



THE Reader

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An Affiliate of the International Literacy Association

Summer 2023

ALA to Host 51st Annual Literacy Conference

On July 26-27, Arkansas Literacy Association will host the annual Literacy Conference at the Benton Event Center. The ALA Board has been busy securing speakers and creating a filled agenda for the attendees to enjoy.

On Wednesday, author Kelly Gallagher will keynote. Gallagher, along with Penny Kittle, is the author of 4 *Essential Studies: Beliefs and Practices to Reclaim Student Agency* and *180 Days: Two Teachers and the Quest to Engage and Empower Adolescents*.

Also, on Wednesday, ALA's annual Book Awards Luncheon will be hosted. Charlie May Simon winner Jerry Craft will be in attendance. Craig O'Neill will again co-host this event.

During the Grand Exhibition, Gallagher will sign autographs at Heineman's booth. Following this, he will host a mini-keynote focusing on the four big ideas discussed in his latest book.

On Thursday, Jerry Craft will keynote and sign autographs following his keynote. During the Thursday luncheon, ALA will host an Arkansas Author Panel consisting of Trenton Lee Stewart (*Mysterious Benedict Society*), Roland Smith, Darcy Pattison, Maria Hoskins, and Eli Cranor.

Join the Experience!



Wednesday, July 26
Kelly Gallagher



Thursday, July 27
Jerry Craft

Conference Registration Open!

Inside This Edition:

Letter from Chair	2
Savouring Reading	4
Book Review	5
Expanding Literacy by Brett Pierce	
Matthew Effects	6
Why Do You Meme?	7

51st Annual Literacy Conference
July 26-27 - Benton Event Center - Benton, AR

Arkansas Author Luncheon Panel

Constructing Lifelong Readers and Writers



Trenton Lee
Stewart



Roland
Smith



Darcy
Pattison



Maria
Hoskins



Eli
Cranor

– Thursday, July 27 – Conference Registration Now Open! –

Announcing! Join the Fun!

The Reader is the scholarly journal of the Arkansas Literacy Association and is designed to serve as a resource for Arkansas teachers. Opinions expressed in articles and studies herein are those of the respective authors and do not necessarily represent the views of the ALA Board or members.

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Letter from ALA Chairperson Lyndsey Laster

I am honored to serve as Chair of the Arkansas Literacy Association. It has been a vivid dream of mine to lead Arkansas educators in literacy. Literacy isn't a project for me; it's a passion. My mother instilled a love of reading as a small child and encouraged and nurtured it throughout my life. My mother taught me, "reading is a way to use my imagination to go to new places, have new experiences, and gain new knowledge. Reading is dreaming with your eyes open." As your state chair, I am honored to lead with my passion and want you to join me in bringing a love of literacy to our students.



This year's theme is "Constructing Lifelong Readers and Writers." My vision is for us to work together using the platform "**Construction**" as a way to entice readers/writers to want to dive into literature like a building project: building a literary foundation, building structure on reading and proper writing techniques, using their imaginations for design and completion of a reading and/or writing project. We want to help our students navigate through what types of books they enjoy reading or writing about. All great writers started as readers. We have opportunities to develop and encourage some amazing future writers and should do all that we can to motivate, educate, and inspire them.

I am excited to welcome you to our 51st Annual Literacy Conference this year! Your Arkansas Literacy Association Board members have been hard at work building this year's main event. We will be **demolishing** old, worn out strategies, and **digging deeper** into ways to help our students be successful. Keynote speakers are Kelly Gallagher and Jerry Craft who will **pave** the way with new ideas.

ALA will also host the Arkansas Book Award Luncheon as well as the Arkansas Author Luncheon featuring Trenton Lee Stewart, Roland Smith, Darcy Pattison, Eli Cranor, and Maria Hoskins. We will have several breakout sessions to help **nail down** strategies for increasing reading and writing skills. I hope you will leave our conference with a **dump truck load** of new knowledge.

ALA will continue to encourage literacy across our great state by having our annual Student Writer's Showcase, hosting book clubs, and bringing in top notch speakers to share their vast literary knowledge.

As you navigate through your lifelong learning journey, consider how a professional organization can support you. ALA's mission is to develop literacy. If you are not a member of ALA, please take a moment to stop by our membership booth and sign up. Be a cheerleader of literacy at the local level. Invite someone new to tag along with you to a meeting. Be an inspiration to your students and fellow staff members. Take time to laugh and have fun with your students and show them by example how FUN reading can be! For some students, reading is the only comfort they have. Fill every day with literacy opportunities!

"There is no friend as loyal and comforting as a book." - Ernest Hemingway

"The world belongs to those who read." - Rick Holland

Writer's Showcase ~ 2023 Winners! ~

Grades 2-3:

1 - Clara McIlwain

3rd grade - Sequoyah Elem. - Russellville

2 - Serenity Davis

3rd grade - Westside Greenbrier Elementary - Greenbrier

3 - Georgie Fuentes

2nd grade - Crawford Elem - Russellville

Grades 4-5

1. Rexi Webb

4th grade - Clarksville Intermediate School - Lamar

2. Leah Taylor

5th grade - Russellville Intermediate School - Russellville

3. Phoebe Evans

5th grade - Russellville Intermediate School - Russellville

Grades 6-7

1. Braelyn Washam

7th grade - Mammoth Spring High School - Mammoth Spring

2. Roberto Polmerin

6th grade - Hamburg Middle School - Hamburg

3. Isabella Chance

7th grade - Pinkston School - Mountain Home

Grades 8-9

1. Ava Berryhill

8th grade - Cabot Junior High - Cabot

2. Anna Stone

9th grade - Harding Academy - Searcy

3. Clair Tittle

9th grade - Harding Academy - Searcy

Grades 10-12:

1. Elayna Russell

11th grade - Mammoth Spring High School - Mammoth Spring

2. Frida Campos

11th grade - Danville High School - Danville

3. Calle City

12th grade - Harding Academy - Searcy

ILA State Co-Coordinators

It is such an honor to serve as ALA State Co-Coordinator alongside Kacy Barden. She is one of my best ALA friends and has done a phenomenal job in all her many positions on the board. We have both been officers of ALA for many years, and we have extremely big shoes to fill in this position. We were preceded in this role by Tanna Clark, Krista Underwood, and Jeanne Trawick. They were more than great coordinators and truly exemplified leadership and passion for serving others. We have learned so much from them. I look forward to working with Kacy as we learn our new roles and responsibilities as ILA liaisons and continue to work to develop literacy in our great state and beyond.



The Arkansas Literacy Association is so very dear to my heart. As a teacher/reading specialist, I have always had a passion for literacy. I knew early in my teaching career that I wanted to serve others and get involved with an organization that works to promote literacy. I joined my local reading council almost 20 years ago. Spreading my love of literacy, not only to my kids at school, but to as many kids in my surrounding communities, was a huge desire of mine. Soon I was asked to be an officer and that's when I got my first experiences with the Arkansas Literacy Association (or Arkansas Reading Association as it was called back then) during summer Council Leadership Institute. I grew to love this organization very early on. I was inspired by other literacy leaders and all the work they were doing to promote literacy in their communities and around the state. I was extremely honored (and a little scared) when I was asked to become an officer of ALA. I had seen so many wonderful leaders as officers and I wanted to do as good of a job as they did. The Arkansas Literacy Association has brought so much joy to my life along with some wonderful life long friends. Every one of our officers are such hard workers and truly love what they do. These ladies (and a few men over the years) volunteer so many hours and work so hard to share their love of literacy. If you are not yet a member, please consider joining the Arkansas Literacy Association. You could help us make a literacy

difference in our communities and state.

I am extremely proud of our State Chair Lyndey Laster and Past Chair Tammy Gillmore. This literacy dream team along with their conference committee have worked diligently to bring you an amazing 2023 ALA Conference. They have a wonderful line up of keynote speakers, breakout sessions, authors, exhibitors, and so much more for you. Of course, The Arkansas Book Award Luncheon along with the Arkansas Author Luncheons are always a hit. You will not want to miss them. I can't wait to attend. If you have not made plans to join us, it is not too late. Registration is still open. We would love to have you!

