UTILIZING CULTURALLY RELEVANT, MULTIMODAL TEXT SETS IN OLDER
ADOLESCENT AND ADULT LEARNER CLASSROOMS

by

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Capstone Project Introduction

As a teacher of adults, my purpose in this Capstone Project is to address the challenges of adult illiteracy and offer positive solutions. In spite of the statistics, there is solid research to support the idea that education for adults not only reduces poverty and incarceration rates, but it also reduces healthcare costs and unemployment rates, which directly affect taxpayers (OECD, 2013; Rasu, Bawa, Suminski, Snella, & Warady, 2015). As an educator, how can I meet the complex needs of my adult learners and prepare them for post-secondary education and living wage employment? How can I instill in them the knowledge essential for helping their children navigate the educational system successfully? In this Capstone Project, I want to investigate the most effective classroom curricular approaches to increasing the retention of older adolescents and adults in an Adult Basic Education urban classroom. My research question is, How can utilizing culturally relevant, multimodal text sets increase critical literacy and result in learner engagement and motivation in older adolescent and adult learner classrooms?

Capstone Project Description

In order to meet the needs of older adolescent and adult learners, my research question focused on the most current, evidence-based research for building classroom curriculum that engages and motivates learners to persist. As a result, I decided to develop four multimodal text sets and house them on a Google Sites website. The final product is a curriculum website that educators can easily access. Text sets are a collection of multimodal, high-interest texts, or “high-quality, award-winning texts,” with a wide range of lexiles, organized around a specific theme or line of inquiry, so that students can make relevant connections between texts (Batchelor, 2018, p. 7). “What they have in common is their focus on providing students the
chance to look across texts and build both general and disciplinary knowledge” (Lupo, Strong, Lewis, Walpole, & McKenna, 2017, p. 434). They can consist of print-based text, images, graphics, maps, charts, both literary and informational based text, primary and secondary source artifacts, and audio or visual mediums. “By having students think generatively and reflectively among multiple text structures,” teachers can guide learners to develop a Critical Literacy lens, expose them to culturally diverse, multimodal text, and increase their awareness of the existence of missing voices and perspectives of which they have been unaware (Batchelor, 2018, p. 2).

Using the Balanced Literacy 2.0 Text Set Curriculum Model Framework developed by Gangi (2017), each text set in this Capstone Project includes an anchor text, bridge texts, mentor texts, and stretch texts. An additional integral component not included in Gangi’s framework but emphasized in the literature is the inclusion of a disruptive text for each text set, so I included a disruptive text for three out of the four text sets. Using a website like Google Sites to share curriculum is beneficial to the field of adult education and to Language Arts teachers as well. The curriculum is free and open-access, so educators can utilize the website, choose the text set that they want to use in the classroom, and then either download the texts or get the link to the texts. Teachers can use one of the texts, some of the texts, or all of the texts.

Text Set Themes

For my first text set, I chose the social justice theme, “Challenges of Migration: Building Resilience Through Stories.” The line of inquiry question that weaves through all the texts in my set is, “When facing adversity through forced or voluntary migration, how do people persevere and overcome obstacles?” I designed this text set for use with older adolescent and adult learners who are trying to build their reading skills, so the lexile range is from 680 to 1310, accounting
for readers that might be one lexile below grade level and including more complex text at the top of the lexile band. Using a Balanced Literacy 2.0 approach to building a text set, this text set includes an anchor text, several bridge texts, three mentor texts, and a unique stretch text. The text set incorporates culturally relevant, multimodal texts that help students gain a deeper understanding of the theme and build content knowledge to answer the line of inquiry question. The format aligns to Kelley Gangi’s “Balanced Literacy 2.0” model (2017).

I am including an additional disruptive text to be read before returning to the anchor text. The anchor text is quantitatively the most complex due to its content, so it will require teacher support via scaffolding and differentiation. After the anchor text, the students will read a bridge text to build knowledge around the theme via group, partner, or individual reading. Then with the mentor texts, students can continue to build their content knowledge, alternating with more bridge texts. The stretch text is two to three lexile levels above grade level, but it gives students an opportunity to engage with complex text.

