Texas Association for Literacy Education Yearbook Volume 7: September 2020

Leap into Literacy

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TEXAS ASSOCIATION FOR LITERACY EDUCATION YEARBOOK

Volume 7:
Leap into Literacy

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2020 Yearbook Review Board

Leap into Literacy

The newly opened Odessa Marriott Hotel and Conference Center in Odessa, Texas served as the venue for the eighth annual conference for the Texas Association for Literacy Education on February 28 and 29, 2020. In partnership with University of Texas: Permian-Basin, TALE hosted well over 300 literacy educators, including preservice teachers, classroom teachers, literacy coaches, campus administrators, district curriculum personnel and university professors. Given that 2020 was a leap year, TALE endeavored to have participants "Leap into Literacy" with a wide variety of professional development sessions. This yearbook is a compilation of some of those presentations and it is our hope that you read, share, and discuss the manuscripts that were selected for publication.

ILA Board of Directors and TALE Past-President, Dr. Laurie Sharp, and literacy guru Donalyn Miller served as opening keynote speakers, encouraging educators to consider the importance of choice, access, and effective literacy instruction as a right for ALL students. Author and Native Texan, Chris Barton was one of several authors who offered sessions sharing suggestions for diversifying reading lists, discussing their process and books with educators. After the engaging research posters were shared at the TALE social, educators were serenaded by Satin Strings from Permian High School in Ector County ISD and entertained by the UTPB Ballet Folklorico team well into the evening. Nationally known authors and researchers, Kylene Beers and Bob Probst, shared instructional strategies for increasing critical thinking and engagement in reading instruction for the Saturday keynote. Aside from these highlights, participants at this year's conference were provided with a multitude of literacy practices to support effective instruction for all levels of learners.

Two local superintendents, Dr. Scott Muri of Ector County ISD and Orlando Riddick of Midland ISD, also graced the main stage to share their support for TALE. They not only stressed the importance of literacy, but the impact of having a major conference in their area to provide professional development for local teachers.

A plethora of vendors sponsored this year's conference and provided additional support. These include Atmos Energy, Discover Odessa, Ector County ISD, EMC Publishing, Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, Matthew & Jody Saulsbury, Mentoring Minds, UTPB College of Education and more.

Additionally, this year the Community Involvement Committee debuted the TALE t-shirt which was available through pre-order and for purchase at the conference. Members and Board members were asked to "Teal out for TALE" on Saturday.

TALE is truly grateful the 2020 conference in Odessa occurred just weeks before the COVID-19 Pandemic, giving educators an opportunity to collaborate and learn together. We are thankful for your support of TALE and hope you can join us for the various virtual professional development sessions we have planned for the upcoming year in lieu of our in-person conference.

Sincerely,

Malene Golding
TALE Chair, 2020

Table of Contents

Co-Constructing Meaning: Tools to Help Adolescent Readers Make Sense of Informational Texts

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Abstract

In a recent classroom-based action research study, the author's adolescent students deepened their informational text comprehension skills over the course of several interactive, strategic shared text studies. As suggested by research and theory, her students appeared to observe and appropriate cognitive, executive, and discourse strategies as they worked together with their teacher and the text. Though teachers may find it challenging to lead explicit strategy instruction while facilitating the shared study of a mentor text, the benefits to adolescent readers can be substantial. The teacher plays a central role in leading strategic text studies (Garas-York & Almasi, 2017)*, from choosing the right text and strategic focuses to facilitating whole-class, team, and independent text-centered experiences. The author makes suggestions for leading shared text studies that can be adapted to each teacher's context.*

Keywords: *Adolescent Literacy, Secondary Literacy, Information Texts, Struggling Readers, Comprehension*

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I have served in secondary public education for 27 years as a classroom teacher, professional developer, and administrator. In these roles, I have worked to build my understanding of adolescent reading comprehension and my ability to support secondary students' development of comprehension skills. Over the past two years, I conducted action research in my seventh-grade English Language Arts (ELA) classroom to gain insight into my evolving practice as a reading teacher and my middle school students' development as readers.

My first action research study—focused on a whole-class exploration of a complex short story—confirmed that frequent text-centered interactions were a driving force of our shared text study. I came to understand that in a co-constructive reading experience, the teacher plays an essential role as a knowledgeable other—a lead meaning-maker who can model

how to approach constructing meaning of a text in collaboration with others (Garas-York & Almasi, 2017). The importance of the teacher's role does not negate the value of students engaging together in purposeful text-centered conversations (Anderson et al., 2001; Baye, Inns, Lake, & Slavin, 2018). Finally, students can gain a great deal from their private "conversations" with the author by reading the text multiple times, using different lenses, and engaging in well-constructed reader response activities.

Having gained confidence in leading strategic literary studies, I next turned my attention to facilitating the strategic shared study of informational texts. In spring 2019, I used mixed methods to investigate teaching and learning in my classroom during 14 sessions devoted to three shared informational text studies. The research suggests that my adolescent students

deepened their comprehension skills as they engaged routinely in interactive, strategic studies of informational texts as members of a meaning-making community (Reninger & Rehark, 2009). Even my struggling readers appeared to appropriate multiple strategies as they worked together with their teacher and the author to build a deeper understanding of each informational text (Langer, 2009). Even students with strong comprehension skills adapted and expanded those skills to fit more challenging texts and new reading purposes (International Reading Association [ILA], 2012; Moore, Bean, Birdyshaw, & Rycik, 1999).

Facilitating these studies is challenging (Croninger, Li, Cameron, & Murphy, 2017; Shulman, 1986). Luckily, I have found that pedagogical perfection is not required for students to make substantial progress, especially those who struggle most with informational text comprehension. I hope that teachers of adolescent readers will be inspired to take up or refine this practice as appropriate for their particular contexts.

What's at Stake

Adolescent students' difficulty with comprehending informational texts is well-documented in the annual publication of standardized reading test results. In spring 2019, nearly 470,000 Texas high school students completed the state-administered English I examination, one of the State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness (STAAR). Fewer than half of the test takers met the state's grade-level literacy standards. Among the 94,197 test-takers who had already failed the English I exam one or more times, a staggering 94 percent failed to meet grade-level literacy standards. On average, test-takers correctly answered 70 percent of questions testing their comprehension of informational passages. Among re-testers and vulnerable student populations, however, the average percent correct was significantly lower (Texas Education Agency, 2019). See Table 1 for more information.

Table 1

Spring 2019 STAAR English I – Informational Reading Results for At-Risk Student Groups

Percent Questions Correct	Total	Males	Economically Disadvantaged	At-Risk	LEP	SpEd	Retested
Reporting Category 3: Understanding/ Analysis of Informational Texts	70%	66%	64%	59%	47%	47%	49%

Many college courses demand that students make sense of complex informational texts. Yet, one-third of Texas high school graduates who qualified for a free lunch in the National School Lunch Program failed to meet the "college-ready" threshold on the Texas Success Initiative (TSI) reading assessment (Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board, 2018). Mid-skill and high-skill professions demand competence in informational text comprehension as well. Finally, as Thomas Jefferson argued, a well-

functioning democracy requires informational literacy (Jefferson, 1789, Jan. 8).

Some of the skills needed for the deep comprehension of informational texts are genre-specific (Duke & Martin, 2019; Fisher & Frey, 2019; Hebert, Bohaty, & Nelson, 2016). Thus, a literacy education that privileges literary fiction and non-fiction at the expense of expository texts may leave substantial gaps in students' meaning-making skillset. Though it is important for students to deeply comprehend informational

texts as independent readers, it is also essential for them to consider and be shaped by other readers' perspectives. Adults collaborate daily to make sense of informational text—in their workplaces, their places of worship, and online discussions (Duke & Martin, 2019).

How Adolescent Readers Make Sense of Informational Texts

My classroom research rests on a conceptual framework informed by Vygotsky's theory of social constructivism, Barbara Rogoff 's theory of cognitive apprenticeship, and Walter Kintsch's construction-integration model of text comprehension (Duke, Pearson, Strachan, & Billman, 2011; Kintsch, 2009; Murphy, Wilkinson, Soter, Hennessey, & Alexander, 2009; Rogoff, 1990). Because cognitive and metacognitive processes are invisible and often unconscious (Greenleaf, Schoenbach, Cziko, & Mueller, 2015), no one can claim with absolute certainty how a reader makes sense of texts. The metaphors of apprenticeship and mental model construction described below are consistent with theory, empirical research, and my practical experience as a classroom educator.

Apprenticeship

As members of reading communities, young children appear to observe, appropriate, and practice comprehension strategies in collaboration with knowledgeable others (their parents and teachers, their peers, and the authors of the texts they read) (Greenleaf et al., 2015; Rogoff, 1990). When students are supported in applying strategies successfully to make sense of a variety of texts, those strategies can evolve into skills that students draw upon without conscious effort or awareness (Almasi & Fullerton, 2012). Adolescent readers continue to need instruction to improve their comprehension skills (Boardman et al., 2008), just as a pianist who last played a Haydn minuet in her fourth-grade recital will be ill-equipped to tackle a Shostakovich sonata without substantial help and preparation.

Mental Model Construction

As they make sense of an informational text, skilled readers construct a mental model—a "strategic simplification of the full text"—that recodes the text for long-term storage (O'Reilly, Deane, & Sabatini, 2015, p. 6). Skilled readers appear to formulate the outlines of a mental text model as they familiarize themselves with the text. As they read, they seem to continually check new ideas and information against their "draft" model, elaborating and correcting the model to reflect their evolving understanding of the text (Kintsch, 2009; O'Reilly et al., 2015). As they work through a complex informational piece, skilled readers appear to formulate a cohesive, elaborated mental model of the whole text. On the other hand, a reader less successful at comprehension may treat each new segment or concept separately, formulating mini-models but never integrating them (Almasi & Fullerton, 2012).

