Get Lit
RESEARCH
BRIEF

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INTRODUCTION

Get Lit programs blend classic and spoken word poetry to inspire and empower students' self-expression, strengthen their social-emotional skills, and improve engagement, motivation, and academic performance. The pedagogy incorporated into the Get Lit curricula is grounded in the process of active learning and 16 principles, referred to as the "Science of Learning Principles," derived from years of empirical research on learning and instruction (Kosslyn & Nelson, 2018). Get Lit incorporates research-based, effective literacy and writing strategies into its curricula while providing creative outlets for the self-actualization and transformation of students into artists, activists, and scholars with greater empathic consciousness of people, culture, and social contexts.

The Get Lit curricula offer students active learning opportunities such as project-based activities, collaborative writing, peer review and feedback, group discussions, presentations, and performances. Engagement is a key feature of Get Lit's programming, both in-person and virtual. Research has shown that as students become involved in course content, their academic and personal engagement is enhanced, and motivation to learn is increased (Martin & Bollinger, 2018).

Get Lit programs expose students to learning through the arts, which has been linked to positive student outcomes throughout the research literature. In 2012, a research report from four longitudinal studies sponsored by the National Endowment for the Arts was published. The findings demonstrated positive, statistically significant differences in academic as well as civic-minded behavioral outcomes, particularly among students in low socioeconomic (SES) conditions. For example, 8th graders with high levels of arts engagement from elementary school and up showed higher test scores in science and writing than their counterparts. High school students with "arts-rich experiences," regardless of SES, were more likely to have higher overall GPAs than their counterparts. Students engaged in arts were also more likely to be interested in social and political contexts, evidenced by increased volunteer rates and community service activities (Catterall et al., 2012).

In addition to being arts-rich, Get Lit programs are academically rigorous and aligned to the California State Standards. Three of Get Lit's curricula (Voices in Verse, Stanzas in America, and Words Ignite) have been approved by the University of California (UC) to satisfy college entry requirements as English courses and/or College Preparatory Electives. To meet the English course requirements, the curriculum must address appropriate anchor standards, require extensive reading of multi-genre texts, engage students in substantial, recursive writing practice directed at various audiences and purposes, and incorporate the development of critical listening skills and public speaking practice. College Preparatory Elective requirements include academically challenging activities to develop skills for critical thinking, problem-solving, research, and communication. Moreover, Get Lit programs align with California's approved Ethnic Studies curriculum for students in grades 9-12.

The supporting research offered in this brief highlights many of the strategies and theoretical underpinnings of the Get Lit program and student outcomes linked to its successful implementation. While not an exhaustive review of the literature, it presents an overview of relevant examples to substantiate the research-based connections between Get Lit's activities and intended positive effects

INTEGRATION OF ETHNIC STUDIES

California's State Board of Education approved an Ethnic Studies K-12 curriculum model in 2021. As stated in the curriculum's overview, the benefits of engaging students in Ethnic Studies are well supported in the research and include a series of positive academic and social outcomes. Such outcomes include increases in GPA, standardized test scores, and attendance; increases in critical thinking and problem-solving skills; skill and language development for critical analysis and response to social issues; and greater social and cultural awareness and empathy. Further, outcomes related to supporting social-emotional wellness, academic motivation, and engagement have emerged from related research (CDE, 2021).

Get Lit seamlessly merges the goals of the state-approved Ethnic Studies curriculum into its curricula through the cultivation of empathy, self-worth, advocacy, and well-being of all people, especially Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) and the LBGTQIA+ community. For over ten years, the research literature has supported the relationships between participation in Ethnic Studies curricula and improved academic outcomes and student engagement (Sleeter, 2011, as cited in Tintangco-Cubales et al., 2015). These findings were especially true when linked to culturally responsive instruction, as this pedagogy builds upon students' experiences and perspectives, develops students' critical consciousness and creates caring academic environments (Tintangco-Cubales et al., 2015).

While much of the research on Ethnic Studies have been done at the college level, Dee and Penner (2016) have studied the effects of an Ethnic Studies curriculum on high school students that included indicators of persistence, such as attendance, GPA, and earned credits. Through the analyses of data on 1,405 historically underserved students from five school cohorts, the researchers found increased attendance by 21 percentage points, GPA by 1.4-grade points, and credits earned by 23. Their conclusions suggest that an Ethnic Studies curriculum, combined with culturally relevant teaching, can effectively support underserved students.

