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IMPLEMENTING BEST PRACTICE LITERACY INSTRUCTION INTO A MIDDLE
SCHOOL SOCIAL STUDIES CLASSROOM

By

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A capstone submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in Literacy Education.

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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

Guiding and developing a new direction for my Collaborative Team (Professional Learning Community) lead to the development of my essential question: How can best practice literacy instruction support student engagement in a secondary (middle school) social studies class? I have had the opportunity to build a strong team as a Collaborative Team Leader (CT) for the past four years. Our social studies department was struggling to close the achievement gap and we were finding that many Black students were struggling with social studies classes. As a collaborative group, we knew that we needed to make a change and we decided after a few meetings that engagement was lacking for many of our students in some of our classrooms. Using grades as preliminary data we found that our Black students were not engaged in the material. I decided as their CT leader to focus on engagement and literacy skills in our content area. It was in these areas that we had success and failures that pushed me to further investigate engagement and literacy in a social studies classroom.

Literacy is a key component to every student's success in the classroom and with their own life-long learning. As a social studies teacher, we are encouraged, but not expected, to keep literacy at the forefront of all our lesson plans to support and develop capable students. While, every teacher knows how to read and write, teaching non-fiction literacy skills is not part of a social studies teacher's licensure. The problem is as a social studies teacher I am expected to teach reading and writing strategies inside my content to support language arts and to develop strong literacy skills in all students. The

teacher's instruction of literacy and how this instruction interacts with the students added to my curiosity of the skill levels of our current students and our lack of training in literacy.

Quality literacy teaching cannot stand on its own as my collaborative team soon learned. We decided that engagement was another aspect of the journey into literacy for our middle school students. We knew that engagement is hard to measure, different for all students, and can change from day to day and minute to minute. Diving into the world of engagement with my CT soon created a passion for my own learning to use in my classroom. I was fascinated by what created engagement for some students while others could care less. Observing my own students and reflecting through my years of teaching, created a curiosity to know how I can improve my instruction to support students and build engagement for literacy in my own content.

To best understand my background as a teacher, I separated my experiences into three areas. The first area is my early years of teaching where I was learning the trade and working closely with students who were struggling readers. The second area I named the middle years, where I was in my own classroom and building my routines and supporting student successes and struggles. The final area is my current roles and purposes that supported the development of the question guiding this research.

The Early Years

Eight years ago, I was assigned to a reading intervention classroom as an educational assistant. The teacher used a program called Read180 to help support students that were not meeting the state expectations of reading at their grade level. The students attended the intervention as part of their regular school day and were in the class

for one hour each day, with a total of five hours a week. My role was to support the students to help them improve their reading ability to meet the expectations of the state required common assessment that the students take each spring. A big part of my role was helping the students to stay focused on their reading and supporting them with the quizzes from the books they chose. I honestly felt bad for these students. As an adult, I had trouble staying focused on the readings they were given, as engagement in the material and classroom was non-existent, even with the students selecting their own texts at their reading level.

My cooperating teacher was very familiar with the program and had created a routine of reading for fifteen minutes from a text at each student's reading level. The next fifteen minutes was spent writing a few facts they had learned from their assigned reading in a composition notebook. The next thirty minutes was spent working with an online Read180 program that focused on reading, writing, and answering questions to track their improvement of their Lexile scores. Even with the computer to support a change in routine, the students were completely disengaged and not making any progress towards the goal of exiting the program and meeting the reading level of their grade.

During this experience, and reflecting on it years later, the engagement of the students was very low. The students were forced to be in the class and they were forced to read and write about topics that were of little interest to them as there were not many choices at their Lexile level. The key components of engagement and literacy, including collaboration, movement, and reading and writing strategies were missing. These missing pieces were at the core of creating a lack of interest and thus it was affecting their progress. I knew there must be a better way to help these students enjoy reading and

writing and Read180 was not the solution. I have used this experience to drive my own classroom devotion and worked to create a classroom that would not become a place that was a dreaded experience for students.

The Middle Years

My experience with Read180 was only one year and what I witnessed continued to haunt me for years, even in my own classroom. At the end of my year with Read180, I accepted a position to teach seventh grade social studies. The curriculum I was given was deeply rooted in textbooks and worksheets. Knowing the struggle that the Read180 students had the year earlier, forced me to rethink my strategies and to change how social studies was taught to the changing needs of students. I knew how students struggled and why they struggled from my previous experience with Read180. I also understood that support for a student who was low in reading looked vastly different than a student who just did not care about work completion. I knew my students, but what I did not know was that engagement was the key to helping all my students. Especially those who were grade levels behind their peers in literacy.

During these middle years, I also accepted a position to teach an AVID (Advancement Via Individual Determination) elective class. This AVID elective class gave me the training to understand engagement and how to motivate students to reach their potential. AVID's purpose is to help students become college and career ready through different writing and reading strategies, while building a community of support. Beyond my elective class, I started to use the strategies I learned through AVID in my social studies class and found that all students were responding in a positive manner. AVID became the spark that helped me to understand that motivation and determination

can lead to engagement. These pieces started to drive my instruction to help students better understand how to become more in tune with their own learning.

As I continued to hone my approach in teaching and literacy, the same question about engagement and how do I know if it is working was always apparent. I knew my kids were engaged, based on their attentiveness in class and their grades improving, but could I prove it and was it helping their literacy? These questions started to guide my own learning as I worked to understand more about engagement in my own class and what a student who is truly engaged in their work represents. These years were the backbone for the research and focus of this paper.

The Current Years and Purpose

Engagement and literacy became the center of my social studies instruction. I was having a positive response from the students, but I knew there was still more to develop. Wanting to further engage my students and how to best support them has driven my teaching to encompass strategies with engagement and student literacy. Using my current teaching as a focus, I looked outward to other social studies teachers and classes in my building to understand what was being offered regarding engagement and literacy.

Students spend six hours a day receiving instruction in language arts, science, math, social studies, and elective classes such as art, music, computer technology, and physical education. My purpose shifted from just students in social studies to all content areas and the literacy skills they were gaining from each of these areas, if any at all. Developing students that are lifelong learners across all their content areas using literacy skills that are balanced between all areas created my purpose to understand how I could best support my students with the literacy skills they were receiving in other content

areas. I needed to understand what is happening in other classes, as well as other social studies classes, to best help my students in the instruction they deserve. Knowing there is more to learning than a traditional approach forced my direction towards engagement and its connection to all learning, especially the literacy skills students need to be successful in and out of a learning environment.

Conclusion

My dedication to engagement and literacy started eight years ago, and has continued through my own learning and dedication to my students. The students are the core of this project and have driven my curiosity into the connection between literacy and engagement. I truly believe that the two are connected and that with a firm grasp of both subjects, I will be able to decipher how to best support my social studies counterparts to create an atmosphere where students flourish with their reading and writing.

I find myself reflecting on past students that struggled with simple texts or creating sentences as they attempted to connect all the dots of what they were learning. I watched them struggle through Read180 and textbooks as they forced their way through the material. I vowed when I had my own classroom, that I would work tirelessly to support these students to find their own engagement and purpose with their reading and writing. Even now, with my own classroom I am still looking for the answers. The search for the answers creates my own engagement and determination to help students successfully navigate their lifelong learning.

To navigate my own learning, I have split my research into four different themes. The first theme is literacy in a social studies class. The second theme is best practice instruction in the classroom regarding literacy strategies and how they can be

implemented in a social studies classroom. The third theme is engagement for both students and teachers. The fourth theme is non-fiction reading to learn strategies as the material and content of social studies is focused on non-fiction reading. Combining these themes will showcase how best practice literacy instruction can support engagement in a social studies classroom.

Literacy. I added literacy as a theme because of the scope and nature of the word. Literacy is used in all contents to deliver information, but at the same time it is the most over looked learning tool in teacher's arsenal. Literacy creates strong confident students, but at the same time it can completely stop a student in their tracks. Understanding literacy and current research will support my goal to support literacy in social studies classes in a purposeful manner.

Best Practice Instruction. The center of all student learning is the teacher's best practice as an instructor. As a middle school teacher, my instruction changes hour to hour and minute to minute and I need to be able to react immediately to my classroom and the students. Sometimes the change is simple or even complex, while sometimes the change does not work to help engage the students in the material at all. Yet I know that change needs to happen to understand my students at that given moment. Regardless of the situation, I must be aware of how I am teaching and the instruction I am giving and if it is authentic best practice instruction. There is a multitude of best practice instructional strategies, but knowing how to best implement those strategies will lead to more effective teaching and a stronger environment for my students.

Engagement. Engagement is difficult to define and observe. Not every student shows the same signs of engagement while in the classroom and often there won't be a

“tell” or a “look” that the student is engaged in the material being presented or studied. Each student is drastically different and engagement with each of these student is the same way. Engagement is the key to learning, but what exactly is engagement and how do we measure it? I know there have been situations in my own classroom where students “looked” completely disengaged, but after a quick conferring activity, they were right where they needed to be. My goal is that understanding all aspects of engagement will help guide my learning on how to build literacy across all my colleague’s social studies classes.

Reading to Learn Strategies. When I think of the word strategy, it creates a vision of a coach drawing out plays on a whiteboard with 20 seconds left on the clock and his players completely focused on what the coach is drawing and saying. When I think of teaching strategies I envision the same idea, the teacher guiding their students with reading strategies up to the last minute before they walk out of their classroom each day. If instruction is the coach and engagement is the focus, finding the best reading and writing strategies is what is needed to win the game.

These four themes were derived from my background and journey as a teacher. Each of these stemmed from the struggles and success that my students encountered over their learning through my classroom. It was my own personal growth as a teacher and a learner that cultivated the need to support social studies classrooms with literacy beyond what was just expected. The creation of these themes was the culmination of the guiding question for my research.

