The Right to Be Literate

6 Essential Literacy Skills

Exclusive Excerpt:

Preface: Robin Fogarty makes the case that literacy is a human right.

Edit Panel: Writing strategy that will teach your students to be Re-Writers.

Elevator Pitch: Student talk enhances learning when it is structured and fun

Assessment: Routine, Rigorous & Reflective assessments provide feedback.

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Preface

If literacy consists of processing codified text as a way to communicate via reading, writing, listening, speaking, *and* viewing and representing, then 21st century literacy is literacy on steroids. In a world where the sheer volume of text is overwhelming and the speed of communications and digital interactions is blinding, 21st century literacy is about how students learn to process this avalanche of information, not just for edutainment but also for honing their academic literacy skills in all content areas. They must learn to think, question the author, wonder about a confusing statement, hypothesize why the author has taken a specific stance, draw inferences about tonality and mood, and appreciate good literature in all its forms. Twenty-first century literacy is the expansive scope that takes a close look at the roles language and literacy play in our world. And the "right to be literate" implies that students will be able to participate fully in these endeavors as contributing members of an educated and literate society.

In this predominantly digital century—less than 1 percent of information currently generated is on paper (Sasseen, Olmstead, & Mitchell, 2013)—students are actually doing much more with literacy tools than ever before. The amount of time they spend watching television and videos and playing on the Internet, all while processing information critically, creatively, and comprehensively, is remarkable. Students aged eight to eighteen spend seven hours a day behind a screen of some sort, sending 3,417 text messages a month. They use, consume, and produce twenty billion photos on Instagram and upload 350,000 photos each day on Facebook (Lella & Lipsman, 2014).

Students might actually be more literacy savvy than ever before. Yet, their literacy experiences look dramatically different than those of their teachers or parents. They are not likely to be sprawled on the overstuffed chair reading a book, nor are they sitting at a desk, writing a letter to Grandma. Rather, 21st century students are most

likely to be huddled together over a digital device, viewing the latest YouTube video, walking while texting, or tweeting their friends in a never-ending stream of abbreviated and tween-coded communications.

However, positioned obscurely alongside this digital phenomenon is the daunting, yet undeniable, socioeconomic effect of these changes. The call for an equal opportunity to be literate brings to light the lopsided, polarizing forces that inhibit opportunities for all students to become competent, proficient, and literate young people in a digital world. For further confirmation of the inequities in the U.S. education system, see Alfie Kohn's (2011) article "How Education Reform Traps Poor Children."

Luis Machado, former Venezuelan minister of intelligence, published his seminal book *The Right to Be Intelligent* in 1980. He addressed theories of modification of intelligence, stating that people are not born with an IQ number that represents a fixed intelligence. Rather, he believed that people's intelligences change as they learn within an environment that nurtures what nature has provided. Our title is inspired by Machado's book and the passion of its message. Every child has the right and the capacity to be intelligent, just as every child has the right and capacity to be literate! This is not a rite of passage secured for the prosperous and privileged. It is a promise and a pledge for all children in U.S. schools, privileged or poor.

So why can't we teach all students to read and write, to speak and listen, and to master the skills of the truly literate person? If literacy is really our priority, then there is no logical, rational, or plausible reason why all students cannot attain these most basic, foundational goals. Sue Duncan, founder and head teacher of the Sue Duncan Children's Center, says it best: "I have never found a child I could not teach to read" (as cited in Kolb, 2014). Her words signal the determination and commitment of dedicated teachers across the United States. It is an unrelenting journey of labor and love to move all students, regardless of their station in life, toward literacy success. As the implementation of literacy standards continues, the need for highly engaging, standards-based instructional strategies are needed now more than ever before.

Upon further examination of this uneven literacy landscape, we find reasons that tend to perpetuate this dilemma. For instance, while every student has a right to be literate, not all teachers are trained as reading teachers. Similarly, elementary teaching certifications require what are traditionally considered the language arts courses, rich in skills of reading, writing, speaking and listening, while middle and secondary coursework often focuses on the specific subject matter of the degree program. However, recent and emerging standards present literacy as the premiere skill across all subject matters, content areas, disciplines, domains, and grade levels. In effect, these standard frameworks call on every teacher to be a teacher of literacy,

including the middle and high school department teams. Grounded in this overriding belief that the skills of literacy are tools that thread through every academic and life endeavor, all teachers should be expected to explicitly advocate, support, and reinforce the foundational communication and collaboration skills of reading, writing, listening, and speaking, as well as the 21st century skills of viewing and representing.

