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Editor

Michelle Avila Vanderburg
University of South Carolina, Aiken
michelleva@usca.edu

Cover Art

Artist: Christian Borquez, 8th grade

Title: *American Hero*

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The *South Carolina Middle School Association Journal* is a peer-reviewed journal that highlights research-based practices that improve middle schools and the learning that occurs within and outside of the classroom. Readers of this journal are generally teachers, administrators, and other educators who are interested in the issues that young adolescents and educators of those individuals face.

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A Brave New World

Transitioning to Middle School

Mike McDowell

Abstract

A considerable number of middle grade students have a drop in academic achievement and an increase in behavioral issues. The changes in body and mind that students are experiencing at this transitional age are frequently not addressed by the middle schools that they attend. This manuscript will review the literature and offer suggestions as to what can be done to ease the transition students face as they enter middle school.

The Situation

Students entering middle school face a multitude of changes. One of the common variations is the fluctuation of how they relate to teachers. Middle school students will typically describe the student-teacher relationship as more distant (Deemer, McCotter, & Smith, 2003). Students are leaving the typically close relationships that they came to know and depend on in elementary school. Once arriving in middle school, they will need to become acquainted with not one but several new teachers.

Arriving on their new middle school campus, students will find that their class sizes are larger. They can no longer rely on the comfort of one classroom, but will most likely travel once every hour to a new classroom. Middle school students find that teaching is less interesting and that classroom management is stricter (Deemer et al., 2003).

Students are not only confronted with relational challenges with their new teachers. This phase in life also brings numerous physical, emotional, and social changes. Young minds at this age are developing, becoming able to carry out abstract thought. Changes are happening to their physical bodies. Moods change frequently.

Adolescence not only brings changes in the physical, mental, and emotional states of students. Accompanying this time is a shift from valuing time spent with adults to valuing time spent with peers. Peer pressure, the inclination to do what seems 'cool' in the eyes of others of the same age, is a huge influence with many adolescents.

Many students face the entrance to middle school relatively unscathed. They continue with academic and social success through the secondary level of schooling. But what if students aren't managing these adversities very well? So what? How will these supposed theoretical ordeals manifest themselves?

Motivation is a concern for adults working with middle school students. In general, motivation declines as students move from elementary to middle school (Haselhuhn, Al-Mabuk, Gabriele, Groen, & Galloway, 2007). Some teachers believe that the decrease in motivation is related to the cognitive and physiological changes that students are experiencing. Other teachers and researchers argue that the variation in motivation is related to the students' general educational environment. Baran (2010) argued that underlying reasons include fewer decision-making opportunities, teacher control and method of discipline, and teacher-student relations.

For all of the reasons discussed, a considerable number of middle grade students have a drop in academic achievement and an increase in behavioral issues. According to Deemer et al. (2003), the changes in body and mind that students are experiencing at this transitional age are frequently not addressed by the middle schools that they attend. What can be done to assist students when they are making the move to middle school? This paper will review the literature and offer suggestions as to what can be done to ease the transition students face as they enter middle school.

Discussion

There are many strategies that can be used to help students make a smooth transition to middle schools. These strategies include developing close personal relationships, using carefully planned classroom activities, student group work, and an administrative approach known as looping. Adams (2008) says that teachers need to connect with students, and not simply be able to deliver the content. Some scholars researching the transition to middle school argue that engagement of students' needs to be looked at through the lens of close personal relationships. That is, teachers and administrators can enhance students' learning by building close relationships with the students (Heller, Calderon, & Medrich, 2003).

Building Teacher-Student Rapport

Teachers who want to work with middle school students need effective ways of relating to the students. Kennedy's study (2011) of disaffected students illustrated that some teachers focus on presenting everything in the curriculum, while other teachers place more emphasis on developing rapport with their students. He articulates that when teachers don't have much of a personal relationship with students, it is more challenging to build upon existing student knowledge and interest. In turn, this can lead to student disengagement. If students don't buy in to what is happening in the classroom, they will simply be there because of the requirement. Many teachers will subscribe to the idea that when students are bored, they not only don't process the curriculum material, they will often misbehave. So as a result, there is a two-fold advantage to attempting to build rapport with students. Not only are students more likely to learn the material presented in class, but they will likely exhibit less negative behavior. This is not to be misunderstood as arguing that emphasis on classroom management with some punishment has no place in a teacher's collection of skills. However, using authority with no emphasis placed on building learning relationships with students may lead to

uninvolved and somewhat more unruly students.

There is a social aspect as to the assistance that teachers can offer to students. The relationship between teachers and students has long been recognized as being important. The social environment of a classroom affects student learning. When caring relationships happen between students and teachers, the students experience an academic and social benefit (Baran, 2010).

Finding a Balance Between Teacher-Directed and Student-Centered Instruction

Research also shows that students learn more when they are engaged through planned activities (Tanner, Bottoms, Feagin, & Bearman, 2003). Teachers should view themselves less as the custodians of knowledge and more as the catalysts to create meaningful learning experiences for students. Teachers need to find a balance between teacher-directed instruction and student-centered instruction. For example, direct instruction (lecture) may be useful to review procedures for operating equipment. But students may become passive and lose interest if teacher-directed learning is done in excess (Tanner et al., 2003).

Teacher-centered learning is often used because it is the fastest way to present material to students. Teachers structure the environment in the classroom and the activities of each day to teach students facts or procedures. At the same time, teachers can model the expected behavior and provide feedback easily to students about their progress.

Students often lose motivation however if teacher-directed instruction is overused. Tanner et al. (2003) argues that by not making an allowance for students' interests and requirements, students will lose interest. This calls for a teacher who knows their subject matter well in addition to knowing their students and how they learn.

An alternative to teacher-directed instruction is student-centered learning. This type of instruction is based on the principle that active involvement by students increases

learning and motivation. It is believed that this motivation comes from the fact that students ask questions, seek answers, and attempt to understand more about the world from the confines of the classroom. While the level of student involvement in this process is up to the teacher, this style operates based on the assumption that students and teachers are partners in instruction and learning.

Cooperative Learning

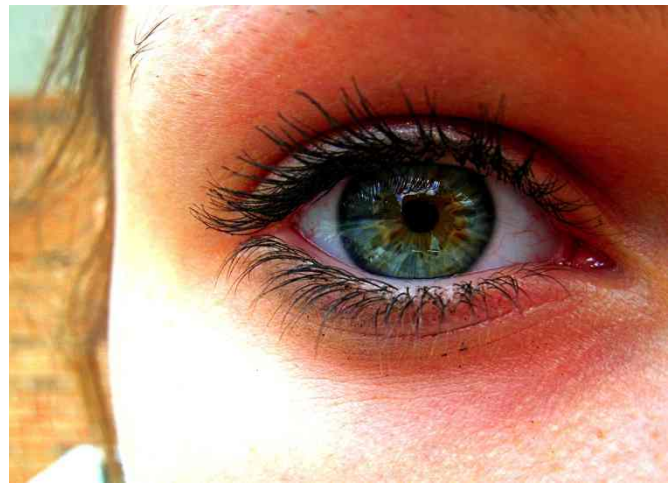
There is a significant amount of literature showing that positive social interaction within the classroom often leads to positive learning outcomes. While individual work has a place in instruction, group work should be considered for positive academic results for many students (Attard, 2003). Many students are more motivated to work with other students than individually.

A pedagogy that has been shown to help middle grade students transition from elementary school is cooperative learning. Cooperative learning is founded in social interdependence theory. It states that the accomplishment of goals by an individual is affected by the actions of others (Johnson & Johnson, 2010). At its core, cooperative learning facilitates the building of positive peer relationships through academic work that is done together by students.

Johnson & Johnson (2010) describe several different styles of cooperative learning. In formal cooperative learning, students work together for between one class period to several weeks to achieve collective learning goals. Informal cooperative learning consists of students learning together to achieve a short-term goal typically for between a few minutes to one class period. Cooperative base groups are longer lasting heterogeneous groups with constant members where the group holds each other accountable.

Looping

In addition to the strategies that teachers may implement to help ease the transition to middle school, another method has demonstrated effectiveness. Looping is a practice where



Artist: Bailey Lindler, 8th Grade
Title: *Molly*

students remain with teachers for at least two years. Looping, referred to as multi-year teaching (Kerr, 2002), has teachers move forward with the students from one grade level to the next. Looping provides the teacher with a deeper understanding of the students. But Kerr (2002) argues that the greatest benefit of looping is the opportunity for students and teachers to develop and prolong relationships that can benefit students intellectually, socially, and emotionally.

Kerr (2002) points out that when students feel no personal connection to the teacher, they can become cynical of their situation and hopelessness may result. When this is coupled with peer pressure, a lack of belonging, and/or challenging family situations, students may be so overwhelmed that they are effectively unable to learn. Kerr continues by saying that how teachers and students interact and the quality of relationships formed have everything to do with the classroom culture that emerges, which has a profound effect on the creativity and productivity that transpires. Looping is akin to the firmness of a caring family. Feelings of belonging enhance the quality of education and encourage motivation for students to achieve (Kerr, 2002). Baran (2010) posits that helpful student-teacher relationships are at the center of effective teaching. These relationships serve as the foundation for improved student learning and budding feelings of self-worth for students.

Conclusion

Middle school is challenging for many students. Adults who work with middle school students should be aware of the research. There are strategies that can be used to assist learning, aid students in the sense of belonging to student peer groups, and improve the overall school culture. Schools have the opportunity to build experiences that assist students facing these developmental challenges. Research has shown that assisting students in building relationships is one of the most important strategies (Heller et al., 2003).

In one aspect, teachers should work at developing relationships with their students. Rather than simply collecting a paycheck or sprinting to present the entire required curriculum, teachers should place an emphasis on getting to know their students. As a teacher spends considerable time with many students, they will find that this occurs if they are simply open to the opportunities.

Teachers can provide activities based on student-centered learning where teachers and students are partners in the learning process. Research has shown that generally students who are more involved in the learning process are more driven to learn the material.

There is not one teaching method that will provide academic and social success to all students. As a result, teachers should strive to structure activities that allow students to construct knowledge for themselves, to continually reflect on their teaching practices, and to tailor learning to particular needs of students when possible. Cooperative learning also provides learning activities that promote the growth of constructive relationships with classmates.



Mike McDowell has been teaching middle school science at Omni Middle School in Boca Raton, Florida for seven years. He has taught at both the 6th and 7th grade levels, giving him the opportunity to have direct experience with several age groups at the middle school level. While teaching sixth grade, he has seen how drastic a change may be for a family when having a child enter middle school.

In addition to the methods of the teachers, there are other procedures that may be implemented. Looping, or multi-year teaching, can afford students more stable relationships with teachers and peers. As discussed, relationships can have a tremendous effect on the academic and social success of students.

It goes without saying that working with middle school students is challenging. But with careful attention to the research and reflection on current practices, education professionals in middle schools can affect the lives of students for the better.

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Text Reformulation

Where Common Core State Standards and Relevance Intersect

Ashlee Horton

Abstract

This article showcases Text Reformulation as an instructional strategy in the middle school classroom. The author offers a description of the strategy, provides a rationale for relevance in a middle school classroom, ties the strategy to the Common Core State Standards and portrays the strategy in action.

“Navigating the Silk Road, from China to Rome, knowing many have gone before never to return home...” This excerpt, from Ms. Jones’ sixth grade class, displays their content on the Silk Road using Text Reformulation.

Overview

Text Reformulation, also known as Story Recycling (Feathers, 1993), is an instructional strategy whereby students take ownership of text through representing the text in another form (Beers, 2003). Traditionally, text reformulation has been used with “pattern” text such as *P is for Palmetto* (Crane, 2002), which is an example of ABC structure. Other common structures include fortunately-unfortunately stories, if-then stories, Cumulative Tale Structure and Repetitive Book Structure (Beers, 2003). However, with the Common Core State Standards (2010) calling for increased analysis and synthesis of informational text, text reformulation is a timely strategy to actively engage each student.

The strategy demands the student comprehend text(s), analyze the text(s) for the main idea and relevant details, and then use the information to create a new work. This aforementioned research process includes reading informational texts, extracting essential information and vocabularies, and evaluating which source(s) are best. Using a mini-lesson format, the teacher models each step of the process extensively. At first, the teacher uses a think-aloud verbalizing her cognitive thinking as she reads the text. Then, the teacher returns to the text showing students through her words

how to extract essential information. At this point, the teacher can allow students to practice the first two steps by giving students a short article or excerpt from a text. Once the students are familiar with extracting essential information, the teacher can introduce a second source; the teacher will model how to evaluate the sources by using a think aloud. Then, the students are given opportunities to do the same.

Once students are familiar with the process of reading, extracting essential information, and evaluating multiple sources they engage in this research process on a given topic. After students have engaged in the research process, they use the evidence to create a new work such as a song, newspaper article or poem. This process requires students engage in Bloom’s higher order thinking skills including analysis, synthesis and creation (Bloom & Krathwohl, 1956).

Rationale

Middle school students seek relevance in lessons they are being taught on a daily basis; they seek to reconcile the school curriculum and ideas with what is going on in their daily life. Consequently, educators strive to create authentic experiences and afford venues for students’ to showcase their learning; text reformulations allows for both of these.

Educator Perspective

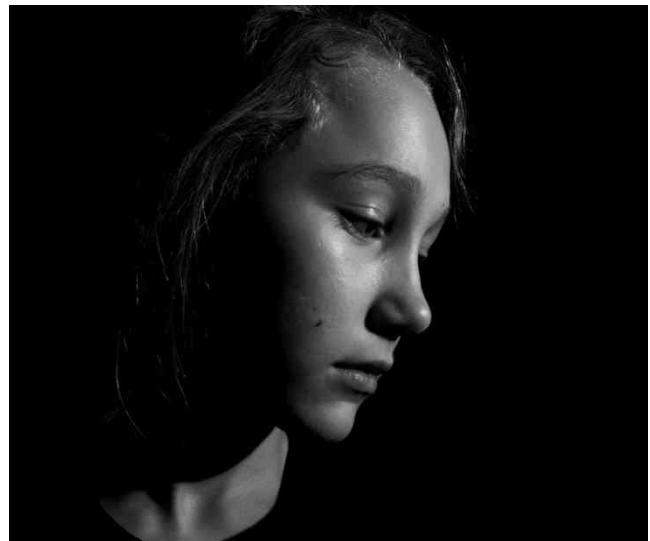
From the Educator’s perspective, students are putting into practice the research skills modeled in the classroom. As students

gather evidence, they are engaged in reading rigorous text and evaluating the text for the information therein. This part of the process can be adapted for diverse learners; educators can differentiate text used as sources for a variety of reading levels. For instance, when exploring the Silk Road, an educator could have various titles on this topic and allow students to read the one that is on their independent reading level. Using this method, students will gain the content knowledge necessary to contribute to the creation of a text reformulation without having to read frustration level text. In science, if experiments are involved, students are collecting data from the experiment and evaluating their experience with what they have read in the text. After the data collection process is complete, students then analyze the material and become decision makers regarding how they will transform the material. Once the text has been reformulated into its new form, students utilize analysis skills by comparing their final product to the rubric. This analytical reflection encompasses their metacognitive thinking; they are “thinking about their own thinking” by evaluating the level of content and creativity represented in the text reformulation. Using the text reformulation strategy, the educator is able to enact Common Core State Standards for Speaking & Listening, Writing and Informational text in a student-centered manner (National Governors Association Center for Best Practices [NGA Center] & Council of Chief State School Officers [CCSSO], 2010).

Student Perspective

Traditionally, once students gather evidence from text and other sources they are asked to take the information and write their findings in essay or report format. Too often for some students, this publication venue is viewed as irrelevant or boring; consequently, students do not display the depth of knowledge they know due to the publication format (Irvin, Meltzer & Dukes, 2007). However, text reformulation allows students to select a venue for publication that is as unique as they are; they can take the

evidence and create a song, poem, or newspaper article. For students, this is empowering and often enjoyable; they are in charge of selecting what genre suits their individual style. Most often, students choose to reformulate using the genre they have the most experience with or enjoy the most in the real world. For instance, if the student listens to a particular form of music outside the classroom, then they might naturally gravitate to reformulating their evidence to fit that particular form of music. If students are familiar with the song, poem or narrative story they have selected to emulate, then they have organization for the piece. Since they have a pre-existing organizational structure in place such as a song, they can exclusively focus on the content.



Artist: Jada Lee, 7th Grade
Title: *Self-Portrait*

Common Core State Standards

This article focuses on the Text Reformulation strategy and the Common Core State Standards (2010) for informational text, writing and speaking and listening in grades six through eight. The following table displays the Common Core State Standards addressed by using the aforementioned strategy.

Table 1 displays the Common Core State Standards (2010) that could be taught using Text Reformulation as a strategy. CCSS.ELA-

Table 1

Common Core State Standards by Grade Level

	Informational Text	Writing	Speaking & Listening	History	Science
Grade Six	RI.6.1	W.6.2	SL.6.1	RH.6-8.1	RST.6-8.1
	RI.6.2	W.6.4	SL.6.2	RH.6-8.2	RST.6-8.9
	RI.6.7	W.6.8		RH.6-8.9	
	RI.6.9	W.6.9			
Grade Seven	RI.7.1	W.7.2	SL.7.1	RH.6-8.1	RST.6-8.1
	RI.7.2	W.7.4	SL.7.4	RH.6-8.2	RST.6-8.9
	RI.7.9	W.7.8		RH.6-8.9	
		W.7.9			
Grade Eight	RI.8.1	W.8.2	SL.8.1	RH.6-8.1	RST.6-8.1
	RI.8.9	W.8.4	SL.8.4	RH.6-8.2	RST.6-8.9
		W.8.8		RH.6-8.9	
		W.8.9			

Note. RI = ; W = ; SL = ; RH = ; RST = . Adapted from “Common Core State Standards State Standards for English Language Arts and Literacy in History/Social Studies, Science, and Technical Subjects” by National Governors Association Center for Best Practices & Council of Chief State School Officers. Copyright 2010 by authors.

