

Reaching Out: A Philosophy of Literacy Education

That Influences Every Student

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The meaning of literacy has shifted from what it was even fifteen years ago. In today's society, to be literate is to possess the ability to sort through mounds of information that is not only readily available, but is omnipresent in our daily lives. Those who are literate must be able to navigate through the myriad of information systems in the surrounding environment. But literacy is more than merely navigating information systems and sifting through the ever-present information the systems provide. Literate individuals have the knowledge that allows them to "read" the information presented and construct a reality at the same time they are deconstructing myths. The construction of a reality is necessary in today's society because of the pervasiveness of information and the subtly persuasiveness of its content. We must be able to compose truths for ourselves as an overwhelming amount of information is constantly presented to us. Composing these truths requires us to reject some information as not truthful, not worthwhile, or irrelevant. By doing so, we deconstruct myths in the surrounding environment; this helps us maintain the truths that are important to us as individuals, or as a societal group.

It is important to note that literacy is relatively fluid. What one individual creates as truth may not necessarily coincide with another individual's creation. While there is some objective notion of accuracy, subjectivity is more prevalent as we become further enmeshed in a society overflowing with information. It is the ability to construct truths and destroy myths that is important to literacy, not the impossible task of assigning a label of objective quality on an individual's construction/deconstruction of reality.

As an educator, particularly as a high school English teacher, a large part of my job is to ensure my students have a well-developed set of literacy skills. In other words, my students should enter the "real world" ready to independently sift through information and create their own realities. To accomplish this, I will set several goals for my students, all with the long-term

objective in mind of achieving modern day literacy for all of my students. First and foremost, students will develop a broad knowledge base about all types of texts—what they are, their history and development, their purpose, etc. This knowledge will serve as the foundation for literacy, and students will use texts to create new worldviews, which will assist in their construction of truths. Another goal that will provide assistance in creating a reality is that my students will read for understanding. A text will not be presented in my classroom for presentation only; students will fully engage themselves with texts (through some choice). Within these texts, both modern and classic, students will learn how to evaluate texts and discern persuasive and objective content in order to build on their knowledge base and continue creating new perspectives.

Literacy is, in a sense, learning a language and the unique uses of that particular language. As such, I will base my curriculum on the process of language acquisition, with the objective of achieving fluency. This is why the foundational knowledge is of utmost importance; without knowledge of basic literacy skills (reading, writing, navigating), higher order literacy skills of evaluating and analyzing texts, and synthesizing a reality, would be nearly impossible. My class will definitely attempt to achieve full literacy through the use of multiple aspects of Bloom's taxonomy of knowledge. Each skill builds on the previous skill and there is a connection among all skills that allows for a combined approach to a text, resulting in a more complete construction of a truth, or worldview. And, while Standard English will be emphasized for assignments and public speaking requirements, an appreciation of other "languages" and dialects will also be promoted.

Perhaps above all, however, along with developing traditional literacy skills that can be applied in modern informational formats, I want my students to develop a full appreciation and

love of texts and the diversity that texts can offer. Since texts are ever present in our society and there seems to be only an increase in the amount of information, it is imperative that, on their paths to literacy, my students learn to understand and appreciate texts and the place texts hold in society.

To assist in helping my students become fully literate, several strategies and programs will be implemented in my classroom. I firmly believe in having an open door policy in my classroom, and students will be welcome at any time. They will also be welcome to borrow from the classroom library I will have. Since I will have read all texts in the library myself, I will be able to help instill a love of literacy in my students by appealing to their interests. In addition, to those who are already motivated to read, I will attempt to start a book and media club that will give those students an extra outlet to experience literature and media for enjoyable projects that stimulate their learning and their interests. Extracurricular activities such as this give students the opportunity to create their own literacy events instead of always being on the receiving end.

Although “Drop Everything and Read” (DEAR) is a controversial program when done on throughout the entire school because it takes time away from other curriculum needs, sustained silent reading will be an integral element of my curriculum. Other aspects of literacy I will implement into my classroom environment are lessons on etiquette, such as invitation design, informal notes, and email. While some may discount these as part of a traditional curriculum, they are fundamental aspects of professional life, and students should understand the correct manner of composing emails, invitations and other correspondence. Students will also be required to work with current events in the media in some fashion throughout the course of a year’s curriculum.

A teacher is a person who has the opportunity to instill a love of learning in his/her students. To do this, a teacher must be an affirmed believer in what he/she is teaching. I firmly believe in literacy education, and that literacy comprises much more than the ability to read conventional texts. It also involves much more than teaching Standard English. I must be a role model for my students, demonstrating the need to embrace diversity in our society. In teaching students, a combination of direct instruction and acting as a “guide on the side” is necessary. When teaching new concepts, a teacher must be present to introduce and explain those concepts thoroughly. But to allow students to understand those concepts fully requires a teacher to step out of the spotlight for a period of time while students explore on their own. I think this is truly part of the joy of teaching—standing off to the side ready to assist students but also able to listen to the exclamations of, “I got it!” and “Check this out!” It is a reward as a teacher that matches no other. But perhaps above all, a teacher is a supporter and a cheerleader for his/her students. As a teacher, I must always be ready to engage my students, challenge them, and praise them for their efforts and accomplishments. It is through these aspects of teaching that I will be able to establish a relationship with each and every one of my students such that I will have the opportunity to motivate them, assist them, and teach them about literacy and other aspects of literature and the multiple forms of expression available to them.