TEXAS ASSOCIATION FOR LITERACY EDUCATION YEARBOOK

Volume 2: Building Momentum

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# TALE Yearbook: Building Momentum

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*Patricia Durham, Ph.D.*

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Building Momentum

For our 2nd annual literacy summit, the Texas Association for Literacy Education met in Round Rock, Texas at the beautiful campus of the Texas State University-Round Rock. The professional space that the conference created brought together literacy professionals from around the state. From Brownsville to Lubbock and from Dallas to San Antonio, the literacy summit offered a wonderful platform where classroom teachers, administrative and curriculum leaders, and teacher educators and their students can engage by telling their stories and building their identities. This year’s summit theme was *Building Momentum*, which is also the title of this year’s Yearbook, Volume 2.

*Building Momentum* could not have been a better theme for the conference, as that is just what TALE aims to do! As a growing organization, our mission is to provide engagement opportunities for literacy professionals around the state to learn, teach, grow, and share in a community that strives to construct literacy experiences for Texas citizens. The articles presented in this Yearbook represent a sampling of the literacy stories our members are creating throughout the state in efforts to *Build Momentum* for not only the teaching of literacy but also the act of participating in reading, writing, thinking, speaking, and listening critically.

The articles in the first section, tell the tales of presenters engaged and *Building Momentum* through literacy. From their inquiries, we become aware of how literacy partnerships between literacy professionals, among the various types of text, the uniqueness of the diverse reader, and even the collaborative nature of a virtual space, can create literacy experience. In the second section, articles from participants of the conference share how their literacy stories grew as a result of the momentum which began for them at the conference.

We hope that the Yearbook provides an opportunity for reflection and inspiration. It is our hope that the momentum continues with your engagement as a reader, a learner, and a thinker. May this scholarship foster new literacy experiences to share with your literacy community, TALE!

Happy Reading!

*Dr. Patricia Durham*
*TALE President*
Section 1: Chapter 1

More Than Just Hands On:
A Partnership Between a University Reading Class and Two Second Grade Teachers

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Abstract

This oral history study looks into the collaborative relationship between a preservice teacher, the professor of a Reading Acquisition and Development class and two second grade teachers from a medium-sized elementary school. The impact of the collaborative relationship is told from the viewpoints of the preservice teacher, the professor and two teachers. Although all participants had a hand in crafting the retelling of this experience, in order to keep some control, each participant was asked to record answers to several questions. The key phrases were extracted from their interviews and categorized in order to discover the common assumptions and beliefs of each of the participants regarding the value of the experience. A descriptive relationship was established among the perceptions, beliefs, and experiences of the participants. This study represents the experiences in teaching and learning within a partnership in the learning environment.

This work was presented at the 2013 TALE Conference as the session, Providing a Life Changing Literacy Learning Experience for Preservice Teachers.

“Alone we can do so little. Together we can do so much” (Keller, as cited in Herrmann, 2013, p. 222). This quote by Helen Keller beautifully represents the powerful paradigm shifting impact the partnership between a university reading class and two elementary school second grade classes produced. This oral history study examines the individual stories and the changes that occurred in the perceptions and practices of the professor, a university student and two classroom teachers within the two institutions of learning. This experience began as a professor’s quest of an introductory reading course for preservice
teachers to create a learning environment which would produce permanent changes in the perceptions, behaviors, and attitudes of her students, as well as help them to develop a deep understanding of how to teach reading to young children. The quest resulted in a partnership between the university and two second grade teachers to provide the university students with a unique tutoring experience that impacted the university preservice teachers, the elementary teachers and the professor. To fully glean the wisdom from this partnership, the professor, one university student, and the two elementary teachers decided to record their experiences and analyze those recordings to determine the commonalities in their very unique personal experience of this common endeavor.

**Literature Review**

**University and Elementary Partnerships**

According to Zeichner (2010), “teacher educators have tried a variety of approaches to strengthen the connections between campus and field-based teacher education” (p. 91). Some of these approaches include creating campus-based lab schools (Fraser, 2007), smaller clinical laboratories on campuses (Berliner, 1985), and using partner schools (Osguthorpe, 1995). The partner school provides a venue for intensifying of the connection between campus and field based education in that it allows for the influx of college students to be able to work with the elementary students. It also provides a platform for structured and professor guided field-based teaching experience before the student teaching semester. The opportunity for the preservice teacher to refine and develop his or her theory, strategies and pedagogical practices through the act of teaching is powerful (Dawkins, Ritz & Louden, 2009). Merrill (2002) suggests that real learning occurs in the application of knowledge to real world experiences. The partnership allows for active participation that enables the preservice teacher to develop one unified theory of teaching that embodies both espoused theory and theory of practice (Crowder, 2013). According to Argyris and Schön (1974), reducing the shadow or gap between theories-in-use, or theories of practice, and espoused theories is required for solid decision making. Haim, Strauss, and Ravid (2004) expound on the research of Argyris and Schön and, in connecting it with educators, demonstrate the need
to provide experiences that do more than inform but, through charged experiences, impact and shift the paradigms held to by the preservice teachers. The ability of preservice teachers to take responsibility for teaching students reading lessons provides that paradigm-shifting emotionally charged experience.

**Reading Instruction**

To effectively teach reading to a group of beginning readers, Cobb (2004) states the two most important aspects of the teaching environment include interacting and monitoring. Vygotsky (1978) asserts that the relationship between the student and the teacher is a vital component of the student’s learning process. Along with building relationships, teachers must monitor students effectively to determine student need. According to Cobb (2004), the implementation of a variety of assessments coupled with teacher reflection regarding the monitoring of the student is nonnegotiable. These two skills are difficult to teach within the walls of a university classroom without a hands-on component. Along with the two aspects Cobb mentions, the concepts related to beginning readers and writers must be taught. These concepts include, but are not limited to: theory of and strategies for language development, phonological awareness, phonics, vocabulary development, fluency, comprehension, writing cycle, writing traits, and assessment. The challenge for the professor lies in developing a learning experience that fosters a deep enough level of knowledge for the preservice teacher to connect the theory with practice. Zeichner and Gore (1990) posit in their theory of teacher socialization that practice in context plays a vital role in assisting the teacher candidate to connect with the context and formal knowledge of the discipline. This concept of practice in context is part of the foundation for Hoffman and Pearson’s (2000) idea that literacy education for preservice teachers must make a shift from teaching preservice literacy educators to training them. The foundation of this assertion is in the idea that training provides the type of learning experience that enables the preservice teacher to practice the skill, not just the knowledge.
Use of Stories as a Method

Why use stories instead of simple answers to questions? As the discussions of how to share our experiences began, we realized that the value of our experiences could not be adequately shared apart from the stories. Biott, Moos, and Moller (2001) explained the value of the personal story as a way to “try to interpret experiences and make their meanings explicit” (p. 36). The oral history interview is one means of collecting personal stories. According to Yow (2005), “in an oral history interview, narrators answer by telling stories” (p. 300). “These stories embody the narrator’s views of themselves situated within their own history. The identity situated within one’s memory is a way of making sense of oneself” (Crowder & Griffith, 2007, p. 168). It is within that situated memory that the narrator makes sense of the experience. The retelling of the university and elementary partnership experience reveals the value of the experience as well as the growth of the narrators.

The Partnership

History of How the Partnership Developed

It is a difficult task to help preservice teachers, in their first literacy education class, to understand the concepts of phonemic awareness, phonics, vocabulary development, fluency, and comprehension. Even more difficult is the job of helping those same students to make the connection between assessment and the selection of teaching strategies. After struggling through a semester of requiring students practice on each other, read, and memorize, the professor determined that the traditional college classroom did not allow for the emotionally charged, inquiry based, and authentic experience necessary to really learn this much difficult material. She sought help from a nearby elementary school. After meeting with the school liaison, she learned of a second grade teacher, Ms. King, who, with her class of struggling readers, was feeling overwhelmed. Ms. King was also discouraged by the fear of not being able to truly meet the needs of each individual student. The professor and Ms. King met.

Together, Ms. King and the professor created an eight week tutoring experience that brought the two classrooms, college and elementary, together. After the first year of collaboration, Mrs. King’s
colleague, Mrs. Mount, requested to be added. Each semester, Mrs. King, Mrs. Mount and the professor matched their students together. Generally, each college preservice teacher was matched with one or two elementary students. They were together the entire eight weeks. During this time, the college students met one of the two weekly class periods at the elementary school.

The Meetings

The first meeting between the students was a getting to know you meeting in which interviews and informal interest inventories are conducted. The preservice teachers were encouraged to use the Garfield Interest Inventory as well as a self-selected interest inventory. During the second meeting, the preservice teacher guided the student through a read aloud and a Language Experience Activity (L.E.A.). For the read aloud, each preservice was instructed to take a variety of books, based on the interests of their students. The books were to be high-quality narrative story books. Once the preservice teacher introduced the book using the picture walk, he or she read the story. Following the reading, the preservice teacher led his/her student(s) through a discussion of beginning, middle and end of the story. Following the discussion, the preservice instructed the student(s) to take a large sheet of paper and fold it so that the crease created a total of eight squares, four on the top and four on the bottom. The elementary student was then directed to number the squares. In the first square, the student was asked to draw a picture representing the beginning of a story; either a retelling or original. The last square represented the end of the story. The six squares in the middle sequenced the rise and fall in action. Once the pictures were done, the preservice teacher asked the student to dictate the story to go with the pictures. This dictation is recorded on a separate paper. Once the dictation was complete, the student was given the opportunity to make changes. The handwritten text was typed and combined with the pictures to create a personal book for the student. This activity may have taken many meetings to finish, however, there was only one meeting devoted in exclusivity to this project. The third meeting was a time for the preservice teacher to conduct at least one running record on the student and begin working with the student on writing. The expectation was for the preservice teacher to use the knowledge he or she had gathered
regarding the student and to use the fry readability chart to select appropriate books to conduct a running record. The preservice teacher conducted a miscue analysis on the running record to determine student approximations for future lessons. The writing work involved the preservice teacher taking the student through a complete writing cycle. The fourth through eighth meetings were broken into three thirty minute lessons: oral reading and fluency, word knowledge and comprehension, and the writing process and 6+1 traits. The preservice teachers were responsible for providing a rationale for each strategy they selected to use with their students. The rationale may have included approximations derived from the miscue analysis, student interest, informal checks for understanding and observation. The preservice teachers were also responsible for submitting a plan for instruction. The plan, if not acceptable, was not be used with the students. For the preservice teacher to have the privilege to meet with the students, his/her plan must have been well written and supported by evidence. If it was not, it is redone until it was acceptable. Finally, the preservice teacher provided a recounting of what happened during the session and a personal reflection giving his/her theory for what happened during each meeting.

**Participants**

The participants of this study were self-selected. The professor was a white female with a Ph.D. in Curriculum and Instruction with an emphasis in reading. The preservice teacher was an African American female working on a BS in Interdisciplinary Studies with teaching certification for EC-6th grades. One teacher was an African American female with a first career in the military. The other teacher was a white female with a first career in social work.

**Method**

Each participant was given a digital recorder and a list of questions. The list of questions for the teachers and the professor were slightly different from those posed to the preservice teacher. To mitigate the influence the responses of one another, the participants chose to record their answers in isolation, rather than interview one another. The expectation for the answers to be supported by stories from the experience was noted before the participants dispersed to make their recordings.
Table 1

*Questions for Teachers and Professor*

1. When we started this endeavor what did you expect or hope to happen in your class with your students?

2. How did this impact your students? Motivation? Reading levels? Behavior? And why do you think so?


Table 2

*Questions for Preservice Teacher*

1. What was your perception of this project when we started?

2. What did you learn about your students? Motivation? Reading levels? Behavior? And why do you think so?


Once the answers to the questions were recorded, the recordings were transcribed and analyzed using a method developed by Yow (2005). This method requires the transcripts be read, general themes or messages in each of the transcripts be noted and then compared among the interviews. The supporting information from the interview transcription is included in the discussion of the groups. The names of the children discussed in the following stories have been changed to protect their identity.

**Student Interview**

The first interview recorded was that of Erika Bolden. At the time of this interview, Ms. Bolden had completed the semester in which the course was situated. Once Ms. Bolden’s answers were transcribed, we had five double-spaced pages of responses. Her responses were a combination of student speak, those things she would expect the professor to want to hear, and genuine stories of her experience. An example of “student speak” is, “I tried to accomplish this goal by championing the cause of improved
reading that met their individual…” One of her stories was based on her first day in the second grade class:

Standing at the entrance of Mrs. King’s class, I experienced joy and nervousness of meeting my two new students that I had just been assigned. I was extremely lucky to be assigned a bright girl and a charming boy. I decided to start my lesson plan with an activity strategy to get both of my students motivated and engaged in the reading lesson. This strategy actually killed two birds with one stone because, not only was my students inspired to learn, but they also gained the opportunity to get to know me.

Following the method devised by Yow (2005), and, after several readings of the transcript, the investigators created categories to lend understanding to the words of the interview: I am a learner; I am confident; and I adore my students.

Teacher Interview 1

Although Mrs. King had been given a list of questions and a digital recorder, she chose to write the answers to her questions and point to discussions that she and the professor have shared over the years of working together. In reference to the first question regarding expectations, she wrote two bulleted statements: “When we began, what I was expecting was more intense small group reading instruction.” and “The preservice teachers would provide additional support for the classroom teacher.” Her information was more abbreviated than the information of the other participants. Her interview was three typed pages. Although her statements were more succinct, Ms. King focused on concepts that are important to the understanding of this experience: “I know what my students need; and I care about my students.”

Teacher Interview 2

The second teacher interview was submitted by Ms. Mount. Where the other two interviews were mostly statements with stories, Ms. Mount’s interview consisted of mainly stories with statements. Her
response to the first question, “When we started this endeavor, what did you expect or hope to happen in your class with your students?” is an example of the style typical to her answers:

When I saw what was going on in Ms. King’s class I was so excited! Because what I saw was more one on one attention. It is very hard for a classroom teacher to really give forty-five minutes to an hour to one or two people. There were so many hands-on activities and I saw excitement on the children’s faces.

Ms. Mount recorded her answers as the preservice teachers were visiting her class. Her answers reflected what she had experienced in the past and what she was witnessing at the time of the recording. The main focus of Ms. Mount’s answers appeared to be a concentration on the emotional needs of the students. This could be a result of her experience as a social worker.

Professor Interview

Dr. Davis’ interview included stories referring to all of her experiences with preservice teachers and reflected changes in perceptions and attitudes. An example of this is found in her answer to the first question:

Originally my expectations were simple and very one dimensional. I remember my initial visit with Ms. King. My biggest concern was the inauthenticity of my course regarding the instruction of my preservice teachers. I wanted them to be able to work with students. Ms. King just needed reinforcements. Her students were fairly low readers and she was finding it difficult to have enough time to meet each student’s needs.

Reading through the transcripts, we found Dr. Davis showed a focus on two areas: developing strong ethics and skills in her preservice teachers; and the desire to do no harm to any student.

Results Discussion

This oral study emphasizes the stories of change for four individuals who encountered the same learning experience. Although each faced the experience from different vantage points, the stories demonstrated unique areas of growth for each as they went through the process. All of the participants,
through individual processes and paths, shared several commonalities: concerns, personal change, and student growth.

**Concerns**

According to Davis and King, this endeavor was born out of concern. Davis, “I was concerned that my students were not able to understand ...” and “The night after we secured the appropriate approvals, I was unable to sleep. It was going to take a lot of teaching and monitoring to keep my students on track.” Ms. King’s original concern, “I was worried that my students were not getting enough personal instruction.” Ms. Mount’s concern centered on her desire for each student to develop a healthy relationship with an adult, “So what I hoped to happen was just to have relationships happen.” Ms. Bolden’s concerns were based on her lack of experience, “While I know I can figure this out, I just hope my students will learn.”

**Personal Growth**

The personal growth that occurred as a result of this experience is expected in the preservice teacher because they are learning and expected to grow. However, the changes that occurred with the professor were somewhat unexpected. Dr. Davis stated:

I am really not surprised that this worked. I am, by nature, a social constructivist. This experience had to work. What changed in me is my understanding of the way I can create deeper collaborative relationships with my students. What is being created is a collegial environment that enables me to write research with my students. It is incredible. The other thing that changed is my perception of my students. This endeavor forces me to see them as the teachers they are becoming. It allows me the opportunity to model, correct and complement in real time. That is powerful!

Dr. Davis went on to describe the impact that being in the public school, working with the students and the teachers, as well as the preservice teachers, enabled her to really see how education has changed since
she left the classroom. Ms. King and Ms. Mount both expressed gratitude for all of the new ideas for teaching the components of literacy. Ms. King stated,

This experience impacted me in so many ways…There were things happening that I was unable to explain…there was a paradigm shift. I was able to see how it is better for the students to get small group instruction, and learn through fun activities.

Along with her growing knowledge of the tenants of reading instruction and pedagogy, Ms. Bolden wrote in her reflection, “I’ve learned that I have to continue to grow professionally because I can never learn and know enough when it comes to teaching.” All four of the participants believed they were changed by the relationships they developed with each other.

**Student Growth**

Without student growth, this endeavor would have been an utter failure. Ms. Mount spoke of student growth in terms of personal growth and academic growth:

How has this impacted my students? Oh my, its impacted all of them. For one thing personally, I had one little girl that had just some bad experiences with men… She had a male tutor that was just so good and it was nice to see her with a positive male role model….reading levels did improve. Last year when I had tutors for both semesters, I didn’t have a child below an L they are supposed to be an M but you can pass a second grader on to 3rd grade at an L.

King reiterated the impact of the relationships:

My students were impacted by the connection that was created between the student and the mentor teacher…The students became invested in the relationship with their mentor, and as they became more invested in them, they became more invested in the materials that were taught.

Ms. Bolden spoke to the specific growth in her students: “Jill is noticing that her accuracy, rate, and fluency in reading have truly developed and Bob is impressed with the results of him becoming more fluent in his reading.” Davis spoke more generally of the changes in her students: “I know this
experience has impacted my students; semester after semester, they return to thank me for the experience.”

Conclusion

The stories recounted demonstrate the power of the experience. The answers themselves point to the changes that are took place in some of the participant; thereby validating the experience. In each of the narratives, powerful examples of growth are found; both the acknowledgement of personal growth and the witnessing of growth in others. The overcoming of concerns by addressing them and working to alleviate them is transformative in the education process. These stories do demonstrate the power and possibilities that are presented through the partnership between the university reading class and the second grade classrooms.
References


Section 1: Chapter 2

Building Momentum in Writing Instruction Through the Use of Mentor Texts

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Abstract

Writing instruction has received a lot of attention over the last decade. High stakes testing has raised awareness of process writing at all levels, from Kindergarten through college. We see the use of mentor texts in writing instruction as a way to build momentum, both in improving writing and in students’ understanding of author’s craft. We present a rationale for using mentor texts, sample lessons using mentor texts, and a list of mentor texts for the traits of writing.

This work was presented at the 2013 TALE Conference as the session, Writing like a Writer: Mentor Texts to Develop Voice and Other Writing Skills.

