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A California State University Initiative To Improve Adolescent Reading in All Content Areas

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In Single Subject preservice programs across the nation, literacy professors are coping with the demands of preparing their candidates to teach reading and writing across the content areas. The professors are challenged to establish a credible rationale for why teachers in content areas such as physical education, art, and music should be required to take a course in content literacy. And, while many candidates wonder *why* they must take a course in reading, many professors wonder *how* that course can be optimally structured to adequately teach a vast array of literacy-related processes and content literacy methods. Thus, professors must make a series of

curricular decisions: What kind and how many literacy strategies should be taught? What assignments and examples should be used to reflect the range of content areas represented by candidates? How can course content and delivery positively affect candidates' attitudes about literacy instruction?

As these new teachers enter middle and high school classrooms, they will discover that many of their students rarely tackle assigned readings and, of those who do, a substantial number struggle to comprehend the material. Large classes and diverse learning needs sorely tax new teachers' emerging skills and knowledge; a growing number of students who are apathetic or struggling readers further complicates the situation.

In his study of over 100 "reading nightmares" of middle and high school teachers in all content areas, including science, math, social studies, English, and art, Bintz (1997) found that teachers were perplexed by classroom teaching dilemmas such as how to make factual reading more interesting, help students understand what they read, and find time to teach reading skills without compromising subject matter instruction. When asked to express a wish that, if it were to come true, would rid them of their nightmares, the teachers expressed hopes such as, "I wish I knew how to teach reading and math together"; "I wish that every teacher regardless of the content area would recognize the importance of reading"; and, "I wish I could stop time so I could catch all kids up in reading."

Preparing candidates to avoid reading nightmares and realize their hopes for student literacy has become a guiding purpose for a group of university professors and classroom teachers in California. As the world's largest public university system, the California State University (CSU), with its 23 campuses, trains approximately 60% of California's teachers. Among the many credentialing requirements is a single course in reading for those who will become middle or high school teachers (as opposed to the two or three courses that most elementary candidates take).

In 2001, the CSU began conducting annual surveys of first-year teachers and their immediate supervisors to determine the efficacy of credentialing programs and the degree to which the CSU is meeting the needs of California's public schools. The new teachers and supervisors surveyed were asked to indicate how well prepared they believed new teachers were to teach reading skills, including vocabulary and comprehension, in their primary subject area. While the percentage of those satisfied with preservice reading preparation for elementary teachers, those usually teaching grades K-5, has steadily risen over the three years in which the survey has been administered, the percentage for new secondary teachers has shown a decline. In particular, the survey results show that a significant percentage of these new secondary teachers, as well as their supervisors, believe the teachers are not adequately prepared to help their middle and high school students learn requisite vocabulary and comprehend subject area texts.

The Single Subject Reading Task Force

To address this challenge, the CSU Chancellor's Office, working through its Center for the Advancement of Reading (CAR), assembled the Single Subject Reading Task Force (SSRTF), a group of 14 members: 12 faculty from various CSU campuses across the state and the two co-directors of CAR, one of whom was also a CSU literacy faculty member. All faculty members on the SSRTF had expertise in secondary literacy and experience teaching the required content literacy course. The charge given to the SSRTF was to ensure high quality and consistency across CSU campuses in the reading/language arts methods courses for secondary teacher candidates. In the first of a series of activities towards meeting this objective, the task force began the process of articulating a curricular framework for the secondary reading/language arts methods classes and developing a guide for faculty use across all Single Subject credential programs in the CSU. As we on the task force engaged in our work, we found it necessary to address three questions:

1. Who is the audience for this work?

2. What curricular framework and materials will best inform and support current and future faculty who teach the secondary reading/language methods course?

3. What form should the final product take?

Initial Processes and Outcomes

The first question was fairly easy to answer. The members of the SSRTF force agreed that faculty teaching the secondary reading/language arts methods course were best positioned to have a direct impact on the literacy preparation of credential candidates and should serve as the primary audience for the work. Still, we acknowledged that the large number of faculty teaching the course throughout the state come from varying backgrounds and possess many different kinds of expertise. In some Single Subject credential programs, full-time tenured and tenure-track faculty have doctoral degrees in secondary curriculum and instruction with an emphasis in literacy. These faculty have spent years studying literacy, particularly adolescent literacy, and have a high degree of both academic knowledge and practical experience in the field of secondary reading/language arts. Many of them also have conducted extensive research in this area and have informed the field broadly with their work.