In chapter two I will complete a literature review on the past and current research on engagement, best practices, literacy, and reading to learn strategies and how they all

interact. My focus will be to use this information to answer my question: How can best practice literacy instruction support student engagement in a secondary (middle school) social studies class? The literary review will be broken into four themes including literacy, best practice instruction, engagement, and finally reading to learn strategies.

CHAPTER TWO

Literature Review

Introduction

Are my students engaged in my classroom? Are my lessons engaging? Why are my students struggling to finish the texts or even understand the material? Am I giving the right instruction? What can I do better? Teachers are constantly surrounded by these questions as they work through their day, class period by class period. Working with multiple teachers at different grade levels in our social studies collaborative team, these were questions that were asked of me and that we attempted to answer. We struggled to find the right answer and discussed if there was even a right answer. This inquiry from my coworkers drove the creation of this question: How can best practice literacy instruction support student engagement in a secondary (middle school) social studies class?

The question stated above is complex and has multiple sections to explore. This literature review will break the question into four main themes. These themes are: literacy, best instructional practices, engagement, and finally reading to learn strategies. Understanding each of these areas and the research presented on the topics is critical to developing an answer to supporting students with social studies content.

Literacy

In the world of education, literacy is everything and everywhere. All content areas are expected to support all students with literacy to support them to be lifelong learners. With the exception of language arts, social studies is currently the next logical choice to

support students' literacy. McKenna and Robinson (1990) defined literacy as, "The ability to use reading and writing for the acquisition of new content in a given discipline" (pg. 184). This certainly applies to social studies content and the non-fiction texts that deliver the content to the students. Social studies curriculum is surrounded with facts, evidence, and claims and nearly all this information is delivered by text.

Literacy Standards. Certain states have not yet adopted the Common Core standards as a "must" for social studies classrooms. Yet, teachers are expected to support students using non-fiction texts, while creating a strong learning atmosphere. It is then reasonable to state that students will have to understand texts at various levels of reading proficiency and need to work with the text to support their own learning. The Common Core provides the groundwork to give students the necessary tools to, "analyze, evaluate, and differentiate primary and secondary sources" (Common Core, pg. 81). The Common Core is structured to support both the teacher and the students with literacy in a social studies classroom.

Literacy in social studies classrooms has always been standard practice. The changes that are occurring, beyond the standards, support students and how they interact with the text. The Common Core supports the development of reading to give all students the ability to learn beyond language arts and the social studies classroom. Kist (2013) believes that all students need to have a goal to find evidence and analyze the details of all texts, regardless of the text they are given to read (pg. 40). Knowing the different amount of texts given to social studies students throughout the year, including textbooks, newspapers, and online resources students need to know how to analyze and decipher the

information. Kist is accurate in his assessment and social studies is the gateway to help students achieve the goal of developing literacy skills.

Literacy Instruction. The purpose of social studies education was to develop students to be citizens that understood what it meant to be a citizen in the United States. Social studies instruction can no longer be centered around one textbook, but needs to be delivered through multiple sources. Literacy instruction becomes a crucial piece of delivering information and beyond the content it must be effective in building engagement and creating a self-efficacy for the students as they learn (Alverman, pg. 191). Literacy instruction must bridge the gap left by language arts teachers and non-fiction text.

Fisher and Ivey (2005) state that, “Literacy is critical to all subject areas” and instruction is going to be the corner stone to the success of literacy in all areas (pg. 4). Students need to be given the opportunity to develop new strategies by using their own background knowledge and learning strategies from a variety of texts, of which the social studies curriculum is perfect (Alvermann, pg. 193). Moving beyond the textbook as merely a resource is the first step to encompassing the support our students need for literacy, but this is not the only step. Instructors need to understand that students need to drive their own learning and that knowledge is acquired through discussions and reading multiple perspectives (Fisher and Ivey, pg. 5). The challenge is to help support our teachers with the correct amount of literacy training to best support the students as they continue to build knowledge and process background knowledge.

The amount of materials available to teachers to use for instruction is constantly evolving. The internet has created new avenues to collect and share texts, videos, blogs,

music and many other resources with students. Even with a multitude of texts at a teacher's disposal, it seems that "print remains the go-to medium for literacy instruction" (McKenna, 2014, pg. 8). It would be agreeable that this is an accurate assessment as textbooks are a common find in many social studies classrooms. But because students are changing, the requirements for their success in literacy is also changing. It is apparent that literacy instruction will need to change to use digital and a larger range of texts in the classroom.

Best Literacy Instructional Practices

The previous section alluded to literacy instruction and the needs that are required to have success with embedding literacy into the social studies curriculum. The next logical step is to understand what the best instructional practices are for today's students. Teachers are expected to balance curriculum and classroom management all while creating a learning environment that holds high levels of student engagement. Best instructional practices work to create a dynamic between students and educators, all while working in conjunction to increase not only student achievement, but the teacher's achievement in instruction (Hollie, 2012, pg. 18).

Best literacy instructional practices can be broken into three areas to help support the research for the guiding question. The three areas are: relational capacity (connection between student and teacher), student learning, and literacy and social studies instruction. While all three areas need to work in unison to have complete classroom and student success, it is necessary to understand each area is independent to comprehend the whole picture. To clarify, each area does blend into the other, but they are also independent and

can stand alone if necessary to begin understanding the best instructional literacy practices for a social studies classroom.

Relational Capacity. All students have the ability and the capacity to learn. The block with most students is not connecting to the material or the teacher. It is imperative that the classroom is a place where all learning can take place and the students feel safe. Muhammad and Hollie (2011) noted that giving all students the chance to feel safe and the opportunity to learn means that the educator will need to align their own behaviors with the needs of the students as they create a safe environment (Muhammad & Hollie, pg. 4) They also state that, “Above all, our teaching must be tailored to student needs, not to the needs of educators” (Muhammad & Hollie, 2011, pg. 3). Building relational capacity needs to be centered at the levels of the students to give them the opportunity to become part of the classroom community.

Creating the community is essential to building relationships that develop encouraging and meaningful learning for all students (Wolk, 2003, pg. 14). Creating this environment cannot be completed immediately. It will take time to understand the needs of the students in the classroom, as teachers must process a multitude of variables to accomplish building a community. These variables include the learning space, knowledge of the students, time between content and student’s needs, and even assessments (Hollie, 2012, pg. 48). Even though many teachers feel they are stretched for time, creating the time to build the community of learners can only improve student learning.

Improving student learning is a given that teachers want to accomplish. Teachers want to see their students find success and joy in their own learning. Yet many educators do not know how to create that successful learning environment and community. They

often start class at the beginning of the year expecting that the students are ready and willing to learn. This is hardly the case and steps should be established to nurture and build that community.

One suggestion to build community would be to create discussion options between the students, so they are sharing their own perspective on different topics both in content and personal connections. Another technique would be to use a Developmental Designs approach that works to optimize relationships between adults and students as well as optimizes these relationships into a strong and safe community (Kwame-Ross, Crawford, & Klug, 2011, pg. 145). Developmental Designs purposely creates time to share, reflect, and understand each student and their view point.

Using the Developmental Designs methods will help students feel safe within their community, and they will be comfortable moving around the room using different activities. These activities could be Think-Pair-Share, Corners, or Give-One, Get-One as each one creates an environment to discuss and connect with other members of the classroom community (Hollie, 2012, 56). These activities force students into conversations, yet give them an opportunity to have their own voice. Overall, a teacher willing to create this type of learning community must be aware that students think and learn in different ways and once the community is built student success will improve (Howard, 2009, 40).

Student Learning. The previous section focused on creating community and building a safe environment for students. Student learning is the next step after the community is established and is about bridging the gap between the student and the material presented (Sweeney, 2013, pg. 42) It is interesting to note that without the first

step of relational capacity and building community the next step of developing student learning will not be as successful. As teachers provide student voice in their classroom by using relational capacity instruction, the learning environment will become student-centered and will increase the ownership of the students with their own learning (Turner, 2010, pg. 1).

The teacher needs to be aware of the avenues necessary to connect the subject matter with the students and how their own instructional goals and needs are met (“Learning and Teaching,” 2006). As a teacher prepares for the next great lesson or unit, they need to be aware of their student’s needs and how to help them develop into strong learners. With the support of the pre-established classroom community a teacher should now be aware that as Sweeney (2013) states, “on any given day, in any given classroom, the students are at different places as learners” (pg. 42). Adaptation and change should be available for all teachers to effectively plan and prepare for the needs of their students within their lesson planning.

Students can be at different places not only academically but socially, emotionally, and physically. Strong and effective teachers are aware of those needs and know that a student can enter your classroom with preconceived notions of what they feel their own learning should be (“Learning and Teaching,” 2006). A student learns the best from the teachers that trigger the student’s own wants and needs, creating the motivation and excitement of learning. A teacher that knows their students, would understand that they would essentially bring what they have enjoyed in the past to their current learning environment. While teachers are not going to be able to predict the needs of all their students beyond academic standings each day, they do need to know that if they continue,

“To support student learning by consciously creating social interactions that help them meet the criteria of academic success, cultural competence, and critical consciousness” students will develop strong learning skills and the classroom environment will change to support all students, regardless of their level (Hollie, 2012, pg. 22).

Knowing the students and what their needs are will help support their learning and development in any own classroom. Effective teachers know that students come to their classrooms with prior knowledge and a vision for how they want to learn. These teachers place students first, but also understand that their own development is crucial to supporting students. Diane Sweeney (2013) made a strong statement when she said effective teachers develop curriculum that moves from generic to specific because the teachers understand their students and know what they need to learn (pg. 42).