How do we learn to do things? We want to learn, so we watch someone else who knows how, a mentor, and we copy them. Imitation may be the highest form of flattery, but it is also an excellent way to learn; any younger sibling knows this truth. Any brand new teacher knows how valuable a seasoned colleague can be to follow and emulate. It is a kind of short term, informal apprenticeship. We create this kind of apprenticeship in many aspects of the writing process. Students share ideas for writing topics, spring boarding from the ideas of others. During revising conferences, students learn things such as sentence structure and word choice from their peers. In the course of the writing process, we can create this kind of “learning from others” through the use of mentor texts. Lynne Dorfman, in an interview on NWP Radio (National Writing Project on Blog Talk Radio), gave this definition of mentor texts:

Mentor texts are pieces of literature that you—both teacher and student—can return to and reread for many different purposes. They are texts to be studied and imitated...Mentor texts help
students to take risks and be different writers tomorrow than they are today. It helps them to try out new strategies and formats. They should be basically books that students can relate to and can even read independently or with some support. And of course, a mentor text doesn't have to be in the form of a book—a mentor text might be a poem, a newspaper article, song lyrics, comic strips, manuals, essays, almost anything.

The use of mentor texts (Dorfman & Cappelli, 2007, 2009), to be enjoyed, studied, dissected, and used as templates and models, is a way to encourage students to learn from those who know how.

There are numerous sources for suggestions of books to use and how to use them. Blogs are available that are updated frequently by the people using the materials (see References). Gallagher (2014) shared how she has her students imitate model texts before they write, as they write, and as they revise. Scholastic has book lists for the traits of writing. In this article, we have included a list based on the 6 Traits of Writing, as well as some lesson ideas.

**Teaching Voice**

To illustrate the use of a mentor text, consider the teaching of voice. When students dissect how authors portray voice in their writing, they can then create it. The poems for two voices by Paul Fleischman are a powerful place to start. *I Am Phoenix* (1985) and *Joyful Noise* (1988) are poems meant to be read aloud with another person, each reader portraying a particular character.

A lesson using these poems might follow these steps: 1) Introduce the books, reading aloud a poem with another reader, modeling how the poems are structured. Have the students tell what they know about the characters in the poem by how they “speak.” 2) Display another poem and have students, in pairs, read it with their partner. Discuss how each of the characters might sound, what would be their tone, accent, volume, etc. Why do they think that? What hints does the poet give to the readers about the character? 3) Students read and discuss two or three more poems, finding the voice in each one. 4) Students, with their partners, write a poem for two voices, focusing on what voices their reader will “hear.”
Teaching Story Structure

Aunt Isabel Tells a Good One by Kate Duke (1992) is a delightful tale of the telling of a bedtime story. The storyteller, Aunt Isabel, verbally labels the parts of the story, such as the who, the where, the problem, etc. The story could be read aloud simply for the pleasurable experience, then dissected. Students could contribute to a chart labeling the story parts, and then use a similar blank chart to brainstorm their own stories. If used with older students, the chart could be expanded to include how Duke elaborates the basic structures.

Teaching Word Choice and Elaboration

Two books to use for word choice are Fancy Nancy by O’Connor (2006) and Owl Moon by Yolen (1987). The Fancy Nancy series of books is about a girl who wants to “fancy up” everything. This leads to numerous instances of using out-of-the-ordinary adjectives and synonyms. Bulletin boards or charts of these word and terms would be a great start for students to start looking for others to add to the charts. When holding writing conferences with students, let them find two or three places in their writing where they could “fancy it up.”

Owl Moon is a beautiful story, told in poetic form. The language is evocative and filled with similes and metaphors. All the senses are appealed to in this simple story. After reading the story aloud and discussing how it makes the students feel, the class could list the similes and metaphors used by Yolen. In addition, a graphic organizer could be filled with how the author included the senses of sight, sound, feel, and taste. As a class, choose an event or experience you have shared. Conduct a class writing activity which uses similes, metaphors, and appeals to the senses. Have students apply the same elaboration to their own writing.

Teaching Ideas (Topics)

“I don’t know what to write about” is a common lament in the writing class. Students often do not see the value in a simple event because it does not seem worthy of being the focus of their writing. Mentor texts can demonstrate the wide variety of topics that authors write about.
Trying to talk your parents into something is a common childhood event. Judith Viorst’s *Earrings* is the story of one such attempt by a child who wants pierced ears. Cataloging the arguments made in the story gives a structure that students could emulate, and can segue into teaching persuasive writing.

Favorite poems and nursery rhymes are great jumping off points for more elaborated writing. The idea is already there to expand on; teaching students that kernel ideas really are that, a kernel to “pop” into a story. Janet Stevens and Susan Stevens Crummel’s *And the Dish Ran Away with the Spoon* can help students see the difference between a simple idea that they can start with and turning that idea into a complete story.

**Teaching Sentence Fluency**

Sentence fluency is best taught by examples. Students who read frequently for pleasure will pick up sentence fluency, well done or not, by being exposed to it. To highlight the concepts for all students, but especially for those who do not choose to read outside of the classroom, the teacher must showcase effective sentence fluency.

Two examples of “hearing” the action in the story are *Hoops* by Robert Burleigh and *The Thunderherd* by Kathi Appelt. In *Hoops*, if read in just the right way, you can hear the movement of a basketball game. Likewise, you can hear a thunderstorm coming and passing through in *The Thunderherd*. Turn students into CSI agents and have them look for the things that the authors did to make this happen.

**Conclusion**

We hope you will enjoy sharing one of your favorite books and see students become a better writer. The following list of books can serve as a beginning point from which to choose those texts that will inspire, instruct, and invigorate children’s writing. You will find some old favorites and some that are a little off the beaten path. Some books will work in more than one area. Enjoy and experiment. Above all, keep the momentum going.
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<td>by Marissa Moss</td>
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<td>And the Dish Ran Away with the Spoon</td>
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<td>by Phoebe Gilman</td>
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<td>Fortunately</td>
<td>The Squiggle</td>
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<td>by Remy Charlip</td>
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<td>Frindle</td>
<td>A Street Called Home</td>
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<td>by Diane Stanley</td>
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<td>When I Was Young in the Mountains</td>
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by Trinka Hakes Noble | |
| *Boundless Grace*  
by Mary Hoffman | *Monster Mama*  
by Stephen Gammell | |
| *Bud, Not Buddy*  
by Christopher Paul Curtis | *Night Tree*  
by Eve Bunting | |
| *A Chair for My Mother*  
by Vera B. Williams | *Old Yeller*  
by Fred Gipson | |
| *Charlotte’s Web*  
by E.B. White | *Ruby*  
by Maggie Glen | |
| *Chattanooga Sludge*  
by Molly Bang | *The School Story*  
by Andrew Clements | |
| *Clown*  
by Quentin Blake | *The Snowman*  
by Raymond Briggs | |
| *Do They Scare You?: Creepy Creatures*  
by Sneed B. Collard III | *The Tortilla Factory*  
by Gary Paulsen | |
| *The Great Brain*  
by John D. Fitzgerald | *Touch Boris*  
by Mem Fox | |
| *The Grey Lady and the Strawberry Snatcher*  
by Molly Bang | *Tuesday*  
by David Wiesner | |
| *Holes*  
by Louis Sachar | *Twilight Comes Twice*  
by Ralph Fletcher | |
| *The Indian Cupboard*  
by Lynne Reid Banks | *Two Bad Ants*  
by Chris Van Allsburg | |
| *The Knight Who Was Afraid of the Dark*  
by Barbara Shook Hazen | *Walk Two Moons*  
by Sharon Creech | |
| *Little Penguin’s Tail*  
by Audrey Wood | *The Wanderer*  
by Sharon Creech | |
| *Long Way from Chicago*  
by Richard Peck | | |

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| *Amber On The Mountain*  
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Edited by Michael J. Rosen | |
| *Aunt Chip and the Great Triple Creek Dam Affair*  
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| *Bigfoot Cinderrrrrrrrela*  
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| *The Big Orange Spot*  
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| *Brother Eagle, Sister Sky: A Message from Chief Seattle*  
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by Eve Bunting | |
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| *Pink and Stry*  
by Patricia Polacco | *Earthdance*  
by Joanne Ryder | |
### WORD CHOICE

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<td>Owl Moon</td>
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<td>All the Colors of the Earth</td>
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<td>Appalachia: The Voices of Sleeping Birds</td>
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<td>The Raggly Scraggly No-Soap No-Scrub Girl</td>
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<td>Sylvester and the Magic Pebble</td>
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<td>Nocturne</td>
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<td>The Old Woman Who Named Things</td>
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<td>Yo! Yes?</td>
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<td>Once When I Was Scared</td>
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### SENTENCE FLUENCY

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<td>Because of Winn Dixie</td>
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<td>Puppies, Dogs, and Blue Northers</td>
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<td>Dogteam</td>
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<td>Sandra Cisneros</td>
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<td>The Table Where Rich People Sit</td>
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<td>Kathi Appelt</td>
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### Professional Bibliography

#### 6+1 Books

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<td>6+1 Traits of writing</td>
<td>New York, NY: Scholastic Professional Books</td>
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<td>Culham, R. &amp; Wheeler, A.</td>
<td>40 reproducible forms for the writing traits classroom</td>
<td>New York, NY: Scholastic Professional Books</td>
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<td>Spandel, V.</td>
<td>Books, lessons, ideas for teaching the six traits: Writing in the elementary and middle grades</td>
<td>Great Source Education Group, Inc.</td>
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#### Writing Process Books

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<td>Striking a balance: Best practices for early literacy</td>
<td>Scottsdale, AZ: Holcomb Hathaway, Publishers</td>
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<td>Calkins, L.M.</td>
<td>The art of teaching writing</td>
<td>Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann</td>
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<td>Calkins, L. M.</td>
<td>Units of study for primary writing: A yearlong curriculum (K-2)</td>
<td>Portsmouth, N.H.: Heinemann (Firsthand Series)</td>
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<td>Fletcher, R</td>
<td>What A writer needs</td>
<td>Portsmouth, N.H.: Heinemann</td>
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<td>A writer’s notebook</td>
<td>New York: Avon Books</td>
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<td>Live writing: Breathing life into your words</td>
<td>New York: Avon Books</td>
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<td>Graves, D.</td>
<td>Writing: Teachers and children at work</td>
<td>Portsmouth, N.H.: Heinemann</td>
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<td>Harwayne, S.</td>
<td>Writing through childhood: Rethinking process and product</td>
<td>Portsmouth, N.H.: Heinemann</td>
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<td>The revision toolbox</td>
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<td>After the end</td>
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<td>Lane, B. &amp; Bernabei, G.</td>
<td>Why we must run with scissors: Voice lessons in persuasive writings 3-12</td>
<td>Shoreham, VT: Discover Writing Press</td>
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<td>Piazza, C.L.</td>
<td>Journeys: The teaching of writing in elementary schools</td>
<td>N.J.: Merrill Prentice Hall</td>
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<td>Romano, T.</td>
<td>Blending genre, altering style: Writing multigenre papers</td>
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#### Web Sites

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<td>Scheduling and lesson ideas</td>
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<td><a href="http://nwrel.org">http://nwrel.org</a></td>
<td>Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory</td>
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References

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Section 1: Chapter 3

Building Momentum Toward F.I.R.E.: Fostering Independent Reading Effectively

Jill R. Culmo, Ed.D.
Mesquite Independent School District, TX

Micheal J. Kessner, Ed.D.
Mesquite Independent School District, TX

Robin D. Johnson, Ed.D.
Stephen F. Austin State University, TX

Abstract

Allowing students time to read independently during the school day is an option that schools consider to improve motivation to read and reading achievement. Two main questions guided this study: Does providing time to read independently in class improve reading achievement? and Does providing time to read independently in class have an impact on a student’s motivation to read? A quasi-experimental design employing quantitative and qualitative methods was used. The quantitative portion consisted of data collected from the Texas Primary Reading Inventory (Texas Education Agency, 2006), and the Motivation to Read Profile (Gambrell, Palmer, Codling, & Mazzoni, 1996). The qualitative portion consisted of second grade student interviews of six participants. Results indicated a general improvement in the reading comprehension and motivation to read of students in a second grade class that implemented structured daily independent reading with follow-up activities as well as higher student engagement and more time spent on task during independent reading.

This work was presented at the 2013 TALE Conference as the session, Are You on F.I.R.E.? Fostering Independent Reading Effectively.

Since the release of the National Reading Panel Report (NRP) in 2000, many schools have re-evaluated the practice of allowing students time to read independently during class. The NRP did not advocate that independent silent reading be eliminated but instead recommended that more research be done on the practice. The purpose of this research was to determine second grade students’ motivation to read and their subsequent reading achievement. Allowing students time to read independently during the school day and providing various reading materials such as trade books in the classroom are options that
some school districts consider to improve motivation to read, and in turn, to improve reading achievement.

**Theoretical Framework**

The problem of illiteracy in the United States has long been a concern of both politicians and educators. As early as 1647, the belief that citizens must be able to read to be productive citizens was established (Smith, 2004). Since then, it has been the goal of educators to ensure that all students are able to read. However, even toward the end of the 20th century, it was estimated that one in five adult Americans was illiterate while only 20% of literate adults read on a voluntary basis (Woiwode, 1992). A National Reading Research Center poll of United States teachers revealed that teachers are concerned with ways to motivate students to read (Koskinen, Palmer, & Codling, 1994). Teachers want to know if it is possible to help motivate students to read and, if it is, how to do so.

Why does it matter if our students are motivated to read? Research supports what common sense tells us—that those who are motivated to read do so more often, and they then become better readers (Stanovich, 1986). Children who score at the 90th percentile in reading achievement spend five times as many minutes reading per day than children who score at the 50th percentile, and they read 200 times as many minutes per day as those children in the 10th percentile (Anderson, Wilson, & Fielding, 1988). Thus, educators should strive to provide time during the class day in which students are able to read. In studies of effective elementary teachers, the volume of reading done in classrooms was the distinguishing feature of high-achieving classrooms (Pressley et al., 2000; Allington & Johnston, 2002). Students do not generally choose to read outside of school (Anderson et al., 1988), so educators must provide opportunities for them to read while in school.
Research Questions

The following research questions were developed for this study:

1. How does structured daily independent reading of self-selected texts impact second grade students’ motivation to read?

2. How does structured daily independent reading of self-selected texts impact second grade students’ reading achievement?

Design

The purpose of this study was to determine if there is a significant difference in motivation to read and reading achievement between second grade students participating in an intervention classroom that implemented time for students to read independently out of self-selected texts with follow-up activities and second grade students in a classroom without follow-up activities. The students in the control classroom had independent reading time, but there were no follow-up reading activities. Students in both classrooms read independently for up to 30 minutes per day. The study utilized mixed methods within a quasi-experimental design.

Procedure

This study utilized mixed methods. Quantitative data were collected and analyzed to determine if there was a difference in motivation to read scores and reading achievement scores between a treatment group and a control group. Qualitative data were gathered in order to gain a more in-depth understanding of the thoughts, feelings, beliefs, and perceptions of the participants in the study.

Quantitative Methods

Subjects

Subjects were two groups of students enrolled in second grade in 2008-2009. The subjects were students at an elementary school in a large suburban school district. Forty-four students in two second grade classrooms were asked to participate in the study. The teacher of the intervention classroom had completed a teacher certification program in conjunction with her bachelor’s degree through a university. She was in her second year of teaching. The teacher of the control classroom held a Bachelor’s degree in
Business and obtained her teaching certification through an alternative certification program at an Educational Resource Center. She was in her fifth year of teaching.

**TPRI Instrument**

The Texas Primary Reading Inventory, or TPRI, (Texas Education Agency, 2006) is a teacher-administered reading skills assessment that is given to students in kindergarten, first, and second grades (Foorman et al., 1998). The TPRI was developed in 2006 by the Texas Education Agency (TEA). The TPRI was used to assess student reading achievement.

**Student MRP Survey Instrument**

The Motivation to Read Profile (MRP) survey (Gambrell et al., 1996) was chosen to assess student motivation to read. The MRP survey items were developed and reviewed by experienced classroom teachers and graduate students in reading. It consisted of 20 items and used a 4-point Likert response scale. The survey was a self-report instrument that assessed the participant’s Self-concept as a Reader and Value of Reading. The MRP was selected because its contents were designed to be easily understood by second grade students.

**Qualitative Methods**

Qualitative data were collected from six student participants who consented to be interviewed. The six student participants were purposefully selected by the researcher to participate in the interview. Three students were chosen out of the intervention classroom, and three students were from the control classroom.

**Student Interviews**

The MRP conversational interview was conducted with six student participants. Conversational interviews were conducted individually with participants to provide greater depth of understanding (Burgess, 1980). This type of interview allows children to share much more information about their motivation and reading experiences than can be reflected in tightly scripted interviews (Denzin, 1970).
The semi-structured interview protocol consisted of 8 questions:

1. Did you read anything at home yesterday? What?
2. Do you have any books that you are reading at home?
3. Tell me about your favorite author.
4. What do you think you have to learn to be a better reader?
5. Do you know about any books right now that you’d like to read? Tell me about them.
6. How did you find out about these books?
7. What are some things that get you really excited about reading books?
8. Who gets you really interested and excited about reading books? Tell me more about what they do.

**Intervention**

The researcher modeled various independent reading follow-up activities for the intervention teacher in the intervention classroom. The activities that were modeled included choosing appropriate books using the five-finger test (Morgan, Mraz, Padak & Rasinski, 2009), side-by-side conferences (Segel, 1990), discussion after reading (Bryan, Fawson, & Reutzel, 2003; Parr & Maguiness, 2005), book talks (Morgan et al., 2009), and journal writing after reading (Pilgreen, 2000). In the intervention classroom, students read independently each day from books that they chose themselves. Students read independently approximately 30 minutes per day in both classrooms.

**Research Findings**

**Reading Comprehension**

Students were asked in both the pre and post assessments to answer eight reading comprehension questions after orally reading stories on the TPRI. Students who answered between zero and five questions correctly were considered to be *still developing*. Students who answered between six and eight questions correctly were considered to be *developed*. A comparison of the two classes’ comprehension results are presented in Table 1.
After the intervention, five out of 16 students in the intervention class were able to move up to the developed level in reading comprehension. Only four students out of 18 in the control classroom were able to move up to the developed level. The control class had a gain of 32% between the pre and post tests, while the intervention class had a gain of 31%.

**Motivation to Read Profile Survey Scores**

The descriptive statistics for the pre and post full survey scores are presented in Table 2. The control class had slightly higher pre scores on the full MRP survey than the intervention class. However, by the end of the intervention, the intervention class post score showed more growth than the control class. Neither within-subjects \([F (1, 32) = .1.279, p = .266]\) nor the between-subjects effects \([F (1, 32) = 4.27, p = .518]\) were statistically significant.
Analysis of Student Interviews

Students were asked identical interview questions from the Motivation to Read Profile (MRP). In addition to the MRP survey questions, three students from each class were also asked follow-up and probing questions based on their individual responses. Throughout the interviews of the six students, the following themes emerged: discussion and becoming a better reader.

