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Utilizing NWEA Map Data To Create Scaffolded And Differentiated Instruction That Advances Student Mastery Of Literary Standards And Deepens Student Understanding Of Literary Texts

Jane Reinhardt
Hamline University

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UTILIZING NWEA MAP DATA TO CREATE SCAFFOLDED AND DIFFERENTIATED

INSTRUCTION THAT ADVANCES STUDENT MASTERY OF LITERARY STANDARDS

AND DEEPENS STUDENT UNDERSTANDING OF LITERARY TEXTS

by

Jane Adele Reinhardt

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Capstone Project Facilitator: Elizabeth Will
Content Expert: Molly Brown

To Henry
Thank you for your smile when I come home from a long day at work, your shining light has kept me going this year.

Joe
Thank you for loving me, supporting me, and doing the dishes.

and Larry
Thank you for being there from the start.

To my parents
Thank you for the opportunities, support, and hope you have supplied me with unconditionally.

To my 8th grade class, 2017-2018
Thank you for all you have taught me. Without you, none of this would be possible.

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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

Fundamental Question

In our current educational system, many districts and states spend an incredible amount of time and money testing our students based on various state and national standards. In a single year my students spend over 15 hours testing. As a new teacher, I was handed a stack of data, an access code to testing data online, and told my job was to move students two brackets on the Northwest Evaluation Association (NWEA) learning continuum. The NWEA creates adaptive computer tests that provide teachers with in-depth data on each student. While the data is informative, it can also be overwhelming for new teachers or those with little training in data analysis. I spent hours going through the three NWEA learning continuums; literary text, informational text, and vocabulary acquisition, in order to understand the skills my students had mastered and those skills they still needed help mastering. I was overwhelmed and discouraged. I received no formal guidance or education on how to use the data which furthered my frustration. Eventually, the data became too much to incorporate into my classroom. I was simply too busy creating my own curriculum to truly utilize the testing data in a meaningful way. By

neglecting the data, I was not helping my students build and grow their skills as much as I could have if I had made an effort to understand their testing data.

After a few years of using the NWEA Measure of Academic Progress (MAP) test, I learned how beneficial the NWEA MAP data can be and started using the NWEA learning continuum to help guide my lesson planning. Because MAP is an adaptive test, responding to each student's abilities, teachers are able to get detailed information about which skills their students have mastered and which skills they should be working on. By creating a unit that helps teachers differentiate to each level of the NWEA learning continuum, it is my goal that students will be able to receive instruction that utilizes data to help students master literary analysis standards. In addition to student success, my goal is to give teachers a tool to help utilize the data provided by the MAP test to create engaging lessons that respond to each student's skill set. Which brings me to my research question; *How can NWEA MAP data be utilized to create scaffolded and differentiated instruction that advances student mastery of literary standards and deepens student understanding of literary text?* My goal is to utilize the individualized data provided by MAP to create a unit that address all levels of the learning continuum. In this chapter I will discuss my personal history, outline my interest in the topic, and provide my statement of purpose. My subsequent chapters will provide my literature review, project description, and my conclusions.

Personal History and Interest

While assessment is an important part of evaluating instruction, I was overwhelmed as a new teacher. Not only was I presented with a plethora of data, I was

also surprised at the influence that standardized testing scores and MAP growth could have on my job security and my performance bonus. My personal philosophy to teach students literary based critical thinking and real world skill conflicted with the teaching-to-the-test practices many of my colleagues took in order to secure their jobs. My goal is to develop a curriculum that allows students to gain deep literary analysis skills and helps teachers feel more empowered to implement data-driven instruction.

In my school, student performance on the NWEA MAP test and the state standardized Colorado Measures of Academic Success (CMAS) influences everything from teaching topics for the next year to job security and performance bonuses. Because of the high stakes of testing, it is essential to use data to create truly dynamic lessons that utilize differentiation to reach students of all abilities so all students are able to master literary standards.

My goal is to create a unit that provides teachers with the tools they need to educate students at every point of the NWEA learning continuum with whole group instruction and guided small group discussions. By providing teachers with a unit that is able to capitalize on teaching differentiated skills in a whole group setting and helping students deepen their discussion skills in small groups, my unit will allow teachers to challenge students of all levels.

Statement of Purpose

In order to answer my research question, I worked to create a unit that uses scaffolding and differentiation to support the development of literary analysis skills. I crafted lessons that respond to the testing data gathered by NWEA testing. Using the data

to create differentiation lessons helps students become more engaged with the material because it responds to their own skill level (Burke, 2013; Watts-Taffe, et al., 2012, p 304). I focus on using short stories and folktales to develop students' skills from all ends of the NWEA learning continuum. By using short texts, students are exposed to a multitude of literary analysis, evidence-based discussion skills, and vocab acquisition skills. Not only should my curriculum help students perform better on the NWEA MAP test, my curriculum also utilize a variety of assessments, beyond the NWEA MAP test, to show that students have been able to truly deepen their literary analysis skills by demonstrating mastery in a multitude of ways. By utilizing many different types of assessments, I will be able to determine the answer to my research question, *How can NWEA MAP data be utilized to create scaffolded and differentiated instruction that advances student mastery of literary standards and deepens student understanding of literary text?*

Chapter Summary

By creating a unit that focuses on the individualized data collected by the NWEA MAP testing, teachers have the ability to create detailed lessons that target individual literary skills. My project aims to provide teachers with a unit that uses data from the NWEA learning continuum to create instruction that deepens students' literary analysis skills. that help deepen students literary analysis skills. In this chapter I outlined my experiences with testing data that influenced the development of my research question, *How can NWEA map data be utilized to create scaffolded and differentiated instruction that advances student mastery of literary standards and deepens student understanding of*

literary text? In chapter two, I will examine the literature and research surrounding the effects of standardized testing, the utilization of testing data, and different models of successful literary curriculums.

