

The Language and Literacy Spectrum

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The articles included in this volume of *The Language and Literacy Spectrum* have been separated into two categories: Issues in Literacy and Focus on Practice. In the first group, the authors deal with issues that are likely of more interest to those involved in teacher preparation programs. In the second, the authors range over a variety of topics important in developing literacy skills in school-aged populations.

The lead article, “Critical issues for teacher educators and literacy specialists: a view from higher education in New York,” reminds us of the many issues that face those in higher education and of the importance of finding the means to keeping up with all of them. The specific issue of coaching is front and center in “Literacy coaching: engaging and learning with teachers.” The article presents several key suggestions for those who are serving or who will serve in this new role of literacy coach. Finally, “Course embedded fieldwork,” provides a model for *faculty-supervised* fieldwork.

The importance of an often controversial topic is addressed in “Voices of critical literacy: how do middle school students, teachers, and pre-service teachers respond?” For those not familiar with this topic, the article may provide an introduction.

Two articles are technology-related. “Teaching with technology: an examination of literacy instruction and the use of technology with teacher candidates and elementary school students” describes the experiences of two teacher candidates in their efforts to bring together technology and literacy in their lessons. The second piece, “Contemporary forms of memoir: how to use blogs and zines in the classroom,” addresses what teachers need to know and do to support their students’ endeavors in these new forms of writing.

A year-long partnership between a fifth grade teacher and a university professor to plan and implement an inquiry approach in Language Arts using a nature preserve is described in “Engaging minds through inquiry and exploration: the Sands Point project.”

The last article presents a series of activities that can be implemented in the classroom to bring together science and the language arts by using Bloom’s Taxonomy and the NYS Standards. Two additional features recommend books of particular interest to teachers. *Book Banter* reviews a selection of newer children’s books, and a book review of Ralph Fletcher’s book, *How to write your life story* highlights this helpful professional resource.



Critical Issues for Teacher Educators and Literacy Specialists: A View from Higher Education in New York

Virginia Goatley

ABSTRACT

This article outlines five critical issues for teacher educators and literacy specialists in New York State. Intended to raise issues and share recent policy decisions, the article provides background and conversations about current policy. Readers are encouraged to make decisions about how to participate in the current conversations across the state.

AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY

Virginia Goatley is Vice Dean in the School of Education and Associate Professor in the Department of Reading at the University at Albany-SUNY. Her research and teaching interests include literacy learning difficulties, integrated instruction, and teacher preparation.

As an Associate Dean for the past five years, I have had the opportunity to bring my knowledge of literacy instruction, teacher education, and best practices to contribute to state-wide conversations from the perspective of both a literacy educator and an administrator. I regularly attend conferences and meetings involving representatives from other higher education institutions, the New York State Education Department (NYSED), State University of New York (SUNY), Independent Colleges and Universities, K-12 educators, superintendents, and so forth. In 2007, as part of a panel presentation at the New York State Reading Association (NYSRA) conference, I shared my current perspectives on critical issues in reading. Several colleagues from across the state urged me to share this knowledge with a wider audience, so I decided to do so.

With a focus on teacher education issues for literacy educators, I write this article with the intent to provide information about policy, raise issues to consider, and offer challenges on how each of us might be involved in the process. I organized this article around several key issues intended to provide discussion points, not simply answers. In reality, all of these issues have several paths they may take and we need to be sure our literacy voices are a part of each path.

Issue 1: New York Teacher Supply and Demand Data

In response to requests from teacher educators and to provide insights into teacher shortages, the New York State Education Department started providing teacher supply and demand data across the state. This information is available in PDF format from the website for 2004-05 (<http://www.highered.nysed.gov/tsdregents052006.htm>) and for 2005-06 (<http://www.highered.nysed.gov/tsd2007.htm>)



The supply and demand data is quite useful for many reasons. It provides an overview of the range of certificates, indicating potential shortages in the upcoming years. With this data, administrators from both higher education and public school districts are in a better position to offer career information to potential teachers and to discuss the data in P-16 collaborative sessions. However, for the literacy certificate, there are a few points to consider.

The 2004-05 NYSED data (published in 2006) indicated many shortages of Literacy Specialists across the state. In this data collection period, NYSED analyzed the supply/demand based upon the number of initial certification applications. This led to indications of shortages in literacy certificates across many regions in the state. This finding is not surprising given that teachers applying for literacy certification must already have initial certification in another area. Thus, the data captured only those applicants, primarily pre-service teachers, who received two initial certificates in the same time period.

In contrast, the 2005-06 data (published in 2007) indicated a surplus of literacy educators in most regions. In the data analysis, NYSED addressed the concerns raised by community members the previous year and the data analysis to account for literacy certificates differently. In 2007, NYSED counted all literacy certificates – not only those teachers who were receiving a certificate from their pre-service program, but also those who pursued it as a second initial certificate (toward their professional certificate). Not surprisingly, the data now shows an oversupply of people with literacy certificates since one person could be represented in three different categories: initial certificate area (e.g., Childhood), Literacy B- 6, and Literacy 5-12. For colleges/universities with dual programs that lead to both literacy certificates, one person automatically represents two people in the literacy counts.

Further, in certain areas of the state with surpluses (e.g., Albany area has more graduates with literacy certificates than the New York City area), there are many students graduating with the literacy certificate who never teach as a literacy specialist. Some school districts are in the enviable position of being able to hire teachers with literacy certificates to teach in the general elementary classroom. Thus, when we look at that component of the data, we need to remember it is a certificate count, not a one-one match of practicing teachers. Within the report, there is a second data collection/analysis based on current teachers in school districts, with indications of continued shortages of literacy specialists in New York City and Rochester.

