Professional Resource Books, Reading Guides, And Student-Generated Discussions

An Alternative To Textbooks

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

Tired of textbooks, but not sure where to start with OER’s? Pairing students with professional resource books may be a solution. This Tools and Tips page will walk you through a process that I have successfully utilized in some of my classes for several semesters.

Don’t let the chapters in this document scare you—Each is only one page long!

In the next chapter, you will read about using professional resource books in place of textbooks.
For the purpose of this paper, professional resource books are books that practicing professionals might read in order to refine and improve their craft. In education, at least, professional resource books are generally much less expensive than textbooks.

One of my classes utilizes professional resource books already in the Allen Library collection. I worked with the library staff, who created themed Libguides for my EDUC 250 class. Students are asked to consult the Libguide for the current theme, and check out a book from the Libguide. One of our themes is “Schools.” You can view the Libguide for “Schools” here: http://libguides.library.vcsu.edu/educ250/schools. Each student checks out a different book from the Libguide list.

In my VCSU/NDSU Math Methods course, students are asked to purchase one professional resource book ($40 or less) in lieu of a textbook that would cost hundreds of dollars. Students are given access to a list of acceptable books via the web app signupgenius. Students then sign up for a book that they purchase themselves, new or used. You can view the signupgenius sample book sign up here: http://www.signupgenius.com/go/4090f49aa8292-sample/ Note that a maximum of two students can sign up for each book title.

In the next chapter, you will read about what students do with the books as they read them.
Students are required to read one chapter prior to each class meeting. I teach students how to use Icons for Depth and Complexity as graphic organizers on which to record their notes as they read. This is what I have the students do prior to reading the first chapter of the book, and every chapter thereafter.

**Materials needed:**

- Professional resource books
- Blank paper
- Pencils

**What to do:**

1. Fold a blank piece of 8 1/2 by 11 paper in half, so that when the paper is on the table in portrait position, there are two wide columns. In the first column, fill the space with a triangle, underneath which are four pillars. These shapes represent **BIG IDEAS**. Write **BIG IDEAS** in the triangle. Your paper will look like this (see next page):
2. In the second column, fill the space with a large daisy shape. The daisy shape represents DETAILS. Write DETAILS in the middle of the daisy. Your paper will look like this:

3. Turn the paper over. In the first column on the backside, draw three or four rectangular boxes. The rectangular boxes represent LANGUAGE OF THE DISCIPLINE. Each box should be big enough for you to write a word inside at a later point. Write LANGUAGE OF THE DISCIPLINE at the top of the page. Your paper will look like this:

4. In the remaining column on the backside, draw three or four question marks. The question marks represent UNANSWERED QUESTIONS. The question marks will serve as bullets for questions you will write at a later point. Write UNANSWERED QUESTIONS at the top of the page. Your paper will look like this:
5. Return to the first column. Add your name, the date, the title of the book you are reading, and the chapter you read in order to complete the reading guide.

6. Read the chapter. As you read, take notes on the reading guide. Paraphrase and write the BIG IDEAS of the chapter in the rectangles of the BIG IDEAS section. Describe important DETAILS, one detail per petal, in the daisy petals. List a new professional vocabulary word you learned in each of the vocabulary boxes under LANGUAGE OF THE DISCIPLINE. Then, next to each box, define each word using your own words--no dictionary or glossary definitions, please. Finally, in the UNANSWERED QUESTIONS section, list a question--next to each question mark--that you asked yourself while reading the chapter.

A sample completed reading guide can be found on the next page. In the next chapter, you will read about how reading guides are used to foster small group discussions.
**Completed Reading Guides**

**Front**

**Back**

- **Language of the Discipline**
  - Differentiated instruction: using multiple teaching methods in order to meet the needs of all students.
  - Zone of Proximal Development: distance between where a student is independently and where they could be with assistance from a teacher.
  - Parallel Tasks: tasks that help meet the needs of each student at different developmental levels, simultaneously.
  - "Soft" words: using words that are vague, less precise, in order to create a rich discussion with multiple perceptions (close to 100 instead of exactly 100).

- **Unanswered Questions**
  - In the past, why have teachers not been trained to understand how students understand math differently? Why is this a new concept?
  - How does a teacher deal with a student who is resistant to open questions because they are so focused on right or wrong?
  - Have there been studies done to look at academic self-esteem and open questions/ mathematical discussion?
  - For a teacher not used to differentiated instruction, and student choice, how could they ease into it?
Students read one chapter, and complete a reading guide to go with the chapter, prior to each class. The reading guide always consists of four parts: Big Ideas, Details, Language of the Discipline, and Unanswered Questions. Students are divided into small groups of four or five students each. The groups remain constant throughout the semester.

For the first 8-10 minutes of class, students share what they read with their small groups. Students use their reading guides to guide their sharing. Students are encouraged to engage in conversation about what is shared.

As students finish sharing, each small group generates a question or topic for further discussion. One person in the group writes the question or topic on the white board, or on a padlet page. Here is a sample of a padlet page I am using in my Math Methods class: https://padlet.com/jowenrclark/dlrnxxhw2zb3

Within small groups, students also identify one or two new vocabulary words that are unique to the discipline (in my case, teaching math). One person in the group writes the words on a word wall, or on an electronic word wall. Again, I use padlet for this. Here is a sample of a padlet page I am using to collect professional language that students have identified in their reading:

https://padlet.com/jowenrclark/clotzo5jit62

In the next chapter, you will read about student-driven class discussions.
After small groups have finished posting their topics/questions and new vocabulary, I project the question/topic padlet page on the board, or refer students to the white board on which they wrote their questions and topics. I select a question or topic from those generated by students. I invite other groups to respond to the question. Finally, I respond to the question.

I continue the process for as many questions as we have time for, before moving on with the day’s scheduled lecture or activities. From time to time, I also project the vocabulary words on the board. I clarify meaning, or ask students to give examples of some of the words they have identified.

Most days, the entire process takes about 15-20 minutes. Usually, at least one of the topics provides an appropriate introduction to the day’s scheduled lecture or activity.

In the next chapter, you will read about my findings as I have used this process with my classes.
I have now been using professional resource books and reading guides in selected classes for three semesters. Here are some of my findings, from my own observation and from talking informally with students:

1. Students are more engaged in small group discussions. Small group times are meaningful, because students are discussing contributions from different books, instead of talking about the same chapter.

2. Students are more engaged in class discussions. Since we are addressing student-generated questions, students are more attentive listeners.

3. Students learn to ask better questions.

4. Students are eager to share the point of view from the book they are reading--not only during discussions, but also during lectures--especially when they can contribute new or contradicting information.

5. Students are grateful to have saved money.

6. Students often keep the book they purchased, because it has personal meaning and they feel it was a worthwhile purchase.

7. Students often bring their book to class, and they often use their book as a reference during class discussions.

8. Students become adept at using professional vocabulary in class discussions and in their writing. They sound more like working professionals than college students. This is one of the most exciting findings for me!

The next chapter contains a list of links to websites for more information on Icons for Depth and Complexity.
CHAPTER 7

Resources

The following links provide more information on Icons for Depth and Complexity. Note that in addition to the icons I use, there are also icons specific to math instruction, and additional icons called “Content Imperatives.” Some of the other icons include Ethics, Trends, Patterns, Change over Time, and Multiple Perspectives.

Introducing Depth and Complexity
Introducing Depth and Complexity and the Icons: Mini Lesson
Printable Icons
Digital Icons