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Osha Lynette Smith  
Walden University

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# Content Area Teacher Perspectives on Integrating Literacy Strategies

Osha Lynette Smith, EdD

## Abstract

The Common Core State Standards (CCSS) recommend that all educators prepare students with the literacy skills needed for college and careers. This study examined seventh and eighth grade content area teachers' perspectives towards teaching literacy. Results indicated that teachers felt unprepared to teach reading. These findings can facilitate communication between teachers and other stakeholders regarding school literacy initiatives. Further the findings informed creation of a professional training program to provide teachers with on-site support for literacy integration.

## Problem

Barriers to meeting the recommendations of the CCSS include:

- Many disciplinary teachers **do not welcome the integration of reading strategies** into their instruction (Bayar, 2014; Warren-Kring & Warren, 2013).
- Content area teachers have **varied levels of competency** in providing literacy instruction and may, therefore, be **unwilling or unable to teach literacy strategies** within their disciplines (Hurst & Pearman, 2014; Vaughn et al., 2013; Wilhelm & Lauer, 2015).
- Implementation of a new district-wide initiative, Rigor, Relevance, and Relationships (RRR), focused on **literacy across the curriculum** has brought **teacher resistance** to the forefront.

## Purpose

The purpose of this qualitative study was to **examine the perspectives** of 11 suburban middle-school content area teachers towards their expanded role and their **ability to provide literacy instruction** within their disciplines.

## Relevant Literature

### Conceptual frameworks

- **Constructivist theory** (Bruner, 1960; Khanal, 2014) Learners build meaning from new concepts dependent upon their present knowledge. **Teachers' perspectives** of their roles as literacy instructors and their individual needs for teaching literacy provided the answers to the research questions.
- Knowles' **theory of andragogy** was chosen in response to the **unique learning needs** of adults. This theory outlined recommended methods for **adult instruction** (Culatta, 2013; Henschke, 2008).
- Bandura's (1993) **theory of perceived self-efficacy** was included in support of the exploration of the **impact of teachers' perspectives** on the learning environments they produce, which ultimately affect student achievement.

### Research

- Teachers **enact literacy** across the content areas **based upon the value** they place on it (Daisy, 2012).
- Some teachers believe in teaching **either content or literacy, but not both at the same time** (Botzakis, Burns, & Hall, 2014).
- Warren-Kring and Warren (2013) found that disciplinary teachers' **perspectives and self-efficacy improved** after learning and applying literacy strategies.
- Moreillon and Ballard (2012) found that adult learners have an **autonomous self-concept**, can **manage own learning**, bring **life experiences**, have **changing learning needs**, and are **problem focused** and **internally motivated**.

## Research Questions

**RQ1:** What are teachers' perspectives regarding their roles as literacy instructors?

**RQ2:** How capable do teachers feel regarding teaching literacy to their students?

**RQ3:** Does the current literacy professional development engage teachers? Why or why not?

**RQ4:** To what extent do teachers demonstrate evidence of adopting literacy strategies presented in professional development in their classrooms?

## Procedures

I used a **purposeful sample** of 11 English, math, science, and social studies teachers who agreed to participate in this study.

Data were collected with **audiotaped formal interviews, classroom observations**, and an examination of **lesson plans**. Member checking was used to ensure accuracy.

## Data Analysis

I used Atlas.ti to organize and review the data in order to identify the primary codes for analysis.

Coded data were grouped to form categories leading to broad themes and concepts to answer the research questions.

## Findings

**RQ1:** All participants viewed **literacy as important** for all content areas. Some participants claimed literacy strategy instruction **enhanced** their subject area, while others shared **negative viewpoints**. The value teachers saw in teaching reading was impacted by a **commitment to content instruction** and **time constraints**.

**RQ2:** Teachers admitted to **not feeling competent** in delivering some literacy components. All participants viewed the **reflective writing instruction** requirement more **favorably** than **close reading instruction** or planning and delivering **literacy-related performance tasks**.

**RQ3:** Teachers admitted to feelings of confusion and spoke of an apparent **disparity in professional development** cohort sessions.

**RQ4:** Teachers willingly used the materials provided during the RRR professional development sessions because they provided **clear guidelines**. In addition an added **job expectation** and **reporting requirement** was in place to ensure compliance.

## Limitations

The study may have been limited in

- Small sample size
- Math teachers were underrepresented.
- Administrators' perspectives were not included
- Students' perspectives not included
- Setting limited to one middle school in the district

## Conclusions

The research overwhelmingly showed that teachers **felt unprepared** to teach reading. While teachers saw value in literacy, their **perspectives were affected by their commitment to content instruction** and **time** required to meet disciplinary curriculum requirements.

Opportunities for **collaboration** across content areas and between grade levels is recommended. **Reading specialists** should be involved in professional development and provide ongoing literacy support.

A professional training program has been created to provide teachers with on-site support for literacy integration.

## Social Change Implications

The **CCSS** now require **all teachers to teach literacy** in each **content area**. Positive social change in literacy is supported by providing an **increased understanding** of reading instruction in the content classroom. **Teachers** need to be aware of their strengths and weaknesses concerning literacy practices as outlined by the CCSS. In addition, **administrators** should be aware of and consider teacher perspectives prior to implementing new **school reform initiatives**.