It is useful, informative, and helpful for NYSED to collect and share this data. The reality is that the current means of collecting this data is difficult. Therefore, educators need to understand the methodology used, the limitations of that methodology, and respond to it with our voices in the interpretation of the data. NYSED responded to the first set of concerns voiced by the literacy educators in the 2006 data set. I have certainly appreciated the opportunities when NYSED asked for feedback and then acted on it. This kind of exchange can only be beneficial to our education system.



New government initiatives, such as Chapter 57 of the Laws of 2007 to study the evaluation of teacher preparation, have the potential to greatly improve this type of data collection through projects including the Teacher Quality Data Center and improvements to the TEACH system (see <http://www.highered.nysed.gov/regentsaction.htm>). I anticipate it will become easier to capture many aspects of this data to inform educators. Again, these efforts are built upon collaborative conversations among teacher educators, NYSED representative, SUNY administrators, and K-12 educators.

From my viewpoint, a pressing issue in the supply and demand data is the shortage of Library Media Specialists. Those of us in the literacy field recognize the need for strong librarians in our schools who have high-quality coursework to make sure our collaborations are most productive for students. A review of the NYSED Inventory of Registered Programs shows only 8 colleges/universities with programs leading to initial certificate as Library Media Specialists. That compares with 66 institutions offering Literacy B-6 degree programs and 48 institutions with Literacy 5-12 certificate degrees (compiled from the website <http://www.nysed.gov/heds/irpsl1.html>).

Issue 2: New Literacy Certificate

In 2004, New York State retired the “Reading Teacher K-12” certificate and replaced it with two options: “Literacy Birth – 6” and “Literacy 5 – 12.” With NYSED suggesting it is time to start thinking about changes to the certification structures, it is an appropriate time to step back and ask, “Are we producing and effectively preparing two groups of literacy specialists?” Based on my conversations, there are four key areas to discuss.

First, let’s talk about the name. We used to be able to say Reading Teacher and have two words together that provided a particular job title, supported by the certificate name. In the new certificate, literacy stands alone. However, many educators started adding the word “specialist” in the development of these programs to indicate this certificate as a degree similar to the “Library Media Specialist” – recognizing it is an advanced certificate. I have always been cautious of the term “Literacy Teacher” because all teachers are, in fact, literacy teachers (though they may not identify themselves as such). This certificate needs to be considered a specialist and appropriately titled. I am sure a few of my colleagues will be surprised to learn it actually does not include that term since that is what we’ve always called it!

Second, what is the job market for the middle school and high school teachers who receive the 5 – 12 certificate? We need to make sure we are successfully preparing sufficient numbers of 5-12 literacy educators who have the specialized skills and knowledge for the upper grade levels. When students with the new job titles went on the market in 2004, I remember visiting with district level administrators at our local Education Expo job fair and reminding them about the certification shifts. Many were not aware of this change (and I still encounter some even three years later). In the midst of Reading First, many of the literacy positions have been at the elementary level. With the possibility of a Striving Readers initiative at the secondary level, do we have the 5-12



literacy specialists we need? Further, we need to make sure school districts recognize the need for these specialists and have jobs targeting these grade levels.

Third, we need to think about the roles assumed by those who pursue the literacy certification. What roles are they assuming in schools and are they prepared to take a leadership role? Many students are at the beginning of their careers, some moving directly from their pre-service program without any additional teacher experience. In some cases, these students then graduate and are automatically placed in leadership positions (e.g., coaches, school-wide literacy expert). It is asking too much of a beginning teacher to have both roles. It seems like we need a separate system in place – one that provides for literacy certification and a second that supports the leadership skills needed for positions such as coaching. At Rutgers University in New Jersey, entrance into the Reading Certification program requires two years of teacher experience prior to admittance. While we do not have the luxury of such a requirement in New York, given the master's degree requirement within five years, this type of delineation between initial certificate and advanced certificates is a useful issue to pursue for upcoming revisions.

Fourth, with the new certificate, New York initiated a requirement for a new Content Specialty Exam in Literacy. I have been in numerous conversations about the exam. From one perspective, it seems to be an “easy” exam with a 99% pass rate. Of course, if the intent of the exams is for everyone who is qualified to pass them, maybe this particular exam is close to reaching that goal. One concern is that the exam includes a strong emphasis on Reading (as indicated by the various sections that include “reading” rather than “literacy”), with limited questions/content on aspects of writing or literacy more broadly defined.

A second concern is that while the certification shifted to two areas (B-6, 5-12), there is only one exam that covers all grade levels. To really have specialized knowledge, it makes more sense to have the exam match the grade areas, similar to the Assessment of Teaching Skills in which candidates take either the elementary or secondary exam, depending upon their certification grade level. Or, at least make it so the extended response portion covers the 5-6 grade level that is common to both certificate levels. Currently, there are some B-6 specialists required to write about eighth-grade examples and 5-12 specialists writing about third grade examples. My greatest concern is that we have our newest teachers taking a high-stakes exam that they recognize as having validity issues. This, in turn, leads new teachers to question all the exams (student and teacher) and not put a great deal of trust in the system.

