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Linking Vocabulary to Reading Comprehension Equals Success for Adolescent English Language Learners

Tracy Butler

Abstract

Studies of the effects of vocabulary acquisition on the reading comprehension of adolescent English language learners (ELLs) have been limited. Further research needs to be conducted in order to achieve a broader picture of the learning environments of adolescent ELLs. Many ELLs struggle with adequate vocabulary acquisition, which is vital to becoming a successful reader. Suggestions will be given in this paper to help teachers improve the quality of vocabulary instruction and reading comprehension. This paper adds to the collection of information regarding adolescent ELLs and the positive effects of increased vocabulary learning on improved reading comprehension.

Introduction

Research regarding the reading comprehension of adolescent English language learners (ELLs) is limited (Ford-Connors & Paratore, 2014; Olson & Land, 2007). ELLs are a diverse group of students consisting of both immigrants and first generation students. The type of instruction and classroom environment as well as strategies implemented by the teacher can affect the learning and success of ELLs. In order to improve the language acquisition of ELLs, teachers must focus on vocabulary instruction. Vocabulary plays a vital role in language acquisition and reading comprehension.

The number of ELLs in the United States has been steadily increasing (Percy, 2011). In order for schools to educate this increasing population of students, teachers need to have strategies that can specifically help ELLs to be successful within the classroom. "Schooling must thus be made accessible, meaningful, and effective for all students, lest we create an under-educated, under-employed generation of young adults in the early 21st century" (Thomas & Collier, 1997, p. 13). Teachers must be given strategies that they can use to help their ELL students to achieve their full potential in the classroom.

In 2002 the RAND report was published and brought to the forefront the lack of literacy skills being taught to students beyond third grade. High school students' comprehension skills were not as good as those of students in other countries, nor were their literacy skills at

levels necessary to achieve success in college. Currently, more colleges have been offering remedial courses in reading and writing due to the lack of literacy skills of their students (Abadiano & Turner, 2003). In order to remedy this deficit in learning, changes need to be made to improve the literacy of ELL and English-only students at earlier ages such as in middle school. ELLs bring with them unique backgrounds in both language and culture and special challenges to overcome to achieve success in U.S. schools. Consequently, teachers must be given tools that they can use to help ELL students be successful.

Language Acquisition

There are two types of language that ELLs must acquire to be productive in school; Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills (BICS), the language used for socializing, and Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALPS), which incorporates the language skills needed for academic language (Bolos, 2012; Peregoy & Boyle, 2008; Watts-Taffe & Truscott, 2000). In order to become fluent in a language, years of language acquisition are necessary. Basic BICS is acquired to varying degrees within six months to two years after arrival (Peregoy & Boyle, 2008), while CALPS language abilities take a minimum of four years to acquire fluency (Thomas & Collier, 2002).

Age at time of arrival in the United States, and the amount of previous education in their native country both play a part in how quickly ELL students will become proficient in

reading (Thomas & Collier, 1997).

Unfortunately, "...adolescent ELLs continue to underachieve in English literacy" (Klingner, Boardman, Eppolito, & Schonewise, 2012). Fortunately, students literate in their native language are often able to use cross-linguistic transfer to assist them in learning English (Proctor, Carlo, August & Snow, 2005; Watts-Taffe & Truscott, 2000). The similarities between students' native language and English can figure into how quickly language acquisition will occur. Phonological and orthographical similarities between languages such as Spanish and English can help students learn English more quickly (Ellis & Beaton, 1993), and students should be encouraged to use those skills while learning English (Jimenez, 1997).

"Accomplished readers in their first language tend to use many of the same strategies that successful native English-language readers do --- skimming, guessing in context, reading for the gist of a text --- when they are reading in a second language" (Drucker, 2003).

However, if the languages are not similar, more practice will be necessary to acquire the vocabulary (Ellis & Beaton, 1993). Regrettably, not all ELLs are literate in their native language and this can make learning English more difficult for them. "Cognitive ability, age, English oral proficiency, previous learning, and similarities and differences between the first and second languages" (August, Shanahan, & Escamilla, 2009, p. 438) can all affect the literacy development of ELLs. Therefore, the level of previous education of ELL students is important to take into account as teachers plan curriculum for their students.

English vocabulary can be challenging to adolescent ELLs because of the many meanings a single word has and the context in which it is used (Fisher, 2007). For example, the word *line* can be used in school for *stand in line*, *follow the line* or *draw a line*. There are also a variety of words in the English language that are spelled similarly but used differently, such as *there*, *their*, and *they're*. ELL students must be taught these differences so that they can learn how to correctly apply and recognize vocabulary in reading, writing and speaking.

Theoretical Framework

Lev Vygotsky's sociocultural theory, as well as schema theory, forms the theoretical background for this paper because both contribute to knowledge acquisition within a social environment. Language is socially constructed and mediated by the people, signs, tools and language used by the society in which the adolescent resides (Vygotsky, 1978). Schunk (2012) stated, "The way that learners interact with their worlds—with the persons, objects, and institutions in it—transforms their thinking" (p. 242). ELLs are experiencing a new world in which the culture and language are different from home. The school environment can be especially foreign, therefore, Vygotsky believed that a social learning environment with cultural tools was important for interaction between students and increased cognition (Schunk, 2012). ELLs learn more language if they are immersed in a social environment in which interaction with the native language is used and the native culture is evident (Schunk, 2012).

The zone of proximal development (ZPD) is another important part of language development (Vygotsky, 1978). When an ELL enters a U.S. school for the first time, he/she brings with them their schema full of past experiences; however, their ZPD can be somewhat limited due to the unfamiliar language and culture or limited past experiences. Furthermore, a student with no schooling will not have a base from which to learn to read and write in another language. This may make language acquisition a more lengthy process. The uneducated child will need more assistance from a more knowledgeable other (the teacher or peers) in order to learn the skills that he/she will need to be successful in school. Scaffolding the learning of ELLs will help them to progress at a pace that is appropriate for them (Watts-Taffe & Truscott, 2000).

Schema theory is also important to language acquisition and reading comprehension. A schema is formed through an individual's experiences, which are placed in memory; it is how language is constructed and represented

within memory (McVee, Dunsmore, & Gavelek, 2013). The structures within a schema are called schemata and they store complex knowledge (Carrell & Eisterhold, 1983; Pressley, Kamil, Mosenthal, Pearson, & Barr, 2000; Watts-Taffe & Truscott, 2000). According to Anderson, Spiro, & Anderson (1978), information found in a person's schema will be viewed as significant, and information that does not have a schema will be considered unimportant; thus information that fits within a schema will be more likely to be remembered. Background knowledge and its interaction are another important part of schemata and they occur within the text during reading comprehension (Carrell & Eisterhold, 1983; Watts-Taffe & Truscott, 2000). As Pressley et al. (2000) affirm, "...the richer a child's world experiences and vicarious experiences (e.g., through stories and high-quality television), the richer the child's schematic knowledge base" (p. 549).

There are two general schemas: recall schema, the response produced, and recognition schema, which analyze responses (Schunk, 2012). When a schema has not been formed for a particular language, culture, or experience, one must be created. Teachers must help students to create schemas for reading and vocabulary in English. Depending on the level of English proficiency of an ELL, techniques such as looking at the beginning and ending of a word, imagining which word might make sense in a sentence, using context clues within a sentence, dictionaries, or simply sounding out letters can be helpful (Schunk, 2012). Paraphrasing, repeating key points, using concrete materials (realia), scaffolding, explicit instruction, and modeling as well as acting out meanings are all ways in which ELLs can communicate meaning (Peregoy & Boyle, 2008). Total physical response (TPR) can also assist ELLs in their comprehension of words (Morrow, Gambrell, & Duke, 2011).

Rowell, Kress, Pahl, & Street (2013) state that "...reading practices cannot be separated from the social, cultural, and ideological contexts that give rise to them" (p. 1192), therefore, teachers need to take into consideration all of the different facets of their

ELLs. A sociocultural environment within a classroom is conducive to language learning. Teachers must keep in mind the language experiences, culture, and schemata of their ELL students in order to improve their learning.

Methodology

A literature review was conducted in order to discover the most relevant information regarding English language learners and the effect of vocabulary and reading strategies on adolescent ELL reading comprehension. Inclusion criteria consisted of books, peer-reviewed articles, full-text articles, and academic journals with published dates of 1970-2013. The bibliographies of articles were mined in order to identify studies that might qualify for inclusion.

Exclusion criteria included articles on early elementary and early childhood programs, articles that went beyond the scope of English language learners and vocabulary or reading comprehension, conference papers, dissertations, and articles or books written in a language other than English.

Specific journals were hand searched for relevant articles: *Journal of Literacy Research*, *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy*, and *Review of Educational Research*. A search of electronic databases was completed, and included Academic Search Complete that was further reduced to include *Education full-text*, *Education Research Complete*, *ERIC*, and *PsychInfo*. Additional research included *Google Scholar*. Keywords for the search were done with the following term combinations: *English language learners*, *English learners*, *second language learners*, *vocabulary*, *reading comprehension*, *adolescents*, *sociocultural theory*, and *schema theory*.

