Moving towards a language arts program extended across the curriculum

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Abstract
A literature-based program integrates oral and written language activity with other areas of the curriculum. Therefore, the curriculum is centered around real ideas, relevant issues, and problem solving. As a result, children have opportunities to experiment with language that can lead to higher levels of competencies (Goodman, 1986; Smith, 1994).

As teachers plan units in social studies and the sciences, they make note of relevant language activities. These activities can be teacher-directed or presented in learning centers (Harms & Lettow, 1992).
Moving Towards a Language Arts Program
Extended Across the Curriculum

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Literature-based programs are based on the nature of language and how children learn it. Language is learned easily when it is whole and relevant and is closely related to both the personal and the social aspects of children's lives. Language is learned while humans are engaged in the language processes. Language empowers people and helps them to make sense of the world (Goodman, 1986).

A literature base can support children's involvement in the processes of language by providing whole units of meaning. Quality literature pieces can offer models of language and content that children can use while engaged in the comprehension and composition processes (Routman, 1991). Literature-based programs can allow children ownership of their own experiences by providing options for involvement in the language processes (Harms & Lettow, 1992).

By integrating the language arts with the areas of the curriculum, children can truly experience the real functions of language. The processes of reading and writing are closely related (Routman, 1991). One process can lead naturally into the other. For example, while reading, children can discover a story of their own and move into a writing experience or a model of language that can facilitate their composition. Also, reading and writing processes have many common tasks. For instance, to comprehend an author's message and to send clear ideas to an
audience, it is important to sort out the main ideas and supporting details.

Since the focus is on whole units of language and meaningful experiences through involvement in the language processes, language tasks are not fragmented and taught in isolation in a drill-like fashion. Rather they are taught in the form of mini-lessons within the context of actual reading and writing experiences as the need arises (Strickland, 1995).

The literature-based classroom is organized to encourage interaction with peers and the teacher. Flexible grouping can facilitate individual and pair/small-group activity as well as large group gatherings that can promote a community spirit within the classroom (Cambourne, 1988).

In programs that focus on children's involvement in the language processes, assessment involves gathering information relevant to the learners' performances and describing these responses through qualitative methods (e.g., logs, running records, and portfolios). A major goal of this type of assessment is to closely connect instruction and assessment. Children, with the support of their teacher set goals, engage in the language processes and then reflect on their progress and instructional needs (Strickland, 1995).
A literature-based program integrates oral and written language activity with other areas of the curriculum. Therefore, the curriculum is centered around real ideas, relevant issues, and problem solving. As a result, children have opportunities to experiment with language that can lead to higher levels of competencies (Goodman, 1986; Smith, 1994).

As teachers plan units in social studies and the sciences, they make note of relevant language activities. These activities can be teacher-directed or presented in learning centers (Harms & Lettow, 1992).

Teachers develop units around themes for a large part of their curriculum. They pay particular attention to authentic and relevant activities for students (Goodman, 1986). Learning centers are commonplace and contribute to a print rich environment and to expanded learning experiences (Harms & Lettow, 1992).

Extended Literature-Based Language Arts
for a Unit on Iowa History

This instructional project has extended the literature base of a social studies unit for grade six. As a result of this search, many language activities have been incorporated into the unit. These literature-based activities have been planned for
middle class students from small, rural Iowa communities. They range greatly in ability, but all have an eagerness to learn.

The social studies curriculum for grade six in the writer’s school is centered on four main topics: Iowa History, Canada, Mexico, and Latin America. Roughly nine weeks is spent on each of these areas. The writer has engaged in instructional development to extend the literature base of the Iowa History unit and to integrate more language activity into the unit. In developing the literature base, works representing several genres are included: historical fiction (full-length fiction and picture books), biographies, folk literature, poetry, and information. Many language activities are developed from these literature works.

The qualitative assessment of the unit is ongoing. Students can keep journals, conference with the teacher, and compile portfolios.