Issue 3: New York P-16 Partnerships

In the past couple of years, the concept of “P-16” is a hot issue. We now have a “Senior Deputy Commissioner of Education P-16”, an “Assistant Provost for P-16 Education” at SUNY, and a Regents Action Plan on P-16 Education (<http://usny.nysed.gov/summit/p-16ed.htm>). Given our requirement for a master's degree to receive a professional certificate in teaching and the importance of the doctoral degree



toward the preparation of teacher educators, I tend to think of it as a P-20 Initiative. Regardless, anything that promotes conversation across critical members of the educational community is a step forward. The question to ask: How is the literacy field participating in the P-16 partnership conversations across the state?

NYSED and SUNY initiated a taskforce on P-16 Education, setting up regional partnerships intended to improve teacher quality. These meetings will have a range of conversational topics, most likely to include discussion of the supply and demand data, placement location for student teachers, and issues related to the local area. According to the information distributed to the Deans of Institutions of Higher Education, a primary goal is to, “to enhance the relationships between P-12 education and higher education to ensure that every child has certified, highly qualified and effective teachers.” (letter written by Joseph P. Frey, on January 8, 2008).

Similarly, at the December 2007 Board of Regents meeting, conversations highlighted several P-16 partnerships across the state. The NYSED website included video presentations from the meeting featuring a Science and Technology program with Mercy College, the College Now program at Lehman College, the University at Buffalo/Buffalo Public Schools partnership, and the Utica College Young Scholars program (see www.nysed.gov).

With these topics being privileged across the state, we need to think about how we want literacy education represented and who might represent literacy interests. Certainly, we need to think about how the supply and demand data is used, interpreted, and represented. It might be a great time to remind everyone of the 5 -12 certificate and how that specialized knowledge could contribute to high quality teaching. The New York State Reading Association is a wonderful example of a P-16 partnership that has many benefits for educators at all levels. What has been particularly helpful in the NYSRA organization that might be useful to the broader state-wide partnership efforts? We need to remember, all of us do not need to be at the gatherings, but we do need to communicate our thoughts about literacy topics to those in our community who are participating.

Issue 4: Perspectives from College Reading Educators Group

In an effort led by Mary Drucker from Utica College and Kathy Hinchman from Syracuse University, the New York State Reading Association has again activated the College Reading Educators Group. This is certainly a community where teacher educators can share ideas and discuss the issues we need to solve. In meetings during NYSRA 2006, a summer gathering in July 2007, and a follow-up session at NYSRA 2007, this group identified three key areas of concerns for Reading Educators in New York State. – Literacy Coaching Concerns, NCLB Impact on Literacy Education, and Shortage of Literacy Professors in New York.

While writing about these three concerns would be an article in itself, coaching is a clear topic of discussion as we consider how to include preparation for coaching in our literacy specialist programs and appropriate recognition in the accreditation process. There is no doubt that coaching is a growing and vital part of the public school



community (see Dozier, 2008). Similarly, the impact of NCLB is a key topic of conversation as we sort through new assessments, modes of instruction, best practices, scientifically-based research, high-quality teachers, and so forth. As a group, it is productive to identify these issues and consider the impact on teachers and students.

The re-registration of teaching certification degrees and the new certificate titles in 2004 led to program changes. For example, all initial teaching certification programs, rather than only some, required six credits of literacy instruction. New York State required all teacher preparation programs to have 50% of courses taught by full-time faculty until fully accredited by either the national or state accreditation agencies (e.g. TEAC, NCATE, RATE). This increase in the number of literacy courses taught combined with requirements for full-time faculty, led to many college educators raising concerns about their ability to hire faculty, noting year after year that those positions were becoming more difficult to fill. Whether or not this is a perceived problem or an actual one will likely require an extended survey of Institute of Higher Education across the state, but the initial conversations certainly indicate this as an area to problem solve and improve.

Issue 5: Critical Literacy and Informed Specialists

Too often, literacy instruction seems to be prompted by a series of quick fixes (see Allington & Walmsley, 2007). In order to move beyond this, we need to think seriously about how our literacy courses are appropriately preparing teachers to be critical consumers and producers of research articles, opinion pieces, and literature reviews. Without doubt, the program revision and accreditation process in the last few years facilitated many conversations about improvements to program curriculum, as well as concern about restrictions placed on academic freedom of faculty members.

For example, with the inclusion of the Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS) assessment in most of the Reading First schools, many preparation programs started teaching about the DIBELS (<http://dibels.uoregon.edu/>). This led to factual knowledge of how to administer and score the assessment. But, do literacy specialists also have the opportunity to read articles on the appropriate uses for the assessment and the critical misuses of and problems with it? Are we preparing them to be informed decision-makers about literacy instruction and materials, rather than simply jumping on the bandwagon similar to teenagers who purchase a new CD each month to be like their peers?

Recent efforts such as the What Works Clearinghouse (see <http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/>) and position statements by the International Reading Association (<http://www.reading.org/association/advocacy/index.html>) are places we might go to start conversations about the benefits and limitations of various programs and instructional methods. As a start, the discussion will help our new literacy specialists to think critically and learn how to become informed on many sides of a topic in order to have a voice in the decision-making.



Similar to other educators, as teacher educators, we have to make difficult decisions about how to spend our instructional time in teacher preparation courses and how these courses fit together to make a unified whole. It is also an issue for the six-credit literacy coursework in pre-service programs and for extra literacy preparation for special education teachers. Many conversations have occurred as to how to incorporate International Reading Association Standards for Reading Professionals into program curriculum(http://www.reading.org/resources/issues/reports/professional_standards.html). With a process already underway to revise the ELA standards in New York, we will need to incorporate those changes into our coursework as well. In the end, we need to continually return to discussions with each other about how to make the best use of coursework to prepare teachers with informational knowledge of best practices AND a professionalism to make critical decisions in an informed manner.

