

BY SUSAN REESE

Adolescents entering the adult world in the 21st century will read and write more than at any other time in human history in order to perform their jobs, run their households, act as citizens, and conduct their personal lives, according to the International Reading Association, which also notes, “Adolescents need high levels of literacy to understand the vast amount of information available to them, and to fuel their imaginations so they can create the world of the future.”

Achieving those levels of literacy is not always a simple task, however. Adolescents come to school having diverse cultural, linguistic or socioeconomic backgrounds. Some may have learning disabilities. Classroom teachers don’t always have the experience and training to deal with the various challenges, so the National Institute for Literacy (NIFL) says, “Classroom teachers must seek out their colleagues in special education, bilingual and English as a second language education, and specialists in reading development to understand the backgrounds and abilities of the students they teach.”

NIFL has published the report “What Content Area Teachers Should Know about Adolescent Literacy,” which presents, summarizes and discusses the relevant literature on adolescent literacy. It also describes promising, research-based instructional practices for improving adolescent literacy skills. The most common suggestion emerging from the research surveyed is that teachers should use systematic, explicit and direct instruction. “When students experience explicit instruction on a specific skill, teacher modeling, guided practice, and independent practice, they are much more likely to become proficient at the skill being taught,” notes NIFL. The second suggestion is the use of repetition—ensuring that students retain a strategy or skill by

reviewing it in different contexts and with different texts. “To be effective, content-area teachers must be aware of instructional approaches and strategies that can be used within their existing curricula to help improve the literacy levels of the struggling readers that they encounter. In this way, they will learn the content area,” the report concludes.

There is no doubt that raising literacy levels continues to be a challenge facing

(FBLA), Family, Career and Community Leaders of America (FCCLA), FFA, Health Occupations Students of America (HOSA), SkillsUSA, and the Technology Student Association (TSA). State directors from each CTSO organized the project as a joint partnership with Kentucky Educational Television.

The third-grade component of the project focuses on Share a Story and complements the PBS Kids Share a Story

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our nation, but it is one that is not being ignored by career and technical education (CTE). When ACTE’s Public Policy staff researched CTE’s role in adolescent literacy, they found projects around the country that were making a difference, including ones in Kentucky, North Carolina and Florida.

A United Effort in Kentucky

Unite to Read is a statewide literacy project designed to encourage a joint effort of all Kentucky Career and Technical Student Organizations (CTSOs), the Student Technology Leadership Program, and the Future Educators of America. Launched in the 2004-2005 school year, Unite to Read focuses on literacy awareness in all grades as well as the community. The participating CTSOs are DECA, Future Business Leaders of America

initiative and the KET/PBS Ready to Learn program. PBS Kids Share a Story is a national literacy campaign designed to inspire adults to help millions of children develop language and literacy skills through daily activities, including book reading, drawing, storytelling, rhyming and singing. Former First Lady Laura Bush served as honorary national chair of the campaign and active literacy advocate. LeVar Burton, actor and host of the PBS program *Reading Rainbow*, is the national chairman.

Each year, the Kentucky project selects books that address relevant education trends or specific events taking place in the state. For example, in 2007, in partnership with the Kentucky Economic Council for Education, the project selected *Trouble with Money* to address financial literacy, and in 2008, schools statewide

used *Gregory the Terrible Eater* because of the obesity issue.

“We are currently having the program continue this year with the theme of horses, due to the World Equestrian games being held in Kentucky,” says Recca Carver with the Office of Special Instruction Services, Division of Career and Technical Education at the Kentucky Department of Education. “So we have chosen two book options for schools to use, *Little Freddie goes to the Kentucky Derby* and *Five True Horse Stories*.”

The middle/high school component is the Unite to Read Certificate Program, which encourages students to read books and improve their literacy during the school year in order to receive a gold, silver or bronze certificate. By integrating literacy assignments and activities in CTE classrooms and CTSO activities, the project encourages students to increase their literacy skills. Students can earn gold seal certificates by completing 25 books, silver seal certificates for 20 books and bronze seal certificates for 15 books.

