Lessons from the Literacy Club: Hamlet Meets the Lion King After-School

Jacqueline Darvin

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this article is to provide a model of an academic intervention and support program in literacy that focuses on the needs of individual students and revalues them as readers, goals that are of extreme importance when working with adolescents who have repeatedly experienced academic failure and view themselves as poor readers. This article describes the key elements and strategies of an academic intervention and support program called the Literacy Club that was designed for struggling high school readers and their literacy tutors. This article supplies a literacy-focused lesson plan format that teachers from the Literacy Club deemed successful for integrating literacy objectives and strategies into the teaching of *Hamlet* and concludes with the three reading strategies that were considered the most helpful by the students.

AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY

Jacqueline Darvin is an Assistant Professor of Literacy Education at Queens College of the City University of New York. Her publications include several articles in *English Journal* and the *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy,* the secondary journal of the International Reading Association.

Introduction

Sung (a pseudonym) is an English Language Learner from Korea who was attending high school in Flushing, Queens in 2006. At that time, he had already failed the New York State English Regents Examination on six occasions and was preparing to sit for it for the seventh time. He had passed all of his high school courses successfully, including English, plus the other six required Regents exams. Due to his struggles with *academic* reading and writing in English, he was having tremendous difficulty passing the English Regents. He had not been permitted to graduate with his class in 2005, and at age twenty, he was still attending high school every day, strictly for English Regents test preparation.

Day after day, Sung was given practice English Regents exams and told that he would need to pass the exam before he would be allowed to graduate. He expressed an interest in attending John Jay College in Manhattan to study criminal justice, but could not apply without his high school diploma. He would have one last opportunity to take the exam before turning 21, the age at which he would be exited from the system,

meaning that New York State would no longer be responsible for paying for his high school education. His only hopes of achieving a high school diploma at that point would be to pursue a GED. During this final high-stakes year, Sung was given the opportunity to try something different, a new after-school program called the Literacy Club. This program was a collaborative effort between the Graduate Secondary Literacy Program at Queens College of the City University of New York and his high school.

Much has been written in the educational literature about the value of literacy clubs (Beers, 2003; Smith, 1997; Goodman, 1996), literacy discourse communities (Barton, Hamilton & Ivanic, 2000; Gee, 2000), and literacy communities of practice (Pahl & Roswell, 2005; Smith & Wilhelm, 2002). Two of the many benefits of literacy clubs and communities include that "members see themselves as readers and writers" and "are concerned with each other's interests and welfare" (Smith, 1997, p.115). Additionally, in literacy clubs, "mistakes are expected, not frowned upon or punished as undesirable behavior" (Smith, 1997, p. 114). These are just a few of the theoretical underpinnings of the Literacy Club, as it was conceptualized for secondary students like Sung who have experienced intense feelings of failure with regard to their literacy experiences in school.

This article describes the key elements and pedagogical strategies of this academic intervention and support program. These facets of the Literacy Club can be adapted to enhance the teaching of literacy in a wide variety of academic intervention and support programs, such as "extra help" programs that take place before, during or after the regular school day, resource room or reading lab settings for special education students, English Language Learners or students with reading difficulties or disabilities, private tutoring sessions that take place in students' homes, "push-in" or "pull-out" reading services for secondary students, and settings in which Literacy Coaches work with individual students or small groups to provide literacy support. This article also supplies a literacy-focused lesson plan format that teachers from the Literacy Club deemed successful for integrating literacy objectives and strategies and concludes with the three reading strategies that were considered the most helpful by the students. The purpose of this article is to provide a model of an academic intervention and support program in literacy that focuses on the needs of individual students and revalues them as readers, goals that are of extreme importance when working with adolescents that have repeatedly experienced academic failure and view themselves as poor readers and writers.

How Students and Teachers Become Members of the Literacy Club

Students are first identified and recommended by the school guidance department based on their records indicating difficulties with reading and/or failing or low scores on standardized tests, particularly the New York State Regents Examinations in English, Global Studies, and American History. In New York State, these Regents exams are high stakes tests because without passing marks, students are not able to graduate from high school. The tests rely very heavily on reading comprehension and the ability to write essays based on difficult readings. Many of the students that are identified by their guidance counselors for the Literacy Club have failed the English Regents two or three

times already. The exam is normally given to students in January or June of their junior year, which gives them four or five opportunities to re-take it before graduation. The exam is given in January, June, and August of each year.

