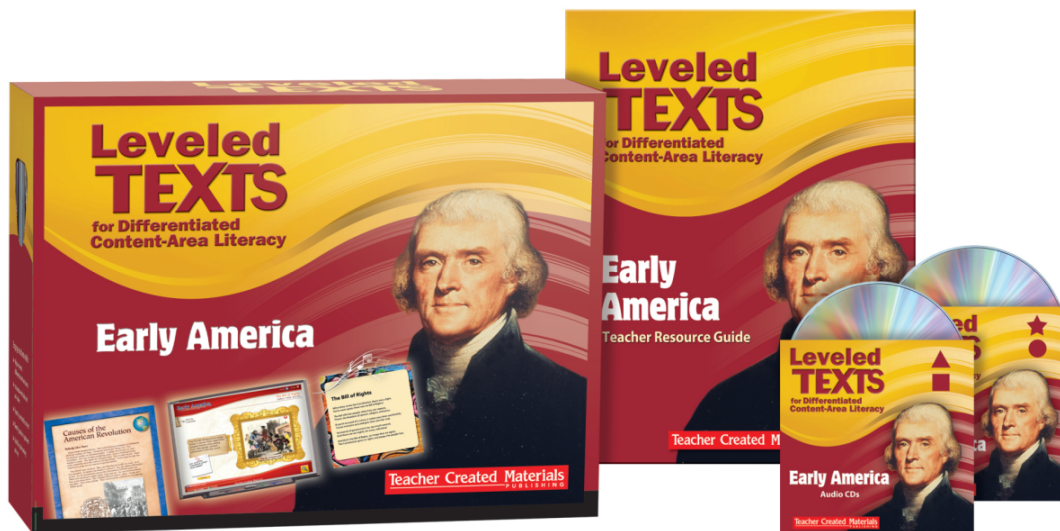


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Research-Based Curriculum

Leveled Texts for Differentiated Content-Area Literacy



Complete Supplemental Program
Based on Respected Research & Literature

HITE PAPER FOR LEVELED TEXTS FOR DIFFERENTIATED CONTENT- AREA LITERACY

Introduction

Leveled Texts for Differentiated Content- Area Literacy combines effective instruction of reading comprehension, differentiation, and standards-based nonfiction content. “Research over 30 years has shown that instruction in comprehension can help students understand what they read, remember what they read, and communicate with others about what they read” (Armbruster, Lehr, and Osborn, 2003, p. 41). This engaging program helps students develop comprehension strategies and nonfiction reading skills in the core content areas for above-grade-level, below-grade-level, and on-grade-level readers, including English Learners.

Over the past few years, classrooms have evolved into diverse pools. Gifted students, English language learners, students who have learning disabilities, high achievers, underachievers, and average students all come together to learn from one teacher in one classroom. The teacher is expected to meet all their diverse needs. It brings back memories of the one-room schoolhouse during early American history. Not too long ago, lessons were designed to be one-size-fits-all. It was thought that students in the same grade level sharing the same class learned in similar ways. Today, it is clear that this viewpoint is incorrect. Students have differing learning styles, come from different cultures, experience a variety of emotions, and have varied interests.

The results of teaching to the middle group of students are catastrophic. According to the 2007 report by the National Assessment of Educational Progress two-thirds of children in the United States fail to read at or above proficient levels by fourth grade and approximately one-fourth of middle- and high school students struggle to read and comprehend grade-level texts and subject-matter materials.

Not only were students not proficient, but The National Endowment for the Arts study of Reading entitled, “To Read or Not to Read: A Question of National Consequence” (2007) identified three unsettling conclusions about Americans and their reading behaviors: “1) Americans are spending less time reading, 2) Reading comprehension skills are eroding, and 3) These declines have serious civic, social, cultural, and economic implications “ (p. 7) Heidi Hayes Jacobs further suggests that “we are behind other nations in international comparisons of academic achievement because of our “antiquated (education) system established in the late 1880’s” (2010, p. 1).

The Need for Integration of Content with Reading Skills

One response to better meet the needs of the struggling readers has been to increase “intervention” programs. In many cases, this means that struggling students are required to be in intensive classes that take up much of their instructional time. As a result, these students often do not attend social studies or science classes.

The need for increasing students’ reading skills is great, but not at the cost of subject matter knowledge and the thinking skills acquired from the other core content areas. With the demands of state assessments, many districts have reduced time for these other subjects. “To accommodate this increased time in ELA and math, 44% of districts reported cutting time from one or more other subjects or activities (social studies, science, art and music, physical education, lunch and/or recess) at the elementary level” (CEP Policy, p. 1). Stinson, Harkness, Meyer, and Stallworth (2003) determined that “the squeeze on

instructional time and other factors increasingly lead educators to consider...integration to be more efficient and effective.” Kinniburgh and Byrd (2008), Feldman and Kinsella (2005) and Meyer (2001) are just some of the researchers who support this recommendation.

