English 7701 Research Projects
Summer 2004

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Variations in Interactive Writing:
A study in four bilingual Special Education Settings.

Method
Participants and procedures
- 4 volunteered teachers in the Bilingual Personnel Preparation Program in Special Education at San Diego State University.
- Student population was of low socioeconomic status, demonstrated by 80% or greater of each school population qualifying for free lunches.
- All students in this study had specific Individualized Education Plan goals in written expression.
- Students ranged from early production to intermediate fluency in English language learning with much greater proficiency in Spanish.
- In three of the classroom cases, all the students spoke Spanish much more fluently than English, and students ranged from second to fifth grade. In the sixth-grade classroom case, students who spoke Spanish, Tagalog, Vietnamese, Cambodian, or Lao also were more fluent in their native languages than in English.
- Triangulation the data from the descriptions of the instruction, weekly logs; samples of students work and a prompt applied before 10 weeks of instruction and another a year later.

Settings
- 4 different Bilingual special education Settings
- 4 cases:
  - Self contained setting for bilingual students in grades 3, 4 and 5.
  - Resource program for primarily bilingual students in grades 3, 4, 5, and 6.
  - Resource program for both Spanish and English speakers in grades 2 and 3.
  - Resource program for English as a second language (ESL) learners in grade 6.

Measures for Student Data
- 2 prompts: a prompt applied before 10 weeks of instruction and another a year later.
- The quality of composition, based on Story Quality Scale (A. Graves & Montague, 1991)
  - 0-4 weak composition.
  - 4.1 to 8 Moderately good.
  - 8.1 to 12 good.
  - 12.1 to 15 is excellent

The cases
Case 1. Mr. Ramirez: Interactive Journals
- Minimal differences between average of number words written by six students.
- Initial prompt: 35.2 to 10 wk prompt: 41.6, these results don’t differ from the year later.
- His work did not appear markedly different.
- He felt forced to switch to English, because they were writing in English in the general education settings.
Case 2. Mrs. Roberts: OLE
- Did not appear to differ substantially in the initial prompt, but a year later they improved markedly.
- Initial prompt: 22.8 to 30.0. A year later 52.2.
- Ms Roberts reported satisfaction a year later with the OLE program.
- She noted the comprehensive nature of OLE and the rigorous daily requirements for reading and writing in various different approaches.

Case 3. Ms. Arquet: Writing-as-a-process
- The progress was maintained but students didn’t write substantially.
- Initial prompt students wrote a higher quality stories than the year later.
- Initial Prompt: 23.0 to 37.08. A year later 42.0.
- There were single specific cases that show advances (1 student from 30 to 78 words).
- Teacher felt improvements but they were affected due to some changes in the schedule at the school.

Case 4. Mrs. Jones: Combination of approaches
- The students wrote more words in the initial prompt than the 10 week later prompt, and than a year later.
- Initial prompt: 65.6 to 54.2. A year later 56.5.
- The progress was not substantive. The fact they are in 6th grade should be considered.
- At the end of the first year Mrs. Jones said that many of her students were unmotivated and hated to write.
- She wished they write more in their classes.

Discussion
- After 10 weeks, students in each of the four settings demonstrated improvements in writing quality.
- After a year OLE program (Case 2) results were the only ones that exceeded the progress noted.
- In the cases 2 and 4 both expresses concerns about the Spanish and English issues, and whether students were ready to transition to English.
- This issue will be more critical for students with LD.

Limitations of study
The study would have been a quantitative one if we could have trained teachers and require them to holdup specific teaching approaches, included more students, observed and collected date from the 10 week prompt to the follow up prompt, and randomly assigned students to each of the conditions.

Educational implications and Future research
- Replications with larger sample sizes would be critical in reaching any definitive conclusions.
- Much additional research is needed to study components of various practices to determine their strengths and weakness.
- Spanish writing practice is helpful to the students, but it is necessary to determine when and under what conditions transition to English is appropriate.
I read this research because I am interested in a research project based on Bilinguism, limitations and further study is what I would be interested in.

I liked this article because work with Hispanic students some cases and the different methods to increase the writing skill in the students. I didn’t like because they didn’t describe the teachers, personality, philosophy, etc. I think this is another variable very important to this study. I’ll need to look further in the bibliography to check they evaluate the writing process.

Bibliographical Information

This is the bibliographical texts I would be interesting in go further reading.

- Christenson, S., Thurlow, M., Ysseldyke, J., & McVicar, R. (1989). Written language instruction for students with mild handicaps: Is there enough quantity to ensure quality? Learning Disability Quarterly, 12, 219-229. *Writing instruction they have been accumulating it for the last 10 years.*
Engaging Reluctant Readers  
Samara Frank  
Kennesaw State University  

What happens to a reader between elementary and middle school? More importantly, how can we hook reluctant readers? Utilizing technology to engage reluctant readers, dramatic read-alouds, ownership in the reading process, and the inclusion of graphic novels in more school libraries are a few strategies for hooking those readers who can, but won’t.

One must not think of books in competition with technology; consider the relationship between reading and technology a partnership. Teachers must capitalize on the fact that many students now have computers in the home and the Internet has become part of everyday life. Now students can read e-books and access web sites with text. While not the traditional book, these forms of text develop literacy skills too. Lancy and Hayes (1988) state, “we believe that interactive fiction could offer students who are reluctant readers a new motivation and interest to use their reading ability for personal satisfaction” (p. 42). Many of the computer programs that fall under the genre of interactive fiction blend text and graphics which appeals to teens.

