

Adolescent literacy essay



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Adolescent literacy is a concern for many involved in the field of education. However, as Vacca and Alvermann (1998) noted, much of the public debate about literacy has concentrated primarily on young children. The assumption underlying much of this debate is that once a child has learned to read, they will be able to take that skill and apply it for the rest of their lives (Vacca and Alvermann, p. 7).

This assumption does not accurately reflect the realities of adolescent literacy. Alvermann (2001) cited a study undertaken by the U. S. Department of Education in 1999 that found that while the majority of adolescent readers have achieved basic proficiency in reading skills, fewer than three percent of eighth grade students and fewer than six percent of twelfth grade students are capable of reading at an advanced level (Alvermann, p. 3). This basic level of literacy is not sufficient to cope with the demands of today's world (Alvermann, p. 4).

Educators have, in the recent past, tried to refocus the public debate on literacy so that it considers the particular problems facing adolescents. The International Reading Association created the Commission on Adolescent Literacy in 1997. The goal of this commission was “ to examine the state of adolescent literacy in the United States” (Vacca and Alvermann, 1998, p. 5).

This Commission issued two position statements on adolescent and young adolescent literacy (1999 and 2001).

A few years later, two journals – Reading Research and Instruction and The American Educator – published special issues devoted to adolescent literacy: the first in 2002, the second in 2003 (Snow and Biancarosa, 2003, p. 5).

Additional publications in the form of books and article-length studies have contributed to the increasing awareness of problems in adolescent literacy.

Concepts and their Applications

Alvermann (2001) devoted the bulk of her paper to discussing five statements that have grown out of her examination of current literacy research and analysis of school-based inquiries: self-efficacy and engagement, demands of academic literacy, struggling readers and their needs, critical literacy, and participatory approaches to instruction.

Because Alvermann's discussion of the ideas and their implications for professional practice is so thorough, this paper examines the first three of these crucial ideas, using them as a jumping-off point for the examination of literacy programs that make use of these concepts. In so doing, research that has been conducted since the appearance of Alvermann's study has been consulted.

Self-Efficacy and Engagement

Alvermann noted that, for adolescents, perceptions of competency affect motivation (Alvermann, 2001, p. 6). Hence, an adolescent who feels competent will often show increased motivation, especially in regards to learning in subject area classes. There are three main directions that research in this area has taken.

First, it has been found that by providing adolescents with clear goals for tasks and giving them feedback about their progress, educators can increase adolescents' self-confidence and feelings of competency (Alvermann, 2001, <https://assignbuster.com/adolescent-literacy-essay/>

p. 6). Second, as Guthrie and Wigfield's engagement model of reading emphasized, success can be achieved by fostering student motivation, strategy use, growth in conceptual knowledge, and social interaction.

All of these factors directly affect a student's level of engagement with a subject and the student's outcomes as measured by time spent reading independently, achievement on standardized tests, performance assessments, and beliefs about reading (Alvermann, 2001, p. 7).

Third, Alvermann discussed the research undertaken by Dillon (1989) that showed that when teachers show concern for individual students and their progress, the students in question will show an increase in feelings of competence and self-worth (Alvermann, 2001, p. 7).

The concept of motivation is the main focus of Guthrie's current research: Reading Engagement for Adolescent Learning (REAL) (Guthrie, 2005). This research takes his earlier-developed Concept-Oriented Reading Instruction (CORI) and applies it to adolescent students.

The primary goal of CORI – to increase students' motivation and engagement – is approached through a six-step, teacher-controlled learning approach. The six steps include interacting with the real world, supporting student autonomy, expanding knowledge goals, using interesting texts, fostering student collaboration, and coordinating motivational activities (Guthrie, 2005).

As the research into CORI application to adolescent readers is still ongoing, the results have not yet been published; however, documentation of a

portion of this study focusing on adolescent students' motivations for reading information books both in school and outside of school has recently been published (Guthrie et al., 2009).