However, curriculum integration is not as easy as it would appear. As Pianta (2007) writes, “Despite the demands for integrated instruction, it remains elusive.” He reports that In observations of over 1,000 students around the country, researchers observed that during a typical fifth grade day, 37% of instructional time was spent on literacy, 25% on mathematics, 11% on science and 13% on social studies—“a reality not in harmony with nationally declared aims to improve science and mathematical education.” The Center for Education Policy (2007) makes the following recommendation, “for funds for research to determine the best ways to incorporate the teaching of reading and math skills into social studies and science” (p. 2).

Studies of classrooms have shown that where integration of content with reading have occurred, increased learning in both content and literacy skills for all students including English Learners, at-risk, and learning disabled students has been demonstrated (Connor, Kaya, Luck, Toste, Canto, Rice, Tani, and Underwood, 2010; Fang and Wei, 2010; Gersten and Clarke, 2007; Guthrie, McRae, Coddington, Klauda, Wigfield and Barbosa 2009).

Leveled Texts for Differentiated Content- Area Literacy was specifically designed to seamlessly integrate literacy skills within the context of the subject-area content. This ensures that instructional time is spent in teaching effective literacy strategies while developing students content-area knowledge and related high-order thinking skills. core content strands are developed from the academic standards of all 50 states, the District of Columbia, and the Department of Defense Dependent Schools. Based on the Mid-Continent Research for Education and Learning (McREL) Compendium, each lesson in the ***Leveled Texts for Differentiated Content- Area Literacy*** was developed to meet the specific standards of the particular content.

Support to the Teacher for Integration

The need for integration of subjects is crucial for student learning. The question is, “Where should the integration occur – in the literacy block or in the content block?” Historically in the twentieth century, content-area teachers taught only content. They assumed, for the most part, students coming into their content classes could already read and understand. Everyone was given the same textbook and assignments. But as the National Assessment of Educational Progress (2007) noted, reading and comprehending the textbook is not a given anymore.

Contentarea teachers, who are now being asked to incorporate basic reading and language skills into their classes, are sometimes understandably uneasy. Yet, it is these teachers—those who are most comfortable with the content—that can make the most difference in helping students acquire literacy skills. “When all teachers take responsibility for developing good reading skills in all students, student success rates will soar” (Tankersley, 2005, p. 43).

Reading guru, Richard Allington notes that “most ‘lessons’ offered in the teacher guides in readers, social studies, and science texts were designed more to assess student recitation proficiency than *to improve* that proficiency. The lesson focused more on immediate recall of the information than on development of transferable strategies that promoted independent use of effective thinking while reading” (2001, p. 97).

Whether the teacher is knowledgeable about literacy strategies or is strictly a content-area teacher, the lesson plans in the Teacher Resource Guide for *Leveled Texts for Differentiated Content-Area Literacy* supports the teacher to ensure that both literacy objectives and content standards are met. Each lesson follows the same format so that teachers can quickly and easily become familiar with the program. Objectives for outcomes are clearly stated in the Unit Learning Objectives. A brief snapshot of the lesson overview orients the teacher to what the lesson will cover, including vocabulary to be introduced. In addition, instructional ideas for ways to differentiate including the use of leveled text and tiered graphic organizers are provided so that the teacher can effectively help students meet the intended outcomes of the lesson. The assessments also provide teachers with specific data as to whether students met the lesson objectives. Unlike most Teacher Resource Guides, the provided support material not only assesses content knowledge proficiency, but also students' improvement in their literacy skills. Costa and Kallick(2010) note that "changing curriculum is about changing your mind first and then forming some new habits and routines as you abandon old ones" (2010, p. 211). The *Leveled Texts for Differentiated Content- Area Literacy* is structured to ensure that new habits can be quickly developed to ensure teaching efficacy and positive student outcomes.

The Need for Differentiation

In this present educational realm of high stakes and accountability, teachers are expected to effectively create instructional activities that address varied student needs. The more that is understood about how students learn, the more it is understood why curriculum needs to be differentiated, especially in reading. Today's reading classrooms are filled with students of varying backgrounds, reading abilities, levels of English proficiency and learning styles. Furthermore, teaching reading is not about merely passing on a set of skills that can be memorized or replicated by students. "Learning to read is a complex process. Most children learn to read and continue to grow in their mastery of this process; however, there continues to be a group of children for whom learning to read is a struggle" (Quatroche, 1999, p. 1). Klenk and Kibby (2000) note that struggling readers do not need radically different instruction than students who master reading. However, they do need more efficacious teaching. Meyer suggests that "Educators must use curriculum and teaching strategies that address the challenges presented" (2001, p. 4).

