What's Hot: Texas and the Nation

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For two decades the International Literacy Association (ILA) has published the *What's Hot, What's Not in Literacy Survey.* In the last five years, the hottest topics featured on the lists have largely been connected to the English Language Arts Common Core State Standards (ELA CCSS) — a publication produced by the National Governors Association Center for Best Practices and the Council of Chief State School Officers (2010). This consistent relationship with CCSS remains true for many of the "very hot" topics on the 2016 list. The "very hot" topics are as follows: close reading/deep reading, college and career readiness, CCSS, digital literacies/new literacies/ media literacies, disciplinary/content area literacy, high-stakes assessment/CCSS assessment, informational/nonfiction texts, and text complexity (Cassidy, Grote-Garcia, Ortlieb, 2015; see Table 1 for more results).

With so much focus being placed on the ELA CCSS, some Texas educators are wondering how the "hot" and "very hot" topics relate to Texas classrooms. In this article, we will look at how some of these "hot" and "very hot topics" relate to Texas educators but first let us look at how the survey is constructed and conducted.

The Survey

Topics on the survey are determined by asking the previous year's respondents to suggest additions, modifications, and deletions to the list. The study uses a purposive sample (Creswell, 2013) of 25 literacy leaders who are asked to label topics in the field of literacy as "hot" and "not hot." During the spring and summer months, the literacy leaders are interviewed, in person, by phone, or via video conferencing. All are read a standard 178-word paragraph explaining that their ratings of "hot" and "not hot" do not reflect their personal interests, rather the ratings refer to the level of attention that the topics are currently receiving. "Hot" does not imply important. If we had asked the respondents if the topics were "important", our results would be very different. After rating the topic as "hot" or "not hot", the literacy leaders are then asked to rate each of the given topics as "should be hot" or "should not be hot". This oral interaction between the interviewed literacy leader and us is crucial in obtaining some of the qualitative data.

The selected leaders form a very diverse group. They not only represent various job categories (e.g., professors, administrators, and classroom teachers), but are also from various geographical regions found within ILA's global membership. In addition, and most importantly, the survey respondents are selected because they possess a comprehensive perspective of literacy.

Table 1
Results of the 2016 What's Hot in Literacy Survey *(Cassidy, Grote-Garcia, & Ortlieb, 2015).*

		What's Hot	What's Not	Should be Hot	Should Not be Hot
1.	Adolescent literacy	*		***	
2.	Close reading/deep reading	**		*	
3.	College & Career Readiness	**		**	
4.	Comprehension	*		**	
5.	Common Core Standards	**		*	
6.	Critical reading and writing		*	**	
7.	Digital literacies/new literacies & media literacy	**		**	
8.	Disciplinary/content area literacy	**		**	
9.	Early intervention (K-3)		*	**	
10.	English Learners/emergent multilingual learners/ESL	*		**	
11.	Fluency		**		*
12.	High-stakes assessment/CCSS assessment	**			*
13.	Informational/nonfiction texts	**		**	
14.	Literacy coaches/reading coaches, reading specialists		**	**	
15.	Motivation/engagement		**	**	
16.	Oral language		**	**	
17.	Phonics/Phonemic Awareness		**		*
18.	Political/policy influences on literacy		*	*	
19.	Preschool & Pre-K literacy instruction/experiences		*	**	
20.	Professional development/ learning communities		*	*	
21.	Response to intervention/Differentiated Instruction		*	*	
22.	STEM literacy	*		**	
23.	Struggling readers (grade 4 & above)		*	**	
24.	Summer Reading/Summer Loss		**	**	
25.	Teacher Evaluation for Literacy	*		*	
26.	Teacher preparation & certification	*		**	
27.	Text Complexity	**		*	
28.	Vocabulary/Word Meaning		*	**	
29.	Writing – Academic, Argumentative & Based on Sources	*		***	
30.	Writing – Creative		***	**	

* Indicates more than 50 percent of the respondents were in agreement (hot or not hot)
** Indicates at least 75 percent of the respondents were in agreement (very hot or cold)
*** Indicates all respondents were in agreement (extremely hot or extremely cold)

Representing the East for 2016 were Julie Coiro (University of Rhode Island), Rona Flippo (University of Massachusettes, Boston), Donald J. Leu (University of Connecticut), Jill Lewis-Spector (New Jersey City University), Barbara Marinak (Mount St. Mary's University, MD), Susan B. Neuman (New York University) and Marcie Craig Post (International Literacy Association, DE). From the Southeast were Richard Allington (University of Tennessee), Donna Alvermann (University of Georgia), Estanislado Barrera IV (University of Louisiana), and Linda Gambrell (Clemson University, SC). The Great Lakes region was represented by Nell Duke (University of Michigan), Patricia Edwards (Michigan State University), Timothy Rasinski (Kent State University, OH), William Teale (University of Illinois-Chicago), and Timothy Shanahan. University of Illinois-Chicago). Julianne Scullen Anoka-Hennepin Independent School District, MN represented the Plains area, while the West area was represented by Diane Barone, (University of Nevada – Reno) Douglas Fisher (San Diego State University), and P. David Pearson University of California, Berkley. Other areas included the Southwest, represented by Katy Landrum (Mannford Public Schools, OK) and Chase Young (Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi); the Rocky Mountains, represented by Ray Reutzel (University of Wyoming); Canada, represented by Shelley Stagg Peterson (University of Toronto); and outside North America, represented by Bernadette Dwyer (St. Patrick's College, Ireland).

