

Spring 2016



Journal

South Carolina Association for Middle Level Education Journal

Spring 2016

www.scamle.org

An affiliate of the Association of Middle Level Education

www.amle.org

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Articles

- Relationships Not Rules: The Heart of Effective Classroom Management in the Middle** 5
Sarah Evanson-Atkinson
- What happened to Single-Sex Education in South Carolina's Middle Schools?** 8
Dennis Kombe, S. Megan Che, J.B. Kingree, & Hans Klar
- Implementing Vygotskian Theories to Improve Writing in Middle Level Students** 18
Tracey Lee Dimsoy & Robert Vanderburg

Columns

- Creating a Lending Library in the Classroom: Simple and Easy Technology Solutions for Your Texts** 25
Kari D. Weaver & Michelle A. Vanderburg
- The 21st Century Learner: Growing Literacy in Multiple Ways** 29
Janie Riddle Goodman and Victoria Oglan
- Young Adult Book Reviews:** 35

Creative Writing from Students and Educators

- Teaching Me** 38
Shamari Moody

Relationships Not Rules: The Heart of Effective Classroom Management in the Middle

Sarah Evanson-Atkinson

Abstract

Effective classroom management in the middle grades classroom is not one that is bound by an extensive collection of rules and regulations but rather by the fostering of a mutual respect between teacher and student which grows out of a professional relationship built on trust. Beginning with the end in mind, any educator in any classroom can develop essential agreements based upon their personal “deal breakers,” thoughtfully pace their instruction utilizing a developmentally responsive framework, and learn how to respect and work within a recognized student-centered hierarchy rather than against it.

Relationships Not Rules: The Heart of Effective Classroom Management in the Middle

When a classroom teacher writes a referral to administration for student behavior, there is an expectation that a punishment will follow that will ultimately change the behavior of the student for the better in the future. This, however, isn't always the case. In fact, there are so many distinct variables that affect student behavior in the classroom that a detention or a day in in-school suspension is unlikely to influence permanent behavioral change for most students in the classroom. Considering these outcomes in the classroom, what can the classroom teacher do to affect student behavior in the classroom on even the most challenging days and in the most challenging classroom locales?

After close evaluation of my personal referral data for a series of four school years in the middle of my current teaching career, it became immediately obvious that the referrals to administration that I was composing shared a few characteristics. The data indicated that I wrote multiple referrals on the same students for many of the same behaviors over a rather short period of time, the overall total number of referrals I wrote was decreasing over the four year period, and the disposition of each of the

referrals depended not upon the infraction of the student but rather upon the specific administrator's approach to discipline in general during a given school year. In fact, there were areas of data that indicated a given administrator's attitude toward me and my work in the classroom during a given period as well. This data analysis caused me to question the effectiveness of my classroom management plan and how well it was truly meeting the needs of both my students and myself as their educator. So, I returned to the beginning and started with the end in mind. What were my management goals? What type of classroom did I want to teach in? What type of classroom would I want to learn in?

The answers to my questions all lived within the complicated concept of “relationship.” Students who were most successful in my classroom academically and behaviorally were the students who knew that I cared about them and their needs in my classroom. If students were convinced that I sincerely cared about their success, they would be more inclined to perform for themselves and for me. This idea changed my paradigm about classroom management. At that moment, the focus shifted from rules and regulations, which had peppered the hallway walls in my school and classroom, to relationships. Middle grade students require a place in their school community that is safe,

academically challenging, and socially fulfilling to them. When we can provide that “space” to students, they will be successful because they have ownership in their learning. They care.

We can’t have a classroom without rules. We can’t maintain order in our classroom and ensure safety if everyone isn’t consistently aware of the rules, right? In part, this is true; however, our middle grades students are professional students by the time they enter our classrooms. They are well aware that they shouldn’t aggress against their colleagues or use profanity in their exchanges with the educator in the room; however, many children do these things out of choice or lack of impulse, not because there isn’t a posted sign reminding them of the “rules.”

Essential Agreements

After considering these ineffective patterns, I developed the “essential agreements.” These are agreements that provide the foundation upon which classroom community can be built with students. They are born from the educator’s “non-negotiables” in the classroom. In my case, my “non-negotiables” included mutual respect, safety, and consistent effort – no “whatever” or “I don’t feel like it.” It is important to realize and acknowledge that these essential agreements go both ways in the relationship between teacher and student as well. The essential agreements for students in my classroom read as follows:

1. I will respect the space, personal belongings, thoughts, opinions, and actions of others in this classroom and will not steal educational time from others.
2. I will give my best effort every single day regardless of what happened before school, how I feel about the subject matter, or the mood I’m in. I promise to be in it to win it each and every class period.

As a class, we spend a great deal of time and effort talking about these essential agreements. When students feel as though they can commit to

excellence in the classroom by these terms, they sign their commitment to a binding classroom “contract.” Many students choose to sign when they fully understand my essential agreements with them as their teacher. The essential agreements for me in the classroom read as follows:

1. I will respect the personal space, belongings, thoughts, and opinions, and actions of others in this classroom. I will not embarrass you in front of your peers; you are my family.
2. I will give my best effort every single day and be prepared to teach you with the best possible subject matter and in the most effective way I know regardless of how I feel about the subject matter, what happened before school, or the mood I’m in. I promise to be in it to win it every class period. Your education is important to me, and I would never do anything to jeopardize your future success.

These essential agreements have changed the way I see my students. They are vital partners in their educational process. There is no single way to handle each and every student; however, if we commit to treating our middle grades students with dignity and respect at the outset, the outcomes will generally be more desirable (Fay, 1995).

If the essential agreements are truly essential, the pacing used to present subject matter and content material to students must be developmentally responsive and thoughtfully constructed so that students can regularly meet their potential and find success. It is important for teachers to recognize that the duration of the lessons as well as the content of the lessons must engage students directly and challenge them to think beyond what they believe they are able. If student engagement is low, student behaviors will disrupt others in the classroom (Williams, Tapia, & Kelly, 2004). When teachers consider the impact of their lessons on not only student

achievement and data but also upon student behavior and classroom management, they can create a learning environment that is academically challenging, safe, and orderly.

Recognizing and Acknowledging Student Gifts

The final and most important element to an effective classroom management plan is a willingness to recognize students' individual talents and gifts and consider those talents when constructing a student-centered learning environment. The quiet young man in the back row might be a gifted writer or blossoming poet. The young lady who is consistently seeking your approval and affirmation may have suffered a loss in her family that has left a void her teacher could fill (Gill, 2007). Whether it's a hidden talent or a not-so-subtle need, the classroom teacher must seek out information that will aid in the development of an effective teacher-student relationship that leaves room for mutual respect and a desire to listen.

Relationships in the middle grades are fragile by nature. Whether students lack appropriate relationship models or they believe that being respected means they somehow receive a "free pass" for their behavior, the student-teacher relationship must be consistently tended. Actions speak volumes, and the classroom teacher must thoughtfully and consistently demonstrate they care for students'

well-being and hold a sincere desire for students to be happy and fulfilled at school. As teachers, we cannot be afraid to praise our students when they are exemplary in word or deed. Likewise, we cannot be fearful of guiding our students toward a righteous path when they have temporarily wandered.

Conclusion

Classroom management in the middle grades is a delicate art because the students are in a state of rapid growth and change. During this tumultuous period, teachers have a unique opportunity to be the reliable adult in the lives of the children they teach. Effective classroom management must be flexible and aware of the specific needs of the students. Management isn't about clearly printed rules or reinforced regulations but rather carefully crafted relationships between teachers and students where mutual respect is the foundational element and the sincere care guides the thoughts and actions of all members of the learning community.

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What happened to Single-Sex Education in South Carolina's Middle Schools?

Dennis Kombe, S. Megan Che,
J.B. Kingree, & Hans Klar

Abstract

This paper examines the rapid growth and related rapid decline in single-sex education in South Carolina's public middle schools. We present findings from interviews with middle-school principals on their rationales for implementing single-sex instruction in their schools and, subsequently, why they chose to either continue or terminate the programs. The paper raises questions about the efficacy of single-sex education and notes the need to compare decision making processes of school leaders in South Carolina, where SSE was a public and concerted effort, led by a state-level initiative, to those of school leaders in other regions of the U.S. where such infrastructure, influence, and support were not as present.

Introduction

From 2007 to 2011, the South Carolina Department of Education (SC DoE) promoted single-sex education as a school choice option that could increase student engagement, bolster participation by girls in mathematics and science, reduce instances of indiscipline, and increase student achievement (Chadwell, 2010). Six years after the program was introduced and championed by the SC DoE, the participation rate of schools in single-sex education in South Carolina has sharply declined. This decline is in contrast to increasing national interest in single-sex education. In this article we share the stories of six middle-school principals from across South Carolina who chose to implement single-sex instruction in their schools and factors that subsequently influenced their decisions to either continue or terminate the programs. These stories provide a foundation for better understanding the dynamic trends in participation in single-sex education in South Carolina.

We define single-sex education (SSE) as an educational reform practice where students are separated, by sex, in to different classes, or buildings for part of or an entirety of a school day. We note that SSE includes notions of single-sex schooling where boys and girls attend separate boys only and girls only schools; and single-sex instruction (SSI), in which students in a coeducational institution have the option to

attend separate boys only or girls only classrooms for some courses and/or for part of the day. In this study, consistent with federal regulations mandating that students opt-in rather than be placed in single-gender classes, mention of single-sex education (SSE) will be related, in large part to Single-Sex Instruction (SSI) in coeducational schools.

Brief History of Single-Sex Education in Public Education in the United States

Single-sex education (SSE) is not a new phenomenon in the United States. As Anfara and Mertens (2008) point out, SSE was the norm until the late 19th century when a rising tide of coeducational public schools relegated SSE to private schools. By the late 1960s and early 1970s, feminists seeking equal opportunities in the economic, political, and social life maintained that the coeducational system inherently contributed to their subordination (Tyack & Hansot, 1990). Citing sexism in biased textbooks, and sex stereotyped ways of teaching, these reformers sought to make coeducational institutions more egalitarian by dismantling institutional sexism in public education. Their efforts culminated in the passage of Title IX Education Amendments of 1972, which prohibited sex-discrimination in institutions receiving federal funds. The

regulations outlined the general principles for equal treatment of boys and girls in public schools and only permitted sex segregation in physical education activities, sex education classes, and choral groups. Additionally, single-sex options were only allowed in instances where schools could show that such programs were designed to overcome past gender discrimination (Brown, 2011).

