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Creating Variety in the Classroom: Using New Ways to Keep Students Engaged in Reading

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Abstract

Research shows that, there is has been a dramatic drop in how much students are reading as they move up in grade levels. The goal of this research is to find ways that teachers can provide variety for reading material in classrooms and strategies to promote student interest in reading. A survey of English teachers was conducted in order to understand teachers' perspectives of strategies to engage students in reading. The survey also explored reasons why some teachers have been unable to use strategies that can provide variety in reading material to engage their students. This research provides tools and information to new and veteran teachers on how to motivate students and help them to be more engaged readers in the classroom.

Introduction

In their free time, students' read books they find relevant to their lives and aspirations (Amicucci & et al 2015). However, the curriculum in many English classes has become stagnant and students are losing interest and motivation for reading. Morgan and Wagner (2013) reported a steady drop in the number of books students read as they rise in grade levels. According to a study conducted by the National Endowment for the Arts (2007), less than one third of eighth graders read daily, and the number of high school juniors who haven't read any books for pleasure has doubled (as cited in Morgan & Wagner, 2013, p. 660).

Reading is a key part in almost every class students take, so it is important for them to be confident and competent readers. In order to do this, they need to take every opportunity to read, so they can develop the skills to comprehend material from all types of sources. However, students are less engaged with material that they do not find relevant to them. By varying the content students are reading in English classes, teachers can find ways to make the content relatable for students, so they are more interested in furthering their knowledge (Renninger & Hidi, 2015). While teachers must work within the standards of their district, there are still ways to get students more involved in their learning.

I have conducted a survey of English teachers to gather their ideas of the varieties of reading strategies that are most relevant and engaging for students today. In the following section of this research, I have made review of scholarly and professional literature on the following themes: why classics make up the majority of reading materials, strategies to add variety into English classrooms, and teacher's perspectives on limitations and barriers for some reading strategies. The survey created for this research was based on the information found in this literature review.

Literature Review

Classics and the Standards

There is a culture in English classrooms that makes it seem as if classic novels are the only novels worth teaching. It is rare to see teachers using young adult novels in a high school classroom and graphic novels are hardly seen at all. Despite having other options, teachers still use classics almost exclusively in their classrooms (Ostenson & Wadham, 2012, p. 5). Ostenson and Wadham reported that some teachers even argued that classics are the only text that should be analyzed in English classrooms. Mukherjee (2010) defined classics as "that which survives critical questioning, and it in fact defines itself by that surviving" (p. 1028). He meant that classic literature is not just old texts, but texts that have withstood the test of time and are still considered worth analyzing by modern generations. There are many old pieces of literature outside of what we consider to be classics. Lopez (2014) discussed these texts as being outside of the current canon. The western literature canon is what is often referred to as classic literature in English classrooms. These works became canon because of their influence across a great deal of time and the authenticity of the works. However, Lopez (2014) said that it is the presence of the books outside of the canon that reinforces the principles of these canon texts (p.110). Unfortunately, the classics of the western canon cast a shadow over all other texts that literature teachers could use in classrooms.

Materials that have been created for teachers in states that have adopted the Common Core State Standards in order to help them plan lessons over the course of the year (Common Core, 2012) illustrate this shadow of the classics. There are books for every grade made by teachers of the Common Core State Standards that share suggestions for novels teachers should

use in their classrooms. Looking at each detailed unit, they have recommended that teachers use

classics for all their novels. The unit for ninth grade created by teachers using the CCSS only

gives three options for one unit: *Romeo and Juliet, Oedipus the King,* and *Antigone* (Common

Core, 2012, p. 38). The common core itself does not forbid the use of other literature to teach

students. However, the suggested literature was shaped with classics in mind to be the center of

units. Even the suggested art to be included as part of the lessons are from renowned classic

artists such as Pablo Picasso and Michelangelo (Common Core, 2012, p. 38). There are two

sections where the curriculum maps deviate from classic western literature. These sections were

specifically on Latin American literature and Asian literature (Common Core, 2012, pp. 69 &

95). Even with this small deviation, there were no units throughout this common core resource

with suggested novels from the current century (Common Core, 2012).

Overall, it was the ability of classics to impart lessons to readers across time that keeps

them in classrooms. Short and Ketchen (2005) argued that the timeless nature of classics allows

modern readers to learn lessons that can even be used outside the classroom. They specifically

mentioned the memorability of classics being beneficial because their lessons stay with the

readers more easily (p. 817). However, there is one large downfall to using classics in the

classroom. Classics require a significant amount of scaffolding in order for students to

understand and appreciate the text (Ostenson & Wadham, 2012, p. 8). As a result, students do

not enjoy what they are reading and become demotivated to engage in the content (Morgan &

Wagner, 2013). Classics are an important part of literature, but their exclusive use in the

classroom is alienating students from the content because of that lack of interest in reading them

(Renninger & Hibi, 2015).

