

Career and technical education teachers integrating literacy and the support administrators provide

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ABSTRACT

Changes in teaching strategies and content for literacy integration require administrators to improve the support systems for CTE teachers. The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to explore CTE teachers' experiences in integrating literacy into the curriculum and the support they receive from administrators. Fullan's change model informed the conceptual framework for this study. Individual interviews with 4 teachers and 3 administrators from a state on the east coast were conducted. Key recommendations included expanding literacy integration across all subject areas by sharing of resources across teachers, leadership and support from administrators, and additional professional development for all. Positive social change implications include improved teaching and enhanced student literacy skills. Students are more likely to be equipped with skills and strategies they need to succeed in college, to acquire postsecondary jobs, and to work effectively in the future.

Keywords: literacy integration, CTE integrating literacy, Fullan's change model, and administrative leadership

INTRODUCTION

Within the United States, state, and federal governments developed an academically rigorous curriculum for ensuring public schools could meet the needs of students (Allen, DeLauro, Perry, & Carman, 2017). The Common Core State Standards (CCSS) called for high school graduates to have the competencies crucial for establishing careers in the 21st century (Tavdgiridze, 2016). The CCSS were adopted as education policy in the state in which this study was conducted. For this study, the state will be referred to as East Coast state. As explained by the East Coast state's education department, the CCSS are educational standards with the goals and expectations that K-12 students should be literate and become college and career ready.

Even with the rigorous CCSS in place, students continued failing the literacy component of the state assessments. Due to these failures, CTE educators were required to integrate literacy skill-building lessons into their curriculum. CTE teachers instructed the same students as the core-content instructors, and all teachers had to integrate literacy education into their curricula so students could develop the literacy skills needed for success at colleges and in careers. However, CTE educators lacked a process for integrating literacy as well as in-depth knowledge of literacy skills and literacy strategies (Barnes, Zuilkowski, Mekonnen, & Ramos-Mattoussi, 2018). There was a lack of empirical study about CTE teachers and the incorporation of literacy skills in CTE curriculum, prior to this investigation. CTE teachers were challenged to integrate literacy skills, and administrators and supervisors were charged to provide support for such integration. Therefore, it was necessary to explore CTE teachers' experiences with integrating literacy into the curriculum and the support they received from administrators (i.e., their supervisors). Administrators are the leaders of school campuses. Administrative support can help CTE teachers to develop the skills needed to integrate literacy into the curriculum. Young, Winn, and Reedy (2017) postulated that school administrators influence every aspect of instruction by shaping teacher practices directly with instructional advice, resources, professional development, and the presence of a culture of trust. Exploring administrators' perceptions of how they supported CTE teachers integrating literacy into the curriculum provided an opportunity to support positive social change. The data gathered from the participants could provide information on what support provided by administrators and supervisors was most effective with CTE teachers seeking to integrate literacy successfully into the curriculum.

PURPOSE

The purpose of this study was to explore CTE teachers' experiences in integrating literacy into the curriculum and the support they receive from administrators. CTE teachers who integrate literacy into the curriculum have contributed to students graduating from high school with the needed capabilities to succeed in college and career (ACTE, 2009; Evans & Clark, 2015; Fang et al., 2014; Madden et al., 2014). The support and training that administrators provide to CTE teachers can help teachers succeed with literacy integration. The study sought to understand the experiences of CTE teachers who must integrate literacy into the curriculum, and the support administrators provide these teachers for such integration.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Background

At the national level, there has been an increased focus on accountability, academics, and college preparation, and the role of CTE in promoting academic literacies (Loveland, 2014). Brezicha, Bergmark, and Mitra (2015) added the goal on improving students' academic results based on test scores required administrators to support teachers in the implementation of new reforms. Diaz and Visone (2018) explained that teaching literacy must be done by teachers of both English and all other subject areas. Diaz and Visone claimed that with the change in CCSS standards, CTE teachers needed to integrate literacy in their lessons by changing their mode of teaching to help students "succeed with real-world skills" (p. 14). The CCSS requires literacy education to be implemented across the curriculum with all students. Literacy is essential for postsecondary education and career success (Wendt, 2013). Students are required to master and apply literacy skills effectively as they interact at work and school. However, Park, Pearson, and Richardson (2017) noted that knowledge and skills acquired from the core subjects, such as literacy and language arts, when integrated into CTE courses equip students for their postsecondary careers.

