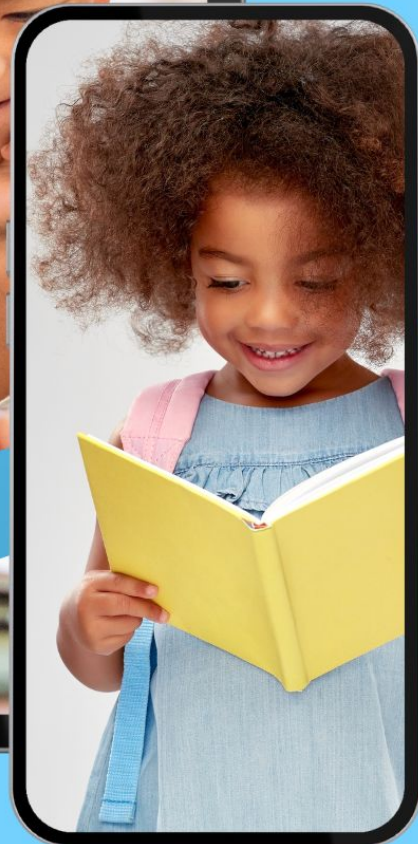


**FLA Journal Fall 2023**



# The Science of Reading & Literacies

Volume 3, No. 2



### **Message from FLA President, Iris Borghese**

The Florida Literacy Association (FLA) is a group of working, passionate professionals who volunteer their time, talents, and expertise to further the cause of literacy in our state. As the new President, I am so incredibly honored to be part of a team so clearly focused on the mission of our organization. That mission is **Promote quality literacy instruction, clarify educational issues for decision makers, support research in literacy, and advocate life-long reading**. As a board, we all agree that one excellent way we carry out our mission is through our publications such as the *Florida Literacy Journal (FLJ)*.

*Florida Literacy Journal* is a peer-reviewed publication of the Florida Literacy Association. Published three or four times a year, this publication offers scholarly writings of educators, working teachers, graduate students, university/college faculty and others. Authors submit manuscripts of their original studies, observations, literature reviews and other work for peer review by FLJ's review team. Using a standard rubric, which stresses the submitted work's pertinence to the FLA audience and classroom practice, the reviewers make recommendations, and the editors compile accepted articles for publication.

This fall edition showcases articles with ideas that impact literacy acquisition and instruction. The FLA editors have selected article submissions which help us reflect on our practice and support our endeavors toward fulfilling our mission! The articles highlight research-proven instructional practices and concepts that impact student learning. I would like to thank our publication committee and members of the review team for dedicating their time and expertise to ensuring that *Florida Literacy Journal* reflects high quality, relevant, and beneficial to educators. It truly is a labor of love!

The Florida Literacy Association invites you to join our passion for life-long learning and share your passion for learning with others. As educators, you combine content expertise with the science of learning and the art of teaching to make learning come alive in your classrooms EVERY day! Please take some time to immerse and recharge yourself with this edition of *Florida Literacy Journal*!

Thank you for choosing to educate our Florida students! On behalf of the FLA Board, we appreciate you and wish you a happy, productive, and successful 2023-2024 school year.

Iris Borghese  
Florida Literacy Association President  
State Regional Literacy Director



### **Message from FLJ Editors**

This edition of the Florida Literacy Journal explores the multi-faceted areas of the science of reading and literacies. Articles in this issue explore the intersection of the science of reading, multi-tiered systems of support and transdisciplinary literacy, using YA Literature to embrace student choice, writing about what you read, supporting developing reading intervention practices grounded in the simple view of reading framework, selective mutism, social competence and the ELA classroom, and music education and its links to language and literacy instruction.

As we envision the future, it is time for us to expand our thinking about the science of reading to include the robust research available and share it with practitioners. As you explore these articles, we hope that you will ponder how, if at all, these initiatives, and trends influence, affect, or alter your classroom practices.

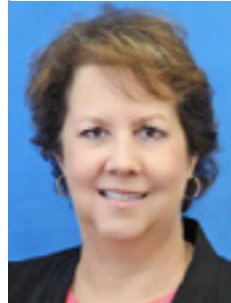
As Editors of the FLJ, we take this opportunity to express our sincere gratitude to authors who have chosen FLJ to disseminate their research and practice. Further, we would like to thank Joyce Warner, our vicechair and publications chair, reviewers, and other supporting staff for the success of this journal. We are more than happy to receive contributions for our next issue (Transdisciplinary learning, leading, writing and teaching) from teachers, doctoral candidates, teacher-educator researchers, advocates of teaching and learning, and scholars to ensure the consistency and the success of the Florida Literacy Journal.

Wishing peace and safety to all,

Elsie Lindy Olan  
(University of Central Florida)



Rebecca Lovering Powell  
(Florida Southern College)



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## The Science of Reading and Literacies

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### **Call for Manuscripts:**

The editors invite submissions of manuscripts for *The Florida Literacy Journal*, the refereed journal of the Florida Literacy Association. We invite submissions geared toward improving literacy instruction and innovation at all levels with a firm grounding in current theory and research. Suggested topics include literacy project descriptions, research or theoretical pieces with pedagogical implications, or issue-centered pieces addressing timely literacy topics of local, state or national interest. Preference is given to articles that most directly impact Florida learners. While theoretical and research articles are invited, please keep in mind that this is a journal primarily for FLA members, who are predominantly practicing teachers and literacy specialists. We encourage articles from PK-12 and adult-level practitioners, literacy researchers and doctoral students, as well as articles written by other experts in the field.

The *Florida Literacy Journal's* audience is largely composed of PK-12 practitioners in the state of Florida. The FLJ editors are interested in exploring topics of interest to Florida educators and valuable in their daily literacy practices. We welcome submissions from researchers as well as PK-12 teachers. The thematic calls listed below are not intended to be exhaustive, but merely meant to be helpful to authors as they consider topics for publication. Please review the submission guidelines before submitting a manuscript.

Submission Guidelines are online at: <http://flareads.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/FLJ-CallForSubmissions2020.pdf>

APA 7<sup>th</sup> edition in the Call for Manuscript Guidelines [https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/research\\_and\\_citation/apa\\_style/apa\\_formatting\\_and\\_style\\_guide/general\\_format.html](https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/research_and_citation/apa_style/apa_formatting_and_style_guide/general_format.html).

### ***Ongoing Annual Theme: Florida Standards in Action***

FLJ has an ongoing interest in submissions related to the implementation of the Florida's B.E.S.T. Standards. Manuscripts that highlight how individual teachers have adapted their instruction to integrate the arts, technology, and the content areas are of particular interest. We also have interest in articles that discuss how districts have addressed the challenges and lessons learned related to the implementation of Florida's B.E.S.T. Standards

### ***Ongoing Call for Book Reviews***

FLJ has an ongoing interest in reviews of professional texts related to teaching and the themed calls for 2022-23. Reviews should be between 750-1000 words and should offer an overview of the book, not a detailed synopsis or an in-depth essay. Examples of published book reviews can be found in previous editions of FLJ.

### ***Upcoming Themes***

Transdisciplinary Learning, Leading, Writing and Teaching- Winter 2024-Vol. 4 No.1

Classroom Teachers as Leaders- Fall 2024-Vol. 4 No. 2

**Learning and Leading at the intersection of the Sciences of Reading, Multi-Tiered Systems  
of Support, and Transdisciplinary Literacy**

Enrique A. Puig, Ed.D.  
University of Central Florida

Jennifer A. Manak, Ph.D.  
Rollins College

Earlisha J. Whitfield, Ph.D.  
University of Central Florida

**Abstract**

In this article, researchers identified five critical universal lesson design considerations that should be incorporated into instruction to promote transdisciplinary learning:

1. Read from diverse disciplines and genres to seek answers to complex problems that can be summarized, synthesized, and communicated on a variety of platforms or styles.
2. Use curriculum content that is age-appropriate, appealing (visually and aurally), and relevant to encourage interest and motivation.
3. Focus on transdisciplinary learning that is intensely collaborative and grounded on the concept that knowledge is socially constructed through facilitating intentional and coherent student talk.
4. Combine multiple knowledge sources to create new knowledge that serves as a springboard for further transdisciplinary investigations.
5. Develop facilitative skills that tap into learners' multisensory orientation by focusing on students' external (taste, smell, touch, sight, hearing) and internal (curiosity, imagination, metacognition, monitoring, timing) sensory mechanisms.

Authors recognized that we live in an inherently transdisciplinary environment and that we must teach students to read widely, think broadly, and communicate globally in this transdisciplinary world. Teaching for transdisciplinary literacy involves collaborative learning, critical reading of a wide range of texts, and coherently communicating using knowledge from multiple disciplines. Because becoming literate is a uniquely personal and internalized journey, we use the preposition “for” when we are talking about teaching for transdisciplinary literacy. However, we can create conditions in our classroom for students to become transdisciplinary literate by providing opportunities to look across disciplinary silos and integrate their academic scientific knowledge and spontaneous lived experiences as they read and communicate.

*Keywords:* The Sciences of Reading, Multi-Tiered Systems of Support, Transdisciplinary Literacy

Currently, it appears that education is having a love affair with contemporary and rediscovered decades old research under the Science(s) of Reading label that strongly emphasizes phonemic awareness, phonics, and spelling instruction to the exclusion of oral language development, vocabulary development, background knowledge building, comprehension, and writing. If we are genuinely going to improve learning and instruction, we must unfold, not unpack, the Sciences of Reading, Multi-Tiered Systems of Support, and Transdisciplinary Literacy. We argue that we need to “unfold” rather than “unpack”. Consider what occurs after we travel. When we travel and return home, we unpack-laundry-and PUT AWAY. Experienced educators have seen the same occur with education initiatives where curriculum (i.e., assessments, content, professional learning opportunities, instructional practices) is unpacked-laundryed-and put away. Unfolding allows for information to be revealed



as it is laid out further. Unfolding of the Sciences of Reading allows meaning to be made while it is integrated within the classroom context and lived experiences of the students in the classroom. Additionally, there is a reason we use the phrase “learning and leading” instead of the popular “teaching and learning”. Learning in a school setting should never be just about student learning (Sai & Siraj, 2015). Stephen Covey (2013) reminds us that we must continuously be sharpening our saw. Sharpening our saw is about balance and self-renewal.

Words are powerful. A simple change in terms or phrasing can mean the difference between successful implementation, mediocre implementation, or failure to launch. Moreover, when our goal is to improve transdisciplinary literacy learning and leading, we need to look at the intersection of the Sciences of Reading, Multi-Tiered Systems of Support, and the role of convergence education (F.C.I.S.E., 2022) or Transdisciplinary Literacy. Vygotsky’s (1992) work highlights the role of language as a tool for thinking. Consequently, the primary thesis of this article is to update our language to upgrade our thinking by challenging existing vocabulary as a medium to improve professional learning and instruction.

### **Sciences of Reading**

The science(s) of reading is broadly accepted as an evolving, incomplete, and massive, transdisciplinary corpus of scientifically based reading research that deconstructs how students learn to read to impact literacy learning and inform instruction. The key operative words to remember from the previous sentence is “evolving, incomplete, and massive”. Much of the research is derived from work in developmental psychology, educational psychology, cognitive science, and cognitive neuroscience. Additionally, this research has taken place globally over decades, and it comes from multiple studies conducted in many languages. It's important to

highlight that while it is usually and erroneously linked exclusively with phonics instruction, the Sciences of Reading embraces a much broader gamut of skills that include phonological awareness, fluency, vocabulary, comprehension, oral language, spelling, writing, executive functioning, motivation, and content knowledge.

The contemporary reading reform movement is the latest chapter of a long history of controversies, dating from at least the early 20th century. Throughout the decades, attention has focused on how teachers teach reading (typically including specific concern for phonics instruction), standardized test scores (including international comparisons), and a changing list of hypothetical causes for disappointing test scores (including progressivism, whole language, and balanced literacy).

The Science of Reading, initially introduced in the 1830s, has evolved over decades and continues to evolve as new research is presented. It is a large, transdisciplinary body of research about reading and issues associated with literacy learning and instruction that draws on education, cognitive psychology, developmental psychology, and neuroscience. Currently, it primarily refers to cognitive research that addresses what happens in the brains of high-progress and low-progress readers. This research is frequently translated to promote systematic and explicit phonics instruction with an emphasis on learning to decode and encode words. Consequently, this research gets overstated by publishers of select programs with a strong focus on systematic and explicit phonemic awareness, phonics, and spelling instruction. Yet, the best quasi-experimental, empirical studies have shown that teaching phonics is moderately better than other approaches. Many literacy experts and Reading Hall of Fame members caution against forgetting that at its core, phonics is a means to an end. In 2000, the National Reading Panel

report, a federally funded meta-analysis on scientifically based reading research stated, “Programs that focus too much on the teaching of letter-sounds relations and not enough on putting them to use are unlikely to be very effective.”

The Science of Reading is not just emphasizing the need for phonics instruction. Yet, a foundational expectation for every literacy teacher is a strong understanding of the content of the alphabetic system. In the English language there are 26 letters/graphemes and approximately 44 sounds/phonemes. A simple view of a complex relationship can be problematic leading to misguided, with the best intention, literacy instruction. An understanding of the concepts, the terminology, the logic, and the essential principles of the linguistic system form a critical body of knowledge for every literacy teacher.

When you have mastered the content of the alphabetic system in English, you have taken an important step in assuring you have the pedagogical content foundation for providing effective phonics instruction. Strong phonics instruction, with a clear understanding that it is a means to an end, is an essential component of your professional expertise in literacy teaching. The Sciences of Reading are not a published program, series, or prescribed sequence of instructional practices with select decodable materials. Although the latter may be construed based on misinterpreted translational data.