“This is the sixth year that we have completed this program,” notes Carver. “We continue to have a great response and positive comments about Unite to Read, because it pulls all ages of students together to see the need for reading and also helps the community see positive things that young adults are achieving.”

Kentucky Teacher Cynthia Smith, CTE coordinator for the Grayson County School District and director of its technology center, explains what makes Unite to Read important: “Any time we can get students to understand the importance and enjoyment of reading at the elementary level, that transference can lead to many opportunities, whether it be during continued education, at home, at one’s job, or for pleasure.”

Teacher Sarah Sullivan adds, “I have been able to get adolescents to find books and magazines that pique their interest—especially sports for the boys, and some really good sports books are out there. It



▲ Instructor Tammy Todd works with student Kaitlyn in an Exploring Business Technology class at North Davidson Middle School, North Carolina.



▲ In Kentucky's statewide Unite to Read literacy project, CTSO members "Share a Story" with elementary school students.

also has affected me as a teacher. I have had some of my students recommend books for my graduate classes on certain topics, which in turn has helped me enjoy them instead of dreading the assignments.”

The rewards for the high school students are more than just the certificates they can earn for their own reading. They also further develop their leadership skills and find enjoyment as mentors and role models for the younger students. This has resulted in an additional benefit of the project. According to Carver, “It has inspired some of the students to want to become teachers.”

Setting Goals in North Carolina

In the Davidson County School District of North Carolina, CTE students have goals that are more than just career related, because the district has also established three CTE literacy goals as well. They are:

1. Students will read a career-related article twice monthly and demon-

strate understanding in a writing assignment.

2. Students will write weekly to complete CTE assignments such as Writing to Learn, Writing to Demonstrate and Authentic Writing.
3. Students will prepare a written report and/or research study each semester in every CTE class.

“Our quest began in 2005-2006 with seeking to improve student achievement under the direction of our former CTE director, Marty Tobey,” explains current Davidson County Career and Technical Education Director Chandra Darr. “We began looking at national research to best determine how to mold a plan in CTE which would include training to best serve our teachers. Through the years we have attended many Southern Regional Educational Board (SREB) workshops and also workshops with Bill Daggett of the International Center for Leadership in Education.”

According to Darr, SREB’s Literacy Across the Curriculum continues to serve

as their framework of study, and in addition to attending numerous workshops through SREB, educators have also found a literacy consultant to provide training opportunities. The district is backing up the effort by providing teachers with professional development and purchasing updated classroom libraries. In meeting the goals, the CTE teachers incorporate reading strategies in three phases. The first one is pre-reading or warm-up thinking. Teachers are asked what key words, ideas and concepts students will encounter in the text. They look for questions or activities that would help students pull together what they know about these words, ideas and concepts, and—if the students don’t know about them—how they could be introduced effectively.

In the second phase, teachers look for ways to guide students through the text and to help them organize information in a meaningful way. They also look for what they can ask students to do while reading to help them “hold their thinking.” In the post-reading phase, teachers look for opportunities they can give their

students to articulate what they have learned and to apply their new learning.

To meet the second goal, students “write to learn” through response journals, in which they write about class experiences and field trips, learning logs, exit slips, admit slips, inquiry logs, double-entry journals and study guides. They “write to demonstrate” through open-response questions, lab reports, process papers, business proposals and on-demand writing. Authentic writing exercises include editorials, letters to the editor/board of directors and other letters, speeches, proposals, reviews, personal narratives, memoirs, personal essays, business plans, resumes and cover letters, evaluations and articles.

For the third goal, students prepare projects such as research reports, how-to manuals, and business

proposals. They may also investigate a current issue or problem, form a solution, and explain and defend the solution. “A Day in the Life of ...” is a project in which students research a specific job, interview someone in that job, and determine where they can obtain the necessary education to prepare them for the position. Students may also conduct an experiment, and then develop a short proposal on the results and how the results can be used in new product development, and present justification for the new process or product.

