

LITERACY STRATEGIES IMPROVE CONTENT AREA LEARNING

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Middle and high school teachers today still ask questions similar to those I asked as a 7th grade student teacher in Science during the mid-1960's, i.e., "Why can't these students read and write by now? Why am I hearing that I still need to teach reading? How can I fit teaching reading into an already full curriculum?" Little research and instructional support were available to help teachers explore answers to these questions in the 1960's

This paper will provide (1) a summary of the emergence of content area literacy as a focus for effective learning across the curriculum and (2) highlights from a content area literacy staff development experience which included student teachers, middle and high school classroom teachers, teacher educators and K-12 curriculum leaders in Orange County, California in Spring, 1999.

CONTENT AREA LITERACY EMERGES

Policies and statements about content area reading instruction can be found as early as the 1920's.

...the U.S. Bureau of Education acknowledged that each subject matter area contributes directly to the development of reading competency (Gray, 1925). Accordingly, educators popularized the slogan "Every teacher should be, to a certain extent, a teacher of reading" (Whipple, 1925, p. 6). Although reading educators recognized the importance of providing instruction that would aid students' understanding of subject matter textbooks, an examination of classroom practice between the 1930's and 1960's failed to provide evidence that this sort of instruction was widespread (Austin & Morrison, 1963). The limited use of reading strategies in the subject matter classroom appears to be a result of the lack of teacher training in reading methods (Early, 1957)... (Ryder & Graves, 1994, pp. 2-3)

Many instructional theories and practices about content area learning have emerged over the past 50 years (Bond, 1941; Gray, 1948; Moore, et al., 1992) with a significant increase in research and related policies since the 1970's. Some states began to require coursework in content area reading instruction for secondary teachers in the 1970's. Many other states joined in making this a requirement for a credential by the early 1980's (Estes & Piercey, 1973; Farrell & Cirrincione, 1984). Content area teachers began integrating strategies in more organized and effective ways in the 1980's yielding evidence which demonstrated that they were more confident, and student learning improved (Pearce & Bader, 1986; Conley, 1986; Alvermann & Swafford, 1989; Bean, Singer, & Frazee, 1986).

Currently, professional resources provide a wide-range of support for implementing content literacy strategies at all grade levels. (Moore, et al., 1998). Some researchers have focused upon the middle school learner, (Atwell, 1987; Duffy, 1990; Beers & Samuels, 1998; Combs, 1997; Irvin, 1998) while others suggest strategies for middle and high schoolers (Lenski, et al., 1999; Cochran, 1993; Silver, 1998; Dupuis, et al., 1989; Tierney, Readence, & Dishner, 1990; Conley, 1995; Roe, Stoodt, & Burns, 1995). Still others offer suggestions for high school and college students (Olson, 1997; Chapman, 1993).

More recently, content area *literacy*, rather than content area *reading*, has been the focus of teacher training resources (McKenna & Robinson, 1993; Alvermann & Phelps, 1994; Readence, Bean, & Baldwin, 1998; Vacca & Vacca, 1999). Emphasis on the integrated nature of the language processes of listening, speaking, thinking, reading, and writing within the context of content-specific classrooms has emerged as a key element for training preservice and practicing secondary teachers (Readence, Bean, & Baldwin, 1998; Postman, 1979; Tierney & Shanahan, 1991).

CONTENT LITERACY EXPECTATIONS IN CALIFORNIA

Policy-makers, legislators, and curriculum leaders in California have been influenced by the need to improve learning for all students by applying literacy skills across the curriculum. The California Commission on Teacher Credentialing (CCTC) adopted the following

"Standard for the Preparation of Single Subject Teaching Credential Candidates for Reading, Writing and Related Language Instruction in English" in January, 1997. Single Subject (secondary) preservice teacher education programs will be held accountable to show evidence that...:

