Online Summit Takeaways

INTRODUCTION
Do Students Have the Right Literacy Skills for Job Success?

Schools are under growing pressure to make sure that students are ready for work or job training, as well as college, when they graduate. But employers often complain that their young hires haven't learned the reading, writing, speaking, and digital skills they need on the job. How can educators bridge the gap between reality and expectations, when it comes to these complex skills?

In this virtual summit, *Education Week* journalists and their guests explored deep dive discussions with you the readers to help unpack some of the literacy skills that today's evolving workplace demands and point to some efforts already underway to instill those skills in young people.

Below, you'll find the takeaways we've distilled from those discussions.

How We Can Teach Students to Speak Knowledgeably and Confidently

*Intro: Eighty percent of executives and hiring managers say that good verbal skills are very important for job candidates. But fewer than half think recent college graduates' oral-literacy skills are up to snuff. **Senior Contributing Writer Catherine Gewertz** explored why oral*

communication is rarely taught or tested, and how some adults are working to ensure that students have the speaking skills necessary for today's workplace.

⯈ *Guest: Lynn Pasquerella, President, Association of American Colleges and Universities*

Literacy Summit Takeaways, Oral Communication:

Teaching oral communication skills is important, but little classroom time is set aside for it. Participants noted that states don't test speaking skills.

Oral communication is important for workplace readiness, but also for mastering other skills and subjects. Teachers noted that students do better in their writing if they have the chance to talk out loud about their ideas first. A former math teacher said that getting students to "talk about and defend their thinking" helped them learn the concepts.

Real-world workplace context matters. Discussing classroom texts won't necessarily translate into the oral-communication skills that are most important at work. Schools must provide opportunities for students to engage in arguments and proposals with real-world implications, participants said. One example: a teacher uses a simulated workplace bidding process, asking students to dream up a company and present their idea to the class.

What verbal communication skills do employers want? They value hires who can propose, construct and evaluate arguments, and speak with precision and clarity, tailoring their message to specific audiences. They want people who can interact well with a team, formulate good questions, make good presentations, and receive feedback well.

Helpful ideas for teaching oral communication, include:

- Small-group projects, video projects, and role-playing.
- Having students do "cameo appearances," where they teach a small part of the class.
- Internships and community-based learning; they demand verbal skills.
- Phone conversation skills. Students themselves report a need for instruction in phone skills, since many haven't had to talk on the phone to many people outside their usual social circles, and they're often most comfortable with text messages. One teacher has students research a job, internship, scholarship, or postsecondary program they're interested in, and create a professional phone message of inquiry.
- Different modes of conversation. Teachers noted that speaking can be categorized by varying levels of formality. Talking with friends is a very different skill than speaking with a potential employer. Students need instruction in these differences.

Teaching Digital Literacy

Intro: As American workplaces become more reliant on technology, the skills needed to succeed have less to do with computer programming than what experts call "digital literacy"—the ability to interpret, create, and strategically use digital information. **Staff Writer Benjamin Herold** examined how digital-literacy can transfer to the workplace, and how schools can build a strong foundation for the skills required.

 Guest: Mark Muro, Senior Fellow and Policy Director, Brookings Metropolitan Policy Program

Educators should be urgent about the issue of preparing students with the digital skills they need for the workforce. While automation and artificial intelligence may not lead to mass unemployment, as the most dire predictions expect, there is a strong likelihood of continued dislocation and rapid change.

The ability to interpret, create, and analyze digital information is increasingly important for occupations up and down the employment ladder, from food service workers to software developers to CEOs. Just about every job requires more digital skills now than it did 10 years ago.

Part of what students need for the future workplace is basic fluency in widely used software and platforms such as Office, G Suite, and Salesforce. Familiarity with those tools can be the difference between being trapped in entry level positions and being able to ascend to the middle class. And even if the tools change, the basic principles behind them will likely be applicable for the foreseeable future.

Another critical skill for students is learning how to evaluate the credibility of online information. In occupations that involve customer service and interacting with the public, such as insurance and even health care, the ability to navigate and help steer people through a fractious information landscape is becoming increasingly valuable to employers.

And there's also a place for "soft" instruction, through job-shadowing and workplace field trips and professional mentorships. Exposing students to a wide range of jobs--and what they require day to day—can help ground the digital skills instruction that takes place in the classroom.

How to Teach Professional Writing in the Context of Traditional English Classrooms

Intro: Even in the wake of new academic standards in most states that encourage more writing, educators and researchers find writing instruction inconsistent and more focused on academic than practical writing. **Assistant Editor Sarah Sparks** and her guest sought answers to the question: In a world where students prefer texting over emailing, how can schools define what workplace writing is, and how to teach it?

🔲 **Guests:**
- **Steve Graham**, **Warner Professor in the Division of Leadership and Innovation, Mary Lou Fulton Teachers College, Arizona State University, Tempe, Ariz.**
- **Tony Nassivera**, **History Teacher, Hudson Falls Central Schools, Hudson Falls, N.Y.**

My story was specifically on professional writing. And Tony Nassivera was a source of mine, because he developed a course for students to prepare for the workforce. He saw that tone and style in professional writing was a problem, so he developed curriculum to address that.

Several teachers commented about how texting and tweeting has caused a reduction in casual letter-writing experience. This lack of letter-writing skills makes it must more important for the student to receive formal writing experience in the classroom. Most students have no casual writing skills developed outside of school.