Other highly competent individuals are hired as part-time lecturers and bring quite different backgrounds and interests to the course. While this second group of instructors usually possesses master's degrees, many have not pursued doctoral work. In addition, their experiences often range from being active professionals as secondary school reading specialists, literacy coaches, and English/language arts

teachers to being retired educators who have formerly served in similar capacities. What the task force realized is that while everyone teaching the course would bring a degree of knowledge and expertise to it, any materials created to support instruction would have to acknowledge the range of background knowledge and experience as well as the teaching and resource needs of the various instructors.

The questions regarding a curricular framework for the course and the creation of an informative and useful product were more problematic. The field of secondary/adolescent literacy is quite extensive, and no single course can or should attempt to cover it comprehensively. Thus, our attention turned to determining essential topics of study one should expect to find in content reading courses taught at every CSU campus. With that in mind, we concluded that our task would be to create a document that everyone from experienced full professors to new lecturers would find both useful and user-friendly as they plan their courses. It was not our purpose to develop a one-size-fits-all syllabus for use in every course, but rather to highlight important points of curricular reference for effective secondary reading/language arts classes, from which individual instructors could take direction as they created their course syllabi and assignments and selected materials and strategies. While instructor autonomy was an important consideration, we also agreed that instructors would appreciate seeing sample syllabi and assignments as part of the final product.

The curricular framework was tied to developing curriculum guidelines to prepare all Single Subject candidates to use best practices of reading/language arts in their disciplines, as outlined in the California Commission on Teacher Credentialing's (CCTC) *Standards of Quality and Effectiveness for Teacher Preparation Programs for Preliminary Multiple and Single Subject Teaching Credentials* (2001). We especially relied on Standard 7-B, which mandates that the "professional teacher preparation program provides substantive, research-based instruction that effectively prepares each candidate for any Single Subject Teaching Credential to provide instruction in content-based reading and writing skills for all students, including students with varied reading levels and language backgrounds" (p. 40).

In addition, the *Standards* explicitly require that "instructional approaches and methods in reading . . . (be) aligned with the state-adopted academic content standards for students in English Language Arts and the Reading/Language Arts Framework" (p. 40). Standard 7-B is further described in seven program elements that include strategies to help candidates build students' content-based reading and writing abilities and develop students' comprehension skills and vocabulary. In addition, candidates must be able to apply this new knowledge to their field experiences and student teaching assignments. Thus, it was important that we carefully align curricular suggestions and resources for the course with the elements specified in the state standards for teacher preparation and for teaching English/language arts content.

Structural Decisions Guiding the Process

Probably the most problematic issue arose when the task force attempted to develop a document that captured this curricular content in a way that would be useful at all CSU campuses. Acknowledging the unique characteristics and demands of each campus' credential programs and courses, we purposely worked toward the creation of a framework that would be as flexible as possible while maintaining a sense of coherence across the system.

After several brainstorming sessions in which we categorized ideas around major concepts (e.g., comprehension instruction, assessment, adolescent literacy), we finally decided upon six core principles that comfortably housed each of the elements we believed critical to a vibrant secondary reading/language arts course. These six core principles are described in detail in the next section of this article.

Through subsequent meetings, we continued to refine the core principles and turned our attention to the format of a final product that would best serve course instructors. We considered several criteria, including meaningful content, ease of use, and ease of accommodating new material. The final product, *Principles and Resources: Enhancing CSU Single Subject Reading Courses*, is contained in a large three-ring binder with tabbed sections. Each core principle has its own section; sample syllabi and additional resources are also tabbed, and an additional section is available for instructors to add their own information and materials.