Tara Derby, ILA State Co-Coordinator

Savoring Reading Comprehension from Simmer to Seasoning

By Ryan R. Kelly, Ph.D., Professor of Reading, Arkansas State University



Introduction

Classics like hamburgers and deli sandwiches can enrich lives, lunches, and the social world, but when it comes to true creature comforts, nothing beats a warm bowl of soup. Savoring a hot, favorite soup—especially on a cold day—is more than just a meal; it is a process. Both text and soup can connect both reader and taster to other units of thinking, and even shape new knowledge in the process. For some, this process is deeply steeped in cultural identity and personal experience. And just as the greater process of reading comprehension can produce waves of new knowledge, so can soup nourish a soul in need and enrich entire days. But just like a proper batch of homemade soup, reading comprehension requires balance and care with several key steps and essential ingredients. And, when prepared properly, they will come together as something to be savored.

Properly Simmered: Soup Base

The key foundation of any soup is, obviously, its base. And a proper soup base must not simply be thrown together from a condensed can, store-bought carton, or reconstituted in water from a tiny cube. The ideal soup base is a longer, complex affair, simmered over time, made in advance. It is far more than a soup's primary feature by volume—it is a foundation, a philosophy, that determines the fate and necessity of ingredients to come. In the very same way, a philosophy of thinking and building knowledge must be the foundation of the reading comprehension process. As reading comprehension is inherently a process of constructing knowledge, an underlying philosophy of constructivism is a must. Cresswell (2014) calls constructivism a greater worldview, a search for making meaning out of experience, and a process “not simply imprinted on individuals,” but rather “formed through historical and cultural norms that operate in individuals’ lives” (p. 8). It is a pathway toward building knowledge that takes time, connections, and the perspective of the learner, and is certainly the more time-consuming path. Quite to the point, as Goodman and Goodman (2009) assert that “learning is both social and personal” and “learners construct their own knowledge” (p. 98). Plus, a homemade broth that takes the better part of a day to prepare has the added bonus of chasing away all other smells in both kitchen and home.

Some may prefer *constructionism*, where attention lies in “a discursive orientation—and orientation to how meaning is produced through communication and rhetoric within social contexts” (Hansfield, 2016, p. 76). Yet, it is important to keep in mind that goal of a constructed product should pay greater attention to the social interaction within that context—a Vygotskian process by which the knowledge is constructed. Indeed, students learn best when they interact socially and Vygotsky emphasized that learning must be a “profoundly social process,” including “dialogue and the varied roles that language plays” when developing a robust set of linguistic and literacy skills (John-Steiner & Soubberman, 1978, p. 131). And Cicconi (2014) reminds us, many years since Vygotsky’s work, that “educational research still supports his theoretical stance” and that “socialization and collaboration play a vital role in learning” (p. 58). Just as a cultivated classroom culture of social constructivism can continue to build upon itself, so does a simmered broth mature in time. And, especially given an overnight to let sit and allow flavors to settle (and to skim off excess fat), it will be ready for the array of ingredients to come that truly makes a soup the rewarding edible experience that it is.

Featured Ingredient: Text Connections

Much like a featured ingredient in soup must match the base, so must the featured action in reading comprehension match the underlying constructivist philosophy. No self-respecting chef puts beef in a base of delicately simmered chicken stock broth, for example. For reading comprehension to produce knowledge, it must fundamentally connect units of thinking in novel ways. And it is these very connections that help the reader both maintain and shape their own thinking, as well as seek out other units of thinking that exist out in the social world, with which to connect. Ogle (1986) gave literacy the famous KWL reading strategy, for example, which at its core helps teachers “honor what children bring to each reading situation” (p. 564). “It does not get any better than this pedagogically” and the very nature of this strategy makes it one that “looks, feels, and is useful in any type of reading situation where students are asked to map the progression of their thinking, or connect ideas” (Kelly, 2015, p. 29).

This is all well and good, but the example of KWL does not necessarily assure that the reader reaches out in search of deeper, more distant connections. Questioning is an essential ingredient in the process of reading comprehension and an equally important act to use when engaging with the social world. *Continued on page 8.*

Book Review

Expanding Literacy: Bringing Digital Storytelling into Your Classroom

By Tammy Gillmore, ALA Past Chair

Occasionally a book comes along that creates a shift in thinking. This book...*Expanding Literacy: Bringing Digital Storytelling into your Classroom* by Brett Pierce...does just that. This professional book provides teachers with the tools and resources they need to integrate digital storytelling into their classrooms.

Author Brett Pierce has an abundance of experience on the topic on which he expounds, having spent over twenty years working with Sesame Workshops and with his own company Meridian Stories (www.meridianstories.com), whose main focus is to better equip students, both middle and high school ages, to collaborate and create, to problem solve, and to lead in the ever-growing world of digital workplace.

The book presents a rationale for incorporating digital storytelling as a norm within the classroom, focuses on the process within the learning, includes many examples from which to springboard, and eases the mind of the teacher on how to “seamlessly” add this high-engaging tool within the classroom. The book is simply full of relevant ideas and project starters that I am excited to implement this fall.

Pierce’s passion lies within the process. “As we know education has been driven by test scores, which are outcome-related, but we, also, know the educational value is truly in the doing thereof and not necessarily in the outcome.” Students, who so enjoy YouTube videos and TikTok, will become immersed in the process when asked to create the very projects they enjoy visually and auditorily that consume so many of the hours within their weeks, projects that have them analyzing information for validity and then storyboarding and writing before the final product is created.

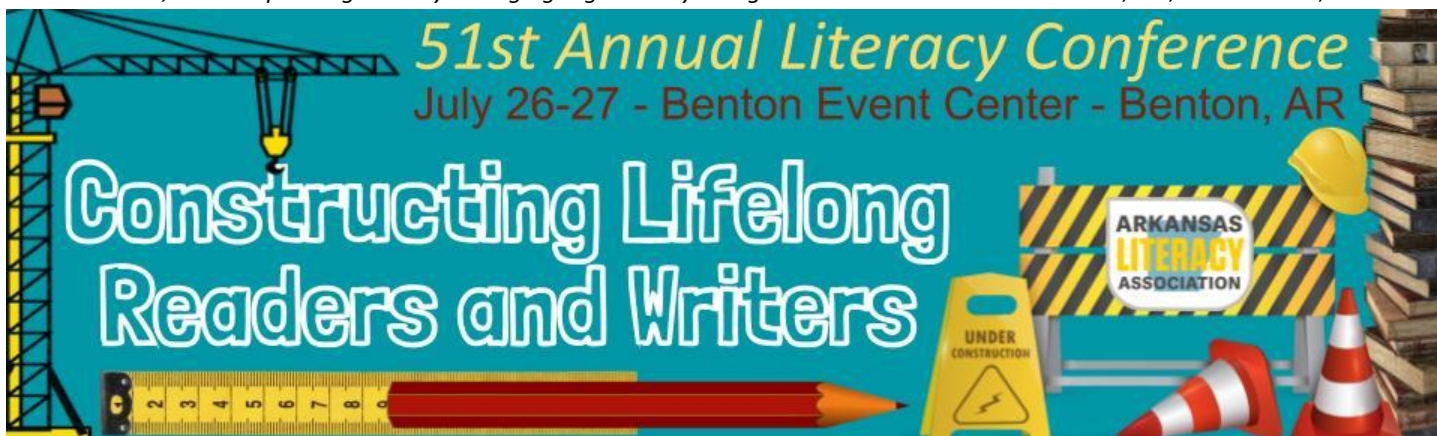
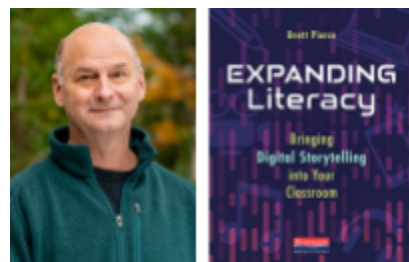
Utilizing the premise of the *Expanding Literacy*, teachers will ever more become the guide on the side yet still feel very much needed within the classroom as the expert in their curriculum areas all the while opening up avenues of learning that the student would see as “hands on,” as they create the informational or how-to videos, the podcasts, vlogs, games shows, commercials, PSAs, and so much more as students join the “participatory culture” of these current times. As this book supports, digital storytelling remains an amazing support for teaching the standards required within our state.