Theme: Discussion

Many students mentioned that they valued having discussions about books. The two main categories of discussions students indicated were book talks given by the teacher and talking with peers about books they had read or wanted to read. None of the students in the control classroom made comments in the category of book talks during the pre or post interviews. All students in the intervention classroom mentioned book talks only during the post interviews. One student in the control class and one in the intervention class mentioned discussion with peers in the pre interview, whereas five out of six students mentioned it in the post interview.

Category: Book Talks. During the post interviews, all three students in the intervention classroom said that they learned about new books to read because of book talks conducted during the intervention. Dan stated that he liked the book Dogarella “because you shared it with us.” Joe said that he liked having the teacher “talk about books that I can read later.” Anna said “I really wanted to read those books you shared with us because I thought they’d be fun and funny, and they’d be interesting.” Anna went on to say that she hoped her teacher would continue having book talks. “I want her to share books so I can read them. It helps to have your teacher tell you about other books.”

Category: With Peers. All three students in the intervention classroom also revealed that talking with peers about books was very valuable to them as readers. They said that they enjoyed sharing information with their peers about books they read and that they liked hearing about the books their peers had read. Dan said that he liked to “talk with my friends about what I read,” This is something that he had not done prior to the intervention. Anna said that talking with her peers after reading helped her find
out about new books to read because “my friends tell me about them.” Joe said that he especially liked “sharing with a partner because when I told them about books they were excited, and when they told me, I was excited too.” He continued to say that he then wanted to read their books.

**Theme: Becoming a Better Reader**

All students were asked what a person had to do in order to become a better reader. The category that emerged: *keep reading*. In the pre interview, five out of six students said that knowing words was how to become a better reader. In the post interview, four of the students again mentioned words. The one student who did not mention words instead said that knowing how to read and pronounce letters was the way to become a better reader. In the pre interview, three students said that the actual act of reading was involved in becoming a better reader. In the post interview, all of the intervention students and one of the control students said that in order to become a better reader, one must read.

**Category: Keep Reading.** Tom stated that readers needed to “read more books” in order to become better readers. Dan also said, “You have to read more books and keep on reading and reading. It makes you better.” Emma said that to be a better reader, “You have to read a lot.” Anna said, “You have to keep on reading.” Joe stated that to become better at reading, people “have to read and reread and when they make a mistake, they keep trying.”

**Conclusions**

This study was designed to determine if structured daily independent reading of self-selected texts had an impact on students’ reading comprehension and motivation to read, thereby introducing students to reading in such a way that might lead to a lifelong interest in reading. Based on the results of this study, the following conclusions were made:

1. Students enjoyed reading independently each day in self-selected texts.
3. Students valued talking with peers about books.
4. Students believed that reading more books and practicing reading more often helped one to become a better reader.
5. Students in a classroom with structured daily independent reading were more likely to remain engaged and on task during independent reading time than students in a class without follow-up activities.

Implications for Practice

Students and teachers in this study valued structured daily independent reading. The students also valued discussing books with peers and having their teacher do book talks. Thus, teachers should be encouraged to schedule time into their daily schedules for the practice of independent reading. Teachers should also strive to work diligently to ensure that they have enough varied, interesting reading materials in their classroom.

The researcher modeled book talks, discussion with peers, and journal writing after reading for the intervention teacher and students. The intervention teacher began using these follow-up activities and improved student engagement while reading. Therefore, teachers who have had successful experiences with this practice should model these components for less experienced teachers. School administrators could provide staff development opportunities for teachers to learn more about structured independent reading. The more information that the teachers have, the more likely it is that they will implement this practice. Likewise, universities should instruct preservice teachers about the importance of independent reading. Preservice teachers should be encouraged to observe teachers implementing this practice.

Campus administrators should be trained in the importance of daily structured independent reading to improve student engagement. They should strive to be supportive of and encouraging to teachers wishing to implement this practice so that students are, in turn, able to spend more time reading. Administrators should work to ensure that teachers have access to funds to purchase interesting books for students on all reading levels. Likewise, administrators should make teacher schedules flexible enough for teachers to schedule a chunk of uninterrupted time for reading daily. Campus administrators who find value in having students read independently and do not see it as a waste of time will easily be able to support this type of instruction.
References


I'm a Boy and I Don’t Like Pink!
The Influence of Book Covers on Male Elementary Students’ Text Selection

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to investigate the extent to which book choice based on a book’s cover was affected by the reader’s gender. Researchers collected data via a survey that was administered to 98 third-grade students; 48 males and 48 females. The survey consisted of color pictures of 24 book covers with four yes or no questions accompanying each book cover and a fifth question asking students to elaborate on why or why not they would choose to read that book. The survey included an equal number of fiction and non-fiction texts, as well as three book covers that could be considered targeted more towards female readers and three book covers that could be considered targeted more towards male readers. The results of this study indicated some gender-related differences in specific text selection as well as in the overall likelihood a text would be selected. Knowledge of factors affecting text selection in male and female students can assist educators in offering book choices that are appealing to students of each gender.

This work was presented at the 2013 TALED Conference as the session, I’m a Boy and I Don’t like Pink! The Influence of Book Covers on Males’ Text Selection.

Although there has been ongoing research for several decades into the relationship between gender and reading achievement, there is still little consensus in the research literature regarding the actual nature, cause, and size of the gap in reading achievement between males and females (Badian, 1999; Hyde, 2005; Liederman, Kantrowitz, & Flannery, 2005; Shaywitz, Shaywitz, Fletcher, & Escobar, 1990; Siegel & Smythe, 2005). Nonetheless, female reading achievement continues to outpace that of...
males on both national (NCES, 2011) and international assessments (Mullis, Martin, Foy, & Drucker, 2012). Although several methods have yielded demonstrable results in improving reading achievement, providing readers with a wide range in book choice has proven to be particularly effective, largely because a greater availability of reading selections tends to lead to an increased motivation to spend more time reading (Guthrie & Humenick, 2004; Reynolds & Symons, 2001).

Several factors tend to influence the manner in which individuals choose books. Because book choice has been shown to be related to reading achievement, it is important to determine if a reader’s gender may constrain a reader’s book choice, thereby limiting the amount of reading material truly available to that reader. A detailed survey of 194 readers indicated that a book’s cover was one of the most frequently cited factors influencing book choice (Ross, 2000), with older readers being influenced by the summary and sample text that are often included on the back cover. It seems that book covers influence selection of books for young readers even more. For instance, in a study of fifth grade male students, researchers found that the majority of males used book covers and text features to choose books (Farris, Werderich, Nelson, & Fuhler, 2009). The influence of gender on literacy identities has received some attention in the research literature (Dutro, 2002; Dutro 2003); the present study adds to this body of work by examining data that show how gender roles can affect book choices based on a book’s cover.

Background

Cultural and societal influences and expectations can contribute to an individual’s identification with a particular gender role; as children grow, they gain an overall sense of self along with beliefs about the positions and expectations of their sex group (Stockard, 2006). These gender roles are thought to have developed from interactions with the environment. As demonstrated by Sax (2005), parents use different language with males than they do with females, and people react differently to males and females, therefore treating them differently. In a study created to gauge perceptions of gender, Sax split adult participants into two groups and showed each group the same video of an infant; one group was told that the infant was male and the other was told that the infant was female. Overwhelmingly, the
participants described the male baby as curious and adventurous, while the female baby was described as being fearful and anxious. Subconscious perceptions such as these and the interpretations to which they lead can cause differences in the way parents treat the sexes, which can also result in parents encouraging males and females differently. For example, Tenenbaum and Leaper (2003) found that parents of young adolescents perceived that science was less interesting and more challenging for females than males, despite there being no differences in student achievement in their science classes at school. In addition, the study also found that fathers tended to use more cognitively complex language when engaging male children in conversations about science than they did when engaging female children. Furthermore, a study by Meece, Bower-Glienke, and Burg (2006) showed that males tend to have positive motivation related to mathematics, science, and sports, while females show more favorable motivation patterns in language arts and reading.

Physiological differences in the way that male and female brains develop, specifically in the area of language use and development, may also play a role in helping to reinforce the gender roles that are created by cultural and societal influences. A longitudinal study by a team of neuroscientists from the National Institute of Mental Health showed that males’ brains seem to develop in a different order, time, and rate than those of females in the areas of the brain that affect language (Lenroot, et al., 2007). Hanlon, Thatcher, and Cline’s research (1999) suggested that the brain areas involved with language and fine motor skills may mature as much as six years earlier in females than in males. In addition, anatomical differences in the brains of men and women suggest that females process emotions differently than males; women show more grey matter in the limbic system, the part of the brain that supports functions such as emotion, motivation, and long-term memory, suggesting that women may be more emotionally expressive than men (Good, et al., 2001). Although the impact of differences in the lateralization of the brain (i.e., certain tasks are processed in the left or right hemisphere) is debated, research suggests that males and females exhibit different patterns of lateralization in emotional processing (Wager, Phan, Liberzon, & Taylor, 2003). Furthermore, some scientists have come to
conclude that differences in emotional processing in the brain might make females more adept at verbalizing and expressing emotion than males (Sax, 2005). In a study of African American kindergarten and prekindergarten students, researchers Craig and Washington (2002) found that females produced a significantly higher number of different words from language samples taken during play. These findings also apply to conversations of adults – Nordenstam (1992) reported females produce more words than males during adult conversation.

Thus, not only do societal expectations of “acceptable” or “normal” behavior seem to play a role in the development of children’s self-perception of their academic proclivities, but physiological differences in the way that male and female brains develop seem to help reinforce these developing academic identities. Indeed, many children from quite a young age begin to view reading within the home as an activity more closely related to women than men. In one survey (Millard, 1997), children reported not only that their mothers read more than their fathers, but that their mothers also played a more substantial role in teaching them to read. Other surveys have indicated that intermediate grade level males view the act of reading as a feminine activity (Dutro, 2003). The same is true in primary grades: a survey of second-grade students found that 24% of males view reading as feminine (Katz, et al., 2003). Survey results such as these tend to confirm that many children of elementary school age will already have begun to regard reading as a feminine activity.

Because gender identities seem to be influenced not only by cultural and societal influences and expectations, but also by physiological differences between males and females in brain development, the present study sought to examine whether gender identity might be reflected in differences between the types of books selected by males and females based on book cover. Understanding that differences in preference exist between the genders and that book covers are commonly used when readers select a text, the following questions guided the research: (a) What impact does the cover of a book have on text selection?; and (b) How do males differ from females in the selection of a text based on the cover?
Methods

Participants in this study were third-grade students attending two elementary schools in a medium-sized city in the Southeast United States. Three elementary school classrooms from each of the two schools participated. The sample included 49 male and 49 female students for a total of 98 participants of which 63 were African American, 23 were Caucasian, and 12 were Hispanic.

Researchers created a measurement instrument that consisted of a survey containing questions about images of a selection of age appropriate book covers. Considering classroom experiences and observations of students’ reading habits, the researchers chose twenty-four books based on various factors including cover design, gender of the character displayed on the cover, and cover color. The researchers included an equal number of fiction and nonfiction books. Three books, *Pinkalicious* (Kann, 2006), *Lilly’s Purple Plastic Purse* (Henkes, 2006), and *Crafty Chloe* (Dipucchio, 2012), were included due to their ostensible appeal to female students; three other, *Couple of Boys Have the Best Week Ever* (Frazee, 2008), *Crust & Spray: Gross Stuff in Your Eyes, Ears, Nose, and Throat* (Larsen, 2009), and *Shark vs. Train* (Barton, 2010), were included because of their ostensible appeal to male students. The remaining books were considered to be more gender neutral, and the survey consisted of a selection of books representing an equal number of male and female characters. In addition, an attempt was made to select book covers with which the students were not already familiar.

The survey questions were designed such that third graders of different ability levels would be able to complete them. The survey included four yes/no questions and one written response for each of the 24 book covers (see Figure 1). Students were able to circle yes or no for the first four questions, which included: “Do you like the cover of this book?”, “Do you like the picture on the cover?”, “Do you like the color of the cover?”, and “Would you read this book?” In addition, students were asked to answer a final question about the book that related to the fourth question (“Why or why not”). This final question provided researchers expanded insight regarding the rationale for students’ book choices. Limiting the number of book covers/questions to four book covers per page of the survey allowed the
book covers to be reproduced in a large enough size so that the students could make an accurate judgment
about them.

The researchers distributed the survey to each of the six classrooms in the two participating
schools (one of the researchers was the students’ teacher in one of these classrooms). To ensure that
students did not lose focus, the researchers divided the survey into two parts consisting of 12 book covers
each and administered the entire survey over two days. The students were instructed to look at the picture
of each of the book covers and answer the five questions about each book cover. Each portion of the
survey took approximately 20 minutes to complete, for a total of approximately 40 minutes over both
days. To reduce potential order effects, half of the students received the first portion of the survey on the
first day, while the other half completed the second portion on the first day.

**Results and Discussion**

Researchers focused their data analysis by identifying the three books most selected by each
gender and the three books least selected by each gender. The top three books chosen by females were:
*Bunnies* (Elora, 2011); *Please, Puppy, Please* (Lee, 2005); and *How to Make a Liquid Rainbow* (Shores,
2011). Out of these three books, *How to Make a Liquid Rainbow* and *Please, Puppy, Please* displayed
female characters on the cover, and two of the covers contain animals. *Bunnies* and *How to Make a Liquid
Rainbow* are nonfiction, while *Please, Puppy, Please* is fiction. The bottom three books chosen by
females were: *Go Figure* (Ball, 2005); *A Couple of Boys Have the Best Week Ever*; and a third-place tie
between *Crust and Spray* and *The Cloud Spinner* (Catchpool, 2012).

The top three books chosen by males were: *Shark Vs. Train; How to Make a Fizzy Rocket*
(Shores, 2010); and a third-place tie between *Dog Breath* (Pilkey, 2004) and *Dragons Love Tacos* (Rubin,
2012). Three of the books were fiction, *Dog Breath, Dragons Love Tacos*, and *Shark vs. Train*, and one
book was nonfiction, *How to Make a Fizzy Rocket*. One book shows a male character on the cover, and
the others show animals. The bottom three books chosen by males were *Pinkalicious, Lilly's Purple
Plastic Purse*, and *Crafty Chloe*. 
The present study’s results contain several points of interest. First, third-grade males were nearly unanimous in rejecting books that would characteristically be associated with female readers. Some of the male responses to the survey question asking why they would or would not read a book included: “This is for girls.”, “It looks too girly.”, “It has too much girly dancing.”, “Don’t like girly stuff.”, “It is about a prissess(sic) and I am not a girl.”, and “Do not like purple or purses.” Second, the female responses to the same survey question also indicated gender-influenced book choices, e.g., “No, it is for boys.”, “It sounds boyish.”, and “No it’s cartoonish and has boys.” However, there were not nearly as many gender-based rejection responses for the females as there were for males. Several of the female rejection responses were directed toward the subject matter as in Crust and Spray, e.g., “I would not because it looks gross.” and “It looks disgusting(sic).” (It is worth noting that Crust and Spray was also towards the bottom of the selection list for male students, even though the researchers had initially believed that this book would appeal to a male audience). Third, the majority of the top three books selected by females were non-fiction, while the majority of top three books selected by males were fiction. Furthermore, Go Figure!, a non-fiction book of mathematics facts, was rejected almost equally by both genders, ending up fourth from the bottom of the books on the male selection list. Finally, the overall percentage of “yes” responses to the survey question “Would you read this book?” was 65% for females versus 58% for males, indicating that females seemed more likely to select books for reading from the survey list than males.

The present study was limited by several factors including (a) a relatively small sample size, (b) a demographic composition that makes generalizing the study’s results problematic, (c) a researcher-created survey instrument, and (d) a choice of books that may not have been representative of the range of commercially available books. The authors suggest that further research be conducted regarding the extent to which both genders have access to an equal selection of appealing books. To that end, the authors recommend the development of more sophisticated survey instruments with more focused questions, a wider and more refined selection of commercially available books, and an exploration of
other factors that may play a role in book selection based on book cover, such as a student’s ethnicity or socioeconomic status.

The present study’s results seem to suggest that males tend to exhibit more gender-based constraints in their book choices than females. Given the gender gap that exists in reading achievement, it is especially important for educators and literacy specialists to be cognizant of the fact that not only might males be more reluctant to read certain books, but that school and classroom libraries might not contain a balance of books that will afford both genders an equal choice of appealing reading material. Several studies have indicated that the two largest factors influencing reading motivation and achievement were (a) personal choice of what to read, and (b) student access to multiple books (Guthrie & Humenick, 2004; Krashen, 2011). Moreover, providing access to *self-selected* texts (emphasis added by authors) for summer reading can provide a cost-effective means of helping to close and/or eliminate summer learning loss in terms of reading achievement (Allington, et al., 2010). Thus, it is incumbent upon educators to make available to both genders an equal number of books that each finds appealing.
References


Do you like the cover of the book?
YES  NO

Do you like the picture on the cover?
YES  NO

Do you like the color of the cover?
YES  NO

Would you read this book?
YES  NO

Why or why not?

Figure 1. Sample of book covers with survey questions.
Research-Tested Comprehension Strategies With a Texas Twist

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Abstract

Three research-based and time honored strategies--Question Answer Relationships (QAR), Question the Author (QtA), and Reciprocal Teaching (RT)—were matched to the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS) to determine if the use of those instructional routines would address the new, more rigorous standards. Specifically, Grade 4 TEKS for Reading were used as representative of the intermediate grades. A chart was presented to outline how the key elements of the instructional strategy would address the selected TEKS for vocabulary development and informational text requirements. Several instructional suggestions, referred to as the Texas Twist, were presented to increase the usefulness of the strategy for the current standards shifts. It was shown that the selected strategies would indeed meet many of the standards. Teachers could utilize these strategies (with Texas Twists) with confidence for addressing rigorous comprehension requirements.

This work was presented at the 2013 TALE Conference as the session, Texas Twist to Research-Based Content Strategies.

Literacy instruction reflects a rich history of changes and challenges; and with each major challenge, a stage of discovery occurs. Faced with new changes in state testing, literacy educators are once again seeking answers for what really works to meet increased rigor in assessment practices. From other historical challenges, teachers ruggedly retained what they intuitively knew worked with students and managed to morph into even stronger and more powerful instructors as one major change replaced another. What might teachers learn from the new challenges?

The recent changes outlined in the Texas College and Career Readiness Standards (CCRS) (TEA, 2009) and the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS) (TEA, revised August 2013) challenge
Texas educators to even higher literacy goals and standards than years past. At the same time, states across the nation are embracing a related set of high expectations through the Common Core State Standards Initiative (CCSS, 2014). Some of the shared shifts include an increased emphasis on informational reading, deeper and closer processing of complex text (literary and informational), and a commensurate understanding of key academic vocabulary (Alberti, 2012/2013, 25-26).

Each of these shifts present possibilities for significant positive impact, but how do such shifts change teachers’ day-to-day instruction? What practices need to change and what can be kept with adaptation? Certainly, it is not wise to overturn everything professionals have supported in the path leading up to this, more rigorous, journey.

