Close Reading and Movement: A Lesson on Student Engagement and the Four Cs

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ABSTRACT

Close reading is a reading instruction strategy. The author combined movement with close reading to engage fourth-grade students in meaning-making of new academic vocabulary words. Through the experience, students assessed new and multiple meanings of words and participated in collaborative, academic discussions of vocabulary words using human sculptures. Findings from the lesson suggest: an increase in student interest in vocabulary development when combined with movement, an instructional method that made sense to students, and a nonthreatening way to engage English learners in text-dependent inquiries. Future investigations may explore the lesson's feasibility with students in the middle and secondary grades.

In the United States of America, individual states are adopting and beginning to implement the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) (National Governors Association Center for Best Practices & Council of Chief State School Officers, 2010). CCSS is the latest endeavor in standards-based education in the U.S. The CCSS outlines academic standards that all students should know and be able to do by specific grade levels. The standards were created to ensure students' college and career readiness regardless as to where they lived in the U.S., specifically in terms of English Language Arts (ELA) and mathematics.

Throughout CCSS, especially in ELA, lessons are centered on the Four Cs: critical thinking, collaboration, communication, and creativity (National Education Association, n.d.). The Four Cs are underscored throughout the curriculum, including in reading instruction where students are expected to analyze complex texts.

The marriage of the arts and instruction has fascinated me for a long time, especially in regard to student engagement. Much research (Belliveau, 2006; Catterall, Chapleau, & Iwanaga, 1999; Catterall, Dumais, & Hampden-Thompson, 2012; Parsad & Spiegelman, 2012; Rodesiler, 2009; Smithrim & Upitis, 2005) in the arts is centered on student engagement.

For reading instruction, strategies such as close reading help students develop deeper meaning of words while using evidence from a given text to support student responses. Many researchers (Brown & Kappes, 2012; Dalton, 2013; Serafini, 2013; Roskos & Neuman, 2014) describe close reading as text analysis where rereading of the text is expected. Serafini (2013) suggested that prior to CCSS, teachers were more focused on students' personal responses to a reading instead of challenging students to analyze and understand more complex texts. Reading strategies like close reading serve a valuable purpose, but may leave some students that are struggling readers or simply disengaged in reading instruction with little motivation to read, especially if the given text is either too difficult to independently read or on a topic that does not interest the student (Malloy, Marinak, Gambrell, & Mazzoni, 2013). Student engagement in reading instruction, therefore, is a crucial element in developing literate learners.

This article describes a strategy that engages all students in reading instruction; specifically close reading with a heavy emphasis on the Four Cs of CCSS. First, I share background information on my early experiences with meaningful learning and student engagement. Next, I share some literature on the relationship between student engagement, movement, and reading. I then describe using movement as an instructional strategy. I close the article with lessons I learned from using movement in reading instruction with my students.

My intent is to explain an instructional strategy that can help students engage in collaborative academic discussions across the curriculum stemming from close reading. I define academic discussions as conversations that include the targeted academic vocabulary of a lesson. I used this strategy in my fourth grade classroom and in multiple workshops for aspiring and experienced educators. It is my hope that educators will use this strategy in their classroom to help make subject matter more meaningful for their students and themselves, across the curriculum; subsequently, enriching academic discussions in the classroom for the entire community of learners.

Background

My earliest memory of meaning-making in my own learning was at the age of four. As a hyper four-year-old, my parents were concerned that I would not do well in kindergarten because I could not sit long enough to listen to directions. This is the age when I started learning how to play the piano. The deliberate practice and sheer focus required to play the piano was sure to test my attentiveness and the patience of my teacher. My experiences in learning to play the piano did not start with sitting at the piano, they started on the floor. My piano teacher had colored carpet squares on the ground and I would jump to different squares that held certain musical meaning. Jumping to different colored carpet squares translated to fingers jumping across the piano's keyboard. Within weeks of jumping on the carpet squares, I was sitting at the piano making music. My parents were happy I was able to follow directions and were impressed that I could sit and focus for longer than a couple of seconds.

An Engaging Instructional Strategy

I teach students from a variety of backgrounds and ages. At the elementary school level, I engaged fourth-grade students in deep academic discussions on social justice. With adult learners, I facilitate academic discussions on curriculum design. My aim remains the same: engage my students with instructional strategies that require deeper critical thinking, collaboration, communication, and creativity. The creation of meaningful learning experiences that engage students in their learning continues to be the heartbeat of my work. The use of movement as a strategy for collaborative academic discussions in reading is a different way than I was taught in formal education, but it is very similar to my early experiences learning to play the piano.

