Richard Montgomery 12/10/18 ED 613

How can English language arts teachers use reading to engage oppositional, defiant, and reluctant leaners?

**Introduction**

Not all students have an innate love of learning and a desire to work hard in school, that is a known and accepted fact in education. There will always be the highly motivated students who constantly seek out extra work to do; and there will always be the students that will do just enough to get by. Between those two categories we can place most students with regards to their work habits. Just as we are to experience our hard working students, we are equally certain to have our students who do not have that drive and motivation. These students may even hold an attitude that is specifically entailed to intentionally not working. These students, to no fault of their own, possess something in their minds that is making them turn off, turn away, and push away from school, work, their teachers, and much of the people in their lives. These students are not necessarily qualified to be in special education programs, nor are they doing anything that requires severe disciplinary action, yet this is how our oppositional, defiant, and reluctant leaners are often treated. Their lack of work is seen as something related to or requiring specific special education support, and it can be seen as an infraction that gets treated with writeups, detentions, suspensions, or other general punishments that schools use. The problem is that neither of these solutions work. These students have all of the capacity and ability to be in the classroom with their peers, learn the same material as their peers, and ultimately succeed along with their peers. Working with these students is not a game of seeing where they fit, but rather what the teacher can do to support them so that they can fit.

The reason I am so interested in this topic is because I have seen what happens when these students are not supported fully by their educators. I’ve worked with teenagers with oppositional defiant disorder who instead of being given the opportunity to show what they can do, are only systematically punished for not doing something that they do not understand or know. We know that every student is unique in how they learn and interpret information, and these students are no exception. The biggest difference that is continuously failed to be recognized is that these students deal with insecurity and stress differently than others. While many students will openly admit that they do not know the answer, or will ask questions when they are confused, our oppositional students have a significantly more reserved demeanor about expressing what they are feeling, and so when cornered with questions and accusations, their reaction is not to open up and give discourse, but to react, close off, and often act out. In the end, the acting out is the only piece of the puzzle that teachers and administrators see; a student refusing to do anything, or a student yelling, being confrontational and aggressive. This is because they don’t feel understood or truly listened to. When I’ve worked with these students, I learned quickly not to make assumptions about what they are thinking or feeling. I had to genuinely express that I was interested in knowing about them, and about what they were thinking. This was often such a new experience for them in their interactions with authority figures that it would take weeks, sometimes months for a student to finally be willing to open up and begin building that relationship. When that bridge of trust was finally built, the results were instantaneous; there was a strong need and desire within them to have a positive relationship with someone, they just needed to get over the trepidation of being willing to be close to someone who might cross or punish them. With that relationship comes the ability to be authentic, candid and honest. The student will honestly share with you their thoughts feelings and experiences; and you as a mentor figure will be genuine and authentic in listening, as well as given true honest feedback to them about how to improve. When you have this relationship with an oppositional student, you can be hard and provide difficult and genuine feedback, they have been looking for someone who truly cares to provide that for them for a long time.

In this inquiry, I want to dive into how to we as teachers, specifically English language arts teachers, build this relationship and engage our oppositional, defiant, reluctant students through the primary medium of any ELA class: reading. In order to explore this question, I will be exploring a scaffold of themes. First is how we as teachers can present reading materials to these students that will be interesting engaging and relevant to their lives and interests. What is it about this literature that will draw these students interests into wanting to read. Secondly, I will explore how we can best support these students to find success through reading. Finding success and building their self-esteem and self-efficacy is vital in the life-time development of work ethic that young people need to be learning. For students who have an opposition to working, perhaps because they seldom find success, how can we show them how to be successful in the classroom. And lastly, I will explore how we can support these students in transitioning their learning in the classroom to their everyday lives. How can the success they are finding through reading translate to success in one or more aspects of their life outside of school. What can we do in the classroom to show our students that what they are reading and learning is in fact relevant outside the walls of the school. Exploring these ideas will build a better foundation as to how teachers can approach oppositional, defiant, and reluctant learners in the classroom to better foster and build an academic identity that will carry on through their lives.