The interview with author Brett Pierce actually begins with the trendy topic of AI (not a topic within the book, but one on which Pierce has some insight) and how to embrace AI as a tool; his enthusiasm is quite contagious as he quickly connected the topic of AI and how to use it as a digital storytelling tool. To listen to the entire interview and Pierce discuss *Expanding Literacy*, go to ALA’s YouTube channel here: <https://youtu.be/ASn5E0KY3i8>

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Mitigating the Matthew Effects: A Parable Reconsidered As We Listen While Reading

By Kimber M. Barber-Fendley, Parkview Arts and Science Magnet High School



Abstract

The established practice of silent sustained reading (SSR) in the high school English classroom is examined and challenged, as the author advocates for the reading practice of listening while reading (LWR). The prominence of SSR coincides with the research on the Matthew Effects, a seminal framework developed by Keith Stanovich almost forty years ago. The Matthew Effects, a reference to a biblical parable found in the book of Matthew, yields strong explanatory power on how initially low and high readers show further divergence of reading skills as they continue their reading development. Employing a review of the literature on the Effects, the author argues

the subsequent research not only verifies and gives voice to the poor trajectory of struggling readers but can also be used to support the implementation of LWR. Yet the author concludes that Stanovich's Matthean parable may now have exhausted its effectiveness as an organizing allegory. She reports her research on the original context which Stanovich changed to match his claims on reading trajectories. Another gospel parable from the book of Matthew, equally compelling, can better depict how all readers, including the least of these, can rise.

Mitigating the Matthew Effects: A Parable Reconsidered as We Listen While Reading

Although secondary English teachers are often the strongest advocates for the simple act of reading, a growing body of evidence indicates silent sustained reading (SSR), the reading model most often implemented in the English classroom, serves as a hindrance, rather than a help, in furthering the reading development in struggling readers. SSR, which will also be called privileged reading, has advocates because SSR is a high cognitive task which elicits critical thinking, begins rich, literary discussions, and creates a space for writing in response. Yet SSR has become complicit in the failure of our struggling readers to gain significant growth in reading.

To understand how the favoring of SSR affects readers in the classroom, one needs to study the research which has examined reading development and the Matthew Effects, that is, the divergence in reading abilities that begins early between high and low readers and becomes apparent and a problem, especially by the time they enter high school English classrooms. Although research into the Matthew Effects often studies the youngest readers, these Effects apply to readers like mine, as these Effects have long term consequences. This research offers an understanding as to why students in my regular, secondary English classes are low readers and continue to be so.

This paper aims to add to this conversation, offering a possible solution of how educators might mitigate the Matthew Effects through a reading strategy which gives audio support while students read a text. As I propose this, I acknowledge that an argument for LWR runs counter to what most English teachers consider "real" reading. Yet as educators who wish to pass the love of literature to all our students, we might consider the possibility that privileged reading is not the only real reading. We might shift our thinking to understand that readers who "cheat" in their reading are not cheating themselves cognitively (Dahl, para. 2). Perhaps the argument made here might allow us to see the good work of struggling readers, which could become a part of our pedagogy if we acknowledge that privileged reading is a part of the problem.

An Argument Made Through a Review of the Literature Researching a Parable, Matthew Effects and Reading Development

Almost forty years ago, Stanovich (1986) proposed a seminal understanding of why initially high and low readers deviate even further from each other in their reading development. He borrowed the "Matthew Effects" from Merton and Zimmerman (1968) who coined this term when discussing how a well-known scientist's status renders his greater reward and further prestige in the discipline for his scientific contribution, and how the opposite is true for an emerging, unknown scientist who offers a comparable scientific contribution and yet receives unequal reward or prestige from it (p. 57). Merton and Zimmerman derived this idea from a parable found in the Bible (p. 58). Just like in the gospel of Matthew (Matthew 25: 14-28), the one who has many "talents" uses them to gain more, and the one with few "talents" has even those taken away. Thus the Matthew Effects are the predictable, divergent results which occur when two parties, unequal in their status or skill, proceed to be charted in their development over time.

The same Matthew Effects can be seen in reading development, Stanovich (1986) asserted. He explained that

Continued on page 11.

What do you Meme? A Framework for Incorporating Memes into Classroom Instruction

By Carrie L. Rockett, Arkansas State University



ABSTRACT

With the implementation of innovative technologies and the development of new, collaborative processes of text creation, the study of new literacies has emerged as a topic relevant to educational practice. As researchers study these new literacies, they analyze ways in which people communicate within a certain Discourse, often with non-traditional text types. Students, considered digital natives, are often fluent in and very comfortable with many of these digital new literacy practices. Incorporating opportunities for students to participate in their own new literacy practices within the classroom environment places value on students' existing literacies, promotes engagement, and further develops new and traditional literacy skills. The stimulus-contraction-expansion framework proposed here serves as a structure to allow educators

to effectively incorporate a new literacies remix practice, meme, into their classrooms.

New Literacies

Literacy is often misconstrued as merely the ability to read and write in a certain language. However, as Green states, "A major problem in adequately conceptualizing literacy involves its relation to thinking and cognition, as opposed to a more restricted view of literacy as concerned with written language in the most narrow, materialistic sense" (Green, 1988, p.2). As a social construct, literacy certainly encompasses skills other than encoding and decoding written texts. This "relation to thinking and cognition" is what drives literacy theorists to explore new concepts related to literacy especially in today's technologically-enhanced cultures.

Widely accepted as a valid model for literacy theory, the three-dimensional approach to literacy proposed by Green (1988) includes three related dimensions: operational, cultural, and critical. On the most basic level, the operational dimension houses the skills necessary to operate within a semiotic domain: often including (but not necessarily mandating) reading, speaking, and writing. The work of James Gee (2007) builds upon the three-dimensional approach to literacy by further exploring semiotic domains and the multifaceted nature of literacy. To expand upon this, Gee states "Words, symbols, images, and artifacts have meanings that are specific to particular semiotic domains and particular situations (contexts). They do not just have general meanings" (Gee, 2007, p.25). Gee clarifies that people belong to affinity groups associated with certain domains and develop knowledge of what he coins internal and external design grammars, or "the principles and patterns in terms of which one can recognize what is or is not acceptable content ... or typical social practice and identity in a semiotic domain" (2007, p.29). The ability to determine meaning specific to a certain context is connected to the cultural dimension of literacy. Literacy, as a social construct, therefore, requires knowledge of certain cultural aspects within a Discourse. Furthermore, the critical dimension of literacy requires awareness of the socially constructed nature of literacy. By recognizing the social constructs of literacy, one can critically evaluate communications and be empowered to elicit change within a certain Discourse.

Colin Lankshear and Michele Knobel take an ontological view to analyze new literacies. In the text, *New Literacies, Everyday Practices and Social Learning* the authors clarify their approach, "To say that 'new' literacies are ontologically new is to say that they consist of a different kind of 'stuff' from conventional literacies we have known in the past ... changes have occurred in the character and substance of literacies that are associated with larger changes in technology, institutions, media and the economy ..." (Knobel & Lankshear, 2011, p.28). This change in "stuff" of which the authors speak is affected by cultural changes due, in part, to the ever-evolving realm of technology. The world, with all its domains, has and is changing rapidly. As new technologies become mainstream, new literacies emerge as people communicate in different ways and with different media.

Despite knowledge of new literacies, the new ways in which students communicate and the tools they use to do so are often outside the parameters of many traditional classrooms. By recognizing and incorporating the new "stuff" mentioned by Lankshear and Knobel, teachers can harness the power of new literacies in the classroom in meaningful ways. This includes creating opportunities for students to communicate in new ways and with new media.

Remix Practice of Meme

New literacies tend to involve a more multi-user, collaborative approach to creation.

Continued on page 18.

Savoring Reading Comprehension...continued from page 4.