An Instructional Strategy Grounded in the Arts and the Four Cs

There is a growing interest in the arts and its importance to a complete education (President's Committee on the Arts and the Humanities, 2011). In December of 2015, the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) was signed into law as the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) and affirmed the inclusion of the arts in

a well-rounded education in the United States of America (Every Student Succeeds Act, 2015). The arts, defined as music, dance, theater, and the visual arts, are argued to elicit student engagement in other subject areas like reading and language development (Brouillette & Jennings, 2010). Furthermore, research findings (Brouillette & Jennings, 2010; Heath & Wolf, 2005; Montgomerie & Ferguson, 1999) stressed the positive relationship arts instruction had on English learners. The investment in arts in schools through legislation and practice underscores the commitment and desire for meaning-making and innovation in today's classroom settings.

Studio habits formed in the visual arts setting have transferrable skills in today's CCSS classrooms. Hetland, Winner, Veenema, & Sheridan (2007) outlined eight studio habits. Two of these habits, "engage and persist" and "stretch and explore," underpin the essence of CCSS in terms of creativity and critical thinking, which are parts of the Four Cs of CCSS (National Education Association, n.d.). According to Hetland et al. (2007) "engage and persist" suggests that students need to be involved and connected with their work while also realizing that it takes sustained focus to complete an assignment or project. In other words, teachers need to facilitate lessons that are "deeply engaging" (Hetland et al., 2007, p. 42). "Stretch and explore," on the other hand, encourages students to take risks, view mistakes as learning opportunities, and be creative through experimentation (Hetland et al., 2007).

Although Hetland and colleagues (2007) discussed studio habits in relation to the visual arts studio, connections with the habits are noted in other art areas. Music instruction, for instance, encourages students to embrace improvisation. Within improvisation, musicians may "blue" notes or bend sounds in pursuit of experimentation or creative expression. Dewey described this as "flexible purposing" (as cited in Eisner, 2002, p. 77) where the implementation of an idea may lead to unexpected effects or outcomes than what were originally considered. In today's classrooms, instructional strategies that foster "flexible purposing" like the arts do will provide students with the well-rounded education all students need and deserve.

Movement and Close Reading as an Instructional Strategy Together

The use of movement to engage students in their learning is not a new idea; however, the use of movement to engage students in close reading may be a new or novel area for teachers to consider. My idea for using movement to engage students

in close reading, specifically during English language development instructional time, is based on Boal's (2002) work of Theatre of the Oppressed. Boal (2002) stressed the importance of audience engagement to ensure audience understanding of the creative work. Peebles (2007) explained rhythm walks as a way to engage struggling students in practicing reading fluency. I, therefore, blended these two ideas together to create human sculptures with my fourth grade English language development students. Since using this lesson with my fourth grade students, I have used it in workshop presentations with other educators.

First, it is important to define human sculptures as this is central for my lesson. I describe human sculptures to students of any age as a statue. In my fourth grade classroom, I asked the students to describe a trophy to me. After several students explained a clear image of a trophy, I shared with them that the top of the trophy, where there is a statue of some sort (e.g., a sculpture of a person kicking a soccer ball or something similar), is what I meant by a human sculpture. In small groups, students created one human sculpture as a team where each student was a part of the sculpture.

Spending time with the students to discuss and explore sculptures as an art form in balance with the other curriculum (e.g., English language development) is grounded in Brewer and Brown's (2009) work in content integrity. Brewer and Brown (2009) suggest that content areas must be given equal weight in lessons, instead of one content area holding the academic worth of another content area in higher regard. For example, a lesson that includes music and social studies content should teach each content area with integrity and not have one content area (e.g., music) be value-added for the other content area (e.g., social studies).

Table 1 illustrates the steps of the lesson in its entirety. In the table, the roles are indicated of the teacher and student in each step of the lesson. Table 1 also includes the Four C connection and literacy skill addressed throughout the lesson. It is my hope that this table helps other educators see the connection between CCSS and reading instruction and be able to re-create the learning experience with their students. I used the vocabulary words that were in the story of the day from the school site's adopted language arts curriculum.