Strategies to Diversify Content and Engage Students

Including other forms of literature in the English curriculum can foster greater engagement from students to make them successful and skilled readers while meeting teaching standards (Ostenson & Wadham, 2012, p. 12). One way teachers can give new life to classics is by linking them to contemporary literature. Abair and Cross (1999) discussed the trends in American literature and their tendency to repeat across time. They were able to find several classics that were complemented by later works of literature with great success. For example, *The Holder of the World* helped students appreciate Hawthorne's dry and obscure writing style (Abair & Cross, 1999, p. 83). Lewkowich (2019) found some teachers were using comics based off of Shakespeare's plays to further engage students in the source material (p.16). Similarly, Bright (2011) conducted a study on popular books that have intertextual links to classic novels. She used Fiske's (1987) definition for intertextuality, "one or more texts which the reader must know in order to understand a work of literature in terms of its overall significance," (as cited by Bright, 2011, p. 39). Out of the 100 texts Bright (2011) looked at, she found 25 with significant ties to classic literature. One particular series she found that used classics for a lot of the source material was Rick Riordan's Percy Jackson series. The novels reference events that happen in both the *Illiad* and *Odyssey* and even reference the texts directly (Bright, 2011, p.40). Without knowledge of the source material, many of the references made in the series go over the head of the reader. By reading the source material, students were better able to understand the contemporary literature and vice versa (Bright, 2011).

Bright (2011) believed that by using contemporary novels alongside classics, teachers can increase students understanding and enjoyment of text (Bright, 2011, p.46). In fact, some classics have been republished with references to popular young adult novels that mention them. For

example, republishing of *Wuthering Heights* has a tag from the Twilight series on it since the series referenced the classic heavily throughout the story (Bright, 2011, p.42). In the case of *Wuthering Heights*, Bright even found that students were seeking out the classic to read on their own because it was mentioned in the teen drama.

To see if adding other literature to classic discussions was beneficial to students, Cook (1934) conducted an experiment to explore the differences between coupling classics with contemporary literature and studying the classic alone. In the experiment, two groups were tasked with the study of the classic poem, *The Lady of the Lake.* During the course of the experiment, the control group went through four weeks of traditional intensive study of the poem. The experimental group, however, covered the poem and several contemporary poems that were related to *The Lady of the Lake.* A final examination was given to all of the students to assess their knowledge and understanding of *The Lady of the Lake* after the four weeks. In the end, the experimental group managed to cover more material without damaging their understanding of the classic. In fact, these students produced a slightly higher average than their counterparts (Cook, 1934, p. 475). This experiment was repeated several times with different literature and the experimental group continued to perform better than the control group each time (Cook, 1934, p. 477). The original research might have been conducted 84 years ago, but the results are still relevant today.

Another option mentioned for introducing different literature was to use comics in addition to or instead of the classics. In recent years, comics have started to become more common additions to both primary and secondary classrooms. However, there are some secondary teachers who view comics with "a troubling sense of distrust, worry and unease" (Lewkowich, 2019, p. 2). Lewkowich (2019) conducted a survey of teachers currently using

comics in their classrooms to discover the teachers' opinions of using comics for instruction. One benefit he found for students is that comics rely more on the reader's interpretation than most forms of literature. Comics require students to fill in the information between the pictures and the dialogue that the author gives the reader in order to turn it into a full story (Lewkowich, 2019, p. 5). The second benefit that Lewkowich (2019) found was that comics encouraged students to read more closely. One teacher explained how he had students read several different comics related to World War II (Lewkowich 2019 p. 18). Each of the pieces showed similar content but the artists' styles changed the tone of the message. By reading across these texts, students got a feel for how the style a writer or artists used could affect the interpretation of an entire text. Another teacher noted that comics helped her students recognize the small details (Lewkowich 2019 p. 17). For example, when her students noticed the use of light and dark shading in comics to convey tone, she believed this would help them recognize the same concept of light and darkness in written texts. Comics forced students to slow down their reading to focus on the meaning behind the drawings. Lastly, Lewkowich (2019) noted that student engagement with written texts could be increased through the use of comics. One teacher Lewkowich talked with decided to use a comic of *Romeo and Juliet* alongside the original text (2019 p. 16). In this case, the aid of a visual coupled with the play, allowed the students a better idea of the play's setting. He noted that students came to class more willing to participate in discussions and class readings than with the play alone. Another teacher found that his students were more willing to ask questions when discussing comics than with other forms of literature (Lewkowich, 2019, p. 21). This had the benefit of making the classroom feel more like a community than individuals trying to understand a text in isolation.

Another method of creating variety is to allow students to choose what they read. To assess this Morgan and Wagner (2013) conducted a case study of a high school sophomore class where the students were given the opportunity to select the book, or books, they would be reading for a three-week long unit. During the unit, the only homework students had was thirty minutes of reading each night and a journal that they were encouraged to keep while they were reading. Over the course of the unit, the teacher held lessons with the entire class on elements of a novel such as character development and conflict that students could relate to the content of their chosen novels. In order to check that the students were reading and understanding the lessons, the teacher held weekly conferences with each of the students to talk with them about their books (Morgan & Wagner, 2013). These conferences allowed the teacher to check the students' understanding of the literary elements they were learning and make sure students were following the reading schedules they made for themselves. In the end, the teacher shared that he was able to teach concepts students needed to know according to state standards while also allowing choice reading by having students relate the concepts to their book rather than using a class novel to teach these same concepts (Morgan & Wagner, 2013, p. 666).

English teachers can also implement choice into their curriculum through literature circles. Literature circles are small groups of students that discuss the contents of a book that they choose (Noe & Johnson, 1999). The book is chosen by the students from a set list offered by the teacher. Literature circles are essentially a version of a book club for young adults. Noe and Johnson (1999) said that these small group discussions help students develop a deeper understanding of a text through questions and insights their peers make in addition to their own. Based on the lessons created by the teacher, students focus on different aspects of the book in

each discussion, so they are able to learn standard objectives while also engaging in a novel they

have chosen (Noe & Johnson, 1999).