The professional preparation program provides substantive, research-based instruction that effectively prepares each candidate for a Single Subject (SS) Teaching Credential to provide instruction in content-based reading and writing skills for all students, including students with varied reading levels and language backgrounds. The SS Credential Program includes a significant practical experience component in reading that is connected to the content of coursework and that takes place during each candidate's field experience(s) or student teaching assignment(s). The program places all candidates for SS Credentials in linguistically and/or culturally diverse field experience sites and student teaching assignments with teachers whose instructional approaches and methods in reading are consistent with a balanced, comprehensive program and who cooperate with institutional supervisors and instructors. (California Department of Education, 1997)

California Assembly Bill 1086 in 1997 identified the following specific skills which current, practicing upper grade teachers (Grades 4-8) are expected to understand and be prepared to apply:

- *Word attack skills*
- *Spelling and vocabulary*
- *Comprehension skills*
- *Research on how reading skills are acquired*
- *Strategic Reading strategies across curriculum (text-handling)*
- *Independent, self-selected reading*
- *Integration of listening, speaking, reading, and writing*
- *Intervention for, and integration of, low performing readers*
- *Effective ELL (English Language Learner) reading instruction*
- *Planning and delivery of appropriate reading instruction based on assessment and evaluation*

The California *Reading and Writing Content Standards for Kindergarten through 12th Grade* (California Department of Education, 1998) include expectations that all students will be engaged in strategies across the curriculum to develop competency in word analysis, vocabulary, literacy response and analysis, reading comprehension, writing, listening, speaking and other related literacy skills. The *Reading/Language Arts Framework for California Public Schools Grades Kindergarten through Grade Twelve* provides teachers with the blueprint for addressing the standards with all students. (California Department of Education, 1999)

CONTENT AREA LITERACY COLLABORATION

Secondary student teachers, classroom teachers, curriculum leaders, and teacher education faculty representing the UCI Department of Education Professional Development Schools program (10 districts and 23 secondary schools), eight Orange County teacher education institutions, and the Orange County Department of Education participated in a “Content Area Literacy” preservice collaborative experience in March, 1999. This experience was a first-step in developing on-going communication among partners for identifying “best practices” in the content area classrooms in which we participate.

Four content area literacy professional resources were introduced to provide the basis for future communication, i.e., *Practical Ideas for Teaching Writing as a Process at the High School and College Levels* (Olson, 1997); *Content Area Literacy: An Integrated Approach* (Readence, Bean, & Baldwin, 1998); *Reading & Learning Strategies for Middle & High School Students* (Lenski, Wham & Johns, 1999); *Into Focus: Understanding and Creating Middle School Readers* (Beers & Samuels, 1998)

LITERACY STRATEGIES IN CONTENT CLASSROOMS

Funds provided through a Goals 2000 Preservice Reading Grant made it possible to offer copies of each resource to student teachers and/or classroom teachers who signed a commitment to (a) implement a minimum of one “new” strategy and (b) offer feedback:

Please write/type a half-page journal reflecting upon your experience in planning and implementing this strategy. Journal content may include your reflections about (1)

planning experiences; (2) observations of students' responses to the strategy; (3) use of strategy with different classes; (4) evidence you saw of various levels of student performance (independent, instructional, frustration/challenging) AND/OR (5) future goals for use of the strategy.

The journals submitted represented middle and high school teachers from Social Science, Language Arts, Math, Science, and World Languages. Each journal provides insights into the ways in which the teacher matched the strategy to curriculum expectations and the students.

SOCIAL SCIENCE

Middle and high school teachers in Irvine, California, explored “new” strategies for Social Studies classrooms.

“Content Reading Inventories” (Readence, Bean, & Baldwin, 1998, pp. 66-70) were developed as assessments by a committee of Irvine Unified School District teachers after being introduced to a sample inventory created by Kathy Wanchek (a middle school Language Arts teacher) and Anne Rubin (a middle school Resource Teacher). An excerpt from Kathy’s journal states:

This idea/template was presented to the committee of teachers who will teach the Summer “I’M RAD” (Irvine Model Reading Advancement Development) program. The teachers saw the many possibilities presented by the use of this tool and wanted to create a collection of CRIs for use in our summer school programs.

