FOR-PD's Reading Strategy of the Month

TEXT SETS
February 2006

(Developed by Smith, L. & Zygouris-Coe, V., 2006)

Rationale:

Reflective teachers often ponder as they plan about which materials to choose when considering their objectives for instruction. They are concerned about how to encourage their students to contemplate theme, plot, and text structures as they read (Mathis, 2002). They may worry if their students are provided with enough time to explore and connect to topics covered in class. Teachers in grades where the FCAT is given may also wonder if the text they are providing in class will match with the standardized tests given during the year (Just Read, Florida, 2004). These concerns are valid and should be considered when choosing materials to be used in the classroom.

As teachers, and readers, we know how books have the almost magical power of creating experiences and summoning feelings. We understand that reading is more than just the recalling of sounds and words without meaning. Reading is an adventure and we must find ways to engage our students as they read in order to help them make those personal connections and interactions with the material (Mathis, 2002). While students come in contact with text everyday, they may not be noting their similarities or themes. Organizing and selecting literacy materials is an excellent way to help learners expand on their critical thinking and personal understandings of the text.

One strategy used to aid in the selection of books is the use of text sets. Texts sets can be considered a collection of books related to a common element, topic, theme, or type of text (Opitz, 1998). Text sets provide readers with a focus and allows teachers to guide readers through specific engagements with the texts. They also provide readers with a medley of text, including non-fiction and fiction, that will support the growing need for students to obtain quality information from a variety of sources.

Along with critical thinking skills and strategies that can be taught, there should also be a focus on aesthetic and efferent reading. Louise Rosenblatt, in her transactional theory of reading, suggests that a reader can approach a piece of writing with two different motivations. If a reader focuses their attention on information to remember facts from a text they are in an efferent stance. If the reader draws from past experiences and feels emotions when reading, they are in an aesthetic stance. (Rosenblatt, 1982). While both of these can be done for almost any type of writing, Rosenblatt believes that an aesthetic stance to reading a particular text will provide students with a greater connection to the writing. As text sets are often designed around a theme, this type of strategy can help provide students with a greater sense personal bond to an area of study.

How to Use the Strategy:

Research suggests that there is no skills-only approach that can substitute for extensive reading when trying to build a reader's aptitude (Just Read, Florida, 2004). A text set can provide a strong base that will allow for both extensive reading and strategy practice. The use of many strategies such as double-entry journals, story mapping, and making connections are good choices when choosing ways to help students enhance critical thinking skills. Yet, it is with extensive reading that vocabulary, comprehension, and fluency can be strengthened.

When considering the use of a text set, the teacher must first choose a primary focus, taking into account your goals for the unit and any standards that will need to be included. There are many areas in which to choose from including:

- theme (i.e., love, friendship, hope)
- plot (i.e., episodic, rising action)
- time period (i.e. the Renaissance, the 1930s)
- historical event (i.e. the Civil War, Kennedy assassination)
- genre (i.e., poetry, biography)

- content area topic focus (i.e., genetics, space travel)
- types of texts (i.e., literature, mass media)

After choosing an area of focus, the construction of the actual text set should begin. Although teachers may already have some books on hand, they will still need to explore the world of fiction and non-fiction to find more. Other types of texts should also be considered. Choosing a text set containing between five to fifteen pieces should be the goall. Types of text that can be used for instruction include:

- poetry and plays
- picture books/picture story books
- websites
- charts
- newspaper/magazine articles
- primary source documents
- historical fiction
- brochures and maps
- journals and diaries
- audio tapes or files
- transcripts
- paintings, pictures, and photographs

As texts are being chosen for the text set, the type of text they represent may also need to be considered. The ability to teach critical analysis of the readings can be accomplished by allowing for texts that sometimes contradict each other or show another side of the story. Adapted from Hartman & Hartman, Jody Fernandez writes that there are five categories of texts in a text set's structure (Fernandez, 2000). Included are companion, complimentary, synoptic, and disruptive texts. The fifth category is listed as "rereading" or basically having texts that are reread or revisited. By having synoptic texts, different versions or accounts of the same event, and disruptive texts, conflicting or alternate perspectives of the same event, in the same text set, the teacher will provide an automatic basis for discussion on the topic. This also helps ensure that teachers are including a variety of different cultural and gender perspectives.