After all 25 participants are surveyed, the collected ratings are tallied. Topics that receive 100% agreement are labeled "extremely hot" or "extremely cold"; those with more than 75% agreement are classified as "very hot" or "very cold". Those receiving more than 50% agreement are labeled "hot" or "not hot".

TEXAS

Though it never adopted the Common Core State Standards, Texas has adopted many of the areas of emphasis in the CCSS. In fact, *college and career readiness,* another "very hot" topic in the annual survey, has generated so much heat that the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board & Texas Education Agency developed its own set of standards (*Texas College and Career Readiness Standards* , 2009) aimed at overall school improvement and career/workplace readiness. Texas has also focused on many of the other "hot" and "very hot" topics. We will look at three of those topics in more depth. *Text complexity* and *disciplinary literacy* were deemed "very hot" this year in the field of literacy by the panel of literacy leaders. Although only rated "hot" this year the topic, *English Language Learners/ESL* has been in and out of the "very hot" category for the last decade. In Texas, this topic has been "very hot" for many years.

ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS

Increasingly, in the United States, English is not every students' native language; perhaps, no where is that more evident than in the state of Texas. Most schools in Texas, however, recognize that learning a new language doesn't involve abandoning one's first language (Cook, 2013). Encouraging children to retain their first language (L1) helps maintain their cultural identity (Creese & Blackledge, 2010; Golash-Boza, 2005; Nelson, 2003). Recent research suggests that bilingual children may be more prepared for school than monolinguals in terms of pre-academic skills, social and emotional competencies, and overall behaviors (Guhn, 2016). On the other hand, English Language Learners are often more timid or reluctant to engage in learning activities than non-English Language Learners.

One of the basic techniques employed in teaching English Language Learners is the maximum use of visual cues in introducing new vocabulary and sentences. Teachers of English Language learners often act out new words, and use graphics, facial expressions, and drawings to identify known concepts in the new language. One Texas teacher also used these techniques in her classroom, but she turned the tables on the English Language Learners by actually having them depict words in

their native language to their English-speaking classmates. This strategy not only encouraged students to value and maintain their first language, but also encouraged them to be less timid and more engaged in classroom activities.

TEXT COMPLEXITY

A great deal of the conversation surrounding text complexity is focused on K-12 students encountering increasingly complex text (Cassidy & Grote-Garcia, 2013). The overall theme of this conversation is that students will leave high school ready for the complex readings they will face in college or in a career. Since Texas educators are concerned about college and career readiness - a point illustrated with the fact that Texas has published its own set of College and Career Standards (Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board & Texas Education Agency, 2009). Thus, the topic of text complexity is "very hot" in Texas.

Wixson and Valencia (2014) contend that text complexity is currently being narrowly interpreted to focus primarily on quantitative measures (e.g., countable factors such as the average number of syllables in a sentence). A classic example of the inappropriate reliance on quantitative measures are the opening words of Hamlet's soliloquy, "To be or not to be…", in Act III of Shakespeare's eponymous masterpiece. The six one-syllable words would be easily decodable by most six year olds, but the understandings that readers must bring to these words require a depth of maturity more suited to late adolescents or adults. Hamlet is contemplating suicide!

The model receiving a lot of current attention is the three part model in the English Language Arts Standards of CCSS (i.e., quantitative, qualitative, and the reader and task). Quantitative measures include "countable" factors such as word frequency, sentence length, and the average number of syllables in a sentence. Qualitative factors include levels of meaning, structure, language, and knowledge demands. Reader and task factors include motivation, knowledge, purpose, and the complexity of the task. Wixson and Valencia (2014) recommend that "reader and task factors be among the first considerations in measuring text complexity because they are likely to be the most important factors in determining the comprehension of complex text in specific instructional context" (p. 431). This is because "when reader and task factors are emphasized, it becomes clear that complexity is not an inherent property of the text. Rather it is a function of the interaction among reader, text, and task factors within a particular situation" (Wixson & Valencia, 2014, p. 431). This three pronged consideration should be the model in Texas and in this section we offer some suggestions for incorporating this modelmatics in Texas classrooms.