Article titles and abstracts were reviewed for their relevance to the research topic. Specifically, articles were selected if they included information regarding adolescent English language learners, vocabulary, and reading comprehension as well as sociocultural theory and schema theory. Comprehensive reading was conducted in order to find pertinent information that fit the criteria of the paper.

Once reading was completed, information was analyzed and collected to determine if it fit the premise of the paper.

ELL Vocabulary Acquisition

According to Ford-Connors & Paratore (2014), there have been limited studies on middle school students and vocabulary acquisition. However, what we do know is vocabulary knowledge can assist students in increasing their reading comprehension (Proctor et al., 2005). Teachers need to choose wisely among the vocabulary that they decide to teach ELLs. Vocabulary such as idiomatic expressions or slang can be difficult for ELLs to comprehend and will require greater explanation when encountered within a text (Watts-Taffe & Truscott, 2000). Limiting the number of new vocabulary words introduced each week so that ELL students don't become overloaded is also important (Carlo et al., 2004). Allowing adolescent ELL students to keep a vocabulary journal can help them to remember their new vocabulary words. The English vocabulary word can be written in English, their native language, as well as phonetically to help them remember how to pronounce the word.

In order to improve the vocabulary acquisition of students, it is necessary to conduct studies involving middle school ELL students to determine what is effective. Carlo et al. (2004) conducted a 15 week study on teaching useful words and strategies for words. They limited the number of newly introduced words to a total of ten to twelve new words introduced each week and a review of those words every five weeks. By limiting the number of new words ELL students encountered academically, students were not overloaded with new words. Extensive instruction was completed on each word, including pronunciation, morphology, meaning and more. Bilingual instruction in Spanish was included when possible. Improvement was demonstrated in reading comprehension for ELLs and English-only students. Carlo et al. (2004) gave the advice that:

Teachers should introduce novel words

in the context of engaging texts, design many activities such as charades that allow learners to manipulate and analyze word meaning, heighten attention to words in general with techniques like Word Wizard, ensure that learners write and spell the target words several times, ensure repeated exposures to the novel words, and help children note how the word meaning varies as a function of context (p. 203).

Ford-Connors & Paratore (2014) found that discussion of vocabulary words between the teacher and students as well as student-to-student participation assisted in increasing the vocabulary of adolescents. Increased exposure and discussion of vocabulary words with the use of visuals such as pictures or realia can be helpful to ELLs.

Linguistically diverse sixth graders were taught academic vocabulary words within a subject context in a study by Lesaux, Kieffer, Kelley, & Harris (2014). Both abstract and high-utility academic words were taught to ELLs. After learning the academic vocabulary ELLs were given a passage to read. Upon completion of the passage, students were given a quiz to determine whether they remembered the academic vocabulary that was used in the text. Focus was also given to building students morphological awareness of words. Their research supports the idea that explicit teaching of academic vocabulary words to adolescent ELLs can assist them in making sense of texts that they read in class. However, students need to have multiple exposures to words in different contexts in order for them to learn the word and all of its meanings (Ford-Connors & Paratore, 2014).

Pacheco & Goodwin (2013) conducted a study on morphological instruction that involved understanding what strategies middle school students used to decipher vocabulary, so that teachers could use these approaches in future morphological instruction. Students were instructed in how to recognize larger words, and "chunk" a word to help them decipher the meaning. They found that "using root words, prefixes, and suffixes supports middle school

students' word-learning demands" (p. 542). With these techniques, students were able to use their knowledge of semantic information within morphemes to figure out the meaning of vocabulary words they encountered. ELL students used Cross-language scaffolding to decipher unknown words as well as cognates, which are words that have similar meanings and/or spelling. Pacheco & Goodwin (2013) discussed how research has shown that morphology helps students with their vocabulary acquisition, which in turn assists them with their reading comprehension. Making connections to other words helps in gaining morpheme knowledge. Furthermore, teaching words within context and encouraging students to find morphemes outside of the classroom and in academic text are also helpful. Prior knowledge can be useful in figuring out word meanings. Another valuable strategy is supporting problem solving across languages: applying native language morphological skills will assist ELLs in deciphering words.

The use of morphemes in strategic ways can help ELL students be successful in obtaining a more diverse vocabulary. Adolescent ELLs need to be able to recognize morphological similarities in words, so that they can add to their skills for deciphering new words. Both bilingual dictionaries and picture dictionaries can assist adolescent ELLs in making words explicit. Furthermore, exposing them to the words visually, aurally as well as the oral use of the words can be helpful (Samson & Collins, 2012). As vocabulary increases, reading comprehension has the potential to improve.

Reading Comprehension

When ELLs enter middle school, reading becomes more complex, and the ability of many adolescent ELLs to read words exceeds their comprehension of vocabulary words (Klingner, Boardman, Kelley, & Harris, 2012). Reading is a complex process that requires a variety of processing stages: "word encoding, lexical access, assigning semantic roles, and relating the information in a given sentence to

previous sentences and previous knowledge" (Just & Carpenter, 2013, p. 750). All of these processes can be difficult for English-only students. However, if English is not their native language, the difficulty multiplies.

Language challenges are something that English learners face on a daily basis in school. The ability to comprehend what is read is a vital skill that all students need in order to be successful in school and beyond. Therefore, emphasis must be placed on reading comprehension strategies within the classroom (Biancarosa & Snow, 2004). Reading comprehension strategies are especially important to adolescent ELLs. Teacher modeling of metacognition as well as other strategies can be helpful.

Unfortunately, by the time students enter fourth grade, expectations for reading have often changed from learning to read to reading to learn. This change requires different skills to be acquired in order for students to be successful. Regrettably, many ELLs that are new to the United States do not have the requisite skills because they are still learning the basics of the English language. Consequently, teachers must implement different strategies to help ELLs gain the reading comprehension skills necessary to pass state exams and be successful in future grade levels.

According to Lesaux & Kieffer (2010) empirical studies of the reading comprehension difficulties of adolescent ELLs are limited in number. The authors found that, in order for comprehension strategies to have a chance at effectiveness, ELLs must have a language base from which to work. During their study, a significant difference was found between ELLs and native English speakers' general vocabulary knowledge. These differences can have profound effects on ELL performances on standardized tests as well as in the classroom.

Jimenez, Garcia, & Pearson (1996) addressed reading comprehension in their study of ELLs. Students in their study used strategies such as "using context, invoking relevant prior knowledge, questioning, inferencing, searching for cognates, and translating" (p. 100) to decipher unknown vocabulary. The authors found that

Table 1

Teaching Strategies for Adolescent ELLs

Strategy	Definition	Example	Article <small>See Reference list for full citation</small>
TPR (Total Physical Response)	Requires students to physically respond to the teacher.	A teacher can use a song to teach a math concept in which the students do physical body responses for each math step.	Drucker (2003)
Schemas	Schemas are like “slots” within the brain where individuals’ life experiences and memories are stored.	Teach a lesson about a U.S. president. There needs to be a brief explanation &/or reading about the president with visuals before conducting the lesson in order to create a schema.	Anderson, Spiro, & Anderson (1978)
Realia	Using concrete materials such as real objects.	A science lesson about machines is being taught. Be sure to bring in real-life examples or pictures of the machines as well as the parts of the machine that the students will be learning about in class.	Peregoy & Boyle (2008)
Paraphrasing	Summarizing or simplifying something into your own words.	A partner activity in which an ELL and a native English speaker paraphrase what was just taught during a lesson.	Peregoy & Boyle (2008)
“Chunk” words	Breaking words down by root words, prefixes, &/or suffixes to make them more easily identifiable. Helps to make connections to other words.	You are teaching a lesson involving content vocabulary. Break down the vocabulary words so that they’re in comprehensible chunks.	Pacheco & Goodwin (2013)
Modeling Metacognition	“The ability to think about one’s own thinking” (Caskey & Anpara, 2007, p. 3) Also, the monitoring, rereading and checking for construction of meaning while reading.	The teacher models how he/she is monitoring her/his reading as well as making sure that meaning is constructed and comprehension is evident.	Biancarosa & Snow (2004) Alvermann, Unrau, & Ruddell (2013)
Scaffolding	Helps students to achieve their next developmental level by working at their zone of proximal development.	The teacher demonstrates how to do an assignment; then he/she guides students; a small group activity is done; then a partner activity is completed, and finally independent work.	Peregoy & Boyle (2008)
Interactive Read-Alouds	Reading aloud a book in an engaging manner in which students think and talk about the book before, during and after the reading.	Choose a book that is a level above the average reading level of your middle school class. Engage students in a discussion of the book before, during and after completing the reading.	Fountas & Pinnell (2006) Bolos (2012)

prior knowledge, metacognitive strategies, and strategic reading practices for deciphering unknown vocabulary are keys to successful reading comprehension.