In a sense, the reader and the author collaborate to co-construct a mental model. Skilled readers may try to discern the author's intended meaning and purpose at the sentence-by-sentence and whole-text level. Simultaneously, they may unearth relevant background knowledge and personal connections to help them solidify and contextualize their mental model (Kintsch, 2009).

A Mismatch between Student Needs and Instructional Practices

In their academic careers, students (especially those attending higher-income schools) may be invited to participate in classroom discussions of literary works from *The Dot* to *Brave New World* (Applebee, Langer, Nystrand, & Gamoran, 2003; Madda, Griffo, Pearson, & Raphael, 2019). Even students who have had the luxury of engaging in fruitful literary discussions, however, typically have had fewer sustained meaning-making conversations about informational texts. Secondary teachers often ask their students to extract information from a textbook or the Internet to prepare for issues discussions and project presentations. Still, those students may not have regular opportunities to practice collaborative sense-making of the informational texts themselves.

Though most adolescent students can comprehend grade-level informational texts to some degree, their mental models might be thin, fleeting, or inaccurate. Secondary students may assume their informational text comprehension skills are sufficient, especially if they regularly "pass" state reading exams. Students may not have developed the executive skills required to monitor and repair their comprehension of a text or even to monitor and manage their attention during meaning construction. When our comprehension assessments stop at students' word- and sentence-level understandings, teachers may not detect the weaknesses in our students' textual models. Because the informational texts assigned in school often address unfamiliar topics outside students' interest areas, adolescent readers and their teachers often attribute their poor comprehension to a lack of interest rather than insufficient skills (Ortlieb & Cheek, 2013).

The Skills Students Need to Make Sense of Informational Text

Active meaning constructors call upon cognitive, meta-cognitive, and discourse skills to make sense of informational texts (O'Reilly et al., 2015). When facing a particularly challenging text outside their prior knowledge base, skilled readers can become strategic, consciously choosing strategies that will facilitate their meaning-making (Almasi & Fullerton, 2012).

As I planned each of the three shared text studies in my most recent action research study, I identified the comprehension strategies that I intended to teach explicitly. During each text study, I re-assessed and adapted my strategic focus frequently in response to students' needs. I de-emphasized several cognitive strategies I had planned to teach explicitly, including predicting and connecting, as I found my students relied too heavily on these generic skills. I spent more time than I had planned supporting students as they learned to annotate, infer exposition structure, and discern key ideas. Though I had intended to teach summarization explicitly, I focused instead on prerequisite strategies with which my students struggled. I dropped back

further to scaffold foundational discourse and executive strategies that my students were not successfully activating, including focusing attention, noticing confusion, attending to others' meanings, and taking up others' ideas.

Cognitive Skills

In 2015, Educational Testing Service (ETS) researchers codified the complex "Build and Convey Knowledge" literacy practice. According to the researchers, readers engage in this meaning-making practice in iterative phases, first laying the foundation for understanding a text and then constructing, repairing, refining, consolidating, elaborating, and finally communicating their understanding of that text (O'Reilly et al., 2015). Some of the cognitive strategies readers activate in this literacy practice, such as visualizing and predicting, are emphasized year after year in instruction in multiple genres. Other strategies are specific to informational texts, such as inferring exposition structure and discerning key ideas and information (Duke & Martin, 2019). While some of these cognitive skills receive a great deal of attention in earlier grades, others receive much less explicit instruction.

Discourse Skills

Though discourse skills are often not taught explicitly in secondary classrooms, the intentional nurturing of these skills is essential for a safe, multivocal, meaning-making community (Reninger & Rehark, 2009). Researchers have found that when teachers ask open-ended questions and value students' voices, skill-building discussions occur (Applebee et al., 2003). In whole-class and team discussions with facilitated discourse, students can begin to take up the strategies they see and hear others using and take their place as "knowledgeable other" in the class. The teacher's leadership as a member of the classroom discourse is essential if students are to develop the discursive skills needed to truly consider others' ideas (Reninger & Rehark, 2009). With practice, the discourse students have practiced with their peers and teacher can be appropriated for their private use as they

attend to the author's voice and even ask questions of the author in their independent readings of the text (Rogoff, 1990)

Executive Skills

Cartwright (2015) described the executive skills that skilled readers activate to support their meaning construction. These skills include attentional control, inhibition of irrelevant information, self-monitoring, and the ability to discern a text's organizational patterns.

In my work with secondary students, I have found that being able to assess and focus one's attention on textual meaning-making is fundamental, but this executive skill is often not explicitly addressed. My students' enjoyment and comprehension of texts tend to increase when I teach them to monitor and redirect their attention strategically.

During the study, as I attempted to help students take up their colleagues' ideas during our discussions, I found that many had difficulty focusing on their peers' meaning-making. In whole-class discussions and debriefs of team discussions, I realized students were not hearing their peers. I came to realize students were disengaging while waiting for their turn to speak. If they were not "on deck," they were not tuned in. I began to teach students explicitly how they could become strategic (i.e., conscious and intentional) about this critical facility.

Leading Shared Studies of Informational Texts

Teachers seeking to implement strategic shared studies of informational texts may find guidance hard to come by. The suggestions outlined below arise from my classroom research and practice. They are also informed by my study of empirical research and my observations of other teachers' instructional practices in my roles as a coach and administrator. I have used tentative language throughout to indicate that these recommendations arise from my context and must be adapted to fit each educator's instructional situation and pedagogical perspective.

The Teacher's Central Role

When scaffolding students' orchestration of multiple strategies, the teacher will need to monitor students' strategy application and drop back to shore up their declarative, procedural, and conditional understanding of the strategy. Explicitly providing the "what," "why," "how," and "when" of a strategy is especially helpful for English Learners (Booth, Land, & Olson, 2007; Mayville, 2015). During class discussions, the teacher may discover spots in the text that were more problematic than expected. She will need to provide just-right support, inviting students to return to the text, modeling her thinking, and formulating questions that help students come to their own "Aha!" moments. The teacher must also help students to re-activate strategies that have atrophied and to become consciously aware of those skills that have long ago become unconscious and automatic.

Choosing Mentor Texts

When secondary students are fed a steady diet of controlled texts with prominent text features, simple sentences, defined vocabulary, and well-marked key ideas, they can lose the willingness and skill to power through complex meaning-making challenges. Adolescent readers grow from wrestling with challenging texts, but they need support to avoid frustration and surrender.

I have found that an ideal mentor text for a shared study is engaging, well written, and somewhat complex. I look for texts that are accessible with scaffolding for my most struggling readers while offering challenge and interest for my most agile meaning-makers. Ideally, the text's syntax and diction will support discussion and imitation of the author's craft. Mentor texts ideally will be relevant to students' interests and will connect with other texts, themes, or topics they have been exploring. Assessment of text complexity should include the length of the piece, sentence length and structure, the amount of unfamiliar vocabulary, the presence of text features, and how explicitly or well ideas are organized throughout.

The teacher needs to read through the text carefully to formulate a robust, accurate mental model. This process includes discerning how the text's exposition is structured. If text features are lacking, they can be added by the teacher or composed by students.

Because we work together as a meaning-making community, serving as knowledgeable others for each other, I do not provide multiple texts or versions of texts during a shared study. I do, however, plan carefully for supporting readers who will flounder without substantial help. For example, I often provide audio support for our first reading, either through a read-aloud or an audio recording that students can return to later. I chunk the text and create opportunities for multiple strategic readings for varied purposes.

Choosing a Strategic Focus

To best prepare students to read challenging informational texts, we help them to orchestrate a manageable number of interrelated strategies during a shared text study (Kamil et al., 2008). Each teacher must decide which cognitive, executive, and discourse strategies to teach explicitly during the study of a particular text. The teacher must also assess the current state of her students' meaning-making skills and strategic knowledge so that she can make wise decisions about which strategies to teach explicitly and in what combinations. The texts chosen will lend themselves to different strategic focuses.

Planning and Adjusting

I found it useful to develop a plan for the four-to five-day shared text study, which became an advance organizer for students and a guide for my instruction. I adjusted my lesson plans daily based on my activity-by-activity, or even minute-by-minute, assessment of students' success in taking up strategies and making sense of the text. I planned for pre-reading and post-reading experiences that I hoped would engage students and reinforce strategy development, but I did not implement all of them. I prepared for multiple readings of the text, with different purposes and different types of interaction.

Throughout these iterative text engagements, I planned to introduce and facilitate the practice of multiple comprehension strategies. As we engaged with the text, I kept close tabs on how students were making sense of the text and taking up strategies and added or removed scaffolding improvisationally. After releasing students to practicing in teams or independently, I would sometimes find it necessary to drop back for more explicit instruction of a strategy or discussion of a confusing point in the text.

Leading Whole-Class Instruction

Whole-class instruction is an essential ingredient in a shared text study. In this setting, the teacher can explain and model strategies while she informally assesses students' strategic knowledge and textual understanding. Students can hear their colleagues' thinking and practice dialogic discourse. To help build a meaning-making community, teachers must work to avoid traditional patterns taking hold, in which 'target' students and the teacher dominate the discussion, and most others fall silent. Many teachers (including myself) are conditioned to this pattern by our own educational experiences, as are our students, so avoiding this habit requires practice, reflection, and feedback.

