
December 1985

I Used the Newspaper

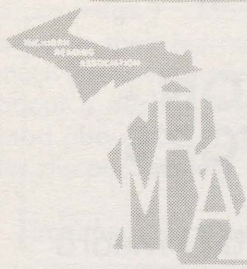
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Recommended Citation

Chamberlain, Karla (1985) "I Used the Newspaper," *Michigan Reading Journal*: Vol. 19 : Iss. 2 , Article 6.
Available at: <https://scholarworks.gvsu.edu/mrj/vol19/iss2/6>

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I USED THE NEWSPAPER

Karla Chamberlain

Three years ago I obtained special permission to use the newspaper to replace textbooks in my sixth grade classroom. The class was made up of 11 girls and 15 boys and represented a diverse ethnic background including Blacks, Caucasians, Hispanics, Native Americans, and Asian Americans. In September, reading levels ranged from third grade to ninth grade. All subject areas were covered by using the newspaper.

We began each school day with 20 to 30 minutes of silent reading. Each student could spend that time reading only favorites, like sports, or could pick and choose throughout the newspaper. Regardless of reading ability, each one always found more to read than time allowed.

Did the students get excited? Absolutely. Not only did they find out unusual information, but they learned many "life-role" skills without complaining because they could see the application.

Parents were not excluded from this program. An evening workshop was sponsored by the PTA. Parents were given suggestions and ideas for using the newspaper at home with their children of all ages. Actual hands-on experiences with newspaper activities were also provided.

Karla Chamberlain
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At parent-teacher conferences, many reported changes at home that were a direct result of the newspaper in the classroom. Parents noticed their children voluntarily reading, or reading more. Discussions around the dinner table became varied and enthusiastic. And parents were pleased to know their children were learning to use the newspaper and the information it provided to become better consumers.

At the end of the first semester and at the end of the school year, students were tested to measure growth. Of 14 students reading below grade level in September, 12 showed growth. Most dramatic was one girl's gain of three years in vocabulary and one boy's growth of seven years in comprehension. Overall, the class averaged one year's growth in reading in nine months of school.

I would definitely recommend using newspapers in the classroom. However, let me add two thoughts to that statement. My special program was done to prove that newspapers can be used successfully in a classroom, not to show that texts should be done away with permanently and replaced by newspapers. Teachers should integrate newspaper lessons. Secondly, I had supplemented texts with newspaper lessons for about three years before this program. A project of this scope is not for everyone. A good beginning is one lesson.

In addition to the enthusiasm for learning, I feel that I enabled the students leaving my classroom to have the skills necessary for becoming contributing members of any community by teaching them how to use a vital and important community tool.