**What Instructional Strategies Should be Kept or Adapted?**

Researchers and supporting professional developers appear eager to catch up (if catching up is possible) with educators’ needs. Meanwhile, teachers are faced with day-to-day and moment-by-moment instructional decisions. In times of less certainty, teachers and administrators often fall prey to questionable sources and practices such as staying with unfounded teacher lore, selecting inadequate curriculum, or taking an unbalanced teach-to-the-test approach. Without belaboring those common pitfalls, this article outlines a few instructional practices that are research-tested and time-honored, and poses that instructional routines may be incorporated into daily instructional practices to meet rigorous standards. The author presents “Texas Twists,” or suggestions and modifications, for teacher use along with tables that match these practices to TEKS requirements.

Three instructional routines were selected for analysis in this article based on specific criteria: a) positive research results, b) longevity as accepted practice, c) level of support for a broad set of comprehension skills, d) usefulness for differing grade levels with diverse student populations, and e) lessons with high student engagement.
2. Question-the-Author (QTA) (Beck, McKeown, Sandora, Kucan, & Worthy, 1996; Beck & McKeown, 2006)
3. Reciprocal Teaching (RT) as originally researched by Palincsar in the mid-1980 and more recently adapted by Oczkus (2010)

The three selected strategies have demonstrated effectiveness with both literary and informational text, but only the informational TEKS were used for this analysis due to the increased emphasis on this skill. Note that the scope of this article cannot do justice to the full use of the selected routines, so teachers are encouraged to examine professional resources to fully implement the strategies. Finally, each routine requires careful scaffolding to transfer expertise from teacher to individual student processing, which is the ultimate goal for classroom integration.

Using the intermediate grades 3-5 as the focus of review and Grade 4 TEKS as representative, each of the selected routines were analyzed and matched as shown in Tables 3 and 4 for the following TEKS categories:

- Vocabulary Development (Table 3)
- Comprehension of Informational Text/Culture and History (Table 4)
- Comprehension of Informational Text/Expository Text (Table 4)
- Comprehension of Informational Text/Persuasive Text (Table 4)
- Comprehension of Informational Text/Procedural Text (Table 4)

**Question-Answer Relationships (QAR)**

The QAR is a strategy which enables students to examine comprehension questions in order to determine how the question might be answered. Students are taught to use the type of question in relation to the respective answer as a tool in comprehension development (Raphael, 1982). In 2005, Raphael and Au reported the QAR as a useful tool to support test-taking strategies on state and national assessments. In a more recent text, Raphael, Highfield, and Au (2006) drew on repeated research to further support instruction on the relationship among the question, the text content, and reader. Such knowledge puts this powerful tool in the hands of students and increases comprehension.
In early grades, the QAR routine begins with two major categories *In the Book* and *In My Head* shown in Table 1, first row or heading. Clipart or pictures and hand motions are often used to support student memory of question and answer relationships. Charts with these images and descriptions are then used throughout the school year.

More advanced students discriminate between answers that are stated directly in the text as *Right There* and those answers in more than one point in the text as *Think and Search*. For questions that require inference, students use evidence *In the Book*, in combination with *In My Head*, for *Author and Me*. Those answers that refer to text but rely on an individual’s experiences are called *On My Own*. See Table 1, second row. The third row of Table 1 provides an example of the type of question or vocabulary associated with the headings.

Table 1

**Instructional Language for Question and Answer Relationships (QAR)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>In the Book</th>
<th>In My Head</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Right There</strong></td>
<td><strong>Think &amp; Search</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The answer is in the text, “right there” in the same sentence.</td>
<td>Readers search in more than one location and put together the parts to answer.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Author &amp; Me</strong></td>
<td><strong>On My Own</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Readers use the text and their own ideas to answer the question.</td>
<td>The answers reflect the text but the readers’ own ideas and experiences are primary.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Example Vocabulary**

- Who
- When
- What
- Where
- Name
- Describe
- Identify

- What things are alike
- Distinguish between
- Compare
- Reconstruct
- Explore
- Consolidate
- Summarize

**Example Vocabulary**

- How could
- Create
- Design
- Infer
- What is implied
- Interpret
- Find implicit clues

**Example Vocabulary**

- Give your opinion
- Defend your position
- What would happen if
- Judge the facts
- Suppose
- Why
- Will it work if
Texas Twist 1 (QAR). The TEKS refer to *explicit* and *implied* text evidence and *stated* as opposed to *implied* author’s purpose. Teachers may use teacher library resources or Internet sites like [ReadingQuest](https://www.readingquest.org) (n.d.) throughout the year and pair the TEKS terms with the student-friendly QAR vocabulary. Some sample questions for teachers are presented below:

- “When you found your answer, was the text evidence explicit (Right There)?”
- “If the answer was not directly in the text, was it implied?”

**Texas Twist 2 (QAR).** Teachers should consider adding to the *Think and Search* label to make it “Think, Search, and FIND,” thus providing an extra emphasis on completion.

**Texas Twist 3 (QAR).** Especially because the TEKS (and resulting tests) emphasize text-based questions and answers, it is important to use *On My Own* QARs with caution. Though making personal connections with the text is important and leads to valued follow-up writing tasks, readers may get off track. Students need to beware that open connections are not a “launching point for musing” which may do “little to enhance a student’s understanding of the text itself” (Boyles, 2012/2013, p. 37).

**Question the Author (QtA)**

Essentially, QtA (Beck & McKeown, 1996, 2006) is a strategy that engages students actively with a text, encouraging them to ask questions or deeper queries of the author. Using queries, or open-ended prompts, to consider the text, in combination with teacher-facilitated discussion, students are drawn to greater elaboration and collaboration toward building meaning from what they are reading. Beck and McKeown (2006) remind professionals that the point of QtA is “to get students to consider an author’s ideas and, if necessary, to challenge the author’s words or organization of ideas in an effort to deduce the intended meaning” (p. 32). This shifts power to students who are reading and interpreting while analyzing and evaluating an authors’ ability to deliver that meaning. Students learn to ask questions such as the following:

- “What is the author's purpose?”
- “What is the author trying to say?”
- “Why do you think the author used the following phrase?”
Texas Twist 4 (QtA). QtA techniques are close to what many Texas teachers do already, i.e. ask multiple questions about the author’s purpose. This Texas Twist, however, suggests that teachers use the specific words *stated* and *implied* as in the TEKS.

- “Can you find where the author states his or her purpose?” “If so, the stated purpose is ‘Right There’.”
- “Does the author state their purpose in more than one place?” “If so, you need to Think, Search, and Find the answer.”
- “If the answer is not stated directly (i.e. if you can’t find it Right There) then the purpose is implied.” “For implied purpose, use Author and Me.”

Texas Twist 5 (QtA). Teachers are encouraged to broaden the scope of QtA queries to include expository text features and organization such as in the following examples:

- “How does the author’s choice of headings support you as a reader?”
- “How does the use of illustration support the author’s purpose?”
- “Why did the author present that image in his/her persuasive text?”
- “How did the _____ structure support your understanding?”

Texas Twist 6 (QtA). QtA queries can also address most of the vocabulary-oriented TEKS including word derivation, context, analogies, and common idioms:

- “Why do you think the author chose this word?”
- “The word origin is _____, how does that relate to the author’s message?”
- “What other vocabulary could the author have chosen?”
- “How would _____ have changed the meaning?”

Texas Twist 7 (QtA). Teacher-facilitated queries support TEKS requirements that our students understand different types of texts, such as cultural, historical, and contemporary contexts as well as persuasive and procedural texts:

- “How does the author reflect the _________ culture?”
- “What techniques does the author using to persuade you?”
Reciprocal Teaching (RT)

Few instructional routines meet rigorous standards as does Reciprocal Teaching (RT). With years of successful practice and research-results, RT provides a framework for using four valued comprehension strategies—predicting, questioning, monitoring, and summarizing—to bring meaning to a text and to monitor thinking and learning (Palincsar & Brown, 1986). The reciprocity in RT is an essential feature in which the students take turns being the teacher. Through modeling and other scaffolds, the teacher releases the strategies to the students to gain meaning. In its essence, teachers facilitate students’ use of these strategies by use of stems such as the examples shown in Table 2.

Table 2

*Instructional Language for Reciprocal Teaching (RT)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Predicting</th>
<th>Questioning</th>
<th>Clarifying</th>
<th>Summarizing</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Suppose….</td>
<td>I wonder….</td>
<td>I did not understand the part where….</td>
<td>The important ideas in what I read were….</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I think I will learn….</td>
<td>Who…? What…?</td>
<td>I need to know more about….</td>
<td>This is mostly about….</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>When…? Where…?</td>
<td>I think the author is saying….because….</td>
<td>In combining the ideas, I see …..</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Why…?</td>
<td>Overall, I learned…</td>
<td>Overall, I learned…</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>How does…..?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Oczkus (2010) expands RT instructional opportunities to include “in-class guided reading groups, after-school and in-class interventions, and pull-out program” (p. 134). She also illustrates how RT can be used in whole class sessions, in literature circles, and with the Internet. As shown in Table 3, the RT strategies for clarifying vocabulary is useful for addressing TEKS vocabulary skills, including a) word derivation, b) analogies, c) common Idioms, and d) dictionary/glossary skills. Students are encouraged to provide evidence of what they tried, e.g. context clues, origin, meaningful roots, affixes, and so on.
Texas Twist 8 (RT). Similar to the instructional caution for QAR On-My-Own responses, the predicting strategies for RT should not become an opportunity for random musings or projections that distract from the text or author’s purpose. Especially for practical TEKS purposes, a prediction should remain focused on text or topic. Requesting students to make predictions is a common practice, but this Twist reminds teachers to forgo predicting before students have adequate clues (or build background knowledge) so that students can make valuable predictions about what is going to be read and reduce guessing that may distract from the text or discussion.

Texas Twist 9 (RT). The original four RT strategies (predicting, questioning, clarifying, and summarizing) are not comprehensive enough to meet the current rigorous demands on students. Teachers can consider using the RT routine and add some of the following to interactive think aloud lessons. See Oczkus (2009) for other ideas and suggestions:

- Evaluating
- Inferring
- Monitoring
- Visualizing

Texas Twist 10 (RT). Oczkus (2009, 2010) and other reading professionals have incorporated visuals and even hand-signals that have been effective especially for English as Second Language Learners (ESL) and other struggling readers. Texas teachers can use their own twist as needed, using images that are close to student lives, such as football, other sports, and more.

Looking at QAR, QtA, and RT Together

The three selected routines (QAR, QtA, and RT) are a few research-validated and long standing comprehension practices that address Texas teacher instructional needs for close reading in content areas with commensurate academic vocabulary. Teachers can use Table 3 for Vocabulary and Table 4 for Informational Text analysis to document that planning for good comprehension routines directly relate to the TEKS.
As demonstrated in Tables 3 and 4, QAR, QtA, and RT work together across multiple text and styles. Once the routines are established, the teacher and students can use them often in multiple settings throughout the day and over the academic year. If the routines are taught early in the year, they will serve as a time-savers as teachers help their scholars explore new information. As teachers introduce new information, they can use the familiar routines so that there is less cognitive load and more carry over from one strategy or text type to another.

Table 3

Examples of How the Three Strategies Relate to the Vocabulary TEKS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TEKS Vocabulary Requirements</th>
<th>QAR</th>
<th>QtA</th>
<th>RT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Vocabulary:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use QAR to address Context Clues:</td>
<td></td>
<td>Use QtA for each a), b), c), d), or e) as per teacher plan and design:</td>
<td>Use RT’s Clarifying strategies to approach: a), b), c), d), and e) as per teacher plan and design:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a) Word derivation</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b) Context clues</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c) Analogies</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d) Common Idioms</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e) Dictionary/Glossary</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- **Right There**—Clues are before or after the word
- **Think and Search**—Clues are in more than one location
- **Author and Me**—Clues must be inferred
- **On My Own**—Schema clues confirmed by text
- Why did the author choose this word?
- Why not another word?
- How does the meaning change?
- Identify a difficult word, sentence, or part.
- How did you figure it out?
- What strategies did you try?
Table 4

How the Three Strategies Relate to Informational Text Requirements in TEKS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TEKS for Informational Text</th>
<th>QAR</th>
<th>QtA</th>
<th>RT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Culture and History</strong></td>
<td>Relate visual QAR terms for author’s purpose:</td>
<td>Sponsor inquiry:</td>
<td>Students use:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Analyze, make inferences, &amp; draw conclusions about the author’s purpose...</td>
<td>• If the QAR is Right There, then the purpose is stated.</td>
<td>• How does the author indicate his/her purpose? (See also QAR.)</td>
<td>• Clarify—“When the author says _____, it means ____.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Provide text evidence</td>
<td>• If the QAR is Author and Me, the purpose is implied.</td>
<td>• How does _____ represent a culture or historical perspective?</td>
<td>• Question—“I’m wondering if ____.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Explain difference between stated and implied purpose</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Summarize—“Overall, the text is saying....”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Expository Text</strong></th>
<th>Apply QAR to address TEKS c) and d):</th>
<th>Analyze how author’s purpose influences organization:</th>
<th>Students use:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Analyze, make inferences, &amp; draw conclusions about expository text</td>
<td>• Contrast explicit (Right There) &amp; implicit (Author &amp; Me) ideas.</td>
<td>• Main idea + detail</td>
<td>• Predict—“From this heading, I believe this section will tell me...” “Next, I think I will learn...”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Provide text evidence</td>
<td>• Text features (like charts) offer Right There data.</td>
<td>• Fact vs opinion</td>
<td>• Clarify—“I’m thinking nocturnal means... because...”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Summarize main idea + detail</td>
<td>• Other feature questions require Think and Search e.g. compare and contrast w/ or Author and Me, e.g. “Why does....”</td>
<td>• Explicit vs implied/implicit relationships</td>
<td>• Question—“I’m wondering if...”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Distinguish fact from opinion</td>
<td></td>
<td>• Students inquire “How does the author use headings &amp; other features?” “When the author does..., then it means ....”</td>
<td>• Summarize—“In this section, I learned....”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Describe explicit and implicit ideas and content relationships</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Use multiple text features</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### TEKS for Informational Text

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Persuasive Text</th>
<th>Procedural Text</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Analyze, make inferences, &amp; draw conclusions about persuasive text…</td>
<td>Glean and use information in procedural text</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provide text evidence</td>
<td>Determine sequence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Explain how author uses language and presentation to influence reader</td>
<td>Explain factual information presented graphically (e.g. charts, diagrams, graphs, illustrations)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### QAR

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Use a variety of QARs:</th>
<th>Analyze why author chose different persuasive techniques, such as: bandwagon, beautiful people, association, and so on.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- Right There: Where is it that the author states his/her opinion?</td>
<td>- “The author wants to persuade me because….“</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Think &amp; Search: In how many ways did the author illustrate the positive effect of _____?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### QtA

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Analyze how the procedural text changes author’s organization:</th>
<th>Students use:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- “Why did the author include the steps to…?”</td>
<td>- Predict—“Next, I think the author will tell me...”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- “Why did the author include a diagram here?”</td>
<td>- Question—“What does it mean when it says...?”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### RT

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Students use:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- Predict—“Next, I think the author will tell me...”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Clarify—“The diagram clarifies how to…. “I need to know what _____ means to understand.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Summarize—“All of these steps tell me....”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Conclusion

Teachers can keep their lessons focused on deeper and richer comprehension experiences for their students as with QAR, QtA, and RT and ensure that TEKS are being met. Tables in this article illustrate how a teacher can address specific TEKS with plans for QAR, QtA, and RT. Especially because research and information on the use of these routines is far greater than the scope of this article, teachers are encouraged to check the internet (or published texts) for even more research, practical suggestions, charts, cards, and specific student examples.
This article illustrated a few research-based routines and strategies to address specific challenges in developing comprehension. The Texas Twists suggest continuous adaptations and modifications to tried and true comprehension instructional strategies in order to meet new requirements. No longer does any single (or two or three) guided reading strategy or routine provide adequate foundation for increased rigorous reading requirements. Teachers and their students need a vast set of comprehension techniques and strategies used in various combinations to extend students’ growth and literacy achievement.
References


Supporting Literacy Through the Visual and Communicative Arts: Building Momentum in Literacy for 21st Century Digital Learners

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Schreiner University

Abstract

Learners in the 21st century rely on images and social media to help them understand and make sense of their world. This article explores the powerful potential of using images and collaborative communication as a cognitive and aesthetic approach for enhancing literacy skills. In consideration of the new proposed resolution from the International Reading Association which affirms the importance of the fine arts as other ways of knowing, developing, and retaining knowledge, we as literacy educators should also expand classroom practice to include the visual and communicative arts as a means of creating meaningful literacy experiences across the curriculum that relate to the image based, everyday life literacy of 21st century learners.

This work was presented at the 2013 TALE Conference as the session, Supporting Literacy through the Visual and Communicative Arts.

Visual images and social media are part of the everyday language and learning medium of our 21st century students. Using media ranging from text messages to email to video diaries on Facebook to using the World Wide Web as their textbook, students communicate and share knowledge through images, symbols, music, video, and interactive interpretation. We live in the most exciting and academically stimulating of times, yet our traditional classrooms often stifle students’ motivation to read and learn in an effort to hold on to what it is often considered the lost art of reading. However, the arts have the potential to make reading come alive for students who have been enculturated in a global society that learns through the universal language of images and icons.
In *The Miracle Worker*, language became an appreciated life-giving tool as we listened to the desperate wishes of Anne Sullivan who struggled to give Helen Keller, “One word, and I can put the world in your hands” (Gipson, 1957). However, that one word which eventually opened up the world for Helen came only as the result of shared experience and imagery. Students experience such transformations when reading is initiated with relevant visual images followed by shared thinking and interpreting through social interaction.

Today’s learners are described by Prensky (2001) as digital natives who process information differently and have new thinking patterns. Using an arts-based literacy curriculum that integrates multiple ways of knowing helps students develop creative thinking skills and nourishes the imagination. Enhancing literacy lessons with the visual and communicative arts provides a repertoire of scripts necessary for visualizing and negotiating meaning (Park, 2012) in a classroom of 21st century learners whose everyday literacy is collaborative and image-based.

**The Relationship between Literacy and the Arts**

Reading is the process of forming a perception based on the imagery, form, and language of the text, translated through the experience of the reader (Cramer, Ortlieb, & Cheek, 2007). However, we read much more than just traditional printed text. We also read images. Multimedia learning, which consists of both linguistic and non-linguistic forms of communicating ideas and information, is also referred to as a semiotic approach to learning. This use of messages and images of pop culture makes literacy a more complex process of reading different forms of text including visual images, mental images produced through enacting text, and other forms of representing meaning in multiple sign systems (Albers & Murphy, 2000; Cowan & Albers, 2006).

Harry Broudy (1987) suggested that the ability to decode the elements of an image is central to the capacity to think. Broudy claimed that from a phenomenological epistemology, the capacity to generate, analyze, and synthesize concepts requires cultivation of the imagination as an instrument for learning. An aesthetic view of literacy portrays reading as the imagined text, the construction and
interpretation of visual images using the process of inquiry. In an aesthetic sense, the reader has the capacity to experience meaning through the imagery of the mind.