Included in the unit are teacher-directed activities and also many independent activities within the learning centers. These centers provide students with options for learning. The two types of learning centers that are developed are sustaining centers and those specific to the unit. Sustaining centers, maintained throughout the school year, have much value as they provide for a predictable and secure learning environment as well as a print rich environment. Such centers can provide a great deal of content from the different genres to support the specific
unit. The specific centers are based on literature experiences and related expressive activity. They are offered only during a particular unit.

The contents of the sustaining centers are presented on tables and bookcases. The centers specific to the unit are offered through stand-up folders with three sides (two sections 10 x 16; middle section 20 x 16). The directions for the literature-based activities are given in these folders. Before the students select which center to work in, either sustaining or specific to the unit, the teacher presents an overview of their content. The centers are presented in the following pages.

**Sustaining Centers**

These centers primarily provide content for the unit. Ideas gained from these centers can be the source of all kinds of activity that are shared in workshop groups (assigned small groups, teacher conferences, and large group sharing sessions).

A. Reading/Listening Center

Several genres are offered in this center for the unit. To provide for a range of reading levels, many works have accompanying teacher-made cassette tapes. Thus, learning experiences are offered for all students, no matter what their reading level may be.
1. Information


2. Periodicals

*Iowa Conservationist*. Des Moines: Iowa Department of Natural Resources. Bimonthly.


*The Palimpsest: Iowa’s Popular History Magazine*. Iowa City, IA: State Historical Society. Quarterly during the school year.

3. Fiction


B. Viewing/Listening Center

For this center, a video of the movie, *The Music Man*, text and music created by Meredith Wilson, can be viewed. The movie has many references to Iowa. Students can search for biographical information on this Iowan, Meredith Wilson, and can report on the influence Iowa had on his life to the class.

C. Poetry Center

Images of rural life and seasons, a part of Iowa life, are presented. These selections are part of the center.


Worth, V. (1994). *All the small poems and fourteen more.*

D. Author/Illustrator Center

Stephen Gammell is the author and illustrator selected for this center. He was born in Des Moines. He is recognized as one of the most prominent contemporary illustrators. Not only will students be able to read the biographical sketches on him, included in the center, but they can read his children’s books and examine the style and media used in his fine illustrations.

1. Selected books written and illustrated.


Gammell, S. (1982). *The story of Mr. and Mrs. Vinegar.*
New York: Lothrop.

New York: Lothrop.

2. Selected works illustrated.


E. Interesting Objects Center

Objects common to Iowa are displayed for student examination, such as a wild rose, the Iowa flag, a geode, a picture of an oak tree, an eastern goldfinch, an Iowa road map, travel brochures, a log cabin and sod home replicas, small scale early machinery, early cooking utensils, clothing, and toys and games, old storybooks, and replicas of a covered wagon, steamboats, barge, and train.

F. Museum Center

In this center, prints of Grant Wood's paintings are displayed. He is a famous Iowa painter. Ernest Goldstein's book, *Grantwood: American Gothic*, can be included (Chicago: Garrard, 1984). This book analyzes Wood's famous paintings (shape, design, and color). Some biographical information is included.

G. Game Center

*Discover Iowa: educational historical game* (1979). Sioux City: Hesse. Students can make bulletin boards which contain questions about little known facts about Iowa for their peers to answer.
Literature-Based Centers Specific to the Unit

The centers along with teacher-directed activities are a part of the students' learning experience during the unit. Some children will spend considerable time in a few centers while others may engage in several. Some children may select one activity in a center, if there are several, and others may engage in all of the activities of a center.

A. Famous Iowans

Literature Experience

Listen to/read some of these books on famous Iowans.


Expressive Activity

1. Choose one of these famous Iowans to research further, perhaps by tracing actual accounts of the person through newspapers.
2. A timeline can be created of a famous person’s life including the important events in his/her life.

3. Interview a person in your town who has played an influential role in the community. You may want to ask this person, with the consent of the teacher, to be a guest speaker, or you may create a display with photographs and information about the person.