Day and Ainsley (2008) observed a sixth grade classroom where the teacher reluctantly

agreed to implement literature circles as part of the curriculum. The classroom consisted of

mostly students who classified as English language learners and low-level readers. In the

beginning, the teacher worried that her students would be unable to complete the literature

circles because of their age and a low comprehension of English. She had to rethink this

conclusion when students began to enthusiastically participate in their small group discussions.

Even more, Day and Ainley (2008) observed students discussing their books using the literary

concepts she taught to them such as tone and symbolism. These group discussions also had the

benefit of allowing the English learners to further develop their vocabulary through natural

conversation (Day & Ainley, 2008, p. 169). Most importantly, though, students were actively

engaged in the reading and discussions that followed. Students were actually talking more in

their small groups than class discussions run by the teacher (Day & Ainley, 2008, p. 170). On top

of that, students were making connections between the characters in the novels and themselves

and even asking for more reading time during class. The teacher admitted that these literature

circles made nearly all her students more excited about reading. They also showed her that her

students were more than capable of applying themselves to that material without her direction

and that small groups can have benefits on reading discussion (Day & Ainley, 2008, pp. 171-

172).

Challenges of Implementing Strategies

Despite having many strategies and resources for engaging students with reading the

classics, some teachers still remained skeptical of the inclusion of texts outside of the classics.

Day and Ainley (2008) found the most commonly cited reasons for this type of skepticism were time constraints, teaching standards, the teacher's unfamiliarity with the process, and a concern for the students' capability and success (p. 158). However, there are ways for teachers to overcome these barriers while working with these strategies.

Considering the constraints during the year, time were a major factor for reasons why teachers are uncertain about using some of the reading engagement strategies. However, Cook (1934) showed that time did not hinder the ability of students to cover the content of both a classic piece and contemporary work and gain an understanding of both (p. 475). In his study of the two classrooms as they read *The Lady of the Lake*, Cook noted that students in the second group were able to cover the classic and additional materials with sufficient understanding of both. Despite covering more content, the second group had a greater mastery of the content and averaged a higher score on their assessment. This experiment was completed several times with different classic texts and the limited time still did not affect the students' comprehension of the unit (Cook, 1934, p. 477).

One reason for focusing on classics is that according to CCSS, students are supposed to read increasingly complex text in order to challenge them, (Ostenson & Wadham, 2012). Young adult literature, though, is considered to be less complex than the list of classics developed by the common core. However, Ostenson and Wadham (2012) found that young adult novels met the complexity standards through all three of the common core's complexity test standards: qualitative dimensions, quantitative dimensions, and reader and task considerations (pp. 6-7). Plus, they also found that young adult literature has the added benefit of motivating students to read more since content that is relevant to readers is often more interesting.

Teachers were also worried about using strategies or alternative literature that they were unfamiliar with in the classroom. While studying the use of comics in the classroom, Lewkowich (2019) found that one reason teachers avoided using comics in their classroom is because they did not know how to teach comics (p.11). For students to see the full story in a comic, teachers need to teach students how to read comics. If teachers skip the introduction to how to read comics, then students will read through the comic without analyzing it as they would another type of text (Lewkowich, 2019, p. 12). Unfortunately, Lewkowich (2019) acknowledged this is not always easy since teachers do not always know how to go about teaching this form of literature. Lewkowich has an easy plan to overcome this barrier, however. He said that if teachers introduce less descriptive heavy text like film or poetry before comics, then students will have an easier time adjusting how they read the content (Lewkowich, 2019, p. 12). He also suggested having students analyze pictures when learning how to analyze texts. By using these alternative texts, Lewkowich (2019) believed students would be better able to grasp the meaning of comics without the aid of written description.

Day and Ainley (2008) also found that some teachers are skeptical of using literature circles because they doubted the students' ability to maintain a discussion without the help of the teacher. Their concern was that students would not be able to gain meaning from the reading without their continual support (Day & Ainley, 2008, p. 166). Considering that for a text like *The Scarlett Letter,* students often need the help of the teacher to understand the language of the text in order to relate to the characters, this is not unfounded (Ostenson & Wadham, 2012, p.11). However, over the course of their unit, Day and Ainley (2008) saw the students actively engaging in their small group discussions even more than when they discussed novels as a whole

class. They found that because students chose a novel they were interested in, they had a deeper engagement in the text as well as the discussions (p. 170).

Conclusion

There are many reasons why teachers use classics as the main source of reading material in English classes (Mukherjee, 2010). However, research has shown that when the classics are connected to texts that are of direct interest to students, the students become more engaged in reading the canon. This can be accomplished through strategies such as literature circles (Noe & Johnson, 1999), contemporary novels (Bright, 2011), and comic books (Lewkowich, 2019). These strategies could create a classroom culture that is both engaging and interesting for students and gets students more involved in reading (Morgan & Wagner, 2013). Still, some teachers cited reasons that they are unable to use these strategies due to constraints put on them through time and curriculum standards (Day & Ainley, 2008). If given the chance, though, teachers can overcome these barriers in a variety of ways.

Having gone through the literature, I found it odd that so many classrooms are still using classics as their exclusive choice for novels. Classics are an important part of understanding literature, but they are not the only literature available to teachers. On top of that, using other forms of literature has been shown to help students engage with classic text more and be engaged in reading in the classroom. As a result, I paid particular attention to teacher's opinions of these strategies as it related to incorporating them into their classrooms. A great deal of the current research has gone into describing the experience of a single classroom during the process of implementing a specific strategy. However, little research has been done on how teachers perceive the results of these strategies or reasons why teachers are unwilling or unable to use these strategies. These two elements were the focus in my own research.