CHAPTER TWO

Review of Literature

Introduction

In my previous chapter, I discussed my desire to create data-driven instruction based on the NWEA MAP testing data to help teachers utilize data to create engaging lessons. My research question, *How can NWEA MAP data be utilized to create scaffolded and differentiated instruction that advances student mastery of literary standards and deepens student understanding of literary text?,* was developed based on my own frustration with the expectations to provide data-driven instruction with little direction and formal training. My frustration lead me to see a need for a curriculum based on the NWEA MAP testing data. One of the benefits of the NWEA MAP test is the individualized nature of data it provides. Rather than simply identify if a student is proficient or not, NWEA MAP data shows areas of strength and areas of focus for each student. It also shows each student's skill set on a learning continuum, which gives teachers a guide for the skill students still need to develop. The learning continuum also allows teachers to look ahead at skills that may challenge students, helping them grow as readers (NWEA, 2018b). By pairing the testing data collected from the NWEA MAP test with engaging lessons, teachers will have another tool to influence their instruction.

In order to understand what quality data-driven instruction entails, it is important to find successful models of testing data being used to grow students in unexpected ways. I will be examining the uses of both scaffolding and differentiation strategies to help grow students' literary analysis skills. I will also be analyzing existing literacy curriculums to determine the best ways to successfully implement a curriculum that tackles both vocabulary acquisition, literary analysis, and keeps students motivated and engaged in their reading. Students who are engaged in their learning are able to deepen their comprehension skills and take ownership over their own education (Burke, 2013).

In this chapter, I will examine the adaptive nature of the NWEA MAP test in order to understand the data provided by the test and what makes the NWEA MAP data an effective tool to use in the classroom. I will also provide an overview of the use of data-driven instruction, examine how to use differentiation and scaffolding in the classroom, and describe various literacy curriculums. These are important topics to research in order to develop a curriculum that not only utilizes the NWEA data, but also provides students with engaging lessons that deepen their literary analysis skills. It is important to create a curriculum that not only responds to the NWEA MAP test but also develops skills students will use in real world settings.

Northwest Evaluation Association MAP Test Overview

The NWEA produces the Measure of Academic Progress (MAP) test, a computer adaptive test, that is used in more than 8,500 schools and districts in the U.S. and internationally, testing more than 10 million students annually (Northwest Evaluation Association [NWEA], 2017, p. 1). NWEA tracks student growth rather than simply

proficiency. Many different educators regularly cite their use of MAP growth for delivering the most precise, valid, and reliable data on each student's academic performance (NWEA, 2017, p. 1). NWEA MAP data is available immediately after students finish testing. With immediately available data, teachers are able provide data-driven instruction based on their current students.

The NWEA MAP test adjusts test difficulty based on a student's answers to more accurately represent student achievement (Olson, 2001, p. 40). The adaptive nature of the MAP test means that teachers are given detailed data on their students' ability to analyze both literary text and informational texts, and students' vocabulary skills. Because of the adaptive nature of the test, the MAP test provides teachers with more comprehensive data then traditional standardized tests (Olson, 2001, p. 40).

NWEA's adaptive nature makes it the ideal test to examine while attempting to create a differentiated curriculum because teachers can access detailed data on students regardless of whether the student performs on, above, or below grade level. Many schools have been able to use NWEA data not only for interventions, but to grow students far beyond grade level (Mckenzie-Wilson, 2002; NWEA, 2014). Teachers are provided with in-depth data about not only which students are behind, on track, or above grade level but also which academic areas students may struggle and which academic strengths students have (NWEA, 2018b).

The NWEA MAP test provides data that can be utilized imiditatebly after the assessment and because of the adaptive nature of the test, the data collected gives teachers more of a holistic insight into student abilities. Students are not just assessed as

proficient or not proficient, instead students are placed on a learning continuum that shows teachers the skills their students are working on, those they have mastered, and those that come next in the learning continuum. This is incredibly useful for teachers to help push students beyond simply being proficient. The use of data-driven instruction combined with engaging lessons can help students master standards based on their current abilities.

Utilizing Testing Data in the Classroom

Introduction

Assessments have always been a tool that teachers rely on to evaluate student progress and demonstrate student mastery of state standards (Bouck, 2006, p. 67). Using assessment data to inform instruction creates proactive lessons that are based on student needs. Every school must establish how they will measure student growth and achievement. Assessment is essential and it is important that assessment data influences the learning that happens within the classroom (Wiliam, 2010). An important assessment tool is testing data. Utilizing testing data, in addition to other assessment tools, can help teachers create lessons that support students mastery of literary standards.

Student achievement on normed assessments is used as one of the main measures of teacher accountability (Bouck, 2006, p. 67). In Colorado, teacher effectiveness is composed of 50% professional practice and 50% measures of student learning (Colorado Department of Education [CDE], 2016, p. 4). With this focus on measures of student learning, there also comes a focus on assessment data and data-driven instruction. While data can provide teachers with valuable information, it is important to examine

instruction in terms of the whole child, not simply a students' ability to perform on standards based tests (Neuman, 2016, pp. 26-27). When teachers use testing data to deepen their teaching, they are able to create engaging lessons that also help students to develop the skills they need to analyse literature and deepen their reading comprehension skills.

Using the NWEA Map Test to Create Data-Driven Instruction

The NWEA MAP test provides teachers with immediate data that breaks down individual student's literary analysis abilities, informational text skills, and vocabulary knowledge. In one school, NWEA MAP data was used "to pinpoint a group of students extremely gifted in math and was able to raise the bar, advancing the students to pre-calculus studies" (Olson, 2001, p. 42). As demonstrated in the case study described by Olson (2001), when testing data is embraced, students are able to grow in unexpected ways. In a similar case study, McKenzie-Wilson (2002) described the growth of students in the Plano Independent School District, located outside of Dallas, Texas. Teachers in the district considered the NWEA MAP data as one of the most valuable tools because it provided them with immediate, individualized data that helped them place new students and screen students for specialized programs (Mckenzie-Wilson, 2002). NWEA data was able to provide guidance for teachers to create instruction that met student needs, leading to mastery of specific skills (Neuman, 2016, p 27).

