



JOURNAL OF LITERACY INNOVATION

RETHINKING LITERACY INSTRUCTION



VOLUME FIVE, ISSUE ONE

SPRING 2020

SEAN RUDAY, EDITOR

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EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION
SEAN RUDAY, *JLI* FOUNDER AND EDITOR
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The manuscripts featured in this issue of the *Journal of Literacy Innovation* are outstanding examples of the work that *JLI* was created to publish: thoughtful and innovative pieces that skillfully blend theory and practice.

“Meet Me in the Zone: Reimagining Comprehension Instruction in the Era of Leveled Literature Lives” by Dr. Wendy M. Snow, Dr. Tammy M. Parlier, and Dr. Angelica D. Blanchette provides “teachers with an innovative perspective grounded in what we know about (1) interpreting student comprehension assessment scores, (2) evaluating the utility of leveling students’ literate lives, and (3) implementing best-practice classroom comprehension instruction for the promotion of student literacy achievement.” In this piece, the authors share “a reimagined model for comprehension instruction” called the *Zone of Dynamic Interaction (ZDI)* model. In the ZDI model, the teacher represents the foundation of reading instruction. Three pillars build from this foundation: the learner, the text, and differentiated supports. The foundation and the three pillars support students’ reading comprehension. In addition to describing these important components and insights in detail, Drs. Snow, Parlier, and Blanchette provide user-friendly recommendations for applying this reimagined approach to comprehension instruction.

The article “‘I Just Have So Many Ideas!’ Celebrating Teachers’ Meaningful Literacy Practices in a Time of Mandated Curriculum” by Dr. Kathleen Olmstead, Dr. Kathleen Colantonio-Yurko, Tara Jackson, Justin Jackson, and Logan Rath also does an excellent job of providing thought-provoking and research-based instructional insights. As the authors explain, “[t]his paper focuses on the importance of teacher agency in the age of mandated curriculum.” In it, they “present reflections from two teachers who make spaces for innovative, identity-focused, arts and technology-based literacy practices in their classrooms—from student created poetry anthologies to text-based social engagements.” Consistent with *JLI*’s mission, this manuscript provides concrete steps and resources that will help teachers “make space for innovative practices in the face of rigid curricular mandates.”

After the conclusion of this issue, you’ll see calls for manuscripts for two special themed issues that the *Journal of Literacy Innovation* is publishing in the future. Publishing in October 2020 is a themed issue on rural literacy instruction that I am co-editing with Dr. Amy Price Azano. Publishing in April 2021 is a themed issue on diversity, literacy, and classroom instruction that I am co-editing with Dr. Tiffany A. Flowers. I am very excited about these issues and hope that you will consider submitting your work to one or more of them. For more information on the journal, please visit www.journalofliteracyinnovation.weebly.com.

See you in October 2020 for *JLI*’s next issue!

Sean

Sean Runday, Ph.D.

Editor, *Journal of Literacy Innovation*

**MEET ME IN THE ZONE:
REIMAGINING COMPREHENSION INSTRUCTION IN THE ERA OF
LEVELED LITERATE LIVES**

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Abstract

Teachers increasingly face pressure to produce evidence of student literacy achievement, with accountability assessments often hinging on measures of reading comprehension. Despite well-known issues with reliability and validity, Informal Reading Inventories (IRI), which utilize leveled passages with accompanying comprehension questions, remain a popular classroom assessment tool. In typical classroom practice, IRI measures of text comprehension factor into pinpointing student reading levels, resulting in the provision of individualized “leveled diets” of books for students (Hiebert, 2017). The purpose of this paper is to provide teachers with an innovative perspective grounded in what we know about (1) interpreting student comprehension assessment scores, (2) evaluating the utility of leveling students’ literate lives, and (3) implementing best-practice classroom comprehension instruction for the promotion of student literacy achievement. A model for conceptualizing comprehension instruction, known as the *Zone of Dynamic Interaction* model, is proposed.

Keywords: leveled literacy; quality instruction; comprehension; assessment; differentiated instruction; teacher education; zone of proximal development; comprehension model.

Meet Me in the Zone: Reimagining Comprehension Instruction in the Era of Leveled Literate Lives

Reading comprehension, or the understanding of written text, is the ultimate goal of reading. Comprehension of text is a complex process encompassing many underlying components such as prior knowledge, motivation, interest level, passage type (narrative or expository), fluency, instructional reading level, etc. (Wixson & Peters, 1987). Each student brings a unique combination of such factors to the transactional process of reading, interacting with texts in individualized ways to form a foundation upon which comprehension is built (Kintsch & Kintsch, 2005; Rosenblatt, 1994; Snow, 2002).

A student's reading comprehension is thought to play a significant role in classroom learning. Particularly in grades three and above, texts are frequently used as a medium for transmitting content knowledge: Students are expected to read, comprehend, and assimilate new knowledge gleaned from a wide variety of texts, both in digital and traditional formats (Lupo, Tortorelli, Invernizzi, Ryoo, & Strong, 2019). Unfortunately, such expectations may pose legitimate challenges for many learners, as only about one-third of American students achieve at or above proficiency levels in reading (The Nation's Report Card, 2019).

Low reading proficiency levels have remained stagnant over the past twenty years despite consistent efforts to improve student literacy outcomes (Catts & Kamhi, 2017; The Nation's Report Card, 2019). Of particular concern is low-income and minority students, whose tests scores suggest a widening of the achievement gap compared to more affluent white peers (Catts & Kamhi, 2017). Within an international context, American literacy rates appear to be declining relative to other countries (Catts & Kamhi, 2017; The Nation's Report Card, 2019). These findings are concerning and suggest a need to reflect on currently accepted reading comprehension instructional practices.

In practice, teachers have long recognized the importance of assessing for reading comprehension (Durkin, 1978). Teachers often define and assess reading comprehension in terms of how well students recall facts, answer questions, and discuss important aspects of text (Paris, Carpenter, Paris, & Hamilton, 2005). This view of comprehension makes *informal reading inventories* (IRIs) a popular classroom assessment option: In addition to oral reading accuracy and fluency, IRIs provide measures for evaluating comprehension across a variety of graded passages, including both fiction and nonfiction texts.

Teachers are then able to gather and interpret student IRI data for the purpose of pinpointing a student's individual instructional range, or *zone of proximal development* (ZPD). In theory, by identifying a student's instructional reading level—that which is neither too challenging nor too easy—the teacher is better positioned to design differentiated learning opportunities matched to student assessed need. Embedded within this common practice is an assumption that the provision of appropriately leveled texts within one's ZPD satisfies the conditions necessary for comprehension. Although well-intentioned, recent research highlights two reasons why the practice of placing students in leveled texts may actually work against student comprehension (Lupo et al., 2019; Shanahan, 2019).

First, many educators justifiably assume that good teaching begins with identifying and honoring a learner's ZPD; however, one's ZPD is too often conceptualized in a very narrow manner. The process generally starts with a teacher assessing for reading comprehension, often using an IRI, resulting in the identification of individual reading levels for each student in the class (Spector, 2005). Then, equipped with a class roster and associated student reading levels, the teacher gathers a range of texts, ensuring that each child is provided books within a level of reading comfort (e.g., one's instructional reading level, or personal ZPD). One problem with this approach is that the measures used to determine one's reading level—particularly reading comprehension assessments—are notoriously laden with technical inadequacies (Spector, 2005). When teachers lack awareness of the significant limitations of reading comprehension measures,

interpretations of a student assessment can result in a narrowing of one's identified reading level. This is particularly troublesome when the subsequent ZPD determination undershoots student abilities, resulting in a pattern of teachers moving students down into increasingly lower leveled texts until a more appropriate "comfort" level for reading comprehension is thought to reside.

