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Teaching with Children's Literature: Theory to Practice, by Margaret Vaughn and Dixie D. Massey.
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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

BELIEFS ABOUT CHILDREN'S LITERATURE

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Welcome to *Teaching with Children's Literature: Theory to Practice.* We wrote this book to help preservice teachers, practicing teachers, teacher-educators, and other educational stakeholders use children's literature to develop purposeful reading opportunities in today's schools. We discuss the relevant theories about this topic and ways to translate these theories into instructional practices. We emphasize three main components in this book: teachers must develop knowledge of their students, knowledge of instructional practice, and knowledge of literature in order to use children's literature effectively in the classroom. The overriding goal of this book is developed around the question, How can we create purposeful reading opportunities in today's schools?

Our view is that purposeful reading opportunities are centered on the belief that *students have agency as readers in and out of the classroom.* We see agentic readers as readers who have the intentions, the knowledge, and the abilities to expand opportunities in their world and to use reading as a tool to accomplish this goal. A central understanding of cultivating agentic readers is that teachers construct purposeful reading opportunities in which students can engage meaningfully with literature.

- *Intentions.* When we talk about developing students who have intentions, we mean that students have a variety of linguistic and cultural backgrounds as well as life experiences. The goal of helping students realize that their intentions are valid is based on the ideas that reading is free, that it has no limits or boundaries, and that students can read anything that interests them. Teachers must capitalize on their students' backgrounds,

interests, and topics they want to pursue when it comes to developing reading opportunities.

- *Knowledge.* Just as intentions are necessary when developing agentic readers, so is knowledge. Developing instructional opportunities based on creating knowledgeable and skilled readers is paramount. Agentic readers are active readers who are able to interpret, analyze, and critique a multitude of texts for a variety of purposes.
- *Ability to expand and transform.* As readers have intentions and knowledge, they can use reading as a tool to expand their horizons and to transform the world around them. Agentic readers can take a critical approach to what they read and use the knowledge gained from texts to expand opportunities.

Teachers are essential in cultivating agentic readers. They must integrate their own beliefs, knowledge, and targeted instructional practices to make decisions that support learning environments that are conducive to reading. Providing this kind of environment calls for teachers who are purposeful in teaching, consider students' identities and interests, adapt curricula, and possess a vision of teaching. Essential in this process is for teachers to continue their own learning trajectories to develop knowledge of their students, of teaching practices, and of literature.

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WHY CHILDREN'S LITERATURE MATTERS MORE NOW THAN EVER

Children's literature matters now more than ever for two reasons. First, high-stakes accountability measures have resulted in narrowed curricula, which means students aren't necessarily able to read engaging, authentic, and culturally relevant texts. Second, we have greater diversity in our classrooms than at any other time in U.S. history.

Narrowed Curricula

The last three decades have seen an exponential growth in federal and state oversight of all education curricula, but especially in reading. The Reading Excellence Act of 1998 (REA; U.S. Department of Education, 2002), a landmark federal bill, provided competitive grants to states to improve reading instruction and to develop reading skills in students by using "scientifically based reading research," that included a systematic approach to reading instruction. Specific, targeted programs deemed as scientifically based were made available for states to purchase for reading instruction as a provision of receiving federal funds. The passing of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB, 2002) federalized reading

policies and the ways in which reading instruction filtered to classrooms across the nation (Allington & Cunningham, 2015). Accordingly, federal officials and their respective agents were in the new federally supported position of selecting particular instructional approaches, curricula, and assessment tools to be used to deliver reading instruction (Cuban, 2013).