While teaching *all* students may seem to be a straightforward task, each teacher enters a room with an incredibly wide array of student abilities, diversity, and backgrounds. One lesson aimed at average achieving students will not challenge the high ability students nor will it properly support the struggling students. Very seldom will one typical, undifferentiated lesson serve the needs of *all* learners! *Leveled Texts for Differentiated Content- Area Literacy* provides teachers information to address the complex task in content area subject matter.

What is Differentiation?

Every student who enters a classroom in the beginning of the school year brings his or her own set of expectations, past learning experiences, preferred learning styles, differing cultural and language backgrounds, personal goals, and concepts of self-perception. All students, regardless of each of these differences, enter a classroom with the expectation placed on them (by themselves) to learn the material. Each learner has strengths that can be used as groundwork for learning. Using strengths to foster academic growth is a fundamental aspect to differentiation. Differentiation is a set of strategies that allows

a teacher to teach toward the required content standards at the same time that the teacher offers support to struggling students and extends challenging activities to higher performing students.

Differentiation has multiple faces depending on the particular students and teachers involved, the outcomes of these learners, and the structure of the classroom environment (Pettig, 2000). Carol Ann Tomlinson, the leading researcher on differentiation, states, "On some level, differentiation is just a teacher acknowledging that kids learn in different ways, and responding by doing something about that through curriculum and instruction. A more dictionary-like definition is "adapting content, process, and product in response to student readiness, interest, and/or learning profile" (Tomlinson, 2004). Rather than advocating for differentiated classrooms, her vision is that differentiation supports students in mixed-ability classrooms (Tomlinson, 1999).

Womeli believes "The first thing that comes to mind when defining differentiated instruction is understanding that it is maximizing the learning that can happen over what traditionally happens with "one size fits all" lessons. At any point when you're choosing to maximize what students learn, as opposed to settling for what they can learn, that is indicative of a differentiated class" (Dyck 2008). Differentiation then encompasses what is taught, how it is taught, and the products students create to show what they have learned. Content teachers become the organizers of learning opportunities within the classroom environment. These categories are often referred to as content, process, and product and are differentiated to support individual learners. Differentiating the content means to put various levels of depth into the curriculum through organizing the content concepts and structure of knowledge. Differentiating the process requires the use of many instructional techniques and materials to enhance and motivate learning styles of students. A teacher should make activities different for each type of learner. Therefore, above-grade learners won't get more work, but different work. Differentiating the products that are differentiated improve students' cognitive development and their ability to express themselves.

Support for Differentiation

Differentiation is simply a teacher attending to the learning needs of a particular student or small group. Today, teacher's bookshelves are lined with books on differentiation. Although many teachers have attended countless workshops telling them how beneficial it is to differentiate curriculum, few teachers actually feel comfortable with implementing it in their classrooms. In *Leveled Texts for Differentiated Content-Area Literacy*, various differentiated strategies are included that allow new and experienced teachers, reading and content teachers to differentiate content knowledge while still focusing on enhancing literacy skills for all.

"In my perfect world, we'd spend lots more time developing rich, high quality curriculum -- then talking about how we modify our teaching so that far more kids have access to the quality (curriculum)." (Tomlinson, 2010) *Leveled Texts for Differentiated Content-Area Literacy* is unique in that it provides quality **leveled texts** which contain the same information at different reading levels. In terms of differentiation, the content of the lessons are the same. However, the program was developed to provide teachers with a way to integrate the teaching of the different content areas while making accommodations for differences in student reading abilities and understanding. Not only does this provide an alternative to the textbook, but it ensures that all students can meet the content standards for the specific subject and are prepared for testing in these areas. Kathy Kalkbrenner, a sixth grade teacher understands the dilemma of duplicating this effort on her own. "Many of my students have difficulty reading their textbooks. Yet I

must cover the content. We have specific content that needs to be covered. And I can't go out and get new, easier books for them to read that covers the same content.” (Rasinski, 2003, p.153).

Every lesson has four cards written at four different reading levels. The levels are clearly distinguished for ease of quick identification for differentiated groups based on reading levels. The texts in this series are written at a variety of reading levels, but all the levels remain strong in presenting the social studies content and vocabulary. “Tiered activities are very important when a teacher wants to ensure that students with different learning needs work with the same essential ideas and use the same key skills” (Tomlinson, 1999, p. 83). Teachers can focus on the same content standard or objective for the whole class, but individual students can access the content at their instructional levels rather than at their frustration levels. One myth of differentiation is that students are learning different concepts. Tomlinson states that teachers need to “carefully fashion instruction around the essential concepts, principles, and skills of each subject” (p. 10), and that “in differentiated classrooms, certain essential understandings and skills are goals for all learners.” (p. 12). Connor, et. al. (2010) grouped students homogeneously by reading ability (reading levels and oral fluency rates) and taught science content infused with literacy skills. “Leveling of groups by reading skills allowed the teachers to provide extra support, scaffolding, and attention to students who were less independent, with the goal of fostering greater independence while ensuring that the students were learning critical science knowledge and literacy skills. The results were increased science knowledge and literacy skills for all groups” (p.476).

