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Using New Literacies to Foster Student Motivation

Cover Page Footnote

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USING NEW LITERACIES TO FOSTER STUDENT MOTIVATION

New literacies are the techniques learners may utilize in various forms to infer meaning. Students use different resources to obtain information, which include text messages, blogs, social networking websites, and electronic devices (Moss & Lapp, 2010). New literacies include “the skills, strategies, and dispositions necessary to successfully adapt to the changing technologies that influence all aspects of our personal and professional lives” (Leu et al., 2004, p. 3). “Literacies is a means of communication and representation of meanings in a broader, richer, and all-encompassing sense” (Kalantzis & Cope, 2012, p. 4). New literacies are associated with an ascending social paradigm (Lankshear & Knobel, 2011), which can be achieved by students working in groups on a multimodal project. New literacies build on traditional elements of literacy, which include comprehension, writing, phonics, and strategies to identify important questions, search texts, read, evaluate, synthesize, and communicate information (Leu et al., 2004; Leu et al. 2017). In using new literacies, students are expected to use various forms of text such as electronic texts, visual texts, and graphic books.

Applications of new literacies, such as blogs, websites, Chromebooks, and software (e.g., Carry-A-Tune), can increase intrinsic student motivation to read. Using new literacies helps students to learn in an interactive and dynamic environment. Students access resources and materials to foster a global connectedness that reaches far beyond the walls of their schools. They also use different tools and strategies to learn about a specific topic. As a result, students become curious and lifelong learners, and their motivation towards learning grows with continual reading.

Research has indicated that intrinsic student motivation for reading decreases from elementary to high school (Gottfried, 1985, 1990; Gottfried et al., 2009; Wigfield & Guthrie, 2000; Wigfield et al., 2016). Wigfield and Guthrie (2000) have explained that this happens when students realize that their reading level varies and could potentially be lower than their peers. Toste et al. (2020) reported a correlation between reading performance and motivation. Additionally, instructional practices exist that foster competition among engaged students and others who are not focused on student interests.

We propose new literacies as an approach to increase students’ intrinsic motivation, as reading becomes part of their repertoire. Students are encouraged to explore different texts and use different skills like searching for information, analyzing claims, and synthesizing texts. Students come to understand that learning is a process, and it requires them to take ownership of their learning and value reading. Using new literacies eliminates student frustration and discouragement. Students received encouragement to focus on themselves and on improving their capabilities. The focus of new literacies is not only to know how to read and write.

It also focuses on applying the knowledge for specific purposes, which increases student motivation towards reading. It is our goal, as educators and researchers, to educate other practitioners on how to successfully use new literacies in the classroom and limit any misconceptions that might hinder them from adopting this method in their classrooms. This paper offers an examination of the relationship between new literacies and intrinsic motivation; a review of literature on the pros and cons of using new literacies with students is presented.

NEW LITERACIES AND INTRINSIC MOTIVATION

New literacies encourage students to identify problems, locate useful information, and critically evaluate information to develop the best solution and clearly communicate the solutions in various forms to others (Leu et al., 2011; Leu et al., 2017). New literacies increase the students' intrinsic motivation because learning with new literacies is meaningful and connects the students' individual needs to their own lives. This helps students become self-aware and motivated to read. They are encouraged to use their learning tools to read texts. Reading is not only limited to certain types of books like novels, cookbooks, textbooks, and graphic novels.

New literacies focus on student interests and motivation. Motivation is a crucial element in the learning process; "Without motivation, learning does not occur" (Caldwell, 2008, p. 221). Wigfield and McCann (1996–1997) indicated that individuals are encouraged by two questions: "Can I do this?" and "Do I want to do this?" Motivation, a powerful force itself, inspires individuals to achieve their goals. Gambrell (1996) stated, for students to succeed in reading, they need "both the skill and the will" (p. 15). According to Fisher and Frey (2012), "Student motivation to read comes from the teacher's ability to provide support in the classroom, be actively involved in the entire learning process with their students, using varying methods to instruct, and provide multiple opportunities for them to learn" (Fisher & Frey, 2012, p. 588).