MENTOR TEXTS AS TOOLS FOR SUCCESS

Mentor texts, exemplar texts, or writing models are written works that serve as examples of good writing and are read for the purpose of studying the author's use of words and structure. The use of mentor texts is widespread in the literature on writing instruction and has been identified as a valuable, research-supported practice in a meta-analysis of effective writing strategies (Graham & Perin, 2007). Within the Get Lit curriculum, students choose their own mentor texts to analyze, improve their writing skills, and become more engaged in their learning. In a 2016 report from the US Department of Education on teaching high school students to write effectively, the authors noted that there was a preponderance of supporting evidence for using exemplar texts. The authors concluded that incorporating such texts into writing instruction encouraged students to think critically, articulate, and analyze their ideas in order to convey them to intended audiences. Further, (Graham et al., 2016).


Additional studies have linked mentor texts to improved writing mechanics, structure, and overall quality across grade levels. A study of primary school students was found to develop early writing skills (sentence variety, word choice, and topic choice) and become more confident in their writing (Gericke & Salmon, 2013). Through a process of collaborative inquiry and analyses of writing samples, Corden (2007) studied the contribution of mentor texts to writing quality among elementary students from nine schools. Teachers used mentor texts in their daily instruction, while students further examined the texts in smaller, collaborative groups. Overall, student writing improved in both structure and style. Further, average gains measured through pre- and post-testing exceeded the national expectation for writing progress over a school year.

Incorporation of mentor texts into writing instruction has been examined in other content areas besides English/Language Arts, such as economics, science, and social studies. Pytash et al. (2014) studied the experiences of 12 high school students using a mentor text to develop their writing in an economics class. These researchers found that collaborative examination of the mentor texts improved students' understanding of word choice and function, particularly transitional words and their potential for clarity and organization.

MENTOR TEXTS AS TOOLS FOR SUCCESS

Findings on the use of mentor texts have also demonstrated transformative experiences for students, particularly related to self-awareness and intentionality. In one poetry writing class, working with mentor texts helped high school students gain critical awareness of the authors' influence on their own writing as well as develop an increasing self-awareness of punctuation and grammatical structure in their own work (Padgett & Curwood, 2016). Using an action research design, one teacher documented the progress of high school students engaged with a non-fiction mentor text over the course of one school year. The teacher found that through this practice her students became more intentional with their own writing as they developed individual and distinct writing identities (Taylor, 2016). Lee et al. (2022) analyzed the process and writing samples collected among 32 students from an alternative secondary program who participated in a three-year poetry program. The researchers found that, for these students, the mentor texts became tools for reflection as their writing became transformational. Through choosing their own mentor texts and engaging in the writing process, the students learned more about themselves and others.