Strategy Explanation. To explain a comprehension strategy, the teacher activates or provides declarative ("what" and "why"), procedural (the "how"), and conditional ("when") knowledge (Almasi & Fullerton, 2012). The teacher must decide how to assess, build, and reinforce students' strategic knowledge. As is true for direct instruction of other concepts, one mode or incidence of explanation will not be enough. Anchor charts, guided notes, slide decks, and "cheat sheets" can help keep the information fresh and accessible for students (Almasi & Fullerton, 2012) and increase comprehensible input for English learners. Though students need procedural knowledge to take up sophisticated strategies successfully, the teacher should be careful not to emphasize form at the expense of function. Cognitive engagement should always be the principal test of how well students are using a strategy (Kamil et al., 2008).

Strategy Modeling. The teacher can model a cognitive strategy by conducting a think-aloud/do-aloud, examining an exemplar, or co-composing alongside students. This modeling is especially important for English Learners (Walqui, 2006). During the study, I took all these approaches to model the cognitive strategies that proved most challenging for our learning community (annotating, discerning key ideas, and recognizing exposition structure). Executive skills can also be modeled through the think-aloud/do-aloud approach. The teacher can demonstrate a discourse strategy with a willing student or team and in the careful facilitation of whole-class and team discussions.

Team Discussions

Students can benefit significantly from conversing with peers as they work to make sense of a text together (Duke, Pearson, Strachan, & Billman, 2011; Zhang, Anderson, & Nguyen-Jahiel, 2013). The teacher must scaffold these discussions, however, if they are to be productive. Otherwise, students can slide easily into arguments or frivolous conversations (Mercer, Wegerif, & Dawes, 1999). Heterogeneous, long-term teams have been integral to my teaching practice since the beginning. I strategically group students so that all students can experience "mutual scaffolding," exploring their own and their peers' thinking (Walqui, 2006). In the study, I found that students needed a great deal of facilitated practice, debriefing, and feedback before they routinely attended to and took up their peers' ideas.

During the study, four team discussion tasks seem to have worked particularly well to keep students focused on the strategic co-construction of textual meaning. When I asked teams to discuss carefully crafted, open-ended, text-centered questions, they tended to stay focused on negotiating meaning. Posting the questions ahead of time, discussing each question and modeling potential responses, and making room for private thinking time are simple ways to provide extra support. Questions that called for students to evaluate or make personal connections seemed to invite the most

enthusiastic discussions, but I had to monitor and sometimes redirect to ensure their conversation stayed anchored in the text. Teams also remained focused on meaning-making when I asked them to compare their individual process writing (such as annotations or graphic organizers). These comparisons allowed students to co-construct meaning, self-assess, and learn from each other's strategy use. When asked to co-compose gist statements, whether in pairs or teams, students wrestled with wording together and returned to the text (sometimes after prompting) to check their thinking. Finally, when I called on team members to report out key discussion points, they were able to check their understanding of each other's ideas.

Individual Text Engagement

Of course, students also need time to wrestle with texts alone. When we interweave these independent text-centered experiences with peer and whole-class discussion, students have a chance to take stock of their current mental models and try out ideas and approaches they have learned from others. I have found annotation, graphic organizers, and summary writing to be effective text-centered meaning-making tasks ideally suited for independent practice.

Through explanation, exemplar study, modeling, and feedback, I teach my students to annotate. The physicality of annotation helps readers to monitor and sustain their attention. Because annotation leaves a cognitive breadcrumb trail, it also helps the student and the teacher trace the student's thinking later to assess strategy use and depth of understanding. The visual nature of the practice helps the student ask questions of the text, identify text evidence, and re-read strategically.

During the study, I asked students to complete teacher-designed graphic organizers independently to give them further practice with identifying key ideas and supporting evidence. They shared their completed graphic organizers the next day with a shoulder partner and compared their process writing. Finally, students composed summaries independently toward the

end of each shared text study. The act of summarizing allowed them to consolidate their understanding of the text and allowed me to assess their mental text models.

Final Thoughts

Strategic shared text studies will look different in each classroom, depending on the teacher's pedagogical bent and the needs of his or her students. Certain principles, however, will serve teachers in many contexts.

- Choose a strong mentor text and a manageable suite of supportive cognitive, executive, and discourse strategies.
- Plan for pre-reading, multiple readings, and post-reading experiences.
- Build in frequent interactions among the teacher, students, and text.
- Adapt your approach as dictated by your ongoing assessment of students' needs.
- Keep experimenting, reflecting, and planning, folding in lessons learned in subsequent studies.

Though it is undoubtedly challenging to orchestrate strategic instruction and a mentor text study simultaneously, students will surely appreciate the teacher's effort to create an interactive community where students contribute actively to the co-construction of textual meaning.

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Unpacking Cultural Barriers in the Secondary Classroom Using Multicultural Literature

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Abstract

The establishment of self-identity within the learning community is at the core of participation; as educators, it is critical that we consider the cultural makeup of our classroom participants, and address those cultures through instructional decision making, teaching opportunities, and development of the classroom community. This article discusses the need for cultural self-awareness from teachers and students. It also provides teachers with a cultural identification activity and multicultural book jigsaw to support the integration of diverse texts into the classroom.

Keywords: *Cultural Relevance, Cultural Competence, Secondary Literacy, Multicultural Texts, Diversity*

Growth Mindset and Cultural Competence

One of the current concerns plaguing the nation's schools is how to find teachers who are capable of teaching successfully in diverse classrooms. Although teacher education programs throughout the nation purport to offer preparation for meeting the needs of racially, ethnically, culturally and linguistically diverse students, scholars have documented the fact that these efforts are uneven and unproved (Ladson-Billings, 2001). Culturally responsive pedagogy, as defined by Gay (2002), requires us to use the cultural characteristics, experiences, and perspectives of ethnically diverse students as conduits for teaching them more effectively. Therefore, to teach in a way that adequately attends to the characteristics of our learners, and certainly to promote the idea in our classes of all of these characteristics as things to be embraced, we must understand what our definition encompasses, how we are using that lens in our instructional choices, and how we can remove limitations from "culture" as something so simplistic and obvious to the naked eye.

Ladson-Billings delves into the concept of culturally relevant pedagogy in her research surrounding the intersectionality of culture and teaching, which reflects an idea that for students to be successful, we must help them accept and affirm who they are culturally (1994). One major tenet associated with culturally relevant pedagogy, Ladson-Billings argues, is that of cultural competence. Cultural competence suggests that teachers understand they are cultural beings, as are their students. It is crucial, then, that our conversation about relevant pedagogy begins with an educator's self-reflection on culture, our cultural lens and identities. In "Culturally Relevant Pedagogy 2.0: a.k.a. the Remix," Ladson-Billings further explores the idea that culture is something that will continue to evolve; in developing our ideas

about how to evolve and sustain practice through appropriate cultural pedagogies, we must be willing to admit that the practice cannot be static, but continually able to grow and change with the students we serve (2014). The need for teachers to have open minds, self-awareness, and growth mindset, with the goal of breaking down cultural barriers and promoting a sense of pride and identity alongside one's academic achievements is of mounting importance (Ladson-Billings, 2014).

Cultural Bias and Classroom Instruction

Children need to have a classroom space where they feel safe to discover and express themselves, a place to explore their own culture while learning more about the diverse backgrounds of their peers. According to Kaiser & Rasminsky (2019), "culture shapes not only our values and beliefs, but also our gender roles, family structures, languages, dress, food, etiquette, approaches to disabilities, child-reading practices, and even our expectations for children's behavior. In this way, culture creates diversity" (p. 20). Culture in today's classrooms has a broad definition to include anything that makes individuals unique (Webster, 2020). Educators play a vital role in creating the type of space that values diversity – a cultural safe haven.

To value diversity in the classroom, educators must be equipped with the proper tools to ensure a safe and optimistic learning environment. One of the most effective ways to create this type of learning environment is through teachers implementing Social Emotional Learning (SEL). Social Awareness is one of the five core competencies of SEL that specifically focuses on perspective-taking, diversity, respecting others, and empathy. Teachers and students together can learn to appreciate diversity within each classroom when teachers provide lessons that elicit and reinforce empathy (Core SEL Competencies, 2020). A classroom as a safe haven can marry SEL with academics to maximize student achievement.

Another valuable component for creating a cultural safe haven is ensuring teachers identify their own cultural bias (Berry and Candis, 2013). What educators think about students impacts how they teach. Children at an early age begin to develop their cultural identity by how they are treated by others. This can led to students feeling invisible, devalued, disrespected, and even ashamed of who they were. On the contrary, students who feel valued and free to explore their cultural identity are more likely to take academic risks (Ladson-Billings, 2014). Classroom communities that are cultural safe havens include teachers who explore students' differences by utilizing instructional strategies that reflect diversity. Teachers must be able to draw upon all of their students' strengths to foster resilient student identities of achievement (Gist, 2014).

Cultural Identification: Activity #1

Merriam Webster defines culture as the "customary beliefs, social forms, and material traits of a racial, religious, or social group, as well as the characteristic features of everyday existence shared by people in a place or time" (Webster, 2020). Based on this definition, the term culture could also be used to describe anything that makes us unique – the type of music we like, our household makeup, hobbies, shared experiences (like travel, first generation graduate, campus resident), struggles (i.e. SES, trauma, illness), as well as heritage and traditions we are proud to call our own. We argue that the term culture is not generally referred to in such a broad sense in the classroom, and is instead used to primarily refer to skin color or language proficiency. In order for students to adequately develop their cultural identity, they must first understand all that the term "culture" encompasses. One activity that can be used within the classroom to help expand our definition of culture is as follows:

Activity 1

1. As an icebreaker, give students a few examples of cultures they may be a part of (i.e. single mother household, first

generation potential college graduate, language spoken, region of state where they reside, etc.). Here, it is important not to give them "all the answers," but to have them explore their own definition of culture as part of the activity.

2. Give students 5 minutes to write down as many cultures as they can come up with (those with which they self-identify).