Literacy RI.6.9 states students should “compare and contrast one author’s presentation of events with that of another” (NGA Center & CCSSO, 2010); this standard can be enacted as students gather content knowledge on their particular topic. During this time, the teacher conducts a mini-lesson on how students can find similarities and differences between two texts. Then, students practice the strategy by reading various selections on ancient Mayan life. Once students have negotiated the texts and have understanding of the content, they begin crafting their text reformulation. It is at this time standard CCSS.ELA-Literacy W.6.2 comes to life in the classroom (NGA Center & CCSSO, 2010). When students take their knowledge of the ancient Mayans and “reformulate” it using the text reformulation strategy, they are writing to convey their knowledge on the Mayans. After completing their text reformulation, the students present it to their peers. The presentation to their peers utilizes CCSS.ELA-Literacy SL.6.4, SL.6.5, and SL.6.6 (NGA Center & CCSSO,

2010). While listening to their classmates’ presentations, the teacher can ask the other students to evaluate the piece based on the quality of the content knowledge therein.

Strategy Snapshot

Ms. Jones, a sixth grade teacher, used Text Reformulations in her English language arts classroom. In a joint effort with the sixth grade social studies teacher, Ms. Jones’ planned a three-week instructional unit on the Qing dynasty to the Ming dynasty. Prior the start of the students’ research, Ms. Jones modeled the text reformulation strategy by presenting a country song she wrote on the Qing and Ming dynasties; an excerpt of this song served as the opening statement to this article. Then, she explained to the students at the end of their study, they would be able to share their findings in a similar manner. Throughout the three-week unit, Ms. Jones conducted mini-lessons on textual evidence and inferences (CCSS.ELA-

Table 2

Text Reformulation Scoring Rubric

	Excellent (5pts)	Good (4pts)	Fair (3pts)	Needs Improvement (2pts)
Content	Work reflects a comprehensive understanding of the content	Work reflects a general understanding of the content	Work reflects the content	Content errors are present in the work
Vocabulary	Work contains multiple instances of subject specific vocabulary used accurately	Work contains a few instances of subject specific vocabulary used accurately	Work contains one instance of subject specific vocabulary	Work does not contain subject specific vocabulary or words are used incorrectly
Organization	Work is well planned and flawlessly executed	Work is well planned and well executed	There is some evidence of planning and mediocre execution	Work shows little to no evidence of planning and/or execution contains errors
Voice	Work displays detailed knowledge of original song, story, article, or article	Work displays knowledge of the original song, story, article, or article	Work displays limited knowledge of the original song, story, or article	Work does not remain true to the original song, story, or article
Conventions	Zero-one errors	Two-three errors	Four-six errors	Seven or more errors

Literacy.RI.6.1). Once students gathered evidence, she placed students into groups to discuss their findings (CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.6.1). Students were able to share evidence and clarify with one another their understanding of the textual evidence. Once the students displayed understanding of the content, Ms. Jones revisited her original song pointing out the content that was located therein. Students noticed the accuracy of the content as well as the specific vocabulary used within the piece; she then scored her piece with them based on the assignment rubric (Table 2).

Next, Ms. Jones had students choose a

genre of music they liked best or wished to use. Based on each student's genre preference, Ms. Jones placed the students in groups of no more than four students to create their own text reformulation using a song. She had seven or eight groups per period and their musical tastes ranged from hip-hop to classical country. Following placement in genre groups, students collaborated to write one song on the Chinese dynasties (CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.6.2). Once students wrote lyrics, the students evaluated their own piece using the content rubric. Ms. Jones then evaluated the pieces for content knowledge using the same rubric.

As a culminating engagement, students performed their songs in front of their peers (CCSS.ELA-Literacy SL.6.2). Students had to listen critically to determine if the group had accurate content knowledge. Peers provided feedback regarding the content, not genre, of the piece.

Concluding Thoughts

Text Reformulation is a useful strategy for students to showcase content knowledge in given subject areas. However, the strategy encompasses more than just ensuring students' proficiency in current standards; it is a vehicle for self-expression and choice for learners. In the aforementioned strategy snapshot, Ms. Jones used mini-lessons, group projects and modeling to assist students in reaching their academic

goals while meeting the demands of the CCSS in a variety of ways. In this scenario, Ms. Jones used the strategy as an instructional tool to engage students. However, the beauty of the strategy lies in its adaptability to both student and teacher needs.

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Ashlee Horton is an Assistant Professor of Education at Lander University in Greenwood, South Carolina. Her primary area of study is literacy.

The New Face of Middle Level Leadership

Robert R. Heath

Abstract

The environment in today's middle schools is one of high pressure to improve student performance. District and school administrators feel this pressure, as do teachers. This article addresses the critical importance of effectively involving stakeholders in middle schools to create and nurture an effective culture of leadership for continuous, systemic improvement. Toward that end, the author will investigate effective middle level principal and teacher leadership, and how a middle school culture can be designed to nurture multiple manifestations of collaborative leadership across the school environment.

As part of the middle school movement in the early '90s, I remember much discussion about middle school structures, particularly moving from a typical junior high organization into interdisciplinary teams with common planning time and advisory programs. School districts at that time were working hard to implement "real" middle schools as put forth in *Turning Points* (Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development, 1989). I also remember thinking that middle school had to be about more than how it was structured, and I vividly recall the publication of *Turning Points 2000* (Jackson & Davis, 2000), which was created to address the issues of what to do within middle school structures.

Most middle level educators can verbalize many of the reasons for middle level structures, yet in my work as a middle school principal and currently as a professor of middle level education, I have seen a broad range of levels of implementation of both the structures of middle school and the implementation of effective practices within those structures. This article addresses a primary function of middle school structures: creating and nurturing an effective culture of leadership for continuous, systemic improvement (Anfara, et al., 2008; Leithwood, Louis, Anderson, & Wahlstrom, 2004).

Much pressure exists within school districts and schools to improve student performance due to high stakes standardized testing expectations. Although schools are encouraged to continuously "raise the bar" for student learning, and many initiatives are created

to do so, they often do not cause the end results expected. Creating effective initiatives necessitates the involvement and buy-in of those responsible for carrying them out (Fullan, 2009; Leithwood, et al., 2004).

The concept of nurturing a culture of leadership for middle schools suggests an inclusive, collaborative perspective. In *The Developmentally Responsive Middle Level Principal: A Leadership Model and Measurement Instrument* by Anfara, Roney, Smarkola, DuCette and Gross (2006) we see that *effective* school leadership includes the development of shared vision among stakeholders, creating clear focus on teacher quality and efficacy and student success, and nurturing an environment of collaboration and trust between and among faculty members, staff, parents and students.

Several studies have noted that the most significant factors in student learning are first: effective teachers, and second: effective principals (Anfara, et al., 2008; Branch, Hanushek, & Rivkin, 2013; Leithwood, et al., 2004). Therefore, to define the new face of effective middle level leadership, we will investigate: (a) what effective principal leadership looks like; (b) what teacher leadership is; and (c) how school culture can be designed to nurture multiple manifestations of collaborative leadership across the middle school environment.

Middle School Structure and Leadership

When a school is structured with

interdisciplinary teams, teachers work with a common group of students within the team, and typically have common planning time. Unfortunately, as noted in *Turning Points 2000: Educating Adolescents in the 21st Century* (Jackson & Davis, 2000), and in *This We Believe: Keys to Educating Young Adolescents* (National Middle School Association, 2010) many schools created the structure of interdisciplinary teams but did little in the way of changing classroom instruction, or in structuring the productive, collaborative use of common planning time. In other words, schools frequently create the structure but do not access the added value for which middle school team structure can be used. It is the availability of common planning among teachers who work with the same group of students that offers tremendous, multiple opportunities for leadership, growth, and improvement. Leadership of the principal is critical in the effective implementation of these structures.

Middle School Leadership and the Effective Principal

It may seem mundane to say that leadership in schools typically revolves around that of the principal. For example, if asked where to find a school's leader, the principal's office is where one will likely be directed. While leadership of the principal is critical to the effective function of most aspects of a school, leadership in truly effective schools is often more broadly distributed. In these schools, teachers, staff members, parents, and even students often take up the mantle of leadership in a variety of ways (Hoy & Miskell, 2008). So, what does effective principal leadership look like?

Studies of middle level education consistently call for courageous, collaborative leadership by principals (Anfara, et al. 2006; Caskey, et al., 2010; National Middle School Association, 2003, 2010). In addition, effective middle level principals create a common vision, maintain a clear focus on teaching and learning, encourage the development of learning

communities, and provide faculty and staff with effective professional development opportunities (Caskey, et al., 2010).

Principals demonstrate courageous leadership when they clearly and adamantly advocate for research-supported principles of effective middle schools (Anfara, et al., 2008).



Artist: Evan Pennebaker, 8th Grade
Title: *American Gothic*

A courageous principal must think beyond the norm when it comes to involving teachers, parents and students in decision-making – after all, on whose desk does the hammer of accountability land when school decisions do not create a desired affect? I once had my job threatened by a superintendent after he learned that I involved teachers in the process of scheduling students for classes. His justification was that “teachers don’t know enough to be involved in important decisions.” Principals with courage understand that more effective decisions *are* made when stakeholders are engaged in them and that initiatives that come from those decisions are more likely to be sustained and implemented with high integrity (Anfara, et al., 2008).

Courageous, collaborative principals encourage and engage in partnerships with stakeholders – teachers, students, parents and

community members – in efforts to establish and implement a common vision (Anfara, et al. 2006) and systemic, continuous school improvements (Heath, 1992). Collaboration is a systemic approach for “...communication, planning, evaluation, and accountability” (Jackson & Davis, 2000, p. 146). As a culture of collaboration progresses, a common language develops among stakeholders, who participate in the creation of a vision for the school. Problems are addressed and decisions made through the highly focused lens of the school’s vision (Anfara, et al., 2008; Jackson & Davis, 2000). An effective principal will nurture collaborative efforts such as these to ensure continuous, systemic, sustainable improvements, which are implemented with high integrity.

Principals who systematically demonstrate these qualities are those whose schools most frequently have significantly higher levels of student achievement (Branch, et al., 2013; Jackson & Davis, 2000; Leithwood, et al., 2004). In fact, among all school-related components, the importance of effective leadership of the principal is second only to the effectiveness of the classroom teacher in student learning (Anfara, et al., 2008). Importantly, schools with effective principals have been shown to have higher rates of retention of these quality teachers (Branch, et al., 2013).

Middle School Leadership and the Effective Teacher

Effective teachers stay in effective schools because they feel valued and trusted (Branch, et al., 2013). A sense of value and trust is created through a collaborative culture in which teacher leadership is encouraged and is the norm. In an effective, collaborative middle school culture, leadership exists beyond the principal’s office, and it is common for teachers to participate in many varied leadership roles.

A discussion about teacher leadership often revolves around those who accept formal roles of leadership, such as being appointed as a department head or team leader. A less formal

kind of teacher leadership emerges from within a faculty when a school culture of collaborative leadership is created to make it a safe venture for teachers. These roles can range from being the teacher on a team who plans field trips, organizes parent conferences, or is considered an expert in seventh grade science to being the expert teacher in technology use – and so much beyond! Though some may disagree, *every* teacher has gifts and talents to offer. They are not always apparent until the school environment – it’s culture – is ripe to support their emergence. A school culture that nurtures teacher leadership is one in which trust and support are commonly understood and practiced.

Teachers are positioned to discover problems and find solutions to them for the simple reason that they are “in the trenches” with students every class period, in the halls monitoring behavior and student movement, and are in touch with parents. Teachers in a middle school team environment with common planning time will converse with teammates about specific students’ learning or behavior challenges. It is because of teachers’ proximity to students and knowledge of their content areas that they must serve in leadership roles in school improvement efforts.

Teachers’ leadership in school improvement efforts ensures initiatives are pertinent to the issues at hand, and that buy-in into changes and initiatives is high (Barth, 2004; Danielson, 2007). Teachers must know and trust they can express ideas and take on new ways of teaching and working with colleagues without concerns of admonishment or lack of support. In a truly *safe*, collaborative culture teachers are *encouraged* to think differently toward improvement efforts (Lieberman & Miller, 1999; Jackson & Davis, 2000).

A widespread culture of teacher leadership encourages student learning. Why? Anfara, et al. (2008) note that a 2004 study by Leithwood and Associates found that “leadership is second only to classroom instruction among all school-related factors that contribute to what students learn at school” (p. 3). Additionally, an

important product of teacher leadership is that it inherently promotes a culture of learning among teachers, thence students (Barth, 2004). An underlying reason for this is that teachers – those adults in the school who know students best – are those empowered to make decisions about and for students and their instruction and learning (Jackson & Davis, 2000). Coupling collaborative teacher leadership with a common vision as the lens through which improvement decisions are made, leads easily to an understanding of how they work together to create a school culture rich for continuous improvement.

Creating a Culture of Collaborative Leadership

Creating a culture of *collaborative leadership* is not an easy task, as much depends on the existing culture of the school, support systems in place from the principal to the superintendent, and among the teachers themselves. Support systems are critical to its development to ensure an atmosphere of trust and safety (Fullan, 2007).

A sense of safety, trust, collaboration and



Artist: Autumn Brown, 7th Grade
Title: *Submerged*

inclusiveness creates a systemic atmosphere of leadership among all stakeholders to provide a true, developmentally responsive environment for middle level students (Fullan, 2007; Jackson & Davis, 2000). In a culture of teacher leadership, teachers work collaboratively on teams and continuously improve instructional practices to meet the learning needs of students. As this culture takes root, the school becomes a true learning community, and one of continuous, systemic improvement of instruction and learning (Jackson & Davis, 2000). When a culture of teacher leadership is firmly entrenched in the belief systems of a school, it takes on a sustainability of momentum that can carry forward even when principals move on.

Middle School Structure and the New Face of Leadership

Where teachers are organized in grade level interdisciplinary teacher teams with common planning time, structures are in place to engage teachers in leadership on many levels. For instance, within a team, teachers will typically determine a team leader, a team secretary, an event planner, and perhaps a parent liaison. Each of these roles requires a level of leadership to be effective.

Teacher teams should have authority to “flex” their class schedules to accommodate special projects, interdisciplinary units, or whole-team meetings. This kind of flexible scheduling allows teachers to maximize use of the academic time they have with students on a day-to-day basis, and creates a sense of ownership for instructional time.

One middle school established Thursday as the grade level content area meeting day, in which teachers met as grade-level content teachers to share teaching strategies, plan lessons, and organize timelines for teaching content standards. These meetings were sacrosanct – in that nothing was allowed to interfere with them. Through these meetings, teachers’ knowledge of their content and instructional strategies continuously expanded, and they reveled in their time collaborating with

their colleagues. Additionally, teacher leaders began to emerge among the content area teachers.

In this school, team leaders met with the administrative team once a month and collaboratively made important decisions about the school. These meetings were important in that the teacher stakeholders or their representatives were at the table with equal voice. I once had a supervisor who insisted that “principals should always carry 51% of the vote” on any decision made in a school. When that is the case, I will argue that teachers whose input carries no weight will soon lose interest in participation in any decision-making, and that decisions will have difficulty being accepted fully by them.

An important note for principals is that many teachers will lead very quietly, and some will hide from any notion of leadership – until asked to be involved. The importance of this lesson is that principals must be collaborative, inclusive *and* inviting to ensure that all teachers are part of the continuous improvement of a school. When a truly collaborative culture exists within a school, teacher leaders will emerge. In a graduate course I teach, I often hear that teacher leaders are those appointed by the principal. Yet, my own experience as a middle school principal of many years taught me that teacher leaders will emerge when they feel safe, trusted, valued, and supported. Through the establishment of highly functioning interdisciplinary and content area teams within a middle school, teacher leaders will begin to emerge. When all members of a school faculty

are working within a commonly held vision, continuous improvements will occur. When middle schools embrace this new face of middle level leadership, schools will see continuous, systemic improvements.

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Robert R. Heath is assistant professor of middle grades teacher education at Appalachian State University. He served as a high school and middle school English language arts and social studies teacher and as a middle school assistant principal and principal for twenty-nine years. He served as president of the SC Middle School Association and SC Association of Middle Level Principals and was named National Distinguished Principal and SC Middle Level Principal of the Year.

Motivation and Engagement

They Really Want to Learn!

Abbigail Jefferson Armstrong

Abstract

The article focuses on how student motivation is connected to the value of learning. The author discusses the importance of discovering what students value and gives suggestions as to how to make this discovery through such activities as setting goals through vision letters. The article includes practical ways to actively engage students through the use of riddle poetry to enhance vocabulary comprehension and the use of graphic organizers to solve word problems in mathematics. In conclusion, the reader is encouraged to reflect upon his or her own instructional practices by asking probing questions about how to access what students value and how to increase student engagement in the classroom.

All too often we hear teachers say, “My students just are not motivated!” or “They don’t want to learn; they are so unmotivated” or “They just don’t care.” Have you ever heard those statements or said them yourself? If you have, you are not alone. “The middle school years are critical for the growth of young adolescents and for development of their self-esteem and motivation to succeed” (Usher & Kober, 2012, p. 9). However, due to intellectual development and more challenging curriculum, students may struggle in school for the first time. Motivation and apathy are concerns for students in secondary settings, particularly if the students are not on track to graduate with a standard diploma. When students show a lack of interest in class assignments and projects, it is common to think their behavior is due to a lack of motivation. Nevertheless, low interest and motivation are not constants. For example, Witzel (2007) found that increased use of contingent praise of efforts in class increases student engagement, an indicator for motivation.

