
READING AND WRITING IN CO-TAUGHT SECONDARY SCHOOL SOCIAL STUDIES CLASSROOMS: A REALITY CHECK

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In this reanalysis of narrative notes collected in a larger study of co-teaching, the reading and writing demands of high school social studies classes were explored. Eight pairs of teachers (one special education teacher, one social studies teacher) from five high schools in Western Pennsylvania and New York were observed co-teaching in social studies for 3–6 periods each. Observers were trained to document teacher and student behaviors in narrative notes; each five-minute segment was coded based on the literacy demands of the class. Results showed little reading and writing by students or teachers. Implications of these findings are discussed.

In the past twenty years, educational opportunities for students with disabilities have changed dramatically. These changes are largely due to policies enacted by the U.S. Congress and state legislatures requiring that students with disabilities have access to a broad, rich curriculum so that they can attain high academic standards.

The ambitious nature of the policy goals embodied by these legislative initiatives has challenged school personnel and researchers to understand and anticipate the difficulties faced by students with disabilities in content-rich classes. The literacy demands of these classes are expected to be great. Teachers are expected to make

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extensive use of text-based resources including textbooks, authentic artifacts, web-based texts, and popular text-based media like newspapers and magazines (Vacca & Vacca, 2002). What to teach and how to teach it are nagging problems for the classroom teacher. For many, textbooks and other text-based artifacts and resources not only help to delimit the content to be covered but form the basis of the instructional routines used in their classrooms (Martorella, 2001). Teachers assign a text to read as homework, usually with questions to be answered, and tell students (in a subsequent lesson) through question-and-answer routines what the material they read was about, explaining the ideas and information that the student encountered in print. Assign-and-tell practices increase steadily from the primary to the senior high school years and constitute the dominant interactional pattern between teacher and students during class presentation of content material (Alvermann & Moore, 1991; Goodlad, 1984).

Students whose disabilities manifest in reading and writing problems are likely to find these content-rich and text-rich classes particularly difficult. To overcome these difficulties, schools need interventions that meet both the letter and the spirit of inclusion and accountability policies. One result has been an increasing interest in and research about text-based learning and adolescent literacy (see Jetton & Alexander, 2004). A second result has been a proliferation of strategies and practices to help secondary school content-subject teachers help their students learn from the required content (see Deshler, Ellis, & Lenz, 1996). A third result has been the introduction and embracing of co-teaching as the special education service delivery model that would allow students with disabilities to access the general education curriculum, enable general education content subject teachers to manage the presence of increasing numbers of students with disabilities in their content subject classes, and facilitate the implementation of the recommended strategies and procedures (Cook & Friend, 1995).

TEXT-BASED LEARNING AND ADOLESCENT LITERACY

As students progress through school, they are required to learn from printed materials that are increasingly complex, less personally relevant, and conceptually dense (Alexander & Jetton, 2000). Textbooks for courses in history, geography, science, mathematics, and other subject matter domains are linguistically challenging, containing specialized knowledge that is organized in a specialized way. To cope with these texts, students need more than decoding proficiency. They

need a rich, domain-specific vocabulary; a base of subject-matter knowledge; and an understanding of language conventions (Adams, 1991; Alexander, Jetton, & Kulikowich, 1995; Goldman & Rakestraw, 2000). In addition, they need to know how to use cognitive (Pressley, Goodchild, Fleet, Zajchowski, & Evans, 1989) and metacognitive or self-regulatory (Winne, 1995) strategies to process and retain the subject matter content. Because text-based reading is a demanding cognitive process, students do better if they have an interest in the specific and immediate content (Alexander & Jetton, 2000) or a personal connection to the topic (Hidi, 1990).