Empirical Research on Teacher Integration of Literacy in CTE

Literacy in CTE courses has historically been taught to build knowledge in these various disciplines through reading and writing. However, this purpose has changed (Dunkerly-Bean & Bean, 2016). Literacy now has to be integrated into the curriculum to provide students with skills and strategies that would allow them to develop critical thinking of complex texts to develop awareness for evidence-based reading, writing, and speaking. With literacy development, students' inclinations to enter college or to become employed increase (Dunkerly-Bean & Bean, 2016). Students taking a critical approach to reading texts is vital in literacy instruction (Larsson, 2017). Critical thinking allows students to be skeptical and analytical in argumentative writing and represents a higher level of learning (O'Halloran, Tan, & E, 2017; Wolfe, 2015). Critical thinking is the ability to draw conclusions, make assumptions, judge the quality of an argument, and develop and defend a position on an issue (Larsson, 2017). Critical thinking incorporates the levels of Bloom's taxonomy. It involves metacognition and the cognitive skills of listening, reading, finding buried assumptions, and acknowledging consequences (Swafford & Rafferty, 2016). Critical thinking is one of the literacy skills high school students need to acquire to pass the assessments and to perform effectively in college and career. Critical thinking is an efficient tool in disputing prejudice, bias, and promoting innovation, creativity, and objective reasoning. It also encompasses steps of conceptualizing, analyzing, synthesizing, and evaluating thought with higher-order skills that are more complex than learning rote facts or concepts (Buluc, 2017; Buskist, Reilly, Walker, & Bourke, 2016; Swafford & Rafferty, 2016).

Empirical Research on Administrative Support of Literacy Integration

Leadership involves collaborating and impelling others to work. It entails motivating, influencing, and directing others towards the achievement of goals within the institution (Thamarasseri, 2015). The success or failure of an endeavor reflects on the leader (Anderson,

2017). Leadership plays an important role in implementing instructional changes within schools. School leaders specifically focus on providing instructional development to teachers to support them in integrating literacy (Puzio et al., 2015). School leaders could benefit from knowing the experiences of CTE teachers having to integrate literacy to create a safe, non-threatening atmosphere for teachers to learn the skills and strategies taught. A school leader is anyone within the school who makes decisions and influences others to get the work done. They motivate and direct individuals towards the attainment of the institutions' goals. Ciampa and Gallagher (2016) purported that teachers have always worked in isolation while preparing lessons and evaluating student learning. Teachers who gain professional development that involves collaboration increase their knowledge of how to integrate literacy into content-area lessons. Alternatively, Thamarasseri (2015) stated that leadership in education is directing the activities of those engaged in the training of minds towards the achievement of the goals. In managing activities to achieve, the goals of the school leaders encourage change. Leaders influence others to take actions to achieve a desirable ending, influence the goals set, activities of followers and inspire change to occur to reach existing and new goals (Thamarasseri, 2015). According to Türkmen Taşer, İbrahim, Aysun, and Naci (2018), leadership support is of great importance in allowing employees to carry out increasing workload. The lack of leadership support perceived by individuals could contribute to emotional burnout and cynicism resulting in a deteriorated work environment. Principals, as administrators who offer support on their campuses, need to be involved in the training of teachers to move from a supervisor to that of instructional leader. Principals should be teachers of instructional programs including evaluators of instruction (America, 2014). America (2014) further stated professional development should allow teachers to learn strategies to teach and facilitate vocabulary development in a literacy lesson to strengthen students' knowledge about the concepts they are taught.

METHOD

Research Question

This study was guided by the following two RQs:

RQ1: What are CTE teachers' experiences integrating literacy in the curriculum?

RQ2: What support do administrators provide to CTE teachers in integrating literacy in the curriculum?

Setting, Population/Participants

The participants in this study were CTE educators who were expected by the School District located in an East Coast state to integrate literacy into their classes and the administrators who worked closely with them. The population of administrators was 11 assistant principals and instructional coordinators combined. The population of teachers was 80. Four teachers and three administrators contributed data for the study.

Research Design and Approach

CTE teachers' experiences of integrating literacy and the support provided by administrators was explored using qualitative methods. Through semi structured interviews, each participant group were interviewed using the researcher created interview protocols (Creswell, 2013). The interview protocol was designed to be intentional, rigorous, systematic, and not guided by overly rigid rules and procedures based on advice provided by Ravitch and Carl (2016). The qualitative research interview allowed participants to reconstruct events, portray ongoing social processes, and represent experiences with change.

Data Collection, Coding, and Analysis

Data from the semistructured interviews were coded. The data from the interviews were used to answer the research questions. Memos were written, as recommended by Ravitch and Carl (2016), to focus on specific thoughts and ideas during all iterations of data analysis. Coding allowed for finding patterns and emergent themes from the chain of evidence. Yin (2016) described five procedures of analysis as identifying and matching patterns, linking data to suggestions, explanation building, and synthesis across interviews. The transcripts from the interviews were analyzed using inductive logic (Creswell, 2013; Merriam, 2009). According to Merriam (2009), inductive analysis allows researchers to formulate concepts from the data and to combine that information to form themes and categories. Inductive reasoning was used to analyze data gathered from the participants through interviews. More specifically, inductive analysis was used to gather thematic information on the phenomenon being studied. The evidence became part of the collection of data that were coded. Coding the data first started to determine what terms appear most frequently and what patterns appeared in the data based on the emic view. Words or phrases that occurred continuously were expected to reflect the thoughts and experiences of the participants. The combined chunks of data to form the emergent, analytical themes. The data from the interviews were used to answer both research questions.

