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ABSTRACT

People who live in a democracy should be well informed of local, state, national, and international happenings. Students should become curious about news items and relate current happenings to the personal self. They must possess skills in word recognition and in diverse kinds of comprehension since reading is an important way to glean current events items. This paper enumerates selected word recognition techniques which students must master to read with comprehension, including determining unknown words through context clues, using phonics to ascertain the correct word, and developing syllabication skills to determine an unknown word. The paper also discusses reading comprehension techniques, such as understanding new vocabulary, seeing each abstract word in print prior to reading the current events item, perceiving a purpose for reading the news item, discussing each possible answer to a purpose following the reading activity, and using current events ideas discussed and analyzed by making appropriate applications (making a mural, developing a vocabulary wall chart, completing journal writing activities, doing a time line). It lists several examples of issues students may learn about, such as cutting taxes for wealthier individuals as compared to those who are on the lower end of earned income, waging/threatening war against enemy nations as compared to attempting a peaceful solution, or emphasizing capital punishment for major crimes. The paper finds that critical thinking and creative thought should be emphasized for students who read about current events and that to deal with current issues, students need to do much reading and studying. (NKA)

Reading Current Events Items.

by Marlow Ediger

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READING CURRENT EVENTS ITEMS

There are salient current events items which cut across all academic disciplines. It is important for students to stay abreast of recent happenings in the news. In a democracy, one needs to be well informed of local, state, national, and international happenings. Informed decisions may then be made by the individual based upon knowledge and skills, not here say. Students should increasingly become curious about news items. Most of these happenings do affect the personal lives of students. Each student needs to relate current happenings to the personal self.

Reading is a very significant approach in gleaning current events items. Thus students need to possess skills in word recognition and in diverse kinds of comprehension. For a well known news web site, check <http://www.cnn.com>).

Word Recognition in Reading Current Events News Happenings

There are selected word recognition techniques which students need to master in order to read with comprehension. First, students need to be able to determine unknown words through the use of context clues (Gunning, 2000, 122-123). Here, the reader is guided to ascertain which word fits in meaningfully in relation to the surrounding words. The chosen word by the student must fit in and make sense. This rules out the placing of a word in sentence which is ridiculous and meaningless. Second, the student may not be able to ascertain the correct word for the unknown in context and thus the use of phonics is also important. With phonics, the student uses a sounding out approach by connecting the abstract symbol with its corresponding sound. There is a limit in using phonics in determining unknown words if the sound/symbol relationship is just not there. Irregularly spelled words come in this category. However, there are numerous initial consonant sounds which are regularly spelled and thus provide a clue to students what the unknown word is, especially when paying careful attention to context clues. Third, syllabication skills are salient for students to use to determine an unknown word. If an unknown word is met in reading current events, the student should notice if there is a familiar inherent part. Common prefixes in an unknown word may provide the student with the needed skills to recognize a word. The commonly used prefixes may be the following: ex, un, ir, de. Commonly used suffixes should also be noticed in order that a reader may unlock an unknown word. Commonly used

suffixes are the following: less, ful. By noticing parts within an unknown word, such as a prefix and/or a suffix, the student might then be able to identify the unknown and continue sequentially in reading current events subject matter. Word recognition techniques used by the student to unlock unknown words are tools, not ends, to comprehend current events news items (Ediger and Rao, 2000, Chapter Seven).

Comprehension in Reading Current Events

If students are to benefit from a quality current events program, they need to engage in higher levels of thinking (See Ediger, 1982, p. 5). But to do so, the student needs to understand vocabulary used in the written work. If a current events news item contains new vocabulary, these need to be understood by the learner. The following, for example, may be new to the learner: strike, production workers, management, labor unions, picket line. The teacher needs to assist students to understand each new vocabulary term. For example, there are a plethora of meanings which may be attached to the concept "strike." Thus, there is a strike in baseball, one may strike a match, or workers may strike due to perceived causes at the work place. It is quite obvious when analyzing the five new vocabulary terms listed above that the word "strike" pertains to workers in a place producing goods and services. Students then need to observe illustrations showing a strike by workers. By reading a current events item, students need assistance to understand the reasons for a strike as well as the pictorial appearance of workers striking. Depth teaching for each new vocabulary term might well be emphasized if time permits. Thus, in addition to observing/discussing an illustration of a strike, students may also observe a video-tape on what is involved when workers strike. Illustrations and videos may also be used to guide students to understand the following: production workers, management, labor unions, picket line.

Second, in addition to understanding new vocabulary terms, the student needs to see each of these abstract words in print, prior to reading the inherent current events item. This will help learners to identify the new words when reading contextually. Seeing the new words in print on the chalkboard prior to reading and seeing related illustrations assists students to read meaningfully (See Wells, et. al, 1987, 270-272).

Third, by this time, students should perceive a purpose or purposes for reading the current events news item. A purpose involves a question which students would like to read

information in order to find a needed answer. Perhaps, a question may involve why there is disagreement between production workers and management when a strike occurs. This question may be answered through reading the current events news item. It is good if students identify the purpose for reading. However, the teacher may also pose challenging questions for students to locate information through reading.

