



Audio

FULL DETAILS AND TRANSCRIPT

A Literacy Framework for Teacher Development

Saline Middle School and Three Fires Middle School, Michigan
February 2009

Topic: Adolescent Literacy

Practice: Comprehension Strategies

Highlights

- Saline Middle School (Washtenaw Intermediate School District) and Three Fires Middle School (Livingston Educational Service Agency) are guided by a countywide literacy framework focused on improving adolescent literacy reading comprehension strategies across the content areas.
- William Loyd and Ronnie Connors, co-facilitators of the Adolescent Literacy Initiative, talk about the countywide progress that has been made with this framework to implement research-based instructional practices as well as infrastructure support for successful student learning in the middle and high school grades.
- Learn about how the countywide model has been implemented and the teachers have been trained to use explicit reading strategies to improve comprehension. Students have made gains beyond the national norms after two years of implementation.

About the Sites

Saline Middle School

Saline, MI

Demographics

92% White

4% Asian

2% Hispanic

2% Black

5% Free or Reduced-Price Lunch

Three Fires Middle School

Howell, MI

Demographics

95% White

2% Hispanic

1% Black

1% Asian

1% Native American

16% Free or Reduced-Price Lunch

Saline Middle School (Washtenaw Intermediate School District) and Three Fires Middle School (Livingston Educational Service Agency) have been successful at developing a professional learning community focused on adolescent literacy among its member schools. The schools demonstrate strength in the areas of explicit instruction in comprehension strategies, the use of text discussion in the content areas, and teaching vocabulary in the context of reading across content areas. Important features for improving reading skills at these sites include:

- Teaching reading through the content areas;
- Explicit instruction, teacher modeling, and thinkalouds to strengthen students' comprehension skills;
- Text discussion that uses a gradual release of responsibility until discussions are more student-driven;
- Use of collaborative models such as pair-share, small-group discussions, and large-group share-out methods to enhance text discussion;
- Emphasis on talking-to-the-text and note-marking techniques;
- Use of metacognitive logs during text discussions;
- Vocabulary instruction embedded in all content classrooms; and
- A systemic approach to professional development.

Full Transcript

William Loyd: My name is Bill Loyd. I'm one of two Literacy Coordinators at Washtenaw Intermediate School District, which is located in Ann Arbor, Michigan.

Ronnie Connors: My name is Ronnie Connors, and I'm a Co-Facilitator for the Adolescent Literacy Initiative at Washtenaw Intermediate School District.

When we looked at the Reading Next document that was produced by the Alliance for Excellent Education, it spoke to the vital instructional and infrastructural components that are necessary for an adolescent literacy focus. And those are things like effective instructional principles embedded in context, text-based collaborative learning, and a focus on metacognition, all of which we felt Reading Apprenticeship addressed. The Reading Apprenticeship framework really acknowledges the fact that reading is a complex process. It allows for very rich discussion that we want between our students and teachers to engage in. It acknowledges that there are four dimensions that we're looking at when we're looking at reading comprehension in order to have these deep discussions with metacognition at a center of that.

Loyd: The social dimension plays a critical role because it develops a safe atmosphere within classrooms for students to take the risk of sharing their own thinking; the cognitive dimension where students begin to monitor their own comprehension, they set their own reading purposes; the personal dimension where they begin to see themselves as a reader because many adolescent students don't view themselves as competent readers; and the knowledge-building dimension where they begin to understand that by making connections between different texts, they're actually increasing their own knowledge. What happens within this framework is that reading comprehension and all the components of reading are made intentionally explicit. There's a conservation of language around math and science that makes it a very, very different kind of reading. So, when I think about teachers in those content areas, they in effect are masters of the reading within their particular domains of knowledge. They're the ones who can model their own thinking around those kinds of texts.

Connors: The teacher, when they are starting to introduce metacognitive conversations, they will often model what they are thinking. They will do what we call a thinkaloud. They will model what they're doing when they are struggling with difficult texts and what happens when they encounter some difficulties. We like to say that they give them strategies for their toolkit that students might be able to pull out when they need them, such as talking to the text; when they are reading, they are writing some things down. Teachers also work on predicting what might happen in a text. Also, they might use the QAR, Question/Answer Relationship, for students where they are actually creating questions as they read to have a deeper understanding. They might use some reciprocal teaching. What's different is how the teachers tie them together and structure their attention and their discussion in the classroom to allow students to come to these understandings independently. So, while they might model at the beginning and then do a lot of guided practice along the way, their hope is that students become independent strategic thinkers. We very

much believe in continuing professional development, developing professional learning communities among our teachers, and continuing to look at data to drive decisions.

Loyd: The plan is in four phases, and we've been implementing it since the 06-07 academic year. We purposefully started small, and we started with volunteers.

Connors: What we do with professional development is we have the teachers come to a four-day workshop. When they leave, we know that our job is not done. We continue to meet with our trainer facilitators monthly here at the Intermediate School District. We model facilitation skills and allow teachers time to practice them because these same facilitators then go back to their buildings and have this same kind of meetings with the teachers that are Reading Apprenticeship trained within their building. And we also do classroom observations or video observations. We talk about data in these meetings. We bring samples of student work and do some protocols around that where teachers can examine student work.

Loyd: One thing that's really helped us, in addition to the teachers' enthusiasm for the model, has been the results that we've seen in summative measures that we have used.

Connors: In looking at student data, in the past two years we've used the Degrees of Reading Power (DRP), and this year we're also looking at other summative assessments. When we look at the results, we're seeing that in our classrooms where Reading Apprenticeship has been implemented, our students are making gains beyond the national norm. In fact, we're seeing in some classrooms between two and ten times the gain in the national norm and DRP units from pre- and post-tests.

Loyd: Part of my work within this literacy model has been to interview students as well, and I've conducted focus groups with middle school and with high school students. This student says, "I've realized I have developed as a reader. Before, I would just scan words on pages of books without a thought, without relating things in the book to real-life experiences. I wasn't reading a book, simply skimming through text on a page. Connecting, picturing, summarizing, things I do naturally now, I didn't do then. I believe having those understandings of the reading helped me and bettered me as a reader and as a writer." This idea of discussing text isn't just for low readers or at-risk students. There are many very capable readers who benefited from this as well because, as we all know, we will always encounter some difficult text that's really challenging. No matter how good we are at reading with all the domains of knowledge, with all the content areas, that challenge awaits all of us.