There were interesting discussions around the need for very basic professional skills like formal memo-writing where an employee might be assessing different sets of data; very little collaborative writing happens in schools, even in PBL schools.

Steve Graham discussed the different contexts for content knowledge. If you are, for example, a police officer you will do a lot of writing and would have a very different tone than, say, a

psychology professor writing a journal article. This results in a variance between what students might want to pursue as a professional and how they might write for that role.

We did hear a lot about the pushback against workplace writing from those in the community who want students to develop literature-influenced writing.

The Common Core State Standards has provided many more opportunities for text-based writing or professional writing.

Students with special needs require support in these classes, and this sort of writing helped these students organize what they are thinking and then writing about. Having more practical writing skills that catered more to what these students wanted to do with their lives improved their engagement.

The NAEP isn't asking kids to do much professional writing. There have been studies of the kinds of writing students are doing, and you really work with short essays or just a few paragraphs. Even in comprehensive tests, students are summarizing in fairly condensed ways during a larger test. Some of the tests are just not showing a student's ability to handle an array of data across data sets. These tests are not proving a student can understand complex data across data sets or whether they're able to manage a relationship across several interactions or memos. And emails are just really difficult to test.

When we first wrote this report, we heard a lot about how basic sentence structure was the problem. But in today's discussion, teachers are using a lot of tools including Grammarly, a grammar tool. Some educators are also using tools originally designed for catching. Instead of using the plagiarism software as a "gotcha" on term papers, they are used to teach the students how to use the software to revise their own writing and learn how to better document their sources.

EDUCATION WEEK
Summit

Real-World Literacy Summit
2019

Tuesday, April 16, 2019
1 to 3 p.m. ET

How to Make Reading Relevant

Intro: Employers say they want students to synthesize information from different disciplines, to think critically, and know how to analyze documents. How can career and technical education support a rich reading experience in its courses? In this discussion, **Associate Editor Stephen Sawchuk** and his guests, a CTE researcher and a practitioner, talk about how textbooks, nonfiction news articles, and technical documentation can be used to support reading goals.

⬛ **Guests:**
- **Travis Park**, **Associate Professor of Agricultural Education, North Carolina State University, Raleigh, N.C.**
- **Larissa VanderZee, English/Language Arts Instruction, Career-Tech Center, Traverse Bay Area Intermediate School District, Traverse City, Mich.**

When we think of literacy we don't often think about literature, rather than CTE, which is often left out of the literacy equation. Yet employers know they need employees who can draw information out of a variety of different texts. We also know, based on cognitive research from the 1970s on, that adults tend to read better when taught in the context of the work they're going to do than via general strategies. So our discussion focused on how to integrate reading into CTE fields via rich and varied texts.

CTE teachers can be resistant to the idea that they need to learn to teach literacy. One of our guests said it takes up to seven days of professional development to get a CTE staff on board with this and to develop a shared vision for what literacy looks like—such as shared vocabulary or writing goals or text sets. It's also generally rare for CTE teachers to get this sort of PD, since literacy resources tend to be aimed at the earlier grades rather than secondary ones.

It's not easy for educators to find rich sets of texts to support reading that relate to career fields. It's not just pairing fiction and nonfiction; it needs to include technical manuals and specs as well. A lot of these teachers are amassing their own lists of news articles they use in classes to provide the curriculum, scouring RSS feeds, and poring through textbooks

There is a sense that CTE students don't require traditional fiction. But some CTE educators cleverly introduce novels or narrative nonfiction to get students to read rich texts. One panelist said that in the health-care program that she oversees, the educators use essays written by nurses who chronicle or journal their experiences as a key text.

Researchers have concluded that there is not enough overlap between what the academic tests on the Nation's Report Card measure, and the workforce domains covered by tests like WorkKeys. That's a bit of a wrinkle for states that want better workforce measurement in their testing plans.

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Should Schools Test Workplace Skills?

Intro: Many states want to include measurements of workplace skills in their new state testing plans; some states already use standardized exams like ACT's Workkeys. But this field is still in its infancy. In this discussion, **Assistant Editor Alyson Klein** and her guests examined what options are on the table for measuring readiness for the workforce and explore what educators are doing in their schools to ensure students are prepared for exciting careers.

 Guests:

- *Anne Hyslop, Assistant Director for Policy Development and Government Relations, Alliance for Excellent Education;*
- *Ryan Reyna, Director, Education Strategy Group*

Nearly every state is measuring college and career readiness under the Every Student Succeeds Act or ESSA.

There's no one right way to measure college-and-career readiness and different states are doing it very differently. Some are using SAT and ACT. A small handful are using ACT's Workkeys, a college-and-career readiness test. Others are using a military readiness test, or industry-recognized certifications.

Most states make it tough to tell whether vulnerable groups of students are more likely to use the "career ready" pathway, as opposed to the college-ready one.

Holding schools accountable for college-and-career readiness can actually have an adverse impact on student learning. For instance, once one state started holding schools accountable for students earning industry-recognized credentials, many students started getting a Microsoft Office credential, which experts say isn't necessarily the greatest measure of college and career readiness.

Be sure to take a look at our entire special report which you can read here: www.edweek.org/go/WorkplaceLiteracy