The “People Search” (Lenski, Wham, & Johns, 1999, pp. 13-14) served to generate interest in a reading selection that would begin a unit studying *China* in Candy Peleaux’s diverse freshmen *Global Perspectives* class at University High School in Irvine.

...Traditionally, we begin a unit with background reading from a textbook. To begin the China unit, I introduced the reading with the “Get the signature of...” activity, hoping to simultaneously access students’ prior knowledge and to get the class excited about the unit. The activity itself was incredibly easy to construct and to integrate. I figured that the response would be positive, but it was better even than I anticipated. Students enjoyed

getting out of their seats, and they enjoyed the “social” aspect of the activity; also, those who already knew about China were proud to share their expertise. ...Comments such as, “This is fun.” and “I like this.” were often heard, and the competitive and cooperative mix in the atmosphere was refreshing. Next time I incorporate this activity, I will make it a bit longer and more complex. I plan to use this activity to introduce each reading assignment throughout the year.

LANGUAGE ARTS

Four Language Arts teachers described strategies implemented in their classrooms. Two who used *Practical Ideas for Teaching Writing as a Process at the High School and College Levels* (Olson, 1997) were an adjunct English professor and a high school English teacher. A UCI student teacher and a high school teacher found strategies which are described in *Reading & Learning Strategies for Middle & High School Students* (Lenski, Wham, & Johns, 1999) and *Content Area Literacy* (Readence, Bean, & Baldwin, 1998).

April Moore (Vanguard University, Costa Mesa) used the "Showing, Not Telling"(Olson, 1997) strategy with a freshman college class.

I used the "Showing, Not Tell" strategy, pp. 39-45 in PRACTICAL IDEAS after I noticed that my students were not using enough examples in their writing. I presented "good" examples of 'showing' paragraphs and "bad" examples (taken from the textbook) and explained that this writing activity would help them use more examples and be able to support their writing points.As they continued to use this strategy until the end of the semester, all of the students continued to improve in their writing....

Christine King's sophomore English class at University High in Irvine used “clustering” and a “sharing/revising process” to scaffold instruction and improve their essay writing skills.

I used a prompt from an old AP exam and modified some of the ideas for pre-writing and sharing/revising in Carol Booth Olson's "Practical Ideas for Teaching Writing as a

Process (Olson, 1997). I was able to do the modifications and have all the materials ready after one evening of work - a very quick and easy strategy....

Students in two of my American Lit. classes were very accepting of the pre-writing and revision strategies...I had all but four students hand in each step of the process - the clustering, the introductory paragraph, the rough draft, the revision, and the final copy. They were actively engaged in the pre-writing with 100 percent of students on-task the first day...I would certainly use the strategies again. I did learn that my typical revision/editing cover sheet was far too demanding. I usually have students looking for correctness, as well as ideas and support. This new revision/editing sheet was much easier for students and less intimidating...

Keri Kemble, a UCI student teacher at Los Alamitos High School, used a "Knowledge Rating Scale" (Lenski, Wham, & Johns, 1999, pp. 37-38; Readence, Bean, and Baldwin, 1998, pp. 73-74). The scale was used to activate her English III students' prior knowledge of vocabulary words in Zora Neale Hurston's "How I Got to be Colored Me."

I asked for a show of hands to see if any students had used a rating scale like this before. None had. I instructed students to look at the five vocabulary words listed on the scale and rate them according to their level of understanding: "Know It Well," "Have Heard It/Seen It," and "No Clue." Students needed no other direction to complete the scale and even seemed to carefully deliberate prior to their choices. I then directed the students' attention to fill-in-the-blank sentences taken directly from the story...We completed the cloze activity as a class, going back and forth between sentences to find the right matches...