The NCLB legislation of 2001 had a significant impact on the types of texts that were used in classrooms and on the reading opportunities made available to students. Proponents of the NCLB emphasized the need for a more systematic approach to supporting students when it came to reading instruction, especially those from the most vulnerable groups in the nation. Punitive measures were put into place for schools that did not meet their adequate yearly progress (AYP) goal. As a result, schools had to meet their AYP goal in order to receive funding or face corrective measures, such as replacing staff members, incorporating another scientifically based reading program, or offering the option to parents of enrolling their children in other schools and supplemental educational services to students. Critics of the NCLB pointed to the lack of culturally responsive texts and a focus on prescriptive reading instruction that emphasized a "one-size-fits-all" approach to developing student skills in reading. Ultimately, this direction widened the achievement gap for students from nondominant cultures and economically disadvantaged homes. These restrictive measures had a significant impact on the types of texts and the structure of literacy instruction in schools across the United States. Teachers were pressured to follow a prescribed curriculum and a uniform teaching approach to reading and literacy instruction. However, a one-size-fits-all program fails to meet the individual linguistic, cultural, and specific instructional needs of all students.

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More recently, the Common Core State Standards (CCSS; National Governors Association Center for Best Practices & Council of Chief State School Officers [NGA & CCSSO], 2010) were adopted by 41 states (at the time of writing this book). A renewed emphasis on reading literature and especially informational text gained heightened attention in schools where the CCSS were adopted. Even so, children are not reading as much as they should at school. Allington (2012) estimated that for students to maintain their reading level, they need to read at least 90 minutes per day. Brenner and Hiebert (2010) found, on average, that students spent between 10.2 minutes and 24.4 minutes reading during reading instruction. Such findings suggest that the amount of time students spend reading within district-mandated literacy programs varies and can be as minimal as 10 minutes within a 120-minute block of targeted literacy instruction.

Unfortunately, even during sanctioned reading time in schools, curricula are restricted to materials that may or may not align with students' cultural, historical, or linguistic backgrounds. In fact, Brenner and Hiebert (2010) emphasized, "the amount of reading that is recommended in the instructional plans of these programs is not changing the trajectory of the very students for whom the mandates have been put in place" (p. 361). Simultaneously, when students are

reading, they are not reading books of their choosing. Gambrell (2015) noted that in a recent survey of reading habits of children ages 6–17, only 33% reported that their class had a specific time during the day devoted to reading a book of their choice.

More Diverse Student Population

At the same time that teachers are coping with educational reform efforts and the resulting narrowed curricula, school populations are becoming increasingly diverse. Some researchers predict that students from nondominant backgrounds will constitute the majority of high school graduates in the United States by 2025. Diversity isn't only found in racial and ethnic categories. Consider a recent illustration of this broad diversity in the classroom:

> To illustrate what this means at the classroom level, an educator in the 1970s or 1980s with a classroom of 24 students might have had five or six students (20–34%) requiring specialized interventions. In a classroom of 24 students today, between 10 and 12 students (40–50%) are living in poverty, have a disability or learning difference, are English language learners, are gifted or talented, are experiencing challenges at home or in their communities that result in trauma, or some combination of the above—each of whom research shows needs personalized approaches to learning. (*https://digitalpromise.org*)

We argue that we need more books in the classroom, specifically those in which a wide range of characters are represented, so that all students, particularly students of color and from nondominant backgrounds, see themselves in the books they read and are afforded multiple opportunities to better understand a range of perspectives, (Beers & Probst, 2017; Mendoza, Kirshner, & Gutiérrez, 2018).

Some curricula include books that might appear to reflect diverse perspectives but whose content has not been carefully reviewed. We know of one fifth-grade teacher in a school with a large percentage of Native American students who was required to use the text *Voyage of the Half Moon* (West, 1995) as part of the required adopted state literacy program. This text portrayed and positioned Native American students as "these people" and "devils" (West, 1995, pp. 2–3; Vaughn, Parsons, & Massey, 2020). Our friend, Sonia, was outraged; however, she decided to use the book in a way that aligned with her beliefs and vision for teaching. She adapted the text to teach a lesson on social justice and had her students critically examine and rewrite the narrative using culturally responsive texts and historical records. Sonia was skilled at adapting her instruction and purposefully teaching to support her learners. Our concern is that these curricula are being adopted by school districts all across the country before the types of texts that students are recommended to read are carefully examined.