Inherent in any discussion of text complexity is the structure of the text itself. Word problems in mathematics, for instance, have a very unique text structure. Many techniques have been devised to make students aware of this text structure. One of these strategies is the MAP (Make a Problem) technique. Students are given a sentence or phrase and then asked to add a sentence or clause to make the information into a word problem. For instance, students are given this information:

> *Juan and Julia have saved $120. They each want to buy touch screen tablets that cost $310 a piece……..." Now make this information into a word problem by adding a question.*

Student responses could vary. Some students might add the question, "What is the total amount Juan and Julia would need - 2 x 310 – 120 == X?" or "How much more would they need if they decided to buy only one touch screen tablet 310 – 120 ==X? " The critical learning experience

derived from the MAP technique is that students become aware of the unique text structure of word problems. They do this by actually creating their own problems through thoughtful interactions with content in environments conducive to learning.

DISCIPLINARY LITERACIES

A shift from content area literacy, or those general literacy strategies that can be applied to reading of academic texts across all disciplines (Shanahan & Shanahan, 2014), to disciplinary literacies has occurred with the advent of CCSS and related state standards. Disciplinary literacies, or specialized ways of reading, writing, and thinking in each academic discipline, represent a philosophical shift away from content area literacy. Now students are taught to think like scientists, explore like archaeologists, and reason like mathematicians, using unique skills in those respective disciplines (Juel, Hebard, Haubner, & Moran, 2010; Ortlieb & Anderson, in press). This augmentation is based on the premise that there is no one-size-fits-all approach to literacy across the disciplines. Strategies like skimming, note-taking, and recall, albeit important skills to have, are not sufficient to equip students with the ability to think critically, make connections, problem-solve and apply meaning within each discipline (Brozo, Moorman, Meyer, & Stewart, 2013). We sophisticated readers who engage in analysis, argumentation, and investigative inquiries, using language and literacy as a means to explore.

As social beings, the teacher and the students must create an atmospheric change in interacting with text, not once, but many times for close reading. We, as teachers, after presenting a text, must make it okay to read and discuss that text multiple times for different purposes: what we think the author is telling us, what we understand or don't understand, what we want to know more about, and what connections we see between our world and the texts. Then, responsibility must be shifted to students for these reading experiences, where they engage in dialogue and posit opinions on events or concepts in the text (Grote-Garcia & Frost, 2015). This socializing of literacy is most appropriate when students read works of literature or passages from the social sciences. Often, when dealing with text in these fields, no one perspective is right or wrong; instead, we can agree or disagree and we can debate ideas using evidential text support while respecting each other. It is through the socialization of literacy (Klauda, 2009), that printed or digitized words gain meaning and a central place in students' lives.

The element of surprise can be used to encourage students to take risks and step outside their text-based comfort zones. Defying traditional boundaries of genre and literary styles is commonplace in successful classrooms today across all disciplines (Askehave & Ellerup Nielsen, 2005). For example, children are exposed to graphic novels and comic books in the real world. However, teachers are often reluctant to introduce these text structures in their classrooms. They often fail to realize that comic books and graphic novels can also be used to teach non-fiction too! In social studies, a unit on the Revolutionary War could be turned into a graphic text. Different groups could be charged with illustrating aspects of the War or the incidents leading up to the war. The Boston Tea Party, for example, would make a very colorful comic book. When students try new text structures with different genres, they become more resilient readers and, in turn, higher achievers. These are just a few examples of how disciplinary literacies, one of the hot topics this year, offer opportunities to keep learners interested in both reading and content learning.

USES OF THE WHAT'S HOT SURVEY

Why does the What's Hot Survey matter? As authors of the What's Hot survey, we hope that it will serve as an impetus for readers to further investigate some of the topics that are receiving attention or should be receiving attention. Generally, if a topic is receiving attention, it is because there is some relevant research or legislation propelling that subject to the forefront. Teachers need to be aware of the forces and research that are making a subject hot and then decide if the topic is relevant to their classrooms and, how best the concept should be implemented in their classrooms.

Several schools in Texas have used the What's Hot Survey as a basis for staff development. The topics on the current year's list are presented on handouts without the results. The teachers then rate the topics as "hot" or "not hot", and their combined results are compared to the national sample. Then, teachers select the topics most relevant to their school. Next, as part of the professional development, each teacher selects one topic to research thoroughly. Finally, teachers share their findings with the entire school faculty. Depending on the size of the teaching staff, in some instances, small groups of faculty research the selected topics. Many college and university instructors use basically the same strategy with their graduate and undergraduate students.

As always, we hope that the What's Hot survey can be used as a springboard for further investigation of the topics on the list both in the U.S. as whole and in the republic of Texas. Ultimately, we hope that the "what hot" topics and the "what should be hot" will be identical.

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