

Teaching Literacy in the Content Areas



Literacy is the foundation of knowledge acquisition; therefore, all students must know how to read and write in the content areas to achieve. Effective content area teachers help students successfully and productively access, read, and understand text. As a content area teacher, it is your responsibility to teach literacy in your area to ensure students' success in the subject.

Students need support with learning the skills that reinforce how to attack new text, solve problems, and learn new content. Texts are one of the tools of the trade for students. If students know how to read them and use them, there is a greater chance of transferring and retaining important and relevant content. When this happens, the success rate for students to know, understand, and be able to successfully perform in the content area will be greatly increased.

Suggestions for teaching literacy in all content areas:

- Teach, model, and share with students what good reading and writing looks like and sounds like in a content area.
- Teach critical academic vocabulary
 - ▶ What is the essential vocabulary in the content area?
 - ▶ Coach students to learn and speak the language of the content.
 - ▶ Hold students accountable for the vocabulary.
- Set a purpose for reading
 - ▶ Why do we read? In school we read to increase content knowledge!
 - ▶ Talk about what has been read. Discussion creates dialogue and understanding.
 - ▶ Use the reporter's questions to engage students: "Who, what, where, when, why and how?" for each reading assignment.
 - ▶ Reflect, share, and write about what has been read. Remember, reading and writing go hand in hand. Have you achieved your purpose for reading? Ensuring that all students comprehend is grassroots formative assessment.
 - ▶ Connect the reading between subject matter and real life. Relevancy is often the key for student buy in.
- Have students reread text
 - ▶ Rereading will reinforce and strengthen the content of the assignment.
 - ▶ Often, even experts miss things the first time around.
- Teach text structure and text features
- Use close reading
- Use text-dependent questions

- Use multiple strategies to support literacy
 - ▶ Model and support students to master a range of literacy strategies.
 - ▶ Highlight key strategies.
 - ▶ Discuss with the students when, why, and how to use literacy strategies.
 - ▶ Have students reflect on their own literacy experiences and identify literacy strategies that are best suited for their own style of learning.

Strategies to Support Literacy

- Graphic organizers – Help students visually organize and understand content. Try word maps, Venn diagrams, story maps, flow charts, or compare/contrast organizers.
- Think-Pair-Share – Have students think and write about what has been read and share those thoughts with a partner and/or class.

Content area teachers need to use strategies to provide students with access to the texts—not to be reading teachers in the intervention or remediation sense—that is for the reading class . . . Both are critical.

– Dr. Anita Archer

- Think diagnostically – What do the students know, need to know, and understand? Constantly question and check for understanding during literacy experiences.
- Chunk text – Break text into meaningful, but shorter units.
- Scaffold text – Have students try choral reading, close reading, and partner reading.
- Anticipation Guides – Activate prior knowledge by asking students what they think about certain ideas.
- Active Participation – Look for ways to make literacy a relevant and dynamic experience. Students that are on-task will experience increased achievement.
- Verbal Responses – Have students try choral responses, responses to partners, and individual responses.
- Socratic Seminar – Engage students in a formal discussion as they think critically, articulate their thoughts, and respond to the thoughts of others.

For a list of resources to help you infuse literacy into your curriculum, visit the PaTTAN website at www.pattan.net.

References

- Archer, A. L. (2010). *Reading comprehension: Strategies for teachers and students*. Santa Rosa, CA: Sonoma County Office of Education.
- Burke, J. (2004). *Reader's handbook: A student guide for reading and learning*. Wilmington, MA: Houghton Mifflin.
- Burke, J. (2009). *The teacher's essential guide series: Content area reading*. New York, NY: Scholastic, Inc.
- Kamil, M. (2009). *Improving comprehension through text discussion: What does the research say?* [Online]. Available: www.corelearn.com/files/Archer/Kamil_discussion_res.pdf
- Zwiers, J. & Crawford, M. (2011). *Academic conversations: Classroom talk that fosters critical thinking and content understanding*. Portland, ME: Stenhouse Publishers.

Resource

Bookshare: www.bookshare.org

Accessible Instructional Materials

Perhaps the most common tool used in educating students in K-12 classrooms is the textbook. The use of textbooks is one effective and potentially powerful means of supporting instruction for many learners. However, for students who struggle to read because of physical, sensory, cognitive, or learning differences, print-based materials can present unnecessary barriers to learning and achievement. In addition, evidence-based interventions designed to improve student skills in reading, while critical for school improvement and student success, are not the only means of boosting achievement in a standards-aligned system.

Students who are unable to use textbooks and instructional materials in a traditional way may need accessible instructional materials (AIM) in order to have meaningful and equal access to the general education curriculum. Such access is guaranteed in federal education statutes, such as the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), as well as in Pennsylvania Special Education Regulations: Chapter 14 (for school districts) and Chapter 711 (for charter schools). Local educational agencies (LEAs) are required to take all reasonable steps to provide instructional materials in accessible formats to students with disabilities who need those instructional materials at the same time as other students receive instructional materials (IDEA 2004, Section 300.172 (b) (4) Access to Instructional Materials).

The Pennsylvania Training and Technical Assistance Network has established the PaTTAN AIM Center (www.pattan.net) to support local LEAs in meeting the requirements of IDEA 2004 for the provision of accessible instructional materials. The AIM Center will assist LEAs in obtaining specialized formats of instructional materials for eligible students with print disabilities. Specialized formats include digital text, audio, braille, and large print.

Commonwealth of Pennsylvania

Tom Wolf, Governor

Department of Education

Pedro A. Rivera, Secretary

Matthew Stem, Deputy Secretary, Elementary and Secondary Education

Ann Hinkson-Herrmann, Director, Bureau of Special Education