Read-alouds should not stop after elementary school. Not only do they improve students’ listening skills, but they can also be a deciding factor in hooking a reluctant reader. High school teacher, Vivian Axiotis (2000) describes her real-aloud of Annie Dillard’s autobiography, *An American Childhood*, “I try to read in the voice of the seven-year old telling the story. I speed up during the suspenseful parts” (p. 25). If the teacher sharing the read-aloud does not provide students with a dramatic reading, teachers will be less likely to hook their reluctant readers.

Children like to be given leadership roles and “special tasks”. When Susan Rosenzweig, a member of the ALA’s Quick Pick for Reluctant Young Adult Readers Committee, included urban middle school students in the selection process the results were impressive. The Quick
Pick Committee had their own criteria for selecting books, but when Rosenzweig (1996) surveyed the students, “They quickly developed a list of criteria that closely matched the four major criteria used by the committee: attractive cover art, catchy title, interesting blurb on the back of the book or flyleaf, and something has to happen right away” (p. 74). The students, who were labeled reluctant readers, were provided with books to read and recommend. Their recommendations were the basis for the ALA Quick Picks for Reluctant Young Adult Readers. When given a “special task” even reluctant readers shine. One can apply this to his or her own classroom by creating a class list or maintaining a book of student written book reviews. Opportunities like this provide students with ownership and an opportunity to take on leadership roles.

In today’s visual and technology-based society we must find new ways to appeal to reluctant readers. One emerging form of literature is the graphic novel. Graphic novels can be considered a close relative of comic books. In their study of a school library that expanded its collection to include comics, Dorrell and Carroll (1981) found a 30 percent increase in circulation after comics were integrated. Graphic novels often have the same amount of text as a regular novel; however, they mix visuals with the text. Michael Gorman (2002) states, “Because they appeal to teens’ predilection to a more visual medium, these novels transcend apathy and the lack of coolness sometimes associated with reading.” Many public and school libraries have not yet incorporated graphic novels into their collections; however, research has shown wherever graphic novels are available, they are being read.

We cannot stand by and blame a student’s lack of interest in reading on technology or the teachers that turn children off from reading somewhere between elementary and high school. Instead, we need to present reluctant readers with alternatives and do everything
in our power to hook them. As Grimes (1991) aptly stated, “helping reluctant readers find that all important breakthrough book is one of the reading teacher’s most important contributions” (p. 45). Through utilizing engaging read-alouds, interactive fiction and websites, graphic novels, and providing students with ownership in the reading process we can hook those who can, but won’t.
References


Summary of Research Findings

I’ve been teaching literature to eighth graders for five years. Over the years, I’ve learned that it isn’t easy to get students who are nonreaders to change their attitudes about reading. In this research, I have found several different methods that have been successfully implemented in the classrooms of other professionals. I realize that it probably isn’t feasible to use every one of these methods. However, I do believe that this research offered some insight into why students don’t want to read and into how to get them to change their minds. I plan to try a variety of these in the fall when school begins.

Students don’t want to read for a variety of reasons. First, most reading instruction over the actual steps of reading ends by fourth grade. Students are then expected to begin reading textbooks with technical language that is written at a level usually at least 2 grade levels above their abilities. This results in a gradual decline in comprehension of text and later results in student failure. The student continues to fail and to fall behind each grade level, as the reading becomes more and more difficult. Eventually, that child forms a very negative view of reading and may even quit.

There are, however some techniques that can help to engage these low motivated students. First, students need to receive some remedial assistance in basic reading skills. Teachers should first create a safe environment for students to explore their reading. This can be done by modeling the reading process. Make guesses about what you read to the students. Allow students to make notes while reading and allow them to talk about the text with their peers.
Finally, show students that it is fun to read by allowing them to see you reading. Then teachers may employ any of the following techniques: Read alouds, sports literature, music, graphic novels. Read alouds are just what they sound like. The teacher reads to the students. If you do this, be sure that your book is interesting enough to keep your and your student’s interest, it leads to discussions and further reading, and keep it to 10-15 minutes of reading. Centering units around sports themes and using unconventional texts such as magazines and newspapers can grab the students who are interested in this topic. The use of music in the classroom will hook the musically inclined. Music can set the tone for a story. It can also familiarize students with settings. Graphic novels are the latest trend in literature to gain interests of nonreaders. These are book length comic books that tell a story. Students are comfortable with these books due to the graphic format of picture and text due to their consistent use of Internet and computer games. Some critics oppose some of these liberal teaching techniques and argue that we need to continue teaching literary classics. However, we need to look at statistics and performance of our students. It is time to make a change in the way that literature instruction is being given. If we broaden our view of what can be seen as literary, we can gain the trust of our students to give reading a try.

References


Engaging Reluctant Readers

Reluctant as defined in the dictionary means to hesitate, be unwilling, or struggle against. Many teachers have these same words come to mind when dealing with reading in the school and class setting. But what makes some students reluctant readers? Only when we answer that question are we able to develop plans and implement strategies aimed at engaging reluctant readers.

