

In Sync With Success! Special-Area and Content-Area Teachers Can Boost Literacy Instruction

Research Base

Arts integration is supported by a large research base (Deasy, 2002; Fiske, 1999), as well as testimonials from educators, parents, and students (Upitis & Smithrim, 2003). Studies connect the arts with academic gains, including strong support for using drama to increase comprehension. In particular, the arts have shown powerful results for engaging diverse learners in high-poverty schools. Most important are the unique cognitive, affective, and social contributions the arts make to learning. Educators are realizing that the special nature of the arts adds essential missing ingredients to the literacy curriculum.

--- "Center stage: Arts-based read alouds," Claudia E. Cornett, © 2006 International Reading Association (pp. 234-240) doi:10.1598/RT.60.3.3

Reading Workshop Success

Content teachers find this reading workshop helpful. They're surprised at how much reading and content objectives overlap. They find that learning theory, teaching students how to learn and how to remember, is the same from class to class. They recognize the need for students to practice thinking skills throughout the day. Teachers know that schools package content into segregated classes for teacher expertise, so we have to demonstrate the connections. Finally, when content teachers know what's on THE tests, they can seize many natural places for reinforcing literacy skills.

In his final reflection, a PE teacher wrote honestly about his concerns going into a reading workshop and the changes in his thinking as he exited:

This workshop has definitely opened my eyes as to how much what we do in PE transcends into the other special areas. I felt going in, that I was going to struggle to see some sort of connection because we don't really teach reading or writing in PE, but I was able to see the similarity in teaching strategies and approaches to curriculum across all the special areas.

When offered a 3-credit reading workshop, content teachers worry, understandably. They fear sacrificing content teaching for teaching

reading. Others, who have been actually asked to teach reading, are unprepared. However, after working for years with these experts, I find they are open to learning how to tweak their language, build vocabulary skills, and reinforce the parallels that exist between their content and reading content – when they know how. My PE colleague continues...

For example, how we teach a generic skill in PE (such as throwing) is so similar to how we teach our students to play music or put together their own unique piece of music. This workshop has definitely caused me to be more open-minded to not only what is being taught in other special areas but also how they approach the task and teach the vocabulary. It has also encouraged me to collaborate more with my fellow special area teachers, so I'm constantly learning and modifying my teaching strategies.

In this workshop, we analyze learning theory. Teachers like the tips they learn for teaching students to think about thinking, setting personal goals, and motivation. In addition, vocabulary is important to any subject. Vocabulary day is a favorite. Teachers learn strategies that will more likely transfer meaning to students' long-term memory.

Teachers enjoy discovering content words and reading jargon they have in common. For example, when teaching "perspective" in an art class, the teacher can remind learners that authors write from unique perspectives also. Offering that explanation – that sentence – helps students link information from one subject to the next. Drawing explicit connections is a subtle yet helpful change for learners.

In addition, the student who didn't understand perspective in reading class might now get it because he learns more easily in art class. In this workshop, special-area teachers share many easy differentiation strategies they've discovered.

These connections can only be made for students if teachers know they exist. The very core of this class is teaching students how to learn and

remember. The set-aside days for studying give teachers the time to explore these opportunities. Back to my colleague:

How we teach a generic skill in PE (such as throwing) is similar to how music teachers teach students to play music or put together a unique piece of music. Chunking the skills into manageable parts, each one progressively more difficult than the next, and differentiating for students is just one aspect of this workshop that transcends the subject areas.

Why I Teach the Workshop

I built this workshop for special-area and content teachers after several successful experiences. After several colleagues recommended I read *Mosaic of Thought* by Ellin Keene and Susan Zimmermann in 1997, I thought I should try it.

I'd heard of metacognition. I knew it was a term that NC DPI threw around a lot and it showed up in my standards. "Thinking about thinking" was an abstract notion to me though. Keene and Zimmermann led me to understand.

I used the reading strategies to comprehend the passages at the beginning of each chapter. By plodding my way through the difficult selections, I thought about how I made sense of the words. If this worked for me, I realized it would work for readers of any age and content.

At every school I worked, students loved reading more and scores improved as a result of applying the proficient reader research. No books. No programs. Just an understanding of how to teach comprehension.

In those early days, Keene and Zimmermann gave us the theory. There was very little help in structuring lessons though until Stephanie Harvey and Ann Goudvis (*Strategies That Work*) and Debbie Miller (*Reading With Meaning*) published.

Now, there are books that show teachers how to apply proficient reader strategies in every content area. Therefore, I ask teachers to create personal inquiries and read texts that support them as the expert in their field.

Confident The Workshop Works

In preparation for this workshop, I worked with many teachers. That's why I'm so confident that teaching special area and content teachers will help a school develop a comprehensive approach to teaching literacy that produces results.

- A music teacher asked me to work with her colleagues to figure out how music teachers could design lessons based on the reading theory. We realized students could apply the strategies to comprehending lyrics. They could remember concepts by putting words to music. We found many applications.
- Other friends asked me to create a seminar to support math teachers based on Arthur Hyde's *Comprehending Math*. He explains how math teachers can build comprehension of math concepts using the proficient reader strategies.
- Jackie Whitfield, Cabarrus County Elementary Director, asked me to develop a 3-day Institute for the county's special area teachers. I learned so much from them. Art, music, and PE teachers have so much to teach us about how students learn, especially those who can't show us their best work with pencil and paper.
- From there, I developed several residencies where I taught one day every other month and then gave teachers time to experiment and process in the intervening days.
- The 4-day seminar I offer now grew out of my work with Country Day Middle and Upper School content and special-area teachers and the seminar I created for all of their Lower School Special-Area Teachers.