Methods

After reviewing the literature on reading engagement strategies in English classrooms, I formed the following research questions to explore through an online survey for my EDCI 590 research project: What are English teachers' perspectives on strategies to engage students with content variety for reading? What are some barriers keeping teachers from adding engaging variety into their reading content?

Participants

For this research study, the participants came from a convenience sampling of secondary English teachers. The participants were recruited through social media postings on Twitter, Facebook, and by email to English teachers I know personally. I used the hashtags #teachingenglish, #english #readinginclassrooms and #englishteachers on Twitter and posted to different Facebook pages for English teachers and education such as English Teachers and Teaching English in order to gain interest in the survey. I also contacted various English teachers I know to recruit participants. The survey ran for four weeks before I closed it after receiving 21 participants. When participants went to the survey, the first page included a consent form with a brief introduction of the research and what it was for, an explanation of all risks and benefits, as well as the confidentiality measures taken. At the end of the consent form, participants were asked for verification that they were at least 18 years of age and for their consent to participate in the survey. Those who gave their consent were allowed to move on to the survey questions, while those who did not were automatically exited from the survey website and removed from the participant pool.

Data Collection

Following the advice of Adams and Cox (2008), I created a questionnaire using Mary Washington's survey tool, Qualtrics. Qualtrics is an online software that can be used to create, distribute, and analyze anonymous survey data automatically. With this resource, I distributed the survey and allowed four weeks for participants to respond to it. At the end of that time, I removed the social media posts, closed the survey, downloaded all the data I received, and deleted the survey and data from the Qualtrics website to ensure the confidentiality of the data.

The first set of questions on the survey included basic demographics. Participants were asked for their age, gender, as well as what grade levels they have taught, and how long they have taught.

In the next section of the survey, I focused on strategies that teachers use or can use to engage students in classroom reading. These questions included information from my review of the literature on strategies such as choice reading (Morgan & Wagner, 2013), literature circles (Day & Ainley 2008), and connecting classic to modern literature (Bright, 2011). I asked how which strategies teachers used in their classrooms as well as if there were any barriers preventing them from using these strategies (Day & Ainley, 2008, p. 166). Participants used a five-point Likert-type scale to answer most questions in this section (Derrington, 2009). For the strategies that teachers have used, I created ranking questions for teachers to rate how effective they found each of the strategies for engaging students in reading. For strategies teachers did not use, I used the skip-logic tool on Qualtrics to skip questions about the effectiveness of that strategy. Teachers were also asked about barriers preventing them from using these strategies and asked to select from time constraints, administrative policies, required content, personal knowledge, none, or other. (Lewkowich, 2019). I paid particular attention to the barriers keeping teachers from

using certain strategies to see if it is more from a lack of effectiveness, knowledge, or ability

(Day & Ainley, 2008).

At the end of the survey, I included two open-ended questions for teachers to answer that

will be optional for response completion (Adams & Cox, 2008, p. 19). The first question was

"Share a brief description of a time where a strategy you used was particularly successful in

engaging the students with a text and discuss why you thought it was successful" (Sunderman,

1999). The second question was "Please describe any strategies for varying content not

previously mentioned in the survey that you use in your classroom for reader engagement."

Data Analysis

Participants

The 21 participants surveyed for this research were a mix of former and current teachers

who have experience with both middle and high school classrooms. One participant has also

taught elementary aged students while three have taught college or university in addition to

secondary students. Participants are 71% female and 29% male and are from mixed age groups.

Out of the participants a majority have been teaching for over 20 years.

Years in Teaching

1-5: 29%
6-10: 5%
11-15: 14%
16-20: 19%
21+: 33%
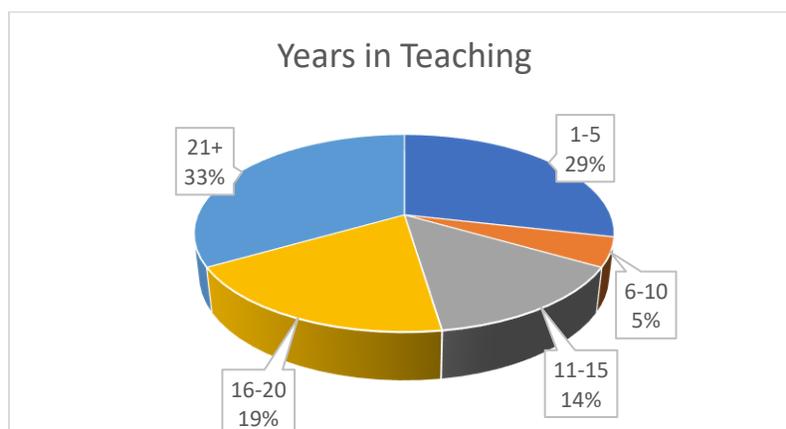
There appears to be no correlation between the length of time a participant has been

teaching and the strategies they used in their classroom.