### **Multi-Tiered Systems of Support**

Multi-Tiered Systems of Support promotes a synergistic network for multisensory instruction across all content areas by integrating general education and special education services (including talented and gifted) to support all students in a humane and respectfully inclusive learning environment. It was conceived out of the amalgamation of the Response to

Intervention/Instruction and Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports initiatives in 1997.

The term Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports comes from a 1997 amendment of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). It described procedures used to characterize and reinforce sought after behaviors in school.

Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS) is a conceptual framework that supports high-quality, research-validated instructional practices based on students' strengths and needs (Freeman, Miller, & Newcomer, 2015; Puig & Froelich, 2022; Pullen, van Dijk, Gonsalves, Lane, & Ashworth, 2018). Using dynamic and static assessments, strengths and needs are identified by monitoring students' progress over time. Teacher decision-making and changes to instruction are grounded on students' response to instruction. MTSS promotes a coherent and intentional system for instruction by connecting multiple factors, at different levels, that cultivate positive student behavior and learning. Ideally, MTSS provides and matches research-validated instructional practices and materials to students' strengths and needs academically, socially, and behaviorally (Freeman, Miller, & Newcomer, 2015).

Much of the current literature on Multi-Tiered Systems of Support and Response to Intervention/Instruction (RtI/I) uses the terms synonymously and interchangeably. We do not. When the rubber hits the road at the school level and the classrooms where teacher-colleagues and students reside, distinguishing MTSS from RtI/I is critical. In many cases, RtI/I is implemented superfluously, catering to a small population of students destined for long-term special education classes because of blurred definitions of the terms. Multi-Tiered Systems of Support is a pedagogical and hebegogical ecosystem. It is a comprehensive transformational structure that has the potential to impact all students, from low progress to gifted and talented,

across disciplines and grade levels. Keep in mind that transformation divorced from reality breeds delusion.

For the human body, as a living organism, to function in a robust and healthy manner effectively and efficiently, it requires integrated multi-tiered systems of support. The circulatory system, the digestive system, the endocrine system, the exocrine system, the immune system, the muscular system, the nervous system, urinary system, reproductive system, respiratory system, and skeletal system all work together in an integrated fashion to ensure that we function productively in the society we live in. When one system is deficient or defective, it usually impacts other systems which in turn impact other systems. A sore back, a sore throat, a headache all impacts how all the other systems will respond. As we age, our bodies require that new multi-tiered systems of support be implemented to ensure an ongoing dynamic, healthy, and productive life.

Imagine a classroom, a school, or a school district as a human body or entity as a living, growing, evolving organism that requires multi-tiered systems of support to function effectively and efficiently. Experienced teacher-colleagues understand that when any system is deficient in a learning environment, learning is usually negatively impacted and a call for solution-seeking is in order.

The question always arises regarding what are the “systems.” Using a literature review process, structured interviews with teacher-colleagues, and school-based focus groups with school administrators, we created the following illustrative list of some of the closely networked systems for consideration that need to be in place to ensure effective and efficient

implementation of a MTSS structure for comprehensive instruction. The multi-tiered systems that emerged are:

1. Multi-Tiered System for Assessment and Evaluation (e.g., formative/dynamic, and summative/static).
2. Multi-Tiered System for Ongoing Professional Learning for everyone that interacts with students (e.g., literacy coach, literacy leadership team, online/offline professional learning).
3. Multi-Tiered System for Parent Support or Involvement (e.g., newsletter, parent night, parent workshops, Parent Teacher Association/Organization).
4. Multi-Tiered System for Curriculum Content (e.g., media center, leveled book room, school, district, and state resource teachers).
5. Multi-Tiered System for Community Relations (e.g., social services, school outreach, phone services, counseling services, health services).
6. Multi-Tiered System for Developing Distributive Teacher Leadership (e.g., School Advisory Committee, college/university courses, professional pathways.).
7. Multi-Tiered System for Response to Intervention/Instruction (e.g., Tier 1 universal core instruction for all students, Tier 2 targeted instruction/intervention for approximately 20% of students, Tier 3 intensive instruction/intervention for approximately 5% of students).

Utilizing Multi-Tiered Systems of Support increases the likelihood that a comprehensive transdisciplinary literacy framework for instruction grounded in the Sciences of Reading is implemented successfully with lasting results. Is it time intensive? Yes! Like any nutritious

homecooked meal, it takes the right healthy ingredients, the right utensils, and time to simmer under a vigilant cook.

### **Convergence Education (Transdisciplinary Literacy)**

Over time, educators come to the realization that proficient learners are transdisciplinary literate (Manak & Puig, 2021; Puig & Froelich, 2022). They crosscut information and knowledge from various disciplines to function, inform decisions, make sense, and create. If our goal is to prepare global-ready students for productive lives and careers, we need to build upon traditional curriculum content, using knowledge across disciplinary core ideas, engaging students in becoming transdisciplinary literate, and developing learners who are mindful of the world around them. Ultimately, our goal for globally minded students is to be responsible, humane, self-directing, self-regulating, and self-transforming independent learners (Tucker, 2017).

Teaching for transdisciplinarity is a holistic, student-centered mode of instruction focused on creating conditions to motivate and empower students while drawing knowledge from a variety of disciplines (Kaufman, Moss, & Osborn, 2003). The term, transdisciplinarity, was originally coined in 1970 by Jean Piaget, Edgar Morin, Andre Lichnerowicz, and Erich Jantsen (Richards & Kroeger, 2012). At the time, these scholars were investigating an innovative curriculum that blurred disciplinary silos to provide a multifaceted view of a topic or focus of study (Klein, 2006; Kaufman, Moss, & Osborn, 2003; Nicoescu, 2011). Consequently, we rely on the concept of transdisciplinarity and its implications for transdisciplinary literacy learning and instruction, or leading, in our attempt to re-envision a more inclusive broad-spectrum education. The International Literacy Association (ILA) defines literacy as “the ability to identify, understand, interpret, create, compute, and communicate using visual, audible, and



digital materials across disciplines and in any context” (2020). Building on ILA’s definition of literacy, we define transdisciplinary literacy as the act of zigzagging back and forth, moving beyond disciplinary literacy to inform instruction that requires the convergence of disciplines to create new knowledge addressing real-world issues. Transdisciplinary literacy provides opportunities for knowledge to be constructed, deconstructed, and reconstructed (Crouch & Cambourne, 2020).

At the classroom level, transdisciplinary literacy learning usually comes to fruition through project-based and inquiry-based learning. Furthermore, teachers foster student inquiry, critical thinking, and reflection through collaborative inquiry and inquiry-based questioning (Jacques, Cian, Herro, & Quigley, 2019; Richards & Kroeger, 2012). Teacher-talk and interactions with students is a powerful scaffold (Darling-Hammond, Wise, & Klein, 2019; Hattie, 2009). As students generate questions and seek solutions to real-world issues, teacher talk and interactions can highlight how sciences, language arts, mathematics, arts, and social sciences impact students’ solution-seeking endeavors. Teachers with a transdisciplinary orientation scaffold students’ critical understanding through transformation, reflection, evaluation, and application (Crouch & Cambourne, 2020) which leads to making deep meaning grounded in spontaneous lived experiences and constructing new scientific academic knowledge.

We have found that there are five critical universal lesson design considerations that should be incorporated into instruction to promote transdisciplinary learning:

1. Read from diverse disciplines and genres to seek answers to complex problems that can be summarized, synthesized, and communicated on a variety of platforms or styles.

2. Use curriculum content that is age-appropriate, appealing (visually and aurally), and relevant to encourage interest and motivation.
3. Focus on transdisciplinary learning that is intensely collaborative and grounded on the concept that knowledge is socially constructed through facilitating intentional and coherent student talk.
4. Combine multiple knowledge sources to create new knowledge that serves as a springboard for further transdisciplinary investigations.
5. Develop facilitative skills that tap into learners' multisensory orientation by focusing on students' external (taste, smell, touch, sight, hearing) and internal (curiosity, imagination, metacognition, monitoring, timing) sensory mechanisms.

We recognize that we live in an inherently transdisciplinary environment and that we must teach students to read widely, think broadly, and communicate globally in this transdisciplinary world. Teaching for transdisciplinary literacy involves collaborative learning, critical reading of a wide range of texts, and coherently communicating using knowledge from multiple disciplines. Because becoming literate is a uniquely personal and internalized journey, we use the preposition “for” when we are talking about teaching for transdisciplinary literacy. However, we can create conditions in our classroom for students to become transdisciplinary literate by providing opportunities to look across disciplinary silos and integrate their academic scientific knowledge and spontaneous lived experiences as they read and communicate.

We all come to teaching with our own funds of knowledge from a variety of disciplines (Moll, et. al., 1992). Increasing knowledge of transdisciplinary literacy is achieved over time by

our engagement in learning and leading. Teaching for transdisciplinarity is a critical factor in any classroom where students are being asked to read the world and the word (Freire, 1970).

### **Summary**

We started our conversation on the Sciences of Reading, MTSS, and transdisciplinary literacy with the human body metaphor and mentioned a cooking metaphor to highlight the fact that the multi-tiered systems of support in our bodies are nourished by what we put in it, the tools we use to exercise it, and the time we dedicate to it. We continue to be aware of the overlapping and interconnected nature of neighborhoods, environments, and real-world issues at a time when climate change, health, economics, and pandemics are urgent scientific issues. As the United Nations, UNESCO, and the U.S. Government have recognized, these are not simply problems to be solved by expertise in any one siloed discipline but require a transdisciplinary approach demanding the integration of many fields at the intersection of the Sciences of Reading, Multi-Tiered Systems of Support, and Transdisciplinary Literacy. Our call to action—implement well-integrated research validated instructional practices that prepare students to read the word and the world (Freire, 1970) in order to become positive critical thinking citizens who collaboratively work across disciplines, cultures, and identities to address pressing, transdisciplinary scientific issues of our neighborhoods, environments, and world.

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### **Authors' Biographies**

Enrique A. Puig ([enrique.puig@ucf.edu](mailto:enrique.puig@ucf.edu)) is the director of the Morgridge International Reading Center in the College of Community Innovation and Education at the University of Central Florida in Orlando, Florida.

Jennifer A. Manak ([jmanak@rollins.edu](mailto:jmanak@rollins.edu)) is a professor of education at Rollins College in Winter Park, Florida.

Earlisha J. Whitfield ([earlisha.whitfield@ucf.edu](mailto:earlisha.whitfield@ucf.edu)) is an assistant professor of reading in the College of Community Innovation and Education at the University of Central Florida in Orlando, Florida.

## **Using Young Adult Literature to Embrace Student Choice and Take a Stand**

Carmen Marroquin, PhD  
Florida International University

Rachelle Savitz, PhD  
East Carolina University

### **Abstract**

In today's educational landscape, many researchers note that providing students with high-quality books is essential to learn about other cultures and practices. This promotes empathy in students and increases their critical thinking. Empathy induces prosocial behavior in students and adolescence is a time for emotional growth. To address that, the unit in this article operationalized culturally relevant and sustaining pedagogies. This manuscript details a widely known book pass method in a Florida secondary English language arts classroom. Students chose a novel to read and analyzed it as they read. They also answered questions created to address state standards for reading. Finally, they created visuals using technology that addressed the 21st-century skills that all students should have. The manuscript provides a window into this classroom with details so that other teachers can replicate it if they choose.

*Keywords:* reading, critical thinking, empathy, discussion, culturally relevant pedagogy, culturally sustaining pedagogy

In her powerful *Ted Talk* outlining the dangers of a single story, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie says, "Many stories matter. Stories have been used to dispossess and to malign. But stories can also be used to empower and humanize. Stories can break the dignity of a person. But



stories can also repair that broken dignity” (2009). This quote exemplifies our goal as teachers in a Language Arts classroom. We want to be intentional about what we teach towards one main goal: to create empathetic human beings who can articulate their ideas and understand other sides of an issue (Hays, 2021; Mirra, 2018; Rainey, 2017;). This type of instruction by teachers provides space for students to question their beliefs and biases (Milner, 2021; Nieto & Bode, 2018) with one another as a group (Fisher et al., 2020; Tovani, 2021), and engaging in opportunities to learn from the different perspectives of the characters and diverse perceptions of their peers (Borsheim-Black & Sarigiandes, 2019; Savitz et al., 2023; Savitz & Kane, *in press*)

With the ease of accessing social media, students are frequently flooded with ideas from various people, such as parental beliefs, friends and family comments, and information on Twitter, Snapchat, or any of the plethora of ways to connect with people across the globe. As students hear updates and events, they may not know *how* to question, evaluate, or critique what they hear or read, especially connected to politicized societal issues such as Black Lives Matter and other nationwide protests in search of equality *and* equity. Without teacher direction and guidance, students may not understand how these issues, such as systemic oppression or new laws in Florida regarding what can and cannot get taught in a classroom, impact their lives, as they may believe that the situation happens to “others.”

For instance, the second author recently taught undergraduate students a Young Adult Literature course (Savitz et al., 2020). When discussing police brutality in *The Hate U Give* by Angie Thomas (2017) or immigration in *The Good Braider* by Terry Farish (2013), students openly admitted not initially understanding the multiple perspectives and reasons why immigrants fled to America. Other students grappled with learning that lived experiences are not

universal when it comes to the police always providing safety. These students may not have learned or explored this critical information without our class discussions. Having an open dialogue and critical discussion prompted them to challenge their beliefs, consider biases, leading to many developing critical awareness. Of course, the hope is for students to then move toward advocating for change (Picower & Mayorga, 2015; Skerrett et al., 2018).