The signing of the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act in 2001 availed resources for experimentation with single-sex schools and classrooms (Schemo, 2002). The NCLB Act also held administrators accountable for the implementation of curriculum and the attainment of established state standards (Herr & Arms, 2004). In October 2006, the Department of Education released amendments to Title IX, which eased legal impediments to public single-sex classes. The revisions expanded flexibility for public schools to offer single-sex classes, and explained how these classes could be provided consistent with the requirements of Title IX (34 CFR Part 106, 2006). Chief among the changes were that, with the exception of non-vocational classes and in extracurricular activities, coeducational schools offering single-sex classrooms were to do so only under the following conditions: (a) the classes were crucial to meeting important educational objectives; (b) the nature of single-sex classes was substantially related to achieving a set educational objective; (c) that male and female students in the program were treated in an evenhanded manner with the option to attend a substantially equal coeducational class or extracurricular activity if they so chose; and (d) schools conducted periodic evaluations of single-sex classes to ensure the programs were based on serious justifications and not broad generalizations about the capabilities of the different sexes (34 CFR Part 106, 2006).

Since the amendments, SSE options have gained traction nationally, to the point that there are currently over 1000 schools offering some variation of single-sex alternatives for academic

courses (Klein, Lee, McKinsey, & Archer, 2014; Office of Civil Rights, 2014). An indicator of recent broad interest in SSE is the Gurian Institute, which provides professional development services to schools and districts interested in SSE, and South Carolina's annual Palmetto State Gender Institute. According to the Gurian Institute website, over the past decade, more than 60,000 school professionals from 2500 school districts have been trained at the institute (Gurian, 2013).

Single-Sex Education in South Carolina

Initially, in South Carolina, SSE was promoted and supported to an extent not seen in other states. South Carolina was the only state in the nation to formally appoint a director to coordinate implementation of single-sex initiatives in public schools. In an article in *School Administrator* (2009), Dr. Rex, the then South Carolina state superintendent of education, and his colleague, Chadwell noted:

... single-gender education has been a win-win-win choice. It has invigorated teachers, engaged students and involved parents. A unique feature of single-gender education is that it can be implemented quickly, in various formats and at a low cost. This helps to explain its rapid expansion in South Carolina from approximately 70 schools in 2007 to more than 200 in 2008. We expect the 2009-10 school year to open with single-gender classes in at least 230 schools in rural, suburban and urban districts. (p. 28)

Notably, by the 2010-2011 school year, the number of schools offering single-sex classes declined to 125, dramatically down from a high of 214 seen in the previous two years. While SSE offerings marginally increased nationally, in South Carolina such programs declined further to 107 schools in 2010-2011, 69 in 2012-2013 and currently stand at 26. Figure 1 below indicates the trends in schools offering SSE options

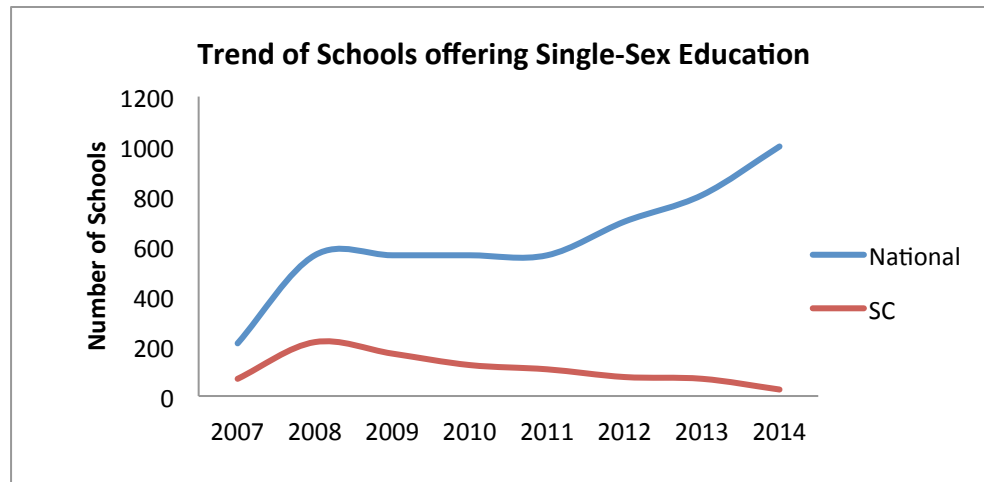


Figure 1. A comparison of SSE Trends in South Carolina and Nationally. Sources: Office of Civil Rights Database (2014); Klein, Lee, McKinsey, & Archer (2014); SC Department of Education (2014); Klein (2012); McNeil (2008); Thiers (2006).

nationally and in South Carolina. It should be understood that these are fluid figures as schools introduce, maintain or terminate single-gender programs every year.

What does the research say about single-sex education in schools?

There are a variety of reasons offered for the establishment of single-sex schools and classrooms. Chief among these are decreased classroom distractions – especially from students of the opposite sex, increased achievement on standardized test scores (Woodward, Fergusson, & Horwood, 1999), and opportunities to address purported differences in learning styles of boys and girls (Sax, 2006). Some scholars have argued that in single-sex classrooms, students feel more at ease, are engaged, and feel free to show real interest in classroom activities without inhibition (Younger & Warrington, 2007). Additionally, some school leaders view SSE as a way to address concerns about the academic performance of boys in general, and African American and Latino boys in particular (Singh, Vaught, & Mitchell, 1998).

Some scholars, however, note that it is very difficult to attribute changes in achievement to SSE alone (Harker, 2000). Any such changes

could be ascribed to interactions between learning variables such as pre-entry differences in children's academic, behavioral and social backgrounds, family functioning, student-teacher interactions, and students' abilities, rather than the structure of the school (Bigler & Signorella, 2011; Bracey, 2007; Smithers & Robinson, 2006). Some would argue that in contexts where SSE was successful, it was not just (or not primarily) the separation of students into different classrooms by sex, but the combination of nurturing teachers, access to resources, and a deliberate crafting of the curriculum and pedagogy that supported students to achieve academically (Hubbard & Datnow, 2005). Additionally, critics argue that advocates of SSE cherry pick research studies and distort findings to persuade teachers, parents and other stakeholders that boys and girls learn differently even though such conclusions are not supported by research (Halpern, et. al., 2011). Critics note that by putting gender at the forefront of educational discourse, previously held concerns on poverty, stereotyping, and other social ills are ignored, with the focus shifted from the failure of schools to educate children – especially boys – to teachers using inadequate, non-gender sensitive pedagogical practices (Mulholland, Hansen & Kaminski, 2004; Noguera, 2012).

Administrators' Role on School Reform and the introduction of SSI in schools

All these rationales notwithstanding, the decision to implement SSE in a school lies largely with a school's administrators. As Jenkins (2009) notes, school principals play an important role in promoting growth in student learning by setting a clear vision for the school, managing the instructional program, availing resources necessary for learning to occur, coordinating staff development plans, and creating a collegial atmosphere necessary for collaboration with and among teachers. In this capacity, principals seek out opportunities and initiatives that not only influence student learning but also have a substantive impact on the structure and culture of the school. Viewed from this perspective, the introduction of SSE programs in coeducational public schools could be construed as a school reform effort by principals looking to reorganize the structure of schools in order to effect positive change and meet predetermined academic and behavioral goals for students. Success, under the circumstances, is highly dependent on cooperation between the principal and the teachers, students, parents, and community.

In this study, we present findings from interviews with middle-school principals that sought to understand why they chose to implement single-sex instruction in their schools between 2006 and 2014, and subsequently, factors that influenced their decisions to either continue or terminate the programs. The study is guided by the following research questions:

1. What are the reasons that framed middle school principals' decision to implement Single-Sex Instruction (SSI), and the subsequent decision to either continue or terminate the single-sex programs at their schools?
2. Based on the principals' assertions, to what extent did the enactment of SSI meet the initial goals for the programs?

Methods

Data Collection

To better understand middle school principals' rationales for introducing, and either continuing or terminating SSE programs at their schools, we interviewed six principals whose names were drawn from the SC DoE listing of schools offering Single-Sex classrooms in the years 2010 – 2014. As a precondition, the principals were expected to have been involved with some aspect of the SSE program implementation at their schools for at least one full academic year. We also interviewed a former SC DoE administrator who had been intimately involved with the single-gender program in a senior capacity – offering professional development to interested teachers and administrators, and conducting school visits. Table 1 below shows the biographical information on participants and relevant school settings.

Among the six participating principals, three led schools where all grade levels had SSI in core courses (i.e. English, Mathematics, and Science), two led schools that had programs limited to one or two grade levels, and one led a school that had terminated the school wide program except for a smattering of classes that maintained SSI.

Each participant consented to a 30 – 45 minute audiotaped interview. The conversational nature of the semi-structured interviews made it possible to modify or delete questions based on the interviewee's responses. The interviews were transcribed verbatim. Four of the interviews were held at the school sites (two in upstate South Carolina and two in coastal South Carolina); two interviews were held over the phone. Interview with the former state administrator was conducted over Skype. For site interviews, researchers were accorded an opportunity to briefly visit various classrooms, observe SSI in progress, and speak to the teachers and students. The researchers prepared field notes that described the schools visited, classes observed, and the nature of interactions

Table 1
Participants' background information

Participant ID	Sex	Years at School	School Location	School Profile	Current SSE Participation
Principal 1	Male	9	Upstate SC	Rural, Grades 6-8, 517 students	2006 - Continuing
Principal 2	Female	9	Upstate SC	Rural, Grades 4-5, 918 students	2006 - Continuing
Principal 3	Female	3	Coastal SC	Suburban, Charter, Grades K-8, 114 Students	2010 - Continuing
Principal 4	Female	28	Coastal SC	Rural, Grades 6-8, 353 Students	2002-2013 Terminated
Principal 5	Male	13	Coastal SC	Urban, Magnet, Grades 6-12, 467 Students	2001-2013 Terminated
Principal 6	Male	2	Upstate SC	Rural, Grades 6-8, 645 Students	2012- Continuing
Former SC DoE Administrator	Male	-	State Capital, SC	-	PD, Consultant

seen. The class visits were brief and put the principal's responses in context. All interviews were conducted between January 2013 and July 2014.

Data Analysis

This qualitative study utilized thematic analysis as outlined in Guest, MacQueen & Namey (2012) to generate an understanding of factors influencing administrator implementation of SSI in public middle schools in SC. Through its theoretical freedom, thematic analysis provides a flexible research tool that can potentially provide a rich and detailed, yet complex account of data (Braun & Clark, 2006). The thematic analysis conducted in this study makes use of coding, constant comparison, questions, and memos to generate an understanding of the phenomenon under study (Walker & Myrick, 2006). Data were analyzed using structural coding (Guest et. al, 2012) and coded electronically on Atlas.ti 7 qualitative data analysis software.

Throughout the data analysis process, and following reviews of audio recordings, interview transcripts and field notes, memos were written that helped flesh out emerging concepts and patterns of ideas. Using the

interview guide as a starting point, the researchers developed a structural codebook (Guest et. al, 2012) that was used to systematically review participant responses and develop initial codes. The researchers read and reread each transcript several times, highlighting key phrases and noting codes that recurred throughout the data. Through an iterative process, the transcripts were then systematically subjected to a second round of coding where initial codes were compared within and across all data sources and participants. Based on these analyses, a final list of emergent themes was developed that depicted commonalities across participant responses and field note observations. In this way the underlying systems of meaning were made apparent.