The NWEA MAP data and learning continuum provides teachers with the data needed to create instruction that meets student needs because it is specific to each individual student's skill set (Howell & Hricko, 2006). As of February 2013, the NWEA

MAP testing materials have been aligned with the Common Core Standards (NWEA, 2013, p. 3). Because the NWEA MAP learning continuum aligns with the Common Core Standards, curriculums that aim to progress students along the NWEA MAP learning continuum will also help students master Common Core Standards (NWEA, 2013, p. 3). An added benefit of NWEA is the Response to Intervention (RTI) scale that has been utilized by NWEA for over 45 years and is proven to be a reliable and stable scale of educational assessment (NWEA, 2013, p.3). The RTI scale is a measurement tool used by NWEA to align achievement levels with item difficulties on the same scale. As students take the test, they are presented with items of various levels of difficulties or RTIs. As the test determines the difficulty level a student is able to successful perform, the system collects data on the student's individual abilities (Prado & Plourde, 2011).

The adaptive nature of MAP tests allows top performers to be challenged without overwhelming students whose skills fall below grade level allowing teachers to understand exactly where their students skills sets are (NWEA, 2018a). The NWEA MAP learning continuum places each student in an RTI band and lists the skills those students show mastery of. The learning continuum also gives teachers the ability to look ahead at skills these students should be working on mastering. This data can be utilized to create curriculums that focus on linking skills that permeate through the learning continuum (NWEA, 2018a).

The NWEA website provides teachers with a detailed MAP Growth report that allows teachers to examine student growth over the current school year and previous years students have been tested. Each report contains clearly highlighted skill

progressions for each student. In addition to these features, student strengths are

identified providing teachers insight into areas students are successful (NWEA, 2018a).

Students are also able to establish a goal score for their next testing session. This allows

students to reflect on their areas of weakness and identify ways to help improve their

literary analysis skills. By considering these suggested goals in conjunction with best

practices, teachers are able to develop targeted and differentiated instructional programs

appropriate for their class (Howell & Hricko, 2006).

Scaffolding and Differentiation

Utilizing both scaffolding and differentiation strategies are essential to ensuring

students are able to learn complex materials. Scaffolding helps students understand

concepts that would normally be out of their range of abilities but with proper coaching

and guidance, teachers are able to help students understand difficult concepts

(Mackiewicz & Thompson, 2014). Differentiated instruction allows all students access to

curriculum by providing learning tasks and outcomes based on individual student needs

(Watts-Taffe et al., 2012, p 304), which allows students of all abilities to find a path to

understanding. Together, these two forms of support can help students excel. Successful

units that aim to address students of all levels utilize both scaffolded instruction and

differentiation.

Differentiation and scaffolding often work together in a reading classroom.

Teachers will often utilize mini-lessons to teach a targeted skill to the whole group and

then these skills are practiced with teacher guidance in small groups, often with leveled

texts, (Walker-Dalhouse, et al., 2009, p 85). The mini-lesson strategy allows teachers to

work with small groups based on the skills each group needs help developing. When students are grouped appropriately, it not only helps build reading skills but also establishes literacy learning as a social and collaborative endeavor (Watts-Taffe et al., 2012, p 304).

Scaffolding

Scaffolding can involve both cognitive and motivational scaffolding techniques to help students succeed academically, stay motivated, and avoid frustration with the subject they are learning or task they must complete (Mackiewicz & Thompson, 2014). Many scaffolding techniques used within reading curriculums have teachers model their own thinking to help students understand the cognitive methods behind reading comprehension and other literary skills. Cognitive scaffolding within reading curriculums includes one or more of the following techniques: pumping (often occurs as question asking), reading aloud, responding as a reader, referring to a previous topic, forcing a choice, prompting, hinting, and demonstrating (Mackiewicz & Thompson, 2014, p 62-63).

Motivational scaffolding is equally important when giving students complex tasks because it helps them learn perseverance and problem solving skills. Successful motivational scaffolding is crucial to helping prevent student frustration and anxiety from taking over a student's ability to complete a task (Mackiewicz & Thompson, 2014, p 56). Common motivational scaffolding techniques include: showing concern for student success and progress, praising student efforts and success, reinforcing students' ownership and control over the topic or task, using humor and being optimistic, and

giving sympathy and empathy when students may begin to struggle (Mackiewicz &

Thompson, 2014, p 64). Motivational scaffolding builds student confidence around

complex tasks. A student's confidence level is essential to fostering independence. It is

helpful for students to understand that teachers not only provide academic guidance but

motivational guidance as well (Mackiewicz & Thompson, 2014).

  While scaffolding is an essential part of teaching, it is important that scaffolding

is used to help a student perform independently. In order to determine the success of

scaffolding, it must ultimately lead to student independence and confidence in their own

ability to complete a task without the supports in place (Ankrum, Genest, & Belcastro,

2014, p 40). In order to help avoid student frustration, a gradual release of supports is

important to the success of scaffolding. In the case study examined by Ankrum et al.

(2014), a teacher utilized verbal scaffolding to model reading conversations for her

students in a mini-lesson. Students were then grouped to read leveled texts and discuss

their reading. The teacher sat in on groups offering support, refocusing, and giving

encouragement when needed. After the lesson, the teacher reviewed the discussion

techniques she saw being used in the small group conversations. As the year went on,

students gained more independence and the teacher refrained from giving them

discussion clues. By the end of the year, students were able to participate in evidence

based discussion by themselves and all students left her classroom at or above

benchmarks even though many of those students entered her classroom with deficits. As

this case study shows, using verbal scaffolding can be a useful tool to help students learn

how to have evidence based conversations. The scaffolding was successful because by

the end of the year the students were able to show mastery of their discussion skills independently.