Concluding Thoughts

At this point, you might be thinking – “how do I ever keep up with all of this, or find a place to share my voice?” Let’s start with the first part. You can keep up with current issues by continuing to read information that comes your way – Francine Stayter’s Advocacy updates in the NYSRA publications, newsletters/website updates from NYSED and Regents meetings, and local efforts to distribute information. When we contribute to sharing what we learn, we all benefit. The best place to start sharing your voice is with your local colleagues and administrators. Find out who represents you at various meetings and conferences. If you share your literacy ideas/issues with those colleagues, they will be in a better position to then understand those concerns and raise issues as necessary. Without your viewpoint, they may not realize the ramification of these policy decisions. Have you shared your voice today?



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Literacy Coaching: Engaging and Learning with Teachers

Cheryl L. Dozier

ABSTRACT

Literacy coaching, a unique and generative opportunity to engage with and learn from teachers, is currently viewed as a powerful intervention to increase student literacy achievement. This article focuses on eight principles for responsive literacy coaching. To build trusting relationships, coaches engage with teachers in literacy events, confirm teachers' strengths, find accessible entry points, examine students work, and collaboratively problem solve. Working side by side with teachers in classrooms, literacy coaches notice, name, and model literacy instructional practices.

AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY

Cheryl Dozier, a former elementary teacher, is an assistant professor in the Department of Reading at the University at Albany where she teaches literacy courses. She presents nationally and internationally on teacher preparation and has written two books, *Critical Literacy and Critical Teaching: Tools for Preparing Responsive Teachers* (Teachers College Press) with Peter Johnston and Rebecca Rogers and *Responsive Literacy Coaching* (Stenhouse).

It is an exciting time in literacy education as literacy coaching is heralded as a “powerful intervention with great potential” to increase student literacy achievement (IRA, 2004). National organizations, literacy leaders, policy makers, and classroom teachers are all contributing to identify, shape, and design literacy coaching positions in schools. The International Reading Association has outlined coaching criteria (IRA, 2004) and created an online support for coaches (www.literacycoachingonline.org) in a joint partnership with the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE). Coaching books written by a variety of educators flood the market. Conferences abound with preliminary research findings in addition to sessions on the “how-tos” of and for coaching. Despite a movement in our current educational and political environment that attempts to simplify the complexities of teaching and learning through scripted programs (Allington, 2002), literacy coaches can help teachers understand and analyze the complexities of teaching and student learning (Dozier, 2006). Literacy coaches support teachers as they develop their professionalism.

Literacy coaches are expected to navigate multiple spaces, stakeholders, and responsibilities. While there are competing claims for a coach's time and resources, a coach's primary responsibility is working with teachers (Toll, 2005). Literacy coaches are advocates for teachers, not evaluators (Allen, 2005). As such, a key feature of literacy coaching is developing relationships with teachers. Some relationships begin smoothly, some have more cautious starts, and others can be contentious initially—until a coach



finds a teacher's entry point (and sometimes relationship building takes much longer than we might wish). As relationships evolve, coaches seek to understand teachers' ways of knowing (Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, and Tarule, 1986) to nurture teachers' continued development. As Natalie Goldberg (2001) offers, "Understanding engenders care" (p.125). Care is at the heart of literacy coaching.

As an educator for over twenty-five years, I view each coaching moment as an opportunity to learn. Some lessons are learned easily, some less so. While it can be easier to recognize our successes, harder coaching work involves thinking through and learning from challenges. Coaching challenges provide impetus for new insights and new learning. For me, literacy coaching involves inquiring, learning together, rethinking, wondering, and exploring multiple instructional possibilities (Dozier, 2006). As a literacy coach, I embrace Brian Cambourne's (1995) co-learner model. While I have areas of expertise, I do not position myself as "the expert." As I develop relationships with teachers, I seek, first, to be responsive to teachers' strengths, interests, and needs. In this article, I share eight principles that guide my responsive literacy coaching.

Engage in Literacy Events ~ Learner to Learner

As a coach, when I engage with teachers, learner to learner, reader to reader, writer to writer, I set the foundation for a trusting relationship to begin. As Seymour Sarason (1993) notes, when teachers are nurtured as learners, they, in turn, nurture the learners in their classrooms. For this to occur, I offer a range of ways for teachers to engage in literacy events.

One literacy event is sharing literacy artifacts. Conversations around artifacts help me come to know what resonates for teachers (at a particular moment) and what moves and interests them. Through literacy artifacts, we learn from and with one another. Recently, several second grade teachers brought mentor texts they used to introduce leads, endings, or character development. Others shared books they were using for critical literacy. Lora introduced *Dumpster Diver* by Janet Wong (2007), a book she used in her class to examine issues of recycling and conservation. During their book discussion, Lora learned that several of the children in her classroom went dumpster diving on weekends. On this same day, all of the first grade teachers in the building chose to bring examples of student writing – poetry, How to Books, personal narratives. They shared great lines from their students' writing, a poem from a reluctant writer who found her voice as a poet, and excerpts from *How to Brush Your Horse* and *How to Pull a Tooth*. When teachers share artifacts, I start from teachers' known interests, and strengths. Right away, I can begin to find a teacher's zone of proximal development (Vygotsky, 1978). The artifacts teachers choose and their reflections offer insights into how teachers understand literacy, literacy teaching, and their learners.