While the content presented in each lesson in *Leveled Texts for Differentiated Content- Area Literacy* is similar for each group, the processes for accessing the content differ based on the needs of students. Each of the leveled texts use supportive text structures to not only scaffold the literacy objectives, but also to help students access the core content. Matching students to texts at their instructional reading level is a key element of any good reading program, but the text must support the reader. The leveled texts in *Leveled Texts for Differentiated Content- Area Literacy* were specifically designed with supportive features of non-fiction texts. “Whether a text is easy or hard for a child depends on more than the characteristics inherent in the text. The way the text is introduced and the supportive interaction during reading play important roles as well”. (Fountas and Pinnell, 1996, p. 117). Images such as globe icon, documents, photographs, and illustrations on each card not only provide interest, but serve as visual supports. Subheads are provided which give the reader the main idea of the upcoming text. Harvey (1998) suggests that “these features alert the reader to important information” (p. 77). Each card, no matter what the level, has the same subheadings helping the teacher to support the needs of all the learners. Brown’s research of students’ use of supportive text structures suggest that if teachers draw student attention to and assist students’ in learning various navigation tools, appropriate strategies for searching and constructing search terms, using typographic features, and organizational cues and patterns, then student ability to locate information should improve.

The use of non-fiction text in *Leveled Texts for Differentiated Content- Area Literacy* not only supports the subject matter content, but is vital to enhancing comprehension skills for students. The reading strategies needed for reading nonfiction text are different from the strategies needed for fiction text. Students often need additional support in learning how to use these strategies for nonfiction text (Brown, 2003). When Nell Duke did a study that found a scarcity of informational texts in first grade classrooms, (1999) she wrote, “These findings are cause for concern both because of the missed opportunity to prepare students for informational reading and writing they will encounter in later schooling and life, and for the missed opportunity to use informational text to motivate more students' interest in literacy in their

present lives.” Novice readers sometimes “come to the text with limited and fragmented knowledge, low personal interest, and a smattering of strategies that they haphazardly apply. Thus, they need a considerable amount of scaffolding that aids them in building a meaningful base of content knowledge and the seed of personal interest” (Alexander and Jetton, 2000, p. 7). Duke (2000) research discovered an extreme dearth of nonfiction materials in the elementary classrooms. A mean of 3.6 minutes per day were spent with informational texts in the classrooms she studied and few non-fiction texts were found in the library or displayed within the class. Both Duke (2000) and Collier (2006) found that students in lower socioeconomic groups were exposed to fewer minutes in informational text than their higher socioeconomic counterparts. Students may need explicit scaffolding and support to be able to read expository texts effectively since they are structured so differently from narrative texts or fiction (Street, 2002). Understanding informational texts, then, is more difficult than understanding narrative for nearly all students (Williams, 2000). Research by Bell and Caspari (2002) to improve comprehension of non-fiction increased the exposure to and specific instruction of this genre. Their results found that students increased their ability to understand non-fiction by using the specific reading strategies for informational text. Nonfiction reading and mathematics are most often taught in isolation.

Fountas and Pinnell (2006) state, “We need to place greater emphasis on information texts in schools because nonfiction is the most frequently read kind of text outside schools – over 96% of texts on the internet are expository. One simply cannot be an informed citizen without reading a great deal of information text. Even if you only listen to the news on TV, you are still processing written expository texts (just) as read aloud. (p. 429-430). Ivey and Broaddus (2000) state in *The Reading Teacher*: Additionally, if reading nonfiction materials increases students’ depth of knowledge in the content areas, and (would) probably help students score higher on the standardized tests that are of such concern to teachers and administrators (Ivey and Braddus 2000). All the material in ***Leveled Texts for Differentiated Content- Area Literacy*** is specifically designed to enhance the comprehension of the non-fiction text.