There is no argument that change is occurring or that literacy skills are critical in every field of study. Therefore, an explicit focus must fall on these areas of expertise as well as on the discipline-specific content of the course. As K–12 teachers accept their new role in growing the communication and collaboration skills of their students, the eventual impact will be one of an expanded society of literate and confident citizens. Constant and varied reinforcement of literacy skills across content areas deepens student effectiveness with literacy in all its forms and provides levels of proficiency that become permanent tools for a lifetime of effective communication and productive collaborations.

Edit Panel

The Edit Panel is a powerful, effective model for teaching students about the process of writing, reading, reflecting, and rewriting. It directs the rewrite with a structured and clear graphic that is easy for students to use as they learn to reread their work and look for possible changes and edits to improve their writing. It really sets the stage for students to be more responsible for what they turn in to the teacher. One teacher actually tells the students, "People are too busy to read your first drafts. You must read your own draft, make sufficient changes, and then share a more finished version with them."

In the Edit Panel strategy, students write opinion pieces on topics or texts, supporting their point of view with reasons. To begin, they draw a line on the left of their sheet of paper to section off one-third of the page for rewrites. Then, in the larger section of paper on the right, they use the following four prompts.

1. Introduce a topic or text clearly, state an opinion, and create an organizational structure in which ideas are logically grouped to support the writer's purpose.
2. Provide logically ordered reasons that are supported by facts and details.
3. Link opinion and reasons using words, phrases, and clauses (such as *consequently* or *specifically*).
4. Provide a concluding statement or section related to the opinion presented.

Once students have written the first draft, they begin the rewriting process by using the following two prompts.

1. Look over your writing and underline three words. In the rewriting column, list three possible synonyms for each of these words.
2. Highlight two sentences: underline your best one and bracket the one you would edit. In the rewriting column, rewrite the sentence you chose to edit.

See figure 2.4, page XX, for an example of the rewriting stage.

The rationale and real-world relevance for this rewriting task is obvious. As a student reads and reflects on his first draft with a partner, he notices word changes begging to be made, ways to rephrase that are more descriptive, and revisions to smooth the reading flow. It is a highly effective learning process for the pair.

Writing	Rewriting
Many students attend schools that do not have a computer for every student, but most every student has a cell phone. Cell phones are the handheld computers that educators dreamed about for years. In fact some schools have a policy of BYOD-Bring Your Own Device. Students benefit in many ways. According to the commission on 21st century skills, just about every job uses technology in some way. [In fact, more and more, this technology is the handheld variety.] As a 4th grader I want part of my curriculum to be not only dependent on a handheld or cell phone but I would expect an aspect of the curriculum to cover how to use technology responsibly, so I don't inadvertently wander in "troubled waters."	Dreamed: • Imagined • Hoped for • Fantasized about Jobs: • Careers • Vocations • Gigs Dependent: • Primary • Unconditional • Fundamental In fact, more often than not, the digital device is of the handheld variety.

Figure 2.4: Completed Edit Panel strategy: Word choice / sentence structure.

Elementary-Level Example

■ Topic: Hurricanes

In the early grades, the Edit Panel strategy is teacher directed; the teacher walks through each step explicitly with students. Over the year, students become familiar with this multiple-step process and some students may move to small-group work for the Edit Panel process. Another tactic in the early grades is to use editing partners. Starting early in the year with editing partners provides students with sufficient time to become skillful at revisions and rewrites.

A fourth-grade teacher decides that informational text from science provides rich content for students to read and write about, just as they do with narratives. In fact, science and social studies texts are significantly worthy additions to the daily reading time with young students. She uses the Edit Panel strategy to help readers get the most out of "The Making of a Hurricane" in *Hurricanes: Earth's Mightiest Storms* (Lauber, 1996) by giving them the following three steps.

1. In pairs, using buddy reading, read the text about the making of hurricanes. Individually, write a summary in the writing portion of the Edit Panel page about how hurricanes form and share the writing with your partner.

2. After reflecting with your partner, circle three words in your piece to change and place them in the Edit Panel. Then name three synonyms for each of the three words.

