WSRA Journal

A PUBLICATION OF THE WISCONSIN STATE READING ASSOCIATION VOLUME 58 NO. 1 SUMMER 2021

Journey Up The Learning Curve

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WSRA Update is the official newsletter of the Wisconsin State Reading Association published six times a year. For information contact the editor.

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WSRA 2022 Conference

The Art of Literacy: Weaving Tapestries of Heart, Body, and Soul

Thursday, February 3

Keynote Speaker: Yolanda Sealy-Ruiz

Friday, February 4

Keynote Speaker: Debbie Miller

Saturday, February 5

Keynote Speaker: Pat Zietlow Miller

Manuscripts

The WSRA *Journal* (ISSN 0160-9270) publishes original research studies and articles highlighting educational strategies for classroom literacy instruction. There are themed issues on special topics as well as open issues. The WSRA Journal is available to all WSRA members. The acceptance rate for publication is approximately 70%.

Call for Manuscripts: WSRA *Journal* welcomes well-written, original research and articles describing research-based instruction that improves literacy learning. Manuscripts must provide a blend of practical classroom application and solid theoretical framework. High quality articles, essays, and reports of different types on reading and literacy education are considered for inclusion in the *Journal*. Separate features, such as poetry, interviews, or historical perspective on literacy education in Wisconsin, are welcomed and printed as space allows. Digital photographs of students and/or teachers engaged in literacy activities are welcomed, as are examples of student work. All photos and student work examples require proof of permission to publish, including parent permission when applicable, for inclusion in the *Journal*.

Open Issue: We are currently seeking manuscript submissions that focus on a variety of topics and research projects across all grade levels and contexts.

Submission/Review Process: Submissions to the WSRA *Journal* should be made using the online submission system on the WSRA website at www.wsra.org/submit. All *Journal* manuscripts undergo a blind peer review by a minimum of two qualified reviewers. Authors will typically receive notice of manuscript status within one month of submission. At this point, reviewer comments, suggestions, and questions will be anonymously shared with authors. If the reviewers suggest the author(s) revise and resubmit, they will be given one month to address the feedback that was provided. The editor of the *Journal* will then send the revised manuscripts back to the original reviewers for further review. Depending on the reviewer feedback, the manuscript may be sent back to the authors for final revision or accepted for publication.

WSRA *Journal* sections:

- **Peer-Reviewed Articles:** Original Research and Teaching Tips
- **Departments Regular Column:** Children's and Young Adult Book Reviews, Professional Book Reviews, and Creative Corner

Editorial Guidelines

All submissions for peer review should conform to the style outlined in the 7th edition of the *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association*. Authors of accepted manuscripts must also provide written permission releases for use of material from other sources (i.e., student's writing samples, text or figures excerpted from another published work). Releases must also be provided for use of any person's words or likeness. Images should be submitted in .png, .tif or .jpg format.

Prepare the following for submission:

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- **Abstract.** For original research, provide an abstract of no more than 150 words, including your research question/purpose, methods, key results or findings, and the significance or implications for educators.

Journey Up the Learning Curve!

Amy Frederick
WSRA Journal Editor

Dear Literacy Friends,

At the spring WSRA Leadership meeting I was asked to introduce myself and say a few words about my new role as editor of the Journal. "It's going to be a steep learning curve," I joked. But this is it, isn't it? Why do any of us agree to do something time-consuming and difficult? We learn from taking on challenges. We stretch and grow through the strain. And we're willing to push ourselves for the things we care most about.

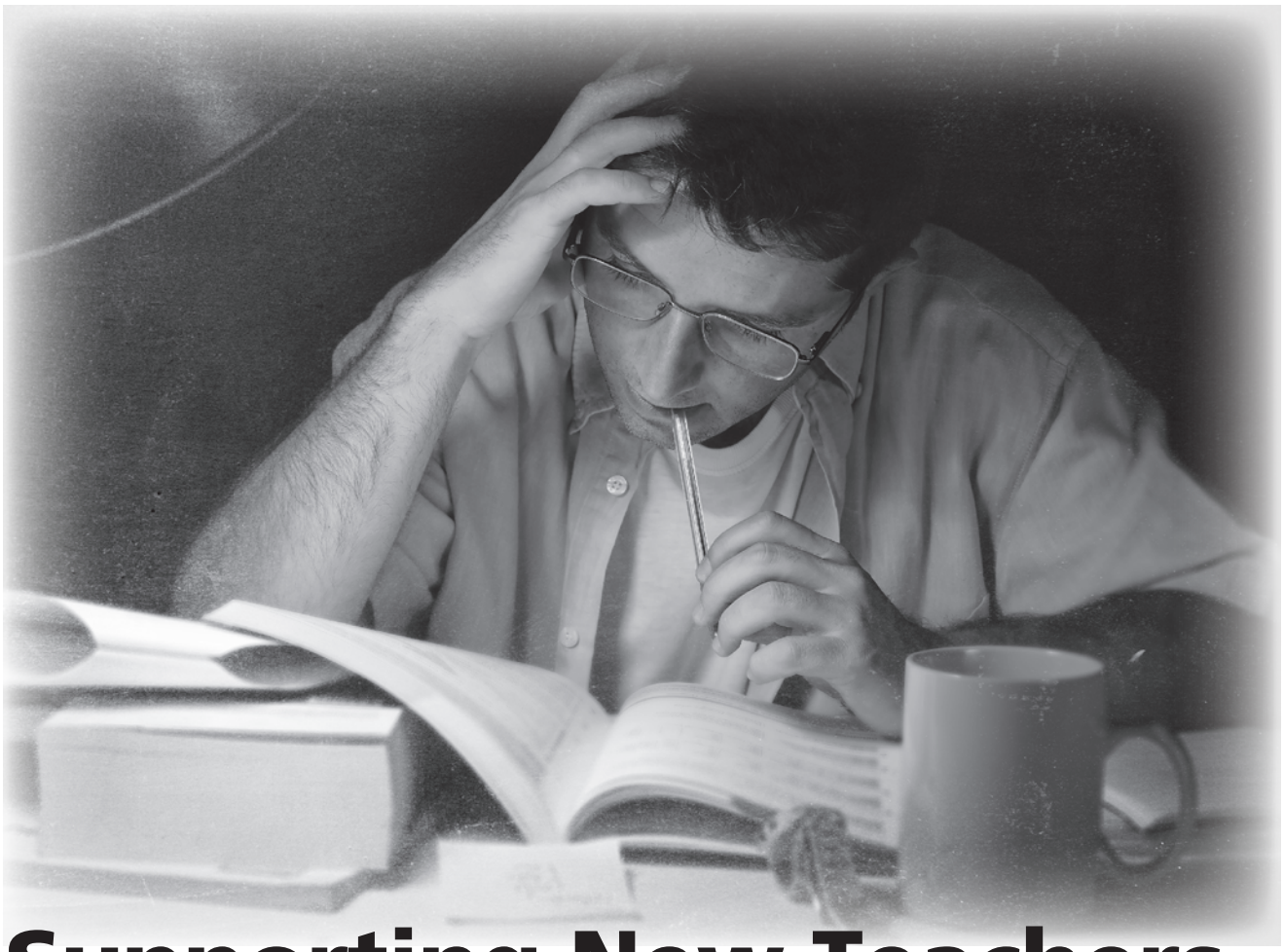
Literacy research shaped my own growth as a teacher, encouraged me as a teacher leader, and compelled me to do a PhD program at the University of Minnesota. Literacy researchers have always been there guiding my path and providing a vision of the kind of educator I wanted to be. When a new article by a favorite author would arrive in *The Reading Teacher* or we'd get a chance to hear a presentation at the International Literacy Association annual conference, my teacher friends and I would chatter with excitement about the groundbreaking literacy practices and theories we were learning. Just a few minutes in the presence of P. David Pearson, Sonia Nieto, Peter Johnston, or Freddy Hiebert were like a perfume of inspiration.

Yet, when Jackie Easley approached me about editing the *Journal* my first reaction wasn't, "How exciting!" but rather, "That sounds hard, I don't know if I can do it." One inspiration during this crazy year of isolation, fear, and unprecedented everything is the way that so many people around me, especially teachers, have said, "I don't know how to do it yet, but I'll learn." They've embraced the learning curve and, in the end, used it as an inspirational opportunity for reinvention. It's hard to do new things. Confusion and frustration and failure are all part of the equation and we usually try to avoid these things. But there's also hope. We hope that the new things we try will help us and the people around us grow in small ways.

Another thing the pandemic has reminded us is the huge well of grace that we all need in times of change. I ask that you dip from the well as I get my bearings in this new role as *Journal* editor. I also ask that you join me on this steep curve. I need your help to make this *Journal* meaningful and visionary in your lives. Perhaps you've never written a research manuscript, book review, or a teaching tip for other Wisconsin educators? Maybe it's time to hop on that learning curve!

In this issue, local educators share their good ideas with us: creative classroom practices, novel ways of supporting each other, and a timely report of Wisconsin teachers' voices. The WSRA *Journal* gathers and encourages us all to keep growing.

Welcome, readers!



Supporting New Teachers Through the Literature Landscape

Christina Edmonds-Behrend
Jennifer L. Springfellow

ABSTRACT

We explore challenges faced by many pre-service teachers and early career educators as they transition from teacher preparation programs to the classroom in terms of reading and their perceived reading skills. Previous research is highlighted, which includes key studies regarding pre-service teachers' reading experiences and how these experiences impact reading at the college level. We provide a brief overview of the current study and report themes mined from pre-service teacher candidate questionnaires in a quasi-replication study. Explicit recommendations are provided to classroom teachers and faculty in teacher preparation programs that have the potential to help pre-service teachers' personal reading experiences and improve how they see themselves as readers. Links to how teacher perception of reading can affect P-12 student achievement are explored.

Supporting New Teachers through the Literature Landscape

Thinking back to one's teacher preparation and first years of teaching, reading was likely done for information (i.e., textbooks, assigned articles, grade-level curriculum manuals). With term papers and lesson plans due, leisure reading may have been unlikely. When first teaching, early career educators may even question their positions as *good* readers who are current on grade-level literature and strategies.

These situations reflect a phenomenon noted in the literature: teachers recognize reading as important, yet they do not often read for leisure and they consider themselves ill-prepared to teach reading strategically (e.g., Applegate & Applegate, 2004; Nathanson et al., 2008). Applegate and Applegate (2004) noted that "many pre-service teachers are not avid readers themselves, and this lack of engagement may be passed on to their students" (p. 554). This sentiment was also reflected by Capps and Huang (2015), who reported a lack of completeness in literature when it comes to pre-service teachers and their reading perspectives and habits. Furthermore, Bishop et al. (2010) stated that early teachers overly rely on their personal experiences as readers, especially when knowledge and skills regarding reading were lacking.

Pre-service teachers need support in their leisure and academic reading endeavors (Kelly & Knelp, 2009). Helping future teachers develop aesthetic reading encourages them to use texts to look outside themselves to explore the feelings and experiences of others. Unfortunately, there may be a disconnect between theory and practice that can develop while teacher candidates are at the college level. This could be because pre-service teachers tend not to use learned reading strategies in their own academic course work, resulting in a loss of the joy of reading, making text reading a tedious activity. By fostering a commitment in future teachers to reading widely and gaining knowledge across children's literature genres while introducing literacy in different modalities, teacher educators help future teachers: become better equipped to pair students to texts (Atkins et al., 2018); become better prepared to match print options (i.e., hard copy or electronic; Larson, 2013); and, have greater knowledge of best practices in literacy (e.g., Burgess et al., 2011; McKool & Gespass, 2009).

Exploring Applegate and Applegate's Study

Applegate and Applegate (2004) reported reading habits and perceptions of pre-service teachers. They began with a small pilot study measuring reading perceptions of candidates in elementary education preparation programs from two institutions. Primarily, participants fell into the categories of being an enthusiastic (i.e., reported having a positive attitude towards reading and who read at least one non-children's book over the summer) or an unenthusiastic (i.e., reporting have no or very little enjoyment with reading and did little/no leisure reading of the summer) reader. Applegate and Applegate described the first findings as "grim" with 54.3% of future teachers identified as unenthusiastic readers.

A follow-up survey was developed with defined questions and force-choice responses. In the second study, Applegate and Applegate hoped to gain a better understanding of how future teachers viewed their own reading habits and perceived influences on these habits. Findings from the same two institutions were reported with data collected from declared elementary education majors at the sophomore level. A small decrease (48.4%) in the overall identification of unenthusiastic readers were reported. The results of the second study showed that college-level reading can have a significant impact on how pre-service teachers perceive reading.

With Applegate and Applegate's findings being nearly 15 years old, the current study's authors questioned if any differences would be found at their own institution. Using Applegate and Applegate in a quasi-replication study combined with a qualitative approach to analyze themes, the following research questions were posed:

1. What themes exist in the self-reported reading habits (i.e., past and current) and perceived enjoyment pre-service teachers gain from reading?

2. What are the identified practices suggested in the literature to bridge the gap between experiences as a college student and early career educators' work in schools?

The ultimate goals were to find support for more meaningful reading engagement in teacher preparation programs and to ultimately impact P-12 reading achievement.

Current Study

Pre-service teachers were provided a version of the Literacy Habits Questionnaire (LHQ) regarding reading experiences and perceived skills as adult readers. The tool was originally developed and used by Applegate and Applegate (2004) and was further explored by Nathanson et al. (2008) with graduate students. Since the current study additionally explored pre-service teachers' exposure/experience with titles that included characters with disabilities, one question was added to the LHQ (see Appendix); however, those results are outside of the scope of this article and, therefore, will not be reported. The LHQ was administered in an Introduction to Special Education course, with no grade assigned, and pre-service teachers participated voluntarily. The LHQ was an out-of-class assignment meant to spark participants' thoughts about their reading history and introduce them to diverse book titles, as suggested by Atkins et al., (2018). Depending upon the semester, one of the two authors was the instructor of the course.

