High-Quality Trade Books and Content Areas: Planning Accordingly for Rich Instruction

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Integrating high-quality children's tradebooks into elementary content areas has long been considered a best-practice (Olness, 2007). When teachers choose to incorporate these texts into content area lessons, they are exposing students to art through the pictures and reaching an array of visual learners. Hoffman, Collins and Schickedanz (2015) state that teachers have difficulty discussing the concepts presented in the books. The goal is to strike a balance between the literacy skills and strategies needed to read the informational text, and the concepts that must be discussed (Hoffman, Collins & Schickedanz, 2015). In order to increase students' understanding, teachers must be able to successfully merge their book selection with a carefully scaffolded lesson plan (Fisher & Frey, 2015). This chapter presents a lesson plan template that assists teachers in planning for integrated instruction.

CURRENT CHALLENGES FACING TEACHERS

Choosing high-quality informational texts in the elementary grades can be overwhelming and time-consuming. Often curricula materials may come with their own texts which do not involve as much planning. However, these texts can be dull, especially in an artistic sense, and often do not accommodate the range of concepts which need to be conveyed in a unit (Hoffman, Collins & Schickedanz, 2015). While teachers may possess excellent pedagogical skills, their lack of practice in cross-curricular integration may prevent them from wanting to attempt such endeavors, especially given the high-stakes environments in which many teachers work (Hoffman, Collins & Schickedanz, 2015). According to Hoffman, Collins and Schickedanz, "Even highly skilled, experienced teachers found discussion of concepts during read- alouds challenging in practice" (365). Teachers may become too focused on the literacy skills and strategies involved in reading informational text and overlook the possibilities for engaging in rich discussions about the concepts (Hoffman, Collins & Schickedanz, 2015). With many school districts focusing on the preparation of students for standardized tests in literacy and math, other content areas can be overlooked, and teachers are forced to weave this knowledge into literacy instruction time. Therefore, the teachers lack practice in providing full lessons in other content areas such as science.

LITERATURE REVIEW

According to Adams and Pegg (2012), literacy and content area learning are in a constant state of change: "One dimension relates to shifting understandings regarding student learning, and the other dimension involves the relationship between content and literacy" (p. 151). Citing the work of previous researchers, Adams and Pegg argue that discipline-specific discourse can be taught through literacy practices; that is, the way the students talk about math, science, engineering and technology can be learned through literacy practices in the classroom. Moreover, since discipline-specific discourse are used by authors to create informational texts, using such texts can lead to increased understanding in content areas.

Integrating high-quality children's trade books into elementary content areas has long been considered a best-practice (Olness, 2004). More specifically, high-quality informational texts can assist students in learning concepts in the STEM areas; using these texts with rich visuals and vocabulary forges a link between the arts and the STEM focus, creating the use of STEAM. Yopp and Yopp (2012) state that students' engagement with informational texts more richly promotes their knowledge of content areas by teaching them vocabulary, text structure (such as compare and contrast),