Second, notwithstanding the technical limitations of IRIs, a teacher's over-emphasis on leveled books may result in students experiencing a disproportionate amount of schooling through "leveled literate lives," whereby teachers promote (or hinder) access to books based on identified reading levels (Hiebert, 2017; Shanahan, 2019). In this way, steady diets of leveled texts provide the foundation from which a learner interacts daily with written material in the classroom and perhaps beyond, extending into library check-outs and/or take-home materials. Aside from the potential risk to students in developing reader identities based on these levels (e.g., a 4th grader who says, "I'm a J"), teachers may fall into the trap of assuming that the "diet" itself of appropriately leveled books satisfies the necessary condition to support student reading comprehension. Unfortunately, reading comprehension is much more dynamic and complex, with the text providing only one piece of the comprehension puzzle.

Certainly, consideration of text and reader variables is appropriate, yet well-meaning efforts towards these ends may hinge on flawed assumptions that actually perpetuate ongoing low and stagnant proficiency scores seen on national literacy tests (The Nation's Report Card, 2019). Thus, the first aim of this paper is to dispel widely held beliefs that reading comprehension is (1) easily assessed and (2) best achieved in the context of leveled texts matched to a student's narrowly defined ZPD. The second aim of the paper is to propose an innovative model for comprehension instruction that broadens notions of a reader's ZPD to include differentiated teacher supports alongside reader and text factors.

Assumption #1: Comprehension is Easily Assessed

With understanding central to reading, it naturally follows that teachers benefit from tools that evaluate the degree to which students are able to read and understand written text. IRIs are a popular classroom assessment tool because they are quick and easily administered; yet, comprehension is multifaceted, and researchers caution that "there is no one comprehension process to assess" (Kintsch & Kintsch, 2005, p.86). Any single measure of comprehension is necessarily incomplete. Problems arise when teachers use IRI comprehension scores in high-stakes ways, such as leveling student access to books for the purposes of learning new content. Thus, teachers are cautioned to consider the following three key limitations associated with interpreting comprehension assessment scores.

Reading and Understanding Aren't Always the Same

Like a house built upon the sand, the practice of using IRI comprehension scores for the purpose of placing students into leveled text instructional groupings is on shaky ground. While comprehension without accurate reading is unlikely, accuracy alone is not a guarantee for understanding (Hoover & Gough, 1990). For example, Cramer and Rosenfield (2008) found that

when assessing 83 fourth-graders using the Qualitative Reading Inventory-2 (QRI-2), less than half the students achieved comprehension scores of at least 75% on an otherwise “independent” level, or easily decoded passage. Even fewer students, only 17%, attained comprehension scores of at least 75% on an “instructional” level, or just right passage.

In older readers, the reading accuracy-comprehension relationship is perhaps more dynamic (Paris et al., 2005). Using two different IRIs, Paris and Carpenter (2003) found that comprehension significantly correlated with reading accuracy at instructional reading levels below 3rd grade, but correlations above 3rd grade were either negative or insignificant. Such findings suggest there is more at play in comprehension than decoding accuracy, particularly as students progress beyond the beginning reading phases (Storch & Whitehurst, 2002).

Researchers have long asserted that the manner in which test-makers assess comprehension leads to conflicting outcome scores, yet how this information translates into classroom practice is less clear. While IRIs remain useful tools, teachers are cautioned to consider the following testing limitations, particularly when using measures of comprehension for student placement into leveled texts.

IRIs and Technical (in)Adequacy

Reliability in testing is equated with repeatability or consistency: A test is reliable in as much as it yields replicable results. The reliability of IRIs first came under attack during the 1980s, and unfortunately, many problems persist today. At that time, teachers mostly used IRIs for diagnostic purposes at a within-individual level, such as comparing how a student approaches expository versus narrative text or observing the strategies one employs while decoding. With today’s accountability initiatives, Spector (2005) reports that teachers use IRIs for a number of purposes both within and across individuals, including identification of reading levels for classroom groupings, reporting of annual student literacy growth, and identification for inclusion in Title 1 and/or special education services. The issue is this: “If a test does not have adequate reliability, then it is inadvisable to use that measure even if the task and materials appear to be well-aligned with classroom instruction” (Spector, 2005, p. 594). With regard to comprehension, reliability on IRI assessments is particularly problematic. If a teacher cannot affirm the test’s reliability, then any conclusions drawn about a learner’s comfort level with reading comprehension, or ZPD, is questionable.

Another assessment issue is the trustworthiness of IRIs as measures with evidence of *validity*; that is, teachers assume that IRIs adequately measure what they claim to measure. However, reading comprehension is concealed within the reader and assessing for it is very difficult. For example, Keenan, Betjemann, & Olson (2008) compared three popular normed assessments often used for special education eligibility identification, where nearly 50% of students in the study were identified as having a comprehension deficit on *at least one* of the measures. After assessing these same students for comprehension on *all three* measures, less than 10% of the same sample was found deficient in comprehension across all tests. This begs the question:

What exactly is “it” that we are measuring? The resulting consequences for special education identification purposes are considerable and reinforce the notion that test formats play a significant role in hindering the validity of comprehension assessments (Keenan et al., 2008).

How Questions Are Asked Matters

Cutting and Scarborough (2006) found “the inferences that are made about how well an individual person comprehends written material vary depending on how it is assessed” (p. 295). To begin, the content validity of *multiple-choice* formats as measures of comprehension is questionable (Keenen & Betjemann, 2006). Passage-dependent multiple-choice questions generate higher validity scores because the reader’s responses are more likely drawn directly from the reading; however, such questions often hinder confirmation of deeper student understanding (Kintsch & Kintsch, 2005). Also, multiple-choice formats may over-inflate student comprehension scores. For example, when researchers asked a group of students to altogether skip the reading of passages and simply answer the end-of-passage comprehension questions on the Gray Oral Reading Test (GORT), students answered questions with greater than chance accuracy, without having read the passages (Keenen & Betjemann, 2006). This suggests that, when assessing for text comprehension, it is difficult to control for the individual differences each learner brings to the assessment, particularly prior knowledge.

Prior knowledge is the culprit thought to complicate validity across many test formats. *Open-ended questions* are troublesome because the assessor is unable to eliminate responses based on other constructs, such as background knowledge or personal experiences. Test makers attempt to offset this conundrum by narrowing the focus, relying on questions with specific text vocabulary and recall of factual information. While narrowing of question focus leads to higher construct validity, its utility in informing how a student comprehends at deeper levels, such as the inferential level, remains limited (Invernizzi et al., 2005).

Retelling is another popular IRI comprehension assessment format whereby after reading a passage, students are asked to start at the beginning and retell as much of the story as possible. Paris (2005) warns, however, that retelling rubrics provide skewed results depending on the level of the text and the reader’s prior knowledge of the subject. “Easy or hard texts will result in most scoring a 2, which provides little variance in which to discriminate” those who can comprehend from those who cannot (Paris, 2005, p. 140).

The limitations of comprehension assessment are apt to leave teachers bewildered with regard to best practice. Teachers rightfully want to know when students struggle with comprehension so that adequate supports can be provided; however, caution when interpreting comprehension assessment results is advised. Reading comprehension is *not* easily assessed and our attempts to do so are necessarily flawed.

Assumption #2: Easier Texts Improve Student Reading Comprehension

When a student fails to demonstrate adequate reading comprehension, teachers may feel compelled to move the learner down to an easier text level where it is believed the book will provide easier access to content and comprehension will more readily follow. The problem with such an instructional practice is that teachers erroneously assume that the leveled text alone satisfies the necessary condition for student reading comprehension. While this approach may yield improved comprehension with a specific text (Lupo et al., 2019), students who read a steady diet of easier texts with simpler grammatical structures and fewer academic or unfamiliar words likely miss out on crucial opportunities to expand vocabulary, develop more sophisticated syntax, and analyze discourse level text used to present ideas and arguments (Fang, 2016). Such limitations, over time, compound comprehension difficulties and act to widen the comprehension achievement gap (Lupo et al., 2019; Shanahan, 2019; Stanovich, 2009).