3. For those who appear stumped, continue sharing ideas that may help them understand what you mean by "culture." This can be anything that makes them unique or represents who they are as an individual. For example, have they considered their favorite type of music as a culture they belong to? Their favorite foods? Whether they have siblings? Extracurricular activities they belong to? What makes them different from the person sitting next to them?

4. After the five minutes is up, see how many cultures they were able to come up with, and have them share some that they think are unique to them. Don't be surprised if they are able to come up with more than 20 or 30 cultures!

5. Use this as an opportunity for them to learn more about their classmates, and also as a springboard for discussions of culture found in their texts and less-than-obvious ways they may be able to relate to characters.

6. Discuss which of these cultures they would know about each other just by looking at them. Which require building relationships or sharing themselves in some way?

This is great for students during the first week of school, as it can be a means of building classroom community, enhancing relevance of lessons, accessing biographical data that will help you differentiate your teaching, and/or to help students think more deeply about cultures, both explicit and implicit, in texts. The ability to make connections to readings will be enhanced as a result.

When examining our definition of the word "culture," educators and pre-service candidates can also find their view limited to the more obvious gender, race, or ethnicity. As the type of cultures represented in society, and therefore in the classroom, continue to broaden, including more representation from multiethnic backgrounds, gender or sexual preference, it is important that educators ask themselves what their personal definition of culture includes, how it can be expanded, and how a more contemporary look at the term can promote opportunities for self-expression and advancement of skill development through their teaching.

Multicultural Book Jigsaw: Activity 2

This jigsaw activity is a cooperative learning technique (The Jigsaw Classroom, 2020) that can be used to 1) vote on a book for class reads, 2) choose books for literature circle groupings, and 3) to introduce new authors to learners for individual/silent reading time.

Activity 2

1. Choose at least four multicultural books for this activity, which is in the format of a jigsaw (book number depends on number of classroom students and jigsaw groups).
2. Divide students into a) home group, and b) jigsaw group
3. Have students disperse into jigsaw groups.
4. Provide each group with a copy of one of the books chosen (if available), a summary of text, an author handout, and an excerpt of the sample text provided.
5. As a group, have them spend time
   a. Reviewing the summary of the text
   b. Learning about the author
   c. Reading the excerpt of the sample text provided

6. Then, have each group answer the following questions:
   a. Are you familiar with this author? If yes, what has your experience been with them?
   b. What are your first impressions of this text?
   c. What cultures might be represented in this text?
   d. What connections could be drawn from what you have read to the students in your class and the cultures they represent?
   e. How might this text be a challenge for you to read?

7. Have students share out in "home group" so they learn about each of the four book choices.

As you are making book choices for this activity, you should also consider: How do these texts align, or deviate, from the types of texts you already integrate in your classroom? What types of pre-reading or during-reading strategies might enhance students' connections to this text or their ability to engage in its content? Gather feedback from learners regarding their interests and analysis of the excerpts they have received. Use this to initiate pre-reading strategies like an anticipation guide or carousel brainstorm as needed for the book(s) you decide to proceed with. Figure 1 provides resources for identifying diverse classroom texts.

- 22 Diverse Book Choices for Students of all Grade Levels: https://www.edutopia.org/article/22-diverse-book-choices-all-grade-levels
- Multicultural 2019 ALA Youth Media Award Winning Books: https://coloursofus.com/multicultural-2019-ala-youth-media-award-winning-books/
- 21 Books That Every High School Needs to Teach Their Students: https://www.bustle.com/p/21-books-that-every-high-school-needs-to-teach-their-students-3073255
- Recommended Reading: Celebrating Diversity: https://libguides.ala.org/c.php?g=488238&p=3530814
- Diverse Books for Teens and Tweens Written by Own Voices Authors: https://www.readbrightly.com/diverse-books-tweens-teens-written-voices-authors/
- The Nerdy Book Club: https://nerdybookclub.wordpress.com/category/2019-nerdies/
- 10 LGBTQ Books for Teens: https://www.readbrightly.com/new-lgbtq-books-for-teens/
- YA Books about Immigration: https://bookriot.com/2018/06/28/ya-books-about-immigration/
- Books for Kids with Characters on the Autism Spectrum https://imaginationsoup.net/books-kids-characters-autism-spectrum/
- Young Adult Books Featuring Teens in Foster Homes/Adoption: https://www.amazon.com/Best-Sellers-Books-Teen-Young-Adult-Orphans-Foster-Homes-Fiction/zgbs/books/10368562011

Figure 1. Texts to Consider: Integrating Varied Cultures into Curriculum

Conclusion

Schools that recognize and celebrate all definitions of culture will promote student success. Teachers who recognize their own cultural bias, understand the myriad of cultures their students represent, and incorporate discussions of empathy and connection alongside culturally diverse texts, will help students to embrace their identities and embrace one another. Expanding the definition of culture and promoting diverse authors that reflect those cultures are great starting points for both.

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Same Song, Different Verse: Consistent Content Vocabulary Across Grade Levels in the New ELAR TEKS

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Abstract

The new ELAR TEKS include consistent content vocabulary across grade levels that represent an opportunity for teachers to build a strong foundation for efficient growth and development. In this article, the author looks at consistent content vocabulary, shifting content vocabulary, and content vocabulary spread in the new ELAR TEKS and then ends with recommendations for capitalizing on the repetition in the new standards.

Keywords: *ELAR TEKS, Content Vocabulary, Standards, Emergent Bilinguals, Literacy Instruction, Text Complexity*

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Introduction

At the beginning of the 2020-21 school year, the final installment of the English Language Arts (ELAR) Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS), will go into effect, concluding a five-year process of revision, review, and implementation of the new standards. For elementary, middle school, and high school teachers, an opportunity stands out in the new standards, the consistent use of content vocabulary. For this article, content vocabulary is the ELAR terminology found in the ELAR TEKS that can be used by teachers during instruction. When students are exposed to these terms early and often, they can build on their understandings efficiently, so by high school, the advanced and complex engagements with the ELAR content connect to their well-developed schema (Piaget, 1936). Thus, the title: "Same Song, Different Verse," because the better the students know the early "verses," recognize the patterns and rhythms in language, the easier they will learn the new "verses" (content) as they progress through the academic grades.

In this article, we review the shared content vocabulary found in the TEKS from the primary grades through high school in order to assure the continual use of these terms across grades. Then we address problem areas where the language of the TEKS shift across grades requiring a transition for learners as they encounter new terms for previous learning. Finally, we connect this understanding to the needs of emergent bilingual students (Garcia, Ibarra-Johnson, & Seltzer, 2016).

Shared Content Vocabulary

The new ELAR TEKS were designed to include extensive opportunities to capitalize on consistent content language. These terms were pulled from the vertical alignment document (19

TAC Chapter 110, 2017). Table 1 provides an
overview of shared content vocabulary.

Table 1

Content Vocabulary Alignment Chart (19 TAC Chapter 110, 2017)

Strand	Grade Levels	Consistent Language
Foundational Language Skills	K-10	*Listen actively*
	K-5 / 8-12	*Work/patriciate collaboratively*
	2-12	*Use/analyze context*
	K-12	*Self-select text, read independently for a sustained period of time*
Comprehension	K-1 (adult assistance)	*Reading purpose, generate questions (before, during, & after reading), predict (make, correct, or confirm), text features, genre characteristics, mental images, connections (personal, other texts, and society), inferences (using evidence), evaluate details for key ideas*
	2-12 (Identical)	
	K-1 (adult assistance)	*Synthesize information, monitor comprehension*
	2-12 (verb levels vary)	
Response Skills	K-12	*Personal connections, text evidence*
Multiple Genres	K-12	*Theme, character, plot, setting*
		Poems, drama, informational, multimodal and digital texts
	3-12	*Argumentative*
	3-10	*Claim*
Author's Purpose	K-12	*Author's purpose, text structure, graphic features*
Composition	2-12	*Literary Texts, genre characteristics and craft*
		Informational texts

3-12	*Argumentative texts*
1-12	*Correspondence*

Shared content vocabulary can be defined as ELAR TEKS terminology that is used consistently across grade levels. An example can be found in the genre selections. All grade levels, K-12, include poems, drama, informational, multimodal, and digital texts in their genre selections. Someone not familiar with teaching literacy might wonder about redundancies such as the independent reading student expectation (SE) and the comprehension strand. However, these repetitions are intentional. Students improve their skills with increasingly more complex texts from elementary through high school. With the implementation of the new ELAR TEKS, Texas students now participate in independent reading at all grade levels, and with consistent standards for developing comprehension skills. Students can internalize these strategies after years of practice and apply them as they encounter difficult texts (Hiebert & Pearson, 2014).

An important feature of the new standards is the explicit effort made to make the content vocabulary more uniform. For example, the use of the term expository, has been removed, and students are now asked to read and write using the characteristics of the informational genre. This term is not only consistent from K-12 but also across the Multiple Genre Strand and the Composition Strand. Additionally, the use of the term informational now matches standards found in other states making the search for strategies and best practices more fruitful for teachers. Another example is the term argumentative, used in grades 3-12 which replaces persuasive in the previous state standards. This updated language will clarify expectations and align with the terminology found across the field of ELAR instruction.

Fortunately, genre choices are not limited to informational and argumentative essays. Every grade level includes standards to consume and create poetry, drama, and correspondence. These traditional texts are sometimes neglected in favor of more tested essay structures. However, the much of the joy of literacy is found in these interactive and creative genres. Additionally, and new for these standards, is the recognition of multimodal texts where multiple organizational patterns, genres, or text features may come together to create new understanding, especially true in digital texts (Morrell, 2012). Students must both analyze and craft multimodal and digital texts. This skill will strengthen students' abilities to communicate to a variety of audiences and represent ideas in a variety of digital platforms.