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INSPIRING HOPE THROUGH CHILDREN'S LITERATURE

When students and teachers left their classrooms in mid-March 2020, none of them realized that they would not return anytime soon. A pandemic and social upheaval left many of us concerned for our physical safety and health. Our students felt the weight of many changes in their academic, social, and family lives, and in many other ways.

Using literature as a tool to read and respond to challenging and critical issues is widely documented in literacy research (Dutro, 2008; Koltz & Kersten-Parrish, 2020; Rodriguez & Kim, 2018). Teachers can use literature to share stories about how to process traumatic experiences (DÁvila et al., 2019; Wiseman, 2013); pose questions about their lives (Wee, Park, & Choi, 2015); and provide a way for students to express their own emotions and understand their experiences (Phillips & Sturm, 2013; Sipe, 2000; Wiseman, Atkinson, & Vehabovic, 2019).

Bibliotherapy uses books to build hope. Lucas, Teixeira, Soares, and Oliveira (2019) found that bibliotherapy was effective in instilling hopeful thinking. Similarly, Selin and Graube (2017) used book clubs with children in a children's hospital, and found that they helped generate hope as well as a sense of community with others who were enjoying the same books.

Hope is an area of specific research in multiple fields, including mental health, war and violence, trauma, and terminal illness. Valerie Maholmes (2014) has examined the role of hope during her tenure as the chief of the Pediatric Trauma and Critical Illness Branch at the Eunice Kennedy Shriver National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD). Maholmes described hope as the ability to envision a more positive future, even when all evidence points to the contrary, noting that hope is the most important predictor of success (Lahey, 2015). Hope is a "galvanizer of action" (Lazarus, 1999, p. 666) and can lead students to "engage in better problem-focused coping, greater agency in the face of negative feedback, more abundant pathways to solving problems when blocked, higher sense of well-being and, importantly, seeking more challenging goals" (Bullough & Hall-Kenyon, 2011, p. 130).

In our own research with teachers and students, we have found an important role for literature as a means of instilling a sense of hope, of engaging students in reading for enjoyment, and of helping them make connections to concepts and ideas that may otherwise be elusive. For example, in our research with fifth graders of the book *Paperboy* by Vince Vawter (2014), a young boy made a connection with a character who had a speech impediment and shared that he never read a book like this one in which someone had a stutter like him (Vaughn & Massey, 2017).

In short, the need to use literature as a tool to inspire hope and to foster agency is greater now than ever. Within the current educational context, and due to wider educational trends in curriculum and accountability, teachers have been pressured to narrow the materials that students read in the classroom. It is

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possible, even probable, that some students will only encounter short excerpts of texts and repeated test preparation materials and rarely be asked to read complete novels or nonfiction books. For example, in classrooms that we visit, we routinely see teachers using worksheets about novels to develop isolated skills, rather than providing students with the entire texts to read and enjoy and pairing the reading with focused and intentional discussion. This narrowing has occurred even while our classrooms have grown more diverse. Navigating this complexity requires teachers who teach with purpose.

TEACHING WITH PURPOSE: CLARIFYING CORE BELIEFS

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We will spend more time in Chapter 2 exploring purposeful teaching. Here, we want to emphasize the importance of teachers' beliefs in relation to purposeful teaching. Taken together, beliefs and visioning are essential in developing knowledge about children's literature and in understanding how to apply this knowledge to instructional practices.

Beliefs shape what we pay attention to and thus what we learn. Teachers' beliefs influence the goals we establish for students, the procedures, the instructional content, and the interactions with texts. Beliefs affect how teachers see students and influence the type of instructional decisions we make and how we use assessments. They are the outcomes of past and present experiences and hoped-for futures. Beliefs do more than help us interpret our past and shape our present experiences; they can also guide our future actions. In this way, beliefs are frequently linked to action and how decisions are made about texts.