Once students are identified by the guidance counselors, letters go home to students and their parents from the principal's office stating that they have been identified as students who would benefit from academic support services in literacy and that a local college will be providing individual and small group tutoring to students who choose to join and attend the Literacy Club sessions. In the letter, students and parents are told that joining the Literacy Club is completely voluntary, but is a serious commitment. The letter emphasizes that if they join, they must be present at every session. The students and their parents are asked to sign "contracts" stating that they agree to this and understand that their attendance every week is necessary in order to see improvement. This is also important to the graduate students who are doing the tutoring because they collect data on their individual students and create Biographic Literacy Profiles as part of their final grades for their course.

The tutors in the Literacy Club are graduate students of literacy education who are already certified secondary teachers of English, social studies, science, mathematics, etc.. These graduate students, as part of their master's degree program in secondary literacy education, are required to engage in a hands-on literacy practicum experience during which they work with struggling and/or reluctant readers doing targeted reading instruction. New York State requires that teachers seeking certification as secondary reading specialists have practicum experiences with students at both the middle and high school levels. The Literacy Club rotates between a high school and middle school setting every semester so that the graduate students can meet this requirement. They are supervised by a professor from the university and attend a half-hour long seminar after each Literacy Club session. During the seminar, the graduate students share their questions and concerns about the students and discuss required readings for the course.

How the Literacy Club Operates

The Literacy Club meets every Wednesday for two hours after school for the length of a college semester (approximately 15 weeks). Prior to beginning the tutoring sessions themselves, the students and teachers share a snack together and students are encouraged to talk about any problems they may be having in their classes, particularly related to readings that they don't understand and writing assignments with which they are struggling. The time that is set aside for rapport building is an important part of beginning the club process (Beers, 2003; Smith, 1997) and promotes trust and facilitates communication between the high school students and their tutors.

For the first hour of the Literacy Club, students meet with their tutors individually. During the first session or two, the teachers normally do some "getting-to-know-you" activities with the students, administer an informal reading questionnaire that asks students about the genres they like/dislike and other personal questions about their reading, and solicit writing samples from students. During the second or third session, the teachers administer the Qualitative Reading Inventory 4 (Leslie & Caldwell, 2006), a

reading assessment that was chosen for its focus on assessment of word identification, fluency, and comprehension. The QRI also provides suggestions for intervention instruction, procedures for assessment of strategic reading, and inclusion of results in classroom portfolios. The QRI is later used as a post-test near the conclusion of the Literacy Club sessions in order to evaluate student growth. During the sessions in between the pre and post tests, the tutors focus on the areas of literacy learning that the students need to improve, as indicated by the QRI. Much of the time that students spend with their individual tutors is spent on learning and applying strategies to help improve their reading, including Coding the Text, Making Connections While You Read, Visualizing and Taking Episodic Notes. These strategies are discussed in detail in subsequent sections of this article.

After students meet with their individual tutors for one hour, they are given a short break and return for whole group instruction. During the remaining fifty minutes of the Literacy Club, all of the students and teachers work together on a literary selection that is chosen by *both* the students and the teachers at the beginning of the semester. The lessons that are taught during the whole group portion of the literacy club are created and team-taught by two teachers each week on a rotating schedule. While the two teachers are presenting their lesson, the other teachers present in the room sit with the students and assist them with individual questions and difficulties as the lesson unfolds.

In 2006, the whole class text that the students and teachers chose was an annotated version of Shakespeare's *Hamlet* (Gorman, 2003). Other literacy selections that were considered but not chosen included *The Color Purple*, *Les Miserables,* and *Wicked*. These literary selections were considered primarily because of their connections to Broadway theatre productions that were running in New York City in 2006. Both the students and tutors were told by the college supervisor that they would be attending a Broadway performance as a culminating activity, therefore that knowledge helped to guide their text selection for the Literacy Club.

Key Elements of "The Literacy Club"

1. Create a community of learners in which students have many opportunities for social interaction that depart from the norm and give them different classroom experiences than they've had in the past.

One of the key elements of the Literacy Club is based upon the powerful social component of language and literacy learning. Smith (1997) discusses the potent connection between social activities and literacy development when he writes about people seeking entry into what he terms "literacy clubs." When discussing membership in these clubs, he writes that "members occupy themselves with whatever activities the group has formed itself to promote, constantly demonstrating the value and utility of these activities to the new members, helping them to participate in these activities themselves when they want, but never forcing their involvement" (p. 114). Vygotsky (1978) also wrote extensively about what he called the "cultural method" of thinking. He went so far as to say that without a social component, learning would not occur at all. Vygotsky's concept of the Zone of Proximal Development also applies directly to the

Literacy Club because an important aspect of the ZPD involves how learners make use of the help of others as they gradually take over more control and direction of their own thinking and learning (McNamee, 1990).