“Vickie Smith has served as our trainer, team-teacher, and visited classrooms to provide support in our new literacy quest,” says Darr. “Our Literacy Leadership teams have provided the necessary leadership at each school to assist teachers in implementing literacy strategies and helping to select books for CTE classroom libraries. Our latest training was based on a workshop with Bill Daggett. This training focused on vocabulary, reading comprehension, lexile levels in CTE and word walls. Best practices workshops serve as our follow-up to share success-

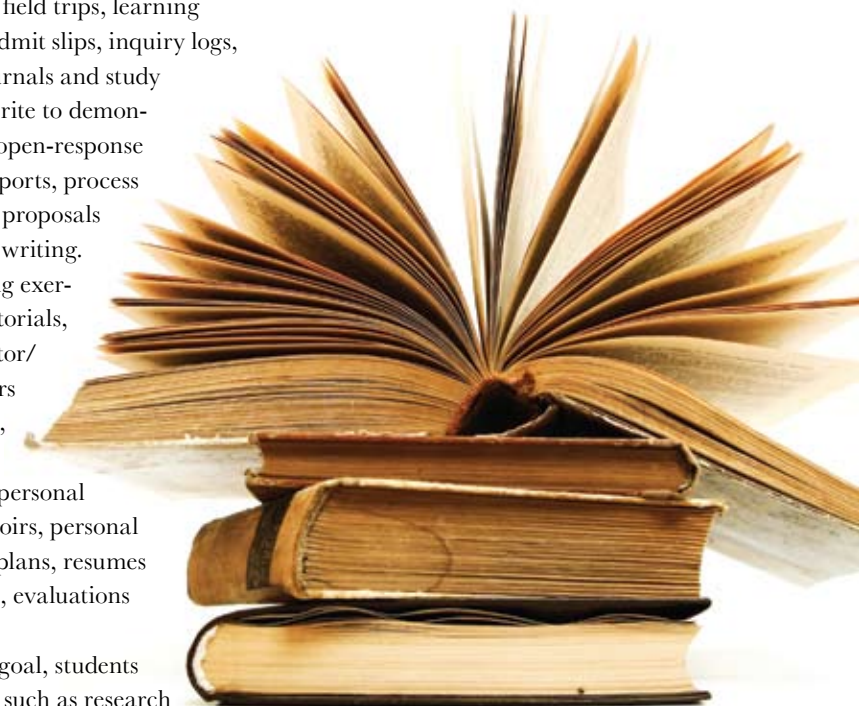


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ful lessons infusing the strategies into our CTE curriculum."

According to Darr, the results of the initiative include an increase in Performance Indicators in Academic and Technical Attainment and, recently, a great performance by students on the WorkKeys and Career Readiness Certificate.

"We are so pleased with our teachers and the excitement our students have in the classroom strategies," Darr says.

In Florida, Just Do It!

On September 7, 2001, Florida Governor Jeb Bush signed an executive order designating Just Read, Florida! as a comprehensive and coordinated reading initiative aimed at helping every student

become a successful, independent reader. The initiative has played a large role in the recognition of Florida's literacy efforts by organizations such as the International Reading Association. Career and technical education has also joined in the Florida effort.

The Career and Technical Education Reading (CATER) pilot program provides opportunities for intensive reading intervention for fluent Level 1 and Level 2 students using CTE course content. It is based on Reading Instruction through Strategy Enhancement, which assists reading teachers in providing intervention through sets of content materials. Through a partnership between Just Read, Florida!, the Florida Center for

Reading Research, and the Volusia, Citrus, and Polk County school districts, teachers from five high schools were recruited (along with reading coaches for support). Rigorous professional development for the educators is an important element of CATER. Through training they received during the summer of 2008, the CATER participants received competencies three and four of the K-12 Reading Endorsement, and completed competencies five and six during the course of the school year.