**Relevant Literature**

The traditional canon of literature in schools is often not the most effective nor most relevant material available to teach to students. In many ELA classrooms you will find teachers assigning works from the classical canon only to bemoan “… the deplorable reading desires and habits of their students” (Santoli & Wagner 2004). If teachers are in recognition of this recurring theme in their students, even across all students, those effects would be even worse with already reluctant learners. By employing focused literature teachers can better foster a desire to read within their students. Focused literature can be anything that is selectively chosen with intention to meets the students needs and interest. Perhaps the main source of relevant focused literature is that of the young adult genre (YAL). YAL often involves a strong coming-of-age theme that deals with hardship, experimentation, and social issues relate to teenage years (Rybakova & Roccanti 2016). This type of literature is drawing to young people, because it deals with more relevant and realistic topics that can be immediately attached to aspects of a young student’s life. Teens will typically gravitate towards YAL with these themes naturally over the established classical canon (Cole 2008).

With finding more appropriate and relevant literature to engage our oppositional students, it is also important to give them ownership over their work (Hall & Hall 2003). No student likes to have a book shoved into their face and be told to read it. Given oppositional students choices in the education can allow for more ownership and responsibility in their learning. Salend and Sylventre assert that much of the communications issues with oppositional students comes down to power struggles (2005). Giving these students choices in their material and content can empower them to learn more about the choices they are making, as well as the consequences of their choices (Cook-Sather 2003). These lessons learned through the classroom are important and translatable to their outside the school lives. The lessons are also means as to which the students are able to build their self-esteem and self-efficacy in relation to their academics.

**Success Through Reading**

Finding quality and relevant literature for students is the first step in engaging oppositional learners. Once you get students reading and engaged in the material, there is not necessary a guarantee that they will be able to find success through that reading. It is important to give students the tools and structures to ensure that they will be able to comprehend and interpret the literature. Students who have access to, and know how to use, the tools that allow them to truly understand the reading will slowly develop a sense of self-efficacy with their reading. One potential tool for empowering students to develop reading engagement and comprehension skills is by use of text-mapping. Stone et al. used a teacher-generated text-map to help the students walk through a developing story line (2008). After careful and intentional instruction of the use of a teacher generated text-map, students were then given the opportunity to create and use their own text-map to lay out a plot structure. Through this procedure, they found that students improved in their reading comprehension skills. This improved comprehension can give students more opportunities to find success through reading, and eventually build a stronger self-esteem related to their schooling.

Cris Tovani found that it was particularly difficult to engage and work with students who held a preconception that they will never be good readers (2000, p. 5-6). His students in a reading intervention class had never heard of nor been aware of strategies that can be used by readers to help them with comprehension. By introducing strategies as something that good readers use to read successfully, he was able to get his students bought into the idea that reading is something that they can be good at. Students who are provided with a context and framework for success in their reading and education will be better suited to achieving that success. Teachers cannot assume that just because a student understands something means that they will be able to comprehend and successfully apply it. Giving students these means to find success is necessary to the students achieving that success.

**Applying Lessons to Life**

The most important take away that a student can get from school are the lessons and learning that they are able to apply to their life. We have explored the ways to get students engaged in class through finding appropriate and relevant reading materials and provided the tools and strategies for those students to find success through reading. In order for students to apply what they are learning and experiencing through reading to their lives, teachers need to support students through reflective and connecting lessons. If we have found a book that is relevant and speaks to a student’s life, the student needs to be able to articulate those connections and relevancies. Jeffrey Wilhelm has created a number of protocols that he used to engage students to reflect on the connections between their reading and their life. He found that by have students visualize what they are reading at regular intervals, and the explain what they are feeling, and whey they are feeling that connection, they were able to draw on personal experiences to connect to the literature (1997, p. 171-172). Developing the students’ ability to connect what they are reading to events and experiences in their lives means that what they are reading has been attached to something with more purpose.