The application of strategies of metacognition such as monitoring, rereading and checking for meaning construction are also important to reading comprehension (Alvermann, Unrau, & Ruddell, 2013). Furthermore, mental imagery is an important part of comprehension: “imaginative and affective processes are how a text is realized, lived through, or brought to life” (Sadoski & Paivio, 2013, p. 902). Therefore, the implementation of charades, plays, and other activities that require imagination can be useful for adolescent ELLs.

English language learners

Vocabulary is the backbone of reading, and without it ELL students will not gain the word knowledge they need to be successful in reading. Pressley et al. (2000) affirmed that “although most vocabulary words are learned through contextual encounters, studies in which vocabulary have been taught explicitly have been especially revealing about the causal role of vocabulary knowledge in the development of comprehension skills” (p. 548). While findings from Pressley et al. (2000) refer to English-only students, there does appear to be a similar effect for ELL students. Increased exposure to reading can have a positive effect on vocabulary acquisition (Graves, 2006).

Bolos (2012) stated that research has shown that vocabulary enrichment, the use of interactive read-alouds, and comprehension strategies can all be helpful when planning instruction for ELLs. However, if linguistic comprehension and decoding become difficult for an ELL, reading comprehension can become limited (Mancilla-Martinez, Kieffer, Biancarosa, Christodoulou, & Snow, 2011). Many ELL students consistently score lower than English-only students on exams involving reading comprehension (Goodwin, Huggins, Carlo, August, & Calderon, 2013), and “this academic failure translates into widening achievement

gaps and reduced opportunities to fully participate in a modern, high-tech, knowledge-based economy” (Betts, Bolt, Decker, Muyskens, & Marston, 2009, p. 144). This gap becomes more evident as ELL students enter higher grade levels with increased demands on vocabulary and reading comprehension.

However, successful programs have been implemented for adolescents that included both vocabulary and reading comprehension. Fisher (2007) followed a California high school in which teachers participated in a school wide implementation of “(a) wide reading, (b) read-alouds and shared readings, (c) content specific vocabulary instruction, (d) academic vocabulary development, and (e) words of the week based on common affixes and roots” (p. 337). Teachers worked together to form and implement change in the school, and improved test scores supported the effectiveness of their program.

Discussion

Increased vocabulary is important to improving the reading comprehension of adolescent ELLs. In order to achieve this goal, strategies and techniques that are specific for assisting ELLs will be necessary. However, the fact that English-only students often do not consistently receive additional instruction in reading comprehension skills beyond elementary school does not bode well for adolescent ELLs. Fortunately, first language abilities have been shown to positively impact second language literacy development (August, Shanahan, et al., 2009; Slavin & Cheung, 2005).

In order for ELL students to successfully learn English they need to have a solid foundation in skills such as word recognition, decoding, and spelling (August & Shanahan, 2006). According to Rowsell et al. (2013), adolescents are missing comprehension and critical framing as they read texts. The way in which ELLs are instructed in vocabulary as well as the use of reading comprehension skills and strategies needs to change in order to improve the reading comprehension of adolescent ELLs.

Reading comprehension has been defined

as “the process of simultaneously extracting and constructing meaning through interaction and involvement with written language” (Abadiano & Turner, 2003, p. 76). This definition fits well within the parameters of this paper. However, the interaction is not only with the written language but also with the sociocultural environment of the classroom that the teacher has created for the students. Reading comprehension can be improved through social interactions such as cooperative learning in group or partner activities (Cheung & Slavin, 2012; Watts-Taffe & Truscott, 2000), or interactive read-alouds (Bolos, 2012) as well as many other strategies.

Some general strategies suggested for monolingual adolescent students can also be helpful to ELLs. For example, comprehension monitoring and summarizing information that they’ve read, so that it makes sense to them (Schunk, 2012) can be helpful to all students. According to Schunk and Rice (1987), self-instruction strategies can also be helpful to reading comprehension, and they include: “(1) Read the questions, (2) Read the passage to find out what it is mostly about, (3) Think about what the details have in common, (4) Think about what would make a good title, (5) Reread the story if I don’t know the answer to a question” (p. 290-291). However, these suggestions are only applicable to ELLs that have a stronger foundation in English.

Conclusion

There are many skills and strategies that teachers can use to assist ELLs in learning vocabulary and improving reading comprehension. Realia, bilingual and picture dictionaries, TPR (total physical response), scaffolding, metacognition, and cognates have all been helpful to ELLs in acquiring the vocabulary necessary to assist them in improving their reading comprehension (Biancarosa, & Snow, 2004; Pacheco & Goodwin, 2013; Watts-Taffe & Truscott, 2000). Utilizing the native language of ELLs in order to use cross-linguistic transfer of their prior language knowledge and using their schemata to assist them in learning

English is also important (Carrell & Eisterhold, 1983; Proctor et al., 2005; Watts-Taffe & Truscott, 2000). Furthermore, teaching vocabulary words within the context of subject matter also helps ELLs in acquiring more vocabulary.

The combination of sociocultural theory and schema theory help to explain some of the experiences and mental processes that are necessary for an ELL student to be successful in English language acquisition. These theories also aid in showing the process needed to further both the vocabulary and reading comprehension of ELLs.

A limited number of studies were available on the effects of vocabulary acquisition on adolescent ELL reading comprehension. However, those studies that were examined for this literature review report positive findings for the interaction of ELL vocabulary learning and reading comprehension. Further studies are warranted in order to give a broader picture of the effects of specific strategies and skills on the language acquisition and improved reading comprehension of adolescent ELLs.

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Student Motivation in the Social Studies Classroom through a Civil War Unit

Melissa Hinch

Abstract

Student motivation can be encouraged in a variety of ways, and has a significant impact on academic success. This article examines the factors involved in student motivation and engagement in the social studies classroom. It connects pedagogical techniques and learning standards with opportunities for personal choice and differentiated instruction to provide a curriculum guide for engaging students in a unit of study on the Civil War.

Introduction

Walk through the halls of any school in America, and you will see a wide variety of learning environments. Even within disciplines and grade levels, there is diversity in how teachers structure their classrooms, how students are expected to behave, and the actual learning going on. It's relatively easy for a casual observer to judge the amount of motivation in the students in these classrooms, and to see the impact of this motivation on the classroom environment and student achievement. One of the biggest factors impacting student success in the classroom is motivation.

There are two types of motivation, intrinsic and extrinsic. While extrinsic motivation, characterized by working for external rewards (such as prizes, candy, free time), can be useful in encouraging student involvement, it is much more important to cultivate a student's intrinsic motivation. Students who are intrinsically motivated are learning because they want to know more. The motivation is self-improvement. This type of motivation encourages students to do their best, to extend their effort, and to build life-long skills (DeLong and Winter, 2002).

Since the educational revolution of the Progressive Era, much attention has been paid to learner motivation and the role that motivation plays in comprehension. Education reformer John Dewey (1916) stated, "Experience has shown that when children have a chance at physical activities which bring their natural impulses into play, going to school is a joy, management is less of a burden, and learning is

easier" (p. 228). The Progressive educators realized that students must be actively engaged in learning in order to reach their full potential. Dewey asserted that academic learning must be integrated with moral and social development, and that authentic experience is the best method for achieving this integrated education. In a later work, Dewey (1934) further expands on this idea, stating that creativity "quickens us from slackness of routine and enables us to forget ourselves by finding ourselves in the delight of experiencing the world about us in its varied qualities and forms" (p. 108). This idea of incorporating self-expression, social skills, and hands-on practice lends itself to finding ways for students to get actively involved in all aspects of the educational process.

Current research (Crotty, 2013) indicates that many high school students describe themselves as "unengaged" in school, which leads to them not putting consistent effort in their work, feeling less confident in their abilities, and ultimately resulting in higher drop-out rates. In comparison, when students "see a direct link between their actions and an outcome, and have some control over whether or how to undertake a task" (p. 2), they feel more competent and motivated, and achieve greater success in their work. As 21st century learners, students need to cultivate the ability to, "think creatively, solve problems, and be self-directed in their learning (Korokowski, 2014). By allowing students to participate in classroom activities that require collaboration and creativity, educators can help students develop a sense of pride in their work, as well as develop the autonomy that middle

school students so desperately desire.

A study (Strobel, 2010) followed an entire school district's middle school students for two years, collecting data about motivation and achievement. The study showed that students felt motivated in classrooms where the teachers treated them with respect and allowed them time to delve deeper into the content. This combination of caring, dependable leadership along with meaningful activities allowed students to truly understand the material and experience the success that goes along with that understanding. Strobel (2010) says, "students' motivational beliefs are dynamic and responsive to the learning context" (p. 4). In order for students to feel motivated, they need to actively participate in goal-setting and creating products to reflect their understanding. In other words, if they are engaged, they are learning. As educators, we recognize that unengaged students do not successfully connect with the material being presented, resulting in a lack of motivation and comprehension. This, in turn, has a negative impact on student achievement.