We understand that teachers in many conservative and conservative-leaning states feel political and professional pressure to censor themselves and reject inclusive curricula and practices (Allen, 2022; Brown, 2021; Hui, 2022). Here in Florida is no different and it is not easy for teachers to instruct students on critically analyzing factual versus opinionated information, where students work together to pose questions that are relevant to them, that build on their experiences of the world, and that helps them to “understand and reshape reality” (Morrell, 2008). However, teachers can still guide their students to build on their knowledge so that they can become critical readers. Therefore, by establishing situations and an environment where questions and curiosity are at the forefront of our instruction, teachers may have the ability to provide equitable, culturally-sustaining instruction, using asset-based mindsets to understand and incorporate students’ diverse experiences and backgrounds (Compton-Lilly, 2020; Milner & Laughter, 2015), where students’ culture is a “vehicle for helping students acquire academic and school knowledge, cultural competence, and socio-political or critical consciousness” (Ladson-Billings & Dixson, 2022, p. 125). Our students do not need to wait until after high school for this level of instruction as English language arts provide an avenue for antiracist teaching (Borsheim-Black & Sarigianides, 2019).

### **Why Me? Why this Instruction? Why Now?**

I, first author (name redacted for review), and a colleague from the district, decided to transform my instruction to bring these issues front and center in students' lives through character exploration in texts representing diverse and inclusive characters and situations. The urban high school I taught at was a multi-ethnic, multilingual city in the Southeast United States. The school demographics are 49% Hispanic (of any race), 21% White, non-Hispanic, 20% Black, 5% Asian, and 5% other races. Although I understand the value of the current district English language arts curriculum, I felt that students needed to become more aware of the social construct of race. Specifically, how race influences many aspects of life because of the unequal resources available to members of specific racial/cultural communities (Gorski, 2008; Kozol, 1991; Johnson, 2015) and the impacts of systemic and institutional racism (DiAngelo, 2016).

I am also an immigrant who started and completed my schooling in the district where I teach. When I arrived in kindergarten, I did not speak English; English is my second language. I became a teacher because I want to help students see the value in themselves and help them realize that they are bringing a wealth of knowledge to school that they can use to make inferences in reading and writing. I have taught Intensive Reading and English Language Arts to secondary students in this district. I have seen how using literature they can relate to has transformed my students and engaged them in ways I have not seen otherwise. My philosophy in teaching has evolved over the years, and during this unit, I could see more clearly how culturally relevant pedagogy (CRP) (Ladson-Billings, 1995; 2021) is essential for students to thrive.

Additionally, I believe in what Bishop (1990) posited in how students need texts that provide mirrors of their lives and neighborhoods and windows into other people's lives and neighborhoods. Moreover, Stephanie Toliver (2020) astutely points out that we need to incorporate texts highlighting characters of color that experience joy and success. I want to not only allocate time and space for students to see themselves but also expose them to other cultures and experiences. I require critical thinking through analysis and discussion of literature that considers their culture as a young person living in an urban society (Paris, 2012). I want my students to become actively engaged with their novel, entering "the social worlds of the narratives...negotiating the problems [the characters] encountered, weighing difficult decisions, and experiencing characters' emotional-relational lives and the consequences of their decisions" (Ivey & Johnston, 2018, p. 144).

### **Creation of "Learning about Self and Others"**

As teachers faced with hard consequences and rules placed on us, it is not easy to introduce topics that could create tension or cause discomfort (Savitz et al., 2023; Tatum, 2015) for themselves or, potentially, for their students. However, it is up to us to start the process. Therefore, I chose to take a stand and create a unit that attempts to follow the Culturally Relevant Pedagogy and Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy (CSP) frameworks by Gay (2018), Ladson-Billings (1995; 2017; 2021), and Paris (2012) as it focuses on student learning, development of students' cultural competence, support critical consciousness, and "sustain[s] cultural and linguistic competence of their communities" (Paris, 2012, p. 95). The Culturally Relevant Pedagogy framework from Ladson-Billings provides the following criteria in teaching practice: "(a) a focus on student learning; (b) developing students' cultural competence; and (c) supporting

their critical consciousness” (2017, p. 142). To add to that, Paris provided CSP that adds the youth culture that students also bring to the classroom (2017, p. 29) to the framework. The idea is to sustain students’ cultures that can be derived from multiple avenues while sustaining the assets they already bring into society. Also, part of the goals of schooling is to build “critical consciousness” in students so that they know what the status quo is, how it affects them, and how they can be an agent of change (Ladson-Billings, 2017). Therefore, I tried to create an environment focused on students’ cultural competence and critical consciousness.

I acknowledge the district’s importance on test achievement and learning gains, but I also believe in pedagogy aligned with honoring students’ lived experiences and cultures. As an educator, I also understand that teachers must teach to specific standards. Therefore, as a veteran educator, I intentionally chose to step away from district-created scripted lessons meant for a one-size-fits-all approach and only focused on meeting adequate yearly progress on state standardized tests. I was fortunate to have an administration that trusted me and supported my ideas in the classroom. Additionally, the school district was supportive in that they did not ban books. Therefore, this six-week unit for my ninth-grade gifted students, “Learning about Self and Others,” incorporated standards from all required English language arts domains: speaking, listening, reading, and writing. We also attempted to bring conversations from character perspectives to invite students to share their experiences and questions, then connect learning to real-world situations and events.

Additionally, the unit incorporated diverse literature, including literary texts and current events, technology and multimedia tools, and wanted to promote student choice as much as possible. I hoped that as students started to see themselves in their chosen novel, they would

develop empathy through humanizing conversations about the situations faced and issues presented. Additionally, I want students to know that having unique perspectives and interpretations is okay, as our cultural identities influence our understanding of the text (Rosenblatt, 1994).

With a heavy focus on standards assessing the use of textual evidence and writing as a requirement in our district, as students read, they responded to teacher-provided text-dependent questions written based on the State Standards (See Table 1 for the potential use of these questions). These questions related to characterization, setting, plot, motif/figurative language, and theme. Students chose and responded to various questions from each category, using citations and textual evidence to support their analysis and inferences. Therefore, not only were students engaged in a literary text that they could relate to or based on their interests, but they were also writing and using higher-level and critical thinking skills to discuss and interact with the themes in the texts.

### **Selecting Novels for “Learning about Self and Others”**

Students need options for reading and choice, allowing them to choose a book that is interesting and relevant to them (Author, 2020; Ivey & Johnston, 2013, 2015, 2018; Smith, 2019). Therefore, novels were chosen based on having common themes of identity, search for truth, coming of age, injustice or seeking justice, and the power of an individual’s voice, using Carol Jago’s (2019) reading lists found in her book entitled *The Book in Question: Why and How Reading Is in Crisis*. Each novel was intentionally selected to reflect different parallel cultures in America, and students’ own culture from their neighborhoods played a part in the selection of the novels. Each has a different storyline, but all reflect a variety of diversity and more than one

voice. Additionally, books were a mix of fiction and non-fiction, including literature, biographies, and memoirs (See Table 2 for the 10 novel options from this unit). Finally, choices had to connect to current, authentic, real-world situations, allowing students to research current events in the United States.

Student engagement in choosing their novels is often not a big production or special event, but it can be. Instead of seeing random books displayed on their desks, the room was designed to look like a cafe in Southeast France, “Bistro 219.” Students came in and teleported to the garden side overlooking a beautiful river with traditional French cafe music playing in the background. The lights were turned down to build ambiance. Students’ desks were in pods, covered with red and white gingham tablecloth and yellow flowers in a vase.

Students then went through a book tasting (Porter, 2018) for each book, noting their thoughts on their Individual Book Tasting Menu (See Figure 1). The menu allowed students to read pieces of each book (e.g., summary, cover, and skimming parts of the book) and then jot down their overarching thoughts and impressions and how many stars they would give each book “tasted.” Students had 2 minutes per book and another two minutes to complete their “Book Tasting Menu” and prepare for the next book. Based on their ratings and reflections, they chose the book they wanted to read for the next six weeks. One goal was that students would stay in their current pods of desks, with each student choosing a different book to allow for conversations across multiple books during activities in class. However, if two students in the same group wanted to read the same book, they could see if the book was not chosen by members of other groups, requesting to borrow their copy.



An important consideration is that if a student was struggling with the book tasting, I offered support by offering potential thoughts, additional information about the book, and even made suggestions based on the student's reading history. Students were allowed to change their book within the first week, but to ensure alignment with the rest of the unit and others reading the book, they were not allowed to change after that week.

### **Establishing Group Discussions “Learning about Self and Others”**

Activities created intended to promote spaces for dialogue among students. As a facilitator, I discussed and negotiated unit expectations, conceptual and procedural goals, and reflection requirements with students. Inviting students to share and connect was essential versus being forced to engage and discuss their connections (Dutro, 2019), disrupting preconceived ideas or arriving at new ideas through their peer discussions. These students previously expressed a strong desire for independent work, so they read alone after structuring a reading plan with their group. The reading plan was an agreement between group members that identified what to read and by when ensuring that each group discussion was active and students were engaged. After class discussion, students also chose to independently respond to the required standard-based, text-dependent questions and creating their final projects.

### **Building a Community Within**

As students independently read, they often stopped and discussed with each other and me. Students were encouraged to connect with others reading the same book and compare themes across multiple texts. We used two different types of literature circles. One was identified as the “expert” group (i.e., all reading the same book), and the other was the “exploring” group, where students shared elements from their texts and discussed how themes, actions, and events

crossed multiple books. Therefore, discussion among group members and across expert groups was not negotiable.

The “expert” group used traditional literature circle roles defined by Daniels (2002), such as discussion leader, illuminator, connector, and summarizer, with students preparing for their roles as they independently read in class. During these gatherings, students connected with their novel (characters, actions, events), asked questions for clarification or understanding, and discussed their thoughts and reflections. For instance, an “expert” group reading *Dear Martin* (Stone, 2017) discussed Justyce’s relationship dilemma. On the one hand, he was attracted to a white girl, SJ, with whom he knew his mother would have issues. On the other hand, he debated his feelings about his ex-girlfriend, Melo, whom his mother would approve of because of her race. Students discussed their feelings and how they would react if they were either Justyce or one of the girls, even sharing their beliefs about how someone should act in this circumstance. One student said Justyce should be honest with both girls, and another commented that Melo is inappropriate for Justyce and that Justyce should explore a relationship with SJ. Even when they disagreed, the group co-constructed new meanings from the novel. It is important to note that students’ roles rotated throughout the unit, so each student was invited to try out each skill. In addition, students were allowed to crossover roles, especially if they had specific questions to discuss with their peers.

The “explore” groups were assigned to ensure the representation of multiple novels during discussions to support a fuller discussion about students’ diverse experiences and to explore similarities and differences related to actions, characters, and events across texts. This unique experience afforded a more in-depth exploration that did not occur within the “expert”

discussion. As students discussed in their “explore” groups, students considered multiple perspectives and developed empathy as they shared their interpretations of their novels to connect with others’ novels. For instance, one student stopped to reflect after reading about the traffic stop in *The Hate U Give* (Thomas, 2017), emphasizing how she had not thought about what occurs by police officers or drivers. She shared what occurred in her text, commenting on how more must be done to prevent these situations. A student reading *Between the World and Me* (Coates, 2015) connected with this situation and shared what occurred in his novel, suggesting that there is training and that the police officers in these cases were not following protocol. The latter student was in the Legal Academy at the school and brought in what he had learned from his class and what he was learning through the anecdotes in his book. They concluded that while the training provided to police officers may keep officers safe, there needs to be a better way because it is not fair or legal that a person can be killed just for reaching for a

hairbrush. As their conversations continued throughout the unit, it was apparent that the students were increasing their critical consciousness, questioning, and learning multiple perspectives - that of police officers, victims in their books, and each other.

This interaction demonstrates how students connected real-life issues with their text. Throughout the unit, students discussed the implications of characters’ actions across novels, relating them to their lived experiences. This type of learning assisted with comprehension and built upon peer relationships and classroom community. We first started with the expert group, allowing students to streamline conversation and build knowledge of their book before discussions with their “explore” group.

### **Connecting to the Real World through Current Events**

To strengthen the authentic connections students made to the real world and their own lived experiences, they were each asked to locate a current article related to the theme or events presented within their chosen novel. For example, one student found an article that detailed the Syrian refugee crisis because she was reading *Refugee* by Alan Gratz (2017). Students made deeper connections by finding and reading current news that reflected what was happening in their novels. They understood how real their character's experiences are for many around the country and world. Mini-lessons taught students how to identify potential biases within the author's diction and language to determine potential attitudes and personal beliefs toward the subject in the article or potential missing narratives from interviews and news reporting. As a class, we perused various websites and news outlets. Example prompts for students to use to annotate for general comprehension and understanding and support later article discussions include the following:

- What are the most important words, lines, or phrases?
- What is the most meaningful literary device?
- Choose one great idea or theme and discuss what part of the text and what part of the text is the best representation of this?
- What part of the work is most discussable?
- What is puzzling to you?

### **Socratic Seminars**

To further engage students in connecting themes in their book to the real world, students shared their articles during a Socratic Seminar. A Socratic Seminar is a student-led whole-group

discussion that necessitates listening closely, speaking to points and comments others make, referring to texts read and researched, asking for clarification of questions or made points, consideration of all perspectives, and inviting others into the conversation (Lent, 2016). To prepare for the seminar, students created six generalizable questions that would work for all texts and relate to current event articles. The questions were there to support the discussion, advance the conversation or change directions. Questions had to be open-ended, referencing resources from the unit and requiring more than a one-word response. When needed, students were given a few guiding questions as a scaffold.