Stringer and Mollineaux believe different psychological principals of adolescent development play a major role in influencing a person’s potential, ability, and desire to read (71). They state students failure to utilize metacognitive and self-monitoring skills is the foremost issue (72). These skills, if developed, have the potential to provide positive reinforcement, improve attitudes, and subsequently improve self-esteem and performance. Second, they believe reluctant readers are often too literal in their reading and interpretation (72). Jeff Wilhelm concluded that reluctant readers do not respond in reflective or connective ways to literature…they do not go beyond text. As a result, students become reluctant because they have no control over the situation because; they are not capable of doing what is asked of them (88-90). Finally, the school environment simply is not conducive to the needs of middle school children. Beth Azar states that while elementary schools focus on the process of reading and making it meaningful, the middle school environment focuses mainly on the end product of scores and grades (qtd. in Stringer & Mollineaux, 74).
Once it is understood “why” some students are reluctant readers, plans that focus on addressing these needs should be implemented. First, teachers need to know their students as readers. This includes not just previous assessment scores but also personal interests and backgrounds (Broaddus & Ivey, 7-8). Much insight can also be gained through interest inventories and student-teacher conferences. Students’ interest must then be the focus of reading selections. In a survey completed by Worthy, 40 students with average to above average reading ability ranked school reading negatively, but the same students each had a positive reading experience to share. These experiences all involved the students being able to read in an area of self-interest (Removing barriers 486). The potential for nurturing desire and motivation is present; teachers must take the time to learn about their students in order to tap into that interest level connection

The students’ interest, however, can only be nurtured if reading resources are available. Too often the selections available are the conventionally accepted titles; many frown upon resources such as popular magazines, comics, and adult books which are the most requested by adolescents (Worthy, A matter of interest 211). Worthy states in this article, “it is of paramount importance that students read, regardless of the perceived quality of the literature….interest must be the primary factor.” In a survey of over 1,700 sixth graders, results showed that good reading materials were the greatest factor in students’ motivation to read. (Ivey, Broaddus 361).

Once needs and interests have been determined as well as resources provided, educators should create an environment conducive to promoting active reading. Reading workshop and silent sustained reading provide such an environment. Through power of choice, response journals, and book talks offered through workshop settings and silent sustained reading, attitudes concerning reading can drastically change (Gutchewsky, 79-85). Attitudes change because
through practice students become stronger readers, which results in positive reinforcement, increased self-esteem, and ultimately less reluctance. On a survey given by Gutchewsky to over 100 students at the beginning of the year, only one student rated reading or the desire to read positively. After a year of utilizing reading workshop and SSR, another survey was given; only one student rated reading negatively (84).

Whether reluctance results from ability, motivation, interests, or available resources, improvement is possible when time is taken to address the needs of the students. Stringer and Mollineaux quoted Mariolina Salvatori as saying, “view difficulties as opportunities for growth and transformation in students and teachers” (71).

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Research Presentation on Literature Instruction On Gender Differences

Michelle Goodsite

To gain a clear understanding of where the ideas of gender in literature come from, a historical context must be given. The women’s movement is divided into three waves beginning in the 1800s through the 1960s to today. The early idea of feminism encapsulates only middle-class white women. Because so many identity categories came to surface regarding race, culture, sexual orientation and the poor, feminism shifted to feminisms to be inclusive of the above categories. Early scholarship thought if women were just simply added to the existing canon, the voices of women would be heard: it proved to not be enough. During the 1980s a resistance movement occurred where women argued for and supported the traditional roles of women. In the 1990s the focus was more on multiculturalism than feminism because of the influx of immigrants into this country (St. Pierre, 1999). Even with this historical background and successes in place, teachers still continue to struggle with gender problems in anthologies and literature instruction in the classroom.

Pace (1992) examines five commonly used US literature anthologies from major publishers. A list was compiled of texts appearing in three of the five anthologies and found, “Of the 98 writers represented in the textbook canon, 65 are white men, 16 are white women, and 10 are black men. There are only four black women, and the two Native Americans and single Chicano are male” (p.35). Only five fictional works were by women and the majority of minority and women authors were represented in the Modern Period as poets. Because many teachers do not get to the Modern Period, many of these writers are left out of instruction. In most of the writings in the anthology, women are represented as weak, passive and victims of men. Oppressed stereotypes exist in relation to people of color and different culture. Essays and
speeches in the text come from men while the writings of Martin Luther King, Jr. are left out. In concluding her research, Pace (1992) suspects that an anthology does not define the presentation of the subject but questions what kind of message we send students by presenting them with this type of text.

In thinking about how an anthology presents a mostly male view of US literature, I wanted to find successful lessons occurring in the classroom addressing the issue of gender in literature instruction. I was excited to find a multitude of promising lesson examples. To begin by questioning where student’s assumptions of gender begin is important. Do they get this from family, culture, media, literature and education? Using this as a starting point, Wallowitz (2004) uses simple texts such as fairytales, first, and then moves to more difficult high school texts to deconstruct gender. Barker (1989) approaches gender by including more female writers, critically examining how male authors treat women in their texts, and moving gender from the text into real life. He felt that for every male author a female author should be added, and if that meant dropping some male authors then it should be done. Barker (1989) uses writings from Charlotte Perkins Gilman, Kate Chopin and Sarah Orne Jewett to complement the literature study. Texts like Hawthorne’s “The Minister’s Black Veil” and *The Scarlet Letter* are used to study the relationships between men and women and how authors treat the women in the text.

