

Creating Futures: Making Literacy Engaging for High School Special Education and ELL Students

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For many high school English learners, becoming literate without the benefit of early exposure to literacy appears daunting, even impossible. The task of learning to read and write at an age when other students around them have already mastered those skills may seem beyond their ability. Consequently, high school English learners may need emotional support to increase their confidence as learners.

Self modeling may offer this emotional support because it provides images of the self in a success mode. Video self modeling refers to a training procedure in which people watch replays of edited video showing them in a success mode, pursuing tasks or accomplishing goals not yet reached. This activity contributes to self-efficacy beliefs, and consequently promotes persistence in the task of learning. Individuals can acquire self-efficacy through external support and encouragement, but they do so even more readily through the observation of their own success—which is the basis for the definition of self modeling as developed by Dr. Peter Dowrick at the University of Hawai'i Center on Disability Studies (CDS). The Creating Futures team has developed several projects designed to engage students in literacy activities and improve "literacy behaviors" through self modeling. Literacy behaviors are what influence student attitudes toward literacy. The team, led by Dr. Dowrick and Dr. JoAnn Yuen, operates under the belief that literacy can be fun for students when it is a constructive and collaborative process.

Teen Actual Community Empowerment (TeenACE), one of the Creating Futures programs, uses multimedia software as an environment in which students create stories using

digital pictures. Students work in pairs to write, type, narrate, peer review, and share the stories they author. They do this repeatedly with different picture sets, using what Dr. Dowrick calls the 90:10 rule. The 90:10 rule states that 90% of learning activities should be within a student's ability and 10% should provide challenge and novelty.

One of the key features of TeenACE is the collaborative learning environment. Students work in pairs and are encouraged to talk and discuss as they write. Rather than providing direction or correcting student writing, the teacher is a coach who looks over the students' shoulders and sets goals for each team as they finish one story and start the next. Students are encouraged to ask questions of each other rather than rely solely on the teacher to correct spelling and grammar. Through this process, students have positive literacy experiences and model for themselves their skill as writers and narrators of stories.

In the 2005–2006 school year, Pacific Resources for Education and Learning (PREL) and the CDS partnered to implement TeenACE in a special education language arts classroom at a high school on the island of Hawai'i. Four sections of a language arts class used TeenACE for 8 weeks. At the end of the 8 weeks, the first and last stories of the students were compared and assessed. The students who had lower writing scores at the beginning of the project made significant progress on the grading rubric.

The language arts teacher noted several other successful outcomes for many students. She described how students were more motivated to write independently once they realized that they were not going to be given directions on what to say or how to write. Students also became more discrimi-

nating about what good writing is. When sharing their stories with others, they noted when their peers did not respond and realized where they may need to add more descriptive text or an interesting plot.

Creating Futures has also used TeenACE with English language learners (ELLs) in Hawai'i and around the Pacific. ELLs benefit greatly from the open-ended prompts and the visual and aural nature of multimedia software. Students can use the text-to-speech feature to have the computer read back what they write. As is consistent with the literature on how text-to-speech helps students write, teachers have reported that students sometimes identify errors in their writing when they hear it read back to them.

During the 2007–2008 school year, PREL will be involved with implementing another Creating Futures project with high school ELLs on the island of Hawai'i. This project, known as Video-Based Personal Futures, encourages students to think ahead about their goals and aspirations. They use video and multimedia software to create projects about their futures. This concept, based on Dr. Dowrick's video self modeling and feedforward, empowers students to envision where they can go, developing ideas and a dialogue in the process of creating the projects.

For more information on these projects, you can visit the Creating Futures website: www.creating-futures.org/ or contact Dr. Peter Dowrick at dowrick@hawaii.edu or Kavita Rao raok@prel.org.

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