Before we became teachers, we had specific beliefs about teaching. These beliefs were strongly shaped by our own educational experiences (Darling-Hammond & Bransford, 2005). They influenced our learning when they pushed us to look for pedagogies that differed from what we experienced or that confirmed our way of learning. As we entered our teacher-preparation programs, we encountered new ideas in our methods courses. We rejected or assimilated these into our beliefs. We also encountered students who were different from us and experienced schooling differently than we did, and we again revised our beliefs.

Developing a belief system about children's literature as a teacher of children's literature can be a daunting task for many teachers, especially if reading is not something they normally like to do or they had negative experiences with reading in school. However, if we want our students to read, we need to critically reflect on our own experiences with reading, our preferences toward genres, and our beliefs about reading.

What do we know about the types of teacher beliefs that result in classrooms where children engage with literature in meaningful ways? The following beliefs about students and reading are essential when developing a classroom culture where students have agency.

Beliefs about Texts

What counts as text? What is the role of text in the classroom? These questions are critical to articulating beliefs about texts and integrating these beliefs into purposeful teaching.

Professional knowledge offers some direction in answering what counts as text. Recently, the International Literacy Association (2017) issued an updated definition of literacy. In addition to including reading, writing, speaking, and listening, this definition of literacy now includes viewing and visual representation. Practically speaking, looking at or creating a drawing with the intention to communicate are now viewed as literate behaviors. Have you ever watched a movie and found yourself connecting with the characters? Making a prediction about what would happen next? Drawing an inference about what motivated a certain action? Those processes are some of the same sense-making processes that we use when making sense of a text. It should be noted that this broad view of literacy is not always reflected in the curricula that teachers are given but one that we believe encompasses what literacy means today for all students. Moreover, text itself can be interpreted broadly—from digital platforms to various types of genres and formats.

What is the role of text in the classroom? Again, we look beyond what is typically handed down in curricula to see what researchers, professional educators, and students have said about the role of texts in the classroom. What all three groups have suggested is that texts, specifically authentic texts rather than text excerpts, are students' conduit to engagement with literacy tasks and with one another. In these texts, students note that they see themselves or begin to understand the points of views of others.

Furthermore, students want choice in the types of texts they want to read. The practice of providing choice in using children's literature includes offering opportunities for students to develop their interests, select and discuss books and provide other options for them to display their understandings.

Consider the following two classroom scenarios. Ms. Keen structures her classroom to include opportunities for students to self-select texts of interest and to pursue reading as a means of finding answers to questions students want to pursue. Ms. Gill uses a reward system in which students must attain a certain number of points per week in the computer-based reading program in order to attend the class party.

Which classroom do you think encourages students' agency toward reading, Ms. Keen's or Ms. Gill's? In Ms. Keen's classroom, she relies on building students' intrinsic motivation toward reading and encouraging her students to read regardless of whether or not they receive any reward. Students in this class learn that reading is something they can enjoy and use to develop their interests. In Ms. Gill's class, reading is tied to an extrinsic reward system wherein it's more than likely that most of her students will disengage and decide that reading is not

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for them if they can't accrue the number of points set forth by Ms. Gill to attend the party. In this class, students have limited agency. Providing opportunities for students to choose a wide variety of texts for multiple purposes is essential in developing a classroom culture supportive of reading in which students have agency as readers.

Beliefs about Tasks

What should we ask students to do with the texts we use? This question forms the core belief about reading tasks. One task we often observe in schools is an emphasis on reading rate. Students are frequently assessed on how quickly they can read a text out loud. We have observed school districts that emphasize this task from the end of kindergarten through middle school. Teachers use this reading rate as a benchmark for students' primary success in reading. Although reading rate is important, reading for understanding or comprehending is equally essential. Interpreting how and what we read influences and informs the way we develop skills beyond reading rate.