Teachers review the workshop favorably because it is about learning what North Carolina expects students to know to pass end-of-year tests, comparing content objectives to reading and writing objectives, and selecting those that match. Teachers can then use what students have already learned in reading classes as background knowledge on which to build their content or complement literacy instruction with their lessons. Plus, teachers enjoy that I differentiate the seminar by asking them to create personal inquiry projects and set personal goals as a part of the seminar.

3-Credit Reading Seminar Timeline

Day One – Proficient Reader Strategies and Reflection

- Teachers set goals and begin personal inquiry projects.
- What are proficient-reader strategies?
- How can those strategies also work in my content area?
- How can I use reflective thinking exercises in my content area to move learning into long-term memory?

Day Two – Overlaps in Reading, Content, and Thinking Goals

- What am I required to teach?
- Where are the overlaps in reading and content objectives?
- What do students need to learn to succeed on end-of-year reading and writing tests?
- What small changes could I make to help students meet all test objectives?

Day Three – Vocabulary

- What strategies will work to teach vocabulary in any content area?
- How can content area teachers help children of different learning styles learn vocabulary through drawing, movement, singing, equations, scientific method, etc?
- Teachers create a list of differentiated strategies for learning vocabulary based on research and the talents of the content-area teachers to be shared schoolwide.

Day Four – Inferring, Determining Importance and Synthesis

- Participants study inferring, determining importance, and synthesis as it relates to their content area.
- Teachers share results of their personal inquiry projects.

My Experience

1. Concord Middle School Residency 2008-present, co-director Dr. Jeanneine Jones, UNC Charlotte.
2. Middle and Upper School Residencies 2008, 2009, 2010, CCDS, Karen Derby, high school teacher.
3. CCDS Lower School 2010, Meredith Vetter, Elementary Director of Studies.
4. South Learning Community K-8 2009, Charlotte Mecklenburg Schools, Tammy Brown, Literacy Facilitator, Beverly Woods Elementary School.
5. Content-Reading 2nd-5th Grade Residency 2008, Irwin Elementary School, Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools, principal Judy Fahl.
6. Math-Reading K-5 Residency 2008, Jefferson Elementary, New York, principal Carole Schwab.
7. Math-Reading K-5 Residency 2007, Independence Elementary, Rock Hill, SC, principal Mary Chandler.
8. Cabarrus County Special-Area Teacher Summer Institute 2003, Jackie Whitfield, former Elementary Director.

Testimonials

Science and reading objectives have always been aligned; the difference now is that I have a clearer understanding of the approach that needs to be implemented to address the objectives for both disciplines simultaneously. I am now much more intentional in the way that I use literature in the science lab as a result of this workshop. I allow them an opportunity to reflect aloud on their reading prior to writing it down as answers to questions. Science Teacher

The workshop has simply reinforced to me that there are areas of overlap that occur between content areas and that the more we can identify and use those areas in our planning and teaching, the greater the overall educational benefit our students will receive from our teaching.
PE Teacher

Learning new vocabulary was one way I developed new ideas. I have grasped much from the terminology alone. Drama Teacher

This workshop has exposed me to many new and different ways to think about teaching, thinking and learning. The exercises, articles and examples you used throughout the workshop helped move my level of understanding in the areas to a new level. The work you did with our group also made me realize how much the special areas can overlap in working with students, where I didn't see that much overlap potential before.

Exceptional Education Teacher

Spreading the workshop out over a school year was ideal. There was time to think about new knowledge and try new ideas. Coming back to the seminar every couple of months was a good way to touch base again and go forward with new ideas.

Computer Teacher

Most students say that the daybook experience has helped them with their organization and their ability to be self-governing and metacognitive.

AP Marine Biology Teacher

The workshop has increased my awareness of how techniques and strategies used for teaching reading, thinking, or learning can work in any content area. With my increased understanding, I can teach kids more intentionally to affect student learning.

Computer Teacher

I thoroughly enjoyed the workshop. At first the information was a little overwhelming and I wasn't sure what to do with it, but as time went on it became evident how it could be related to my field. This is just the nature of the beast.

PE Teacher

I think the structure of the workshop was great. We got to meet with other special area teachers on an informal basis, learn more in detail how their curriculum is taught, and especially how we all connect in our teaching strategies.

Music Teacher

The workshop has made me much more aware of the process of learning that takes place in the music room. It also has made me more cognizant of my approach to teaching to the different learning styles of students. I also now understand that I make more

connections to literacy than I had realized, so I feel confident that students are receiving music instruction that includes literacy strategies.

Music Teacher

There are students in my class that have real difficulty understanding certain activities that we do. I am sure that the difficulty is due in part to different learning styles. I will take the information that I have learned in this workshop and structure my lessons so that I take advantage of the skills my students are learning in other content areas.

PE Teacher

I have definitely been more intentional about teaching the art vocabulary in studio time. I do feel that I have more strategies to implement as a result of this workshop.

Art Teacher

The work we have done this year has enabled me to work with the children using more literature and music terminology than I had used in Kindergarten classes before. It is so important to integrate with the classroom teachers and the other special areas.

Media Specialist

I am more aware that there are many different ways to engage students in their learning. The workshop has emphasized that it's important to allow the students to take ownership of their learning and in doing so the students will learn more.

Science Teacher

Because of the workshop I initiated my goal of working with the exceptional education staff to investigate the possible benefits of technology for students diagnosed with learning disabilities. I doubt very seriously I would have otherwise made this decision.

Technology Teacher

I have incorporated many of the teaching tips and methodologies learned within the workshop. Simple tips such as assign a partner and rotate has had a huge impact on class management. I incorporated various ways to receive student feedback as a quick assessment tool.

PE Teacher