Participants included pre-service teachers in early childhood, elementary, middle level, and special education programs. Dual licensure options are available, and many participants identified as seeking more than one teaching license. Table 1

Table 1. PRE-SERVICE TEACHER INFORMATION

Semester Turn in Rate	Gender	Year in School	Major		
F 2016 71/77 = 92%	66 F / 5 M	Freshmen = 11 Sophomore = 34 Junior = 24 Senior = 1 GS = 1	ECH = 13 ECH/ELE =10 ELE = 33	SPE = 7 SPE/ECH = 2 SPE/ELE = 2 SPE/SED = 0	ML = 6 SED = 1 CDS = 1
SP 2017 22/46 = 48%	19 F / 1 M 1 Not Reported	Freshmen = 7 Sophomore = 11 Junior = 1 Senior = 2	ECH = 8 ECH/ELE = 0 ELE = 5	SPE = 2 SPE/ECH = 1 SPE/ELE = 2 SPE/SED = 0	ML = 4 SED = 0 CDS = 0
F 2017 41/67 = 61%	35 F / 4 M 2 Not Reported	Freshmen = 8 Sophomore = 15 Junior = 15 Senior = 3	ECH = 10 ECH/ELE = 3 ELE = 14	SPE = 5 SPE/ECH = 4 SPE/ELE = 2 SPE/SED = 0	ML = 4 SED = 0 CDS = 0
SP 2018 22/23 = 96%	18 F / 5 M	Freshmen = 8 Sophomore = 6 Junior = 6 Senior = 2	ECH = 4 ECH/ELE = 1 ELE = 10	SPE = 4 SPE/ECH = 0 SPE/ELE = 0 SPE/SED = 0	ML = 1 SED = 0 CDS = 0 PSY=1 OT = 1
Totals 156 /213 = 73%	138 F / 15 M 3 Not Reported	Freshmen = 34 Sophomore = 66 Junior = 46 Senior = 8 GS = 1	ECH = 35 ECH/ELE = 14 ELE = 62	SPE = 18 SPE/ECH = 7 SPE/ELE = 6 SPE/SED = 0	ML = 15 SED = 1 CDS = 1 PSY=1 OT = 1

Key for College Major: ECH = Early Childhood Education; ECH/ELE = Early Childhood Education with Elementary Education; ELE = Elementary Education; ML = Middle Level Education; SPE = Special Education; SPE/ ELE = Special Education with Elementary Education; SED = Secondary Education; SPE/SED = Special Education with Secondary Education; CDS = Communication Disorder Sciences; PSY = Psychology; OT = Occupational Therapy

shows participant demographic and pre-service teacher program information. Once collected, data were reviewed for themes by a graduate student and one of the authors. Inter-rater reliability was conducted throughout the analysis of the findings. The University Institutional Review Board (IRB) approved all surveys and procedures.

General Findings

Seventy-three percent of the 213 pre-service teachers (N = 156) surveyed returned complete sets of data across 4 semesters of data collection. Participants reported reading across many different types of texts and books for different age groups. These included: fantasy/science fiction/supernatural, mystery and horror, romance and drama, Christian readings, sports, history (both fiction and non-fiction), and young adult literature. News and magazine articles, along with social media, representing information from online sources were reportedly read. Many participants did provide specific titles, author names, and/or both (title / author) when asked about recreational reading. Titles and authors reported with the greatest frequency included *Harry Potter*/J.K. Rowling, *Pride and Prejudice*/Jane Austin, and *Fault in Our Stars*/John Green. Nicolas Sparks and Stephen King were authors reported with some frequency across all semesters. Although elementary education majors made up roughly 40% of the participants across semesters, these majors were more likely than other majors to indicate that they did not read for recreation. A discovered theme related specifically to participants reading books that were to be turned into movies; this was noted with greatest frequency in the Spring 2018 semester.

Pre-service teachers noted their elementary-level experiences as positive and important to their development as readers. Specifically, participants reported how their elementary teachers' behavior positively impacted their development (n=103). Themes that surfaced included that their teachers had made reading fun, and participants perceived themselves to be "good" or "fast" readers. Participants responded positively to the perceived competitiveness of reading at the elementary level. Amongst those reporting negative experiences (n=17), this appeared to stem from a perceived lack of comprehension. When reporting negative experiences, participants wrote that they perceived themselves as "slow" or "not good" readers; others reported not liking being "forced" to read for homework. One participant wrote, "Reading was just one more task to complete." Thirty-four participants rated their reading elementary school experiences as "neutral". Common "neutral" themes related to participants having some perceived struggle with reading, reporting that reading was "just another task to complete", or simply having no direct memory of reading instruction.

Most surveyed rated their college reading experience as "neutral" (n=92), with only 24 participants reporting a positive experience with college-level reading. Many reported not having time for recreational reading with a majority of required reading coming from textbooks. Participants described reading as "long," "boring," and "mind-numbing." One participant wrote, "I know it helps me, but I don't enjoy it (i.e., assigned readings)." Participants did confess to simply not reading their assigned college-level texts. Those who reported negative college-level reading experiences (n = 34), described a lack of interest in the topic, that there was "too much" required reading, and a perceived lack of accountability (i.e., tested). An apparent lack of time to read was reported; one participant simply wrote, "Teachers (in higher education) don't encourage reading for fun."

Discussion of Results

As the current study was a quasi-replication study, both Applegate and Applegate (2004) and Nathanson et al.'s (2008) findings were used for comparison purposes. A wide range of titles, authors, and types of texts were reportedly being read, which is encouraging. This somewhat mirrors Nathanson et al.'s (2008) findings who reported that 48% of graduate level respondents read two or more books over a summer. Unfortunately, no titles or authors were reported by Nathanson et al., so no comparisons can be made. Knowing what pre-service teachers are interested in reading could be a link to motivation and encouragement for teacher educators.

Findings from the current study do mirror those from Applegate and Applegate (2004). Specifically, elementary-level reading experiences seem to matter to pre-service teachers' perceptions of themselves as readers. Comments made by pre-service teachers in the current study are similar to those made nearly 15 years ago, both positively and negatively. Participants in both studies noted that elementary-level teachers had made reading "fun", particularly that there was a sense of accomplishment being a "good" reader. A common theme across both studies was the negative feelings regarding participants' perceptions of poor reading comprehension.

College-level reading experiences were also explored. For the current study, most participants (n = 92; 59%) reported a neutral perception of reading at the college-level, with 34 reporting a negative experience. This is similar to the college-level reading experience reported by Nathanson et al. (2008) where 68% of participants reported a negative or neutral college-level reading experience. Applegate and Applegate (2004) found a significant correlation between college-level reading and level of perceived reading enjoyment of pre-service teachers. Combined, these results seem to indicate that college-level reading can and does impact the pre-service teacher.

Implications to the Field

Supporting teacher candidates through their teacher preparation programs and into the first years of teaching is important. Faculty and school districts cannot assume pre-service teachers and early educators are "readers," nor assume that they have developed an aesthetic view of reading (Applegate & Applegate, 2004; Capps & Huang, 2015). The fact that most of the future teacher "pool" has grown up in an era of high regard for tests and testing data must not be ignored (Davis & Vehabovic, 2018). Pre-service teachers who reported not feeling that they were held accountable (i.e., tested) on assigned readings at the college level may have been influenced by test-centric practices/ philosophies, likely having learned to read for information rather than valuing reading for pleasure. Therefore, faculty must explicitly advocate aesthetic reading, provide explicit reading instruction, and provide authentic opportunities to learn and apply evidence-based instructional strategies (Applegate & Applegate, 2004). Practices such as book talks and reading circles should be explored; providing time for teacher candidates to read within scheduled course time must also be scheduled (McKool & Gespass, 2014; Marabel et al., 2010). Explicit instructional time should be given to include the use of technology-based reading (see Larson, 2013).

Davis and Vehabovic's (2018) discussion regarding reading comprehension and testing can be applied and openly discussed with pre-service teachers. Teacher educators must ensure they are not encouraging pre-service teachers to only read "for the test." Clark et al. (2017) encouraged those in teacher preparation programs to examine both the content and frequency of literacy-focused instruction because more does not necessarily mean better. Teacher preparation programs must examine their curriculum to find a "balance between content and pedagogical knowledge as well as a balance of all components of reading instruction" (Clark et al., 2017, p. 229).

Murphy et al. (2014) reported on pre-service teachers' narrow understanding of literacy and how post-secondary educators could have an impact on P-12 student outcomes. In a rush to cover content/curriculum with mandated passages and to "test," teachers may be sending the message to students that reading is meant to be completed quickly and that passages are written for instructional purposes only. Davis and Vehabovic (2018) mirrored this warning. Early career educators engaging in such practices may not know that what they are doing is having unintended consequences on the reading development of their P-12 students. By having open conversations, administrators, cooperating teachers, and higher education faculty should examine the unwritten messages such practices have on students and, together, develop more purposeful practices.

Furthermore, faculty need to examine both curriculum and instruction to determine wherein effective modeling and purposeful reading can take place. Modeling is an effective teaching strategy which can be used with reading at any level. Cooperating teachers and faculty modeling how to effectively use reading aloud can build listening

skills as well as engagement within and across literature and content areas, finding that balance between content and pedagogical knowledge. Teacher preparation faculty may find it useful to include reading aloud from the textbook and introducing other fiction or non-fiction books or alternative document (e.g., photographs) that pertain to varied content matter (see Fang, 2014). By providing a sampling of texts that covers a wide variety of content (e.g., history, science, biographies of mathematicians and/or scientists), students are afforded the opportunity to develop language, effective use of reading strategies, and a deeper connection to what they prefer to read. These opportunities may, then, foster a more positive attitude towards reading and increase the possibility that there will be subject matter that is personally interesting (Fang, 2014).

Faculty and school districts should collaboratively develop book lists for pre-service teacher, teacher, and faculty use (Gilbert & Fister, 2011; McKool & Gespass, 2009; Mol & Bus, 2011). These could include children's literature, online resources, young adult titles, and adult literature. Book lists across disciplines and content areas should be shared. This could also include specialized lists such as award recipients (e.g., Monarch Awards, Rebecca Caudill Awards), cultural awareness (e.g., Pura Belpre' Award), and disability awareness (e.g., Schneider Family Book Award; see Table 2 for additional resources).

Closing Thoughts

"The place of literacy both as a basic prerequisite for success at school and as a fundamental skill in modern society is unquestionable" (Murphy et al., 2014). To change literacy outcomes for P-12 learners, a focus on teachers' reading needs to be paramount. It must also be understood that education is a joint effort between teachers, students, and families. As a society, we must

Table 2. TEACHER EDUCATOR / SCHOOL LITERACY RESOURCES

Source	Brief Description
https://www.aisled.org See below for book awards across grade levels.	Association of Illinois School Library Educators provides a book list and subsequent award which reflects excellence in literature for a variety of learners across grade levels.
https://www.aisled.org/monarch.htm	Monarch Award: K-3
https://www.aisled.org/bluestem.htm	Blue Stem Award: Grades 3-5
https://www.aisled.org/claudill.htm	Rebecca Caudill Award Grades 4-8
https://www.aisled.org/lincoln.htm	The Lincoln Award: Young adult/adult fiction and nonfiction
https://www.goodreads.com/shelf/show/disability-awareness	Good Reads is the world's largest site at which readers can access recommendations and reviews.
http://illinoisreads.org/home.html	Illinois Reading Council provides a book list each year for varying age/grade levels featuring Illinois authors.
https://literacyworldwide.org/get-resources/standards/standards-2017	International Literacy Association website; link to updated Standards for the Preparation of Literacy Professionals (2017) and video descriptions
https://www.interventioncentral.org/	Intervention Central is a link for educators to academic, behavioral, and assessment related resources.
https://iris.peabody.vanderbilt.edu/books/	IRIS Center of Vanderbilt University has a generous listing of not only books regarding "disability" but also a guide to evidence-based practices, resources for teacher education faculty, and more! Check out the "Resources" tab on the dashboard.
Teaching Reading Sourcebook, 2nd ed. by Honig, Diamond, & Gutlohn (2015)	Authors provide a practical guide linking theory to practice for the development of reading in youth; best practices are described with example lesson plan templates.
https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/	What Works Clearinghouse provides product, program, and practice reviews in so that educators have access to up-to-date evidence-based research.

address students' experiences in order to teach them how to read and how to find enjoyment in the activity itself. Teacher educators should be a part of this conversation and recognize that teachers need to be life-long learners. Thus, teacher preparation programs, cooperating teachers, and school districts must join forces to ensure the next generation of teachers develop a love of reading within supportive environments with multiple opportunities to engage with texts and young readers (Bishop et al., 2010). Developing teachers who can model and express the joy of reading and learning should be the collective mission.

Based upon current data and support from published literature, pre-service teachers appear to be experiencing a lack a positive engagement with reading, which can have an impact on P-12 students. Teacher educators, administrators, and cooperative teachers need to actively encourage the next generation of teachers to enthusiastically engage in reading in front of students. By educating the next generation of teachers about a child's right to read (see International Literacy Association; https://www.literacyworldwide.org/docs/default-source/resource-documents/ila-childrens-rights-to-read.pdf) and through inclusion of children's right to excellent literacy instruction (see https://www.literacyworldwide.org/get-resources/childrens-rights-to-read, a ripple effect can be caused within the P-12 system.

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Appendix

Adapted Literacy Habits Questionnaire

Candidate E#: _____ Major: _____

Year in School: Freshman Sophomore Junior Senior

1. In general, what do you read for recreation? Are there any titles or authors you can recall?

2. When you think of yourself in general as a reader, how much enjoyment do you associate with reading? What reason(s) do you have for responding in this way?

3. When you consider the instruction in reading that you received in school, how would you rate the emphasis that was placed upon each of the following: (circle 1 for each prompt)

1–no emphasis 2–little emphasis 3–some emphasis 4–considerable emphasis 5–great deal of emphasis

Prompt	Elementary School	High School
Remember the details of what you read	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5
Your own reaction to or interpretation of what you read	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5
Discussing your reactions and interpretations with classmates or teachers	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5
Completing assignments or report associated with the reading	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5

4. When you consider your early elementary school reading experiences with learning to read, do you recall them as primarily positive, negative, or neutral? Why?

5. Did your experiences with reading at home differ from your experiences at school? If so, how?

6. Were any of your teachers effective in sharing with you a joy of reading? If so, how did you they do this?

7. When you consider your college level reading experiences, do you see them as primarily positive, negative, or neutral? Why?

8. In your experiences as a reader (home – elementary-now), have there been a variety of titles which portrayed individuals with disabilities? Were these characters positively, negatively, or neutrally portrayed? How so?

Experiences Taking the WI Foundations of Reading Exam: Results of a Questionnaire of University of Wisconsin System Students and Alumni

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ABSTRACT

This study was designed to examine Wisconsin Foundations of Reading (FoRT) test-takers' experiences, specifically their methods of preparation and perceptions of the exam's influence on their identity as teachers. Data consisted of a questionnaire distributed to potential participants across the University of Wisconsin System. Results of 451 responses were analyzed using descriptive statistics, quantitative measures, and qualitative analysis. The study begins with a brief history of the FoRT in Wisconsin, providing context for results and conclusions. Findings report overall passing rates, resources, processes, and university support accessed as candidates prepared for the FoRT. Also reported are test-takers' perceptions of the influence test results had on their identity as teachers, particularly through the constructs of self-efficacy and attribution. Conclusions raise questions regarding the role of professional exams in teacher licensing.