A different task is sense making of text. This goes beyond simply repeating information from the text and encourages students to engage with the text, apply their understandings of the text to their lives, and converse with others about the text. To encourage sense making, a teacher might opt to hold a discussion about a component of text or arrange a student-chosen book club so that students can talk with one another about the broader meanings of a text and how they understand it.

Using children's literature to develop authentic tasks is an important dimension of classroom practice. Teachers can structure tasks to create real-world and authentic learning opportunities that engage students with reading. Brophy (1983) described how the types of instructional tasks influenced students' motivation to learn. Academic tasks that were thoughtful and engaging encouraged students to value the process of learning and were considered to be the most beneficial in supporting students' willingness to participate and engage in the learning process.

Let's revisit Ms. Keen's and Ms. Gill's classrooms. In Ms. Keen's classroom, students choose reading materials to learn more about topics of interest to them and decide what to do with the knowledge they've gained. Some students create a poster about the knowledge they've learned, and other students decide to write a play to perform for the class. Students in this classroom make connections to their lives and personal interests and see that reading can serve as a bridge from their existing knowledge to future knowledge. In contrast, in Ms. Gill's classroom, students have little autonomy regarding the types of reading opportunities. The reading reward program she uses does allow students to choose the texts they read, but is restrictive because they can read only texts whose predetermined reading level matches their own reading level. The types

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of texts students are able to choose shapes how they view themselves in relation to reading. It is important that teachers structure tasks in which students approach reading as a tool that connects to their backgrounds, interests, passions, and questions they want to pursue—and not just as an exercise in reading at a predetermined level.

Beliefs about Readers

What do kids deserve as readers? This question embodies the foundational beliefs about readers. For a time in our past, children were viewed as tabula rasa—blank slates to be filled. Although our society seems to recognize a particular set of acceptable answers (e.g., kids are amazing, talented, capable, and unique individuals), our practices don't always match those beliefs. Instead, our practices, such as curricula that require every student to read the same text for several days of the week and complete the same set of questions, suggest that students are not treated as individuals.

We further ask, who gets to decide what our students do with their texts and tasks? In this book, we use a sociocultural framework. By *sociocultural*, we mean that we emphasize the importance of students' home languages, background experiences, and the ways in which they interact in relation to the world. According to Johnston and Costello (2005), "although we often think of literacy as a set of all-purpose skills and strategies to be learned, it is more complex, more local, more personal, and more social than that. Becoming literate involves developing strong reading identities, relationships, dispositions, and values these as much as acquiring strategies and skills for working with print. Children becoming literate are being apprenticed into ways of living with people as much as with symbols" (p. 256).

In a sociocultural framework, students' voices about their reading decisions matter. Asking students questions about what they want to read and why they want to read is a cornerstone of effective literacy instruction. This means that students might choose books that are outside a recommended reading level for them, but by giving them choice we offer them the opportunities to try, believing that they may surprise us and that there are multiple ways to engage with a text. This is not to say that there aren't targeted instructional times during the day when the teacher directs text selection for specific purposes, but that there is allotted time for student choice and decision making in reading. Including and highlighting students' voices in classroom discussions allow for them to become part of a community and helps to create meaningful interactions that support goals and identities. Becoming part of a community requires that students be engaged in the learning process. Reading and engaging with literature are not just mental activities but social and interactive opportunities. Reading literature needs to be viewed in its full range of contexts—not just cognitive, but social and cultural as well (Gee, 2012).

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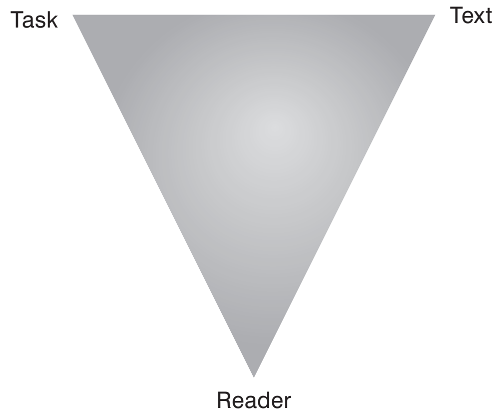

FIGURE 1.1. The reader–task–text relationship.

