Hello, my name is Shawn O’Hara. I am a student taking EDCI-5750-40, which is being taught by Professor Dana Robertson at the University of Wyoming. The topic I have chosen for this podcast is “What does current research show about a correlation between literacy acquisition and engagement strategies?”

Most of us know that a teacher can deliver the perfect lesson, but if the students aren’t engaged they won’t hear it, won’t learn it, their test scores won’t reflect it, and they will have no ownership of the skill or content of that lesson. In investigating best practices for teaching engagement strategies, researchers have identified various approaches that help teachers to improve their classroom instruction. I have selected six research studies written by authors who are well known and often cited in their field of expertise to support my topic. This podcast will highlight how important cognitive engagement is in literacy learning and demonstrate with examples from research which strategies are most effective.

Guthrie and Humenick (2004) help to define motivation “in the sense of engagement in an important task. The term *motivate* does not point toward mere frills, fun, or transitory excitement, but to a cognitive commitment toward reading to learn and to extending one’s aesthetic experience. Motivation, then, is not isolated from the language or cognitive processes of reading, but gives energy and direction to them.” (pg. 329) This research focused on external motivation, internal motivation, and self-efficacy. Internal and intrinsic motivation happens when a reader believes that there is value in reading that will satisfy desires, interests, and needs. Self-efficacy is when a student has the belief that he or she can read well. Taboada, et al. (2008) supported these ideas in their research that identified elements of reading engagement that include, interest, involvement, self-efficacy and competition. These studies show there is a high correlation between instructors who stress content goals and deeper meaning to help their students to become good readers. So, what can we do in our classrooms to encourage students to become intrinsically motivated experts? Guthrie and Humenick (2004) recommend setting knowledge goals, offering students’ choice in text, providing interesting text and arranging for student collaboration. In looking at just one factor from the study, students who were given free choice of text read significantly more words and for longer durations than students who were not offered a choice. Therefore, this shows that student interest came into play.

Taboada, et al. (2008) specifically looked at how motivation affects reading comprehension. In addition to what I already said about the contributions of the Taboada article, it is worthwhile to note that their research shows a relationship between internal motivation, background knowledge and good self-generated questions that enhance growth in reading comprehension. These researchers draw conclusions that are rooted in other studies that show a causal relationship between students’ background knowledge and comprehension of text. They go on to point out “High quality questions (by students) convey curiosity, inquisitiveness, and interest in the topic and text” (pg. 98).

Brian Cambourne, for several decades has researched theories of literacy learning in the classroom setting. His study, like Guthrie and Humenick (2004), showed that “if students didn’t engage with language, no learning could occur.” (pg. 186) What he identified in his study were the following conditions: immersion, demonstration, engagement, expectations, responsibility, approximations, employment, and response. He believes these conditions or “Principles of Engagement” must be met. In the model he came up with engagement was the key. His study shows that immersion and demonstration are critical for engagement. What would this look like in our classrooms? Students would be immersed in all kinds of text. Teachers would be demonstrating how texts are arranged and can be used. Students’ own expectations for their learning must be high; they must also take responsibility for what it is they must get out of the text they are reading. Students will be employed when they are given time to work at applying the craft of reading. Approximations are opportunities for students to emulate the models with mistakes being allowed and learned from. And lastly, in response to their reading the students must be given challenging feedback in collaborative exchanges. Once again the experts heighten our awareness that engagement is vital for learning to occur.

In my article by Taylor et al. (2003) the authors’ research also stresses that, “teachers need to know how to promote reading engagement in order in order to teach reading well” (pg. 4). They conclude that students who have been challenged with higher level thinking and effective teacher questioning become more efficient readers and learners. As an example of higher level questioning, a teacher in their study asked students, prior to reading the next chapter in a text, if they thought the children in the story should be allowed to be in a play. Next, he took a vote to elicit student involvement, and then he had students defend their positions. As a follow up he had them write in journals to response to another higher level question and asked them to show evidence.

As research is indicating, literacy is no longer confined to the English classroom but now we know that literacy should be threaded through the discourses. In the Norton-Meier, L. A., Hand, B., & Ardasheva, Y. (2013) article where the researchers describe the teaching model of *Science Writing Heuristic Approach,* (SWH) “The SWH approach is a curriculum innovation that replicates authentic science investigations by supporting students’ critical thinking and problem solving strategies through dialogue, reading, and writing” (pg. 44). Students ask their own research questions and gather evidence which supports students’ critical thinking and problem solving strategies. SWH employs collaborative dialogues, writing, graphing, and other activities linking the discourses of literacy and science. So many language lessons that would otherwise be dry and uninteresting can be taught in the science lab to maximize student engagement and scaffold literacy learning along with science vocabulary and concepts. I found that the research of Mantzicopoulos & Patrick (2011) corroborate the findings of Norton-Meier & Ardasheva. Both articles support the engagement of young readers in the use of informational text.