Motivation is a "multidimensional concept" (Caldwell, 2008, p. 222). According to Caldwell (2008), students choose to read or avoid reading because of their intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. Recent research shows a "reciprocal" relationship between reading achievement and intrinsic motivation (Hebbecke et al., 2019). Intrinsic motivation comes from the student's curiosity, interest, desire, challenge, and social interaction. Intrinsic motivation "is the basis for lifelong reading" (Caldwell, 2008, p. 230). New literacies develop students' interests and enables students to read a wide range of texts, including digital and traditional texts (Hoch et al., 2019; Moss & Lapp, 2010). New literacies can motivate disadvantaged students to build their identities by expressing their voices and their points of view in multiple ways such as with written, visual, audio, spatial, tactile, or gestural meanings (Kalantzis & Cope, 2012).

Intrinsic motivation relates positively to learning, achievement, and perceptions of competence and relates negatively to anxiety (Gottfried, 1985; Lepper et al., 2005). Developing intrinsic motivation is significant for motivation and learning (Schunk et al., 2012). By adopting new literacies, students who are intrinsically motivated and engaged in activities improve their learning and maintain a high self-efficacy. For instance, students tend to accept instruction, organize knowledge, and apply skills and knowledge in different contexts. Teachers' use of new literacies in instruction varies, as their instruction is focused on the students' needs and interests. New literacies help students become critical thinkers and creative problem solvers (Karkar-Esperat, 2019; Leu, 2017). Students define meanings by themselves, instead of passively consuming information. Students use critical pedagogy and functional pedagogy. They analyze and interrogate texts and apply knowledge (Freire, 1970; Freire & Macedo, 1987; Kalantzis & Cope, 2012; Leu et al., 2011; Luke, 2012). Reading and writing are essential elements of learning. Teachers use technology to provide students with more resources to increase their literacy skills, critical thinking, and engagement (Voogt et al., 2018). "Critical literacy is one approach to teaching students to challenge a text" (Moss & Lapp, 2010, p. 287). Critically literate students first "process and analyze the multitude of information" (Moss & Lapp, 2010, p. 3) and then use this information to gain insight and knowledge.

New literacies increase student-reading engagement. Becker et al. (2010) noted students' motivation for reading is positively related to their reading skills because students who are intrinsically motivated to read actually read regularly. Guthrie et al. (2000) referred to students who are intrinsically motivated to read for knowledge and pleasure as "engaged" readers. Guthrie et al. indicated students with high intrinsic motivation, who are task-oriented and have high self-efficacy, actively read and achieve high scores. New literacies focus on student intrinsic motivation. The intrinsically motivated reader will read different genres and will read a wide range of topics. "Becoming an excellent, active reader involves attunement of motivational processes with cognitive and language processes in reading" (Wigfield & Guthrie, 2000, p. 408).

THE BENEFITS OF NEW LITERACIES

TEACHING STRATEGIES

Scanlon et al. (2016) discussed some teaching tactics to increase student motivation to read. Some of the most compelling strategies are: (a) provide students a choice in what they read and write; (b) help students develop confidence; (c) use approaches to help students in problem-solving; and (d) scaffold their reading. Students in this study grew to enjoy reading by being able to read and understand the book and having a genuine interest in the subject of the book. Teachers needed to collaborate with their students, and they learned how to keep them engaged and

how to guide them in taking ownership of their learning. This built the students' intrinsic motivation, so the students wanted to learn and participated in different activities they value. Providing students with creative activities, such as editing or modifying text and acting out portions of the story, gave them more opportunities to practice reading and writing (Scanlon et al., 2016).

INSTRUCTION

Motivating students to read is a challenge for most teachers. Scanlon et al. (2016) discussed responsive instruction and the important factors that teachers need to consider in motivating students to read. They suggested teachers provide students with different types of instruction: whole class instruction, small group instruction, and one-on-one instruction. However, Scanlon et al. (2016) stated, "Instructional plans need to consider the current status of all children in the class" (p. 30). This means that for teachers to successfully group students by instructional level, they need to know their students' literacy skills and be able to identify their strengths and weaknesses. For instance, struggling readers need coherent instruction and more opportunities to practice reading and writing than more advanced readers do. The experiences to which teachers expose their students will ultimately determine the students' eagerness towards engagement in reading.