Differentiation

Differentiation provides students with multiple pathways to access the same materials or skills. There are a multitude of ways differentiation can be used in the classroom to make curriculum accessible for all students. Differentiation can occur in: the process of learning, the product created to show learning, the environment students learn in, or the content they are learning (Watts-Taffe et al., 2012, p 304). Often, although not always, the product expected from students will be the same but the process teachers utilize to get to the end product may look very different depending on the student (Watts-Taffe et al., 2012, p 306). For example, all students may be required to write a paragraph that uses evidence to support their thinking but each student may be reading a text leveled to their ability or interests. Teachers may use sentence frames to help lower level writers organize their thoughts. Students that struggle with organization may be required to use a graphic organizer before writing. Even though the end product expected is the same, the process used to create the product may be different depending on each student's abilities. In other situations, the teacher may decide to differentiate the end product, allowing students to decide how they show their mastery of a given topic. In these cases, the learning target is the same but the product created could be different.

Differentiation can be used to have students work collaboratively. Teachers can have student think, write, and pair-share, work on group projects that tap into multiple skills, and teach students how to self-assess and improve their own work (Marshall, 2016,

p 12). When students work collaboratively to solve problem, students of all abilities are able to interact. Collaborative learning strategies expose lower level students to the thought process of higher level students while also engaging the critical thinking skills of those higher level students.

While differentiation of the environment can help students develop skills, it is important to consider implementing student choice and other differentiation options in the processes or the products in order to help maintain student engagement, allowing them to deepen their literary analysis skills. In addition to helping students access curriculum, differentiation and scaffolding can also help improve student engagement (Burke, 2013; Watts-Taffe et al., 2012). When students are able to select texts based on their interest and reading level, they become more engaged with the topics and are able to use their background knowledge to deepen their understanding of a text (Burke, 2013).

Summary

When utilized together, scaffolding and differentiation provide students with the opportunity to access curriculum in a way that responds to their needs while providing them the supports needed to accomplish their own goals. Both scaffolding and differentiation can be implemented into almost every aspect of a lesson, from instructional practices to the products produced by students. The true goal of scaffolding is to provide students with supports that will eventually allow students to be independently successful. The ultimate goal of differentiation is to allow every student access to the curriculum in their own way, based on their own abilities and interests. Both

scaffolding and differentiation can be utilized to increase student understanding of content and engagement with the curriculum.

<div align="center">**Literacy Text Curriculums**</div>

Importance of Literary Analysis

Being able to understand and interpret stories are essential skills for interacting with the world around us. It is important that students are able to interpret the telling of stories in a range of means and media in order to understand the world and make connections with people who may be different from them (Burke, 2013, p. 18). Because of the real world implications, literary analysis holds an essential role in any language arts classroom (Beers & Probst, 2013, p. 16). The reading of fiction and the ability to analyze fiction text is important because narrative is the way students make sense of the world (Beers & Probst, 2013, p. 17). In essence, literary analysis skills allow students to understand the world at large and learn how to make connections with people. The reading and analysing of literature allows students the opportunity to think about human issues that concern us all (Beers & Probst, 2013, p. 17). Literary knowledge helps create well rounded citizens who are able to understand and discuss issues that all of humanity deals with. To become college and career ready, students must be exposed to works of exceptional craft and thought from multiple genres, cultures, and topics. Works should offer profound insights into the human condition and serve as models for students' own thinking and writing (Burke, 2013, p. 15). In essence, literary skills help connect students to each other and the world at large. By creating a curriculum that helps students deepen

their literary skills, they will become more adept at navigating and connecting with the world around them.

Teaching Literary Analysis

One common method to helps students synthesize their reading is to have students take notes while reading. One common note taking strategy, outlined by Burke, is the 4 Rs. When using the 4 Rs strategy, students record what they have read, retell their reading in their own words, relate the text to other topics or other readings, and then respond with their own thoughts and insights (Burke, 2013, p. 165). Beers and Probst outlined a similar reading process in their *Notice & Note* (2013) text; however, they focused on common literary techniques, called *signposts*, that are used across literature. Students notice common signposts during their reading to help build connections between texts. By identifying six signposts that are common throughout all literature, students are able to build connections between texts and identify elements of an author's craft (Beers & Probst, 2013, p. 79). The strategies of 4 R notetaking and signpost identification can be utilized to help students understand connections between texts and respond with their own life experiences.

In addition to helping students identify common literary techniques and learn to connect their reading to other texts and their own lives, it is important to help students dig deeply into the literature they read. It is important that they understand the purpose of both the genre and form of different texts. In Margaret E. Mooney's guide, *Test Forms and Features*, she identified the "why and what of each text form" (Mooney, 2001, p. 15) and the "voice within a text" (Mooney, 2001, p. 105). By teaching students the purposes

of different texts and the academic language used to discuss literary texts, students will be able to participate in a variety of conversations about literature. Mooney outlined the intent, purpose, and features of a multitude of different types of writing, including the academic language used to describe the aspects of the writing (Mooney, 2001). Creating a curriculum that helps build the academic knowledge of literary texts will help students discuss literature in high school and beyond.

Vocabulary Acquisition

Success in school is directly tied to vocabulary acquisition (Marzano & Simms, 2013, p. 5). Despite this, "vocabulary instruction consumed less than one-half of one percent of instructional time in schools" (Marzano & Simms, 2013, p. 9). While drill-based vocabulary instruction can be ineffective at developing true vocabulary knowledge, it is important that language study is a valued part of a language arts curriculum (Burke, 2013, p. 256). It is important that students are able to decode challenging words and have strategies to deal with unknown words that they may encounter in real world scenarios.

The Common Core Standards identify three tiers of words; tier one; everyday language, tier two: general academic words which are much more likely to be written than spoken, and tier three: domain-specific words (Burke, 2013, p. 261; Marzano & Simms, 2013). Tier one words are often taught in early grades and tier three words are usually introduced in informational texts and are "heavily scaffolded" (Burke, 2013, p. 261). Tier two words are best taught through literary text because they "represent subtle or precise ways to say relatively simple things" (Burke, 2013, p. 261). Literary texts often

contain unknown tier two words that can be decoded using a variety of strategies. By explicitly teaching students decoding strategies, they are able to deepen their understanding of literary texts and vocabulary acquisition.