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In sum, our beliefs and texts, tasks, and readers shape our choices about how we teach. Our conception of purposeful teaching connects beliefs to a larger sociocultural framework that views teaching and reading as a social, dynamic practice.

As Figure 1.1 indicates, the *reader* is the fulcrum on which everything is balanced. In other words, the teacher focuses instructional opportunities on the reader. The task and the text must be tied to and centered on the reader. Everything is guided by the reader.

PRACTICAL CONSIDERATIONS: WHO ARE WE?

We are former classroom teachers, and now teacher-educators and literacy researchers. We have been struck by the lack of reading we have observed in schools over the last several years. The literature says that kids aren't spending enough time reading during literacy instruction (Brenner & Hiebert, 2010) and lack opportunities to read engaging and authentic materials (Madda, Griffo, Pearson, & Raphael, 2011).

Unfortunately, reading authentic and engaging texts has been relegated to the background during literacy instruction, indeed an unfortunate situation we encounter daily in our work in schools. Students lack agency when it comes to reading. We continue to ask what might happen if we provide structures and supports in schools that cultivate and support agentic readers. We believe that children's literature is one of the most important components needed to refocus efforts to support reading in schools and to develop agentic readers.

This book explores the beliefs and knowledge teachers construct about children's literature in an effort to increase purposeful reading opportunities in

schools and develop agentic readers. We emphasize the importance of developing visions inclusive of all students with regard to reading and the importance of having core beliefs about teaching with and understanding children's literature. We explore how teachers can come to know about children's literature by developing content knowledge about children's literature and the important theories that undergird what and how to use children's literature in the classroom. We want this book to be an important resource in developing practice-oriented knowledge, or knowledge of how to use theories and apply them to practice.

This book is organized into 10 chapters that feature a section on theories about the teaching of reading and practical considerations with a connected practice section. The theory and classroom practice sections include relevant examples and writing activities for readers. Each practice section contains questions for reflection, which are intended as ways for you to share your thoughts with a learning community or group or to track your thoughts in a learning journal. Each practice section also includes a case study that shows what theory in practice looks like in an actual classroom with an actual teacher.

PRACTICE

Cultivating agentic readers relies on incorporating purposeful reading opportunities in classrooms where students can engage meaningfully with literature. Because today's teachers face the challenge of narrowed curricular mandates and other uncertainties, we believe the need to support and cultivate agentic readers is greater now than ever before.

ACTIVITY 1. *Reflecting on the Reading*

1. When you were a student, what were your reading experiences? How was reading structured for you in elementary, middle, and high school? What were the positive and negative experiences? What types of books and materials were emphasized as part of reading in your schooling experiences? What types of reading materials do you like to read now?
2. When you think about these formative experiences, how have they shaped how you use (or hope to use) literature in the classroom?

ACTIVITY 2. *Examining Your Beliefs*

1. What do you believe is important about texts, tasks, and reading?
2. Create your own list of Beliefs about Reading that you can share with your students. Have your students complete their own Beliefs about Reading list. Talk together about your shared beliefs and develop classroom beliefs about reading.

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Questions to consider when writing your own Beliefs about Reading:

a. What do you think is important when it comes to reading? I think that ____________ is important when it comes to reading because. . . .
b. What types of books do you think are important to read? Why?
c. What do you believe should motivate students when it comes to reading? Why?

Questions to consider when asking your students to create their Beliefs about Reading:

a. What do you think is important when it comes to reading? I think that ____________ is important when it comes to reading.
b. What types of books do you think are important to read? Why?
c. What do you believe will make you want to read? Why?

Questions to consider when creating the classroom's Beliefs about Reading:

a. What do we value when it comes to reading?
b. What types of books are valued in this classroom?
c. What do we believe will encourage us to want to read in this classroom?