Introduction and Background Information

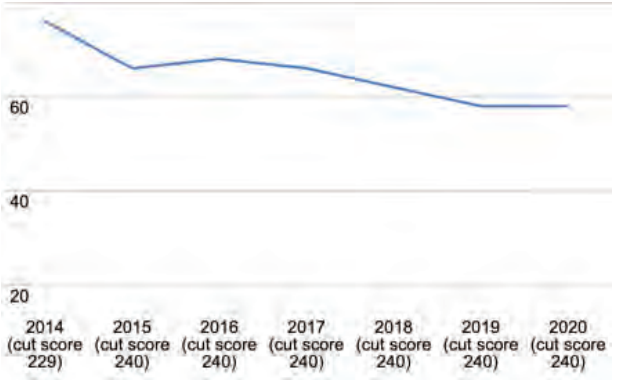
Assessments of content and pedagogical knowledge play a significant role in a teacher candidate's journey toward licensure. In our current educational landscape, standardized evaluations ensure that candidates have the requisite knowledge and skills to teach. The movement in favor of standardized assessments began in 1998 with the reauthorization of Title II of the Higher Education Act (Public Law 105-244) which required teacher education programs to report the performance of their candidates on a variety of state tests. Three years later, the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (Public Law 107-110) was enacted, calling for "highly qualified teachers" by the 2006-2007 academic year. Specific to teacher education, NCLB mandated that preservice teachers demonstrate competence in content and pedagogy prior to entering the profession.

One such standardized assessment, the Foundations of Reading Test (FoRT), was designed by Educational Testing Service (ETS). The FoRT is organized into four sub areas including Reading Foundational Skills, Development of Reading Comprehension, Assessment and Instruction, and Integration of Knowledge and Understanding. ETS emphasizes that the exam was designed to "measure the knowledge and/or skills thought to be important for beginning practice" (Educational Testing Service, 2006 as cited in Goldhaber, 2007, p. 769). Since its inception, the FoRT has been adopted by eight states. The Wisconsin FoRT was first administered in May of 2013, with an initial cut score set at 229. Beginning September 2014, per Wisconsin State Legislation 118.19(14)(a), Wisconsin teacher candidates seeking teaching licenses for grades K-5, special education, and those who desire a reading teacher or reading specialist license have been required to pass the Wisconsin FoRT by earning the mandated cut score of 240.

In response to the introduction of the FoRT as a requirement for teacher licensing in the state of Wisconsin, teacher preparation programs across Wisconsin designed individual plans to support their teacher candidates in preparing for the test. Later, in 2017, the Deans and Directors of the University of Wisconsin System Schools of Education, in partnership with the University of Wisconsin System Administrators, commissioned a work group composed of literacy or reading faculty and instructors representing each of the thirteen University of Wisconsin campuses. The UWS FoRT Workgroup was charged with leading efforts to prepare teacher candidates and in-service teachers to take the FoRT.

An examination of score reports from those who have attempted the WI FoRT reveals that most test-takers (92%) eventually earn the cut score and are eligible for licensure. This statistic alone, however, does not tell the story of candidates' experiences preparing for and attempting the test. As teacher educators and researchers, we are concerned that the first-time pass rate has steadily declined since 2015, when the average first-time passing rate was 66%, to the more recent 2020 average first time pass rate of 58% (Figure 1).

Figure 1. FoRT FIRST TIME PASS RATES



The decline in first time pass rates is likely reflective of the larger sociopolitical contexts of teacher preparation in Wisconsin. As participants in these contexts, we are aware of the many issues surrounding teacher preparation in Wisconsin, including attracting and retaining teachers, particularly teachers of color, as well as issues around requirements for initial teacher licensure. The aim of this study is to better understand the FoRT as one aspect of teacher licensure in Wisconsin. To that end, we undertook this study to bring forward the perspective of those most impacted by the FoRT, the test-takers themselves.

The following research questions guided this study:

- What are the results of test-takers' attempts at passing the FoRT?
- How did test-takers prepare for the FoRT?
- How did FoRT preparation and results influence test-takers' identity and self-efficacy?

Research Design

The research design was developed to investigate the experiences of Wisconsin teacher candidates, and teachers seeking advanced licenses, who have taken the FoRT. In this section, we describe the questionnaire, sampling selection and respondents, and discuss approaches for analyzing data.

Questionnaire

The primary data source for this study was a Qualtrics questionnaire distributed to participants during the spring and summer of 2020. The first page of the online survey consisted of detailed study information as required by the Institutional Review Board, with a button click to indicate consent to participate and link to the survey itself.

Participants were invited to respond to 23 questions developed by the researchers to better understand respondents' test preparation, test-taking experiences, and impact of the testing experience and results on their identity and self-efficacy. The survey asked questions such as: Did you pass the FoRT on your first attempt? Do you feel prepared to teach literacy to elementary students? How well did you feel supported by your university faculty and staff to pass the FoRT? How did your FoRT results make you feel about yourself as a teacher?

UWS FoRT work group representatives from the ten University of Wisconsin institutions who opted to participate in the study recruited participants through an email consisting of a brief cover letter and a link to the Qualtrics survey. In order to accommodate individual university schedules, each university representative chose a two-week window in the spring and summer of 2020 in which to collect survey responses. Responses were housed anonymously in the Qualtrics survey platform and accessible to researchers for data analysis.

Respondents

The questionnaire was completed by 644 respondents. Incomplete responses were removed from the data set, leaving 451 responses representing 12 universities. Descriptive statistics indicate that respondents were primarily white women, which is representative of the teaching population in Wisconsin, as well as across the United States more broadly (U.S. Department of Education, 2020). Descriptive statistics were calculated through Qualtrics survey analytic software and are summarized in Table 1. Table 2 describes the universities attended and programs completed by respondents.

Data Analysis

In order to gain an understanding of participants' experiences of the FoRT and how those experiences influenced their identities and senses of self-efficacy, data was collected and analyzed through a mixed methods epistemology (Johnson et al., 2007). Along with descriptive statistics, quantitative data included percentages of

Table 1. RESPONDENTS' DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

Ethnicity	White	426
	Hispanic	10
	Other	5
	Asian/Pacific Islander	4
	Black	2
	American Indian/Alaska Native	1
	Prefer not to answer	3
Gender	Female	410
	Male	38
	Prefer not to answer	3
First Generation	No	276
	Yes	175
Age	18-22 years	157
	23-25 years	143
	26-29 years	72
	30-39 years	54
	40-49 years	18
	50+ years	5
Level of Service	Preservice	239
	In-service	212

participants who passed the FoRT, the number of attempts participants had made at the time of the survey, as well as types and quantity of resources used to prepare for the FoRT. Additionally, Pearson correlation was used to determine relationships between time and effort spent studying for the FoRT and first-time pass rates.

Qualitative methods (Miles et al., 2020) were used to analyze data pertaining to research question three, which sought to better understand how FoRT preparation and results influenced test-takers' sense of identity (Hammerness et al., 2005; Heider, 1958) and self-efficacy (Bandura,1977). Researchers independently coded responses to open-ended short-answer survey questions. The research team compared coding schemes, returning to the data to verify response patterns. Researchers then wove across the data set, moving between quantitative data and the open-ended responses to develop themes.

Table 2. INSTITUTIONS OF ATTENDANCE AND PROGRAMS OF STUDY

University of Wisconsin Institution	UW-Milwaukee	70
	UW-Whitewater	70
	UW-LaCrosse	66
	UW-Platteville	62
	UW-Oshkosh	50
	UW-River Falls	48
	UW-Stevens Point	38
	UW-Stout	22
	UW-Green Bay	14
	UW-Parkside	9
	UW-Eau Claire	1
	UW-Superior	1
Program of Study	Middle Childhood	144
	Early Childhood	137
	Early Childhood, Middle Childhood	64
	Middle Childhood Special Education	35
	Early Childhood Special Education	20
	Early Childhood, Early Childhood Special Education	19
	Middle Childhood, Middle Childhood Special Education	18
	Early Childhood or Middle Childhood Special Education	12
	Middle Childhood, Early Childhood Special Education	2

Note. The University of Wisconsin System provides teacher preparation programs at all 13 of its campuses. Candidates choosing to further their education may have received training at more than one campus, thus explaining why there are more campuses reporting than participated in the study.

Results

In this section, we present results for each of the three research questions.

RQ 1: What are the results of test-takers' attempts at passing the FoRT?

Survey results showed that 249 of the 451 respondents (55%) passed the FoRT on the first attempt. In comparison, per state data, 12,894 of the 19,458 test takers (66%) have passed the FoRT on the first attempt since the onset of testing in Wisconsin in 2013. State data is comprehensive, as it includes results of all those seeking licenses requiring a passing FoRT score from 2013-2020, while the sample for this study represents a self-selected sub-group of test-takers. Many survey respondents who did not pass the FoRT on the first attempt (202; 45%), earned a passing score on their second attempt (48; 11%) or a subsequent attempt (47; 10%). All told, 344 (76%) of survey respondents reported they had passed the FoRT at the time of this study.

Those who had not yet passed the FoRT at the time of the study (107; 24%) indicated a varied number of attempts: 34 (7%) attempted it once, 20 (4%) attempted twice, 15 (3%) attempted three times, four attempted it four, five, and six times (less than 1% each), three people attempted to pass the FoRT more than six times and the remaining 23 did not respond. The majority 71 (66%) of respondents who have not yet passed the FoRT indicated they will attempt to pass the test until successful, eight (7% of those who had not yet passed) indicated they will not continue to try to pass, and 28 (26% of those who had not yet passed) are not sure about future plans for retaking the FoRT.

In addition to reporting the number of attempts to pass the FoRT, respondents were asked to rank the four subareas of the FoRT from least difficult to

most difficult. Most respondents (187; 41%) indicated that Subarea 1-Foundations of Reading Development was the least difficult portion of the test. The majority of respondents considered either Subarea 2-Development of Reading Comprehension (156; 35%) or Subarea 3-Reading Assessment and Instruction (145; 32%) to be somewhat difficult, while Subarea 4-Integration of Knowledge and Understanding (229; 51%) was ranked as the most difficult portion of the FoRT. Figures 2-5 present difficulty rankings for each subarea in full.

Although respondents reported that Subarea 1-Foundations of Reading Development was the least difficult portion of the FoRT, statewide data indicate that Subarea 2-Development of Reading Comprehension was the subarea in which test-takers were most successful, as indicated by statewide average scores per subarea. Perceptions of difficulty aligned more closely with statewide results for Subarea 4-Integration of Knowledge and Understanding, with respondents reporting that Subarea 4-Integration of Knowledge and Understanding was the most difficult portion of the test and statewide averages indicating Subarea 4-Integration of Knowledge and Understanding as scoring the lowest on average scores by subarea. Of note, scores for all four subareas have declined steadily over time. Table 3 presents state averages for each of the four subareas across the seven years the FoRT has been a licensure requirement in Wisconsin.

TABLE 3. STATE-WIDE AVERAGE SCORES BY SUBAREA

	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
Subarea 1	2.83	2.80	2.82	2.86	2.80	2.69	2.67	2.60
Subarea 2	3.01	3.04	2.93	2.93	2.87	2.84	2.78	2.78
Subarea 3	2.93	3.02	2.93	2.91	2.90	2.82	2.78	2.70
Subarea 4	2.47	2.45	2.45	2.41	2.40	2.42	2.38	2.41

Note. FoRT subarea scores range from 0-4.

In summary, of 451 survey respondents in this study, 249 (55%) passed the FoRT on the first attempt. Of those who did not pass the FoRT on the first attempt (202; 45%), 95 respondents (21%) passed the FoRT on their second attempt (48; 11%)

Figure 2. SUBAREA 1—FOUNDATIONS OF READING DEVELOPMENT

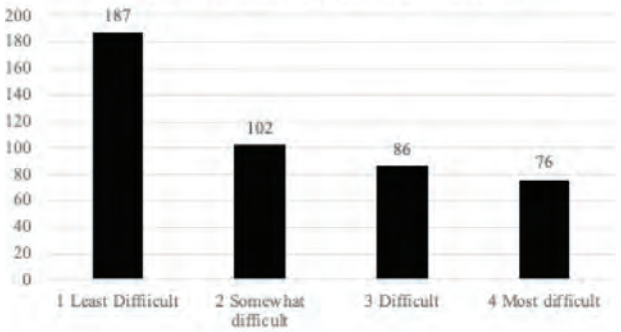


Figure 3. SUBAREA 2—DEVELOPMENT OF READING COMPREHENSION

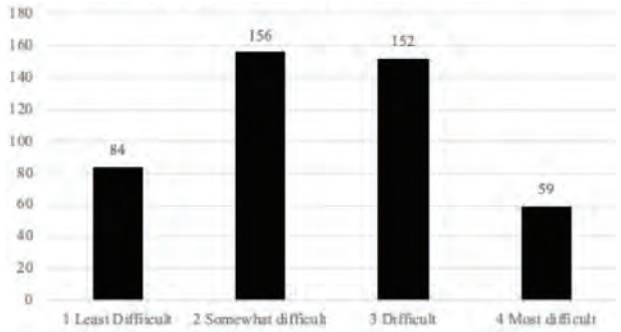


Figure 4. SUBAREA 3—READING ASSESSMENT AND INSTRUCTION

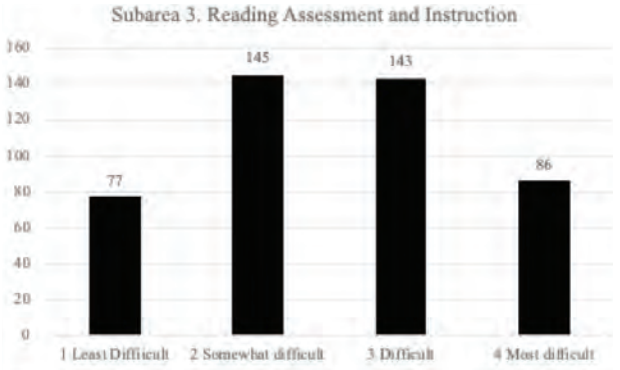
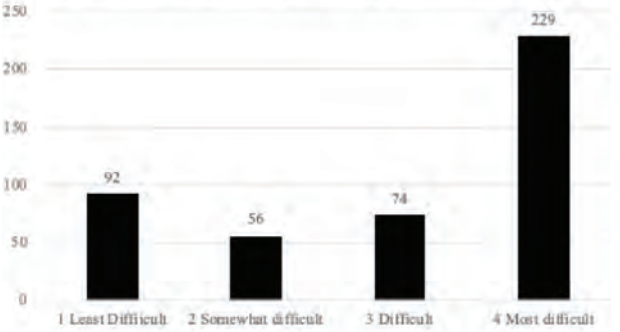


Figure 5. SUBAREA 4—INTEGRATION OF KNOWLEDGE AND UNDERSTANDING



or a subsequent attempt (47; 10 %). The number of attempts among respondents who failed the FoRT the first time varied from two to more than six attempts. Regarding respondents' perceptions of difficulty, the majority of respondents (187; 42%) indicated that Subarea 1-Foundations of Reading Development was the least difficult subarea and Subarea 4-Integration of Knowledge and Understanding (open responses) (229; 51%) was the most difficult subarea.

