order to support literacy instruction, coaches found the need to provide novice teachers assistance in areas beyond literacy, such as classroom management. During observations, one coach stated that she “look[ed] at the classroom management first and at the students’ behavior” to determine if children were interested and involved in the lessons. One coach developed a program for new teachers and described it as “Reading First and…a combination of other areas as well. Just to make sure that…the new teachers are not lost because … I remember being lost.”

Affective Support

Coaches described themselves in a number of roles, including “advocate,” “good listener and problem solver,” and “a shoulder to cry on.” A coach wrote, “My role is also to provide ample opportunities for teachers to feel confident in the classroom.” Coaches developed trust by keeping information confidential. One of the coaches shared the following experience:

“One particular teacher thought I was only working with her and… I told her,...I can’t really come and say, …I’m also working with so and so. Just like I can’t go around and tell everybody else that I’m working with you.”

As relationships with teachers grew, the coaches were better able to support the teachers emotionally as well as academically. One participant shared the following experience: “When the
relationship grows… it’s amazing. They come to you [coach]… instead of going over to the facilitator or administration.” This participant also explained that “if they [teachers] feel that they need something, they come to me… because I’m there and they see me as a support. So, it’s a strong bond that we have.”

Discussion

The literacy coaches in this study differentiated their coaching practices based on teachers’ experience levels. The new teachers’ needs were taken into consideration by the coaches as illustrated in their coaching practices. Literacy coaches did not regard new teachers as “finished products.” By providing frequent and individualized help that differed from support given veteran teachers, they showed recognition for the distinct needs of new teachers. This is consistent with the literature that suggests the specialized needs of new teachers must be addressed if they are to develop and grow into quality teachers and be retained in the profession (Feiman-Nemser, 2003).

Specifically, literacy coaches reported spending more time with new teachers to focus on individualized needs, to provide extra instructional and affective support, to aid and assistance on teaching matters beyond literacy, and to offer job embedded professional development tailored to needs. The differentiated coaching provided for new teachers aligns with the continuum of support recommended by Stansbury and Zimmerman (2002) because it focused on personal and emotional support, problem-focused support, and support in reflection on teaching practices and student work.

Affective support was provided for new teachers by coaches who spent extra time with them and frequently visited their classrooms throughout the year. As a result, new teachers viewed literacy coaches as trusted colleagues and confidants to whom they could consult at difficult times. These trusting relationships also provided a critical and essential ingredient for successful coaching (Knight, 2006). Emotional support is identified as the first step in the successful induction of new teachers (Stansbury & Zimmerman, 2002).

Participating coaches spent time on specific classroom issues such as classroom management and attended to other needs of first year teachers outside of literacy instruction. Feiman-Nemser (2003) suggests new teachers need support for their nitty-gritty day to day dilemmas. Assistance with distinctive teaching problems is the second type of support recommended on Stansbury and Zimmerman’s continuum (2002).

Literacy coaches assisted new teachers’ reflective ability by modeling instruction, co-teaching lessons, observing teaching, and giving feedback on instructional practices within their classroom. This type of coaching support fits with Stansbury and Zimmerman’s (2002) recommendation for helping new teachers reflect critically upon their own teaching. Feiman-Nemser (2003) observed that “beginning teachers have legitimate needs that cannot be grasped in advance or outside the context of teaching” (p. 26). The literacy coaches in our study provided needed support within the context of the new teachers’ classrooms. Additionally, literacy coaches fulfilled new teachers’ desires to work collaboratively with experienced peers on instructional matters (Johnson & Kardos, 2003) in a non-evaluative setting (Andrews, Gilbert, & Martin as cited in Hoover 2010).

School leaders’ support is vital to new teachers’ success. Leaders are to assign them expert mentors and facilitate the relationship (Brock & Grady, 1998; Hope, 1999; Shann, 1998), help them build collegial relationships with peers (Hope, 1999), and provide collaborative opportunities to work on
instructional matters with experienced peers (Kauffman, Johnson, Kardos, Liu, & Peske, 2002). Principals should establish a professional culture that encourages teacher collaboration across all experience levels (Johnson & Kardos, 2003; Johnson et al., 2001) and promote sustained ongoing school-based professional development (Feiman-Nemser, 2003; Johnson & Kardos, 2003; Moir 2009a; Wong, 2003). Literacy coaches can support all of these practices.