Barker (1989) uses media and questions coming out of the reading to have students connect the gender discussion to real life. This makes for interesting classroom conversation. And finally, Moore (1989) looks at pairing male and female authors to show comparison and contrast of writers. She uses the poetry of Emily Dickinson and Walt Whitman as a pair with a high level English class and then later uses Maya Angelou’s *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* and Richard Wright’s *Black Boy* with an average-to-low group of students.
While all of these lessons are exciting, I am more enthusiastic in thinking about my own teaching implications regarding gender instruction in literature. I hope to reexamine the existing secondary canon in the anthology and look to include more women and possibly juxtapose male and female writers. I want to also begin simplistically and move to more difficult texts through modeling to begin conversations of gender in the classroom.

References


Research Reflection

I came upon the concept of studying boys’ learning habits through the experiences my first year teaching. I never felt that I could reach the boys, despite trying to do the best I could in offering them options for choosing “boy” books. I missed a key component that arose multiple times in my research—including nonfiction in my repertoire. I didn’t even do a unit on nonfiction; survival mode at its worst! That said, I will use what I found to make my teaching more effective.

I guess the best place to start is with worst practice in male literacy. According to Jones (9), boys comprehend fiction far less than girls do, yet most of us (including myself) build our classrooms on so-called great literature. Thus, we are inherently beginning a gender-inequitable classroom from the beginning. One mother/Ph.D. student studying her own boys had them do a critical literacy assignment where they found that even magazine articles gave more action words to male characters than females. She found that the boys also shied away from “girl” boys in an apparent attempt to pronounce their heterosexuality (Young 6-9). Brozo and Shemelzer agree that male stereotypes promoted in literature are unrealistic and often negative (4), so it’s no wonder that young males see reading as a feminine activity. They in fact have a distorted view of its importance that teachers continue to perpetuate.

From the pessimistic view of male literacy, researchers have observed some truths that can guide the way to a more male-friendly reading classroom.
We know from the work of those like Michael Smith (qtd in Jones 9-10) that boys like nonfiction, but also can be tempted by hobby or sports books that are humorous if they have to. The bottom line is that they often are non-readers; over one-half self-label by the time they reach high-school. This causes a literacy gap that starts early in childhood and becomes more pronounced through adolescence and adulthood. In other words, by the time I teach them in eighth grade, the outlook is bleak, unless I do some creative baiting to get them hooked again.

That’s why I found this research so helpful. Other people care about the gender discrepancy like I do, but they have more ideas than this rookie teacher. I will only detail some of the tips I gathered. Dutro puts the need for a safe gender-boundary-breaking classroom at the forefront; through her research with fifth graders, boys who chose a “girl” book by default many times liked it and could relate (9). Thus, I should find ways to get various books into all my students’ hands. At the school level, the librarian or a teacher might organize a skateboarding demonstration where all participants receive a book on the subject in a giveaway bag. Booktalks that use PowerPoint to show the covers of books also interest boys who are visually stimulated (Jones 11). Investing in more periodicals as Jones also suggests (11) can allow boys to focus on what interests them—plot—instead of “boring” character development as well (Hood-Williams 89). Overall, it is a task worth taking on to reach boys before it’s too late. We don’t want them to end up part of the prison statistic perpetuated by Jones and Fiorelli (12), but a part of a literate and living global society.

Works Cited

Brozo, William G. and Ronald V. Schmelzer. “Wildmen, Warriors, and Lovers:


I was immediately drawn to the topic of teaching poetry because I am so bad at it. I am the English teacher who saves his poetry unit until the last two weeks of the school year, all the while praying that other units will take longer than expected so I can cut poetry to one week – if I get around to it at all. Thankfully, the journal articles offering many imaginative and effective ways to teach poetry are abundant. I have divided my research project into four sections: introducing poetry in the classroom, teaching poetry, encouraging written response to poetry, and encouraging original student poetry.

One interesting way to introduce students to poetry, while also stressing the importance of words and their sounds, is to have students choose three of their favorite words and then compose a poem using all three words. In “The Fire This Time: Renewing the Poetry Unit,” Fred Barton encourages teachers to implement this activity instead of using some of the more “stock” introductions to poetry, because it encourages students to compose their own poems immediately. In “Back-Door Teaching of Poetry,” Leona Welch also espouses an introductory technique which encourages students to compose poetry from day one. Welch also states that teachers should demonstrate poetic techniques through student poetry instead of initially demonstrating the techniques in poems that are difficult to understand. Another way to introduce poetry, according to Sean Murray and P.L. Thomas, is to have students bring the lyrics of their
favorite songs to class and facilitate a class discussion regarding the songs’ meanings and whether or not a song is “poetry.”

Rachel Basden teaches poetry to her students at South River Middle School by first reading examples of easily understood poetry aloud before moving on to more complex poetry which she has her students paraphrase, either line by line or stanza by stanza as a class. She then encourages students to paraphrase on their own. P.L. Thomas teaches poetry through a five step process: Students will (1) listen to a song that is closely related to a poem, (2) address literary techniques in the song, (3) read the poem and analyze it in groups, (4) write individual analytical essays on poems, and (5) compose poetry that mimics a famous poem. Thomas also incorporates literary criticism into his teaching of poetry to show students how poems can be viewed in vastly different ways. Dallas Crow teaches poetry by having students quickly compose poems from a series of words she reads to the class. Edward Federenko uses art to encourage students to draw comparisons between poetry and visual images.

Students’ written responses are important to the effective teaching of poetry. Tanin Longway encourages her students to respond to poetry through journals using the categories Literary Critic, Personal Response, and Comparative Critic. Kari Willis, a middle school teacher, has students write Poetry Opinion Papers that agree or disagree with a certain aspect or aspects of a poem. To prepare her students for the AP exam, Eleanor Haugh assigns in-class essays where students must analyze theme, style, poetic technique, and tone in poems that they have seen for the first time. All of these methods focus on reader-response as the most important aspect of interacting with poetry.