Perhaps the best explanation of the educationally beneficial relationship between literacy and the arts comes from Perkins (1994) who explored works of arts as a means of learning to think by looking at art. He explained how the visual arts support the development of habits of mind through a sensory or aesthetic connection because “works of art call forth our personal involvement …Looking at art requires us draw on various types of cognition and encourages us to make connections with other domains of human experience” (p. ix).

In Vygotskian Perspectives on Literary Research: Constructing Meaning Through Collaborative Inquiry, John-Steiner and Meehan (2000) pointed out that Vygotsky provides a framework for understanding socially mediated creativity and learning which takes place through a performance and inquiry based classroom. Social interaction and role play are linked with cognitive and literacy development. As students use language, images, and modern technologies to negotiate meaning, their learning also resembles imaginative play that requires taking on a role in the thinking process. The arts can provide the medium for social construction of meaning.

There is much support from educational researchers in support of the arts as a catalyst for thinking and learning. In The Arts and the Creation of the Mind, Eisner (2002) validated the arts in education as a means of enhancing imagination and creative thought: “We do indeed see in our mind’s eye” (p. 4). In further support of creativity and the communication skills necessary for learning and working, Eisner claims that the arts help us create our lives by “expanding our consciousness, shaping our dispositions, satisfying our quest for meaning, establishing contact with others, and sharing a culture” (p. 4). Jensen (2001) also reminded us that it is not that we cannot learn without the arts, but that “the arts enhance the process of learning by nourishing the sensory, attentional, cognitive, emotional, and motor capabilities systems connected to learning” (p. 2).
Sweet (1997) offered “justification for an expanded view of the definition of literacy” (p. 264) as a possible niche for the visual and communication arts. Included in the 1997 edition of the *Handbook of Research on Teaching Literacy through the Communicative and Visual Arts*, his article recognized that the definition of reading as the construction of meaning is confining. Sweet (1997) pointed out the possible handicapping effect that a narrow definition of literacy can have on children with varying aptitudes. The article claimed that broadening the definition of literacy to include the representation of visual and communication arts can make school relevant across cultures and various backgrounds.

**Evidence of Success in Schools**

Although research in learning through the arts is now more widely acknowledged, it is not celebrated or promoted in schools where testing results mandate the education curriculum. On July 27, 2007 the *New York Times* released a story about a ground breaking study on the effects of learning through the arts designed and implemented by the Guggenheim Museum Teaching Literacy Through Art program (Korn, 2007). The study was conducted in partnership with Randi Korn and Associates from 2003 -2006 and indicated that students became better learners and developed more effective thinking skills when they learned to describe, interpret, and write about art. The Guggenheim Museum study revealed a correlation between art education, social learning, and increased literacy. Over 500 students in four New York schools participated in the museum’s program, and results also indicated a strong correlation with improved critical thinking and literacy skills.

Another rigorous research success story can be found at the Boulder Community School of Integrated Studies in Colorado. In collaboration with the community, this school created an education program using the arts to enhance intellectual development and increase scores in reading comprehension. The results, which were based on the Colorado state student assessment program, indicated that learning through the arts curriculum helped students develop thinking skills that transferred to success on standardized testing scores (Mantione & Smead, 2003).
The Champions of Change: The Impact of the Arts on Learning (Fiske, 1999) is a compilation of research that involved seven major studies including research teams led by Shirley Brice Heath of the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, Steve Seidel with Harvard University’s Project Zero, and James Catterall with the Imagination Project at the University of California. Catterall worked with over 25,000 students to provide evidence of how learning is enhanced through involvement in the arts. His study specifically referred to the potential of the arts to offer different ways of thinking and representing knowledge (Catterall, Chapleau, & Iwanaga, 2000).

Beth Olshansky’s (2008) art-based literacy models have been proven to increase literacy achievement and standardized test scores especially for at-risk readers. She has taught many educators to discover the power of pictures to stimulate the imagination and provide students who struggle with verbal skills and a new language with which to communicate and share ideas. Her longitudinal studies with over 12,000 students in New Hampshire indicated that “the language of pictures and the language of words are equal languages for learning” (p. 11).

Best Practices: Implementing Arts-Based Strategies in the Literacy Classroom

The social media generation has led me to consider a new acronym for digital readers struggling to read traditional texts. Now we have students who are WSL: Words as a Second Language. For today’s digital visual learners, words are not their first language. They have grown up communicating through text, images, and music enhanced story telling through videos. Why not initiate a literacy experience with an image and build the vocabulary to share the image?

As students then think through, share, and discuss their interpretations of an image, they adopt a discourse of literacy (Gee, 1996) for communicating “in role” as an artist or historian or mathematician or scientist uses a common language and a disposition for thinking, creating, evaluating, and interpreting. Introducing new texts and concepts with visual images followed by a negotiation of meaning through discussion leads to a stronger personal connection to the learning experience (Roswell, McLean, & Hamilton, 2012).
Proposed benefits of incorporating the visual and communicative arts include the following:

1. Incorporating the arts in literacy education elevates art in education from a past time or interest to a meaningful method of learning and provides multiple ways of knowing and understanding across the various disciplines.

2. The arts can teach us to think by using multiple literacies to express ourselves and communicate with others in a meaningful way through a common language - the image, especially for today’s visual learners.

3. The arts provide a means for multiple cultures to find common ground for understanding one another and our world. After all, symbols and images are the universal language.

4. The arts allow us to appreciate and come to see the perspectives of others through a safe medium where there are always many ways to interpret, and we “see” through the lens of our experiences.

5. The arts provide an aesthetic environment of learning, and seeing, and creating where our emotions and intuitions and feelings matter which allows us to learn with our whole being through our bodies, our voices, our minds, and our imagination.

(Based in part on the introduction of the National Visual Arts Standards (National Art Education Association, 2008)

In order to reap such potential benefits from the arts, literacy educators must create a learning environment conducive to interactive meaning construction that makes thinking visible. Rather than viewing thinking as a set of skills, thinking must be developed as a disposition which defines the character of the student as learner, reader, and scholar. Thinking involves a variety of cognitive acts such as questioning an assumption, developing a perspective, casting doubt, seeing something through the eyes of another, reflection, wondering, inquiring, creating, and visualizing. Students must first be immersed in a classroom learning environment that increases their sensitivity to critical/creative thinking processes and when and where they might apply, followed by an inclination to use such processes to solve a problem or
deepen understanding which will result in the skill and capability to utilize such processes proficiently (Ritchhart, 2002).

The arts can set the stage for developing thinking dispositions for 21\textsuperscript{st} century learners by providing a canvas of thinking routines that teach students to think through the use of visuals and multiple forms of conveying meaning. Suggestions for using the arts include playing music (movie sound tracks work well) and asking students to write what they hear, or displaying an image and asking students to write what they see and explain their reasons. Using paintings and visual images can be used with a think aloud response which was created for one of my reading/writing through the arts classes. It is called the Four Ds of Determining Meaning. Students go through the thinking process of describing, discussing, and defending their perception of the image followed by a performance of understanding that involves directing the creation of text to tell the story of the image. The steps for the thinking routine appears in figures 1.

As students think aloud, mediate ideas and interpretations of images, share explanations, and perform their understandings, thinking becomes visible. For a term or concept to be meaningful, we must form a personal image or icon for that term. The senses, however, are constraining. We can view with only a single focus. Once the image is in the imagination, it can be recalled and imaginatively manipulated (Eisner, 1991). It is this ability to maneuver ideas/images that allows us to take on the perspective of others, to empathize (Greene, 1995). Through the use of the arts and thinking routines, we provide students an internship for developing mental imagery while they read which for most students has indeed become a lost art. Without imagery of text, there is no meaning - just decoding at best.
The Four Ds of Determining Meaning

**Describe:** First, students view and describe the image.

**Discuss:** The second step asks the students to discuss what they see with others to expand their vision and powers of observation.

**Defend:** The third step is to defend their claim based on what they see, feel, or know. One student defended his perception by noting the tiny village in the bottom of the picture where no one was seen outside and the dark and a fire surrounded their village. He described the setting as a tiny village in Vietnam where the people of the village prayed to a shiny star for peace. His story ended with the star granting peace and happiness, and the people became “amicable.” The student came from Vietnam and was able to view the image through the lens of his own experience using a digital translator to add the word amicable.

**Direct:** The final step is to have students tell the story of the image in text by directing a performance of their understanding through a scripted narrative.

Figure 1. The Four Ds of Determining Meaning. This figure provides an example for the thinking routine. The image of *The Starry Night* by Vincent van Gogh is a faithful photographic reproduction of a two-dimensional, public domain work of art. This file has been identified as being free of known restrictions under copyright law, including all related and neighboring rights.
In the following classroom example, students read *The Incredible Painting of Felix Clousseau* written by J. Agee (1988). This charming story tells of a French painter who became famous for his paintings that came alive with eventual disastrous effects. To create a literacy experience, students were asked to choose an image of a famous painting (old calendars are a great source for images of artwork) and describe what they saw in nouns, verbs, and adjectives. Using creative and critical thinking, students then imagined what the result would be if their painting were to “come alive” followed by writing and illustrating these events. A Vietnamese student imagined that the small village at the bottom of Van Gough’s Starry Night came alive, and the villagers prayed to the mighty stars above for peace.

![Image of a student response](image)

Figure 2. Student response. This figure provides an example of a student response to Van Gough’s Starry, Starry Night.
Famous Painting Literacy Experience Form

Created by Dr. Neva Cramer, PRTE/IRA presentation (2013)

Directions:

1) Work with a group of 2-3.
2) Examine your famous painting or illustration
3) Fill out the list of descriptive words. What do you see?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Nouns</th>
<th>Adjectives</th>
<th>Verbs</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
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4) Create a story using your word list– Make your painting “come alive.” Consider your story elements:
   a. Setting
   b. Characters
   c. Conflict
   d. Plot: Sequence of events

5) Sketch pad – draw a picture to go with your story

Figure 3. Famous Painting Literacy Experience Form. This figure provides a form designed by the author.
Evidence of Transformation- My Own Classroom Experience

My struggling students were visual learners and by using the visual and communicative arts, I found a way to make words come alive for them where meaning could be transferred and constructed through the drama of the voice, the embedded story of an image, or the mental pictures evoked through music and sound. Using an arts-based literacy curriculum based in part on the work of Matione and Smead’s *Weaving Through Words: Using the Arts to Teach Reading Comprehension Strategies* (2003), I developed a 12-week Learning through the Arts Program for struggling middle school readers. The program included literacy lessons initiated with visual images that incorporated various forms of social interaction to construct and share meaning. Assessment was performance based, and students were expected to perform their literacy understandings through visual art, music, or drama or a combination.

Students read a series of various genres ranging in level from early childhood picture books to challenging chapter books. New vocabulary was introduced through an initial exposure to the words using visual images or videos. Students kept evolving journals that visually represented their comprehension journey through collage, word poems, storyboards, and scripts. They often used partner reading and a reading strategy similar to GRASP (Guided Reading and Summarizing Procedure). After preparing students to read by frontloading with relevant visual images, students would read an assigned passage, write down what they remembered, talk through their reading, reread and edit lists of remembered ideas, facts, or scenarios, and finally summarize by visually representing the reading.

As a pre and post illustration of attitudes toward reading, I asked students to draw a picture of themselves reading and title it. The following illustrations provide a student sample of student illustrations before and after going through the 12-week reading program. This type of transformation in attitude occurred in about 90% of those students who begin with a negative attitude toward reading.
Conclusion

The arts can set the stage for developing the thinking dispositions and the language potential of visual learners who struggle to transfer the construction of meaning from their visual and social media world to the seemingly less relevant world of classroom text. In my own experiences of tutoring very learning disabled students, I found that their vision was very limited. Their mental imagery was sparse and unconnected rather than creative and contiguous. This same disability can be environmentally
induced through neglect or abuse of students’ natural creativity for the sake of educational directives and outdated teaching methods. Using the arts to help educate students for the 21st century turns our literacy classrooms into a culture of inquiry that reflects critical/creative thinking in an effort to make educational standards meaningfully prepare our students to be lifelong learners. Promoting and teaching reading as a multisensory experience through the arts makes literacy a learning experience that struggling readers might otherwise have neglected, ignored, or been deprived of within the limits of life’s opportunities.
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meaning through collaborative inquiry, (pp. 31-48). Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press.


### HELPFUL WEBSITES

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<th>Category</th>
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<tr>
<td>The Kennedy Center for the Arts</td>
<td><a href="http://artsedge.kennedy-center.org/educators.aspx">http://artsedge.kennedy-center.org/educators.aspx</a></td>
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<tr>
<td>Project Zero</td>
<td><a href="http://www.pz.harvard.edu/">http://www.pz.harvard.edu/</a></td>
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<tr>
<td>Arts Integration Solutions:</td>
<td><a href="http://artsintegration.com/">http://artsintegration.com/</a></td>
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<tr>
<td>Creativity and the New Common Core Standards</td>
<td><a href="http://edu.moca.org/education/teachers/commoncore">http://edu.moca.org/education/teachers/commoncore</a></td>
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<tr>
<td>The Kennedy Center ArtsEdge website</td>
<td><a href="http://artsedge.kennedy-center.org/educators/standards.aspx">http://artsedge.kennedy-center.org/educators/standards.aspx</a></td>
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Figure 6. Helpful Websites. This figure presents a list of helpful websites generated by the author.
From Playing to Learning: Using the Learning Principles of Video Games to Rethink Classroom Literacy Instruction

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Abstract

While videogames have not been widely embraced in the classroom (e.g., Halverson, 2005; Rice, 2007), researchers (e.g., Abrams, 2009; Abrams, Gerber, & Burgess, 2012; Gee, 2007; Gee & Hayes, 2010) have made compelling arguments for the connection between videogames and literacy. There is now an emphasis on the variety of practices associated with digital literacies (Lankshear & Knobel, 2008; Warschauer & Ware, 2008), including elements of popular culture such as videogames. In the past, literacy revolved around reading printed text but now includes information presented in any format, including videogames. Today’s teachers must consider ways to make literacy and learning relevant to students. One source of information for rethinking classroom literacy instruction comes from the learning principles inherent in videogames (Gee, 2007).

This work was presented at the 2013 TALE Conference as the session, Classroom Literacy Practices: Using Video Games to Bridge the In-School/Out-of-School Literacy Gap.

There is a need to emphasize “the plurality of digital literacy” due to its diversity (Lankshear & Knobel, 2008, pp. 1-2). The view of literacies as plural also includes the variety of competencies and practices associated with digital literacies (Warschauer & Ware, 2008). In the past, literacy revolved around reading printed text but now includes information presented in any format, including videogames. New literacies are being defined in terms of social practices or processes, and the definition of what constitutes text has expanded (Hagood, 2008). As a result, texts are experienced through technologies and formats of the time, which leads to literacy development taking place both socially and culturally (Hagood, 2008).
In regard to videogames, Gee (2007) presents thirty-six principles found in videogames that relate to literacy and learning. While each of Gee’s principles is distinct, there are overarching elements common to the principles, such as the following: the scaffolding within videogames, such as directions that the game provides just as the gamer needs to know how to use the game controller for a new task; an understanding of the connections between and among signs/symbols within the videogame, including images and words; the active role of the gamer, who must continually think about and make decisions while playing the game; the learning that takes place as a gamer experiments with game controls and tasks and learns more about what his or her character within the game can/cannot do; understanding that there are numerous paths within the videogame, rather than just one way to progress; and discovering abilities and information as a result of practice within the videogame and then applying and transferring that knowledge in other gaming contexts.

Observations of and discussions with students who are also gamers show how videogames can encourage learning and facilitate reading and writing (e.g., Abrams, 2009; Gee & Hayes, 2010; Gerber, Abrams, Onwuegbuzie, & Benge, 2014; Johnson, 2005). While some classroom teachers may consider videogames void of educational value, as evidenced by the lack of inclusion of videogames within the classroom (e.g., Halverson, 2005; Rice, 2007), compelling arguments exist for the connection between videogames and literacy. In his book about the ways in which pop culture may promote thinking and learning, Stephen Johnson (2005) presents an interesting example of learning that takes place in videogames. Johnson recounts showing the videogame *Sim City* (Electronic Arts, 2003) to his 7-year-old nephew, who after a brief introduction to the game suggested that Johnson should lower the industrial tax rate. Johnson goes on to say that this comment indicates that his young nephew was able to recognize and understand the relationship between taxation and industrial development without being explicitly taught the information.

In terms of peripheral learning and literacy practices that relate to videogames, one example comes from the game *Age of Mythology* (*AOM*; Ensemble Studios, 2002). Gee and Hayes (2010) present
the story of seven-year-old Sam who began playing AOM and “was very much in charge of his own learning and saw to it that his game play resulted in mastery on his own terms” (p. 22). Sam did not view game play as separate from reading and writing but instead connected AOM to his reading and writing activities. Sam and his classmates also received support from parents who encouraged them to read and write about mythology. In Sam’s case, gaming was about “production, participation, and authorship, not passive consumption” (Gee & Hayes, 2010, p. 25). In this case, the videogame supported Sam’s interest in reading myths and writing his own mythological stories.

Videogames also can contribute to students’ understanding of content information and academic vocabulary. Abrams (2009) states that “students learned vocabulary or historical information as a result of playing particular videogames, experiences that later enabled the students to understand and relate to the material when it was discussed in the classroom” (2009, p. 339). Abrams shares the example of a student who hears the word ‘brackish’ in school and is able to define it based on his familiarity with the geographical feature Brackish Lake in the videogame Gears of War 2 (Epic Games, 2008). These examples provide insight into the ways in which videogames may relate to literacy and learning.

As a former middle school teacher, I am familiar with the popularity of videogames among adolescents; over 90% of teenagers in the United States spend time playing videogames (Lenhart, Kahne, Middaugh, Macgill, Evans, & Vitak, 2008; NPD Group, 2011). During a conversation with my preservice teachers regarding the role of technology in the classroom, I listened to my undergraduate students’ views about technology and thought about the ways in which they supported their views based on their personal experiences with and preferences for/against technology. As one student explained, technology is a consistent presence in her life; this student shared examples of how she plays online games with her cousins who live in another state while they communicate with one another through headsets while playing. Other undergraduate students voiced support for their use of technology to connect with others through venues other than phone calls or texts. While a few undergraduate students expressed their disinterest in videogames – one student in particular said that the graphics give him a
headache – the majority held favorable views of technology and popular culture as enjoyable elements of their lives and further expressed that they would have been more interested in school (i.e., K-12) had their teachers incorporated these elements into the classroom. Listening to their views inspired me to personally explore the learning principles in games; while I was familiar with Gee’s (2007) concepts of learning and literacy within videogames, I had not previously explored them myself. I decided to play a videogame to completion as a way to further explore and reflect upon the learning principles in games and as a way to reflect upon and possibly rethink my views of videogames in light of the information I had read regarding learning and gaming.