Before lowering a child's overall reading level based on comprehension scores, teachers are cautioned to consider the following limitations with book leveling systems.

Text Leveling: An Inexact Science

The use of leveled texts is predicated on the assumption that leveling systems accurately measure and identify finite, incrementally more challenging levels of text readability. *Readability* is a quantitative measure specifying the grade level where the majority of students should be able to read the text independently (Rasinski, 2003). Readability scores are calculated through the use of one or more formulas measuring sentence and word difficulty in the text. Some factors associated with text readability are the number of syllables in a word, syntax, sentence word count, abstractness of ideas, etc. (Lupo et al., 2019). Like comprehension assessment, however, there are a number of inherent factors that may interact with student comprehension.

First, book leveling systems often fail to yield consistent readability results (Begeny & Green, 2014; Dzaldov & Patterson, 2005). For example, a quick search for the readability level of Lois Lowry's *The Giver*, a popular middle grade text, yielded leveling labels ranging from a Lexile of 760 (grade 4; Reading A to Z) to Level 60 and Guided Reading Level Y (grade 6; DRA and Fountas & Pinnell, respectively). Even if assuming one's reading level is constant and readily discernable, inconsistent outcomes in readability formulas by as many as two years or more creates obstacles for teachers when attempting to match books to a reader's identified instructional reading level.

Second, book leveling systems fail to acknowledge the variability each learner brings to the text, such as prior knowledge. Background knowledge is a critical lynchpin in reading comprehension. To prove just this point, researchers recently asked readers questions about a baseball passage: Weaker readers scored equally well as strong readers when both groups had similar knowledge of the sport (Wexler, 2019). Similarly, when researchers made up a passage using non-words and a fictitious game scenario, eliminating the possibility of prior knowledge, comprehension scores were again the same across readability ranges. These findings suggest

that low comprehension scores aren't always indicative of a gap in reading skills, but rather a gap in prior knowledge (Wexler, 2019).

Impact of Leveled Literate Lives on Comprehension

A growing body of research suggests that reliance on leveled texts as the primary tool for differentiating reading instruction leads to diminishing returns on comprehension over time (Fang, 2016; Hiebert, 2017; Lupo et al., 2017; Shanahan, 2019). Easier texts tend to be shorter and contain fewer difficult words and less detail, resulting in students learning less content. As a result, “extended exposure to easier versions of texts may ultimately stunt comprehension growth” (Fang, 2016, p. 5), contributing to inequities among students (Hiebert, 2017; Lupo et al, 2019; Shanahan, 2019).

Equally concerning, teachers are thought to adjust the quality of their comprehension instruction based on the reader's level, providing fewer interactions with text for students placed in easier text levels. In Lupo et al., (2019, p. 19), teachers admitted that instruction for lower level readers included “fewer overall reading encounters, less discussion about texts, and fewer opportunities for students to read texts independently,” resulting in students who “were exposed to less text and less sophisticated vocabulary and sentences and did not receive any benefit in comprehension in exchange for the reduced text exposure.” Such teacher biases in instructional practices act to perpetuate the well-known Matthew Effect in literacy, contributing to increased inequities amongst certain populations of students while widening knowledge gaps as each year in school passes (Fang, 2016; Hiebert, 2017; Stanovich, 2009).

In summary, current practices associated with the identification of one's reading comprehension ZPD hinge on tenuous assumptions. For those students beyond the beginning reading phases, (1) even if assessments such as IRIs were valid and reliable indicators of one's ZPD, and (2) even if readability formulas were capable of determining precise matches between student and leveled text, growing evidence suggests that sorting students into reading levels under the auspices of teaching to one's assessed ZPD may do more harm than good to long-term comprehension growth (Lupo et al, 2019, Shanahan, 2019).

Addressing Assumptions with a Reimagined Model for Comprehension

Current Model Conceptualization

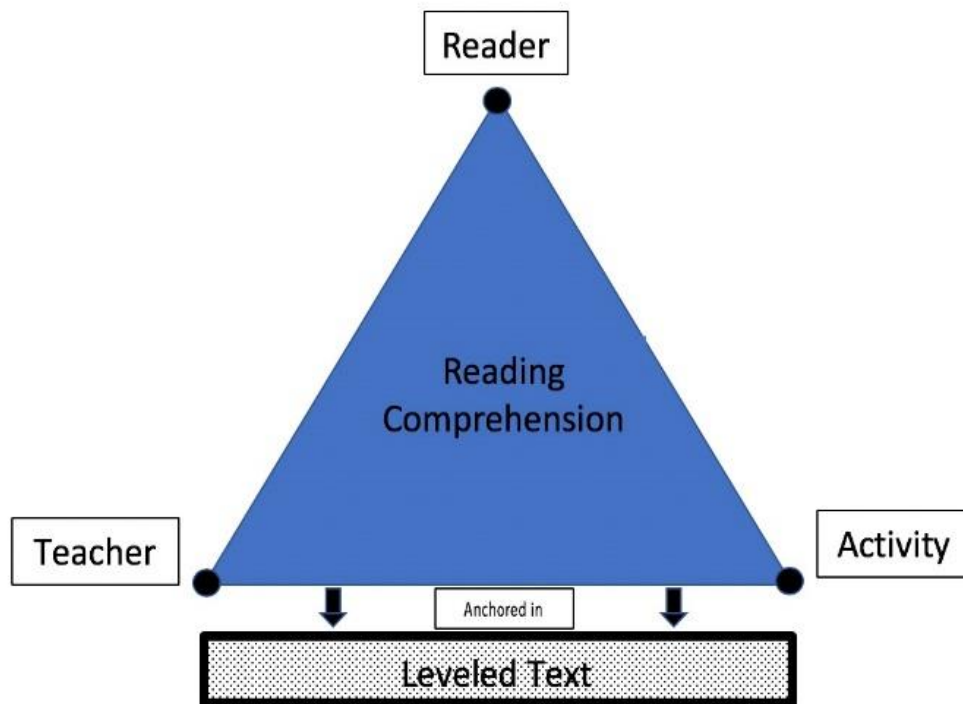
In grades three and above, teachers frequently lean on texts for content dissemination. When considering student reading levels, teachers contemplate differentiating reading materials according to need, particularly for struggling readers, believing that the ease of text readability will promote increased overall reading comprehension.

As Figure 1 suggests, four main constructs typically play into the design of reading comprehension instruction. **Leveled texts** are at the heart of this model, positioned as the

foundation from which student reading instruction is built. The **teacher**, **student**, and **instructional activity** are orchestrated each day around and anchored by leveled texts. The teacher differentiates instruction by putting a “just right” book into the hands of each student—“leveling” the proverbial reading playing field—undergirded by the assumption that the leveled text ensures success with the classroom activity. In this manner, the text serves as the catalyst around which the teacher differentiates instruction, with reading comprehension sure to follow as the teacher, student, and instructional activity interact to build upon the leveled text.

Figure 1

Model of Comprehension Instruction Anchored in Leveled Text



While this approach may appear sensible during the lesson planning stages, such a paradigm has the potential to produce misleading conclusions post-lesson delivery: When a **student** fails to show mastery of content in the post **instructional activity** (i.e., what the student is expected to do with the new material learned from the text reading), the **teacher** may respond by over-emphasizing the shortcomings of the book (e.g., “this book is still too difficult” or “she needs an easier level”), as the leveled text was the foundational and differentiated consideration built into the classroom instructional design in the first place. Thus, if we are to more fully address the

complex nature of reading comprehension instruction, we need to shift classroom practice away from one which gives disproportionate emphasis to leveled texts as the cornerstone upon which one's ZPD for learning is defined.