The second text set consists of both Language Arts and Social Studies content through the lens of “Civil Rights in America” as the theme. The line of inquiry essential question for the entire text set is a debatable question: *Throughout history, has the United States treated all*
citizens equally under the law? I chose this topic to give my older adolescent and adult learners real social justice issues to read and write about, which engages their attention, helps them to persist in their education, and addresses the need to read complex text. By working collaboratively on authentic, current issues, students utilize a Critical Literacy lens. With a culminating project that attempts to suggest a solution to the problem, students develop a social justice learning framework.

The third text set consists of both Language Arts, specifically Science Fiction, and Science content through the lens of “Genetic engineering, Ecological tampering, and Social engineering.” This text set is Dystopian in genre, but the texts connect from the past, to the present, and into the future. The line of inquiry essential question for the entire text set is the question: What impact does human activity have on the world’s populations and ecosystems? I chose this topic to give my older adolescent and adult learners both current events and Science content issues to grapple with that are systemic problems affecting the globe with widespread ramifications for the future. Many students are unfamiliar with these timely, essential questions that they will need to answer in their lifetime because they directly affect future generations.

The fourth and final text set centers on the theme of “Self-sacrifice for the Common Good.” This text set is a collection of multimodal texts, some a study of people throughout history who have made significant contributions to the world at great sacrifice to themselves. Other texts give students an opportunity to utilize Critical Literacy theory in an authentic way to see what protest, activism, and civil disobedience can accomplish to enact powerful change in the world. The line of inquiry essential question for the entire text set is: How does confronting inequities and practicing civil disobedience result in systemic change? This topic also aligns
with Critical Race theory and restorative justice practices. In addition, it gives students the opportunity to build background knowledge about key events in United States History, especially as it pertains to the Civil Rights Movement.

**Intended Audience**

While written primarily for teachers of older adolescent and adult learners, Language Arts teachers in both K-12 settings and adult basic education teachers would benefit from using the culturally relevant, multimodal text sets in this Capstone Project. Housing the text sets on a Google Sites website and providing open access makes the curriculum available to teachers throughout Minnesota, teachers in other states, and even interested teachers from other countries who are looking for culturally relevant, multimodal text sets curriculum. Due to funding shortages, lack of time for planning, and access to quality curriculum, teachers relish free resources and curriculum that is relevant, current, and readily usable. With the emergence of Web 2.0, also referred to as the “collaborative Web,” educators can access and share information via “learning networks, online education, and virtual communities,” with highly innovative, technological forms of “social interaction, community and collaboration and content construction” (Harasim, 2012, p. 26). This Capstone Project curriculum website is an attempt to fill that need.

**Capstone Project Format and Description**

The Capstone Curriculum Project Google Sites website URL link is:  

[https://sites.google.com/hamline.edu/capstoneproject-tamaratwiggs](https://sites.google.com/hamline.edu/capstoneproject-tamaratwiggs)

The website has a Home page that explains how to navigate within the site:
The Home page lists my name, a description of the website, how to navigate to the text sets, and a contact email at the bottom. There is a link for the text set curriculum model that I utilized to build each set. The text set links are at the top of each page, and to access a text set, an educator would just need to click on the tab.

Once inside of a text set, the theme and essential question line of inquiry are always at the top of the page. Educators can navigate at the top of the Home page to peruse the four different text sets. Once inside a text set, there is a Table of Contents under the thematic topic listing all of the texts in the text set. There are two options for accessing the text: click on the link in the Table of Contents or scroll down to the text and click on the hyperlink. Navigation via scrolling
provides a more detailed look at the content in the text set, and the inclusion of multimodal text provides better visual appeal to the website.

Here is an example from Text Set # 1:

**Challenges of Migration: Building Resilience Through Stories**

**Essential Question:** When facing adversity through forced or voluntary migration, how do people persevere and overcome obstacles?