Paradoxically, just as the demands for text-based learning increase, academic supports for students in the form of explicit reading instruction diminish. Reading is not taught in the secondary school. Students must rely on their extant abilities to read, understand, interpret, and use demanding subject matter texts if they are to succeed academically. Many adolescents, particularly those with disabilities, are not up to the challenge. One solution has been to modify the textbooks. Some textbook publishers have begun to insert various organizers such as semantic maps, webs, and matrices (Schumm & Stickler, 1993). Others have suggested inserting questions into the text (Kinder, 1992) and restructuring text organization (Barba, Pang, & Santa Cruz, 1993; Hartman & Dyer, 1992; Konopak, 1988). Still others (e.g., Carnine, Crawford, Harniss, & Hallenbeck, 1995) have taken on the complete redesign of textbooks to make them more "considerate." Despite these efforts, there is a common belief that an inordinate number of high school students, particularly those with disabilities, cannot cope with assigned content subject reading.

Strategies

During the past several decades, a great deal has been learned regarding how adolescents acquire knowledge within a domain. Researchers and practitioners alike have designed and disseminated instructional strategies to facilitate that learning. The benefit of these instructional strategies is that they both increase the content knowledge in a domain and at the same time teach students to think strategically. Deshler and colleagues (1996) describe numerous teaching devices that can be used to organize, understand, or store and recall critical information. These include study guides, charts and diagrams, textbook supplements, outlines or overviews, and graphic organizers. Deshler and colleagues also describe planning and teaching approaches that can facilitate content acquisition and teach students to become strategic learners capable of processing information creatively and effectively.

Co-Teaching

Students with disabilities are often placed in general education content subject classrooms to benefit from instruction delivered by content experts. The alternative is to have a special education teacher teach them a different set of objectives or frameworks with different written material used to present the content. This alternative has grown less and less popular, not only because separate pull-out programs for students with disabilities are politically incorrect, but also because of accumulating evidence that teachers' content knowledge is crucial to the students' learning of content, and special education teachers are, by training, *not* content specialists. Once in the mainstream, however, students with disabilities are likely to have problems with text-based learning and need instruction in strategies for content mastery, and their content teachers, left to their own devices, are likely to do nothing about it (Dole, 2000; Pressley, 2002). Co-teaching solves this problem (Cook & Friend, 1996). Having two teachers in the classroom, one an expert in content, the other an expert in individualized instruction and learning strategies, *should* provide opportunities for the kind of mediated text-based learning demanded of today's high school students. But does it? There is scant evidence of what actually occurs in high school content subject classes that are co-taught, although co-teaching has become the service delivery model of choice for students with disabilities in high schools (Schumaker & Deshler, 1988).

Realities of Secondary Schools

We take for granted many of the serious challenges facing content-subject high school teachers in our public schools. The pressures of state and national assessments force them to cover larger and larger amounts of information. They are required to use textbooks written beyond their students' reading ability. They assign these texts to be read in class or at home and expect students to summarize, answer questions, and discuss what was read (Jetton & Alexander, 2004). The texts are often poorly organized and written in an unfriendly or inconsiderate manner (Armbruster & Anderson, 1988; Barba, Pang, & Santa Cruz, 1993; Hartman & Dyer, 1992; Konopak, 1988). Even when written better, the sheer volume of information in those textbooks is often overwhelming for both teacher and students. Students in high school content-subject classes range broadly in academic ability, and high school content-subject teachers teach so many students each day that there is little time for individual (let alone individualized) academic interactions.

But is this the reality of secondary schools? Are students in high school content-subject classes really confronted with text-rich learning environments in which they must struggle to perform? The purpose of this research was to do a reality check on the literacy demands of high school social studies classes.

READING AND WRITING IN SECONDARY SOCIAL STUDIES CLASSES

In the course of a larger study of the efficacy of the co-teaching special education service delivery model, content subject classes in several urban, rural, and suburban high schools were observed. Those naturalistic observations were documented in rich narrative notes and originally analyzed to identify the activities undertaken by the special education teacher and the contribution of the special education teacher to the educational experiences observed (see Zigmond & Matta, 2004). In this reanalysis of those narrative notes, we have sought to explore the reading and writing demands of high school social studies classes. The focus of this work is not on what could or should be the literacy environment in secondary school co-taught social studies class, but rather what is actually assigned to a diverse set of learners that includes students with disabilities. Recognizing the concerns of researchers and practitioners about text-based learning and the need for strategy instruction in content-subject classes in general, and in those with students with disabilities in particular, this reality check was undertaken.