**Conclusion**

Research indicates that new teachers require support if they are going to provide quality instruction to their students and remain in the field (Berry, 2011; Moir 2009b). This support is best provided by an expert peer rather than an administrator because the administrator is also responsible for evaluating the teacher. The results of our study indicate that literacy coaches can support novice teachers with classroom management and environment, daily scheduling, paperwork requirements, and other needs as well as coaching them in literacy instruction. Literacy coaches have the experience as teachers, the formal education, and the professional development in how to mentor teachers. Their role as coaches allows them to team teach and model lessons in the classroom, something that administrators or other teachers are usually not in a position to do. In addition, they build relationships and trust with new teachers so that the teachers are willing to accept suggestions from them and even consult with them about the challenges they encounter. Literacy coaches, therefore, should be considered a resource for new teachers because they are uniquely positioned to provide support for novice teachers.
References


Chapter Eleven

Prompting with a Purpose: Preparing the Literacy Coach

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Abstract

Professors at one university have developed a continuum of graduate level courses (i.e., foundational course, clinical course, and literacy coaching practicum) that scaffold the development of purposeful prompts through reflection-based models. Prompts at the foundational level implemented small group instruction built upon goal setting, thinking in action and thinking on action. Prompts in the clinical course built on systematic, daily reflections to facilitate children’s literacy development. Finally, graduate reading candidates transitioned to a literacy coaching practicum where purposeful prompting was used to guide teacher-to-teacher interactions. In addition to describing this continuum of courses, this chapter will examine the multiple perspectives of the classroom teacher, the clinician, and the literacy coach within the various course levels.

Graduate reading programs are often meant to transition candidates from a focus on classroom instruction to literacy coaching, and to make a change of stance from reflection-on-action to reflection-in-action (Schon, 1987). In order to support this transition, graduate candidates must experience embedded opportunities for reflection and continuous practice in developing and utilizing purposeful prompting. Purposeful prompting is a significant component because the use of effective prompts provides a lens for teacher envisioning and reflection (Denton, 2007). This chapter discusses one university’s continuum of graduate level courses that was specifically designed to transition candidates from a focus on classroom instruction to literacy coaching. Each of the three courses embedded in the graduate continuum will be discussed in a separate section. In addition, each section will also feature the participants’ perspectives.
Foundational Coursework

Graduate reading candidates, at the onset of their Master’s program, have a variety of background experiences that shape their perceptions of effective literacy instruction, particularly as they become influential teachers (Ruddell, 2004). Rapp, Rhodes and Strokes (2006) recommend designing coursework to integrate teachers’ background experiences while incorporating reflective practices to enhance their view of literacy instruction. Teacher talk or strategic teacher prompts can be evaluated within individual courses, practical teaching experiences, and among a Reading Master’s program to monitor changes in reading candidates’ reflection of the use of strategic prompting (Ruddell, 2004; Thwaite & Rivalland, 2009).

A snapshot of the foundational course. Research outlining reflective practices and teacher discourse indicate that teachers have varied views of effective teacher talk, which is meant to support strategic comprehension and communication (Rapp, Rhodes & Stokes, 2006; Ruddell, 2004; Thwaite & Rivalland, 2009). “The teachers’ roles within a classroom are closely related to types of classroom discourse” (Madda, Griffio, Pearson & Raphael, 2011, p. 45). During course discussions, candidates shared their perceptions of effective strategic prompts or teacher talk used during literacy lessons. For example, one graduate reading candidate, a novice primary teacher in a rural, public school district in South-central Pennsylvania, had a comprehensive definition of strategic teacher talk used to prompt readers’ comprehension behaviors in a small group setting. This teacher reported using this prompt with a struggling reader, “I noticed that you seem confused. When I am confused, I reread a sentence, phrase or word to help me understand.” Whereas, another graduate reading candidate had limited prior knowledge related to effective literacy prompts. Her instructional experiences included teaching struggling readers in a learning support middle school classroom. Her definition of prompting students’ comprehension behaviors was limited to teacher directed content questions, including “Who are the characters in the story?”