Every person is motivated by something. People are motivated in different ways and by different things (Ryan & Deci, 2000). A teacher’s job is to find out what drives each student to perform better (Ruiz, 2012). In most cases, we are willing to counter our fears to save or protect a loved one. However, would students be willing to tackle their fears and anxiety to improve their learning or school performance? In many cases, the answer is yes. Motivation is very important for student success (Ruiz, 2012).

Students either are or can be motivated, and educators directly impact this by employing the “value + success = motivation” philosophy (Blackburn, 2012, p. 27). Value and competence, the student’s belief in his or her ability to be successful, are two key dimensions that contribute to motivation (Usher & Kober, 2012). Students are more likely to learn if they see the value in classroom activities and if they feel as though they can be successful with reasonable effort.

One of the essential sixteen characteristics of successful schools for adolescents is that students and teachers are engaged in active purposeful learning (Association for Middle Level Education, 2010). One way to make learning purposeful and create value in the classroom is by providing students choice. A simple strategy is to allow choice of reading material to supplement course content or for pure enjoyment. One result of providing a choice of reading material is an increase in how much effort goes toward their reading (Guthrie, Klauda, & Ho, 2013). Another option is to give students multiple ways to demonstrate their understanding of a subject, such as writing an essay, creating a video, or performing a character sketch. Doing so allows adolescents to take ownership of their learning, which according to Doda (2011) motivates them. Teachers have the power to positively affect a student’s motivation. They can do this by using what their students value to guide instruction and by incorporating student engagement in their classrooms.

Understanding What Students Value

Find out what students value. This information illuminates their vision of success. Inform yourself of students' personal interest or goals through such formats as writing vision letters. Some students may enjoy the idea of writing a letter to a friend in class. They should date their letter with an ending date based on when you want to follow-up with them about their success. You may decide to have them date their letter for the end of the grading period. Their letter must have a greeting and it may be to a friend, a teacher or someone they care about and trust such as a pet. The opening paragraph should read, "This was the best nine weeks (time constraint of your choice) ever because..." You can decipher from the vision letter in *Figure 1* what is important to this student and what her primary motivation is for doing well in all of her classes.

Not only will you know what your students value, but also goal setting contributes to their success. When students set realistic goals that are important to them, they work hard to meet their own expectations (Usher & Kober, 2012). Both the teacher and student win when this happens.

October 6, 2013

Dear Patricia,

This was the best nine weeks ever because I did not have silent lunch for six of the nine weeks. I also received all As and Bs on my mathematics homework and I hate math. Well, I used to hate math. All of my teachers realized I liked to talk and that letting us discuss our classwork actually helps me do better in class. I even helped other students understand when they were really confused.

Your Friend,
Cecily

Figure 1. Vision Letter Sample



Artist: Joy Bertling, Middle Level Art Teacher
Title: *My Janette*

Another way to find out what your students value and their interests is by having them complete "I Am..." Poems. Gailbrath and Vogel (2008) suggest that students start by brainstorming about what they want to include in their poem. Students should be given the option to think about ideas through the use of graphic organizers or free-writing techniques, especially if they are struggling writers. A student can create a graphic organizer with the subheadings of a favorite place to visit, a hobby, people he or she loves, or things that make him or her smile. Once the student has written pieces of information under each subheading, he or she can then complete a draft of his "I Am..." Poem similar to the poem in *Figure 2*.

It is easy to discern what is important to the writer and what she values based on the poem. She misses having a fresh vegetable garden and values her ethnic heritage. This activity has value because students write about themselves in an authentic manner. You may decide to be more flexible with the format and that is appropriate. I encourage you to not worry about grammar and mechanics for the first draft for this may hinder their creativity.

“I Am....Poem”

I Am From.....

I am from pinecones and pollen, dirt roads and shiny cars
That didn't stay clean for long.

I am from hopscotch, kick-bally, hide and seek, “go!” I didn't say Simon Says.

I am from climbing trees, making dirt pies and teaching imaginary students.

I am from popsicles, now-and-laters, orange push-ups, plum bushes, muscadine vines and honey suckles
I am from garden fresh cabbage, beans, okra, tomatoes, squash and hot peppers, man I miss our garden
I am from thanksgiving turkey and dressing and Christmas ham and potato salad and I can't forget my
momma's biscuits

I am from fresh sheets, pine-sol and a water pump that always needed to be primed
Band camp in the summer along with the migrant peach pickers and Friday night football games and
sleepovers, “Can I spend the night with_____” and wait for momma to yes, usually she said no
Church on Sunday and back to school on Monday

I am from African kings and queens and based on my lactose intolerance probably a little Native American,
too!

I am from Sally and William, Ada and Henry, Momma and Daddy and many other relatives

All that I do, all that I am and all that I will be I stand on the shoulders of my ancestors and my God!

~Abigail J. Armstrong (2009)

Figure 2. I Am Poem

Success Through Engagement

Once teachers establish students' goals and interests, they can focus on instruction that includes active engagement. There is a direct link between student engagement and achievement. Students who are actively engaged are more academically successful (Fredricks et al., 2011). You can actively engage your students in the classroom by using games to help them internalize concepts.

Engagement with vocabulary

No matter the content you teach, there is content specific vocabulary students should know. Marzano and Pickering (2005) recommend playing games with students to enhance their vocabulary comprehension. Riddle poetry is a strategy that can be used to help students come up with their own meaning or definition of a word or concept in any content area. Give your students the words or concepts you wish for them to learn. I suggest you allow

them to thoroughly review the words or concepts before doing this activity. After your vocabulary instruction, simply have your students look up the word or concept, draw a picture to represent it, and then paraphrase it in their own words. Paraphrasing is an abstract concept to some students but riddle poetry is a good strategy for teaching how to create their own meaning.

In *Figure 3*, you will see an example of a riddle poem. The word used is *photosynthesis*. The student came up with a riddle for her classmates to guess the word. In order for the student to create this poem, she needed to have a clear understanding of the word. She will never

Feed me, feed me is what plants say to me
Because I help them convert light to energy.
The energy is so so sweet
And that is what I like to eat.

What Am I?

Photosynthesis

Figure 3. Riddle Poem

forget this definition because it was her own. This activity engages students because it is authentic and they have a choice. The student was not told her poem had to rhyme or that it had to have certain syllables. She could use “What am I,” “Who Am I,” or “Where am I” to prompt her classmates to guess the answer to the riddle.

Engagement with graphic organizers

Graphic organizers actively engage students and provide support through the learning process. The mathematics graphic organizer in *Figure 4* was created by teachers at Chestnut Oaks Middle School in Sumter, South Carolina to help their students solve multi-step word problems with ease. Although the students solve traditional type problems, how they use this graphic organizer is authentic. They are required to take the time to dissect the problem and consider what they are being asked to do before immediately working the problem out to

get a final result.

The final step prompts students to explain their process. This will help students to further understand their own thought process, as well as helping the teacher recognize where students might have made a mistake.

Conclusion

“A study of over 300 high school juniors and seniors demonstrated that motivation was at least as predictive of achievement in a subject as was intelligence” (Frey & Fisher, 2010, p. 30). If students are motivated and engaged in valuable learning, they will succeed. As you plan your lessons and strategies and create activities for your students, always pose three questions to yourself:

1. Does the activity, lesson, or strategy have value to my students?
2. Will my students be actively engaged in the learning?
3. How can I increase value and engagement in future lessons?

As you reflect on your purpose as an educator and the affect you have on your students, keep these questions on your list of priorities. Your students will receive the positive benefits.

Organizing Word Problems

<i>Clue Words</i>		
What I Know K	Question ?	Steps to Solve
<i>Anything Missing?</i>		
Write a sentence explaining the solution.		S

Figure 4. Graphic Organizer from “Rigor is Not a Four Letter Word,” by B. Blackburn, p. 73. Copyright 2012 by Routledge.

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Abbigail Jefferson Armstrong previously taught 7th and 8th grade mathematics in various districts in South Carolina where she had experience teaching students of various backgrounds. Dr. Armstrong currently works at Winthrop University where she teaches core middle level education courses in the undergraduate and graduate programs. She is originally from Chesterfield, South Carolina but now resides in Gastonia, North Carolina with her husband, Caldwell Jerome Armstrong, and their children, Asheland and Justin.

What About Science?

The Importance of Motivating Students in the Middle School Science Classroom

Jennifer Regelski

Abstract

Science education in the United States has been subject to reductions in instructional time as an unintended consequence of NCLB. Because of the perceived unimportance of science there has been a decrease in the motivation of students to not only learn science but to also pursue STEM-related careers. Motivating students during the middle school years is of extreme importance because their biases towards certain areas of study become strong predictors of further academic successes as well as career aspirations and pursuits. Engaging students in collaborative inquiry-based science instruction is important during middle school science instruction in promoting motivation and academic success.

Introduction

Science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) education significantly contributes to a country's growth and development both economically and technologically (Harris & Miller, 2005; Ozturk & Debelak, n.d.; Sahlberg, 2006). In order for a country and its citizens to be competitive in a global market, there must be high expectations for rigorous instruction to include science, math and language skills. Each of these skills incorporate new technologies to transform education at every level from primary and secondary schools to higher education and beyond (Hess & Rotherham, 2007; Hughes, 2005; Ozturk & Debelak, n.d.; Vasquez, Teferi, & Schicht, 2003). However, in the United States, education reform efforts, such as No Child Left Behind (NCLB), have focused instruction on basic mastery of math and reading skills in an attempt to raise measured student achievement. However, this focus has precluded educators from teaching skills that enhance global competitiveness (Jorgenson & Vanosdall, 2002; Marx & Harris, 2006; Munson, 2011; Zhao, 2007).

The Problem

One unintended consequence associated with NCLB was that school leaders and teachers began to focus the majority of their instructional

time and resources on those content areas included in their measures of progress or growth (Azzam, Perkins-Gough, & Thiers, 2006; McMurrer, 2008; Darling-Hammond, 2010; Griffith & Scharmann, 2008; Jorgenson & Vanosdell, 2002; Marx & Harris, 2006; Rentner et al., 2006; Vasquez, Teferi, & Schicht, 2003). In order to ensure that their schools met Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) requirements under NCLB in their state, some districts have made math and reading the central curricular focus, especially in the primary grades. The other content areas such as science, social studies, the arts, and physical education have seen reductions in the amount of time spent on instruction (Azzam, Perkins-Gough, & Thiers, 2006; McMurrer, 2008; Darling-Hammond, 2010; Griffith & Scharmann, 2008; Jorgenson & Vanosdell, 2002; Marx & Harris, 2006; McMurrer, 2008; Rentner et al., 2006; Vasquez, Teferi, & Schicht, 2003). This decreased instructional time in science becomes an issue because scientific concepts and skills build on each other from elementary school to middle school, from middle school to high school and beyond (Griffith & Scharmann, 2008). Without an emphasis on a strong science curriculum during the elementary years, the process of acquiring scientific content and skills does not begin until middle school. As a result, difficult science concepts and processes do not become solidified in students' minds at an appropriate

time for the introduction of advanced study (Griffith & Scharmann, 2008).

Another unintended consequence associated with the lack of emphasis on science throughout the elementary grades is a reinforced perception that science is not important. This has resulted in student interest in science declining as they advance in school (Vedder-Weiss & Fortus, 2012). Studies have shown that student motivation and attitude for science is a predictor of their career choice later in life. During the key formative years of elementary school, educators are missing the window of opportunity to encourage students to pursue STEM careers by either limiting their exposure to scientific investigations or teaching science ineffectively.



Artist: Paige Smith, 8th grade
Title: *The Scream*

Data from the literature

Decreased instructional time

In a study conducted by the Center on Education Policy (McMurrer, 2008), the self-reported average increase of total instructional time in reading since 2001-2002 was 47 percent and in mathematics was 37 percent. Griffith and

Scharmann (2008) conducted a survey of 164 elementary teachers and nearly 60% of the teachers reported they decreased the amount of science instruction in their classrooms since the implementation of NCLB. Of those that decreased their science instruction, 71.8% decreased the amount of instruction 31 to 90 minutes per week in order to spend more time on either math or reading instruction. Some of the teachers reported that they were directed by administrators to reduce the instructional time and others simply felt they needed to spend more of the available time on math and reading because of mandated testing. This same study found that 36.9% of teachers indicated there was a limited curriculum in their school since NCLB was introduced. The authors defined a limited or narrowed curriculum “as one that focused the majority of instructional time on math and reading while cutting back on other subject areas” (Griffith & Scharmann, 2008, p. 41). Another study by Milner et al. (2012), determined that teachers were instructed by the administration to reduce science instructional time beginning with the enactment of NCLB. The studies imply that science instruction is secondary to what NCLB deemed important. Another large-scale study by the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development showed that a substantial amount of time in third-grade classrooms was spent on literacy (56%) with mathematics being the next highest (29%). Science (6%) received very little instructional time (Marx & Harris, 2006; National Institute of Child Health and Human Development-Early Child Care Research Network [NICHD], 2005). These data reinforce that schools are spending their instructional time in areas deemed important by NCLB.

Student motivation

As students advance in grade level, studies have shown decreasing student motivation and attitudes to study and pursue science (Vedder-Weiss & Fortus, 2012). This contributes to a decline in the interest of young people to pursue scientific careers (Degenhart et

al., 2007; Vedder-Weiss & Fortus, 2012). Creating enthusiasm towards science is crucial during the middle school years as that can have a much greater impact than any other time of life (Anderman & Maehr, 1994). Osborne, Simon & Collins (2003) reported that there was no single factor that helped shape a child's attitude or motivation to pursue advanced scientific studies or careers in science. Some of the multiple factors included the child's perception of the science teacher, their value and enjoyment of science, and the attitudes of their peers towards science. Degenhart et al. (2007) indicated that a student's positive experience in science increased the likelihood that they would continue their studies in science as well as pursue a scientific career. They also noted that teachers with strong content knowledge in science were far more likely than their less astute peers to generate enthusiasm and interest in science among their students, leading to a positive effect on student attitudes.

Improving instruction and increasing student motivation

Beginning at the elementary level, curricula needs to move beyond the pressures of reading and mathematics test preparation and into a more comprehensive instructional model that includes science and prepares students for the complex global future (Jorgenson & Vanosdall, 2002; Marx & Harris, 2006). Students need to understand political issues such as climate change and the teaching of evolution and be prepared to combat societal issues such as pandemic illnesses and resource use, which all require knowledge of science and technology (Marx & Harris, 2006; National Science Teachers Association [NSTA], 2010). Bybee, Powell, and Trowbridge (2008) suggest that science instruction should be centered on the constructivism model in which learning is both dynamic and interactive. Middle school science teachers should ensure that the learning in the classroom is collaborative, relevant, challenging and engages students in information that they

will carry with them not only for more advanced study in high school but throughout their lives. The following is an example of how to integrate science with other content areas:

There's a New Wind Farm in Town:

Problem-based learning takes a real-world scenario or problem and students work in collaboration with others to solve this problem using their content knowledge. In this scenario, simply have the students determine whether a wind turbine design is an efficient way to generate power for their town (Yonkelowitz, 2008). They will need to determine if there is a suitable location for a wind farm and if it can generate enough power to sustain the town. The students will also present their recommendations to the city council in the form of a presentation. This project integrates science, geography, mathematics and language arts as well as various communication and collaboration skills in the problem solving process. The use of technology can easily be incorporated into this lesson if it is available.

The literature makes several recommendations about how to encourage middle school students to take interest in STEM education. In this age of high stakes testing, teachers feel pressured to drill students on content and vocabulary in preparation for state assessments. However, allowing students to experience science by actually doing science is the best way to not only learn about these concepts but to also be engaged and develop an interest in scientific endeavors. The limiting factor for incorporating inquiry into the curriculum would be time. Allowing students to investigate science content using inquiry involves more time but the impact on student learning is significant. Science teachers should afford students the opportunity to regularly collaborate in inquiry lessons in which they construct their own knowledge and synthesize content that is relevant in their lives (Degenhart

et al., 2007; Holbrook & Rannikmae, 2007; Judson, 2010; Miller, 1996; Yager, 1996). The following activity is one suggestion of how to bring more inquiry into the classroom:

Coffee Filter Parachutes: Increase the amount of inquiry that happens in science class by modifying the “cookbook labs” that are already a part of the curriculum. A common lab for air resistance is to drop two coffee filters – one that is crumpled in a ball and one that is lying flat. The students measure the time that it takes for each to drop with a stopwatch. They explain the difference between the two, which is air resistance. This is the standard “cookbook lab.” Add an element of inquiry by extending this activity. Ask the students to design the crumpled coffee filter so that it falls faster and design the flattened coffee filter so that it falls slower. The mass of the coffee filters cannot change, which is the only rule. The engineering design process that takes place between the pairs of students is where the real science is happening. The engagement and excitement in the classroom is taken to a new level. Have the students graph their data and if possible have them use technology to do so. They can even present their engineered designs to the class. Another way to involve technology is to have them take pictures and create an electronic lab report or a video documentary of their lab.

Allowing students opportunities to acquire new scientific knowledge through inquiry and solve real societal problems using technology is a key step in promoting an interest in STEM (Judson, 2010; Marx & Harris, 2006; Miller, 1996; Yager, 1996). Offering students practical, real-life experiences in the classroom will assist them in transferring this knowledge outside the classroom (Yager, 1996). Increasing student’s motivation could assist them into the future as trends are showing a decreased interest in the sciences while the need for science and

technology careers is on the rise (Darling-Hammond, 2010; Department of Education, 2006; Harris & Miller, 2005; Yager, 1996). These recommendations not only impact the amount of science content being taught and retained by students but it affects the literacy of the nation’s citizenry and its economic and global competitiveness.