RQ 2: How did test-takers prepare for the FORT?

The processes engaged in, resources accessed, and the time and effort put forth, showed that preparation for the FoRT was as individual as each test-taker, as were test-takers' perceptions of support from university faculty and staff. Each of the following sections states overall numbers and percentages of responses for each category of preparation.

Processes Used to Prepare for the FoRT

When asked which processes were used in FoRT preparation, the 451 respondents typically chose more than one process. The majority of FoRT test takers utilized three key processes: studying on their own (423; 94%), practice tests (300; 67%), and use of online resources (246; 55%). FoRT specific courses were also mentioned by 191 respondents (42%). A number of respondents indicated that they studied with a friend, (180; 40%), and 168 respondents mentioned reviewing course materials (37%). Purchasing of supportive materials (120; 27%) and individual tutoring (57; 13%) were the least selected processes. Processes used to prepare for the FoRT are presented in Figure 6.

The survey requested study respondents to select resources that they accessed in preparation for the FoRT. The most common resources identified were the FoRT Study Guide (Yaeger, 2019) and online resources developed by Jen Yaeger (Yaeger, 2021) (248; 55%), as well as interacting with Quizlets (208; 46%). Other resources accessed by test-takers included university or college created modules (200; 44%), the UW Madison online FoRT course

Figure 6. FoRT PREPARATION PROCESSES
Preparation Resources and Coursework

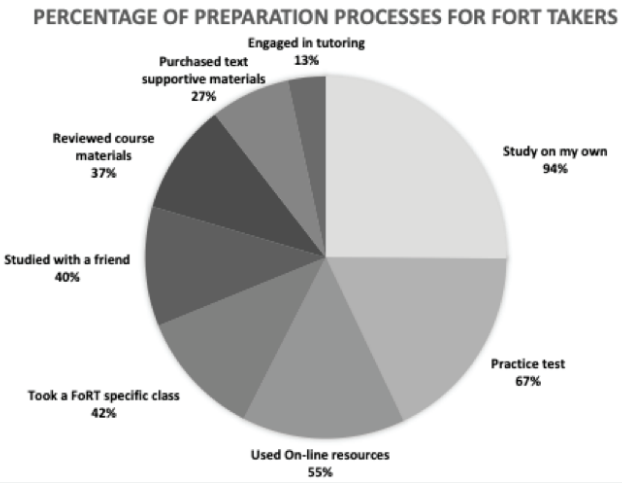
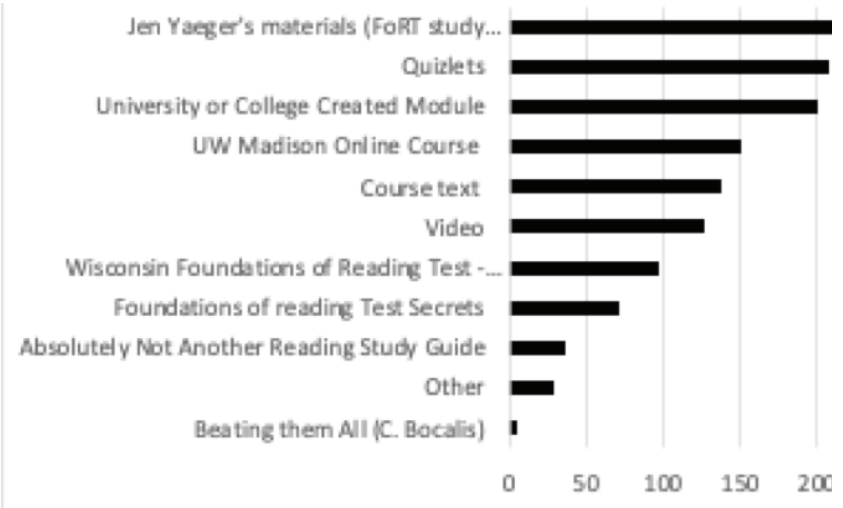


Figure 7. RESOURCES USED BY TEST-TAKERS
FoRT Preparation Time

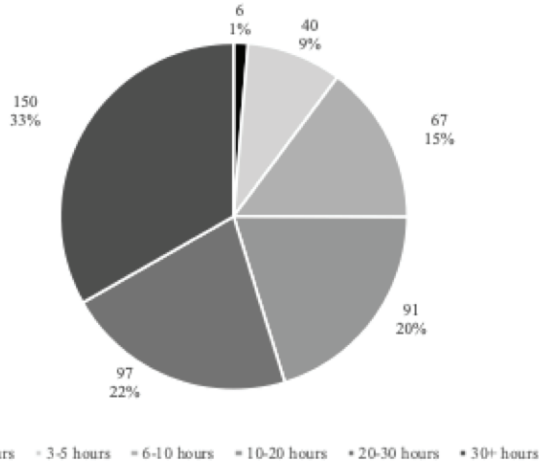


(150; 33%) and test preparation videos (163; 28%). Respondents were less likely to use resources such as books specifically designed to prepare candidates for the FoRT (i.e. DeSouza-Stephens, 2016) (159; 36%) or course texts (138; 31%). Resources used by test-takers are presented in Figure 7.

FoRT Preparation Time

Regarding preparation for the FoRT, the number of hours to study for the test ranged from one hour to more that 30 hours. As Figure 8 indicates, 150 respondents (33%) studied more than 30 hours, 97 respondents (21%) studied 20-30 hours, 91 respondents (20%) studied for 10-20 hours, 67 respondents (15%) studied for 6-10 hours, 40 respondents (9%) studied for 3-5 hours, and six respondents (1%) spent 1-2 hours for FoRT preparation. Overall, 54 % of the respondents studied at least 20 hours before taking the FoRT.

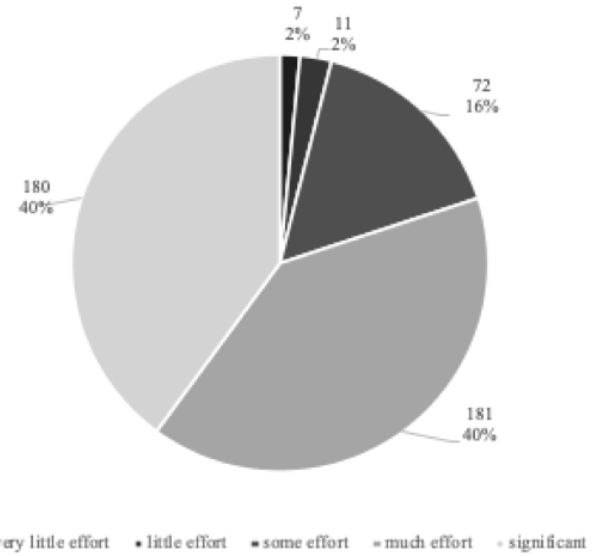
Figure 8. PERCENTAGE OF HOURS SPENT FOR FoRT PREPARATION



FoRT Preparation Effort

Respondents self-reported a high level of effort expended towards FoRT preparation. A majority of survey respondents (361; 80%) reported putting forth "significant effort" (180; 40%) or "much effort" (181; 40%) toward FoRT preparation. On the other hand, 72 (16%) of the respondents put forth "some effort," 11 (2 %) reported "little effort," and 7 (2%) reported "very little effort." Results for the level of effort put into FoRT preparation are presented in Figure 9.

Figure 9. LEVEL OF EFFORT FOR FoRT PREPARATION



Respondents' self-reporting of time and effort spent studying for the FoRT varied widely. In order to determine if there was a correlation between time spent studying and first-time passing rates, we conducted a statistical analysis. Although most respondents reported studying between 10 and 30 hours for the FoRT, Pearson correlation suggests that a statistically significant but weak relationship exists between time spent studying and first-time passing rates ($r=0.09$; $p<0.05$). Likewise, self-reported effort did not appear to correlate with a higher first-time passing rate ($r=0.15$; $p<0.01$).

Change in FoRT Preparation Strategies

In an effort to understand how respondents who did not pass the FoRT on their first attempt changed the way they prepared for the exam, we asked which strategies they used to prepare for their second attempt. Of the 152 who responded to this question, 138 (91% of those responding to this question) indicated that they changed how they prepared for second or subsequent attempts. Only 14 (9% of those responding to this question) reported that they did not change their strategies to prepare for the FoRT after an unsuccessful first attempt.

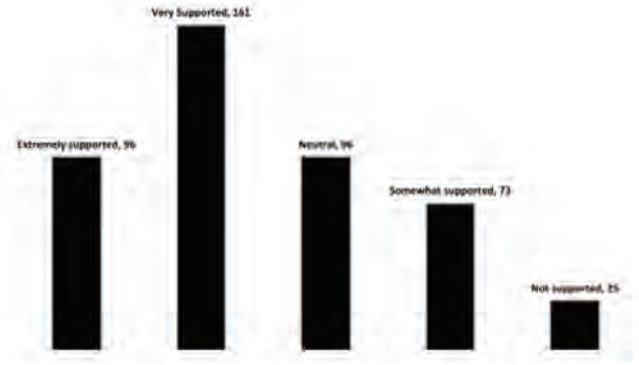
The three top approaches identified by respondents who changed strategies included spending time looking for more FoRT resources (28; 20%), increasing study time study for the

FoRT (24; 17%), and spending time in tutoring (20; 15%). For example, respondents reported: "...for the second attempt I went to tutoring classes at night for six weeks," and "the first attempt I simply reviewed my notes once or twice because I had typically been good at taking exams. After that attempt failed, I inquired about a tutor and spent large amounts of time reviewing material by myself as well as with peers." Of lesser frequency, respondents reported that they analyzed and focused on specific FoRT subareas (14; 10%). One participant shared, "I reviewed what I struggled on the first time, studied more." Another shared, "I figured out which areas I struggled in and studied them more." Another approach was focusing on vocabulary and terminology. One respondent shared they "studied more especially vocabulary so I knew how to apply it to different application situations." Another wrote "I started using online resources and made my own Quizlet with vocabulary practice." Other FoRT study approaches were using the FoRT practice test (10; 7%) and studying with classmates and/or friends (9; 7%).

FoRT Preparation University Support

Preparation for the FoRT requires many test-takers to access resources, use effective processes, allocate time, and put forth effort; yet test-takers are not alone in their study. Teacher preparation programs and teacher educators play a large role in supporting candidates' preparation. Universities allocate space (i.e. FoRT specific courses or designated FoRT tutoring sessions) and financial support (i.e. scholarships to pay FoRT registration fees or stipends for FoRT tutors and coordinators) while instructors embed FoRT material into coursework, design resources (i.e. repositories for readings, practice quizzes), conduct tutoring sessions, and offer general support for teacher candidates. Overall, 96 respondents felt extremely supported (21%) and 161 indicated they were very supported by their university faculty and instructors (36%). A percentage of respondents indicated neutrality to this survey question (96; 21%). Sixteen percent felt somewhat supported by faculty and staff (73; 16%) while 25 (6%) felt unsupported in their FoRT preparation. Results regarding respondents' perceptions of university support are presented in Figure 10.

Figure 10. FoRT SUPPORT BY FACULTY AND STAFF



In research question two, we explored ways in which test-takers prepared for the FoRT. Results indicate that test-takers used a variety of processes, with the majority of respondents indicating that studying on their own (423; 94%), taking practice tests (300; 67%), and using online resources (246; 55%) were the most widely used processes. Respondents typically selected more than one study resource, with Yeager's FoRT Study Guide (2019) being the most popular (248; 55%). The majority of respondents put significant effort into FoRT preparation with 55% putting in 20-30 hours or more of study time. Overall, 257 (57%) of respondents felt either extremely or very supported by faculty and staff during FoRT preparation.

RQ 3: How did FoRT preparation and results influence test-takers self-efficacy?

Self-efficacy (Bandura, 1977) is a construct of identity (Heider, 1958) describing individuals' belief in their ability to be successful in a desired outcome. Tschannen-Moran and Hoy (2001) posit that self-efficacy is a central factor in teacher effectiveness. To gain a sense of how the FoRT influenced test-takers' sense of self-efficacy, the survey asked respondents to respond to the question, "How did your FoRT results make you feel about yourself as a teacher?"

Responses to this question fell into three categories:

- FoRT results led to positive feelings (e.g., "Like an effective teacher," or "I felt qualified and confident to work with students on multiple levels.")

- FoRT results had no effect on feelings (e.g., "Does not reflect my ability to teach.")
- FoRT results had a negative effect on feelings (e.g., "not confident" or "incompetent")

Most respondents who indicated positive feelings of self-efficacy (169; 37%) also passed the FoRT on their first attempt (152; 90% of those reporting positive feelings passed on their first attempt). Respondents who indicated that their FoRT results had no effect on their feelings of self-efficacy (142; 31%), also tended to pass on their first attempt (92; 65% of those reporting no effect on feelings passed on their first attempt). Most of those who reported negative feelings (110; 24%) had attempted but not yet passed the FoRT (10; 9% of those reporting a negative effect on feelings passed on their first attempt). The remainder (30; 7%) chose not to respond to this question. These results are presented in Figure 11.

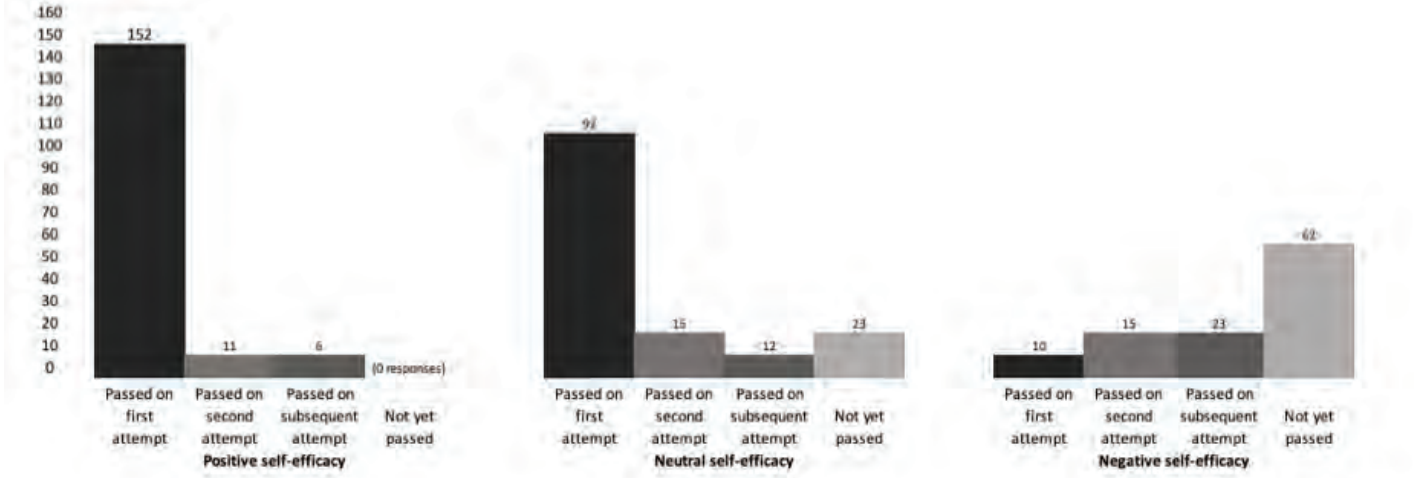
Attribution of FoRT Results

Attribution theory (Alderman, 2008; Heider, 1958) suggests that people identify reasons for their success or failure at certain tasks, and that these reasons are related to their sense of efficacy. Data analysis relating to self-efficacy raised questions about test-takers attribution of their FoRT results, specifically if respondents' attributions were related to internal or external characteristics. Although not all respondents gave reasons for their success or failure, 103 respondents did include attributions for their FoRT results. The following paragraphs discuss internal and external attributions for FoRT results as given by these 103 respondents.