Fourth, each possible answer to a purpose needs to be discussed, following the reading activity. Meaning may then be attached to what has been read. The discussion should not only emphasize the abstract (reading and discussing verbally) but also the semi-concrete (films, CD ROMS, video disks, computerized visuals, and study prints) as well as the concrete (objects and items) directly related to what is being discussed. In other words, students need to make sense of ideas gleaned from the current events program (Ediger and Rao, 2001, Chapter Fourteen).

Fifth, students should use current events ideas discussed and analyzed by making appropriate applications such as in the following:

1. developing a vocabulary wall chart of new terms learned.
2. making a mural showing the interrelatedness of the new terms encountered.
3. writing and dating diary entries written on current events items covered in class.
4. completing journal writing activities which incorporate impressions gleaned from ongoing learning opportunities.
5. doing a time line to show sequence of events occurring in a current events unit of study (See Ediger and Rao, 2001, Chapter Fifteen).

Time devoted to current events instruction will assist in determining which of the above can be completed successfully by students in ongoing lessons/units of study. A current events news item may be taught within a unit covering four to five days in duration. It may be covered in a daily lesson plan if the relevance does not warrant an entire unit of study. The current events items might also be woven into the present social studies unit being taught. The latter approach emphasizes the news item being related to what is being studied by learners in the social studies. The current events curriculum then needs to be organized efficiently and effectively to assist students to learn as much as possible in this important area. All in society should have a good grasp of important happenings locally, statewide, nationally, and internationally. Why? What transpires

every day in society affects the individual who does not live in an island unto the self but interacts and relates to others in an ever widening arena. Being able to read well in current events is salient in that reading is a major way of learning across the curriculum. Journal writing stresses a connection with reading in that what is written may be read so that meaningful communication does take place.

Issues in Current Events and Reading

Issues in current events which students need to read about are many. There are pros and cons for taking a stand on an issue. Which issues, as examples, may learners read about?

1. keeping natural lands as they are compared to economic development of these areas. When considering issues, there are trade offs in accepting either end of the continuum.
2. cutting taxes for the wealthier individuals as compared to those who are on the lower end of earned income.
3. waging/threatening war against enemy nations as compared to attempting a peaceful solution to conflicts.
4. having a system of welfare available for the needy as compared to each person/group completely fending for themselves.
5. emphasizing capital punishment for major crimes committed as compared to lighter sentences given such as life imprisonment.

The above are examples of issues in current events. Each issue discussed needs careful delimitation and much research. Students, too, need to possess background information in order to study each issue. Much reading, along with other learning activities, will need to be done to assist students to deal intelligently with the diverse issues discussed. Critical thinking will need to be emphasized in order to

1. separate the salient from the more trivial subject matter.
2. stress the importance of main ideas with supporting content or details.
3. analyze content read so that it truly focuses upon the issue being considered.
4. do indepth reading/studying of the current issue being emphasized.
5. use ideas read and gleaned by writing related summaries and conclusions (See Resnick, 1990,183).

Creative thought also needs to be inherent in dealing with

issues in current events. Thus, the student needs to

1. consider unique solutions to issues in current events. Reading is one way of delving into an issue so that possibilities exist for creative thinking.

2. brain storm solutions to synthesize different points of view in an issue. Novel ideas are to be encouraged.

3. write diverse possibilities for narrowing the gap when issues are being discussed (See Curriculum Standards for Social Studies, 1994).

There is ample room for creativity to flourish in a quality current events program. The reading/writing connection needs to be inherent in developing originality in ideas when considering issues in current events. Parker (2001) lists the following major purposes of current events instruction:

1. to read and view news materials.

2. to discriminate between important and less significant news items.

3. to take a position on issues based on knowledge and critical evaluation of the facts, and

4. to predict likely consequences in terms of present developments.

Thus to deal adequately with issues in the current events, the student needs to do much reading and studying to separate what is important from that which is of lesser value. In any issue there are main ideas, supporting content, and vital concepts which need to be considered in order to be a thinking individual. Being able to take a stand on an issue and being able to foresee selected possible results of the stand taken are vital in current events instruction.

Careful planning of the objectives for students to achieve in current events is a must. Knowledge, skills, and attitudinal objectives need to be emphasized in teaching and learning situations. Learning opportunities for students to attain the chosen ends need to be varied to provide for different interests, abilities, and motivation levels of involved learners. Reading and writing connections are important learning activities. A quality program of assessment needs to be in evidence to ascertain how much each student has learned. A variety of assessment procedures need to be in the offing including

1. testing which contains valid and reliable test items.
2. journal writing which indicates learner achievement in current events study.
3. diary entrees and logs completed by learners to show

major facts, concepts, and generalizations acquired.

4. self evaluation instruments completed by the involved learner.

5. reflective thinking stressed whereby the learner appraises what has been learned, what is left to learn, and how the remainder will be learned in current events.

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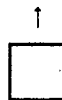
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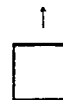
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