By Ryan R. Kelly, Ph.D., Professor of Reading, Arkansas State University

Raphael and Au (2005) supported Question Answer Relationships (QAR) in order for teachers to have a “framework that offers teachers a straightforward approach for reading comprehension instruction” (p. 208). This explicit framework is very popular, with implications for remediation as well. The original intent by McKeown, Beck, and Worthy (1993) was to guide students toward thinking of the text’s meaning “as something to be negotiated, as if setting up a dialogue with the text’s author” (p. 561). Ultimately, “with questioning, we are forced to set various units of thinking out on the table,” some of which “are not merely our questions, but they are the basis for the formulation of our questions, which are rooted in our prior knowledge,” and others that “are not merely our questions, but an array of early evidence supporting a claim” (Kelly, 2018, p. 8-9). These bold, core, explicit ingredients are very, very carefully chosen steps in the reading comprehension process because they fundamentally make sense, given the background context of constructivism. Traditional ingredients are key in the sense that they are proven to work—and when teachers and students fundamentally believe that linking new units of thinking produces new knowledge, this will be a delicious ingredient indeed.

Supplemental Ingredient: Literacy Skills

Trending, seasonal, local, or innovative ingredients add to the uniqueness of any piping hot bowl, keeping the concept current and also assuring its success. Additional ingredients in the comprehension process add this depth and complexity, much like additional ingredients add the very same to a soup. Presently, a great deal of policy discussion and scholarship have taken a deep dive into the language-based skills propounded by the science of reading—and any conversation on comprehension that neglects its consideration would be remiss, given its present importance. Cabell and Hwang (2020) remind educators that “the national attention paid to foundational skills may inadvertently reinforce narrow conceptualizations of the primary grades as a time to learn to decode words, at the expense of other important learning” (p. S99) and very adamantly issue the reminder that “knowledge is intimately related to language” (p. S100). Given the foundation of knowledge discussed herein, and the notion that language is intimately related to it, the construction of knowledge should therefore not occur far removed from instruction in the code of language. These authors ultimately land on a profound suggestion that “in the context of knowledge building, language and knowledge can grow together to have a synergistic effect on linguistic comprehension and eventual reading comprehension” (p. S105). Local flavors should never ruin a dish, nor should they ever replace other iterations entirely—they simply are an essential perspective to consider.

Culinary flavors are often rooted in local tradition. And likewise, it is essential to value student identity and their existing funds of knowledge, rooted in their own experience and culture. All students, regardless of their background or identity, always bring units of knowledge with them that are ready for injection into the comprehension process. Hattan and Lupo (2020) suggest that “by positioning students as deficient in knowledge, teachers may fail to value the vast funds of knowledge that all learners bring to literacy experiences” (p. S285), and they acknowledge a historic problem has been “emphasizing a singular interpretation of a text rather than encouraging students to develop their own understandings of the text” (p. S287). To further attempt mediation comprehension in the age of the science of reading, Galloway, McClain, and Uccelli (2020) stitch this together well, suggesting three key understandings that will better situate reading comprehension in the context of present debate:

(1) The precise language skills and language-focused practices that support skilled comprehension of texts read in school settings, (2) the socioculturally situated nature of the language of texts and readers, and (3) the role of reader identity and agency in reading events involving academic language comprehension. (p. S337)

The general public will ultimately always crave flavors that are both traditional, as well as locally and culturally enriched; they will also always crave that which is trending, popular, and under current cultural examination. And, as the supplemental ingredients in a bowl of soup must find the right presence and tone among these featured ingredients, so must the teaching of comprehension find the proper tone among current scholarship that emphasizes language-based skills.

Final Seasoning: Teacher Flair

Often, it is the unique hint of seasoning in a soup that one will notice the most, and interestingly enough, that initial note of seasoning can make or break the experience. And there is no single more influential flair in the reading comprehension process than the explicit presence of the one who teaches it. Graves, Juel, Graves, and Dewitz (2011) note that it is exemplary teachers who “demonstrate a rich combination of direct explicit skill instruction (phonemic

awareness, phonics, comprehension, and the like) and more holistic activities like reading quality literature” or teacher-led discussion—but more importantly, they “ignore the age-old fight between teaching phonics skills and whole language; they do both,” and they “also ignore the fight between basal readers and literature-based instruction—they employ both” (p. 27). A step further, Tracey and Morrow (2006) offer metacognition as one additional dimension to the seasoning, noting that “explicit instruction means that teachers attempt to be especially clear, organized, and detailed regarding the nature of the metacognitive strategy they are explaining, and when and how that strategy should be applied by a reader during the reading experience” (p. 62). All debates aside, there is no question that a teacher of exceptional quality is one who models the acts and processes inherent to literacy, guides students through their practice, and evaluates their progress while standing ready to remediate any deficiencies in achievement.

This need not be at all like a rather epic moment in Skinner’s (1976) *Walden Two*. In Skinner’s text it is Frazier who describes a rather epic moment of behavior modification using what one must certainly imagine at this point: hot soup. When expecting supper, Frazier explains, the children instead “must stand for five minutes in front of steaming bowls of soup” (p. 99). He quickly ups the ante by adding that when it is time to sit, the children call heads or tails for a coin toss, “and if it comes up heads, the ‘heads’ sit down and eat,” while “the ‘tails’ remain standing for another five minutes” (p. 100). While this example holds no weight in the sense of knowledge construction—except perhaps reinforcing that hot soup is a must at dinner time—this example does underscore the essential presence of the teacher. But reading comprehension is, in the end, a deeply personal process replete with connections in all sorts of directions. It is also a process that simply cannot flourish without the explicit guidance of one trained to model and reinforce it—done so on a positive and engaging note, and not one of conditioning or control. A teacher must never “condition” students to comprehend a text, but rather facilitate their process, to assess and measure its growth and scope, and ultimately a teacher must possess a passionate devotion to reader success.

Coda: Comprehension Savored

From a delicately simmered base of constructivism, to key connections between units of knowledge, to supplemental ingredients of language skills and cultural relevance, to the undeniably explicit flair of the educator, reading comprehension is indeed a process to be savored. It may sound like a literacy dish that is easy to serve, yet even a single ladle-full reveals complexity, care, and intention in preparation. Yet even a process that is so time-tested (and, yes, sometimes at risk of being bumped aside in favor of other trends) can continue to resonate on a deeply personal level. There is, indeed, every bit of room for the presence of a dedicated educator to facilitate this process from simmer to seasoning. Reading comprehension should, after all, be delicious, and readers—indeed all learners—deserve a delicious hot bowl served up right, with care in preparation, and all the right ingredients. Readers deserve something to be savored every time. And, of course, readers also deserve something sweet for dessert...

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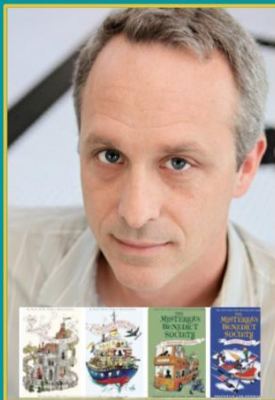
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Mitigating the Matthew Effects...*continued from page 6.*

By Kimber M. Barber-Fendley, Parkview Arts and Science Magnet High School

early skilled readers have initial reading success in applying phonological awareness, have positive experiences in reading which begets a greater desire to read, and thus they continue vocabulary development, becoming more skilled readers. The opposite can be seen in readers without early reading success. They have initial difficulty in acquiring phonological awareness, have negative reading experiences which begets less desire to read, and thus they have less exposure to vocabulary development, becoming less skilled readers. When charted over time, the fan spread trajectory of high and low readers expresses and confirms their divergence into what is commonly described as the “rich get richer” and the “poor get poorer” (p. 382).

The significance of Stanovich’s work is that it provides a framework in which to think about reading development. Yet Stanovich’s Matthew Effects, when first published, was more claim than evidence, more conjecture than proof. It has, in turn, sparked a flurry of research trying to confirm what Stanovich already claimed to be true. Perhaps the reason researchers have sought to chart the Matthew Effects in real student populations is not because Stanovich did it first. Rather I would argue that the term itself, the Matthew Effects, holds strong explanatory power that is still irresistible to researchers. It is a persuasive, organizing parable that gives voice to our real experiences as researchers and teachers when we work with readers who never seem to catch up with their peers. The Matthew Effects is therefore “gospel truth,” offered in a tender tale which gives voice to the struggles of the least of these. Stanovich’s theory explained our students’ plight and allowed us to sympathize with them. It was and still is high rhetoric.