Internal attributions (71; 16%) fell into two primary categories: respondents' own efforts (42; 9%) or their ability as test takers (29; 6%). Respondents attributing FoRT results to their own efforts included responses such as, "I never worked so hard to pass something," or "I know the content and I am confident in my teaching choices;" while those citing their ability as test-takers were typified by responses such as, "I've always been good at taking tests, so it didn't make me feel strongly one way or the other," or the opposite, "I have never been a good test taker so I felt that a test shouldn't determine if I am a good teacher or not." Less frequent were responses such as, "I didn't score as high as I thought I could, but I have the knowledge that is needed to teach. The FORT score does not determine my ability to teach, it determines my ability to take a test."

Responses attributing FoRT results to external characteristics (32; 7%) can also be sorted into two categories: coursework/field experience (17; 4%), or characteristics of the test itself (15; 33%). Those attributing FoRT results to their teacher preparation program mentioned professors, "What had made me feel more like a developed teacher are my professors and their classes," and cooperating teachers "I still feel more than ready to teach based off of my student teaching placements and feedback from my cooperating teachers," as primary influences on their identity as teachers, while one mentioned that the FoRT "made me feel better about my ability to apply what I learned in my courses." Those attributing their FoRT results

Figure 11. FEELINGS OF SELF-EFFICACY RELATED TO FoRT PASSING S



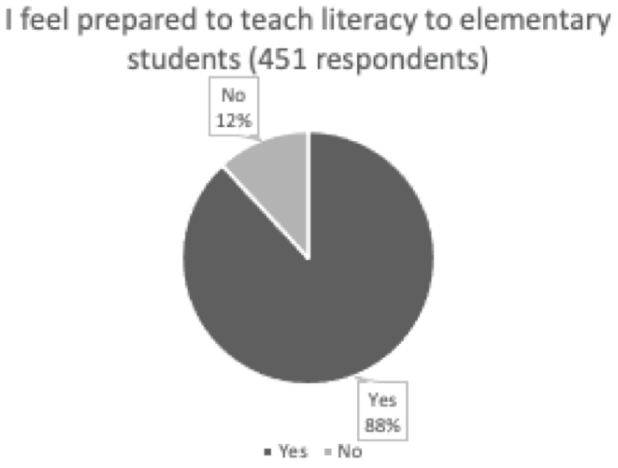
to characteristics of the test itself noted that decontextualized assessments do not measure teaching ability, with responses such as, "This test can't see how I am as a teacher and it doesn't show my success in a way that matters," and "I felt this was an inadequate test. It made me question the system rather than my teaching. The edTPA was far more rigorous and truly looks at your teaching." Others mentioned that the FoRT was not appropriate for their teaching area "I felt frustrated that I was required to pass in something I have no interest in teaching and for an age range I have little interest in as well as the feedback being useless from the test (even though I passed)." One respondent attributed their results to just plain luck.

Preparedness to Teach Literacy

Regardless of FoRT passing rates, the majority of the 451 survey respondents noted they feel prepared to teach literacy to elementary students (397; 88%) (Figure 12), to assist a student who has reading difficulties (381; 84%), and to assess students' literacy skills and behaviors (379; 84%).

In RQ 3 we sought to identify patterns connecting test-takers' self-efficacy, attribution, and sense of preparedness with their FoRT results. Feelings of self-efficacy were categorized as positive, neutral, or negative, with positive or neutral feelings of self-efficacy generally associated with those who passed on the first attempt, and negative feelings of self-efficacy generally associated with those who had not yet passed at the time of this study.

Figure 11. PREPAREDNESS TO TEACH LITERACY TO ELEMENTARY STUDENTS



Respondents attributed FoRT results to their own efforts or ability, as well as their teacher preparation experiences or to characteristics of the test. Regardless of their FoRT results, most respondents indicated they feel prepared to teach literacy.

Limitations

We acknowledge limitations to the current study. Recruiting teacher candidates and in-service teachers from all University of Wisconsin System institutions was challenging due to university policies on data privacy. Another limitation included the length of time between when respondents took the test (i.e., 2014, 2015, etc.) and completion of this survey. Some respondents admitted that the lapse in time challenged their recollections of their test-taking experience. Using a self-reported survey for the collection of this kind of data also has its limitations. In general, asking people to retrieve information from their long-term memory always leads to selective information, influenced by more current experiences, events, and other people (Ross & Conway, 1986).

Respondents for our survey were overwhelmingly white women. While this demographic is reflective of the teaching population at large (U.S. Department of Education, 2020), it is troubling. Although exploring issues related to diversification of the teaching force is beyond the scope of this study, results do add evidence pointing to the urgent need for attention to issues of educational inequalities in the state of Wisconsin.

Conclusions

The results of this study raise important questions for those who are interested in the role of professional exams in teacher education. Inquiry around standardized evaluations of content and pedagogical knowledge and their impact on the construction of teacher identity and self-efficacy, as well as the role of standardized assessments in teacher preparation would be fruitful avenues for exploration. Additionally, future studies exploring the many variables involved in evaluations of content and pedagogy hold potential for engaging stakeholders in discussion around teacher preparation and licensure. Results may also be of interest to those supporting teacher candidates

and early-career teachers as they prepare for the FoRT exam. Test-takers' experiences are varied, but for many, their success on this high-stakes exam affects their self-efficacy as literacy teachers well into their first years of teaching.

In conclusion, this study highlights the varied experiences of FORT test-takers. Results indicate that even with significant effort and access to multiple resources and types of support, many of those seeking licensure do not pass the FoRT on their first attempt. Finally, results suggest the need for those invested in reading education in the state of Wisconsin to engage in productive conversation regarding teacher evaluation and licensure requirements.

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TEACHING TIPS

The Six-Grid Organizer: Increasing Student Engagement in Teacher Read-Alouds

Amy Davis

An interactive read-aloud is an opportunity for teachers to engage students with a variety of literature while promoting engagement and building the necessary knowledge for successful reading comprehension. Allowing time for students to listen to an expressive, fluent reader introduces them to the enjoyment of reading (Hedrick & Pearish, 2003; Lennox, 2013; McClure & Fullerton, 2017; Morrow, 2003). A defining feature of a read-aloud is the sharing of visual elements and their connections to the text. Teachers rely on the illustrator's text interpretations to enhance students' comprehension. Children listen to the text, view illustrations, and discuss their responses to the book; this allows them to construct meaning from linguistic and visual contexts (Leung, 2008).

Most teachers would agree that interactive read-alouds are an essential component of their literacy instruction. While researchers have not identified a best read-aloud procedure, there are a standard set of effective implementation practices. This article proposes implementing a strategy that encourages students' creativity, active listening, and engagement. While listening to the teacher

read a portion of the text, students are encouraged to create their own images on a six-grid organizer. Their completed organizers are used to recall, summarize story events, and develop productive language skills. A defining feature of this strategy is that the text is instructed in sections allowing teachers to guide students to think critically, develop vocabulary, and make text-to-self connections.

Creativity in the Classroom

Often teachers prescribe to a "right" way to complete an instructional task; however, adhering to a "one size fits all" way of thinking and discouraging creative, divergent ideas ultimately fail students (Geist & Hohn, 2009; Thorne, 2007). Educators should create opportunities for students to think critically, take intellectual risks, and challenge students to develop their creativity.

The six-grid strategy requires students to listen closely and negotiate the most relevant information to add to their organizer. They review vocabulary, read the text section, engage in dialogue, and check for understanding. It is the students' responsibility to express their understanding through the images they select to sketch. It matters little if they are a skilled artist; rather, this strategy is about the thought process and transfer. They become personally invested in the text, interpret it, and negotiate what they want to add to their organizers.

The Role of Visualization in Comprehension

Visualization is a cognitive process through which images are retrieved from memory in the absence of retinal input. Creating pictures in the mind impacts many cognitive processes such as motor control, attention, perception, planning, and memory (LeVan, 2009). The ability to successfully construct coherent, meaning-based mental representations of the text is essential for reading comprehension (Van den Broek, 2010). Teachers can successfully create a guided imagery format so that students can learn how to construct mental images and become self-regulatory learners (De Koning & van der Schoot, 2013; Hibbing & Rankin-Erickson, 2003). During an interactive read-aloud, teachers rely on the text visuals to support comprehension and promote text-to-self connections. These connections are dependent on the students' background and vocabulary knowledge. When students actively listen to their teacher read-aloud sections of text then transfer their thoughts to paper, it creates a deeper, more profound connection. The images they create are theirs alone and have significant meaning to their text understanding. Creating images connects them to their private sensory experiences and makes the story more personal for the reader (De Koning et al., 2013).

The Six-Grid Organizer

To prepare for a read-aloud using the six-grid organizer, teachers select a text that will be of interest to students and divide it into six manageable sections. The purpose of dividing the text is to slow down the reading and spend time scaffolding vocabulary, generating questions for discussion, and focusing on key details. The vocabulary selection process consists of closely examining the text within each section and identifying tier 2 and 3 words. Tier 2 vocabulary are words that occur across content-areas, such as multiple meaning words and descriptive vocabulary. Tier 3 words are low-frequency, context-specific vocabulary that occur in specific academic content-areas (Sprenger, 2014). For example, in the text example of Figure 1, the teacher chose the Tier 2 word sneaky to review before reading the section. During reading, the teacher asked, "In what ways could a tiger be sneaky?" and "Do any of you have a pet cat, have you seen your cat be sneaky?" The purpose was to help students visualize tigers' behavior to understand the theme of the story.

The implementation phase of the lesson consists of students folding an 8-½ x11-inch piece of paper into thirds and then in half to create six boxes. Additional sections can be added depending on the length of the text or if teachers are reading a chapter book and would like to use the organizer throughout the reading. Before reading aloud a section of the text, teachers discuss vocabulary in-depth and write them on a SmartBoard or whiteboard. They can also provide a picture for students if needed to support their understanding. While the teacher begins reading the first section of the text, students listen and sketch the images

that come to mind. The teacher can also incorporate questions and pauses to allow students to label their drawings with the accompanying vocabulary or write a short synopsis of that section (Figure 1). The procedure is repeated for each section of the text until all boxes are completed (Figure 2). When first using the six-grid organizer, students may struggle to transfer images to paper; however, they will become more proficient through repeated practice. Teachers may also choose to reread the book to students while sharing the illustrations to compare the illustrator's interpretation to their own.

Expressive Language Extension

Expressive language is the ability to speak and write; these skills are active because they require production. There is a strong link between oral language proficiency and text-level skills, such as reading comprehension (Lesaux & Geva, 2006). Once students have finished adding to their sixth and final box, teachers can either ask students to verbalize or write a summary of the story. The student-generated artifact encourages dialogue because it is personal to their understanding and helps them remember what they were thinking at that moment in time. The visual provides a scaffold for their storytelling or writing. In Figure 2, a first-grade student completed the organizer after listening to "Fox the Tiger" by Corey R. Tabor and then I asked them to write a summary of the story's theme on the back of their paper (Figure 3).

English Language Learners

An interactive read-aloud can offer vocabulary and oral language development for students who come to school with less exposure to English literature and language development. A defining feature of a read-aloud is the dialogue before, during, and after reading. For example, teachers might ask students to discuss their predictions based on the book's visuals or text features, explore themes during reading, or summarize story events. Through these collaborative conversations, students learn to develop and extend their ability to think critically and achieve intended learning outcomes (Lennox, 2013; McClure & Fullerton, 2017).

Figure 1. VISUAL INTERPRETATION OF TEXT – GRADE 1

Text Read Aloud–*Fox the Tiger*	Example of Student Sketch
"*I wish I were a tiger," says Fox. "Tigers are big. Tigers are fast. Tigers are sneaky. Tigers are the best."* (Tabor, 2018, pp. 5-9).	

English learners (ELs) may not possess the vocabulary and English syntactic knowledge to comprehend oral and written language well. Vocabulary knowledge is essential to reading comprehension; students must understand the meanings of words to decipher the author's intended message. Shared read-alouds immerse children in learning new words and increase vocabulary knowledge (Bortnem, 2008). The purpose of reading a text aloud should be to expose, expand, and build upon existing vocabulary knowledge (Fisher et al., 2004; Lane & Wright, 2007; Lennox, 2013;).

Using the six-grid organizer lesson requires the teacher to spend time discussing the text and developing vocabulary knowledge. From my experience working with ELs, they often require additional language scaffolding, explicit vocabulary instruction, and additional time to process content. The six-grid strategy allows for additional instructional aid to support their comprehension. Because students are not viewing the illustrations, the teacher should closely monitor students and address any misconceptions.

Six-Grid Organizer Strategy in Practice

I recently utilized the six-grid strategy with a small group of third-grade ELs. Over the course of eight weeks, the group showed an increase in their productive language skills and the usse of academic vocabulary in their writing. Once students became accustomed to the routine, they became proficient in listening closely and discerning the text's most relevant details (Figure 4). In this example, I used an expository science text, and the participant labeled their drawings with Tier 3 vocabulary. When I analyzed each participant's first journal entry, I noticed that they were consistently struggling with fluently expressing their thoughts and ideas in their writing. The participants' final journal entries went from one or two simple statements with virtually no incidence of content-specific vocabulary to more detailed, lengthier written response incorporating the lesson's vocabulary.