The Binder: Principles and Resources

We included in the binder a consistent set of structural elements that provides instructors with significant foundational research, strategies, and resources to build student understandings. These elements, present in each tabbed section of the binder, include the following:

◆ a core principle along with a brief focus statement;

◆ 3-4 key questions that heighten instructors' awareness of and curiosity about each principle;

◆ a discussion section that follows the key questions and that includes relevant research, concepts, and strategies related to the principle;

◆ an activities, assignments, and assessments section that provides instructors with ideas and strategies for teaching content and assessing candidate learning related to the core principle;

◆ a list of candidate outcomes, i.e., a listing of skills and knowledge related to the principle;

◆ enduring understandings, i.e., a list of candidate knowledge and insights we believe should endure and mature over the course of a teacher's career;

◆ references and resources related to the principle; and

◆ appendices, including matrices connecting aspects of each core principle with the state standards.

Principles: What They Are and What We Hoped They Would Accomplish

First, we list the six principles along with their focus statements to offer a snapshot of the overall scope; then we provide a more detailed description and explanation of each.

1. Reading Processes: The literacy processes and factors that affect reading development and proficiency are complex.

2. Comprehension and Content Learning: Comprehension and content learning are increased through vocabulary development and writing, listening, discussing, and reading texts.

3. Adolescent Literacy: Proficient adolescent readers engage in reading texts critically and deeply.

4. Assessment: Informal and formal literacy assessments guide effective secondary content instruction.

5. Differentiation: Adolescents learn most effectively when instruction addresses their academic, linguistic, and cultural needs and interests.

6. Planning and Integration: Effective content lessons include the integration of literacy strategies for the purpose of content learning.

It is important to reiterate that neither the principles nor the other structural elements were intended to serve as a codex or prescription that every content reading instructor throughout the CSU system should use in a lock-step fashion. By articulating these principles, our intent was to increase the likelihood that secondary reading course syllabi would gain coherence and focus and that candidates across the CSU could expect to leave their Single Subject program with an appropriate level of research-based knowledge and skills.

We can only provide here a limited sampling of the materials that elaborate upon and support the structural elements of each principle. When compiling the original documents and supporting resources, we suppressed the impulse to compose a comprehensive textbook, which was not our intent, by limiting the content of each principle, along with discussion and supporting material, to 15-20 pages. What follows is a brief discussion of elements from each principle.

Principle 1 is based on the premise that teachers in all secondary content areas should have a basic understanding of the reading process and how components of that process interact with each other. We believed that Single Subject candidates should be able to explain elements of the reading process and how those processes

influence proficient reading. We also recognized that during the past few decades we have gained a deeper knowledge of reading processes through research, that many theoretical models of reading have been designed based on that research, and that the richness of that research and theory could never be covered in the limited scope of our endeavor. Therefore, we elected to construct and present a cogent description of reading processes within a compact model that includes a number of key components embedded in a sociocultural context: word recognition, fluency, comprehension, an internal text representation, long-term memory, and metacognition. These components and their relationships with each other are represented in Figure 1.