Literacy and Social Studies. Social studies teachers that use best practices of creating relational capacity and understand their student’s needs, also need to focus on how to tie those to systems together and cultivate literacy in their curriculum. The true purpose is to develop literacy in the social studies, but literacy cannot survive inside the curriculum if best practices are not being used in a meaningful way. According to Hollie (2012) “Strong literacy skills—reading, writing, speaking, and listening—are central to success in most content areas” which is completely true for any social studies classroom (pg. 51). An effective teacher would seek to create opportunities for all students to read, write, speak, and listen inside their own curriculum. While these opportunities can be small group based or whole classroom instruction, it is important to bring strategies to help all students find their niche with their own learning.

Creating the areas necessary for literacy skills to improve in a social studies classroom will require moving away from the traditional classroom where all activities are organized into one large individual activity (“Learning and Teaching,” 2006). Instruction will need to change for the needs of the students, but instruction must be more than just change. Instruction must be targeted at the needs of the students in class. Knowing what works for your proficient students needs to be adapted for your struggling students. The key becomes that effective teachers know that teaching strategies to support students will require different texts, tasks, and materials (Howard, 2009, pg. 43). Truly, the goal would be for all students to find success and to learn with a positive successful experience.

As literacy and the social studies curriculum becomes fluid, the effective teacher creates a classroom that Wolk (2003) believes is not only interesting, but is creative, purposeful, and highly relevant to the students (pg. 17). Clearly, there are going to be activities and class periods where material needs to be given to the students in a lecture or a traditional means, but these methods should not be most of the curriculum. Effective teachers have a large tool box of teaching strategies that support not only the teacher but the students as well.

Bolinger and Warren (2007) concluded that in social studies instruction that there are five main elements of best teaching practice: (1) multiple representations of perspectives, (2) appropriate methodologies, (3) critical use of appropriate source materials, (4) Interdisciplinary methods, and (5) ability to construct new knowledge or sound interpretations. (pg. 72)

Combining the statement that Wolk make with the five steps created by Bolinger and Warren an effective teacher would be creating a learning environment that not only supports content standards, but is positive and conducive to student-centered learning.

Finally, teachers need to know when and how to use the best practice strategies in their classroom. Each class period cannot be a Socratic Seminar or whole-class instruction. The use of all strategies should be used intermittently with one another and a few that Howard (2009) mentions can be interactive read-alouds, turn-and-talks, and using sticky notes to jot down ideas and share with others (pg. 39). An effective teacher knows when to implement these strategies, as well as others, to keep engagement high and students learning. Being an effective teacher takes time and effort not only to understand your students but to update your own professional knowledge that not only includes content, but pedagogical knowledge as well (“Learning and Teaching,” 2006).

Engagement

Student engagement is the hardest area to measure in a classroom. It is difficult because students that “look engaged” might not be learning or those that “look distracted” might be completely aware of their own learning. Engagement is the centerpiece of knowing if the best instructional practices are working and if the teacher is effective. Yet, the student is the only one that knows if they are engaged in the material and why at that given moment they are engaged. Schlechty (2011) believes that there is a difference between students that are engaged and those that are not by the way the students are relating to the current task given to them (pg. 15). While this does make sense, it also leaves room for interpretation by the teacher.

There are a multitude of different views and definitions for engagement in the world of education. The one area that many can agree on is the fact that motivation does play a key role in engagement and learning. Kwame-Ross, Crawford, and Klug (2011) presented that engagement in learning is influenced by student motivation and how educators best meet the needs of students (pg. 146-148). If motivation is the key, then the effective teacher who uses their tool box of strategies, must be able to keep all students engaged and learning and moving in a direction that supports the students learning. Yet, it is not so simple and is much more complex to witness and to assess.

Schlechty developed five areas of engagement that support the belief that student motivation equals engagement. The five areas were created based on ways in which, “a student might respond to a learning task” (Schlechty, 2011, pg. 15). The five areas Schlechty (2011) defined are: engagement, strategic compliance, ritual compliance, retreatism, and rebellion. (pg. 16) The list of five creates a different level for the students to be engaged in a classroom and the student could be in multiple levels through one class period.

The first on the list of engagement strategies is where all teachers want their students to be in their classroom. This is where the authentic learning occurs, and the student is learning for their own wellbeing. The second level is strategic compliance and the students are merely doing the work for a quality grade, as learning the material is not of high importance. The third level is ritual compliance and the students are completing any work given to avoid any negative consequences. They do not want anything taken away from them for not doing the work. The fourth one was retreatism where the students will not do the work, but also do not cause a problem for the class or the teacher. The

students merely sit there and do nothing. The fifth and final level is rebellion, and this includes the student creating disturbances in class and attempting to do other activities beyond what is assigned. While the last two would be considered completely disengaged, it is the first three that many students can interchange during a class period, which makes it difficult to measure. (Schlechty 2011)

Schlechty's five levels also involved a cognitive presence in authentic learning. The *ASHE Higher Education Report* wrote an article titled, "Learning Theories and Student Engagement" that stated, "Cognitive engagement...involves both student motivations and learning strategies, such as will students find their own solutions to problems as well as learn how to learn" (pg. 35). Beyond just the cognitive aspect students also need to be engaged through social, behavioral, and emotional engagement. The classroom teacher can support and provide this engagement if the environment is safe, positive, and lets the students function at their optimum level for learning (Hollie, 2012, pg. 50). The goal is for all students to be engaged and focused on the material for authentic learning to occur and for the students to understand the purpose of their learning.

Creating Engagement. Defining and understanding engagement is only fifty percent of the process. The other fifty percent is creating engagement in the classroom that directly relates to the students and their own learning. Even with Schlechty's five areas of engagement and knowing that cognitive, behavioral, and emotional engagement all work in conjunction not every student is going to be engaged at the level of authentic learning all the time. While setting a goal to have one-hundred percent of students engaged is a great goal, realistically this will not happen. It is important to remember that

students change daily, and they may or may not be ready to learn the material being presented.

There are many ways that a teacher can create engagement. Using collaboration, discussion protocols, games, even rewards will work if used in the right way. Yet one of the most effective ways to create engagement is to give the students choice. As Perks' (2010) mentions it can foster a high level of interest in the students own learning which then leads to the student's own motivation and engagement. Choice can scare many teachers as it can put the control of the classroom into the hands of the students as they direct their own learning. While this may be accurate for some classrooms, most of the students will find that they are cultivating their own knowledge. The end results for all students in a classroom is for authentic learning to occur and what better way than to give them choice with their own path.

Even with choice the teacher does need to help supply some direction. As Bradley and Alcock (2010) mention that even though we offer choice the teacher must model and demonstrate the skills necessary to guide the student on their choice as barriers and hurdles will exist throughout the process (pg. 8). Often as teachers, we forget that the students are students and need extra guidance and modeling to show them how to tackle the choice they have made.

Teachers need to be clear with their expectations and instructions to help guide the students in the right direction, but it is essentially up to the student to continue the rest of the way.

As a teacher attempts to create more engagement in their class there are a few things to remember. Choice is meant to give the students purpose and knowledge in areas

they feel they will succeed. Teachers want to give choices that foster control, purpose, and knowledge versus choices that the teacher feels will work best (Perks, 2010, Pg. 2) Teachers must know their students and their interests to help deliver the right choices to them and if the community is built properly, this should not be extremely difficult. Finally, students, “must believe their work will have meaning, even if the meaning is not immediately apparent to them” (Schlechty, 2011, pg. 25). Students believing in their own work revisits the belief that all students want to learn; it is just finding the necessary tools for them to learn.

Engagement and Literacy. Literacy and engagement are a double-edged sword. Teachers complain of students not completing their reading or revising and editing their written work. Keeping students engaged in literacy is difficult, but by using choice, it will help students find their own success in literacy. Feger (2006) explains that student engagement rose once literature that was culturally relevant was placed into the curriculum (pg. 18). Something as simple as finding literature that supported the students views and culture while giving the students a choice as to what they wanted to read could strike engagement in the classroom. Being an effective teacher and giving students choice in the classroom will take work and effort, yet the result is worth the journey and the risk.

Choice can be developed beyond having students choose which text to read. Choice can also be leveraged with activities that have been mentioned in earlier paragraphs. Huskin (2016) notes that any opportunities for students to use Think-Pair-Share will help them cultivate thoughts and ideas while collaborating with others in the room, which naturally leads to building engagement between all students involved (pg. 288). Even activities such as Philosophical Chairs (debate protocol), Socratic Seminars,

or activities where students are collaborating will create the engagement with the text or sources used in class. Choice will still play a key piece as the students choose a position, side, or partner to work with.

Effective teachers understand and know how to build engagement. If it is a collaboration activity or a risky chance on giving the students choice, engagement is the central piece to student learning. Raphael and Burke (2012) summed up engagement and successful teachers with their statement that “Teachers who met the social and emotional needs of their students achieved success in the classroom” (pg. 7) Knowing your students and knowing their needs, will build a community of learners that are engaged and ready to build their literacy skills and become authentic learners.

Reading to Learn Strategies

The last part of this literary review is reading to learn strategies and the final piece to create and implement literacy in a social studies curriculum. The prior paragraphs focused on the teacher and students, while the reading to learn strategies need to be understood primarily by the teacher to become more effective at teaching. Reading to learn strategies are the skills students need to possess to have success with different texts, but most importantly for this purpose, non-fiction texts. All social studies curriculum is delivered through non-fiction text and it is important to focus on specific strategies to help the students build skills in literacy.

For this final part, it will be broken into two sections. The first section will center on the goal of teaching reading and the purpose. The second section will focus on key ideas, craft, and structure with reading and how to engage the students in each of these areas. Both sections work in conjunction to support student literacy with the goal that all

students can build upon their previous knowledge. By breaking them in two, it will help with the clarity of such a large topic.