Burke's text, *The English Teacher's Companion* (2013), identified four techniques for deep vocabulary instruction:

1.   provide rich and varied language experience;

2.   teach individual words;

3.   teach word-learning strategies; and

4.   foster word consciousness. (Burke, 2013, p. 262)

Burke's text focuses on vocabulary acquisition in the higher grades. While these techniques are echoed in Marzano and Simms' text, *Vocabulary for the Common Core* (2013), an additional two techniques are added that focus on developing tier one words in the lower grades. While building a curriculum to focus on 8th grade vocabulary acquisition, tier one words are less important than fostering an understanding of tier two words because tier one words are developed in the lower grades (Burke, 2013, p. 261).

Fostering Motivation and Reading Engagement

In order to successfully teach content, students must be motivated and engaged to read and think critically. Motivation and engagement play an important role in students' ability to comprehend a text. As students become more engaged with a text and motivated to deal with any challenges presented by a text, they are more likely to comprehend a text (Lenski, Wham, Johns, & Caskey, 2011, p. 13). Many students lack reading engagement which affects their comprehension abilities and prevents them from

analyzing the deeper meanings of complex literary texts. By creating curriculums that target both academic skills along with motivation and engagement, teachers will be able to increase students' comprehension abilities and maintain positive reading engagement. In *Reading & Learning Strategies* (Lenski et al., 2011), four motivation constructs are identified:

1. Interest regarding the students' personal investment; Perceived control referring to students' choices and decisions about reading;

2. Collaboration involving interactions among peers;

3. Involvement entailing students' immersion and experiences with reading; and

4. Self-efficacy as a student's belief in his or her ability to perform a task. (Lenski et al., 2011, p. 14)

While it can be difficult to incorporate all four constructs in a single lesson, structuring and presenting lessons in a way that utilizes choice, peer to peer interactions, and helping students believe in their own abilities can help motivate and engage readers (Lenski et al., 2011, p. 15). By using a variety of best practices, teachers can create intrinsic motivation and increase reading engagement. It is important that teachers focus on engaging students' background knowledge in order to help them make connections to the text (Lenski et al., 2011, p. 15).

Many of these four constructs are echoed in Burke's *The English Teacher's Companion* (2013). Burke identified the engagement norms that reflect student choice, including, "that students have choice, room to customize, make their learning their own"

(Burke, 2013, p. 31). Burke's norms stress the importance of allowing students to choose how or what they learn, customizing the means with which they show their knowledge, and allowing students to take ownership over their own learning. Allowing for student choice in the classroom also incorporates differentiation strategies into the classroom. It seems essential to include student choice when creating lessons in order to increase both student engagement and motivation. It also is important to allow students to interact with each other and take ownership over their learning. Collaborative learning can also provide teachers the opportunity to use scaffolding and differentiation techniques in the classroom. All of these strategies for engagement require teachers to give students freedom within their classroom and embrace student interactions.

Summary

This section outlines the importance of literary analysis in the classroom and discusses ways to deepen student understanding of literary analysis It also discusses how to develop students' vocabulary acquisition skills of both academic language and content related vocabulary. This section also discusses techniques to foster motivation and engagement in students using choice and customization, which often reflects differentiation use in the classroom.

Conclusion

The NWEA MAP test gives teachers an incredible amount of useful data. Because the test is adaptive, it provides a snapshot of individual students, whether they are above, below, or at grade level. The MAP test shows teachers a student's strengths, weaknesses, and growth. This information can be leveraged in many different ways. By creating a

curriculum based on the NWEA MAP test data, teachers can easily incorporate the data into their teaching.

In order to create a compelling curriculum based on testing data, it is important that my curriculum contains engaging lessons that utilize classroom assessment as a tool to help teachers know when their teaching is successful. The utilization of testing data must never ignore the learning needs of all students. Teachers should utilize their teacher training to create engaging lessons that utilize scaffolding and differentiation to deepen their students' knowledge based on their needs. In order to help teachers advance the skills of all students, it is essential that units utilize scaffolding and differentiation.

Literary analysis helps connect students to each other and the world at large. By utilizing literary analysis skills, students can become better readers and better thinkers. Literary analysis is one important aspect of reading. The ability to build students' vocabularies is also important to help students develop real world skills. In addition to building students' academic abilities, it is also important to help foster students' motivation and reading engagement by allowing students to have choice and take ownership over their own learning.

Chapter Summary

This chapter described the literature and research necessary to understand and respond to my research question, *How can NWEA MAP data be utilized to create scaffolded and differentiated instruction that advances student mastery of literary standards and deepens student understanding of literary text?* I gave an overview of the NWEA MAP test and its adaptive nature which is important to understand because it

gives rationale for why I decided to utilize NWEA testing data rather than state testing data. The NWEA MAP test provides specific data on each individual student. This individualization provides teachers with a guide to implement differentiation and scaffolding strategies based on the needs of their students. I then outlined the benefits of data-driven instruction and overviewed how to utilize testing data in the classroom. I examined the importance of utilizing both scaffolding and differentiation to create unit plans that help students of all abilities improve their reading comprehension skills. Finally, I outlined the important aspects of both literary analysis and vocabulary acquisition curriculums. In the next chapter, I will provide a description of my project, detailing my curriculum framework, my setting and audience, and an overall timeline for my project completion.

CHAPTER THREE

Project Description

Introduction

For my project, I focused on creating a curriculum that utilized testing data and best teaching practices to create an engaging literary analysis and vocabulary acquisition unit. My unit is intended to be used in an 8th grade classroom and uses folktales and short stories to give students exposure to a variety of text types. The design of this unit is a response to my research question, *How can NWEA MAP data be utilized to create scaffolded and differentiated instruction that advances student mastery of literary standards and deepens student understanding of literary text?*. My desired skill outcomes for students are related to the NWEA vocab acquisition and literary analysis learning continuums. I implemented this curriculum in my own 8th grade classroom during the 2018 spring semester.