An important aspect in being able to build a strong sense of self and seeking to engage their learned material to outside of class comes down to the relationship that is built with their teacher. Archambault et al. found that students experience more warmth and compassion from their teachers, exhibited lower levels of negative behaviors, as well as increased engagement to the material being taught (2017). This connection between the building of relationships, and positive behavioral outcomes are important to the oppositional students. If teachers can use that positive relationship to motivate students to engage in reflective activities, then they can help students create those positive life connections. When using the correct and appropriate literature, and strategies and techniques to encouraging success and comprehension, and the teacher-student relationship is positive and authentic, students can learn the tools to become life-long readers (Santoli & Wagner 2004).

**Discussion**

Through this inquiry, I’ve explored how to engage oppositional, defiant and reluctant learners through reading in ELA class; I’ve given tools and strategies to ensure and aid students in finding success in reading comprehension; and I’ve explained the importance and basis behind building relationships and connections with students in order to best foster a life-life desire of reading through creating relevant life connections. These themes, and the process of working through these themes is a scaffold for engaging oppositional students in class. A similar approaching could be taken in various disciplines and content areas, but specific to ELA, using reading as a tool to find that engagement can give students a successful experience that will carry on through their lives.

Educating oppositional, defiant, and reluctant students can be extremely difficult in the classroom. They are a sensitive population that if dealt with incorrectly can make the classroom a very tough environment, this is why using the right tools and working with these students intentionally is so incredibly important. Through my research into this topic, through the lens of engaging them in reading, I have learned a lot not just about working with the students in an educational setting, but a lot of tools and techniques that can be used across all classes and students. Relevant literature can be a draw for any student and has to potential to create life-long learners and readers. Reading comprehension tools and strategies gives students who need engagement ways to find success but can also be an additional tool for students who struggling with reading skills, or students who need an additional challenge and push when reading new material.

Building relationships with these students has already been found to be a crucial step in successfully working with them in school. The relationship building piece is inherent through all the different steps of the process. You cannot know what books to look for or recommend if you do not know your students. It can be difficult with students who seem to always want to push back and push away, but persistence and authenticity are evident to them, and through the time and effort they can and will respond positively to you actions. Being able to use that relationship to their benefit will allow them to recognize how much you care about them as a person and as a student. This sense of belonging in school can give them the space the feel comfortable expressing who they are and letting the lesson and knowledge that you are providing in your classroom to be absorbed and applied.

In applying this learning to my teaching, I think a lot about how to naturally build in the relationship build progression into my lessons in a way that I am able to connect to all of my students. It can be easy to work hard to connect to just a small handful of difficult students who you may see often outside of class or spend a lot of time working with. But when you have 120 students, all who are desiring genuine care and a relationship with their teacher, how do you find the time and ways to build those connections so that you can always create the best and most relevant lessons and materials. Structuring your units so that you can provide ample time for assignments and work that is designed to teach you, and your students, about each other is going to be crucial for building the student wide relationships. Writing prompts and ideas that are choice based, can be written about student interests, and that are positively shared and encouraged can give students comfort in being able to be open and expressive in their work and in the classroom.

What I want to do next with the information is develop lessons and unit plans that appropriately and effectively lay out a progression for building student relationships in the classroom. A system that allows students to be able to express who they are as individuals, while working and utilizing the materials and knowledge that are necessary within the curriculum will give them a way to best connect the content to their lives. Good education is about learning how to learn, and how to use what you are learning in your life. If I can provide a means for students to apply their learning to their passions, that I will feel accomplished as an educator.

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***WRITER’S NAME: Richard Montgomery***

**Writing Rubric: ED 613 Literature Review/Inquiry Project** **(30 Points, v. fall 2017)**

***Circle or highlight the estimated number of points for each item and write total here: \_\_\_27\_\_\_\_/30***

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | **Exemplary** | **Proficient** | **Developing** |