To explore one aspect of critical literacy, I asked teachers to read a magazine article from a range of perspectives. The *Newsweek* article (Conant & Wingert, 2007) I chose featured Andrew Speaker, a 33 year old lawyer who flew to Europe for his wedding and caused an uproar when he continued to travel, even though he knew he had a highly contagious form of tuberculosis. Each teacher read and discussed the article from



a different perspective – from the perspective of Andrew Speaker; from the perspective of a passenger sitting next to Andrew; from the perspective of a CDC official; and from the perspective of local, national, and international agencies. After these small group discussions, each teacher then examined the text for compelling and biased language choices. Together, we questioned whose voices were heard and whose voices were excluded. The “passengers sitting next to Andrew” noticed (much to their chagrin!) that their voices were not once included in the article. We then engaged in a process conversation intended to unpack this experience (Nichols, 2007) with the following questions: What worked? What did not work? What do you wish had happened? What does this activity cause you to think about in terms of your learners? As teachers talked, they noticed and identified the range of ways they engaged in the literacy event. Some teachers underlined as they read, a few highlighted extensively, some wrote comments and questions in the margins, others used post-it notes to gather their thoughts. Some read quickly, others read slowly. We then turned our attention to how this literacy event could transfer to classrooms.

Sometimes the literacy events I engage in with teachers (i.e. book introductions, writing during professional development sessions) transfer directly to classrooms. Other times, teachers discuss possible modifications for use in classrooms. Coaching relationships are enriched when we learn from and with teachers.

Continue to Develop Professionally

Literacy has never been a neutral endeavor. All of our choices as teachers are value laden. As a literacy coach, I read extensively and attend conferences to broaden my professional and content knowledge of literacy and instructional practices as a way to question and challenge my current understandings and practices. As such, I expect moments of intellectual unrest (Cambourne, 1995) as I continue to learn. Through these experiences, I become a resource for examining and recommending materials, assessments, and instructional practices.

I routinely share articles, books and resources with teachers that I think they will find informative, interesting, and engaging. Just as I want teachers to support and attend to the range of learners in their classrooms, I, too, tailor book and article choices for teachers. For each teacher, I work to choose books that will support their interests and address questions they are raising about literacy and literacy instruction. As teachers rethink instructional practices, they have particular needs at particular times. In one building, as teachers moved to a writer’s workshop model, some wanted resources to support their writing conferences (Anderson, 2000), others asked for a framework for writing instruction (Calkins, 2003), while others first wanted a broader understanding of writing (Routman, 2005). I draw from a range of articles and resources to meet individual needs and interests.

To extend my pedagogical knowledge, I continue to spend time in classrooms to try new instructional practices. Since my own teaching experiences were primarily in kindergarten through third grade, I asked upper elementary colleagues if I could spend time with them to learn about the learners in their classrooms. In this way, when I



recommend an instructional practice, I can speak from experience. I routinely share modifications implemented, logistics navigated, and pitfalls overcome.

As a coach, it is also my responsibility to understand how schools operate. I become familiar with literacy initiatives already in place, learn from successes and failures of past initiatives, and seek to discover if current initiatives conflict with one another ideologically. Periodically, it is helpful to step back and analyze the landscape to see where teachers are, what has been required in the past, and then analyze how to provide support at this time. After several years of rethinking and revising writing instruction, I worked with teachers in one K-2 building to create a *Writing Instruction Timeline* to analyze writing instruction across the three grade levels. Teachers easily talked and questioned one another about genres covered, how instruction aligned with district assessments, and their increased confidence as writing teachers. As we constructed the timeline, the teachers continued to adjust, extend, and refine their visions for writing instruction.

Find Strengths and Entry Points for Each Teacher

When coaches change the discourse to strengths first, we support teachers to look at students from a lens of strengths. It can be easier to see or focus on what is not going well, to dwell on difficulties. Beginning each professional development session with celebrations of teaching and student learning changes the discourse. Recently, Rose celebrated students' risk-taking and voice as writers. Nancy noted how readily her kindergarteners chose topics during writing time. Julie commented on how focused her second graders were as they searched the Internet during inquiry projects. And, several teachers described their increased comfort level and confidence for teaching writing. By focusing on strengths first, we can avoid the trap of deficit driven theorizing (Dozier, 2006). Focusing on strengths also supports our relationship building.

Change requires risk-taking. I celebrate steps teachers take, and are willing to take. In Louis Sachar's book *Small Steps* (the sequel to *Holes*), Armpit learns, "The secret was to take small steps and just keep moving forward" (2006, p.4). My first step as a coach involves finding each teacher's entry point. Entry points for change have included: providing more detailed and focused book introductions, introducing a range of genres during read alouds, using mentor texts during writer's workshop, offering a range of paper choices for writer's workshop, and analyzing language choices and instructional conversations to help students become more strategic readers.

When several middle school teachers shared, "Students love reading. They are readers. They are critical readers. They are visualizing. They are motivated. They are no longer afraid of longer texts. But, students dread writing and I dread writing," I wanted to build from their strengths as readers and teachers of reading. These teachers were avid readers, passionate about reading, and deeply engaged in reading instruction. To transfer their knowledge and passion for reading to writing and writing instruction, we wrote together, noticed when we read like writers, and selected mentor texts teachers loved from their wide reading to use during writing instruction. Through this process, teachers gained confidence as writing teachers and expanded writing instruction. As a literacy



coach, it is important for me to remember that some teachers will toe in, some will dive in, and some will observe *other* teachers until they decide instructional changes are worthy.