RESEARCH PLAN

Sample

Pairs of teachers (one special education teacher, one social studies teacher) from five high schools in western Pennsylvania and western New York volunteered to be observed. Of the five high schools, two were in urban school districts, two in suburban districts, and one in a rural district. School sizes ranged from 350 students to 1,553 students, with a median school size of 972 students.

Depending on the school, the teaching arrangements for these pairs of teachers were referred to in several different ways: consultant teaching, co-teaching, inclusion, and mainstreaming. Regardless of the terminology used, in order to participate in the study, the special education and social studies teacher had to be assigned for the same

Table 1. Observations by grade level

Subject	Grade 9	Grade 10	Grade 11	Grade 12
Social studies	20	1	3	15

instructional period to a secondary class with both general education students and students with disabilities.

Eight co-teaching social studies pairs agreed to participate in our study. Each co-teaching pair was observed between three and six times during the second semester of the school year, for a total of 39 observations of the eight classes. Observations in the same classroom were scheduled at least one week apart, and observers took narrative notes for the entire class period (from 41 to 44 minutes).

The observations were recorded in ninth-grade civics, American history, and African American history; tenth-grade global studies; eleventh-grade American history; and twelfth-grade American Problems of Democracy and two classes of economics (see Table 1). Class sizes ranged from fifteen (in a twelfth-grade economics class in the rural high school) to 32 (in a twelfth-grade "comprehensive" or basic level economics class in a suburban high school). The balance of special education to general education students assigned to the class was, on average, 27%, but ranged from two of 26 (8%) in an eleventh-grade American history class to fourteen of nineteen (74%) in a ninth-grade civics class.

Although the teachers knew ahead of time when an observer would be present, there was no indication that instruction during these class periods was any different from instruction that was not observed. In fact, teachers told several observers that they were so busy meeting the daily demands of high school teaching, they had no time or energy to do anything "special" for the observers.

Observation Protocol

A narrative observation protocol was developed, and observers were trained to document teacher behavior and student behaviors in narrative notes. Every five minutes, the observer described what roles each of the teachers took in the classrooms, what students were doing, and what was written on the blackboard. The reliability of narrative notes was checked by having two observers take notes during the same class period. If the observers both captured the same essence of the class during 80% of the five-minute segments, the narrative notes were considered reliable. Reliability checks were done at the conclusion of training and once during the data collection period

for each of the eight pairs of teachers. Reliability was judged to be better than 80% throughout data collection using the formula $[\text{agreements} \div (\text{agreements} + \text{disagree-ments}) \times 100]$.

The handwritten narrative notes taken by the observers were typed and saved as text documents. The researchers read printouts and developed a coding scheme based on the literacy demands of the class (see Fig. 1). The segment was not coded if there was no mention of reading or writing in the five-minute narrative segment. For every other segment, a reading code, writing code, or both was assigned. In reading, the students could be read to by the teacher or do the reading themselves. If a student was reading, the nature of the reading source was also coded (textbook, primary source material, handout, chalkboard, computer screen, classroom notes or class