The Just Read, Florida! office also partners with the Florida Office of Career and Adult Education by providing opportunities for CTE teachers to complete the Florida Online Reading Professional

Development (FOR-PD) in a separate cohort specifically for these teachers. These teachers then also have the opportunity to continue with a specialized Content Area Reading Professional Development (CAR-PD), so that they can provide reading intervention for fluent students scoring at Level 2 on FCAT.

According to Just Read, Florida!, "This training will help these teachers have a better understanding of exactly what reading intervention can look like in CTE courses, as the instructional materials and methods for these courses are often vastly different from other content area courses."

Kevin Smith is the high school reading specialist with the Florida program, and he says, "Career and technical education makes a natural place to really infuse literacy skills because of its strong ties to literacy and the workplace. We also know how motivating these courses can be."

Motivation is also demonstrated by the teachers who were in the first cohort of CATER, and according to Smith, they included teachers of accounting, digital design, agriculture, criminal justice and marketing. The teachers completely restructured their courses because of the strong infusion of literacy skills. At one of the schools piloting the program, Citrus High School (CHS), students in Computing for College and Careers worked on literacy projects and a project in which they worked to bring a novel's imagery to life through illustrations. An accounting class dissected literature pieces and identified vocabulary words they found difficult.

CHS also offers a Digital Design and Intensive Reading course that intertwines reading skills with Digital Design I content. CHS Reading Specialist Debra Stanley believes CATER is the wave of the future. As she explains, "We've really found a way to engage them and to give them a desire to read." That is something she has seen transfer to all of their other classes. The students spend the first 15 minutes of class reading material they

have selected themselves. Interestingly, that exact amount of time was mentioned by one of our nation's most famous educators many years ago. "Resolve to edge in a little reading every day, if it is but a single sentence," said Horace Mann. "If you gain 15 minutes a day, it will make itself felt at the end of the year."

Mann's advice seems to still hold true today, since one student in the CHS pilot program says her vocabulary skills "shot up through the roof." But there is more than just anecdotal evidence that the program is already making a difference. "We did a comparison study, and the students in the CATER pilot did as well as the students in the reading intervention class," notes Smith.

The CATER students didn't have to miss out on a CTE course they were interested in because they needed a reading intervention class. They got the benefits of both in one class. The program was also a success from the perspective of the CATER teachers. "All of the teachers said they should have done this a long time ago," Smith says. "They said it really helped their students master their content."

Smith credits the Florida Association for Career and Technical Education and the Division of Career and Adult Education at the Florida Department of Education for their support of the program, and with another cohort of teachers now participating in the professional development offered by CATER, he is looking forward to expanding the program regionally so that it can serve even more students across the state. "I am truly excited about this program and the great results we had this past year," he adds.

Speaking Out for Literacy

"Science and technology multiply around us. To an increasing extent they dictate the languages in which we speak and think," said British novelist and short story writer J.G. Ballard. "Either we use those languages or we remain mute."

In career tech, science and technology continue to grow; certainly our students must be literate in the languages they dictate in order to have a voice in their own futures and the future of this country. Programs such as those cited by the ACTE Issue Brief are giving CTE students that voice. And by speaking out for issues such as CTE's role in helping our young people achieve high levels of literacy, ACTE continues to be a strong voice for the educators who are charged with the task of teaching them. **I**

Making a Statement on Literacy

To learn more about ACTE's recent Issue Brief on CTE's role in adolescent literacy, see the article by ACTE Assistant Director of Public Policy Alisha Hyslop in this issue of *Techniques*.

Learn More about Literacy

For more information about the organizations and initiatives discussed in this story, here are the Web sites to visit.

Davidson County Schools Career and Technical Education
www.davidson.k12.nc.us/education/dept/dept.php?sectionid=1532&

Just Read, Florida!
www.justreadflorida.com

International Reading Association
www.reading.org

National Institute for Literacy
www.nifl.gov

PBS Kids
www.pbskids.org

Unite to Read
www.education.ky.gov

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