A Reimagined Model for Comprehension Instruction

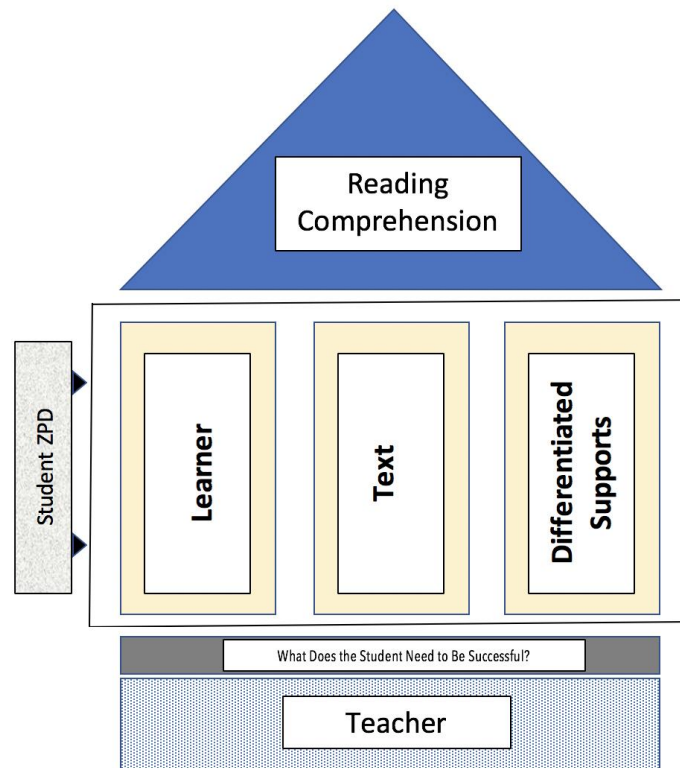
Recent research suggests that the teacher plays the central role in reading comprehension, including below level readers (Lupo et al, 2019). Consequently, whereas leveled text served as a foundation in Figure 1, we propose an alternative innovative model for comprehension instruction known as the *Zone of Dynamic Interaction (ZDI)* model. The ZDI model expands narrowly defined student ZPD to include differentiated instructional supports while simultaneously placing an expert teacher squarely at the foundational level.

The rationale for the ZDI model rests upon a growing research body suggesting that matching struggling readers to easier texts does little to improve reading comprehension. For example, O'Connor (2002) found poor comprehenders could reach equal levels of assessed reading comprehension from both below- and on-grade level texts when provided appropriate support from an instructor. Additionally, Lupo et al. (2019) found that below- and on-grade level ninth grade readers grew in comprehension when provided differentiated teacher instructional supports—regardless of whether the text was considered below or on grade level. Moreover, the comprehension growth of these 9th graders over just twelve weeks of instruction was greater than expected when compared to an external normative sampling, which is particularly encouraging given the relatively short period of instructional time. Such findings imply that “it is the instructional support that defines a student’s zone of proximal development” (Lupo et al., 2019, p. 2), not the level of the text itself (Shanahan, Fisher, & Frey, 2012; Shanahan, 2019).

Thus, as Figure 2 depicts, in a reimagined view of reading comprehension, an expert teacher is situated at the foundation. Between the teacher (foundation) and student comprehension (capstone) stand three pillars comprising one's ZPD—one each representing the **reader**, the **text**, and the differentiated **instructional supports**. These ZPD pillars represent constructs that are dynamic and variable within students and across content. For example, a self-proclaimed “history buff” may have a higher working ZPD for history content than another discipline. As such, expert teachers orchestrate and differentiate the interplay of these pillars as a means for creating a dynamic and expanded view of one's ZPD. Implications of model elements and recommendations for how teachers might apply such a model in daily classroom practice is described in the sections that follow.

Figure 2:

Zone of Dynamic Interaction Model of Reading Comprehension



The Foundation Level: Teacher

The teacher is at the heart of a reimagined model of comprehension instruction. Vygotsky defines ZPD as learning through “problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers” (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 131). Central to thinking about ZPD has always been the teacher, with Vygotsky highlighting the importance of student instructional interactions *with the teacher* occurring within an appropriate zone. In this conceptualization of ZPD, the teacher no longer plays second chair to the text level, as Figure 1 suggests, but instead is elevated to the role of maestro, as pictured in Figure 2. The teacher in this case is both the composer and conductor of comprehension instruction, simultaneously orchestrating and guiding the instructional interactions between the reader and learning activities, setting the appropriate pace and making real time adjustments as necessary through responsive teaching opportunities.

Admittedly, teachers must rely upon a multifaceted and sizeable skillset in order to deliver high quality learning opportunities. When expecting students to assimilate new knowledge from texts, teachers must consider the intersection of (1) the learner, (2) nature of the day’s learning activity as it relates to the text, and (3) the differentiated supports each requires in the context of

reading for meaning. Attention to these three ZPD pillars, rather than text level alone, better addresses the dynamic nature of reading comprehension.

The ZPD Pillars: Learner, Text, and Differentiated Support

ZPD Pillar 1: The Learner. A reimagined model of the pillars supporting reading comprehension begins with the subtle yet purposeful shift in terminology away from the word *reader* to *learner*. Whereas a reader tends to be defined in terms of narrowly assessed reading levels, a learner perspective suggests a more holistic approach that includes a variety of factors known to influence reading comprehension, only one of which is assessed reading level.

Assessments remain an integral part of the Learner pillar, and IRIs are a useful tool for gaining insight into how individual students approach and learn from texts. A student's fluency and stamina for longer passages, for example, influences interactions with text, with diminished fluency rates and stamina impeding completion of activities in time with typically achieving classmates. IRIs also reveal opportunities for differentiating teacher supports, providing information about how each student approaches reading based on knowledge of text or story structure, purposes for reading, and skill with comprehension strategy use. Fortunately, these are elements of reading comprehension amenable to teacher instruction.

In addition to IRIs, content related interest inventories and pre-unit assessments of prior knowledge provide teachers with opportunities to differentiate instructional support as needed, independent of text reading level considerations (Tomlinson et al., 2003).

ZPD Pillar 2: The Text. There is increasing reason to question the practice of maintaining a system that places students in learning trajectories according to leveled literate lives. Whether above- or below-level readers, research suggests that both groups are capable of achieving adequate comprehension when reading more challenging texts *so long as* differentiated teacher supports are provided (Lupo et al., 2019). This is exciting news given that the use of more challenging texts often exposes students to more robust vocabulary, richer content, and provides opportunities for higher level thinking without jeopardizing comprehension.

ZPD Pillar 3: Differentiated Supports. With the provision of differentiated instructional supports, teachers who provide students with more complex texts “yield more successful reading outcomes than merely providing easier versions of the texts” (Lupo et al., 2019, p. 4). Rather than grounding instruction in a text level, “it is the instructional support that defines a student's zone of proximal development” (Shanahan, Fisher, & Frey, 2012 as cited in Lupo, 2019, p. 2). With a solid understanding of their learners, teachers are better positioned to infuse appropriate instructional scaffolds at the point of need while reading, creating a richer and more dynamic view of one's ZPD.

In the following section, a general list of recommendations is provided to assist teachers in providing scaffolded instructional supports for comprehension in everyday classroom practice.