If motivation is such a key factor in genuine understanding, the question becomes how to keep students consistently motivated within the classroom. Research (Strobel, 2010) indicates that involving students in the decision-making process is one way to keep them engaged and motivated. The study results support this by showing that teachers "who encouraged students to put forth effort and pursue deeper understanding" (p. 3) helped create students who "were more likely to feel motivated and earn higher test scores" (p. 3). Another way to increase student motivation is to offer a variety of lessons and opportunities for students to utilize their personal interests and strengths. By allowing students to review and manipulate content in both collaborative and independent learning, "students consolidate their thinking and understanding (Fisher & Frey, 2008, p. 7).

In order to engage students in the learning process, they must be stimulated, interested, and they need to have some autonomy (Middleton, 1995). For the classroom teacher, the question is, what does this actually look like? In order to keep students motivated, teachers

must play a combined role of coach, mentor, guide, and partner. Teachers must be flexible, realistic, interested in individual students and their needs, and willing to give students some control over their own learning. When teachers provide purposeful opportunities for students to interact with the material in a variety of ways, they encourage students to be more engaged, which in turn increases motivation and achievement.

A Civil War Unit

A common perception about social studies is that it requires rote memorization of names and dates. Just the thought makes students glaze over! Keeping students motivated in the social studies classroom requires reflection and experimentation. In my own classroom, I have made an effort to combine creative, self-selected activities with the more traditional methods of presenting information, such as lecture and document analysis. The following sample activities are framed within the context of a Civil War unit, but could be utilized in any social studies subject area, from Ancient Egypt to modern history. The driving theme is to use diverse skills, variety in form, opportunities to utilize technology, and varied groupings to allow students to demonstrate understanding in an assortment of ways.

I attempted to implement these ideas in my own middle school social studies classroom. The 8th grade US History curriculum includes the Civil War, a topic that can very easily confuse students with its parade of characters, battle tactics, and skirmishes. I started with the basic content standards and attempted to build out from there, adding interactive lesson plans to engage even my reluctant learners. I gave students options to tailor their study to specific interests, and allowed them to express their learning through a variety of products.

Throughout the unit, the classes are a mix of traditional lecture, primary document reading, analytical and creative writing, and skills practice (like map-making and utilizing charts and graphs). The interactive elements are dispersed throughout the unit as a tool for

expression, reflection, and enrichment. Students are able to study and manipulate the material on a variety of levels, and to create their own products to reflect learning.

The Activities

Movie Trailer

As an introductory activity, designed to encourage every student to connect with the subject matter from the start, my classes make small group “movie trailers” for a movie about the coming of the Civil War. This actually draws on the students’ background knowledge from a previous chapter and helps them connect the pre-existing issues to the Civil War itself. By giving students choice in what events the video will focus on, the viewpoint from which the video is presented, and the presentation style, each student becomes personally involved in telling the story of the Civil War.

The students are clearly excited and involved in the creative process. The class actresses are happy to demonstrate their skills, the natural leaders enjoy directing, and even the quieter members of the class are engaged in script writing, costuming, and camera work. The planning stage fosters thoughtful discussions about why our country went to war, and the filming force students to focus on making connections and clearly summarizing major events.

The final products are enthusiastically received by the class, which then leads to a meaningful discussion about viewpoints, collaboration, and problem solving. This fun “warm-up” activity gets the kids excited about the topic, and gives everyone a sense of ownership of the material.

Historical Journal

The next interactive activity is designed to be more introspective. A historical journal project allows students to literally put themselves into the time period that they are studying, and to see the historical events through new eyes. The first step in the project is to invent a character. This is appealing to the creative writers in the group, and gives everyone the chance to

personalize their project. I’m always surprised by the time and thought that students put into picking a name for their character and creating a biographical sketch as a preliminary activity. Almost every year I have a student who takes this opportunity to delve into his or her own family history, and create a character based on one of their ancestors.

Throughout the unit, the class continues to write entries in their journals. Some assignments are “free write” entries, in which the students can express anything that they (through their character) are feeling, pondering, or interested in. Other entries have assigned topics, such as opinions on leaders or important events from the time period.

Students are also tasked with creating a binding for their completed journals. This is always a fun time for the students, and the creativity amazes me. I have seen journals with leather-looking binding (made from wrinkled and pasted paper), journals with burned edges (the boys love to burn things), and journals with beautiful old-fashioned calligraphy. Again, the addition of personal touches and creativity help keep the students engaged and motivated.

The journal activity helps students reflect on the content, form opinions, and put their observations into their own words. The opportunity for quiet reflection allows the students to think about these events in a much more personal way.

Multi-Media

Technology is one of the most effective tools for keeping students motivated, so I include several opportunities to use technology within the Civil War unit. The Library of Congress (<http://www.loc.gov/teachers/>) is an excellent resource for photographs, maps, letters, and other documents relating to US history. I utilize the school’s iPad cart for a group browsing session, where students are required to look at all the images on the subject page (in this case, the Library of Congress image database on The Civil War), and then select one image to study in depth, analyze, and share with the class.

I also include more “traditional” activities such as researching battles and writing

biographies of important people from the time period. Again, the students have some control over their subject matter, and by combining technology with written and oral expression, student motivation and active participation increases. By becoming the “expert” on a particular person or event, students feel more connected to the information.

There are also numerous period “battlefield” games online, which give the students a chance to see the geography, manipulate the weapons, and experience the strategies and tactics of Civil War battles. This is especially popular with the boys!

The students are provided with several other options for expressing themselves throughout the unit. A formal debate (made up of debaters, moderators, reporters, and illustrators) allows students to discuss the Constitutional controversies surrounding secession. They must go back to the Constitution and study it through the lens of slavery and secession in order to present their case.

An illustrated timeline activity allows students to select events that they see as crucial to telling the story of the Civil War. Often students will “specialize” their timelines to a particular topic, such as weapons. Political cartoons give students the opportunity to use symbolism and exaggeration to express a point of view on the issues. Students can be creative and clever through their cartoons, and the finished products are displayed for others to appreciate. There are numerous ways to address the content standards through student-guided activities. The more involved the students are, the more they learn.

Conclusion

By making a conscious effort to keep students engaged in the subject matter, I retooled my presentation of the Civil War unit. While the students were responsible for learning important terms, dates, events, and people from the time period, they were also provided with opportunities to examine specific aspects of the Civil War, to work in a variety of mediums, and

to work individually, in small groups, and in large groups. These activities can be modified to suit a wide range of social studies topics. I have used the journal activity in a study of the Silk Road with my world history class, I use timelines throughout the year in all of my classes as a way to help students visualize the chronology of events and to better understand the themes of cause and effect as well as change and continuity. Students of every age enjoy the opportunity to utilize technology, and relish the freedom of designing their own presentations.

Throughout this Civil War unit, students were actively participating and excited. Students who were typically disengaged connected to the topic through the variety of activities. The journal project gave students an opportunity to see the Civil War from a new perspective, and by offering students the chance to work with technology they used their interests and skills to create meaningful work. Students expressed their appreciation for the diversity in comments like, “I’m glad that I had a chance to make this video. I didn’t do well on the test but with the video I was able to show you what I think was important.” Personalized learning opportunities gave students the chance to build confidence in their abilities and to showcase their individual talents. This demonstrates the value of keeping students motivated- they want to understand, and they strive to do their best when they can take ownership of their work.

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Aligning Instruction and Assessment to Diverse Learners

Nora R. McMillan

Abstract

A diverse learner is a student who learns differently from a regular education student. All students enter the classroom with a variety of learning styles, but a diverse learner has a unique set of characteristics. Students must become active participants in their own learning and the divergent learner need not be put aside from other students. Diversity cannot be measured or identified from a test. These characteristics are either observed or discovered through informal teacher/student discussions. A reading and writing portfolio is an instructional and assessment strategy that can improve the overall academic achievement of the diverse learner.

Portfolios for the Diverse Learner

All students learning needs must be met in relation to instruction and assessment and the diverse learner in no exception. His/her skills and abilities should be emphasized rather than disciplined for misbehavior or defiance to authority. Such unique characteristics may include special talents, physical impairments, or behavioral/emotional needs (Guild and Garger, 1998). A diverse learner may be overlooked as being learning disabled and/or having behavioral/emotional disabilities. Often mainstreamed from a self-contained classroom during the day into a regular class, this student is sometimes put alone and left to be undisturbed in case of an outburst.

One way to best meet the instruction and assessment needs for this type of diverse learner is a reflective portfolio in reading and writing. Instead of considering this student to be left in isolation, he/she can participate in student-led portfolio conferences demonstrating content mastery. This is an effort to meet individual learning needs and to build self-esteem.

An instructional method would be for the student to keep an individual instructional improvement log (Mendler, 2000). The student could keep track of his/her own progress as he/she selects articles for the reading and writing portfolio. Through using this type of instructional and assessment method, all work is authentic and genuine (Miller, 1997). The middle school student is able to personally track and identify his/her own academic growth and

performance. For the diverse learner who has been mainstreamed into a regular education classroom with behavioral/emotional disabilities, he/she can work on building self-confidence in reading and writing. Through individual student-teacher portfolio conferences, there can be reflective conversations about academic strengths and weaknesses.