Summary

Since the inception of NCLB, school districts sought a more narrowly focused curriculum with their primary concern being the AYP subjects of math and reading whereas less instructional time was spent on science (Darling-Hammond, 2010; Griffith & Scharmann, 2008; Marx & Harris, 2006). The narrowly focused curriculum dictated by NCLB also forces educators to resort to teaching basic skills and content that is typically found on standardized tests (Darling-Hammond, 2010; Munson, 2011). Careers requiring the sciences, engineering and technology are expected to increase by nearly 25% over the next several years (Darling-Hammond, 2010; Department of Education, 2006). However, student interest in the sciences and mathematics is regressing (Harris & Miller, 2005). By creating science curricula in the primary grades through middle and high school that is relevant and engaging, including advanced instruction with qualified teachers, incorporating current technologies, and allowing for collaborative inquiry then students may be drawn back into the STEM fields again and you may have the next great inventors sitting right in your classroom.

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Jennifer Regelski is an assistant professor of science education at the University of South Carolina Aiken. Dr. Regelski was a science teacher and special education teacher for 14 years before coming to USCA in August of 2014. Her research interests include science efficacy and motivation, best practices in science pedagogy and educational technology in the STEM classroom. Dr. Regelski resides in Aiken with her husband and two children.

Teaching Science with Science Fiction Novels

Rebecca Harper and Melissa Kidd

Abstract

Content literacy is a cornerstone of the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) being implemented in classrooms across the country. The benefits of such integration are many, despite the fact that many teachers are resistant to the practice for a myriad of reasons. This article reflects on the integration of science fiction in an eighth grade class and offers practical suggestions and ideas for implementation in the classroom.

Introduction

Educators have long known that reading and writing in the content areas are best practices, and are important to integrate into instruction. However, content literacy has gone from being important and a best practice to becoming a necessity as part of the Common Core State Standards (CCSS). Research has proven that the integration of literature in the content area classroom can be successful and yields a number of benefits (Bean, 2000; Morrow & Gambrell, 2000; Saul, 2004). As many states transition from other standard sets to CCSS, more and more content classrooms will see an influx of content-specific literature. Specifically, CCSS address literacy in content areas such as Social Studies, Science, and Technical subjects.

While it is a given that content area literature integration is a best practice, it is often

met with resistance. Many are not necessarily convinced that special training in reading in the content areas will improve their teaching (Bean & Harper, 2006; Bean, Readence & Baldwin, 2007; Dupuis, 1984; Siedow, Memory, & Bristow, 1985; Singer & Donlan, 1989); and many are not convinced that reading is the best medium for learning in various content areas (Fisher & Ivey, 2005); plus, they often misunderstand the purposes and goals of content area reading (Stewart & O'Brien, 1989). Although the benefits are plenty, the logistics of just how content area literacy works is the challenge. Subject-area teachers often are unsure of how to integrate literature in their classrooms due to the vast number of standards that must be covered in a year. For many, adding in literature is just one more thing to add to an already overloaded plate.

Despite the fact that the integration of content literature is often one met with apprehension, the need to do so is paramount. However, without careful planning, and purposeful instruction, the likelihood of success is greatly reduced. A former colleague and I, Rebecca Harper, decided to tackle this issue, as we delved into a science fiction unit in an eighth grade science class over the past year. Through trial and error, we developed what we believe to be a successful unit that allowed us to seamlessly integrate quality science fiction in the classroom, while using the literature to teach and address numerous science standards.

Our History

Melissa Kidd and I taught together at an area middle school for three years. Designated



Artist: Destiny Shippy, 8th Grade
Title: *Water Fountain*

as a Title 1 school, the school has a large student population who receive either free or reduced lunch, has limited parental involvement, and has its share of discipline problems. In addition, the school has been on the Needs Improvement list for a number of years, a classification designated by No Child Left Behind. During our time teaching together, we shared our successes and frustrations, a major one being the lack of motivation and interest the students had in many classes, including science.

I later left the middle grades classroom for the university, but Melissa and I remained friends and often discussed best practices, strategies, the district's literacy model, and other ideas for the classroom on a regular basis. These conversations led to our investigation of the use of science fiction literature in Melissa's eighth grade science classroom and the implications this had for future lessons, additional classes, and content areas. Through conversations, suggestions, and reflections, we began to develop strategies for Melissa to effectively integrate literature in her classroom, without de-emphasizing the content or getting over involved in the teaching of the literature.

What We Believe

Knowing that literature often serves as a connecting means between teachers and students, Melissa and I avidly read young adult literature, and while our motives are often similar, many times our justifications are unique. Melissa reads young adult fiction because she finds the material interesting and it often offers her opportunities for connections and conversations with students in the classroom. These conversations help Melissa develop relationships with her students and encourage reading along the way. It also serves as a way for her to get to know her students outside of science, as she is able to connect with them through conversations about literature.

Yet I read young adult literature not just because I enjoy it, but in an effort to continue to build a solid base of quality literature that I can show the pre-service teachers I interact with. In

addition, as a teacher of writing, I always use literature as a springboard for writing assignments, studies of author's craft, and genre study, so keeping up to date with current young adult novels is an important part of how I continue to prepare and inform my practice as a teacher educator.

While I recommend books for pre-service and practicing teachers to use in the classroom, Melissa recommends books for her students to read for pleasure. Although our justifications for reading young adult literature are different, we often find ourselves having conversations about the newest novel we are reading, with Melissa explaining how she is utilizing it in her teaching and in building relationships with her students, and me discussing how I could use it to teach a literacy lesson. These conversations that first started off as generic discussions about young adult literature eventually became narrow and focused as Melissa began sharing an experience with content literature integration from the prior school year.

Melissa's First Experience with Content Literature

Melissa's experience in the middle grades classroom and with middle grades literature offered her opportunities to come in contact with young adult literature that could be integrated in science class. An avid science fiction fan, Melissa knew that this genre had great potential to work well with science content. As she explained to me, the prior year she identified a series of science fiction books to integrate in her eighth grade science classes. The Last Survivors series, by Susan Beth Pfeffer (2006, 2008, 2010, 2013), consists of four books, each chronicling a host of characters after a large meteor has collided with the moon, causing mass casualties, natural disasters, and a plethora of problems and changes for the world. Because the novels were full of science content, Melissa knew that they were excellent choices for integration in her classroom because of the potential connections to the standards. However, she explained that not everything went as planned on the first go

round. According to Melissa, “It felt too much like English lessons being taught in the science classroom. I needed science lessons coming from a science fiction novel,” (personal communication, 01 May 2012).

Melissa originally assigned two of the Pfeffer trilogy books and gave students assigned reading for homework that consisted of chapters to read. When the students returned to class, they formed small groups and discussed the night’s reading. She used what she learned from her coursework in her elementary education degree when discussing and designing lessons. They focused on main idea, characters, plot, and other English Language Arts concepts. During this time, all Melissa had to go on was her training as an elementary educator. “I certainly never learned how to do this in a science education class,” (personal communication, 01 May 2012).

While the kids enjoyed the books, Melissa did not feel like the class was getting the science out of the book because of the literature-based approach. In her opinion, her and her students were spending too much time focusing on the literary aspects of the books, but were not taking part in as much science as she had hoped. From a purely literary stance, this activity was successful because the students were engaged in literature, successful in small group instruction, and were able to reflect and discuss with her.



Artist: Erin Jones, 8th Grade
Title: A Day at the Office

Yet from a science standpoint, she never felt like the literature was tied effectively to the science content she was required to teach. In addition, the timing and the scheduling made the task difficult. Many times, the students did not complete the assigned reading. This made book discussions and activities difficult considering the fact that some of the students were not keeping up with the reading. Plus, there were a variety of reading abilities in the class that made the task difficult for certain students. Although Melissa knew that an engagement such as this was valuable in class and she wanted to continue it in the future, she knew that changes needed to be made in order for it to be more successful.

The New Science Fiction Unit

Melissa’s frustrations with the unit became the impetus for a newly developed approach that we worked on cooperatively. The summer before school began, we talked about what worked in the past unit and what needed to be improved. As a result, we compiled a list of before, during, and after reading activities that could be incorporated in the new unit. We discussed the implementation of activities such as word splashes, alpha boxes, and clustering. We also discussed ways to get through the reading without adding additional homework for the students, and made decisions so that the variety of reading ability levels of the students would no longer serve as a barrier.

We also discussed how she should introduce the books, ideas for integration, and possibilities for research using the books as springboards. In addition, we looked closely at the standards for the year, and identified which ones we knew could be taught in conjunction with the books. In doing so, we found that the majority of her astronomy and earth science standards were either covered in depth, or at the very least, introduced in the series. As a result, Melissa could now plan her reading around lab activities, textbook material, and other activities so that the content in the books married well with traditional teaching plans. We even made plans for culminating projects, one being an

ABC book that built off of the alpha boxes strategy she introduced at the beginning of the unit. However, we were pleased when the students also suggested their own ideas for final projects, some of which included a screenplay of the book and additional research ideas sparked by material in the book.

Taking it to School

After all our conversations and reflections, Melissa went back in the classroom with new ideas and strategies for the second go-round. Instead of using literature circles, now she reads a chapter a day, which has worked well for a number of reasons. This ensured that she kept the book going at a brisk rate because she set the pace. Because the students were engaged with the book and were interested in the content, they came to class ready to listen, which was helpful from a management viewpoint. Instead of spending valuable instructional time getting students settled in the classroom or spending time on bell ringers or morning work that changed with the day and skill, students now knew that every class period began with a read aloud, so they knew what to expect when they entered class. Plus, Melissa explained that it was helpful that what was read in the book was exactly what was being covered in the science content, thus making the transition from the reading of the literature to the teaching of the content seamless, which was something she had struggled with in the past. Plus, reading aloud addressed the issue of varying reading abilities. In fact, one of her students remarked that though he had trouble reading the book on his own, he was able to follow along with her as she read aloud, which he found enjoyable.

In addition, she began integrating the before, during, and after reading strategies into her teaching. Students brainstormed with their alpha boxes, created word clouds, logged questions and thoughts in science journals, and developed cluster maps to help aid them with remembering and understanding the large amount of science vocabulary they were learning. This assisted them as they made

connections and defined relationships between science concepts and material. In addition, Melissa encouraged her students to brainstorm questions, yet another reading strategy, about the science content as they read together. These questions later became the basis for group research projects they conducted. She kept a list of questions generated during the reading, and at a later point in the unit, students got in teams and were able to choose a question of interest to research. This kept the task relevant and related to the content, but also allowed the students choice in their research project.

Throughout the entire unit, Melissa was able to utilize a variety of formative and summative assessments. Many of the reading strategies/exercises utilized also served as formative assessments. The alpha boxes, concept maps, brainstorming lists and questions all gave Melissa opportunities to monitor and gauge student learning and performance. In addition, classroom discussion, observation, and questioning also gave ample opportunities for assessment. Depending on the class, Melissa utilized a variety of summative assessments. These included an ABC picture book that students created using all the science vocabulary learned, traditional science laboratory engagements, a variety of research tasks that stemmed from questions generated from the book, and writing tasks such as the drafting of screenplays and responses to the literature.

Not only was Melissa able to effectively incorporate content literature, a variety of reading strategies, and both formative and summative assessments, she was also able to address and teach a number of science content standards. As a result of this unit, Melissa was able to address and teach ten content standards, which included:

- 8-1.4 Generate questions for further study on the basis of prior investigations;
- 8-2.1 Explain how biological adaptations of populations enhance their survival in a particular environment;
- 8-2.3 Explain how Earth's history has been influenced by catastrophes that have

- affected the conditions on Earth and the diversity of its life forms;
- 8-3.7 Illustrate the creation and changing of landforms that have occurred through geologic processes;
 - 8-4.1 Summarize the characteristics and movements of objects in the solar system;
 - 8-4.4 Explain the motions of Earth and the Moon and the effects of these motions as they orbit the Sun;
 - 8-4.6 Explain how gravitational forces are influenced by mass and distance;
 - 8-4.7 Explain the effects of gravity on tides and planetary orbits;
 - 8-6.4 Summarize the behavior of waves;
 - 8-6.6 Explain the sight and terms of the relationship between the eye and the light waves emitted or reflected by an object. (SC State Department of Education, 2005)

Moving Forward

Although Melissa clearly identified some areas that she improved upon when she integrated the Pffefer trilogy in her class the second time, she explained that there are still areas she will adjust and modify the next time around. For example, she is continuing to identify a number of before, during, and after reading strategies to integrate in class so that her students are exposed to a variety of writing to learn activities and exercises. In addition, she is continuing to work through the pacing of the lessons and reading. Although the integration of the literature was much more efficient this time, taking about six weeks to complete, she explains that this area can always be improved, as she found that even with the additional planning, the reading of the book still took longer than planned due to disruptions in the schedule, assignments taking longer than expected, and a myriad of other reasons.

While she has identified areas where she will modify and adjust when implementing this series again, Melissa's content literature integration won't begin and end with the Pffefer (2006, 2008, 2010, 2013) trilogy and astronomy.

Instead, she is currently gathering and researching additional science fiction or science-based novels to integrate in other units. For example, she lamented that one of her least favorite concepts to teach was force and motion, and other concepts that deal with physical science. However, she has located a number of books including *The Physics of Superheroes* (Kakalios, 2009), and has plans to integrate them in the near future. As a result of this inquiry, she has created a working list of science titles that she can weave in and out of her curriculum based on time, resources, students, and other factors. In addition, she now has a hearty list of books that she can recommend to students that address science content. While she may not be able to integrate them in all her classes, she can certainly offer recommendations to her students in hopes they will pick one up when they head to the library.

A Model for You

Melissa's experience with science fiction in her eighth grade science classroom has been a learning experience for both her and her students. Through trial and error, best practice integration, and quality content literature, she has been able to engage students with science concepts that in the past have seemed irrelevant and uninteresting to students. While the process and strategy are far from perfected, the fact that Melissa was able to incorporate high interest literature and address the state mandated standard, while providing engaging and authentic learning experiences for her students, is encouraging and can serve as a model for other teachers as they toy with implementation of their own.

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Rebecca Harper is an assistant professor of literacy at Georgia Regents University. She is a former middle grades writing teacher. Dr. Harper's research interests are focused on writing pedagogy, teacher beliefs, and cutting-edge instructional strategies in writing. When not at work, she enjoys exercising, reading, and spending time with her husband and three children.



Melissa Davis Kidd teaches seventh grade science at Kennedy Middle School; she formerly taught eighth grade science at Aiken Middle School. She was inspired by her own seventh grade science teacher to have a career in science and tries to pass that inspiration onto her own students. She enjoys reading, scrapbooking, and relaxing with her husband and two children.

Improving Reading Comprehension Through Questioning

Robert Vanderburg, Sierra Wald,

S. Breanna James, and Tracey Lee Dimsoy

Abstract

This paper provides definitions for three different questioning styles: textual, inferential, and critical. After defining each questioning style, the paper provides a step by step list of procedures for using these questions while reading texts to students. The paper ends with a line by line analysis of a text for teachers to use in their classrooms.

Helping students improve their reading comprehension skills is an ongoing dilemma for middle level educators. One way to help students improve their reading comprehension skills is to use read alouds and questioning. In other words, teachers can read to their students and ask questions during the reading process. Questioning during reading is a very difficult task. Teachers may ask questions that are too leading, making the questions too easy to answer, or ask questions that have one specific answer, leaving their students feeling as if there is only one right answer, or ask questions that are too open-ended, leaving students wondering what the teacher is really asking. The goal of this paper is to provide different questioning styles and provide a process to use these questioning styles to help teachers develop from more focused textual questions to more open-ended questions. Specifically, the paper will be broken into three sections: the first section will define the questioning styles, the second part will demonstrate how to use the questioning styles together and the third part will model the use of the questioning styles with student responses using the text *No Man Is an Island* by John Donne (Peterson & Brereton, 2008).

Defining the Different Questioning Styles

The first type of question is called textual questioning. Textual questions ask about the details specifically mentioned in the passage, including content and layout (McGraw Hill, 2010). The details that are examined through

these types of questions may include: main ideas, supporting ideas, vocabulary, and the organization of the writing. These types of questions require little attention and discernment on the part of the reader as they are easily found within the passage (McKenna & Robinson, 2014) and these questions help students become more specific and focused. The teacher literally asks the students what the text is saying. The goal of these questions is to get the students to put the writer's text into their own words. If the student doesn't re-word the text, the answer is wrong. This type of question has a small array of correct answers.

Many students want to tell a teacher what they think about a text before they know what the text means. Some students also tend to personalize a text and provide an inaccurate understanding of the text. The key is to keep asking this style of question no matter how simple the text seems or how simple the question seems. The best wording of the question is "what does the text say?" You can ask this question every sentence or every paragraph or every section of the paper, depending on the difficulty of the text. The goal is not to use the question sparsely enough to lose the students in the reading of the text.

Many researchers and educators refer to textual questioning as a lower level question (McKenna & Robinson, 2014). This is an oversimplification of this style of questioning. Textual questioning can appear lower level on less taxing texts; however, there are many texts where understanding the text is harder than critiquing the ideas or synthesizing the text. In

fact, the sample text we are going to model falls into that category. The inaccurate interpretation of *No Man is An Island* (Peterson & Brereton, 2008) causes the problem people have accurately critiquing the text. Critiquing it is easy, but understanding its true meaning is the complex part.

The key is to not use a hierarchical approach to using questions. It is important to realize that every style of question can elicit higher level thinking. However, even if textual questioning is being used to elicit lower level thinking, it sets the stage for salient information needed to start the process of higher order thinking.

The second type of question is called inferential questioning. This type of question is a more open-ended style of questioning; questioning that uses information relayed in the passage to get the reader to suppose what is not stated (Hayakawa, 1939). Inferential questions require the students to deduce information that may not be specifically mentioned from the details that are given within the reading (McGraw Hill, 2010). These questions can usually be identified by using words such as: infer, suggests, and implies.