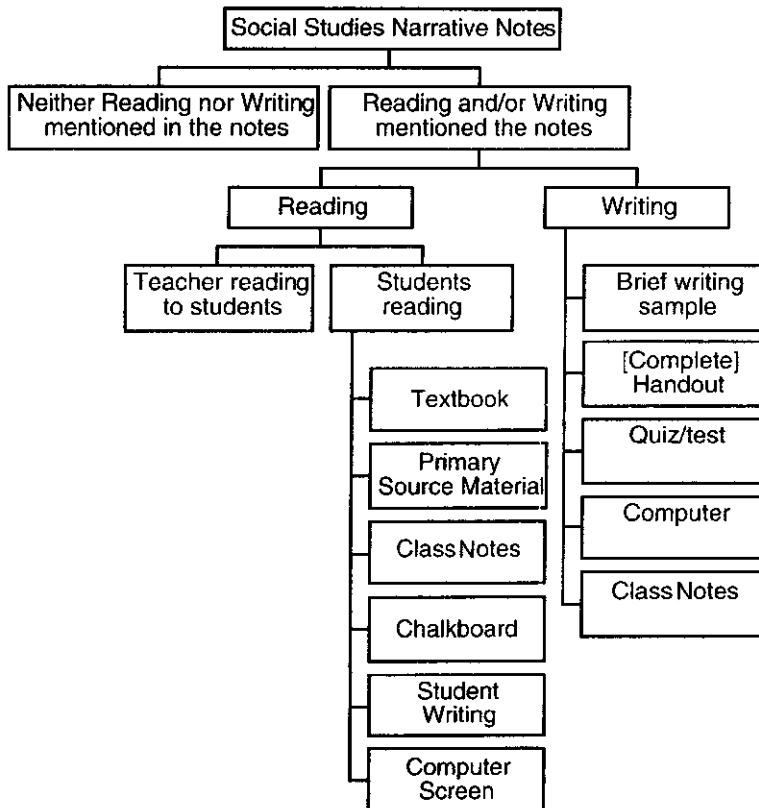


Figure 1. Coding scheme for capturing literacy demands of high school social studies classes.

work, or students' writing). If students were coded as writing, the form of the writing was also coded (classroom work or notes, brief writing sample, [completing a] handout, quiz or test, or [writing on the] computer. A code was established for "extended writing," but there was no evidence of extended writing in the narrative notes.

Only one reading code and/or one writing code was assigned to each five-minute observation segment. Fig. 1 provides a schematic of the coding system used to capture the literacy demands of co-taught social studies classes.

Once the two research assistants had been trained on the coding system, they coded all of the narrative observation notes. Coders double-coded sixteen of the 39 observations (41%) independently to establish reliability. The reliability of coding five-minute segments was better than 85%, using the formula $[\text{agreements} \div (\text{agreements} + \text{disagreements}) \times 100]$.

The observations were imported and codes were entered using the Q.S.R. NUD.IST Version 4.0 software program, making it possible to disaggregate narrative notes by code and to calculate the frequency of codes across observations.

RESULTS

Reading in Social Studies

Overall, there were 406 five-minute segments across the 39 observations of co-taught social studies classes. Reading was coded in 159 segments (39.2%) and writing in 104 segments (25.6%). As seen in Table 2, by far the greatest number of reading segments were coded as reading from the chalkboard or overhead transparency ($n = 71$). For example, in a twelfth-grade American Problems in Democracy class, the narrative notes read as follow (*italics denote narrative notes that warranted the assigned code*):

7:55 GET (General education teacher) began the lesson by saying, "Let's go over some notes." *GET goes to the blackboard and begins to write notes about the Fourth Amendment, 'search and seizures' and the exclusionary rule . . .*

Thirty minutes later, the notes continue:

8:25 GET continues the lecture/discussion as before, *now writing a list of students' rights on the board.*

Table 2. Distribution of narrative five-minute segments by reading code

Code	Five-minute segments	
	#	%
No reading	247	60.8
Textbook	7	1.7
Primary sources	21	5.2
Handout	32	7.9
Chalkboard	71	17.5
Computer	24	5.9
Student writing	2	0.5
Class notes	2	0.5
Total	406	100

In an American history class, the students were preparing for a map quiz.

11:40 GET begins the class right away, as soon as the bell rings . . . He uses a strong authoritative opening. *There are states listed on the board.* GET walks to map of the United States, points to a state, and calls on a student for the name of the state.

Sometimes the chalkboard text was substantive, but other times it related to the objectives of the lesson to be taught. In an African American history class, "as students entered the room, GET told everyone to *look at the two objectives on the board.*"

Generally, text written on the chalkboard was not very complex. Often it was only a list of single words. For example, as part of a social studies lesson modeled after *Survivor* (a television program), the GET asked all the students to *consider the 25 occupations listed on the front chalkboard.* Students read one occupation at a time, and voted whether to keep it or "vote it off the island." In a civics class, as a preliminary to a homework assignment to watch President Bush's State of the Union address the following night, the *GET listed on the board* some of the people who would likely be present in the room during the speech.