ACTIVITY 3. *Case Study*

Read the case study of Jason in Box 1.1, which describes a real teacher's reflection about navigating his first year of teaching. Reflect on the questions about how his beliefs shaped his instruction.

1. List Jason's beliefs in the following areas: teaching, learning, students, and literacy.
2. How did Jason's beliefs influence his instruction?
3. What were the areas of conflict for Jason between outside expectations and his own beliefs? How did he respond to these conflicts?

ACTIVITY 4. *Using Children's Literature: What Do You Do with an Idea?*

Consider how texts can be used to empower and support student agency. Use read-alouds to model for students how to have agency with their ideas and how to use reading as a tool to act on their ideas. A powerful text that can be used to model agency for students is *What Do You Do with an Idea?* (Yamada, 2013).

Begin by asking students to generate ideas about topics and projects they would like to pursue. Using students' ideas, organize your class into groups with similar ideas and projects. Work with students to teach them how to research

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BOX 1.1. Jason: A First-Year Teacher Navigates Mandates and Expectations

As a first-year teacher in a middle school special education classroom, Jason admitted he was overwhelmed. He was frustrated with the literacy curriculum (worksheets, computer lessons, and regular Accelerated Reader tests) and frustrated further by the lack of motivation he saw in his students. Jason believed he couldn't change everything about the program immediately because he still had to work with the other team members who were very traditional in their approaches. He also knew that he had to be realistic about the planning time it would take to completely change the curriculum.

Jason hoped to emphasize the enjoyment of reading, not instead of learning necessary skills, but as an accompaniment to learning them. He felt that the heavily structured tasks were "coma inducing" for both the students and himself and were limiting student engagement. Jason reflected:

> "I want to be able to teach comprehension without feeling like a robot every time I intentionally try to do so. I want my students to feel successful, so that they can get past their insecurities with reading. I want the students to be engaged in the material and for them to not even know that they are learning. I want the students to have more time to just sink into a book and get lost amidst their day."

Jason decided to make two changes to his curriculum based on his beliefs and his vision for teaching: introduce reading for enjoyment and increase student reading time. His first specific change was to begin reading aloud to students at the beginning of each period, beginning with Kwame Alexander's (2014) *The Crossover.* Additionally, he allowed students a short amount of personal reading time each day. He did not quiz them on what they read but simply allowed them time to read in his class from a book of their choice. This change was not supported by the other resource room teachers, so Jason and Dixie, the second author, had ongoing conversations about this practice, with Jason asking, "Should I feel guilty about just letting them read?" His students responded positively, looking forward to hearing more from the read-aloud books and the books that others shared. They even reminded Jason if he neglected reading aloud to them.

Gradually, Jason began asking his students to talk with each other about what they'd been reading, and commented on what he learned:

> "I have been reluctant to talk about what books the students are reading in my sixth-grade class. There is so much disparity in their reading levels that I have been avoiding the potential for some students to shame other

(continued)

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students based on their 'low' books and to further stifle progress. Today I decided to go for it, so I asked if anyone had a book that they were reading that they wanted to recommend to their reading community. Just as I feared, one of the struggling readers raised his hand and wanted to share his book, one of *The Magic School Bus* books. [The other students] were so supportive, and the higher readers even made connections to their own books, which opened up time for some of the other low readers to participate with their books. I just let the conversation go on for about 10 minutes. It was such an incredible experience for me to be a part of."

Jason didn't initially identify building community as an important part of his vision. However, as a former employee at a behavioral hospital, Jason had firsthand experience with the effects of isolation and loneliness. Jason's actions in his classroom showed that he was adding the importance of community building to his vision for teaching, even as he was navigating what role community building would have in his instruction.

their topics so that they can find the materials and information they need to develop and complete their projects.

Ask your students these questions to guide them:

- What do you want to learn more about? Why?
- What materials do you think you need, and where can you find these materials?

See Appendix A for other texts to support developing students' agency.

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