This chapter gives an overview of my project and provides background information on my curriculum framework. I describe the intended audience and setting for my curriculum, providing an overview of my own classroom demographics. I then provide a description of my project and outline an intended timeline for my curriculum.

Project Overview

My curriculum is based on short stories with a focus on vocabulary acquisition and literary analysis. The unit focuses on whole group instruction with differentiated learning targets. Because many teachers lack the time and support for differentiated, small group instruction, my project aims to provide teachers with a curriculum that can be used in a whole group setting and with guided small group instruction to give time for reinforcing skills taught in the whole group setting. The structure of my unit allows high level students (based on their NWEA literary analysis and vocabulary acquisition scores) to practice and reinforce their vocabulary acquisition and discussion skills. This unit also provides lower level students (based on their NWEA literary analysis and vocabulary acquisition scores) exposure to higher level critical thinking through class discussions of literary analysis.

In order to answer my research question, *How can NWEA map data be utilized to create scaffolded and differentiated instruction that advances student mastery of literary standards and deepens student understanding of literary text?,* I provided teachers with an overview of how best to utilize NWEA testing data and how to use that data to influence their use of my curriculum. In order to ensure the data is being used to deepen student knowledge, it is important to provide a variety of different types of lessons to engage multiple skill levels.

In the next section I give an overview of the curriculum framework I used to create my project. I outline the framework guide I used to create my curriculum and describe the main ideas of the framework.

Curriculum Framework

The curriculum was designed using Understanding by Design (UbD) created by

Grant Wiggins and Jay McTighe (2011). The UbD framework challenges teachers to

utilize backwards design to focus on learning results based in the real world (desired

results), determine the evidence they will use to evaluate learning (evidence), and identify

the learning events needed to successfully teach those learning results (learning plan)

(Wiggins & McTighe, 2011, p. 9). UbD stresses the importance of teaching for

understanding, not simply teaching engaging activities that may not translate to true

learning.

UbD highlights starting curriculum planning with the big picture, whether that is a

big picture standard, an enduring idea, or performance weaknesses revealed by

assessments (Wiggins & McTighe, 2011, p. 36). My unit focuses on performance

strengths and weaknesses as revealed by the NWEA MAP test. UbD also stresses the

importance of quality units having the following: A real world, transfer goal that can be

applied beyond school, an important insight or inference, big ideas and thought

provoking questions to get students to think deeply, standards and established goals, an

important activity or experience, key resources, and key assessments (Wiggins &

McTighe, 2011, p. 41). All of these components come together to create engaging lessons

that teach true understanding based on the desired results, evidence, and learning plan.

The UbD framework worked well for my intended curriculum because I have

utilized establishing clear goals though the NWEA learning continuum. I have used the

NWEA MAP testing data as a pre-assessment and a summative assessment, providing

teachers with clear evidences of the effectiveness of their teaching. The curriculum framework also helped my curriculum be engaging in addition to being data-driven. By highlighting the connections to the real world, the UbD framework helped my curriculum stand outside of testing data to teaching compelling and lasting understanding of literary texts and vocabulary.

<div align="center">**Audience and Setting**</div>

The intended setting for this curriculum is an 8th grade classroom. My unit is intended to be used with students that take the NWEA MAP test at least once a school year. My school is a rural, K-8, charter academy in Colorado with approximately 350 students. The student population is 94 % white, 3% Hispanic and 3 % other ethnicities. Our school does NWEA testing 2-3 times a year, depending on students grade and the test subject. Students in 8th grade take the NWEA MAP test 3 times a year. Test are administered during the fall, winter, and spring benchmark periods. This school has been conducting NWEA testing for approximately 20 years.

I implemented this curriculum during the spring semester in my 8th grade classroom. In this class, approximately 3% of my students were on 504 plans or Response to Intervention (RTI) plans related to reading. Approximately 5% of students tested at least two grade levels above 8th grade. The rest of my class was testing at 8th grade level, in regards to literary analysis and vocabulary acquisition.

My students took the NWEA reading test in the fall, winter, and spring. All though my students tested during all three benchmark periods, for this project, we utilized their winter benchmarks for the needs assessment because that was the most recent data

collected. We used their spring benchmarks as the summative assessment after the unit was taught. While this curriculum is intended for an 8th grade classroom, the lessons could easily be tailored for an advanced 7th grade class or a lower performing 9th grade class who take the NWEA MAP test. This curriculum is intended to provide middle school teachers a framework to utilize their testing data in an easy and effective way.

In the next section, I give a description of my project, detailing the assessments, design, implementation, and evaluation of my curriculum. I provide details for how NWEA testing data will be utilized as needs assessments and summative assessments as well as describe how the effectiveness of the curriculum is determined outside of testing data.

Project description

Introduction

My project is based on reading and analysing folktales and short stories in an 8th grade classroom. The curriculum provides teachers with an overview of the NWEA learning continuum and how to utilize their testing data. The curriculum also utilizes NWEA testing data as the needs assessment and the summative assessment. The goal of the curriculum is to increase both teacher and student confidence to utilize testing results. As my research question, *How can NWEA MAP data be utilized to create scaffolded and differentiated instruction that advances student mastery of literary standards and deepens student understanding of literary text?,* states, my curriculum provides differentiated and scaffolded instruction based on the NWEA testing data.

Needs Assessment

The needs assessment for my unit is based off of the NWEA learning continuum. The MAP test serves as the initial assessment. My curriculum outlined the learning continuum for both vocabulary acquisition (the main goal for lower performing students) and literary analysis (the main goal area for high performing students). Because the curriculum is designed to be taught to the whole class, both higher and lower performing students are exposed to the whole continuum, allowing higher level students to truly master vocabulary acquisition and discussion techniques. Meanwhile, the lower level students are exposed to the higher level thinking of literary analysis.