The importance of the relationships between the high school students, their tutors, one another, and the university supervisor is emphasized and encouraged in the Literacy Club to maximize the social component of learning. In this program, struggling high school readers are tutored in an environment that models a community of learners, one that they don't often experience in their traditional high school courses. Examples of how this community of learners is achieved include both students and teachers calling each other by their first names, teachers sharing their own reading struggles with students through think-alouds and read-alouds, students and teachers sharing a snack together before the tutoring sessions begin, and students being encouraged to ask a lot of questions, particularly when they are confused or having trouble comprehending what they are reading. This departure from the norm is extremely important when working with at-risk or struggling students who rarely benefit from remediation that is simply "more of the same." Greene, a fierce proponent of the arts in education, writes, "In many respects, teaching and learning are matters of breaking through barriers – of expectation, of boredom, of predefinition. To teach, at least in one dimension, is to provide persons with the knacks and know-how they need in order to teach themselves" (Greene, 1995, p.14).

2. Allow the students to take active roles in their learning and be involved in decision-making at many levels in order to combat passivity.

A second key element of the Literacy Club is to encourage the high school students to take active roles in their learning and to be involved in decision-making with the teachers on many levels. For example, through an innovative teaching projects grant that I received from the president of my college, the Literacy Club was able to provide the opportunity and monetary resources for the students to attend a Broadway play with their Literacy Club tutors and to use the aesthetic experience as a springboard for many instructional literacy activities. Members of the Literacy Club in the fall of 2006 attended a performance of Disney's *The Lion King* after reading an annotated version of Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, a play that contains many similar thematic elements that are also present in the tragedy. In order to teach *Hamlet* in a different way than most high school English classes, it was taught using its connections to Disney's *The Lion King*, an animated film with which the students were already familiar. Because the high school where the program is housed is in Queens, New York, the Literacy Club also had the opportunity to see the Broadway production of *The Lion King* in Manhattan at the end of the semester. From the very first day of the *Hamlet/Lion King* unit, students were encouraged to make connections between the characters, themes and plots of the two works. Additionally, the Mel Gibson film version of *Hamlet* was shown so that students could see yet another rendering of this powerful tragedy.

The Literacy Club tutors and high school students chose the play and corresponding text collaboratively at the beginning of the semester. This ability to choose

the play and text *together* helped combat the passivity that teachers often encounter when working with adolescents, particularly ones that struggle academically. In *It's Never Too Late: Leading Adolescents to Lifelong Literacy*, Allen writes,

> "It is this very passivity, at least in terms of academics, that I have found often characterizes students in special programs or resource classes. They wait for work. They wait for something to happen. They wait to get out of school. As passive nonreaders, they wait for reading to happen to them, not knowing that reading doesn't work that way" (1995, p.155).

This emphasis on combating student passivity is an element of the Literacy Club that encourages students to be more responsible for their own learning and view reading as a more active transaction between a reader and text.

3. Re-value the students as readers using miscue analysis and make them more aware of the kinds of miscues they make and the strengths they already possess.

A third key element of the Literacy Club is re-valuing the high school students as readers and writers and making them more aware of their strengths in these areas. As a former high school teacher for twelve years, I know that this is particularly important when working with at-risk adolescents because they have often experienced years of failure and are reluctant to engage in school-related experiences that will cause them to feel unsuccessful again. Recall the example of the Korean-born student that failed the English Regents exam six times. How must he have felt about himself as a reader?

One way that this re-valuing is done in the Literacy Club is through miscue analysis (Wilde, 2000; Goodman, 1976; Goodman, 1973), a diagnostic procedure that helps identify "miscues," rather than *mistakes* in reading. This procedure can also be used to identify what readers *do well*. Retrospective miscue analysis (RMA) has proven effective in revaluing readers because as part of the process, readers come to understand why all errors aren't bad and the difference between miscues that preserve meaning in text and those that don't (Goodman & Marek, 1996). The process of looking at the kind of miscues that they make also shows readers their abilities to self-correct and apply a range of strategies when they need to do so.

The tutors in the Literacy Club chose miscue analysis and retrospective miscue analysis as means of assessment for the high school students because they are two of the best ways to show readers, in very specific ways, what they do well as they read and to pinpoint the kinds of errors that impact meaning and those that don't. An example of this might be a reader that substitutes the word "bunny" for "rabbit" in a text. This miscue is one that preserves meaning in the reading, even though the word substitution itself is incorrect. After completing the RMAs, the tutors discuss the types of miscues that the students make *with them*, allowing them to see that not all of the miscues they make affect their ability to comprehend text. This is an eye-opening experience for high school students that are accustomed to simply being told how many mistakes they made, with no discussion about the graphophonic, syntactic, and semantic acceptability of their miscues and the extent to which they affect meaning. Discussing not only the quantity but the quality of a reader's miscues is also helpful for adults and English Language Learners

because the process acts as a confidence builder and a perfect segue for introducing reading strategies that will be helpful in targeting specific weak areas in their reading. An excellent, easy-to-use resource for teachers to learn about using miscue analysis in this way is *Miscue Analysis Made Easy: Building on Student Strengths* (Wilde, 2000).

