15 Elements of Instructional Leadership

Tool	Rating					Practical Examples
Extended time for literacy	1	2	2.5	3	4	
Ongoing professional development	1	2	2.5	3	4	
Ongoing summative assessment of students and programs.	1	2	2.5	3	4	
Teacher teams (collaboration)	1	2	2.5	3	4	
Effective leadership	1	2	2.5	3	4	
Comprehensive and coordinated literacy program	1	2	2.5	3	4	
Ongoing formative assessment	1	2	2.5	3	4	
Instructional principles embedded in content	1	2	2.5	3	4	
Direct, explicit comprehension instruction	1	2	2.5	3	4	
Text-based collaborative learning	1	2	2.5	3	4	
Motivation and self-directed learning	1	2	2.5	3	4	
Strategic tutoring/targeted instruction	1	2	2.5	3	4	
Diverse texts	1	2	2.5	3	4	
Intensive writing	1	2	2.5	3	4	
Technology component	1	2	2.5	3	4	

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WISH: _____

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Literacy and Language as Learning in Content-Area Classes: A Departure From "Every Teacher a Teacher of Reading"

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ABSTRACT: The popular mantra "Every teacher is a teacher of reading" and several decades of emphasis on content-area literacy have not resulted in major changes in reading and writing across the curriculum in secondary schools. In this article, we argue that reading and writing strategy instruction has not focused on what really matters to content-area teachers. Through examples from two classrooms, we suggest a focus for our content colleagues in which they learn that capitalizing on reading and writing versus teaching reading and writing is the goal of content literacy. We identify five specific principles in which reading and writing actually engage students in the content topics at hand, as well as suggestions for preservice and in-service content-area teachers.

Far too many secondary school students do not graduate or graduate without the skills necessary to become successful citizens in a global community. Given that the ability to read and write is an access skill to all other content areas, literacy has become a significant focus and has gained national attention. For example, President Bush's goal is to spend over $200 million on a "striving readers" initiative aimed at improving the literacy achievement of high school students. Similarly, the U.S. Department of Education funded a research competition in 2005 on supplemental reading programs and spent over $20 million. Clearly, adolescent literacy is a national priority.

The response to this priority has been to ensure that every teacher is a teacher of reading, not just the English teachers or teachers who provide supplemental reading instruction. Unfortunately, this focus has not yet resulted in significant changes in the ways in which content teachers provide instruction (e.g., Lesley, 2005; O'Brien, Stewart, & Moje, 1995; Stewart & O'Brien, 1989). In this article, we explore the changes that need to occur to ensure that adolescents become literate and that all of their teachers understand their role in developing literacy and thinking skills. Two scenarios of the many we have experienced as researchers and teacher educators offer an insight into how teachers perceive this common slogan. First, we enter a content literacy methods course.

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Setting the Context

The Preservice Content Reading Course

The instructor, equipped with a well-planned syllabus filled with interesting readings and class activities, is excited about the start of a new semester. A line of students anxiously awaits him as he walks to the front of the room, but unfortunately they do not share his enthusiasm. The first student blurts out, rather impatiently, "I don't really need to take this class. I'm a science major." Another student, with indignation, says, "I don't need this class either. My advisor said that you might sign a waiver; I'm going to be teaching physical education." For now, students will have to accept being in the course for the simple reason that it is a state requirement for all new secondary teachers. But this instructor knows that he will have to spend the first few classes, at the very least, helping students understand why literacy is critical to all subject areas.

As content literacy instructors we can always predict questions and concerns surrounding this course. Students fail to see the relevance of the subject matter, and some colleagues from other disciplines appear to share their sentiments as they seek exemptions for their students. Does the phrase "every teacher a teacher of reading" change their perspective or actions? Probably not, but before we explore that notion any further, we will visit a department meeting of current teachers.

Teachers Talking in a Department Meeting

Members of the math department are sitting around a large table in the faculty workroom. The table is piled high with materials for teaching every level of math—prealgebra to calculus. The teachers are practically salivating with the "freebies" and support materials that they see. A sales representative from the publisher calls for the teachers' attention. She begins her presentation, discussing the research that has informed the creation of this particular program. The teachers are anxiously eyeing the materials, flipping through the pages, whispering to each other about the problem sets until the consultant says, "We know that every teacher is a teacher of reading, so we included . . ." There is a noticeable change in the room—arms are crossed, books are closed, eyes are rolling. It is clear to any observer who knows this group of teachers that they will not be recommending this series for adoption.

