Framework for Success in Secondary Reading

Foundational Document
for the development of the
MAISA ELA Secondary Reading Units

Participant Groups:

ELA Teachers, Special Education Teachers, Consultants, Curriculum Leaders, and Administrators across state of Michigan

National Writing Projects of Michigan is a network of educators working together to improve the teaching of writing in schools around the state. The NWPM network consists of 11 university-based sites.

Michigan Department of Education Consultants

Michigan Association of Intermediate School Administrators: Career and College Readiness Project ELA Leadership Team

Adolescent literacy researchers from University of Michigan, Michigan State University, and Northwestern University

Context

In 2010, the state of Michigan adopted the Common Core State Standards (CCSS). Soon after, the Federal Government funded consortia to develop national assessments linked to the CCSS. Michigan became a governing state in the Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium (SBAC). With both the CCSS adoption and the looming 2014-2015 rollout date for national assessments, Michigan's Association for Intermediate School Administrators (MAISA) decided to anticipate high stakes assessment and federal and state mandates by sponsoring the statewide development of a model curriculum intended to support teachers as they implemented rigorous new standards. At this writing, teachers across Michigan are beginning the process of developing units of study for reading. Foundational to the curricular design for secondary reading units of study, this framework is intended to provide a research base for the approaches to reading instruction used in the development of the secondary MAISA ELA units.

Guiding Research on Adolescent Literacy

The Secondary Reading Framework is built upon recent adolescent literacy research drafted in response to a June, 2012, Reading Summit held at Oakland Intermediate School District, featuring Elizabeth Birr Moje, University of Michigan, Carol Lee, Northwestern University, as well as David Kirkland and Danielle DeVoss, Michigan State University. As adolescent literacy scholars and researchers of contemporary literacies, their research addresses disciplinary literacy, sociocultural perspectives on language and literacy, computer and technological literacies, as well as digital and visual rhetoric. This document is informed by these approaches to adolescent reading.

In addition to aforementioned scholarly perspectives on adolescent literacy, reports including Reading Next (Biancarosa and Snow, 2006) and The Framework for Postsecondary Success in Writing (2011) were consulted. Those reports affirmed common beliefs held by secondary English teachers: that today's educators are faced with motivating adolescent readers to engage in work that requires sustained effort and a high degree of skill. These beliefs are supported by recent National Assessment of Educational Progress results. According to Carol Lee and Anika Spratley (2010) relying on The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) data trends, "less than 10 percent of 17 year olds, regardless of race/ethnicity or SES [socioeconomic status], are able to comprehend complex texts" (p. 2, 2010) and literacy skills remain flat at a time when adolescents face increasing subject matter text demands.

Instructional Implications

Readers today must move far beyond basic literacy skills. Reading Next (Biancarosa and Snow, 2006) identifies a partial list of sophisticated reading skills that includes reading with a purpose, text selection, learning from texts, managing unfamiliar vocabulary, determining fact from opinion, making sense of new learning in relationship to what is already known, reading critically across texts with differing perspectives, and grasping the writers' point of view and intent (p. 1, 2006). These rigorous skills, identified by researchers and addressed in national assessments are also reflected in the Common Core English Language Arts Standards.

Units that are designed to support academic success for a wide range of students will also have to shift instruction towards a thinking culture that empowers student thought and perspective (Kirkland, 2012). In this scenario, teachers facilitate learning and determine next learning steps based on formative assessments and knowledge of where students are to determine an instructional ladder. Such direct instruction, recognized as a teacher understanding and explicitly naming the learning intentions of a lesson along with what the success criteria is in student performance (J. Hattie, 2009) is essential to fostering academic success. Accompanied by guided practice, teachers will have multiple opportunities to formatively assess and offer feedback (2009).

The challenge of scaffolding adolescents into sophisticated reading extends beyond skill deficits and instructing students in ways to accommodate the complexities of text. Instruction to address these skills is compromised by the fact that secondary students find themselves increasingly pulled in directions beyond academic schooling. Competing demands of social interests, work, and extra-curricular activities compromise how much attention a student has or is willing to give to the classroom.

Lee and Kirkland (Reading Summit, 2012) remind educators to consider students' cultural backgrounds, identities, and school congruence when planning instruction. They also emphasize the importance of recognizing learner engagement as essential to instructional planning. One approach might include cultural data sets (Lee, 2012) as a way to relate to and engage adolescents with literary and informational texts. Another approach recommended by David Kirkland (2011) includes a flexible range of culturally responsive resources to scaffold readers into canonical texts. Paying attention to engagement, culture, and relationships is part of what it means to reach and teach adolescents.

Just as Lee and Kirkland advocate reading across multiple texts in a range of media formats and genres, so, too, does the ELA Common Core. The standards expect students to have substantive text structure knowledge and experience across narrative, literary non-narrative, informational, and media text. Readers are also required to negotiate multiple texts on a topic and determine connections, differing perspectives and bias, the influence of text structures on interpretation, and develop their own independent claims. To accomplish building such complex, multi-faceted thinking and learning has

instructional implications regarding resources that stretch beyond a whole class text approach.

Emerging Questions

Before educators decide on curricular units for teaching reading to middle and high school students, considerations gleaned from preliminary investigation into adolescent literacy may offer guidance and depth. Given what is widely acknowledged about adolescent literacy, several overarching questions emerge.

How do educators engage adolescents in literacy learning when their attention is divided?

How do educators leverage the knowledge, both process and content, that students bring with them to access increasingly sophisticated and rigorous literacy demands?

How do educators imagine a sequence of scaffolded, strategic lessons that support literacy growth at the secondary level?

How does new media and technology inform and shape instructional decisions?

These questions will guide the development of subsequent units of study and frame the challenges that will need to be addressed in a relevant and meaningful English language arts curriculum. Reading Next (2006) suggests the skills needed for adolescent reading success. Carol Lee and David Kirkland provide ways to induct a range of learners into sophisticated literacy practices. Elizabeth Moje guides our understanding of disciplinary literacies so prominent in the Common Core State Standards. Danielle DeVoss offers insight into ways that technology and new media can enhance and define contemporary instructional approaches. Drawing from these sources, teachers across Michigan will be empowered to reconsider static notions of adolescent literacy. Current research, impending national assessments, and the de facto national standards found in the CCSS insist on updated approaches to the challenges of teaching reading.

While this document lays out the challenges ahead and the questions that will need to be considered when authoring secondary reading units of study, the work of crafting those units has yet to occur. This framework provides a starting point. Unit writers will need to keep in mind the framing questions—in what ways do the units address the challenges raised in each question? Answers will be found in collective iterations of review and response. Together, teachers across Michigan will find support from reading units intended to address some of the most persistent and pressing problems of practice.

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