Teaching Reading. Social studies teachers do not have formal training on how to teach reading. While their training requires them to be avid readers and understand the basics, all they must “fall back on is the modeling that was done for them” (Spandel, 2005, pg. 78). This is a problem for many social studies teachers. They teach reading from what they remember as a student. The problem is teachers access their prior knowledge of how they have been taught and with the changing cultures and dynamics of classrooms it is not always the best method. Yet, teachers must work with what they know and all the support they can find in their own classrooms.

While content standards are important for content, social studies teachers do have support in the Common Core when it comes to literacy in their classrooms. As Calkins, Ehrenworth, and Lehman (2012) explain, the Common Core was developed to help support and accelerate students’ literacy development not only in language arts but in social studies (pg. 14). The Common Core creates some new pathways to approach the content standards of social studies to help support and blend the standards together. It must be noted that social studies will need professional development to build in literacy training with the Common Core because reading is no longer the sole responsibility of language arts teachers (Calkins, Ehrenworth, Lehman, 2012, Pg. 30). Social studies teachers need to embrace the non-fiction reading strategies to support language arts and their student’s literacy skills.

With the Common Core as a resource, the next step is for social studies teachers to develop an understanding of reading in their own classrooms. Robb (2003) mentions

that there isn't a step-by-step method for social studies teachers to follow, but as best practice teachers they need to be aware of how students respond to text and how they best learn (pg. 34). For teachers looking for that magic bullet to teach reading in social studies, there isn't one. But there is the understanding of what makes a good reader and how to help build reading skills in students.

The first genuine steps are to build inquiry and give the students choice, as mentioned earlier in the engagement section. Inquiry and choice can be driven by essential questions for the unit or lesson and help with the flow of learning (Block, 2017, pg. 3). Essential questions lead to student based inquiry and force students into having a more in-depth understanding of the material. With essential questions built into the curriculum by both teachers and students, the students will begin to read for purpose and as Zimmermann and Hutchins (2008) state, "it will help the students create mental images, make inferences, and synthesize the information" (pg. 13). Developing these skills in students will ultimately help them become lifelong learners, apply themselves, and become real readers (Daniels and Zemelman, 2014, Pg. 69).

Another step with reading instruction is to teach the students to use close reading. The purpose of close reading is to give students the opportunity to help students use their own thinking in conjunction with the text. Lehman and Robert (2014) state:

Close reading instruction must: (1) raise engagement and joy, not diminish it, (2) lead to student independence, not dependent on the teachers prompting, (3) must be repeated across time and involve lots of practice, not a one-time, off-the-checklist activity. (pg. 5)

Close reading forces the students to look for key words, phrases, and the authors ideas to combine them with their own, thus creating new ideas and connections. Close reading instruction needs to be frequently taught and modeled in the classroom to give the biggest opportunity or success.

Social studies teachers, while not academically trained to teach reading, need to develop the necessary skills to provide reading instruction in the classroom. Building essential questions, using multiple reading strategies, and continually building upon the previous knowledge of all the students will lead to a strong and complete social studies curriculum that supports non-fiction reading throughout all texts. Collectively, an effective teacher would continually use all these strategies, but even with these strategies used individually, students would benefit. The reading process is highly interactive, and the students need to be constantly engaged with the material and if the teacher is helping the students develop a dialogue with the text, reading with purpose will develop and occur (Zimmerman and Hutchins, 2008, pg. 5).

Key Ideas, Craft, and Structure. The rationale in understanding key ideas, craft, and structure is to help student learners recognize and understand the texts they will be presented in any social studies class. Historically, social studies curriculum has focused on students memorizing new vocabulary and information rather than working with the material and understanding new concepts (Robb, 2003, pg. 28). Social studies curriculum has been centered for years around skill and drill, where students are expected to read a textbook chapter, note the bolded words, and answer questions at the end of the chapter. Even the unit tests were like the end of the chapter questions. This left very little, if any room, for the student's own development of ideas or self-choice in the direction they

would take their own learning. Consequently, this would create a lack of engagement and authentic learning.

To make changes to the curriculum, effective social studies teachers need to embrace the purpose of key ideas within the text. Students need to approach a text to understand the author's purpose and to note the possible meanings and purpose behind the text (Custer, n.d., pg. 77). Once students decipher the meaning of the text and start to interact with the material this is when the authentic learning begins to take shape. Instruction needs to support the chunking of text and breaking it apart into manageable sections. Modeling will need to occur to show the teacher's own thinking of this process and to give insight into tougher texts. Eventually the students will build a routine, but it will take time and effort from both the teacher and students.

Time is always an issue when balancing content and reading strategies in a social studies classroom. While the Common Core helps supports both content and literacy in social studies classrooms, it will be a balancing act for a teacher to implement. Robb (2003) argues that, "Investing short bursts of time teaching reading strategies will pay off and can actually free up time for constructivist teaching and learning" (pg. 26). It will pay big dividends to front load many reading strategies in the beginning of the year and to continually build upon a strong base. Less and less time will need to be spent teaching how to read, and more time can be used to dive into content and reading for purpose.

As students build the skill of reading for purpose, teachers need to scaffold instruction and gradually release each activity regarding the structure of the text, text processing strategies, and reflection after the reading is completed ("WICOR: AVID's Foundation for High Engagement," pg. 74). By building upon each strategy students will

continue to use their prior knowledge and begin to make new connections to the material. A few of the reading strategies that students could use would be “making and annotating texts, summarizing and charting texts, learning and using academic and discipline-based language, and identifying and evaluating an author’s claims” (Custer, n.d., pg. 78). The strategies force the student to dialogue with the text as they write, highlight, and jot notes in margins. Each of these steps forces the students to constantly interact with the text for deeper meaning and purpose.

As students become more familiar with the key ideas of the text as they mark or annotate the text while stopping and jotting, the next area to develop is to understand the author’s craft and structure of the text. A strong method to break apart and understand craft is to use a Balanced Literacy model. The purpose of Balanced Literacy is that students are surrounded with authentic texts and study the syntax, word choices, and cultural representations (Goltche, 2015, pg. 3). Balanced Literacy surround the students with not only the strategies of key terms, but also the modeling of read-alouds, guided reading, and independent reading. The students can use one or each of these strategies during a class period. Social studies teachers might struggle with the ability to develop and give the time for each of these, but if the students are surrounded with the material and the content from social studies, authentic learning will occur.

Social studies teachers have a multitude of sources at their grasp. Surrounding students with materials such as digital media, music, journals, reports, newspapers, charts, tables, and short-clips can all be considered texts that will engage and energize a student’s reading potential. Each of these can be used in an intentional manner to understand an author’s craft to help engage and be effective in the classroom (Hicks,

2013, pg. 5). Understanding an author's craft and structure, supplies students with a connection to school, each other, and authentic learning that develops strong readers that are willing to learn because of interest. Teaching students to understand is all that is necessary to build a strong connection to the material.

Conclusion

The purpose of this literary review was to analyze the guiding question: How can best practice literacy instruction support student engagement in a secondary (middle school) social studies class? The question was broken into multiple areas to study including literacy, best practice instruction, engagement, and reading to learn strategies. Each of these areas plays a crucial role in the examination in how social studies teachers can best support literacy in their classroom. Literacy in social studies classrooms is not a new idea, as reading and writing have been embedded in the social studies curriculum since its inception. It is new however, that the social studies curriculum now supports non-fiction reading strategies to better support language arts classes.

Undertaking the support of language arts classes in social studies is not an easy process as many, if not all, social studies teachers lack the proper training in literacy. Yet, by using strategies in best practices to build engagement, while implanting simple to use reading strategies, any social studies teacher can begin more in-depth literacy instruction in their classroom. Granted the argument still exists between content instruction and literacy instruction, but they both can be equal in an effective teacher's classroom. The social studies curriculum is an open door to blending the two into one effective curriculum that supports a strong learning environment.

Daniels and Zemelman (2014) stated, “If we spend part of every school day helping kids enjoy some reading, whether inside our content areas or out, we are giving a great and lasting gift” (pg. 72). Ultimately this is the goal as a teacher. To develop students into lifelong learners that understand how to think and develop connections to the world around them. Social studies teachers are great ambassadors for this process, as they are at the helm of a curriculum that is flooded with opportunity for students to connect to prior learning and find their own path and choice in direction with their own knowledge.

The following chapter will explain how the above research will be placed into action. Using the essential question and the research posed in the previous paragraphs, the purpose of chapter three will be to explain how the final project will be implemented. The goal is to develop a website that is accessible by social studies teachers to support their literacy instruction in their content area. The goal will also be to provide resources, examples, and starting points to develop a literacy based curriculum.

CHAPTER THREE

Project

Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to provide an explanation of a resource that social studies teachers can access to support literacy in their classrooms. The question used for this project was: How can best practice literacy instruction support student engagement in a secondary (middle school) social studies class? The question above supports all research with the purpose of developing and designing a useable website. The website contains resources and examples to use for implementation of literacy in a social studies classroom. This project was selected based on the needs of social studies teachers struggling to find support with literacy in their classrooms. Social studies teachers lack the training and the support to tackle a strong literacy program and embed it within their content standards. The website offers that support.

The structure of this chapter will explain the framework of the website, the target audience, and the implementation and structure of the material to explore with the website. The framework of the website will offer information from beginning stages of implementation to high levels of implementation. The target audience will be social studies teachers at the secondary (middle) level. Finally, the structure and implementation of the website will be explained to better support the interface that will be accessed by social studies teachers. Dividing the chapter into these three sections will help simplify the goal of this project.