Following the meeting, a few of the teachers remain in the room and are asked, "Why the reaction to the reading comment? You have had more content-literacy-instruction professional development than most schools in the U.S. What's up?" An algebra teacher says, "Yeah, we know how to teach and make sure that students are reading and writing, but I'm not a reading teacher." A geometry teacher says, "I want to see the presentation to the English department when the consultant says, 'Every teacher is a teacher of calculus.' Or maybe, 'Every teacher is a teacher of physics.'" They all laugh and keep adding, "Every teacher a teacher of cooking," "Every teacher a teacher of volleyball," "Every teacher a teacher of historical thinking."

When the laughter dies down, they are asked, "What is it about that statement that caused your reaction?" A geometry teacher says, "I feel discredited, like my subject doesn't matter as much." Interesting, despite a significant investment in content-literacy professional development (e.g., Fisher, 2001) and evidence of the use of content-literacy strategies by these very teachers (Fisher, Frey, & Williams, 2002), they were not comfortable being called "reading teachers."

Where Are We With Content-Area Literacy?

Content literacy is not a new field. As a profession, over the past several decades we have encouraged thousands of content teachers to

become "teachers of reading." Further, it has been argued that "the organization of secondary schools and middle and high school teachers who are trained as subject matter specialists are challenges schools confront as they respond to the reading deficiencies of their students" (Sunderman, Amoa, & Meyers, 2001, p. 675). Unfortunately, both preservice and in-service teachers are still resistant to content literacy as an instructional approach (Lesley, 2005; Nourie & Lenski, 1998). While there is evidence that credential classes or professional development can change these attitudes (Brozo & Hargis, 2003; O'Brien & Stewart, 1990; Stewart & O'Brien, 1989), it is not uncommon for teachers to report that they are uncomfortable planning instruction to foster reading development (e.g., Zipperer, Worley, Sission, & Said, 2002). In his review of literature, Lester (2000) notes that secondary school teachers perceive literacy to be relatively low priority and/or the responsibility of English teachers.

O'Brien, Stewart, and Moje (1995) offer a compelling hypothesis for secondary teachers' reluctance to prioritize principles of content literacy. They describe the purposes and methods of content literacy instruction as "paradoxical" (p. 446), meaning that teachers often do not see the connection between literacy skills and content information. The problems with perception are multidimensional, to say the least, but we can start with distinguishing between the old label of *content reading* and the newer term, *content literacy*. We used to hear the phrase *content reading* in reference to what we taught subject-area teachers. Courses and methods books on content reading were filled with ways to help students read and remember information from their textbooks. Unfortunately, content-reading strategies of old may have perpetuated a traditional transmission model of learning. Content reading can be associated with more teacher-centered, curriculum-driven instruction. More recently, literacy educators have found the expanded notion of *content literacy* to be a more productive way to think about reading and writing across the curriculum. Content literacy supports the view that students construct and coconstruct knowledge through activities such as discussion and reading and writing from multiple perspectives. Thus, learning is viewed as more student centered and student driven.

The problem is that neither view may match the perspectives, purposes, or constraints faced by content-area teachers. Let's first look at the notion of content-area reading strategies. By and large, these strategies have historically centered on textbook reading. Unfortunately, the content and format of many current textbooks is problematic. Many teachers find that the dry and difficult exposition of typical textbooks actually gets in way of learning and teaching, and we know of many teachers who would rather circumvent textbook reading than go through the painful process of coercing students to read. Furthermore, whole-class strategies assume that every student will benefit from the same support at the same time, and more fundamentally, none of the strategies we know will really help students who cannot yet read a substantial percentage of the words in the text.

Does the broader conception of content literacy make more sense to teachers? While the theories and practices associated with content literacy appear to be more student centered, purposeful, and constructivist oriented, O'Brien and his colleagues (1995) argue that they are inconsistent with secondary curriculum goals, which are still fairly traditional. How much time is a content-area teacher willing to devote to student-led discussions of contemporary issues and field-based research on student-selected topics when they know students are being tested on specific mandated content at the end of the year?