Both Jack Trammel of Randolph-Macon College and Haugh encourage students to describe people, animals, dreams, nature scenes, etc. in Observation Journals and to then use
these descriptions as inspiration for original poetry. Keith Polette has students compose pastiche poems blending the works of great poets with Mother Goose rhymes. When teaching Imagist poetry, Jacqueline Bach has students write poems describing exact images. Students then pass their poems to the front of the class. She passes the poems back to the students – making sure that no student gets his or her poem. The students must then draw the image. Rachel Basden also has her students freewrite about different pictures, phrases, and types of music. Students then bracket their favorite images and use related images to compose a poem.

Works Cited


My research on creating life long readers was interesting. Although I only found a few articles with the words life long readers in it, I did find various other articles that provided information to teach reading and encourage students to read. This information led me to believe that if teachers taught reading in interesting and exciting ways that more students would be inclined to read and thus life long readers will be produced.

The experiments that have been conducted over the past ten years have proved that teaching reading has yet to be perfected. All articles stated that the old way to teach reading was ineffective and needed to change; however, there weren’t many researchers that provided ways to assess students’ reading comprehension other than testing and questioning. I also found various strategies implemented into classrooms which are showing to be more effective in enhancing student’s reading interests.

Many of the strategies I found were very similar if not the exact same. The most mentioned strategy was making connections with the text and teaching students how to read or chose a book they can connect with. Another strategy that has been proven through studies were actual reading strategies, things to do before or during reading so the students can see the meaning behind the text. Atwell, Gouduis, and Harvey all discussed the processes of questioning, reflecting, inferencing, synthesizing information, and visualizing, in addition to connecting with text. These tested strategies worked to make students’ comprehension levels significantly evolve.
Marlyin Z. Joyce’s study proved that rewarding students was a way to encourage lifelong readers. She studied various reading programs and reading approaches utilized in the classroom and found that intrinsic motivation was the most reward and long lasting for life long readers. Her study showed that using reading programs and introducing clubs and contests were ways to get students motivated initially, which intern made student self motivated to continue to read.

Lastly, Nancy Atwell made many good points to why teaching reading should be revised and offered ways to start the revision process. She stated many good ideas; however the ones that stand out the most are allowing students to have a say in the literature that they read and giving time for social interaction and text interpretation encourages life long readers.

In conclusion, the studies that have been researched have presented their findings in strategy form more than data analysis. I found the research to be fulfilling, yet incomplete in that there is still no definite effective way to create life long readers. Yes, the information is there and is enhancing students reading interests all over the country, but nothing has been set in stone. Reading is an evolving process that cannot be fully developed; however the research is showing that teachers are heading in the right direction with their efforts to create life long readers.


The Circuit that Lights the Bulb: Thematic Units

When humans actually learn a piece of information, the brain literally grows. The neuron receives an impulse which it sends through the dendrites which creates synapses. When there is no connection to an experience, no more messages are sent. No more synapses are created (Parnell 24).

How do we learn? According to Dale Parnell, there are four components to brain-based learning: learning for acquisition of knowledge, learning for application, learning for assimilation, and learning for association (28). Each aspect relies upon the other.

Since there is not enough time to teach all the required knowledge, there certainly is not enough time to learn it all. Yet, According to futurist Alvin Toffler, knowledge is power. Those who can create, connect, and transfer knowledge will yield power (Toffler 174). Connecting different ideas to other texts, classes, situations, and self is the educators’ short cut. Thematic units solve this problem by connecting learning to the real world and to texts (Harvey 21), creating an individualized and customized unit, and living the “Third Wave” (Toffler 414).

Why is creating thematic units difficult? The state-mandated standards for each subject do not relate to the standards of other subjects or even within a subject. Policy makers in the United States think that because they have been a student they know how to teach. Just because my tonsils were taken out, doesn’t mean that I can perform the surgery on someone else. They decide what knowledge is important based on conversations at cocktail parties and golf courses.
Policy makers were taught in Henry Ford’s mass production model. A supervisor (teacher) told each assembly line worker (student) what to do, and that worker did the same thing all day long. At the end of the day, a car was made. School is the same way. Parents, educators, and politicians think that after attending classes that the students have produced knowledge even though no connection has been made to the students’ prior knowledge or to the other subject areas. The factory worker, who only knew how to put on a door, should not be tested on how to repair a car. He hasn’t been shown the connection between the door and the engine.

How do you construct a Thematic Unit? Trying to create a complete, all-encompassing unit is very hard especially during years of curriculum, standard, or textbook changes. Understanding students’ desires and needs is the place to start when deciding a theme. The most effective units are inquiry-based. “The teacher must design instruction that presents a puzzling event, question, or problem (Johannassen 38).” The student – not just the teacher – makes connections.