The research article of Mantzicopoulos & Patrick (2011) identifies the lack of informational texts in kindergarten classrooms. They find there is no clear evidence to support the assumption that young children learn best through story form. In contrast to story books, informational texts offer that “When used with authentic inquiry activities, experiences with meaningful texts that are rich in disciplinary content support children’s learning and offer insights into the nature of science” (pg. 271). Young students can understand the content of informational text vs. fictional as long as the teacher guides them. Therefore drawing from children's background knowledge about nature and their personal experiences, the teacher can engage students in literacy through the use of informational picture books.

So, research does show that there is a strong correlation between literacy acquisition and engagement strategies. All of the research articles seem to point to the same conclusion. Even very young children can be taught to point out key ideas and look forward to what is coming next, as well as to think deeper and clearer about the meaning of text, when they are well guided and taught specific engagement strategies.

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EDCI 5750

Fall 2015

Podcast Bibliography

The following research articles identify factors that help teachers understand how important cognitive engagement is in literacy learning and demonstrate with examples from research which strategies are most effective.

Cambourne, Brian (1995). Toward an educationally relevant theory of literacy learning: Twenty years of

inquiry. *The Reading Teacher*, 49(3), 182-190.

Cambourne’s research showed a correlation between a certain set of conditions that seemed to be present when students are learning language. These were the conditions that were identified by the study; immersion, demonstration, engagement, expectations, responsibility, approximations, employment, and response. This collaborative investigation of these conditions, showed that none of these conditions could stand alone without the element of engagement. The author presents a model for literacy learning that he calls, “Principles of Engagement.”

Guthrie, J. T., & Humenick, N. M. (2004). Motivating Students to Read: Evidence for Classroom Practices

that Increase Reading Motivation and Achievement. In P. McCardle & V. Chhabra (Eds.), *The*

*voice of evidence in reading research* (pp. 329-354). Baltimore: Paul H. Brookes.

These authors looked at 22 research articles that show that teachers can build specific strategies that help students become better readers. In other words, the strategies are highly correlated with students’ motivation to want to read and learn. The authors focus on three dimensions of motivation for reading: external motivation, internal motivation, and self-efficacy. Some of these conditions involved content goals, student choice, interesting text, and collaboration that motivated students in reading and other activities. A comparison between mastery goals and performance goals are also defined and discussed.

Mantzicopoulos, Panayota & Patrick, Helen (2011). Reading Picture Books and Learning Science:

Engaging Young Children with Informational Text. *Theory Into Practice,* 50:269-276, 269-275.

These authors have examined findings from the work of the Scientific Literacy Project to show how teachers should scaffold instruction to facilitate cognitive and affective engagement of kindergarten students. The use of informational picture books to engage, teach and enrich learning in science for kindergarteners facilitates opportunities for discussion, re-readings, and clarifying concepts. These strategies not only support vocabulary and comprehension but they also foster a lifelong interest in the sciences.

Norton-Meier, L. A., Hand, B., & Ardasheva, Y. (2013). Examining teacher actions supportive of

cross-disciplinary science and literacy development among elementary students. *International*

*Journal of Education in Mathematics, Science and Technology, 1(1), 43-55.*

The authors’ goal of this study was to pinpoint and describe the teaching model of *Science Writing Heuristic Approach,* (SWH) that integrates literacy and science, involving higher order thinking and language skills. “The SWH approach is a curriculum innovation that replicates authentic science investigations by supporting students critical thinking and problem solving strategies through dialogue, reading, and writing” (pg. 44). In other words students ask their own research questions then gather evidence which supports students’ critical thinking and problem solving strategies. This also involves collaborative dialogues, writing, graphing, and other activities linking the discourses of literacy and science.

Taboada, A., Tonks, S. M., Wigfield, A., & Guthrie, J. T. (2009). Effects of motivational and cognitive

variables on reading comprehension. *Reading and Writing: An Interdisciplinary Journal, 22*(1),

85-106.

This research study takes a look at five related dimensions of internal motivation for reading a) perceived control, b) interest, c) self-efficacy, d) involvement, and e) social collaboration. Internal motivation is defined as an intrinsic desire, in this case, to view reading as a reward in itself. Classroom observations made by teachers served as an effective means to identify student motivation. Internal motivation, background knowledge, good self-generated questions, and interaction with text are all engagement strategies that are highly correlated with growth in reading comprehension. Taking advantage of students’ innate abilities is one way to help a teacher build strategies to engage students in reading comprehension.

Taylor, B. M., Pearson, P. D., Peterson, D. S., & Rodriguez, M. C. (2003). Reading growth in high-poverty

classrooms: The influence of teacher practices that encourage cognitive engagement in literacy

learning. *The Elementary School Journal, 104*(1), 3-28.

This research study attempts to show “how teachers teach reading is of paramount importance” (p.24). This article identified five areas of literacy instruction that need to be addressed to maximize students’ cognitive engagement. According to the National Reading Panel (NRP) these areas need immediate implementation: “ (a) phonemic awareness instruction, (b) explicit, systematic phonics instruction, (c) repeated oral reading practice with feedback and guidance, (d) direct and indirect vocabulary instruction, and (e) comprehension strategies instruction” (Taylor, et al, p. 4). Higher level questioning, modeling, coaching, small group instruction, and appropriate assessment tools are shown to be some of the components necessary for students’ cognitive engagement and achievement.