The end result, regardless of new versus old conceptions of reading and writing in content areas, is that learning through literate experiences is probably limited in most secondary classrooms. Despite significant attention to adolescent literacy and the increased awareness of the reading performance of youth, the "every teacher a teacher of reading" initiative has not resulted in increased achievement or attention.

What, then, should we do? Is it possible that students are really learning without much reading and writing? We doubt it. If you ask anyone to consider what they know well, whether it is something academic, such as geology, or something viewed as nonacademic, such as growing vegetables, classic-movies trivia, or the Washington Redskins, chances are they would realize that much of their expertise came from literacy experiences related to that topic. We know that students can—in fact, they must—use reading, writing, speaking, listening, and viewing to make meaning in their content-area classes. We also know that the English teachers cannot assume responsibility for the overall literacy progress of adolescents and that every teacher has a role to play in the overall development of students' literacy. As such, content literacy is nonnegotiable if our goal is to help students learn and grow as readers and writers.

But "every teacher a teacher of reading" is not working. As an alternative, we suggest a focus for our content colleagues in which they learn that *capitalizing* on reading and writing versus *teaching* reading and writing is the goal. Our work with students and teachers in middle schools and high schools that truly are prioritizing learning through literacy has helped us see literacy as a way to engage students in the content at hand. We start with looking in on two classrooms we observed in which teachers have realized the crucial role of literacy in captivating students in surprising ways. Next, we will identify some guidelines for considering engaging content-literacy experience, and we will conclude with some suggestions for content-area literacy education courses.

Theory Into Practice

Maria Green is a high school physics teacher and Danny Thomas is a future physical educator. Given the differences between these two teachers—from their content expertise to their novice versus veteran status to their gender—examples from their teaching have the power to inform a wide range of contexts. One of the primary lenses we used to examine the observational data from these two teachers' classrooms centered on our belief that students must be expected to read and write in every class. For us, this is very straightforward. We believe that reading and writing (and speaking, listening, and viewing, for that matter) are foundational to thinking. We knew that every student at their school had the opportunity to read self-selected materials every day based on the class schedule (Fisher, 2004), so we visited classrooms to determine how the other expectations played out. We want to see students engaged in authentic literacy tasks, tasks that build their content knowledge and their interest in reading and writing.

When we observe Ms. Green, we see significant evidence of reading and writing. A typical class session in her physics class starts with a writing-to-learn prompt, and students enter the classroom knowing that the first thing they'll do is respond to it. For example, in a unit of study on momentum called "Movement Is Life," students entered the classroom one day to find a prompt on the board that read, "Based on what you know about the science of momentum, how or why do we use the word in our own lives?" Ms. Green was clearly inviting students to make connections between the science she was teaching and the experiences her students had in their own lives.

Following the brief writing-to-learn activity, students took notes on "forces in nature" using Cornell note pages—a split-page format that provides space for key ideas, details, and a summary (for more information, see Fisher & Frey, 2004). A special education teacher, Mr. Davies, came in the room during the lecture to model note-taking skills for the class. By doing this, he could avoid pulling a student with a disability who had difficulty taking notes out of the classroom. During the 13-minute lecture, Ms. Green paused a number of times for students to update their vocabulary journals. Following the lecture, students used the information from their notes and the vocabulary journals to create graphic organizers based on the course content. Ms. Green ended the class session with a read-aloud from the Eyewitness series, a book called *Force and Motion* (Lafferty,

2000). She also reminded her students that they would be in reciprocal teaching groups the following day reading a science news article about the tsunami and the forces that created it. Turning to the observers as the bell rang, she said, "Students love informational texts; we just need to give them opportunities to read them and write about them."

Danny Thomas, our physical education student teacher at the same school where Ms. Green taught, and his cooperating teacher also used the theme "Movement Is Life" to organize their unit on aerobic fitness. In this class, students first change into their gym clothes and then meet their teacher on the field. Each day, Mr. Thomas reads something aloud as they stretch. Some days he reads articles from the sports page while other days he reads short biographies of sport figures. He starts this particular class with an ad from a magazine about the Cooper Institute. He then shares the biographical information he found on the Internet about the person who introduced the world to the word and concept of *aerobics* in 1968. Following his read-aloud to stretching, students are asked to move to their reciprocal teaching groups to read a short article on aerobic fitness. They know the routine—at least once a week they read in groups.