4. Teach challenging content-area texts through a lens of literacy and include reading objectives, strategies and rationales for how and why the methods chosen will help the students become better readers.

The last and most important key element of the Literacy Club is to teach literature and other kinds of texts first and foremost through a lens of *literacy*. When the tutors, who are all New York State certified teachers working toward master's degrees in secondary literacy, design their lessons for the Literacy Club, they are required to include literacy objectives, strategies and rationales for how and why the methods that they are using in the lesson will help the students become better readers. The teachers are asked to try and view the texts that are being studied through the eyes of struggling readers and to do things in their lessons to make the texts more user friendly for them. The lessons and activities are created with the explicit intention of enabling the struggling reader to make visible things that proficient readers see and do naturally and unconsciously. These include strategies such as coding the text, visualizing, making connections, questioning, inferring, evaluating, analyzing, recalling, and self-monitoring (Daniels & Zemelman, 2004).

Literacy-Focused Lesson Plans

When the tutors design lessons for the whole group sessions of the Literacy Club, one of the required elements is at least one "literacy objective" for every lesson. This objective is written just below the content objective(s), and is written in the form of a "Students will…" statement. Examples of literacy objectives can include things like: "Students will visualize ideas and situations in the text," "Students will be able to evaluate the reading and determine what is important," or "Students will self-monitor while reading and indicate problematic passages in the text." These differ from content area objectives, such as "Students will be able to explain why *Hamlet* was a tragic hero," "Students will write a paragraph with supporting details comparing Claudius from *Hamlet* with Scar from *The Lion King*," or "Students will be able to define the word procrastination and provide an example."

Another element that is required in the lesson is a rationale for how and why the lesson will help the students to reach the literacy objective and a description of the method(s) that will be used. Adopting this literacy-focused lesson plan design obliges teachers to really think about *how* they teach literacy skills to their struggling readers and allows them to be more reflective about their practices when particular methods are effective or unsuccessful. What's innovative about this lesson plan is that it makes literacy and content area objectives equally important and views lessons as "works in progress," rather than finished products that are set in stone. It requires teachers to be

introspective about their lessons and to articulate clearly their plans for future improvement. A sample lesson plan can be found in Appendix A.

Although this lesson plan may be too labor intensive to be used daily, it can be used periodically by teachers to ensure that literacy objectives are being integrated with the teaching of content, particularly when students' difficulties with reading are preventing them from accessing the content necessary to complete lessons or assignments. Most secondary teachers have encountered this situation, particularly when working with challenging texts. If students can't read and understand the text, then all learning stops.

It is also an excellent lesson plan for reading specialists, special education and content-area teachers to use when demonstrating to administrators, parents or university supervisors that they are, in fact, integrating the teaching of literacy into content area lessons. At the conclusion of the lesson, teachers record how successful they believe the methods chosen were in helping students to achieve both the content and literacy objectives and possible suggestions for improvement the next time the lesson or a similarly-designed one is used. This reflective component can be used by teachers as a form of self-analysis, and it can also be shared in discussions with colleagues, administrators or university supervisors as part of program evaluation.

Successful Reading Strategy One: Coding the Text

One of the three most successful reading strategies (as reported by students in the Literacy Club) used during the *Hamlet/Lion King* unit was Coding the Text (Daniels & Zemelman, 2004). Students were told to record their mental responses and thoughts about the text as they were reading and were provided with a list of symbols and Post-its on which to mark these symbols in the text itself. The symbols included:

Symbol	**Meaning**
?	This part of the text seems strange
??	This part completely confuses me
*	This strikes me as being important
!	This confirms what I thought would happen
X	This contradicts what I thought would happen
~	New or interesting information

As the students read *Hamlet*, they placed Post-its on various sections of the text containing the symbols above as well as one or two sentence explanations of the thought processes behind their uses of the symbols. During group discussions, the students were encouraged to share their Coding of the Text with others and make visible their thought processes as they were reading. As the students became comfortable with this strategy, they were not only able to share their thoughts with one another and with their Literacy Club tutors, they were also better able to understand their own thought processes as they read, a worthy goal for struggling readers who often have difficulty articulating their

reading behaviors in such explicit ways. This strategy can be employed in many different ways, but this particular version was adapted from Daniels & Zemelman (2004).