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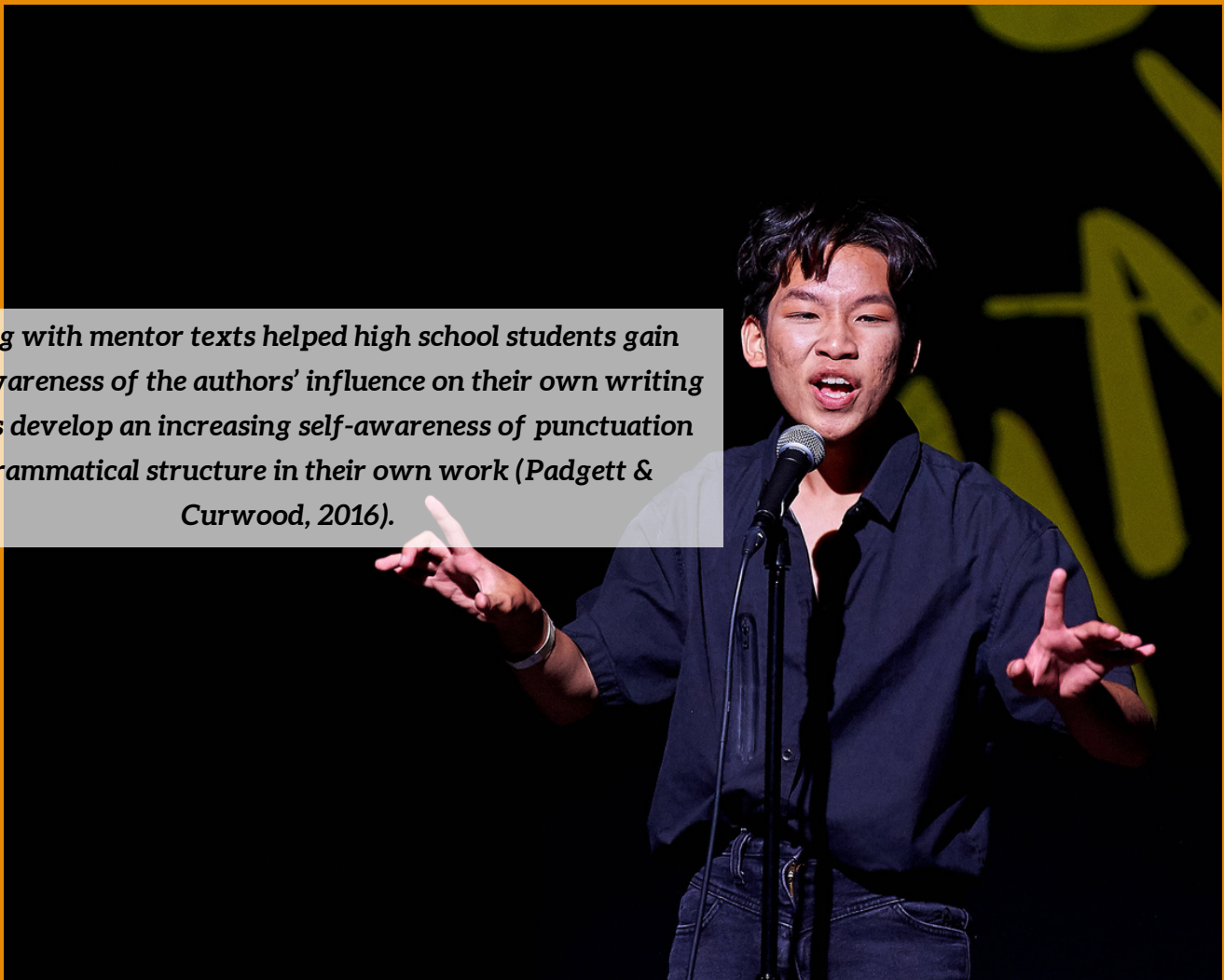
PEER COLLABORATION, REVIEW, & FEEDBACK AS VEHICLES TO POSITIVE GROWTH

Throughout the curricula, Get Lit integrates peer collaboration, review, and feedback as instrumental components toward advancing writing and literacy outcomes, and inspiring confidence and voice. Research over the years has shown that active engagement in the collaborative process of reciprocal peer review and feedback further develops students' writing skills and knowledge of subject matter (Wu & Schunn, 2021). Topping (2009) describes empirical evidence dating back to 1990, in which students working in peer feedback groups outperformed their counterparts (students who only received feedback from their teacher) in the improvement and overall quality of their written assignments. Topping's review of the research also concluded that through peer feedback, students were able to build critical thinking and social skills that enabled them to give and accept constructive feedback and justify their positions. In a meta-analysis of research-based writing practices, peer review was noted among the effective strategies to have a strong impact on writing quality when compared with independent writing (Graham & Perin, 2007).

Marsh (2018) utilized an instrumental case design to study a creative writing class of 16 high school students. Peer feedback provided opportunities for students to exchange writing techniques and expand vocabulary, beyond what was taught through traditional instruction. In an earlier study, Jocson (2008) concluded that peer collaboration and feedback loops within poetry-writing activities influenced students to foster their individual voices and apply them to other genres.

PEER COLLABORATION, REVIEW, & FEEDBACK AS VEHICLES TO POSITIVE GROWTH

Wiseman (2010) found that peer collaboration, when implemented within an 8th grade poetry writing program in an urban classroom, gave students opportunities to develop communication skills and learn from one another in a reciprocal fashion. Throughout the program, they supported one another's writing and expression. The researcher further demonstrated how the combination of poetry aligned to students' emotional and lived experiences and peer collaboration, improved student engagement and enhanced communication skills.

Cho and Cho (2011) further contributed to the evidence base for the "learning-writing-by-reviewing" hypothesis through a regression analysis of peer feedback among undergraduate students. Findings showed that the process of giving feedback, not just receiving feedback, also led to improvements in writing. Padgett and Curwood's (2016) qualitative study of a high school poetry class also found that students participating in reciprocal peer review and feedback served as motivation to write, improve, and explore their literary interests further. In a more recent study, Wu and Schunn (2021) used a statistical regression approach to examine the effects of peer review on performance and learning outcomes with a sample of 185 high school students. The findings revealed, overall, that providing feedback was directly related to growth in writing ability. Further, the number of revisions predicted growth in writing ability, and the amounts of both received and provided feedback were associated with an increased likelihood of revision.