Providing differentiated text is not enough. Students need to be able to access the content of the non-fiction text. This means not just the ability to read, but the capability to acquire information and knowledge, understand it, and then be able to process it. The ***Leveled Texts for Differentiated Content- Area Literacy*** program provides opportunities for learning and teaching literacy skills within the content areas based on best practices in reading education. The learning objectives for nonfiction reading and nonfiction writing are stated in the lesson plan. Some of the strategies for nonfiction reading include: making connections, visualizing, finding details, identifying the main idea, comparing and contrasting, identifying facts and opinion, creating questions from the text, summarizing, identifying causes and effects, and identifying important ideas. These are the same strategies that proficient readers (Fountas and Pinnell 2006; Harvey 1998; Keene and Zimmerman 2007; Pressley, 2000, Pressley 2001). “The research on comprehension strategy teaching provides powerful evidence that most struggling readers (and many not so struggling readers) benefit enormously when we can construct lessons that help make the comprehension processes visible” (Allington, 2001, p. 98). Pressley states, “The case is very strong that teaching elementary, middle school, and high school students to use a repertoire of comprehension strategies increases their comprehension of text. Teachers should model and explain comprehension strategies, have their students practice using such strategies with teacher support, and let students know they are expected to continue using the strategies when reading on their own. Such teaching should occur across every school day, for as long as required to get all readers using the strategies independently -- which means including it in reading instruction for years” (Pressley, 2001). Bluestein (2010) remarks, “for most students, the integration of comprehension strategy instruction does not simply take place

through osmosis. For our struggling readers, who require explicitness and direction to internalize instruction, expanding their understanding of determining importance will enable them to navigate anything they choose to read more effectively (p. 600) Specific support is provided in the Teacher Resource Guide for *Leveled Texts for Differentiated Content- Area Literacy* to ensure that teachers, whether content or reading teachers, can provide the explicit teaching of the non-fiction literacy skills students need to be successful.

Another unique feature of *Leveled Texts for Differentiated Content- Area Literacy* is the three tiered graphic organizers provided in each lessons. One graphic organizer is intended for on-grade students, one is written to challenge above-grade-level students, and one is scaffolded to support below-grade-level students. “Teachers use tiered activities so all students focus on essential understandings, and skills, but at different levels of complexity, abstractness, and open-ended. By keeping the focus of the activity the same, but providing routes of access at varying degrees of difficulty, the teacher maximizes the likelihood that (1) each student comes away with pivotal skills and understandings and (2) each student is appropriately challenged” (Tomlinson, 1999, p. 83). Brassell and Rasinski (2010) suggest that “an effective classroom can be organized like a good high school athletics program, which usually has a varsity team, a junior varsity team, and a freshman team. Not all students are ready yet to perform at the most advanced level, but that does not mean they should be denied the opportunity to practice and perform” (p. 65-66). By using the tiered graphic organizers, all students can “practice” their literacy skills while “performing” and demonstrating what they are learning in the core content.

Graphic organizers are effective for all learners. “Initial rehearsal occurs when the information first enters the working memory. If the learner cannot attach sense or meaning, and if there is not time for further processing, then the new info is likely to be lost. Providing sufficient time to go beyond the initial process to secondary rehearsal allows the learner to review the information, to make sense of it, to elaborate on the details, and to assign value and relevance, thus increasing significantly the change of long term storage (Sousa, 2006, p. 87). This is especially helpful for English Language Learners (Hill and Flynn 2006). Chularut and DeBacker (2004) studied the use of concept mapping with English Language Learners. The results of his study found that “concept mapping group was found to have significantly greater achievement gains than the individual study plus discussion group” (p. 259). In addition to these benefits, they concluded “that concept mapping appears to promote the use of self-monitoring and knowledge acquisition strategies and to increase self-efficacy for learning from English text.” (p. 261). The Teacher Resource Guide for the use of the Graphic Organizer in *Leveled Texts for Differentiated Content- Area Literacy* provides a specific section that supports the vocabulary and language needs for the English Language Learner. Tips for each particular lesson are provided including for small group instruction and hands-on activities. These additional scaffolds help ensure that ALL students are successful in meeting the objectives of the lessons.

The graphic organizers in the *Leveled Texts for Differentiated Content- Area Literacy* provide opportunities for the readers to attach meaning to what they read and to manipulate the information into their long-term memory. “Being asked to think about what you’ve just read is different from being asked to recall the text you’ve read. And quite different from being asked to simply copy information from that text into a blank on a worksheet or to match information in the text with answer stems on a multiple-choice test” (Allington, 2001, p. 87).

The goal of the graphic organizers in *Leveled Texts for Differentiated Content- Area Literacy* is to provide experiences that challenge students in their content knowledge, yet scaffold their reading ability. “The more we use both systems of representation – linguistic and nonlinguistic the better we are able to think about and recall knowledge. This is particularly relevant to the classroom, because studies have consistently shown that the primary way we present new knowledge to students is linguistic” (Marzano, Pickering, Pollack, 2001, p. 73). However, without additional sensory input – whether auditory or kinesthetic, we are only using one pathway for students to encounter content.