A range of technology tools teachers could use in classroom instruction includes Glogs (multimedia posters), VoiceThreads, podcasts, wikis, and Twitter. However, students need to learn procedural knowledge before they use a virtual tool like Glogster. They must examine the images and videos to make sure they present a unified message. Concurrently, teachers should assess the students' reading and writing and provide differentiated instruction (Karchmer-Klein & Shinas, 2012).

STUDENT AWARENESS

According to Brozo and Afflerbach (2011), students who learn reading as an essential "tool of learning" (p. 9) will be able to connect reading with success and, thereby, become lifelong learners. As students read more, they become more experienced in analyzing and evaluating texts (Brozo & Afflerbach, 2011). They utilize their prior knowledge and some reading strategies, such as inferencing, critically analyzing texts, summarizing, and determining vocabulary meanings (Brozo & Afflerbach, 2011). Students ought to learn how to read and enjoy reading for long periods of time. Teachers should know their students' reading interests in order to select books and choose instruction for individual and group readings. This can help students in building intrinsic and extrinsic motivation towards reading (Caldwell, 2008). Students who possess positive motivation to read, "have a strong sense of their reading competence and fluency" (Wigfield & McCann, 1996–1997, p. 360). Intrinsic motivation stands as the foundation of lifelong readers and nurtures advancement of complex comprehension skills (Caldwell, 2008).

RELATIONSHIPS

Research shows strong teacher–student relationships foster gains in student engagement and academic achievement. The children in White’s (2013) study did not have a positive relationship with their teacher; this not only had a negative impact on their writing, but also they were unable to take full advantage of the available learning opportunities. This research finding supports Rita Pierson’s (2013) statement, “Every child needs an adult who understands the power of connection and insists that they become the best they can be” (p. 3). Literacy in a classroom is also achieved through the dynamics of interactions within the classroom setting.

According to Moje (1996), “The discourses that shape the construction of literacy are interpreted and reinterpreted through the process of interaction within a dynamic and diachronic classroom culture” (p. 176). Moje conducted a study concerning student–teacher relationships and student literacy. According to Moje (1996), the classroom teacher was “committed to student success and believed that she had to ‘reach out’ or ‘build a rapport’ with students to help them be successful learners” (p. 180). She collected data to see if the two were positively correlated. The study was carried out over the course of a school year. Moje discovered the teacher’s commitment to care for the students and see them become successful directly influenced her students’ literacy. The students were willing to participate in literacy events because they believed the teacher used the activities to help them learn and be successful.

FLUENCY

Most elementary school programs strive for their students to become fluent readers (Brozo & Afflerbach, 2011). Student motivation to comprehend is mediated by the number of books they read (Troyer et al., 2019). Caldwell (2008) acknowledged sustaining motivation for reading activities is challenging. “Reading is a complex developmental process, and the ability to understand text grows with each print experience” (Brozo & Afflerbach, 2011, p. 10). A student’s school and home environment are crucial elements in students constructing engagement and being motivated towards reading. “Without engagement students will demonstrate a lack of motivation and unwillingness to persevere when confronted with a reading challenge” (Brozo & Afflerbach, 2011, p. 9). A motivated reader will always seek help (Brozo & Afflerbach, 2011).

ENGAGEMENT

New literacies must be addressed both inside and outside of school systems. Students use various forms and modes of technology in all aspects of their daily lives. Clearly, technology peaks the students’ interests. When it comes to engaging and motivating students in a classroom, educators should closely examine

incorporating new literacies that are centered around the technologies and the social media platforms students use on a daily basis (Beach & Doerr-Stevens, 2011; Stathopoulou et al., 2019). Then, students will use these new literacy modes on their own each day. When new literacies are effectively combined with the technologies and platforms that peak students' interests, motivation and engagement are sure to follow (Leu et al., 2004; Leu, et al., 2008).