RESULTS

The themes that emerged from the coding process were analyzed to ensure alignment with the research questions and the conceptual framework. The results are presented by research question. The discrepant case data are presented following the results for the two research questions. The first research question asked: What are CTE teachers' experiences integrating literacy in the curriculum? The four themes generated from the CTE teachers interviews for Research Question 1 were the following: (a) literacy integration is important, (b) adapt to education changes, (c) teacher-administrator collaboration is beneficial, and (d) support learning with student-to-student teaching. This can be seen in figure 1 (See Appendix).

Themes for research question one***Literacy integration is important***

Participants in this study explained their experiences in integrating literacy into their lessons. They all conceded that literacy integration is important which was a theme supporting findings by Allyn (2014). All four of the CTE teachers in the current study concurred with Polkinghorne and Arnett-Harwick's (2014) 90.4% agreement that reading integration instruction should be included in FCS courses and that students need literacy skills to be successful in academia and the workplace. Shifflet and Hunt (2019) concurred that integration of literacy in CTE is an effective practice for addressing the imbalance between literacy and other subject areas.

Adapt to education changes

With the implementation of the CCSS, school leaders were charged with graduating high school students who had the competencies crucial for establishing careers in the 21st century (Tavdgiridze, 2016). Integrating literacy into the curriculum was a challenge for CTE teachers, as not every teacher was a teacher of reading as a content area; thus, the participants agreed it was impractical to expect content-area teachers to be literacy experts (Friend, 2017). According to ACTE (2009), addressing the issue of low literacy levels has been met with numerous challenges, as such CTE educators unskilled with offering literacy content and strategies. Giles and Tunks (2015) conceded that the assumptions educators hold of teaching and learning impacts their pedagogical practices, and regardless of educators' experience levels, they enter the classrooms with preconceived ideas of teaching and learning.

Teacher-administrator collaboration is beneficial

The CTE educators reported that their administrators were very helpful in providing technological support and literacy training. Their administrators collaborated with the CTE teachers and enabled CTE teachers to collaborate with teachers of other subject areas to integrate literacy. Silva et al. (2017) explained administrators are the educational leaders who provide professional development by offering collaborative training opportunities in the required areas. Teachers needing to change their teaching style benefit from receiving the support and training for developing effective strategies to manage change (Fullan, 1994, 2007).

Support learning with student-to-student teaching

In the interviews, the CTE participants indicated that learning needs to be supported through student-to-student, or peer-to-peer, teaching. Students who work in groups aid in supporting differentiated instruction based on the students' levels of learning. Students can be grouped together so that stronger students support weaker students together to learn new information. According to Fullan (2007), teachers having to embrace change need to infuse new materials needed to identify the needs of students and receive the support and training for developing effective strategies to integrate literacy.

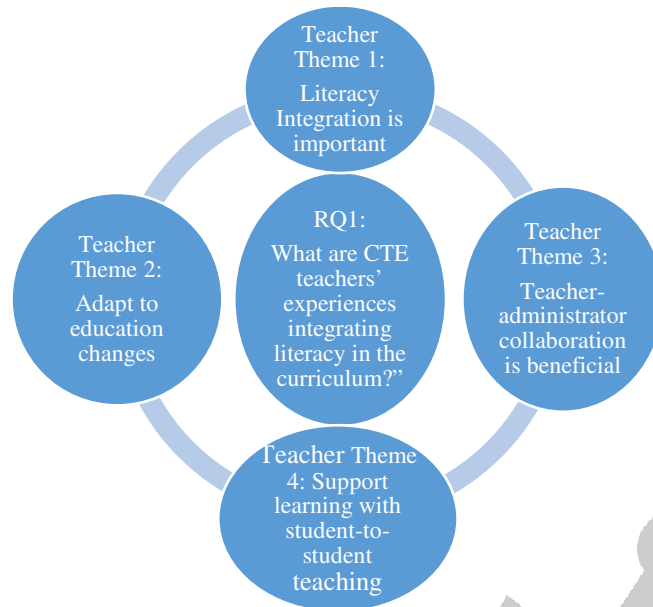


Figure 1. Representation of the themes surrounding the CTE teachers' experiences with integrating literacy in the curriculum.

