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ABSTRACT
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with "Beowulf"; and (3) a business training or education proposal used with
"Pygmalion." Authentic examples of two students' works are included.
(Author/RS)

Workplace English: From Literature

Classics to Workplace Literacy

Lisbeth Dixon-Krauss
Associate Professor, Reading Education
Florida International University
University Park, ZEB 259A
Miami, FL 33199
Kraussl@fiu.edu

Linda McClanahan
Reading Resource Teacher
Armwood High School
Tampa, FL

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Abstract

This paper explains the rationale and methods for integrating workplace literacy with English literature instruction. The workplace literacy/English literature activities presented include: (a) a newsletter format reporting on the major historical periods in English literature, (b) a business project report used with *Beowulf,* and (c) a business training or education proposal used with *Pgymalion.* Authentic examples of students' work are included.

Workplace English: From Literature Classics

to Workplace Literacy

Statistics collected in the <u>National Educational</u>

<u>Longitudinal Study: 1998-94U</u> (1996) on 1994 high school graduates

revealed:

●43.1% attended a four-year college or university.

●22.4% attended a junior college.

●6.9% went to a technical or vocational school.

●100% entered (or planned to) enter the work force.

One of the primary goals of secondary education in America is to

prepare students for a successful career and, at the same time,

to enhance the work force by preparing competent employees. To

accomplish this goal, educators must integrate workplace literacy

into the curriculum so all graduates can compete successfully in

the workplace in the 21st century. But the task of preparing a

competent, educated workforce does not end with students in the

secondary school setting. It must continue on with adult

students in GED, workplace, and other adult literacy settings.

In this article, we explain how workplace literacy can be

integrated into literature instruction to enhance both literature

study and competence in workplace literacy for high school or

adult students.

Workplace Literacy

Workplace literacy in the schools has evolved over the past

three decades. In a 1971 speech delivered to the National

Association of Secondary School Principals, USOE Commissioner Sidney P. Marland, Jr., launched career education in public schools. He declared that students need to understand a relationship between the subject matter they were required to learn in schools and the competencies required in a workplace setting. The infusion of workplace skills and experiences into content courses continued in the 1980s, primarily as educational programs mandated at the state level (Terry & Hargis, 1992).

Workplace literacy in the schools took on an economic focus in the 1990s in order to meet increased technological advancements and an international marketplace (Terry & Hargis, 1992). The most comprehensive guidelines for career education projecting into the 21st century were listed in What Work Requires of Schools, the report of the Secretary's Commission on Achieving Necessary Skills (SCANS, 1991). The SCANS report directed the focus of workplace literacy beyond basic reading and math skills to include higher level thinking and problem solving activities in the following workplace competencies:

1. Communication and math skills.

2. Thinking and problem solving skills.

3. Personal qualities of self-esteem and sociability.

4. Resource management of time, money, materials, and facilities.

5. Interpersonal skills of collaboration and leadership.

6. Information acquisition, use, and processing.

7. Understanding and designing complex systems.

8. Technology expertise (SCANS, 1991).

The economic focus of workplace literacy also extended to adult literacy programs in response to the National Adult Literacy Survey (NALS). According to the NALS report (Kirsch, Jungeblut, Jenkins, & Kolstad, 1993), nearly half of all adults did not have the literacy and technological skills needed to compete for good jobs in the global economy. Further evaluation of adult programs revealed a curriculum emphasis on school subject matter rather than workplace and life skills (Moore & Savrianos, 1995). In order to answer the question of what life and workplace skills adults need, The National Institute for Literacy began the initiative, Equipped for the Future, with a consumer survey of students in various adult literacy programs (Stein, 1995). The students identified a need to perform a variety of tasks in the roles in which they operate within the three contexts of **parent/family, citizen, and worker.** They also identified the following four purposes for which they need literacy:

1. Literacy as orienting self—to physically and socially access self within the world.

2. Literacy as voice—to express one's ideas and have those ideas count in the world.

3. Literacy as means of independent action—to have self reliance, problem solving, and decision making for privacy and protection of self

4. Literacy as a bridge to the future—to meet changing demands of the world and workplace.

Another initiative for connecting workplace literacy demands and academic content knowledge was the school-to-work program, a program designed to prepare students for high-tech careers and lead them toward life-long learning. The School-to-Work Opportunities Act of 1994 provided use of work-based learning experiences to prepare students for high-tech careers, access to college or other training options, and high quality instruction that applied academic learning to realistic work related problems (Imel, 1995).