Although some of the research on the Matthew Effects has yielded inconclusive results (reported in Kempe, Eriksson-Gustavsson, and Samuelsson, 2011; Protopapas, Sideridis, Mouzaki, and Simos, 2011; Pfof, Hattie, Dorfler, and Artelt, 2014), the discipline has been responsive, self-critiquing, and it has continued to examine the different stages of reading that have different purposes for reading. The main difference, often cited in the research, is the one that began by Chall (1983). Rigney (2010) summarized Chall’s research in which she distinguished that at first a younger child “learns to read” and then an older child “reads to learn” (p. 51). Thus Rigney explained good readers quickly advance to using reading as a learning tool whereas poor readers linger longer in the stage of learning to read, often becoming frustrated with the laborious act of reading (p. 51).

However, basically all children advance through the “learning to read” stage eventually, which is why studies that contained a “ceiling effect” did not show a Matthew Effect (Pfof et al., 2014, p. 208-209). Pfof et al. explained that any research which purported a model in which delayed readers will “catch up” to their more advanced counterparts often limited its research design to examining only initial reading skills. The “catch up” only appeared to occur on finite, beginning reading skills, such as the letter recognition of the twenty-six letters or phonological awareness of their sounds. When studied, it was determined that these reading skills had a ceiling, a set amount that high readers could obtain quickly yet low readers would eventually arrive at because there was a limit of what can be learned (p. 208). Thus the Matthew Effects did not express in studies where a ceiling effect occurred. However a transition in the research occurred when they began to examine reading skills that have no ceiling. To do so, researchers needed to study readers who were learning to read and readers who were reading to learn; they needed to track readers into their adolescence. Finally they had the longitudinal research to do it.

Cain and Oakhill’s (2011) research serves as a fine example. Their research reported no Matthew Effects when they examined word reading and other constrained variables, since the study began with eight-year olds when, presumably, all readers had mastered these skills. Yet Matthew Effects were detected in the unconstrained variable of vocabulary development, the acquisition of novel words which happens over a lifetime and thus contains no ceiling effect. When these eight-year olds grew up to be sixteen year olds, their vocabulary development correlated with reading habits, and the fan spread could be charted because of the differences in reading ability could be seen by secondary school (p. 441).

It is at this age, fifteen or sixteen, where I as an English teacher meet my struggling readers, who have struggled for eight or more years prior to entering my classroom. It is here, when the research turns toward the unconstrained variable of vocabulary development and the reading skills of older student populations, the research becomes relevant and at times almost poignant. What I gleaned from the research is the reciprocal relationship between vocabulary development, reading comprehension, and print exposure, that is, readers become better readers by reading, by simply being exposed to new words in the texts they encounter.

Although vocabulary development and print exposure are being confirmed as central for reading development, both were posited as essential by Stanovich (1986) in his original framework. He first proposed this reciprocal relationship between print exposure and growth in reading (p. 379). He even went further, agreeing with Nagy and Anderson who said, “We judge that beginning in about the third grade, the major determinant of vocabulary growth is amount of free reading” (p. 380). Stanovich argued that print exposure varies greatly among readers. He cited Nagy and Anderson again:

the least motivated children in the middle grades might read 100,000 words a year while the average children at this level might read 1,000,000. The figure for the voracious middle grade reader might be 10,000,000 or even as high as 50,000,000. If these guesses are anywhere near the mark, there are staggering individual differences in the volume of language experiences, and therefore opportunity to learn new words. (Stanovich, p. 381)

Stanovich called this enormous difference in print exposure between low and high readers a “cumulative advantage phenomenon” (p. 381). Thus the cumulative life-long advantage of print exposure keeps early readers positioned to benefit the most from their initial print exposure.

The subsequent research verified the strong connection between print exposure and vocabulary development. Duff’s (2015) study showed the overall accumulative advantage that 4th graders with above average vocabulary had over their counterparts with average vocabulary. Their 4th grade vocabulary skills predicted their differences in vocabulary growth, with the above average group showing large gains over the smaller gains made from their counterparts by the time they were in 10th grade (p. 859). Kempe et al. (2011) could also affirm a Matthew Effect that was widening over time for the more advanced reading skills, such as reading comprehension and vocabulary development, further verifying the reciprocal relationship between the two. They concluded by arguing that print exposure, that is, free reading encountered voluntarily at home and at school, contributed to the Matthew Effects (p.192).

Other research gave more evidence for the same conclusion. Stanovich and Cunningham (1992) found print exposure correlated with vocabulary and verbal skills. Cunningham and Stanovich (1997) further confirmed the efficacy of print exposure, as their findings linked print exposure, at home and at school, with reading comprehension (p. 942). Furthermore, print exposure has other champions, even for struggling college readers. University professor Ari (2013) cites research that indicated print exposure, through what he calls “wide reading,” was better than repeated reading practice or SSR (p. 16). Thus the act of reading is central for vocabulary development, for reading.

How the Poor Might Get Richer, LWR for Struggling Readers

If print exposure reassures vocabulary development and reading comprehension, it also explains why many of my diverse-leveled readers struggle to read. My students tend to dodge reading for probably the same reasons that students studied for the Matthew Effects did: reading is boring, my students tell me. It takes too long; the only time they read is when they take a reading test. They never read at home. They don’t like the book, and they rather just watch the movie. I have observed that most of my students’ “reasons” might be better labeled “avoidance behaviors.” Their lack of print exposure exposes their lack of reading ability. I say this because when I finally observe them reading in the classroom, I see that their act of SSR involves such difficulty and concentration that they sometimes prefer to fail on their own terms rather than to read on mine.

Yet the research on the Matthew Effects cannot speak toward all the reasons why my students in my co-teach English class struggle because most of the research into the Matthew Effects specifically eliminates students in special education from their studied populations. Although no study I reviewed gave reason as to why they did not include these students, I got the sense the researchers were trying to see the typical fan spread of the Matthew Effects, and the inclusion of students with reading disabilities or other language impairments might show an even greater divergence. There are notable exceptions (Duff, Tomblin, and Catts, 2015; Kempe et al. 2011), and yes, these studies reported Matthew Effects when students with disabilities were included. These studies seemed to display more external validity in that they show a better representation of the greater student population in our public schools as well as a greater picture of the students I teach.

Although the literature on the Matthew Effects tells me why my students struggle, I believe a possible solution to the Effects lies within another body of research, a literature that centers on students in special education or reading intervention. These studies are unique in that instead of purposefully excluding students with reading disabilities/difficulties, these studies do the opposite; they study only these populations. I want to now focus my discussion on these studies, for the use of audio support by students with disabilities may hold the potential to create new opportunities for print exposure, for the vocabulary development, and for the reading development that follows.

I am not the first to propose that audiobooks might be a working solution for students with disabilities when they need to read grade-level texts (Baskin and Harris, 1995; Wolfson, 2008; Moore and Cahill, 2016). These authors' advocacy for the use of audiobooks serves to further back my discussion on four studies that researched the use of audiobooks for students with disabilities to read their literature and textbook assignments. Esteves and Whitten (2011) began their study by explaining how listening while reading (LWR), what they called "assistive reading," offered reading support while performing the same literary goals that were found in SSR. They said, "students are exposed to literature; however, assisted reading approaches provide scaffolded support by using a fluent model as an example of effective reading practices, whereas SSR does not" (p. 23). They summarized previous studies on assistive reading, noting that, "Researchers cite improvements in reading attitudes due to the self-confidence gained by marked improvements in reading fluency and comprehension, the ability to read grade-level test, and the enjoyment of reading high-interest material" (p. 24). Thus LWR promises to give reading support and therefore give reading capability, confidence, and pleasure.