Each student partnered up, one in the inner circle and the other outside of the circle, noting partner responses, discussion patterns, and trends and jotting down ideas or questions to ask when it was their turn. After the first group went, partners briefly met to debrief to discuss potential next steps before switching roles. After the Socratic Seminar, students reflected on the new information and perspectives gained, personal assumptions of their text, and what their text says about an idea or issue. They also reflected on their involvement in the seminar. For example, one student shared the following after reading *Between the World and Me* by Ta-Nehisi Coates (2015):

One question that led to the biggest thought-provoking discussion was caused by the question, "How does one escape the dream?" We got into a discussion on how it can sway. The dream can be a multitude of things, it can be a mindset, and way of life, a social or wealth status, or just an idea. We found ourselves looking for which one was the true meaning of "the dream" and we concluded it is really all of the above. You can be told about the dream you are in, and you can't escape it at all, because you have grown up

and based your life off the dream. At the same time, you can be in the dream but realize the trance that you are in and enter a higher state for a more empathetic way of life in which you realize that life isn't all about yourself. It took us a while to figure out what the dream was to begin with, let alone how to get out of the dream.

### **Sway Presentations**

We know as teachers that there is a need for our students to learn digital literacy, not only in the fashion of learning how to determine bias online but also to use technology in the classroom. Students must know how to navigate different technological tools and learn how to present information using different tools (OECD, 2005; Trilling & Fadel, 2009). Therefore, the final projects addressed this technological and digital need, simultaneously providing another level of choice. Groups could choose which multimedia presentation (Table 3) tool they preferred, such as Microsoft Sway. Students were encouraged to be creative to demonstrate synthesis of all learned over the past six weeks. Presentations were to include a review of the novel, either as a summary or by creating an original book trailer; responses to chosen text-dependent questions; a reflection of the in-class Socratic Seminar; and at least two specific connections between the book and current events. As a bonus, after students presented their Sways, other students became interested in the books they had not read.

### **Possibilities for Future Practice**

Today's educational landscape must push past our comfort to ensure learning from diverse perspectives. As one of my colleagues said at a recent meeting, "we must have uncomfortable conversations." This may not be easy, depending on the support of the school

district or the administration's support. However, we must continue to be willing to follow the steps of the late great John Lewis and "get in good trouble" or take on what Gloria Ladson-Billings (2021) calls the "hard re-set" to continue to provide quality education for all our students. Creating an educated citizenry that solves problems of the future involves creating spaces where students can explore other perspectives and have civil discourse.

This unit provided a safe space for students to explore different ideas which they presented as questions and curiosities and have dissenting opinions. While I addressed the standards and engaged students in classroom discussions, I also created a community of readers. Students became more interested in other novels and began to request other novels to read. This motivation is the goal for most teachers. One student asked their peer about *On the Come Up* by Angie Thomas (2019) after she had read *The Hate U Give* by Angie Thomas (2017) during the presentation, asking if this novel was in the same "universe" as Starr's story. This kind of response is the ultimate goal. We want students to be readers and critical thinkers, and these students demonstrated complex thoughts when making connections and discussing current societal problems.

Educators in today's classroom deal with numerous challenges, such as students experiencing trauma or systemic oppression and the need to build community within their classrooms (Fisher et al., 2020; Savitz & Kane, in press). By providing students with choices and opportunities to communicate with their peers, we support their need for connection with others. Students can explore current events and learn how to make connections between today's societal landscape and their books.



To implement this unit into the curriculum, start by considering which state standards and objectives will get addressed within the unit. Then, identify a theme that can connect across numerous novels, potentially considering text that supports cultural competence, critical thinking, student learning, and sustains the language in their communities (Ladson-Billings, 1995; 2017; 2021; Paris, 2012). Consider using an anchor text, a text required in the curricula, and then select additional books from there that already relate to what is happening in the classroom. Conduct a book tasting or book pass with the novels where students peruse each book and identify their first impressions and thoughts on the book. Consider parameters for when and how a student can walk away from a chosen book due to lack of interest or difficulty. Also, once students choose their novels, create sample standards-based, text-dependent questions that students will answer as they read their novels and questions that provide strong mentors for the types of questions students need to pose throughout their reading and inclusion in their final multimedia presentation.

Next, consider the parameters for an expert and an explore group for each student, considering classroom dynamics. Determine how and when each group will engage with one another, possibly having expert groups begin discussions to promote students' engagement in their book and clear up any misconceptions as they read. After students share in their expert group, they can meet and discuss with their explore group to focus on book crossover themes and events.

When students appear ready, which may vary by group and student, they can start bringing in current events that connect with their book and theme. Determine if mini-lessons on finding current events is needed to ensure students curate texts from reputable sources. Finally,

along with students, identify expectations for how they will demonstrate their learning and continue engaging with others, such as a Socratic Seminar, Debate, multimedia presentation, or another way for students to participate in a student-led analytical discussion to synthesize the ideas from the text and the current event.

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### Figure 1

Students used this chart to survey the books before making a choice.

The form is titled "BOOK TASTING MENU" in a decorative, hand-drawn style. Above the title, there are fields for "Name:", "Date:", and "Period:". To the left of the title is a circular logo with the word "BISTRO" and the number "219". Below the title is a table with five columns and four rows. The columns are labeled: "Quote that hooked you", "Book Title", "Author", "1-2 sentence Reflection", and "Rate on a scale of 1-5 (1 worst, 5 best)".

Quote that hooked you	Book Title	Author	1-2 sentence Reflection	Rate on a scale of 1-5 (1 worst, 5 best)

Note. Image of the book-tasting menu. Own work.

**Table 1**  
*Literary Devices & Prompts*

Literary device	Example prompts
Characterization	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• How did a character in the story solve a problem? What personality traits do you think allowed the character to reach this resolution?</li><li>• Take a complex character from your text (one with multiple or conflicting motivations) and describe these motivations throughout the book.</li><li>• How does the main character change from the beginning of the text to the end?</li></ul>
Setting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Summarize how the plot has developed in your book from the beginning to where you are currently.</li><li>• How does the author’s reference to the setting help advance the plot?</li><li>• Explain how the main character feels about the setting. Then, give details from the text to support your answer.</li></ul>

Plot

- Summarize how the plot has developed in your book from the beginning to where you are currently.
- How does the author's reference to the setting help advance the plot?
- Explain how the main character feels about the setting. Then, give details from the text to support your answer.

Motif & Figurative Language

- What technique does the author use to create an effect (a dramatic beginning, short quick sentences, long sentences, repetition, metaphors, imagery, or simile...etc.)? Explain how the author uses this technique and the impact it has on the tone of the piece.
- Select a word from your tone list that BEST describes the speaker's tone. Now explain why the word you selected best describes the speaker's tone.
- Explain a motif that is evident in the novel. How does the author use it to convey a message?



Theme

- Identify a major, specific theme from your book so far. Describe the development of the theme at different points in the book.
- How does a major, specific them in this book compare to something else that you have read?
- What message do you think the author is trying to convey to readers? How does the author develop this theme for others throughout the text?

**Table 2**

*Book Choices*

Name of Book	Author	Summary
<i>Between the World and Me</i>	Ta-Nehisi Coates	This is a non-fiction book that is a letter to the author's son about the realities of being an African-American male in America.
<i>The Hate U Give</i>	Angie Thomas	This is a fictional story that follows the main character, Star after she watches her best friend get shot and killed at the hands of a police officer during a traffic stop.
<i>I Am Not Your Perfect Mexican Daughter</i>	Erika L. Sanchez	This book is about a young girl's coming of age in America while realizing that not everything is what it seems.

<i>Born a Crime</i>	Trevor Noah	This is a memoir about Trevor Noah's upbringing in South Africa during Apartheid.
<i>Poet X</i>	Elizabeth Acevedo	This is a coming of age story about Xiomara as she finds her voice in spite of her surroundings.
<i>Refugee</i>	Alan Gratz	This novel tells three stories in different settings and how young people have had to overcome being forced out of their homes because of war and political strife.
<i>On the Come Up</i>	Angie Thomas	This is a coming-of-age story about Bri who is trying to make a way out of her violent neighborhood through a rap career.
<i>Undefeated</i>	Steve Sheinkin	A true story about the Carlisle Indians football team and how they overcame prejudice and became a winning team.
<i>Dear Martin</i>	Nic Stone	Justyce overcomes police bias and injustice through his connection to Dr. Martin Luther King's teachings.
<i>Internment</i>	Samira Ahmed	Layla lives in a futuristic United States that has decided to create camps for Muslims living in the U.S. She finds allies to create a revolution against the injustice Muslims face in a futuristic America.

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**Table 3**

*Rubric for Multimedia Presentation*

Element of presentation	Criteria and suggested score			
	4	3	2	1
Review of the novel: summary or original book trailer	Original trailer with music and voice summary of the conflicts in the book, specific information on the main character, antagonist, that does not give away the ending embedded into the presentation OR Original Written Review of the novel with summary of the conflicts in the book, information on the main character, antagonist, that does not give away the ending included in the presentation.	Original trailer about the book, with a summary of the events in the book, general information about the characters and what the characters go through, that does not give away the ending embedded or linked into the presentation OR Original Written review with a summary of the events in the book, general information about the characters and what the characters go through, that does not give away the ending included in the presentation.	Original trailer with some information about the book, may or may not give away the ending, but no specific information given included in the presentation as a link or embedded OR Original Written summary with no specific information that may or may not give away the ending included in the presentation.	Trailer created by an outside source included in the presentation or summary of the novel written by someone other than the student.

Responses to text-dependent questions	Students answer all text-dependent questions using evidence with MLA citations from the novel and complete elaboration using their own words to support why the evidence supports the answer to the question.	Students answer most text-dependent questions using evidence from the novel with some elaboration on how the evidence supports their answer to the question.	Students answer some text-dependent questions using some evidence and a basic explanation of the reason why the evidence supports the answer to the question.	Student minimally answers the text-dependent questions or does not use evidence to support the answer, and/or using summary of the text instead of elaboration
Reflection of in-class Socratic Seminar	Students will write about their thinking during the Socratic Seminar AND make specific references to what their peers said during the discussion AND how the discussion confirmed or challenged their thinking with specific ideas.	Students will write about their thinking during the Socratic Seminar AND make some specific and general references to what their peers said during the discussion AND how the discussion confirmed or challenged their thinking with some specific and general ideas.	Students will write about their thinking during the Socratic Seminar in generic terms that are not personal AND makes some reference to what peers said during discussion AND makes some reference to ideas that challenged or confirmed their ideas.	Students attempted to write a reflection about the Socratic Seminar, but did not make references to any ideas from their peers or any ideas that confirmed or challenged their own ideas before the discussion.

Two specific Connection to Current Event article	Students provided the title, author, publication, and date of publication of the current event AND made two specific connections between the novel and the article with specific evidence and citations of the novel and the article and explained how the specific evidence supports their connections.	Students provide information about the article's name and author, may be missing some information of the origin of the article AND made at least one specific connection between the novel and the article with at least one specific evidence with citation and generally explained how at least one specific evidence supports their connections.	Students provide some information about the article that they chose AND made general connections between the article and the novel without specific reference or citation and provides general explanation of how the evidence or general statements support their connections.	Students provide minimal information or none at all of the article's name or identifying information AND provides minimal connections between the article and the novel and minimal explanation of the connections.
References of all articles, videos, websites, and novel at the end of the presentation	All articles, videos, websites, and novel cited in MLA citation on the last card or slide of presentation titled Works Cited and arranged in alphabetical order.	Most articles, videos, websites, and novel cited in MLA citation on the last card or slide of presentation titled Works Cited and arranged in alphabetical order.	Some articles, videos, websites, and novel cited but not in MLA citation on the last card or slide of presentation but not titled Works Cited and not arranged in alphabetical order.	Articles, videos, websites, and novel NOT cited in MLA citation on the last card or slide of presentation.

Creativity and originality in design, pictures, colors chosen	Student uses color, pictures, videos and word choice that is vivid and purposeful to support a chosen theme for their project.	Student uses some color, some pictures, some word choice to create a coherent presentation that is easy to follow.	Student uses standard color and at least one picture that is part of the standard presentation tool chosen.	Student uses the standard presentation tool colors and fonts with no videos, pictures, or vivid language.
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### **Authors' Biographies**

The teacher-author, Carmen Marroquin, Ph.D., is certified in K-5, English 6-12, Reading Endorsed, and Gifted Endorsed in Florida. She has taught Intensive Reading, English 9-12<sup>th</sup> grade, and AP English Language and Composition. Currently, she is Adjunct Faculty at Florida International University and a Training Specialist and Florida Virtual School. Her research interests are in the connection between reading and writing, civic empathy, and using culturally relevant pedagogy. She can be reached at [cguti005@fiu.edu](mailto:cguti005@fiu.edu).

Rachelle S. Savitz is an associate professor of reading/literacy at East Carolina University. She was previously a K-12 literacy coach/interventionist and high school reading teacher. She received the 2019 Association of Literacy Educators and Researcher's Jerry Johns Promising Researcher Award and the 2018 Early Career Literacy Scholar Award from the American Reading Forum. She researches culturally sustaining and equitable pedagogy, trauma-sensitive practices, and teacher self-efficacy.

**Write about what you read: Preservice teachers consider Notable Books for a Global Society**

Mary Ellen Oslick, Ph.D  
Stetson University

**Abstract**

In this article preservice teachers read and develop writing mini lessons for recent Notable Books for a Global Society award-winning titles. This piece could be useful for those teachers looking to refresh their classroom libraries and as supportive material to assist new teachers beginning their time in the classroom.