Opinions of Strategies and Barriers

Of these 21 participants, a majority have used the four strategies discussed in the

Literature Review while five of the participants specified other strategies they used like project

work and diversifying content by reading level. There was only one participant who did not have

experience using any of the four strategies mentioned.
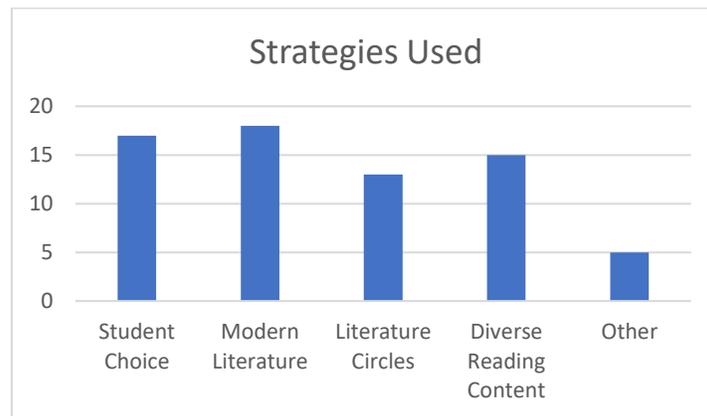
The majority of these teachers believe that all of these strategies are effective. In their

collective opinion, teachers found that literature circles were the least effective of these

strategies. On the other hand, the largest percentage of participants believed that Student Choice

was effective for engaging students in reading. One participant, though, disagreed that student

choice was an effective strategy. This was the only strategy of the four that a participant

completely disagreed that the strategy was effective for engaging students.

Strategies are Effective
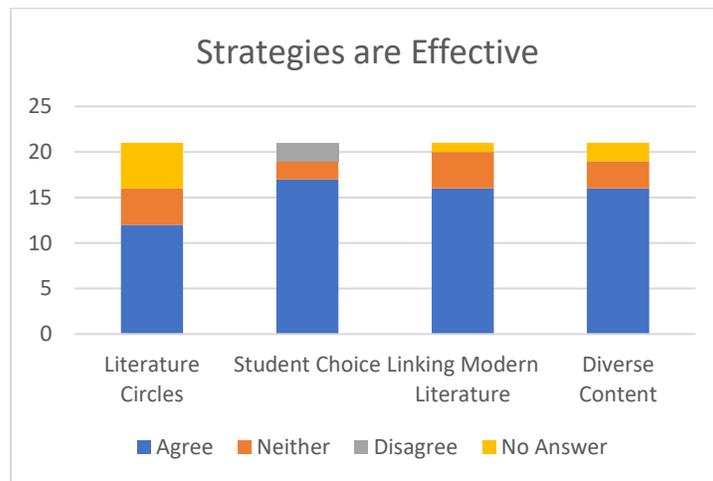
However, they also acknowledged that there were barriers to being able to use these

strategies. Out of the 21 participants, only three believed that there were not barriers

preventing them from implementing these strategies and other reading strategies. The most

significant barrier out of them seems to be time constraints.

Barriers
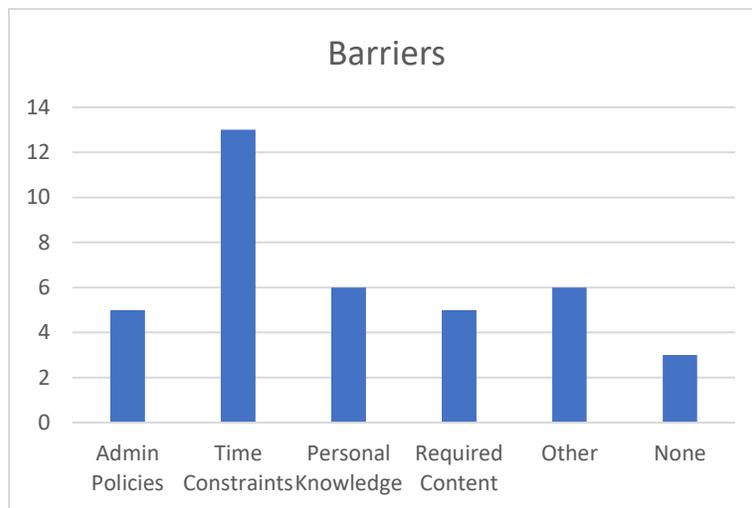
In fact, 70% of participants found that time constraints were an issue when trying to use

these strategies in their classrooms. On the other hand, about 50% of participants disagreed that

administrative policies and required content were a barrier for them and only 20% identified

administrative policies as a reason preventing them from using these strategies.

Barrier for Reading Strategies
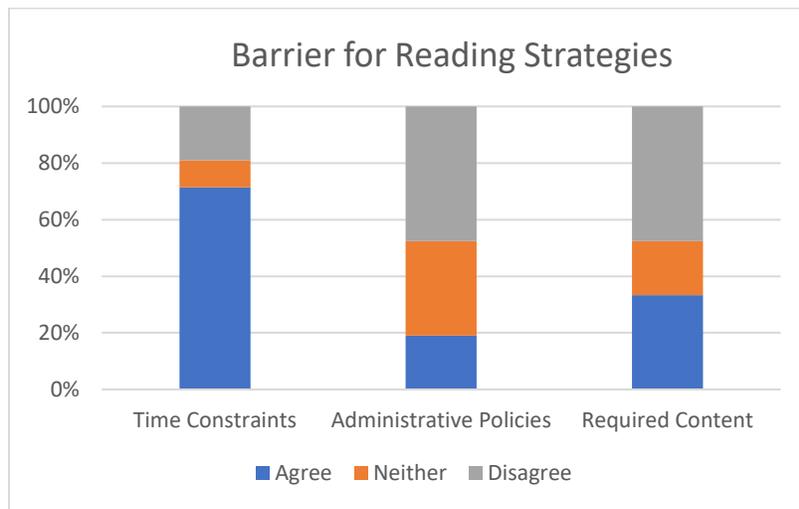
On the other hand, even though 6 participants considered personal knowledge to be a barrier when trying to use strategies, over 70% of participants felt confident in their knowledge of all of these strategies.