Mr. Thomas has identified specific vocabulary terms that he wants his students to know and will provide them with practice on these words during their class time over the next three weeks. The class then moves into a variety of aerobic activities and ends with students responding to a writing prompt—an exit slip that required them to describe their previous experience with aerobic exercise.

Learning Is Language-Based—And Teachers Can Do Something About It!

How else might Ms. Green or Mr. Thomas have engaged their classes with the content they were covering? We have lots of ideas for teaching this content, but they all involve literacy skills (e.g., Fisher & Frey, 2004). The content is mandated by the state in the standards documents, but simply telling students this information is not likely to improve their understanding of the content or facilitate their literacy development. Relying solely on the textbook would not have accomplished the job either.

Some specific themes are evident in both classrooms. First, fundamentally, reading and writing are critical to learning in these classrooms. Second, it is clear that students have been taught strategies to make sense of what they are reading, but this strategies focus is but one dimension of the overall literate focus of each class. Third, note that each teacher, even in these snapshots from larger units of study, is using a variety of texts in his or her teaching. Fourth, neither teacher has traded off curriculum demands for student experiences and relevance. In both cases, students are encouraged to link the subject matter with their own lives and contemporary issues. Finally, although not observed on these particular days, students in these classes have regular opportunities to read self-selected materials related to the course.

These characteristics match the following five interrelated principles we have identified in our work with other engaging content-area classes grounded in literacy (Ivey & Fisher, 2006).

Expect Students to Read and Write in Every Class

Old experiences with textbook reading may leave many teachers looking for any way to avoid reading and writing as a way to teach specific information. But notice how the reading and writing in the physics and physical education classes actually kept everyone involved. Reading and writing are not only ways of thinking, but methods to foster students' participation in the learning.

Imagine a college-level course, such as anthropology or biology, that involved no reading and writing. How would you become even mildly expert on the subject through just listening or observing? Certainly, you would pick up some information, but your cognitive interaction with the information presented would be extremely limited. When we expect deep

learning, reading and writing are critical components of the process.

When we suggest that students ought to read and write in every class, we also mean that literacy needs to be facilitated by the teacher as an integral part of instructional time. In other words, assigning reading and writing to be accomplished out of class will not do the trick. Notice how the two teachers in our scenarios use reading and writing in their teaching as a way to engage students in the content and to support their conceptual understandings. Juxtapose students' activity in these scenarios with the passive roles students take during more traditional activities such as lectures. Learning is based in language and students need lots of opportunities to explore, use, and reflect on language through engagement with text.

Teach Students Strategies for Reading and Writing Increasingly Complex Text

As you likely noticed in the discussion about reading and writing in every class, both teachers read aloud to their students. Read-alouds are a very effective way for encouraging students to read increasingly complex text. We know that students enjoy read-alouds and that they prefer read-alouds when new information is being presented (Ivey, 2003; Ivey & Broaddus, 2001). Read-alouds provide all students access to complex texts and information as well as to teacher models of reading. We would like to see read-alouds every day, in every class! We expect that our credential candidates can demonstrate competencies in delivering read-alouds that are aligned with the content of the class and that use quality, authentic literature (for information on the components of read-alouds, see Fisher, Flood, Lapp, & Frey, 2004).

In addition to read-alouds, we expect that teachers provide students with reading strategies that they need to improve their understanding of increasingly complex text. As we noted in our observations of Ms. Green and Mr. Thomas, strategic teaching and learning is an important component of content instruction. However, we don't want to imply that all of the strategies are taught in a whole-class format. While some strategies can be effectively used with the whole class, students' individual needs should dictate the specific instructional strategies that they need help acquiring.

Select Texts That Span a Range of Difficulty Levels

One reason some might believe that reading in content areas is difficult and boring for students is that their experiences have been limited to textbook reading. We know that students will not be motivated to read or learn much from books that are too difficult (Allington, 2002). There are no strategies that will help students read materials that are just too hard. Alternatively, we must change the reading experience by changing the texts we use.