*Keywords:* preservice teachers, culturally relevant texts, the Notable Books for a Global Society award books

Multicultural or culturally relevant books can be powerful forces for literacy instruction in the classroom (Christ & Sharma, 2018; Guerra, 2012; Heineke, Papola-Ellis, & Elliott, 2022; Kibler & Chapman, 2019; Laman, 2006; O'Neil, 2010; Wood & Jocius, 2013; Yoder, 2013). Unfortunately, researchers report a scarcity of culturally relevant texts (Horning et al., 2022) and furthermore, educators often lack the ability to identify culturally-specific texts (Brinson, 2012; Koss & Paciga, 2022). Baratz (2015) found that teachers do not make a regular effort to use culturally relevant literature as a tool in their classrooms. Teachers have an obligation to their students to provide quality children's books that reflect the varied conditions of our world (Leahy & Foley, 2018). Furthermore, Martin, Smolen, Oswald, and Milam (2012) argue that through reading and discussing these powerful stories, students can develop genuine respect and

understanding of socially and politically oppressed peoples and become inspired to take action to address these injustices.

Rectifying this need is possible. Teacher education programs have a responsibility to include direct instruction on the identification and use of culturally relevant texts as an important component of any classroom. Iwai (2013) found that when preservice teachers were explicitly taught about culturally relevant texts, they understood topics of diversity better and were motivated to use those texts in their future classrooms. This places an important charge on teacher education programs to provide their preservice teachers with experiences and opportunities to read and use such texts.

One such experience includes reading and discussing books from the Notable Books for a Global Society award, presented by members of the International Literacy Association's Special Interest Group, Children's Literature/Reading. Each year, the Notable Books for a Global Society (NBGS) committee selects a collection of 25 multicultural books that address issues from around the world and are available for school-aged students in PK-12<sup>th</sup> grade. These books reflect diversity in the broadest sense and celebrate a wide variety of voices and topics, including war, immigration, Indigenous populations, Black Lives Matter, environmental advocacy, and LGBTQ+ issues.

In the required course, EDUC 314: Reading in the Intermediate Grades, teacher candidates read various chapters from the Fountas and Pinnell's (2006) text, *Teaching for comprehending and fluency: Thinking, talking, and writing about reading*. One chapter explicitly details the benefits readers gain when they write about what they read and includes a template for a mini-lesson. Over the past few semesters, I have provided class time for reading NBGS award



winners and completing the lesson plan template with a focus on the following parts: book summary; description of writing about reading; and what will children learn from this task. Additionally, nonfiction NBGS award books were purposefully used; the recent position statement on the role of nonfiction literature by the National Council of Teachers of English (2023) argues that such texts are underutilized in language arts curriculum and classroom libraries. Lloyd and Wertsch (2016) assert that nonfiction texts foster critical reading, another important skill for teacher candidates to practice themselves before their own classroom instruction.

Teacher candidates read their self-chosen texts and then completed the writing mini-lesson template. They were given some scaffolding (based on the textbook reading) to determine what kind of writing they used based on the learning outcome. If they determined that the learning outcome was to clarify understanding, then they could choose to assign a summary, letter of explanation, or an exit slip. If they determined that the learning outcome was to extend learning, then they could choose to assign a dialogue (script), different role (RAFT), or a nutshelling-questioning sequence.

Seven writing mini-lessons from the spring semesters of 2021 and 2022 were examined. Four teacher candidates crafted writing prompts to extend learning and three crafted prompts to clarify understanding. The prompts were thoughtful and relevant to the texts; additionally, all teacher candidates were eager to read the books they chose and then share parts of their lesson plans with their peers. The following Table 1 provides bibliographic information about the books chosen and the purpose of the writing prompt.

Table 1

Book title	Author, Illustrator	Publication Date	Purpose of Writing Prompt
<i>The oldest student: How Mary Walker learned to read</i>	Rita Lorraine Hubbard, Oge Mora	2020	Extend learning
<i>The cat man of Aleppo</i>	Karim Shamsi-Basha & Irene Latham, Yuko Shimizu	2020	Clarify understanding
<i>The only woman in the photo: Frances Perkins &amp; her New Deal for America</i>	Kathleen Krull, Alexandra Bye	2020	Clarify understanding
<i>Fauja Singh keeps going: The true story of the oldest person to ever run a marathon</i>	Simran Jeet Singh, Balijinder Kaur	2020	Clarify understanding
<i>The power of her pen: The story of groundbreaking journalist Ethel L. Payne</i>	Lesa Cline-Ransome, John Parra	2020	Extend learning
<i>Saving American Beach: The biography of African American Environmentalist MaVynee Betsch</i>	Heidi Tyline King, Ekuia Holmes	2021	Extend learning
<i>Born ready: The true story of a boy named Penelope</i>	Jodie Patterson, Charnelle Pinkney Brown	2021	Extend learning

Tiffany, a student athlete, chose *Fauja Singh keeps going: The true story of the oldest person to ever run a marathon* (Singh, 2020). She opened to the back of the book immediately to see Singh's photograph and shook her head in wonder. For her writing prompt, she wanted students to write a letter of explanation and persuasion to their own parents.

Students will create a letter to their parents describing the book while using evidence to support the main idea. Students will also write a persuading paragraph on why the book is great and why their parents should buy it for them.

With this writing exercise, Tiffany wanted her students to clarify their understanding (e.g., main idea and text evidence), as well as practice their persuasive writing skills.

Emily, a student from out of state, chose *Saving American Beach: The biography of African American Environmentalist MaVynee Betsch* (King, 2021) because she loves going to the beach. In her reflection, she wrote that she enjoyed the book so much because she has spent time in Jacksonville and its surrounding beaches, but had never heard of American Beach. Furthermore, she found the book engaging and relevant as it, "brings to life the importance of helping the environment and Florida history." She especially thought that 4th graders studying state history would be able to build on their own background knowledge. Her writing prompt was for students to extend their understanding by writing a letter to a state government official lobbying for the protection of a natural area that was meaningful to them.

Students will reflect on how natural areas are treated both in the book and what they see in their own experience living in Florida. They will also learn about the importance of being an active citizen and communicating with their legislators about things they care about.

At the end of the course, I have students reflect on the big ideas– what did they learn from this class and how does it relate to prior knowledge. It pleased me to see the following reflection:

Between fieldwork and the courses, it becomes very apparent how these two skills (reading & writing) build upon each other. Writing about reading allows for students to reflect on a text and reconstruct it through a new thought process, explore new thinking, or find evidence to support their thinking from the text. In the primary reading course we never explored the interconnectedness of reading and writing but it was always implied. Now, I actually understand how they work together and how I can help students build both skills at the same time and to foster an environment of readers and authors.

We want students to see that interconnectedness of reading and writing, but sometimes that has to come from a teacher’s own ah-ha moment. Making space for such moments with preservice teachers is important work. Another challenge has been our university’s professional development partnership with a district with a strict ELA curriculum. Although the teacher candidates enjoyed these texts and the time to consider how to use them for writing instruction, I distinctly remember the lament of one particular teacher candidate: “When am I going to be able to do this in my future classroom?” She was thinking about her current field placement in a third-grade classroom and knew how prescribed the lessons were. I encouraged her and the others in class to fight for these opportunities– share these texts and their lesson plan ideas with their grade-level team leaders, instructional coaches on campus, and finally their school administrators. Students need these authentic experiences to grow as readers and future authors.

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### **Author's Biography**

Mary Ellen Oslick is an associate professor of education at Stetson University and a former elementary school teacher. She currently serves as chair for Notable Books for a Global Society award and can be reached at [moslick@stetson.edu](mailto:moslick@stetson.edu).

## **Supporting Developing Readers: Intervention Practices Grounded in The Simple View of Reading Framework**

Earlisha J. Whitfield, Ph.D  
University of Central Florida

### **Abstract**

The ability to read is a fundamental skill that empowers individuals to access information and participate in society. However, about 30% of students have reading challenges in schools, so exploring effective reading interventions is crucial. This article presents information that explains one of the Science of Reading foundational models, the Simple View of Reading (SVR), and aligns it with intervention practices for classroom use. The SVR proposes that reading comprehension is a product of two essential components: decoding (word recognition) and linguistic comprehension. By understanding this model and examining other research on how the brain learns to read, educators can align their instruction and interventions to effectively meet the diverse needs of students.

*Keywords:* reading interventions, the Simple View of Reading (SVR), the Science of Reading

### **Introduction**

Reading plays a vital role in today's world and is a fundamental skill that allows students to participate effectively in society. Reading is essential to living a successful life, whether understanding important documents like instructions for assembling a toy or navigating everyday tasks like assisting with grocery shopping. It requires reading signs to navigate to the grocery store and access the aisles for the items you want to purchase. A simple trip to the grocery store



also requires comparing nutrition information to select the best food products for your unique diet. Reading is embedded in many tasks that we complete daily, and it plays a significant role in navigating our world efficiently. Educators are tasked with the critical job of preparing students for reading in today's society. Preparing students to become literate, functioning adults has led to many questions over the decades, but reading achievement has remained low (Hong et al., 2000). The percentage of students in the U.S. reading below grade level is 31% (National Institute for Education Statistics, 2023). The Science of Reading has brought new insight that can help answer some questions about how children learn to read and what instruction should look like in classrooms.

### **The Reading Deficit**

The issue of reading deficits in the U.S. has been a concern for several decades. Various solutions have been sought to address this issue. One significant effort was the establishment of the National Reading Panel (NRP) in 1997. The NRP consisted of experts who made recommendations for effective instructional practices. In 2002, the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) was enacted, which introduced federal mandates for schools to measure student progress in reading and math. The act aimed to hold schools accountable for student performance and bridge the achievement gap. More recent efforts have been the adoption of Common Core State Standards and Science of Reading. These initiatives have demonstrated a commitment to improving reading skills in the U.S., but the challenge of reading deficits in schools continues to persist. The prevalence of reading difficulties among students suggests that educational approaches that have been used in schools are not adequately equipping students with the skills needed to succeed (Hong et al., 2019).

## **The Science of Reading Implementation**

From 2013 until recently, 32 states and the District of Columbia have passed laws or implemented new policies related to the Science of Reading. In 2021, Florida's reading law was updated to implement a system for monitoring student progress, establish reading coaches in schools, identify evidence-based materials, and require a reading endorsement for teachers who work with slow progress readers (Education Week, 2023). In October 2023, educators were notified of the launch of a Science of Reading Foundation training for K-12 Florida educators. The purpose of this professional learning opportunity is to strengthen teachers' knowledge in the Science of Reading to, in turn, "positively impact the lives of all students" (Florida Department of Education, 2023). With the onset of what is perceived to be a required new way of teaching, there have been growing concerns about how the Science of Reading is supposed to look in the classroom setting. Many educators have exhibited frustration and uncertainty about reading instruction, moving back and forth from reading approaches, perspectives, curriculums, etc. (Heubeck, 2023). Reading instruction has been the subject of significant controversy for decades. Researchers and scholars have debated the merits of phonics, whole-word, and wholistic approaches to reading and the nature of research and instruction in general. However, the debate, also known as the reading wars, has had minimal value to educators looking for guidance to help students in schools. The Science of Reading research, along with the Simple View of Reading aims to clarify how students learn to read and how to best teach them in classrooms.

### **What is the Science of Reading?**

The Science of Reading aims at answering the question, "How do students learn to read?" It explores the cognitive processes and skills involved in reading so educators can align reading

instruction to students' learning. The Science of Reading is a term that embodies research from multiple fields, including cognitive psychology, developmental psychology, communication services, neurosciences, linguistics, and education. (Jump & Johnson, 2023). In essence, the Science of Reading is a collection of scientific findings into how students learn to read.

Recently, advancements in imaging have provided insight into brain activity during reading that has become a road map for researchers. The brain activity teaches us how to best teach reading based on what we know about the reading brain. Integrating the Science of Teaching Reading into practice involves the awareness of how the brain learns reading so teachers can actively select suitable instructional practices, understand their specific purposes, determine when to apply them, and effectively integrate them to enhance reading proficiency.

### **The Simple View of Reading**

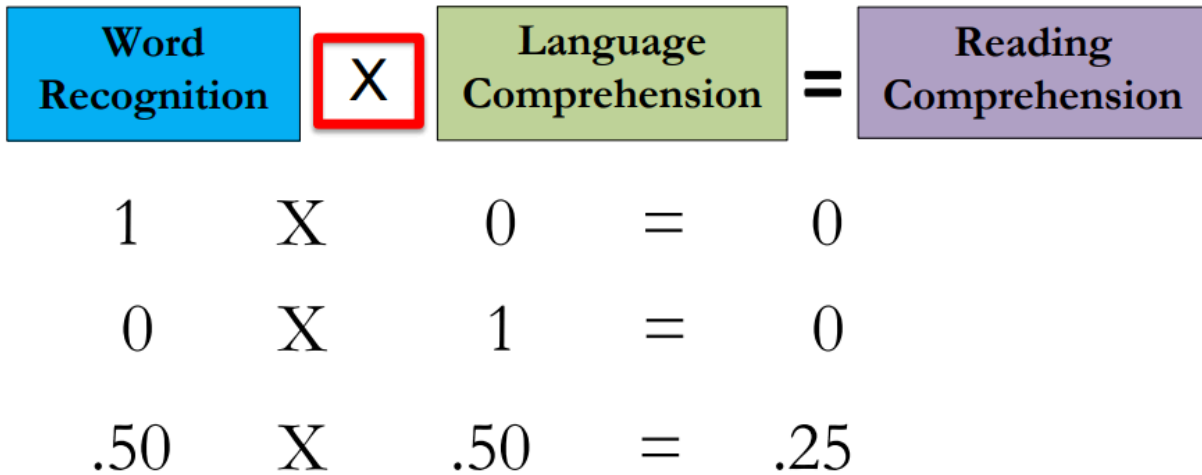
While reading, specific areas of your brain become involved in perceiving and interpreting words to form meaning. This process is the premise of what the Simple View of Reading is based. An analysis of brain imaging revealed that skilled readers exhibit high levels of activation in the back of the brain, known as the parieto- and occipito-temporal areas, which analyze a word's appearance, sound, and meaning. Within this brain activity pattern, there are two main components that must be used to comprehend language- word recognition and language comprehension. This model of reading is called The Simple View of Reading. One of the foundational tenets of the Science of Reading research is the Simple View of Reading (Gough & Tunmer, 1986), which provides a helpful model for understanding how word recognition-related reading components (phonemic awareness, phonics, and fluency) are connected to meaning-related reading components (vocabulary, comprehension). The Simple

View model illustrates that strong reading comprehension can only occur if both word recognition and language comprehension abilities are strong. However, poor word recognition skills or weak language comprehension can lead to difficulties in reading comprehension.