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Organization, structure, synthesis (16 points)** | □ Paper is relevant to inquiry question and well-organized around several themes. Each theme is supported with multiple sources. (5-4 pts.) 4  □ Synthesis consistently blends sources to show their relationship and points out where sources agree and disagree. Does not sound like an annotated bibliography or list. (4 pts.)  □ All paragraphs include a clear topic sentence and coherent sentences that develop the paragraph’s main idea. (5-4 pts.) 4  □ Consistently uses scaffolding for reader re: organization and flow (e.g., what to expect, where paper is headed). (2 pts.) 2 | □ Paper is somewhat relevant to inquiry question and organized around several themes. Some themes are supported with multiple sources. (3 pts.)  □ Synthesis sometimes blends sources to show their relationship and points out where sources agree and disagree. Sounds like an annotated bibliography or list in some parts. (3 pts.) 3  □ Most paragraphs include a clear topic sentence and coherent sentences that develop the paragraph’s main idea. (3 pt.)  □ Sometimes uses scaffolding for reader re: organization and flow (e.g., what to expect, where paper is headed). (1 pt.) | □ Paper is not closely relevant to inquiry question and not organized around several themes. Themes are generally not supported with multiple sources. (2-1 pt.)  □ Synthesis rarely blends sources to show their relationship or point out where sources agree and disagree. Sounds like a list or an annotated bibliography. (2-1 pts.)  □ Paragraphs generally lack coherence: topic sentences are not effectively placed and/or sentences do not coherently present the paragraph’s main idea. (2-1 pts.)  □ Rarely uses scaffolding for reader re: organization and flow. (.5 pts.) |
| **Conventions & APA (5 points)** | □ Strong grasp of standard writing conventions: correct capitalization, punctuation, spelling, grammar (including verb tense), usage. Virtually no errors exist. Professional quality. (2 pts.) 2  □ Consistently uses APA format correctly throughout whole paper and in reference list. Professional quality. (4 pts.) 4 | □ Good grasp of standard writing conventions (capitalization, punctuation, spelling, grammar, usage), but some errors exist. (1 pt.)  □ Generally uses APA format correctly throughout whole paper and in reference list, but a few errors exist. (3 pt.) | □ Many errors in standard writing conventions (capitalization, punctuation, spelling, grammar, usage); errors may distract/confuse reader. (.5 pts.)  □ Frequent, recurring errors in APA format throughout whole paper and in reference list. (2-1 pts.) |
| **Writing style and voice (9 points)** | □ Sentence structure is consistently clear, concise, and fluid. (3 pts.)  □ Conveys author’s personality and passion for the topic effectively and appropriately without sounding overly personal/informal or too generic/removed. (2 pts.)  □ Consistently written in active rather than passive voice throughout whole paper. (2 pts.)  □ Uses direct quotations from the literature minimally. When used, consistently and smoothly introduces and integrates quotes into text. (2 pts.) | □ Sentence structure is somewhat clear, concise, and fluid. (2 pts.)  □ Voice/tone are generally effective and appropriate. May sound too personal/informal or too generic/removed in a few places. A sense of passion for the topic sometimes comes through. (1 pt.)  □ Generally written in active rather than passive voice. (1 pt.)  □ Sometimes overuses direct quotations. Quotes are sometimes introduced and integrated into text, or introduced/integrated in an awkward or clumsy fashion. (1 pt.) | □ Sentence structure frequently lacks clarity and/or fluidity. May sound too wordy. (1 pts.)  □ Voice/tone is generally too personal/informal or too generic/removed. Little sense of passion for the topic comes through. (.5 pts.)  □ Overuses passive voice. (.5 pts.)    □ Overuses direct quotations from the literature. Quotes are rarely introduced, or are introduced/ integrated in an awkward or clumsy fashion. (.5 pts.) |