Findings

The principals' responses indicated a general agreement in their reasons for introducing SSE and the benefits derived from the programs, which were corroborated by the SC DoE official. However, the principals differed in the steps they took to implement, sustain or terminate the programs from their schools. The findings that follow have been organized into four broad themes which consider the initiation, impact,

challenges and impetus for termination or continuation of single-sex instruction in these coeducational public schools, and include opinions from the state's perspective on the role the department of education played in establishing single-sex classrooms across the state.

Initiation and Implementation

“My middle school student achievement was pretty low, the report card was below average ... we had boy girl discipline type issues, and we just, we knew we needed to do something different” (Principal 5)

There was a common sense among the principals that something different had to be done if the schools were to (a) turn-around lackluster student achievement, (b) reduce the number of discipline related issues – especially from boys, (c) increase participation – especially for girls in what they considered to be male-dominated classrooms, and (d) change the academic culture, and generate enthusiasm at their schools. Thus, enacting SSE was typically a form of intervention. The manner of introduction, however, varied from school to school. For some administrators, the initial program implementation was informed by “trial and error” (Principal 1). The launch of the SC DoE's Director of Single-Gender initiatives office marked a turning point in the statewide drive to introduce SSE in schools around the state. Following presentations by the single-gender initiatives office, the principals thought there was sufficient compelling evidence that girls and boys learn differently enough to warrant introducing SSE.

Because these principals were convinced by the arguments about learning styles, they were emphatic that teachers working with single-sex classes buy-in to ideals related to learning differences between boys and girls. This idea was so vitally important to one principal that he required all new hires to undergo gender training within the first semester of working at the school

to ensure that they were in tune with what the rest of the faculty was doing. Whereas one principal argued that teaching is common sense and what works in a coeducational class will probably work in a single-sex class, there was still a large presumption that “the key is the teacher you put in there ... they're gonna make it or break it” (Principal 2). Principal 4 noted the necessity of rotating teachers around with the understanding that just because a teacher excelled in teaching SSE classes during a particular year that was not necessarily going to be the case year after year.

Impact of Single-sex Instruction on the Schools

“It's the other things you notice, like the attendance, like the boys wanting to be here. The test scores have not shown what I would like for them to show [but] we've gotten everything else out of that program that we want” (Principal 2).

Overall, principals reported an improvement in the school and classroom atmosphere with fewer referrals, improved attendance by boys, and increased classroom participation by girls. There was a general consensus among the participants that by separating students by sex, girls became more participative, seeking out opportunities to talk where they might not have done otherwise, and most of these principals perceived boys to be more engaged in school.

While the principals in general were pleased with what they viewed as the positive impacts of single-sex classrooms on the school environment, there was a lack of consensus on the effects of SSE on achievement. Three principals observed that, whereas SSE had an effect on the overall classroom climate, this change had not translated to a variation in scores between students attending the single-sex classes and those enrolled in coeducational classes. In one school, which had won state awards for student achievement and for closing the achievement gap five years in a row, the

principal noted that the success could not be attributed solely to SSE as the administration had done several things simultaneously to “keep the excitement or the anticipation up” (Principal 4).

Challenges

Among the challenges encountered with single-sex classes were scheduling difficulties. Principals described ensuring sufficient numbers of students were placed in the required classes of their choice based on class type as a balancing act, and noted that this process could very easily turn into a “scheduling nightmare” (Principal 1) for the guidance office. This was particularly so for specialized courses such as Algebra I, which only a small portion of students qualified for at the middle school level. As one principal observed, there was occasionally a sufficient number of boys and girls to form two single-sex Algebra 1 classes, but at other times this was not the case and the classes had to be coeducational. “I can’t have a class of 10 and another class of 40” (Principal 5).

Another scheduling complication for administrators came from parents who argued that their children stood to benefit from learning and interacting with students of the opposite sex in a coeducational classroom setting. That, in and of itself, is not a problem because schools, by law, were required to provide coeducational classes for students who chose not to participate in single-sex classes. However, if boys’ only and girls’ only classes had been constituted and one or two students objected to the participating in single-sex classes, then the classes had to be reorganized as coeducational classrooms.

Decisions to Continue or Terminate the Programs

Of the six school principals, three planned to continue the program in the upcoming school year, one sought to expand the program from just the 7th grade to include both 7th and 8th grade classes, one principal was contemplating whether or not to terminate the program (and, in fact, subsequently terminated the program in the

months following the interview), and the final principal had eliminated the program from a majority of the middle school classrooms except for a few classes such as the gifted and talented students and the JROTC. Schools that chose to continue were fully vested in the programs, which had become a vital element of the school culture – accepted by teachers, students, parents, and the community, and which they expected to continue irrespective of a change in administration.

The principals, together with the former state DoE official, noted that the 2008 recession and the resultant cuts in state budgets contributed to the widespread termination of SSE programs from schools in South Carolina. Reduced funding from the SC DoE, led to a significant cut in teacher allocations making the SSE program unsustainable. Additionally, with a new state superintendent of education elected in 2010, the SC DoE’s priorities shifted and the office of the Director for Single-Gender Initiatives was absorbed into a redesigned Office of School Transformation. The resultant scaling down of single-gender initiatives and lack of a specific designated point person to offer support, make presentations to schools and parents, answer questions from teachers and administrators made the process of introducing and sustaining a single-sex program difficult.

Discussion

This study sought to understand the basis for middle school principals’ choice to implement SSI in their schools between 2010 and 2014, and factors that influenced their decisions to either continue or terminate the programs during that period. Data suggests that the impetus to implement single-sex classrooms in coeducational public schools could be viewed as a confluence of school administrators’ need to maintain order within the school whilst aiming for student achievement. Participant principals saw SSI programs as a cost effective way to address behavioral issues, increase participation in the STEM related courses, increase student

achievement to meet state AYP targets, address students' self-esteem issues, generate enthusiasm for school, and promote an academic culture. The SSI program, which was part of the available school choice options, was thought to be an apt reform strategy that could be easily tailored to the needs of the school, be implemented quickly, and at a relatively low cost. Other than an invitation to parents to elaborate on the benefits of implementation, and consideration of faculty and class scheduling options, the programs did not call for any additional investments in time, space, and equipment.

Additionally, in line with Rex and Chadwell's (2009) assertions, the principals initially perceived the programs as being flexible because administrators could, within a relatively short period, "examine performance data to identify the needs for boys and girls, select the appropriate grade levels and subjects for single-gender classes, train teachers, involve parents, and design and implement a program" (p. 29). This speedy reform and the need to see significant improvements in the students' academic and behavioral outcomes within a relatively short period of time without setting the appropriate social-interaction foundations to achieve such goals might have led to the demise of some of the programs set up in middle schools around South Carolina.

As Wills, Kilpatrick and Hutton (2006) note, establishing a safe and supportive climate where teachers build strong relationships with their students and the school community gets to re-learn the socialization processes that stem from new classroom arrangements can be challenging and take a substantial period of time to achieve – not just for the students, but for the teachers as well. If these adjustments are not immediately apparent, it would be difficult for principals to justify and expect related improvement in student achievement. Though some of the study participants found success with SSI, there was consensus among the study participants that the separation of boys and girls

in single-sex classrooms did not necessarily lead to achievement gains they had hoped for. Additionally, problems with teacher buy-in and teacher/course scheduling conflicts in some instances all but led to the elimination of the programs.

It should be noted, however, that the rapid pace by which principals embraced SSE could not have been possible without advocacy from the SC DoE. The push for increased school choice options by Dr. Rex – the newly elected South Carolina State Superintendent of Education in January 2007 – led to the creation of a new Office of School Choice and Innovation which was tasked with facilitating the development of single-sex programs across South Carolina, including training teachers, advising program creation, facilitating implementation, hosting informational sessions for faculty, parents, and community members, and maintaining a network of people interested in or already working in SSE (Gurian, Stevens, & Daniels, 2009).

As the study participants note, the office proved to be a one-stop location for information on SSE and played a central role in the increasing demand for the introduction of SSI in schools. The importance of such centrality could be seen when, following the recession, subsequent funding cuts, and the consolidation of different offices into a new directorate on school reform, emphasis was drawn away from promoting SSI in schools. Without the State program support, a number of schools that were considering the program did not go through with implementation, whereas those that already had the program running reverted back to whole school coeducational options. Though single-sex education still remains as an open school choice option, the number of schools actively participating in the program has significantly diminished, from a high of 216 to now 26.

As Protheroe (2009) aptly points out, principals looking to introduce the program at their school would do well to engage in an intensive study and reflect on questions such as

“why introduce a single-sex instructional program at their school” as well as “how” such programs would be implemented to meet the school’s goals. Without clearly defined rationales for implementing SSI, engaging stakeholders such as teachers – who will be implementing the programs, and parents – who have to knowledgeably consent to their children’s participation, could lead to a lack of buy-in to the ideals espoused by school administrators and hence an unsuccessful implementation of the SSI program.

Though the jury is still out on the benefits of separating boys and girls in to different classrooms and on appropriate research based instructional practices necessary to address the learning needs of either boys or girls, it would appear that administrators intent on implementing the SSI programs do so from an ideological rather than research based position. Perhaps it is this view that SSI is not, as one principal noted, “a magic pill” to dealing with behavioral issues or elevating standardized test scores that has prompted many of the initial adherents to reorganize their SSI classes back into coeducational classes.

Conclusion

While this study informs our current understandings of SSE in South Carolina, it also raises questions and issues for further research. It would be informative to compare the decision making processes of school leaders in South Carolina, where SSE was a public and concerted effort, led by a state-level initiative, to those of school leaders in other regions of the U.S. where such infrastructure, influence, and support were not as present. With more studies such as these, it may become more possible for school leaders to make decisions about SSE from a perspective more empirically informed than has been possible up to this point.

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Implementing Vygotskian Theories to Improve Writing in Middle Level Students

Tracey Lee Dimsoy & Robert Vanderburg

Abstract

With the increasing pressure on teachers to ensure that their students are prepared for standardized testing, there is a need for effective strategies that will strengthen students' cognitive processes. Writing is an important task that involves many cognitive processes (Vanderburg 2005). When teaching writing, it is important to know and understand models of writing to guide students with a process that they can systematically start with. The goal is to have students eventually internalize the process and form a habit of using the process in their writing. This paper will provide strategies that will help teachers to improve the writing of their students based on the study of a program that derives its strategies from literature of writing theories, and more specifically, writing theories based on Vygotskian literature and the Flowers and Hayes model (1980).

