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Balancing Your Approach to Literacy Instruction – Adolescent Literacy

Literacy Resources

Professional Offerings and Opportunities

- Improving Reading for Older Students
- Vermont Folklife Summer Institutes
- Community Engagement Lab's Project Design Lab
- Partnerships for Literacy and Learning Summer Courses

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## Balancing Your Approach to Literacy Instruction – Adolescent Literacy

All students deserve a learning environment that is responsive to their individual circumstances and learning needs. “To implement foundational skills programs equitably, we also must ensure that in addition to holding high expectations for all students that all students have access to a full range of supports, culturally relevant content and practices, and aligned instructional materials” ([Pimental & Liben, 2021](#)). This includes adolescent readers.

According to the National Council for Teachers of English (NCTE), “Reading is not a technical skill acquired once and for all in the primary grades, but rather a developmental process throughout the reader’s life. A reader’s competence continues to grow through engagement with various types of texts and wide reading for various purposes over a lifetime” ([NCTE, 2018](#)). For this reason, literacy instruction looks different for older students.

NCTE reminds readers that “[e]ffective literacy programs move students to deeper understandings and greater independence of reading texts while increasing their ability to generate ideas and knowledge (Newmann, King, & Rigdon, 1997)” ([NCTE, 2018](#)). When reading instruction focuses solely on basic skills at the expense of meaning-making, older students can be mislabeled as struggling readers when in reality they “lack extensive reading experience, depend on different prior knowledge, and/or comprehend differently or in more complex ways” ([NCTE, 2018](#)). Once identified as “struggling,” these readers are likely to receive isolated skill instruction instead of a more holistic, robust reading model, which “may perpetuate low literacy achievement rather than improve their competence and engagement in complex reading tasks (Allington, 2000; Alvermann & Moore, 1991; Brown, 1991; Hiebert, 1991; Hull & Rose, 1989; Knapp & Turnbull, 1991; Sizer, 1992)” ([NCTE, 2018](#)).

NCTE suggests a few key actions to consider in supporting adolescent literacy. Teachers should incorporate disciplinary literacy instruction, including the specific reading strategies required to access the different kinds of texts found in different disciplines. They should integrate “multiple and social literacies,” attending to the “multiple message streams” (Hicks & Steffel, 2012) that require students to “use literacy as a social and political endeavor in which they engage to make meaning and act upon their worlds” ([NCTE, 2018](#)). Students are exposed to very different types of texts, from digital to classic literature, text-based gaming, and social media. As such,

teachers need to “recognize and value the multiple literacy resources students bring to the acquisition of school literacy (Moje, Young, Readence, & Moore, 2000; Moje et al., 2004; Moje, 2007)” ([NCTE, 2018](#)).

Teachers can engage and motivate students as well as build confidence in their reading abilities by providing diverse texts in a variety of genres that include print, digital, and visual media ([NCTE, 2018](#)). “Wide independent reading develops fluency, builds vocabulary and knowledge of text structures, and offers readers the experiences they need to read and construct meaning with more challenging texts” ([NCTE, 2018](#)). Finally, teachers are called to appreciate multicultural perspectives in order to avoid the “danger of a single story” ([Adichie, 2009](#)). “Through extensive reading of a range of texts, supported by strategy lessons and discussions, readers become familiar with written language structures and text features, develop their vocabularies, and read for meaning more efficiently and effectively” ([NCTE, 2018](#)).

Still, adolescent readers may need support with fluency. Texts increase in complexity across grades and text types, so students who are fluent in one grade or with one text type might not be fluent in another ([Pimental & Liben, 2021](#)). In these situations, it is important to match the texts with the grade level being taught. When reinforcing foundational reading skills for older students, what is taught does not change, but how it is taught does. This means choosing appropriately complex texts that are of interest to older students. Use the texts students are already reading in their content classes, if possible. Much like adults, older students will be more committed to their learning when they know why they are being asked to do something, so be clear about the purpose behind the exercises (Liben & Liben, 2019). Similarly, older students need to know that reading fluency has nothing to do with intelligence – in fact, it is a completely different part of the brain, which can be strengthened through repetition the same way a muscle can ([Pimental & Liben, 2021](#)).

Learn more about supporting adolescent literacy development by taking the online course offered by Student Achievement Partners, listed below under **Professional Offerings and Opportunities**. Stay tuned for future articles about knowledge and comprehension, text-based writing, and reading motivation and engagement.

#### References:

- Liben, M & Liben, D. (2019). *Know Better, Do Better: Teaching the Foundations So Every Child Can Read*. West Palm Beach FL: Learning Sciences International.
- National Council of Teachers of English (2018, July 17). [A call to action: What we know about adolescent literacy](#).
- Pimental, S. & Liben, M. (2021). [Reading as Liberation – An Examination of the Research Base](#). Achieve the Core.