Similar to the textual questions, the teacher does not ask the students' opinions of the text. The teacher asks what students can infer from the text. In contrast to textual questions, inferential questions have a larger array of correct answers. Students can basically infer most meanings they can prove with text. So, the teacher would first ask students what they can infer from the text. After a student answers that question, the teacher should ask the student what text led to that inference and why that text led to the inference.

Inferential questioning involves higher order thinking. Students need to use different reasoning skills to infer what a text can mean and need to provide evidentiary support for the inferences. The knowledge that the reader has before reading and analyzing the passage can help them to attain the answers to inferential questions as they are drawing from facts to come

to a conclusion (Basche, Trabasso, Risden, Yuhtsuen, & van den Broek, 2001). This type of questioning tends to be more popular than textual questioning because it elicits higher order thinking, which is the goal of most teachers. However, asking inferential questions without asking textual questions leads students to erroneous inferences and can cause confusion for students having difficulty understanding the text.

Procedure for Using the Questioning Styles

The procedure for asking textual and inferential questions is the salient part of this paper. Many teachers know of the types of questions we have presented in this paper, they might just have different names for the types of questions. However, the key to helping students develop their reading skills is to understand and follow the procedures for using the questions.

The most important part of the questioning procedure is to always remember to ask textual questions first and follow up with inferential questions. It is acceptable to ask multiple textual questions before you ask an inferential question; however, the goal is not to ask an inferential question before asking a textual question. This is easier said than done.

Because inferential questions are viewed as higher level questions and elicit more interesting conversations, teachers tend to gravitate to inferential. The weakness of following this procedure is twofold. First, it can elicit spurious inferences due to a lack of textual understanding. If a teacher does not ensure students accurately understand the meaning of the text, it is easy for students to make inaccurate inferences. This creates a problem for the teacher. The teacher can be guided to think the student is making inaccurate inferences when the real problem is the student did not understand the text.

Second, asking inferential questions before textual questions models the incorrect procedure to students. While one reason for asking students questions is to assess students

understanding, another reason is to model the steps good readers follow in their mind while reading. Good readers use textual questions innately in their mind during the reading process to ensure understanding. And, asking those questions first is one of the reasons good readers are good readers. If a teacher models the wrong procedure—asking inferential questions before textual questions—they are modeling a reading style that unintentionally teaches poor reading strategies. Many students misunderstand the text and manifest their own meaning to the text that they use in inaccurate inferences. Simply put, this is one reason so many students have difficulties comprehending texts. Students skip the process, in their minds, of answering the textual questions or answering the textual questions accurately during the reading process and jump to inaccurate inferential questions.

Critical Questions

This process of asking textual questions and then inferential questions is followed until the end of the text. Again, it is acceptable to ask multiple textual questions before asking inferential questions, but it is not advisable to ask inferential questions before textual questions until the end of the text. Once you have finished reading the text there is another style of questions you can ask, critical questions.

We waited to introduce critical questions until this point in the paper because we felt introducing them earlier in the paper would guide the reader to use critical questions too early in reading the text. Critical questions are student opinion and value questions about the text. They rely on the readers' understanding of the information given in order to expound on what was read (McGraw Hill, 2010). Critical questions do not result in factual answers (McKenna & Robinson, 2014). The answers derived from these questions are based on the reasoning of the reader and is shaped by their life, exposures, preferences and beliefs. As they do not result in factual answers, the importance lies in the rationale behind the answer.

Students can also be asked to critique the

order of the text, critique supporting evidence within the text, critique the flow of the text, and then critique the sub-points and the overall point of the text. These questions also ask students to share if their values are in line with the text, ask students to share their opinions on the text, and ask students to share experiences relating, supporting, or disagreeing with the text.

We also waited to share the critical questions until now, because these questions should not be asked until you finish reading the text. When students are taught to start critiquing a text during the reading process, the comprehension process tends to be hindered. It is difficult to understand the greater purpose of a text if you start disagreeing with one piece of evidence in the middle or at the beginning of the text. Many teachers start asking critical questions at the beginning or middle of the text and this questioning causes students to start an internal argument before they understand the entire text. It is important for students to fully grasp the meaning of a text before they start asking critiquing questions.

Sample Lesson

In conclusion, we felt it was important to provide a text with all three questions used in the order we presented to demonstrate how to use these questions in an actual lesson. So, we are



Artist: Navyen Nam, 8th Grade

Title: *The Eye*

presenting the text *No Man Is an Island* (Peterson & Brereton, 2008) with sample questions, sample responses, and ways to respond to those questions.

When teaching John Donne's *No Man Is an Island* (Donne, 2008), the teacher would begin by reading the first two lines of the poem, "No man is an island, Entire of itself" (p. 596). Then the teacher would stop reading and ask a textual question such as, "What does this phrase mean?" Students may then answer with, "No man is alone" or "Everyone is a part of something." Next, the teacher would ask an inferential question such as, "What can we infer from this part?" Students may respond with "The poem is going to be about someone who is lonely and looking for companionship." After discussing these two lines, the teacher would continue reading lines 3-4, "Every man is a piece of the continent, A part of the main" (p. 596). Textually, students may conclude that the author is making a metaphor relating humankind to a continent. Next, teachers would ask an inference question, such as "What can we assume about the direction of this piece?" A response might be "Donne is saying that people are dependent upon each other."

In Lines 5-6, "If a clod be washed away by the sea, Europe is the less" (Donne, 2008, p. 596), the teacher might need to pause and define the meaning of the word "clod" because it is most likely not in their vocabulary. Once the word has been defined, the teacher stops reading and can then ask the students "What is the meaning of these two lines?" A middle school student may reply with "Well, I know Europe is a small continent, so if a clod of dirt is washed away by the sea, then Europe will have gotten smaller." The teacher would then offer an example using the student's rationale in order to reinforce accurate responses and to clarify any unclear thoughts or reactions to the text. After elaborating on the student's answer, the teacher would ask an inferential question, "What can be assumed from these lines in the text?" Students may reply, "As a whole, people are in need of interaction or they will become lesser people."

After reading Lines 7-9, "As well as if a promontory were. As well as if a manor of thy friend's Or of thine own were" (Donne, 2008, p. 596), teachers will have to reference Line 6 for the context of these lines as well as define "promontory." Then teachers would ask students a textual question like "What is going on in the poem?" Replies may vary from "Everyone needs someone and the ocean can make land smaller," to "Big objects are made up of little objects and when a little object is missing from the big object, the big object becomes reduced." The teacher would then assess these statements. Next, an inferential question would be asked. For example, "What can we infer from the author's choice of words, i.e. 'clod,' 'promontory,' et cetera?" A student might then respond with an assertion that the word "clod" carries a negative connotation in conjunction with the word "less." Also, that "promontory" and "manor" convey a sense of grandeur and positive emotion.

The teacher would begin reading again with Lines 10-11, "Any man's death diminishes me, Because I am involved in mankind" (Donne, 2008, p. 596). Teachers would ask a textual question after reading Line 11 such as, "What happened in these two lines?" A student might respond with "It's similar to the continent part where the author said when some dirt is washed away from the land, the continent is smaller. Well, when a person dies, there are less people." This answer would be analyzed and then an inferential question would be asked; "What do you think these lines are saying?" Students' answers might be "The author wants people to feel bad when someone dies," or "Just because you don't know someone, doesn't mean you shouldn't be sad about them dying."

Finally, the teacher would read the closing lines, "And therefore never send to know for whom the bell tolls; It tolls for thee" (Donne, 2008, p. 596). Then the teacher would ask textual questions such as "What does this phrase mean?" and "Why do bells toll?" At this point, the teacher would need to help students understand sixteenth century customs, the

meaning of tolling bells, and practices like sending someone to find out why the bells were ringing. The teacher would then pose an inferential question such as “What do you think is the purpose of these lines?” Reactions might include “I think the purpose is to tell people to be sad when someone dies because you and them are a part of one whole,” “I think the purpose is to show how no one is alone,” or “I think the purpose is to be a way of telling people not to try to be independent because you need other people in order to live.” After students give their opinions, the teacher should explain the poem’s meaning and allow students to give structured feedback in the form of critical thinking questions.

Critical thinking questions are those that explore the meaning of the text outside of its literal phrasing and into its universal purpose. Donne’s last two lines are the driving force for the overall significance of the poem. Critical

thinking questions posed to students might be, “Do you agree with the purpose of Donne’s work? Why or why not?” or “How can this poem be applied to your life? Do you think of death differently after reading this poem?” Teachers should encourage open discussion and ask for details and follow up questions with student responses. Students should use the text to support their reasoning when answering.

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Robert Vanderburg is an Associate Professor at Clafin University. He received his PhD in Educational Psychology with a focus in literacy. Dr. Vanderburg is the Program Director and Curriculum Specialist for the Clafin University Saturday Academy. He is a social cognitive researcher interested in all aspects of how reading and writing develop and is instructed at the Middle and High School level.



Sierra Wald is a junior at Clafin University. She is a middle level education major and is a member of the Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Incorporated. Her hometown is Laurens, SC.

S. Breanna James is a junior at Clafin University. She is an early childhood education major and is a member of the Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Incorporated. Her hometown is Spartanburg, SC.

Tracey Lee Dimsoy is a sophomore at Clafin University. She is an early childhood education major and is a member of the Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Incorporated and Pi Lambda Theta. She is from the island of Trinidad.

iPods Hit the Big Screen: Integrating iPod and Apple TV into the Math Classroom

Gary F. Bradley

Abstract

iPods and Apple TVs were introduced during a technology seminar designed to help teachers integrate technology into the Common Core State Standards. The teachers learned how to operate the iPod and Apple TV. They were enthusiastic about the potential of iPods and Apple TV to engage students and facilitate mastery of the math concepts. Free math apps were used by the teachers to create lessons for practice, presentations, and problem solving. All of the teachers were optimistic about using iPod and Apple TV to develop further engaging and effective lessons; however, some teachers expressed concerns about funding and network issues.

Technology's Impact on Teaching and Learning

Technology continues to change the way that teachers teach and how students learn. The globalization of the economy has employers searching for employees who are dependable, knowledgeable, and tech savvy (Lam, 2007). Job opportunities continue to favor people who are adept in locating, evaluating, and producing online content. Employers in the 21st Century are looking for individuals who can work collaboratively and think outside the box (Partnership for 21st Century Skills, 2004). States, districts, schools, and teachers strive to prepare their students to meet these new challenges that their students will someday face. Schools and teachers work with limited budgets to try and keep up with these changes. Furthermore, programs and technologies are regularly evaluated by the criteria of students to perform in the redefined skill set of the Common Core State Standards for math.

Technology is also changing how students gather information and share information. Smart phones allow students to communicate with each other by texting, by talking, or by virtual face-to-face conversations. The stream of social media gives students the opportunity to post what they are saying and doing as well as to see what their friends are saying and doing all in near real time. This digital mindset spills into the classroom. Students are becoming less engaged with

instruction that ignores their digital skills (Prensky, 2006). Students are motivated to use content in ways that are familiar to them.

Technology can give teachers a whole array of new opportunities that help meet the needed skill set of working in a global economy and the expectations of students. Students with digital tools are already solving daily problems such as homework, gathering information, personal interests, and communication (Lei & Zhao, 2008). Students are becoming more adept at locating and sharing information that is relevant to them. In fact, studies suggest that student learning experiences were enhanced by the use of the iPad which provided opportunities for collaboration, engagement (Henderson and Yeow, 2012), and personalized learning (Melhuish and Falloon 2010). Webb (2012) found that students involved in one to one programs (one device for each student) became more motivated in their classes when using the iPad.

iPods in the Classroom

Schools across the state are incorporating iPod technology in their classrooms. The iPod runs nearly all of the more than 300,000 math applications available for the iPad and iPhone. These applications, or "apps" as they are commonly known, are the programs that the iPod runs. The vast majority of these apps are either free or cost just a few dollars. The iPod's diagonal screen size of 4 inches is half the size of



Artist: Elexis Byrd, 8th grade
Title: *Girl with a Pearl Earring*

the iPad, but the device is also about half the price. Many schools with limited budgets are attracted to the iPod because they can put more devices in the hands of their students for the same amount of money.

The iPod has most of the same features of the iPad including camera, video, audio recording, Internet, and Bluetooth. iPods can also be connected wirelessly to the internet. This allows students to locate and evaluate information from the Internet. Students can also produce original mathematical content (Mills, 2010). In addition, parents can view their child's work online and share it with others if they choose.

Teachers can use iPods to construct lessons that encourage collaboration, creativity, and differentiated instruction (Bennett, 2011). iPods give teachers the flexibility to individualize practice and review with each of their students. Teachers can also use iPods to gather data for analysis, present student projects or enhance problem-solving skills using puzzles. Using technology such as the iPod device can facilitate a more personalized instruction and help develop individual learning skills (Webb, 2012).

iPod Screen Mirrored on Classroom Screen via Apple TV

The screen size of iPods generally limits the use of the device to one or just a few students. The 4-inch screens work well for individual students who are working with review or puzzle applications. However, teachers may want to have their students work on a project that the student will want to share with the class. Teachers may also use a data-gathering app and mirror the screen of the iPod on the classroom screen so that all of the students can observe the presentation or lesson.

To facilitate this process, Apple TV is worth consideration. Apple TV can wirelessly mirror the screen of an iPod onto a classroom screen such as a Promethean Board. Apple TV is a small, black, 3-inch plastic box that uses a wireless network to connect with the iPad. Apple TV is then connected to the classroom projector via HDMI cable or through a VGA adaptor. Apple TV has a menu guide that walks the operator through a simple set-up that connects to the school's wireless network. One Apple TV unit is \$99 and an HDMI to VGA adaptor generally runs \$35.

Learning to Use iPods

During the summer of 2013, 26 elementary and middle grades math teachers attended a mathematics technology seminar in the Southeastern United States. The seminar and iPods for each attendee were funded by a grant for the Commission of Higher Education. The goal of this conference was to integrate math content with technology. The workshop also covered the set-up and operation of iPods and Apple TV, evaluated math apps, and developed lessons for differentiated learners using the framework of the Common Core State Standards.

The majority of these math teachers had not used an iPod before. But they soon felt comfortable using the device because it uses similar functions and navigation as most smart phones. The teachers soon completed the initial setup and connected to the network. Within a

matter of minutes they were navigating the iPod menus, selecting their own settings, and customizing their backgrounds.

Teachers then went on to locate, select, and download apps. Then they used the Apple Store built in app to search for the apps using key words. The key words included “Middle Level Math,” “Basic Operations,” “Math Practice,” and “Math Review.” The App Store returned a list of apps that met the search criteria. The store lists basic information about each app such as a short explanation, memory requirements, user ratings, and various screen shots. Teachers could then download their chosen apps. Downloads usually take less than one minute since most apps are less than 50 megabytes. All of the apps that the teachers evaluated were free.

Evaluating Apps

Choosing appropriate applications is of great importance because the apps work as lesson modules that can provide a number of support activities. To help teachers learn to evaluate applications, a list of criteria was used. The criteria included ease of use, Common Core State Standards, and student enjoyment. The apps were also evaluated on their potential to increase the students’ speed and accuracy, adjustment of difficulty level, and ease of viewing student scores or progress.

Teachers evaluated over 120 applications. They found that apps differ widely in these categories. No one app was found that met all these categories to the teachers’ full satisfaction. However, many apps met the approval of the teachers in one or more categories. Teachers soon realized that they needed to be able to use several apps to meet their lesson objectives and the objectives of the Common Core.

The teachers found using the apps to be somewhat intense. The background music would often become distracting or the app would soon become tedious. Teachers also discovered that many of the free apps had limited features, or worse, had pop-up advertisements. Most of these advertisements were inappropriate for

middle school students. For this reason, some apps were deemed inappropriate.

The number of apps can be overwhelming. The iPod may quickly fill with pages of options. Teachers were shown how to create folders that they could use to categorize the apps. This way they could tell the student to select a specific folder and choose their own app. Students who choose their own math app within these folders may feel more invested in the assignment and therefore show more interest and progress.

In preparation for the Technology Conference, four app categories were created: practice, presentation, problem solving, and utilities. The practice apps made up about three quarters of the apps that came up in the searches. These apps are designed to enhance content that the teacher has already covered. These apps range from simple flash cards to racing games in which students must answer math questions within a certain amount of time in order to win the race. Some of the teachers’ favorite practice apps were 3D Math Racing, Arithmetic Invaders, Hungry Fish, Math Snacks, Mathmateer, and Sushi Monster.

Presentation apps can be used by the teacher or student to present new content or to display projects. Several of these apps are similar to Photo Story where the user selects photos and makes a narration. Other presentation apps allow the teacher to use the iPod as a dry erase board and voice recorder. The iPod records what the teacher writes on the dry erase board and records their explanation. Teachers also liked Apps for Common Core, Apps Gone Free, iDrawing Paper, Little Story Maker, and OSnap.

Problem solving apps like Blueprint 3D, FlowFree, and Tan Zen Lite, help students develop skills in solving non-routine problems as outlined in the Common Core. Teachers said that they would often use these apps as a reward to completing other assignments.

Utility apps include apps like a graphing calculator and protractor. Other apps, like MyScript Calculator, allow the student to enter a

problem free hand onto the iPod by using a stylus or a finger, and the iPod gives the correct answer. The program works well for all the basic math operations as well as for many advanced operations found in algebra and trigonometry.

Developing Lessons Using Apps

Teachers at the conference developed several lessons based on Common Core State Standards. These lessons often included small group learning in which students could rotate through different activities. For example, one teacher created a lesson using the Virtual Manipulatives app to calculate the surface area of solid geometric shapes. Another activity gave students the opportunity to choose from a set of iPod practice apps that were created to enhance multiplication skills. Teachers used the Common Core app as a quick reference when they created each of the lesson activities.