Student motivation and engagement with reading material is also the main focus underlying Scaffolded Reading Experiences (SRE). SRE consists of two phases: the planning phase and the implementation phase. During the planning phase, the students, the text, and the purpose of the assignment are considered.

The implementation phase consists of three parts: pre-reading, reading, and post-reading. During the pre-reading phase, educators spark students' interest in the reading selection, remind the students of previously acquired knowledge that will help them read the passage, and go over some of the difficulties the students might encounter while reading the passage.

During the post-reading phase, students are given the opportunity to synthesize the information gleaned from the text, to evaluate the reading, and to analyze the students' level of comprehension (Seward Inc.).

Demands of Academic Literacy

In regards to the demands of academic literacy, Alvermann (2001) noted that “ adolescents respond to the literacy demands of their subject area classes when they have appropriate background knowledge and strategies for reading a variety of texts” (p. 9). Alvermann summarized the results of the National Reading Panel (NRP) inquiry into effective strategies for teaching reading comprehension.

The NRP found the following strategies to be particularly effective: comprehension monitoring, cooperative learning, using graphic and semantic organizers, answering questions, generating questions, using text structure, and summarizing (qtd. in Alvermann, 2001, p. 9-10). Alvermann (2001) further remarked that, in addition to these seven strategies, educators must also provide vocabulary instruction, adequate background information, and hands-on experience (p. 10-11).

SRE, discussed above, also aims to meet the demands of academic literacy. Another such program is Guided Inquiry supporting Multiple Literacies (GIsML).

In this orientation towards teaching, educators “seed” ideas or language, question the students, refocus student thinking and activity, and encourage students to create artifacts that represent their understanding of the material (GIsML, n. d.). This program is specially geared to scientific learning.

Struggling Readers and Their Needs

Alvermann (2001) noted that students who have difficulties reading need instruction that is geared to their specific developmental, cultural, and linguistic needs (p. 12).

This group of students includes not only students who have learning disabilities but also those students who are learning English as a second (or third) language (English Language Learners, ELL) as well as monolingual students from economically disadvantaged or minority backgrounds (Alvermann, 2001, p. 12).

Snow and Biancarosa (2003) highlighted this facet of adolescent literacy in their report, noting that African-Americans, Latinos, English Language Learners, and students from low-income homes consistently “underperform on common indicators of academic achievement” (p. 1).

This phenomenon is largely due to disparities in literacy achievement (Snow and Biancarosa, 2003, p. 1). It is therefore hoped that increases in literacy in this population will lead to improved achievement overall.

READ 180 is a program designed to meet the needs of struggling readers. In addition to working in large groups and smaller groups with a teacher, students read independently and work with computer software. The computer-supported instruction is designed to make the student feel more comfortable as they do not have to display their “weakness” in public (Snow and Biancarosa, 2003, p. 10).

Though the program was designed specifically for struggling readers (especially those from economically disadvantaged households), recent additions to the program include special packages designed for special needs students and ELLs (READ 180).

Conclusions

There are many varied approaches to improving adolescent literacy. Each of the practical models is designed to address a particular theory of what causes these weaknesses in literacy skills (Snow and Biancarosa, 2003, p. 7). It is difficult to gauge the relative effectiveness of each of these programs because the various approaches have not been evaluated in similar ways.

This lack of a consistent analytical framework makes comparison across programs and large-scale evaluation a difficult endeavor (Snow and Biancarosa, 2003, p. 1).

One commonality that most of these programs share, and that an educator would do well to keep in mind when making lesson plans, is that literacy programs must focus on adolescents' interests and needs in order to be effective (Alvermann, 2001, p. 2).

Often, these adolescents have a wide range of literacies that they use outside of school: video games, internet use, graphic novels, texting, and chatting, for example. When educators do not notice or value these literacies, they are missing prime opportunities to engage with their students and to encourage the development of literacy skills to the adolescents' fullest potential (Vacca and Alvermann, 1998, p. 4).

References

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