Creating thematic units without knowing the students and without the intent of increasing knowledge and test scores is a mistake according to Timothy Shananan. He is concerned that many educators take a bandwagon approach to teaching. If it’s new, it must be good. They see it as a “bulwark against traditional approaches (Shananan 12)”

Will my students score higher on the standardized tests? Will they know more? If they making connection to the knowledge, their brains will grow so they will know more. Parnell compares National Assessment of Educational Process (NAEP) scores of High Schools That Work (HSTW) students’ to College Prep students. HSTW students are a program that integrates academic and vocational learning. (Parnell 113). In reading the HSTW students scored 2 points higher; in math, 8 points higher; in science, 12 points higher. The HSTW students learned more because they were not as bored at school and their attendance increased (Parnell 45). Ed
Lawton studied 15,000 Maine eighth graders and the effects of learning by using interdisciplinary units. He found that students taught using interdisciplinary instruction scored 58 points higher on standardized testing (Ritter 2).
Works Cited


With all the abundant information that students receive in their education, it has become important for teachers to develop a curriculum where students can retain the information and most importantly, be able to apply it to their lives. Jim Burke defines curriculum as asking the question, “What are the ‘currents’- strands, themes, threads- that run through this course?” (167). Thematic teaching will help students absorb the information as they run the course, transfer this knowledge and weave it through the curriculum and make it meaningful to their lives and personal beliefs.

Thematic teaching is instruction based on themes, instead of around simple, subject areas. An appeal for thematic teaching grew out of national assessment results, showing that students did not know basic knowledge of information concerning America, nor were they able to support opinions in their writing with adequate examples and research (Shanahan et al. 718). Therefore, thematic teaching has become a popular method of teaching because it increases deeper understanding, demonstrates an interdisciplinary nature of learning, and increases student interest and time engaged (“Using the Net” par. 2). Teaching thematically, also helps teachers to use a variety of assessment and expand the resources they utilize. Most importantly, thematic teaching allows students to connect learning and ideas to their own lives and community, making learning more meaningful.
There are important steps to take in developing a thematic unit. First, you need an engaging theme related to student interests, experiences, and issues. Next, you need to establish essential questions and develop a one-sentence focus statement that summarizes the direction of the unit. A key component of good thematic teaching is implementing a variety of materials and resources such as, periodicals, maps, brochures, internet resources, films, and computer and CD-ROM resources. Annette Lamb writes, “Technology tools can assist students in accessing, organizing, analyzing, and communicating their approaches to essential questions” (par. 2). In addition, literature selections should cover a wide range of genres from fiction, non-fiction, poetry and drama. Finally, a variety of activities and a culminating project should help students collaborate and connect their discoveries (“Using the Net”). Thematic units should not be based on close-ended topics such as bears. Guiding themes should state a point of view; they should be dynamic and allow students to take a position (Shanahan et al. 718). For example, a teacher could establish a thematic unit on world, religious texts and title it “Circles of Faith.” Rodney White suggests, “A thematic approach to the study of religion helps students make a connection between the Eastern and Western world and their differences in major religions; more importantly, they see the commonalities among all people in their search for the meaning of life” (161). This multicultural, thematic unit promotes deeper understanding and multiple perspectives from students.

Curriculum, the units we design, and the essential questions we want our students to answer determine the outcome of valuable student learning. Burke concludes, “If we are lucky, our class reveals to kids and prepares them for their possible lives, the kind of lives they can compose using skills and knowledge they learn in our class” (166).
Works Cited


http://eduscapes.com/ladders/themes/


How many students relish novels like *The Scarlet Letter*, *Moby Dick*, or *Great Expectations*? Many critics argue that removing classic literature from the curriculum is the appropriate response to the widening gap between adolescents and the traditional reading canon. In his article on reevaluating the place of classic literature in the classroom, Bland claims he is “bothered by the stubborn assumption that students should be reading the classics in the first place” (Bland 20). But the teaching of the classics is still prevalent in schools of all kinds. In fact, some studies show “the curriculum as a whole remains relatively traditional in its emphases” (Applebee 27). We know, though, that it is difficult to engage students in these traditional texts. Is there a happy medium? Many new (or not so new) methods encourage approaches to literature that make it come alive in the classroom and make it relevant to today’s students.

One method to engage students in a traditional novel is dramatization. Studies show “active methods allow students to have some ownership in generating meanings and understandings” (Baxter 120). When students take on the role of a character, they are more likely to connect to the character and relate to the story. “Hot-seating” is a method in which a student assumes the role of a character whose motives are questionable. Then other students “bombard them with questions about issues of motivation or conscience” (Baxter 121). Another dramatic method is “Role-Breaking” in
which students assume the roles of minor characters to explore issues of culture, history, and marginalization. As students reenact the scene, “the minor character decides to ‘role-break’ by intervening in the action” (Baxter 121). This method encourages insight into the constraints placed on various characters in a major work of literature.

Another (not so new) method is scaffolding. If students do not understand the historical or cultural context in which a novel is written, it “impedes students’ ability to resonate with the classics” (Shelley 387). Ways to ensure that students have proper scaffolding are “building background knowledge, developing vocabulary, facilitating the reading of the text, and enriching and extending a text” (Shelley 387). Giving students a solid knowledge of the context of the novel allows them to move beyond the “confusing” parts of the novel and explore the true meaning behind the text.