Text Complexity

Though repetition supports student learning in ELAR, some policy leaders are mistakenly concerned that it does not support a rigorous learning environment, or the standards set low expectations when they are not totally different from one grade level to the next. However, this argument does not account for increased text complexity. Assuming that the complexity of texts is more than a quantitative measure, we look at the comprehension of texts and the tasks required in response to a text as a measure of its complexity (Valencia, Wixson, & Pearson, 2014). As students move across grades, the complexity of the texts they read, analyze, and craft increases (Hiebert & Pearson, 2014). This complexity allows teacher to manipulate texts to provide differentiation for our students. For example, for independent reading, students will "self-select and read independently…" (19 TAC

Chapter 110, 2017). Teachers must work with students to teach them how to self-select a text and read independently, so each student reads a book at an independent level thus helping students develop a love of reading while improving fluency and comprehension (ILA, 2018).

Inconsistencies across Grade Levels

Consistent language across grade levels was intentionally regulated, yet there are places where the content language is inconsistent, and this too needs to be a focus to assure long-term success. This article considers two types of content language changes. The first is different terms across grades, and the second is content-language-spread. Content language spread occurs when elements are separated, so different elements are scheduled to be taught at different grade levels in an effort to make the naturally spiraling development of English Language Arts appear linear in the standards. For example, figurative language such as personification, onomatopoeia, metaphors, similes, imagery, and hyperbole occur in picture books in pre-k, but to provide a sense of vertical articulation, these elements have been parsed out, a couple to each grade level to give the appearance of developmental rigor from grade to grade. Table 2 shows the first of these, the content language used to describe *thesis*.

Table 2

Content Vocabulary Changes across Grades Alignment Chart (19 TAC Chapter 110, 2017)

Strand	Grade Levels	Consistent Language
Multiple Genres	K-5	*Central idea*
	6-8	*Controlling idea or thesis*
	9-12	*Thesis*
Multiple Genres	K-2	*Persuasive*
Composition	3-12	*Argumentative*
Author's Purpose	3-8	*Author's Use of Language*
	9-12	*Author's Diction*

Students learn to identify and create a central idea in the lower grades. In middle school they learn *controlling idea*, and then in high school, *thesis*. Each of these content terms represent the same concept. These terms, and others including main idea, could be consolidated for instructional clarity. Some districts might streamline these terms for their students, but that is problematic because the STAAR test follows the direction of the ELAR TEKS. For example,

on the 7th grade ELAR STAAR test, the student should be prepared to answer questions with either *controlling idea* or *thesis* in the question or answer choices. These changes across grade levels cause confusion for students, and teachers can help students be successful by making these changes explicit during instruction.

Content Language Spread

ELAR teachers create lessons with repetitive content language in response to class reading selections. For example, students in first grade discuss alliteration in poetry. Clearly, a first grade discussion would not have the complexity of the *alliteration* found in a senior class studying *Beowulf*, so, the senior teacher may recognize the need for an additional mini lesson on *alliteration*. Content language spread appears in several sections of the new TEKS, and where

the consistent terms feel like a familiar tune, these spreads often feel like the forgotten lyrics to a favorite song. We must bring them back again and again as the text complexity increases, so students are competent with these elements with advanced texts. Table 3 shows some examples of spread in the new ELAR TEKS. This table demonstrates how four concepts, identified across the top, follows vertical alignment from kindergarten through 12th grade. The spread is evident when elementary teachers see elements present in their picture books appearing in the high school TEKS. Meanwhile, high school teachers find elements that accompany their literature in the elementary TEKS. If the TEKS are strictly followed, students will not study humorous poetry until eighth grade, and extended metaphors would not be emphasized in complex texts in high school.

Table 3

Content Language Spread Alignment Chart (19 TAC Chapter 110, 2017)

Grade Level	Multiple Genre / Poetry / Figurative Language	Author's Purpose / Literal & Figurative Language	Author's Purpose / Perspective / Literary Devices	Composition / Punctuation
K	Rhyme and rhythm	How an author uses words	1st & 3rd person texts	End of declarative
1	Rhyme, rhythm, repetition, alliteration	How an author uses words	1st & 3rd person texts	End of declarative, exclamatory, & interrogative
2	Visual patters and structures	Descriptive, language	1st & 3rd person point-of-view	End punctuation, apostrophes in contractions & commas in a series & dates
3	Rhyme scheme, sound devices, structural elements (stanzas)	Imagery, sound devices, onomatopoeia	1st & 3rd person point-of-view	Apostrophes in contractions, possessives & commas in compounds, & in a series
4	Simile, metaphor, personification	Imagery, simile, metaphor. Sound	1 & 3rd person point-of-view	Apostrophes in possessives, commas in

	devices, alliteration and assonance			compounds, quotation marks, and commas in compound & complex
5	Sound devices, poet vs. speaker	Imagery, simile, metaphor, and sound devices	1 & 3rd person point-of-view	Italics and underlining for titles and emphasis, quotation marks, commas in compound and complex
6	Meter, line breaks,	Metaphor, personification	Omniscient and limited point of view	Commas in complex, transitions, and introductory elements
7	Punctuation, capitalization	Metaphor and personification	Subjective and objective point of view	Commas to set off words, phrases & clauses, & semicolons
8	Punctuation, line length, epic lyric, & humorous poetry	Extended metaphor	Multiple points of view & irony	Commas in nonrestrictive phrases and clauses, semicolons, colons, & parentheses
9	Line length, word position		Irony, oxymoron	Commas, semicolons, colons, & dashes
10	Metrics, rhyme schemes, rhyme types (end, internal, slant, eye)		Irony, sarcasm, and motif	Commas, semicolons, colons, dashes, & parentheses
11	Stanzas, line breaks, sound devices		Paradox, satire, and allegory	
12	Figurative language, graphics, and dramatic structures		Paradox, satire, and allegory	

The concern about spread is not limited to upper grades. Parenthesis are prevalent in children's literature but are not included for direct instruction until eighth grade. Most students know how to use parenthesis in elementary, so an argument can be made that this skill appears

too late. In general, content language spread, where new content vocabulary and the skills associated with the terms are spread out over grade levels to create a sense of development over grade levels, sets an expectation of mastery without review. However, teachers will need to make connections across grade levels and bring these spread-out terms together to work with texts in class and to craft writing assignments.

Other Beneficiaries of Consistent Content Language – Emergent Bilinguals

Emergent bilinguals, that is, students in the process of learning a second language but who have a solid grasp of their first language and who continue to function in that language (Garcia, Kleifgen, & Falchi, 2008), benefit from teachers using the same content vocabulary from one grade level to the next. Like reading a series of books, once we read the first one, we know the characters and the setting, so there is less work as new plots run over the memory of previous experiences, much like learning new verses to an old song. By being consistent from grade to grade, we build on what students know and their strengths to teach new material (Garcia, Ibarra-Johnson, & Seltzer, 2016). We provide frameworks that can be used by students to represent their own experiences and learning as the vocabulary moves beyond a single in-class text offered for a specific unit to a more conceptual understanding as a full consumer of

English Language Arts. As teachers, when we offer consistent terms across grade levels, we support our learners academically to free their minds to make the big connections between the texts and their own lives. We give them the vocabulary to demonstrate their comprehension of the text and the author's purpose, and we provide the framing for models of genres that students can internalize and create following the patterns of language and characteristics present in each genre.

Recommendations

By consolidating our content vocabulary to terms that we use across grade levels, we can create a strong language arts foundation for our students that will lead to continued success as they matriculate through grade levels (Hiebert & Pearson, 2014). When we use familiar terms, we connect our students' learning from their early years to more advanced work with more complex texts and use brain power to think deeper, make better inferences, evaluate readings, and create thoughtful pieces of writing. Teachers should see this alignment as an opportunity to build on previous learning, and make explicit the shifts of language for students, so they are able to make connections across grades. As we implement these new standards explicit attention to the language in professional development can set up our students for years of well-developed literacy skills.

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READ: Accepting and Interacting with the Diverse Needs of Texas Literacy Learners

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Abstract

R.E.A.D @TALE (Really Accept and Engage with Diversity) is a Special Interest Committee of the Texas Association for Literacy Education whose mission is to engage in understanding and supporting the needs of all students and teachers in Texas no matter their backgrounds. Beyond understanding the characteristics that make us unique, this committee was created to accept and affirm diversity and showcase it as a quality that makes us stronger. At TALE's Annual Conference in Odessa, Texas a roundtable discussion served as a catalyst to determine the needs of teachers and students, as well as discuss issues that impact our students as it relates to inequalities and misrepresentation.

Keywords: Diversity, Culturally Responsive Pedagogy, Representation, Literacy, Access, Equitable Learning

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Texas is one of the largest states in the country—which is full of resources, and many move to or choose to live in Texas for the opportunities the state provides. In addition to its varied landscapes and climates, the population of its residents continue to grow increasingly diverse. The size of the state and the ever-changing demographics impacts and shapes the culture of the state's needs, and more importantly it impacts the future growth and the youth within the state. As it relates to schooling and education, the assessment system in Texas laid the groundwork for our current assessment systems in this country, and with such a diverse population the state's public education system has faced numerous challenges over time. From addressing a growing English Language Learner student population, to honoring and respecting the cultures of students' families and backgrounds, whether in poverty or affluent, preparing educators to meet all of the learning needs of students in urban, suburban, and rural populations is a huge task.