Implementing Vygotskian Theories to Improve Writing in Middle Level Students

Flowers and Hayes (1986) promotes that writing can be achieved through planning, translating, and reviewing. These processes, which are reciprocal in nature, allow for the writer to brainstorm, organize details, produce writing and review writing. Vanderburg (2005) explores the significance of Vygotskian theory, such as the use of the Zone of Proximal Development and inner speech, and its role in writing. This paper examines Flowers and Hayes (1980) and Vanderburg's (2006) writing theories in order to provide strategies for teachers to use in the classroom to help their students to improve their writing.

Flower and Hayes Writing Model

As an educator, one integral aim is to teach students to communicate through written word (Hayes & Flowers, 1980). Hayes and Flowers (1980) describes three basic cognitive processes that are used when writing: Planning, Translating and Reviewing.

According to Hayes and Flowers (1980), planning requires not simply determining how to get from one point to the next but having a mental representation of the information that will be used to write. It is abstract knowledge that will eventually guide the writer to concrete

writing. There are several sub processes involved in planning. These include generating ideas, organizing, and goal setting. Generating ideas involves recalling information from memory, however organized or fragmented. When this information is recalled, it can then be organized and thus be given meaning within the structure of the writing. Once the writer has organized the information, the goals they have set dictates how they move forward with the writing. The writer creates these goals and the goals often help in the writing process as they lead to ideas that continue to generate other ideas thus allowing for the writing process to continue. These subcomponents allow for the planning of writing to be efficient and well thought out.

Translating, as described by Hayes and Flowers (1980), is the process of turning ideas into words. Information in the form of pictures, feelings or symbols must be translated into words for the reader to picture each representation as the writer intended. It also requires the writer to use and be limited to writing conventions and grammar, which may sometimes block their creativity. However, without such conventions, there would not be a way for the reader to understand the ideas of the writer.

Hayes and Flowers (1980) also stresses the importance of reviewing the work that has been produced. In order to review it the writer must be able to evaluate and revise the product.

Reviewing may simply be reading the product in order to further translate. This requires the writer to evaluate whether they have adequately translated their ideas on paper. After evaluating, the writer can determine whether the text needs to be revised. It is important to note that these stages are reciprocal in nature. When reviewing, the writer may need to return to the planning process to generate more ideas, or to the translating process to ensure that what the writer envisions is properly executed into words.

Vygotsky's Theories

Vanderburg (2005) discusses the importance of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), inner speech, and scaffolding as integral to the writing process.

The ZPD can be defined as “the distance between the actual development level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers” (Vygotsky, 1978, p.86). Teachers, parents and tutors are the more knowledgeable guides that lead students to become more knowledgeable. This can be done through the use of both written and human scaffolds.

Vygotsky (1978) believed that “upon conversion to inner speech, does [language] come to organize the child’s thought, that is become an internal mental function” (p. 89). Inner speech is noted as internalized and self-directed talking and aids in writing when students can develop a writing nomenclature (Vanderburg, 2006). This nomenclature is language that is used for students to understand the components and process of writing. Once they can internally elaborate on the process and components with language that is understood by them, writing becomes more natural.

Vanderburg (2006) discusses that in order to help struggling writers, teachers can use human and written scaffolds. Human scaffolds require interaction that provides assistance on the process, structure, and content of writing. This

can be executed through a teacher providing support to a student, or student groups sharing strategies to improve their writing. In situations where human scaffolding may not be possible, written scaffolds can be used. Teachers can develop written scaffolds that guide the student with different parts of the writing process (Hallenback, 2002). Lists can be produced so students can check off whether they have (a) used the writing process the teacher wants them to follow, (b) edited the essay focusing on a different aspect with each review (e.g. punctuation, capitalization, and spelling), and (c) included the necessary parts of an essay (e.g. thesis, supporting details, and conclusion).

With this literature in mind, a study was conducted with a group of students who use this literature as a basis for their writing curriculum. The study was to determine whether the strategies that were derived from this literature would help improve the writing of the students.

Methods

A letter was sent to the program director and principal investigator of an afterschool program, Saturday Academy, seeking permission to work with their middle school students. After seeking parental and personal permission, 40 students were able to participate. The students all come from various schools and are all on free and reduced lunches. The students were involved in a pre-test, posttest design experiment. They were all administered the same test, taken from The Praxis Series Test. The Praxis tests measure academic skills in reading, writing and mathematics (E.T.S., 2010). They were designed to provide comprehensive assessments that measure the skills and content knowledge of candidates entering teacher preparation programs. Although these students are not at college level, the test’s writing prompts were used to determine the students’ writing ability at the start, with attention to grammar, punctuation, format and content. The essays were scored out of five points. Once their ability was determined, the writing method was

implemented in the classroom. At the end of a six-week period, the students took the same test again. It was expected that the students' writing scores would improve over the six-week period.

Procedures

On the day of the pre-test, the students were all given blank writing paper and a pencil. The instructions were read to the students and the time limit was set to forty minutes. The students were placed in rows with an empty chair placed between each student so as to prevent communication or copying. The students all started the examination at the same time and were supervised by some of the tutors of the program. I, the first author, Tracey Lee Dimsoy, was the external evaluator, thus present each time the test was administered to ensure the same instructions were given. Students may have been anxious before, during and after taking the test as they were taking an exam from a text that is used on the college level. In knowing this, I told students beforehand that the assessment is difficult but the grades would not be recorded to their name, nor would it be counted against them. I also told them that the scores will be used in a research project but since a number will represent them, their names will be confidential.

Upon completion of the examination, I gathered the test and gave them numbers in no particular order so that the students' identity would not be disclosed. I graded the test scores out of five points and recorded the information

throughout the process on a database that was carefully stored on my personal computer and accessed by myself. The students remained in their regular environment throughout the six-week duration and were supervised as they usually are within their program. The process was implemented in the teaching of the students.

After the six-week period the students were administered the same prompt with the instructions given in the same manner as the pre-test. I collected the data from the post-test and matched the scores with the names in order to identify whether there was improvement in their writing. The program S.P.S.S. was used to evaluate whether any statistical significance occurred in the scores.

Results

Prior to analysis, all scores were converted to z-scores, through the program S.P.S.S., for the following analysis. Table one provides the mean number of students, the number of students, the standard deviation, and standard error mean for the pretest and posttest scores. The writing was scored out of five points. The mean score for the pretest was 0.95, whereas the mean score for the posttest was 2.48. The number of students who participated in both pretest and posttest was 40. The standard deviation for the pretest was 0.504, and the 0.679 for the posttest. The standard error mean for the pretest was 0.080, and 0.107 for the posttest.

Table two provides the results from the

Table 1

Descriptive Statistics

	Mean	N	Standard Deviation	Standard ErrorMean
Pre-test	.95	40	.504	.080
Post-test	2.48	40	.679	.107

Table 2

Results from Repeated Measures ANOVA

		df	F	P
Pair 1	Pre-test & Post-test	39	-16.112	.0001

repeated measures ANOVA on the F scores, degrees of freedom and the significance. The results show that there was significant difference in the scores of the pretest and posttest $F(1, 39) = -16.11, p = 0.0001$. This shows that the scores on the posttest increased significantly from the scores on the pretest.

Discussion

The goal of this study was to determine whether the “writing process” helps students to improve their writing skills. I hypothesized that after the six-week period, the students writing will improve with significance. The results analyzed through S.P.S.S. determine that improvement did occur in the students’ test scores. There are several factors that could have contributed to the improvement, apart from the writing method used. Some of those factors may include: (a) recent exposure to the test, (b) desire to do better on the second test, and (c) recent instruction about essay structure.

The pretest and posttest were the same measure; it was administered and taken the same way. The students would therefore have already thought about the prompt recently, thus having ideas prior to re-seeing the prompt. Thus their exposure may have a part to play in the improvement of their scores. However, if they were not also exposed to the writing method they would not have improved in the manner that they did because they would have the ideas but still without proper format.

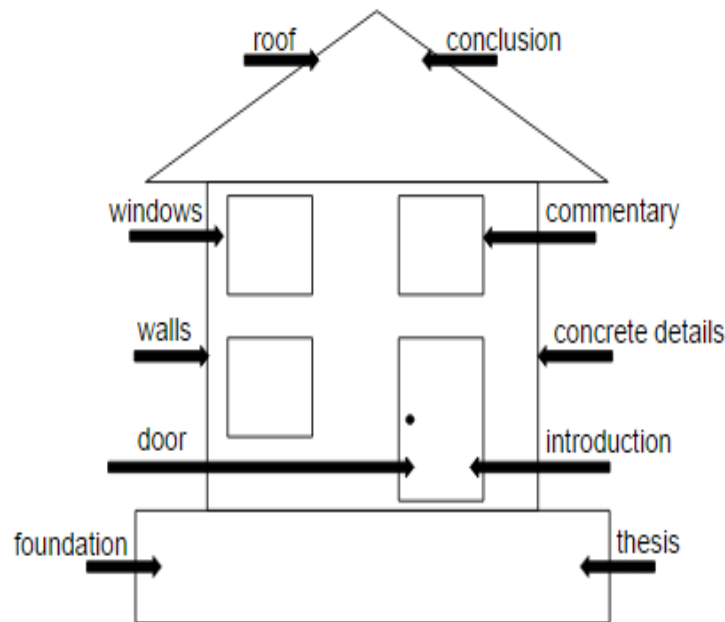
When working with participants, especially with pretest/posttest measures that are the same, their perception of the research and their performance in it affects what they may do. Thus the students may have a desire to do better the second time as they have seen it already and now have a chance to do better than the first. Though they know that the scores will be confidential and their names will not be exposed, they still want to know that they did well, regardless of whether they actually did or not.

Some of the students had structural problems within their essays. It was easily noticed when the tests were graded. However, there was a difference in the structure of the posttests in most papers. That in itself was an improvement that changed the flow of the students’ writing as they had a structure to follow and thus understood how their message should be relayed.

Strategies to Assist Middle School Students in Writing

From the literature researched and the strategies implemented in the study, the following strategies were seen to be effective in helping middle school students to develop a process in writing: (a) developing a nomenclature for writing, and (b) assisting teachers in scaffolding students’ writing to instill a foundation within the students that will lead them to become better writers.

Figure 1. Diagram of House Analogy



Introduce a Standard Nomenclature that Introduces Students to the Writing Stages, the Importance of Each Stage and the Reciprocity of Each Stage.

Within the program, a house analogy is used to portray the nomenclature of an essay (see figure 1). This is important because it creates a visual representation that can easily be remembered, and it provides a practical explanation of the parts of an essay and the purposes that they serve. For example, every house needs a foundation to hold the house in place. Without a solid foundation, a house can easily be destroyed. As such, without a solid thesis in an essay, the essay will not be well structured. In the Saturday Academy program the middle school students are introduced to this concept prior to writing and the members (college students) model writing an essay with those parts in mind. The students are then allowed to create a simple essay while getting help from the members, with the visual of the house and the model of the member's essay

displayed. Using the visual, students can easily remember the important parts of the essay and how those parts are integral in creating a well-written essay.