3. Finally, underline one sentence you like. Bracket one sentence you want to change, and make the changes by writing the new sentence in the Edit Panel.

Middle-Level Example

■ Topic: Reading Music Lyrics

As a class of seventh-grade students learns to read a selection and then write about it, the explicit revision process of the Edit Panel leads them back to the completed writing for a close reread. In this way, students learn about the full cycle of the writing process: read, write, reflect, and rewrite. After several walkthrough lessons with the teacher, students become familiar with this multiple-step process and, over time, become more aware of their own writing results.

The teacher directs students to pair up and read "Rambling 'Round" from *This Land Was Made for You and Me: The Life and Songs of Woody Guthrie* (Partridge, 2002). The students then individually write a summary and share the writing with their partners. Following the reflection, they take the following steps.

1. Circle three words in your piece to change, place them in the Edit Panel, and name three synonyms for each of the three words.

2. Now, underline one sentence you like. Bracket one sentence you want to change, and make the changes by writing the new sentence in the Edit Panel.

3. Finally, share your edits with your partner.

Secondary-Level Example

■ Topic: Sociology

A high school class focusing on sociology uses the Edit Panel strategy to explore the text "The Three Rules of Epidemics" in *The Tipping Point* (Gladwell, 2002). After students read the selection in pairs, they use the following three steps.

1. Circle three words in your piece to change, place them in the Edit Panel, and name three synonyms for each of the three words.

2. Now, underline one sentence you like. Bracket one sentence you want to change, and make the changes by writing the new sentence in the Edit Panel.

3. Finally, share your edits with your partner.

Speaking may be the most important communication skill for college and career readiness. Many times, the interview is the clincher in the job application process. The voice, the presence, the way the applicant speaks, what is said, how it is said, and how it comes across to the interviewer can make the difference between a hire and a handshake, a compliment and a callback, or a "don't come back."

Knowing the power of spoken words, students must have multiple, daily opportunities to speak with and to others—partners, small groups, or the entire class. In the end, speaking skills lead back to writing skills. When students are able to say something in their own words, repeat, retell, recall, rephrase, and paraphrase, they anchor the ideas in a personal and lasting way. In addition, speaking is the expressive skill of voicing one's opinion, affirmation, description, explanation, exclamation, persuasive plea, or outright argument.

Thus, in an emerging reality, the neglected classroom skill of speaking nudges its way to front and center as an essential skill for learning and living. The 21st century classroom is poised to fully embrace this literacy skill across the disciplines and grade levels.

Standards-Based Speaking Strategies

To explore this skill, we've included five standards-based speaking strategies.

1. Elevator Pitch
2. Panel of Experts
3. The Three Musketeers
4. Cooperative Tear Share
5. People Search

Each strategy is active, engaging, and inviting to students who have much to share.

The Elevator Pitch

The Elevator Pitch (Fogarty, 2009) is an energizing way for students to practice summarizing, synthesizing, and getting to the point of an idea. It is a brief, one-minute talk—about the length of an elevator ride—that tells the audience about their topic. It could be a book, report, film, poem, essay, research, idea, or project that they have completed or are planning to complete.

This strategy originated in the world of business, and the name refers to a fortuitous encounter with someone important in the elevator. If the conversation inside

the elevator in those few seconds is interesting and value adding, the conversation will continue after the elevator ride or end in the exchange of business cards or a scheduled meeting. A real-world example comes from Hollywood. In 1978, screenwriters Ronald Shusett and Dan O'Bannon were talking to the executives at 20th Century Fox, and they presented what is considered the shortest successful pitch of a movie. The movie they wrote was *Alien*, and their elevator pitch was simply, "*Jaws* in space." 20th Century Fox gave them $4.2 million to make the movie, and it grossed over $200 million worldwide (Nash Information Services, 2015).

The Elevator Pitch is comprehensive in scope but laser-focused in execution. It can be quite useful in helping students get to the point. When students have time to develop an effective summary and to extract the gist of the idea, communications become crisp, clear, and abundantly appreciated by the listener.

Frequent and varied opportunities to use this strategy help students improve in gathering their thoughts in coherent statements and shifting that skillfulness to their writing. For example, in an Elevator Pitch about a thousand-word essay task assigned for the end of the school year in social studies, requirements might include the following: proposed topic, reason for choosing it, most interesting aspect or angle, relationship to social studies class, and any expected obstacles. In addition, once students learn how to do the Elevator Pitch well, it easily transfers into other classrooms, as well as into the world. Regardless of topic, the ability to say something succinctly is a skill of a successful communicator.