Yet another effective method is pairing young adult texts with classic novels. By introducing a young adult book that has the same theme or character development as a classic novel, teachers can encourage understanding. The proposed steps are to read the young adult text, discuss the themes, characterization, etc. and then read the classic novel. Connect, discuss, and relate the similarities and differences. Ask questions of the text, such as “what if these two worlds collided?” (Abair 84). The idea behind getting students to read a text that they will immediately connect to, and most likely enjoy, is that they must learn to enjoy reading before they will enjoy the classics. The enjoyment of reading is crucial to students’ learning because “without an appreciation of the magic of reading, our students will never, never gain a love of literature” (Crowe 138).
Works Cited and Consulted


Creating Lifelong Readers

Each year the students who come with a pre-determined hateful attitude towards reading dismay me. This behavior hurts and then disappoints me because I know I am going to spend the next few months trying to convince non-readers that reading is fun. Will I succeed? Sadly, no—especially if I continue teaching reading like I have previously. Anticipating more reluctant readers, I am thinking positively and deviously about my new reading plan. Thinking positively because I know I can achieve my goals and deviously because I can deceive my most reluctant readers. Through research—reading and discussion with my newly found friends—I have decided to use the Reading Workshop approach.

While researching books, I found Gary Robert Muschla’s *Reading Workshop Survival Kit*. Muschla takes the Reading Workshop framework and makes it user-friendly. Along with specific beginning instructions, he includes 100 mini-lessons, covering specific reading skills. To add further support to Muschla’s schema, I found several educational articles, lending instruction and encouragement.

One inspiring article comes from Leila Christenbury, former NCTE president, and she discusses her own “…unpleasant discovery---some of the teenage students in [her] …class could not read well at all” (1). Determined to help her students improve their reading skills, Christenbury implements several strategies: materials beyond the textbook (i.e., class library, newspapers, magazines), frequent trips to the school library, and a set reading time. She
recognized her students needed opportunities to talk, question, predict, and write about what they read. By providing this forum, Christenbury broadened her students’ reading abilities.

Likewise, *Strategies That Work—Teaching Comprehension to Enhance Understanding* by Stephanie Harvey and Anne Goudvis explains how we can give our students the proper tools—strategies—no matter the text. Like Muschla, Harvey and Goudvis simplify the basic strategies, making them teacher and student accessible. They suggest teachers model the strategies (and model them again), and when students see them over and over they will be able to replicate the method being taught. One method I found helpful deals with slowing down the reader, and having them think about what they have just read—periodically stopping and asking, “What have I been reading?” Many times I have had students state they read the assignment, but don’t have a clue what they have read. If they used this STOP & REFLECT method, then I think they would get better comprehension.

Betty Carter, a librarian, admonished librarians and teachers who try to force their students into reading levels, keeping them there until they can progress to a higher reading comprehension level. She claims categorizing kills students’ love for reading, calling it a “formula for failure” (34). Her article caused me to stop and reflect about how I recommend a book. Do I really think about the student’s reading abilities? Do I think about difficult vocabulary? I cannot recall giving much thought to those questions. I just want my students to read and enjoy what they are reading.

Through my research of creating lifelong readers, I have come to the conclusion that if I want my students (all of my students) to become lifelong readers, then I will have to change the way I teach. In the past I have used a classroom library, but I have not given them the time and space to read, think, discuss, and write. They will get time for reading, thinking, discussing, and
writing. By incorporating journals, I will give my students “a place to catch and record…thoughts…a place to develop and push them to more interesting places” (Fulwiler 13). Modeling reading strategies and encouraging them to use them will make them stronger readers and better test-takers, especially with EOCT and GHSGT (Barr 84). I realize next year will not be easy, but I do believe that I will find it rewarding.
Works Cited


The Place of Literary Criticism in the High School Classroom

I teach high school juniors American Literature and Composition, College Prep. During the spring of their third year, it is our department’s policy that students write a literary criticism research paper based upon an American literature novel they chose to read the previous semester. In an effort to make this task more relevant and to find a way to teach the concept of literary criticism so that students comprehend it and feel comfortable with the topic, I have conducted research on how literary criticism can be applied to the high school classroom.

The first article I located is entitled “Mirror, mirror on the wall: Readers’ reflections on literature through literary theories.” In this piece, authors Joanne M. Golden and Donna Canan collaborate together in order to create a lesson that introduces students to literary theory. Their lesson begins with the fairytale of Snow White. After reading about Snow White, students were introduced to structuralist theory, feminist criticism, and Marxist theory. As the teacher talked about each theory, students were encouraged to locate sections within the fairytale that fell under each category. Once the students had a good grasp on how these theories applied to Snow White, the teacher introduced new pieces of literature such as D.H. Lawrence’s “The Rocking-Horse Winner” and George Orwell’s 1984 and asked students to apply whichever theory they thought best fit each work. The results were many spirited classroom debates among students.

The next article I found is entitled “Demystifying the text: Literary criticism in the high school classroom.” The author of this article, Lisa Schade, introduced literary theories into her classroom progressively. As they read a text, the teacher would explore a theory with her
students that might apply to the work. In this way, students were slowly introduced to each theory and how it was applied to a work. As the year progressed, students began to look at a work and apply a variety of theories to their reading of that text. This process culminated in an end-of-the-year project that forced students to choose a geographical area of the world and research a country and its literary history from that area. Choosing poems and short stories, students applied literary theory to their new found texts.

The subsequent article that I located is entitled “Sing a new song: A fresh look at literary criticism.” The author, Catherine P. Sagan, as frustrated with the difficult and shallow language that often accompanies literary criticism located in the dusty, thick reference books in the library as her students were, decided to have her pupils create their own literary theory and apply it to a text. In order to accomplish this task, she would tell students to form a thesis around a resounding theme in whatever they chose to read, research that theme in modern texts such as “Seventeen” or “Time,” and then use that research to back up their thesis. In this way, students were acting like literary critics and reading into texts like Lord of the Flies and discovering new perceptions such as labeling the conch as an instrument of censorship rather than a symbol for democratic order.