Figure 2. COMPLETED SIX-GRID ORGANIZER – GRADE 1

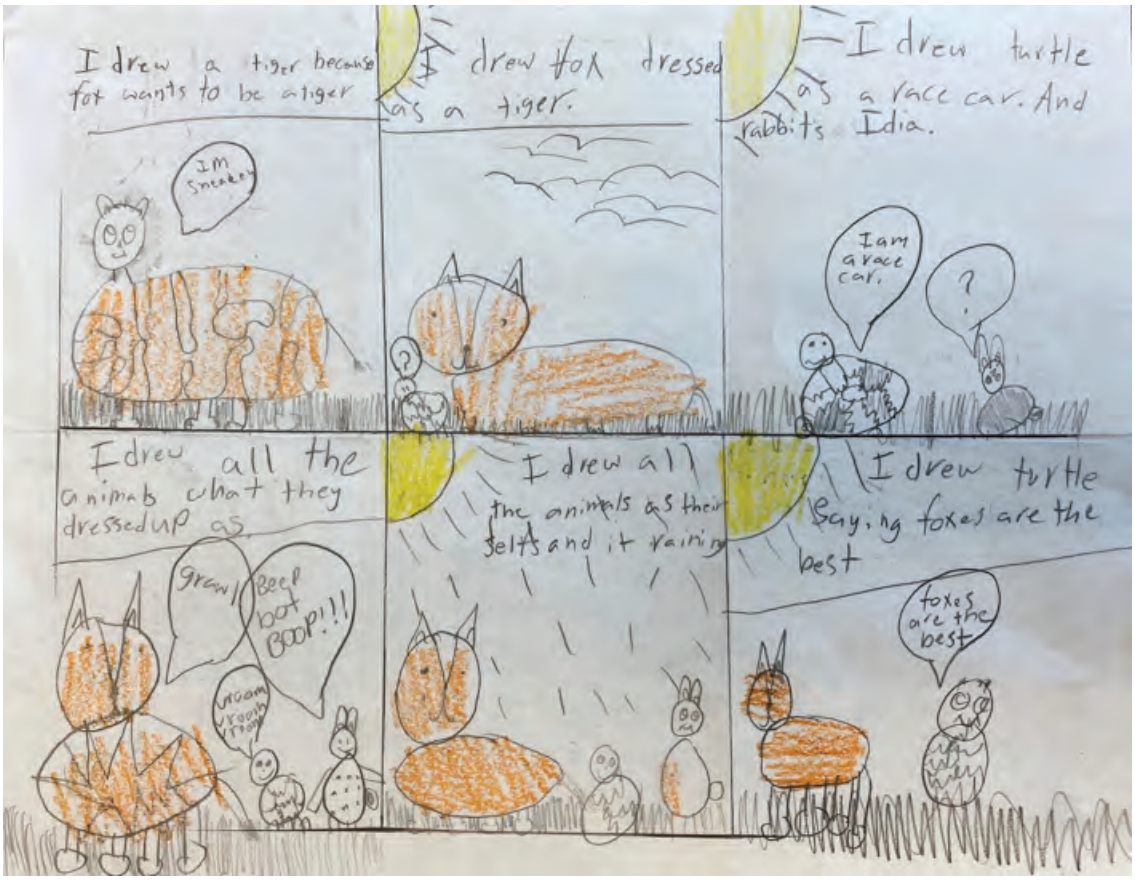
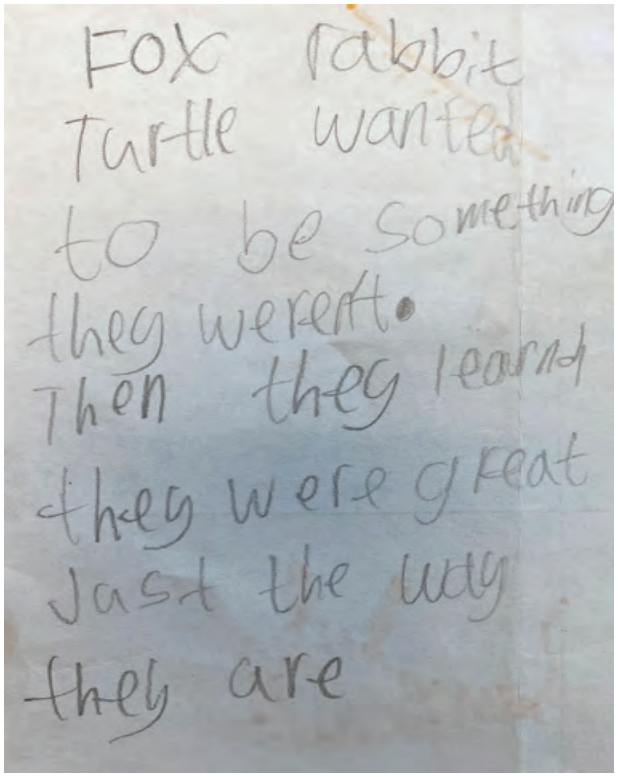


Figure 3. WRITING SAMPLE – GRADE 1



Last year, I took a group of undergraduate students enrolled in one of my reading courses to 15 classrooms, grades first-fourth and seventh, where we employed the six-grid strategy. First, I modeled using the organizer with the children and the second time, my students implemented it. In Figure 5, a seventh-grade student listened to the first chapter of "Piecing Me Together" and not only added visuals, but also text pertaining to the section read. After introducing the strategy in the seventh grade, the teacher contacted me after finishing the chapter book and continuing to utilize the strategy with her students. She reported that some students felt that they weren't good artists, but that they enjoyed the freedom of sketching and labeling. I had one student say to me, "I love this strategy! I'm a good artist and I feel like I can really express myself."

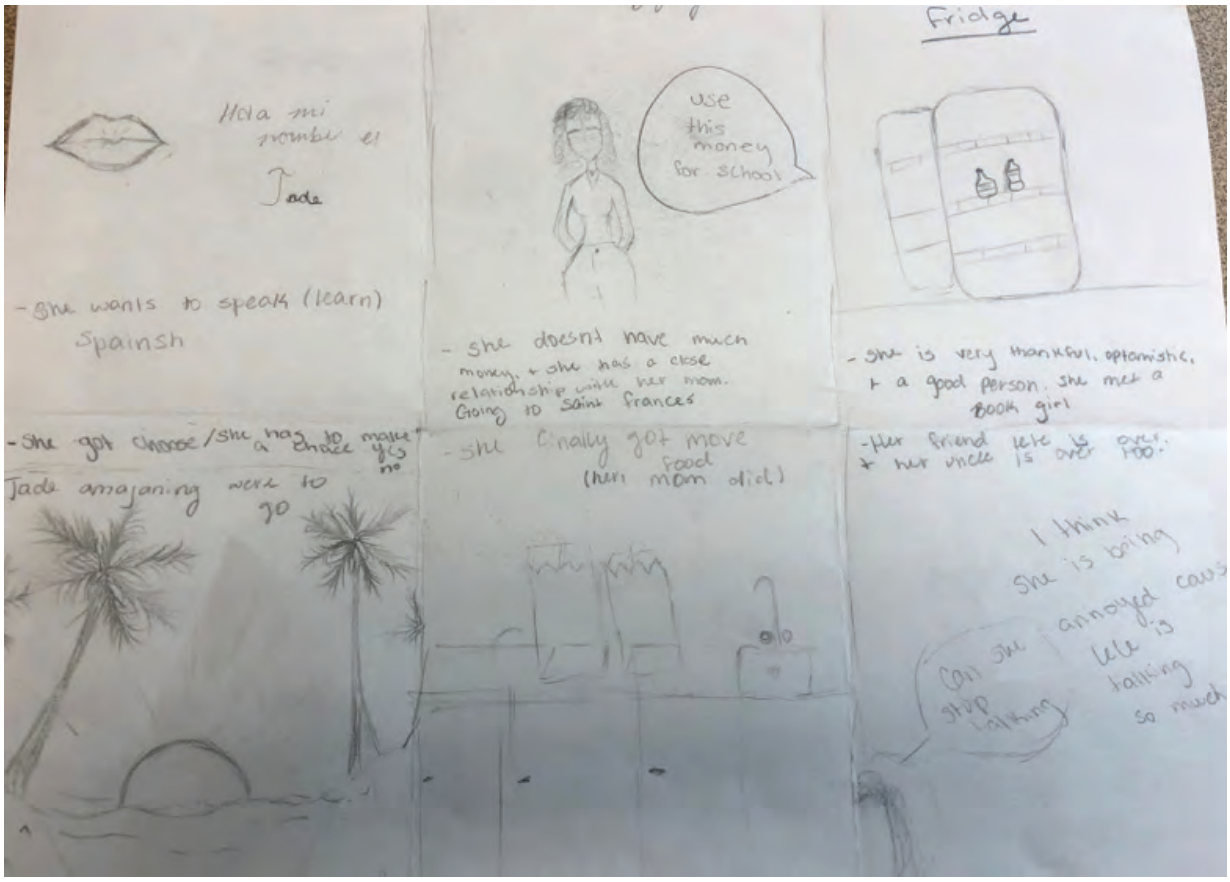
During the lessons I modeled for the undergraduate students, I noticed the level of engagement at all grade levels was very high, especially as students became more comfortable

Figure 4. STUDENT EXAMPLE OF THE COMPLETED SIX-GRID ORGANIZER – GRADE 3

with the implementation routine. When my students were teaching the lesson, I observed students and noted what they were drawing on their organizers. I would occasionally ask students questions of why they chose to add a particular visual. Some were very meticulous and detailed with their drawings while others drew very basic sketches. When I asked students to share their completed organizers with a partner, they were generally engaged and enthusiastic. Some students wanted their teacher to reread the story and share the illustrations, while others did not want to see because they had formed the images in their minds and were satisfied. When I went to first grade, students were so excited, they immediately wanted to add color to their drawings. I was so impressed with the finished product and they were equally proud of their creations. The middle school teacher shared with me that even her most reluctant students participated and engaged in conversations about the text. When students are actively engaged, the likelihood of knowledge retention increases; and if students create their interpretations, retention is even higher.

Educators are responsible for creating opportunities for students to think critically, take intellectual risks, and develop their creativity. The six-grid organizer is a student-generated artifact that, when used with interactive read-aloud, promotes active listening, visualization, productive language, and fosters individuality and creativity.

Figure 5. STUDENT EXAMPLE OF THE COMPLETED SIX-GRID ORGANIZER – GRADE 7



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Cue Cards: A Helpful Support for Reading Skills

Greg Conderman
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Reading involves the complex act of "simultaneously constructing and extracting meaning from text" which involves many skills and subskills (RRSG, 2002). Effective readers consider their background knowledge, apply sound-symbol relationships, recognize word parts, remember what they have read, consider the text structure, use context clues, and monitor their comprehension (Conderman et al., 2013). Because of the many skills associated with reading and the increase in student diversity in today's general education classrooms, such as the increase in students with disabilities and those who are learning English (Friend & Bursuck, 2019), teachers are continuously seeking effective ways to support students with their reading skills. Cue cards are one tool that has many uses for supporting readers in any grade level. This article describes cue cards and provides examples of how to use them in supporting students with various reading skills.

What are Cue Cards?

Cue cards are portable, low-tech devices that contain written and/or visual steps, prompts, processes, directions, examples, abbreviations, or a

mnemonic to cue a student about a skill or set of steps. These prompts or visuals can be written on a notecard, hard stock paper, or provided in electronic form. If they are developed on paper or notecards, they are typically small enough to be placed in a student notebook or backpack when not in use. They can also be used as a handy book-mark to prompt reading strategies or skills while reading. For example, Figure 1 shows a basic cue card for Minnie, a fourth grader, who needs support remembering the steps of determining the "gist" of a paragraph (Swanson et al., 2011).

Figure 1. MINNIE'S MAIN IDEA STEPS

Read the paragraph carefully

- Ask yourself: What is the most important who or what in this paragraph?
- Ask yourself: What is the most important idea about that who or what?
- Think about your answer: Can you provide a good reason for your answer?
- Write your "gist" main idea statement in 10 words or less

As shown in Figure 1, Minnie's cue card reminds her of the steps her teacher modeled for this skill. If Minnie forgets the steps, she can refer to her card. As Minnie practices this skill, the steps will become automatic, and she will rely less on her cue card.

Cue cards can be laminated for longer and multiple uses, especially if the student uses a dry erase marker to check (and then wipe off) completed steps. They can be used in any subject area and any grade level (Conderman & Hedin, 2011). Researchers have discovered that cue cards are effective in supporting skills in reading (Sencibaugh, 2008); writing (Mason et al., 2002); math (Montague, 2008), and self-management (Murphy & Korinek, 2009).

Because of their wide use and versatility, cue cards offer numerous advantages to students and teachers. The main purpose of cue cards is to provide a temporary support until a student masters a specific skill or strategy. Therefore, cue cards support memory, skill, or language challenges by providing steps or skills that students find challenging, confusing, or have forgotten. For example, a cue card could provide memory support for a student who struggles in decoding who confuses certain letter sounds. Also, cue cards can be individualized so students have their own card that scaffolds learning just for them. Informal assessment results may reveal that one student needs additional review with certain letter sounds, while another student needs support with word parts or specific comprehension skills. Each student's cue card can pinpoint specific skills.

To illustrate, Richard and Abe are two fifth graders receiving intensive reading comprehension instruction in the same reading group. Richard still needs support with "right there" questions while Abe is practicing "search and think" questions (Raphael & Au, 2005). Their individualized cue cards, shown in Figures 2A and 2B, are differentiated to pinpoint their area of need. Richard and Abe use their cue cards primarily when working on independent reading comprehension tasks.

Figure 2A. RICHARD'S "RIGHT THERE" CUE CARD

- These questions often begin with who, what, when, or where
- Often, the answer is a fact
- The answer is in one place in the passage
- The question often uses the same words as the passage
- Scan the passage to find the answer

Figure 2B. ABE'S "THINK AND SEARCH" CUE CARD

- The answer is in the text, but you need to look around
- Read over the whole passage to find it
- It might be in one paragraph, across paragraphs, or even across pages
- Identify important information from various places that helps answer the question

As an instructional tool, cue cards can include an example of reading skill or the steps of a strategy.

As students become more automatic in using their cue cards, they become more independent and self-regulated learners, especially if the cue card provides a space to check off each completed step or Cue cards offer advantages for teachers, as well. As noted earlier, teachers can develop cue cards for a variety of reading skills at any grade level. Therefore, as a student masters a skill or process, they can trade their cue card in for another card containing a different or more complex skill. Because cue cards promote student independence, they support instructional efficiency as teachers do not need to provide as much individual student support throughout the day. Also, cue cards are inexpensive to make, take little time to construct, and can be connected to instructional goals, common core standards, and/or assessment results (Conderman & Hedin, 2011).