- The Danger of a Single Story
- Images of Migration Media Collection
- The Only Road
- Migration in the 21st Century and its Effects on Education
- Refugee
- Home
- A Long Walk to Water
- Silver People: Voices from the Panama Canal
- We Are Displaced
- The Danger of a Single Story

As a person scrolls through each text in a specific text set, there are several key features included for each text: the type of text it is, the name of the text, the author(s), the lexile, a brief summary of the text, and how a teacher might use the text in a classroom setting. There are hyperlinks to each text source, and when a video is utilized, the option to click on the video and view it from the “Preview” mode is available. To access the first text, a person would simply click on the link, and the link goes directly to the text hyperlink. A teacher can download the text and assign it via
Google classroom or another method. With other texts, the hyperlink will take the person to the parent site, such as the Newsela or Vimeo in Text Set #3:

7. Mentor Text release to individuals: “Kiribati: The Face of Climate Change” by Maddie Shoden, article from newsela; “Biodiversity” by The Vancouver Film School, animated short film

**Lexile: 1050**

**Summary:** Since the article about “Kiribati” is from Newsela, the teacher can change the lexile to match the needs of the learners in class. The range is from a low of 400L to a high of 1100L. In the earlier text, *Rising Seas*, there is a page about what could possibly happen in Kiribati due to climate change. Now, students can read the informational text to see that the predictions about Kiribati are coming to pass. Located between Australia and Hawaii, and made famous by the reality television series, Survivor, Kiribati consists of 33 diverse atolls made of coral. In the past five years, gigantic waves have been washing over Kiribati, flooding people’s homes and making fresh water undrinkable in the wells. With climate change in motion, Kiribati could be underwater in the very near future since it is only 6 feet above sea level. The article explains the greenhouse effect and the causes of climate change. The lack of fresh water and the sea water poisoning crops are very real problems for the people of Kiribati. Reading such a current, devastating account of how human actions via pollution results in climate change, which affects real people, will be eye-opening for many students.

By combining the article with the Vimeo about *Biodiversity*, students can start to think about how their actions today will affect future generations of people.

Typically, if two texts are placed side by side as a unit, they complement each other, so they should be used together. In the first image, there is a link to an article about Kiribati, and in the second link there is a short video describing biodiversity, why it is so important, and what will happen if we lose it. By using both the print text and the video, students gain a deeper understanding of the issue of climate change and how human actions can have devastating, long-term impacts on the environment.
The majority of the texts in the set are single texts, but the entire text set provides students an opportunity to read and engage with complex text on a substantive topic, building their knowledge as they read each additional text. The texts have been curated to be high-interest, lexile-diverse, and theme-dependent.

Here is another example from Text Set #4:

**Poems of Protest, Resistance, and Empowerment**

**4. Bridge Text:** “Poems of Protest, Resistance, and Empowerment,” 61 poems by diverse poets

**Summary:** With this collection of poetry, students will continue to build their understanding to answer the essential question: How does confronting inequities and practicing civil disobedience result in systemic change? I would spend time introducing students to different poems through a teacher read-aloud, focusing on how each poem contributes answers to the essential question. For example, I would start with the Maya Angelou poem “Caged Bird.” Pairing the poem with the Nearpod lesson, “Poetry Analysis: Caged Bird,” students can view a virtual shop in Jailara where people build bird cages. The poem sets the stage for understanding the theme of inequity and how a person who faces inequity might feel as if she or he were living in a metaphorical cage. Another good poem for a teacher read-aloud is “We Are Not Responsible,” by Harryette Mullen. Using powerful imagery of people whose rights can be violated over the most trivial, common situations, Mullen creates a shared sense of responsibility for our current state of systemic discrimination. Finally, working in groups, pairs, or individually, students can choose other poems to read to build their knowledge of the essential question.

![Image of a fist holding a pen with a background of protest signs]

**Conclusion**

To enable academics, educators, and other interested parties to find the wonderful resources in each text set, I included a Google Drive document on the final page of the website with an APA References tab. My hope after I finish my Master’s degree in Literacy Education is to continue building text sets and adding new ones to the website. Each text set could be a
monthly theme, and by creating 5 more text sets in the future, I will have a year-long curriculum on the Google Sites website.
Resources


http://www.teachinglearningalliance.org/blog/balanced-literacy-20-productive-curiosity-and-text-sets


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