Work Collaboratively ~Problem Pose and Problem Solve

Collaboration is generative. We extend our understandings and learn together as we teach together. When I teach side by side with teachers, I can work with and come to know their students on a particular issue that is of importance to the teacher. This collaboration continues to build the trusting relationships we are working to develop. I begin side by side teaching noting, “And, if this does not work for us, we will come up with five more ideas to try.” Liesl, a fourth grade teacher, was just beginning to confer one on one with writers in her classroom. As we sat side by side and conferred with Stan, a student in her classroom, about including more details for his readers, she was excited when he shouted, “Oh, *now* I get it. No one would understand this part.” Our side by side conferring gave her confidence that she was on a productive path.

As a coach, I routinely conduct and analyze assessments side by side with teachers. Together, we look for places where we are consistent and talk through discrepancies. Our side by side analysis often gives teachers confidence in their analysis. It also opens the door for teachers to ask questions and use colleagues as resources. Together, we raise issues and question practices. We engage in focused conversations instead of becoming defensive. Our collaboration leads to communities of inquiry and has led to changes on assessment questions, formats, and actual tests used. As we negotiate, challenge, and question one another, we create stronger, more focused assessments to support student achievement. This collaborative work encourages and promotes problem posing and problem solving.

Through observations and analysis of how children navigate assessments, we better understand the children as learners. This is why I do not complete assessments and then report results to teachers. If I become the sole administrator of assessments, independent of classroom teachers, teachers then lose valuable information on how children process texts and navigate assessments. I believe that when coaches are the sole administrators of testing or assessing, it sends a dangerous message to teachers and students that testing or assessing are somehow beyond the responsibility of the classroom.

Ground Conversations in the Work of Children

To consider how children “take up” a range of genres, activities, and lessons, I invite teachers to ground conversations in children’s work. Using children’s work, together we question, when were children most engaged? Least engaged? What excited them, motivated them? To analyze Running Records and praise points or teaching points, I ask teachers to use actual Running Records for the conversations. Looking across Running Records (Clay, 2000) we examine the types of prompts used and what strategies children are using (or not). This analysis helps us notice when children re-read, when and where they self-correct, what strategies they privilege.



In one building, we analyzed the written responses children completed after reading. First, we looked across the range of responses. Through our discussion, we decided to include a broader range of written responses. We also had a valuable conversation about how much scaffolding students needed when they responded to texts. As we analyzed writing samples, and talked about writing instruction, we gathered ideas from one another. We identified voice in writing, students' attempts at using dialogue, and interesting leads. For conversations about genre, we noticed where children took risks and engaged with the conventions of the genre. Our instructional conversations (Tharp & Gallimore, 1988) around children's work challenged us to envision multiple possibilities.

Notice and Name Instructional Practices

Noticing and naming (Johnston, 2004) involves an explicitness, an intentionality, and an opportunity for teachers and children to articulate developing understandings (Dozier & Rutten, 2005/2006). When I am working with teachers, I name the practices I engage in with them. As Natalie Goldberg (1986/2005) advises, "Be specific... Give things the dignity of their names" (p.77). When I ask teachers to work in pairs, I articulate the purpose for the practice. "Notice how I am asking you to work in pairs. In this way, everyone has a voice." or "I am going to provide a more detailed book introduction to Kari because I want to help him become comfortable with the author's language." This explicitness operates on two levels. It names the practice, and it names the purpose behind the practice.

The specificity of naming craft features, literate processes and strategies supports the child's continued literacy development. In classrooms, I name literate behaviors for children. After a Running Record, I might say, "Let's look at your self-correction on page 6, how did you know to do that?" or "You read this page so fluently, I could hear Mrs. North telling Marvin and Casey to be quiet." While conferring with Taurian, I said, "Your lead made me want to know more about your Grandpa." As we model naming for students, they, in turn, take the lead and begin to name their practices. Noticing and naming (Johnston, 2004) encourages a shared language.

Take a Listening Tour

When I first begin to work with teachers, I take a listening tour. A listening tour involves visiting classrooms to listen and to observe literacy practices. During these visits, I connect with teachers and children and immerse myself in instructional practices and classroom contexts. I gain a sense of teachers' literacy instruction and how children engage – what literacy instruction looks, sounds, and feels like, in classrooms and in the school. On listening tours, I ask teachers if I can take notes – solely for them. These notes include scribing conversations along with student responses. The notes help ground conversations in language choices to analyze how children respond and engage during conversations. Analyzing our language helps us become more astute observers. I have learned to be careful and to offer note taking as a possibility. Although it was not my



intent, in one building, a teacher felt the note-taking was evaluative. Other teachers welcomed the feedback from “another set of eyes.”

I draw from these observations and noticings to illustrate points when I am working with small groups of teachers or entire buildings. These conversations build community around instructional practices when teachers share and name what is happening in their classrooms. I am sure to first gain permission before I ask teachers to share, “Mary, could you talk about the ways you use family journals with your class?” “Caryn, will you share your approach to Status of the Class (Atwell, 1998) with us?” “Lora, can you talk about the ways your second graders do partner shares?” “Melanie, will you tell everyone about your *Great Leads* bulletin board that includes both published authors and classroom writers? When teachers hear about instructional practices in other classrooms, they can draw from each other as resources.