Students need access to a wide range of texts, in terms of difficulty, topics, and genre (Brozo & Hargis, 2003; Fisher, 2004; Ivey & Broaddus, 2001). We know that good reading materials make the content more interesting. Textbooks cannot shoulder the burden any more than the English teachers can. When it is important for students to learn or reflect on specific content or concepts, perhaps the worst thing we can do is assign difficult reading. A good rule of thumb is that the text needs to be easy enough to read so that students can focus on the information rather than get tangled up in figuring out hard words, poorly explained concepts, or badly written text. What is purposeful and manageable varies from student to student because we all know about the wide range of readers and writers that exists in any secondary classroom. Effective teachers of content literacy do not rely on a one-size-fits-all text (e.g., Allington & Johnston, 2002), but instead use a multisourced and multileveled collection of texts for learning (Allington, 2002).

Focus Students' Reading and Writing on Big Ideas

If the goal of instruction is for students to regurgitate isolated facts and display knowledge of discrete skills, then reading and writing is probably not the best course of action. But if conceptual understanding is the goal, then lots of reading and writing makes sense. What we get from reading and writing are conceptual understandings, and students can learn deeply through literacy experiences that focus on big ideas—that is, through constructing knowledge by linking new information to prior knowledge, relevant life experiences, and contemporary issues.

For instance, in English class, how important is it for students to know specific books, characters, and quotations? Yet in many English classes students are required to pick apart a work of literature, examining the minute details of its construction and interpretation, with little discussion of how it applies to their lives. What if, instead, all studies of English literature focused on major universal themes that students find relevant to themselves or to people in their worlds? In real life, the only time we ever read for isolated bits of information is when we are looking for specific information such as trying to match health symptoms to a medical ailment in a reference book or when we are trying to accomplish some specific task, such as putting together a do-it-yourself piece of furniture. Even in those scenarios, though, it always seems more productive, not to mention much safer, to first read for the big picture. Everything needs to be placed in a larger perspective.

Dedicate Instructional Time to Self-Selected Reading

When Ivey and Broaddus (2001) interviewed nearly 1,800 sixth-graders about what they considered worthwhile in their language arts classes, the overwhelmingly most popular response was free reading. When probed further about this phenomenon, students said that when they are left alone to read, they could actually think and learn. This information seems vital to all content-area classes, where thinking and learning is the order of the day. Unfortunately, though, students rarely get the opportunity to read any time during the day, much less in content-area classes. Plus, if we truly want students to consider the new texts we bring to their attention, they need ample opportunities to read the texts they prefer (Worthy, Moorman, & Turner, 1999), and we cannot guarantee that these opportunities exist for students outside of the school day.

The Future of Content Literacy?

Let's return to the question posed by this journal—Is every teacher a teacher of reading? If this were the case, we would likely be in a different place in terms of adolescent literacy achievement. As we have noted, content teachers feel marginalized by this comment and question their capacity to teach students to read. We also know reading specialists who are cynical about this phrase because they understand that "teaching reading is rocket science," as Moats (1999) put it.

As such, we suggest that we focus on the very fact that all learning is language based, at least until such time as we can download new information into our brains while we sleep. Hopefully, a focus on the role that language plays in learning will help increasing numbers of content teachers understand their role in improving adolescent literacy.

If we are to change content teacher's perceptions about their roles in literacy development, then we must change their own experiences with reading, writing, and learning. We close with some ways for university instructors to help preservice and in-service content-area teachers come to value the roles of language and literacy for learning new information:

1. Include reading and writing regularly as ways for students to consider new information in content-area literacy methods courses. Reading, writing, listening,

viewing, and discussing should play perhaps an even larger role than lecture during actual class meetings.

2. Strategies for reading and writing content-area texts should be demonstrated and experienced in methods courses, but they should also be accompanied by critical discussions about what they do and do not accomplish, as well as who would benefit from particular strategies and in what contexts.
3. Preservice and in-service teachers should be given significant opportunities to explore alternatives to traditional grade-level textbooks. Knowing a wide range of texts related to their disciplines that span the gamut of reading levels, such as picture books, biographies, journals, scrapbooks, poetry, photo essays, newspapers, magazines, and primary source documents will allow new and experienced teachers to create more engaging and accessible reading experiences for individual students and the whole class.
4. Related, special attention should be paid to creating reading and writing experiences that focus on big ideas rather than on a particular text. Specifically, both novice and expert teachers need models of how to design and facilitate reading and writing when students around the classroom may be reading and writing different texts rather than a common text. In connection, compatible forms of assessment that emphasize conceptual learning, as opposed to the demonstration of discrete knowledge, need to be explored. ATE

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