The final section of this chapter will summarize the main points of this project. It will provide any final clarity needed to support the essential question and how best practice instruction can support literacy in a social studies classroom with engaging strategies. It will also emphasize any learnings that were gained throughout this process and how they can best support the essential question that guided this project. Finally, it will explain why a website was selected as the medium to present the information.

Framework

The framework of the website consists of five headings to simplify access to the information. The categories are: purpose, literacy, best practice instruction, engagement, and reading to learn strategies. By breaking the website into five headings, it will help keep the information organized and easily found based on the need of the participant. Each heading has subheadings to present the current research and information on how to implement those strategies. The framework has multiple levels of information, but is structured for ease to find the available information. The overall goal is to provide a website that can be used as a quick reference or for more in-depth study.

Purpose. The “purpose” section is the landing page for the website visitors. This section explains the website as a resource for social studies teachers to help with their own development of literacy in their current content. It also provides the resources that were used in the creation of the website and the rationale behind the strategies that are presented and why they were selected. The final piece of this section provides links to help understand the hierarchy and the site map of the site. This section contains the least amount of information for instruction but the highest amount of direction for use of this website.

Literacy. The “Literacy” section defines literacy as a general term as well as a specific definition to social studies. Understanding literacy will be the key to implementation in a social studies class and therefore; is defined in both areas. The literacy section defines the purpose of literacy in social studies classroom to best support the needs of the students to develop their reading and writing. This section also introduces the Common Core State Standards for literacy in a social studies classroom. Giving this resource and breaking it into manageable pieces will guide the learner to understand the why behind the Common Core State Standards and their classroom.

Best Instructional Practices. The “Best Instructional Practices” section breaks down the different ways to implement and to understand the best instructional practices for a social studies class. Within this section are areas of relational capacity, community, student learning, and strategies. While each subsection is different, they are also fluid with one another. A teacher developing new strategies for classroom connectedness would start with the relational capacity strategies and then work their way down through the steps. The goal of this section is to highlight the different best practices that could be used in the instruction of literacy in a social studies classroom.

Engagement. Best instructional strategies lead to the development and assessment of engagement in the classroom. This section explains engagement research and how to understand the different levels of student engagement. This section not only focuses on the differences in engagement, but how to assess engagement and strategies to help build and maintain student engagement. Engagement has multiple levels and this section will guide teachers not only in their classroom but can also target whole social studies departments attempting to build engagement with literacy and content strategies.

Reading to Learn Strategies. The final section of the framework is “Reading to Learn Strategies.” This section is one of the most complex out of all the others as this is the heart of developing curriculum to implement literacy in any social studies curriculum. This section will use strategies from Balanced Literacy, Close Reading, and AVID (Advancement Via Individual Determination) to help teachers build a strong working toolbox to teach reading skills to their students. Beyond the larger topics, activities will be presented to use in each of those areas along with examples that teachers can use immediately. This section should be a starting point for most teachers looking to use more reading to learn strategies in their classrooms.

Target Audience

Social studies teachers are going to benefit from the resources on this site. While all teachers will be able to use the site, it is targeted at social studies teachers researching new ways to implement literacy into their social studies curriculum. Currently, social studies teachers are not given the necessary professional development to implement literacy skills with fidelity in their classrooms. This is a complication when it comes to this subject area.

Due to the lack of training, social studies teachers are forced to teach literacy based on how they have learned to read throughout their own educational journey. While this is not inherently wrong, it is not the best or most effective way to teach reading skills to students in their classrooms. Using this site will not complete the professional development that social studies teachers need, but it will give them a starting point to begin their own learning. It will also give them materials and ideas to practice in their own rooms that are in unison with current language arts practices.

Social studies teachers, instructional coaches, department chairs, and collaborative subject area committees would find benefit in using this site as a resource. Any department or school looking to create opportunities to read across content areas would also find this site useful. Currently there are very few, if any, websites that offer a complete set of resources that collectively support creating a strong classroom atmosphere and support to develop reading skills for all students. Using this site effectively would create new direction for any building looking to improve their students' reading skills outside of a language arts classroom. Whomever the visiting individual was to the site, they would find enough information to effectively help students improve.

Structure and Implementation

Care and purpose has been given to the structure and implementation of this website. The ease of use from the order of the tabs, to the structure of the material has been well thought through and purposeful. As mentioned earlier, this site can be used as a single resource to implement in a classroom immediately or used as a constant tool to build growth and effectiveness in any classroom. Anyone visiting the site will move from the left tab and gain more knowledge and insight as they moved through the topics to the right. The key to building engagement with websites is to keep the clicks minimal and the material easily accessible. The vision for the website kept the focus of engagement and time scrolling for material at a minimum. Knowing that time is always against teachers with planning and other duties, having an online source that is clear and concise is what will make this site effective.

Using the 2006 manual on developing websites by Bailey and Barnum entitled, "Research-Based Web Design & Usability Guides" I created a website that was clear of

cluttered displays of information while keeping my most important information at top center (pg 45, 47). The site was developed for a research and information seeking individuals while keeping simple navigation at the top section as ordering the information from general to specific supports the learner in their journey through this site and provides a simple navigation system (Bailey and Barnum, 2006, pg. 59). All pages are labeled with a header that corresponds exactly to the navigation wording and the sub-pages contain simple wording to ease the reading and speed at which a reader will travel through this site (Bailey and Barnum, 2006, pg. 79). The final aspect of the website design that was the use of visual and textual consistency (Baily and Barum, 2006, pg. 102). Using the same font and addressing the importance of a common format supports the reader in a commonality of the information provided and how all the information is fluid from one category to the next.

Conclusion

The website will help answer the question: How can best practice literacy instruction support student engagement in a secondary (middle school) social studies class? The purpose is to give teachers a resource that will guide their teaching by combining multiple strategies to increase their effectiveness in the classroom. The strategies to increase effectiveness are best instructional practices, understanding literacy and engagement, and finally reading to learn strategies. Each one of these individually will help increase student learning, but used collectively will create a strong teaching practice.

The internet and online resources have changed the way classroom is structured and how teachers are able to access materials. Online resources have opened new doors

from classroom instruction and teachers use these materials daily. Creating this website will help support teachers in a method of research that is not only for their students but for themselves. It is easily accessible and can be kept for future reference as well as shared with other colleagues. Using a medium that teachers can access and understand will benefit not only themselves, but their students, which is the goal.

Chapter four will be a reflection on the process of the website that was created and how it can best benefit the visitors to the site. Chapter four will also study the analytics of the website to track any limitations and changes that need to be made to help with the user experience in finding what they need and how they use the site. The final part of chapter four will be to focus on the future of the site and the next steps in the development of the website.

CHAPTER FOUR

Reflection

Introduction

As my essential question was created for this project, I was driven to support my own learning and my Collaborative Teams (CT) learning as well. My Collaborative Team had been searching for more information and resources into student driven literacy and how we can best support these students through our social studies content areas. It was during these conversations at our CT meetings that gave me the direction to create the question that has guided this entire project. The question is: How can best practice literacy instruction support student engagement in a secondary (middle school) social studies class? The question of literacy, engagement, and best practice instruction were three huge areas for a secondary social studies teacher to consider with their daily lessons. My purpose was to create a website that would give the support needed for social studies teachers to better implement literacy into their current curriculum.

The first section of this chapter contains the influences for the creation of this project. These influences were inspired by research that was conducted and findings that completed the pathway to learning more about best practice literacy instruction. These findings supported literacy and how to blend both the content and teaching strategies to best support our student learning. The research acquired was the core how to best support the answer to the guiding question.

The second section of this chapter is how the gateway to the learning was established and focused into the medium of a website. The pathway generated from the research used the information gathered to answer the guiding question and helped to support the website development. The website was the final answer to the question using examples, ideas, video clips, and written text to best support the secondary social studies teaching community. The second section also contains how this learning supported my own development as a social studies teacher.

The third section of this chapter discusses the future and next steps for the website. The goal is for the website to be used as a resource for all secondary social studies teachers, but realistically the site might not support all users. The limitations of the site will be discussed and how to plan accordingly to keep the site operational for all users. The final part of the chapter will discuss how users will leave feedback on changes or future development of the website.

Influences

As a teacher, I know that many of my students make connections to the new material through the prior knowledge they have already acquired. This learning can be both good and bad. I also knew that as an adult learner I had to show a growth mindset as I dove into the research regarding my topic of literacy, engagement, and best teaching practices. I knew that my current knowledge on topics I was researching would create bias, yet I knew I had to keep an unbiased approach to my research. Having some prior knowledge on the subject, I knew it would be an interesting project to explore, but I had to be open to new areas of research and the ideas being presented. This proved to be the biggest challenge with my research journey, as I found research that did not contradict

the current reality with literacy in a social studies classroom, but were offshoots of multiple viewpoints that all pointed to the same conclusion. It was the multiple viewpoints that I needed to collect for the final project to be completed.

Four Areas of Research

As I progressed through my learning I broke my question into four areas of research. The areas were literacy, best instructional practices, engagement, and reading to learn strategies. In each of the areas I found research that fit my current knowledge and new information, but overall each section supported my journey to build a website that sustained all social studies teachers at the secondary level. It was during this time of research that I connected with these different areas and I knew that this was to be the best way to support my learning and my result.