Figure 1. Major Reading Processes
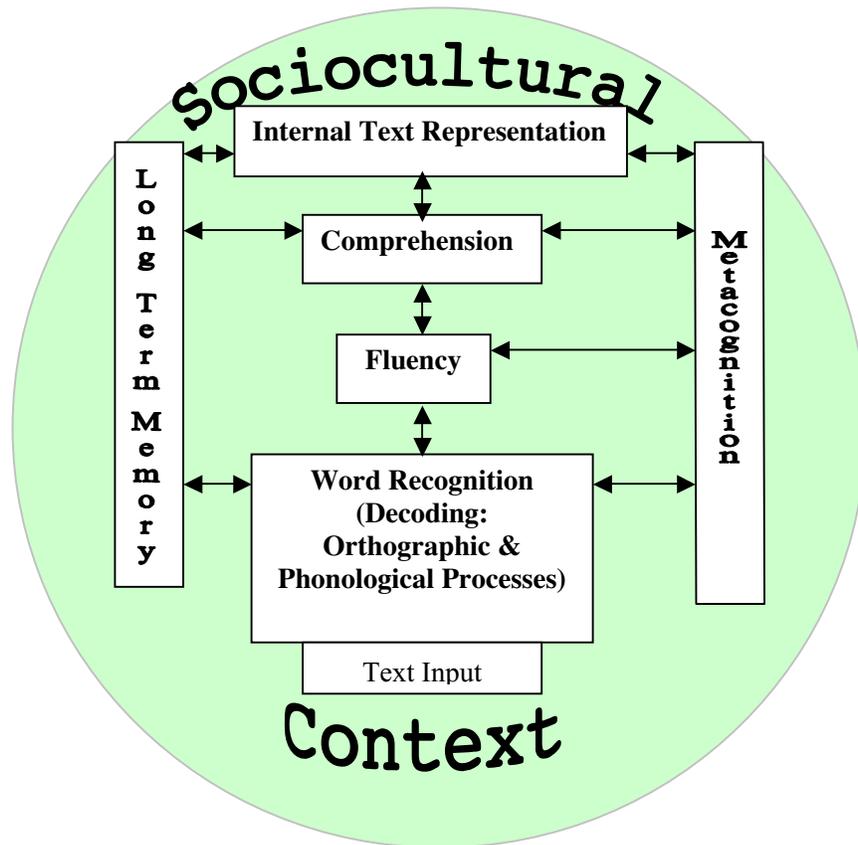
Principle 2 highlights the belief that teachers should understand how they can support adolescents' reading fluency, comprehension, and content learning through vocabulary development, writing in various genres, and discussion. We saw important connections between *Reading for Understanding*, the RAND Reading Study Group's (2002) report on their investigation of comprehension, and the work of Single Subject teachers in California. Among these was the importance of developing adolescents' comprehension skills through instructional practices and strategy instruction that facilitates comprehension. We acknowledged that secondary teachers must address the enormous need for growth in academic literacy, as students move from elementary to middle and high school, if the students are to succeed in college and the work place. We identified a number of strategies and activities that secondary teachers might use in their classrooms to foster fluency, build comprehension, develop vocabulary growth in the content areas, and encourage construction and exploration of meanings through instructional conversations.

Principle 3 focuses on engaging students in deep and critical readings and on developing Single Subject candidates' awareness of factors influencing classroom engagement, including motivation, out-of-school literacies, and critical literacy. Candidates should enable students to see connections between academic concepts taught in content areas and the value of those concepts to students' current and future lives, including a deeper understanding of their world and their role in it. By learning to develop students' school literacies, such as the communicative processes that enable school success, as well as community and personal literacies, candidates can learn to build bridges for adolescents to academic literacies (Gallego and Hollingsworth, 2000).

Principle 4 underscores the belief that assessment guides effective content instruction. It encourages Single Subject candidates to learn and apply a spectrum of informal and formal, formative and summative literacy assessments to determine students' abilities as well as monitor their development. Assessment provides teachers with data informing text selection, lesson planning, evaluation of instructional effectiveness, student grouping, and identification of students needing further diagnostic attention in reading and writing. Several specific informal literacy assessment tools can make teaching in the content areas more effective; through their use, candidates can discover which literacy strategies enable students to not only understand course content, but also help build students' comprehension and vocabulary.

Principle 5 is based on the understanding that differentiated instruction is critical to effective teaching in all content areas; indeed, adolescents are likely to learn best when instruction addresses their academic, linguistic, and cultural interests and needs. Differentiation describes the practice of selecting and adapting texts, modifying instruction, and grouping students according to their assessed needs. We believed that Single Subject candidates should not only learn how to differentiate their content instruction appropriately in order to meet both the

literacy and learning needs of their students, but also experience that instructional ideal in their teaching credential courses. In order to differentiate effectively, teachers can manipulate several dimensions of classroom instruction, including adaptations in course content, providing students' with alternative means for processing content, and variable assessments for students to demonstrate under-standing and competence.

Although content standards commonly provide explicit expectations for course content coverage, lesson delivery and instructional materials can and must be adapted in response to individual student needs. Becoming acutely aware that adolescents vary widely in personalities and proficiencies is antecedent to design-ing differentiated instruction and developing classroom communities that address the needs of all students, including English learners and struggling readers.