Meeting Students in the Zone: Recommendations for Putting a Reimagined Approach into Practice

- 1. Rethink text difficulty.** When it comes to ZPD, “it may be time to think of text difficulty as a characteristic of the support offered around a text rather than the text itself” (Lupo et al., 2019, p. 20). Consider the intersection of the learner’s background knowledge, the text, and instructional supports as a “sliding scale” measurement of a broadened, more dynamic ZPD.
- 2. Capitalize on the background knowledge they bring.** Not all students have the prior knowledge you may want, but they all have background experiences upon which you can build. For example, Shakespeare’s *Romeo and Juliet* may not be familiar to some high schoolers, but young love is. Tapping into larger universal experiences is an easy way to generate discussion connected to texts while simultaneously scaffolding a common foundation of knowledge from which to relate.
- 3. Telling is not the same as activating background knowledge.** Limit telling: Telling students what they are soon to read (i.e., *our topic today is, the important vocabulary words are*, etc.) does not yield the same benefits for student comprehension as does purposeful connecting of content with prior knowledge. For example, a teacher led discussion built around a K-W-L (Know-Want to Know-Learned) resulted in significantly higher post-reading comprehension scores when compared to classrooms where students were simply told what they were going to read. Engage in active content discussions prior to reading, bridging the gap between learner and challenging texts (Lupo et al., 2019). Identify potential obstacles to understanding before class and guide the pre-reading discussion, careful to intertwine relevant content information and vocabulary with student background knowledge.
- 4. Less is not more.** Less is not more when it comes to struggling readers. Don’t shy away from texts with challenging vocabulary. Instead, when texts are more abstract or require inferential thinking, provide the necessary details to fill in the gaps prior to reading. Use concrete or everyday language. This practice supports both daily and long-term comprehension growth (Lupo et al., 2019).
- 5. Activities and strategies aren’t the same.** “Instructional activities are not inherently strategies if they do not focus on what students should actively think while performing the activity” (T. Shanahan et al., 2010, as cited in Magnusson et al., 2019, p. 189). Avoid limiting scaffolds to simplistic “how to” steps for completing the graphic organizer *after* the reading. Instead, encourage the type of thinking one should be doing *during* the reading, explaining how the graphic organizer may be used as a tool to place-hold, organize, and synthesize new information acquired *as a result of* thinking through the reading of the text.
- 6. Strive for conditional knowledge, not procedural.** Teach for transfer. Consider the following golf analogy: We may assert that golf is a sport (**declarative knowledge**). We may even know a little about how golf is played, such as starting at the tee box and hitting

towards the green (**procedural knowledge**). But if we have insufficient knowledge of which clubs to use when, our knowledge is of limited practical use once placed in live action on the golf course (**conditional knowledge**). Teaching to a level of conditional knowledge promotes transfer. Be explicit about *when* it makes sense to use a particular comprehension strategy and *why* this one makes sense *under which circumstances*. Like a golfer playing in less than ideal weather conditions, situational challenges will arise and adjustments will be required: When challenging texts surface, be confident that you have stacked the deck in the reader's favor. Teaching for conditional use of comprehension strategies broadens a reader's working ZPD (Magnusson et al., 2019) and results in greater likelihood of use and transference across academic disciplines.

- 7. Model your thinking.** Think aloud, explicitly modeling your own use of comprehension strategies while guiding student efforts as part of a vibrant ZPD instructional support system. Students experience greater success when teachers make “a clear explicit connection between a strategy and how it is applied to text” (Magnusson et al., 2019, p. 199), breaking it down into the following steps: (1) ensure the student understands the concept/strategy, (2) name the strategy, (3) state when to use it, and (4) provide context for its use by answering a question related to the text (Magnusson et al., 2019).
- 8. Outcome goal directed.** Make clear what the student will need to demonstrate *as a result of* the reading, reinforcing that the “reading goal influences the choices we make” before and during reading (Magnusson et al., 2019, p. 199). Go beyond simply sharing a lesson objective or providing students with the procedural steps necessary to complete a worksheet, chart, or graphic organizer. Ensure that your instructional activity and ultimately, assessment of comprehension, align with the lesson goal.
- 9. Reflect and adjust.** Remember, you matter! Conduct a self-audit of potential innate biases. Do you make assumptions about reader abilities, perhaps based on faulty comprehension assessments? What is the level of your instructional quality and are your reader expectations different based on the “leveled literate life” identities of your students, particularly for lower level readers? With comprehension heavily influenced by the teacher instructional supports, what proactive steps are you taking to close the reading and knowledge gap for all students?

Final Thoughts and Take-Aways

Benefits of a Reimagined Model for Comprehension Instruction

Most students, regardless of identified reading level, receive benefit from using challenging texts. Conceptualizing reading comprehension through the Zone of Dynamic Interaction model affords breaking down students' leveled literate lives while minimizing inequities in knowledge perpetuated by controlled diets of lower leveled texts. Teachers can use the ZDI model to facilitate a process of decision-making that is less about selecting “comfort” texts and more

about (1) planning (teacher as composer) for optimal understanding and (2) the provision of appropriate instructional supports (teacher as conductor) based on the needs of the learner.

Instructing for comprehension requires a dynamic learner-teacher relationship that is reciprocal and mutually reinforcing. A teacher, armed with content knowledge, is responsible for planning how content will be shared throughout this responsive learner-teacher relationship. The value of teacher planning should not be underestimated. For example, a conductor pours over a musical score long before the musicians begin playing, noting which portions are particularly tricky, which instrument sections will need cueing when, and even identifying where above-level musicians may need to carry the melody by playing a solo. In the “during reading” phases of practice, the conductor takes care to lead the musicians through dynamic changes in a score of musical “text,” emphasizing time signatures, when to speed up or slow down, when to play loud or soft, etc. The musicians recognize that, in order to successfully “read” the piece, they must look to the conductor for differentiated cues at regular and ongoing intervals. They trust and rely upon the conductor to get them through the piece because she knows in advance how and when to match which supports to individual need. Such responsive interactions between students and teacher during a text reading epitomize the value of reimagining comprehension instruction in light of a dynamic interaction model: A student’s identified reading level may only be as stagnant as the teacher’s willingness to meet the learner with differentiated instructional supports in his zone of comprehension-building.

A central purpose of academic text is to promote dissemination of content; however, the teacher, not the text, serves to differentiate by the provision of instructional supports appropriate for individual learner differences (i.e., background experiences, familiarity with topic, vocabulary knowledge, interest) so that text difficulty is mitigated and content knowledge is acquired. Teachers can close the knowledge (or comprehension) gap by pinpointing the approximate intersection of learner need with the provision of differentiated instructional supports. This meeting of a student in the knowledge-building zone—intentionally called a zone because the meeting spot is dynamic and may shift from day to day depending on individual learner factors—is the true value of conceptualizing reading comprehension instruction through a Zone of Dynamic Interaction.

Further Research

While evidence suggests that instructional supports can assist readers in learning from challenging texts, less is known about which types of specific supports or the intensity with which such provisions are necessary for student success across a range of grade levels, particularly at the lower grade levels. Furthermore, the role of background knowledge is thought to play a significant role in comprehension and literacy achievement scores. How teachers honor and harness the influence of individual differences in background experiences across diverse learners for optimal reading success is less clear. More research is needed to better understand the relative contributions of these factors on reading comprehension instruction.

Conclusion

Comprehension is the undisputed end-goal of reading, yet assessing for comprehension is notoriously problematic. Reducing students' literate lives to narrowly defined text levels is thought to increase disparity amongst learners, particularly for lower level readers. In contrast, students benefit equally from challenging texts in both short- and long-term ways when provided appropriate and differentiated teacher instructional reading supports. Rather than assuming difficulties reside solely within the reader and/or text level, teachers are encouraged to meet students in the zone: Acknowledge faulty assumptions related to comprehension assessment and text leveling practices and respond by providing appropriate instructional scaffolds to mitigate student gaps in reading comprehension.