Since graduate reading candidates have a variety of definitions about strategic prompts (Almsi & Hart, 2011; Rapp, Rhodes & Strokes, 2006; Thwaite & Rivalland, 2009), a course assignment was designed to confirm candidates’ perceptions through reflections. Working as a group, the graduate reading candidates planned a comprehension strategy-based lesson that included the following: identifying important information, monitoring understanding, and making connections. The candidates created a list of prompts to be implemented within the lesson. A lesson simulation with primary readers served as a practical experience to investigate the use of the prompts. Lessons were taped, and following the lesson, the professor printed the teachers’ prompts on sentence strips. Graduate reading candidates sorted each of the sentence strip prompts into one of the following categories: content prompts, directional/procedural prompts or pedagogical/strategic prompts. Content prompts were identified as requiring the reader to relate efferent information from the text, including “What is a noun?” Directional or procedural prompts required the reader to follow a process or steps to complete a task, including “Find the topic sentence and look for a key word that explains the main idea.” Pedagogical or strategic prompts included statements that modeled expected literary behaviors used to scaffold readers, including “When I read that sentence, I thought of a connection.”
Graduate reading candidates found that a majority of their statements could be categorized into content prompts and directional/procedural prompts. They noticed that the more effective prompts were those statements that included a model of best practice, thereby validating the importance of pedagogical/strategic prompts. These strategic prompts included reflective statements like, “When I read and I don’t know what to do, I stop and think.” They concluded that to support strategic readers, their prompts must explicitly direct readers’ critical thinking through the comprehension process.

What was learned from this experience? It appears that in a foundational literacy course, both the professor and graduate reading candidates must recognize prior knowledge as a starting point for constructing a unified approach for prompting. Guiding graduate students’ knowledge of effective teacher talk can support the graduate candidates as they transition from foundational knowledge into practicum experiences.

**Clinical Course**

After completing the foundational course, candidates transitioned into a clinical setting where purposeful prompting was incorporated into tutoring sessions. Assessment and instructional strategies were also practiced and discussed to build insights about literacy processes related to individual developmental needs. This promoted an understanding of the relationship between assessment and instruction that included purposeful prompting to adjust and strengthen literacy behaviors. The experience necessitated decisions that need to be made within a clinical setting with struggling readers.

**A snapshot of the clinical course.** At this point in the continuum of coursework, candidates were provided experiences in facilitating children’s literacy development in a clinical setting with guidance and support from the course professor as well as feedback from peers. The candidates, now clinicians, delivered one-on-one literacy lessons that were based on observed student need. The clinical experience provided a supportive context in which to explore understandings about the teaching and learning process. The clinicians were expected to articulate an understanding of the foundations and processes of becoming literate. They were also expected to articulate an awareness of the reading-writing connection with the use of purposeful prompting to adjust literacy behaviors that have shown to be obstacles in literacy development. Clinicians were required to plan and participate in meaningful instruction including purposeful prompting for the development of proficient literacy. This clinical framework was a four-week program. Clinicians met with two tutees individually for five, 60-minute lessons each week. The lessons reflected a balanced literacy framework.

Within this setting, an action research project was set up around a specific identified need of the tutee based on observed reading behaviors. Prompts are chosen to adjust the reading behavior and strengthen the tutee’s literacy development. Candidates had the opportunity to look carefully at the development of each child, observe gaps and weaknesses, and ultimately make decisions about appropriate instruction. Once critical behaviors were identified, choices were made about purposeful prompting to adjust the identified behavior. The source of the prompting came from *The Fountas and Pinnell Prompting Guide Part 1. A Tool for Literacy Teachers* (Fountas & Pinnell, 2009).