Given the aforementioned complexities, one main struggle that Texas educators face is being sure that students have authentic and meaningful literacy learning experiences when they are in schools. The struggle between becoming fluent in reading and still maintaining a level of engagement with students in their literacy

journeys begins early. Mesimer and Heibert (2015) state that "...educational researchers urgently need to examine how students, especially those in high-poverty urban communities, are responding to the increase in text complexity, especially at third grade where policies are increasingly calling for actions such as retention" (p. 492). Although school districts align and design curriculum to maintain consistency in learning across the state, certain demographics and particular geographic regions often suffer as it relates to accessibility, misrepresentation, and equity of resources. Texas has nearly 1,000,000 (18 percent of the student population) English Learners (U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 2019), 58 percent of students represent disadvantaged backgrounds, and 69 percent are students of color. (Texas Education Agency, 2018). In a state that spans 268,597 square miles (Google), a one size fits all model cannot and will not meet the needs of students and the educators that serve them. The more socially and culturally relevant literacy teaching practices and resources that are made available, collaboration and creation of newer materials, and outreach efforts that are made— the better off students will be, and the schools and communities in which they reside will be able to thrive and flourish in the future.

Accessing and Utilizing Resources Created by Professional Organizations

It is difficult to create a change if you do not know where to begin. Organizations such as the International Literacy Association (ILA) and state affiliates, such as Texas Association for Literacy Education (TALE), have teams dedicating time and resources to previewing and curating lists. A teacher or school does not have to start from scratch, but can utilize these lists to find the resources and materials that match their community's needs. In creating these lists, one of the goals identified by ILA is to "showcase a diversity of cultures, races, gender identities, and abilities, reflected through authors and

illustrators of K–6 literature" (International Literacy Association, n.d.).

Beyond curated lists, professional organizations create a sense of community beyond the classroom or school campus to assist teachers in their professional development. Local, state, national, and international organizations allow opportunities for collaboration that connects individuals with varied experiences and expertise to ultimately support students. Think of these as professional learning communities outside of school. For example, TALE's annual book clubs allow educators from all over to read a central text, such as *From Striving to Thriving* (Harvey & Ward, 2017), *Being the Change* (Ahmed, 2018), and *Every Child a Super Reader* (Allyn & Morrell, 2016), to discuss best practices, and to support each other in the implementation of these practices within individual classrooms and schools.

Considerations when Building a Culturally Responsive Classroom Library

Having the support of professional organizations and a list of resources to start from is great, but there is still work teachers have to do to make their classroom an accepting and affirming space for all students. Once teachers have their support network in place, they can start building their classroom library and creating learning opportunities for critical, and sometimes difficult, conversations. Both of these practices will be on-going, so teachers should start with what feels comfortable. It is like getting in the pool; some people jump right in, while others slowly submerge themselves from the steps.

First, when building a classroom library, it is important to recognize that books are, as Rudine Sims Bishop (1990) stated, windows, mirrors, and sliding glass doors for students. As quoted:

> Books are sometimes windows, offering views of worlds that may be real or imagined, familiar or strange. These windows are also sliding glass doors, and

readers have only to walk through in imagination to become part of whatever world has been created and recreated by the author. When lighting conditions are just right, however, a window can also be a mirror. Literature transforms human experience and reflects it back to us, and in that reflection we can see our own lives and experiences as part of the larger human experience. Reading, then, becomes a means of self-affirmation, and readers often seek their mirrors in books. (p. ix)

This perspective is important as it helps the readers understand the power reading has in their lives. Reading allows them to see into new worlds, reflect on their own, and hopefully step out into new experiences.

A key consideration for teachers when building their classroom library is to listen to students and the questions they are asking. As Engel (2015) pointed out, "When children ask questions, we find out something about what interests them, what particular information they are seeking, and what it is that states their appetite" (p. 12). For example, if students are asking how religion shapes a person's worldview, the teacher might collect books showcasing protagonists of multiple faiths. It is important to remember that asking questions is not solely the teacher's responsibility. Students should be able to ask questions of themselves, each other, and the teacher, and subsequent space should be made for these questions.

When it comes to understanding other people, their experiences, or complex topics, students can utilize the books in the classroom library as central texts. According to Larry Swartz (2019), teachers want to foster a safe environment where students can engage in these difficult topics, then they must allow the space to "confront hesitations or perhaps insecurities by hearing what the students have to say about the topic" (p.10). Through the combined acts of asking probing questions while pushing the students to talk through their sometimes culturally

misinformed views and listening to what they are saying, we can begin to foster more complete understandings as the central text acts as a bridge which fosters self-awareness, connection, and empathy.

Reaching Out and Taking Action

Now, more than ever, educators need ways to help learning communities embrace diversity. One way is to share a variety of texts which both represent identities similar and disparate to one's students and community. Taking action involves the providing of outreach opportunities. Some ways that outreach can be provided is by doing the following:

- Providing opportunities for educators, parents, and administrators to collaborate (on support for students, resources for students and parents, celebrating contributions of populations, etc.)

- Formally evaluating texts (for including diverse perspectives) within upcoming units and in district and/or state curriculum

- Facilitating campus planning teams that offer book club style planning and gathering online, or face to face that discuss that cultural significance of texts

Educators are called to foster culturally responsive techniques such as these previously listed and to "interrupt instructional practices that produce dependent learners" (Hammond, 2015, p. 154). Spreading examples of how to interact with students, parents, and colleagues by providing models of interaction, resources and media, and assessing the academic and socioemotional needs of individual communities around the state are necessary.

The Future of R.E.A.D@TALE

This special interest committee seeks to fill a void in Texas literacy education, by engaging and embracing the vast diversity within our

state-wide learning community. The work that needs to be done moving forward is amplified in the mission and objectives of R.E.A.D@ TALE (see Figure 1 and Figure 2) which not only calls for the support of students, but the support of teachers and the learning communities in which they serve and impact.

To engage in understanding and supporting the needs of all students and teachers in Texas no matter their backgrounds. Beyond understanding the characteristics that make us unique, R.E.A.D.@TALE accepts and affirms the diversity, showcasing it as the quality that makes us stronger.
-Mission of R.E.A.D.@TALE

Figure 1. R.E.A.D@TALE's Mission

Our work will include:
● Educating ourselves and others on the diverse needs of both students and teachers
● Reviewing diverse children, middle grade, young adult, and practitioner books
● Creating and curating resources for teachers across the state to utilize
● Supporting teachers through collaboration
● Organizing outreach opportunities
● Promoting socially and culturally relevant literacy teaching practices

Figure 2. R.E.A.D@TALE's Objectives

In a state that is so widely spread out with vast land and populations, the people and ideas are just as eclectic. The state of Texas has numerous organizations with focuses on diversity, however, R.E.A.D.@ TALE will work to fill the void of advocates for fair and equitable literacy practices, resources, and representation. With the knowledge base, experience, and compassion of educators involved, the ultimate goal of this special interest committee is to be a group that promotes ways to utilize literacy as a representation of life experiences, and to respect, honor, and support the character, cultures, families, perspectives, and changes that students bring to Texas classrooms in order to shape a more inclusive future.

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Structured Literacy Supports All Learners: Students At-Risk of Literacy Acquisition – Dyslexia and English Learners

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Abstract

Learning to read is a complex endeavor that requires developing brain connections. The brain connections for reading written words begins forming during the development of oral language. The maturing of oral language and reading instruction continue the growth of the necessary brain connections to read and write. Structured Literacy instruction helps to develop and strengthen brain connections for reading and processing written language. Structured Literacy encourages educators to teach the essential literacy foundational skills during the preschool and primary school years, so students have a better chance of achieving and maintaining proficiency in literacy.

Keywords: Instructional Principles, Foundational Literacy Skills, Structured Literacy Instruction, Dyslexia, Scaffolding,

We are not born prewired to read and process written language (Moats, 2014; Pugh, 2013, Wolf, 2018). The neural circuitry system for reading needs to be developed to process written language. For example, the visual function needs to communicate with the lexicon function of the brain, and the word encoding function needs to collaborate with the word processing function of the brain. The energy necessary to develop a complex, interconnected system to read and write is different for each individual, as both student genetics and environment play a role in the development of brain circuitry. Some students will develop the brain circuitry system easily, while others will struggle. Students with developmental dyslexia typically work twice as hard to develop an accurate reading circuitry system, as their brain is genetically wired differently (Pugh, 2013; Shaywitz, 2003). Students learning English typically work twice as hard as they often enter the classroom "with limited world knowledge and limited exposure to reading" (Cárdenas-Hagan, 2011, p. 606). Student oral language skills often predict student ability to move from speech to print comprehension (Marks et al., 2019). Learning how to process written literacy is a complex activity that can be softened with the use of a Structured Literacy model (International Dyslexia Association, 2019).

Structured Literacy

Structured Literacy is a fairly new label developed by the International Dyslexia Association (IDA) to better prepare teachers for literacy instruction. Structured Literacy is an instructional model that focuses on building and developing the foundational literacy skills of phonemic awareness, letter-sound correspondences, syllables, morphology, syntax, and semantics using explicit, systematic

instructional principals (Cowen, 2016; IDA, 2018;). Structured Literacy is a blueprint for effective literacy instruction based on the Knowledge and Practice Standards for teachers of reading developed by the IDA in 2010 and updated in 2018 to better prepare educators to meet the instructional needs of students for literacy acquisition. Structured Literacy instruction can be effective for students learning English as a second language, as well as students at-risk for literacy acquisition (Baker et al., 2014; Gersten et al., 2009). Students who receive explicit, systematic literacy instruction are more likely to become biliterate (Cárdenas-Hagan, 2011). Research supports that over 60% of students in the regular classroom need to receive literacy instruction in a Structured Literacy format (Young, 2018). Structured Literacy has shown to be effective for teaching all students how to read and write (Moats, 2019; Young, 2018,).