After the collection is gathered, the consideration of how to present the text set should be addressed. Because every classroom will have students with a range of reading skills activating prior knowledge, using read-alouds, providing leveled independent reading opportunities, participating in guided reading groups, linking text to texts, and research and writing opportunities are some ways to help ensure interaction with the text and extensive reading. (Just Read, Florida, 2004).

Activating prior knowledge through the use of brainstorming, reading about current events, or relating local items from newspapers is important first step to teaching the unit. By allowing for some non-print materials such as video clips and or movies to be included in the text set, the teacher is setting-up a great way to grab the students attention on the focused concept.

Read-alouds provide the teacher the opportunity to do strategy focuses by think-alouds, modeling, and leading discussions. The choice for read-aloud could be picture books, short pieces of fiction or non-fiction, poetry, or even longer pieces of fiction. The teacher should strive to make sure the read-aloud is on a higher level than the student's abilities and also still relates solidly back to the focused concept. It is also during the read-aloud time that students will benefit from learning the aesthetic stance toward reading. The teacher can take the time to explain how the book or chapter made her feel and how she connected her feelings with the book.

Leveled independent reading time and materials should also be provided to students. There should be at least four copies of any given text so that the students can have choice of what they wish to read. A variety of levels should also be included to ensure that each student is being reached at his or her independent reading level. Students should be given books to either read during SSR time or be able to check books out to read at home.

During class time, students and teachers should be interacting with a primary piece of text related to the main concept of the text set. The focus should be primarily on vocabulary and comprehension instruction. Vocabulary should be introduced, background should be built, and comprehension lessons should be provided. Other activities should include an emphasis on plot, themes, characters, settings, and other story map components. While it is important that students should read from an aesthetic stance, the ability to summarize the text is also an important activity (Richison, Hernandez, & Carter, 2002). This can be done during guided reading groups or through mini-lessons during whole group instruction.

Linking the main selected texts to other texts that were selected is also an important part of working with text sets. Sometimes known as complimentary texts, synoptic texts, or disruptive texts, these should enhance the understanding about the focused concept and primary text. Allowing students time to read through these texts and discuss their reactions is vital to the success of the text set strategy.

As students become more involved with the focused concept of the text set, they will gain a better understanding for it. The

ability to complete research and writing on that topic will be much easier than if asked of the student before the introduction of the text set. Students should be given time to do "free writes" that will increase writing fluency and engagement (Just Read, Florida, 2004).

Text sets provide teachers a way to provide different perspectives on the same focused concept. Engagement of learners and an emphasis on critical analysis are also benefits of this strategy. Creating a unit where extensive reading, writing, and research components are intertwined are some of the keys strengths of this useful strategy. A well-desinged text set can reach stduents with different skills levels, interests, and backgrounds.

Assessment:

The assessment for the use of text sets can come in many forms. While a teacher can observe how the class is drawn to the chosen books and materials and listen to the degree of understanding and empathy during discussion, the teacher can also use a variety of strategies that will provide insight into the comprehension and awareness gained during small group and whole group instruction. With the use of graphic organizers, strategy sheets, and journal writing, the teacher can collect much useful data on how the texts are being used and how the information found in the selected texts is being analyzed.

Assessment in the form of research projects can also be designed to cover what was learned by using the text set experience. A synthesis of the material could easily become an assessment point, along with the possibility of oral and visual presentations.

Resources:

Virginia's Center for Children's Books
This website provides many examples of pre-selected text sets based on topics.
http://www.teach.virginia.edu/go/tempo/VCCB/TextSets2/TextSetMain.html .

Creating Text Sets for Your Classroom
The author of this site provides ideas on how to create text sets in the classroom.
http://www.readwritethink.org/lesson_images/lesson305/creating.pdf

Multimedia Text Sets
Complied by the San Juan PDS Center students, this site provides materials that correspond with the California content.
http://www.csus.edu/indiv/g/gipej/mts/textsets.htm

Text Sets
This lists supplies us with text sets based on themes such as friendship and family.
http://www.lesley.edu/crr/content/lfa/handouts/if_text_sets.pdf

An Exploration of Text Sets: Supporting All Readers
This lesson is designed to let middle school students experience text sets.
http://www.readwritethink.org/lessons/lesson_view.asp?id=305

References:

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forpd@mail.ucf.edu | (866) 227-7261 (FL only)

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