As mentioned by Flowers and Hayes (1986), writing occurs in stages. According to their theory, students need to plan, translate, and review their writing. In the Saturday Academy program, the writing stages are modeled and practiced by the members who are guiding the middle school students. In the planning stage, the middle school students are shown how to generate ideas from the writing prompt. These ideas can be derived from brainstorming activities and sorted in graphic organizers. Once the student has ideas, they can be guided into translating their ideas into a more comprehensive form. The ideas may be single sentences or thoughts but in the translating stage they are striving to give their ideas meaning in order to form a cohesive essay, rather than a group of disjointed ideas. After this stage the students should have a rough draft that can be reviewed.

In reviewing, the members read the essays with the students using probing questions to determine whether the students' vision for the essay was executed successfully. Sometimes, in reading their writing and being questioned, the students realize that they may have strayed from their original thought or that the idea that they had could be improved. Thus the students are taught the importance of reviewing their writing. They also learn that these stages are reciprocal in nature. After reviewing, the students can return to planning or translating in order to improve what they have written until they believe that the product is the best that it can be.

Utilize Different Writing Scaffolds Within the Classroom.

Human Scaffolds. In the Saturday Academy program, the members act as human scaffolds to their students. They sit next to the middle school students as they write and assist them by ensuring they undergo the process of writing correctly, including the necessary parts of an essay. Once that is done, the members can assist the students with other aspects of their essay such as spelling and punctuation. In the classroom, teachers can plan time to help the students become more competent writers like themselves.

Nancie Atwell (1998) speaks of dividing her class time among her students so that she can personally scaffold them in their writing. This suggestion allows for the interaction necessary to give students the help to become better writers by obtaining guidance and feedback from a more knowledgeable person. Peers can also act as human scaffolds when put into groups (Vanderburg, 2006). Once students have learned the basic principles necessary for writing and are given specific guides or instructions, they can scaffold one another when placed in writing groups.

Written Scaffolds. In the classroom, it is not always possible to see your students individually to scaffold them. The ratio of students and teachers, the time allotted for

writing, and the different content that needs to be taught would not allow for the constant use of this strategy. However, teachers can prepare written scaffolds for students to use and follow in the classroom (Hallenback, 2002).

In the Saturday Academy program, there are two major written scaffolding devices used. Students are given a list that outlines the writing process so they can determine what is done and needs to be done next. On this written scaffold, all the components of writing are listed with a box so the students can check each part off. The other written scaffold is a list comprised of different editing processes the students can check as they successfully accomplish each task (e.g. punctuation, capitalization, and spelling). In the classroom, teachers can use written scaffolds that model essay formats, planning checklists, transcribing checklists, and editing checklists. With these tools, the student can be scaffolded through the writing process with less human assistance.

Conclusion

The study was to determine whether the strategies derived from this literature would help improve the writing of the students. As seen from the data, there was a significant improvement from the results of the pretest to those of the posttest. Writing is a task that is highly underestimated until encountered by difficulty. Even in writing this paper, I had to constantly remind myself of the strategies and consciously use them. When faced with a section that I was unsure of how to voice, my co-author scaffolded me and reminded me of my own strategies. Students, like adults, want to produce perfect writing as soon as their pen touches the paper and are often so frustrated by their lack of product that they often despise writing. However, writing is a craft that requires a process.

If from a young age, students are taught to attribute their writing to the effort and thought put into it, rather than the ability to simply produce writing, then as adults, they would have

a framework for writing and become the more knowledgeable writer to pass on to other generations of writers. Pressure has to be taken off the product of writing and a careful focus needs to be placed on the process. Although this may be time consuming at first, it allows for more successful writers long term. Students will then no longer concentrate on immediate perfection in their writing but will revise and edit until it is their desired product.

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Creating a Lending Library in the Classroom: Simple and Easy Technology Solutions for Your Texts

Kari D. Weaver & Michelle A. Vanderburg

Look around your classroom. Chances are you, like most teachers reading this article right now, have a sizeable classroom library of materials somewhere in view. These classroom collections are of great importance as South Carolina and other states move toward the integration of more informational texts in the curriculum and students come to our schools with an ever-wider variety of needs in their reading materials. While the classroom library is important, it can be difficult to find and organize the collections in ways that work to both catalog and track the materials when they are borrowed by students or colleagues. This column provides some suggestions for free or low cost options you may wish to use in your classroom to make the most of your own library.

LibraryThing

Free for up to 200 cataloged items, \$10 annual fee for over 200 items or \$25 for a lifetime membership with over 200 items.

LibraryThing is a fully realized online library catalog that pulls the cataloging information for titles from a variety of international libraries and online websites including the Library of Congress and Amazon.com. Teachers have the option of separately purchasing a USB compatible scanner to simply scan books into the cataloged collection, or imputing ISBN numbers. Either option works equally well, though there is some time saving in scanning materials if you have a particularly large classroom library.

Where LibraryThing truly shines is in the array of customizable options. Of great interest to teachers are the extensive selections of community groups where one can easily reach

out and ask questions. It is also easily possible to compare your own library to the libraries of others with similar materials – an especially great feature for teachers building text sets on new, informational topics where finding materials may present difficulties. Users are also able to create book lists with LibraryThing to share with the community.

Within the catalog, books can be easily tagged with user-generated tags, making it easy to maintain lists of tagged topics, or assign minimum Lexile scores to each text. Perhaps the best option in LibraryThing is the ability to “check out” items to individuals through a special pop up screen on each items page.

Finally, LibraryThing has a variety of fun features, including the option to create haiku book summaries, and the ability to include “common knowledge” information on a book. The “Common Knowledge” section includes space for important quotes, related movies, and character information among other options. These features could be creatively used in the classroom environment to create fun activities related to the classroom libraries.

WorldCat Lists

Free for an unlimited number of books, but requires users to sign up for an account using an active email address. Information saved can be made private or public, depending on preferences and privacy concerns.

WorldCat.org is the public website of the service most libraries use to obtain their catalog record data. As a consequence, it contains data on over 2 billion items from libraries worldwide. To set up a classroom library in WorldCat, one must use the list function within an individual

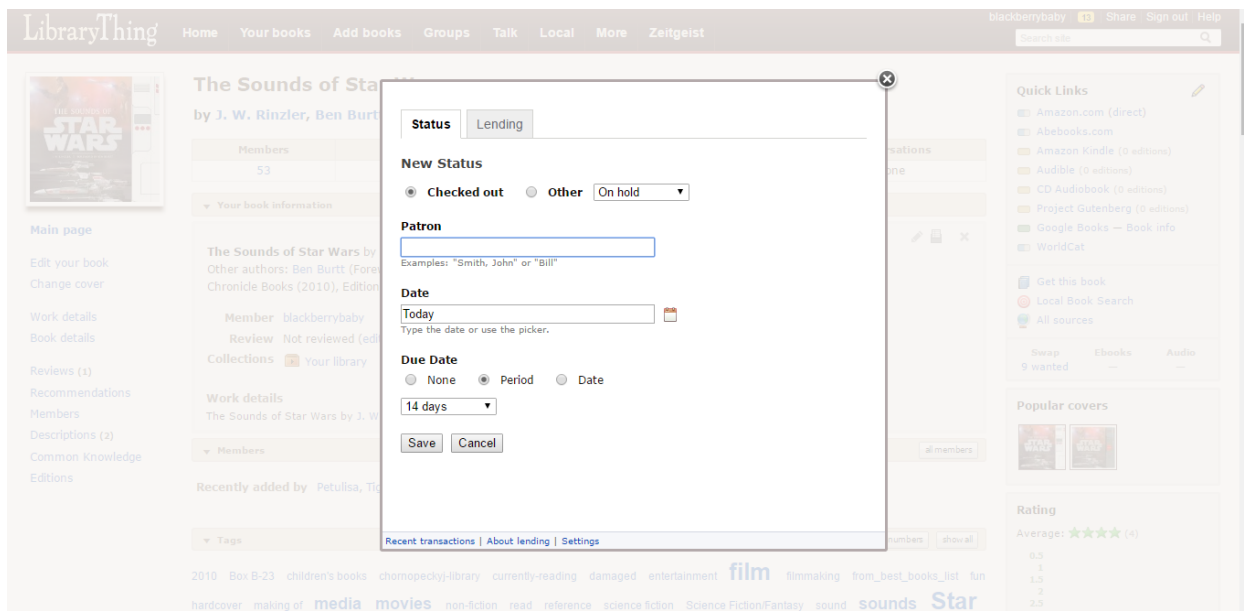


Figure 1. Checkout feature available in LibraryThing accounts.

account. To add items to a classroom library collection, simply search for the title in the Google style search box, click on the item record, and select “add to list” from the top navigation bar.

To keep track of items as they are loaned out, a note can be added to the individual item record within the list and saved. The most useful feature of WorldCat lists for utility as a classroom library tool is the fact that all lists can be downloaded as Microsoft Excel files, making maintaining a local or print copy of your collection simple and easy.

For additional functionality, WorldCat has excellent downloadable Apple and Android compatible apps – both perfect for classrooms with tablets. WorldCat lists may also be shared through a feature on the site, allowing easy distribution to parents and students alike.

Goodreads

Free for an unlimited number of books, but requires users to sign up for an account using an active email address. Information is also shared with other Goodreads users, offering limited privacy protections.

Goodreads is ostensibly a book sharing site, but recently merged with the Shelfari website, resulting in a free option for classroom libraries that both connects the classroom with other readers and offers an opportunity to catalog the collection. The functionality for teachers is found under the “My Books” link in the Goodreads header menu, where one can “shelve” books virtually and search their personal collection.

Books can be inputted into the collection through the use of the ISBN number or by a title search. In testing, ISBN number proved to be an easier and more accurate way to find and add books to the library. Goodreads also links easily with Amazon, allowing teachers to have items purchased from a class wish list to the library upon purchase.