Design

I utilized UbD as the framework to design my unit. I created a three week unit based on short stories. The unit provides opportunities for students to learn literary analysis, deepen their evidence-based discussion techniques, and develop their vocabulary skills though close reading. I used backwards design to establish my essential questions and to help focus my unit. By utilizing the UbD curriculum framework, I have ensured that my unit is not only based on individualized student data, but also employed best teaching practices to create engaging lessons. I have created a unit that gives students real world analytical skills and that goes beyond the sole goal of improving their test scores.

My unit is a three week unit, focusing on two different short stories as well as common folktales. Each lesson of fifteen total lessons is designed for a 55 minute class period. Each class includes a free write related to the content of our weekly story. Some

lessons contain mini-lessons and individual student work time or small group work time. Each week features a seminar to help students deepen their evidence-based discussions. All lessons end with an exit ticket (either written or verbal) or other formative assessment to help guide the next day's focus.

Implementation

The unit has been designed to sit in the fall or spring semester, depending on when the school administers MAP testing. If the school MAP tests in fall, winter, or spring, the unit can be taught at any time. If the MAP test is only conducted in fall and spring then the unit fits best in the spring. The unit has been designed to be implemented in an 8th grade classroom with the majority of students performing at grade level. Lessons can be tailored to students at different grade levels.

Formative and Summative Assessment

The unit was designed to have students complete exit tickets, participate in small group activities, complete multiple seminars, and take a test with similar questions to those asked on NWEA MAP test as well as short answer/essay questions to determine evidence of high order thinking. Students are evaluated both on their ability to write about the stories and their abilities to participate in discussions based on the stories. By providing students with multiple types of evaluation, my curriculum goes beyond simply teaching the skills needed for the NWEA MAP test. The MAP test is only multiple choice and my assessments include short answer, creative writing, class discussions, and fostering connections to other texts. In order to truly understand students' ability to

communicate their literary analysis, they need to be able to show their analysing skills in short answers and class discussions.

Final Assessment

The second NWEA MAP test (winter or spring) serves as the final assessment. The assessment will focus on student growth in literary text and vocabulary acquisition. The ideal time to teach this unit is at the beginning of the spring semester, which means there will be approximately 12 weeks between when the unit is taught and when the students take their final assessment, the NWEA MAP test. Because of this unique timing, the final exam of the unit (multiple choice, vocabulary, and short answer), also serves as important evaluation of student learning.

Summary

My project utilizes NWEA as a basis for assessment. I have utilized the NWEA learning continuum to create differentiated learning targets based on both vocabulary acquisition and literary analysis. My curriculum evaluates students success and growth based on their abilities to write about and discuss the literary elements of the stories.

In the next section, I outline the timeline for my project completion. I identify the important aspects of my curriculum that need to be developed and give an outline as to when they will be developed. The timeline allowed me to finish my project by the start of May 2018.

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Timeline

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In December 2017, I determined the essential questions for my unit, determined my texts, and created an outline of the learning continuum strands my curriculum focused

on. I determined the big ideas and standards my curriculum addresses and picked texts

that help highlight those standards. In January 2018, I developed a unit map. I created a

three week unit that provides ample time for student group work and discussion. In

February, I designed the formative assessments, based on NWEA questions and my

essential questions. In March of 2018, I wrote my lesson plans and taught this unit in.

Using my experience teaching the unit in March, I spent April revising and fine tuning

the lesson plans and handouts needed for my unit. In April, I also wrote the introduction

for my unit and finalized the appearance of my unit. I also wrote the final chapter of my

capstone paper.

Chapter Summary

In this chapter I provided an overview of my project and outlined the curriculum

framework I utilized. I also provided the setting and intended audience for my

curriculum, highlighting the need for my curriculum to push students beyond grade level

proficiency. I provided a description of my project that details the various assessment and

evaluation criteria to be included in my unit. I also shared a timeline that guided the

creation of my curriculum. In the next chapter I will provide a reflection on the capstone

process and my learnings as a researcher, writer, and learner.

CHAPTER FOUR

Conclusions

Introduction

My capstone project aimed to answer the question, *How can NWEA MAP data be utilized to create scaffolded and differentiated instruction that advances student mastery of literary standards and deepens student understanding of literary text?* In Chapter One, I identified my personal connection to my research question and introduced my goals for my curriculum. In Chapter Two, I reviewed research on the NWEA MAP test, using scaffolding and differentiation, and examined different literary curriculums. In Chapter Three, I outlined my capstone project, a unit that utilizes both Colorado State Standards and NWEA skills identified on the learning continuum. By utilizing seminars and inquiry days, my unit uses structured, evidence-based discussion and choice in order to help scaffold and differentiate students' literary analysis skills. My unit also provides teachers with an overview of using NWEA data in the classroom.

In this chapter, I will outline how this experience has made me a more aware researcher, writer, and a learner. This chapter will outline the key findings of my research and identify the most influential sources to my curriculum. In addition, I will discuss the

policy implications and limitations of my project. This chapter will also include an

overview of my future research plans and ideas for sharing my unit with other teachers.

Major Learning

The process of researching taught me patience and diligence. I had to comb

through many articles that were out of date, responding to older educational policies. I

learned how quickly education policies change and the effects national policies can have

in individual districts. When researching a topic that is constantly changing, it is

important to evaluate when an article was written and account for the historical

background of a source. I learned the importance of evaluating as many sources as

possible, even if all the sources do not end up making their way into the final product.

Many of the policies I thought I was well versed in, had many layers that I was unaware

of. After my extensive research, I was able to gain an overview of the history of testing

and assessment data use in schools.

As a writer, I have grown by learning how to understand the APA writing style.

Most of my writing experience is with the MLA style of writing, which is much different

from APA writing. I learned the power of paraphrasing and the need to avoid biased

language. Learning how to use the APA guidelines stretched me as a writer and helped

me analyze my language use. I enjoyed writing the lessons plans for my unit. While

creating my lessons, I focused on teacher word choice and ways to craft carefully worded

questions that would help students discover the deeper meaning of a text.