A reading and writing portfolio is an instructional and assessment strategy that can improve the overall academic achievement of a diverse learner with behavioral/emotional disabilities. With teacher guidance, diverse learners can select which assignments to include in portfolios, which allows them to personally determine and reflect on the reason it was selected (Overturf, 1997). Both teacher and student can monitor skills that need practice and review. Kearns, Kleinert, and Kennedy (1999) researched the importance of ensuring all student assessment was reasonable and encouraged teachers to allow students to become involved with evaluation through portfolios.

It is vital that teachers identify learning outcomes so students will know what is included in their portfolios. Students must know exactly what is expected of them. Both teachers and students can provide evidence of curriculum objectives that have been practiced and mastered (Jones, 2000). Assessment must be based on learning outcomes and portfolios for the diverse learner can provide such evidence in a middle school classroom (Clark & Clark, 2000).

Building a portfolio will depend upon

how well the instructor takes time to model the steps to develop one. Students will need to see examples and practice writing reflections about their work. There is not a specific format to follow and the teacher can design how the portfolio should be created based upon the curriculum standards. Articles included in the portfolio should be aligned with the standards so that the student sees a direct correlation between the standards and their completed assignments. A small amount of time each day (ten to 15 minutes) devoted to portfolio development and reflection does not have to consume a large portion of the class time.

There is a connection between instruction and assessment. Each relies on the other to determine how information will be presented and whether or not the diverse learner understood what was taught. Teachers base learning outcomes on both formal and informal assessment methods. Through portfolio assessment and reflection as well as rubrics and projects, there is student involvement and participation in learning. When students are motivated about their learning, student achievement is increased (Mendler, 2000).

The portfolio has been a successful tool used in the classroom. It is worth the time and effort involved with allowing students to preview what they have actually learned and to determine if there is a weakness in a particular area. Assessment becomes meaningful for the student and not just a number on a report card. The diverse learner becomes an active participant through portfolio based instruction and assessment. Many classroom teachers at the middle school level with a student who has a behavioral/emotional disability have determined that portfolios provide overall learning achievement records that are self-reflective.

Even though formal assessment methods such as standardized testing are mandated and also provide immediate results, student involvement and motivation are minimal. Guild and Garger (1998) explain how self-reflection promotes individual awareness of one's own strengths and weaknesses in content mastery. The student identifies what specific actions they personally took to learn the information and produce evidence of the learning. Student portfolios are powerful assessment tools when carefully designed and implemented by the teacher.

Portfolio assessment does take time and they are not always uniform. Perhaps this is the reason that they are not widely used in middle school or high school as a single form of assessment. A formal test is simply a quick way to get an assessment done and over with. Students are not actively engaged with their own assessment. Portfolios can be managed by the diverse learner at the middle school level who needs to be actively engaged and who will feel like they play an essential role in their own learning.

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Portion Control: A Simple and Easy way to “Flip” your Classroom to better engage middle school learners

Sondra LoRe

Abstract

The merits of flipping the classroom to engage middle school students has been well documented as they are “digital natives” (Small & Vorgan, 2008) who are plugged into multiple devices at all times of the day and night. Extending the learning beyond the classroom doesn’t have to be time consuming, difficult or require fancy equipment. Flipping the classroom uses online short teacher derived video lectures or related digital content to expose students to a topic prior to class so that classroom time can be better used for discussions, projects, and experiments. Infusing a variety of technology into lessons better engages middle school students to assimilate knowledge.

Why “Portion Control” when Flipping?

Flipping your classroom has been equated with sharing a lesson in its entirety with students prior to teaching the topic in class. While this is helpful to both teacher and students, the approach can often become repetitive and stale. “To many educators, relying on lecture and class notes almost exclusively is an inefficient and limited way to secure information into long-term memory” (Kundart, 2012, p. 1).

There is great merit in sharing partial information beforehand as well as continuing a study or reflection after the lesson or in the midst of a project with students. Mixing up your modes of flipping to not only the main attraction but also to trailers, prequels, sequels, commercials and infomercials is more engaging. Flipping only certain portions of your lessons and using multiple resources can have a greater impact than you alone. In this way an educator is not flipping the entire lesson; they are providing “portion control.”

Your students are connected day and night to technology. They are “digital natives” (Small & Vorgan), who know nothing of a world without instant access to information. They are intelligent knowledge seekers with Siri at their side and can Google quick responses to almost anything. Harnessing various forms of technology to fully engage students is often a welcome prospect to middle school learners.

Jumping into entirely flipping a lesson can be a daunting task. With the increasing expectations on classroom teachers, shrinking planning times, and increasing focus on standardized testing one can feel quite overwhelmed by the prospect of filming their own videos for classroom flips. Start small and change it up often using some of the following techniques.

No special equipment is necessary

A meaningful and engaging video for your students can be filmed with things you probably carry around in your back pocket or purse, your cell phone or tablet. You don’t even have to show your face. It is perfectly acceptable to film your content with your voice in the background. In other words, if your goal is to share another strategy for balancing equations a phone pointed at a whiteboard is perfectly acceptable. That is not to say that a white board with your voice will be engaging every time, but it is a great way to get started.

Not quite ready to make your own videos? No need to recreate the wheel. Great videos and photos already exist. Consider what your students find meaningful and use that venue to reach out. YouTube and Teacher Tube videos as well as Pinterest boards and Instagram photos are not typically professionally filmed or edited. If your goal is to connect with your students while sharing information, don’t worry so much about what your video “looks” like. Instead, enjoy the social interaction and connection with

your students. Your enthusiasm for the content will be contagious (Goleman, 2006). A simple picture or series of pictures posted to a Pinterest board or sent via email is a great way to engage learners in classroom discussions and reflections. Students can provide you with a photo album or slide show for documentation of their understanding or a focal point for a group discussion.

Use resources already available to you

Before you get started on a project check your resources. You can always start with a simple Google Search of an upcoming topic. TeacherTube and YouTube have videos on just about every topic and are easy to share. For example, a biology lesson could involve the flipping of a food safety video that talks about the growth of food-borne illnesses that can then drive an in-class discussion of cell structure and division.

And once you find the media you want to use, save it! Create your own Pinterest boards and YouTube channels to stash for upcoming school years. If you use other people's videos, these can be your motivation for creating and guiding your own materials in the future.

Recruit your students - they can be the best teachers

Remember, your students are great resources. Shouldn't they be the experts when it comes to sharing engaging information in their age group? "Educators must shift from a teaching-centered paradigm toward a learner-centered paradigm" (Roehl, Reddy & Shannon, 2013, p. 2). Have a topic coming up that you just can't find great material on? Consider flipping a potential lesson out to your students. What can they come up with? How can they be inspired to share information about the topic? Perhaps have them create a movie trailer for your unit. Empower students through ownership and add it to your stash of videos for the following school year!

You CAN hit the standards

As project based learning gains frequency in the classroom and many schools

focus on an interdisciplinary approach to standards, teachers can reach learners in many unique ways. Photos or quick in-class videos of students collaborating in groups can stimulate reflection and discussion around the emotional intelligence of students (Goleman, 2006). Regardless of the curriculum benchmarks or standards for your subject and grade level you can find online content to fit your specific needs.

Promote your classroom to the school administration and parents

Consider your impact beyond the students in your classroom. You can gain a unique insight into your classroom by reaching out to connect with parents who are looking over their child's shoulder as they view a video. The benefits of learning a bit more about their child's day has a ripple effect that cannot be underestimated.

Good marketing and community relationships are not exclusively important to private schools that solicit enrollment. How a teacher markets his/her classroom has great benefits for public schools as well. "A growing number of principals and school leaders are supporting flipped teaching in their schools" (Fulton, 2014, p. 1). Building your professional portfolio of curriculum gives a teacher clout and validity in state evaluation models.

Connecting teacher professional development to classroom studies

There are multiple professional development programs available that bundle good classroom lessons with multiple media sources you can utilize to assist in your "portion control." Teachers can use these previously developed videos and lesson plans to flip out to their students. For example, Hands On: Real-World Lessons for Middle School Classrooms, <http://handsonclassrooms.org>, is an interactive, interdisciplinary curriculum that teaches students key food safety concepts while meeting national and state curriculum standards for all core subject areas. Not only can teachers participate in a free professional development workshop that uses project-based curriculum, but as a measure of additional support for teachers,

Hands On also has a growing YouTube channel, <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCP-mF8-VhMFK3-rr0uTbL0A>, with videos for teachers and students that supplement the curriculum. Taking advantage of this previously developed content can help make the flipping process simpler and more effective.

Using multiple various resources will be more engaging to your students and will keep them emotionally invested throughout your studies.

Acknowledgements

Thank you to Dr. Jennifer Richards from the Department of Food Science and Technology at the University of Tennessee Knoxville for her continued support of middle school educators.

