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# *Solution to Obstacle* **16**

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## **My District Requires Me to Follow a Prescribed Text**

### **A DESCRIPTION OF THE ISSUE**

Textbooks are an integral part of school. Students look for them on the first day of school. Parents use their existence as a measure of how well their school is doing. Districts budget more money for textbooks than for all other teaching aids combined. Textbooks are probably here to stay for the foreseeable future. However, there are reasons that teachers should, at the very least, supplement textbooks with additional or alternate information and sources.

### **TEXTBOOK OPTIONS CAN CREATE MORE EFFECTIVE READERS**

When you use a variety of textbooks, you increase the likelihood that one will spark the interest of a particular student, a key ingredient in successful reading. Reading comprehension involves more than simply decoding words. It involves motivation. Students must feel some motivation to learn through reading, or else academic success will be limited, particularly for high school students (Dolezal et al., 2003; Reynolds & Symons, 2001; Shaywitz, 2003; Stipek, 2002).

Learning through reading involves three key processes: phonological and decoding skills, motivation, and engagement. As high school teachers, we frequently do not need to assist our students with the phonological and decoding process, but the most effective teachers are those who make a

significant effort to support student motivation and engagement in reading. If students “want” to understand the material, they will process the material more deeply (McCrudden et al., 2005).

Modern research in reading has shown us that simply having a textbook that matches the reading level of your students is not enough for real learning. If we expect our students to glean usable information from a text, we must include the five keys to motivating students for effective textbook reading:

- Before reading, the students must have an understanding of the content goals.
- The students should have a choice of texts.
- The students perceive their textbooks as interesting.
- There is significant social collaboration during reading.
- Small-group instruction should be used as support for the reading.

When trying to motivate and engage your students in a textbook, take into consideration that both cognitive skills and emotional issues are involved in engagement. Most of us have been trained in helping students engage cognitive skills. We have been taught, for example, to help students activate background knowledge with the use of questioning and summarizing techniques and graphic organizers.

But students who successfully gain knowledge and understanding through reading are those students in classrooms where the teacher also helps with the emotional component of reading engagement. There are good motivational practices that teachers can use to help students with reading. These include things like using content goals, providing hands-on activities, offering students choice, using interesting texts, and encouraging social collaboration during reading instruction.

## **A VARIETY OF READING MATERIALS KEEPS INFORMATION UPDATED**

Many texts may be outdated. Some are outdated almost as fast as they are published. Many of us teach in fields where new information changes ideas almost weekly. Subjects such as social studies, geography, the sciences, art, music, technology, business, and industrial arts all must use supplemental materials in order to keep up with changing issues and new information in the field.

We are all aware of the length of time it takes to write, edit, revise, publish, and market a text. In fields such as computer technology, genetic science, and world geography, much has occurred and changed during the years it took to move a textbook from the author’s writing to your classroom.

Another reason for supplemental or multiple texts is one that is rarely discussed in department meetings. Textbooks are often full of inaccuracies