Themes for research question two

The second research question was: What support do administrators provide to CTE teachers in integrating literacy in the curriculum? All three administrators contributed to the two themes. The themes generated from the administrators' data were (a) leadership that is transformational and (b) innovative instructional practices. Figure 2 visually depicts the CTE administrators' themes in relation to the research question. This can be seen in figure 2.

Leadership that is transformational.

According to the participants, leadership has to be transparent and honest. Leaders provide resources to differentiate instruction and through invitational inquiry to transfer learning. Administrators use the trust they establish with teachers to gain teacher participation, such as in workshops (Liu et al., 2016). Ch et al. (2017) posited that leaders inspire and influence others by providing vision and direction. Principals, for example, would collaborate with teachers to develop strategies to raise reading achievement through the integration of literacy skills in content areas, such as CTE courses. Transformational leaders also share the responsibility of leadership.

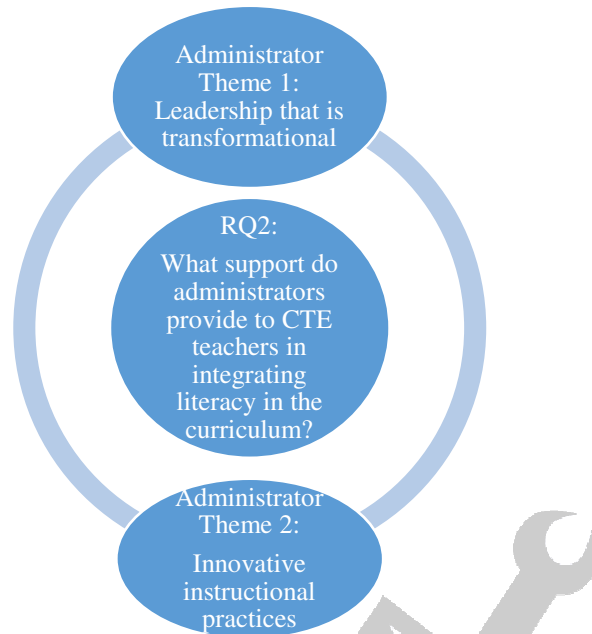


Figure 2. Representation of the themes surrounding the CTE administrators' experiences with supporting CTE teachers in integrating literacy in the curriculum

Innovative instructional practices.

The three administrators supervising the CTE teachers reported on the necessity to provide CTE teachers with innovative instructional practices and strategies. Their data support Goff (2015) who stated that restructuring instruction requires principals to support teachers and to display effective instructional practices. Larsson (2017) explained that teachers need to expose students to innovative learning experiences which challenges allows students to acquire cutting-edge content knowledge. Young, Winn, and Reedy (2017), for example, noted that school administrators impact teachers' practices by providing instructional advice. Administrators provide literacy instruction support that allows teachers to overcome challenges connected to changing their classroom practices, as stated by the data. Thus, leaders focus on providing instructional development to teachers (Puzio et al., 2015).

CONCLUSIONS

The findings of this qualitative study involved interviews with seven participating educators. The data provided a deeper understanding of phenomenon of integrating literacy in CTE courses and of providing support to the CTE teachers tasked with doing so. The four themes generated from the CTE teachers for Research Question 1 were the following: (a) literacy integration is important, (b) adapt to education changes, (c) teacher-administrator collaboration is beneficial, and (d) support learning with student-to-student teaching. The themes generated from the administrators were the following: (a) leadership that is transformational and (b) innovative instructional practices. The findings and results multiple themes addressed the central research questions that guided the study.

CTE educators' mandate to implement state reforms for integrating literacy led to adaptation, collaboration, and operating as educational change agents for implementation to be

effective. It was evident that CTA educators were challenged to adapt to the requirement to integrate literacy, but administrators were clear about their need to provide support to ensure the integration. Thus, the data showed the administrators understood that they needed to be change agents, to identify the type of leader they are, and to support teachers in embracing the change. Not only teachers but also administrators were facilitators of the literacy integration change. As change agents these educators influenced the culture of the institution in which they worked as part of ensuring its success with graduating high school students ready to be effective contributors to society.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Literacy integration is one educational change found in CTE programs operating in high schools in the East Coast state. As supported by the data in this study, educators must embrace reforms and facilitate sustaining them to accomplish the reform goals, such as ensuring all high school students in CTE programs graduate with literacy (Carse, 2015; Rolheiser et al., 2003; Takada, 2018). The teachers in this basic qualitative study indicated that literacy integration is important, teacher-administrator collaboration is beneficial, and student-to-student teaching supports learning. By adjusting pedagogical practices to support the integration of literacy in CTE, the sample of teachers and administrators implemented change and incorporated new strategies just as Fullan (2007) indicated would be the case.

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