

Free essay on preparing novice history teachers to meet students' literacy needs

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Reflection Paper: Preparing Novice History Teachers to Meet Students' Literacy Needs

Abstract

This paper explores Nokes' (2010) article that has discussed the content area literacy by novice History teachers. It also critically reviews the approaches given by various authors on the topic. The paper also looks at how content area literacy has been applied in today's education curricula at high school levels. In addition, the attitude of both teachers and students and how they affect content literacy will be explored. Furthermore, different strategies will be explored all of which have the main aim of achieving desired levels of content literacy. Most importantly, positive reflections are detailed on how content area literacy is crucial. It is also suggested that it is embedded in high school curricula. Suggestions are also made on how students can unleash their full potential with literacy on the content area.

Summary

According to the article by Nokes (2010), literacy content area is slowly diminishing in the current education systems especially in high schools. There have been inadequate instructions on the part of educators on this area, or perhaps they are lacking adequate skills to teach students on content area. Literacy area content is defined as an art of writing, speaking, listening, and communicating to enable the student to apply such knowledge or create new ones in such disciplines (O'Connor, 2010). From a personal perspective, if I had been exposed more to content literacy in high school, I would be better equipped to learn new concepts and critique them. I would

also develop a deeper understanding of the content area. This would have helped me to acquire skills that would prepare me for higher learning in colleges and universities, and in their field of my specialization.

The area of content literacy has recently expanded from having the ability to read and write, to evaluation of easily accessible information.

In order to broaden the skills on content area literacy, the students should be exposed to informational texts. They are available on print and off-print copies. Both can be used for content literacy, but caution should be practiced with off-print sources. Critical thinking skills are also required to evaluate the sources especially electronic sources. Some of these sources may not be accurate or even relevant to students.

In content area literacy, what students learn in class must be applied to practical uses. This must be done under the guidance of their instructor. Content area literacy will encourage scaffolding; this is defined as adding more knowledge on what is already on the text books. Teachers are faced with a great deal of pressure to cover much deep content within a limited time frame. With such challenges, literacy skills are better taught through content (Munt, 2003). Therefore, literacy on content theory is important for high school students.

Reflections

Like history, every subject area or discipline has its own requirements in terms of reading, writing, and conceptualization of ideas. Content literacy is sometimes very difficult to infuse into secondary schools because the model used to infuse 'content literacy' into the system is constructed externally,

hence causing a mismatch. Nokes also contends that, “ the method used and goals of content literacy in teaching and research are paradoxical” (p. 443). This means that this situation is that values, beliefs, and practices are attacked by content literacy in situations upheld by secondary school teachers.

The face of content area literacy instruction is changing according to previous researches. High school tutors are quickly embracing and encouraging the use of content area literacy at all levels, especially the basic level. There has been a sharp increase in the use of informational books by high school students. This has helped them broaden their views on the subject area. Three important critical factors have led to this change according to Moss (2005, p. 46); “ Standards-based education, technology, and emphasis on standardized-test performance.”

In addition, the improvement in standards of education has helped students seek informational books with renewed vigor. Such informational texts have been extended for use even at the lowest levels of education like kindergartens. Teachers have also become aware that students are now being taught in such information texts but not the ‘ theoretical classroom contents’. This is following the standardization of examinations by the state. Technology has become crucial to the changing ways of content area literacy. The requirement of today’s digital world has pushed students to seek more information on the Internet than relying on textbooks. Most of these texts on websites are expository as a result, becoming the cornerstone of success at high school. Should students not be introduced to expository

texts at an early age, their performance will deteriorate at later levels.

As a student, I would benefit greatly from the use of informational texts.

Firstly, it would be a great boost to my motivation because such reading evokes one to relate with one's experiences; it feels like a real life experience. Engaging in such reading helps me to improve my learning and knowledge, because of the motivation it inspires in me. With such high interest in reading, new knowledge domains are increased. It would also enable me to develop skills in evaluation whilst also enhancing my comprehension of the subject matter and contribute to building my vocabulary.

Classroom teachers' attitude towards content area literacy has a strong impact on students' reading achievements in high school (Nourie & Lenski, 1998). Research has been done before and supports this view of teachers' attitudes. Preservative teachers do not recognize the relationship between content area subjects and use of language. They also keep at bay the ideas proposed in the content area literacy, which might be helpful to students. This consequently lowers the secondary students' ability to process ideas through, reading and writing. The same authors also posit that in solving such problems, which are common in high schools, content area literacy courses should be introduced to pre-service teachers.

In addition, students' attitude will also determine how they perform in the content area literacy courses. This area requires a lot of reading; as a teacher, I would encourage students to have a positive attitude towards reading. Therefore, I would have to be very observant to notice any student who has a weakness in this area of content literacy. In case I discover a

weakness, I would have to employ an effective strategy that can be used by educators in content area instruction, which enhances students' attitude towards this course. This can help them devise new strategies to use on content studies. However, they must first embrace the strategy for themselves and use the same for students. With little assistance to weak students, they will understand all the content areas.

There are also other ways to make the use of content area literacy excel. Students can use their background knowledge to realize their full potential with content area literacy (Munt, 2003). In addition, they can broaden their reading by using a mix of both print and off-print texts. Student can also find other articles on topics discussed in class and put the lessons learned to application. In most cases, lecture notes and assignments dominate learning in high schools as opposed to content area literacy. This fact seems to negatively affect content area literacy in terms of construction and retaining of knowledge by learners. I suggest that their use be limited, and should be adjusted to help students grasp the new knowledge they acquire.

Content instructors will be needed much in development of content area literacy. They will aid the students with ideas on how to read, write, communicate, and think like a mathematician, engineer, philosopher, or a historian. Importantly, they must be aware of technologies that are available. These technologies can broaden the sources of content information some of which are not adequate even with ease of accessing information. Therefore, the progress of critical literacy is becoming more significant as sources of text information expand. These include email, hypermedia, among others.

The content instructor has to train students acquire skills of information searching.

In summary, there are considerations for succeeding in the content area literacy. First, the students' viewpoints on a subject area will affect their desire to learn and excel in that discipline. It will further enable them to obtain content area literacy in those disciplines. Students should also be allowed to participate fully when the content instructor is giving instructions. The instructor can help students develop some background information on strategies for gaining content area literacy especially for students who might be struggling.

In order to develop critical content literacy, it is important to implant such skills and knowledge at high school level. It will prepare them professionally for future needs of content literacy. Content area literacy is a process and will take time to realize through nurturing. The skills of thinking like a mathematician, engineer, or a historian cannot be obtained overnight. It calls for persistence and commitment on the part of students. It also needs constant supervision by the content instructor when students are stuck.

My opinion is that in order to enable students develop adequate skills in this area, content area literacy should be embedded in the high school curricula. Consequently, students who advance from high school education level develop important skills of text criticism. This will enable them to manipulate such information to meet societal needs.

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