Confident in Personal Knowledge
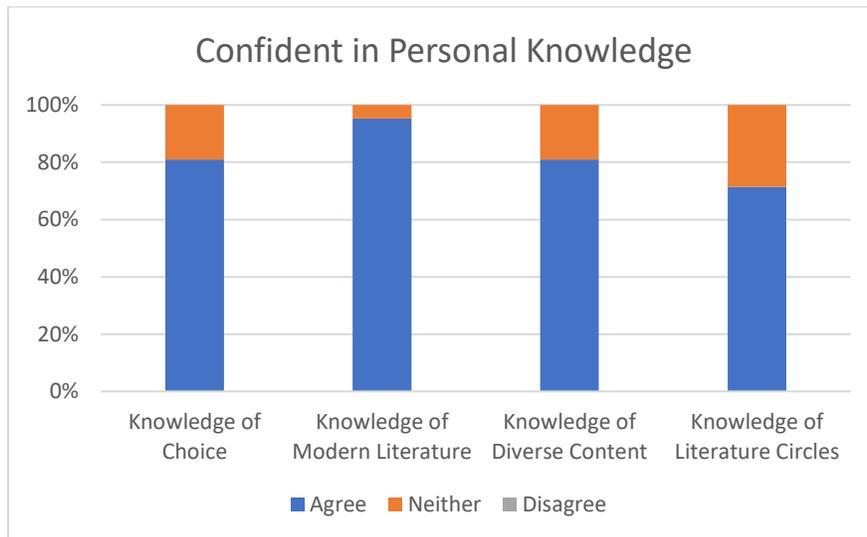
Descriptions of Success and Other Strategies

In the final section of the survey, participants were asked to share times where strategies they used were successful and give descriptions of other strategies they used. The participants of this survey all described different times where they had been successful.

Several of the teachers who participated in this survey talked about using diverse content as a way to support what they were learning about. While teaching a Latin literature class, one teacher discussed the heroic themes of Virgil's *Aeneid* with his class before having them use the knowledge gained to assess those same themes in the modern movie *Rango.* Another teacher fond a graphic novel version of *Romeo and Juliet* to use alongside the main text in order to give students a visual of the play's setting to help supplement their understanding. Lastly, one teacher explained that they use songs to teach poetry concepts like tone and mood and explore how diction effects the understanding of the message.

There were also many teachers that discussed the use of modern literature. One teacher talked about the time they used Just Mercy by Bryan Stevenson in addition to The New Jim Crow by Michelle Alexander to discuss the concept of slavery and racism in America. Another found the novel The Hate U Give by Angie Thomas was successful in engaging readers in their 8th grade class because the story was relevant to events going on in their community and our country as a whole. There were also teachers who suggested using current events articles to link with the classic text being discussed in order to make content more relevant.

One thing many of the teachers agreed on was the concept of choice. More than half of the participants mentioned using choice in some way or another to get students more invested in their reading. Some teachers used silent sustained reading time during class to give students the opportunity to read their own books. Others would give students the opportunity to chose from a group of books for their literature circle units. One teacher in particular mentioned that choice can and should be used outside of novels but with poetry, short stories, and other text as well. In these teachers opinions, choice allowed their students to "feel powerful" because they were able to pick what they wanted to read rather than being forced to read something.

The teachers also talked about several other strategies that teachers can use to engage

students in their classrooms. One strategy is to use programs like Newsela and Tween Tribune to

alter the reading level of the text for students. By doing this students of various reading

capabilities can read and comprehend the same content. Another strategy mentioned was

fishbowl style discussions. These types of discussions allow students to both share their own

ideas and listen to their classmates talk about what they are reading. Lastly, one teacher said that

linking current events with any content students are reading can help to make it relevant to them

and engage them more in the content.

<div align="center">**Discussion**</div>

Data Interpretation

The data collected from this survey was mostly positive in favor of the different reading

strategies and their effect on student engagement. These teachers had experience using these

strategies and a majority found them to be effective. The problem, however, seems to be time.

Time is something that is always a concern for teachers. There are ways to get around the

constriction of time in a classroom, though. As Cook (1934) showed in his own experiment with

Lady of the Lake, teachers are able to look at both modern and classic texts together in the same

amount of time as they would take to cover the classic alone. Strategies like linking modern texts

and using diverse content do not take any additional time in the classroom.

The lower perception of effectiveness concerning literature circles is understandable as

well. In my own experience using literature circles, I also noticed students were less engaged

than with other reading strategies. However, I think this has more to do with students not

knowing how to discuss what they are reading with peers more than a fault in the strategy itself.

Students need to be shown how to engage in these discussions in order to get the full benefits

from them. Practicing small group discussions before using literature circles may help make these groups more effective in the long run.

The participants in this survey were also spent a lot of time answering the two short answer questions and gave very detailed accounts of strategies they used in their classroom. There are more strategies that teachers can use in their classrooms in addition to the ones listed. If teachers are worried about time constraints with strategies that may take more time like introducing literature circles or teaching students how to read comics, there are other options for teachers to turn to. The most commonly repeated advice among the participating teachers was to make the content relevant to the students.