Sometimes the chalkboard text consisted of a few simple sentences. In an economics class, the teacher directed students to "the two questions you ask yourself when you want to invest money." *Written on the board were* "2.b. Do you need to get to the money easily? 2.c. Can you survive without using the invested money?" In an African American history class,

8:10 ...GET asked someone to define abolitionist. A student answered as *GET wrote the definition on the board*—person who works for end to slavery. GET asked students what is wrong with slavery. As students responded, *GET listed reasons on the board*.

Often, the chalkboard text was read only because it needed to be copied into the students' notebooks. In one civics class, there were several phrases and sentences on the chalkboard during the course of the period. At 11:35, students copied "civil law—disputes between individuals, businesses or government." After a three minute discussion of civil cases from the *Judge Judy* television program, students copied "civil court involves suing someone that seeks money damages." At 11:40, the students copied "plaintiff—the person bringing the suit to court," and then they copied "defendant—person answering or defending from the suit." Over the next twenty minutes, the students copied from the chalkboard the definition for "preponderance of evidence," three criteria for being on a jury, three sources of the jury registers, and four reasons for not serving on a jury.

The second most frequently coded reading source consisted of handouts from the teacher (coded in 32 segments, 7.9%). Teachers distributed text handouts in twelve of the 39 social studies classes observed. As with the chalkboard text, reading demands of handouts varied considerably. In a civics class, the handout consisted of a one-word occupation printed on a note-card. In a global studies class, the handout contained vocabulary words and their definitions. In economics, the teacher created a handout that summarized the lecture on investing financial assets, but also distributed a crossword puzzle and word search handout for vocabulary review.

11:57 ...*The GET directs the class to look at the new handout. "This is simply vocabulary. One of the search words is "standards of force." It will just be SF in the search. The words can go horizontal, vertical, diagonal, but not backwards."*

Sometimes the handout was a study aid distributed at the end of a unit of study.

11:50 *GET goes over parts of the worksheet to be filled out: Section I is vocabulary. He tells them to make sure that they spell the words correctly. If they can't find the word in boldface type of chapter 14, they are to use the glossary in the back of the book. Section II is reviewing facts they should already know. GET tells them to look at the Review Section on p. 477 for answers.*

11:55 *GET goes over Section III, Critical Thinking skills.* He explains that here is where he wants the partners to come up with their own ideas about what they think are the most important rights to be obtained—political, employment, others. The students are to list reasons why. Then, working with their partner, they are to write a letter to the editor of a newspaper in 1840 . . .

Students were coded as spending almost equal time reading from primary sources (21 segments) and reading text on the computer (24 segments). Students in an economics class spent twenty minutes (four segments) reading six pages from *Up Front: The News Magazine for Teens*. The teacher of the American Problems of Democracy course copied and distributed magazine and newspaper articles related to the Fourth, Fifth, and Sixth Amendments. Students spent the next forty minutes (eight segments) reading and preparing class presentations on the text material. In a global studies class, students in groups of four spent ten minutes (two segments) reading a story about the survivors of Hiroshima, and in an African American history class, students read a biography of Harriet Jacobs (one segment). In six separate segments spread throughout the data set, students read briefly from newspaper or magazine articles they brought in themselves or were given by their teacher. In all, primary sources were observed in seven of the 39 observations (18%).

Reading on the computer was seen in only four of the 39 observations (10%), mostly as a result of a particular assignment in the American Problems of Democracy class. Students spent 2.5 class periods (seventeen segments) searching the Internet for information on the resources of particular states and learning how to present their findings in a Power-Point presentation. In a civics class, students spent 35 minutes (seven segments) “having fun,” finding examples of “crazy laws” on the Internet.

Observers rarely (1.7% of segments) saw students spending class time reading from their social studies textbook. In an economics course, the GET directed students to review pages in their textbook that were relevant to the lecture he was delivering.

11:08 *The GET directs the class to open their textbooks to Chapter 13, page 325.* The GET directs a quickly-paced question and answer introduction to the new chapter on Financial Assets . . . [At the end of a four-minute mini-lecture] the GET informs the class that they are not going onto compound interest now but indicates that the next section in the text talks about various ways to save and talks about compound interest.