In yet another approach to literary theory in the classroom, the article “'Reception Moments,’ Modern literary theory, and the teaching of literature,” advocates teaching students an often forgotten theory in the literary world. Author Patrick Sullivan stresses that students should study how a work was received when it was first published in order to see how the text’s message or structure impacted the people of that time. This is what Sullivan calls researching a text’s “reception moment.” He advocates this as a great way to introduce students to literary criticism.
My final article, “Let’s give them something to talk (and think) about: Using literary theory to enliven our classrooms,” focused on exploring the thoughts of the two leading experts concerning literary theory in the high school classroom, Deborah Appleman and Petter J. Rabinowitz. The author pointed out that the two writers previously mentioned had different ways to approaching literary theory in the classroom, emphasizing that there are multiple ways to go about using criticism with high school students. Appleman, in her text Critical Encounters, focuses on what theories are best used in the classroom and how; while Rabinowitz’s text, Authorizing Readers, focus on how to implement the “authorial audience,” a type of theory, in the secondary classroom.

All of the articles that I collected offered many different ways to introduce and implement literary criticism in the classroom. When I first began my search, I wasn’t sure what I would find. I was half expecting to be bombarded with articles that denounced the relevancy of literary theory in the high school setting. However, I am happy to see that using literary criticism in the secondary classroom is advocated and even praised. Now that I have some idea of how to get students excited about literary criticism, I can’t wait to start!

Works Cited


What is Reading Workshop?

When I graduated from college in 1989 I came to Marietta Middle School equipped with creative and dynamic lesson plans I had spent hours designing. Plans that I felt would entertain my students and keep my discipline problems to a minimum. Plans that met the required curriculum and utilized the required textbooks. I taught for six years and was delighted when I became pregnant with my first child; I was exhausted and ready to leave the classroom. At the time, I thought, for good. Teaching had, in essence, become a career in acting and being on stage all day long had become too much.

Seven years later with two children in school, I felt the calling to return to the classroom. After watching my children grow and develop and realizing how different they were, I knew I could not return to the classroom as the chief entertainer. I had to find a way to meet the needs of the individuals in my classroom and in doing this allow those needs to drive instruction, not me. It was time to get off stage.

I spent the summer before returning to the classroom reading, researching, and listening to my best friend who had left the middle school classroom to work for the Department of Education in the area of school improvement. It was through her that I learned about what was considered “best practice” and I found my answer.

For the past two years I have used the workshop model in my language arts and reading classes. The underlying premise of reading workshop is to allow students to read on their own
level, books of their own choice. The teachers’ job is to meet students where they are individually and then through mini-lessons, conferences, book groups, etc. move them forward.

The format for reading workshop is simple; what goes on in the workshop is not. I begin every class with a read-aloud, think-aloud followed by a brief mini-lesson. Most always the two are connected. Workshop time follows. During this time students can be doing a variety of things: reading independently, meeting in a book group or a literature circle, writing in their response journals, using sticky notes, or searching for a “just-right book”. The class period always ends with what I call Reader’s Chair. Students may have the “chair” to do a “book talk” or comment on a connection they made in their reading. Often I will connect the mini-lesson with Reader’s Chair and ask my students to share how they related what they learned in the mini-lesson to their own reading.

Focusing on the format of the workshop was the goal for my first year. Last year I worked on the content of my mini-lessons. I realized that although my students were reading more books that ever, I wasn’t doing a lot of teaching and I wasn’t sure I knew if my students really were becoming better readers. After researching authors renowned to the workshop approach, I realized what my workshop lacked. I needed to focus my mini-lessons on more than information about authors and different genres. I needed to teach students how to think about what they are reading. In Laura Robb’s book Teaching Reading in Middle School, a book that has become like a bible, she outlines these reading strategies and gives sample mini-lessons. This summer I have been reading Strategies That Work and Mosaic of Thought. The focus of both of these books is the necessity of teaching reading strategies in the workshop classroom. Although I have used the workshop format for the past two years, I feel like I am constantly editing and revising my vision. I am also reading about individual student assessment in a book by Kylene
Beers called, *When Kids Can’t Read What Teachers Can Do*. Again this book focuses on how to teach student’s effective reading strategies, but it zeros in on students who make it to the middle school classroom with severe reading problems.

For me, the definition of readers’ workshop is a place where students can find a text, connect with that text, and develop as independent readers. A place where student needs dictate the lessons being taught. A place where my students are on stage.

Works Consulted


This new technology sorts through the government's reservoirs of research and rapidly returns information in an order more likely to meet patrons' needs. The Web portal. The library staff is commended for its work in 2003 on both the design and creation of the NIST Integrated Knowledge EditorialNet (NIKE), an enterprising project designed to facilitate the capture, organization, retrieval and dissemination of NIST publications; and the Laboratory Liaison program, which promotes collaboration between researchers and the library and enhances collection development and access. 2111 7701 Telegraph Road Alexandria, VA 22315-3802 Phone: (703) 428-7430 Fax: (703) 428-6310 E-mail History of Sponsored Projects. Past Summer Research Projects. Academics. FURSCA Home. Summer Research Grants. Academic Year Grants. Conference Grants. Past Summer Research Projects. Student Co-Authored Publications. Submissions Page. News and Events. Summer 2015 Projects. FURSCA Feature: Emily Morlock, '15. FURSCA Feature: Sarah McDaniel, '16.