CARRY-A-TUNE SOFTWARE

Students with difficulties in learning to read after elementary school need more assistance to motivate them and help them understand what they are reading (Biggs et al., 2008). In Biggs et al.'s (2018) study, Carry-A-Tune software was used to help students improve their reading. The software which helped users sing in tune by matching their pitch to prerecorded songs was found help struggling readers. Students in Grades 7 and 8 who used Carry-A-Tune to improve their singing scores, which increased their self-efficacy in singing, further enhanced their motivation and engagement in reading tasks in integrated literacy curriculum. Findings from this study showed a shift in the students' linear reading cognition towards printed texts to audio and oral meanings.

SOCIAL NETWORKING

"Social networking sites can be used to help students acquire argumentative strategies through interactive, collaborative exchange of ideas for the purpose of addressing issues, negotiating differences, and solving problems" (Beach & Doerr-Stevens, 2011, p. 166). Social media sites, in conjunction with effective teaching strategies, can be used to improve student engagement and learning. Argumentative writing, which is the type of writing found on sites such as Facebook, YouTube, and Twitter, is essential to the discourse of a classroom. Through the use of these networking sites, students learn more easily how to validly express their opinions in a manner that is viewed as less formal, therefore less intimidating, than by standing and speaking in front of a class or a large group. YouTube, specifically, can be a helpful tool used for presenting if a student struggles with speaking in front of a class.

YOUTUBE

Danielowich and McCarthy (2013) found when using YouTube, "Participants were more likely to engage in a collaborative space with peers and were more likely to learn how to interact effectively in a group setting" (p. 160). When comparing the possible problems with the potential benefits of using YouTube in a classroom, Long et al. (2016) reported, "Using videos to shift students' passive learning in traditional instructor-centered, lecture-based classroom to outside the classroom, and in the formal classroom space, students engage in individual and collaborative activities foster deep understanding and higher-order thinking" (p. 245). According

to Sherer and Shea (2011), “YouTube, in conjunction with the ubiquity of the Internet, provides unprecedented opportunities for online participation, collaboration, communication, and user-based development” (p. 57). Particularly for the lower-level students, the addition of YouTube in class instruction helped students gain knowledge on topics and held their interests longer than traditional lectures ever had.

MICROBLOGGING

Microblogging involves posting on social media platforms, such as Facebook and Twitter. These two platforms comprise a large portion of the interests of third-year students who were enrolled in the Bachelor of Education degree program. According to Mills and Chandra (2011), “Print based conceptions of reading and writing are no longer adequate” (p. 36). Microblogging is a method students are extremely comfortable with, so it is natural they would feel better about writing, if they were permitted to use one of these methods. It is less intimidating to them than a blank piece of paper. Having third-year college students share their thoughts on a classroom topic by posting to a classroom Facebook or Twitter account could easily spark an in-depth discussion that is less formal yet infinitely more beneficial, in terms of helping students create their own meanings to what they are learning. From their findings, Mills and Chandra (2011) reported, “Students wrote about a topic more frequently over a more extended period of time when using microblogging” (p. 37).

INTERACTIVE WHITEBOARD

Gillen et al. (2008) found the interactive whiteboard is a “heterogeneous,” useful toolkit that utilizes a wide range of resources. The interactive whiteboard helps in scaffolding the learning and helps students remain engaged and stay focused. This tool encourages teachers to use different modalities and to construct continuity in lessons. Kress (2001) conducted an ethnographic study of school science classrooms in London. Results of the study indicated different modes had different effects on student learning and shaped their identities. Mercer et al. (2010) affirmed the interactive whiteboard assists in providing “dialogic space,” a space where children access information and deliver information which contributes to shared solutions to science-based problems. Schmid (2008) found teachers and students encountered difficulties in using interactive technologies such as cognitive overload and a lack of cognitive engagement.