To streamline the process, we suggest using a timer or bell and giving students guidelines for their elevator pitches: the speech must take no more than one minute and may include an artifact, object, or visual. At the end of the speech, the student in the role of listener gives one positive comment and asks one question. Then, the two shake hands and exit the scene.

Elementary-Level Example

■ Topic: Animals and Pollution

In a fourth-grade class, the teacher has integrated the science units of pollution and the animal kingdom so that students are learning about life in the sea and how pollution is a threat to the existence of the animal life there. Each student has to pick a sea animal, study its habitat and its contribution to the ocean's ecosystem, and then create an Elevator Pitch designed to persuade someone to help protect this endangered animal.

To add a twist, the student can speak from the animal's point of view.

Middle-Level Example

■ Topic: Writing a Thousand-Word Essay

A seventh-grade teacher is using this strategy as a way to jumpstart the rigorous writing assignment of a thousand-word essay. For their elevator pitches, students must include their topic, reason, angle, obstacles, and (optionally) an artifact or visual.

As a role play, Polly enters the imaginary elevator and greets the other person:

> Good morning. I'm just curious, have you ever had to do something that seemed undoable? That's where I am. I must write a thousand words. It seems impossible unless I do it on something that I love to talk about. What do you think that is? If you're thinking politics, you are absolutely right. That is the part of social studies that gets exciting. I think because politics is about people, it is the most intriguing. I wonder why people get involved in politics. The way I want to approach my paper is to find one politician and find out how she became interested, what she had to do to prepare, and how she likes it as a career, really. I want to know what the ups and downs of being in the political limelight are. I think this would be fascinating, and I can see myself writing a thousand words on this subject because it is in the news every day. The hardest part will be sticking to the word limit. That's a joke. But I know I can do this. What do you think? Did I make my case?

Her partner responds with one positive comment and one question. Then, both shake and break. The teacher (and perhaps other students) then completes a predesigned checklist or rubric to see if all requirements were met.

At this grade level, teachers could have four elevator pitches going on in the four corners of the room at the same time. Each elevator team would then have a panel of judges to observe and comment.

Secondary-Level Example

■ Topic: College and Career Readiness

Senior-level students can create two separate elevator pitches, one for college and one for a career. To prepare for college and careers after high school, students write a self-evaluation and a list of goals. They consider their accomplishments from the previous three and a half years in high school and how these accomplishments might help them in future interviews with colleges or employers. The focus will be not only

on the content of what they say but also the quality of the delivery (Roberts, 2014). For example, do they make eye contact or use filler words?

The thinking skills targeted by the Elevator Pitch strategy are determine, clarify, and synthesize. For more detail, refer to table A.1 (page XX) in the afterword.

Formative Assessments: Listening and Speaking

Traditionally, earning a grade for speaking skills has meant public speaking. Students have time to plan and rehearse before their presentation, and while they prepare, they are well aware of the rubric the teacher is using to grade them. Yet, in a 21st century classroom where students are being asked to engage in meaningful conversations that require critical thinking skills, it can be difficult for the students and the teacher to agree on what is considered progress toward the goal. Thus feedback and student self-assessment are important ways to keep the student and teacher on the same page and to inform the teacher regarding the needed instructional adjustments.

Three levels of feedback in the formative assessment cycle are delineated here: (1) routine, everyday assessments; (2) reflective, deliberate metacognitive assessments; and (3) rigorous, professionally and collaboratively designed assessments.

Routine Formative Assessments

On a daily basis, teachers should be able to informally or formally gather observational and anecdotal evidence about how students are progressing in listening and speaking. For instance, improvement can look like students who demonstrate patience when listening, students who interrupt their partners less often and pause to gather their thoughts, students who paraphrase often and accurately and become more skilled at summarizing, students who express what they know verbally in cooperative groups, students who ask more substantive and more complex questions in class, and students who use transitional statements in everyday conversation, such as "I agree with you on that one point, but I disagree with you when . . ." or "When you said . . . it reminded me of a related idea that . . ."