In an observation two days later, the teacher “*directs the students to page 328 of their textbook with information on bond rating agencies: Standard and Poor and Moodies*” but proceeds with a lecture on agency ratings without reference to the book. In an American history class, the GET tells students to “*skim chapter 14*” in order to complete a homework worksheet. Observers noted only three instances in which material from the textbook was actually read aloud in class. Two of these were readings by students, both during an observation of the African American history class.

- 8:20 . . .The Special Education teacher (SET) asked what law stated, “If a slave crossed the Mason Dixon line he could be brought back?” SET asked a student to read the answer in the textbook.
- 8:35 SET asked a student to read a part in the textbook about another slave, Tom Brown.

In the third, the teacher read aloud to the students one paragraph from their economics text.

Writing in Social Studies

Writing codes were assigned to only 104 of the 406 (25.6%) five-minute segments of social studies narrative notes (see Table 3). The majority of that writing consisted of students taking notes. In the American Problems of Democracy course, students spent fifteen minutes listening to the teacher lecture about the amendments to the Constitution.

Table 3. Distribution of narrative five-minute segments by writing code

Code	Five-minute segments	
	#	%
No writing	302	74.4
Class notes	41	10.1
Brief writing sample	3	0.7
[Complete the] Handout	27	6.7
Quiz/test	25	6.2
Computer	8	1.9
Total	406	100

- 7:55 ... The students are listening but not taking notes. *GET directs them to get out their notebooks and write down what she is saying. Most of them do...*
- 8:00 GET continues the discussion of civil liberties with the 6th amendment. She leads the students in a discussion of the amendment, right to counsel, as related to their civil rights. *All the students are listening and most of them are taking notes...*
- 8:10 GET continues as before with the lecture/discussion, now covering the 14th amendment, equal protection under law. *Students continuing to participate and take notes as before...*

Most often the notetaking was generative—students wrote down what they heard and thought was important. The observer of an American history class noted, “GET talks about US foreign policy. *Students are taking notes.*” On another day, the observer noted, “GET... begins to give lecture on important reform movements in US history. *Students take out notebooks and begin to take notes.*” In a civics class, students were divided into small groups.

12:30 Groups continued brainstorming ideas... *One student from each group recorded ideas on paper.*

Just as often, however, the notetaking was simply copying from the chalkboard or from an overhead transparency. In a global studies class, the observer noted

8:55 The class is focused on the Enlightenment and a review for a test the next day... SET reviewed notes that were on an overhead that *students were copying [into their notebooks].*

In an American history class, the teacher had written notes on the chalkboard. “GET tells students to *get their notebooks out and copy what is on the board.*” In a civics class, the students spent much of one period copying definitions the teacher had written on an overhead transparency.

- 11:35 *The students copied* civil law—disputes between individuals, businesses or government... Next, the *students copied*—civil court involves suing someone that seeks money damage...
- 11:40 The GET defined plaintiff (the complainer)—person bringing the suit to court. The *students copied*... GET defined

defendant—person answering or defending from the suit. *Students copied* . . .

12:20 The GET asked the students a few questions to review civil law. He turned on the overhead and the *students copied* . . .

12:30 The GET turned on the overhead and had *students copy*—to be on a jury you need to—1. Be an American citizen 2. Be over 18 3. No felony . . . The GET defined on the board—“sequestered”—having no outside contact. He also defined—“change of venue”—the need to take the case out of town. *Students copied* . . .

Or, the teacher dictated what was to be written down. In economics, we saw

11:15 The GET continues reading from the overhead/*dictating the notes* and interspersing questions to check student understanding.

11:20 The GET *dictates information from the overhead as students write down the notes* about: C6: International Bonds C7: Treasury Notes and Bonds. *The GET directs the class to get it all down in about four minutes and focuses the PowerPoint notes so students can see to copy them.* [This is faster than the observer could write it. Several students struggle to keep up.] . . .

11:25 *All students are busy copying* the following notes from the PowerPoint display . . . Several students move up to the floor near the screen, in order to see the notes better.

Observers also saw students filling in handouts, study guides, or outlines provided by the teacher. In an economics class,

11:15 *All 26 students are on task listening and writing.* The pace of the lesson is very fast with several examples added while *students fill in the blanks* on their outline notes. . . The GET moves on to the outline, Section II. A 2. Investment Objectives. . .