Literacy. Literacy can be a negative and a stepping stone that inhibits success for many students in social studies classes. Much of social studies content is delivered through non-fiction texts and the process can be difficult for many learners. Over the course of my research, I found there are three main points that need to be established for students to be successful with their own literacy and learning. The first point was made by Kist (2013) as he believes that all students need to have a goal to find evidence and analyze the details of all texts, regardless of the text they are given to read (pg. 40). The reality is that students need to be able to read and they need to be able to understand what they are reading. This corresponds to what Alvermann states as literacy instruction becomes a crucial piece of delivering the information and beyond the content it must be effective in building engagement and creating a self-efficacy for the students as they learn (Alvermann, pg. 191). The final piece of the puzzle was the connection made by

Fisher and Ivey (2005) as they stated that, “Literacy is critical to all subject areas” which moves literacy beyond language arts classes (pg. 4).

It was this research that helped me conclude that literacy instruction is not just about handing out texts and telling students to read. Literacy is so much more and as teachers we need to understand that students need to know how to read to understand, but they also need to be taught in new and meaningful ways to access the texts across all content areas. It was this connection that helped to provide the direction to answer my question and why social studies teachers need to understand the literacy aspect of their teaching.

Best Instructional Practices. We often model how we teach after how we were taught as students. I remember both the good and bad teachers in my educational journey and find myself teaching in the same methods that I learned, and I often steer away from the teachers I did not connect with. This created a block in my teaching mindset and I needed to realize that students learn in different ways and just because I did not like how my teacher’s taught, does not mean that another student feels the same way. I broke out of the teaching mindset of how I learn when I found the works of Sharokey Hollie. His work centered on validating students in their own space to help create new learning environments for the students. Hollie (2012) stated, “Teachers must weigh several factors, including outcome, purpose, standards-based relation, time allocation, resources, students’ background knowledge, environmental space, assessment methods, and a host of other variables.” (Pg. 48). This statement moved my mindset from who were my good and bad teachers, to how did each of my teachers teach me over the years and how can I learn from each of them. I found that successful classrooms were no longer teacher

centered, but a mix of both student and teacher. Understanding that all students and teachers have needs that need to be met, will help structure any classroom into an area where best practices are able to support all students on any given day and in any given classroom (Sweeney, 2013, p. 42).

Engagement. Research on engagement is abundant, yet it is one of the most important areas to student learning and the hardest to monitor. Engagement and motivation are connected, and this dynamic is what creates the biggest factor in engagement. Often teachers use assignments and scores to judge the motivation level of our students. While motivation can be a factor to assess students' success, I connected more to the notion that choice in the student's own learning can help develop more motivation and engagement. Thinking critically, people like to make their own choices on what they want, and this should also be the norm for our students as well with their learning. While giving students choices, it can create a risk for the both the student and the teacher. Bradley and Alcock (2010) state that, "The unexpected and advantageous result of encouraging students to take measured risks is that we, as a staff, learned that the risk is not just for the students." (Pg. 7). If we are going to engage all students, we need to create risk and give our students a choice.

Reading to Learn Strategies. The final piece of research was to understand the reading to learn strategies that are implemented in a social studies classroom. These were the strategies that supported student learning through the non-fiction texts and were taught to the students by the teacher. Reading to learn strategies are key pieces to developing students learning through inquiry, choice, close reading, key ideas and structure, and finally an author's craft. Zimmermann and Hutchins (2008) stated, "Good

readers ask questions, create mental images, use their background knowledge, make inferences, determine what's most important, synthesize information, and use fix-up strategies.” (Pg. 13). Quality reading to learn strategies encompass everything that Zimmermann and Hutchins mention in their statement about the development of good readers. Using reading to learn strategies in a social studies classroom leads to a stronger reader as they are supported multiple times with their reading beyond language arts classes.

The Gateway

The creation of this project was to give social studies teachers professional development without taking them away from the classroom. In our current systems we have instructional coaches that help support our teachers in their endeavors to develop their craft. While instructional coaches are extremely beneficial to the growth of teachers, many teachers complete much of their own professional development outside the school day on their own. My goal was that this website would support literacy learning and professional development for social studies teachers.

I structured the website into seven pages to scaffold the learning of the visitor to my site. The seven pages are: purpose, literacy, best practice instruction, engagement, reading to learn, feedback, and resources. I built the site with this framework to help support not only beginning social studies teachers, but those that are experienced with social studies curriculum. My overarching goal was to provide an easy to follow learning experience that could be used for both in-depth learning and as a quick resource.

Purpose. The purpose page is the first page of the website (appendix A-Purpose). It outlines the reason why the site was created delivers the essential question for the

project in the first paragraph. This page is strictly a beginning page for the user to start their journey through the website. I also added the list of hyperlinks to the center section of the page, to help with navigation and ease of use. Overall, the purpose page was developed to support any visitors that want to know more about literacy best practices in a social studies classroom and to help them understand the purpose of the website.

Literacy. The second page of the website is the literacy page (appendix B-Literacy). The visitor is given the definition of literacy and how to apply literacy to a social studies classroom. This page also has references related to the Common Core and different pathways to support the common core in a social studies classroom. While not everyone agrees with the Common Core, for my research purposes and the instructional strategies stated elsewhere in the website, it was important to define and give examples of why the Common Core is an effective support of literacy in a social studies classroom. I also provided the first resources necessary to fully understand and use this website to its potential as a resource to learn about literacy.

Best Practice Instruction. As the third page of this site, visitors have been exposed to my essential question and the definition of literacy (appendix C-Best Practice Instruction). The Best Practice Instruction page is the first experience for the visitors where they can gather information to use in their own classrooms. The structure of this page is simple and is easy to implement as relational capacity, collaboration, and student-centered discussion activities are key pieces to help support quality instruction in the classroom. The focus of this page is to help the visitor know that student experiences and a strong classroom community is important to build and implement the strategies listed

on the next few webpages. After viewing and implementing the activities on this page the visitor would be ready to move to the next steps of engagement.

Engagement. Student engagement in a classroom is difficult to measure, but it is one of the most important areas for supporting student success (appendix D-Engagement). The engagement page was added as a support structure to help provide activities and knowledge on why engagement is important to student learning. While engagement does not directly tie to literacy, teachers need to understand the research surrounding engagement to better understand how to engage their students and help support the community of learners they developed using the previous webpage. The engagement page provides research, activities, and different models of classrooms to give options to teachers working to sustain a strong and effective classroom environment.

Reading to Learn. The Reading to Learn page is the heart of this entire site (appendix E-Reading to Learn). The Reading to Learn page provides the reading strategies necessary to build a strong literacy curriculum in a social studies classroom. The strategies of close reading, inquiry, and student choice are each represented with research and activities. The second level of this page presents key ideas and the author's craft as a tool to implement reading to learn strategies into a social studies classroom. As the nucleus of this site, this page will provide growth to new teachers as well as veteran teachers with the information presented. The Reading to Learn page is the answer to developing literacy in a social studies curriculum and the result to answer my essential question.

Feedback and Resources. The final two pages of the website is the feedback form and the resources used to create the site (appendix F-Feedback and G-Resources). I

added all the resources collected to best support any further learning from the visitors as they reach the limits of this site. The feedback form will help support my own learning as I add new information to the site and continue to support the development of literacy in a social studies classroom as requested by the visitors to the site. The feedback form will help guide new directions and new needs for social studies teachers.

The structure of the website was built to keep the visitor engaged and to provide an effective use of time and learning. Keeping the pages in the order of purpose, literacy, best practice instruction, engagement, reading to learn, feedback, and resources scaffolds the new learning to the visitor. As the visitor clicks through each of the pages, a new level of learning is created and new techniques to build student engagement in literacy are delivered. While each page of the website has a specific role, the website supports both new teachers and experienced teachers to develop or to support the development of literacy in any secondary social studies classroom.

The Future

My essential question was developed to support secondary social studies teachers with literacy. Much of the social studies curriculum is threaded with non-fiction texts and is heavy in reading and writing. Knowing that social studies curriculum is not supported with data from state driven high stakes testing, it is important to have this resource as a supplement for professional development and the growth of social studies curriculums. I truly hope that with this website teachers will be able to hone their craft and support more literacy work inside their classrooms. What I created as an online resource is an immense amount of knowledge with literacy and best practices, but it is also a great stepping stone for any social studies teacher to use as they progress their school year and their career.

Reflecting on the process used to create the website and the purposes for which it was created, my goal is to continue researching new social studies literacy techniques and add them to the existing resources. This website is a living document and one that will continually grow with the learning community. I plan on staying updated with literacy, best practices, engagement, and reading to learn strategies to continually support my own path of learning. As my learning grows, so will this site with the addition of more information and new research.

As the developer of this website, I would like to be able to state that there are no limitations and the site is exactly the way it needs to be. Realistically, this is untrue. I know there is more that can be added and researched to support the site. While I feel that the structure of the site is user friendly and will be used to the fullest, this will not be true for all visitors. Some may want a simple interface with less videos and more text or they may want more interactive experiences with videos and online lessons. Either way, as any website is a living document, I can use the feedback gathered from my feedback page to best support the continuous development of the site.

The feedback page of the website asks four questions. The four questions ask the user to rate the site's navigation, support of literacy, and provide valuable knowledge. The feedback form uses a Likert scale to rate each of these questions. The Likert scale on the feedback form has the user rate the site from a one to a three, where a one is a disagree and a three is agree. Using this type of scale will provide a quick experience for the user to give feedback, but will also support the next steps of the site and changes I may need to make. The final question asks the visitor of the site to add any written feedback or suggestions to be added to the website. The feedback does not collect any

personal data from the visitors and is strictly voluntary. I also hope to collect enough feedback and data to prove that this site is a worthwhile support for the teaching community.

Conclusion

The website was the answer to my essential question of: How can best practice literacy instruction support student engagement in a secondary (middle school) social studies class? The website gives examples of each area of best practice, literacy, engagement and reading to learn strategies in social studies classrooms. Each of these areas also supports the research that was completed to give the visitor to the site the most current views on the topic of literacy in a social studies classroom. The research completed was done with purpose and consideration to support teachers to help them best support their students. Social studies teachers need professional development and support as they develop curriculum supporting literacy and engagement in their classrooms and this website fits that need. The overall goal is to help our students be more complete in literacy beyond language arts classrooms and with this website social studies teachers will be able to help complete that goal.