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**“I JUST HAVE SO MANY IDEAS!”:
CELEBRATING TEACHERS’ MEANINGFUL LITERACY
PRACTICES IN A TIME OF MANDATED CURRICULUM**

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Abstract

This paper focuses on the importance of teacher agency in the age of mandated curriculum. Many teachers desire to implement creative and joyful literacy practices into their classrooms yet wonder whether these practices are possible in their local professional contexts. Here, the authors present reflections from two teachers who make spaces for innovative, identity-focused, arts-based and technology-based literacy practices in their classrooms—from student-created poetry anthologies to text-based social engagements. Recommended resources and ideas for meaningful responses to texts are presented by the authors.

**“I Just Have so Many Ideas!”: Celebrating Teachers’ Meaningful Literacy Practices in a
Time of Mandated Curriculum**

Joyful and creative classroom literacy experiences are becoming increasingly rare in this era of accountability and standardized testing—with scripted reading programs and mandated literacy modules the focus in many schools. Some suggest the goal of improving American education is actually undermining education today (Ingersoll & Collins, 2017; Ravitch, 2010). Schools that focus entirely on accountability and test scores strip teachers of their autonomy and do not allow them to use their expertise to craft responsive and meaningful curriculum that can improve student performance *and* students’ schooling experiences. As Ravitch (2013) makes clear, the emphasis on testing is compromising our schools; instead of rigid test prep, schools should have a “rich arts program, where students learn to sing, dance, play, sculpt or use technology to design structures, conduct research, or create artworks” (p.7). We fear this has all but disappeared. We, two literacy faculty members and an instructional librarian, began to have long conversations about the many struggles our preservice and in-service teachers discussed in class. Like Tara, who exclaimed during our initial conversation, “I just have so many ideas,” many

teacher candidates desire to implement creative and joyful literacy practices into their classrooms, yet wonder whether these practices are possible in their local professional contexts. With this in mind, the impetus for this paper was the following question: In the age of mandated curriculum and prepackaged educational literacy programs, how do teachers make space for meaningful and innovative literacy practices? This paper explores the work of two teachers—Tara and Justin—who have created engaging and personalized literacy learning experiences in their classrooms.

Testing, Instruction, and Mandated Curriculum

There has been much written describing how accountability measures and testing can have negative consequences for both teachers and students, including “negative psycho-social outcomes” and “negative instructional outcomes” (Saeki, Pendergast, Segool & von der Embse, 2015, p. 90). These increased pressures and stresses for teachers and students alike, as well as an increase in curriculum focused on test preparation instead of the learning process, are some of the unintended consequences of the Common Core based testing. According to Saeki et al., teachers tend to focus on what is being tested and put less effort into “making academic work interesting and engaging for students” (p. 93), resulting in joyless learning tasks and rote test prep practice for many of our K-8 students.

Indeed, we have seen the unintended effects of these schooling practices even here in our college programs, where many of our teacher candidates report “hating to read” and often write about experiences where reading passages, followed up with questions, consume their memories of school reading as young children—detering them from positive relationships with texts.

This work takes place in New York, where many teachers are required or strongly encouraged to use state-developed curriculum in their classrooms. Scripted reading programs like these modules “have had a negative impact on teachers and students around the country” according to researchers (Dresser, 2012, p.71). Many teachers report feeling overwhelmed by the rigid nature of scripted programs and are frustrated that they are unable to meet students’ individual needs with the prescribed programs. Furthermore, it has been suggested that a teacher’s mandated use of scripted programs often creates a “dissonance between their own philosophy of education and that of their schools” (p. 77). While some teachers we’ve encountered like the scripted modules due to ease of planning, others wish they, as teachers who understand their students, could develop their own curriculum. Additionally, there is controversy around the mandated instructional materials themselves. While some reviewers of the Common Core modules tout that the selected texts are “high-quality and appropriately rigorous” (Haydell & Carmichael, 2015, p. 5), others see them as rigid and troublesome; neglecting the learning needs of some students and lacking diversity in text choice. Indeed, one highly criticized component of the materials is the Common Core “exemplar text” list of books for teachers’ recommended use. This exemplar text list is problematic due to the lack of diversity of the suggested titles. Predominantly white characters and white authors comprise this list; only 18 of 171 books are by nonwhite authors (Gangi, 2008). Additionally, the focus on Common Core testing results in privileging the

linguistic mode of communication at the expense of honoring the affordances of multimodal composition (Miller, Knipps, Goss, 2013). Regardless of whether teachers believe these modules are meaningful to their students' lives, contexts, and literacy learning, they are often problematically mandated.

Social Justice and Book Choice

Like many teachers and teacher educators, we view text choice as political. By selecting certain texts to use in schools, teachers are inherently endorsing a specific story. As Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie (2009) notes, perpetuating one narrative, or “single story” is dangerous and does not provide avenues for other perspectives and voices. As Bishop (1990) argues, teachers need to provide students with “windows” and “mirrors,” or opportunities for students to see themselves and learn about others through authentic textual readings. When students' stories are not represented in the classroom, their identities are silenced. All students deserve to engage with diverse and inclusive books that affirm their (and others') lived experiences. However, in the age of mandated curriculum, teachers do not always have the opportunity to provide students with the stories that they know their students need to read and hear.

Our Collaboration

In response to this narrowed curriculum, we decided to look more carefully at teachers who demonstrate agency in the classroom. Tara teaches third grade and Justin is a fourth-grade teacher—both work in elementary school buildings in a district that neighbors our college. Tara and Justin are both former graduates of the Literacy program where Kathy and Kate currently teach literacy classes. Although mandated to use certain texts in the classroom, both Tara and Justin provide innovative opportunities for students to respond to texts—building on students' identities while providing spaces for exploring multiple perspectives. Justin enhances the mandated curriculum by providing opportunities for students' creation and celebration of personal poetry anthologies, and Tara expands upon the mandates by incorporating multimedia and social engagements as responses to the texts.

Just as text choice is political, we believe modes of reader response have come to be political as well. We know many teachers are denied the freedom to provide their students with opportunities to respond to reading in authentic and meaningful ways and we ask teachers to consider: What modes of reader response are privileged in the classroom and whose interests does this serve? How can we disrupt narrow literacy practices? We begin with Justin's story below.

Classroom 1: Poetry as Experiential Response

Kids come to understand that it's important to know who they are and that it's ok to be who they are. Through their work creating poetry anthologies, students explore ways to look within themselves and look critically at world issues.

-Justin, teaching reflection excerpt

“I don’t want to (write) because boys don’t write poetry, girls do,” shares Jack, the protagonist in Sharon Creech’s *Love that Dog*. Creech’s text, written in verse, enables readers to confront the notion that poetry is both gendered and rigid. As Jack engages in reader response, he learns experientially that poetry does not always have clearly defined boundaries and that poetry is creative, personal, and an avenue to explore wonder. Jack’s misunderstandings of poetry writing as an exclusively female and formulaic endeavor are later disrupted as Jack creates his own counter-narrative; he emerges as a poet composing heartfelt verses that bring life to the memories of his beloved dog who was hit and killed by a car.