I selected the game Red Dead Redemption (Rockstar Games, 2010) because it is set in the American Wild West of the early 1900s. I chose the game primarily because I enjoy reading historical fiction and thought that the game may be similar to that genre. One disclaimer about this game that is important to mention is its rating of M for mature; this would not be a game that I would ask middle school students to play or that I would project on a screen in my classroom. However, it is equally important to understand the “gamer’s experience with the game rather than just the content of the game itself” (Abrams, 2009, p. 337). I am not advocating that teachers bring videogames portraying violence, profanity, or other questionable content into the classroom. At the same time, I am suggesting that educators understand the potential for learning inherent in videogames and that educators recognize games, including those some may deem ‘inappropriate’ that may nonetheless be played by students outside of school, as springboards for literacy activities within the classroom.

My own game play was at times arduous as I learned to navigate with the controller and tried to figure out what I was supposed to do within the game. At other times, though, I lost track of time while playing and enjoyed being in the setting and exploring the digital world. Thinking back to Gee’s (2007) principles of learning inherent in videogames, I was able to make several connections with the learning principles and my own experiences playing a videogame. I also thought about the ways in which these principles of videogames can and should relate to learning in the classroom. Gee presents the active,
critical learning principle, which refers to the way that the features and environment of videogames lead to active learning, as opposed to passive receipt of information. In a videogame, nothing happens until the gamer takes action; the videogame requires active cognitive engagement from the player, who must decide whether to move forward, to jump, to hide, to pick up an object, and so on. In the classroom, we want to encourage our students to be actively engaged in critical thinking throughout the class period and school day. Rather than having students passively receive information from a lecture, teachers need to consider ways in which to engage students and to encourage the critical and creative thinking that promotes learning. This may mean project-based learning in one classroom or group discussion in another; the point is for teachers to work toward creating a learning environment within the classroom that contributes to students’ active learning.

Another learning principle found in videogames is the psychosocial moratorium principle (Gee, 2007). This principle refers to the way in which videogames provide a space within which gamers can take risks without the worry of severe real-world consequences. In a videogame, a gamer can jump off a ledge in search of a possible hidden world; if such a hidden world does not exist at that location in the game, the worst that can happen is that the gamer loses a life within the game or has to restart the videogame level. Since real-world consequences are lowered in videogames, gamers are able to take risks beyond those that they may attempt in real life. When we think about students in our classrooms, we as teachers need to consider ways that we can support students to take chances without the constant fear of failure. I think of my own students, both middle school students and college students, who often seem hesitant to begin work on a project or activity, instead asking questions like, “Is this what you mean?” or “Is this right?” With the pressure of having grades attached to most work and knowing that standardized testing is around every corner, students may not feel able to take risks in ways that stretch their thinking or promote creative expression because they fear the real-world consequences of being wrong. The psychosocial moratorium principle in videogames provides teachers with a reminder of the
importance of creating a positive classroom climate where judgment is withheld and a sense of failure is removed so that students are able to take risks as they explore, think, and learn.

Gee (2007) mentions the identity principle in which there is a relationship between a gamer’s identity and the virtual identity that the gamer takes on in the game. I experienced this at times in my game when I had choices, such as whether to skin a deer. My “real life” personality would not be interested in that activity at all; my virtual identity needed to engage in the activity to advance in the game. According to Gee, “learning involves taking on and playing with identities” in ways that allow the learner to make choices and to consider the connection between new and old identities (p. 222). In the classroom, we want students to consider their potential and to explore new identities that they may not have previously considered, such as the identity of mathematician or scientist or author. Identity is part of learning and in videogames allows for choice and reflection. In our classrooms, we must consider ways to provide students with choice and to encourage reflection as they explore their abilities and their identities as learners.

Gee (2007) also mentions the regime of competence principle which involves the gamer having opportunities to operate within his or her ability while still being challenged and pushed to the “outer edge” of competence (p. 223). At the beginning of Red Dead Redemption, I was focused on trying to learn the controls and figure out what I was supposed to do in the game. The bottom left corner of the screen had a compass, with a white shape indicating where John Marston (my character) was within the game and a yellow dot indicating where he needed to go. At the beginning of the game, I approached a building and saw a yellow “x” on the swinging doors. Once inside this building, a man called toward my character and said that some men had hired him as my guide. The man moved toward a door and the directions, “Follow Jake to the horses,” appeared on the screen. Marston and the man approached the horses and the instructions, “Mount your horse,” appeared on screen. Then the text, “Accompany Jake to Fort Mercer,” displayed on the screen, along with the hint, “Hold RB to slow and stop your horse.” While I was playing Red Dead Redemption, the regime of competence principle was at work, guiding me...
through the game by providing little pieces of information and support to help me overcome challenges and make progress. In the classroom, we must scaffold instruction so that our students have opportunities to experience achievable challenges. Videogames provide scaffolding in ways such as providing information “on demand and just in time” (Gee, 2007, p. 226), meaning that the gamer receives information right when it is applicable and needed to overcome a challenge. In our classrooms, though, we sometimes provide a great deal of information at one time and then expect students to identify what is important and to recall and apply the information at a later point in time. Videogames provide a different model for teachers, one in which students actively think and learn while receiving pertinent information and guidance right when it is needed and immediately applicable.

I also had a personal experience with Red Dead Redemption (Rockstar Games, 2010) that led to learning and provided opportunities for reading and writing. At one point during game play, I (my character) went to an area called Hennigan’s Stead. My character was able to collect flowers called Wild Feverfew that grow near this location in the videogame world. The flowers can be used within the game to reduce headaches and fevers. Out of curiosity, I searched online to see if it was a real flower. I found the Latin name for the flower, in addition to information regarding where it grows best, how to tend to it, and so forth. I found pictures of the flower online; the photographs are similar to the way the flower looks within the videogame. My online search for information about the flower led me to message boards for gardeners, online almanacs, and other genres of literature. This is just one example of how videogames allow gamers/students to identify areas of personal interest that may lead to peripheral learning and support literacy.

My own experiences playing a videogame parallel those presented by Johnson (2005) and Gee and Hayes (2010). Other examples of ways that videogames may connect with Gee’s (2007) principles of literacy and learning can be seen in the use of World of Warcraft (Blizzard Entertainment, 2004) to create a school curriculum (Sheehy & Gillespie, 2011) and the increased use of Minecraft (Mojäng Aktiebolag, 2009) in classrooms (e.g., Barack, 2013; Jenkins, 2014). More information about the use of World of
Warcraft and Minecraft in the classroom can be found at [www.wowinschool.pbworks.com](http://www.wowinschool.pbworks.com) and at [www.minecrafteredu.com](http://www.minecrafteredu.com), respectively.

Within the school setting, teachers and students can learn from and work with one another to develop digital competence that may support content learning (Søby, 2008). In this way, both teachers and students can share their knowledge and learn from one another as both parties develop their own skills. As teachers, we can strive to create and maintain a culture of digital learning within our classrooms (Søby, 2008). For example, teachers and students often use technology at home in ways that are not reflected in the school curriculum (Søby, 2008). In addition, students may engage with media as cultural forms, rather than as technologies, when they are at home (Buckingham, 2008). It is necessary for schools to bridge the gap between in-school and out-of-school literacy in order to create a digital learning culture (Hagood, 2008). Classroom literacy practices can expand by recognizing forms of literacy students enjoy and pursue outside of school and by incorporating those out-of-school forms of literacy into the current classroom literacy practices. By reflecting upon the learning principles found in video games, teachers can rethink classroom literacy instruction.
References


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Abstract

Hasn’t the education scene had enough pointing of fingers as to whose job it is to teach students literacy strategies? The best answer to this might be found in Moje’s (1996) statement, “teachers should be encouraged to examine their beliefs about students’ needs and what it means for student to be successful in relation to their beliefs about subject matter and literacy in secondary classrooms” (p. 192). Perhaps instead of students being the only ones to have questions asked of them, teachers should regularly ask themselves, or be asked by administrators, quality type questions regarding what they are doing to meet every the needs of every student. Rather than pointing fingers, this article is intended to make content area teachers aware of the research proving teaching literacy strategies within their discipline, which is key to empowering students with the ability to develop critical thinking, thus flourishing.

This work was presented at the 2013 TALE Conference as the session, Content Area Literacy Strategies for Preservice and In-Service Teachers. Carolyn Stufft was the co-presenter for this session.

Introduction

We have officially arrived into the 21st century. While some aspects of how literacy plays out in the educational process may be recognizable, or maybe even habitual, others might seem foreign to the educator. The definition of literacy alone has taken on a whole new meaning. Traditionally, literacy has been referred to as the ability to read and write. But today, Kane (2007) states, “the term has broadened to accomplish a wide range of reading, writing, speaking, listening, and other language tasks associated with everyday life” (p. 19). A little over three decades ago, Herber (1978) began a significant study to understand the cognitive processes involving literacy and how they specifically relate to content-area subjects, if at all.
After Herber’s research surfaced onto the educational scene, Moje (1996 & 2000) noted state departments of education across the United States began to examine state and national assessments, indicating students, particularly grades 7 through 12, were struggling with planning and critical analysis while they were engaged in reading and writing activities. As a result of these observations, mandates were made requiring content area preservice teachers to include literacy in content areas as a required course of their educational degree. These mandates opened a floodgate of research to measure if there was any correlation between the teaching strategies being used in secondary content areas gained through content area literacy instruction. The results of these researches began to unearth the fact that the majority of content area teachers were not implementing strategies learned during the required undergraduate content area literacy course.

**Review of Literature**

Valuable instructional strategies have been developed and proven to be successful for nurturing the ability to think and react cognitively for secondary students. These approaches, used by teachers to teach subject matter are collectively referred to as content literacy strategies; just like there is not a single definition for literacy, there is not a uniform list of literacy strategies. Rigorous strategies listed by Fisher & Frey, (2008) did include anticipatory activities intended to connect, stimulate interest, activate schema, connecting vocabulary, use of graphic organizers, students asking the questions, reciprocal teaching, note-taking, and writing to learn activities (p. 247).

Multiple researchers have confirmed that an alarming 70 percent of ninth graders are reading several years below grade level (Nichols, Young, & Rickelman, 2007, p. 98). While most secondary students have been equipped with decoding skills necessary to read content area material, they lack the ability to comprehend the words they have processed. This tends to be an area secondary teachers struggle with, not being able to help these students connect words to meaning. In Moje’s (1996) study (as cited in Davey, 1988; Hinchman, 1987; Ratekin, Simpson, Alvermann, & Dishner, 1985; Readence, Konopak, & Wilson, 1991; Smith & Feather, 1983), observation of classroom instruction documents
infrequent use of literacy strategies used by teachers, (p. 172). Why is it that teachers do not, or do so infrequently, use the strategies they have gained during their mandated literacy in content area, preservice teacher course as an undergraduate? Quality questions, such as this one, can be answered by a plethora of answers or what some may consider to be excuses.

Asking teachers to switch the focus of their learning and thinking processes can be difficult because it can imply their instructional practices and content knowledge are not valuable. According to Wright, (2007), “Improving students’ academic achievement through teachers’ altering pedagogical approaches to emphasize literacy, critical thinking, and learning processes does not come easily: it is neither linear nor straightforward nor a technical process” (p. 422). There is no “one size fits all” process for teachers to implement; instead, it involves teachers’ professional identities. While change for teachers is complex and often times uncomfortable, it is pertinent if reform is to occur. The major contributing factor in effective instruction is the teacher, which in return produces greater student learning.

Opposition of teachers to employ literacy strategies may not be an act of defiance, but rather could a result of them not being able to simply recognize how literacy could play a part in their discipline. Could our university instructors of content area literacy be to blame for secondary teachers not utilizing literacy strategies within their discipline? Shanahan & Shanahan (2008) suggests when instructors do not understand valued disciplinary literacy practices, they do not prepare teachers of specialized subjects to meet the needs of students who will likely struggle with the reading and writing required in particular content areas. These courses should be the place for preservice teachers to “grapple with what adolescents should know in their content areas, how that information can be engagingly introduced and taught, and to be become better prepared to become more student-centered teachers” (Gritter, 2010, p. 167). When these courses fail to provide preservice teachers with experiences in classroom contexts then it will become more difficult to convince teachers, particularly preservice teachers, of the usefulness of literacy strategies. This message and opportunity to practice implementing these strategies must be conveyed before preservice teachers will find value. Without value, there will be no motivation for
utilization. A challenge for university professors could be that they should not only be concerned with teaching literacy methods and strategies but to change their deep beliefs regarding classroom interactions and also encourage teachers to modify theirs as well.

While it is essential for teachers to practice these strategies to improve students’ critical thinking processing, perhaps one explanation for why they do not implement them could be that while they took the required literacy in content area course during their undergraduate studies, they do not feel their knowledge and ability to teach these strategies is adequate. Following the research of Fisher and Frey (2008), content area teachers have been observed not using literacy strategies to assist their struggling students. Hopefully, this is not the result of being defiant, but instead, teachers’ lack of implementation could be a result from feelings of unfamiliarity, not feeling comfortable with the purpose and/or delivery, insecurity of messing things up then creating further confusion for the students, and/or in general just needing more information. It is the belief of Nichols, Young, and Rickelman (2007) that “improving teachers’ knowledge of instructional strategies and methods, teachers will have a better understanding of the value these when teaching in their classroom” (p. 101). An assumption can be made when teachers do not, or seldom, use literacy strategies within their content area it could be they recognized they lack the knowledge to execute them properly and effectively.

Taking a closer look at the knowledge and understanding obtained by some content teachers may reveal their beliefs and practices stem from their past learning experiences when listening, reading, and writing were the routes one took to learn formally. While there is value in these strategies and they have proven to be beneficial for learners for many decades, 21st century students now learn through a much broader range of venues, such as technologies, than many veteran teachers were ever exposed to during their childhood and adolescent years. As Wright (2007) points out, many teachers tend to concentrate attention on the content of their subject domains in which they have become expert, rather than the learning process and social practices practiced through literacy strategies (p. 421). Therefore, many teachers are guilty of simply teaching content rather than teaching a learning process and generally
become fairly defensive when suggested they should be concerned with more. Perhaps instead of students being the only ones to have questions asked of them, teachers should regularly ask themselves, or be asked by administrators, quality type questions regarding what they are doing to meet every the needs of every student.

While teachers’ primary focus should be to equip students with learning and thinking tools necessary to navigate, make sense of, and critically examine subject content, unfortunately, they do not get this privilege due to challenges they face as a result of school’s requirements and restraints. Teachers really have no control over the amount of time allotted for teaching and unfortunately within this limited amount of time, many are required to deliver a standard set of curricular which is not tolerable of deviation. If school administrators are not supportive of allowing teachers to teach learning instead of content, then this will require the teachers to be creative and to intentionally find ways where literacy strategies can be incorporated into their content. By doing so requires time and many teachers reported by Fisher and Frey (2008) claim they lack the time to devote to this.

A common theme of the reviewed articles was facilitating change of instructional delivery within content areas produced positive learning outcomes for both teachers and students. By teachers creating and actively incorporating literacy-enriched environments within their classrooms, they modified their beliefs of what learning and teaching meant. These beliefs were not kept behind the doors of the classrooms. Teachers shared ideas and experiences within and beyond their discipline creating a network of ongoing professional development without a formal presenter and at no cost to the schools. As teachers began to adopt the belief that teaching should be focused more toward helping students learn how to learn, they began to value and meet the learners’ needs and interests. As teachers began to understand what literacy strategies are and how powerful they are in influencing students’ learning they began to look for ways they could effectively apply them to their content area. Wright (2007) reported that when teachers increased their experimentation with literacy-oriented approaches, students responded positively indicating the approaches made learning more accessible and comprehensible, increased
enjoyment and engagement, and improved their disposition towards the subject (p. 423). Positive attitudes give students a sense of empowerment, which according to Moje (1996) is critical to understanding.

So where might a good starting place be for tying all of this research back into the original question, “If teachers of content areas are aware of the research proving teaching literacy strategies within their discipline is key to empowering students with the ability to develop critical thinking, thus flourishing, then why are the majority not using them in their instruction and what is the solution to getting more teachers to accept and put them into practice?” The best answer to this might be found in Moje’s (1996) statement, “Teachers should be encouraged to examine their beliefs about students’ needs and what it means for student to be successful in relation to their beliefs about subject matter and literacy in secondary classrooms” (p. 192). Once teachers have inventoried themselves, allowing them to share their needs and concerns can add value to their person and their role of a teacher. Following a five year study of a school’s attempt to reform student success by incorporating content literacy strategies, Fisher and Frey (2008) noted the importance of listening to the teachers’ feedback. Adding value to their voices can contribute greatly to the continued growth of a school as it seeks to improve teaching and learning (p.261).

If it is our belief that teachers need to be more aware of and educated in their instructional design and strategy selection in relationship to the learning goals. However, they lack the knowledge of what they are and how to implement them. It then only makes sense to provide teachers with meaningful training through ongoing professional developments. Reflecting on the work of Dillon, O’Brien, and Sato (2011), in order for professional development to be meaningful and effective, it must be relevant to the teachers’ needs. Nichols, Young, and Rickelman (2007) stated, “It is imperative professional development moves beyond ‘one-shot training’ and begins to make the most of the time allocated to such an important cause” (p. 99). Traditional approaches of short-term professional development for teachers must change. Traditional professional development of single-day courses emphasizing classroom strategies and
activities must become second to developing understanding of the learning process. Torgesen, Houston, & Rissman (2007) provide a model that districts could use for training their content area teachers.

Focusing on the research-based instructional strategies that are most frequently discussed in terms of improving upper level students reading skills, this guide concentrates on: (a) comprehension strategies, that include before, during, and after strategies that enable students to consciously apply to their understanding and learning from text; (b) discussions facilitated by the teacher or structured discussions among students in cooperative learning groups, providing opportunities for deeper, more sustained discussion of content from text; (c) setting and maintaining high standards for level of text, conversation, questions, and vocabulary reflected in discussions and reading and writing assignments; (d) reading-writing connection to improve student opportunities to reflect on the meaning of text and receive feedback on their reflections; (e) creating more motivating and engaging classrooms and interacting with students in a way that promotes internal motivation for reading as they learn to process text more deeply; and (f) content learning, teaching content knowledge to ensure learning of the most essential concepts by all students by using instructional methods such as graphic organizers or concept comparison routines.

Because research has proven literacy strategies within the content are the vehicle to lead students to become successful learners across the board, it is crucial for the focus of teachers to move from subject centered to student-centered strategies. Content area teachers should not be held responsible to teach struggling readers basic reading skills, but it is imperative that they are able to identify such students and be able to teach them strategies to help improve their ability to comprehend text. “Professional development that presents important research-tested practices and ideas in creative manners that are sensible to the practicing teacher, have a greater opportunity of being implemented” (Nichols, Young, & Rickelman, 2007, p. 112).
Theoretical Framework

In order for teachers to reinvent their pedagogical practices to sustain students’ current and future learning needs, a framework supporting teachers’ professional knowledge, based on their social, educational, and physical contexts will need to be established. Nichols, Young, & Rickelman (2007) suggests, “Effective teachers incorporate theory into practice and do not rely on a single instructional strategy or method to meet the learning needs of their students” (p. 102). Because many instructional practices can be associated with multiple theories, three theories of learning support this framework, which include: constructivism, social learning perspectives, and information/cognitive. These theories of language and literacy development highlight the relationship between cognition, language, literacy, and social and cultural interactions.