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APPENDIX

Appendix A-Purpose

Social Studies Best Practices

Purpose Literacy Best Practice Instruction Engagement Reading to Learn Feedback Resources

Implementing Best Practice Literacy Instruction into a Social Studies Classroom

The purpose of this site is to help support secondary social studies teachers as they work to implement literacy into their current curriculum. This site was created from the research question of, "How can best practice instruction support student engagement in a secondary (middle school) social studies class?" The question was created in fulfillment of a master's degree in literacy from Hamline University.

While there was plenty of information regarding literacy in a language arts classroom, there was minimal research supporting a strong social studies literacy center in a classroom. This website addresses that gap in the core content of our middle school classrooms, but can be enhanced to support high school social studies content



Social Studies Best Practices

Purpose

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Feedback

Resources



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While there was plenty of information regarding literacy in a language arts classroom, there was minimal research supporting a strong social studies literacy centered classroom. This website addresses that gap in the core content of our middle school classrooms, but can be enhanced to support high school social studies content classes as well.

This site will focus on four main components. The implementation of [Literacy in a Social Studies Classroom](#), [Best Practice Instruction](#), [Engagement](#), and [Reading to Learn Strategies](#). While each part can be studied and used independently, the goal is to implement all four to help best support your social studies classrooms.

The research for this site was compiled through thoughtful consideration of the tools and skill sets of many of our social studies teachers today. All resources used are [linked on the resource page](#) and in many cases are [linked directly to the article or information](#).

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Literacy

In the world of education, literacy is everything and everywhere. All content areas are expected to support students' literacy to create students that are lifelong learners. With the exception of language arts, social studies is the next logical choice to support students' literacy. McKenna and Robinson (1990) defined literacy as, "The ability to use reading and writing for the acquisition of new content in a given discipline" (pg. 184). This certainly applies to social studies content and the non-fiction texts that deliver the content to the students.

The Common Core

The Common Core is a heated topic in classrooms nation wide. Some are for it, some are against it, and some are stuck right in the middle. What can be said about the Common Core is that provides the groundwork to give students the necessary tools to, "analyze, evaluate, and differentiate primary and secondary sources" (Common Core, pg. 81). The Common Core is structured to support both the teacher and the students with literacy in a social studies classroom. The

Pathways to the Common Core

Out of the think-tank that is [The Reading & Writing Project](#) at Columbia University came an amazing resource titled, "[The Pathways to the Common Core](#)." This resource supports the notion that the Common Core is a tremendous resource to understand how to use and teach non-fiction texts in any classroom. Understanding that the goal of the Common Core is to prepare students to accelerate their literacy development and to prepare them for a college and



Appendix B-Literacy

Social Studies Best Practices

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language arts standards. Many feel that these standards add extra work into the already existing standards for our content, but if social studies teachers are to help support out students prepare for their career and college pathways, they need extra literacy support.



Literacy Instruction Must Bridge the Gap Left by Language Arts Teachers and Non-fiction Text

Fisher and Ivey (2005) state that, "Literacy is critical to all subject areas" and instruction is going to be the corner stone to the success of literacy in all areas (pg. 4).

Students need to be given the opportunity to develop new strategies by using their own background knowledge and learning strategies from a variety of texts, which the social studies curriculum is perfect (Alverman, pg. 193). *Moving beyond the textbook as merely a resource is the first step to encompassing the support our students need for literacy, but is not the only step.* Instructors need to understand that students need to drive their own learning and that knowledge is acquired through discussions and





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Best Practice Instruction

Best instructional practices work to create a dynamic between students and educators all while working in conjunction to increase not only student achievement, but the teacher's achievement in instruction (Hollie, 2012, pg. 19). Every minute throughout every day, a teacher is in front of students and they are building relationships to support every student's success in the classroom. Best instructional practices have three areas: relational capacity (connection between student and teacher), student learning, and literacy and social studies instruction. These work in unison to create a strong learning environment.

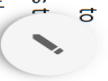
Relational Capacity

Consider the relational capacity to be the team building as you create a cohesive family-style atmosphere in your classroom. A place where students learn without the fear of failing. A place where students can ask questions and drive into their own learning. A place where students can be comfortable with their strengths and weaknesses. Creating this environment cannot be completed immediately. It will

Student Learning, Literacy, and Social

Studies

Social studies teachers that use best practices of creating relational capacity and understand their student's needs, also need to focus on how to tie those to systems together and cultivate literacy in their curriculum. The true purpose is to develop literacy in the social studies, but literacy cannot survive inside the



Social Studies Best Practices

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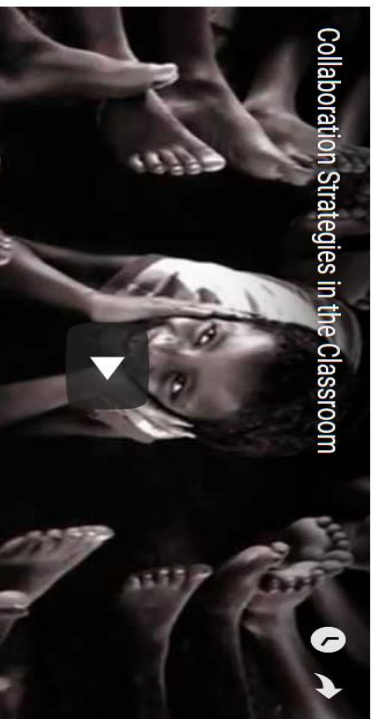
Take time to understand the needs of the students in the classroom, as teachers must process a multitude of variables to accomplish building a community environment. Social studies content is a great gateway to develop discussions, collaboration, and critical thinking. Below is a list of other websites and videos to support building relational capacity in your own classrooms!

Developmental Designs Games

Think, Pair, Share

Give one, Get one

Games to Build Critical Thinking



curriculum if best practices are not being used in a meaningful way. According to Holle (2012) "Strong literacy skills—reading, writing, speaking, and listening—are central to success in most content areas" which is completely true for any social studies classroom (pg. 51). Finally, teachers need to know when and how to use the best practice strategies in their classroom. Each class period cannot be a Socratic Seminar or whole-class instruction. The use of all strategies should be used intermittently with one another and a few that Howard (2009) mentions can be interactive read-alouds, turn-and-talks, and using sticky notes to jot down ideas and share with others (pg. 39).

Social Studies Best Practices

Purpose

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Best Practice Instruction

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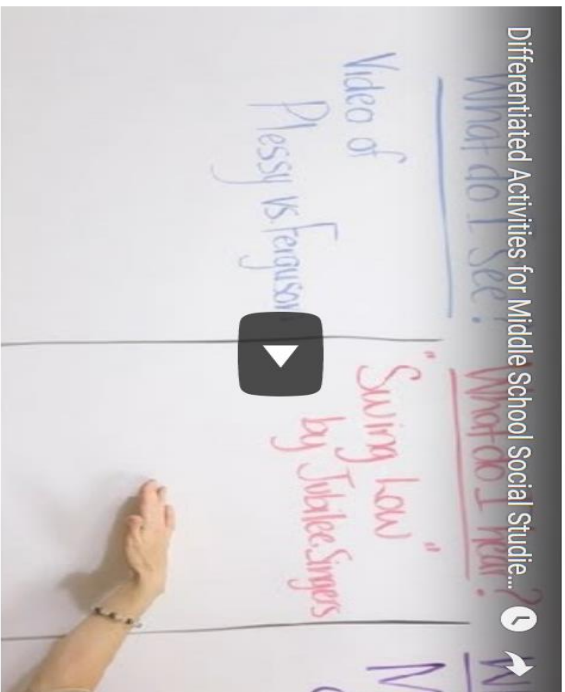
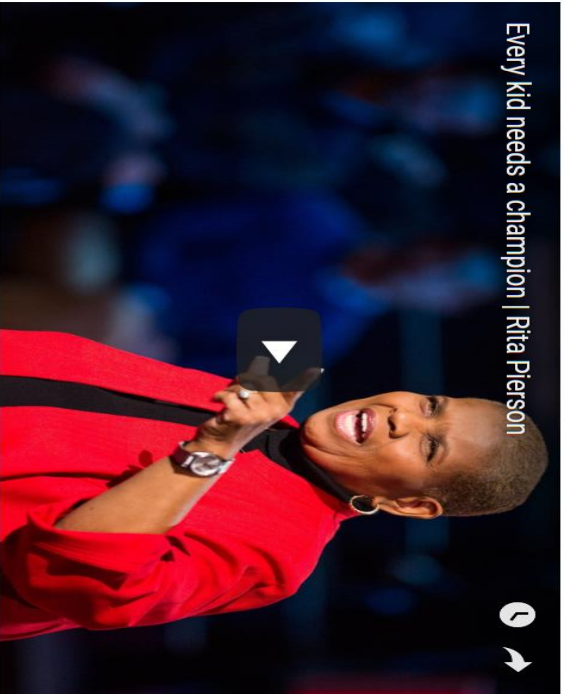
Reading to Learn

Feedback

Resources



The article is referenced to help answer the question.



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Engagement

Student engagement is the hardest area to measure in a classroom. It is difficult because students that “look engaged” might not be learning or those that “look distracted” might be completely aware of their own learning. Engagement is the centerpiece of knowing if the best instructional practices are working and if the teacher is effective. Yet, the student is the only one that knows if they are engaged in the material and why at that given moment they are engaged. Schlechty (2011) believes that there is a difference between students that are engaged and those that are not by the way the students are relating to the current task given to them (pg. 15). While this does make sense, it also leaves room for interpretation by the teacher. As social studies teachers, we have the ability to use video, images, text, and discussion protocols to build engagement in the classroom.