I used the Knowledge Rating Scale strategy with two classes and the results were clear. Students finished the introduction with an understanding of the vocabulary words and intrigued to begin the essay. I will definitely use this strategy again, but perhaps next time I might adapt it to include a brief response space so that students will have to record their pre-lesson answers to check post-lesson (knowledge). What a great (and quick) assessment!

Jennifer Davis used an “Anticipation Guide” (Lenski, Wham, & Johns, 1999, p. 143; Readence, Bean, & Baldwin, 1998, pp. 159-61) with English 1 students at University High School, Irvine, to introduce the issues in *Romeo and Juliet*.

The Anticipation Guide was a nice opportunity for students to examine their beliefs prior to beginning the play Romeo and Juliet. In a non-threatening way, it also presented the issues the students discuss while reading the play. Often, especially with the classic love story, students "buy into" what they are presented without thinking for themselves first. I personally liked the fact that the students were forced to decide how they think/feel about an issue which they never encountered prior to reading about it in the play.

Creating the questions was easy because there were only five... We spent approximately thirty minutes sharing and discussing the various beliefs in the room...students willingly participated....

This strategy seemed easy for all levels of students. The only complaint I received was from some of my special education students. They had no problem circling an answer, but some had problems trying to justify their answers...

MATHEMATICS

Three high school and middle school Mathematics teachers chose strategies from three different resources (Olson, 1997; Readence, Bean, & Baldwin, 1998; Lenski, Wham, & Johns, 1999).

Freshmen in Ryan Dahlem’s Math A class at University High School, Irvine reviewed vocabulary through competition on a day prior to taking a test.

...The unit I was teaching was full of vocabulary terms that are similar and often confusing to students, e.g., “area, surface area, square, square units, cube, cubic units...” I used “Teaching Vocabulary through Competition” (Olson, 1997, p. 276) as a review the day before a test. I have used competition strategies before and knew the students would enjoy this type of activity. The most successful part of the lesson was “Vocabulary Charades,” which was new for both the students and me. Seeing a student “gesture” a

math term really showed whether s/he understood it or not....I will use this strategy again in Math A, and perhaps try it in my functions, statistics, and trigonometry courses.

Jo Ann Byars demonstrated the importance of the communication skills of listening and writing in her math lessons at University High.

The idea of having students record their thoughts was based on the rationale that writing is a powerful tool for learning and questioning across the content areas. The students wrote about their reflections, reacting to what they observed and learned from going through the class activity. Information about writing as a tool for learning can be found in Content Area Literacy (Readence, Bean, & Baldwin, 1998, pp. 183-203.)...

The students seemed to enjoy the activity that made them aware of the importance of literacy development in the study of mathematics and in life in general....Students had some very interesting insights. One stated, "I am a better listener than a speaker." Another student wrote, "I also realized how I could be hearing something my friend or someone is saying to me in a different perspective."

Lois Hoshijo, a middle school math teacher at Spring View Middle School in Huntington Beach, used the "Magic Square" strategy.

I used the Magic Square example from Art Scholastic (1993) that was found in Reading & Learning Strategies for Middle & High School Students (Lenski, et al, 1999, pp. 43-45) to assess students' knowledge of mathematical terms....The students found this review challenging and interesting. It took just a few minutes for students to complete the activity...There are many uses for Magic Square in math literacy. Magic Square can be used as a warm-up to review previously-learned content, as a pre-test for future lessons, or as a post-test...Students' responses to this activity were favorable ...(1) "It was fun studying definitions with the Magic Square;" (2) "This was a different activity. I think I'll remember the definitions of the terms that were difficult for me to learn;" (3) "I like this. It was more challenging than just writing the definitions for each vocabulary word."

SCIENCE

Tinh Tran and Ingrid Chlup teach Science at University High, Irvine. Tinh used a “Word Sort Assessment” (Lenski, Wham, & Johns, 1999, pp. 53-54) with 11th and 12th grade chemistry classes.