Above-grade-level readers are asked to think deeper about the content, analyze the text, form opinions, and make judgments. The on-grade-level readers are challenged, and expected to demonstrate their master of the content standards and literacy objectives. The below-grade-level readers have additional scaffolds built into each graphic organizer which ensures their success and extends their learning of the content while developing their literacy skills. “Graphic organizers give students the ability to identify main concepts, assign specific labels to concepts and sort relevant and non-relevant cues,” (Payne, 2005, p. 100). These are all skills needed to be successful in reading and comprehending non-fiction texts.

Grouping strategies are another approach for differentiation. As previously noted, in *Texts for Differentiated Content- Area Literacy* students are grouped by reading level and provided with leveled texts that match their academic levels. The tiered graphic organizers also are intended to match students to skill levels in order to increase their success in comprehending the subject matter text. “A big part of a differentiation is flexible grouping, but not individualized instruction -- that is a bit of a myth. No one is asking everyone to do independent programs for every single child. We're talking about flexible grouping within the class and making sure that you're adjusting your instruction” (Dyck 2008). Specific routines in *Texts for Differentiated Content- Area Literacy* are generated to meet the learning needs of different groups of students. However, students not only work in homogeneous groups, but the Teacher Resource Guide of *Texts for Differentiated Content- Area Literacy* directs the teacher to create heterogeneous groups for some of the follow – up activities. As students are learning the same content, they are easily able to work together in mixed ability groups and contribute to the product. “Traditionally, schools have used tracking and other grouping strategies to help tailor instruction to the needs of diverse learners. Although tracking has allowed teachers to focus instruction on the needs of a homogenous classroom, it also has been problematic. The use of tracking has led to a lower standard for some students including English language learners, special education students, and a disproportionate number of minorities” (Englert, p.53 in Barley, et.al., 2002) . Tracking also has resulted in a less rigorous and enriched curriculum, which has allowed many students to slip through the cracks academically (Oakes & Wells, 1998). Research synthesis into the effectiveness of grouping examined “two very different approaches to grouping students — heterogeneous, or mixed-ability grouping, and homogeneous, or ability-level grouping. Studies of both of these grouping interventions report positive impacts on low-achieving students or at-risk students” (Barley, Lauer, Arens, Aphthorp, Englert, Snow, and Akiba, 2002, p. 60).

Another process that teachers might use to differentiate teaching is the use of Gardner’s Multiple Intelligences (Gardner 1983; Gardner, 1994; Moran; Kornhaber, Gardner 2006). “...by teaching in ways that are compatible with the way the brain learns, and by allowing students to demonstrate their knowledge and skills in a variety of ways, teachers are creating the conditions for high quality learning, better achievement, and greater success for all students (Hargis, 1995, p. 147). Multiple intelligences are defined as the abilities or intelligences inherent in all individuals: logical mathematical, visual spatial, verbal linguistic, rhythmic musical, bodily kinesthetic, interpersonal, and intrapersonal (Gardner 1983).

Another distinctive feature of *Leveled Texts for Differentiated Content- Area Literacy* is the deliberate integration assignments and assessments in the program. By utilizing different modalities, students are more successful in demonstrating their literacy skills within the content. Echevarria, Vogt, Short (2004) suggest that effective teachers of English Language Learners might consider the multiple intelligences of students in order to scaffold the learning and assessment of learning.

Each lesson *Leveled Texts for Differentiated Content- Area Literacy* begins with a content-based rap to spark students' interest and provide an introduction to the content to be learned. Students often hold negative attitudes about reading because of dull textbooks or being forced to read (Bean 2000). By beginning the learning with a rap, teachers are tapping into a different learning modality and motivating students. The use of chants increases literacy skills as well as content subject matter (Douville, 2001; Lloyd, 2003). Perhaps one of the most striking and underestimated things about the use of song ... is its capacity to engage the active side of people (Shaw, 2003).

The Need for Vocabulary Development

Marzano, et. al. (2001) states, "researchers have concluded systematic vocabulary instruction is one of the most important instruction interventions that teachers can use particularly with low achieving students" (p. 124). "One's vocabulary is highly predictive of one's level of reading comprehension" (Fountas and Pinnell, 2006, p.. 527). Content-area vocabulary is highly specialized with words that are not typically encountered in everyday life. Therefore, all students need explicit introduction to vocabulary words to understand the text. The task is even more complicated for English language learners and struggling readers. "Developing readers cannot be expected to simply 'pick up' substantial vocabulary knowledge exclusively through reading exposure without guidance. Specifically, teachers must design tasks that will increase the effectiveness of vocabulary learning through reading practice" (Feldman and Kinsella, 2005, p. 3).