While Goodreads can be used to track the classroom library, it lacks some of the functionality of other options. However, the website has an extremely robust user community and back end recommendation algorithm, which are both where it truly shines. For new teachers looking to track, but also build a classroom library Goodreads might be the perfect solution that can bring some organization and incorporate

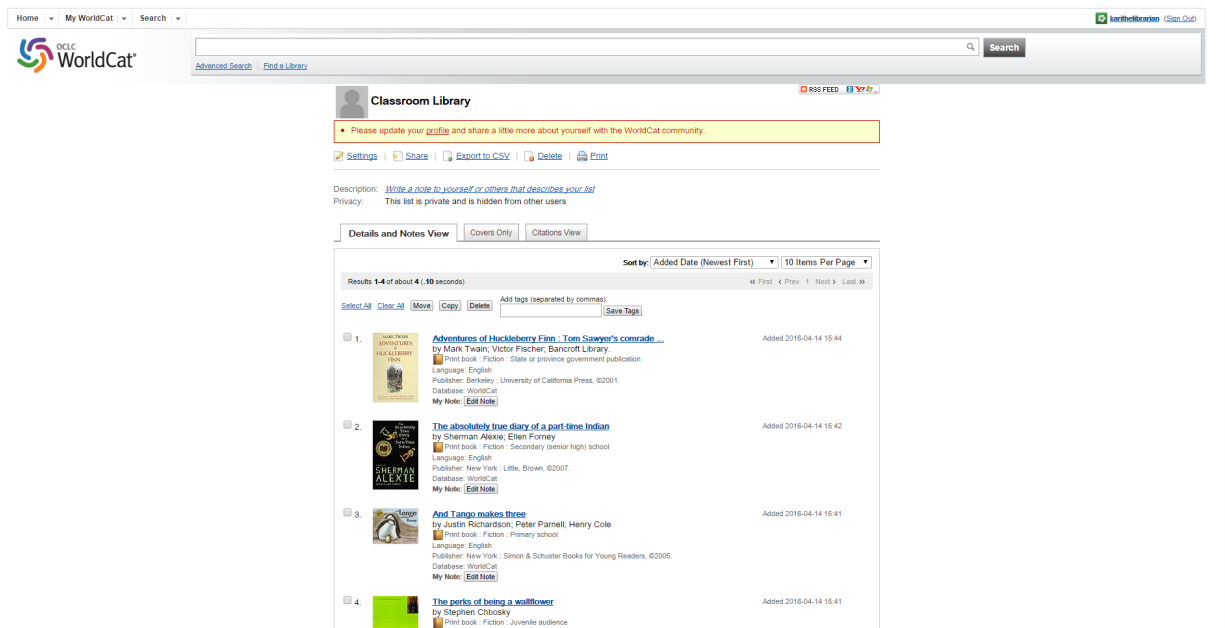


Figure 2. Example of WorldCat classroom library collection using the list feature of an individual account.

recommendations from other teachers and users into the process.

Pinterest

Free for an unlimited amount of “pins,” but requires users to sign up for an account using an active email address or through a Facebook or Google account. Information can be shared through social networks, such as Facebook and Twitter.

Pinterest is essentially an online bulletin board. On Pinterest, users can “pin” media content, such as images and videos, onto “pinboards.” The content can be organized and each pinboard can be labeled. Users can download a “Pin it” button onto their web browser bookmark bar. Content can be found online and pinned to a Pinterest account using the Pin It button. Or users can search within Pinterest to view what others have posted, then pin it on their own board. Users can also download the Pinterest App to a smartphone or tablet.

For classroom text organization, teachers can find the images of the books in their

classrooms, then create pinboards in Pinterest to organize the books into categories (i.e. chapter books for boys, multicultural themes, informational texts, biographies, etc). The same image can be uploaded to different pinboards. The number of categories a user can create are endless.

Pinterest is a good option for organizing texts; however, it may not be the best option if the user wants to create some sort of checkout option for students. Pinterest does have a large community of users and it is a good option for finding more texts for your classroom library.

Booksource Classroom Organizer

Free for an unlimited amount of books, but requires users to sign up for an account using an active email address. Users create a “classroom ID” and password that can be shared with students to use the check-out/check-in feature.

Booksource Classroom Organizer can be used on a desktop, or through a downloadable app. Users can add, edit, or delete texts into their library database by using the texts’ ISBN.

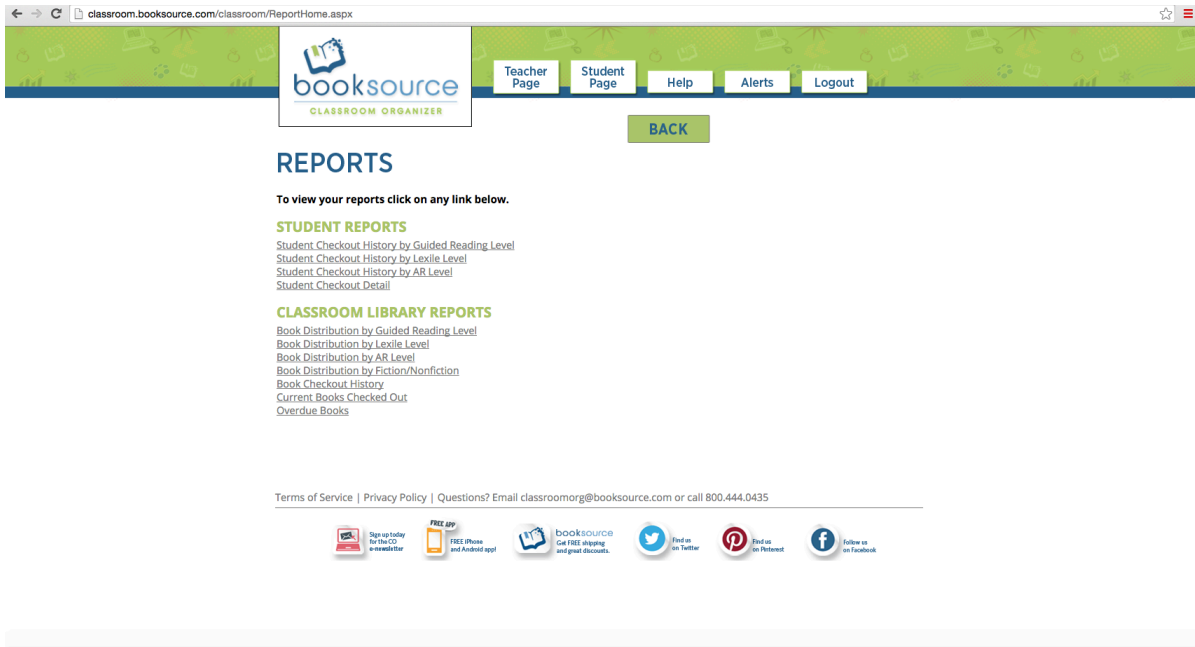


Figure 3. List of reports available on Booksource.

ISBNs can be scanned or entered manually. The library database will show an image of the text (if available), title, author, guided reading level, and lexile level. Users also have the option to use Excel to import/export their database. In addition, texts can be purchased through the Booksource website and invoices can be added to the library database.

Users can also import a student roster that will enable students to check-out and check-in books. Users can create check out rules, such as setting maximum books allowed or check out period. There are also assessment reports that can be created to track student checkouts and classroom library (see Figure 3). Students can also rate and review the books.



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Michelle Avila Vanderburg is an Assistant Professor of Literacy Education at the University of South Carolina Aiken. She holds a Ph.D. in Language & Literacy from the University of South Carolina. 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.

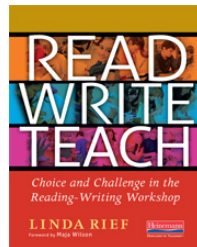
The 21st Century Learner: Growing Literacy in Multiple Ways

Janie Riddle Goodman & Victoria A. Oglan

According to the International Literacy Association's *What's Hot in Literacy* survey (Cassidy, Grote-Garcia, & Ortlieb, 2015), adolescent literacy continues to be a major topic of interest and concern among middle and secondary educators. Nationally reported statistics for this population of students indicate issues regarding their reading and writing proficiencies (NAEP, 2015). Because it is generally recognized that the ways in which teachers structure classroom environments will either limit or expand students' capacities for learning, what becomes evident is that classroom teachers need support in developing authentic instructional best practices to help their adolescent students become better prepared in meeting the literacy demands of their world.

Rief (2014) writes that teachers are looking for choices that are meant to enable, guide, inspire, motivate, and teach students to develop into literate, articulate, thinking, feeling young men and women, who contribute creatively and productively to society by communicating effectively with others, by understanding the world in which they live, and by finding their places in a complex and diverse world (p. 4).

As a result, educators are looking for resources to help them develop and grow instructional practices that address both the print-based and digital literacy needs of their adolescent students. We, the authors, believe this collection of professional texts offers middle and secondary educators the choices to meet those needs. (VAO, JRG)



Read, Write, Teach: Choice and Challenge in the Reading-Writing Workshop by Linda Rief, Heinemann, 2014, 258 pp., ISBN 978-0-325-05360-8

How does a teacher go about creating a classroom environment that supports the literacy learning of all students who enter and exit the room throughout the school year? What instructional practices best suit the literacy needs of any given teacher's adolescent students? In this, her latest book, Linda Rief makes a strong case for choice grounded in beliefs as the main focus of effective teaching that will help students "develop into the strongest writer, readers, and speakers they can be, by showing growth from September to June" (p. 3).

She reminds teachers that they must examine both their core beliefs about teaching and what they think students need in order to grow as readers and writers. Rief allows readers to take a peek into her own beliefs about teaching and the language arts as she generously shares stories from her own eighth-grade classroom at Oyster River Middle School. Teachers of young adolescents will laugh and maybe even cry when reading the excerpts from the students.

Teachers who read this book may wonder how to foster the desires to read and to write in their own adolescent students as Rief does with her students. She writes, "My job is to help them [students] find that writing and that reading that matters so much to them that they want to keep writing and they want to keep reading" (p. 1).

The first step she recommends is getting to know the students right away. She reminds teachers that anecdotal information about who students are as readers and writers is “often more helpful than any number scores that accompany the students on standardized tests previously taken” (p. 23). Rief believes that building a community in a reading-writing workshop takes a teacher and students who know and trust each other. In chapter two, Rief shares descriptions of the engagements (choosing books, marshmallow challenge, poetry challenge, covering the writer-reader notebook) she uses to get to know her students.

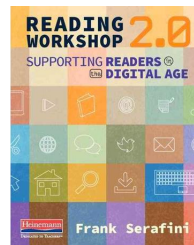
A strength of this book is the on-line support for teachers. In chapter three, Rief shares her planning for the school year. As she describes each part of her plan, such as the curriculum overview or the pamphlet to parents, she indicates where and how the resources can be accessed on-line at the Heinemann website. Having access to these resources allows teachers to see deeper inside Rief’s planning for an effective reading-writing workshop. Online resources are also provided in chapter seven for essentials such as conferences and evaluation in the reading-writing workshop.

Another strength of this book can be found in chapter four as Rief shares her beliefs about the importance of having students keep a writer’s-reader’s notebook. In her explanation, Rief writes, “[The notebook] is their thinking for their own reasons, and it is the best tool I have ever used that allows students to develop their voices” (p. 42). Excerpts from her students’ writings show that they concur. Libby writes, “I think that everyone who gets a chance to experience the WRN [writer-reader notebook] is lucky” (p. 54). Spencer writes, “This reader-writer notebook has revealed a part of me that I never knew existed” (p. 52).

Lastly, Rief includes chapters that provide teachers with ideas and resources for a variety of literacy engagements in the workshop. These include immersion in reading and writing, whole novels, author-genre studies, and

persuasive writing. Throughout these chapters, Rief provides descriptive explanations, excerpts from student writing, photographs of her students and the workshop, along with online resources.