B. Ghost Stories of Iowa

Literature Experience

Listen to/read these ghost stories.


Expressive Activity

Find a ghost story in your community to tell, or compose your own ghost story based on an event in the community’s history. Share your story through taping or writing.

C. Pioneer Life in the Midwest

Literature Experience

Listen to/read some of these books on pioneer life.


Expressive Activity

1. Write a diary pretending as a pioneer to be making the journey west to Iowa. Be sure to record the route and your feelings as you travel and any hardships you encounter.


3. Make a game board depicting the journey west during the settling of Iowa.

4. Compare and contrast the life during pioneer times with the life you live and then make a chart depicting the similarities and differences.

D. Food Center

Recipes from early times in Iowa are offered in this center. Recipe books from the writer’s great-grandmother and others in the community will be provided. Students can prepare some of these foods as samples for the center. Other students can then describe and rate the foods. A rating system will be included.
E. Quilt Center

Literature Experience

Listen to/read some of the books on quilts.

Information


Fiction


Expressive Activity

Construct a quilt block from paper or material. You may want to quilt a block made of cloth. Note examples of quilt patterns used in early times in Iowa in the center.
F. Immigration Center

Literature Experience

Listen to/read some of the immigration stories.


Expressive Activity

1. Search for the origins of your ancestors and see how far back you can go. See the example in the center.

2. Interview an elderly relative(s) to gather family stories of the past.

3. Make a memory box for an elderly relative or friend. In the box, place special memories or symbols of significant events in that person's life.

G. Slavery and the Underground Railroad Center

Literature Experience
Listen to/read some of the books on slavery and the underground railroad.}


Expressive Activity

1. Pretend you are a slave on the underground railroad. Make a diary of the experience during your escape to freedom.

2. Draw a map of your escape route, detailing specific safe houses along the way. Include times and dates you expect to be in that location.

3. Research the Underground Railroad Routes in Iowa.

G. Famous Inventors Center

Literature Experience

Listen to/read one of the books on famous inventors who have a connection to Iowa.

Page 48 - Factories in Iowa.

Page 64 - Men of science.


Page 15 - Norman Borlaug, Nobel scientist, researched crops to be grown in the third world countries.

Page 25 - Roy Carver invented tire retreading and gave millions of dollars to schools.

Page 123 - James Van Allen, famous astronomer, conducted many research studies whose results are well known.


Page 10 - John L. Harvey patented the paper clip.

Page 18 - Frederick Maytag developed a washing machine.

Page 234 - John Vincent Atanasoff, father of the computer, conducted early computer studies.

Page 245 - John Deere invented the first steel plow.

Page 245 - Frederick Maytag invented the washing machine.

Page 251 - Arthur Collins founded Collins Radio.

Expressive Activity

1. Do further research on one of the inventors. Make a foldout brochure selling the invention to the public.

2. Write an informational piece to accompany a map showing where this person in Iowa lived.

Conclusions

The literature base for my social studies unit on Iowa History, for grade six, has been greatly enriched through this instructional development project. The print rich quality of my classroom will be enhanced. Much more content will be available as well as many more models of language. Many opportunities to
integrate the language arts into the social studies have been discovered.

The opportunities for student learning have been extended. The teacher-directed activities will be enriched and more interesting because I know more about Iowa History as a result of my library search. As I reviewed volumes for the unit, many related expressive activities emerged. Some of these literature-based activities have been developed into learning centers, thus students will have more options for learning experiences.

I eagerly look forward to teaching this integrated unit during the next school year. I anticipate as the sixth graders engage in the language processes within the literature base representing several genres and in the many options for expressive activity, they will generate much enthusiasm for learning.

I also look forward to sharing the extended literature base and related activities with the other sixth grade teachers. Since they are also interested in literature and understand the potential of the different genres to enrich the curriculum, I hope we will band together to integrate the language arts into the other social studies units.
References

Professional Works