The Simple View of Reading emphasizes two main factors that produce reading comprehension:

**1. Decoding:** "efficient word recognition" (Hoover & Gough, 1990). This definition goes beyond the traditional definition of decoding as the ability to sound out words based on phonics rules. The meaning of decoding expands to include fast and accurate reading of familiar and unfamiliar words in both lists and connected text.

**2. Language Comprehension:** Language comprehension refers to understanding the meaning of oral or written language. It involves both vocabulary knowledge and background knowledge. Language comprehension allows readers to make sense of the words they decode and connect them to sentences to make sense. According to Hoover & Gough, the combination of these two processes leads to reading comprehension. The formula below provides details about what is required to produce reading comprehension.



Based on the Simple View of Reading by Gough and Tunmer, 1986

Figure 1.1

The Simple View of Reading formula can be summed up as a student's reading comprehension is determined by two factors: decoding skills and language comprehension. If a student has good decoding skills, their reading comprehension will be equal to their language comprehension. Any improvement in language comprehension will result in an equal improvement in reading comprehension. Similarly, if a student has a strong language comprehension ability, their reading comprehension will be equivalent to their decoding skills. Improving decoding skills or language comprehension will lead to better reading comprehension. (Farrel et al., 2023).

If a student is lacking in word recognition and language comprehension, reading comprehension is compromised. For example, a student is selecting a can of soup at the grocery store and picks up a can with the words "*Cream of Mushroom.*" (Assuming there are no pictures or symbols on the label) They may see the letters but not recognize the sounds the letters make. The child would not have any meaning of what kind of soup they have chosen. If the child can

produce the sounds the letters make and say the words with some effort but doesn't know what the words mean, the child still cannot make sense of the words to make an informed selection of soup. If the child sees the label and can associate sounds to letters that make words and know the meaning of the words, they can understand the kind of soup they are selecting. We need both variables in the formula's equation for successful reading comprehension.

### **Simple View of Reading Informed Interventions**

Learning to read can be a challenging experience for some students, especially those who are at risk of reading failure. Appropriate intervention strategies are crucial in closing the achievement gap among students from underserved populations. Studies have shown that tier 2 students who are "mildly at risk" can typically attain grade-level reading ability with the right instruction. However, early identification and appropriate teaching methods are essential for most students to learn to read adequately (Moats, 2007). By understanding the Simple View of Reading, educators can identify and address specific areas of strengths and weakness to support students' overall reading development. Since we know that both components, word recognition, and language comprehension, produce reading comprehension, they should both be taught thoroughly to ensure students become proficient readers. If a student struggles in reading, the Simple View of Reading provides insight into identifying and addressing the issue. Since we know the factors influencing reading comprehension, we can assess and identify the student's strengths and needs to support them accordingly. When working with students with reading deficiencies, identifying their strengths and needs to provide targeted interventions can provide the direct support students need.

Supporting student needs aligns with the SVR model because the skills are identified in the strands for reading comprehension, which allows educators to pinpoint the support students need. Interventions should target specific skill deficits while incorporating multiple language components within lessons (Moats, 2007). Reading skills and strategies can be understood by comparing them to strands in a rope. In Scarborough's Reading Rope, much like the Simple View of Reading model, there are two primary strands: the "word recognition" strand and the "language comprehension" strand. These strands are interconnected and work together to create a strong foundation for effective reading. For example, to effectively address language comprehension deficits in students, it is important to include the relevant skills in individual components. These components can be represented as strands, with each strand corresponding to a particular skill, such as background knowledge, vocabulary, word structure, reasoning, and literacy knowledge. As students improve their reading abilities, these strands become more tightly woven together, creating a stronger rope that signifies their increasing proficiency in reading.

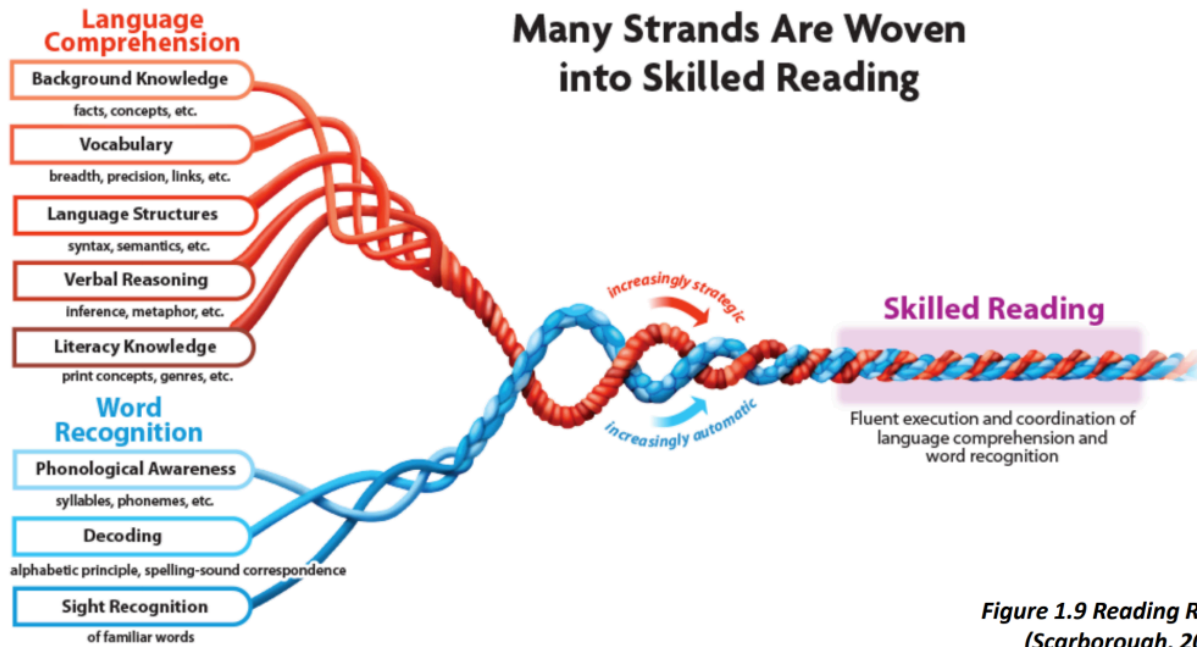


Figure 1.2

Figure 1.9 Reading Rope (Scarborough, 2001)

(Scarborough, 2001)

The Science of Reading also acknowledges that students' reading abilities develop in stages, and all students do not reach levels simultaneously. So, it is essential to provide targeted interventions recognizing that students come from different backgrounds and abilities. According to Farrel et al., reading difficulties can be categorized into three main types:

1. The first type involves individuals with adequate decoding skills who need language comprehension help. An extreme example of this profile is a hyperlexic student displaying severe language comprehension issues despite excellent decoding skills.
2. The second type consists of individuals with adequate language comprehension but weak decoding skills. A prime example is a dyslexic student with average or above-



average language comprehension abilities but experiences significant decoding difficulties that do not improve with research-based interventions.

3. The third type encompasses individuals with weaknesses in decoding and language comprehension, often called "Garden Variety" poor readers. (Farrell et al., 2023)

Data-informed instruction is effective in supporting students exhibiting reading challenges. The process of collecting and analyzing relevant data allows educators to gain valuable insights into a student's reading abilities and make informed decisions about appropriate interventions. The Simple View of Reading framework provides a framework for understanding the components of reading - word recognition and language comprehension. When applied to data analysis, this framework helps educators identify specific areas of weakness for students struggling with reading. The Simple View of Reading model acts as a roadmap for selecting appropriate interventions by highlighting the specific areas for improvement and supports intervention work with students experiencing reading difficulties that include the following practices:

1. Diagnostic Assessment: The Simple View of Reading emphasizes the importance of conducting diagnostic assessments to identify specific areas of difficulty for struggling readers. These assessments can help educators understand the underlying causes of reading difficulties, such as word recognition or language comprehension deficits. By pinpointing these areas, teachers can tailor instruction to target specific needs.

2. Individualized Instruction: Educators can provide individualized instruction that addresses students' specific strengths and needs with a deep understanding of the different components and skills within the Simple View of Reading.

3. Progress Monitoring: The Science of Reading recommends ongoing assessment and monitoring of student progress to ensure that educators adjust instruction and interventions to provide additional support if progress is not made. (Farrell et al., 2023)

The Simple View of Reading model allows educators to incorporate research-validated practices such as assessment, intervention, scaffolding, and progress monitoring to benefit students with reading difficulties. These practices allow educators to tailor their teaching methods to meet the specific strengths and needs of each student. By regularly assessing students' progress and adjusting instruction accordingly, educators can support developing readers improve in the skills they need to become proficient readers. This approach benefits developing readers and all students in the classroom by improving overall literacy outcomes. Ultimately, this creates a more inclusive learning environment where every student has the opportunity to succeed (Catts et al., 2006).

### **Conclusion**

The Science of Reading research in classrooms allows teachers to make more informed, strategic, and evidence-based decisions about their teaching practices, ensuring that interventions are explicit, systematic, and cumulative. The scientific lens of SOR can provide educators with the knowledge to align their teaching methods and interventions to focus on all the skills illustrated in the Simple View of Reading (SVR) formula, avoiding an overreliance on any one skill. A potential downside of the Science of Reading and the Simple View of Reading is educators' misunderstanding of the science as an emphasis on decoding instead of quality instruction in all components of reading. Interventions based on SOR are critical for students experiencing difficulties in reading. Research shows that if students are identified early and

provided with appropriate interventions, they have a chance at reading proficiency (Moats, 2007).

In an evidence-based, informed world, helping with grocery shopping can become a more enjoyable experience for children. A child can read and comprehend the label description when choosing which soup to buy. With context and meaning, they can also decipher the ingredients, nutritional content, and dietary information to make an informed choice based on their personal preferences and dietary needs. Reading labels in the grocery store is just one example of how the ability to read affects our daily lives. It enables us to make informed choices, avoid harm, and nourish our bodies. Deciding which food items to purchase may be small in scope, but its significance reaches far beyond the confines of the supermarket. The ability to read opens countless possibilities: exploring new subjects different cultures, or losing oneself in a captivating story. It symbolizes the ability to navigate the world with knowledge and confidence.

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### **Author's Biography**

Earlisha J. Whitfield, Ph.D., serves as an Assistant Professor of Reading Education at the University of Central Florida. She has worked as an adjunct professor at Louisiana State University and Assistant Professor of Reading at McNeese State University. Dr. Whitfield's passion is to help improve literacy in underserved schools and communities. Before joining higher education, she worked for 17 years in public schools as a teacher, literacy specialist, director of instruction, and assistant principal.

## **Selective Mutism, Social Competence, and the ELA Classroom**

Priscilla DeVelder, MEd  
Arbor Ridge K- 8

### **Abstract**

This literature review was conducted to help examine Selective Mutism's (SM) impact on social competence and its implications in the ELA classroom. Findings from this review revealed parents as key in the diagnosis and treatment of SM, a social anxiety disorder that affects people's ability to speak in social contexts. The role of parents, teachers, factors, interventions, treatments, assessments, and outcomes were presented. Teacher strategies to incorporate within the ELA classroom were discussed. The purpose is to provide readers with awareness of Selective Mutism and ways to help students succeed in the school setting.

*Keywords:* selective mutism, young children, anxiety, social competence interventions

No two students are alike. Every child has unique traits, personality, needs, abilities, hopes, and dreams. Under those needs hide children with immense potential. However, educators may not always see every student's potential. Often, we become occupied with outspoken and outgoing students while assuming that the silence of others means understanding and effortless learning. What if the silent student cannot help being silent? What if reading and answering questions aloud to the entire class provokes desperation and physical and emotional distress? What if I tell you that children with Selective Mutism (SM) often feel like this?

Selective Mutism is a rare childhood disorder characterized by a child's failure to speak in specific situations or settings, such as school or playgrounds, but who can speak normally in

other settings, such as at home (Muris & Ollendick, 2015). It is slightly more common in females than in males. Children with SM fail to speak in specific situations where there is an expectation of speaking. Despite them being able to communicate in other settings verbally, the failure to speak usually occurs at school (Busse & Downey, 2011). While children with SM may not speak to teachers or classmates, they may converse normally at home (Cunningham, McHolm, Boyle, & Patel, 2004).

Selective Mutism was first reported in the late 1800s by Adolph Kussmaul, a leading German physician at that time. In 1934, child psychiatrist, Moritz Tramer, began referring to this disorder as Elective Mutism. In the 1970's and 1980's, the term's name was changed to Selective Mutism. This change reflected the prominence of a child's "consistent failure" to speak in selective settings (Busse & Downey, 2011). Unfortunately, SM is not diagnosed until children's early school years. It typically develops between the ages of 2 and 4, with most not being diagnosed until later, thus resulting in them not receiving timely treatment (Conn & Coyne, 2014). This problem led me to my research question. How does selective mutism affect young children's social skills and competence in the classroom? Ale *et al.* (2013) suggested that SM has been related to significant social skills deficits and poor peer-classroom relationships. Not being able to speak in a school setting affects students' ability to form social relationships (Busse & Downey, 2011).