Steps in Creating Cards

Reid et al., (2013) and Sabornie & de Bettencourt (2009) described the following steps when developing a cue card:

1. **Determine the skill, procedure, or strategy to include on the cue card**. The cue card can highlight a new skill or one that has been previously taught, but the skill or strategy needs to be one that the student has not yet fully mastered. Cue cards are most appropriate when students forget or confuse skills or steps. Some students also benefit from a cue card for a new skill that is only slightly different than a previous skill.
2. **Add a title to the cue card that aligns with the skill**. Cue cards should be attractive so the student wants to use them. Adding a title for the cue card with the student's name and skill personalizes the card and reminds the student (and others who work with the student) of the skill or strategy name. Younger students can color or design their own card.
3. **Write the steps or skill(s) in a logical order**. Teachers should number and/or sequence steps in the order students should follow. Also, include no more than seven steps on a card to avoid a tax on memory.
4. **If possible, develop a mnemonic for the student to use when multiple steps are involved**. Some strategy steps form a mnemonic, such as PARS, for Preview the material by surveying the introduction, headings, graphics, and summary to identify main ideas; Ask questions that relate to the main ideas discovered when surveying the material; Read the text to answer the questions developed; and Summarize the main ideas of the text (Reid et al. 2013). Other times, teachers (or students) can develop a mnemonic to remember the steps. A mnemonic provides memory support for completing the skill or strategy independently when the cue card is removed. Introduce or develop the mnemonic after the student understands the steps. The mnemonic does not teach students how to complete the task; it only serves as a reminder of the steps and their order.
5. **Determine the type of cue card that is most suitable for the student and the skill**. As described in the next section, popular types of cue cards include steps only, two column, three column, and visual supports. The type of card to use depends on how much support the student needs and the chosen skill or strategy.
6. **Consider logistics about the card.** Proactively make decisions about the use of the cue card such as materials needed to make the card, where the student will keep the cue card, and ways to gradually wean the student from depending on the cue card if that is the end goal. If family members are involved, they need to understand the cue card steps so they can cue and reinforce their child for effort and correct performance or if they need to model a step.

Types and Examples of Cards

There are four main types of cue cards: steps only, two-column, three-column, and visual supports.

Steps Only

Steps only cue cards include only the steps (in their correct order) without any explanations or exemplars. They provide the least amount of

support for students. Teachers should develop steps only cards when students understand each step, but they confuse the order or forget one or more steps. For example, Walter understands and can provide examples from his reading of characters, the setting, the problem, key elements, and the solution, but when he writes or discuses a story, he often forgets one or more of these components. Therefore, Walter's cue card (Figure 3A) reminds him to include all these components in his story discussions. His cue card does not need to include a definition or example of these terms. Whenever Walker is discussing a story, he can view his cue card which reminds him to include all the story elements. Similarly, middle school student, Evelyn, has learned the three steps of the RAP comprehension strategy (Schumaker et al., 1984). Like Walker, Evelyn understands and has mastered each step as demonstrated through in-class activities. She still needs a reminder to follow the steps in their proper order and include all three steps in her paraphrasing efforts. Her cue card (Figure 3B) provides a minimal amount of support to help her with this task.

Figure 3A. WALTER'S STORY ELEMENTS CARD

- Characters
- Setting
- Problem
- Key Events
- Solution

Figure 3B. EVELYN'S RAP READING COMPREHENSION CARD

- Read a paragraph
- Ask yourself: What is the main idea and what are at least two details?
- Put the main idea and details into your own words

Two Column

Two column cue cards, which provide more support than the steps only cards, typically name the skill or strategy steps in one column with a brief description, definition, example, or exemplar of that skill or step in the second column. The second column can also include a place for the student to check off step completion. These interactive cue cards promote self-regulation as they teach the student to self-monitor their performance.

Figure 4A includes an example of each type of two column card. Fern needs support remembering short vowel sounds. A card with only the letter names of the short vowels will not provide enough support for her because she needs a cue for sounds, not letter names. Therefore, her individualized cue card includes the vowels in one column and Fern's known key words for each letter sound. Fern can read the key words, isolate the beginning short vowel, and apply that sound to unknown words containing short vowel sounds. High school student, Donald, has learned a research-based strategy called DISSECT (Lenz et al., 1984) for decoding unknown multi-syllabic words. His cue card (Figure 4B) reminds him of the steps of the strategy in their correct order and a place for him to check that he completed each step. Donald does not need an example of each step, but rather he

Figure 4A. FERN'S SHORT VOWEL CUE CARD

Vowel	Key Word
a	Ant
	ant
e	Egg
	egg
i	lll
	ill
o	Octopus
	octopus
u	Umbrella
	umbrella

Figure 4B. DONALD'S DISSECT CARD

Step	Check off when completed
D – Discover the context	
I – Isolate the prefix	
S – Separate the suffix	
S – Say the stem	
E – Examine the stem	
C – Check with someone	
T – Try a dictionary or other source	

needs a reminder of the ordered steps. If Donald's card is laminated or provided electronically, he can use his card numerous times.

Three Column

Three column cards provide the greatest amount of versatility and include various kinds of supports for learners. Like previous cards, the first column names the skill or step. The second and third columns contain additional supports such as a description of the step, an example of the step, a non-example of the step, and/or a place to check off step completion. Figures 5A and B provide examples of three column cue cards. Informal assessment from writing samples and spelling tests indicate that Helen confuses some prefixes. Her cue card clarifies six common prefixes, their meanings, and example words that she selected in consultation with her teacher. As Helen becomes more proficient in using these prefixes in her writing and spelling, these six prefixes can be replaced with others. Middle-level student, Lillys, needs reminders of the steps of a recently taught textbook reading strategy, SQ3R. Her three-column interactive card provides steps, directions or reminders for each step, and a self-monitoring step. Because her cue card provides important instructional reminders, Lillys can refer to her card and work independently rather than frequently ask teacher questions about the strategy. Also, her cue card reminds her of teacher expectations (i.e., use one of the note-taking systems we learned in class and have someone quiz you once a week). Lillys can use her card whenever she begins reading a new textbook chapter.

Visual Supports

Another type of cue card is the visual supports card. This card is different from others as it contains a picture or icon to provide memory and visual support. Visual support cue cards are especially well-suited for younger students or students who are still learning the English language. These cards can contain two or three columns. The main purpose is to augment instruction in a visual form. Figures 6A and B provide examples of visual supports. Leslie, like her peer, Walter, who was mentioned earlier, needs support remembering short vowel sounds. However, unlike Walter, Leslie is unable to read and remember the key words listed on the cue card. Therefore, her cue card needs to provide additional support by including a picture of the key word, as shown in Figure 6A. Similarly, Violette is receiving additional support with vocabulary, specifically remembering the meaning of content area vocabulary words. Sometimes she is confused by lengthy and abstract definitions. Her cue card (Figure 6B) contains student-friendly definitions

Figure 5A. HELEN'S PREFIX REMINDERS

Prefix	Meaning of Prefix	Example
un	not	unfair
over	too much	overeat
semi	half	semicircle
non	not	nonfat
re	again	rewrite
mis	wrongly	misspell

Figure 5B. LILLYS' SQRRR CUE CARD

Step	Directions/Reminders	Check when completed
S-Survey	Survey by looking at the chapter title, chapter objectives, sub- headings, figures, summary, and self-quiz. Think about what the chapter is about.	
Q-Question	Question by turning each main chapter heading into a question using Who? What? When? Where? Why? or How? These questions guide your reading for each section.	
R-Read	Read by silently reading just one section at a time with your questions in mind. Take notes using one of the note-taking systems we learned.	
R-Recite	Recite by writing the main idea and three details from the section on your notes sheet. Write these using your own words.	
R-Review	Review by reading your notes once a week. Have a classmate or family member quiz you on the chapter information.	

and pictures, so it resembles a vocabulary map. Violette can also draw the pictures on her cue card rather than have a teacher-imposed picture or one from the internet. Violette's teacher can model how to use the cue card by verbally rehearsing the information on the card (e.g., "Agriculture means the process of growing food, and the picture shows corn growing in a field. I will repeat that a few times. I understand this. Now I will self- check and cover up columns two and three and ask myself: What does agriculture mean? Let me see…I remember a picture of corn growing…Oh, yes, agriculture means growing food. Let me uncover the columns. Yes, I was correct)."

Additional Reminders for Cue Card Use

To maximize the benefits of the cue card, teachers should invest time teaching the student how to use the card. They should also remind the student that the goal is to learn the skills, so the cue card is no longer needed. Here are some additional considerations when working with students and their cue cards:

- Some students may be embarrassed if they are the only student with a cue card even though they should not consider cue cards a negative intervention. If this may be the case, respect the student's privacy by introducing the cue card privately. Also, consider making a cue card available for the whole class
- If the card has a self-checking column, demonstrate how to cover up columns to check for understanding.
- Consider informing and involving family members, so they can prompt and reinforce the student's cue card use at home. This collaborative effort signals to the student the

Figure 6A. LESLIE'S VISUAL SUPPORTS CUE CARD

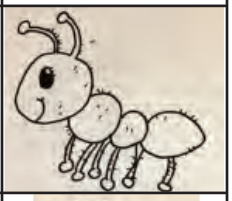
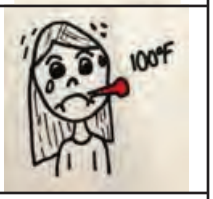
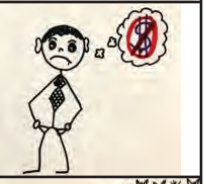
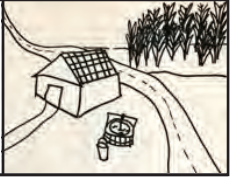
Vowel	Key Word	Picture
a	ant	
e	egg	
i	ill	
o	octopus	
u	umbrella	

Figure 6B. VIOLETTE'S VOCABULARY CUE CARD

Word	Student Friendly Definition	Picture
agriculture	process of growing food	
peninsula	land surrounded by water on most of its sides	
pickaxes	T-shaped hand tools used for prying	
debtor	person who cannot pay money that they owe	
rural	country or farmland	

value of reading and provides a consistent support system.

- Keep record of which students are using which cue cards, so you can follow-up with their use of the card and their skill mastery.
- Gradually wean the student from using the cue card as verified through frequent formative, informal assessments. For example, transition the student from using visual displays and three column cards to two column cards or two column cards to steps only cards and steps only cards to no cards.

Concluding Thoughts

Cue cards are a flexible, inexpensive, and research-based learning tool that teachers in any subject and grade level can use to scaffold learning for students. Their use is especially appropriate in reading due to the many reading skills that readers encounter. Teachers use cue cards to support learning as a temporary scaffold until the student can meet the objective or perform the skill without the use of the cue card. Teaching students how to use their card promotes independence and self-regulation skills. Students can even be taught how to develop their own cue cards. As a learning tool, the use of cue cards is limited only by the teacher's imagination.

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Socratic Seminar Redoux

Peg Grafwallner

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As the instructional coach/reading specialist at a large urban IB (International Baccalaureate) high school, I have the unique privilege of supporting teachers in all content areas. In one day, I might be modeling an active listening lesson in a Theory of Knowledge classroom or coaching a Cornell note-taking lesson in Middle Years Program Design or supporting a Socratic Seminar as the classroom scribe in a 9th-grade English class. These experiences demand that I stay current with research and practice. As a result, my days are never boring; instead, they are filled with opportunities to learn, grow, and expand my repertoire of knowledge and inquiry.

Recently, one of our teachers asked for assistance in implementing better questioning and discussion strategies into his 9th-grade English class. While I had seen Socratic Seminars demonstrated and while he had been a participant during his college studies, we had never been involved with one from inception to completion. Before we proceeded, I needed to extend my understanding and do some basic background research.

Socratic Seminars got their name from Socrates, the Greek philosopher and teacher (470-399 BC) who placed great importance "on empowering students, through conversation and questioning, to build their own understanding and to think analytically" (Chowning, 2009, p. 2). His ability to ask questions encouraged students to think beyond what they knew and to continue asking questions with questions, looking for inconsistencies in thinking and ways to resolve, if possible, those discrepancies. According to Chowning (2009), it was Mortimer Adler, an education reformer, who supported the use of Socratic Seminars (p. 2), promoting the educational concept known as Paideia, a Greek word signifying the general learning that should be the possession of all human beings.

Chowning (2009) goes on to explain that "The purpose of the seminar, therefore, is to achieve a deeper understanding about the ideas and values in a particular text. In these seminars, students systematically question and examine issues and principles raised by the text, and articulate different points of view" (p. 2). As I continued my background reading, I grew more excited with the possibility of incorporating the basic components of the Socratic Seminar and modifying them, if necessary, to make it "fit" a freshman English class. I continued gathering background and created a brief *PowerPoint* presentation introducing Socratic Seminar to the students.

As the classroom teacher and I outlined our ideas, we agreed on five non-negotiables:

1. **This would not be a "talk with your neighbor" partnership or "get in groups of four and discuss these questions" situation.** Rather, this would be a sophisticated seminar grounded in best practice and based in systematic routine so students would eventually know and be able to implement the seminar with little to no instruction from the teacher.
2. **All short stories would be read in class.** To eliminate misunderstandings or confusion about a story, all reading was done in class with clarifications and support provided by the classroom teacher and reading specialist.
2. **References would be grounded in text. While students could certainly comment and agree with one another, the text must be the source of the conversation.** We would also encourage students to jot down brief notes as information was being shared, so they could comment on student responses later.
4. **Think time and processing time would be respected.** Searching for textual evidence and gathering one's thoughts to process that evidence would be critical to students verbalizing sophisticated thoughts. Silence might be a part of this process and that was to be honored.
5. **Finally, we had to do it right the first time.** We knew the expectation for success would be instrumental to ongoing seminars. For the sake of our students, we had to do it right the first time for it to be considered a welcome addition to their classroom procedures.

Resources and Research

I began learning about Socratic Seminars by viewing various *PowerPoint* presentations created by teachers and by watching YouTube videos of classrooms engaged in Socratic Seminars. I also read Rick Wormeli's (2005) book entitled, *Summarization in Any Subject*, specifically his observations about Socratic Seminars:

> *Socrates knew how to get students and citizens to confront their basic assumptions and to learn from the analysis. His technique of questioning and ongoing discussion is still one of the best ways to illuminate content. Students can participate in such experiences before a unit to help prime their minds for what is to come, but they get even more out of the experience when they have studied the concepts to be discussed. In a Socratic seminar, students process, apply, and extend what they've been learning. It's summarization, but it's also good instruction. (p. 140)*

Wormeli's words helped to change my thinking about how to demonstrate understanding. As an English teacher for 22 years, I had usually

assigned an essay, project, or some other type of assignment at the end of a reading. Wormeli encouraged us to try something different with our students, focusing on the process instead of putting all of our energies into product.