I selected this strategy because I wanted to see if the students could make connections between concepts and ideas. Also, it was a way to see if the students remembered information from the previous chapter. I made a list (Gas Laws Word Sort) of terms, concepts, equations, and ideas arranged in a random manner. I then instructed the students to group the words in a way that made sense...I intentionally made the assignment open-ended, because I did not want to limit the students' thinking. Throughout the monitoring process, I heard students propose different ways to group the terms....I will use this strategy again as an individual assignment, instead of a group one. There were some students in the groups who just “went along for the ride,” and contributed little. Assessing each student individually would provide a better indication of exactly what percentage of the class retained the information...

Ingrid Chlup used a “Knowledge Rating Scale” (Lenski, Wham, & Johns, 1999, pp. 37-38; Readence, Bean, & Baldwin, 1998, pp. 73-74) with her “sheltered” sophomore Science students to assess prior knowledge and provide students an opportunity to preview upcoming topics and vocabulary.

I believe this strategy was beneficial for students, assisting them to identify significant vocabulary and concepts...I found this activity useful for both myself and my students since I was given the chance to assess what students already knew...and students previewed where the unit was going with the amount of vocabulary they would need to learn.

WORLD LANGUAGES

A UCI Student Teacher majoring in French and two high school Spanish teachers provided examples of three different strategies for students studying a second language.

UCI student teacher, Lauri Resnikoff, used the “Deceptive Definitions” strategy (Olson, 1997, p. 274) in a French I class at Ocean View High School in Huntington Beach.

Based on the suggestions in Practical Ideas, I divided the class into groups of three or four and distributed the twelve vocabulary cards...After students played the game, I gave them a matching quiz to assess how much they had learned. The students did not complain about the activity and I believe that it helped them learn new words, because they all scored from “very good” to “excellent” on their pre-quiz.

Michelle Natan used a “Pre-Writing Graphic Organizer Strategy” (Olson, 1997, pp. 14-17) with her intermediate Spanish students at University High School, Irvine.

This is a great prewriting strategy for any level language learner. The essay topic this day involved the students writing a letter full of recommendations to a student who would be visiting them from Costa Rica. The strategy was easy to explain and model in Spanish. .I drew a center circle with the main topic of the essay and then asked students to help me connect ideas (supporting ideas, examples, further ideas) to this center idea with more circles. This center circle expanded outward as ideas were connected to it...Students then created their own clusters....The best part of this strategy for me was that students, regardless of ability level, could all find something to write so that their job of writing the actual essay at home was less daunting....

Marjie Toops used a different type of graphic organizer (“sunflower organizer”) in her intermediate Spanish class to organize information read in the text (Lenski, Wham, & Johns, 1999, p. 78).

The purpose of this lesson is to help students organize material they read about Nobel-winning authors from the Spanish-speaking world. This has always been a troublesome unit for the students, with a great deal of information to organize. ...The cluster revolves around country of origin. Each “sunflower petal” is an author, with room for facts about each. I then provided a summary area for those who needed a different visual approach. In previous years, I did not use a graphic organizer for this reading. I felt that using the “sunflower” would help students better organize and remember the information...I found

this to be a very successful exercise for most students, although some felt it was pretty “grade-school,” and they would prefer to take notes in a more traditional format.

SUMMARY

Many of the partners who participated in the Spring, 1999, Orange County Content Area Literacy project expressed a desire to continue to communicate with one another to gather evidence of effective strategies for content area classrooms. To help achieve this goal, e-mail and school addresses of educators who participated in the project are posted on a web site developed as part of the 1998-99 Tri-County Reading Preservice Grants (Imperial, San Diego, and Orange Counties): www.icoe.org/reading (*Resources/Content Area Literacy*). Educators who collect evidence from their content classrooms are invited to contact teachers listed on the web site.

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