Research Question

Thirty years after Herber’s influential work, several reasons attempt to explain why so many content area teachers do not teach literacy strategies within their respected content area. The neglect to do so is believed to account for students who struggle to catch up and keep up with valuable cognitive strategies. To summarize the problem, if teachers of content areas are aware of the research proving teaching literacy strategies within their discipline is key to empowering students with the ability to develop critical thinking, then why are the majority not using them in their instruction and what is the solution to urge more teachers to accept and put such strategies into practice? Perhaps by answering this question, a solution can result in getting content area teachers to find value and implement literacy strategies into their teaching.

Future Research

Throughout this paper, the history, purpose, trends of use, and research proving there is a correlation to content literacy strategies being associated to equipping students with the cognitive strategies that allow them to proceed and critically investigate subject content has been synthesized.
When teachers realize the importance of moving from subject-centered to student-centered objectives, they must be proactive, providing whatever is necessary in order for their students to be successful.

Extending this topic for future studies could include a focus on professional development, which have proven to be successful at convincing and leading resistant content area teachers to incorporating literacy strategies within their discipline. A further extension for research could be to concentrate on the implication of administrators’ informal, follow-up, formative teacher evaluation, focusing on observing teachers to ensure they are implementing the recently learned best practices for teaching gained during the course of professional development, which would almost certainly ensure teachers are instilling new practices into their instruction. With a non-threatening evaluation of this nature, teachers would have the opportunity to display newly acquired teaching techniques and administrators could see first-hand a solution at work to increase students’ success. Because evaluation systems have largely failed to achieve quality assurance, a paradigm shift in teacher evaluations must be considered by educational agencies for results in improved learning for all students to occur.
References

Effect of Literacy Interventions on Achievement of African American Male Elementary Students

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Abstract

Literacy interventions were implemented with one group (n = 8) of African American male elementary students while a similar group (n = 8) did not receive the interventions. The participants met specific criteria: (a) African-American male; (b) in 3rd grade or 4th grade; and (c) below grade level in reading by at least one year. All students receiving the nine-week intervention were on free/reduced lunch. A quantitative quasi-experimental method was chosen to discern how literacy interventions might improve academic achievement. Pre-tests were given before the intervention and compared to post-test results after the nine-week intervention. The Developmental Reading Assessment (DRA) was used for both pre- and post-tests. Participants in the experimental group made statistically significant (p < .05) progress in literacy improvement while the control group did not make statistically significant progress. Findings suggest that explicit literacy interventions may help bridge the literacy achievement gap for struggling elementary students.

This work was presented at the 2013 TALE Conference as the session, Effect of Literacy Interventions on Achievement of African American Male Elementary Students.

All children, no matter what race or ethnicity, are entitled to receive a free and appropriate education in the United States. However, African American males are facing serious challenges in education. Many are not obtaining the basic skills needed to succeed academically and graduate from high school. The national graduation rate for African American males is 47% compared with 53% who drop out (Aud et al. 2011).

Inadequate literacy skills are major contributors to the educational crisis involving school-age African American males. Additionally, illiteracy and crime are closely related. One in three African
American males can expect to enter the United States prison system during his lifetime (Kerby, 2012). Ellis (2012) reported that 85% of all students who interface with the juvenile justice system are functionally illiterate, and 70% of inmates in the prison system cannot read above the fourth grade level. However, academically successful school programs can contribute to decreasing the disparity currently plaguing public education.

This study was implemented to determine if explicit literacy interventions, when applied with fidelity, would have a significant impact on growth in literacy achievement of African American male elementary students. The study followed theory set forth by Fountas and Pinnell (2011) and included the following fifteen elements: (1) daily group instruction; (2) research driven approach; (3) low student-teacher ratio; (4) accelerated process with entry and exit points; (5) framework that is structured and systematic; (6) fast paced lessons that are well designed and sequenced; (7) explicit teaching method for reading fluency; (8) explicit teaching method for comprehension; (9) well designed plan for phonics and word study; (10) writing component that involves reading; (11) leveled text library with selection that is engaging; (12) assessment, progress monitoring, and record keeping that is systematic; (13) connection with classroom for students and teachers; (14) at home connection with parents and school; (15) professional development for all teachers (Fountas & Pinnell, 2011). The underpinning for the intervention was based on Montessori’s belief that students need to use their hands during the learning process. Further, Montessori posited that students want to learn from the adults in the world around them (Blount, 2007).

The quantitative quasi-experimental study method was chosen for this study because it allowed the researcher to build a holistic picture of how interventions can help students overcome literacy deficiencies. The design utilizes an experimental and a control group to determine how literacy interventions and intense vocabulary development correlate with achievement. Findings from the study contributed to the knowledge base and added to the field by providing an examination of the factors that contribute to African American male low academic performance and the literacy interventions needed to
remedy low performance across all contents. The study provides a foundation for educators and leaders in education with the necessary tools to make academic improvements within the African American community.

**Background Literature**

African American boys are completing elementary school without the necessary literacy skills needed to be successful at the next level of their education. Furthermore, African American males are dropping out of high school at higher rates than other races. Black males are least likely to graduate from high school in 33 out of 50 states (Schott Foundation Report, 2010). Unfortunately, too little attention has been given to solving the problem; rather much attention has been given to documenting the cause of the problem (McGuire, 2005). The research instead offers what seems like a lost cause based on several issues such as policy, environment, society, and economics. Current research presents a clear pattern concerning African American males mirrored in society in places such as the workplace and criminal justice system (Gordon, 2005).

**Literacy Development**

Literacy development begins at birth. As babies hear sounds, words, sentences, and music, neurons in their brains make connections that will become permanent if those sounds are continually repeated. Thus, the home environment and child care provided in the early years is extremely important (Morrow, 2012).

Phonemic awareness is the best predictor of a kindergarten child’s beginning reading success. It is a stronger predictor than intelligence quotient scores or any other measure. Proficiency in phonemic awareness is even more important than the type of reading instruction received by a first grader, whether the instruction is whole language or phonics based (Settlow & Jacovino, 2004, pg. xi). Students need direct instruction in phonemic awareness incorporated into their classrooms to facilitate their academic success.
According to the National Reading Panel (2001), phonics, vocabulary, comprehension, and fluency in addition to phonemic awareness are the elements most important to reading. Children with access to proficient preschool and kindergarten programs will experience instruction relating to the reading components, and thus, have an advantage over those students lacking such instruction.

Children in poverty may not have access to successful literacy programs. In fact, the largest group of at-risk children are those in poverty. Poverty is a growing problem for the United States, and the bigger the problem gets the more literacy deficits will become evident (Strauss, 2011). African American children in particular are at most risk, with the risk being three times higher for African American children in poverty. Children living in poverty are twice as likely not to read on grade level (Children's Defense Fund, 1994; Kao & Tienda, 1995).

Historically, children enter school with unique histories based on their particular backgrounds. Interactions around literacy will propel some students toward immediate success in school, whereas others may be less prepared and not immediately successful in school (Morrow, 2012). African American males currently have the lowest performance on all standardized tests administered by the state of Texas (NCES, 2007). African American children at age nine compared to White children were behind by 26 points in reading in 2004.

**Literacy Interventions**

All students come to school with an ability to learn (Thomas & Bainbridge, 2001). It is the job of the school to provide quality instruction and interventions if necessary. Even students who have had limited experience in literacy prior to kindergarten can become successful readers. The school can make the difference (Fountas & Pinnell, 2009).

A growing number of literacy interventions are available to help children of all ages advance their reading achievement. Reading Recovery (Clay, 1987), for one, has been shown effective as an intervention for first grade students. Computer software, such as Imagine Learning (2014), Imagine
Learning Espanol (2014), or Waterford (2014), is used by some schools to help advance students’ early literacy learning.

High quality educational programs that have built in strong literacy instruction, language, and story-telling have been very beneficial to students for long term reading success. Excellent reading instruction married with a powerful intervention program makes it possible for all learners to become literate and successfully acquire reading skills needed for academic success (Fountas & Pinnell, 2009).

Struggling readers may need early literacy interventions in small groups or individually. The intervention should be intense and short term for students to be able to make accelerated progress and benefit from classroom instruction. High quality instruction can help in closing the gap (Fountas & Pinnell, 2009) and building momentum for children and schools.

**Methods**

A quantitative quasi-experimental method was chosen for this study in order to discern how literacy interventions might improve academic achievement. The control group design allowed for identification of the variables that correlate with achievement. The model allows for independent variables (literacy interventions and parental involvement) and a dependent variable (academic achievement). A t-test was conducted to account for the impact of each variable.

The Developmental Reading Assessment (DRA) developed by Pearson (2012) was chosen as the pre- and post-test of reading achievement because its development was based on existing literature identified as including key traits and behaviors of effective readers. The following reliability analyses were conducted: (1) internal consistency reliability, (2) passage equivalency, (3) test-retest reliability, and (4) inter-rater and expert rater reliabilities. The DRA has been noted as a valid measure of accuracy, fluency, and comprehension as evidenced by these measurements: (1) criterion-related validity, (2) construct validity, and (3) content validity.

There were two groups. Group A was the experimental group, and Group B was the control group. Each group had eight students. Group A received daily interventions for 30-45 minutes a day for
a period of nine weeks. Group B was not provided with interventions from the researcher. Students in Group B received regular, daily instruction including Read 180 Interventions. Read 180 is the standard intervention the school currently provides.

Students in Group A received interventions which consisted of literacy and vocabulary instruction. During the first intervention the students read a leveled book to determine current reading levels. Second, the researcher administered a vocabulary assessment. After reading and vocabulary levels were determined, students read, were read to, answered questions about the readings, and were introduced to vocabulary words found in text. They also wrote, decoded text using phonics, and participated in word study during the 30-45 minute intervention. In short, the intervention plan included emphases as follows: phonemic awareness, phonics, reading, writing, vocabulary development, word work, and ongoing assessment.

During the nine weeks of interventions, students were given a weekly reading assessment, and the data were analyzed weekly. Assessments available from Raz-Kids (2014) software were used weekly. At the end of the nine weeks, all the students in Groups A and B were given a post-test to assess their reading skills and vocabulary knowledge. The data collected from the pre-test and post-test were analyzed using SPSS. Data from Group A were compared to data from group B to determine if the early literacy interventions were effective in promoting student achievement for African American males in the grade levels identified.

Parents of the participants responded to a questionnaire developed by the researcher (See Appendix). The questionnaire contained 12 questions pertaining to literacy emphasis in the home. For example, question one asked, "How often do you read to your child?" Fifteen of the sixteen parents responded to the questionnaire.

Participants

The participants for this study came from a low-socioeconomic elementary school in a large urban school district. There were 16 students in the study (8 from each class). The participants in the
experimental group met specific criteria: (a) African-American male; (b) in 3rd grade or 4th grade; and (c) below grade level in reading by at least one year. Additionally, candidates selected might have a Below Reading 0 (BR0) assessment on either Read 180 or the Scholastic Reading Instrument as their reading level. A convenience sample was used to select the student participants.

The study was conducted in a school district that was 80.6% economically disadvantaged with 64% at risk (TEA AEIS Report, 2011). The student demographics were 26.2% African American, 61.9% Hispanic, and 7.8% Caucasian. The elementary school that was chosen for the study had a population of 54% Hispanic and 46% African American. One hundred percent of students were on a free or reduced lunch plan with 75% of those students being at-risk (TEA AEIS Report, 2011).

**Data Analysis**

According to comparison between pre- and post-tests administered to both experimental and control groups, the experimental group (A) made statistically significant \( p < .05 \) literacy improvement while the control group (B) did not make statistically significant progress.

On average, students in the experimental group learned six new words per day. Other improvements were noted as follows for each child in Group A: (1) 35-45 books read; (2) 42-48 sight words learned; (3) increase in fluency; (4) increase in reading comprehension (5) increase in reading level; (6) increase in mastery of phonics and phonemic awareness for decoding.

According to Table 1, all students in the experimental group made at least 1-2 grade level improvements in reading, with over 50% reaching grade level reading equivalency. Originally, all students selected were 1-3 grade levels behind in reading. The data in Table 1 show evidence of the intervention being effective with all students \( n = 8 \) making at least a 2-16 reading level increase. The intervention was effective and statistically significant at the \( p < .05 \) level. Table 2 represents the results for students in the control group.
### Table 1

**DRA Results for Experimental Group**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
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<th>Pre-test</th>
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*Note. DRA= Developmental Reading Assessment. The reading levels per grade are defined: 1st Grade Reading Level-4-16 DRA; 2nd Grade Reading Level-18-28 DRA; 3rd Grade Reading Level-30-38 DRA; 4th Grade Reading Level-40 DRA.*

### Table 2

**DRA Results for Control Group**

<table>
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<th>Participant</th>
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<td>8</td>
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<td>28</td>
<td>38*</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

*Note. DRA= Developmental Reading Assessment. The reading levels per grade are defined: 1st Grade Reading Level-4-16 DRA; 2nd Grade Reading Level-18-28 DRA; 3rd Grade Reading Level-30-38 DRA; 4th Grade Reading Level-40 DRA. *indicates at least one grade level increase in reading.*
Students represented in Table 2 (control group) did not make significant growth in reading. Three out of the four students in the third grade control group (n=8) stayed on a first grade reading level. Only one student moved from a second grade level to a beginning third grade level. The fourth grade students in the control group all moved up by at least one grade level.

The mean of both experimental groups was examined using the pre-DRA results. Four students were third graders, and four students were fourth graders. The mean for the pre-test for the first experimental group was 22.00 (SD = 6.92) and for the second experimental group was 15.50 (SD = 5.97).

Responses to the parent questionnaire did not indicate statistically significant differences between literacy emphasis in the homes of students in Groups A or Group B. Generally, minimal parent involvement in literacy was noted.

**Extension of the Interventions**

Interventions were provided to students who attended an urban, economically disadvantaged school district in Texas. This study indicated educators can essentially do more with less, and in a system that is constantly facing budget cuts, doing more with less is becoming more appealing. Reaching as many students within the time constraints of a school day is essential to failing schools and schools with high concentrations of low socio-economic students.

As a result of its effectiveness, the study was expanded and replicated with grades pre-kindergarten, kindergarten, first, second, and fifth grade and the results were just as successful as for the third and fourth grade students. The researcher trained all teachers how to effectively provide interventions using the framework and met with teachers on a weekly basis during their professional learning communities to discuss the progress of the interventions throughout the weeks, strategies being used, level of fidelity, and assessments.

The interventions continued throughout the entire school year in order to assist students who were reading below grade level. This campus had over 450 students, and the overall goal for this campus was
to have all students reading at and/or above reading level by the end of the school year. At the middle of the school year, 80% of the students met the goal set forth in the intervention plan.

**Implications and Recommendations**

Results indicate that interventions implemented with fidelity across an elementary campus can increase the literacy success rate of elementary students while building momentum for the entire school. It is recommended that school leaders explore interventions that are based on credible research like the plan developed by Fountas and Pinnell and implemented by a school leader who can train teachers on the campus to implement the interventions. Since research suggests that parent involvement can increase academic achievement of students, it is recommended that literacy interventions be paired with parent involvement to help students reach even greater achievement levels. When parents are involved, important adults may encourage the continuation of literacy learning, so that students continue the path toward literacy achievement. Further research using this particular intervention in different settings is recommended since the number of participants in this study was small and focused on African American males in a low-income school.
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Section 2: Chapter 10

Building Momentum: The Importance of Multicultural Literature in the Classroom

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Abstract

It is often said that reading is fundamental. Reading is part of every educational subject. Research has found that when students have a strong literacy and reading background, it enhances their overall achievement (Cunningham, 2005; Howard, 2010). However, the literature available in the classroom often does not match the diversity of students in the classroom, creating a disconnect between the classroom and student. This chapter examines literature regarding reading engagement of children from diverse backgrounds.

The work of this manuscript resulted from the 2013 TALE Conference session called Children’s Literature: The Key to Academic Classroom Success. The session discussed the importance of engaging students’ interests, assisting in making connections across content area, and developing problem solving and divergent thinking skills. Yet a review of National Assessment of Educational Progress shows that students of color are not achieving academic success at the proficient levels. Including multicultural children’s literature would support academic success by assisting the children in making connections with the characters in the literature. It would also support students of other cultures by allowing them to see different points and inspire divergent thinking. This is why multicultural literature is often called a mirror and window. Using multicultural literature in the classroom is one way to build momentum in a student’s academic success.

The student population in the United States will continue to grow more diverse in the next two decades in terms of race, ethnicity, and language (Hernandez, Denton, & Macartney, 2008; U.S. Department of Education, 2006). By 2022, over 50% of students in K-12 will be of a race or ethnic group other than White, and currently, several states are already in this category, including Texas, California, New York, and Hawaii (Kyles & Olafson, 2008). This diversity has caused some researchers to question if a Eurocentric curriculum taught by a majority of European American teachers is appropriate for a
diverse student population (Herrera, 2010). The cultural mismatch or cultural discontinuity that often occurs in schools has prompted some educators to advocate for the usage of culturally responsive pedagogy and multicultural education in school systems (Banks & McGee Banks, 2009; Sleeter & Grant, 2007). This chapter presents a review of the research regarding the use of multicultural literature in the classroom.

**Introduction**

It is often said that reading is fundamental. Reading is part of every educational subject and has been called the “most important subject area for academic success” (Howard, 2010, p. 15). Yet a review of the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) scores for 2013 show that only 17% of African American students, 20% of Hispanic students, and 21% of American Indian/Alaska Native students scored proficient or above. In comparison 46% of White students and 52% of Asian/Pacific Islander students scored proficient or above (National Center for Education Statistics, 2013) on the NAEP. This chapter examines how multicultural literature can increase students’ reading engagement, thereby increasing students’ reading achievement.

Social constructivism, according to Au (2011), is “a powerful and generative framework for thinking about the literacy achievement gap” (p. 27). Using this perspective, Au offered five explanations for the literacy achievement gap evidenced by the research described above: linguistic differences, cultural differences, discrimination, inferior education, and rationales for schooling. Au (2011) proposed several methods for closing the literacy achievement gap. Specifically, she posited that if teachers begin using the works of authors of diverse backgrounds, using materials that present diverse cultures in an authentic manner, and becoming culturally responsive in their management of classrooms and interactions with students, they will assist in the academic achievement of students from diverse backgrounds. This chapter provides insight into the need for increased multicultural literature in the classroom, including its impact on reading engagement and comprehension.
Reading Engagement and Comprehension

Guthrie (2004) examined NAEP and PISA data and suggested that engaged reading can prevail over the reading achievement gap in spite of gender, parental education, and income. There are three components of engagement in reading in the PISA: diversity of reading, frequency of leisure reading, and attitude toward reading (Brozo, Shiel, & Topping, 2007). After examining the PISA data for 15-year-olds in 27 countries, the conclusion was drawn that “the level of a student’s reading engagement is a better predictor of literacy performance than his or her socioeconomic background, indicating that cultivating a student’s interest in reading can help overcome home disadvantage” (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, 2004, p. 8). This conclusion was also evidenced in the PISA 2009 results (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, 2010).