CHROMEBOOK TECHNOLOGY

Chromebook technology is a teaching tool in the classroom. The findings of Kulow’s (2014) study indicate the depth of a teacher’s relationship with the students determined the level of success of using Chromebook technology. This tool increases student engagement. Kulow recommends educators use this

technology as a learning tool in the classroom and find applications to help the students have a valuable experience. Additionally, Zemmahi et al. (2015) suggests districts provide teachers with Chromebook training in professional learning communities to learn about the best technology applications and to learn about appropriate technological information and technology instruction to effectively engage students. However, some apps used in the Chromebook might limit students in conceptual development. Teachers need to be mindful of this limitation (Falloon, 2017).

COMICS AND GRAPHIC NOVELS

When actively searching to increase the literacy rates of students, we should look to sources that may be deemed unorthodox. One of the more untraditional methods would be to use comic books as a tool for increasing literacy and reading rates. Comic books and graphic novels bring in several aspects which are fundamental in improving literacy in people of all ages. They provide shorter contexts of reading and support the text with pictures and graphics which aid in synthesizing and comprehension.

According to Moss and Lapp (2010), “Countries with the highest literacy rates also have cultures that embrace comic literature for children and adults” (p. 126). Because of the illustrations and graphics, some students, older students especially, may see this type of reading as more of a leisure activity. Therefore, they will be more likely to read comics outside of the classroom (self-engagement).

TEACHER’S ROLE

Teachers play an essential role in increasing student reading engagement by sharing their own enthusiasm, giving positive feedback, and creating enticing classrooms (Dolezal et al., 2003). Increasing student engagement will ultimately increase their motivation. Wigfield et al. (2008) defined engagement in learning as “students’ behavioral, cognitive, affective, and social involvement in instructional activities with their teachers and classmates” (p. 432). Wigfield et al. (2004) also found that motivation and engagement contribute to reading comprehension.

Caldwell (2008) discovered, “Good readers pronounce words both accurately and automatically” (p. 131). Some of the behaviors the readers in Caldwell’s study were engaged in included constructing meaning; creating visual images; matching meaning to words, phrases, sentences, and paragraphs; and predicting what might happen. Some of the good reading behaviors included “rereading, skimming, reading out aloud, taking notes, highlighting, reorganizing the text the same way” (Caldwell, 2008, p. 176). Caldwell concluded good readers make inferences and are metacognitive; furthermore, they know when they comprehend and when they do not.

MEANING-MAKING

New literacies affect meaning-making because they allow students to be responsible for developing their own meanings, regarding the information with which they are presented or tasked with learning. Meaning-making is designed and redesigned as a result of multimodal forms of learning and communications because these forms present us with an ever-evolving flow of information (Kalantzis & Cope, 2012). This fluid flow of information at our fingertips naturally allows for our thought processes and meanings to change and adapt as we continually seek and gather information.

The similarities that exist across modes of representation increases the accessibility of these modes, which in return allows for a very diverse atmosphere of information and communication. These modes allow for connections to be made that would never otherwise occur. As a result of multimodal meaning-making, we are presented with a vast expanse of ideas that go far beyond of a traditional textbook. Multimodal meaning-making allows students to have a much more original stance on a topic (New London Group, 2000). It does away with much of the biases that have hindered students because of the lack of resources from which to make a decision. Now, they are easily able to gather and sort through unlimited information and find pieces of information that fit into their beliefs and with what they find fascinating and valuable.

It is clear there are some benefits to using new literacies. However, there are some limitations associated with using new literacies, from the authors' experiences as practitioners.

THE DISADVANTAGES OF NEW LITERACIES

TEACHER ATTITUDES AND TRAINING

Qablan et al. (2009) found diverse contradictions in the Information and Communications Technology (ICT) based science-teaching activity. They stated contradictions exist between subject and object, between community and object, and between artifacts and object. Utilizing ICT tools in teaching science would require transformation in the dynamics between subject, object, and community. Any time an educator takes a different approach to instruction and student learning, they will be faced with a multitude of problems before success occurs.

LIMITED ACCESS

The teachers' experience and preparation impact the use of new literacies in the classroom. Additionally, Freitas and Castanheira (2006) found students have limited access to textbook images used in biology classrooms in Brazil. Only 20% of the freshmen students could afford to purchase the textbook adopted for the class. The graphical representation was only available to the teacher. Additionally, not all students had access to the Internet.