Support for Vocabulary Development

It is not enough to give students a list of words and have them look up the definitions in dictionaries or glossaries. Students who are struggling with learning a language are not going to find the process easier by simply being given more words to sort through (Echevarria, Vogt, and Short, 2004). Struggling readers and English language learners need context-embedded activities that acquaint them with the necessary and most central words for comprehension of the content. *Leveled Texts for Differentiated Content- Area Literacy* provides these opportunities at the beginning of every lesson. "Direct instruction helps students learn difficult words, such as words that represent complex concepts that are not part of the students' everyday experiences. Direct instruction of vocabulary relevant to a given text leads to better reading comprehension" (Armbruster, et al., 2003). It is imperative to choose the right words to teach. "To responsibly prepare students for a challenging reading selection, a teacher must first critically analyze the text to determine which words are most central to comprehension and thus warrant more instructional time, then consider how to teach these terms in a productive manner, conveying both their meaning and import" (Feldman and Kinsella, 2005, p.3). Each lesson in *Leveled Texts for Differentiated Content- Area Literacy* gives teachers that head start by identifying for the teacher the key content vocabulary words and high-utility academic words that students might not know, which can greatly affect overall comprehension of the text. Effective vocabulary development involves a rich contextual environment in which students learn terms as they read content area text (Echevarria, et.al, 2004).

In the Teacher Resource Guide for *Leveled Texts for Differentiated Content- Area Literacy* definitions of the key words for the lessons are provided. Embedded in each lesson are a range of vocabulary-development strategies necessary for really comprehending the text and learning the new content concepts. Heterogeneous grouping supports struggling readers as they work with unknown words. Activities such as acting out new concepts and drawing meanings of targeted words support the development of vocabulary (Marzano, et. al., 2001; Tankersley, 2005. “It is important for content vocabulary to be learned independent of the text in which it is found because many students do not possess the tools to use context clues within a sentence to determine the meaning of an unknown word. “Developing readers cannot be expected to simply ‘pick up’ substantial vocabulary knowledge exclusively through reading exposure without guidance” (Feldman, et.al., 2005, p.3). ”By making discipline-specific ways of using language explicit, teachers can help adolescents, especially those who have little access to these ways of making meaning outside of school, better engage with school knowledge and more effectively develop disciplinary literacies across academic content areas,” (Fang and Schleppegrell, 2010 p. 596.

Developing Writing with Reading – The Reading/Writing Connection

“The structures and strategies that readers and writers use to organize, remember, and present messages are generally the same in reading and writing” (Langer, 2002, p. 33). If students are to successfully develop literacy skills, they must be able to read for comprehension and write for clarity of thought. “The type of prose that accounts for approximately 80% of the reading writing experiences students in the U.S. encounter during their school careers” (Langer 2002, p. 33). Hence, the need for developing skills in writing in non-fiction genres is imperative. The processes of reading and writing are inseparable and we should examine pedagogy in the light of these interrelationships. The two should be integrated in instructional settings..Each lesson *Leveled Texts for Differentiated Content- Area Literacy* identifies a non-fiction reading objective and a parallel non-fiction writing objective. This scaffolds students as they read the text as a “reader” and then read the text as a “writer”. For example, as students apply the compare/contrast strategy to understand the leveled text, they are then taught to write a compare/contrast essay. Notes from the tiered graphic organizers which are structured to support the reading and understanding of the text are then used to support the students’ writing. Allington suggests that an effective school organizational plan should have ““reading and writing ... integrated across all subject areas and a curriculum that featured wide reading and writing of informational texts as well as narratives would frame the lessons and activities, (Allington, 2001, p. 43).

Assessment

“When teachers know how students are progressing and where they are having trouble, they can use this information to make necessary instructional approaches, or offer more opportunities for practice. These activities can lead to improved student success” (Boston, 2002). Each lesson in *Leveled Texts for Differentiated Content- Area Literacy* contains assessments for evaluating how well students have met the objectives of the lesson. The assessment activities help pinpoint areas in which students did not grasp the concepts of the lesson. The form of the assessment varies from lesson to lesson. Some lessons provide students opportunities to choose how they would like to “show what they know”. There are a variety of ways to allow students choice in a classroom. Students often participate in learning activities where there is very little element of choice. However, when students have opportunities to choose some component of their learning process, they exhibit more motivation

and interest and feel like their learning is more relevant. “If we truly want students to learn to be responsible decision-makers when they leave school, we must begin to create opportunities for them to make important decision while they are still in school,” (Erwin, 1995, p 161). In the Assessment Activities in *Leveled Texts for Differentiated Content- Area Literacy* students may participate in multiple intelligences projects, leveled assessment questions, Bloom’s taxonomy questions, choices board activities, or menu of options projects.

Rubrics are also provided for open-ended assessments. Using these, both teachers and students know the specifics that define quality of the work. (Matusevich, O’Connor, and Hargett, 2009; McGatha and Darcy, 2010). Students have guidelines which support their work on the open-ended assessments.