Esteves and Whitten's study (2011), like the studies they cited, showed promising results. Although their control group had higher reading proficiency scores before the study, their students who used LWR could read more words than their control counterparts at the study's completion (p.30). Izzo, Yurick, and Mcarrell (2009) showed similar results, as high school students with disabilities performed better on reading comprehension tests with access to a curriculum containing a text-to-speech function than did their SSR control (p. 16-18).

Boyle, Rosenberg, Connelly, Washburn, and Brinckerhoff's study (2003) mirrored these studies' successes yet added an additional nuance. Their study's secondary students with mild disabilities were given audio support or audio support with an additional complementary note-taking strategy for their history classes. Their results showed that both audio supported groups performed better on content-based assessments than the control with no audio support. Yet what is particularly interesting is that the audio alone group scored higher than the note-taking group. The surprising result was these students did not need any additional support to comprehend the textbook (p. 212).

A final study, entitled "Accommodating remedial readers in the general education setting: Is listening-while-reading sufficient to improve factual and inferential comprehension?" by Schmitt, Hale, McCallum, and Mauck (2011), needs to be mentioned because its findings showed opposite. In their study with students with reading difficulties, they distinguished between factual or inferential questions for reading comprehension, believing initially that LWR might only affect factual comprehension rather than the subtler reading of inference. Yet they discovered no significant difference in reading comprehension when the students were LWR or when they engaged in SSR (p. 41). Although they interpreted their results to show how LWR was not a helpful support, their research verified that students' reading comprehension was equal in both SSR and LWR in both factual and inferential questions. Both reading methods worked equally well.

How the Rich Might Get Richer, LWR for On-Level and Advanced Readers

The research on LWR could potentially quell other concerns LWR holds for my colleagues and I as we reconsider our privileged model of reading. One of our concerns might be expressed this way: audiobooks might serve readers with special needs, but on-level students without disabilities need to practice SSR. If on-level students do not practice SSR, teachers might say, they will not get better at reading. Although I can laud the attention given to on-level readers, I question the assumption that only SSR is reading practice, that only SSR can make students better readers. And yet it might be time to question our assumptions, as the research indicates that our special view of SSR, which we associate with a high cognitive skill, is in fact evenly matched when we read and listen.

Some interesting research is emerging from cognitive studies concerning mind wandering during reading. While Kopp and D'Mello (2015) acknowledged that all readers' minds wander, they challenged the assumption that LWR, the presumed easier cognitive task, allows the brain to wander more. Kopp and D'Mello used the hypothesis resource theory, which states the greater the mind is taxed, the less resources it can spend on another cognitive task. Thus in reading, the greater the cognitive task, the more concentration and attentiveness must be invested, the less the mind wanders (p. 30).

What I find interesting is that their results varied based on text selection. When readers were presented with a high-interest text, a Sherlock Holmes mystery, there was no difference between SSR and LWR. This suggested that the mind is engaged evenly, performing a high cognitive task with both reading practices. Yet there were differences when the text was a nonfiction selection, *Walden* by Henry David Thoreau. For this selection, Kopp and D'Mello found once again that LWR readers' minds wandered just as much as the slow readers performing SSR, thus confirming their initial findings of the cognitive similarities. However they also found the mind wandering of fast readers was greater than those

who were LWR (p. 36); this suggested these fast readers were less engaged, using less mental resources than their LWR counterparts. Thus their study challenges our assumption that SSR, our privileged reading model, is the highest cognitive modality of reading.

Although English teachers might be reassured that LWR is a high cognitive challenge, my discipline might still hold reservations about using LWR for other readers, particularly our most advanced. Perhaps our concern might be voiced this way: audiobooks, if endorsed by teachers in the classroom, might not improve the reading of all students, especially our highest readers. After all, we want to serve all students well, including our strongest readers. We might suspect that if we allow these readers access to LWR, it might do them a disservice, or worse; it might do irreparable harm to them since they are not practicing SSR and therefore not furthering their reading development.

While I can affirm my discipline's commitment to serving all students, including our most literary ones, I must once again challenge the assumption that this statement holds, that only the privileged model of SSR creates reading growth. We must remember the research into the Matthew Effects tells us different; it is print exposure, not SSR, that creates reading growth, and thus the print exposure offered through LWR can help our readers, all of our readers, toward further reading development. Furthermore if print exposure creates greater reading development, then LWR can further aid, rather than hinder, our most advanced readers, as LWR gives them an additional reading option to SSR and thus an additional way for them to gain greater print exposure. LWR gives them another way to engage in literacy and to enjoy the books we love. High readers can quicken the speed of the audio, reading more quickly, more quantity, and more print exposure (Wolfson, 2008, p.108).

There might still be hesitation in using audio support in general education classroom because in secondary education grades, sports eligibility, and scholarships are predominantly determined by students' achievement in SSR, as most core classes consists of responding to the reading of a classroom textbook, a nonfiction selection, or a literary passage; even math classes have word problems. LWR might mask students' actual reading abilities, might not distinguish between the advanced reader and the average reader. LWR might not differentiate in reading scores in standardized tests and thus might not give the tangible rewards to those who deserve them the most.

However the research indicates that student achievement is not determined by the learning strategy, not determined by the medium in which the information is presented. Rogowsky, Calhoun, and Tallal (2015) examined their participants' preferred learning style (audio or visual/written) and then assessed their reading skills while they performed SSR or LWR. Their results found that the participants whose learning preference was visual, (a.k.a. text-based SSR) still outperformed their peers whose learning preference was audio. And SSR-preferred participants outperformed their peers in both reading and listening, that is, whether they were assessed in SSR or in LWR (p. 68). It did not matter how these readers were reading; they still outperformed their lower counterparts. Thus good readers are good readers, good listeners, and good comprehenders of information, regardless of how the text is presented.

When Stanovich (1986) wrote on the Matthew Effects, he focused on struggling readers, not advanced ones. And yet, he made a final recommendation which I believe applies to all secondary readers. He suggested the use of audio assistive technology to promote greater print exposure for adolescent readers (p. 394). Although we might have disciplinary discomfort with audio renderings of our favorite texts, our higher calling is not to SSR but to all of our readers. All of our readers can experience greater print exposure through audio recordings, can advance their vocabulary, advance their literacy. All of our readers can read higher, read further, read better, if only they read a little more. Thus all of our students can grow in their reading talents, by embracing LWR in our classrooms, but we cannot expect to reap where we do not sow nor gather where we do not scatter.

Where Our Loyalty Lies, The Talented Teacher in the English Classroom

Although the research for LWR in the secondary English classroom is compelling, I wonder how the English discipline might interpret these findings when we have an established preference of SSR, our privileged reading model. Indeed I have this preference, this bias, too. The research presented here may not be enough to convince my fellow teachers that LWR should become a part of their reading practices in their classrooms. In fact, Olof and Duic (2015) shows that teachers are generally hesitant to use audio in their classrooms. Less than half (47.1%) of surveyed teachers used audio recordings a paltry 1-3 times per year (p. 706), though Olof and Duic did note that the most experienced teachers use audio more than their least experienced colleagues (p. 706). They reasoned this infrequent use is due to a lack of established pedagogical use of audio in primary schools as well as a lack of resources (p. 706-707).

However I suspect my colleagues, with the best intentions, still uphold SSR as the only viable option for reading in their classrooms and look to the discipline's long tradition of SSR to back them. And yet my discipline also holds a long tradition of teaching literature for all students, not for just the literary elite. Thus I wonder why we still choose to affirm

SSR and disallow other reading practices, even when these practices might render us the results in reading development we desire, even when the established practice of SSR creates the inequalities seen in the Matthew Effects.