In a reflection about the Coding the Text strategy, a high school student named Mandy (pseudonym) wrote, "Now when I read, I know how to notice specific things in the story and ask questions. If I come to a word and don't know what it means, I look at the words around it to help figure it out. Before, I would just skip it and then the sentence wouldn't make any sense." This same student had written in her introductory writing sample during the first Literacy Club session,

> One of the things I would like to work on is remembering what I read. I don't like school that much, but I want to be somebody when I grow up, so I'm trying hard to pass. I'm not that good of a student. I don't pass that many tests and I get confused easily. I also get distracted. My attitude towards my work is I try my best. Even if I don't know something, I write anything down to show I did some work.

This transformation in Mandy's view of herself as a reader shows how differently adolescent struggling readers feel toward themselves when they are given literacy strategies that work and are re-valued as readers who possess strengths and abilities in reading, not just shortcomings.

Successful Reading Strategy Two: Making Connections While You Read

Another reading strategy that was embedded into many of the *Hamlet/Lion King* literacy-focused lessons and deemed helpful by the students involved asking them to make a variety of connections as they read. The Literacy Club tutors emphasized the Transactional Theory of Reading (Rosenblatt, 1978) in which the reader and the text interact with one another in the process of meaning-making, a process during which the reader is taking an active, rather than passive, stance toward the material. Students were taught about the three most common textual connections, text-to-self, text-to-text, and text-to-world (Tovani, 2004), and encouraged to make all three during the reading of *Hamlet*. This was done in several different ways throughout the course of the semester.

For example, in Act III, students were provided with actual quotes from the text and asked to read the quotes, make one of the three types of connections listed above, and then explain their connections in detail to the group. In another lesson about tragic heroes (such as Hamlet and Simba in *The Lion King*), students were asked to consider people in their own lives that they consider to be tragic heroes. They were asked to articulate in writing how and why the tragic heroes were trapped in situations where they could not win, what their tragic flaws were, how they fell from greatness, and how they won a moral victory and their spirits lived on.

In a lesson at the end of the unit, students were asked to record connections between the written text of *Hamlet*, the Mel Gibson film, the animated version of *The Lion King* and the Broadway play on a graphic organizer. The conversation that followed included an in-depth analysis by the students as to why the endings of the various versions may have been different, what stylistic choices were made by the creators of the different adaptations, and what effects these choices have on a reader or viewer. These

lessons about connections made the text far more accessible to the students and broke down some of the barriers that they felt about reading a Shakespearean tragedy. Making connections to the text also enabled the students to get to know each other better and make the text into more of a living entity.

Successful Reading Strategy Three: Visualization and Episodic Notes

A third reading strategy that proved to be beneficial to the students in the reading of *Hamlet* was visualization (Harvey & Goudvis, 2000), followed by the taking of Episodic Notes (Burke, 2000). One of the problems that many struggling readers face with texts is that they have difficulty visualizing elements of the text in their minds' eyes. This is a skill that proficient readers develop naturally and for the most part, unconsciously. This may account for why it is common for proficient readers to like the written version of stories, such as books, more than the film versions of the same stories. Such people often complain that the characters in the film were not like the ones they pictured in their minds or the setting of the movie didn't look the way they thought it should. For struggling readers, however, the film version of a literary work often has the *opposite effect*, providing them with visual representations of characters, settings, or other story elements that they have difficulty envisioning on their own. It is for this reason that struggling readers must be given opportunities to practice the skill of visualization during reading and understand that their ability to do this is an important part of proficient reading.

Periodically throughout the reading of *Hamlet*, the students were asked to stop and illustrate what they visualized during the reading of that scene. They were provided with sheets that contained blank boxes for drawing on the left and blank lines for writing on the right. The boxes and lines were labeled Act I, Scene I; Act I, Scene II; and so forth. After the reading of each scene, students drew what they visualized in the boxes and on the lines provided, summarized the events of the scene and explained why they *Organizers for your Classroom*. A sample of a blank form that was provided to the students appears in Appendix B.

The Episodic Notes were later compared and contrasted with those of other members of the group, and students became better able to express, both in writing and verbally, why they visualized particular aspects of the text in certain ways. They also were asked to look over their Episodic Notes when they were reviewing the scenes that had been read the previous week and used them to help remember what they had read. Remembering what has been read is another challenge that many struggling readers face, and Episodic Notes are an excellent way to combat this problem. One reason why the Episodic Notes help readers to remember what they've read is because they are pictorial and textual representations of meaning that are created by the readers themselves. They are the products of their highly unique and personal transactions with the text. Also, the fact that the Episodic Notes contain drawings or other symbolic representations of thought means that the creator of them must interact with the text on a highly complex level, one that involves analysis, synthesis, and interpretation. It is much harder for readers to forget material with which they have interacted in these multifaceted ways.