Six Foundational Pillars

Structured Literacy instruction features six crucial pillars necessary to develop a solid foundation of literacy (Cowen, 2016). The pillars should be taught in sequential pattern, beginning with pillar one. Each pillar is dependent on the previous pillar. Some pillars can be taught side-by-side, as language development becomes more complex. The pillars become more interdependent to process written language-reading, comprehending, using read information, and writing. Foundational Pillar One of Structured Literacy is the study of phonology, the rules of how sounds are encoded (Cowen, 2016; Hennessy, 2019). Students should have the ability to hear, identify, and manipulate individual sounds of spoken language or phonemes, before learning how to read written words. Student oral language skills usually predict literacy achievement (Hennessy, 2019; Marks et al., 2019). "Children's ability to learn to read depends critically on a range of oral language skills that develop in the preschool years before they to learn to read" (Lervåg et al.,

2009, p. 764). Formal education of learning how to read often begins with the study of phonological awareness, which is umbrellaed under the study of phonology. This is the ability to process and manipulate letter sounds, rhyming words, and segmenting of sounds within words. Students who possess a higher knowledge of phoneme awareness will have an easier time of building connections or a relationship between the visual and auditory regions of the brain (Preston et al., 2015). The second foundational pillar of Structured Literacy is sound-symbol correspondences or the relationship(s) between phoneme(s) and grapheme(s) that comprise words (Cowen, 2016). This is learning the name of a printed letter and the possible sound(s) that the letter can produce within written words. For example, the written letter B represents the phoneme /b/, the written letter K represents the phonemes /c/, /k/, /ch/, /-ck/, /-que/. These are predictable, constant rules of sound-symbol correspondences found in written language. Teachers often call letter-sound correspondence instruction "phonics." Studies continue to support student knowledge of alphabetic principal as a predictor of later reading abilities (Lervåg et al., 2009). The third pillar of Structure Literacy is syllable knowledge, the understanding of the different types of syllables (Cowen, 2016). There are six common syllables in the English language—CVC, final e, open, vowel diagraph, r-controlled, and constant-le. Syllable knowledge increases student ability to encode and decode words. Syllable knowledge also increases student ability to comprehend and pronounce written words. Syllable knowledge may increase student ability to analysis words for morphemes (Donah & White, 2017). The fourth pillar of Structured Literacy is morphology, the study of the smallest units of meaning or morphemes (Cowen, 2016). These are the suffixes, prefixes, and roots of words. Morphology focuses on how smaller units of meaning are encoded to form words and new meaning. Teachers often use word analysis exercises to teach students the meanings of different parts of words. Word analysis usually

increases student lexicon and comprehension abilities (Donah & White, 2017). Research suggests that morphological analysis may ease the transition from Grade 3 to Grade 4 in relation reading comprehension (Levesque et al., 2018). Morphology should be introduced during the primary grades to increase student knowledge of spelling, vocabulary, and reading to improve written composition and reading comprehension (Castles et al., 2018; Henry, 2019). The fifth pillar of Structured Literacy is syntax, the study of sentence structure— mechanics, grammar, and variation of words (Cowen, 2016). This includes the rules that dictate the sequence and function of words to form comprehendible meaning in written language. This also includes the types of punctuation that are necessary to comprehend written sentences. The sixth and final foundational principle of Structured Literacy is semantics, the study of the meaning(s) of words, symbols, and units of words (Cowen, 2016; Hennessy, 2019). The study of semantics involves different aspects of meaning, such as morpheme and syntax information to comprehend the written passage (Moats, 2000). Student lexicon or dictionary stores meaning(s) of words and their environment supports the development of their lexicon. Students often attach pictures to a word or groups of words. Each individual may derive at a different conclusion of a passage based on their past history. Semantics assist in attaching inferred meaning to written and oral verbiage.

Instructional Principals

Parallel in nature to the foundational principles, the instructional principles of a Structured Literacy model provide a blueprint of the most effective ways to provide instruction for students learning how to read and write (IDA, 2019, 2018). The instructional principles better ensure students are receiving the right instruction to develop the most effective brain connections to process literacy. The first instructional principle of Structured Literacy is learning the

foundational or prerequisite skills of the current lesson (IDA, 2019, 2018). For example, students should know the sounds of letters before encoding letters into words. The second principle is systematic instruction or teaching skills in a logical order (IDA, 2019, 2018). Instructional lessons should move from simple to more complex, building on prior knowledge (Cowen, 2016). The third instructional principle of Structured Literacy is teaching students through explicit, direct instruction (IDA, 2019, 2018). Instruction should include teacher modeling of the task using clear, easy to understand steps of completion. Vygotsky (1934/2002) believed that for learning to occur in the classroom, teachers need to constantly model and explain tasks. Explicit instruction often includes scaffolding instruction to student(s) needs (Archer & Hughes, 2011). The fourth principle of Structured Literacy is scaffolding instruction to meet student abilities (IDA, 2019, 2018). This means providing the exact temporary support for task completion that is just beyond student unassisted abilities (Vygotsky, 1934/2002). Scaffolding is a process that includes contingency, fading, and transfer of responsibility (Van de Pol et al., 2010). Contingency is responsiveness, which is tailored, adjusted, and differentiated during instruction (Van de Pol et al., 2010). Responsiveness to increase the control when students are failing and to decrease the control when students are succeeding (Van de Pol & Elbers, 2013). The zone of proximal development is the ideal place of instruction (Vygotsky, 1934/2002), this where contingency should place.

Contingency, fading, and transfer of responsibility were observed during a research study titled, *Tier 2 Intervention for Students in Grades 1-3 Identified as At-Risk in Reading.* The findings from this research revealed the following types of the first finding was that teachers asked students specific questions using "who, why, what, where and how questions to determine student understanding" (Ray, 2017, p.

129). A second finding was that the teacher and students used contingency during a teacher led discussion about "the similarities and differences related to "mp" words," such as "camp," "bump," and "limp", by providing bits of information and asking leading questions about the word patterns to better understand how the letters formed similar sounds, using similar letters (p. 129). A third finding was teacher modeling of "how students could use their fingers to mark words, say words, and highlight the vowel sound of the word" and "how to sound out words when students asked how to spell a word" (p. 128). A fourth finding was that a teacher wrote words using different colors to signify the difference between vowels and constants (Ray, 2017). It is important to note that teachers "moved back and forth between contingency and fading, depending on the student's ability to complete the task" (p. 129).

Fading is defined as "gradual withdrawal of the scaffolding" or contingency support (Van de Pol et al., p. 275, 2010). The following examples of fading were observed:

- "asking students to create a new word by changing the vowel sound, and providing positive feedback to students about their sentences" (Ray, 2017, p. 129)
- "asking students to correct their use of space on the lined writing paper, spelling and punctuation errors, and line spacing as they wrote their paragraphs" (p. 130)
- "asking students to either write their own sentences or to copy her modeled sentences" (p. 130).

Transfer of responsibility is the completion of the fading stage when students can independently process the task. The following examples were observed. The teacher "asking students to independently find and highlight the base for words with prefixes", and "asking students to independently sound out words using arm movements" (Ray, 2017, p. 129). Another

observed example of transfer of responsibility was the teacher "asking students to independently highlight vocabulary words and words that had similar meanings" to the vocabulary words (p. 130).

The fifth instructional principle of Structured Literacy instruction is interactive discussions about the assignment (IDA, 2019, 2018). Concerning the meaning of collaboration, Vygotsky (1934/2002) emphasized that teacher and student need to work together in order to solve a learning problem. Vygotsky also emphasized the need to have students explain assignments to help them develop the ability to ask questions and explain concepts. This can include discussions about the steps necessary to complete the assignment. This can also include discussions about the material or focus of the lesson. The sixth principle of Structured Literacy is allowing students to practice the new skill (IDA, 2019, 2018). Students need to see, process, and work through the steps of a task several times before claiming ownership of the skill, having the ability to teach the skill to someone else. The last instructional principle of Structured Literacy is monitoring student progress through observation, interaction, and formal assessment (IDA, 2019, 2018). Antidotal notes may give validity to a short monitoring probe (Snowling et al., 2011). The process of monitoring should be short and reveal what pieces of the task or lesson students know and which pieces need to be retaught.

Instructional Method

A method that can increase the effectiveness of the Structured Literacy instruction is the response to intervention (RTI) model (Birsh, 2011; IDA, 2018; Moats, 2017). This model of instruction is a mandated (ESSA, 2015, IDEA, 2004, NCLB, 2002) tool that may increase the implementation and effectiveness of Structured Literacy instruction. The RTI model is a system within the educational system of an individual school mandated to identify students at-risk in

literacy to provide instructional supports based on their literacy acquisition needs to increase literacy achievement (ESSA, 2015, IDEA, 2004, NCLB, 2002, Ray, 2017). Each school model is developed and modified to serve the students present. Each model usually includes a grade level universal screener beginning in the primary grades that uses short literacy probes to determine students "at-risk for grade-level literacy acquisition" (Ray, 2017, p. 30). RTI models have at least three tiers of instruction, some have more (Fuchs et al., 2012; Kashima, 2009; Ray, 2017). Tier 1 is differentiated research-based instruction that should reach 80% of all students. Tier 2 instruction is for students struggling or not showing growth at Tier 1 (Kashima et al., 2009; Ray, 2017). Tier 2 instruction is usually taught in small groups focused on student learning needs. This instruction may take place in the regular classroom or in a pull-out situation. Tier 3 instruction is for students not showing growth at Tier 2. Tier 3 is usually one-on-one group instruction and may include special education students, depending on the school model. Each tier of instruction should include scaffolding of

instruction and progress monitoring (Kashima et al., 2009; Moats, 2017; Ray, 2017).