As presented in the journal article "Observing and Supporting Young Children's Social Competence," Nissen and Hawkins (2008), children who struggle with social competence skills while young are considered at risk for developing socially maladaptive behaviors that can affect them meaningfully in their future. These scholars also suggested that children who cannot

maintain close relationships with peers are more likely to struggle socially as adults. Children who struggle with these skills may show poor behavior, inability to express or deal with emotions, such as extreme frustration, and difficulties interacting with peers and understanding their feelings. What does that mean for a child with SM?

### **Role of Parents and Teachers**

The research findings of Ale *et al.* (2013) supported that caretakers' actions may play a significant role in developing and treating selective mutism. They also stated that parents may allow avoidance of speaking in situations that are anxiety-provoking. Caregivers provide comfort to the child when they cannot speak, thus demonstrating one of the reasons why parents are needed in the intervention process. Martinez *et al.* (2015) noted that parents of children with SM may exhibit anxiety themselves by facing the stigma associated with mental health assistance, thus preventing them from accepting and seeking the help their children may need.

Alongside parents, teachers can help in the assessment and intervention process of children with SM. However, there are currently no teacher-reported measures of SM (Martinez *et al.*, 2015). Most methods of assessment typically include parent measures (i.e., parent questionnaires and interviews) and clinician observations and interviews. Teachers often notice the symptoms first and can provide helpful information about the children's behaviors at school, such as during playtime in the classroom, lunch, or recess. Teachers, clinicians, and parents must work together to ensure the treatment and interventions are appropriate for the child (Martinez *et al.*, 2015). Students with SM may receive classroom accommodations through 504 legislation or Individualized Educational Plans (IEP).



Just as important, students with SM may also struggle academically. According to Nowakowski *et al.* (2009), children with SM rely heavily on their parents to practice and strengthen their reading skills at home, as they may choose not to partake in any classroom verbal exchanges during instruction. Parents are the most critical component in the teacher-student-parent triad. Working closely with the families is the key to reading and language success, as they are considered these students' place of safety. The place where they can be surrounded by the people that make them feel at ease. When children with SM must speak in public, significant levels of stress increase because attention is brought upon them, thus resulting in feeling overwhelmed and persuaded against speaking (Hung *et al.*, 2012).

As an English Language Arts (ELA) teacher, I often think about my pedagogical practices if one of my students exhibits SM. Might a teacher think this type of student is rude and disrespectful for "choosing" not to participate, read aloud, share their thoughts, or even work in groups? Children with SM are not defiant or stubborn, as others may perceive them to be. The reluctance to speak, in most cases, is due to tremendous anxiety. Sluckin (2011) added that these children would speak if they could. As a mother of a child with SM, I can attest to this. It is physically unbearable for these children to speak, even when they are being bribed or threatened to do so. Other characteristics that children with SM may exhibit are having a blank expression when you talk to them, lack of smiling (i.e., in pictures), staring into space, reduced eye contact, frozen appearance, awkward, stiff body language, difficulty responding nonverbally, may be slow to respond, or may show excessive tendency to worry or have fears. Why does this happen, and how can teachers help these children? As one who experiences this on a day-to-day basis, I know that children with SM want to be well-liked, play with others, and even participate in class

discussions. Instead, these children are often misunderstood as being rude and impolite, thus leading to the inability to form bonds with peers at school, especially during the early years of schooling (Sluckin, 2011).

What strategies can be incorporated in the ELA classroom to help ensure the social and academic success of our SM students? The Selective Mutism Association (SMA) (2023) suggests that teachers accept nonverbal communication in the classroom, such as asking for a drawing, nodding, or for students to point. It is also okay to ease into communication by accepting one-sided conversations. Forcing conversations can cause students with SM to regress and become highly anxious. Perhaps, instead of asking them to state the theme of a story or poem, we might ask them if they agree with a specified or indicated theme. Another suggestion the SMA provides is to give specific praise and choices when asking questions. Open-ended questions may cause increased anxiety, but if we provide our students with forced-choice questions, they will most likely be able to answer. In an ELA classroom, this may look like, “Do you prefer fiction or non-fiction books?” When asking students to present, you can allow them to record themselves from home, as that will most likely be where they feel most comfortable. As SM stems from social anxiety, allowing students to select their seats or partners can be a practical classroom strategy. Most importantly, be open-minded, patient, and positive. Children with SM possess intelligence, and by showing care, concern, and respect, teachers can nurture their social and academic needs.

### **Factors**

Sluckin (2011) suggested that SM has no definite cause. Still, she states that research suggests a familial genetic predisposition to introversion, starting very early in life. The exact onset of the child’s muteness is hard to determine; however, most parents describe their children

as being somewhat shy and cautious in new situations, and the problem becomes apparent upon their children entering primary school (Oerbeck *et al.*, 2012). SM is considered relatively exceptional, with a prevalence between 0 and 2 children per thousand (Conn & Coyne, 2014). They speculate that social mutism may result primarily in reducing social anxiety.

Diagnostic criteria include that the condition sufficiently inhibits the child's education and social development, that the child exhibits mutism behavior at least one month beyond starting school, that the failure to speak is not due to a language barrier, but that the child fails to speak in selected situations. Further, the child speaks in selected situations, and the condition cannot be better described as a communication disorder (Sluckin, 2011).

Researchers implied that some other risk factors for developing SM may include maladaptive family dynamics, unresolved internal conflicts, genetics, immigration, hospitalization, or trauma (Hung *et al.*, 2012). Establishing close relationships with parents, getting to know the student, and seeking and offering support from appropriate school personnel will help form trusting bonds with all students, especially those with SM. Nawakowski *et al.* (2009) suggested that, as educators, we are responsible for creating a trust-based relationship tailored to each student's specific and unique needs, with support from families.

### **Interventions, Treatments, and Outcomes**

A common misconception about the SM condition is that the child will outgrow it. Interventions as early as pre-K or early elementary grades are critical in helping children with SM overcome their problems. They help prevent subordinate issues of socialization and learning as the child grows older and moves on to higher academic grades (Hung *et al.*, 2012). While examining SM, I found this Mark Twain quote: "A habit cannot be tossed out of the window; it

must be coaxed down the stairs a step at a time,” which resonated with me, as it reminded me of the patience, persistence, and determination needed in helping children with SM. Behavioral intervention, play therapy, and school and family involvement are some interventions used with these children.

A study conducted by Oerbeck *et al.* (2012) examined a multimodal intervention for SM for 20 months, which included seven children between the ages of 3-5 years. None of the children spoke to adults, but some talked to peers during peer activities. Behavioral interventions for these children began at home while gradually moving to the kindergarten classroom. After six months, results reported significant changes in the children’s mutism behavior. They demonstrated increased classroom talk and a small but significant increase in public speaking. The outcome was favorable with the interventions given through behavioral therapy, thus reporting that almost all children spoke unreservedly after the interventions (Oerbeck *et al.*, 2012).

Another study suggested that a timely diagnosis of SM leads to positive outcomes and that exposure, modeling, and interventions help increase verbal communication. They followed a 3-year-old African American boy and concluded that using positive reinforcement through behavioral therapy as an intervention for SM led to positive social experiences for this child. They also reported that early interventions are associated with a reduced likelihood of developing anxiety-related disorders later in life (Conn & Coyne, 2014).

A case study by Ale *et al.* (2013) included two 5-year-old children, a boy named Brian and a girl named Zoe. Both children only spoke at home. Brian’s parents agreed to the study because they wanted him to be able to communicate and participate in the classroom with age-

like peers, independent of their presence (Ale *et al.*, 2013). Zoe's parents wanted her to make new friends and develop age-appropriate relationships using a whisper or a normal tone of voice. The parents of both children completed a clinical interview, which revealed that Zoe's parents often accommodated her SM by acting as her spokesperson in public. Brian's behavioral therapy included fifteen weekly one-hour sessions. The treatment was divided into four phases, which included "psychoeducation and implementation of reward system for oppositional behavior, graduated exposures with adults, graduated exposures with peers, and skills generalization" (Ale *et al.*, 2013). Zoe's treatment occurred over 23 sessions over six months. With the help and support from her parents and teachers, who worked alongside the therapist, Zoe could progress rapidly and shake off the barriers of SM. Unlike Zoe, Brian's progress was limited. Parents could help at night, but the reported inconsistent monitoring from teachers may have contributed to the limited effectiveness of the interventions set in place. This case study by Ale *et al.* demonstrated how important it is for parents and teachers to be involved and work together in the intervention process. The discussed research findings indicated how behavioral interventions can effectively treat SM (Hung *et al.*, 2012).

A case study by Hung *et al.* (2012) involved a preschool 4-year-old Renee from an inner-city family. Multimodal interventions, such as behavioral intervention, play therapy, and school and family involvement, were implemented once a week in the classroom and an adjacent reading room under the supervision of a therapist, two supervisors, the parents, and the teachers. The child spoke at home but not at school. After the interventions, Renee's teachers reported that she started talking a few sentences at the beginning of the new semester and, after two months, she was speaking just like the other children. The authors of this study suggested that a critical

component to the success of these interventions, and thus of other children with SM, is to celebrate the child's verbal and social accomplishments in subdued and private ways (Hung *et al.*, 2012).

### **Assessment**

In their research, Cunningham, McHolm, and Boyle (2006) used a Social Skills Rating System tool to collect their data. This Social Skills Rating System (SSRS) was used by parents and teachers. The SSRS is a norm-referenced assessment tool focusing on social behavior, such as social skills, problem behaviors, and academic competence. Parents and teachers rated 58 children with SM, compared to a control group of 52, and determined that children with SM were less confident socially, had difficulty making friends, and were less likely to join groups. The children completed a self-concept measure that did not require verbal responses, supported by the questions in the SSRS, which showed that children with SM do not rate themselves as being less accepted by their peers and are equally well-liked by their peers. This research is significant to understanding SM because data showed that poor peer relationships greatly influence a child's self-esteem later in life rather than in the early school years (Cunningham *et al.*, 2006).

Earlier, Cunningham, McHolm, Boyle, and Patel (2004) conducted research in which 104 children participated, 52 with SM and 52 controls without SM. Children with SM were recruited over nine years. Using an SSRS, this research examined social skills and peer victimization as perceived by parents, teachers, and students. They found that teachers and parents reported perceived deficits in social behavior, such as introducing themselves, starting conversations, or inviting friends over. However, neither the parents nor teachers felt that children with SM were

more submissive than controls, and it was concluded that children with SM were equally likely to be enrolled in sports and other recreational activities and have playdates (Cunningham *et al.*, 2004).

Another study by Martinez *et al.* (2015) implemented the survey “School and Classroom Social Participation Behaviors” subscale of the *Teacher Telephone Interview: Selective Mutism and Anxiety in the School Setting* (TTI-SM), which is a teacher interview protocol used in the assessment of children with SM. Data demonstrated that students with SM showed more difficulty responding to teachers and going up to the front of the room or board, thus suggesting that these students struggled with day-to-day classroom activities (Martinez *et al.*, 2015).

## **Conclusion**

Even though this rare disorder is starting to become more recognized by many, additional research needs to be conducted that could lead to a clearer understanding of how SM specifically affects children’s social competence in the early years. We must acknowledge that parents of children with SM have the most information and input to provide. In addition, given their private disposition of the fears, children with SM would give the most accurate, personal views, which might help researchers understand SM in more depth and future development of its treatment. Carbone’s study added that teacher ratings are also necessary since children spend substantial time in the classroom during their early developmental years. Minimal SM research includes teacher reports of their pedagogical experiences with SM students (Carbone *et al.*, 2010).

Most of the researchers included in this review concluded that children with SM respond positively to interventions and stated the importance of parental and teacher involvement at school and home. Working together to help children with SM will help reduce the anxiety and

behaviors associated with this disorder, thus resulting in the ability to form close relationships and develop social competence in the early years of schooling. SM in the ELA classroom does not mean silence. An ELA classroom, in relation to SM, means potential, compassion, understanding, flexibility, and creativity. The ELA classroom is a place for teachers to be innovative in their practices and a place for SM students to shine in a myriad of ways. Through literature, we can inspire SM students to imagine, relate, and feel by simply allowing them to discover the power of the written word and the power within themselves.

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### **Author's Biography**

Priscilla DeVelder has been an elementary classroom teacher for 17 years with experience in grades 1-4. She works at Arbor Ridge K-8 in Orlando, Florida. She completed her bachelor's and master's degrees in Elementary Education K-6 and specializes in teaching English Language Arts. She can be contacted at [priscilladevelder@ucf.edu](mailto:priscilladevelder@ucf.edu).

**Unlocking Literacy and Learning: Practical Strategies for Leveraging Music in Enhancing Language Skills, Reading Proficiency, and Memory in P-12 Classrooms**

Erin E. Margarella, PhD  
Western Kentucky University

Beckie Stobaugh, PhD  
Western Kentucky University

Lucas W. Firkins, Teacher Candidate  
Western Kentucky University

**Abstract**

This article explores the use of music as a powerful tool for supporting students' academic growth and achievement. Highlighting neuro-musical education research, we enumerate how music reinforces language skills, develops reading abilities, and improves memory and attention more effectively than other activities. It also discusses the cognitive benefits of music, including its role in enhancing language processing, decoding and comprehension, and improving attention and memory. We introduce three strategies, namely Hear, Think, & Wonder; Overheard Quotes; and Music Metaphors, that content area teachers can use to integrate music into their lessons effectively. These strategies encourage students to analyze song lyrics, connect music to content learning, and make meaningful associations between music and academic concepts. By thoughtfully embedding music into content-area instruction, educators can create meaningful and engaging learning experiences that promote cognitive processes, foster creativity, and deepen students' understanding, retention, and overall academic success.