Limitations

Compared to the number of teachers in the country, this was a relatively small sample size. In order to get a better idea of teachers thoughts across the country about reading strategies and barriers, another study would need to be done with a greater sample. It would also be beneficial if participants were from a greater geological area. With this convenience sample, most participants came from those working in Virginia.

The strategies discussed here are also not a comprehensive list of all reading strategies that could be used in classrooms. There are many more as evidenced by the number of examples brought up by this small pool of participants. Only the four most popularly discusses strategies in the literature were mentioned explicitly in the survey. However, creating a survey that listed other strategies not as well documented might yield interesting results. I would like to know if there is a significant number of teachers who use fishbowl discussions consistently and find ways to link the literature with current events.

Lastly, this survey asks what teachers believed were barriers for implementing these strategies but not why they thought so. Time is a consistent issue for teachers but what makes time a barrier? It is possible that it is the time within a class period that constricts the type of strategies teachers can use. Another consideration is that teachers have certain content they must teach and they believe these strategies will interfere with the time needed to cover those topics. However, we do not know from the information gathered here so another study will be needed to get the information needed here.

Conclusion

There is much about what goes on in a classroom that we can learn from teachers' perspectives. Teachers have intimate knowledge of what works and what doesn't in practical applications within classrooms and they are willing to share these experiences as you can see from the examples given. This study shows that reading strategies that look beyond classic texts are effective in getting students engaged in classrooms, at least by the participants of this survey. To get a clearer idea of all strategies used by teachers and those things that are barriers to using these strategies, however, a study with a larger sample of participants will need to be done. These participants, at least, believe that these strategies are helpful in their classroom and encourage their use. It is not enough for us to know that these strategies work, though. They need to be regularly implemented into classrooms with the focus of engaging students more in the reading that they do for class. We also need to see why teachers believe time is an issue for implementing these strategies in their classrooms. While this research can give teachers a starting point for possible reading strategies, I believe a deeper look into the subject is needed. Education is changing and the students of today have different needs and ways of comprehending content.

We need to focus on using these strategies and others to engage students in reading in order to

help them succeed in being competent and confident readers moving forward.

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Appendices

Appendix A

ADULT RESEARCH PARTICIPANT INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Brief Description
The purpose of this research is to investigate teachers' perceptions of certain literary strategies and their ability to add variety to curriculum content and their effects on student engagement in reading. Individuals who volunteer to participate in this study will take a brief anonymous survey answering questions about their views on these strategies. It will take about 10 to 15 minutes of your time. There are few, if any, risks to participants in this survey, and no direct benefits or rewards for participants. The risks are primarily associated with privacy. These risks will be minimized by using measures to protect your identity, as well as that of your school and school division. **Please read the remainder of this form before deciding if you want to volunteer to be in this research study.**

My name is Amber Snyder, I am a graduate student at the University of Mary Washington, and I am seeking your consent to participate in this research study. Involvement in the study is voluntary, so you may choose to participate or not. The information below explains the study in detail. Before volunteering, please ask any questions that you may have about the research; I will be happy to explain anything in greater detail.

Details of Participant Involvement
I am interested in learning more about strategies that teachers can use to add variety to their curriculum content and more effectively engage readers. Teachers are in the unique position of having first hand knowledge of the content in their classrooms and how students respond to their curriculum. Questions relate to such things as how often a strategy was used in your class, your opinion of student response, and your thoughts on limitations caused by or preventing the use of these strategies.

Privacy and Confidentiality
All information about participants will be kept anonymous. This means that your name will not appear in any data collected or in any reports of this research, and neither I nor anyone else will be able to associate you with your data. Your name and school will not be asked for, and surveys will be sent using Qualtrics, making use of their "Anonymous Responses" feature, which you can learn more about by clicking this link. Furthermore, you can read Qualtrics's privacy policy by clicking this link. I will download the survey responses to my personal computer, and delete the survey from Qualtrics. After the data has all been analyzed and my project is complete, I will delete the survey responses from my computer as well.

Risks and Benefits of Participation
The risks to you for participating in this study are minimal. You might feel some discomfort at answering questions about your personal opinions or practices, or about answering these questions online. To minimize these risks, you will not have to answer any questions you do not want to answer. If you should experience any adverse effects from taking the survey, please tell me immediately so that I may take appropriate action. The benefit of this research is that it may contribute to better general

understanding of how teachers add variety while teachers and barriers for new teachers for introducing new strategies. There are no direct benefits to you as a participant.

Participant Rights
This research has been approved by the University of Mary Washington Institutional Review Board, a committee responsible for ensuring that the safety and rights of research participants are protected. For information about your rights as a research participant, contact the IRB chair, Dr. Rosalyn Cooperman at rcooperm@umw.edu. You have the right to **ask any questions you have** before, during or after participation, and I encourage you to do so. As a voluntary participant in this research, you have the right to refuse to answer any questions that I ask of you. If you do not want to be in this study, there will be no penalties or loss of benefits that you are entitled to. If you volunteer to be in this study and later change your mind, you have the right to withdraw. You may withdraw by exiting out of the survey webpage, and no data about you will be included in my study. You may also withdraw by emailing Amber Snyder at asnyder@mail.umw.edu and your data will be removed from the study.

Contact Information
For more information about this research before, during or after your participation, or to report any unanticipated problems relating to the research that you experience during or following your participation, please contact me (asnyder4@mail.umw.edu) or my faculty research supervisor, Dr. Nancy Guth (nguth2@umw.edu).

To be Completed by Participant
I have read all of the information on this form, and all of my questions and concerns about the research described above have been addressed. I choose, voluntarily, to participate in this research project. I certify that I am at least 18 years of age.

