



Literacy at Hartford Public High School

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Making Literacy Part of Every Student's Middle and High School Experience from Adolescent Literacy Resources, Meltzer, et al.

During the 1980s and early 1990s, researchers posed two central questions. Can literacy skills be taught? And, if so, does direct instruction of literacy strategies correlate with greater student achievement?

Contrary to common beliefs, the research base in this area is solid and has proven consistent for more than a decade. We know a lot about how to teach reading to struggling adolescent readers. We know a variety of strategies that encourage successful literacy development. A substantial body of research point to promising reading comprehension strategies for adolescent learners. Difference do exist between better and poorer readers in metacognitive skills—methods for learning studying or solving problems, and awareness of one's own thinking processes. Nevertheless, researchers are in resounding agreement that poorer readers can be taught the strategies that better readers use. Researchers also concur about the necessary conditions for implementation: to make effective use of these cognitive and metacognitive strategies, students must learn the literacy strategies, be given time to practice and apply them in a variety of contexts, and use them to learn across the content areas.

Based on the research, the following combination of literacy best practices result in enhanced literacy for diverse learners. The practices relate to the following:

1. teacher strategies
2. a focus on reading and writing
3. the importance of speaking and listening
4. an emphasis on thinking
5. the establishment of student-centered classrooms

Mining the research yields a clear picture of the types of teaching and learning practices that scaffold literacy development and enhance content-area learning. The key is to have all of the identified best practices occurring regularly as part of every student's middle and high school program.

Teacher Strategies

The research supports literacy skills and strategies that are taught and used in context, rather than in isolation—a direct contradiction to the skill and drill worksheets often advocated for remediation. The research does not show strong results for students who learn skills in isolation and then are expected to apply or transfer those skills appropriately at their own discretion. However, ample evidence proves that a number of particular literacy strategies, when explicitly taught, modeled, and practiced, enhance the ability of secondary school students to use the reading and writing skills across the content areas. The research is particularly emphatic that reading comprehension can be greatly improved through regular use of certain strategies before, during, and after reading. Successful strategies include the use of anticipation guides, KWL, reciprocal teaching, graphic organizers, question generating, directed reading-thinking activity, think-alouds, sensory imagery, drama, art, and structured note taking. Reading and writing are complex and vary by context. Reading a scientific journal does not require the same set of skills as reading a historical novel. Writing geometric proofs, lab reports, stories, poems, and persuasive letters requires overlapping but not identical sets of skills. Moreover, people who are proficient in some aspects of reading and writing are novices at others. Modeling and using various other techniques are effective ways to make reading and writing visible and, therefore, to support the development of more sophisticated reading and writing skills.