Feedback for students engaged in a listening or speaking assignment must be as specific as possible to steer readers toward strong use of 21st century skills, such as, "Nice thesis statement and two pieces of supporting evidence" or "You did a good job of including supporting evidence in your opinion."

Student actions to look for when using routine formative assessments include the following.

- Being patient when listening
- Not interrupting their partners
- Summarizing in a more skilled manner
- Pausing to gather their thoughts
- Often and accurately expressing ideas
- Asking substantive and more complex questions
- Being affirming and using transitional statements
- Incorporating specific feedback

Reflective Formative Assessments

To enhance the development of the students' speaking skills, the teacher can ask questions that require the students to think about their own learning. Questions that cause students to go beyond the content and challenge them to think about their own learning are reflective in nature. For example, a teacher could ask, "What was the hardest part of trying to explain complex ideas?," "How do you think you did? What might you change if you did his again?," or "How does this connect to something you know? How might you use this in the future?"

Student actions to look for when using reflective formative assessments include the following.

- Answering questions that go beyond the content
- Answering questions about the process
- Writing reflections
- Thinking about their thinking
- Expressing how and why they know something

Rigorous Formative Assessments

To judge ease of speaking, peers or teachers can count filler words (*and*, *well*, *but*, *so*, and *you know*), filler sounds (*ah*, *um*, or *er*), or repetitions of words or phrases ("I, I" or "This means, this means"). Called, the *ah* counter strategy, it helps students realize what they are doing and start correcting it, as these words and sounds can be annoying to listeners. Students can also recall PACTS—paraphrasing, affirming, clarifying, testing options, sensing tone—when speaking.

Student actions to look for when using rigorous formative assessments include the following.

- Counting filler words and phrases
- Developing performance rubrics
- Using attentive listening skills, such as eye contact, nodding, and verbal affirmation
- Employing PACTS

Parental Involvement: Listening and Speaking

The first thing parents can do to help their child become better at listening and speaking is to model appropriate speaking habits themselves. Talking in complete sentences with proper grammar is a great place to start. If parents talk to their child in rich, full sentences, their child will build a vast vocabulary and begin using the words in conversations.

Parents can also ask better questions; just like in a classroom situation, simple low-level questions require little thought and fewer words. Avoid questions that can be answered with a "Yes," "No," or "Maybe, so." Instead, ask, "What were three things you did today?" and then follow up with, "OK, of those three things, what was the most fun, and why?"

Conclusion

Speaking belongs to the category of expressive language skills. In fact, it is one of the first language skills and one of the most important, as it turns out. The formal opportunities for speaking in the classroom are well known—speeches in speech class, of course, but also show-and-tell times, book reports, oral reports, project presentations, and speaking in front of the class by reading an essay or poem or even sharing a science or math log.

Yet, speaking in small-group work is really where students get more airtime to share their thinking. Interestingly, pair or partner work is most beneficial, as the dialogue between two people, as modeled in the Serve and Volley strategy, really gets at the heart of classroom discourse. The more often students have an opportunity for cognitive rehearsal, forming their thoughts and saying them aloud to another person, the more students learn to think, speak, and share their opinions with a sense of confidence and, over time, a sense of authority. In sum, student interactions in the whole group, small groups, and particularly in pairs need to be part of every classroom

lesson whenever possible. It is through the spoken language that the thinking process is crystallized and clarified (Vygotsky, 1962).

Listening and speaking are somewhat like the clichéd duos of bread and butter or milk and cookies. Even though these skills are often taught separately, they can easily be explicitly targeted within the same learning experiences. According to a recent survey published by Georgetown University (Center on Education and the Workforce, 2013), active listening is the first skill listed. They define active listening as "giving full attention to what other people are saying, taking time to understand the points being made, asking questions as appropriate, and not interrupting at inappropriate times" (p. 26). Interestingly, speaking—defined as "talking to others to convey information effectively" (p. 26)—was the second skill named.

While speaking and listening are the essential grist for the reading and writing mills, they do stand on their own as extraordinarily essential in the communication spectrum. And, to reiterate, they set the groundwork for the more sophisticated language skills of reading the written word, writing digital codes of every sort, and composing and digitizing language for others to share.

It is with these thoughts that this section comes to a close and we turn to the final set of literacy skills: viewing and representing. While these skills have taken on new energy in the 21st century with digital rich communications ruling the worlds of home, work, and school, they are skills that students are already intimately familiar with.