Engagement strategies

- [Schlechty Center of Engagement](#)
- [Teaching For Cognitive Engagement](#)

STRATEGIC COMPLIANCE NEW STRATEGY - USE APPROPRIATELY

The task has little inherent or direct value to the student, but the student associates a with outcomes or results that do have value to the student (such as grades). Student will abandon work if extrinsic goals are not realized and will not retain what is learned.

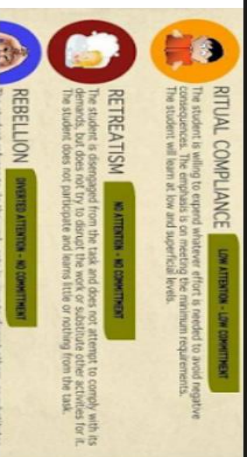


Appendix D-Engagement

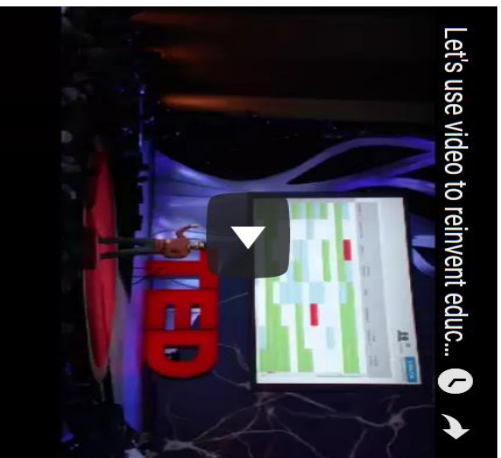
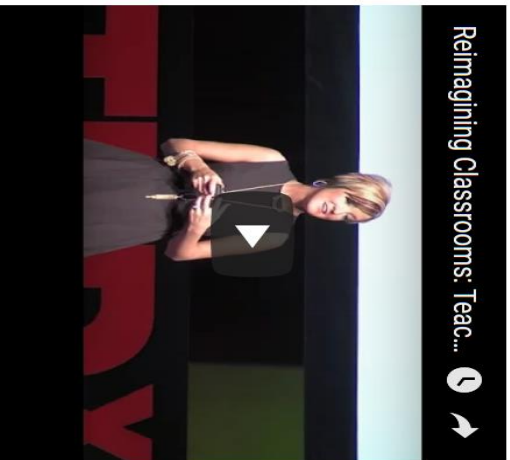
Social Studies Best Practices

Purpose Literacy Best Practice Instruction Engagement Reading to Learn Feedback Resources

- [Student Engagement In the Classroom](#)
- [Flipped Learning in the Classroom](#)
- [Collaboration Activities](#)
- [Collaborating Techniques](#)



Levels of Engagement



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Gothell Notes with Stan the AVID man.

wrote test
question

Explain	key things you should do to take Cornell notes?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> you took notes on the Cornell way - you should use abbreviations - symbols - hand - Cornell says the ideas - cross the AVID class notes notes? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> You can mark points of confusion with ? or POC to help show for follow up questions later.

What is a POC?

PHILIPSON

PHILOSOPHICAL CHAIRS

Philosophical Chairs

It's a discussion, not a debate!

PHILIPSON

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Reading to Learn

Reading to learn strategies are the skills students need to possess to have success with different texts, but most importantly for this purpose, non-fiction texts. All social studies curriculum is delivered through non-fiction text and it is important to focus on specific strategies to help the students build skills in literacy.

The previous pages were the stepping stones to building literacy in your social studies classrooms and this page is the final step in the process. Literacy and engagement are a double-edged sword. Teachers complain of students not completing their reading or revising and editing their written work. Keeping students engaged in literacy is difficult, but by using choice, it will help students find their own success in literacy. Feger (2006) explains that student engagement rose once literature that was culturally relevant was placed into the curriculum (pg. 18). Something as simple as finding literature that supported the students views and culture while giving the students a choice as to what they wanted to read could strike engagement in the classroom. Being an effective teacher and giving students choice in the classroom will take work an effort, yet the result is worth the journey and the risk.



Appendix E-Reading to Learn

Social Studies Best Practices

Purpose Literacy Best Practice Instruction Engagement **Reading to Learn** Feedback Resources

Inquiry

Give students the ability to ask questions and guide their own curiosity. As a teacher, you can support the beginning stages of inquiry by setting up essential questions for the daily lesson and the unit.



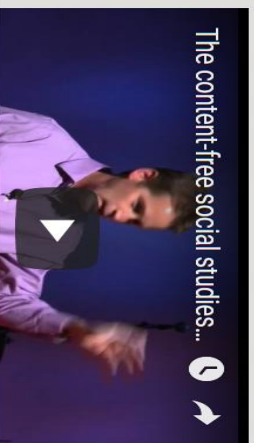
Choice

Give students choice in their learning. The teacher is a guide, but the students find their own path. The flow of learning will improve and the students will be more engaged with the material.



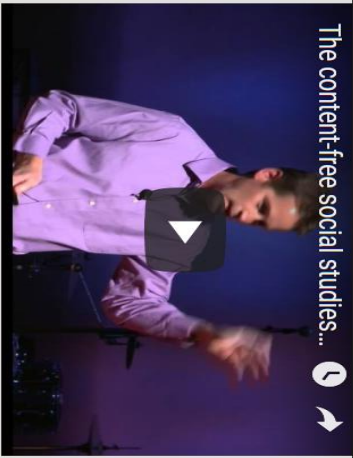
Close Reading

Another step with reading instruction is to teach the students to use close reading. The purpose of close reading is to give students the opportunity to help students use their own thinking in conjunction with the text.




Social Studies Best Practices
Purpose Literacy Best Practice Instruction Engagement **Reading to Learn** Feedback Resources

Key Ideas, Craft, and Structure



The content-free social studies...



Close Reading, Grade 6 social s...


Key Ideas and Structure

To make changes to the curriculum, effective social studies teachers need to embrace the purpose of key ideas within the text. The following a resources support student non-fiction reading in texts and resources.

- [Reading and Writing Project](#)

Craft

Understanding an author's craft and structure, supplies students with a connection to school, each other, and authentic learning that develops strong readers that are willing to learn because of interest. Teaching students to understand is all that is necessary to build a strong connection to the material.



Michelle Olson, Instruction in Structure, Author's Craft, and I

Social Studies Best Practices

Purpose

Literacy

Best Practice Instruction

Engagement

Reading to Learn

Feedback

Resources



AVID Mark the Text USE

IT TO ...

Identify information as you read

Complete a first read, then on the second read mark the relevant text to the topic being studied.

Whole Class Instruction in Studying Author's Craft and I...

How to Annotate a Text

Write questions that you have as you are reading.

Which kinds of craft do author's commonly use in Nonfiction Informational and Nonfiction Persuasive writing?

- Facts
- Statistics
- Personal experience
- Logical order of ideas
- Persuasive language
- Argument
- Imagery / Figurative lang. (and more!)
- Symbolism
- Metaphors & Similes
- Characterization



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- **Syntax** (word order)
- **Diction** (word choice)
- **Irony** (what happens is not what you expect)



Feedback

Social Studies Best Practices Feedback Form

* Required





* Required

The website was easy to navigate *

1 2 3

Disagree Agree

The website supported literacy in social studies. *

1 2 3

Disagree Agree

The website provided valuable knowledge to support literacy in social studies. *

1 2 3

Disagree Agree

Do you have any suggestions to add to the website? *





social studies. *

1

2

3

Disagree



Agree

Do you have any suggestions to add to the website? *

Your answer

SUBMIT

Never submit passwords through Google Forms.

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Google Forms



Resources

Website Resources

- Alshomrani, Siad (2017) "Give One Get One" <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xDA6z520HE>
- <https://www.teachthought.com/critical-thinking/10-learn-building-games-that-promote-critical-thinking/>
- BMS AVID (2014) "Cornell Notes with Stan the AVID man" TED Talk <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8fH030Z6Yfg>
- Butz, Heather (2016) "How to Annotate a Text" <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NlmAKxhpm>
- Candea, Kasey (2014) "AVID Mark the Text" <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GIxM8bMwE>
- Dezler, Kayla (2015) "Reimagining Classrooms: Teachers as Learners and Students as Leaders" TED Talks <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6vIXMvVys>
- eHow (2013) "Differentiated Activities for Social Studies Students" <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8G74nLLg>
- Hutton, Peter (2014) "What if Students Controlled Their Own Learning?" TED Talk <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nkxqEkg3wQ0>

Text Resources

- Alvermann, D. E. (2002a). Effective literacy instruction for adolescents. *Journal of Literacy Research*, 34(2), 189-208. doi:10.1207/s15548430jl3402_4
- Amranda Nichols Hess. (2015). Motivational design in information literacy instruction. *Communications in Information Literacy*, 9(1), 44. Retrieved from <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/E11089288.pdf>
- Bergmann, J., & Sams, A. (2014). Flipped learning: Gateway to student engagement. Eugene: ISTE. Retrieved from <http://replace-me/ebinaryId=1052410>
- Block, J. (2017). Encouraging students to own their work. Retrieved from <https://www.edutopia.org/article/encouraging-students-own-their-work-joshua-block>
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- Bradley, A., & Alcock, M. (2010). Providing Choice—A risk worth taking for teachers and students. *Adolescent Literacy in Perspective*, 6-8. Retrieved from <https://trc.ohioah.edu/files/Instructional%20Activities/Learning%20Activities/Cra>