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IMPACTS OF SPOKEN WORD POETRY

Spoken word poetry is an art form that transforms poetry into performance. Get Lit programs engage students in spoken word poetry, integrating writing and performance in ways that empower students to take on the roles of working poets and speak to social contexts, cultural landscapes, and real-world struggles. Spoken word poetry in K-12 contexts has not been widely studied. Nevertheless, the studies cited here demonstrate that students' sense of self, ownership, voice, and motivation has been clearly amplified through their participation.

Camangian (2008) studied the impact of teaching performance poetry within a social justice framework with students from an urban, public high school comprised largely of African American and Hispanic students. Through qualitative examination, the researcher found that the students not only embraced the genre but were able to think critically, self-actualize, find their voices, and gain an empathic awareness of the struggles of their own and other racial and ethnic groups.

When integrated into the curriculum, spoken word poetry helps students build on prior knowledge and skill as well as make connections to real-world and social issues (Lesus & Vaughn, 2022). Bagwell et al. (2017) studied the use of spoken word poetry in an 8th-grade social studies classroom to explore the effects on understanding, engagement, and voice. While there was some measured improvement in understanding the social studies content, the students demonstrated marked engagement in the content as well as in the poetry writing, as many of the students expressed the desire to continue writing in their free time. Researchers also concluded that students' voice was amplified through the student's willingness to share their writing in class among peers and other teachers.

IMPACTS OF SPOKEN WORD POETRY

The achievement of personal and social outcomes was also documented in an ethnographic study conducted by Weinstein (2010) spanning over four years in school- and community-based poetry workshops. The researcher found that youth experienced increases in self-confidence and self-esteem through their participation. Overall, students underwent transformative experiences as they became more self-aware and reflective in writing and performing. Finally, the researcher noted the connection to school engagement, as the youth enhanced their social skills and were more motivated to learn.

Scarbrough and Allen (2015) studied the practices of two high school educators who organized a writing workshop around spoken poetry and performance. Through observation and writing analysis, the researchers found that the students gained an empathic awareness of people with varied life circumstances, were able to reflect on their own status and potential futures, and critically discuss the structures and expectations of their school environments.

In a case study of an after-school spoken word poetry team, three high school students were tasked with writing individual poems and a collaborative poem. The study focused on student choice and connecting the writing to students' experiences and real-world contexts. The researchers hypothesized that this more authentic approach would lead to greater ownership of the writing and more engagement in the writing process. Students' sense of ownership became most evident in their feedback sharing and identified writing purposes. The students also tended to integrate previously learned traditional writing practices as they worked to refine their poetry, seeing themselves as poets more than students (Lesus & Vaughn, 2022).

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THE ROLE OF SELF-EFFICACY IN PERFORMANCE

An individual's self-efficacy has been defined as a belief that one has control over something or a situation and achieves positive results (Bandura, 1997). Self-efficacy has been linked to achievement, performance, and resiliency in school. Get Lit's programs develop students' confidence and self-efficacy as they teach students to perform and speak in public contexts with eloquence, authentic emotion, and purpose. Studies of communication skills development have supported the relationship between self-efficacy and public speaking. Dwyer and Fus (2002) used a predictive regression design to examine this relationship among 304 undergraduate students. Key findings included an inverse relationship between self-efficacy and anxiety related to communicating in public. Further, the more students believed in their ability to achieve their public speaking goals, the greater likelihood of earning a higher final grade in the course.

Developing skills in public speaking and performance can lead to improved critical thinking as well as the ability to fine-tune verbal and non-verbal skills. Paradewari (2017) surveyed students in a public speaking class to examine their levels of perceived self-efficacy and confidence in relation to speaking in front of an audience. Students with greater awareness of their own self-efficacy were more motivated to speak in public and improve their performance. The researcher also suggested that a supportive and motivating classroom environment also contributed to students' success in performing or engaging in public speaking.

Get Lit incorporates research-based strategies and practices leading students to academic, social, and transformative outcomes. This overview highlights the research supporting these connections. Students develop and improve literacy, writing, and communication skills through active learning opportunities. Expanded empathy, cultural and social awareness, and self-actualization are achieved by working with mentor texts, encouraging expression and voice, and collaborating with peers in a culturally responsive learning environment.

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