As part of the listening tour, I also want to learn what materials and resources are available, and needed, for literacy instruction. To create book rooms filled with leveled readers, mentor texts, books on tape, professional resources, together we question: What books do you love? What books do your students love? Where are gaps in your book rooms? Are there a range of culturally responsive texts? Is there a balance of fiction, non-fiction? What else do you need? Over time, we have become more strategic about purchasing materials. I become nervous when books are ordered without conversations or are ordered in bulk. We want to put our students’ needs and interests at the heart of the book room.

Advocate

As a coach, I advocate for strong learning communities, continued professional development, collaboration, and a thoughtful examination of literacy practices. I advocate for purposeful change. I advocate for teachers to develop as professional decision makers and to use their voices as literacy teachers. I also support teachers to articulate their needs to administrators. In one building, first grade teachers wanted sustained time each morning for literacy instruction. After several discussions, we jointly met with the principal to address this issue. Together, we looked over the building schedule to see how this proposed change would impact other classes. In doing so, we recognized the complexity of “specials” schedules – and fifth grade band schedules. In talking through the constraints, we recognized that while we could not schedule an extended block of instructional time for five mornings, we could – and did – schedule it for three mornings.

Concluding Thoughts

Literacy coaching is a unique and generative opportunity to engage with teachers. To understand and analyze the complexities of teaching and student learning, coaches first meet teachers where they are. These entry points serve as a foundation for coaching relationships to evolve. Coaches and teachers collaborate to problem solve and create inquiry communities. In these communities, we notice and name strengths and engagement – of teachers and students. In turn, our teaching becomes more refined,



deliberate, and purposeful. When we listen and notice, we learn. Every day brings new opportunities and challenges to learn from and with teachers.

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Course Embedded Fieldwork: A Look at a Working Model

Reva Cowan and Dee Berlinghoff

ABSTRACT

This study investigated the value of course embedded faculty-supervised fieldwork for pre-service teacher candidates. These candidates were enrolled in undergraduate literacy and special education courses at a small private liberal arts college. Both qualitative and quantitative data were collected to ascertain students' perceptions of course embedded fieldwork. Quantitative data were based on a Likert Scale survey; qualitative data were collected from written responses to two open ended questions. Additional data were collected from pupils in the classes where the teacher candidates worked. Results of the study pointed to the positive value of this fieldwork model.

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In New York State, teacher candidates must complete a prescribed number of fieldwork hours prior to student teaching. The pre-professional regulations require teacher candidates to complete at least 100 hours of field experiences related to coursework prior to student teaching for a single area of certification (e.g., childhood or adolescence) and at least 150 hours of fieldwork experiences for dual certification in either childhood/special education or adolescence/special education (NYSED, 2005). The latest report on the review of the No Child Left Behind law recommends "higher education institutions...set goals for more closely linking their instruction with the needs of schools and the demands new teachers face in the classroom" (Thompson & Barnes, 2007, p. 48).

The teacher preparation courses at the small private liberal arts college where we work use several models of course-embedded faculty supervised fieldwork to fulfill this requirement. Neither of us was familiar with course-embedded faculty supervised fieldwork for undergraduate education before working at this college. After our first year at the college, we understood the rationale for this fieldwork model from the perspective of college educators. However, we were interested in learning about our students' perspectives of this model.



While all higher education institutions require their candidates to complete pre-student teaching fieldwork hours, faculty supervised course-embedded fieldwork is not a state mandated requirement. At our college, two models of course-embedded fieldwork are consistently used. One model used in the literacy courses has teacher candidates on campus for four weeks, then in the field with one time per week for the next eight to ten weeks of the semester. During this eight to ten week period, faculty directly supervise and coach candidates as they work in individual classrooms, usually one on one with children. In the context of the college classroom, candidates learn instructional strategies focused on literacy and how to plan and implement effective literacy lessons. Research-based instruction is central to these literacy courses. The fieldwork model used in the special education courses has the candidates on campus for approximately the first seven to eight weeks of the semester, then in the field for two sessions per week for four to five weeks. Again, the candidates are directly supervised and coached by the college faculty member. The special education methods course focuses on research based instructional methods of direct instruction, suitable for students with disabilities.

Overview of Faculty Supervised Course-Embedded Fieldwork

Teachers need opportunities to combine research-based practices with practical experiences (Levine, 1992). The college classroom provides the theoretical basis for practice, but it “does not call upon [teachers] to transform those findings for real situations “ (Levine, 1992, p. 11). The issue of teachers rarely having the opportunity to leave their egg crate classroom existence once they assume full-time employment has been recognized for many years (Lortie, 1975). This lack of opportunity to see and be seen by colleagues does not promote conversations about teaching practices and hence teachers tend to perpetuate their existing practices (Darling-Hammond, 1992). Therefore, we suggest that course-embedded fieldwork serves the needs of the pre-service teacher by attempting to establish a climate of collegiality that is necessary to promote collaborative contexts once the teachers are employed in schools (Hargreave, 1993). Our teacher candidates are in the process of developing teacher identities (Dozier, Johnston, & Rogers, 2006). We believe they need opportunities to engage in guided reflections on their teaching practices. Course-embedded fieldwork supports the opportunity for reflection with peers guided by faculty.

In a previous qualitative study (Cowan & McCloskey, 2004), graduate students who were teacher candidates in literacy reported that course-embedded faculty supervised fieldwork afforded them the opportunity to form collegial relationships that enhanced their professional knowledge. These kinds of relationships between professionals help teacher candidates at pre-service and in-service levels become more reflective about their practice.