Finally, Principle 6 focuses on the importance of effectively integrating literacy strategies into content-area instruction. We believed that all Single Subject candidates should be capable of drawing on evidence-based strategies that support students' learning in content area texts and that develop academic literacy. Candidates must also acquire the ability to skillfully combine strategies in ways that enable students to gain access to content-area texts and promote self-regulated learning. In addition to assessing students to determine which strategies are most likely to promote literacy growth and content-area learning, candidates should be able to integrate those strategies into unit and lesson plans that support both immediate learning and long-term literacy growth.

The six principles, if included in the syllabi of all CSU secondary reading courses, will contribute to a shared vision of literacy integration and growth among teacher educators in California's state universities and among candidates in all disciplines. If all candidates for Single Subject credentials understand these principles and apply them in content-area courses, it is reasonable to assume that the quality not only of student learning, but also of students' academic literacy, will be enhanced, thus better preparing all students for success in universities, in the work force, and in our democratic society.

Resources

The resource section of the binder was designed to provide a number of ways for instructors to build the literacy knowledge and skills of their candidates. It contains model syllabi, additional examples of assignments, and references for instructor and candidate use. Resources in the binder include the International Reading Association's position statement on adolescent literacy that emerged from the Commission on Adolescent Literacy; suggested content area and adolescent literacy texts; Internet links; and several California standards-related documents, such as the standard for Single Subject reading, writing, and related language instruction in English, which specifies instruction in content-based reading and writing skills for all students across the content areas.

Presentation of Materials

After completion of *Principles and Resources*, the SSRTF was charged with disseminating its work throughout the CSU system. The primary forum was a series of workshops conducted by task force members with the support of the CAR. In addition, task force members presented portions of the work at CAR conferences and annual meetings of professional organizations that professors of reading were most likely to attend. The SSRTF's recommendations were also shared with reading faculty through publications such as this. The section that follows details the SSRTF's efforts to disseminate its work through a series of statewide workshops.

Faculty Training Workshops

The SSRTF has relied primarily upon collegial workshops to disseminate the best practices contained in the *Principles and Resources* binder to reading faculty throughout the CSU. These workshops were initiated during the spring of 2004 in venues that were selected based on their proximity to campuses across the state. Preferring a combination of dissemination and discussion models, the task force settled on a workshop format, rather than lecture-based training. An emphasis on participation and sharing of ideas has been shown to be more effective in attracting and maintaining faculty buy-in (Weimer, 1990; Travis, 1995).

The members of the task force believed that simply disseminating the concepts and suggestions contained in the resource binder would not adequately train faculty in its principles. Accordingly, the CSU Chancellor's Office was adamant in its position that the *Principles and Resources* binder should not be disseminated without faculty attending one of the scheduled sessions first. CAR offered a $100 honorarium to attendees and enlisted the support of the deans of the 22 colleges of Education across the CSU in identifying all part-time and full-time instructors responsible for teaching Single Subject reading methods on each campus. The deans were asked to encourage reading faculty to attend one of the training sessions to be introduced to the principles and to engage in meaningful peer-to-peer discourse. Deans were apprised of attendance at these trainings and asked to follow up with faculty who did not attend to ensure complete participation throughout the CSU.

Each session was designed to achieve the objective of sharing the recommendations of the SSRTF outlined in the *Principles and Resources* binder. Although the body of material established the reason for assembling faculty, workshop presenters made special efforts to ensure participation and collaborative dialogue around the principles rather than simply covering the material. Attendees were briefed on the need for additional emphasis on secondary reading as evidenced in system-wide exit data and statewide reading scores for secondary students. Then, participants were introduced to the organization of the binder and the resources it contains. In addition, attendees were asked to discuss how the principles were currently addressed in their instructional approach and given an opportunity to

learn from one another about successful implementation of the content. Finally, after the workshops, participants were encouraged to spend time reviewing the work to a greater extent than was possible at a one-day workshop. To assist in this process, model syllabi were identified in the binder along with other resources to assist faculty in modifying their current instructional design and in addressing any principles they may have overlooked in constructing past syllabi.