“There are times that providing choices of assessment is not an option. If on the other hand, the learning is more content-based, more knowledge than skill, you may find that students can demonstrate that knowledge in many ways” (Erwin, 1995, p. 143). Preparing students for the state assessments means that they need to be able to answer multiple choice questions. Quizzes are provided in each lesson in *Leveled Texts for Differentiated Content- Area Literacy*. They include short-answer questions as well as forced choice questions. This type of assessment provides teachers opportunities to monitor the overall achievement of the class as the all students take the same quiz. The below-grade level students must use their literacy skills to respond accurately. However, all students must apply their content knowledge to demonstrate their master of the objective for the lesson.

21ST CENTURY LEARNING

“Adolescents entering the adult world in the 21st century will read and write more than at any other time in human history. They will need advanced levels of literacy to perform their jobs, run their households, act as citizens, and conduct their personal lives. They will need literacy to cope with the flood of information they will find everywhere they turn. They will need literacy to feed their imaginations so they can create the world of the future. In a complex and sometimes even dangerous world, their ability to read will be crucial” (Moore, Bean, Birdyshaw, and Rycik, 1999, p. 3). Twenty-first century literate students should be able to process information from a variety of sources and should be able to communicate effectively with others. We live in the information age – may read a bit of fiction or watch TV, but the majority of our daily lives involve reading, understanding and using language for the exchange of information. In the twenty-first century, all educators, regardless of specialty or level, must commit themselves to helping today’s students prepare of tomorrow by promoting literacy. ”Supportive classrooms where students can experience success with teachers skilled in teaching reading are key to helping all students prepare for the literacy demands they will face in society” (Tankersley, 2005, p. 43).

Leveled Texts for Differentiated Content- Area Literacy is unique in its use of interactive white boards for supportive learning activities. The interactive white board takes the place of traditional overhead projectors, blackboards, bulletin board displays, and document cameras. Anything on a computer can be projected onto the interactive whiteboard, which can be manipulated from either the computer for the whiteboard. One of the most important advantages to using interactive white boards in multi-need groups is that it can accommodate different learning styles – tactile, auditory, and visual. “Interactive applications are in demand for educators who want to involve their students in learning with technology. The electronic interactive whiteboard is a device that combines both of these attributes, offering shared learning experiences for large or small groups, (Bell, 2002). As reported in *e School News: Technology*

News for Today's K – 20 Educator “ student achievement (increased) by an average of 17 percentile points, according to new research that also confirms the experience, comfort, and skill level of teachers in using the technology has a huge impact on how effective they’ll be (Devaney, 2009). Marzano’s initial research (2009) supports the concept that interactive white boards increases student achievement. Demonstrating the use of information via the new technology also support students’ as they move into the 21st century.

Finally, each *Leveled Texts for Differentiated Content- Area Literacy* Teachers Resource Guide wraps up with a culminating activity. This activity is rich with activities that support and promote twenty-first century skills. Student projects incorporate creativity, innovation, critical thinking, and problem solving while being immersed in communication and collaboration. Although it is impossible to predate what will happen in the future or what today’s students will need to know five to ten years from now, we can predict that advances in technology will continue at a dizzying pace. What used to be considered literate – basic skills in reading, writing, and math is now woefully inadequate. To be literate in the twenty-first century truly encompasses not only proficiency in the “three R’s”, but also information, information, and communication literacy. As educators, we must be literate ourselves and then show our students how to learn for today and prepare for tomorrow. Perhaps the National Alliance of business sums it up best in its publication, “Building America’s Twenty-First Century Workforce” (2000): The current and future health of American’s twenty-first century economy depends directly on how broadly and deeply Americans reach a new level of literacy – ‘twenty-first century literacy’ – that includes strong academic skills, thinking, reasoning, teamwork skills, and proficiency in using technology.” (p. 5).

CONCLUSION

Developing students’ reading skills is a critical goal that may begin in the primary grades, but continues on through every grade level. With each successive grade, students must acquire increasing skills at reading and understanding a variety of texts, especially the non-fiction genre. *Leveled Texts for Differentiated Content- Area Literacy* provides teachers with valuable instructional tools and engaging materials and activities for increasing students’ literacy. Leveled texts, lessons, and activities in the program will not only provide instruction based on solid educational research, but also give students opportunities to learn and practice specific academic standards. Teacher Created Materials created this program to be used to foster literacy while supporting core content learning, to bridge gaps in content and understanding, and to prepare students for testing. Whether the students are above grade level, on grade level, below grade level, or English Language Learners, *Leveled Texts for Differentiated Content- Area Literacy* was developed to provide teachers with a way to integrate the teaching of different content while making accommodations for differences in students’ reading ability and levels of understanding. Based on solid research, by using *Leveled Texts for Differentiated Content- Area Literacy*, teachers will help students gain success. Our success as teachers in helping students see themselves as competent in the subjects we teach will affect the rest of their lives.

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