

Practitioners as Decision-Makers: What and How They Teach

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This issue of the *Journal of Curriculum and Instruction* presents four articles and a book review that focus on choices that educational practitioners make as they address various aspects of K-12 teaching in a range of classroom settings and locations in the United States and other countries. To begin, the research studies describe results of two large-scale teacher surveys that explore how practitioners allocate instructional time, what methods they use to teach content, and the effect of mandated testing on time and teaching methods. Next, the practitioners' articles provide international perspectives on the use of multimodal instruction and the determination of graphic quality in textbook selection. Finally, the reviewed book offers insights on skill-based practice that addresses a series of related questions: What makes an effective teacher? If an effective teacher applies specific skills at specific points in a lesson, can those skills be identified, studied, and taught to other teachers?

Research Forum

In "An analysis of time prioritization for social studies in elementary school classrooms," Paul Fitchett, Tina Heafner, and Phillip VanFossen (2014) examined the responses of 2,336 elementary teachers across the United States to determine the relationship among time spent teaching social studies, attitudes about the workplace, and decisions about which instructional strategies to use. They also considered the impact of mandated testing and integration of social studies in English language arts classes. Results indicated that there was a significant association between teachers' decision-making and attitudes about work and proportional time spent on social studies. Mandated testing was associated with increased use of student-centered, teacher-centered, and discipline-specific instructional strategies. There was also an association between high frequency integration of social studies and student-centered and discipline-specific instruction. The authors discuss implications and recommendations for practitioners, school leaders, teacher educators, and policy makers.

Kenneth Vogler and Nathan Carnes' (2014) study, "Comparing the impact of a high school exit examination on biology teachers' instructional practices," presents

another view of what and how practitioners teach. Participants in their study, 247 high school biology teachers from Mississippi and Tennessee, reported on the type and amount of time they used specific instructional strategies and delineated factors related to their use. Results indicated that teachers from both states employed a mix of student-centered and teacher-centered tools and practices. A large majority of respondents reported that an interest in helping students earn test scores required for graduation and helping their school improve exam scores influenced their instructional decision-making; however, only a minimal relationship was found between the type of instruction used and time spent preparing students for the exit exam. Vogler and Carnes conclude with recommendations for future research and practice based on implications of their findings.

Practitioner's Platform

In "Advancing English language learning in China through multimodal content area teaching," Cheryl North and Nancy Rankie Shelton (2014) share the experiences of ten U.S. teachers who worked alongside their Chinese counterparts to enact an interactive curriculum at an elementary school in China. Focusing on one elementary student in a representative case study, North and Shelton studied the English literacy development of "Paul" over the ten-day experience. The teacher-researchers employed a *kid-watching* approach to assess the impact on learning of a combination of factors: an environment that encouraged risk-taking, a focus on written and oral communication, an inclusion of multiple content areas and associated literacies (science, social studies, engineering), and a diminished emphasis on correctness in grammar and structure. As a result of this experience, the U.S. teachers developed a deeper understanding of the importance of attending to intended expression, purposeful observation, factors that motivate students to learn a new language, and the impact of multimodal education. The authors include a representative sample lesson.

The second article in the Practitioner's Platform focuses on the role of graphics in second language acquisition. Striving to select educational materials that actively and effectively support learning is a ubiquitous task in education. In the case of second language education, the graphics found within those educational materials are often viewed as essential supporting components that foster enhanced learning. In their article, "More than just eye-catching: Evaluating graphic quality in middle school English language learners' science textbooks" (2014), Katherine Landau Wright, Erin McTigue, Zohreh Eslami, and Dudley Reynolds provide the results of their study of 118 graphics from 54 texts used to teach science to 7th and 8th grade language learners. The results of their study, set in Qatar, indicated that graphics that ineffectively aligned with

concepts, that were ambiguous, or that were confusing and distractive not only failed to advance learning, but also were capable of impeding reading comprehension. The authors provide a graphic-evaluation rubric, designed in response to their study, to inform educators' choices when selecting textbooks for English language learners.

Book Review

The book review (Steadman, 2014) of Elizabeth Green's *Building A+ Better Teacher: How Teaching Works (and How to Teach it to Everyone)* analyzes the author's approach to tackling a question that has been central to educational conversation over time: What makes an effective teacher? The author strives to make visible the complex blend of knowledge and skills enacted by master teachers, notably Magdalene Lampert and Deborah Ball, as they guide K-12 students to develop their own theories and understandings of concepts. In providing these teaching vignettes, Green challenges the notion that teachers are born, not made, and presents a forceful argument that a highly interactive, collegial approach to developing teaching skills, such as the practice known as *Japanese Lesson Study*, would benefit U.S. teachers, their students, and ultimately, the nation. While the text does not provide a step-by-step approach to creating more effective teachers, as the title suggests, it does offer thought-provoking insight into the skills that highly competent teachers possess and challenges the educational community to consider how these skills might be refined, taught, and applied by today's educators.

Final Thoughts

As we end our tenure as *JoCI* editors, we reflect on the last three years and the contributions made by authors in diverse areas of curriculum and instruction. Research, practice, and perspective articles have included such disparate topics as working with multicultural students, families, and communities (Byrd, 2012; Walkingstick & Bloom, 2013); technology and game dynamics (Chandler, 2013); and assessment of individual students, pre-service teacher candidates, and teacher preparation programs (Cuthrell, Stapleton, Bullock, Lys, Smith, & Fogarty, 2014; Kilgus, 2013; Schaffer, 2014; Vostal, Messenheimer, Hampton, & Keyes, 2014).

We are especially grateful to the invited authors, leaders in their respective fields, for sharing their knowledge, insights, and recommendations for practitioners, administrators, and teacher educators. In the Diversity and Global Learning issue, Kevin Murry (2012) described a six-level framework, the *accommodation readiness spiral*, which promotes teachers' readiness as they accommodate culturally and linguistically diverse students and their families. In the Behavioral Support issue,

Kathleen Lane, Holly Menzies, Robin Ennis, and Jamie Bezdek (2013), summarized school-wide and individualized systems, assessments, and strategies that promote positive behavior and facilitate classroom instruction. In the Performance Assessment issue, Cap Peck, Marcy Singer-Gabella, Tine Sloan, and Susan Lin (2014) provided a rationale, examples, and suggestions for using standardized performance assessments. Working with these individuals has afforded us opportunities to grow professionally and to share their visions with *JoCI* readers.

While each published article bears the name of one or more authors, they and we know that no submission moves from manuscript to publication without a team effort. We thank the many *JoCI* peer reviewers who offered their opinions and suggestions to authors over these years. Also, we acknowledge Michael Vitale for his instrumental reviews of manuscripts submitted to the Research Forum.

A special thanks goes to *JoCI*'s executive editor, Diane Kester. For the last seven years, the first and last steps – and many of the ones in between - of the publishing process were masterfully accomplished by her. Diane's technology expertise and editorial skills provided continuity and smooth transitions for successive editorial teams.

During the last three years, we have endeavored to uphold the original mission of *JoCI*: to publish free open-access quality research, practice, and prospective articles that are relevant, useful, and make a contribution to the field of curriculum and instruction. We are thankful for having had that responsibility and opportunity. We will miss working on the journal, regret its current necessary hiatus, and look forward to its reinstatement as a robust, contributory member of the scholarly community of educational journals.

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