Justin leaned into Jack’s notion of poetry with his students in order to engage them in meaningful responses through poetry. Justin’s focus on meaningful response is in contrast to many area school districts’ predilections for the standardized curriculum such as the ELA modules mandated in many areas. In the ELA module that includes *Love that Dog*, it is prescribed that students write a mind-numbing series of 22 summary statements as a means of response (New York State Department of Education, 2014). Writing one systematic summary right after another for the entire book would *kill* such a powerful and meaningful novel. We want kids to remember the themes and messages from *Love that Dog*, not the fact that they had to stop and summarize every two pages. Summary as response removes emphasis on the role of the reader, perhaps taking us back in time to a pre-Rosenblatt (1978) world where information is reduced by a “generic reader”—in this case through repeated summary after summary. Disgusted with the popularity of modular curriculum and the overshadowing emphasis on text-based questions, Smith, Appleton and Wilhelm (2014) label this approach *Zombie New Criticism*—the wave of dehumanized text response that ignores readers’ prior experiences, readers’ connections and thinking in general, resulting in student disengagement. Indeed, Rosenblatt (2005) herself laments the absence of the aesthetic stance in schools. In her response to a third-grade workbook page with a poem heading that read “What facts does this poem teach you?” Rosenblatt writes:

The children were being alerted to adopt an efferent stance, to read with their attention focused on the facts to be reported later! This instance has come to symbolize for me the ways in which in our educational process the aesthetic stance is, often unwittingly, nullified or subverted. (p. 43)

In our conversations with Justin, we explored the ways he celebrates his students’ voices through the use of poetry as a form of reading response. Justin has created classroom spaces for meaningful literacy practices, countering the ELA module mandates of many local school districts in our area. Instead of the prescribed summaries as the response to *Love that Dog*, Justin thought outside of the module. Like Creech’s character of Jack, his students jump into the creative abyss to become poets by authoring and illustrating their own anthologies of verse.

For Justin, the marriage of art and text became a way for his students to express both textual understandings and connections, as well as a way for students to explore their own interpretations of ideas through the act of authoring poetry. At the beginning of this unit, many of Justin's students groan that they don't like poetry and come in with both limited understandings and preconceived notions of poetry—much like Jack in *Love that Dog*. However, student transformations take place through this unit—ones that would never occur from writing 22 summary statements of the text. Justin's end of year student reflections indicate that most students come to love poetry writing and name the poetry unit as their favorite experience of the year.

Poetry as Reader Response: Justin's Classroom Process

1. Students explore two essential questions: What is poetry? What inspires authors to write poems? Students record their initial thoughts about poetry on an index card.
2. The class reads *Love That Dog* together as a read-aloud, consistently referring back to the essential questions and discussing them several times throughout the unit. Students notice how their answers to the questions evolve as both students and Jack progress through the poetry unit and novel.
3. Students respond throughout the novel by creating poems that reflect their identities as demonstrated by student work samples in Figures 1, 2 & 3. Some poetry styles students explore include:
 - a. acrostic name poems—as a creative introduction
 - b. personification-based poems to reflect students' favorite objects
 - c. cinquain poems about people who have influenced them
 - d. free verse poems reflective of their interests and identities
4. Students engage in whole class and small-group discussions about differences and the importance of personal values to support students in exploring their own and others' identities.
5. Students compile their own anthology of poems that reflect who they are as individuals. In this process, students use the mentor text *Love that Dog* to synthesize information and create new poems to share meaning (Roessing, 2019).
6. As a capstone celebration, poetry anthologies are shared in the classroom through a gallery walk where visitors (students, teachers, administrators, etc.) read through student work and offer post-it note praise in the back of their anthologies.

Justin's students transform from hesitant authors of poetry to creative poets who use their interpretations of a text to develop authentic representations of their understandings and sense of self. Students learn new ideas about what poetry is and experience how inspiration impacts poetry by writing the poems themselves. They come to understand that it's important to know who they are and that it's okay to be who they are. Through their work creating poetry anthologies, students explore ways to look within themselves and look critically at world issues.

Justin uses the *Teaching Tolerance Social Justice Standards* (Teaching Tolerance, 2016) to help guide his instruction around poetry writing and student identity. Teachers can use these standards to ensure their instruction is founded in best practices regarding equity and social justice teaching. Since so many students authored personalized poems about themselves, it was important for Justin to explicitly focus on how a diverse classroom community could come together to understand and explore individual students' understandings of self and their membership in multiple groups. Students explore how their own "multiple identities interact and create unique and complex individuals" (Teaching Tolerance, 2014, p. 3). The Teaching Tolerance Social Justice Standards and resources provide teachers with language to discuss the importance of student identity in the classroom — and poetry as reading response gives students a venue for meaningful, personalized literacy engagements.

In this age of mandated curriculum, it is crucial for us, as teachers, to find ways to celebrate students' identities and unique responses to readings. It is important for teachers to find ways to make creativity and personal response central to their practice. By doing so, students like those in Justin's diverse class find ways to celebrate their understandings and responses to literature by becoming authors themselves. Every child deserves the right to be a poet.

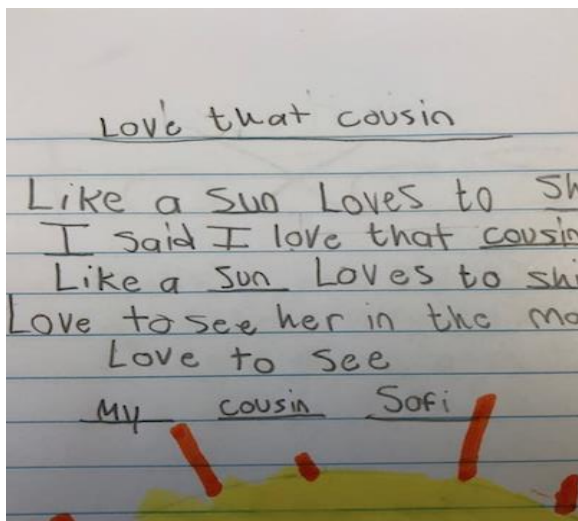


Figure 1. Cinquain poem sample.

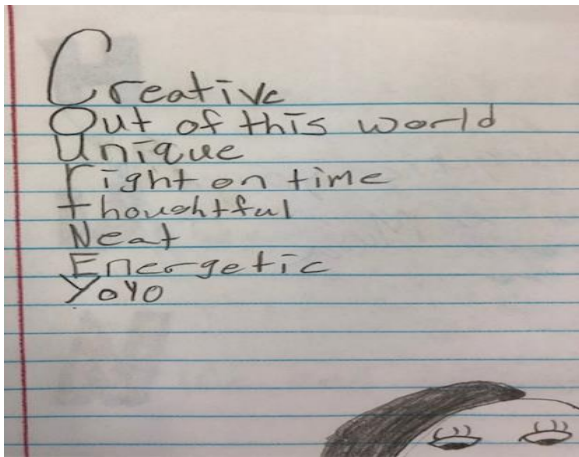


Figure 2. Acrostic poem sample.

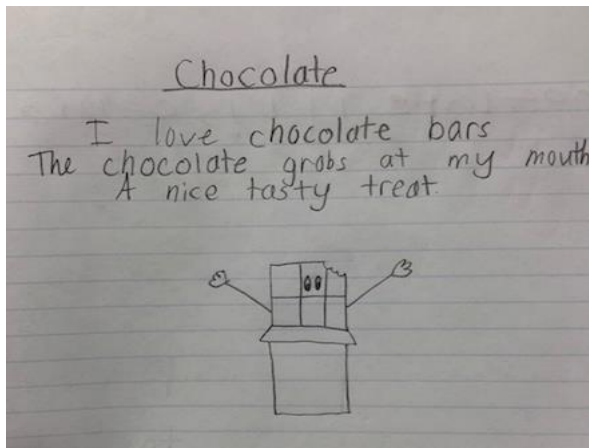


Figure 3. Free verse poem sample.

Classroom Two: Multimodal Response and Social Engagements

In Tara's third grade classroom, students use texts from the New York State ELA modules focusing on cultures and community. While the texts are very heavily informational texts, they are books that are well aligned with the third-grade social studies curriculum and also enable connections to the Teaching Tolerance standards.