Workplace English instruction in high school English classes provided a context-specific environment in which students learned to read and write for the workplace as well as to connect academic content with real life experiences. This included (a) learning literacy skills for communication in the forms of letters, proposals, memoranda, documents, etc.; (b) using computers to gather and present information; and (c) reading and responding to literature (Boiarsky, 1997; Probst, 1990).

When instruction of literature in English class is limited to critical analysis of the work, many students who are not college bound see little connection of reading to real life and

do not read the classics. As Boiarsky (1997) pointed out, students need to read to "react more sensitively to the human condition and the environment in which we live as well as to become literate and to sample literary classics" (p.77). Probst (1990) suggested five purposes for reading literature: (a) to know about self, (b) to know about others, (c) to know about texts or content learning, (d) to know contexts, and (e) to know about processes for making meaning.

The idea of connecting the academic content, literature, to real life experiences such as workplace literacy activities is also applicable to promoting lifelong learning in adult classes. Learning experiences using literature would effectively address the literacy purposes and many of the parent, citizen and worker roles identified by the adult students surveyed in the Equipped for the Future reform agenda (Stein, 1997). Reading literature could support adult learners in: (a) understanding more about the human condition to teach their children about right and wrong; (b) understanding more about the world, analyzing and reflecting on situations and information to make decisions, and using their voice to take action as citizens; and (c) understanding more about social interactions, relationships, and personal perseverance to perform as adaptive and productive workers.

Workplace Literacy Activities In Literature

The activities described here were used with grade 12 students in a large southeast high school (1800-2000 students) located in one of the most rapidly growing areas in the country. The student population was from a low-middle to middle income suburban area with a rural tradition, and from low-income inner-city housing areas. They were college-prep students who usually began their studies at a junior college, tech-prep students, and lower achieving students who usually did not go directly on to school beyond high school.

All students responded to the literature they read by doing the workplace format reports, newsletters, proposals, and presentations explained below. The report and proposal were culminating activities for the literary pieces and used as an evaluation of students' understanding of the work and application of knowledge to life. To supplement instruction for the tech-prep and lower achieving students, commercially packaged workplace literacy materials (e.g., videos, workbooks, cassette tapes) were used to give scenarios, examples, and assignments to further teach workplace report writing.

Literature instruction included reading, reading aloud, group discussions, class discussions, lecture, etc., with the amount of teacher support varying from minimal with college-prep to increased facilitation for tech-prep and students with lower literacy achievement. College-prep students usually read the

material independently prior to class or group discussions. With tech-prep classes, the teacher would read selections of the work to students, followed by their rereading the selections. The teacher also led discussions on analysis of author's purpose, literary elements, and images such as metaphors or symbolism. Mostly, the discussions concentrated on the themes, and how the themes related to students' lives.

A Newsletter

A newsletter format was used as a research project for reporting on the major historical periods represented in English literature. In this activity, students worked in groups to research information on the Internet and used desktop publishing to produce their newsletters. First, students read an overview of the period in their text, and the teacher led class discussions explaining key aspects of the overview. Included in this overview were suggestions of topics to research, such as the role of women or the religions of the historical period. Students were given samples of a newsletter with teacher directed explanations of the writing format and instruction in desktop publishing.

Samples of the students' work are shown in the two examples below and in Appendix A. Example 1 showed students' historical understanding of the Victorian Era beyond memorization of history facts. Their comprehension of Chaucer's implied meaning in the prologue to the *Canterbury Tales* was evident in Example 2:

Example 1. Article in _Victorian Station_ newsletter.