There were five critical steps in the action research process. Clinicians identified a problem area after working one-on-one with the tutee for four days. The clinician began a daily collection of data. The
clinician also interpreted the data daily. After reviewing the data collected, a plan of action was designed and implemented using purposeful prompting. Finally, the clinician evaluated the results. Adjustments to the plan of action were made and maintained for the remainder of the clinical experience.

Areas of focus by the clinicians in the tutees’ individual literacy development vary from clinician to clinician based on individual needs. One clinician discovered her tutee did not read for meaning; therefore, she chose to respond to the reading behavior with the prompt, “You said ______. Does that make sense?” (Fountas & Pinnell, 2009, p. 13) or “Try that again and think of what would make sense” (Fountas & Pinnell, 2009, p. 7). Another clinician chose to focus on the tutee looking through the entire word while reading. The clinician’s prompt chosen was, “Does that look right?” (Fountas & Pinnell, 2009, p. 7). Similarly, another tutee demonstrated proficiency at using picture clues to determine unknown words when reading but needed to check visual clues in the word. In addition to using the prompt, “You said ______. Does that look right?” (Fountas & Pinnell, 2009, p. 13), this tutor also chose to prompt with “Does the word you said look like the word on the page?” (Fountas & Pinnell, 2009, p. 13). One tutee was not making any attempts when he came to an unknown word, but he would verbally appeal to the clinician each time he came to an unknown word. That clinician chose to prompt with, “Try something” (Fountas & Pinnell, 2009, p. 15) and “Say the first sound” (Fountas & Pinnell, 2009, p. 11). A related issue appeared when a tutee came to an unknown word and he did not attempt to figure it out; instead, he waited for the clinician to tell him the word. His clinician chose to say, “What can you do?” (Fountas & Pinnell, 2009, p. 15). After first working to teach him to get his mouth ready to attempt the first sound, eventually the clinician worked to prompt him to look through the whole word. Another clinician chose to focus on her tutee reading word endings. Her prompt was simply, “Read to the end of the word” (Fountas & Pinnell, 2009, p. 7).

When it came to fluency, one clinician was concerned about her tutee having difficulty in this area, often ignoring, skipping, or misusing punctuation when he read. In addition, his reading rate was much slower than what is expected for his grade level. His fluency seemed to be impeding his comprehension of the text. This clinician chose to prompt him with, “Read it again and read the punctuation” (Fountas & Pinnell, 2009, p. 17) or “Read this part again, faster” (Fountas & Pinnell, 2009, p. 17), or “Put your words together so it sounds like the way you talk” (Fountas & Pinnell, 2009, p. 18).

What was learned from this experience? Reports consistently indicated a decrease in the number of prompts needed for tutees to read for meaning; look through the entire word; check visual clues; make attempts at an unknown word; get mouths ready to attempt the first sound; look through the whole word; read word endings; read faster; and read with prosody. In addition, clinicians consistently reported that the choice of prompts impacted literacy development overtime. Ultimately it was the responsibility of the clinician to determine appropriate literacy instruction; however, it was purposeful prompting that appeared to assist the reader in becoming a more strategic reader and the clinician in becoming a more effective teacher.

Literacy Coaching Practicum

At this juncture, the candidate transitioned from the stance of a clinician to that of a Literacy Coach. This necessitated two changes. The first transition is from a focus on pedagogy to a focus on
andragogy. The second transition is viewing one’s self as possessing a sufficient level of expertise to facilitate reflection-in-action (Schon, 1987) in a peer.

**A snapshot of the literacy coaching practicum.** Candidates in the literacy coaching practicum utilized Lyons and Pinnell’s (2001) framework to examine high-quality professional development. They developed professional development experiences intended to scaffold the introduction and implementation of instructional strategies for the teaching of literacy based on a language and literacy framework. The literacy coaching practicum included three components—personal interviews, videotaping of sample lessons, and coaching rounds.

