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LITERACY STRATEGIES FOR INSERVICE TEACHERS

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Literacy Strategies for Inservice Teachers

Synopsis:

The focus of this presentation will be literacy strategies that were presented to teachers (K -8) in a funded project that was administrated by the Arkansas Department of Education.

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***Impact of Professional Development on Content Area Teachers' Dispositions about and Practice in**

Literacy Integration: Initial findings

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Background

Starting from August 2013, we were involved in a No Child Left Behind grant and worked with a group of college professors from various disciplines such as mathematics, physics, chemistry, and literacy, and several public school teachers. We developed a three-year teacher professional development curriculum and implemented the first year training that was focused on increasing content knowledge and integrating technologies and literacy. The teachers involved in the training are about 35 5th through 8th grade public school teachers who teach various content areas ranging from math to life science, physical science, math, literacy, etc.

Literature Review

Content area teachers' resistance to integrating literacy into their content areas is well documents and various reasons were suggested (Ratekin, Simpson, Alvermann, & Dishner, 1985; Stewart & O'Brien, 1989; Siebert & Jo Draper, 2008).

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Content area teachers may be well trained in their respective content areas, but lack the knowledge and skill to infuse literacy into their content areas (D'Arcangelo, 2002; Vacca, 2002). In fact, Fisher and Frey (2008) found that content area teachers "know relatively little about effective instructional practices for vocabulary development."

Some research indicates that through training content area teachers' beliefs may change and their skills may improve so much that their students learning improve as well. For example, Huysman (2012) found that through professional development, high school content area teachers' dispositions towards using literacy strategies changed.

Cantrell, Burns, & Callaway (2009) conducted a pre- and post-survey on middle and high school content area teachers' beliefs about literacy teaching and learning for their year-long literacy professional development project and discovered that most content area teachers were positive about teaching literacy in content areas. They believed that literacy was integral to their content area and they viewed themselves as both literacy teachers and content teachers. Although they encountered a number of barriers during the initial phases of content literacy implementation, the teachers reported that content literacy professional development with coaching and collaboration supported teachers' efficacy with literacy teaching and their implementation of content literacy practices.

Falk-Ross & Evans (2014) actually found that through a teacher professional development on integrating vocabulary strategies into content areas improved student reading comprehension, vocabulary use, and student achievement.

Research Design

The purpose of this research was to investigate the impact of the literacy component of a primarily content knowledge focused teacher professional development training project on participating content area teachers' beliefs about infusing literacy into content areas. Given the limited amount of

time for literacy trainers, would the training have any influence on the teachers' perceptions? Therefore, the research questions of the current study were:

1. Will content area literacy training change the beliefs of upper elementary to middle school content area teachers about the importance of integrating reading and writing into content areas?
2. Will content area literacy training change the beliefs of upper elementary to middle school content area teachers' beliefs about their role and responsibilities to integrate literacy into content areas?
3. Will content area literacy training change the teaching practice of upper elementary to middle school content area teachers regarding integrating literacy into content areas?

The researchers administered a self-constructed 20-item Likert Scale survey at the beginning and end of the first year training to 35 participating teachers. All 35 teachers completed the pre-training survey, and 32 returned the post-training survey. Some demographic information regarding the grade level the participating teachers teach, the content area(s) they teach, and their years of teaching experience. Nine questions were about reading, seven about writing, three about vocabulary and one about grouping. Questions range from their beliefs about the importance of involving students in reading and writing content area materials, to their perceptions of their role and responsibility in using reading and writing to learn content areas, to their beliefs about their students' ability in reading and writing content area materials, to specific reading, writing, vocabulary, and grouping strategies they use in content area instruction.

Initial Findings

Analysis of the pre- and post-training survey yields the findings summarized in the following charts. On the first question, i.e., the impact of the training on the belief about the importance of

integrating reading and writing into content areas, there is a 10% increase on the number of teachers who believe or strongly believe that integrating reading and writing is important (see Figure 1).

Figure 1 Findings on importance of reading and writing

Question #1	Pre-training	Post-training
Importance of reading	86% agree or strongly agree; 14% disagree or strongly disagree	96% agree or strongly agree; 4% disagree or strongly disagree
Importance of writing	86% agree or strong agree; 14% disagree or strongly disagree	96% agree or strongly agree; 4% disagree or strongly disagree

As for the second question which is about their perception of their own role and responsibility in infusing reading and writing into content areas, the results show a 10% gain in reading and 6% gain in writing. It seems that more teachers view integrating reading as their role and responsibility than writing (see Figure 2).

Figure 2 Findings on roles and responsibilities

Question #2	Pre-training	Post-training
My responsibility to integrate reading	86% agree or strongly agree; 10% disagree or strongly disagree; 4% neutral	96% agree or strongly agree; 4% disagree or strongly disagree
My responsibility to integrate writing	86% agree or strongly agree; 10% disagree or strongly disagree; 4% neutral	92% agree or strongly agree; 8% neutral

Teaching practice in Question #3 is defined as reading instruction, writing instruction, and vocabulary instruction. It is partially because of the design of the training program which only selects those three areas. Analysis shows that there is a 24% increase in the number of teachers who report regularly involving students in reading after the training, 16% increase in the number of teachers who report regularly involving students in writing, and 25% increase in the number of teachers who report regularly teaching vocabulary after training.

Figure 3 Findings on teaching practice

Question #3	Pre-training	Post-training
Regularly involve students in reading	52% agree or strongly agree; 38% disagree or strongly disagree; 10% neutral	76% agree or strongly agree; 18% disagree or strongly disagree; 6% neutral
Regularly involve students in writing	52% agree or strong agree; 29% disagree or strongly disagree; 19% neutral	68% agree or strongly agree; 28% disagree or strongly disagree; 4% neutral
Regularly teach vocabulary	71% agree or strong agree; 24% disagree or strongly disagree; 5% neutral	96% agree or strong agree; 4% disagree or strongly disagree

The survey also asked the participants to report the estimated time their students spend on reading and writing activities and also the most common reading and writing activities students are engaged in. As Figure 4 shows, and Figure 5 summarize

Figure 4 Findings on reading and writing time

Time per week	Reading	Writing
More than 90 min	33%	10%
61-90 min	5%	33%
31-60 min	33%	24%
1-30 min	29%	33%

Figure 5 Findings on reading and writing activities teachers use

Reading	Writing
Read aloud 76%	Writing summaries 67%
Independent reading 62%	Writing logs/journals 43%
Round robin reading 48%	

The pre-training survey reveals that the majority of content area teachers (86%) held positive beliefs about the importance of integrating reading and writing into content areas and positive perceptions of their own role in integrating reading and writing into content areas. However, only

slightly more than half (52%) of the teachers actually involve their students in reading and writing. More teachers (71%) regularly teach concepts/vocabulary in content areas (25%).

When comparing the pre- and post-training survey, there is an increase in all the following areas: beliefs about the important of integrating reading and writing (10%), perception of their role in integrating reading (10%) and writing (6%), involving students in reading (24%) and writing (16%), and finally regularly teaching vocabulary.

Implications

Findings suggest that the majority of teachers were positive about teaching reading and writing even before training started, although fewer teachers actually integrated. For some reason, a gap exists between what they believe and what they do in the classroom.

Findings also suggest that training did make a change in their beliefs, perceptions as well as practice as the increase in the post-survey indicates. However, a correlation may not be established because this study had a small sample size and the researchers used their own self-constructed survey. For future studies, a bigger sample, and a more scientifically tested survey will better reveal the relationship between literacy training and teacher beliefs and practice. Teacher interviews will also help prove their thoughts on the impact of this type training.

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