"Reality of Victorianism: Prudish and repressed?" Most people think of our time as this, but it just isn't so! In fact, we're living in a very complex, paradoxical age. We have invented the idea of invention, the notion that one can create new means of bettering himself and his environment. We have made great changes in ideology, politics and society. Things such as unionization of workers, socialism, and Marxism have all been thought up during our era, the Victorian Era.

Example 2. Editorial in _Medieval Times Gazette_.

"Travelers Beware" In recent news, local innkeepers have been caught bamboozing touring caravans by posing as hosts and traveling with the tour. The innkeeper then befriends the tour members and deceives the people into participating in a contest in which the innkeeper always wins and ends up making a considerable amount of money off of his unexpecting victims who have the feeling that their close friend would not deceive them. This scheme is very affective and preys on people when they are at their lowest point. So TRAVELERS BEWARE

A Business Project Report

In this culminating activity, students worked in groups to write a project report for the selection, _Beowulf_, in a business writing format using headings and bullets. The following instructions for the activity were distributed:

Beowulf **Project**

Overview

You are in a managerial position at Monsters Eradicators, Inc. You gave been assigned a project of ridding Herot of the monster, Grendel, and establishing a safe existence for the Danes. To complete this project, you have sent your best hero, Beowulf, to eradicate the monster. Now your group of three must write the report of the success of the project. One person (data processor) will be in charge of typing the report in final format. One person (writer) does most of the writing. The third person (supervisor) is in charge of making sure each person has the necessary materials/information to complete the task. The supervisor is also responsible for writing several sections of the report and seeing that the day's portion of the report is completed and turned in on time.

Suggestions for Headings

- <u>Assessment of Problem</u> (identify the location, who is involved, what is happening)

- <u>Goals/Objectives/Proposals</u> (tell the outcomes you expect; begin each with to . . .)

- <u>Man-power/Materials</u> (how many people, weapons, supplies, etc.?)

- <u>Procedures</u> (What specific action will be taken? Who will take the action? Where? In what order?)

- <u>Evaluation/Overview</u> (What happened? What is the outcome of the actions taken? Success? Failure?)

- <u>Suggestions/Follow-up</u> (Think of possible outcomes that could result from the action you have laid out. Suggest ways to prevent further problems.)

A Business Training/Education Proposal

When students write a training or education proposal for this culminating activity, they learn about the planning and written format of a proposal. They also learn how continuous education and retraining can lead to better performance, an important concept in today's workplace. Appendix B shows an example of a tech-prep student's education proposal for this Eliza Doolittle Education Proposal Activity.

Eliza Doolittle Education Proposal

Overview

In response to *Pgymalion*, you are to create a proposal Henry Higgins will use for Eliza Doolittle's education. For each heading, provide a one or two sentence description.

Suggestions for Headings

- <u>Justification</u> (Why is education needed? For what purposes?)

- <u>Methods</u> (Action plan to accomplish proper speech)

- <u>Schedule</u> (Time of day for each area she practices)

- <u>Capabilities</u> (Qualifications of Eliza's teachers)

- <u>Materials/Equipment</u> (Any equipment used for Liza's lessons)

- <u>Expected Results</u> (Why is instruction given? What is the goal?)

- <u>Plan for Evaluating Results</u> (How will her ability to speak correctly be tested?)

- <u>Feasibility</u> (Probability of success of this plan)

- <u>Budget</u> (a pie chart is recommended)

Conclusion

A major obstacle to teaching the classics is that students may lack understanding of the role literature can play in their lives. Their comments often include, "Shakespeare is dead, and that stuff's too old," "Sophocles died over 2000 years ago!" The integration of the workplace report and newsletter writing provided relevance for studying literature because great universal themes could be explored in a current and acceptable format. Specifically, students enjoyed experimenting with graphics, fonts, or borders, were excited about their final projects, and expressed pride that their products looked professional.