When first using the modules as prescribed, Tara noticed several issues with this mandated literacy instruction— including the sheer amount of time needed to complete all of the scripted daily work (at least 90 minutes), the repetitiveness of the reading activities and the lack of kid-friendly literacy materials designed for responses to reading. To learn more about how things were going from her students' perspectives, Tara surveyed her students and they too voiced concerns: "I don't like reading because we read the same book four times," said one student, while another responded "Close reading is boring." These complaints about repetition were common, so Tara knew she needed to make some changes to improve engagement with the texts.

Engagement and Action—Tara’s Classroom Process

Example One:

1. As the teacher, Tara considered how she could bring life to her curriculum and avoid redundancy. She asked herself:
 - a. How can I improve engagement?
 - b. How can I help students make social justice-based connections with selected texts?
2. Students were asked to write multiple informational paragraphs. Tara thought that her students could still use the informational writing genre; however, they could use a more compelling format so that students could write for a wider audience. As an engaging textual response assignment, Tara gave students the option of creating a brochure or using the Book Creator application to create a digital text to share their learning.
3. Tara’s students read about a variety of countries and cultures as detailed in the module. They used notetaking strategies to capture the information they wanted to include in their brochures and Book Creator texts.
4. Students developed brochures in either hard copy format or through multimodal means. They shared, revised, and discussed as they brought their brochures and digital texts to life.
5. Lastly, Tara arranged social engagements to celebrate learning. She invited a range of guests to attend a schoolwide celebration hosted by the third-grade class— including students who were studying abroad in the US and who were able to partake in this rich exchange of ideas. Third graders presented their ideas, while guests shared their experiences—creating connections with one another and enhancing intercultural understandings along the way.

Example Two:

1. Tara reflected on another required module about water issues around the globe. The module requires students to create a Public Service Announcement (PSA) about water. Tara chose to integrate multimodal responses into her students’ required work.
2. Students used the Photo Story software to create a PSA around one of the major water concerns (demand, access, or pollution).
3. Students’ videos were posted and shared through a school community online platform.
4. Tara and her students reflected on how they could make meaningful change in their local communities and the world. The actions that emerged from this work were dependent upon students’ PSA topics as well as their own individual explorations of the issues that students felt were important. One group of students spent their recess picking up litter found around the school. Other students worked on collecting bottles and using the funds to donate to the Ryan's Well Foundation (<https://www.ryanswell.ca/>). While other students spent time cleaning up the local canal. In addition, many students made personal oaths to cut back on their water use—something they had previously taken for granted.

Students became personally invested—and their responses were extremely powerful leading to school and community action.

What Can Other Teachers Do?

We suggest that other teachers working within the confines of mandated curriculum can make spaces to center their courses around their students—just as Tara and Justin have. Central to their successes in the classroom, Tara and Justin engaged in reflective teaching practices that were inclusive of their students’ voices and their students’ responses to the mandated curriculum. Knowing they needed to make learning meaningful and engaging to students, both teachers designed creative responses to reading that affirmed and celebrated both students’ identities and their learning. In the chart below, you will find some suggestions for how other teachers can make space for innovative practices in the face of rigid curricular mandates.

| Steps | | Resources to bring your ideas to life |
|---------|---|--|
| Step 1: | Review the required texts and learning outcomes for the unit. Locate spaces within the lesson to integrate the Teaching Tolerance Social Justice Standards. | Social Justice Standards |
| Step 2: | Read the text and look for spaces where students can engage in creative text-to-self, text-to-text and text-to-world interactions with and responses to texts. | <p><i>Helpful books:</i></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Go Be a Writer, Kuby & Rucker (2010) 2. Artifactual Literacies (Pahl & Rowsell, 2010) <p>Making Connections During Read Aloud</p> |
| Step 3 | Celebrate learning: Plan a day for students to share and celebrate their creative responses to texts. Sharing and celebrating motivates students to produce outstanding work for a real audience. Invite fellow students, families, and the community to take part in these learning celebrations and you will also build school-community connections. | <p><i>Book chapter:</i></p> <p>Leaders of their Own Learning, Ch. 6 (Berger, Rugen, & Woodfin, 2014)</p> |

| | | |
|-----------|---|---|
| Step 4 | Reflect on learning: Have students and faculty consider how things worked to influence your future instruction. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● 20 Simple Assessment Strategies You Can Use Every Day (TeachThought, 2018) ● 25 Quick Formative Assessments for a Differentiated Classroom (Dodge & Duarte, 2017) ● A Guide to Documenting Learning (Tolisano & Hale, 2018) |
|-----------|---|---|

Closing

We hope that this work highlights the possibilities for teachers working within restricted curricular environments. As Brannon (2016) notes, “As teachers, it is our duty to read the standards not as curricular jail cells, but as opportunities to infuse students’ learning with a joy for language” (p.11). The classroom reflections of Tara and Justin demonstrate that teachers can and should work to carve out spaces for meaningful and student-centered literacy practices that respond to diverse student needs and bring joy to the classroom. Like Tara and Justin, many of our teacher candidates will begin their careers in the age of mandated curriculum and prepackaged educational literacy programs. Drawing on the resources put forth by organizations like Teaching Tolerance, we urge teachers to consider their own unique students and take action when they too think—“I just have so many ideas!”

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Author Bios

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JOURNAL OF LITERACY INNOVATION
CALL FOR MANUSCRIPTS
OCTOBER 2020 SPECIAL THEMED ISSUE:
RURAL LITERACY INSTRUCTION
CO-EDITORS: SEAN RUDAY AND AMY PRICE AZANO

The *Journal of Literacy Innovation (JLI)* is excited to announce that its October 2020 issue will be a special themed issue on rural literacy instruction. Co-edited by Sean Ruday and Amy Price Azano, this issue seeks to apply *JLI*'s focus on research-based and classroom-applicable ideas to topics, issues, and practices related to rural literacy instruction.

Works that are well-suited for this issue will provide innovative, practical ideas that add to the knowledge base of rural literacy instruction. *JLI* welcomes for this issue pieces that address all aspects of K-12 literacy instruction within a rural context, including writing, reading, language study, and all specific ideas addressed within those broader topics. The journal especially encourages the submission of pieces that address issues of representation, empowerment, and inclusivity in rural literacy instruction, such as those that provide teachers and teacher educators with insights for enacting empowering and inclusive instruction in rural contexts.

The deadline to submit a piece for consideration for this issue is August 1st, 2020. *JLI*'s standard guidelines for manuscript length and submission procedures apply to this issue. For more information, please contact Sean Ruday at rudaysr@longwood.edu.

JOURNAL OF LITERACY INNOVATION
CALL FOR MANUSCRIPTS
APRIL 2021 SPECIAL THEMED ISSUE:
DIVERSITY, LITERACY, AND CLASSROOM INSTRUCTION
CO-EDITORS: TIFFANY A. FLOWERS AND SEAN RUDAY

This special theme issue will include articles related to diversity, literacy, and geared toward a K-12 audience. The articles within this special theme issue are empirical, conceptual, and practical submissions on some of the most pressing issues within the field of literacy. This special theme issue will focus on overlooked topics which are of great importance to K-12 teachers within the field. Some of the topics include diverse children's and young adult literature, the literate reading lives of children beyond the classroom, implementing diverse books for diverse students, engaging reluctant readers, and fostering the reading interests of diverse students. This special theme issue is co-edited by Tiffany A. Flowers and Sean Ruday.

The submission for this special theme issue will include both innovation and practical ideas for classroom teachers. To that end, the special theme issue should include a lesson plan, strategy suggestions, book lists, art, writing and/or language extensions. The journal encourages authors to submit pieces which reflect representation, empowerment, and an inclusive environment for diverse students.

The deadline to submit a piece for consideration for this issue is September 1st, 2020. Please see the *JLI*'s standard guidelines for manuscript submission. For more information, please contact Sean Ruday at rudays@longwood.edu.