#### Literacy Resources

- [Essential Instructional Practices for Disciplinary Literacy in the Secondary Classroom](#) – This resource is one of many from [Literacy Essentials](#), which includes research- and evidence-based [Essential Practices](#) to improve literacy

outcomes, bundled by grade band. This particular document focuses specifically on secondary literacy and content knowledge across disciplines.

- [Text Set Project: Building Knowledge and Vocabulary](#) and [Text Set Guidance](#) – These resources provide information about text sets, which support all learners in building knowledge and developing vocabulary.
- [What Works Clearinghouse/IES Practice Guides](#) – These publications present recommendations for educators, which are based on reviews of research, practitioner experiences, and expert opinions. There is also a [Resources for Educators](#) page. Guides related to secondary literacy include:
  - [Improving Adolescent Literacy: Effective Classroom and Intervention Practices](#)
  - [Providing Reading Interventions for Students in Grades 4-9](#)
  - [Teaching Secondary Students to Write Effectively](#)

## Professional Offerings and Opportunities

**Improving Reading for Older Students** – In this self-paced course from Student Achievement Partners, participants will work on how to improve literacy outcomes for older students who are reading below grade level. Participants in this course will have the opportunity to learn the research behind literacy accelerators that can propel reading progress, consider how to support students in rebuilding their academic confidence, and gain practical skills for how to implement these ideas to support students in regular classroom settings. [Visit the website](#) for more information or to register.

### Vermont Folklife Summer Institutes:

- [Documenting Everyday Life](#) (in-person in Brattleboro, VT) - July 6 and 7, 2022 – This workshop presents the foundations of what we at the VFC refer to as the “ethnographic toolkit.” Capturing the scope of everyday life through deep listening, description, and cultural documentation is a part of how ethnography builds context. These tools can be used by anyone looking to engage with individuals and communities to reach a deeper understanding about how we live and live together.
- [Community Driven Media Making](#) (Online only) - July 25 - Aug 4, 2022 – What impact does sharing a documentary audio story, oral history, or other multimedia have on the individuals or communities represented within that medium? With a specific focus on audio-production, this two-week online course is for anyone interested in using digital media and community interviewing as tools for social engagement and change.
- [Teaching with Primary Sources: Vermont Farming and Foodways](#) (in-person in St. Albans, VT) - July 21 and 22, 2022 – In this free workshop for educators, participants will explore VT Folklife oral history recordings focused on the role that farmers play in Vermont’s history and identity and discover how these primary sources offer a window into experiences often hidden from the public. Participants will be introduced to curated primary source sets and application strategies and activities for middle and high school learners, including how to bring in digital resources from the Library of Congress.

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**Community Engagement Lab's Project Design Lab** – The [Community Engagement Lab](#) is now accepting registration for the [2022 Project Design Lab](#), which will take place July 11-14 at UVM. The Project Design Lab is a professional development intensive that helps educators strengthen the well-being of their students and school community, and their personal well-being. At the Design Lab, educators will collaborate with a teaching artist to design a project that uses creative engagement as a powerful tool to bridge differences, build collective agency, imagine new approaches, inspire joyfulness, and reflect individual and community identity – all vital components of individual and community well-being. Participants receive three graduate credits or 34-46 hours of continuing education credits, depending on the registration chosen, and can register as individuals or in teams from their school or district. Tuition includes a private dorm room at UVM, breakfast and lunch. For more information go [here](#) or [email Paul Gambill](#).

**Partnerships for Literacy and Learning Summer Courses** – Earn 3 graduate credits from Saint Michael's College for each asynchronous online course:

- [JOY WRITE: Time, Choice, and Response for Developing Writers, K - 8](#) – While taking this course, we will read and reflect upon *Joy Write: Cultivating High-Impact, Low-Stakes Writing*, written by Ralph Fletcher, while examining your own practices and the practices of other influential teachers of literacy. We will examine the set-up for a writers' workshop as well as what is needed to teach and support student writers to become better writers as evidenced by classroom based and/or state assessments. (July 6 – August 16, 2022)
- [YOUNG ADULT LITERATURE: Bringing relevant texts into our classrooms](#) – In this course, teachers will read and analyze current, relevant texts for young adult readers. We will address a range of genres, including historical fiction, realistic fiction, and nonfiction books that young adults read. Participants can expect books in verse, graphic novels, and prose and texts which contain material that includes but is not limited to discussions of race, sexuality, gender, and addiction. (June 23 – August 11, 2022)
- [MIDDLE GRADES LITERATURE: Bringing relevant texts into our classrooms](#) – Reading is a social act, and in this course, we will have the opportunity to engage with middle grade text in a social, as well as an analytical manner. We will read and analyze current, relevant texts for middle grade readers along with the soon to be released *The Joy of Reading* from Miller and Lesene. There will be an emphasis on practical applications of book clubs, discussion protocols, and familiarity with current literature. (June 22 – August 3, 2022)

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