Another lesson that the teachers created asked their students to take a series of pictures of their progress in solving a non-routine problem. The problem that was used was “How can Dora plant her 10 flowers so that she can have 5 straight, separate rows of 4?” The teachers used color tiles to try and solve this problem. They documented the shapes that didn’t yield the correct answer. They even looked back through the photos to find ways that they had already tried. When the teachers discovered the right arrangement, they took their final photo. They then recorded the explanation of their progress and frustrations as they solved the problem along with their elation with the completion of the problem. Teachers outlined these steps and incorporated them into the lesson.

Teachers worked to develop another lesson using OSnap. They were assigned to make a model of a person and a car using Play-Doh to create a set for a Hollywood movie. The car was to plummet off a cliff. Teachers needed to calculate where the car would be at each second as it fell off. Teachers used thread to hold the Play-Doh car and a ruler to measure where the car should be at each second as it fell

off the cliff. OSnap was used to take still shots of the car as the car was repositioned using the algebraic formula. When the shots were all taken, the teachers presented their calculations to the class along with the details of how they shot the still frames. OSnap was used to put all the frames together into a single movie that was shown to the class. This movie can then be posted to YouTube or other video servers. Parents and other stakeholders can access this original online student content.

Presenting iPod Content on the Big Screen

Teachers and students can use the Apple TV to mirror the content on their iPods onto the classroom projector. Teachers can present lessons, use practice or review applications, or even data-gathering apps all on the much larger classroom screen. Students can also use Apple TV to present their projects to their classmates in an interactive format and in real time. Classrooms with Apple TV now have the opportunity to take the content from an individual iPod and make it visible to the entire class via the classroom projector.

Teachers found mirroring the iPod onto the classroom projector to be a relatively simple process. Once the Apple TV is on, the teacher must select the correct input on the classroom projector. Then, the user swipes the iPod up from the bottom and looks for the mirroring button, which is a square with a triangle in the bottom. At this point, everyone can enjoy the presentation on the big screen.

Teacher Impressions of iPods and Apple TV

Teachers were surveyed for their impressions of Apple TV. Teachers were asked, “Do you believe that iPods and Apple TV will help you to meet the math Common Core State Standards.” All of the teachers responded positively. One teacher said, “I have lots of ideas of how I am going to use the apps to help my students with the Common Core.” Teachers

were asked, “Do you think that the iPod will help motivate your math students?” Every teacher responded positively. A teacher said, “I think that the students will play with the iPod as long as I let them.” Teachers were also asked, “How often do you plan on using the iPod in your classroom?” Nearly all of the teachers said that they planned on using the iPod more than once a week. Numerous comments reflected the sentiment of the respondent who said, “I will probably use the iPod for some class related activity several times each week.” The overwhelming response from the teachers was that iPods would be a great investment and asset in the learning process.

Teachers were also asked what they saw as the major challenges to implementing the iPods and Apple TV into their lessons. Funding for the Apple TV was the primary concern. Several teachers elaborated by saying that they would like to have several iPods in their classroom but even having one would be useful. In addition, having Apple TV would enable teachers and students to share with the entire class their practice, presentations, problem solving puzzles, and data gathering apps that they would like to use. Implementing the technology was the second concern listed. Teachers stated that they felt fairly comfortable using the apps on the iPod and mirroring its content on the classroom screen via Apple TV while participating in the technology workshop. But they expressed some concern that they would run into network related problems when they used iPods and Apple TV in their own classrooms. Teachers stated that their schools have very strict network policies that may prevent them from using the Apple TV to mirror the iPod.

Conclusions

Although many of the teachers were new to both the iPod and Apple TV, they were soon developing lessons and implementing instruction on both devices. This process is likely to expand as teachers continue to explore new iPod applications and implement them into their

lessons. The research of Okojie and Olinzock (2006) found that teachers who develop a positive attitude towards learning and using various technologies in the classroom would extend their desire to explore emerging technologies.

Bennett (2011) states that teachers who began to incorporate the iPod into their lesson in innovative ways enhanced the learning experience of their students. Teachers found apps that help their students with speed and accuracy. They found apps that can help students review and practice. They also found apps that can help with problem solving and gathering data, and apps that facilitate student creation of online content as well as classroom presentations.

Notwithstanding the stated challenges to implementing the iPod and Apple TV, teachers were, in general, optimistic that they would be able to use this technology in their classrooms. They believed that these devices could help them meet the Common Core State Standards and help



Artist: Ernest Williamson III, Professor
Title: *The Brilliant Dancer*

students feel positive about their learning experience by using technology that they are already familiar with. iPods, apps, and Apple TV may help prepare students for the information-driven, global community, and global economy skill set expected of 21st century citizens.

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Gary Bradley is an assistant professor at the University of South Carolina Upstate. He teaches middle level and secondary science methods classes. He consults for the Spartanburg County School Districts in elementary iPad math applications. Dr. Bradley is currently the president-elect of the South Carolina Association of Mathematics Teacher Education (SCAMTE).

Technology Column: Finding Informational Texts for Classroom use on the Web

Kari D. Weaver and Michelle A. Vanderburg

For years national teacher associations have promoted the use of informational texts in our K-12 classrooms. For example, the International Reading Association (IRA) and the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) (1996) jointly published their standards for English language arts and included standard eight which states “students use a variety of technological and informational resources (e.g., libraries, databases, computer networks, video) to gather and synthesize information and to create and communicate knowledge” (p. 3). IRA and NCTE reaffirmed these standards in 2012.

When the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) began to be implemented, we again saw standards that focused on helping students become close readers of informational texts. According to the CCSS, students who meet the standards:

- Habitually perform the critical reading necessary to pick carefully through the staggering amount of information available today in print and digitally.
- Actively seek the wide, deep, and thoughtful engagement with high-quality literary and informational texts that builds knowledge, enlarges experience, and broadens worldviews. (p. 3)

As we worked with pre-service teachers in our courses and in-service teachers at conferences, we found that information about where to find quality informational texts is needed. There are many useful online sites available to teachers. However, as the CCSS states, the amount of sites can be “staggering.” Therefore, we have put together a list of quality sites that teachers can go to and have reviewed them in this column.

Kids.gov

The official U.S. Federal Government portal for kids, *Kids.gov* integrates games,

lessons, videos and more all conveniently divided by subject area and age group. All materials provided by *Kids.gov* are free for use by anyone with an Internet connection, though broadband connections are recommended for those interested in streaming videos or games.

For middle school students, many of the content areas feature information on varied careers in each area. Under *Science Jobs*, for instance, students may learn more about careers ranging from archeologist to engineer to farmer, with many other options in between. The *Grown-ups Portal* contains a variety of ready-made lesson plans, activities and worksheets for use in the classroom. A particular highlight for educators and parents is the *FBI’s Cyber Surf Islands*, a game that teaches students about Internet safety by grade level.

The search feature of *Kids.gov* searches the archive of the *Kids.gov* website and other government sites including *Read.gov*, *NASA.gov*, the *U.S. Mint*, and more. *Kids.gov* is an easy to use, comprehensive website of quality information for use in the classroom and topic areas, including money management, which parents may wish to use as teaching tools in the home. The comprehensive look at careers and the extensive math and science portals make the information especially helpful for teachers looking for informational texts to use in meeting CCSS requirements.

Hippocampus.org

HippoCampus.org describes itself as, “A free, core academic web site that delivers rich multimedia content--videos, animations, and simulations--on general education subjects to middle-school and high-school teachers and college professors, and their students” (The Monterey Institute for Science and Technology, 2014). Though some content will be beyond the level appropriate for middle school students, the



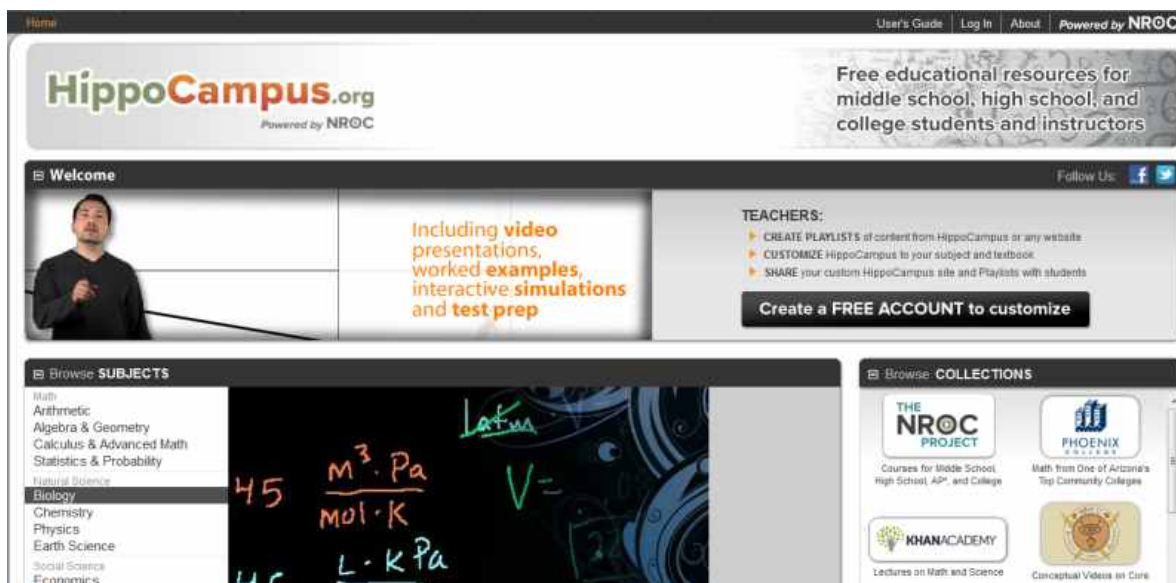
multimedia rich content can be effectively used to supplement classroom instruction or provide exceptional differentiated content for accelerated learners.

Teachers may register for an account, create playlists for entire classes or individual students, and share those playlists with as many people as they desire. The design of the content is also appropriate for educators experimenting with the flipped classroom model. The one major drawback of this site is that many of the videos rely on the Adobe Flash program, which is unsupported by Apple products and will not work for iPad classrooms.

YouTube.com and TeacherTube.com

Though both may be somewhat controversial as many schools still restrict access to one or both, each site provides a wealth of instructional materials and are particularly strong in supporting content area literacy in the classroom. For example, the YouTube channel ParrMr contains a variety of excellent videos where students can learn science concepts as Mr. Parr, a middle school science teacher, writes new, science-oriented lyrics to popular songs.

YouTube contains other content, such as author interviews, the NASA channel, and



Partner Channels

- > Texas Instruments
- > AIHE
- > GradeResults
- > Gynzy
- > Howdini
- > NASA [LIVE]
- > NJ350 Anniversary

Channels

- > All
- > TeacherTube Tutorials
- > Fine Arts
- > Math
- > Health & Physical Education
- > History & Social Studies
- > Professional Development
- > Reading
- > Science
- > Social Sciences

professional development channels from Edutopia, eHowEducation, and the Harvard Extension School.

TeacherTube focuses on instructional videos created by teachers to be used by other teachers. The TeacherTube coverage of content including read alouds, math activities, and writing tutorials may be especially helpful in the classroom. TeacherTube, because it has a clear mission related to teaching, also divides content clearly by subject area.

For teachers at schools where content would be blocked, it is possible to download videos from both websites. TeacherTube has a built in download feature that may be found on the webpage of the individual video to be downloaded. To download a YouTube video, the best option is to use a free downloadable video converter. Some of the most widely used include Vixy (vixy.net) and KeepVid (keepvid.com), though many others are available.

The major drawback of both YouTube and TeacherTube is that they do both contain advertisements and have such large collections, the time needed to find the ideal content on either site may, at times, be prohibitive.

Museums and Historical Organizations

The majority of major museums and historical organization have large-scale educational initiatives that have moved to an online environment. Both types of organizations routinely create online exhibits to highlight existing collections within the physical space and expand their educational goals beyond what was available even a decade ago.

The following are some examples of Museums with exceptional online exhibits and educational resources:

- The 19 Museums of the Smithsonian Institution at <http://www.si.edu/Museums>
- The Field Museum in Chicago, Illinois at <http://fieldmuseum.org/>
- ArtNC from the North Carolina Museum of Art at <http://artnc.org/>
- The Indianapolis Children’s Museum in Indianapolis, IN at <http://www.childrensmuseum.org/>
- The Virtual Museum of Canada at <http://www.museevirtuel-virtualmuseum.ca/index-eng.jsp>
- The British Museum at <https://www.britishmuseum.org/>

In addition to museums, many libraries and historic organizations also maintain quality resources for educators using materials from their collections and permanent exhibits. Some excellent examples of such websites include:

- Columbia University Libraries at <http://library.columbia.edu/find/online-exhibitions.html>
- The New York Public Libraries at <http://www.nypl.org/events/online-exhibitions>
- The U.S. National Library of Medicine at <https://www.nlm.nih.gov/digitalprojects.html>
- Colonial Williamsburg at <http://www.history.org/>
- The Ancient World Mapping Center from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill at <http://awmc.unc.edu/wordpress/>
- Bibliothèque nationale de France English language website at http://www.bnf.fr/en/tools/a.welcome_to_the_bnf.html

While the recommendations above are a small sampling of the information that can be found, it is important for educators to think broadly when considering resources. As with the example of the Bibliothèque nationale de France, many museums, libraries, and historical

organizations around the world make their websites and collections available in multiple languages, including English. This broader perspective when locating information for classroom use allows for greater variety and freedom, especially with regard to informational texts.

DocsTeach

DocsTeach at docsteach.org is a free online resource that allows teachers to bring history to life for their students. The website uses thousands of primary source documents related to American history provided by the National Archives, largely organized by historical period. The true benefit of DocsTeach lies in the ability to pull documents into classroom activities designed using Bloom's Taxonomy and the large user community of educators that have shared such activities for use by others.

Teachers must register for an account with the website to design activities and access activities designed by others. The activities draw on sound active learning principles and the exceptional array of primary document source material with a focus on critical thinking. One such example may be found in the image below where students are encouraged to consider whether the American Revolutionary War was patriotism or treason.

The screenshot shows the DocsTeach website interface. At the top left is the National Archives logo and the DocsTeach logo. Navigation links for 'ACTIVITIES', 'DOCUMENTS', and 'ACCOUNT' are visible. A search bar and 'Browse' button are present. The main content area displays an activity titled 'Road to Revolution: Patriotism or Treason?' with a 'Start Activity' button. Below the title, it lists the author as 'National Archives Education Team', the tool as 'Focusing on Details: Discussion Topic', and the historical era as 'Revolution and the New Nation (1754-1820s)'. It also mentions 'Primary Historical Thinking Skill: Historical Analysis & Interpretation' and 'Bloom's Taxonomy: Applying'. A 'Use to Create an Activity' button and a 'Print this activity' option are also shown. The activity content includes a historical illustration of the Boston Tea Party and a list of four questions for students to analyze the image.

Star This

Road to Revolution: Patriotism or Treason?
<http://docsteach.org/activities/19>

Start Activity

Author:
National Archives Education Team

Tool:
Focusing on Details: Discussion Topic

Historical Era:
Revolution and the New Nation (1754-1820s)

Primary Historical Thinking Skill:
Historical Analysis & Interpretation

Bloom's Taxonomy:
Applying

Use to Create an Activity

Print this activity

Synopsis
Students will analyze the causes of the American Revolution and examine them from various points of view. Perspectives include the Sons of Liberty, loyalists living in the colonies, patriots, and British citizens living in England.

1. Write down descriptive words or phrases that come to mind when you see this picture.
2. Imagine this picture appeared in a London newspaper. How would it look to a British citizen living in London?
3. You are the man on the left with the tea bucket. What are you doing and why?
4. What is the significance of a rope tied to the tree "Liberty Tree"?

All activities may be shared with students electronically by using the provided link, or by printing them out. If no current activity exists, the website has numerous templates to help educators design their own with relative ease. Though best for social studies curriculum, the material from the National Archives provides documents that may assist with literary interpretation, scientific developments, and contemporary issues in the news including the growth of the environmental movement, 9/11, and the life of President John F. Kennedy that may present opportunities for special events in your school.

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Kari D. Weaver is an Assistant Professor of Library Science and the Library Instruction Coordinator at the University of South Carolina Aiken. She holds a B.A. from Indiana University and an M.L.I.S. from the University of Rhode Island. Her research interests include information literacy, mentoring, book banning and censorship, and the use of informational texts in Common Core Curriculum. She has presented and published on these issues at local, national and international conferences in addition to core journals including *Public Services Quarterly* and *Business and Professional Communication Quarterly*.



Michelle Avila Vanderburg is an Assistant Professor of Literacy Education at the University of South Carolina Aiken. Dr. Vanderburg previously taught middle school and high school English. She now works with K-12 pre-service and in-service teachers across South Carolina to develop effective literacy methods.

Understanding the Common Core State Standards: Teachers as Personal Professional Development Providers

Janie Riddle Goodman and Victoria Oglan

The success of a democracy is based upon the ability of all its citizens to think and reason at the highest levels. Our democracy in the 21st century—with all of its problems and possibilities, composed of an increasingly diverse citizenry, and beset by the complexities of a global economy—demands the best educational system we have ever had. Achieving that standard will require the support of many—national and state policymakers, teacher-educators, classroom teachers, district- and building-level administrators and supervisors, parents, and students. (Beers, 2009, para. 11)

On December 28, 2013, the *State* newspaper reported that critics in South Carolina (SC) of the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) want to see those standards ejected from SC schools. Those critics see the standards, which set national standards for what students in all states should know at certain grade levels and originally proposed by states, as “a dangerous expansion of the federal government into education, traditionally a function left to the states” (Looking forward, para. 8). Unfortunately, classroom teachers now find themselves caught in the controversy created by the political rhetoric swirling around the 2014-2015 full implementation of the CCSS in all SC public schools.