11:25 All 26 students are on task. The GET continues with the information as *students fill in the outline notes*: 4. Avoid Complexity: Stick with what you know.

11:57 [Bell] There are 28 students in the class after lunch. A minute after the bell rings, the GET continues the guided notetaking lecture with *students copying the sentence completion* to define ‘Bonds’ [Outline II. B. Bonds as Financial Assets.]

Sometimes the handout was a crossword puzzle (to review definitions) or a word search that students completed independently.

In American history, students were to work in pairs to complete a worksheet distributed by the teacher.

12:00 GET directs the students to get together with their partner. . .

The students begin *working on the worksheet together*.

12:05 The students are working together in pairs. . .some pairs are more on task and active than others.

12:10 Continuation from above.

12:15 Continue, same as above. GET gets up and walks around room, checking on students' progress and making suggestions.

12:25 GET collects worksheets from everyone and gives out the next one. He assigns: Begin now, finish for homework. Skim chapter 14 and select names from the list and put them in the appropriate box on the worksheet for the kind of reform. . .

Student writing was also evident when students completed a quiz or test. During three of the 39 observations, observers found the students taking a test during all or part of the class period. The tests all contained at least some multiple-choice items and sometimes, required short written answers. During a civics quiz, the teachers asked questions orally and students were instructed to write their answers on a piece of paper. The students then exchanged papers, and the teachers read answers for the students to check.

In one of the 39 observations (2% of segments), observers saw students "writing" at a computer terminal. In that class, students in American Problems of Democracy gathered in the computer lab and spent the entire period learning how to use Microsoft Word and PowerPoint.

There were only three instances of composition or creative writing. In a civics class, students had to list questions they would ask the mayor, who would be visiting their school later in the week. In global studies, students wrote answers to questions about an article on Hiroshima that had been assigned. In American history, during the unit on the amendments to the Constitution, students composed a 'letter to the editor' of a newspaper published in 1840.

Reading and Writing in Homework Assignments

There was scant evidence in the narrative notes that students were assigned reading and writing tasks as homework. One observer noted

that the social studies general education teacher in American Problems of Democracy “asks students a question that they should have been able to answer from reading their textbook.” We surmised that the reading had been a homework assignment. In an economics class, the teacher announced that “students had until next week to read from the textbook.” In the American history class, there seemed to be an expectation that students would read the newspaper or watch television to keep up on current events. The observer noted that the teacher “started a review of current events by asking, ‘Who has the most awesome current event?’” In the economics class, the teacher encouraged students to look for current economic events, and during one class period reminded students to “bring in current events for the next day’s class.”

There was little evidence that significant writing assignments were given as homework. One observer noted that students were asked to watch the President’s State of the Union address and “write down the names of the two people who will be missing from the Cabinet and the House... for security reasons.” In economics, students were sometimes given problems to complete as homework, but these were more math than writing. Occasionally, a worksheet distributed in class was assigned to be finished at home.

DISCUSSION

Given what has been written about social studies instruction at the high school level, observers expected to see text-rich environments, extended reading and writing assignments given to students, and both the special education co-teacher and the general education social studies teacher actively working to help students cope with the complex reading and writing demands. The research was designed to confirm these expectations. Thirty-nine sets of narrative observation notes taken in eight co-taught high school social studies classes in five high schools in western Pennsylvania and New York were re-coded. A search was conducted for evidence that would corroborate the conventional wisdom that high school social studies classes are text-based and require students to perform high levels of reading and writing skills. This re-analysis was viewed as a “reality check.”

The findings were surprising. In 20.5 of nearly 34 hours of social studies instruction, students were not engaged with print at all. Social studies in these high schools was taught mainly through lecture, discussion, and Q&A. Students or teachers were almost never seen reading the texts. When students read in class, they read teacher-constructed text written on the chalkboard or in handouts. Unlike

textbooks that are characterized as dense with content and linguistically complex, the teacher-constructed text was often only single words (in vocabulary exercises) and sometimes short phrases or single sentences. Students spent very little time (less than 7% of five-minute segments) reading "authoritative" sources like newspaper articles, magazine articles, or the textbook. Even if they occupied the students for the entire segment in which they were coded (which they often did not), reading newspapers or magazine articles account for only 140 minutes of the 2,030 minutes we observed.