Research has shown there is a decline in children’s reading for pleasure between the ages of 8 and 11 (McKenna, Kear, & Ellsworth, 1995; Scholastic, 2008). A Scholastic (2008) survey found children between the ages of 9 to 11 were three times as likely to be identified as low-frequency readers as children between the ages of 5 to 8. Thirty-four percent of children between the ages 9 and 11 said one of the top reasons they did not read for pleasure was because they were unable to find books they liked. This may be because this is the period when children are transitioning from picture books and easy readers to chapter books (Barkley, 2009).

Strauss (2011) found that level of agreement (i.e., agree or strongly agree) for the statement that reading was a favorite activity was similar for Whites (33%), African Americans (34%), and Hispanics (27%), and Asians (44%). However, for White and Asian students who strongly disagreed with the statement, they scored 77% and 76%, respectively, at or below the basic reading level. African Americans, Hispanics, and Native Americans who disagreed with the statement scored 93%, 91%, and 89%, respectively, at the basic or below basic reading level (Strauss, 2011). Therefore, children of color who dislike reading score at the basic or below basic reading level.
As they progress through elementary school, children tend to become less motivated to read and often develop negative reading attitudes and beliefs which impact their future reading achievement (McKenna, et al., 1995; Wigfield, 1997). Students who have reading problems in the fourth grade tend to continue to have reading issues in future grades (Allington, 2002). The Casey Foundation (2011) found students who had not reached a proficient reading level at third grade were four times as likely to have left high school than students who were proficient readers in third grade. They also found students who were not basic readers in third grade were six times less likely to graduate from high school than proficient readers.

Reading comprehension, which is one of the focuses of the reading achievement tests, has been substantially correlated to reading motivation in later elementary grades (Guthrie et al., 2007). Guthrie and Wigfield (2000) developed an engagement model of reading comprehension development. One premise of this model is that reading comprehension is the result of a time spent engaging in reading. In Guthrie et al. (2007), engaged reading is described as “motivated, strategic, knowledge driven, and socially interactive” (p. 283). Engaged reading is influenced by the types of experiences students have in the classroom (Guthrie & Cox, 2001). Based on previous research (Baker and Wigfield, 1999; Guthrie & Humenick, 2004; Wigfield & Guthrie, 1997), children’s reading motivation in later elementary grades was based on several factors: curiosity or interest, preference for challenge, involvement, self-efficacy, competition, recognition, grades, social interaction, and work avoidance (Guthrie et al., 2007). A student’s interest in reading has been shown to correlate with (a) deep processing of individual texts (Schiefele, 1999); (b) elementary students’ reading grades (Alexander & Murphy, 1998); and (c) elementary students’ ability to recall passages (Renninger, 1992).

Guthrie et al. (2007) examined reading motivation and comprehension using pre- and post-interview data, teacher ratings, motivation self-reports, and reading comprehension scores of four fourth-grade students. They found that highly interested students had a positive attitude toward certain authors and books and had favorite topics, while the least interested readers tended not to have a favorite book.
and did not enjoy any authors. They also did not list reading as a preferred activity. Those students who expressed a high interest in reading tended to like being able to select what they read, while children who showed less interest in reading did not believe selecting what they read was important. Reading motivation was found to increase reading comprehension as measured by changes in comprehension on the standardized test. However, reading comprehension did not influence motivational growth.

Straus (2011) examined the motivation to read, application of reading strategies, activation and use of readers’ knowledge, and social interaction around texts using the 2007 NAEP scores of eighth-graders. Straus (2011) suggested not only that reading achievement could be predicted by engaged reading but that classroom instruction influenced reading engagement. Motivation to read was found to be the strongest predictor of reading achievement, though all four constructs were significant predictors for all ethnic groups and genders.

Using the Guthrie and Wigfield model (2000), Padak and Potenza-Radis (2010) suggested that there are three keys for motivating struggling readers. The first is purposeful, authentic reading programs that consist of texts that are connected to students’ interests, lives, and the real world. These types of texts assist students in becoming engaged readers. Authentic texts have natural language patterns that assist struggling readers in using their oral language competence. The other two keys are having time for independent reading and having an authentic and purposeful instructional routine. With motivation impacting student achievement, teachers must consider ways to improve the motivation of all students, including students from diverse cultural and economic backgrounds. As stated previously, CLEED students are more likely to score in the basic or below basic in their reading levels. Increasing the amount of multicultural literature would allow these students to see themselves in the story and bridge the home and school gaps, as well as increasing their reading motivation, reading engagement, and reading achievement, therefore, building momentum for the overall reading success of CLEED students.

The introduction or inclusion of culturally relevant texts has also been shown to assist in improving the motivation to read of culturally, linguistically, ethnically, and economically diverse
CLEED) students (Cleary, 2008; Guthrie, Wigfield, & Perencevich, 2004). Cleary (2008) conducted a study of Native American students and found that they were more likely to read when the reading materials included representations of their culture. When Native American students were asked how teachers could improve instruction, they answered that teachers should include more stories that related to their lives and were about their culture and their people. Gangi (2008) argued that children need books reflective of their culture in order to start the process of becoming proficient readers. Children’s multicultural literature could increase students’ engagement in reading by allowing them to make self-connections to the text. This process may also impact the students’ ability to perform well on standardized tests.

Exposure to culturally and linguistically relevant reading material impacts many aspects of reading. McCollin and O’Shea (2005) found that multicultural literature increased the reading comprehension and fluency and decreased phonological awareness gaps of culturally and linguistically diverse students. They suggested that relevant reading materials assist in supporting the students’ reading acquisition skills and motivation to read.

**Lack of Diversity in Children’s Literature**

Teachers need to examine the diversity of their classroom library. The foundational study that examined the lack of diversity in children’s publications was completed by Nancy Larrick (1965). Larrick examined over 5,000 books published between 1962 and 1964. She found only 6.6% of the books published during that time period included an African American character and less than 1% had a contemporary African American character. Larrick discussed the negative impact this absence of African American characters could have on African American children. The lack of African American characters could also impact society because the majority of images in children’s literature were White children. Some believe this study was the beginning of the multicultural publishing movement (Hughes-Hassell & Cox, 2010).
Multicultural literature may remain limited in availability (Horning, Febry, Lindgren, & Schliesman, 2011). In 2009, only 15% of all children’s literature published was considered multicultural (Children’s Cooperative Book Center, 2010). A review of the National Endowment for the Humanities’ summer reading list found that less than 5% of the recommended books were multicultural (Gangi, 2005). McNair (2008) reviewed Scholastic’s Seesaw and Firefly book order forms for 6 months and discovered that of the 1,200 books listed, only two books were written by Hispanic Americans and one book was written by an Asian American. There were not any books written by a Native American. African American authors were listed more frequently but they tended to be featured during Black History Month.

The lack of multicultural representation of literature in the classroom begins at an early age. Pentimonti, Zucker, and Justice (2011) examined the read-alouds of 13 preschool teachers during an academic school year. The teachers read 426 books, but only 10.6% of the children’s literature was identified as multicultural. This discrepancy continues as students grow older. Agosto, Hughes-Hassell, and Glimore-Clough (2003) found one-sixth of the sample of books for middle-grade readers had people of color as the main or major secondary characters.

Hughes-Hassell and Cox (2010) examined children’s board books published between the years of 2003 and 2008 and evaluated them for the representation of people of color using critical race theory and a typology developed by Rudine Sims Bishop. They found that of the 218 books reviewed, 89.9% contained White characters and 36.6% contained characters of color. In addition, 59.6% of the books contained only White people, while 5.5% of books contained only people of color. Finally, 22.9% showed multiple racial and ethnic groups, and 9.6% of the books examined were bilingual or Spanish.

Several studies have examined books for transitional readers who are moving from early readers to independent, self-regulating readers (Szymusiak, Sibberson, & Koch, 2008). Second- through fifth-grade students (transitional readers) tend to decrease their frequency of reading and tend to develop a negative attitude toward reading as a pastime and as a school-related activity (Lempke, 2008; McKenna et al., 1995; Scholastic, 2008). In an examination of transitional books, Barkley (2009) found 81%
contained White main or major secondary characters, 16% contained African American characters, 1% contained Hispanic characters, 0% contained American Indian/Alaska Native characters, 5% contained Asian/Pacific Islander characters, 14% contained characters classified as other, and 3% were unidentifiable. There were 106 books containing main characters from two races/categories and 11 books that had main characters from three different races. Hughes-Hassell, Barkley, and Koehler (2009) examined transitional books on the Fountas and Pinnell Leveled Book List database (http://www.fountasandpinnelllevelledbooks.com) and found that approximately 16% included literature about African American children.

The lack of representation of people of color impacts students. Students are more likely to read and value the importance of reading when they are able to see characters that are like them and with whom they are able to connect (Heflin & Barksdale-Ladd, 2001). When students were able to identify with the characters in the text and their experiences, the students’ level of reading enjoyment increased (Cianciolo, 1989; Jose & Brewer, 1984). Eight- to 11-year-olds often read to gain assistance in answering life’s basic questions, including who they are and why they are the way they are, as well as questions about the world. The text and illustrations help students develop a sense of identity that stays with them (Cianciolo, 1989). However, multicultural literature not only assists CLEED students but also allows all students to move beyond stereotypes (Rochman, 1993).

Conclusions and Recommendations

According to the review of literature students need to be engaged readers. Reading is fundamental to almost every academic area. The more students read the more likely they are to succeed academically. For CLEED students reading can open the doors to success in all areas of their lives. However, the lack of diversity in books creates a space where students may not be able to see themselves in the literature available in the classroom. Therefore, they do not become engage readers because they do have anything they are motivated to read.
America has not reached the goal of all children performing on grade level in reading, especially students who are of color or who come from low-income families (The Education Trust, 2008). This is a major problem as the student population continues to become more diverse. The classroom literature needs to reflect the diversity of the student population. However, research has shown that the majority of the literature available is Eurocentric (Hughes-Hassell and Cox (2010); Horning, Febry, Lindgren, & Schliesman, 2011; Pentimonti, Zucker, & Justice).

The lack of characters of color lessens the teachers’ ability to use literature to bridge the cultures of students’ home and school as culturally responsive pedagogy suggests. Cummins (2007), in discussing the issues with Reading First and No Child Left Behind, stated that culturally relevant teaching (Ladson-Billings, 2004) should “emphasize that cultural validation promote engagement with instruction and is particularly important for student whose culture is devalued in the wider society” (p. 560).

Research has found that when students have a strong literacy and reading background, it enhances their overall achievement (Cunningham, 2005). The lack of characters of color also impacts the literacy engagement of children of color. Literacy engagement as evidenced by reading motivation increases reading comprehension. Guthrie (2004) examined NAEP and PISA and suggested that students that are engaged readers can prevail over reading achievement factors (i.e., gender, parental education, and income). After examining PISA data of 15-year-olds in 27 countries, the conclusion was drawn that “the level of a student’s reading engagement is a better predictor of literacy performance than his or her socioeconomic background, indicating that cultivating a student’s interest in reading can help overcome home disadvantage” (OECD, 2004, p. 8). The same results were duplicated in PISA 2009 results (OECD, 2010). The Matthew Effect becomes evident because those who are engaged in reading increase their vocabulary and their understanding of academic writing, and therefore increase their comprehension skills; while those who do not engage in reading have the same level of skill or their skills become weaker (Stanovich, 1986).
One way to reverse this Matthew Effect is for administrators, teachers, and literacy specialist must analyze the literature available in their curriculum for diversity. The literature available should reflect the diverse world in which we live. Research has shown that CLEED students need to be able to see themselves represented in the literature that they read. When they are able to see themselves in the text and use their prior knowledge, their reading engagement and skills increase, which leads to increased reading achievement (Cianciolo, 1989; Jose & Brewer, 1984).

In addition, it is recommended teachers need to measure student engagement and comprehension with children’s multicultural literature. Student’s engagement with multicultural literature can be measured by how well they focus on the text and avoid distractions, along with the attention given the literature and the dialogue that occurs (Guthrie & Wigfield, 2000). Reading engagement occurs when students are able to see themselves in the literature they are reading, and reading engagement leads to reading comprehension. When students are engaged readers, they score higher on reading achievement tests. If teachers know what multicultural children’s literature their students find engaging, they can increase their students’ reading comprehension and reading achievement scores.

Finally, it is recommended that administrators provide professional development for teachers that keeps them updated on the latest multicultural children’s literature and trains them on how to use multicultural children’s literature in the classroom. Research has found that when teachers use multicultural children’s literature, they tend to avoid controversial topics (Gonzalez, 2008). Including multicultural literature in the classroom can increase the engagement and comprehension of CLEED students, moving students to proficient and advanced levels on the NAEP and building momentum for their overall success in the academic arena.
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Literacy “App”lications: Preservice Teachers’ Explorations of the Role of Technology in Literacy Instruction

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Abstract

One noticeable commonality among sessions at the 2013 TALE Literacy Summit was the emphasis on technology – from using e-readers as part of guided reading instruction to iPad apps to support students’ retelling of stories to the use of a variety of apps and mobile technology as part of literacy instruction. The emphasis on technology encouraged us to rethink the ways in which we prepare our preservice teacher candidates to effectively use apps, e-readers, and other technology in their future classrooms.

Particular sessions from the TALE Literacy Summit that inspired our exploration are as follows: Guided Reading for the 21st Century Learner, presented by Deanna Long; I-Pad Apps That You Can Use in Your Classroom With Your Students for Centers or Other Educational Purposes (K-5th), presented by Christy Drekaj; “App” Happy: Integrating Apps and Mobile Technology Into Literacy Education, presented by Amy Andersen; Roadrunner Press: Our Digital Publishing Journey, presented by Mary Higdon and Laura Lee McQueeny; and, E-Readers: Junior High Student Usage Patterns and Comprehension of Fiction Texts, presented by Diana Sarao.

As faculty in an elementary education teacher preparation program, we not only teach courses specific to literacy but also supervise students in field-based placements within which they teach small-group (Field Experience I) and whole-group lessons (Field Experience II). As part of the Field Experience II course, preservice teacher candidates are expected to use technology in their lessons. Such technology use generally involves projecting a data sheet via a document camera during a mini-lesson or showing completed student work via the document camera during seminar. The use of PowerPoints to pre-teach vocabulary is also common. In Field Experience I, preservice teachers are more limited in their...
access to technology during small-group guided reading instruction, which often takes place outside of the classroom. After attending the 2013 TALE Literacy Summit, we reflected on ways to better prepare our teacher candidates to use technology in their own teaching.

While technology use is on the rise with today’s K-12 students (Kaiser Family Foundation, 2010), preservice teachers may struggle to implement technology in the classroom (Bozdoğan & Özen, 2014; Çelik & Yeşilyurt, 2013; Ertem & Ottenbreit-Leftwich, 2010; Goktas & Demirel, 2012). By promoting a “digital learning culture” (Søby, 2008, p. 138) within the classroom, preservice and in-service teachers can support students’ learning through the use of technology. One session at the TALE conference focused on the use of e-readers during guided reading instruction, and this led us to consider the ways in which our preservice teachers provide small group instruction and to reflect upon the ways we can use technology as part of that instruction. While Field Experience II undergraduate students do not specifically teach guided reading as part of their field-based experience, they do confer with students and engage in independent and partner reading during the mentor-led reading workshop time. In past semesters, teacher candidates visited the campus library to check out the same titles K-5 students in their placement were reading. While many preservice teacher candidates own e-reader devices, the use of technology while in their K-5 classroom has been prohibited. After attending the 2013 TALE Literacy Summit, I (Carolyn) revised the Field Experience II electronic device policy to allow teacher candidates to read on their e-readers as part of reading workshop. This semester, several K-5 students have been bringing personal devices (e.g., Kindle, Nook, etc.) to school to use for reading workshop; now my undergraduate students also have that option. Teacher candidates are able to partner more easily with students for paired reading by accessing titles on their own e-readers, too.

Several TALE sessions focused on the use of apps in literacy education. I (Robin) have been able to bring apps into one of the content courses that students take concurrently with Field Experience I. This course focuses on oral language development, and I have had great success using iPad minis in my
classroom to have preservice teacher candidates not only explore educational apps but also evaluate those apps in terms of their content base. Each app was chosen based on reviews from other educators and/or its label in an internet search as an app that would increase oral language development through vocabulary, story retell, and listening and speaking activities. During multiple class periods the preservice teacher candidates interacted with the apps and evaluated them based on the knowledge of oral language development and strong pedagogical practices they had previously studied. The specific categories for evaluation that I chose were: the connections to the curriculum (which in my course was oral language development), vocabulary, and retelling of stories; the format of the app whether problem based or rote practice; differentiation for meeting students’ needs and the ability to change levels; feedback of results and student performance both for the student and the teacher to view; and user friendliness for understanding instructions and independent use by students. The teacher candidates also evaluated each according to the levels of Bloom’s taxonomy addressed by its content.

One app evaluated was Describe it to Me (http://smartyearsapps.com/service/describe/) developed by Smarty Ears. The content addressed in this app was vocabulary development. The students agreed that this app was fun, visually appealing, and simple for a child to use independently. One student said, “It gives the students an opportunity to apply prior knowledge to real life situations in game form.” Another recommended the app because it addressed multiple Bloom’s levels. Teacher candidates thought the app Sock Puppets (http://my.smithmicro.com/mobile/sockpuppets/index.html) by Mike Clifton and Associates had content most closely related to the course because it addresses story retell through vocabulary, the recording of sound, and artistic expression. One student said, “This app is perfect for elementary age children learning to retell. They would have a blast with retelling their stories and then seeing the socks speak in funny voices using the words they wrote.” They also noted that stories could be saved and viewed later for assessment by the teacher. As a part of their field experience, the preservice teacher candidates used the highest rated apps during small group instruction and assessment time with their k-2
students. For teachers interested in utilizing apps in their classroom, an internet search for the phrase “free educational apps” will generate a starting list with user reviews.

By evaluating educational apps before using them during their field experiences, teacher candidates realized that not all apps perform as advertised. They had to critically analyze the content of the app and make decisions on whether the app would help reinforce the content they wanted taught in an engaging way. The teacher candidates also learned that there are free and low-cost apps that can be valuable in helping students learn. My students were awakened to the fact that just because something is labeled an “educational” app or is advertised to teach a specific skill, that is not always the case; teachers must evaluate carefully the benefits of using this technology in their classrooms and never assume.

Through the use of technology in our content courses and through supporting the use of technology for authentic purposes in our students’ field experiences, we have been able to practice what we preach -- rather than telling our preservice teacher candidates that technology can be used for literacy instruction, we are showing our students how to do so and are giving them hands-on opportunities to use technology. As we prepare our preservice teachers to teach K-12 students in the 21st century, we must model ways to incorporate technology into instruction. Previous research (e.g., Smith & Greene, 2013) has demonstrated the importance of providing opportunities for preservice teachers to use technology as part of a field-based practicum experience, and we were motivated to encourage such technology use with our own students. The 2013 TALE Literacy Summit provided us with a jump-start for considering ways to promote authentic, effective uses of technology as part of literacy instruction.


http://my.smithmicro.com/mobile/sockpuppets/index.html

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