Research Base

Development of Amplify ELA was, and continues to be, based on extensive research into learning and cognition and how students develop these skills. Although we will provide both print and digital versions of our materials, note that the digital version will be continuously updated to reflect the latest research.

Reading and Writing

Close reading to analyze passages supports larger analyses and understanding of the overall text (Wheeler, 2014). Scholars note that engaging students in the process of close reading requires developing their thinking about reading and language (Brower, 1962; Lehman and Roberts, 2014). Competent readers focus on the operations of written language, actively engage in dialogues with the writer, and seek to understand the writer's purpose (Paul and Elder, 2003). They carefully consider the lexical choices made by writers and the relations between units of language in texts. These processes yield evidence to support a claim or a thesis statement. Close reading therefore often involves working through an argument or narrative to produce a novel argument (Hillocks, 2010).

To write well, students need to become skillful readers of texts that can teach them how to further develop their craft (Murray, 1999). The converse is also true: Amplify's curriculum utilizes writing instruction as a vehicle for improving reading skills (Moore, 1995; Graham and Hebert, 2010) and for promoting learning to meet the CCSS (Freedman 2003; Hawkins, 2006). Quality writing can serve as a model for teaching well-- crafted writing, and carefully selected texts play an important role in informing students how to better their writing ability (Avery, 2002; Calkins, 1994; Graves, 1983). Students can develop an awareness of the rhythm and cadence that characterizes quality writing when listening to and reading literature (Ray, 2004). Studies indicate that a student's writing becomes influenced by the books they read—whether it is an emulation of the writer's style or the genre (Eckhoff, 1984); an incorporation of the literary traits and details (Dressel, 1990); the borrowing of plots, characters, or structure (Lancia, 1997); or the use of imagery often found in poetry (Langer and Flihan, 2000). In this process, students come to understand that writers carefully craft a text so that the reader finds it worthy of reading (Graves, 2004)—and in crafting their own writing, students develop their own voices as they think about the effect they intend to have on the reader (Graves, 1983). Students become motivated to write clearly for communicative purposes (Graves, 1983; Romano, 2004).

Paraphrasing, or putting things into one's own words, is also a foundational skill that links reading (receptive skill) and writing (productive skill). In paraphrasing a single word, or a sentence, a paragraph, or multi-- paragraph text, students develop a broader ability to restate and summarize what they have read (Kissner, 2006). This also aids their identification of central ideas and themes in texts. When reading literature, retelling a story clearly helps students process and internalize what they have read (Gambrell, Pfeiffer, and Wilson, 1985). Paraphrasing also engages students to make connections between text and their prior knowledge (Kintsch, 1998).

Students who understand the basic structures in an expository text—description, sequence, cause and effect, etc.—consistently use their knowledge of top--level text structure in reading and recall tasks (Akhondi, Malayeri, and Samad, 2011; Meyer, Brandt, and Bluth, 1980; Pearson and Duke, 2002; RAND Reading Study Group, 2002; Sweet and Snow, 2003). Understanding how a text is organized helps build coherent models of a text (Dymock, 2005).

Vocabulary

Vocabulary is a key factor in text complexity and determines how likely students are to understand a text (Graves and Fink, 2007). Research suggests that significant components of effective vocabulary instruction are: frequent, varied, and extensive language experiences (i.e., through listening, speaking, reading, writing); rich, deep, extended instruction that involves both definitional and contextual information; and specific instruction on word-- learning strategies such as using context, word parts, and cognates (Biemiller 2000; Graves, 2006; Graves and Fink, 2007). Amplify's approach to vocabulary instruction encompasses all of these components.

Engagement

It is motivating for students to have access to texts that are interesting, meaningful, and accessible to them— texts that are neither too difficult nor too easy (Baumann and Kame'enui, 2004). Researchers have also shown that primary sources (e.g., original documents such as letters, diaries, speeches, and images) trigger stronger interest and identification (Morgan and Rasinski, 2012).

Student learning and engagement is enhanced when educational activities involve participation in interactive, collaborative, project--based tasks in everyday, meaningful contexts (Renzuelli, Gentry, Reis, 2004), such as role--playing characters in fiction or drama. (Poitras, Stimec, and Hill, 2013). Having students work in teams is an effective way to

encourage and sustain student effort and persistence (Boss, Johanson, Arnold, Parker, and Nguyen, 2011; Van Garderend, Hanuscin, and Lee, 2012).

Studies have shown that learning is enhanced when students receive information in more than one mode, such as through images, words and sounds (Mayer, 1997; Schnotz and Kulhavy, 1994). Researchers claiming the effectiveness of multimedia learning include (Sadoski and Paivio, 2001), (Sweller, Van Merrienboer, and Paas, 1998) and (Novak, 1998; Vygotsky, 1978). Materials supplied in several presentation modes can facilitate learning and retention of information, particularly for lower--achieving students (Chen and Fu, 2003), as visualizations will maintain learner's attention more concretely through external representations of information (Shah and Freedman, 2003) and allow students to experience learning in ways that are better suited to their modal preference and learning styles (Doolittle, McNeill, Terry and Scheer, 2005; Picciano, 2009; Sankley, Birch, Gardiner, 2010).

Formative assessment and Feedback

Various types of low--stakes assessments provide teachers with student performance data on a regular basis to determine the effectiveness of their teaching, make decisions about how to improve instruction and further encourage students to become more aware of their own performance (Safer and Fleischman, 2005). Research has shown that various forms of feedback, such as a teacher's comments about student progress in specific writing strategies (MacArthur, Schwartz, and Graham, 1991; Schunk and Swartz, 1993) or reactions from peers about particular aspects of writing (Boscolo and Ascorti, 2004; Couzjin, 1999) all have significant positive impact on a student's writing skills.

ELL Instruction

ELLs show greater achievement when they engage in activities that encourage language growth through interaction, planning, research, and discussion (van Lier, 2007). Language learning becomes usage--based, rather than grammar--based (Ellis & Larsen--Freeman, 2010). ELLs show greater achievement with complex texts when they are encouraged to build on their prior knowledge and experiences. (Bunch, Kibler, & Pimentel, 2013), when they are exposed to a variety of writing styles and useful expressions/phrases that will help them express their ideas in various settings (Bunch, et al, 2013). and when high--quality literacy instruction is coupled with well--developed oral language skills (August & Shanahan, 2006).