The answer, I believe, lies not in doing the reading, but in doing the math. In “When do Matthew Effects occur?” Bothner, Haynes, Lee, and Smith (2010) sought the answer to their title’s question by creating a mathematical equation that accounts for the conditions which allow initial inequalities to expand over time. They did not limit their discussion to reading development but used their equation to broaden their conversation to include many scenarios where the social and skill dynamics influence inequalities (p. 52). They claimed the math boils down to a single factor, down to one element that determines what reins in the Matthew Effects, one element that might help our struggling readers. This single factor, in terms of our students’ reading development, is us. They said it better. They said, “The results of our [mathematical] model highlight the importance of a single factor, governing whether the Matthew Effect operates freely or is circumscribed. This factor is the degree to which status diffuses through social relations” [emphasis original] (p. 84). They explained:

When actors’ status levels are strongly influenced by the status levels of those dispensing recognition to them (i.e. status diffusion occurs), then in due course the top-ranked actor is nearly matched in status by the actor she endorses. By contrast, when actors’ status levels are unaffected by the status levels of those recognizing them (i.e. status diffusion fails to occur), the top-ranked actor then collects nearly all status present in the system. (p. 84)

This passage acknowledges that the continuance of the Matthew Effects is determined by the top ranked actors rather than by the lesser actors. The lesser actor “catches up” with the top ranked one only when the top actor recognizes the skills and contributions of the lesser.

While Bothner et al. used the term “actors,” I might easily replace this word with the language of our discipline, from “actors” into teachers and students. When these words are used, they are similar to the original players and status described in the Matthew Effects when this term was first published by Merton and Zuckerman in 1968. When the Matthew Effects were first proposed as means to convey disparities between unequal groups, Merton and Zuckerman (1968) were not comparing high student to low student, rather they were comparing the established professional to the rising professional, the science professor to the graduate student. They were comparing teacher to student. Yet when Stanovich (1986) wrote his original framework using Merton and Zuckerman’s concept of the Matthew Effects, Stanovich changed the original meaning of the Matthew Effects by changing the key players. Instead of showing the divergence skills and contributions between teacher and student, he showed the differences between high and low student readers. He did not speak to the presence of the teacher, the most experienced reader in the classroom, the one who holds the status of literacy gatekeeper.

This top actor has the highest reading skills of all other actors, all other readers, and therefore shows the greatest inequality, the greatest divergence, between her and her students in the classroom. This top actor determines what reading practice will be assigned, assessed, and therefore valued and given status. This top actor’s preferred and privileged reading practice determines which students will match the teacher’s status, which students will rise to meet her in her skill and contributions. Thus it is the English teacher, not the English student, that determines the status of the lesser, that determines if the reading is “real,” if it is academically equivalent to SSR. Perhaps we have held too dear to our privileged reading practice so much so that we refuse to allow other means of print exposure. We then in turn create classrooms in which only a few can rise to our status, to our standards. This is the reason why good initial readers of SSR will gain more from SSR. This is the reason why poor initial readers of SSR will gain less from SSR--because we determine the status of SSR and therefore the status of their reading, the status of them. Thus we are culpable in our students’ reading development because we are the top actors; we are the determinants who validates our students’ ways of reading.

We value the privileged model so much that we inherently believe that audiobooks are a type of “cheating,” of getting the reward of the book without doing the work of reading (Dahl 2016, para. 3). Cognitive scientist Dahl gently mocks this belief, “There are people who think of reading as a sort of achievement, a mark of honor that you’ve done something worthy of respect...that when you have read a book, you’ve done something that is worthy of pride” (para. 10). He ridicules this thinking because from a cognitive perspective both LWR and SSR are equal cognitive challenges (para. 2). And yet he is not a part of our discipline; he cannot assist us with our own self-critique. Perhaps we now are ready to question our loyalty to SSR and maybe to this Matthean parable.

Conclusion

A New Parable, A Competing Narrative, the Workers in the Vineyard

As we continue our research into the Matthew Effects, as we rethink how a diffused academic status might be realized, we might need to also reconsider the Matthew Effects as our persuasive, organizing allegory. We might consider finding a competing narrative, an equally compelling parable, a new gospel truth, one which is also found in the gospel of Matthew (Matthew 20:1-16), about a privileged landowner, who owns a vineyard, who owns the status in his field. Although his vineyard is fruitful with the labors of his workers, he also searches for others, not engaged. Their work not valued; their beginning somehow marred. Yet he still invites them to work and values the work they do. These workers, the ones whose work blossomed at later moments, all receive the same reward, the same status, in the end because the landowner, the gatekeeper of status, sees value in all their contributions.

Our discipline can no longer afford to support only the skilled workers in the field, the ones who arrive early, silently sustaining the privileged work they do. Nor can our discipline grumble against the landowner when she affirms the work of those who arrive later, catching up with their peers. We cannot be envious of students' reading development when the classroom teacher is generous with her reading practices. We must value all the workers in the vineyard, allowing the least of these to rise.

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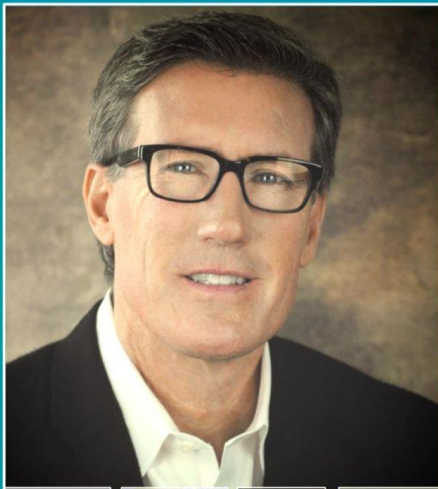
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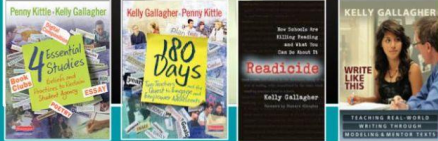
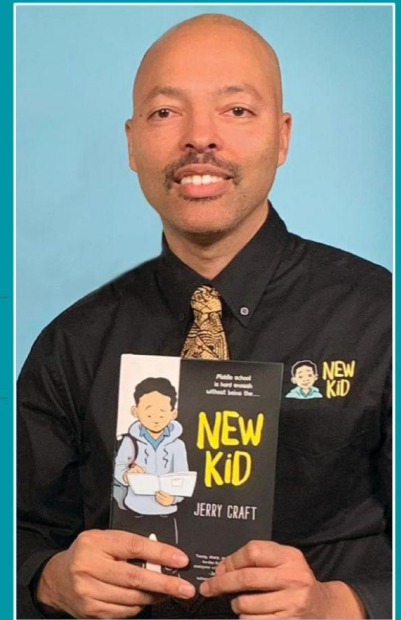
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Constructing Lifelong Readers and Writers

A graphic featuring a construction crane on the left, a yellow hard hat, a stack of books, and a yellow and black striped construction barrier with the text "ARKANSAS LITERACY ASSOCIATION" and "UNDER CONSTRUCTION".

What do you Meme?...continued from page 7.

By Carrie L. Rockett, Arkansas State University

This type of collaboration often involves hybridization of texts in a practice known as remix. Particularly popular among students, remix is a practice which has emerged within the realm of new literacies. Remix involves the hybridization of texts to create new, often continuously evolving, texts (Knobel & Lankshear, 2008). As a way to communicate without the exclusive use of traditional written language, remix practice incorporates a variety of mediums. Examples of the practice include photoshopping, memes, remixed music, video mashups, machinima, etc. With little technical skill required, meme creation is an excellent option for including digital remix in the classroom curriculum.

Memes saturate internet culture. As a culture that is constantly evolving, it would seem fitting that the term meme is attributed to evolutionary biologist Richard Dawkins. In the book, *The Selfish Gene*, Dawkins wrote, "The new soup is the soup of human culture. We need a name for the new replicator, a noun that conveys the idea of a unit of cultural transmission, or a unit of imitation. 'Mimeme' comes from a suitable Greek root, but I want a monosyllable that sounds a bit like 'gene'. I hope my classicist friends will forgive me if I abbreviate mimeme to meme" (Dawkins, 2016). With his original text written in 1976, obviously, Dawkins's term predated the, often emotionally charged, rectangular photographs plastered with simple descriptive phrases that we now associate with meme. The idea, however, remains the same. Memes reduce large, often complex, ideas into simple, relatable, and easy to digest chunks of communication that replicate quickly. They are often funny, and sometimes very domain specific. The power, however, in these little rectangles is in their ability to communicate concise messages in such a contracted text.