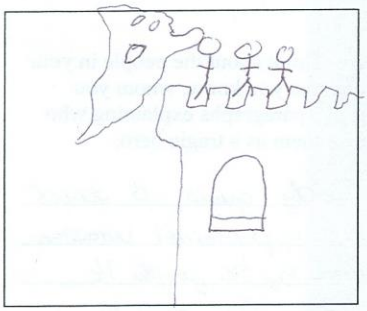
When reading Act 1, Scenes 1 and 2 of *Hamlet*, Tom (pseudonym) visualized and interpreted the information as shown in Figure 1:

Name: Phillip Date: _____

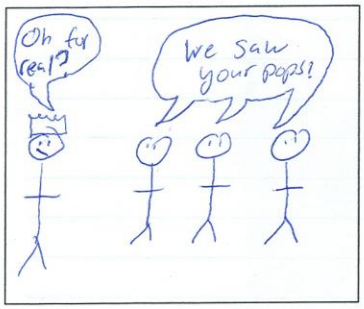
Book Title: *Hamlet* (Act I) Author: William Shakespeare

Episodic Notes

Directions: After each scene of Act I, we will stop periodically. In the space provided, you will illustrate what you visualized while you were reading that scene. On the lines, you will summarize the events of that scene. Explain the most important events that occurred and why they are important.



Act I, Scene 1: Bernardo, Horatio and Marcellus were doing their job. Suddenly taking watch when a ghost came to them. They have encountered it once before but nothing dident see it before they believe it was King Hamlet who died before because he was wearing the armor and the crown they tryed to speak to it but a rooster crow and it went away.



Act I, Scene 2: After the King and Queen talk with Hamlet, all leave room except for Hamlet who starts to say how he is mad at his mother for marrying after his Fathers death, then Horatio, Marcellus, and Bernardo come in and tell Hamlet how they see his ~~so~~ fathers ghostly figure when they do their ~~guard~~ watch, so

Figure 1: Tom's Episodic Notes

For Act 1, Scene 1, Tom wrote,

> "Bernardo, Horatio, and Marcellus were doing their shift taking watch when a ghost came to them. They had encountered it once before, but Horatio didn't see it. They believed it was King Hamlet who died before because he was wearing the robe and the crown. They tried to speak to it, but a rooster crowed and it went away."

For Act 1, Scene II, he summarized,

> "After the king and queen talk with Hamlet, all leave the room except for Hamlet who stays to say how he is mad at his mother for marrying after his father's death. Then Horatio, Marcellus, and Bernardo come in and tell Hamlet how they saw his father's ghost figure when they did their guard watch."

In the box that contains Tom's drawing for Act I, Scene II, Bernardo, Horatio and Marcellus, the three guards, are drawn as three stick figures beneath a text bubble that says, "We saw you Pops." To this, the stick figure wearing the crown (Hamlet) replies, "Oh, for real?" This example is representative of many of the students' Episodic Notes. When using this strategy, it is important to emphasize to students that they don't have to be good artists, and that they can interpret the text using any language that will help them comprehend and remember what occurred in the scene. Tom's example illustrates both of these points nicely by his use of stick figures and vernacular language in his Episodic Notes.

Effectiveness of the Literacy Club

At the conclusion of the Literacy Club, all of the high school students and their literacy tutors completed questionnaires and reflections about their experiences in the program. Students were asked what they found the most and least beneficial about their tutoring sessions, how the Literacy Club was different from other tutoring/extra help that they have received in the past, and whether or not they believed the program would help them with the New York State Regents Examination in English (why or why not). They were also asked what suggestions they had for improving the program, to provide examples of how the Literacy Club helped improve their reading and writing, what strategies they learned, what they learned in the *Hamlet/Lion* King lessons, and what connections they could make between *Hamlet* and *The Lion King.* In all of the questionnaires, the students responded favorably.

One of the questions that provided telling information about the students' perceived effectiveness of the program was the question about how the Literacy Club was different from other tutoring/extra help they had received in the past. All of the following names of students have been changed to pseudonyms. A student named Cindy wrote, "It [the Literacy Club} has been different because all of the tutors actually took some type of time to get to know us, which made me enjoy coming every week." Eric responded, "The Literacy Club was one-to-one, rather than the usual tutoring with ten or eleven kids. That made me feel a lot more comfortable." Mandy stated, "I haven't received any tutoring since elementary school. I do remember that there was only one teacher with about

twelve students and none of the attention was focused on me and my needs." Oscar agreed, "They [his past tutors] never sat with me and showed me step-by-step. I learned so many new things with my Literacy Club tutor." These comments speak to the fact that the individual attention and rapport between the Literacy Club tutors and high school students made them feel valued and more comfortable with the learning process. It was different from the academic intervention services that they had received in the past and increased their desire to attend.