As a learner, I started noticing connections between my classroom and my

research. By teaching my curriculum in my classroom, my unit came alive and I was able

to fine tune the details of my lesson plans. The connections I was able to make between my research and my classroom have influenced my teaching in a positive way. I have been able to deepen my understanding of my students' data and how to create engaging lessons that help deepen students' literary skills. I also learned how to manage my time. As a full time teacher, new mom, and graduate student, time management became more important than ever before. I had to juggle multiple deadlines in all aspects of my life, working to balance my stress levels and hoping not to miss any important moments.

Literature Review Revisited

Throughout my research process, I worked to understand the uses of testing in schools and the benefits of the NWEA MAP test. This process allowed me to dig into the NWEA website and truly understand what the test has to offer teachers. I learned that the RTI system used by NWEA has been used since the 1970's and has been shown as a reliable indicator of student growth for over forty years (NWEA, 2013). The reliability of RTI benefits my curriculum because my unit will be aligned with student growth regardless of various educational policies that aim to measure student learning.

In addition to becoming well versed in the NWEA MAP test, I learned new ways to implement differentiation and scaffolding into my classroom. Scaffolding and differentiation can easily be added to a teacher's practice by simply changing teacher word choice, which is considered motivational scaffolding (Mackiewicz & Thompson, 2014) and allowing more choice in the classroom, which also helps with engagement (Burke, 2013; Watts-Taffe et al., 2012). These techniques have already made their way

into my classroom and continues to help shape the way I structure my assessments and lessons.

When I examined literary analysis curriculums, Burke's (2013) key idea of connecting student reading to other texts and experiences students have had helped me develop the real world connections in my unit. I appreciated his notion of having students take notes while reading so they are able to make connections between what they were thinking while reading and connections they were able to make after. This became a very important part of my unit. I have students notetake during reading and reflect after their reading. Students also participate in seminars that help them make connections between their reading, other texts and their own lives.

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Policy Implications

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The largest policy implication of my project is that schools should provide teachers with time to examine student NWEA MAP data and analyze how it can be used in their classrooms. I have started prioritizing time to review NWEA MAP data with students by utilizing the student profile provided by NWEA. This time with students has helped me understand what data matters to each individual which has shaped my teaching. With this experience, I plan to advocate for time to review NWEA MAP data in my own school. My hope is all teachers will be able to have time to review data after every testing session. My goal is to work with my school to help ensure planning time devoted to NWEA data analysis. In addition to time, new teachers should have guidance on the NWEA website and how to align the skills from the NWEA learning continuum and their lesson plans.

While I am seeing change in my small environment, I think it is important that all teachers are given time to analyze data. Because 50% of Colorado teachers' evaluations must come from measures of student learning (CDE, 2016), it is important that Colorado teachers are given the time to process and create lessons that respond to student data.

Limitations of the Unit

While my goal was to create a unit that can be implemented in a number of different environments, my unit has limitations. Most of my students perform at grade level or above. I have no students with IEPs, only 3 students with 504 plans, and no English learners. Many classrooms have a more diverse learning population which means teachers face different scaffolding and differentiation issues that do not exist in my classroom. This unit is also limited to schools who use the NWEA MAP test. Although the NWEA learning continuum is aligned to Common Core Standards (NWEA, 2013), this unit uses the NWEA MAP testing data for multiple assessments. Teachers in schools that do not use NWEA MAP testing may need to find alternative prior knowledge assessments and an alternative summative assessment.

Future Research

I plan to use the research I have done for this project to create a unit based on informational text. NWEA also has an informational text learning continuum and I would love to create a unit that helps students advance their informational text reading. In order to create that unit, I will need to examine other informational text units and look for sources that have studied differentiation and scaffolding with informational reading. I would also like to use this unit structure for a poetry unit or a whole group novel.

Sharing of the Unit

I plan on sharing my project with my administration and with other middle school Language Arts teachers that use NWEA testing data. I also will be sharing my project with teachers that I have met at NWEA conferences. This project is important to share because it can help show teachers how they can use the NWEA learning continuum skills in their classroom. My unit also shows how the NWEA learning continuum can be aligned with Colorado State Standards. I could share this with teachers of all disciplines to show how easily the two align.

Benefits to the Teaching Profession

This unit provides teachers with beneficial tools needed to implement engaging, data-driven instruction into their classrooms. This unit not only shows how the NWEA learning continuum can be used to guide instruction, it also provides teachers with various differentiation and scaffolding ideas that teachers can adapt based on their own individual class. This unit helps teachers navigate using NWEA data in their classroom based on their own classes needs. Because my unit identifies skills across the learning continuum, teachers will be able to determine which skills they need to focus on, based on their own student data, while still using the lessons from my unit to guide literary analysis.

Summary

Overall, this project has helped me utilize the data I have on my students. I have grown as a researcher, writer, and learner. After observing the effects of my unit in my classroom, I hope to continue learning about data-driven instruction and helping my

administration provide data analysis training for new teachers. Although there are some limitations to my unit, the individualized data collected from the NWEA MAP test and the flexibility of my unit means it can support teachers in many different environments.

Conclusion

Creating a capstone project has challenged me as a teacher and a learner. I worked to find an answer to my research question, *How can NWEA MAP data be utilized to create scaffolded and differentiated instruction that advances student mastery of literary standards and deepens student understanding of literary text?* Throughout the capstone process, I have learned the importance of creating data-driven lessons that are also engaging. While teaching this unit, I was impressed with the level of dedication my students had because I was providing multiple ways for them to show their learning and providing them with scaffolded lessons. I have learned the importance of looking at student data from multiple views and using the NWEA MAP website to help determine student strengths as well as weaknesses.

I hope to continue using NWEA data to create data-driven units that use engaging lessons to help students deepen their literary skills. I will continue to explore ways to implement different types of scaffolds and differentiation in my classroom and examine ways I can use choice to help engagement. Throughout this process, I have become a better researcher, a better writer, and a better teacher. Overall, I hope this unit is able to help teachers, who may seem overwhelmed, to utilize data in their classroom in an engaging way.

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