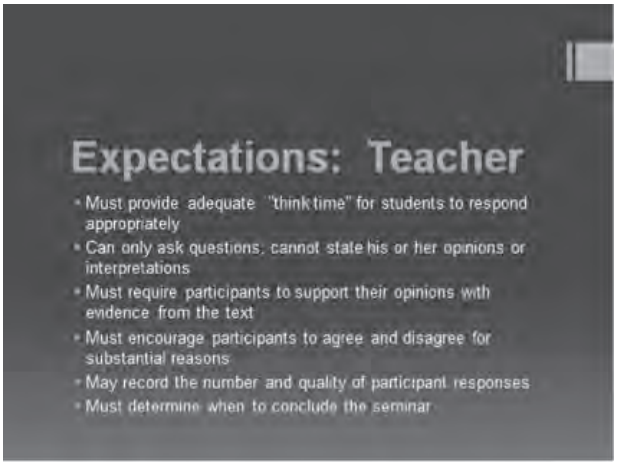
As I began creating the presentation, I wanted to make sure students understood the value of structure along with what the expectations were for the classroom teacher and for them (Figure 1). We were all in this task together, and they needed to know that while much was expected of them, much was expected from the teacher as well.

After I completed a *PowerPoint* slide presentation, the classroom teacher reviewed it and whittled it down to 26 slides. We referred to our version as Socratic Seminar Redoux because we knew we were not following all of the tenets in a formal way. We met to discuss the use of open-ended questions for our first short story, Richard Connell's (1924) *The Most Dangerous Game*. The questions needed to give students the opportunity to think and process, without settling for a definitive answer or "one right answer" (Socratic Seminar, n.d., p. 107). Through my research, I realized the questions are the heart of a successful seminar. Questions should "be open-ended [and] reflect genuine curiosity" (p. 107), giving students the opportunity to share their justified reasoning based on evidence. After much contemplation and examination, I created a set of questions that I hoped captured the text's "core ideas and values" (p. 107). After collaboration, our final set of questions was ready to go.

Socratic Seminar Questions for *The Most Dangerous Game*

- Were you surprised when you found out that Zaroff wanted to hunt Rainsford for sport? If you were surprised, why? If not, what led you to expect Zaroff to want to hunt Rainsford?
- Do animals have feelings? What is your evidence?
  - Is there anyone who doesn't think that animals have feelings? What about wild animals? What about cockroaches?
- Is there a difference between instinct and feelings? Give evidence from the story to prove your argument.
- How do you think Rainsford changed by the end of the story? Did he learn his lesson and stop hunting or did he become like Zaroff? Show evidence from the story that supports your argument.
- If you were Rainsford, would you have jumped off the cliff into the rocky sea (you might die) or wait for Zaroff to find you?
  - What would have been the benefit/ challenge of each choice?
- Do you think Zaroff was disappointed that he didn't get to shoot Rainsford? Why or why not?
- Discuss the various ways that color is used to set a mood in the story.
  - How does such visual language add to the development of the setting?
- Is General Zaroff a credible character? Could such a situation unfold in today's society? Why or why not?
- How does the fact that the story took place on an island contribute to the story?
- Do you agree with Zaroff 's belief that "instinct is no match for reason"?
  - Why or why not?
  - In what ways does Rainsford demonstrate both instinct and reason during the hunt?
- Do you think that the story is a commentary on the ethics of hunting?
  - Why or why not?
  - What moral positions could be drawn out from the text?

Figure 1: SLIDE OF TEACHER EXPECTATIONS



The Big Day

The day arrived to implement the Socratic Seminar. In a class of 33 students, the design of the environment would be crucial in giving students the opportunity to share as well as in respecting those who wanted to observe. With time, we hoped all students would want to be active participants in the seminar, but initially we had to rely on student perception: Did the Socratic Seminar look engaging and motivating? Did it look inviting to students? If so, then eventually all students would want to participate. I offered to be the scribe, recording student responses as they verbalized their thoughts.

First, the teacher framed the expectations. Our first Socratic Seminar utilized only three of the open-ended questions we created and lasted about 20 minutes. We wanted to keep the conversation fresh and exciting. We knew discussion would be an essential component to success. We wanted our students to "listen closely to the comments of others, thinking critically for themselves, and [to] articulate their own thoughts and their responses to the thoughts of others" (Israel, 2002, p. 89). Therefore, if the conversation turned stale or boring, our chances of student buy-in for a second one could be diminished.

Next, the teacher went through the *PowerPoint* methodically and carefully. He defined Socratic Seminar and explained its purpose. He highlighted his expectations for himself as the classroom teacher and his expectations for the students. He noted that they both had to engage and participate for the seminar to be successful.

Modeling

At this point, I chimed in, offering to model how student thinking and processing might look when searching for textual evidence. As I sat in the front of the class with the short story on my lap, the teacher asked the first openended question: "Is there a difference between instinct and feelings?"

I thought for about 10 seconds and then asked for the question to be repeated. At that point, I began flipping pages to find my textual reference. As I began answering the question, offering my textual reference as a source, I realized my answer was contradicting itself. I said, "Wait. Now that I'm saying this out loud, I'm realizing that I need to change my mind. I need to answer the question again because I believe he . . . " While I hadn't expected to change my mind and didn't expect to change my answer, I realized that my modeling had actually been of great benefit. I demonstrated that thinking and processing is not an exact science but an opportunity to listen and grow into one's own thoughts and ideas.

We were ready. Desks were moved: 10 students in the middle of the room in a circle as active participants; the remaining students would be in the outside circle (fishbowl strategy), taking notes and being ready to join the middle when someone wanted an opportunity to listen. Courageous students began taking their seats in the middle of the circle. As students opened their books, I asked them to give me their name and the page number of the evidence.

I wanted to make sure that I connected the right student with the correct comment, and I wanted to make sure that the page numbers demonstrated that students were using the entire story and not just settling on the same page for all of the evidence.

Student Responses

The classroom teacher asked the first question:

> *Were you surprised when you found out that Zaroff wanted to hunt Rainsford for sport? If you were surprised, why? If not, what led you to expect Zaroff to want to hunt Rainsford?*

The modeling worked. There was dead silence. Then students started flipping pages as they searched for the textual evidence needed to sustain their responses.

Student 1

Page 27

> *Zaroff believed that anything can be hunted; it doesn't matter. It's not murder; it's sport. (Student reads the passage from page 27 to prove his point.) The people he hunts aren't smart enough, they can't reason enough. They don't deserve to live. This is cold-blooded murder.*

Student 2

Pages 33, 35

This is the difference between them. (Preston reads passages from page 33 and page 35.) By this point, the General considers him hunting Rainsford a game. Rainsford sees this as survival; he does what he must. He wants to live. This difference gives suspense and urgency to the story.

Student 3

Page 34

This is the biggest thing that makes them different. Rainsford thinks hunting people is not okay. (Student reads a passage from page 34.) Zaroff thinks it's a sport like you said. They are both cunning hunters, both of them have hunted before. They know certain strategies for hunting. He thought it was a mistake when the tree fell over. Rainsford thought, "Oh, I can start making traps." He digs the pit, and Zaroff thinks they both have done this before. Yeah, I don't know.

Student 4

Page 30

One of the differences is that Zaroff has a lot more overall power than Rainsford. Zaroff seems to be more clever than Rainsford because even though Rainsford does the sneaky tricks like the traps, Zaroff still seems to follow him and know where he is. (Student reads the passage on page 30.) He controls what Rainsford does. In the middle of page 30, if Rainsford didn't play the hunting game, he'd be tortured by Ivan. Zaroff has all the power, and Rainsford is helpless.

Student 5

Page 33

I want to add onto that. Zaroff knows he has the power but doesn't necessarily use it. For example, when the tree falls on his shoulder, he isn't incapacitated; he just walks away like it's a battle in a bigger war. (Student reads the passage on page 33.) He doesn't use power to make the game more interesting. He could just kill Rainsford, but to have more fun, he doesn't use all of his power.

Student 3

Page 32

Adding onto what you said, I agree with that. When the game has started, in their first interaction, he knew he was there. Zaroff has power, and he's not using it. He wants to freak out Rainsford. Pretty much what you said, but here's another example. (Student reads the passage on page 32.)

Student 4

He's the best opponent he's had, so he doesn't want to ruin the fun.

Student 3

Yeah, he's pretty crazy.

The discussion stalled. The teacher didn't rush the conversation, but rather waited until the room was completely silent for a minute. He asked if anyone inside or outside of the circle wanted to add a final observation. No one spoke up.

At this time, the teacher asked if anyone in the middle of the circle wanted to move to the outside of the circle, and if anyone sitting in the outside circle wanted to move to the middle? Several students made their move. Not every student in the middle of the circle spoke and that was okay. No one was pushed to speak, and the conversation was truly organic. Because I was taking notes, we had a record of who spoke and what the individual said. This was merely for informational purposes—not for evaluative purposes.

The teacher introduced his next question:

Do you think that the story is a commentary on the ethics of hunting? Why or why not? What moral positions could be drawn out from the text?

Student 6

Page 35

I do think the story goes on about hunting. It's almost like how would you feel if you were the animal being hunted? You kind of find out if you're Rainsford. The General symbolizes you unting and Rainsford the animal. So you can feel the fear. (Student reads the passage on page 35.)

Student 7

Page 25

> *In General Zaroff 's point of view, he was born to hunt. (Student reads the passage on page 25.) He feels that he's entitled to hunt whatever he wants. To him, God made me a hunter, so I think that he thinks he has the right to hunt whatever.*

Student 8

> *It may be okay to kill jaguars, but if somebody says they're going to hunt humans, people are like "No, no."*

Student 9

> *I agree. That might be the message for this entire story. This entire thing is talking about how we hunt animals and not give a second thought to what the animals might be feeling.*

Student 4

> *I didn't think about this before. It could be a giant metaphor. It goes to a certain level to make it more human and more relatable to the reader regarding the effects of hunting.*

When the teacher announced our time was up and desks had to be put back, there was a general groan of annoyance. Students wanted to keep discussing and sharing their ideas. Many said they found the Socratic Seminar to be "fun" and "better than writing a paper." Several liked the opportunity to share their evidence, feeling confident in their responses, especially when other students agreed with them.

Reflection

After school, the classroom teacher and I met to reflect on the lesson and our first attempt at Socratic Seminar. We learned a few things:

- *Our* PowerPoint *presentation had 26 slides.* While the teacher skipped several in the interest of time, he offered to go back and treamline the presentation to what was absolutely needed.
- *Reading the short stories in class proved instrumental to the success of the discussion.* Students felt confident in their responses and in their search of accurate textual evidence because they had been guided by the teacher and reading specialist.
- *Modeling was necessary to demonstrate think time and "change" time.* Students often feel as though they have to answer right away. Giving them the opportunity to see my thinking was invaluable; in addition, changing my mind in front of the students showed them that changing one's ideas might demonstrate development and growth about a topic.
- *Timing is everything.* Twenty minutes was enough. We left them wanting more which would benefit us when we revisited Socratic Seminar again.

In closing, while the Socratic Seminar strategy has been done a million times in classrooms all over the world, each one is unique based on what the teacher deems as important or necessary. In our case, we knew we wanted to create an opportunity for freshmen to recognize the value of textual evidence and how to use it in an engaging and motivating way. We wanted to give them a chance to demonstrate their thinking, and we wanted to create a safe environment to change that thinking, if necessary, based on what they read and perhaps on what they heard. We knew we had to continue stretching our freshmen, giving them opportunities and time for this sophisticated work; however, we felt emboldened over the success of our first Socratic Seminar. In the words of Socrates, "I cannot teach anybody anything. I can only make them think." We believe we made them think.

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Appendix

AVID Elective Teacher Training Socratic Seminar Handouts and Reproducibles

Socratic Seminar focuses on deep discussion around a central text:
https://d2ct263enury6r.cloudfront.net/Qc101URJbVZajxNp3vVZnm5eacpjdh6cGkpxp4f4mPwiBuxY.pdf

AVID Socratic Seminar

Eighth-grade students participate in a Socratic Seminar about
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oG64GWpE9Jo

Expeditionary Learning: Socratic Seminar Protocol

Use of Socratic Seminar in an Expeditionary classroom:
https://www.engageny.org/file/2331/download/socratic_seminar_protocol_el_012612.pdf

Socratic Seminar – Paideia

How to teach Socratic Seminar in elementary, middle, and high school, using questions to teach critical thinking, communication, and Common Core skills:
https://www.paideia.org/about-paideia/socratic-seminar

Strategy Guide: Socratic Seminars

This strategy guide explains Socratic Seminars and offers practical methods for applying the approach in your classroom to help students investigate multiple perspectives in a text:
www.readwritethink.org/professional-development/strategyguides/socratic-seminars-30600.html?tab=2

The Socratic Seminar

This is a short video about the Socratic Seminar in a Freshman English classroom. The teacher, Bill Wesley, articulates the methods and benefits of this approach:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RBjZ-4MK1WE

The Teaching Channel

"How to Bring Socratic Seminar Method into Your Classroom":
https://www.teachingchannel.org/videos/bring-socratic-seminars-to-the-classroom

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WSRA MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION/RENEWAL

Today's Date _____

First Name _____ Initial ____ Last Name _____

Home Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip +4 _____

Place of Employment _____

Duties, Title & Level/Dept. _____

Cell Phone (_____) _____ Work Phone (_____) _____

Home E-mail _____

Are you a member of International Literacy Association? ❑ Yes _____ (Membership Number) ❑ No

Are you a member of a local reading council? ❑ Yes ❑ No If yes, check name(s) →

Access information about local reading councils at http://www.wsra.org/councils

Submit your self-nomination to join a committee at http://www.wsra.org/committees-task-forces

❑ Renewal _____ WSRA Membership Number ❑ New

Membership is for one year from the date of joining. Dues may be tax deductible. Some of the information provided will be in the WSRA Membership Directory.

Visit www.wsra.org/membership-application to join or renew and pay by credit card to expedite your membership benefits or mail your **$39** check with this form payable to WSRA at

WSRA W260 N6653 Mary Hill Rd, Sussex, WI 53089

❑	Ashland Bayfield Counties	55045
❑	Central Wisconsin	55050
❑	Door County	55075
❑	Eau Claire	55100
❑	Fox Valley	55125
❑	Greater Bayland	55150
❑	Headwaters	55200
❑	Hidden Valley	55210
❑	Interlake	55250
❑	Lake Superior	55300
❑	Madison Area	55350
❑	Mid-East Area	55400
❑	Midwest Wisconsin	55450
❑	Milwaukee Area	55500
❑	Muirland	55512
❑	Northeast Wisconsin	55525
❑	Northwest Wisconsin	55550
❑	Racine-Kenosha	55750
❑	Rock River	55825
❑	St. Croix Valley	55800
❑	South Kettle Moraine	55850
❑	Southern Lakes	55860
❑	Washington Ozaukee	55875
❑	Waukesha County	55900
❑	Wis. Professors of Reading	56703
❑	Wolf River	55950

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