Students did even less writing than they did reading. Writing consisted mostly of taking notes, copying from the chalkboard or overhead transparency, or filling in missing words or phrases on a lecture outline or handout. Very few instances were observed of students composing text, and no instances had been recorded of students being asked to write more than one paragraph at a time.

What should one make of these data? The most likely explanation is that the teachers who were observed had adjusted their instructional demands downward because of the literacy limitations they recognized in their students. The co-taught secondary school classrooms that were observed had a substantial numbers of students with learning and behavior problems assigned to them. The teachers assigned to these classrooms were experienced. They probably had found over the years that many of their students did not complete homework assignments because they simply could not read the textbooks or have effective strategies for reading difficult text. These teachers seem to have abandoned textbooks or consigned them to the status of supplemental reference material.

This accommodation to the skill levels of the students may be a realistic short-term solution, but as a long-term solution, it appears to have serious limitations. First, it requires that all content delivered to the students be filtered through the teacher, making the teacher the primary authoritative source for the subject matter to be learned. It speaks to the need for social studies teachers to truly be highly qualified in their content field and limits the role that a special education co-teacher can play in a high school social studies class.

Second, it perpetuates a vicious cycle. Teachers accommodate the reading and writing deficiencies of their students by shifting from textbook-lecture to lecture-discussion as the mode of information transmittal. Students give up on reading with the expectation that teachers will impart all the needed information through lecture and recitation. They become dependent on their teacher as their primary source of information and are rarely in a position to think and learn with text.

Texts convey the specialized knowledge, processes, and vocabulary deemed essential by experts and by society (Lampert & Blunk, 1998; VanSeldright, 2002). It is true that textbooks are often complex, contain high readability levels and many formats, and introduce a significant number of new vocabulary words and concepts in each chapter (Bulgren & Lenz, 1996; Chiang-Soong & Yager, 1993; Mastropieri & Scruggs, 1994). It's not surprising that studying from textbooks is hard and frustrating for many students with disabilities and those at risk for school failure. Learning to negotiate a textbook means learning to learn independently (Scruggs & Mastropieri, 2000), an increasingly important skill in our rapidly changing world. Students with special needs may require explicit instruction in how to predict text structures, highlight or outline essential information, and use content enhancements such as lesson organizers, space organizers, illustrations, charts, graphs, and diagrams. These are skills that students with disabilities can acquire (Deshler et al., 1996). A special education teacher in a co-taught classroom could (theoretically, at least) teach these skills. Yet in the social studies classrooms that were observed, they were not doing that (see Zigmond & Matta, 2004). Instead of providing strategy instruction and scaffolding students' work with text, special education social studies co-teachers spent a lot of classroom time standing around, not interacting with students, and only occasionally providing a substantive contribution to the ongoing lecture or discussion.

Whether as preparation for high-stakes assessments, or for college study, or for being an informed citizen, learning to read text and reading to learn from text are vital skills for adolescents with (and without) disabilities to acquire and master. And this involves more than assigning pages to read and using questions to check whether students have read the assigned material. Learning with text is an active process. It teaches students to use reading and writing as tools to construct knowledge, to discover, clarify, and make meaning in a given discipline (Vacca & Vacca, 2002). It teaches students to ground their opinions in authoritative sources like textbooks, trade books, electronic texts, magazines, and newspapers. It is so important that rather than abandoning texts because students can't read them teachers should select equivalent texts that students can read while teaching students content reading skills.

Teaching and learning with texts is a challenge in today's classrooms where the range of linguistic, cultural, and academic diversity is increasing steadily. But a text-rich classroom environment is what we have always expected in high school content subject classes and one of the reasons those classes (and service delivery models that

support students in those classes) are desirable for students with disabilities. It is disappointing not to find that in the classes observed in this study. Hopefully, they are the exception and not the rule.

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