The Structured Literacy model requires delicately interwoven instruction to build the foundational literacy skills necessary to effectively speak, read, and write. "Young children need writing to help them learn about reading, they need reading to help them learn about writing, and they need oral language to help them learn about both" (Roskos et al., 2003, p. 3). Many individuals were not taught how to read and write using an explicit, direct, systematic instructional model that included the phonology sounds system. This concept is often a weak introduction within a teacher preparation program that should be strengthened through on-going professional development (IDA, 2018; Moats, 2014; Neuman, 2020). Educators can find more information about where individuals can learn the knowledge and skills necessary to teach Structure Literacy at dyslexiaida.org. The organization also has information about the different curriculum programs that meet the Structure Literacy model guidelines.

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Write Away: Writing Across the Curriculum and Beyond

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Abstract

Writing often serves as a medium for students to express their feelings as well as share their perspectives gained. Students can benefit from learning to articulate through authentic and relevant writing. Writing can be beneficial in all core subjects (not just English Language Arts) as well as special programs (such as Fine Arts and Physical Education). This article shares the importance of writing to learn, with discussion about integrating writing in core subjects at school and beyond the classroom (at home). In order to further engage students, insight will be shared on how to teach the major purposes for writing in a way that is more applicable and relevant to students' lives.

Keywords: *Writing, Integrated Writing, Curriculum, Engagement, Writing Instruction*

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Writing is a skill that is necessary and relevant in many settings. Students benefit from writing tasks in every subject area (core and elective). This should be done with creative, culturally relevant, and engaging curriculum and instruction and open-ended prompts that allow students to fully develop responses. Writing can be a subject that transforms instruction across subjects and grows a students' literacy skill. However, students usually only have the opportunity to be exposed to writing instruction during English Language Arts.

Writing allows students to express, reason, and share their knowledge—which could serve as a form of assessment. There is an urgent need for educators to work to integrate core and elective subjects and let students articulate their knowledge in multiple facets—writing is the gateway to making this possible.

Effective Writing Instruction

In order for students to get quality writing experiences in other subjects, they need to be taught how to write effectively. Effective writing instruction involves assigning authentic tasks and teaching engaging lessons. First, students need time to write daily in various settings (Graham, et. al., 2012)—not as an optional or extra activity. Students also need to be taught the writing process to write to learn, to write for informative purposes, and to learn the elements of various genres. Learning the technicalities of writing is also important—from the physical aspects as a young writer (holding a pencil, spelling, word processing, etc), to learning about typing and conventions. Finally, it is important to create a sense of community (Graham, et. al, 2012) among writers, and ensure that they are engaged.

Authentic and Engaging Writing

Creating an engaging writing community involves several efforts. Time, resources, and the method in which writing is presented and evaluated plays a factor. Writing should not be an afterthought in any classroom, nor just reserved for literacy block time on campus. "Empowered individuals can consider varied perspectives, negotiate with others, amend policies as needed as they can think independently, make their own decisions thoughtfully and with reference to relevant information, and act on that knowledge" (Broom, 2015, p. 81).Writing should be a tool used for learning as well as a tool to empower students to use their voices in school and throughout their community.

Students often struggle with writing when it is not personal to them or their experiences. Depending on their age, students interact with writing via social media and texting, however, this is not seen as writing, as it is not done in an academic tone. More should be done for students to see the connection between their informal language experiences and what is required of them in the classroom. In regards to urban students, Johnson and Mongo (2008) state that, "Using a thematic approach that incorporates culturally relevant literature, artifacts, graphic organizers, and other media to activate and build on urban students' background knowledge is vital" (p. 3). What makes writing engaging to students is the opportunity to share their own thoughts and knowing their own perspectives will be received. Students often become more vocal when they know they are not being judged or pressured on having the correct answers. This involves the building of trust and moments of vulnerability. It also involves knowing the population of students and their interests, capabilities, likes and dislikes. This is not something that happens overnight, and it takes time and several attempts to use writing as a means of assessment and refuge in the classroom.

Students also struggle when writing does not serve a purpose for them. "Writing is both an individual performance and a social practice" (p. 280). Authentic and meaningful writing tasks are those that show students the intentions behind the assigned tasks and are those assignments that expose various aspects of voice (point of view and emotions) and exploration of written genres. Writing instruction can be disconnected from reality. Deane (2018) speaks of the "…disconnect between the sociocultural environment typical of most U.S. schools and the environments that demand skilled writing later in life" (Deane, 2018, p. 280). Though writing is used in real-world scenarios, students often do not connect their experiences with that of authors or well-known writers, even though they are exposed to writing with television, music, and movies daily.

Authentic writing allows students to utilize their writing skills across subjects and topics, and it allows students to become more comfortable with the processes that writing involves. Students need explicit instruction on the processes of composing texts for different purposes and different audiences (Behizadeh, 2019). In school settings, students are frequently asked to write and respond to set topics, and little time is spent on giving students the chance to develop their own topics. Authentic writing involves more than just reactions and rehashing or summarizing. Authentic writing tasks allow students to create, question, explain, and even challenge their environments. Writing tasks that involve students' daily lives (such as relationships with friends, their favorites, their environment, etc.), sets them up to be more comfortable with the idea that the purpose of writing is not simply to convey a "right" answer. Students must learn and trust this process to feel connected to their curriculum in any classroom.

Integrating Writing Across Curriculum

Writing is a subject that is usually limited to the English Language Arts classroom. It is an authentic task that provides students a voice. However, for the benefit of students, the more

exposure to writing, the better the potential of turning out more dynamic readers and thinkers. Unfortunately, research (Nils, 2019) has shown that "when teacher groups are composed of teachers of different subjects…there is little room for discussion of how literacy strategies may be used meaningfully in specific school subjects" (p. 381). Writing across the curriculum is not a new concept. Schools would benefit from ensuring that teachers are comfortable implementing writing tasks, prompts, and exercises across grade levels. No matter the grade level, students will benefit from reflective writing and writing to open-ended prompts. These types of writing allow students to create, question, explain, and even challenge their environments.

It is possible to implement writing in core and elective subject areas. Essentially, it takes some creativity, common planning meetings, and customization of content on the behalf of the classroom teachers. It also involves all educators in their building to understand the standards and curriculums from subjects other than their own area of expertise, but most importantly all educators need to be familiar with the ELA standards and benchmarks within their school district and state, as English and writing skills serve as a foundational subject.

Writing across the curriculum has been thought to improve the literacy experience and content area literacy (Cantrell et al., 2008). To successfully integrate writing into other subject areas, Anaheim Union High School District (a 7-12 school district in Southern California) decided "rather than starting with a focus on *how* to get more writing in the classrooms, teachers were asked to consider *why* writing is crucial to students' literacy development" (Gallagher, 2017). Getting on one accord as a staff, as a grade level, and as a district are crucial when making curriculum decisions. There must be staff buy in, for the greatest student benefit. The task of integrating writing across the curriculum does take effort and some level of creativity and innovative ideas. The following are suggested prompts or ways to

weave writing into subject areas (can be modified for younger or older students):

Writing and Math (Writing for information)

Use flash cards to have students write word problems. Within the word problems, use key math vocabulary, and incorporate everyday problems that might occur (grocery trips, playing outside, etc.). Have the students include themselves or people that they know in their math problem. Once the word problems are created, have students write the steps needed in order to solve the problem. Do not just have the students write equations but have them answer (in words) to solve the problems.

Writing and Science (Writing for persuasion)

Have students think of a scientific problem that they would like to solve. This allows students to become more familiar with the scientific method in a more personal manner by choosing problems they have observed or encountered (which might resonate more with them). Give the students the opportunity to write detailed questions and steps as to how they could solve the identified scientific problem (Ex. Why do Mentos and soda cause a reaction similar to a volcano?).

Writing and Social Studies (Writing for persuasion)

Using brochures, maps, etc. or electronic devices (possibly Google Earth), students can create a list of towns, cities, states, countries, and continents that they would like to visit. For a few minutes, have the students free write the reasons as to why they would want to go to the places they selected. This activity serves as a prewriting activity, and the list can frequently be revisited. This could be a weekly, bi-weekly, or monthly activity.

Writing and Electives (Writing for all purposes)

Physical Education. Students can write about their favorite athlete, sport, or game. This is an opportunity to write in various genres. Students could write biographies about a popular or historic athlete, write directions on how-to play a sport, or compose descriptive paragraphs on certain leagues or types of sports.

Art. Students can write about their artwork or the work of other artists. This is a great opportunity to explore mood, tone, and comparison/contrast.

Music. Students must know that music originates from emotions or inspiration. Songs begin as a written language before they become a sound. Have students explore song lyrics or create their own.

Foreign Language. Have students write down new vocabulary they find, and compare the look of written languages (This provides students with the opportunity to look at the roots and origins of languages, as well as the breakdown of words and parts of speech).

Writing A.W.A.Y (Authentic Writing Awaits You) and Beyond

There are challenges that are faced when writing is integrated into a curriculum that it was is not traditionally a apart of—such as the time needed to grade (and determining how to grade), knowing how to differentiate assignments for students with special needs or accommodations, and allowing students the time and care needed to develop their writing and thought process in general—however, the benefits outweigh the inconveniences.

Jones (2015) states, "An authentic writing pedagogy supports children's evolving identities" (p. 76). Incorporating writing across the curriculum allows students and teachers to engage in rich and authentic conversations about standards in a manner that is relevant, allows for choice and more open-ended questioning (allows for higher-order thinking), as well as allows teachers and students to see their development in thought and abilities over time. Writing across the curriculum also allows for teachers grow in their teaching practices.

Writing is a skill needed for communication throughout life, and providing students with quality writing instruction involves working as a team across subjects. Writing influences and educates beyond the classroom. Writers take a stance. Why not equip students in multimodal ways to take on their social and academic journeys through writing?

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