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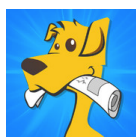
Sondra LoRe is the *Program Coordinator* for the *Hands On* program and a doctoral candidate at the University of Tennessee Knoxville. With nearly 20 years of elementary teaching and administrator experience, an Ed.S. in Educational Leadership, and a Master's degree in Curriculum and Instruction, Sondra serves as the primary point of contact for participating schools handling the day-to-day operations of the program and supervises the graduate and undergraduate students who serve as research assistants or interns.

Technology for Teachers: Apps Galore!

**Meagan Kinard, Keely McDonald,
Deborah Mims, and Thomas Smyth**

Want to revitalize your classroom? Try out some of these student-tested apps as reviewed by practicing middle-level teachers. Included are apps for English Language Arts, Mathematics, and Science. Many can be used across the curriculum.

English/Language Arts



**News-O-Matic,
Daily Reading for Kids**
<https://itunes.apple.com/us/app/news-o-matic-daily-reading/id578023255/>

This free iTunes app daily provides five current, interdisciplinary newspaper articles for young students throughout the workweek and is compatible with the iPhone, iPad, and iPod. Additionally, each article offers a fact, an idea for an interactive activity, a slide show with images and captions, a video based on the article, and an audio playback. This app is most ideal for the English Language Arts classroom; however, teachers in other subject areas, including the fine arts, can easily find and utilize articles related to their content. There are a few game options that focus on historical dates and events. Users can also view daily editions from two weeks prior.

The app's developer has also released a version titled *News-O-Matic for School, 2014-2015, Nonfiction Reading*, which consists of reading material for both elementary and middle school students. The school edition incorporates built-in, standards-based questions for each article. According to the developer's website, the teacher can modify each of his or her student's reading level, create custom questions

based on an article, view each student's responses to all of the assessment questions, and chat with the students. A teacher's daily guide with lesson plans and additional resources is also available. Both versions are strongly recommended for both classroom and home use. Age-appropriate, relevant nonfiction text is now just one click away!



iBrainstorm
<https://itunes.apple.com/us/app/ibrainstorm/id382252825/>

With iBrainstorm, students can create visual diagrams by applying one of the many background templates as well as freeform write and draw on the drawing board. To type on the template, the user can add a note and edit the text. The notes can easily be dragged and dropped anywhere on the template. If students are composing a fictional story, they can create plot diagrams. In order to help students understand a text or literary concept, such as cause and effect, the students and/or teacher can create a mind map to visually present the information. Students can compare and contrast two pieces of literature or ideas by using the Venn diagram template.

The most impressive feature, though, is the multi-device collaboration tool. A student can share his or her notes with another individual's iPad that is within the Wi-Fi range with the simple in-app sharing tool. Students can then share their notes with the teacher's iPad, and the teacher's iPad can display on the classroom's interactive board. A user can also share his or her entire drawing board via email or AirDrop. Organization, design, and

collaboration are all incorporated in iBrainstorm. The free app is available in the iTunes store and is compatible with the iPad only at this time in the United States.



English Idioms Illustrated

<https://itunes.apple.com/au/app/english-idioms-illustrated/id413057971/>

The app's title says it all. The developer of English Idioms Illustrated has combined humorous illustrations with descriptive captions in a comic strip format to explain the historical origins and meanings of the most popular idioms in the English language. Whether you are teaching a unit on figurative language or you simply need an idea for a warm-up writing prompt, this app can help. Students can often struggle with recognizing idioms, and we may all be slightly curious about how such phrases came to be. The application is compatible with all Apple devices and is free.



New Words with Friends

<https://itunes.apple.com/us/app/new-words-with-friends/id804379658/>

Yes, Words with Friends is an addicting social word game that countless teenagers (and adults) play on a daily basis. Nevertheless, it can serve as a wonderful activity for early finishers. The Scrabble-like game challenges students to formulate words from the seven letters provided. Once the student creates a word with their blocks, he or she "sends" their word on the game board to a "friend." In this case, the "friend" would be a classmate or even the teacher. Students are then motivated to look up terms and their definitions to determine whether or not they will be accepted as an actual word in the program. The goal of using this app in the classroom is to encourage students to expand their vocabulary. New Words with Friends is the most recently updated free version available on iTunes and is compatible with all Apple devices.

Mathematics



Khan Academy

<https://itunes.apple.com/us/app/khan-academy-learn-math-biology/id469863705/>

Khan Academy is an app that gives anyone the ability to access a vast array of information. The Mathematics section of the app has different sections. For example, the information one can access ranges from early Math to Linear Algebra and Math contests. When you enter the category you wish to browse, you are taken to different standards from which to choose. Practice is at your fingertips! The app also allows a person to show their work in the area to the side of the problem with a digital pen. The only thing you need to work this app is your finger. Teachers can use this app to project to their interactive whiteboard. If one needs practice with another content area, the home screen is full of other subjects that have many different ranges.



Educreations

<https://itunes.apple.com/us/app/educreations-interactive-whiteboard/id478617061/>

Educreations allows the whiteboard to come to your tablet. Teachers can import videos and documents, share the information outside of the classroom, and create a virtual classroom. This interactive whiteboard application allows the teacher to record a lesson with great audio to use anywhere. Absences in the classroom will no longer be a problem! If the teacher uses this app, the students can access the video anywhere. One of the best features of this app is that it is stored in the cloud. Tangible storage is unnecessary. Other teachers also share their lessons on the "Featured Lessons" section of the app. The burden of creating another lesson from the beginning is eliminated. It is easiest to create your presentation, then to record your annotations. When finished, you have just created an easy-to-view presentation that can be

accessed anywhere.



7th grade Math Learning Games
<https://itunes.apple.com/us/app/7th-grade-math-learning-games/id843388724/>

7th grade Math Learning Games allows the user to choose from five broad standards of Math: Ratios and Proportions, the Number System, Expressions and Equations, Geometry, and Statistics, and Probability. After one selects a broad standard, one can choose specific areas of that standard. Using this information, the application then generates questions that could be used as review. The ease of use with this application is very straightforward. Since the application is specifically designed for 7th grade, the users do not have to search the application for their interests. This app also allows users to show their work on the face of the tablet. Trying to create more questions for review can be a daunting task. This application, however, helps to make a review easier.



Geoboard
<https://itunes.apple.com/us/app/geoboard-by-math-learning/id519896952/>

The Geoboard app is a digital, interactive app that allows students to explore certain Geometry concepts. Many physical geoboards have to be handled with care and use many rubber bands. This digital geoboard can be used individually and as a class. The digital rubber bands keep the classroom safe and free of accidental flying objects. The students are able to explore triangles, perimeter, area, angles, congruency, fractions, and more. After the user virtually creates a shape on the geoboard, the user can fill in the object with a color to make it visually appealing. The user can also switch from a “normal” size geoboard to one with 100 pegs for the biggest of shapes with just a swipe of the screen. The user is also able to access eight different colors for the rubber bands to allow the user to visually see the differences in the shapes. Overall, this app is very user

friendly and is a great alternative to the traditional geoboards.



MyScript Calculator
<https://itunes.apple.com/us/app/myscript-calculator-handwriting/id578979413/>

The MyScript Calculator application is ideal for students who need to understand why a formula works the way it does. The student can easily access formulas ranging from simple addition to finding the log of a value. The students can use the application to solve problems that they would normally stumble through. This calculator also uses the user’s typing and converts it to a formula immediately while walking through the process of solving it. The calculator supports editing throughout problems. If the user does not know a value for the problem, the user can include a question mark and the calculator will automatically balance the problem. For the left-handed students, the calculator has a specific option for them. Overall, this is a great tool for the students who need the extra help.

Science



Nova Elements
<https://itunes.apple.com/us/app/nova-elements/id512772649/>

Seventh Grade teachers and students alike are loving the Nova Elements app. This app contains three facets: “Watch,” “Explore,” and “Play.” In the “Watch” part of this app, students can watch chapters of Nova’s “Exploring the Elements.” Each chapter offers information about the elements in an entertaining and educational manner. In the “Explore” facet to this app, students can tap any element on the periodic table and get information about that element, such as by whom it was discovered, whether or not it is reactive, practical applications, and interesting factoids. From the informational screen, students can go directly to a “build” screen where they can attempt to build

the atom, and a “build” button that builds the molecule for them with very cool effects. Finally, there is a “Play” button. In this part of the app, students can attempt to build molecules of various items. There they can drag and drop elements and submit their finished molecules. The app then tells them with voice and sound effects whether they are correct, whether all or some or none of their elements are in the proper places.

This app keeps the student’s attention as they get information and watch a molecule be “built” as well as try to build them on their own.

“snapping” a leaf, shown by photos of leaves, flowers, seeds, fruit, bark (if any), and petiole. These can be narrowed to a list of nearby species by allowing location services to be used by the app. At the touch of a finger, the user can change from common names listed first or last to scientific names. Students love going into the woods to collect various leaves and bringing them back to the classroom to identify them. This is a useful tool to interest the students in the plants that grow around them, and to help them identify types of plants, seed dispersal methods, and different types of pollination methods.