*Keywords:* Content-Area Instruction, Teaching Strategies, Music

Engaging with music not only stimulates the brain's response to sound but also contributes to the development and enhancement of language and reading abilities (Gaser, 2003). In the past decade, musician Angélica Durrell initiated a percussion program in Connecticut high schools, teaching immigrant students how to play instruments like the *charango* and *toyos* from Central and South America. This after-school music program, originally aimed at Latino students who faced academic challenges, gained recognition as a strategic tool for addressing persistent issues in the school district. Students in the program showed independence, language acquisition, and social integration. Intempo, Durrell's non-profit organization, now serves over 3,000 students annually in Stamford and Norwalk schools, highlighting the profound impact of music on enhanced cognitive and social-emotional learning (Willis, 2023).

When schools integrate music, students have enhanced academic and social-emotional skills crucial for learning. Neuro-musical education research (Gkintoni, 2023) suggests music reinforces language skills, develops reading abilities, and improves memory and attention more effectively than other activities (Qi, 2018). With the positive benefits of integrating music in schools, educators possessing strategies to infuse music into daily instruction can captivate students' attention while positively impacting academic outcomes.

The current state of music education in schools is disparate and often inadequate. According to a 2019 study by The Arts Education Data Project (AEDP), nearly 3.7 million students lack access to arts education. When used strategically, music can serve as a mnemonic device, helping students remember important information by associating it with melodic patterns or rhythmic cues. Moreover, music can evoke emotions, which in turn can enhance students' motivation, focus, and overall engagement with the subject matter. Whether it's classical music

during a reading activity, a catchy tune for memorizing facts, or a thematic soundtrack to set the mood for a historical discussion, the integration of music in core content classrooms has the potential to deepen students' understanding and retention of concepts. By harnessing the power of music, educators can create an immersive and dynamic learning experience that not only stimulates cognitive processes but also fosters creativity, critical thinking, and a love for learning.

Utilizing music to support instruction provides numerous cognitive benefits that are rooted in the intricate connections between sound processing, movement, cognition, speech, and attention in the brain. Researchers such as Moreno (2009) and Spilka, Steele, and Penhune (2010) have highlighted the advantages of incorporating music in educational settings.

When students interact with music, various cognitive processes are activated and strengthened (Zhang, 2018). The brain's ability to process and interpret information is finely tuned through exposure to music, which can lead to improvements in language skills, including vocabulary acquisition, phonological awareness, and syntactic understanding (Luo et al., 2012). Additionally, engaging with music enhances the brain's ability to decode and comprehend written text, thus benefiting reading comprehension and fluency (Moreno, 2009). Furthermore, music's impact on cognition extends beyond language and reading. Students who regularly engage with music as part of their learning demonstrate improved attention and cognitive control as well as increased memory capacity (Weinberger, 2004) thus resulting in elevated rates of academic achievement. The connection between music and cognition provides a unique opportunity for students to engage with content, resulting in deeper understanding, retention, and overall academic success (Weinberger, 2004).

Music also fosters social cohesion and prosocial behavior (Gromko, 1998). Singing and music-making have been fundamental to human connection for thousands of years. Studies show that music activities involving singing and movement increase social cohesion and encourage behaviors like empathy and helping (Carnegie Hall, n.d.). These findings align with the principles of social and emotional learning (SEL) that schools strive to cultivate.

However, access to music education remains a challenge due to budget constraints, increased academic demands, and a shortage of music teachers (Hilger, 2022; Vinnard, 2021). Some schools and districts are partnering with nonprofit organizations and community groups to provide instruments, teacher training, and intensive music programs for underserved students. These collaborative efforts help enrich the learning environment and offer opportunities for deep content learning and consistent engagement with music.

The inclusion of musical elements is frequently overlooked as teachers design lesson plans for English, math, science, social studies, or other content-specific classrooms. Content area teachers can meaningfully utilize music to enhance their teaching and engage students. For example, using background music that complements the topic or theme can create a positive learning environment, grabbing the attention of each student in the classroom. Introducing songs, jingles, or rhymes related to the day's learnings can support students as they recall relevant information and concepts more effectively and with ease. Additionally, teachers can encourage students to develop their own songs or raps to reinforce key learnings, thus supporting them as they actively engage in the learning process and express their understanding creatively. By embedding music strategically into content lessons, teachers are able to create dynamic and

multimodal experiences that deepen students' comprehension, foster a positive learning atmosphere, and promote an authentic appreciation for the subject matter.

### **Strategies Connecting Music and Content**

Many content teachers are unfamiliar with ways to integrate music., *Hear, Think, & Wonder*; *Overheard Quotes*; and *Music Metaphors* are three strategies that can be used in any content area merging discipline-specific learning with music. Capitalizing on many students' interest in music, these strategies challenge students to analyze music as they critically think about the content. Each strategy below is described using classroom examples, strategy steps, and content-area connections.

#### **Hear, Think, & Wonder**

*Hear, Think, and Wonder* is a strategy that encourages students to deeply analyze song lyrics while connecting the lyrics to prior knowledge (Connell, 2014). Prior to the lesson, the teacher will need to select a song related to the learning target of the lesson. The teacher will create a graphic organizer (Table 1) and insert the learning target for the lesson at the top. Students will also need a written copy of the song lyrics.

#### ***Classroom Example***

Students listen to "Bohemian Rhapsody" while also reading their own copy of the lyrics. The students complete the first row of the *Hear, Think, and Wonder* graphic organizer recording what they hear, think about, and wonder. In pairs or groups, the students complete the second row of the organizer noting what they read in the lyrics, then think about, and finally understand. They share their notes as a class to begin their whole-group discussion of the song.

#### ***Strategy Steps***

1. Listen to the entire song and complete the first row in the *Hear, Think, and Wonder* graphic organizer (Table 1). Record words and phrases you hear, what it makes you think about, and what you wonder in the appropriate column.
2. In a pair, share what you have recorded adding information and ideas your partner mentioned.
3. Listen again to the song for a specific purpose (e.g., theme, concept).
4. In pairs, complete the second row in their Read, Think, and Understand columns. Read the music lyrics and think about how the song connects to the lesson’s learning target. Record in the Read column lyrics from the song that connect to the learning target. In the Think column, explain how these lyrics relate to the learning target. Finally, in the Understand column draw conclusions about the main point or theme of the song as connected to the learning target.

**Table 1. Hear, Think, and Wonder**

<b>Learning Target:</b>		
<b>I HEAR</b>	<b>And that makes me THINK...</b>	<b>Now I WONDER...</b>
<b>I READ</b>	<b>And I THINK</b>	<b>So now I UNDERSTAND</b>



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**Content Area Connections**

- Language Arts: Students listen to Taylor Swift's "Love Story" and compare it to William Shakespeare's *The Tragedy of Romeo and Juliet*.
- Science: Students listen to "The Electric Slide" and compare it to the process of static electricity.
- Math: Students listen to "The Cupid Shuffle" and compare it to the process of solving for variables in an equation.
- Social Studies: Students listen to "Electric Avenue" by Eddie Grant and compare it to the Great Depression.
- Humanities: Students listen to "Homeless Blues" by Bessie Smith and compare it to the deep south in the early 1900s American History and where the Blues were born.

**Overheard Quotes**

Another strategy for integrating music is called Overhead Quotes. Overhead Quotes is a strategy to engage students in listening to various ideas and drawing meaningful conclusions about the information (Guillaume, Yopp, & Yopp, 2007). This strategy is an effective way to hook students' interest while focusing them on a topic. To prepare for this lesson, the teacher

will need to select one or more songs with lyrics related to the learning target of the lesson. The lyrics should be recorded on separate cards on copied papers.

### ***Classroom Example***

The teacher selects music lyrics based on the theme of good versus evil like DeStorm Power's song "Good vs. Evil." Song lyrics from various artists are recorded on different cards and distributed to students. After walking around the classroom sharing various song lyrics cards, students return to their small group and discuss the common themes, conclusions, and questions. In a whole-classroom discussion, students divulge their groups' ideas and questions. The teacher then reveals that the focus of the lesson is to explore several pieces of literature with the literary theme of good versus evil.

### ***Strategy Steps***

1. Generate a list of quotes from one or more musical pieces. Try to give each student a different quote. Have quotes express different ideas or viewpoints.
2. Print out the quotes or write them on index cards.
3. Distribute cards to students face down.
4. When directed by the teacher, read the quote and write down your initial thoughts about the quotation.
5. Circulate among other students sharing their quotes. Students should not discuss the quotes.
6. After exchanging quotes with five peers, return to the tables to discuss the following questions in small groups:

What common ideas were in the quotes?

What conclusions can we draw?

What questions do you have now?

7. Conduct a whole-class discussion about the ideas and conclusions mentioned in the groups.

8. Connect the quotes to the topic being learned.

### ***Content Area Connections***

- Language Arts: The song quotes all have similar grammar mistakes.
- Science: The quote cards represent different viewpoints on global warming in various songs.
- Social Studies: Utilizing quotes from songs about compromise, students try to find commonalities among the quotes. The teacher connects this activity to key compromises in history.
- Career Studies: The quote cards represent song lyrics with bad advice on how to get a job.

### ***Variations***

- Instead of students sharing the quotes, quotes could be posted on the walls around the room, and students meander around the room reading the quotes.

### **Media Metaphors**

A third strategy for integrating music is called Media Metaphors. Using metaphors is a way to make unfamiliar concepts more meaningful by connecting to students' prior knowledge and integrating music and media to link to students' interests. For example, students could compare a main character in a book to a musical or a commercial jingle. Additionally, to highlight the differences between Thomas Jefferson and Alexander Hamilton, students can select music that represented either person. For example, many of the themes of country songs sound like the ideals Thomas Jefferson possessed—rule by the people, agrarian economy, and states' rights.

Other ideas for using metaphors include students finding music with parallels to a concept like recycling, distributive property, and commas. In addition, they could select a song that represents a book character. Choosing media that represents abstract concepts challenges students to first deeply understand the topic and then consider various options to determine which best represents the topic—critical thinking!

### ***Classroom Example***

Students have been reading *Romeo and Juliet* in their English class. While discussing Juliet's relationship with Romeo, students are prompted to get in groups of three and find a song, commercial, or movie clip that represents their relationship. The students connected lyrics in the song or words in the commercial or movie clip to evidence from the text to support their decisions.

### ***Strategy Steps***

1. Select a song, commercial, or movie clip that loosely connects with the identified topic.

2. To prepare for a classroom discussion, students in small groups discuss three ways the media connects to the topic while citing appropriate lyrics or words as supportive evidence.
3. Groups will share relevant connections.

### ***Content Area Connections***

- Language Arts: Songs often have the parts of a plot diagram. Find a song and explain through citing lyrics how all the elements of the plot diagram are represented in the song. To extend the learning, groups create a soundtrack that represents the most important plot points of the whole text.
- Science: There are many different ecosystems around our world. Find a song and explain how that song represents a specific ecosystem.
- Math: After learning the associative and distributive properties, find a commercial that relates to these properties.
- Social Studies: Geography shapes the way people live. Find two clips from musicals that demonstrate this idea.

### ***Variations***

- This strategy can be used at the beginning of the school year for teachers to get to know their students. Students could select a song that tells something important about themselves. This task encourages the students to describe themselves while critically thinking.

- Students could add dance movements to accompany certain parts of the song to represent the mood of the character from the novel or famous historical figure.
- To organize their thinking, students could use the below graphic organizer (Table 2).
- Instead of music, other media or pictures could be used for metaphors.

**Table 2. Music Metaphor Graphic Organizer**

Song Lyrics	Connection

Incorporating music into every child's education is essential, as it offers a variety of cognitive, social-emotional, and academic benefits (Moreno, 2009). Current research findings champion the belief that schools should provide students with varied opportunities to actively engage with music, as it has the potential to enhance their overall learning experiences and increase achievement (Peretz, 2005). To meaningfully integrate music into content instruction, teachers can utilize effective strategies such as: Hear, Think, & Wonder; Overheard Quotes; and Music Metaphors. These strategies can serve as impactful tools for capturing students' attention while teaching content. These strategies can be a strong beginning of a lesson to hook students' attention or deepen students' understanding of content by connecting song lyrics with prior learning.

By effectively implementing these strategies, teachers can easily identify ways to incorporate music into their curriculum, creating an exciting and enriching learning environment focused on subject-matter retention and an in-depth understanding of content. The classroom examples, strategy steps, and content-area connections provided all serve as valuable resources that can assist teachers in adopting these ideas into their teaching practices. By embracing music as an integral part of education, teachers have the opportunity to enhance students' academic achievement, foster their social-emotional development, and cultivate a lifelong appreciation for the arts.

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### **Author Biographies**

Dr. Erin Margarella is an Associate Professor and coordinator of Middle and Secondary Education at Western Kentucky University. Her research interests include Technology Integration, Policy, Issues of Power, Struggling Readers, Adolescent Literacy Development, and Literacy Leadership.

Dr. Rebecca Stobaugh is a professor at Western Kentucky University. Her research interests include teacher induction, classroom assessment, and instructional strategies.

Lucas Firkins is a Teacher Candidate at Western Kentucky University and currently working as a long-term emergency substitute at a local high school. His research focuses on the best methods for approaching literature for secondary, below-grade-level readers.