

Pedagogical Possibilities of Content Area Classrooms

WOW Stories: Connections from the Classroom is excited to present our second issue featuring recipients of Worlds of Words Global Literacy Communities grants. These grants were funded by the Longview Foundation for World Affairs and International Understanding, an organization that has been helping young people in the United States learn about world regions and global issues since 1966.

In this issue the Willamette Valley Literacy Community shares their work using global and multicultural literature with middle and high school students in a variety of content areas. We begin with an overview and a description of the theoretical framework used by this literacy community in a vignette written by Marie LeJeune and Tracy Smiles. Next, Jennifer Hart Davis describes integrating global literature and science in a unit on water in an eighth grade Earth Science classroom. Eryn Willow helps her seventh and eighth grade students use literature circles and text sets to explore post-war Afghanistan. Mariko Walsh introduces her ninth grade language arts students to other cultures through literature circles with multicultural and global young adult literature. Finally, Mallory Marquet works with sixth grade struggling readers as they complete a global biography project.

As you read this issue of *WOW Stories: Connections from the Classroom*, think about how you connect students of all ages with literature in ways that promote intercultural understandings. Consider sharing your innovative practices by submitting a vignette to *WOW Stories*. We are interested in descriptions of interactions with literature in classrooms and libraries at preschool through graduate levels. [See our call for manuscripts and author guidelines for more information.](#)

Janine M. Schall

Editor, *WOW Stories: Connections from the Classroom*

Examining Adolescents' Literate Lives

By Marie A. LeJeune and Tracy Lynn Smiles

As former teachers of adolescents, we are fully aware of the multi-faceted, complex, and often messy nature of adolescents' literate lives and identities. We are also aware that we are *former* teachers of adolescents and that in the span of the several years since we have left our middle and high school classrooms, adolescents' lives, identities, and literate practices have exploded with the advent of new digital literacies and social networking platforms such as blogging, texting, Facebooking, Tweeting, etc. Additionally, today's secondary students are more culturally and linguistically diverse than they have ever been, both in their own backgrounds as well as within the

literate, textual practices in which they engage. Considering this, we are particularly interested in and concerned with how today's teachers of adolescents approach, meld, and bridge students' out-of-school literacies and the content of schooled literacies and the ways in which cultural and linguistic diversities are embraced (or resisted) within schooled literacy practices.

We also acknowledge and empathize with the increasingly complex juggling act educators face as they attempt to honor the literate, linguistic, cultural, and technological diversity of their students, while simultaneously facing increasing mandates that limit the scope and breadth of curriculum in favor of scripted and mandated "programs" for teaching. The teachers we know and the teachers we work with understand that teaching students must mean more than following the (often scripted) and predetermined curriculum, using "one size fits all" basals, textbooks and other schooled texts they are being expected to teach in order for students to perform on assessments that teachers had little input in creating.

This issue of *WOW Stories: Connections from the Classroom* features voices from four such teachers—the teachers we were lucky enough to work alongside over the past school year as part of our participation in the World of Words Global Literacy Communities grant. Our group, comprised of four middle and high school content area teachers and us, their former professors, used our time together and the resources provided through the grant to grapple with many of these issues—how to best insure teachers could meet mandated state standards and core curriculum while inviting students into spaces that acknowledged and embraced the diverse backgrounds of their own lives and interests, and the larger world around them.

The Theoretical Framework that Guided Our Group's Work

Through our work as content area teachers and teacher researchers, our literacy group explored a humanizing pedagogy with a focus on scaffolding students towards becoming "conscious of their presence in the world" (Freire, 1970, p. 407). This work with adolescents is built on the belief that students need opportunities to voice their experiences about their reading, their worlds, their concerns, and the issues and discourses that shape their ever-evolving identities and sense of self. We believe researchers, teachers, and policy makers have much to learn from the voices and experiences of adolescents (Moje, 2002; Alvermann, 1998). Additionally, our small group, or literacy community, embraced the belief that as educators we are charged with preparing students for entering a world that is as highly diverse and complex as the individual students who inhabit our classrooms. In addition to navigating the many demands of meeting mandates, students must be prepared to act and relate appropriately and effectively in various cultural contexts (Short, 2010). As Short contends:

Technology is increasing interconnectedness across world economies, politics, environmental

conditions, arts, education, etc. Migration and immigration are creating more culturally and linguistically diverse societies in U.S. communities and schools. Students need to be knowledgeable and interested about world regions and global issues and able to communicate across cultures and languages.