LACK OF FUNDS

Students encounter limited access because of a lack of funds. Multimodal lessons may be a limitation to low socioeconomic districts because they require the use of projectors, computers, and other electronic devices. Along with the equipment needed, high installation costs and continuous expert maintenance is also needed.

CLASSROOM MANAGEMENT

Even when funding is available to acquire needed technology, issues could arise concerning student behavior and classroom management. Multimodal lessons involving the use of various technologies, such as laptops, can create classroom management issues due to the difficulty in monitoring all students. It is difficult for teachers to monitor a classroom full of students as they navigate various websites and online platforms.

TECHNOLOGY PROFICIENCY

Classroom management issues could also arise when teachers utilize new literacies, as some students and teachers may lack the necessary skills to utilize them proficiently. Assigning multimodal projects might be a challenge to some students who are not proficient with technology; these students may need to spend more time learning computer skills and learning how to access information. Anytime the Internet is involved in learning and education, there could be problems. Many schools have strict rules that result in blocking access to certain sites, such as YouTube, because of the problems that could arise. “The impersonal nature of online communication often leads students to post or send hurtful things they would never say in person” (Lane, 2011, p. 1793).

RECOMMENDATIONS

When educators pay attention to the intrinsic and extrinsic personal motivation of their students (Moss & Lapp, 2010), they can learn what interests them and what motivates them. To help students become critical thinkers and creative problem solvers, it is necessary to let them define meanings for themselves, which could be realized in media creation (Scheibe & Rogow, 2011), instead of asking them to passively consume information. Based on the evidence provided in the literature, student motivation will increase when new literacies are incorporated into classrooms. The following is a recommended list of tools and techniques founded in new literacies that can help increase student motivation and engagement.

1. Use electronic text to engage students in critical thinking skills that they will need to read, manage, organize, and evaluate text (Moss & Lapp, 2010). Electronic texts, including digital curriculum and materials, can be accessed with the use of readers, tablets, smartphones, Chromebooks,

- and laptops. Digital texts can be found on a range of websites and applications, including Kindle, Amazon Books, and iBooks.
2. Use the singing software to encourage student success by focusing on singing rather than reading scores (Biggs et al., 2008). An example of a singing software is Carry-A-Tune.
 3. Multimodal presentation platforms are a creative way to incorporate new literacies and synthesize and present information all while increasing student motivation. Students are drawn to digitally interactive technology. Multimodal platforms offer students a digital platform to create and share within, ultimately sparking interest and increasing motivation. Examples of student- and teacher-friendly online multimodal presentation platforms are Piktochart (www.piktochart.com), ThingLink (www.thinglink.com), and Glogster (www.edu.glogster.com).
 4. “Social networking sites can be used to help students acquire argumentative strategies through interactive, collaborative exchange of ideas for the purpose of addressing issues, negotiating differences, and solving problems” (Beach & Doerr-Stevens, 2011, p. 166). With this in mind, the use of social media sites, when used in conjunction with effective teaching strategies, improves student engagement and learning. Microblogging is a method with which students are extremely comfortable. “Students wrote about a topic more frequently over a more extended period of time when using microblogging” (Mills & Chandra, 2011, p. 37). Examples of social networking/microblogging sites could be valuable learning platforms, used to increase student interest and motivation, are Twitter (www.twitter.com), Facebook (www.facebook.com), Instagram (www.instagram.com), and YouTube (www.youtube.com).

CONCLUSION

When incorporated into classrooms, the new literacies practices described give teachers the necessary 21st-century skills and tools that their students will need to become engaged and motivated learners in today’s environment. The facts and information presented suggest there is a connection between student motivation and engagement and the use of new literacies in classrooms. New literacies provide a bridge from the classroom to the technologies that interest students outside of school. When new literacies are incorporated into classrooms, students are provided multiple ways and opportunities to engage in the lessons at hand. Higher levels of engagement and participation then result in higher academic and literacy achievement.

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