

WORKING TO TRANSFORM ELEMENTARY TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF ADOLESCENT LEARNERS

AN INTERACTIVE PRESENTATION

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EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Graduate students interested in reading development often focus on younger, beginning readers. This focus is extremely important, but the literacy needs of older students can be overlooked. The majority of students in the Master of Education in Reading program have elementary teaching experience, often causing interactions with adolescents to seem intimidating. An essential part of their preparation is an awareness and understanding of the complexity of literacy for young adults. This presentation focused on the transformative experience for literacy educators when examining the varied learning needs of adolescents, assessing their interests and attitudes towards reading, and developing strategies to increase engagement with reading.

The importance of wide reading is well documented but often not facilitated in classrooms (Allington, 2012). Creating a culture of reading with engaging and enabling stories encourages students to take ownership of their own literacy development by choosing appropriate and interesting texts (Tatum, 2008). Adolescents are more likely to succeed when their preferences are valued, and they are active participants in the learning community (Brozo, 2017). Through exposure to texts, students may begin to understand the transformative nature texts can have on their lives and be able to develop their own textual lineage (Tatum, 2008).

This project provided the candidates experience with adolescents and was developed into a research project. The participants in this research are the graduate students studying to be reading specialists or literacy coaches. As part of an adolescent literacy class, graduate students were required to interact individually with a secondary student in eighth grade or higher. The adolescent students completed attitude assessments, interest surveys, and an informal writing activity. The results and observations were used to develop a second individual session to share a new comprehension strategy and book recommendations. The participants contacted the adolescent one final time to see if any book suggestions or strategies were useful. A final reflection and presentation over all the sessions was shared in class and ongoing applications were made to class readings and content.

This research project was developed to address these research questions:
What literacy instructional factors are valued by adolescent learners?
What do the teacher educators learn about working with adolescents in literacy?

The reflections completed by the teacher educators served as data sources. The researchers read the reflections, independently coded responses, and looked for themes that emerged across the data (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Analysis found adolescents valued choice along with a meaningful purpose to read and participate. Graduate students had a heightened awareness of adolescent learning needs and saw the values of personal connection with learners. In addition, results showed both graduate students and adolescents valued similar educational literacy priorities in their classrooms.

The interactive presentation was focused on the transformative experiences for the graduate students throughout their sessions with the adolescent learners. Presenters involved participants in examples of the activities completed with the adolescents, provided opportunities for attendees to complete their own version of the activities, and shared results of the ongoing research.

SELECT REFERENCES

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