



Research Base

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I. Introduction

The world in which we currently live, the world in which the students of today will become the great thinkers, dreamers and architects of tomorrow, is a world in which interactive, high speed communication is constantly evolving. Today's students must be prepared to masterfully evaluate, critique and navigate this type of sophisticated communication if they want to create a niche for themselves in the larger world of post secondary education and the workplace (US Department of Education, 2012). Literacy proficiency has always served to define the fluidity with which one can negotiate the layers of communication, from rudimentary to genius. Literacy isn't just the ability to interpret basic signs and information needed for survival; it's the ability to read, write, speak, and listen at an advanced level (Jones-Kavalier & Flannigan, 2006).

As our world evolves, so too does the way in which we define literacy excellence for 21st century learners and the way in which we teach these lifelong skills; it must be a curriculum fundamental for all educational institutions. A 21st century learner must be able to work independently, think critically, solve complex problems, communicate and collaborate effectively, and most importantly have the drive and desire to acquire new knowledge (Soland, Hamilton, & Stecher, 2013). In order to nurture and inspire the kinds of learners that are able to achieve literacy excellence we must craft a learning environment that is filled with opportunities for deep learning, rich in personal meaning.

"Literacy is the most basic currency of the knowledge economy we're living in today. Only a few generations ago, it was okay to enter the workforce as a high school dropout who could only read at a third-grade level. Whether it was on a farm or in a factory, you could still hope to find a job that would allow you to pay the bills and raise your family." – President Barack Obama

This is no longer true in a world that demands intellectual sophistication as much as it demands technological savvy. In short, the skills that allowed previous generations to succeed, would barely prepare current generations for basic survival. Given the rate at which the U.S. must grow just to maintain stability in a competitive and highly skilled global arena, the literacy component must be addressed before students leave high school if we want them to be prepared to meet the demands of a rapidly changing world. In fact, the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE), indicate that 21st century readers and writers must be able to (National Council of Teachers of English, 2013):

- ✓ Gain proficiency with tools of technology
- ✓ Develop relationships with others and confront and solve problems collaboratively and cross-culturally
- ✓ Design and share information for global communities to meet a variety of purposes

- ✓ Manage, analyze, and synthesize multiple streams of simultaneous information
- ✓ Create, critique, analyze, and evaluate multimedia texts
- ✓ Attend to the ethical responsibilities required by these complex environments

As the definition of literacy evolves in relation to our high-speed, mass information world, so must the vision of educators dedicated to helping 21st century students work towards a mastery of the skills needed to assimilate in this fast paced environment. The ability to process information from a multitude of sources, many of them technology based, and further filter vast amounts of digital information, will be paramount for students if they want to excel in higher education and the workplace (Office of Educational Technology, 2010). Whether we like it or not written essays, “book reports”, and inanimate information sources are quickly becoming relegated to back shelves and history blogs; they’re no longer the leading literacy and communication paradigm they once were.

Schools have a commitment to prepare students to be the global leaders of tomorrow, to expose them to technologies that excite them about literacy in a way that roots deep learning, critical thinking, and effective communication into the core of their learning experiences. It’s not about exposing the 21st century learner to all that they’ll encounter in the wider world, which would be impossible. The crux of 21st century learning is to instill in students the higher order, critical thinking, and technological skills they need to navigate an ever changing, multicultural, global world, regardless of the ephemeral definition of what that is (National Education Association, 2010).

II. Program Overview

myPerspectives™ English Language Arts is a learning environment that allows students of all levels, in grades 6 through 12, to read texts and engage in meaningful activities designed to inspire thoughtful conversations, high level discussions and lively debate. Designed with an emphasis on a connected approach to learning, students are exposed to various perspectives uniquely presented by authors through literature that spans time periods, cultures and distinct writing styles.

Centered around Essential Questions, *myPerspectives* delivers an interactive, unit of study that exposes learners to both classic and contemporary fiction and non-fiction texts. Each unit of study also integrates a visual/audio media selection that promotes additional technology based learning opportunities. The instructional model of *myPerspectives* is based on scientific research that constitutes best practices for delivering the 21st century skills and independent learning habits needed for college and career success.

The purpose of this document is to highlight the research base behind the following key principals that make *myPerspectives* uniquely suited to engage 21st century learners and teachers in a partnership devoted to effective instruction and learning in the English classroom. Specifically, *myPerspectives* was designed to drive student centered learning, foster student engagement and ownership, and facilitate the mastery of independent reading, writing, speaking and listening skills by integrating the following research based concepts:

- Student Centered Learning
- Supporting the Role of Collaborative Educators
- Generative Vocabulary
- Integrated Writing
- Differentiated Support

In looking more in depth at the research base behind *myPerspectives* and the way in which scientifically based concepts have been built into the structure of the program, readers will be able to better appreciate the applied science and digital age innovation that sits at the core of *myPerspectives*.

III. Student Centered Learning

Learners must be active in their construction of knowledge in order to cultivate awareness through their actions and experiences in the world (Fosnot & Perry, 2005; DeVries & Kohlberg, 1997). When student centered learning opportunities are implemented properly, students experience a multitude of positive outcomes including increased motivation, deeper retention of knowledge, greater understanding, and improved attitudes towards the subject being taught (Collins & O'Brien, 2003). In recognizing that prior experiences and wisdom are valued as integral components of the learning process, students are given permission and tools to make connections and choices that influence future learning. Indeed, McCombs and Whistler (1997) state that a student centered learning environment allows learners to be treated “as co-creators in the learning process, as individuals with ideas and issues that deserve attention and consideration.” When students are able to take ownership of their unique learning processes increased engagement follows (Benson, 2001).