We, the authors, strongly believe it is the responsibility of each and every teacher in SC to engage in personal professional development in order to fully understand the ambitious expectations of the standards themselves. We further believe it is the responsibility of each and every teacher to know what the standards

actually say and imply as well as what they do not say, as these standards represent a comprehensive reform of K-12 curriculum. We believe teachers must learn to use the standards as a lens for reflecting on their own instructional practices as well as planning ways to deepen and further the learning of their students. It is from this stance that teachers will come to believe that “teaching well means engaging in a continual process of studying students and their work in order to strengthen teaching and learning” (Calkins, Ehrenworth, & Lehman, 2012, p. 2).

Fortunately, nationally recognized teacher-educators have begun to explore the language and implications of the CCSS through their own research and writing. While school districts and individual schools provide certain amounts and types of professional development for teachers, the standards are predicated on teachers taking individual responsibility for their own professional growth, with schools becoming sites for professional study. What follows is a sampling of some of the available books for teachers’ personal professional development. We encourage all teachers to explore publishers’ websites and other educational resources to find professional sources that meet their individual needs for implementing the CCSS with students.



The Common Core Companion: The Standards Decoded, Grades 6-8

By Jim Burke, Corwin, 2013.
ISBN 978-1-4522-7603-8

What Jim Burke provides for teachers is a reformatted version of the standards that he first created for himself to make the Common Core document more helpful as he planned his own

lessons. The format of this book can help teachers better understand what the standards actually say, what they actually mean, and what the classroom instruction would both look and sound like. Don't misunderstand; this book is not a "scripted" text, telling teachers what to say and do. Rather it opens up spaces for professional conversations and collaboration around the implications in the standards for instruction.

The book is divided into four sections (reading, writing, speaking and listening, and language), and each section begins with a restatement of the official anchor standards. Facing pages have user-friendly "translations" of each standard. The remainder of each section is devoted to considerations of individual standards. On a single page, Burke uses horizontal and vertical views to show how individual standards change across grade levels for a given subject or down a given grade level in all subjects. For example, reading standard 1 and the indicators for grades 6, 7, and 8 in literature, informational text, history/social studies, and science/technical subjects are all included on the same page. This format facilitates cross-curricular collaboration and planning.

For each standard, Burke includes a page entitled, "What the **Student** Does," with gist sections that provide plain-English synopses of the standards and comprehension questions that help students master the thinking moves and skills behind each standard. He includes specific teaching techniques for addressing each standard on a page entitled, "What the **Teacher** Does." Each standard ends with a page of academic vocabulary—explanations of the critical words and phrases embedded within each standard.

Along with the companion book for grades 9-12, Jim Burke provides teachers with a user-friendly version of the CCSS. This book is an excellent choice for schools and/or districts looking to establish a common text for teachers and administrators to work from and refer to while coming to understand the expectations of the CCSS. (JRG)



Ten Differentiation Strategies for Building Common Core Literacy

By Jill Spencer, Association for Middle Level Education, 2013. ISBN 078-1-56090-253-9

This three-part book offers teachers effective strategies that engage students in reading and writing by having students interact with content texts at high levels. Jill Spencer points out how the CCSS are forcing all teachers to become more cognizant of literacy due to the literacy standards reaching across the curriculum. She also notes how teachers must scaffold practices driven by the standards based on the development of young adolescents and its implications for instruction.

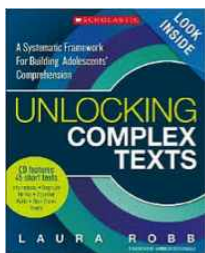
In part one, "Reading and Writing Differentiation and the Common Core," Spencer reminds teachers that whether they love or hate the Common Core, the message being sent loudly and clearly is that all students need to develop sophisticated literacy skills in all of their classes. She contends this can only be achieved if teachers create classroom conditions where every student has access to a rich curriculum and instruction that moves all students toward meeting standards.

In part two, "FAQs about Differentiating Reading and Writing and the Common Core," she presents seven questions teachers typically raise about the standards. She directs her responses to teachers of all disciplines and content areas by reminding them that helping students meet the literacy standards is not just the responsibility of the English language arts teachers. Literacy demands such as *explaining the meaning* and *analyzing* are applicable to all texts whether those texts are literacy, science, social studies, or mathematics.

In part three, "Strategies for Helping All Students Understand Rich, Meaningful Texts and Developing Their Writing Skills," Spencer explains specific learning strategies and how they differentiate. One example she gives includes four strategies—Just Say Something, 30-15-5, Jammin' the Text, and Last One

Standing—to use when everyone must read the same text. Not only does she explain the procedure for each strategy, she gives examples using authentic texts, offers variations on the strategies, and provides content area applications.

All teachers, from English language arts to physical education will find applicable examples of instructional practices foregrounded in literacy and the CCSS in Jill Spencer's book. Her explanations are clear, concise, and user-friendly. Additionally, she provides an extensive list of electronic resources in the appendix. Jill Spencer has found a way to demystify the process of differentiation across disciplines and content areas as a way to help students grow in their literacy while meeting the demands of the CCSS. (JRG)



Unlocking Complex Texts: A Systematic Framework for Building Adolescents' Comprehension

By Laura Robb, Scholastic Teaching Resources, 2013.
ISBN 978-0-545-44906-9

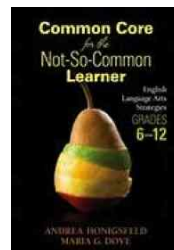
For those teachers who want to help their students deepen their comprehension of text while meeting the expectations of the Common Core reading standards, Laura Robb has written a comprehensive text that is the epitome of effective instructional practice. In this book, Robb provides not only ideas for effective lessons, but she also includes a CD with materials for those lessons. Included on the CD are anchor, on-level, and below-level texts for differentiation of instruction. Following the structure of her lesson plans will help teachers with their own planning for instruction.

Units of study included in this book are based on genre and built around a theme. These seven units include informational texts, biography, memoir, myths, short stories, texts that argue, and poetry. At first glance, this text may look like Robb wrote it solely for English language arts teachers. However, looking closer, teachers will discover how most of these genres

should also be integral components of the reading students do in all disciplines and content areas. An example is in Robb's text selections for the chapter on reading biographies, which include Woodrow Wilson, Sir Francis Drake, Idi Amin, Cleopatra, and Catherine the Great. She includes her step-by-step procedures for modeling how to apply the CCSS for reading to one of these short biographies.

All of the units of study in this book are written using Robb's three-part instructional framework: 1. Teacher modeling by reading aloud an anchor text and modeling the skills and strategies necessary to meet the target Common Core reading standards; 2. Student collaborative practice with partners to practice the skills and strategies modeled with the anchor text; and 3. Independent student work with a new text at students' instructional reading levels.

For teachers interested in deepening their own understanding of the reading standards, Laura Robb's book is invaluable. It is an excellent text for both personal professional development as well as collaborative professional study. (JRG)



Common Core for the Not- So-Common Learner: English Language Arts Strategies, Grades 6-12

By Andrea Honigsfeld & Maria G. Dove, Corwin, 2013.
ISBN 978-1-4522-5781-5

Teachers are facing many challenges as they address the new CCSS that are soon to be fully implemented in 2014-15. In the increasingly diverse classroom, one of those challenges for teachers is how to address the CCSS with all students who bring a range of interests and abilities to the classroom. *Common Core for the Not-So-Common Learner: English Language Arts Strategies Grades 6-12* is a valuable resource that outlines that much-needed support for teachers in addressing the needs of their diverse learners.

This book is teacher-friendly and easy to navigate. Teachers can read individual chapters

that meet their immediate teaching needs and concerns. Chapter one offers a detailed list of the characteristics of the diverse or not-so-common learner. Andrea Honigsfeld and Maria G. Dove are quick to point out that their intention in providing this list “is not to add to the divisiveness or segregation of these pupils” (p. 5) but rather by identifying them, teachers will be in a more informed position to plan instruction that meets the needs of their diverse learners. As well, the authors outline the variety of challenges teachers may face as they work to address the CCSS with their special student populations.

Chapters two through six address the CCSS for academic language, reading literature, reading informational texts, writing, and speaking and listening. These chapters are organized in similar fashion with sub-headings that respectively include: the standard, strategies, anticipated outcomes, instructional challenges, promising classroom practices, un(common) reflection questions, and resources both print and web-based.

There are a wide variety of best practice strategies offered in each chapter with easy to follow descriptions of how to use the strategy. The anticipated outcomes section provides details of what students will be able to do as a result of the strategy used. The instructional challenges identify areas of concern for teachers and offer support for navigating these travails. Promising classroom practices is a rich resource of classroom vignettes from classrooms across the country that are celebrating success with diverse learners in a variety of content areas. This section offers teachers a lens for looking at best practice teaching from a variety of perspectives as teachers work to implement strategies across content areas in an effort to authentically engage diverse learners in the learning process and to demonstrate their measured success.

The un(common) reflection questions would promote collaborative conversations among teachers, engage teachers in critical thinking about their beliefs and practices, and offer a forum for ongoing professional

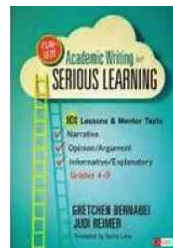
development. At the end of each chapter, the authors offer a list of print and web-based resources that will be valuable to teachers.

Chapter seven calls for teachers to explore a collaborative approach to the CCSS because:

It has been recognized by many that the complexity of the challenges that diverse secondary students encounter on a daily basis calls for a collaborative approach so teachers are better able to pool their talents and resources and offer the best possible education to these learners (p. 227).

This collaborative approach may include such things as joint planning, collaborative assessment of students, teacher research, co-developing instructional materials, and preparing for and conducting joint parent-teacher conferences and are some of the activities explored here. Again, this chapter delineates anticipated outcomes, challenges through reflection questions and offers print and web-based resources.

This book is a must-have resource for teachers. It addresses the concerns teachers have about diverse learners and how to support their learning efforts with the CCSS. (VO)



Fun-Size Academic Writing for Serious Learning: 101 Mentor Texts – Narrative, Opinion/Argument, & Informative/Explanatory, Grades 4-9

By Gretchen Bernabei & Judi Reimer, Corwin, 2013. ISBN 978-1-4522-6861-3

The CCSS call for an increased emphasis on writing in all content areas with a focus on three text types: narration, argument, and information. As a result, teachers are looking for resources that will help them address all three text types but particularly argument and information. Gretchen Bernabei and Judi Reimer offer that support with this book which also includes a companion website for downloadable versions of all the student essays and text structures.

In the introduction, the authors describe

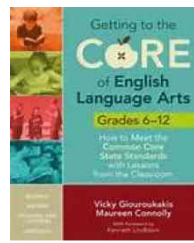
their book as a “lifeline to real writing instruction” (p. xiii). They offer a collection of 101 mentor texts all of which are written by students from grades 4-12. The book is organized into three parts which offer craft lessons for each of the three text types. The craft lesson appears on the left hand page and the mentor text appears on the right hand page for easy reading and reference. In addition, at the bottom of each craft lesson page is a visual that details a structural analysis of each piece of writing, much like a graphic organizer. The visual makes the structure immediately visible to writers. Each craft lesson is divided into four sections: “What Writers Do” details a craft lesson to try with students; “What This Writer Does” shows how the mentor text addresses the craft move; “Activity for Your Class” offers ways for teachers to engage students in the craft move with the mentor text; “Challenge for Students” invites students to try the craft move in their own writing.

Part I focuses on narrative writing. There are over 50 craft lessons in this section that address this text type. The lessons offer a wide variety of craft moves that deal with the 6 traits of writing. Some of the topics include “Using Foreshadowing to Create Mood,” “Using Variations of ‘Said,’” and “Layering Thinking and Dialogue.”

Part II focuses on information/explanatory writing. There are over 25 craft lessons in this section again with a wide variety of craft moves for this text type. Some of the topics include “Analyzing a Movie,” “Using Opinions and Facts When Explaining Something New,” and “Explaining a Historical Context.”

Part III focuses on opinion/argument writing. There are over 35 craft lessons in this section with topics that include “Using Facts as Evidence,” “Using Personal Experience to Support Opinions,” and “Weaving Information into a Persuasive Argument.”

For teachers looking to deepen their understanding of how to engage students in writing across all the text types in the CCSS, this book is a must-have. (VO)



Getting to the Core of English Language Arts Grades 6-12: How to Meet the Common Core State Standards with Lessons from the Classroom

By Vicky Giouroukakis & Maureen Connolly, Corwin, 2012. ISBN 978-1-4522-1881-6

Teachers who are looking for support to deepen their understanding of how to align their lesson plans with the CCSS have a valuable resource in this book by Vicky Giouroukakis and Maureen Connolly. The authors address the four strands of the CCSS for reading, writing, listening and speaking, and language by providing samples of lessons that have been used in classrooms across the country. The lessons include varied levels of text complexity with a focus on higher order thinking to meet the demands of the CCSS. There is also a website that offers additional materials and resources.

The book is divided into four parts, with each part addressing one of the four strands of the CCSS for English language arts. Part I focuses on Reading, Part II focuses on Writing, Part III focuses on Speaking and Listening, and Part IV focuses on Language. Each part follows a predictable structure first addressing the benefits of the CCSS for that particular strand, and then moving to the lessons from the classroom. The predictable structure provides a reader-friendly format for teachers and allows them to choose a part of the book that meets their immediate planning needs. As well, the authors are quick to point out that teachers are already addressing the CCSS in significant ways in their lessons and so the changes to planning are not as daunting as might be anticipated. The book concludes with a focus on collaboration, which is also a significant part of the CCSS.

In the section on the benefits of the CCSS, the authors provide a comprehensive look at what students need to know and do within each standard. They offer charts that show the knowledge and skill progression across the grade levels which will help teachers determine what they are already doing and what they need to

further address in their planning. At the end of this section is a collection of questions, challenges, and pondering points that encourage teachers to be reflective and grow in their understanding of their practice.

In the section on lessons from the classroom, Giouroukakis and Connolly offer a variety of detailed lessons that are engaging and challenging and feature both new and classic texts. Teachers will find a variety of supportive documents that include lesson plan templates, helpful handouts, grading checklists, and graphic organizers. There are marginal sidebars in this section titled, “Tech Connection,” “Theory Link,” and “Differentiation Tip” to help teachers make modifications or enhancements to the lessons based on the diverse needs of their students.

The final section of the book deals with teacher collaboration as a means to working smarter not harder. The authors talk about collaboration within schools and beyond. They address the issue of technology and how this medium connects teachers across the country in ways that will support their efforts to work together to meet the expectations of the CCSS. They encourage teachers to be a part of the larger professional learning community via social

networking sites. They also offer a collection of Internet resources and websites that will be very helpful to teachers as they work to implement the CCSS in their classrooms. (VO)

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Janie Riddle Goodman is a doctoral candidate in Language and Literacy at the University of South Carolina. She is an Adjunct Faculty member in the Middle Level education program, teaching both undergraduate and graduate courses along with supervising pre-service teachers.



Victoria Oglan is a Clinical Assistant Professor in Language and Literacy/Secondary Education at the University of South Carolina. She is the Co-Director of the Midlands Writing Project and she teaches graduate courses in ELA methodology and research.

Young Adult Book Reviews

**Kim Wells, Keri Reaney, Henry Hall,
Deitre Helvy, Joshua Helvy, and Princess Helvy**

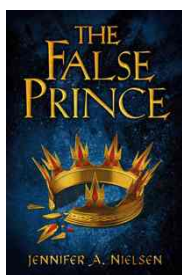


The Night She Disappeared

By April Henry, Square Fish, 2013. ISBN 978-1250016744.

Review by **Kim Wells**, Media Specialist, McCracken Middle School, Spartanburg, SC.

The suspense in this story begins immediately as it incorporates the reader into the action from the first page. Gabie, Drew, and Kayla work at Pete's Pizza. One night Drew takes a delivery order, but the caller wants to know if the girl in the Mini Cooper will be delivering his pizza. Gabie drives the Mini Cooper, but she is not working that night. Instead, Kayla goes out to make the delivery and doesn't come back. The action develops as the story is told from multiple, alternating viewpoints, including Drew, Gabie, Kayla, and the mysterious caller. The story comes to life even more with the inclusion of forensic evidence, such as police reports, transcripts of 911 calls and police interviews, lab reports, newspaper articles, and coroner's reports. This book is highly recommended to teens and young adults as a thriller that will keep them hooked until the climactic ending. It will appeal to both genders and will be a highly circulated book in any secondary media center.



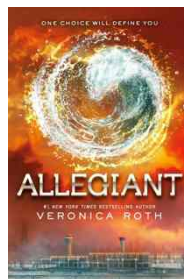
The False Prince

By Jennifer A. Nielsen, Scholastic Press, 2012, ISBN 0-545-28413-9.

Review by **Keri Reaney**, Media Specialist, Northwest Middle School, Travelers Rest, SC.

Fourteen-year-old Sage survives life in Mrs. Turbeldy's Orphanage for Disabled Boys by lying and stealing. Although bleak, his future at least is predictable until he is bought by nobleman Bevin Conner. After the

recent murder of King Eckbert, the kingdom of Carthya teeters on the brink of collapse. To prevent civil war or an invasion, Conner forces Sage to participate in a dangerous competition to impersonate the King's long-lost son. The teen's unruly tongue and reckless behavior make him an unlikely candidate for prince, but Sage must convince Conner of his worthiness. His very life depends on it. Nielsen (*Underworld Chronicles*) holds readers in suspense throughout this intense novel, the first in the *Ascendance Trilogy*. The first-person narrative highlights the fear, loneliness, bitterness, and determination that Sage experiences as he becomes more entangled in Conner's devious plan. This book could be a great choice for a boy's book club or a class read aloud.