I also certify that I meet the requirements to participate in this survey: I have taught or am teaching English classes on the secondary level.

- ` I grant my consent (Check this box to continue)`
- o I DO NOT grant my consent (Check this box to close the website; no information about you will be provided to the researchers)

Appendix B: Survey Questions

SURVEY QUESTIONS

The first set of questions are general demographic questions. Please answer by selecting the choice that applies to you.

1. What is your age?
   o < 24 years old
   o 25-34 years old
   o 35-44 years old
   o 45-54 years old
   o 55+ years old
2. What is your gender?
   o Male
   o Female
   o Other
   o Prefer Not to Answer
3. What grade level(s) do you teach and/or have you taught? (Select all that apply)
   o Elementary
   o Middle school or junior high school
   o High school
   o Other (please specify):
4. How long have you been teaching?
   o 1-5 years
   o 6-10 years
   o 11-15 years
   o 16-20 years
   o 21+ years

The following questions will provide me with a basic understanding of your familiarity with certain strategies.

5. (Select all that apply) I use _____ in my classroom.
   o Literature Circles
   o Student Choice
   o Diverse Reading Content (ex: comics/graphic novels)
   o Modern Literature
   o None
   o Other _____
6. Are there barriers that determine which of these strategies you are able to use?
   o Administrative Policies

o Time Constraints
o Required Content
o Personal Knowledge of Strategies
o None
o Other _____

With 1= Never, 2= Rarely, 3= Sometimes, 4= Frequently, and 5= Always, please mark how often you do the following, and explain your answer further in the area provided, if you want.

7. How often do you use Literature Circles as a part of instruction?

    Never   Rarely   Sometimes   Frequently   Always
      1   2   3   4   5

Explain:

8. How often are students given a choice in what they read for class?

    Never   Rarely   Sometimes   Frequently   Always
      1   2   3   4   5

Explain:

9. How often is modern literature used in connection to classic literature in your classroom?

    Never   Rarely   Sometimes   Frequently   Always
      1   2   3   4   5

Explain:

10. How often do you use diverse content (ex: comics/graphic novels) in your classroom?

    Never   Rarely   Sometimes   Frequently   Always
      1   2   3   4   5

Explain:

Please answer the following questions based on your opinion of these strategies as part of your instruction.

Rate how effective you believe each of the strategies are for engaging students with 5 being highly effective and 1 being not effective at all. If you have not used a strategy in your classroom, select NA.

11. Rate how effective you found **Student Choice** for engaging students in the reading.

Not at all Effective		Neutral		Highly Effective	NA
1	2	3	4	5	

Explain:

12. Rate how effective you found **Literature Circles** for engaging students in the reading.

Not at all Effective				Highly Effective	NA
1	2	3	4	5	

Explain:

13. Rate how effective you found **linking Modern and Classic literature** for engaging students in the reading.

Not at all Effective				Highly Effective	NA
1	2	3	4	5	

Explain:

14. Rate how effective you found **diverse content** for engaging students in the reading.

Not at all Effective				Highly Effective	NA
1	2	3	4	5	

Explain:

With 1= Strongly Disagree, 2= Disagree, 3=Neutral, 4= Agree, and 5= Strongly Agree, please mark how you feel about each statement below, and explain your answer further in the area provided, if you want.

15. Literature Circles are effective in getting my students engaged in class assigned reading.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4	5

Explain:

16. Student Choice Reading is effective in getting my students engaged in class assigned reading.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4	5

Explain:

17. Using Modern Literature is an effective in getting my students engaged in class assigned reading.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4	5

Explain:

18. Diverse Content (ex: graphic novels/comics) is effective in getting my students engaged in class assigned reading.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4	5

Explain:

19. Administrative Policies are a barrier for using one or all of these strategies in your classroom.

Strongly   Strongly
Disagree   Disagree   Neutral   Agree   Agree
1   2   3   4   5

Explain:

20. Time constraints are a barrier for using different strategies in your classroom.

Strongly   Strongly
Disagree   Disagree   Neutral   Agree   Agree
1   2   3   4   5

Explain:

21. Teaching content that is required is a barrier for using at least one of these strategies.

Strongly   Strongly
Disagree   Disagree   Neutral   Agree   Agree   NA
1   2   3   4   5

Explain:

22. I feel confident in my ability to use Literature Circles in my classroom.

Strongly   Strongly
Disagree   Disagree   Neutral   Agree   Agree
1   2   3   4   5

Explain:

23. I feel confident in my ability to offer choice reading time/assignments to students in my classroom.

Strongly   Strongly
Disagree   Disagree   Neutral   Agree   Agree
1   2   3   4   5

Explain:

24. I feel confident in my ability to use Modern literature in connection with Classic text.

Strongly   Strongly
Disagree   Disagree   Neutral   Agree   Agree
   1   2   3   4   5

Explain:

25. I feel confident in using diverse content (ex: graphic novels/comics) in my classroom.

Strongly   Strongly
Disagree   Disagree   Neutral   Agree   Agree
   1   2   3   4   5

Explain:

26. I would like to learn ways to add more variety to the content I teach.

Strongly   Strongly
Disagree   Disagree   Neutral   Agree   Agree
   1   2   3   4   5

Explain:

27. Share a description of a time where a strategy was particularly successful in engaging the students with a text and why you thought it was successful.

28. Please describe any strategies for varying content not previously mentioned in the survey that you use in your classroom for reader engagement.