The Work of The Willamette Valley Literacy Community

This special issue of *WOW Stories* describes how the World of Words Global Literacy Communities grant provided four middle and high school teachers with the opportunity to engage students in authentic inquiries that supported and enhanced their content area teaching for adolescent learners through reading and discussing international children's and adolescent literature within their secondary classrooms. These vignettes describe how literature-based discussions within content area classrooms--science, social studies, and language arts--not only fulfilled teachers' goals of teaching the state and national standards they are held accountable to, but created new roles for themselves and their students as they examined critical global issues in light of their content, such as use of resources and water scarcity, racism, war, and civil rights.

This project focused specifically on using global children's and adolescent literature to explore pedagogical possibilities within secondary content area classroom contexts. Research illustrates the powerful impact that literature has on content area literacy and learning, drawing connections between the various subjects and critical issues adolescents explore in their secondary classrooms (Bean, 2003; Fisher & Frey, 2008; McLaughlin, 2010). Although teachers in our classrooms were eager to engage with global literature in their classrooms, they admitted hesitancy towards how literature might be implemented within a content area classroom, particularly within the confines and time constraints of a predetermined curriculum scope, common to many secondary classrooms. What teachers found was that collaborating with other secondary teachers, within the smaller grant project and across various communities throughout the nation who also received a Global Literacy Communities grant, opened up powerful spaces for professional and pedagogical growth and development.

The project employed online components, such as an email chat loop for the teachers as well as an additional Wiki Space and Group Blog for teachers and students to share experiences and book responses across classrooms. We visited the classrooms to support and celebrate the classroom communities' inquiries into global literature and intercultural understandings. We met at the university and browsed stacks of books, and met for coffee at local restaurants to discuss our teaching successes and tensions. In short, we engaged in the type of professional development and talk that many teachers today are missing out on in an educational climate that encourages pre-determined, scripted programs in the place of teacher and student-centered, authentic curriculum.

Collaborating with these visionary teachers revealed for us the power of global literature integration in content area classrooms for secondary teachers, students, and the literate community of the classroom. These vignettes come out of diverse classroom contexts and represent a variety of subject areas, but collectively they illustrate the following:

- Cross curricular ties with literature encouraged secondary students' motivation towards and integration of content area topics and themes,
- Examination of global literature encouraged both teachers and students to examine their own cultural understandings and ways of looking at the world and the concept of "others" who live in different parts of the world,
- Examination of global literature encouraged these teachers to implement not only new texts, but also new practices around these texts within the classroom, expanding the pedagogical possibilities of content area classrooms.

Donna Alvermann (2006) proposes four principled practices for guiding and improving adolescent literacy instruction. “[Adolescents] need to generate and share their ideas about complex content area texts with others, thrive in active learning environments, need support in developing a critical awareness of what they read, write, and share, and opportunities to connect literacies that span in – and – out of schooling” (pp. 9-11). Our experiences with the teachers we collaborated with has affirmed our belief that discussion of quality children’s and adolescent literature offers spaces to involve students in seeing connections between their own lives and experiences with texts, as well as opportunity to critically discuss these connections (Langer, 1993).

The work described in this special issue was derived from a desire to meld students’ out of school reading interests and experiences within a schooled setting. Despite district and departmental mandates that often keep children’s and adolescent literature, intensive literature based discussions, and students’ perspectives on their schooled experiences on the sidelines of the required curriculum, these teachers demonstrate that international children’s and adolescent literature coupled with inquiries into global issues can be powerful in supporting students in making connections between literacy and their lives while building self confidence as literacy and language users that can use language and literacy for empowerment (Goodman, 2003).

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Multicultural Literature in the Secondary Science Classroom: Connections to Content and Culture

By Jennifer Hart Davis

Water, we cannot live without it, yet few of us really understand or stop to consider our relationship with the natural resource that ties humanity together. Water is the very essence of life. While many of us in the developed world take our unlimited access to clean water supplies for granted, there is a water crisis in much of the world. What connection and responsibility do we