Another question that yielded valuable information about the students' perceptions regarding the effectiveness of the program was the question about how the Literacy Club has helped improve the students' reading and writing skills. Randi responded, "The Literacy Club helped me to improve my writing by following an outline and taking my time. I also learned that when I have trouble with vocabulary, I can read it in that sentence and figure it out from the context." Eric wrote, "My reading has improved because now I notice connections and more of the literary elements. I now know what a tragic hero is too." Finally, Mandy wrote, "Before, I was having issues comprehending what I was reading. I feel as if the individual help and focus that I learned in the Literacy Club will help me with all of my reading and classes in school." These responses are promising with regard to the ways in which the students viewed the transfer of the strategies that they learned in the Literacy Club to other learning contexts and classes. They learned strategies that they could use in situations beyond the Literacy Club setting and were becoming more confident in their abilities as readers and writers.

At the conclusion of the semester, the tutors also completed questionnaires and detailed reflections about the Literacy Club experience. Questions included: What did you find the most/least beneficial about your individual tutoring sessions and why? What suggestions do you have for improving the program? How has the Literacy Club helped you grow as a literacy specialist? Describe what you learned by teaching the *Hamlet/Lion King* lessons.

One of the things that all ten of the tutors believed benefited them was using the literacy-focused lesson planning. Michelle, a graduate literacy student who teaches high school social studies wrote,

> "My student, Mandy, has effectively learned how to make connections when she reads, specifically text to text and text to self. This has helped her comprehension skills during our sessions. My skills have improved when it comes to assessing a student's reading level and pinpointing specific problems that need to be dealt with during the sessions. I feel more comfortable teaching literacy strategies. I feel more like a 'reading specialist.'"

Amanda, a middle school drama teacher wrote, "By teaching the *Hamlet*/*Lion King* literacy lessons I learned that even classic literature like Shakespeare can be taught from a 'reading' point of view, and that it's essential to connect older, more difficult literature with a hook like a popular film. It really helps the kids a lot." These comments by the tutors indicate that the Literacy Club sessions and Literacy-focused lesson planning increased their professional knowledge and added to their expertise as reading

specialists. They took pleasure in the successes of their tutees and learned pedagogical methods that they could bring to their own classrooms and school communities.

Finally, Sung, the Korean student mentioned in the introduction, did go on to pass the Regents Exam in English at the conclusion of the semester. He is currently attending college and is pursuing his dream of becoming a police officer. In addition to the services that he was already receiving during the school day, the Literacy Club offered him an opportunity to practice his literacy skills in new and different ways. This may have boosted both his academic literacy skills and self-concept as a reader and writer of English and contributed to his eventual success.

Conclusion

NCLB and the continued emphasis on high-stakes, standardized testing have made high schools in the United States into places that allow classroom teachers very little time and energy to spend building relationships with individual students. Teachers are responsible for hundreds of students each day, and the curricula in most courses have been limited to teaching for the tests. When students are not successful on national and state exams, electives are replaced with additional periods of core courses in an effort to get them to pass. Student choice has been eliminated almost entirely, as high school kids are forced into academic intervention and support programs that simply give them *more of the same* instruction that they already receive during the normal school day. The underlying belief behind this kind of academic intervention and support is if we teach the material to students enough times, they will eventually learn it.

Unfortunately, however, this has not proven to be the case. The drop-out rate for high school students is escalating, and many that remain in school feel disenfranchised and neglected by the system. What is needed in academic intervention and support programs in literacy is a shift from business as usual. Students need learning experiences that depart from the norm and give them opportunities to recognize their strengths and grow as individual readers. Programs such as the Literacy Club described in this article are built upon the belief that reading is a highly individualized collection of mental and emotional processes that people engage in as they interact with texts. They provide students with the chance to be part of a community of learners and allow them to take active roles in their learning and decision-making. Although the key elements and strategies of the Literacy Club may not all be practical in traditional whole class settings, they can be adapted in academic intervention and support programs that that take place both outside and within the school day, resource room or reading lab settings, private tutoring sessions, individual reading services for secondary students, or settings in which Literacy Coaches work with individual students or small groups. If we truly want to make sure that no child is left behind in this country, we need to find times and spaces to identify, nurture and support them, one child at a time.