Hudson Alpha iCell

<https://itunes.apple.com/us/app/hudsonalpha-icell/id364882015/>

iCell is a free app that is relatively simple and can easily be used in the classroom or at home for students to see a bacteria, an animal cell, and a plant cell in 3-D from any angle. Simply moving the cell around gives a different view of the cell and its organelles, and in the case of the plant cell, its cell wall. When anything within the cell is tapped on, a text box appears with information at three different levels: basic, intermediate, and advanced. This feature is especially useful, as it addresses different learning levels in the classroom. This app can be used as a quick review or a way to allow students to view cells without a trip to the lab.



Leaf Snap

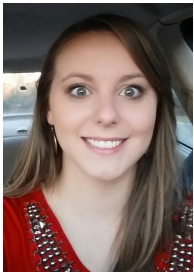
<https://itunes.apple.com/us/app/leafsnap/id430649829/>

For middle-level science classes, the free Leaf Snap app is a fun and relatively accurate way to learn about species of trees, flowers and bushes. Students can collect leaves, set them on white paper and snap a photo of them. The app then gives a list of possible species matches within seconds. Users are then able to tap the description that matches and add the leaf to their collections.

There is currently a list of hundreds of possible species that can be browsed without



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What Do You See? Fusing Literacy Strategies into Content Area Instruction

Janie Riddle Goodman and Victoria A. Oglan

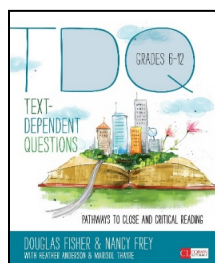
Many teachers find themselves caught on the proverbial “horns of a dilemma.” On one hand, teachers face calls for increased rigor and attention in their instructional practices on students’ complex literacy needs. On the other hand, they wonder how to bring literacy instructional practices into an already crowded day of teaching content area conceptual knowledge. Teachers are left wondering, “How am I supposed to do it all?”

It helps to use a common metaphor when thinking about ways to fuse literacy practices and strategies into content area curricula. We all are familiar with the optical illusions in which one image can be viewed two ways—is it a young woman’s face or the face of an old crone; a vase or two profiles; a man playing a saxophone or a woman’s face? What you see depends on how you look at it, and if you look closely, you often are able to see both images.

It is the same when thinking about teaching students how to use effective literacy instructional practices of reading and writing within a content area context. It all depends on how you look at it. In fact, even content area teachers can be seen two ways—not only are they content area specialists, but they are also perfectly poised to teach students how they and others within their disciplines read and write content area texts. By explicitly sharing their own literacy processes for understanding content area texts, teachers can critically scaffold students to develop their own understandings of the texts they read. Thus, literacy instruction does not stand apart but rather is embedded throughout content area instruction.

The following texts offer teachers different ways of thinking about literacy strategy instruction within content area classroom contexts. Douglas Fisher and Nancy Frey (2015)

provide a different way for structuring comprehension questions through a four-level scaffold that helps students become close, critical readers of complex, content area texts. Thomas Newkirk (2014) invites teachers who think of narrative writing as primarily appropriate for younger students to imagine it instead as the primary way we understand our world and ourselves. Tom Romano (2013) invites teachers to expand their thinking about writing by considering multigenre writing as a means for students to demonstrate their knowing about fiction and non-fiction. Heather Wolpert-Gawron (2014) offers a collection of writing strategies for content teachers to support their efforts to meet the writing demands of the Common Core State Standards.



**Text-Dependent Questions
Grades 6-12: Pathways to
Close and Critical Reading**
by Douglas Fisher & Nancy
Frey, Corwin, 2015, 309 pp.,
ISBN 978-1-4833-3137-9

“Close reading leads students on a cognitive path that begins with establishing the literal meaning of a text and ends with an exploration into its deeper meaning and a plan for what should occur as a result of the reading” (p. 5).

In this, one of their newest offerings, Fisher & Frey offer teachers a text that will change the way they think about instructing students in effective strategies for reading and responding to text-dependent questions. As an instructional practice, close reading is defined as “an instructional routine in which students are guided in their understanding of complex texts” (p. 1). The authors note that accessible texts

which students read either for pleasure or for locating a specific piece of information generally do not warrant a close reading. It is instead those “complex texts—texts that do not give up their meaning easily or quickly” (p. 2) that students must learn to read closely.

Chapter One offers readers an overview of the four phases of close reading which encourage students to move from surface-level comprehension to deep comprehension of text. These phases include:

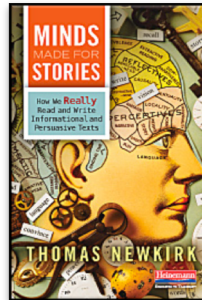
- What does the text *say*? (general understanding and key details)
- How does the text *work*? (vocabulary, structure, and author’s craft)
- What does the text *mean*? (author’s purpose and intertextual connections)
- What does the text *inspire you to do*? (write, investigate, present, and debate)

Each of the subsequent four chapters focus on one of the phases. In each chapter, Fisher & Frey offer explanations for why students need each type of questioning if they are going to learn how to deeply understand complex texts. Each chapter also features the authors’ examination of how each type of questioning addresses the Common Core State Standards of reading, language, speaking and listening, and writing. Included are not only reading standards for literary and informational texts but also reading standards in history, science, and the technical subjects.

Examples are provided in each chapter to illustrate how each phase of questioning might look and sound in middle and high school content area classrooms. From questions for determining the author’s purpose in middle school social studies to what the text inspires you to do in middle school science, the authors invite readers to take a glimpse at what goes on in classrooms where students are taught close reading strategies. Included at the end of each chapter are illustrative classroom video clips available via QR codes.

Fisher & Frey have gone the extra mile in providing secondary teachers a number of resources to support implementation of close reading strategies with adolescent students.

Appendices in the book include texts and questions for middle and high school English, social studies/history, and science. On-line resources include classroom video clips, authors’ video clips, and pdf documents. (JRG)



**Minds Made for Stories:
How We Really Read and
Write Informational and
Persuasive Texts**

by Thomas Newkirk,
Heinemann, 2014, 159 pp.,
ISBN 978-0-325-04695-2

Imagine that you are one of the jurors listening to the defense attorney deliver the closing argument as the trial comes to its end. What would you say is the writing genre underlying the attorney’s spoken words? Perhaps you would quickly respond that the attorney is making an argument for the client’s innocence. But isn’t the attorney also telling a story about the crime, the circumstances, and the client’s role? Are there elements of narrative underlying the argument?

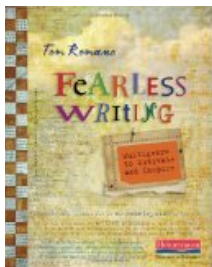
In this book, author Thomas Newkirk challenges the way narrative is often treated in secondary schools as an easy type of writing. He unabashedly writes, “The hero of this story is narrative itself” (p. 5), and continues, “It [narrative] is there to ground abstract ideas, to help us see the pattern in a set of numerical data, to illuminate the human consequences of political action. It is home base” (p. 5). He asks readers to engage in a kind of “what if?” and consider narrative as “the deep structure of all good sustained writing” (p. 19). Indeed, he proposes, “even research reports must tell a story” (p. 19).

Newkirk invites his readers to consider the relationship that exists between a reader and a writer. “Sustained reading is a mysterious form of attraction—writers inviting readers to stay with them. Readers forming attachments to writers” (p. 35). He further explains how readers have trouble sustaining a reading (often the case with textbooks) when the “teller” of the text is hidden or undetectable. Newkirk believes that readers crave nonfiction that has a human

presence, a narrator and guide, “just as a tour guide is part of the experience of visiting Monticello” (p. 38).

Readers of this book will want to carefully consider what Newkirk refers to as *the seven deadly sins of textbooks*. He goes so far as to suggest that students’ comprehension difficulties may not always result from their failure to handle complex texts, but rather from the problems inherent in the textbook writing they read in content area classrooms. He worries “that textbook language be taken as a model for students’ writing of information texts” (p. 55).

Newkirk addresses each content area by showing how his perspectives are applicable across the curriculum. He provides many examples that contrast textbook writing with authentic, engaging nonfiction writing in English/language arts, social studies, science, and mathematics. He encourages teachers to provide students with time and support for *listening to the text*. What if we all read informational and persuasive texts that way? Have you ever listened for Thoreau’s wit in *Walden*, thought about the story of American identity within Lincoln’s *Gettysburg Address*, taken a walk with Eric Carle in *A House for Hermit Crab*, or reconstructed the story of a baseball game from the box scores? Would we be surprised at the stories and voices we would hear if we considered writing the way it really works outside school walls? (JRG)



Fearless Writing: Multigenre to Motivate and Inspire by Tom Romano, Heinemann, 2013, 208 pp., ISBN 0-3250-4806-1

Tom Romano embraces multigenre writing for many reasons. He has been teaching it for some twenty-five years and he is convinced it has much to offer teachers and students.