The *myPerspectives* Interactive Student Edition allows for seamless, self-guided, exploration of each unit. Students have easy access to background, author and standards information. The integrated notebook allows learners to take notes, highlight text, apply close reading strategies and download interactive resources while investigating over 100 literary selections. Effective Expressions activities encourage the sharing and defending of ideas, creative collaboration, and personal, project based exploration.

IV. Supporting the Role of Collaborative Educators

The 21st century language arts teacher must make learning relevant for students; they must address the complex, multicultural lives their students live both in and out of school if they want their students to remain engaged and to actively seek meaningful learning experiences (Alvermann, 2003, 2004). It's no longer enough to get students to extrapolate on what things "mean," but rather good educators must find ways and approaches to teaching that explore what things mean to their students (Morrell & Scherff, 2015). Teachers must reflect on *how* their students are thinking and learning, rather than focusing on what they prefer to teach, if they expect students to achieve high literacy levels. This requires a willingness to hand over, at least in part, a portion of the teaching to the student, to embrace new ways of facilitating a unique learning process, and envisioning ways of differentiating instruction that speak to local contexts (Moje et al., 2004, Scherff & Piazza, 2008/2009; Souto-Manning, 2010). Educators must become willing collaborators with their students; they must create the arena in which students define and achieve meaningful literary experiences for themselves.

myPerspectives provides teachers with the tools they need to effectively support student learning while allowing students to maintain a level of choice and freedom in their literary pursuits. Whole class learning opportunities let teachers model key concepts as the class broadens their perspective of the unit topics. Small group and independent learning opportunities set the stage for collaboration and creative, student drive instruction.

V. Generative Vocabulary

As educators seek to help students unravel and draw meaning from complex texts students must be able to infer the meaning of new words based on their knowledge of how words work in the English language. Indeed, morphological awareness, or the application of generative vocabulary instruction, has been shown to significantly contribute to students' literacy development, especially when it deepens students' understanding of the morphemic structure, spelling, and meaning of written words (Carlisle, 2010). When students are exposed to generative vocabulary "we share with students the way in which words have grown beyond their original meanings, and developed their legacies, we are helping to give students a sense of control and power as they employ these words in different genres and in the service of different purposes" (Templeton, 2011). Research has shown several key strategies when it comes to unlocking complex text (Hiebert, 2014):

1. Teach students to anticipate that complex texts will have many new words and that their generative word knowledge will assist them in figuring out new words.

2. Expose students to many new topics and the vocabulary associated with those topics, including “stories” about how words work and their histories.
3. Teach student about the multiple uses of many words.
4. Teach students words in families, not just single words.
5. Teach students about the rich networks of similar meaning words from which authors of narratives choose words for traits/attributes, emotions, motion and communication.
6. With the vocabulary of informational texts, teach students about relationships among concepts of critical topics.
7. When appropriate, introduce new concepts with pictures and illustrations.

Following each *myPerspectives* selection, students make meaning of the text through close reading activities that allow them to analyze the author’s unique craft and structure. Students also engage in language development activities with Concept Vocabulary words that are introduced at the beginning of the selection and Conventions practice. *myPerspectives* was designed to provide learning opportunities that develop a strong vocabulary foundation that promotes students’ ability to comprehend increasingly more complicated texts.

VI. Integrated Writing

“Reading makes us better writers. Conversely, let us not forget that the opposite is also true: Writing makes us better readers.” (Gallagher, 2015). Indeed, research has shown that intensive writing is a critical component of effective adolescent literacy programs (Biancarosa and Snow, 2004). Writing about a text also improves comprehension and assists students in making the connection between what they already know, read, and comprehend. When students are given daily opportunities to write, their reading gains increase with the amount of writing that occurs (Graham and Hebert, 2010). When students have teachers that create engaging learning experiences focused on higher order discussions and writing about text, they exhibit greater reading growth (Taylor et al., 2002). In addition, when students spend time reading and writing they’re able to think more deeply about their reading via writing (Gallagher, 2015).

myPerspectives provides a variety of opportunities for effective expression, including activities designed to foster writing within the unit’s focus mode. Notes in the Teacher’s edition offer additional ways to personalize the curriculum through writing experiences such as WriteNow, Express and Reflect.

VII. Differentiated Support

In order to maximize student growth, educators must teach in a way that allows them to identify the distinctive learning needs, varied backgrounds, and strengths

of each student rather than attempting to teach to a class as if it were composed of identical students (Tomlinson & Allan, 2000). The ability to customize the literary experience, so students of all levels are exposed to a wide variety of texts, increases the vocabulary skills and knowledge needed to expand learning. For English Language Learners (ELL) and students of low socioeconomic status access to a rich text environment that allows for active and engaging literacy helps increase positive learning effects (Cummings & Early, 2015).

For students of *all* abilities those who receive instructional interventions designed to meet their unique educational requirements show a statistically significant difference in achievement over those students not being accommodated (Dunn, et al. 1995). When literacy teachers are able to learn about their students' backgrounds, identify language demands inherent in classroom tasks, and scaffold learning, they're better equipped to facilitate needed supports and provide targeted, differentiated, instruction (Lucas, et al., 2008).

myPerspectives gives teachers the tools they need to personalize learning for *all* students. With a built-in, continuous, improvement loop performing formative assessments, providing remediation, and selecting reading supports for each text becomes seamless. Support suggestions are based on complexity rubrics for each text and give teachers appropriate differentiation options for all levels of learners, including English learners, below level, and advanced students.

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