Challenges to the Project's Success:
Content and Dissemination

Through the SSRTF's ongoing efforts and in our exchanges with faculty across the CSU, we have identified several challenges to the project's success associated with its first phase. As we reflected upon the first round of trainings, task force members felt that the discussions were robust and engaging at each session, and feedback from participants supported this assessment.

However, we did not foresee the degree of difficulty that providing training to an ever-changing system-wide reading faculty might pose. Tenure-line faculty's teaching assignments may change on a yearly basis; it is also the case that lecturers are often hired to teach a secondary reading course close to the beginning of a new term. Thus, members of the SSRTF felt that, for the initiative to be successful in the long term, there would need to be a mechanism for training new instructors (e.g., annual training sessions, designated campus mentors, or a trainer-of-trainer model). Feedback from participating CSU reading faculty indicated an interest in seeing more instructional approaches and resources that address the challenges of differentiating instruction and addressing the needs of English learners and struggling adolescent readers. Faculty also suggested that the SSRTF consider the many ways in which technology might be used in the service of cross-content literacy instruction. These issues will be addressed in our future efforts.

Implications for Practice

Despite the comprehensive nature of *Principles and Resources*, the work of the SSRTF is still in its early stages. Plans are in progress to extend the work through at least three phases of outreach. In early 2005, the SSRTF was reconstituted; some of the original members left to pursue other projects, while new members were added to continue the work. In addition to secondary literacy faculty, new members included methods faculty with literacy expertise from subject areas such as mathematics, English, social science, physical education, world languages, music, and the fine arts. The current work of the SSRTF centers on exploring the intersection of literacy and content methods instruction. The task force is producing another resource binder for effectively integrating content methodology and literacy learning; the audience will be content-area methods instructors in Single Subject credential programs. We

anticipate that the compiled resources and the professional development that results will reach methods faculty across the campuses system-wide in the fall of 2006.

Through these efforts, we anticipate that candidate satisfaction with regard to preservice literacy preparation should improve as CSU reading and methods instructors begin to demonstrate a united front regarding what constitutes relevant content in their classes.

The final and much larger audience for dissemination of content area reading resources is the K-12 community, including cooperating teachers who supervise candidates in their field placements, administrators of individual schools, and the superintendents of entire school districts. When teacher candidates enter their first teaching positions, the schools in which they find themselves will have specific teaching cultures, which may or may not support the idea of bringing students to texts via meaningful and productive strategies. Planning for this final phase of our work is not yet underway.

California is currently experiencing a strong reform movement in secondary education. In fall 2004, State Education Superintendent, Jack O'Connell, led the High School Summit to address the disconnect between reading and writing proficiency expectations for high school students and the level of preparation that these students will need to successfully meet reading and writing demands once they enter college or the world of work.

In fact, many of the activities in secondary school reform are converging. For example, the CSU is involved in a comprehensive outreach to high schools known as the Early Assessment Program (EAP). This three-part program begins with a voluntary assessment conducted with the 11th grade STAR test, California's statewide testing program. Students receive a report of their readiness for college-level English and mathematics. For those whose skills do not meet the requisite levels, there is a 12th-grade instructional program to assist them in gaining knowledge and skills for college. In English, this means a 12th-grade expository reading and writing course that is currently being piloted by many English teachers around the state.

The CSU is also providing support for another initiative, Reading Institutes for Academic Progress (RIAP), at 17 of the 23 campuses. These institutes provide professional development for high school teachers across the grade levels (9-12) and across the curriculum for increased knowledge about literacy and the role it plays in student learning. The 12th-grade expository reading and writing course materials have been integrated into the institutes, and participants are also expected to provide school leadership in EAP.

In an effort to promote awareness of these multiple initiatives, the SSRTF now includes the 12th-grade expository reading and writing course materials in its *Principles and Resources* binder so that all CSU professors, as well as graduates of our programs, will be ready to make their high school students aware of their opportunity to be involved in the EAP.

When today's students graduate from high school, they will enter a challenging

adult world of work in which they must be able to flexibly apply their knowledge to "learn how to learn." Members of the SSRTF are working hard to revitalize teacher education at the secondary level to enable newly certified teachers to effectively integrate literacy into content-area instruction and to help them avoid the reading nightmares that have troubled too many in the past.

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