Linda Rief understands what it takes for teachers to grow middle-level students as readers, writers, and speakers. As she writes in the afterword, “[Students] are what keeps us teaching through the choices and challenges we face” (p, 248). (JRG)



Reading Workshop 2.0: Supporting Readers in the Digital Age by Frank Serafini, Heinemann, 2015, pp. 133, ISBN 978-0-325-05754-5

Teachers have long been familiar with Frank Serafini’s workshop approach to literacy instruction. After all, his seminal text, *The Reading Workshop: Creating Space for Readers* was first published in 2001. So why is he publishing a new book on reading workshop? What else is there for him to say on the subject? As Serafini (2015) writes in the introduction to this, his newest book:

It seems there is more to say about the changes that have taken place in literacy education, in particular, the changes in technology and digital resources that have affected the ways we teach children to read and write and how we organize classrooms to support this endeavor (p. 1).

He goes on to describe in the introduction how the purpose of his book is not to create “an unwelcome addition to an already overcrowded curriculum,” (p. 1) but to help teachers better understand how to use “new resources and technologies to help children become sophisticated readers in more effective, efficient, and engaging ways” (p. 1).

A strength of his book is the way in which Serafini guides readers in the introduction to consider the technological lives of today’s students. For example, he makes a strong case

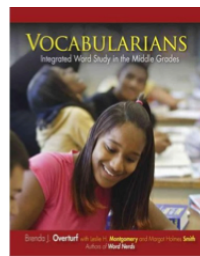
for attending to all forms of technology, both print- and digital-based, in the classroom. Additionally, he asks teachers to consider the way web-based and digital resources can extend the reading workshop beyond the traditional, physical spaces of a brick-and-mortar classroom. He writes, “The resources teachers need for supporting children’s development into sophisticated readers in the digital age extend well beyond the walls of the traditional classroom” (p. 3). As he presents a portrait of readers and reading in the digital age, he describes students who engage with multimodal texts, social media platforms, and digital bookshelves.

Another strength of his book is the way Serafini has structured the contents. The three chapters in Part I provide a foundation for the reading workshop. Devotees of Serafini’s original thinking about the workshop framework will be happy to read that his original beliefs about reading and literacy instruction remain intact. What he has added is his new thinking about the role of technology in students’ lives and ways for teachers to move reading workshop 1.0 into reading workshop 2.0. Serafini describes this shift as “*evolutionary* rather than *revolutionary*” (p. 39). Thus, he takes his original framework for reading workshop and extends it into the digital age.

The four chapters in Part II present the reading processes that Serafini believes are essential in the digital age. These four processes include (a) accessing and navigating, (b) archiving and sharing, (c) commenting and discussing, and (d) interpreting and analyzing. In chapter four, teachers are asked to think about new reading strategies they must teach today’s students that will enable them to better navigate different digital reading devices and access a variety of digitally based texts. Chapter five presents the ways in which digital environments allow readers to archive and share what they read with others. These digital environments open readers’ reading lives, allowing others to take a look at a reader’s individual preferences and

opinions. Likewise, the web-based environments described in chapter six give readers opportunities to discuss texts in different ways. Book discussions can take place with readers not only within the school but also around the globe. Chapter seven explains how students can access numerous digital and web-based resources to support interpretation and analysis of texts, both print- and digital-based.

Most people would agree that change is never easy. Why would a teacher want to change a reading workshop to include a digital component that may seem quite daunting? As Serafini writes in the epilogue, “As we move into the digital age, we have to let go of some outdated practices and embrace the new technologies that support our teaching and our students’ learning in more effective and efficient ways” (p. 124). Embrace the change. (JRG)



Vocabularians: Integrated Word Study in the Middle Grades by Brenda J. Overturf, Leslie H. Montgomery, & Margot Holmes Smith 2015, 210 pp., ISBN: 1-625-311-61

The vast majority of people would agree their learning experiences with vocabulary in school revolved around looking up definitions in the dictionary from a list of words chosen by the teacher, then using the words in a sentence. Of course, when middle school students turn to the dictionary for word definitions, they are often confused because most words have more than one meaning. Students then choose the shortest and easiest definition from the collection whether the definition fits in context or not. Many teachers rely on using lists and definitions as the instructional strategy for vocabulary but research indicates this methodology is ineffective (Beck, McKeown, and Kucan, 2002).

In their book, Overturf, Montgomery, & Smith offer teachers a way to move beyond lists and definitions in vocabulary instruction. The opening chapter delineates a compelling case for

why teachers should focus on ongoing vocabulary development in their instruction. For students, knowing more words can result in better reading comprehension across the disciplines, as well as improved performance on standardized tests. The authors also report that the achievement gap can be attributed, in part, to gaps in vocabulary knowledge. They advocate for implementing an ongoing, strategic vocabulary plan to engage adolescents in word study in an effort to enhance middle school students' overall academic experience. This book offers teachers across the disciplines with an instructional plan as well as a network of critical and creative strategies for intentional and consistent vocabulary instruction.

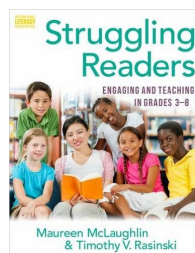
Teachers will find the instructional framework offered in chapter one easy to follow and backed by research. The authors credit Michael Graves' (2006, 2007, 2009) work as the cornerstone of their strategic plan which offer teachers a way to embed vocabulary instruction "within rich and varied language experiences in all content areas and throughout the school day" (p. 11). Students engage in authentic reading, writing, listening, and sharing in conversations and discussions with both their peers and the teacher in various groupings such as whole group, small group, and pairs. In all these experiences, students are immersed in vocabulary that is interesting, challenging, engaging, and fun. The authors emphasize the need for students to have multiple opportunities throughout the day and across all disciplines to explore and deeply learn vocabulary, to pay attention to words in unique and interesting ways, and to personalize words in ways that will help them internalize meanings and connections.

To further facilitate this learning, the teacher actively teaches word-learning strategies to scaffold these experiences. In chapter one, the authors offer teachers an easy to follow and helpful guideline for implementing the vocabulary plan. They also share classroom vignettes of teachers focusing on academic vocabulary in mathematics, science,

history/social studies, and English Language Arts and they make the claim that "academic vocabulary development is concept development" (p. 20). Content teachers know that academic vocabulary is challenging and overwhelming for many students which then impacts both students' comprehension and academic success. Focusing on a strategic vocabulary plan in the disciplines benefits the students and the teachers. The authors state that in order to help students become vocabularians, teachers in all disciplines need "to plan strategically together, teach in ways that are motivating to middle-level students, assess for student learning, and base our instruction and assessment on the best vocabulary research available" (p. 12).

Other topics addressed in the book include a close look at the types of context clues, developing morphological awareness, deeper vocabulary learning through multiple modes of learning, and using art, music, technology, movement, drama, and public speaking across the disciplines as ways to interest, engage, excite, and encourage middle school students to learn new words. Of particular interest is the chapter on assessment which explores options for both formative and summative classroom assessments that measures both students' vocabulary knowledge and use.

This book is a must have for all content teachers. It provides many practical strategies as well as an easy to follow instructional and assessment plan that places vocabulary development in a new and much needed position of prominence. (VAO)



**Struggling Readers:
Engaging and Teaching in
Grades 3-8** by Maureen
McLaughlin & Timothy
Rasinski 2015, 161 pp., ISBN:
087-207-385-8

Many K-12 teachers will readily admit that they are concerned with the number of students in their classrooms who

struggle with reading; their concerns are warranted. Struggling readers are often thought of as one group of students with similar characteristics but nothing could be further from the truth. Students who struggle with reading do so for a variety of reasons and, as such, no two struggling readers are the same.

McLaughlin & Rasinski have been teaching struggling readers and their teachers for many years and they make the claim that “The nature of struggling readers is as varied as the students themselves” (p.2). Not only do struggling readers differ in terms of characteristics, they also have diverse needs that must be met. Struggling readers are a complex group and for teachers helping them progress as readers can be a daunting task. In their book, McLaughlin & Rasinski offer teachers a variety of instructional strategies for dealing with the manifold issue of struggling readers in grades 3-8 classrooms.

McLaughlin & Rasinski open chapter one with an introduction to their beliefs about what it means to be an effective educator. They remind us that the path to helping all struggling readers rests with the teacher. For teachers to be in a position to support all readers, teachers must be knowledgeable about: their students, strategic literacy instruction, integrating technology, and ways to use formative assessment to move teaching and learning forward. To accomplish this, teachers must be learners who are their own best professional development providers. Learning to teach is a career-long process; keeping abreast of what is current in the field is the hallmark of a successful teacher. When teachers are learners, they create learning environments that expand student potential. When teachers are learners, they provide students with opportunities to engage in learning that is different, interesting, engaging yet challenging. Teachers need to develop a broad and deep knowledge base to address the complex issues struggling readers bring to the classroom.

Readers will find this book easy to

navigate. Most of the chapters have a similar format, which includes background on the theory of the chapter topic, practical teaching ideas, instructional strategies, and a section titled *Struggling Reader Connections*. This section is very helpful since it includes vignettes from literacy coaches, reading specialists and classroom teachers across the disciplines who share how they developed the teaching ideas and implemented the instructional strategies. Also included in this section are the resources teachers used across the curriculum that include book titles, websites, poems, songs, apps, photos, film, and audio files. The impressive collection of resources will be a valuable time-saver for teachers. Because the chapters have a similar format, teachers can read the book in its entirety or choose a chapter based on immediate needs and interests. Either way, teachers will find a wealth of useful information to inform their teaching and support their readers.

McLaughlin & Rasinski report, “We have designed this book to be a comprehensive resource that contains what we believe to be the most current and best information about teaching struggling readers” (p. x). Chapters focus on topics of high interest to teachers in all disciplines and include: motivation and engagement, the reading and writing connection, vocabulary, comprehending both narrative and informational texts, phonics and decoding, and fluency. As well there is an impressive collection of reproducible appendices at the back of the book.

Ultimately, the message the authors want teachers to take away from their book is that knowledgeable teachers are the crucial element in the classroom. Teachers want to create classrooms where all students feel successful and this book offers teachers a window into how to make that happen. (VAO)

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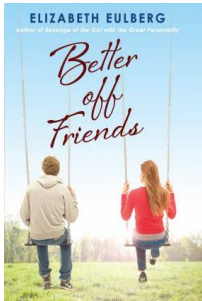
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Young Adult Book Reviews

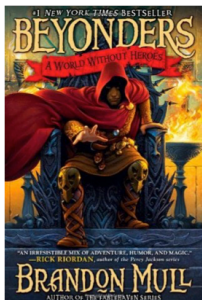
Pleasant Hill Middle School Students



Better off Friends

By Elizabeth Eulberg, Scholastic, 2014. ISBN 978-0545872119. Review by Emily Beiers.