These workplace literacy/literature activities also helped students grow in their reading, writing and interpersonal skills. Students had to edit and revise their projects several times; they had to analyze a situation and write a succinct and grammatically correct analysis. In the group projects, students had opportunities to discover and develop talents. They were observed dividing assignments among the "best writer," "computer whiz," or "best proofreader" in their group.

Literature and workplace literacy can be integrated in adult programs. The examples provided here show that exploring classic literature can be an important component for literacy instruction of tech-prep and low achieving high school students, as well as those who are college-bound. Further, we believe that integrating literature into adult programs will help older learners continue to strive for individual growth and understanding in addition to preparing to meet the changing demands of the workforce in a global economy.

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The Lady Who Started it All

The eighteen-year-old, Victoria, becomes Queen of England in 1837.

This outstanding young female is creative in literature and science. During her reign Britain reached the first place among nations in wealth and power. She reigned after her Uncle, William IV, died in 1837. Queen Victoria eagerly acted upon her new duties. Queen Victoria encouraged many new things to fit the era.

The Victorian Age was a very simple age of the women, in their styles. Women's style became more simplistic. Woman dressed mostly in white with various colored shawls. The ban on silks and velvets brought about the use of cottons and the linen dresses. The high-heeled shoes disappeared and were replaced by soft, flat slippers, which were cut low and laced across the instep. Victorians also wore jewelry such as lockets and broaches incorporating portraits or locks of hair. Their hair often was worn slicked down and parted down the middle. They often tried to neglect cosmetics. Basically they tried to keep things simple

Empedocles on Etna
The world, which seems
To lie before us like a land of dreams,
So various, so beautiful, so new,
Hath really neither joy, nor love, nor light,
Nor certitude, nor peace, nor help for pain.

-Matthew Arnold

Reality of Victorianism

Prudish and repressed?
Most people think of our time as this, but it just isn't so! In fact, we're living in a very complex, paradoxical age. We have invented the idea of invention, the notion that one can create new means of bettering himself and his environment. We have made great changes in ideology, politics, and society. Things such as democracy, feminism, unionization of workers, socialism, and Marxism have all been thought up during our era, the Victorian Era.

Corn Laws

Originally designed to protect have now been abolished.
These law that were created in 1689 has now been abolished due to the Anti-Corn Law League, that was formed in Manchester. This law originally protected landholders by encouraging the export and limiting the import of corn when prices fell below a fixed point. Now, after this lengthy campaign, the Anti-Corns have won.

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Eliza Doolittle Education Proposal

METHODS:

I will have Eliza Doolittle go over her vowels until she pronounces them correctly, and I will have Eliza speaking with H's before the six months are over. In order to do so, I will have to use every machine in my manor.

SCHEDULING:

I will have Eliza work from dawn till dawn until she can start talking correctly, and once she has done that, she will only have to practice from dawn till dusk. In the morning Eliza will practice her vowels and in the afternoon she will practice her H's, and in between she will learn good posture and how to act like a lady.

CAPABILITIES:

I have a degree in speech, and my life revolves around the art of speech. I can place a man or woman within five miles of his/her home, and I can place him/her in his/her street if he/she is from London.

**MATERIALS
& EQUIPMENT:**

I have many recording machines throughout my house to copy Eliza's voice, so after awhile she can hear her progress. I have a machine that will show by a flame if she says her H's correctly.

**EXPECTED
RESULTS:**

Eliza should be able to go to the ball and be passed off as a dutchess and fool the prince.

**PLAN FOR
EVALUATING
RESULTS:**

We shall first take Eliza to the races and try her out to see if she is ready for the ball and to find out what she needs help in; I will only give her two topics to talk about: the weather and people's health. Then the final evaluation would be the BIG BALL.

FEASIBILITY:

Eliza is a strong girl so she should be able to handle the stress of learning to speak, but I think the harder I drill her, the faster she will learn.

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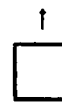| The sample sticker shown below will be affixed to all Level 1 documents	The sample sticker shown below will be affixed to all Level 2A documents	The sample sticker shown below will be affixed to all Level 2B documents
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