References

Allen, J. (1995). *It's never too late: Leading adolescents to lifelong literacy*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

Barton, D., Hamilton, M., & Ivanic, R. (Eds.). (2000). *Situated literacies: Reading and writing in context.* London, UK: Routledge.

Beers, K. (2003). *When kids can't read: What teachers can do.* Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

Burke, J. (2000). *Tools for thought: Organizers for your classroom.* Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

Daniels, H. & Zemelman, S. (2004). *Subjects matter: Every teacher's guide to content-area reading.* Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

Gee, J. P. (2000). The new literacy studies: From 'socially situated' to the work of the social. In D. Barton, M. Hamilton & R. Ivanic (Eds.), *Situated literacies: Reading and writing in context* (pp. 180-197). London, UK: Routledge.

Goodman, K. (1976). The Goodman taxonomy of reading miscues. In P. David Allen & Dorothy Watson (Eds.), *Findings of research in miscue analysis: Classroom applications* (pp. 157-244). Urbana, IL: ERIC and NCTE.

Goodman, K. (1973). Miscues: Windows on the reading process. In Kenneth S. Goodman (Ed.), *Miscue analysis: Applications to reading instruction* (pp. 3-14). Urbana, IL: ERIC and NCTE.

Goodman, K. (1996). *On reading.* Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

Goodman, Y. & Marek, A. (1996). *Retrospective miscue analysis: Revaluing readers and reading.* Katonah, NY: Richard C. Owen.

Gorman, T. (2003). Adaptation of *Hamlet* by William Shakespeare. Irvine, CA: Saddleback Publishing.

Greene, M. (1995). *Releasing the imagination: Essays on education, the arts, and social change*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass Publishers.

Harvey, S. & Goudvis, A. (2000). *Strategies that work: Teaching comprehension to enhance understanding.* Portland, ME: Stenhouse.

Leslie, L. & Caldwell, J. (2006). *Qualitative Reading Inventory 4*. Boston: Pearson

McNamee, G. (1990). Learning to read and write in an inner-city setting: A longitudinal study of community change. In Luis Moll (Ed.), *Vygotsky and education: Instructional implications and applications of sociohistorical psychology* (pp. 287-303). Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

Pahl, K. & Rosewell, J. (2005). *Literacy and education: Understanding the new literacy studies in the classroom.* London, UK: Paul Chapman Publishing.

Rosenblatt, L. M. (1978). *The reader, the text, the poem: The transactional theory of the literary work.* Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press.

Smith, F. (1997). *Reading without nonsense* (3rd Ed.). New York: Teacher's College Press.

Smith, M. & Wilhelm, J.D. (2003). *Reading don't fix no chevys: Literacy in the lives of young men.* Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

Tovani, C. (2004). *Do I really have to teach reading? : Content comprehension, grades*

6-12, Portland, ME: Stenhouse.
Vygotsky, L. (1978). *Mind in society.* Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
Wilde, S. (2000). *Miscue analysis made easy: Building on student strengths.* Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

Appendix A

Literacy Focused Lesson Plan Format

Literacy-Focused Lesson Plan Format

Topic & Unit of Study: The topic is the smaller subject within the larger unit of study

NY State Learning Standards Addressed: List the standards addressed in this lesson

Content Objective(s): (The student will be able to…)

Literacy Objective(s): (The student will be able to…)

Rationale: How and why the lesson will help the student reach the literacy objective(s)

Anticipatory Set/Do Now: What you will do at the beginning of the lesson to grab the students' attention and get them into the topic

Materials Used: Books, photos, videos, computer software, posters, etc.

Teacher Input: What you (the teacher) will say and do to facilitate the lesson.

Method: A description of the methods used in the lesson; i.e., small group discussion, individualized practice, collaborative learning, silent reading, etc.

Reading Strategies Employed: Episodic notes, vocabulary tree, read-aloud/think aloud, etc.

Assessment: How you (the teacher) will assess whether students have achieved both the content and literacy objective(s) of the lesson as outlined above

Follow Up: What will come next? Includes homework assignments & a brief description of the next lesson, topic, assessment, etc. in the unit of study

---

Reflection: (*completed after the lesson*): How effective was the lesson in helping students achieve both the content and literacy objectives? What possible suggestions do you have for improvement for next time?

Appendix B

Episodic Notes

Name: _____ Date: _____

Book Title: *Hamlet* (Act I) _____ Author: William Shakespeare_____

Episodic Notes

Directions: After each scene of Act I, we will stop periodically. In the space provided, you will illustrate what you visualized while you were reading that scene. On the lines, you will summarize the events of that scene. Explain the most important events that occurred and why they are important.

Act I, Scene 1: _____

Act I, Scene 2: _____