*Personal interviews.* While the graduate students had previously participated in professional development as a learner, they had little experience in planning and delivering it to fellow educators. Lyons and Pinnell’s framework consists of an interview for educators, which uses questions to gather information regarding perspectives about personal efficacy and willingness to work in collaborative settings. This interview seemed to be one of the challenging aspects of using the framework. One student reported that she had never had to think about what she knew or needed to know, that someone told her what training she would attend. Another student stated that she didn’t feel that she knew enough personally to be preparing and offering professional development even though she was in the final course in the program. This inception, preparation and delivery of a professional development experience required scaffolding and prompting by the professor.

*Videotaping of sample lessons.* In order to make visible the experience of coaching a peer, class members recorded themselves teaching three reading lessons in their own classroom. Students were directed to select either a typical large group or small group lesson that they taught and recorded. Teacher behavior and language was the focus of the recording rather than student reactions or interactions. The recordings were used as an artifact for simulated coaching rounds.

*Coaching rounds.* The intent of the coaching rounds and collaboration was to offer guided practice in coaching behaviors. This was in preparation for the experience of coaching a peer. Students, performing as literacy coaches identified a peer in his/her own district and asked the peer to participate in a coaching session on-site. The coach prompted the peer to determine an area of instructional need and to do the analytical preparation for a classroom observation. The coach completed a classroom observation using the pre-determined parameters to collect data. The coach analyzed the data and prepared a plan for sharing it. The coach and peer met to have a conversation about the lesson and the coach used questions to prompt the peer in analyzing teacher and student behaviors. The coach offered suggestions and resources related to his/her expertise in teaching reading developed during the graduate program. This process was detailed in a case study paper along with the coach’s reflection-on-practice (Schon, 1987). What was learned from this experience? The findings can be organized into three categories— a feeling of intimidation, the development of empowerment, and the growth of prompting.

*A feeling of intimidation.* Students commented that the role of the coach was the most difficult. They said that asking another educator about the intention of a lesson or about the reasoning behind a particular instructional choice made them uncomfortable. One student stated that she just didn’t know what to say that would lead teachers to make judgments about their own teaching. When coaching the coach, students stated that they didn’t know what to say when sharing observations because they didn’t know what to suggest for the coach to say or do differently. It appeared that the dissonance they
experienced during the rounds involved them building a schema for creating actual coaching prompts. The professor also noted that the tendency of the students assuming the role of teacher or coach was to move off task when they became uncomfortable. During the observations, the professor prompted participants back onto task when overhearing them discussing classroom decorations or specific students rather than the teacher behaviors exhibited.

The development of empowerment. Students commented in the reflection section that they were able to draw on the experiences from class to assume the role of a coach. Students’ comments have included that they felt empowered by the experience, that they were amazed by their own level of expertise about teaching reading, that they felt they were ready to become a coach if the opportunity would become available. Students have also reported a high level of support by building and district administrators for the concept of literacy coaching and peer led professional development and collaboration.

The growth of prompting. Most importantly, the fledgling coaches reported that the opportunity to conference with another teacher allowed them to refine their prompting skills. Not only were they able to use professional prompting to guide the conversation during the pre and post conference conversations, they were also able to clearly articulate the effective use of prompting as a strong addition to instruction and could recommend it to their peer. As a result, when they returned to their own classroom, their heightened awareness of that effectiveness allowed them to improve their own instructional decisions.

Final Thoughts

The graduate program described here has been developed on a continuum (i.e., foundational course, clinical course, and literacy coaching practicum). This model was designed to facilitate the development of purposeful prompting through reflection-based models. Prompts at the foundational level implemented small group instruction built upon goal setting, thinking in action and thinking on action. Prompts in the clinical course built on systematic, daily reflections to facilitate children’s literacy development. Finally, graduate reading candidates transitioned to a literacy coaching practicum where purposeful prompting was used to guide teacher-to-teacher interactions. The concept of prompting is purposefully built into each course because the professors in the program view it as a needed element for facilitating intellectual growth, both with children and adults.
References