Table 1

Steps of the Lesson, Roles of the Teacher and Student, Four C Connection, and Literacy Skill

STEP	ROLE OF TEACHER	ROLE OF STUDENT	FOUR C CONNECTION	LITERACY SKILL
1	Select Text.			
2	Write Vocabulary Word on Board.			
3	Point to and Say Aloud Vocabulary Word.	Repeats Vocabulary Word After Teacher.	Communication	Phonics, Oral Language Development
4	Explain Human Sculpture.	Give Examples of a Sculpture.	Communication	
5	Assign Small Groups Vocabulary Word.	In a Small Group, Create a Human Sculpture of the Assigned Vocabulary Word.	Collaboration, Communication, Creativity, Critical Thinking	Prediction
6	Read Aloud Text.	Form Human Sculpture When the Teacher Reads Aloud the Small Group's Assigned Vocabulary Word.	Collaboration, Communication, Critical Thinking	
7	Monitor Student Groups.	Analyze Word Meaning in Small Group and Edit Human Sculpture of Given Word Based on Evidence From the Text.	Collaboration, Communication, Creativity, Critical Thinking	Semantics, Text Analysis
8	Second Read Aloud of Text.	Form **Revised** Human Sculpture When the Teacher Reads Aloud the Small Group's Assigned Vocabulary Word.	Collaboration, Communication, Critical Thinking	

STEP	ROLE OF TEACHER	ROLE OF STUDENT	FOUR C CONNECTION	LITERACY SKILL
9	Third Read Aloud of Text With Faster Pace Than Second Read Aloud.	Form Human Sculpture When the Teacher Reads Aloud the Small Group's Assigned Vocabulary Word.	Collaboration, Communication, Critical Thinking	
10	Time Students for 60 Seconds as They Read Aloud.	Students Read Aloud the Given Text as Quickly as They Can in 60 Seconds.	Communication	Reading Fluency
11	Assign Small Groups Additional Vocabulary Words From the Text.	In a Small Group, Create a Human Sculpture for Each of the Assigned Vocabulary Words.	Collaboration, Communication, Creativity, Critical Thinking	
12	Repeat Steps 6-10.	Repeat Steps 6-10.	Collaboration, Communication, Creativity, Critical Thinking	Semantics, Reading Fluency

At the introductory stage of the new vocabulary words, students discuss the words and make a human sculpture based on what their group predicts each word means. As students use their group prediction to create a human sculpture, students take risks of sharing their predicted word meaning. Providing students space in a safe environment to share their human sculpture of a new vocabulary word encourages students to stretch and explore (Hetland et al., 2007) word meaning with their peers. As anticipated in close reading lessons, the selected text is reread at least three times, but the students continue to analyze the meaning of the vocabulary words throughout each reading with a sustained focus (i.e., engaged and persist) on better understanding the meaning of a new vocabulary word. As indicated in Table 1, Step 7, students analyze their human sculpture using evidence from the text. Student groups may revise their human sculptures based on their new understandings from their academic discussions and the text. The revision process connects students with the studio habit of "engage and persist" as it requires students to focus their attention on understanding the meaning of a specific vocabulary word throughout a given assignment: the human sculpture. It is during the collaborative group time that academic discussions develop in a holistic way, without my prompting. Students engage in discussing the meaning of their group's vocabulary word and how to best depict their word in a human sculpture.

Lessons Learned

I learned three lessons from my experiences. First, although I introduced the instructional strategy to the students, their excitement in collaboration made the lesson successful. Student grouping, for example, was initially planned with four students in each group. Students quickly asked to have additional students in their group. As the lesson progressed, the group sizes increased and the number of groups, therefore, decreased. In the end, instead of having eight groups of four students in each group, I had two groups of 16 students in each group.

The second lesson I learned from the experience is that students asked to repeat the lesson when asked to learn new vocabulary words. Their suggestion underscored two salient points for me. Although the lesson was not a novel approach to deeper learning, it was an instructional strategy that made sense to the students. It also made learning meaningful to them.

Lastly, I learned that the instructional strategy encouraged students to make predictions about unfamiliar vocabulary words in a way that emphasized creativity and deemphasized one correct answer. This learning was particularly important in my fourth grade classroom where the majority of the students were English language learners. Similarly, the possibility of multiple meanings for words led to deeper discussions and other text-dependent inquiries. The end result was a classroom full of students, fully engaged in collaborative academic discussions across the curriculum.

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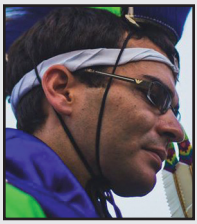

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