**ED 613 Literature Review/Inquiry Project Overall Scoring Checklist (20 Points)**

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| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Indicator** | **Evident**  **(1 pt)** | **Partially Evident**  **(.5 pts)** | **Not Evident (0 pts)** |
| **Introduction** with history and background is included: |  |  |  |
| * Your interest in the topic is clearly stated and explained. | 1 |  |  |
| * An overview of all themes is presented. | 1 |  |  |
| * Rationale for selection of themes is presented. |  | .5 |  |
| * The introduction and topic reflect the overall project goals, purposes, and essential questions (e.g., extend writer’s pedagogical content knowledge and research-based best practices in one’s discipline) | 1 |  |  |
| A **discussion & theory-practice connection** section is presented. |  |  |  |
| * The themes are restated and synthesized. | 1 |  |  |
| * The audience is reminded of your interest and what you gained from reading, reviewing, and organizing the literature. | 1 |  |  |
| * You included written reflection on what is most intriguing/exciting for you about how to apply this information concretely in your teaching practice (“So what?” question) |  | .5 |  |
| * You have written about additional questions raised for you through your inquiry, and/or where you want to go next with this information (“Now what?” question) |  | .5 |  |
| * The paper comes to closure appropriately. |  | .5 |  |
| **Reference section** is included and titled *References* rather than *Bibliography* or *Works Cited.* |  |  |  |
| * After each reference list entry, you have included in brackets which kind of required source it represents: peer-reviewed journal (note which are from flagship journals in your discipline), practitioner text, webpage. | 1 |  |  |
| * Each citation in the reference list appears in the text of your paper, and each citation in the text of your paper appears in the reference list. (Be sure to triple check this.) | 1 |  |  |
| * APA style is used correctly for all of your in-text citations and well as reference list entries. | 1 |  |  |
| * The literature review is min. 1000 words long, not counting reference list. More sources will generally lead to a longer, more robust literature review. | 1 |  |  |
| A *minimum* of 5 scholarly, peer-reviewed journal articles been consulted and cited (direct quotes not required). |  |  |  |
| * At least one of the peer-reviewed articles is from a flagship journal in your discipline (see list on original task description). | 1 |  |  |
| * The five peer-reviewed journal articles were published within the past 15 years. | 1 |  |  |
| A *minimum* of 2 practitioner texts (such as books written for teachers) have been consulted and cited (direct quotes not required). | 1 |  |  |
| A *minimum* of 3 professional webpages have been consulted and cited (direct quotes not required). |  |  | 0 |
|  | **Total # Evident Items x 1 =** | **Total # Partially Evident Items x .5 =** | **Total # Not Evident Items** |
| CHECKLIST SCORING: | 12 | 2 |  |

**SCORING**

Scoring is determined by the combination of total number of points from the writing rubric (out of 30 possible) + the number of **TOTAL EVIDENT** points and TOTAL PARTIALLY EVIDENT points from the above checklist (out of 18 possible).

Writing rubric score: \_\_\_\_\_\_27\_\_\_\_\_ / 30

Checklist score: \_\_\_\_\_\_14\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ / 20

TOTAL score: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_41\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ / 50

**Writer Self-Assessment to Submit with Final Literature Review/Inquiry Project**

*[You need to submit a completed version of this rubric and checklist along with your narrative comments when you submit your final paper.]*

1) Mark where you think your paper falls on the literature review writing rubric and the evident/partially evident/not evident checklist. Write in your self-assessed scores.

I believe that my discussion section is quite week. I was not sure how to discuss and synthesize differently than from what I had already done during the introduction and the theme reviews. I also struggled to coherently talked about my last theme.

2) Write some brief reflective comments here*, including these prompts, please.*

* What are the main things you changed since getting feedback?

I attempted to make my theme and assertions more clear and accurate within the scope of the assignments objectives. I am not confident that I succeeded in that endeavor.

* What are you most proud of in this paper? What do you think are your paper’s strongest points?

I think that throughout the paper I wrote with an obvious passion for the topics. It is clear in my introduction, and during the theme reviews that I care a lot of both reading, and more important students struggling with severe mental and behavioral health concerns.

* If you had more time, what would you continue to improve?

I would spend more time trying to iron out my assertions more concretely. I would also give myself more opportunity to find sources from a wider ranger of topics or subjects.

* Now that you are finished with this project, what feedback do you have about the assignment for the instructor to consider in future iterations?

I think that this was a cool assignment. I think it would be something that should be started at the very beginning of the semester and worked on slowly through the whole time. That would make it possible to connect and tie a lot of themes and ideas to the other various pieces of work being done throughout the class.