In his latest book, Romano shares his concern with the traditional focus on exposition in classrooms where students are relegated to writing formulaic research papers, summaries, reports and essays. And he objects to the

Common Core Standards on writing that, in his estimate, privilege argument and information writing, forms of exposition, over narration. According to Romano, this monopoly on exposition does a disservice to students, creates in them a narrow view of writing and leaves them “expositioned to death” (p. 75). In fairness, he acknowledges that not all exposition is created equal. As a writer, Romano embraces exposition as a genre that can be “creative, urgent, limber, provocative, exploratory, linguistically sophisticated, and voiceful, using all I know about making writing vivid: imagery, strong verbs, directness, surprise, figurative language, convincing logic, rhythmical syntax, and stories” (p. 75). He sees exposition in larger terms where is it both informative and provocative.

Romano wants teachers to know that a multigenre paper combines research, imagination, and experience in unique ways that require academic rigor. He says:

Multigenre doesn’t have to be an add-on. Imperative skills and concepts can be woven naturally into it – text types, research skills, rhetorical strategies, voice, point of view, grammar, usage, punctuation, genre study, expressive writing to launch all writing, revision, and the reading of wide-ranging nonfiction texts as writers hungrily pursue their research interests. (p. 4)

It is this blending of genres that requires students to be creative researchers and fearless writers who explore writing in all its forms and functions. Students flourish as writers and meaning makers as they experiment with many genres all the while working to explain, analyze, describe and persuade the reader about their research topic. And, over time, Romano has watched his students become more engaged writers whose attitudes, not only about writing, have changed but their sense of self as writer has changed too.

This book provides teachers with a range of ideas for incorporating multigenre writing into their curriculum. It is easy to navigate and teachers can select sections/chapters individually based on their needs. Romano divides his book

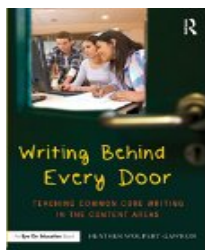
into five sections each with a collection of chapters to explore:

- Section I offers a history of multigenre;
- Section II offers ways to engage students in multigenre writing and how to set up assignments that encourage them to be critical and creative thinkers;
- Section III details many practical suggestions for genres and sub genres that make up the landscape of multigenre;
- Section IV discusses the components of successful multigenre papers;
- Section V offers ways to assess these assignments and how multigenre fits into the Common Core Standards for writing.

Student work samples abound throughout the book.

Teachers will especially want to explore Section III *What to Write, How To Write It* which is filled with practical ideas for narration, exposition, poetry, and innovative genres such as visuals that include maps, drawings, photos, diagrams, collages which add meaning in new and interesting ways and add aesthetic appeal to the overall paper. The samples of student work in this section fill the pages with a multitude of voices and perspectives and are valuable demonstrations of the potential of multigenre writing.

Teaching writing can be a rewarding experience for teachers; Romano's book can help them in this endeavor. And maybe after reading this book, they just might become fearless teachers. (VAO)



**Writing Behind Every Door:
Teaching Common Core
Writing in the Content Areas**
by Heather Wolpert-Gawron,
Routledge, 2014, 196 pp., ISBN
0-4157-3208-5

It is clear writing has a new place of prominence in the curriculum with the advent of the Common Core State Standards (CCSS). This has created angst among teachers for a variety of reasons. For ELA teachers, the

learning curve is not so steep. The shift from narration to argument and information requires them to think about writing in new ways with regard to teaching, planning and assessment. For content teachers the learning curve is steep. Teaching writing is uncharted territory and now they are required to share this writing territory with their ELA counterparts. For many of them, they are at a loss. Wolpert-Gawron's book is a resource content teachers can turn to for many ideas on how to incorporate writing into their curriculum in ways that will meet the demands of the CCSS.

In her latest book, Wolpert-Gawron sees the focus on writing as a step forward in the field of education. She says the CCSS are insisting on incorporating the 4C's into our teaching and into students' learning: critical thinking, collaboration, creativity, and communication. And, in concert with this, the new assessments aligned with the CCSS will require students to show their comprehension through writing. For Wolpert-Gawron, the way to make the necessary changes in our classrooms can occur if we, as teachers, work together, and share with each other what works in our classrooms. She says, "Together, we can examine the importance of writing in a Common Core world and in the real world. Together, we can help each other, teachers of all disciplines, adjust our practice in a way that excites us all to teach writing" (p. 2). This collaborative spirit amongst teachers works to serve students as well. For students then come to see "a consistent web of expectations... regardless of the room in which they are learning. And this consistent message of expectation helps support the transfer of information from classroom to classroom" (p. 4). Her book offers best practice techniques, strategies and structures teachers can use immediately to engage students in the 4C's and prepare them to be college and career ready.

The book is easy to navigate and teachers can choose from the nine chapters based on their immediate needs. Chapter 2 titled Argument: The Universal Writing Genre and Chapter 3 titled Informational: It's All Around Us have many examples of cross-curricular assignments and engagements with a variety of student

samples in different formats to use as demonstrations. Teachers can see how an assignment can serve many purposes across the disciplines and how these two genres can be linked. The TED Unit is an advocacy unit, where students work collaboratively and independently and the Google Search Story are two interesting engagements that provide students with many opportunities to research, create, write and visualize topics. Also included in these chapters are additional resources and websites.

Also of interest is Chapter 6 on multigenre writing. Not only are there suggestions for some of the more common genre options for students such as blogs, interviews, ads, and songs but there is also a section on students creating websites and apps, which meld multi-modal literacies with more traditional

writing genres. Student samples abound and are interesting and engaging.

This book is a must-have for all teachers but in particular for content teachers who are looking for a resource that will provide a multitude of practical ideas for how to teach writing. (VAO)

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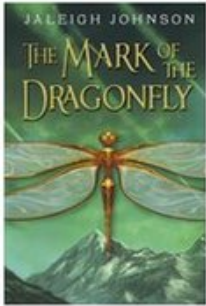
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Victoria A. Oglan is a Clinical Assistant Professor in Language and Literacy/Secondary English Education at the University of South Carolina. She is the Co-Director of the Midlands Writing Project and she teaches graduate courses in ELA methodology and research, and in content literacy.

Young Adult Book Reviews

Michelle Martin and Keri Reaney



The Mark of the Dragonfly

By Jaleigh Johnson, Delcorte Books for Young Readers, 2014. ISBN 978-0385376150. Review by **Michelle Martin**, South Middle School, Lancaster, SC.

Scrap Town Number 16 is a dismal place to grow up. Set on the far outskirts of civilization, the people who live there survive by scavenging the items that mysteriously fall from the sky during deadly meteor showers. Since her father's death in the Dragonfly capital, 13 year-old Piper ekes out a living fixing the gadgets that fall from the sky.

Piper's adventure begins when she wanders out in the middle of a meteor shower to save a friend. She sees a caravan destroyed by the meteors and saves two survivors: a man and amnesiac Anna. Anna's extreme fear of the man and the potential for reward that the dragonfly tattoo on Anna's arm hints at is the impetus for Piper's decision to flee to the Dragonfly Territories. To escape, she and Anna stowaway on the 401, a beautiful old train that takes cargo and passengers across the Merrow Kingdom and the Dragonfly Territories.

Johnson creates vivid imagery for this imaginary world going through an Industrial Revolution, but her heroine exhibits qualities that at times make the reader think Piper is older. These qualities nicely balance with Gee's character to make for a believable budding romance.

This steampunk fantasy has action and adventure, as well as a little magic and romance, and some well-timed humor. Even with a female protagonist, *The Mark of the Dragonfly* should appeal to a broad audience.



Gated

By Amy Christine Parker, Random House, 2013. ISBN 9780449816004.

Review by **Keri Reaney**, Media Specialist, Northwest Middle School, Travelers Rest, SC.

Seventeen-year-old Lyla Hamilton's gated community seems to have it all - stables, gardens, orchards, a clubhouse, and even a pool. The members of this tight knit community have no need to rely on the outside world. They can provide for and protect themselves. Protecting Mandrodage Meadows is of the utmost importance now that the end of the world is at hand.

The community's leader, Pioneer, has prepared his followers for this moment for years. In fact, they have built an underground shelter, or Silo, and will defend it at all costs. Lyla's chance meeting with Cody, the local sheriff's son, opens her eyes to potential lies and deceptions. As the apocalypse approaches, she begins to question and doubt all that Pioneer has taught her. Who can Lyla trust? She must decide quickly - time is running out.

Amy Christine Parker's debut novel provides a glimpse of life in a religious cult. The first person narrative of this story gives insight into the fear, confusion, and awakening that Lyla experiences throughout the novel. The twists and turns of this unpredictable plot will keep readers wanting more. Fortunately, the sequel awaits!



Michelle Martin is in her second career as a Library Media Specialist at South Middle School in Lancaster, South Carolina. In 2007, she graduated from the University of South Carolina with her Masters in Library & Information Science. She is currently working on her PhD through Capella University and is serving on the SC Junior Book Award Committee.



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