The start of this story is like most others. New kid, new town, new school, new friends. For Levi, making friends wasn't very hard. Levi met Macallan on the first day of his new school. They weren't friends at first sight, but they soon realized they had so much in common. They started hanging out everyday after school. They never left each other's sides. Soon people at school thought they were dating because, of course, in middle school guys and girls can't just be friends. Soon after this rumor goes around, they do start to date but it didn't take long to realize they were better off friends. However, going back to being just friends brings on more challenges than they expected. This book is a great realistic fiction story for girls, especially for middle school girls.

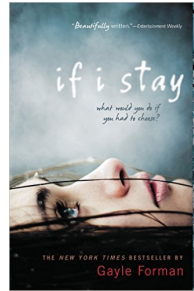


Beyonders: A World Without Heroes

By Brandon Mull, Alladin, 2011. ISBN 978-1416997924. Review by Kevin Smoak.

This book, the first book in a trilogy, begins on what you would think to be any other day but this day couldn't be more extraordinary. Jason was just a regular boy who played baseball and worked at a zoo. Then one day he finds himself in a new, mysterious world, Lyrain. Jason eventually meets this girl, Rachel, another Beyonder stuck in the unimaginable world. They go on a quest to find all the syllables to the word that can destroy the evil emperor, Maldor. The story is told from both viewpoints of Jason and Rachel. The story gets more intense as they

find more of the syllables, for the relentless emperor wants to stop them even more. Jason and Rachel run into a lot of interesting characters on their journey to defeat Maldor. The story also includes multiple magical races (Displacers, Amar people, Giants, etc.), created by wizards. This story is highly recommended to middle and high school students as a thrilling fantasy with a multitude of ups and downs. This book is great for both genders and I think it would be a hit in any school library.

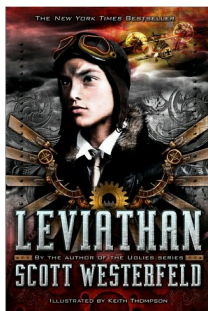


If I Stay

By Gayle Forman, Dutton Penguin, 2009. ISBN 978-0525421030. Review by Camille Free.

If I Stay is the first book in a two-book series by Gayle Forman. The story begins with a shy girl whose only true love is the Cello. Mia is an advanced prodigy and clearly feels like an outcast in a normal public school until she meets the bad boy, Adam. Adam is a lead guitarist and singer in one of the most hip new hard rock bands out of Seattle. Adam is royalty at their high school and doesn't notice Mia until he hears her playing the cello. After that, they make an immediate connection through their music. The intensity of the story begins immediately after Adam and Mia's eyes first meet. Their romance flourishes until a tragic accident jeopardizes their relationship. When Adam and Mia's relationship starts to flourish, Mia is tested with an out of body experience. She has two options: leave, or return to her shattered life. Adam and Mia's relationship isn't a perfect fairy tale romance, but rather a window into a true commitment between young adults. This book is told from Mia's perspective, everything from her and Adam, to the tragic accident. This book is highly recommended to mature teenagers and young adults. It is mostly read by young women rather

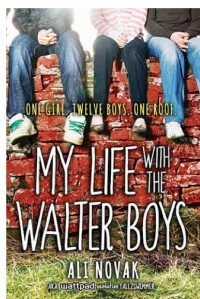
than men, but still is extremely popular in many schools.



Leviathan

By Scott Westerfeld and
Illustrated by Keith Thompson,
Simon Pulse, 2009.
ISBN 978-1416971733. Review
by Garrett Spees.

Leviathan is the first book in an entertaining and fantastic trilogy. It is 1914. World War I is around the corner. Alek is a young prince of Austria-Hungary who is awakened in the middle of the night to find out that his parents are dead and he has to leave. Now he is on the run from his own people. Deryn, a girl disguised as a guy, is a fantastic midshipman in the British Air Service. She must fight for her country while protecting her own secret. These two characters come from completely different worlds. Alek comes from the Clankers. Clankers are countries that use machines in their everyday life. Whether it's by using two-legged walkers or eight-legged giant land dreadnoughts, Clankers' lives revolve around oil and gears. Deryn comes from the Darwinists. Darwinists use fabricated animals rather than machines. These animals could be hydrogen sniffers or fléchette bats that eat spikes to use them as weapons. Somehow Deryn and Alek, who couldn't be more different, end up serving on the same air ship, the *Leviathan*. Now they must work together if they want to stop a war. The action continues in the second and third books of the *Leviathan* series. I would recommend this book to any teen or young adult who likes historical fiction mixed with fantasy. It takes readers to an olde time with other worldly creatures and machines.

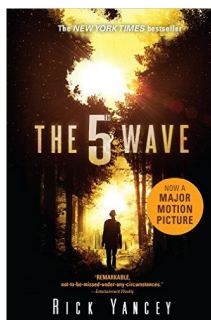


My Life With the Walter Boys

By Ali Novak, Sourcebooks
Fire, 2014. ISBN 978-
1402297861. Review by
Jimena Ambriz.

This drama-filled book begins when Jackie is forced to

move to the countryside from the city with TWELVE kids. It starts to hook the reader by making them wonder why she has to move, why she wanted to be so "perfect," and what it is like to live with eleven boys and only one girl who acts like a boy anyway. It turns out that all of the older boys are drop-dead gorgeous. One in particular though, Cole, makes Jackie feel something she can't explain. But, another Walter boy, Alex, makes her feel safe and comfortable. Jackie struggles to settle in Colorado because she feels guilty worrying about boys when her family just died and the city is more of her setting. The drama unravels more and more throughout the story. The author keeps the reader hooked by making even the smallest details seem realistic. For example, having twelve kids, the Walters all couldn't go to a great college unless they saved money or got a scholarship. Also, all the children had unique traits, which were explained throughout the book. All of them had chores since they owned a farm, they had a slam-packed shower schedule, and dinners were always chaotic. I loved the way Ali Novak made these details seem so realistic; I felt as if it were a true story. I definitely think all girls who are in middle school and in their first years of high school would enjoy this drama-filled book because it brings up topics and problems girls of this age are likely to encounter.



The 5th Wave

By Rick Yancey, Penguin
Group, 2013. ISBN 978-
0142425831. Reviewed by
Miguel Torres.

The 5th Wave is a post-apocalyptic book about aliens, or "Others," that invade the Earth. The "Others" begin

to destroy Earth with three main waves that weaken the population: the first wave is taking the power, the second is huge tsunamis, and the third is a disease that kills most of the population. Cassie, the main character, is struggling to survive on her own after her parents are killed and her brother is taken. As

Cassie tries to make it on her own, she becomes determined to figure out a way to get her little brother back from the “Others” and in the process, she finds out the fourth wave is “Other” snipers, or “Silencers.” The book is told through the perspectives of many characters: Cassie, Ben, Sammy, and a “silencer.” The novel follows their suspenseful adventures in which secrets are revealed, stories are told, and people die, a lot of people.

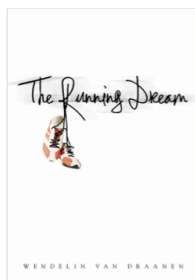


The False Prince

By Jennifer A. Nielsen, Scholastic Press, 2012. ISBN 978-0545284134. Review by Greer Prince.

The False Prince is a novel that hooks the reader at the start. The main characters

are Sage, Tobias, Conner, and Roden. In the kingdom of Carthya, civil war threatens as the king and queen are dead, along with their oldest son, and Prince Jaron is missing. Nobleman Conner has a daring plan to unite the country once more, a plan of lies and deceit, a plan involving fooling the whole kingdom, making a prince out of an orphan, and stopping an all-out civil war. Sage, Tobias, and Roden fight to be chosen, fight for their lives, and for their kingdom, each with their own tactic, own plan, and own talent. This story unfolds as lies become tangled and stories turn twisted, meanwhile in the kingdom of Carthya things go from bad to worse. It's a race against time for Conner, and his chosen false prince. It all comes down to one intense moment, when the chosen prince is put to the test in front of the whole kingdom. This book is a great novel for all teens and adults (both genders) alike. It's a thriller from the first page with a phenomenal start and finish.

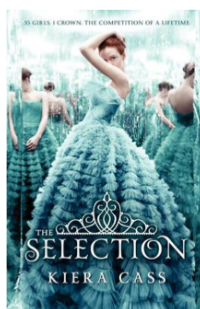


The Running Dream

By Wendelin Van Draanen, Ember, 2011. ISBN 978-1250016744. Review by Abbey Johns.

The drama in this novel

starts out when a 16-year-old girl named Jessica loses her leg in a traumatic accident. Jessica's dreams are shattered; she had one dream: to run. With her 'stump,' she feels as if she'll never be able to run again. She returns back to school with a rocky start and feels as if she'll never have a normal life again. But then she finds a little hope; she discovers there is a prosthetic leg just for running. With the help of the track team, citizens, friends, and family, she finally raises enough money to buy it. Will her new prosthetic leg live up to the hype? *The Running Dream* is an amazing story filled with nightmarish endings and torturous new beginnings, oozing with heart and hope. The story is told in the perspective of Jessica from her horrible days in the hospital to her first marathon with her prosthetic leg. I recommend this book for teenagers and early adults.



The Selection

By Kiera Cass, Harper Teens, 2012. ISBN 978-0062059949. Review by Hannah Rivers.

For thirty-five girls, the Selection is the chance of a lifetime; but for America Singer, being in the selection is a nightmare. You would think

the opportunity to be living in a world of glittering gowns, priceless jewels and the palace of the gorgeous Prince Maxon is all a girl would want, but not for America. All she could think about is turning her back on her secret love for Aspen, who is a caste below her, and leaving her home to enter a competition she doesn't even want the crown for. Then America meets Prince Maxon. Over time, she begins to realize that the life she's always dreamed of with Aspen may not compare to a future she never imagined. The story is told through the viewpoint of America. The story comes to life even more with all of the palace duties and robberies. This book is highly recommended for teenage girls as a suspenseful and romantic story that will keep them hooked.

Creative Writing from Students and Educators: Teaching Me

Shamari Moody

I asked a student who looked just like me,
“In the future, what would you like to be?”
Without a blink, he replied, “Like you!”
I tried to smile to keep the tears subdued

Mr. Moody why are you crying?
He jokingly asked,
You’re always bouncing all around the class!
I know I’m bad, but I’m not that bad...
Why do my goals make you sad?

So I told the boy
about a conversation I had
with a peer of mine
that couldn’t understand.

Mr. Moody why do you teach so hard?
I can hear you down the halls.
I love these students, can’t you see.
I’m not teaching strangers.
I’m teaching me.



Shamari Moody is a charismatic, student-centered educator with an uncanny ability to connect with the current urban generation and popular culture. He uses an innovative teaching style that allows his curriculum to resonate with student interest. Mr. Moody recently graduated from Southern Wesleyan University with a Master of Education in Supervision and Leadership. He enjoys, sports, laughing and spending time with his beautiful wife and children.