The contemporary definition and qualifying factors for memes are debatable. For this discussion, the term meme will fall in line with Schifman's proposed definition for internet meme, "... (a) a group of digital items sharing common characteristics of content, form, and/or stance; (b) that were created with awareness of each other; and (c) were circulated, imitated, and/or transformed via the Internet by many users" (Shifman, 2014, p. 7). Shifman goes on to support this description, "This definition is helpful for analyzing Internet memes as socially constructed public discourses in which different memetic variants represent diverse voices and perspectives" (2014, p. 7). As a "socially constructed public discourse" meme creation requires knowledge of each of the three dimensions of literacy and, therefore, is an excellent candidate for inclusion in classroom instruction.

Referring to Green's three-dimensional approach to literacy, it seems meme creation takes little instruction to master at the operational level. Most students are familiar with the basic computer software skills required to produce a meme, however the design grammars required to assign meaning to the meme are related to the particulars of the domain for which the meme is created. In other words, not much technical skill is needed; however, semiotic domain knowledge is required to communicate effectively (and therefore replicate) with a meme within a certain Discourse. The ability to comprehend a meme is related to the cultural dimension of literacy. When incorporating memes into classroom instruction it is important to account for the variances in cultural backgrounds of the students, and to consider how their differences may affect the comprehension of memes. Lastly, the critical dimension of literacy cannot be ignored in relation to memes. As students recognize that memes are a participatory socially constructed text, they gain understanding of how their participation in the hybridization of memes contributes to the discourse at hand. In addition, the integration of memes into the classroom serves as an excellent opportunity for students to critically analyze digital texts.

Organizational Framework for Meme Integration in the Classroom

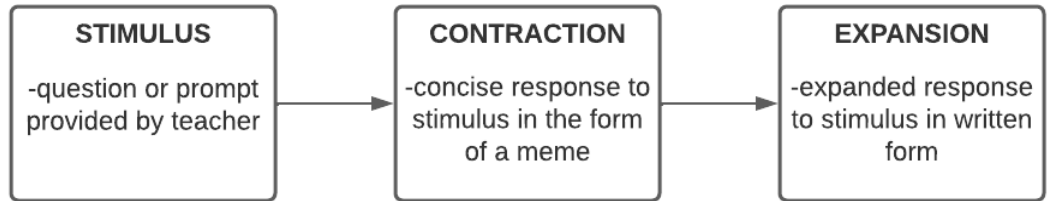
This idea of contraction (and then perhaps expansion) of communication is what primes memes as an excellent new literacy practice to include in English Language Arts instruction. Shifman explains the contracting power of memes, "Because memes constitute shared spheres of cultural knowledge, they allow us to convey complex ideas within a short phrase or image." He goes on to illustrate, "Thus, instead of saying 'I had a bad date and I feel miserable and lonely,' one can simply paste the 'Forever Alone' character." (Shifman, 2014, p.173). Thus, the meme communicates the message in a contracted form to those with the cultural knowledge to comprehend it. This practice of communicating complex ideas symbolically is not exclusive to memes. Popular culture practices such as emoji use demonstrate the same idea of contraction.

With the popularity of meme usage, especially in students, it is natural to consider meme creation's relationship to language. According to Shifman (2014), "This influx of shared symbols has led to the evolution of memes into a secondary layer of language, often complementing and sometimes even replacing its standard uses" (p.173). If memes

can replace the standard uses of written language, then the process should be reciprocal. Meaning, a shift (or translation) should be possible from the “language of meme” to traditional language. With meme creation and consumption a comfortable new literacies skill for students, teachers have the opportunity to incorporate literacy tasks within the classroom which encourage students to transform their meme-based thought into written work. By doing so, teachers can bridge the gap between new literacies and traditional writing instruction.

An organizational approach to the usage of memes in the classroom is the stimulus-contraction-expansion (SCE) model proposed within this practitioner project.

Figure 1. SCT Framework. The three-part SCT framework includes stimulus, contraction, and expansion.



Stimulus

The SCE model begins with a stimulus. Provided by the teacher, the stimulus can be presented in the form of a question, prompt, quote or visual. When first introducing the SCE model, it is recommended to use a low-risk, high-interest stimulus. Teachers should choose a stimulus that is accessible and engaging for students to encourage acceptance of the process. After students are comfortable with the SCE model, the teacher can present stimuli that are integrated into the curriculum. A variety of topics and stimulus types can be used.

Contraction

During the contraction phase of the model, students create a meme in response to the stimulus. Basic computer software and internet access are required, but little technical instruction should be necessary. It is recommended that students focus on creating a basic meme, or what is referred to as an “image macro” (Harvey & Palese, 2018).

Table 1. Sample stimulus prompts or questions
How does Scrooge respond to the message from the Ghost of Christmas Yet to Come?
What can you infer about Jonas’s decision to lie to his parents?
Describe the turning point in chapter three of the novel.
How does the author use weather to reflect the mood of the character?

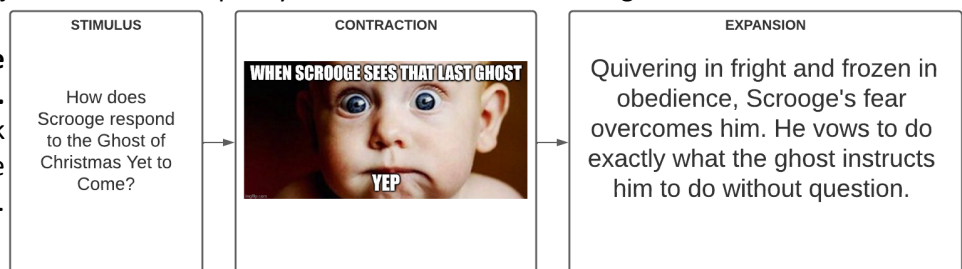
Image macro memes feature a photograph with a basic text overlay. They are easy to create based upon a template and can be created in a variety of online meme generator sites.

When developing a meme, students contract their ideas in response to the stimulus into a succinct text. Quality criteria here is for the meme to communicate the intended message clearly and concisely through the integration of a brief written text overlay and photograph. Prior to the introduction of the SCE model, teachers, along with their students, may wish to co-create a “quality meme checklist”. This checklist can be used during meme creation as a self-assessment. At this point in the process, teachers may wish for students to share their memes in small groups or paired partners. This will allow for feedback so that the student can determine if the intended message of their meme is successfully communicated. Revision may be necessary.

Expansion

During the expansion phase of the SCE model, students translate their contracted communication (meme) into an expanded (written) response. This requires students to bridge their thinking from new literacies skills (meme creation) to traditional literacies skills (writing). By demonstrating the link between these “old” and “new” literacies the SCE model helps students discover relevancy. Flexibility exists for the expectations of written responses. Teachers should clarify the expectations prior to the start of the project. The use of a quality-criteria checklist is encouraged.

Figure 2. Example Completed SCR Framework. A completed SCR framework includes a student-created meme and written response.



Special Considerations

While the idea of mixing pre-existing texts is not new to classrooms, the ways in which digital remix texts, such as memes, are developed are not in line with traditional writing instruction. For example, in traditional writing instruction, much emphasis is placed upon proper citation of borrowed ideas. In remix culture, citation is non-existent. Authorship is often placed in the background of remix culture, as texts are created collaboratively, remixed, and created again. The creation of memes as a classroom project is an excellent opportunity to host discussion about copyright, plagiarism, originality, and ownership.

The SCE model proposed here is intended to be flexible. The order in which the framework is completed can be altered, as can the input. The framework can be easily adapted to incorporate different meme remix practices such as video or music. In addition, in true remix fashion, the project can be collaborative and completed in small groups. Another option would be for the framework to be completed in “rounds” where a different student completes each section of the framework independently, resulting in a collaborative project of sorts.

Conclusion

As a new literacy practice, meme creation serves as a means of communicating complex ideas in their most concise form. Rather than dismiss memes as an irrelevant pop culture product, teachers can incorporate memes into classroom instruction by using the stimulus-contraction-expansion framework. The SCE framework integrates digital remix practice familiar to students into the classroom curriculum in a way that fosters engagement and promotes higher order thinking.

Resources

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