Allegiant

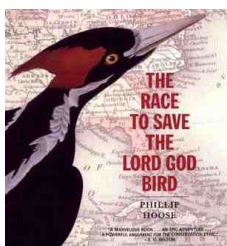
By Veronica Roth, Katherine Tegen Books, 2013. ISBN 978-0-06-202406-0.

Review by **Henry Hall**, Media Specialist, R. H. Fulmer Middle School, West Columbia, SC.

Veronica Roth brings her *Divergent* series to a breathtaking conclusion with *Allegiant*. Readers of the dystopian themed series will not be disappointed. A cautionary note for readers: review or re-read *Insurgent*. Roth spends little time recounting what happened or the various characters in the earlier two volumes. It took me longer to get back into the storyline than I would have liked. Once I got into the book, however, the action started and hardly ever stopped. A plotline in the story and the series is the complicated relationship between Tobias and Tris. One of the book's strengths is Roth's use of the alternating viewpoints of Tobias and Tris. It was pretty

much assumed from early in the series that these two would be more than competitors or allies. The romantic theme develops nicely without overwhelming and distracting from the story. Their affection for each other strengthens their ability to survive and at the same time makes them more vulnerable to villains in this future world.

There are inevitable comparisons with Suzanne Collin's (2008) *The Hunger Games* series or Marie Lu's (2011) *Legend* series. Each takes a different twist on a society that is anything but civilized. The beauty of Roth's dystopia is her creation of a society of five factions each dedicated to a particular virtue. The first two books illustrate the flaws with this approach and the resulting intrigue, betrayal, and violent grab for power. *Allegiant* records the final struggle where several characters don't survive the violence, others betray when the opportunity arises, and some presumed enemies turn out to be just the opposite. I try to avoid predicting how a story plays out and my reading of *Allegiant* was no different. I admit that certainly did not see how the story was finally resolved. This was a terrific novel by a new author who will attract many YA readers.



The Race to Save the Lord God Bird

By Phillip M. Hoose, Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2010, ISBN 978-0374361730.

Review by **Henry Hall**, Media Specialist, R. H. Fulmer

Middle School, West Columbia, SC.

This is a perfect example of how nonfiction (*i.e.*, informational text) should be written. The story effectively pulls in the reader and never lets go. When you meet Sonny Boy described in words and in photographs you have some small inkling of what a profound loss the ivory-billed woodpecker truly is. Every school and public library should have a copy of this book. It is a valuable addition to the study of man, nature, and the environment.

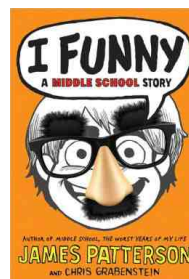
Phillip Hoose's wonderful book captures

the reader's attention and doesn't let it go till the very end of a beautifully written account of one of the most magnificent birds ever to grace this land. The cover of the book, not to mention the title, immediately attracts attention and after reading it the reader clearly understands why this bird was referred to as the "Lord God Bird."

Hoose introduces us to collectors like Brewster and Wayne who helped lead to the bird's demise. There are the corporate villains in the form of the Chicago Mill and Lumber Company and the Singer Manufacturing Company who could have saved the last real refuge of the Lord God Bird but who chose profit over conservation when the Singer Tract was not spared from the woodcutter's ax. There are heroes to this story. You will meet Jim Tanner, "Doc" Allen, and J. J. Kuhn who worked tirelessly to save the species. Having read this book I felt that Jim Tanner was definitely someone I wished I had known personally.

Educators will find countless lessons on environmental awareness, extinction of species, and the recklessness with which man has "civilized" the wilderness.

Well done Mr. Hoose, well done.



I Funny: A Middle School Story

By James Patterson, Little, Brown & Co., 2012, ISBN 978-0316322003.

Review by **Deitre Helvy**, Curriculum Specialist for Special

Education, Greenville County Schools, Greenville, SC.

I picked this book up purely to help out my son, who is behind on reading for pleasure, which happens when you are a junior in high school. Being a middle school teacher for 10 years, I thought that I could breeze through this quickly, check it off the list and move to the next. See, I'm someone who really doesn't watch comedies, sitcoms, read comedies, get jokes the first time they are told etc., etc. So when I saw *I Funny* and James Patterson, I thought, I'll give it a try. Now, this is the first book that I've ever

read by James Patterson. However, my oldest has probably read everything YA that he has ever written. Let's just say I know why. WOW, where should I begin? Mr. Patterson had me rethinking my laughing ability after the first chapter. I found myself reading and pausing to find the nearest kid in the family to retell the joke that I just read. Even my dearest hubby was so surprised that it took this long for me to really get into comedy all because of a book. Am I completely reformed? Not yet. However, did this book open up some brand new doors for me? Absolutely!!!

Jamie Grimm is the main character. He uses a wheel chair. He's a middle schooler and is determined to enter the Planet's Funniest Kid Comic Contest. Throughout the novel we follow Jamie's journey through this quest. He entertains his audience through every page, until the very end. Does Jamie win the coveted title? Pick this book up, devote a few hours and find out!



Proxy

By Alex London, Philomel, 2013, ISBN 978-0399257766.

Review by **Joshua Helvy**, 12th Grade, Belton Honea Path High School, Anderson, SC.

In the age of *Hunger*

Games (Collins, 2008) we find many dystopian-based novels trying to glean a lot of the fame from the *Hunger Games* success.

Like with *Twilight* and *Harry Potter* we also find many books with the same basis like supernatural love and magical coming of age. But it's when you find a novel that can use one of those bases to its advantage as a means to create an amazing story then you truly have a fantastic book. Alex London, a new author on the rise, takes on the dystopian genre and gives his own fresh twist. With a blazingly fast writing style, dramatic suspense, and, of course, gripping action, *Proxy* has the foundation to be an immense series.

Starting us off in *Proxy* we find a daunting world that could be a premise for ours in the future. On future earth we find a world

built around debt. With a high upper class using the poor to deal with their crime and follies you have a system bound to fail. Which brings us to the main character, Syd, who sadly is a poverty and debt-stricken guy. Known as a proxy, Syd has a debt in which he pays off by receiving physical punishments for crimes committed by his patron. One day, however, his Patron goes too far and someone dies, starting an unimaginable journey filled with lies and danger.

In *Proxy*, London creates a dark and gritty world but fills it with characters who bring somewhat of a light to the darkness. With diverse people and unique settings it's easy to lose yourself in the pages of this book. In fact, my only qualm is that London almost goes too fast through the novel and I wish there was more description and detail. That, though, remains a very trivial setback to an otherwise stunning book. This book shall be the vision of what's to come from the sensational author who is Alex London.



The Unwanteds

By Lisa McMann, Turtleback, 2012, ISBN 978-0606269537.

Review by **Princess Helvy**, 7th Grade, Southwood Academy of the Arts, Anderson SC.

I started off reading Junie B. Jones and *The Magic Tree House*. Then I began to drift away from that type of genre. I knew I wanted to read something more action filled. Later on it felt like I was forcing myself to read books that really weren't my cup of tea. Then one day while at the bookstore I stumbled upon a book that instantly pulled me in. It was called *The Unwanteds*.

I began to read a few pages and was hooked. I didn't buy the book that day. However, I enjoyed it so much I downloaded the sample to my iPod. Eventually, my mom got me the book. A bookish friend of hers had gotten it signed by the author just for me. I couldn't stop reading it. It was the first time I'd ever really been hooked to a book.

This is an action packed book that leaves

you in suspense after each chapter. In this story, children caught being creative in any way are immediately sentenced to death. By the day of the "Purge" the thirteen-year-olds are split into groups of the Wanted, Necessaries, and the Unwanted.

A set of identical twin brothers Aaron (Wanted) and Alex (Unwanted) knew that this would be the last day they would ever see each other, or so they thought. It is said that the Wanted are sent to learn and become leaders

and the Unwanted are sent to a death farm to die. Do the twins ever reunite?

In my opinion, the author Lisa McMann has done an exquisite job when it comes down to detail and being able to paint a picture in your head of what's happening in the story. This book by far is one of my absolute favorites.

References

- Collins, S. (2008). *The Hunger Games*. New York, NY: Scholastic Press.
 Lu, M. (2011). *Legend*. New York, NY: The Penguin Group.



Kim Wells has been a Media Specialist in Spartanburg District 7 for six years, currently serving at McCracken Middle School. She also works with faculty and students as a Technology Integration Specialist as the district has recently implemented a one-to-one mobile device structure for grades 3 through 12. Mrs. Wells received a Bachelor of Arts in Mathematics and Secondary Education from Converse College and a Master of Education in Library Media from the University of West Alabama.



Keri Reaney is Media Specialist at Northwest Middle School. In 1994, she received her BA from Winthrop University in Elementary Education. In 2010, she graduated from the University of South Carolina with her Masters in Library & Information Science. She is an active member of the South Carolina Association of School Librarians (SCASL) and serves on the SC Junior Book Award Committee.



Henry Hall has shared his enthusiasm for reading to the students in his middle school over the past twenty-five years. His background also includes experience in public and academic libraries. He has taught young adult literature courses at USC's School of Library and Information Science. An avid reader he credits his grandmother with motivating him to explore the world, both real and imagined, through books. After having read literally thousands of books, his personal favorite continues to be *Robinson Crusoe*, the ultimate adventure tale.

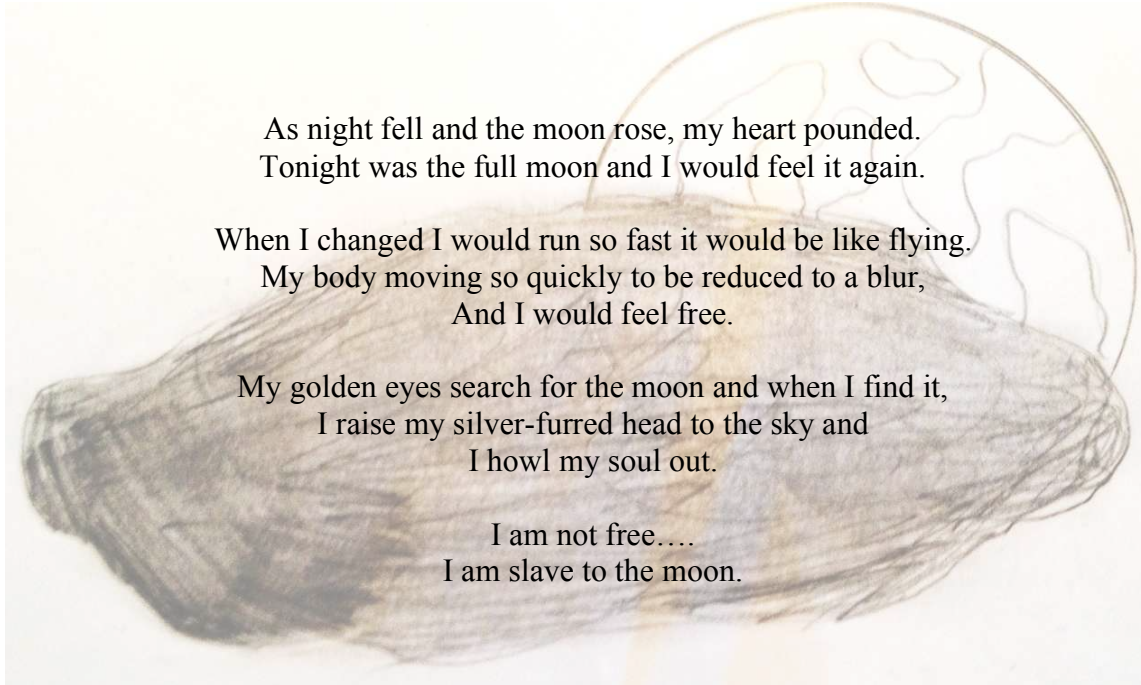


Co-Director of the Piedmont Region of SCSMA and Curriculum Specialist with Greenville County Schools, **Deitre Helvy** spends her spare time talking "all things books" with her family, friends, teachers and students. Avid reader since the age of 8, **Joshua Helvy** is currently a 12th Grader at Belton Honea Path High School, in Anderson School District 2 and will be attending the College of Charleston in the Fall of 2014. Violinist and lyrical dancer, **Princess Helvy** is currently a 7th Grader at the Southwood Academy of the Arts in Anderson School District 5. The Helvys frequently talk about books on their website, www.aleisuremoment.com, and welcome others to chat, blog, or have a casual conversation with a "bookish" friend or author.

Creative Writing from Students and Educators:

Full Moon

Anna G. Regelski



Anna G. Regelski is in the 7th grade and is an honor roll student. She is a member of the girl scouts, the Jr. SPCA, and a member of her middle school's set design club. Anna is an avid reader and loves Star Trek. She has her orange belt in karate and plays tennis with her family. When she gets older, she would like to be a veterinarian and she has already started to write her first fantasy novel.

Creative Writing from Students and Educators: Touting a Relentless Dream

Ernest Williamson III

I'd die for gray green
lichens
posing on all of my brick
habitat
layering a spawn of scrolling
cricket songs
along the dream
I speak into a crab bucket
where blue and green veins from Grandma's hands
level the devils of the premature
anyway
I'd live for a united kingdom in
America
no segments lessening love
with banter or libel
because I crave the pulp of Florida
rain
of California's hazel
orange
sun
of Colorado's steep
bare
mountains
but something happened to me
something happened to people
who look like the mahogany
I wear
and all I need to know
at this point
on my death bed
in my whim of lackluster
sight
is a dream
doused in veins
blue and green ones
vessels
civilized
and
working
together



Dr. Ernest Williamson III has published poetry and visual art in over 400 national and international online and print journals. An Assistant Professor of English at Allen University, Dr. Williamson has published work in *The Columbia Review*, *Bricolage: University of Washington's Literary Arts Journal*, and many others journals around the world.

Description of Artworks/Photographs

Journal Cover: Christian Borquez, 8th Grade, McCracken Middle School

American Hero

Christian created this portrait of a fellow classmate by positioning him against a tree and then having another classmate wave a flag in the background. Then he edited the lighting and color with Adobe Photoshop Elements to achieve a higher contrast.

p. 8: Bailey Lindler, 8th Grade, McCracken Middle School

Molly

Bailey was able to achieve an in-focus view of a fellow student's eye by setting her camera up on a tripod and using the macro setting on the camera. Then she used Adobe Photoshop Elements to edit the lighting of the image.

p. 11: Jada Lee, 7th Grade, McCracken Middle School

Self-Portrait

Jada created this dramatic self-portrait by carefully controlling the lighting of this photograph. She set her camera up on a tripod, darkened the lighting in the room, and directed one spotlight to her face. She set the timer on the camera so that she could take this photograph of herself. She considers this photograph a happy accident since she dropped something and looked down just as the camera took the picture.

p. 16: Evan Pennebaker, 8th Grade, McCracken Middle School

American Gothic

Elexis was inspired by Grant Wood's painting *American Gothic*. She aimed to recreate a modern rendition of his iconic painting. She photographed fellow art students in a similar pose to those in *American Gothic*. However, instead of the boy holding a pitchfork like the man did in the original, she had him hold a paintbrush. And instead of wearing farm clothes like in the original, the students wore their school athletic attire. Rather than representing farm life like the original, this new portrait provides an image of middle school art students' experiences.

p. 18: Autumn Brown, 7th Grade, McCracken Middle School

Submerged

This digitally-altered image began as a photograph of a student jumping in the air. Autumn positioned the camera at a low angle and photographed the student using a fast shutter speed. Then she digitally edited the lighting and color of the image to make the student appear underwater.

p. 21: Dr. Joy Bertling, Art Teacher, McCracken Middle School

My Janette

This sculpture was inspired by Joy's trip to the South of France where she visited Henri Matisse's former home. There she saw his series of sculpture busts of a woman name Janette. She was inspired by the large geometric forms of the hair and wanted to incorporate those robust forms into her own piece. She also wanted to represent a woman with strong facial features who appeared aged. She sculpted the woman out of clay and constructed a wooden base.

p. 26: Paige Smith, 8th Grade, McCracken Middle School

The Scream

Paige Smith was inspired by Edvard Munch's painting *The Scream*. She attempted to create her own modern rendition of the image. She photographed a fellow student in a similar pose with a fence in the background. Then she used Adobe Photoshop Elements to distort his features and to incorporate a feathered pattern in the background.

p. 30: Destiny Shippy, 8th Grade, McCracken Middle School

Water Fountain

Destiny used the macro setting on the camera to capture the droplets of water on the surface of the school water fountain.

p. 32: Erin Jones, 8th Grade, McCracken Middle School

A Day at the Office

Erin wanted to represent how caffeine withdrawals can impact the workplace. She chose to represent this issue in a comic way. In this comic, she has the coffee cup as the villain in the office who is taking over people one by one. She drew this comic with marker, scanned it, and then filled in the color digitally.

p. 38: Navyen Nam, 8th Grade, McCracken Middle School

The Eye

Navyen was able to achieve an in-focus view of a fellow student's eye by setting his camera up on a tripod and using the macro setting on the camera. Then he used Adobe Photoshop Elements to add the pattern to the eye and to edit the lighting and color of the eye. He was inspired by an image from a science fiction scene.

p. 42: Elexis Byrd, 8th Grade, McCracken Middle School

Girl with a Pearl Earring

Elexis was inspired by Johannes Vermeer's painting *Girl with a Pearl Earring*. She aimed to recreate a modern rendition of his iconic painting. She photographed a fellow classmate in a similar pose and inserted a patterned background using Adobe Photoshop Elements.

p. 45: Dr. Ernest Williamson III, Professor, Allen University

The Brilliant Dancer

This painting is a poignant reminder of the transformative energy exuded by classically trained dancers. Drawing upon the many riveting performances of famous classical dancers, Dr. Williamson was moved to paint an abstract reflection of the translucent yet complex kinesthetic art that the seasoned dancer has for her craft and her audience.