Chapter 3
High-Quality Trade Books and Content Areas:
Planning Accordingly for Rich Instruction

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Integrating high-quality children's tradebooks into elementary content areas has long been considered a best practice. When teachers choose to incorporate these texts into content area lessons, they are exposing students to art through the pictures and reaching an array of visual learners. There is a delicate balance between teaching the literacy strategies needed to read these texts and the actual content materials that students need to learn in the STEAM areas. This chapter explores how to incorporate texts appropriately into content area lessons so that students can focus on the content, as well as apply literacy strategies for comprehension.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Literacy and content area learning are in a constant state of change. According to Adams and Pegg (2012), "one dimension relates to shifting understandings regarding student learning, and the other dimension involves the relationship between content and literacy" (p. 151). Citing the work of previous researchers, Adams and Pegg argue that discipline-specific discourse can be taught through literacy practices; that is, the way the students talk about science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) can be learned through literacy practices in the classroom. Moreover, because

discipline-specific discourse is used by authors to create informational texts, using such texts can lead to increased understanding in content areas.

Integrating high-quality children's trade books into elementary content areas has long been considered a best-practice (Olness, 2007). More specifically, high-quality informational texts can assist students in learning STEM concepts. Using these texts with rich visuals and vocabulary forges a link between the arts and the STEM focus, creating the use of STEAM. Yopp and Yopp (2012) state that students' engagement with informational texts more richly promotes their knowledge of content areas by teaching them vocabulary, text structure (such as compare and contrast), and text features (such as charts and tables). Teachers must be able to merge their selection of high-quality informational texts and scaffolded instructional models in order for students' experiences to be successful (Fisher & Frey, 2015). Fisher and Frey (2015) state that "as students invest themselves in these informational texts, look for opportunities to encourage ways to inspire further investigation, discussion, and writing" (p. 529). However, for pre-service teacher candidates and novice teachers, planning for the blend of literacy and other content areas may not come naturally (Hoffman, Collins, & Schickedanz, 2015). Citing prior research, Hoffman, Collins, and Schickedanz (2015) state the following with regard to science instruction:

Research on effectively integrating science and literacy instruction to develop conceptual understandings uses informational text as a complement to hands- on scientific investigations in the science curriculum, not as a replacement for such experiences (Palincsar & Magnusson, 2001; Pappas & Varelas, 2004; Varelas & Pappas, 2006). Thus, informational texts are most meaning fully integrated in literacy instruction when they align with the ongoing science curriculum (i.e., the texts are related to the scientific concepts investigated in hands- on experiences). (pp. 368-9).

The lesson plan template provided in this chapter is meant to assist teacher candidates and practicing teachers in preparing for the integration of high-quality informational texts into STEM content area lessons, focusing on the integration of visual information and concept development.

According to Mallett (2010) who draws on the work of Piaget and Vygotsky, there are three principles for effectively teaching and learning with informational texts. The first principle is that the act of teaching concepts always begins with active exploration (Mallett, 2010). Children are able to become naturally curious about concepts presented to them, and teachers can draw on that excitement by allowing children to actively explore the concept in combination with evidence from informational texts (Mallett, 2010). Mallett (2010) writes that "experiments in science, field trips in geography, outings and museum visits to enliven history and English all help to sustain and deepen interest, and all nourish learning from