Data Collection

For the present study, teacher candidates in four undergraduate classes were surveyed about the positive or negative value of course-embedded faculty supervised



fieldwork. Two literacy course sections and two special education course sections were included in our study. There were 44 female students and 4 male students in the two sections of the literacy courses, most of whom were sophomores. Similarly, in the special education courses there were 48 female students and 6 male students, most of whom were juniors or seniors. In all sections of these courses, all students were traditional undergraduates .

At the end of the semester after all fieldwork was finished, teacher candidates responded to a survey with a Likert Scale rating the value of fieldwork, as well as responding to two open-ended questions regarding the positive and negative aspects of fieldwork from their perspective. In order to obtain valid responses, teacher candidates were instructed that all surveys would be anonymous. Additionally, children in one of the fieldwork sites for a literacy course were asked to respond to two open-ended questions about the positive and negative experiences they had working with their college tutors. The children who responded were in grade three of a bilingual education class. There were 24 children, more than half of whom were going to be transitioned to general education classes the following school year. The pupil-generated responses allowed triangulation of the data obtained from the teacher candidates. Using these multiple sources of data provided the opportunity to view faculty supervised course-embedded fieldwork through the lenses of the various stakeholders in the study (Mathison, 1988).

The quantitative questions asked pre-service teachers to rate the following statements: 1) Fieldwork embedded in a course is a positive feature of the education programs at Mount Saint Mary College; 2) Fieldwork helps me see my peers working and that gives me confidence when I work with pupils; 3) I dislike doing fieldwork when it is course embedded because I think my professor spends too much time observing and not enough time helping the Mount students; 4) I will be better prepared when I teach because of course embedded fieldwork; 5) I have not learned anything from doing course embedded fieldwork. It is a waste of my time. Each statement was rated on a scale from 1 to 5 with 1 being strongly agree, 2 being agree, 3 being neutral, 4 being disagree somewhat, and 5 being strongly disagree.

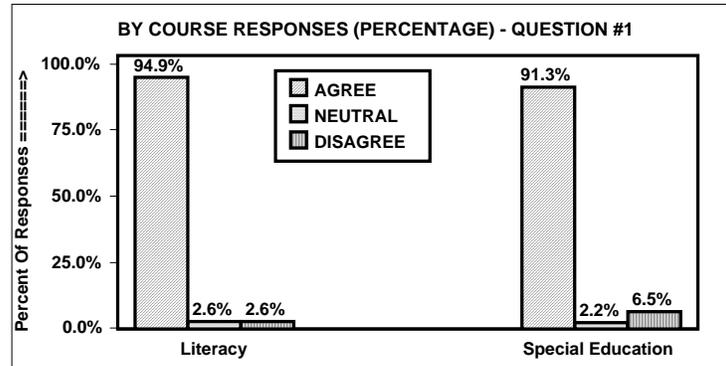
Findings

The Likert Scale data were compiled in Microsoft Excel and analyzed to compare responses. For purposes of analysis, *strongly agree* and *agree* were aggregated, as were *disagree* and *strongly disagree*. For question 1, responses in all course sections were overwhelmingly positive, indicating that teacher candidates do value the course-embedded fieldwork component of their courses. Data showed that 94.9% of respondents in the literacy course and 91.3% of respondents in the special education course indicated that they agreed that course-embedded fieldwork was valuable.



FIGURE 1

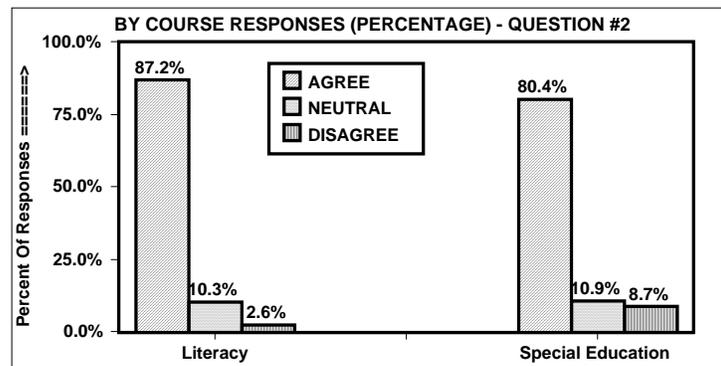
Question 1 Responses by Course: Fieldwork embedded in a course is a positive feature of the education programs at (Name) College.



Responses to question 2 were also positive, with 87.2% in the literacy course and 80.4% in the special education course.

FIGURE 2

Responses by Course: Fieldwork helps me see my peers working and that gives me confidence when I work with pupils.

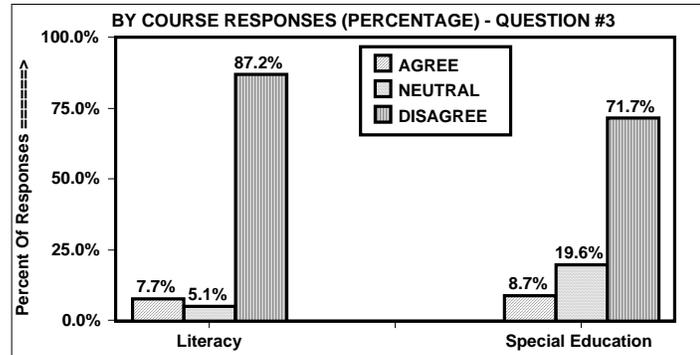


Question 3 was worded as the inverse of question 1; therefore responses were negative, as would be expected. In the literacy course, 87.2% of informants indicated responses of disagree and strongly disagree; 71.7% of the respondents in the special education course reported the same.



FIGURE 3

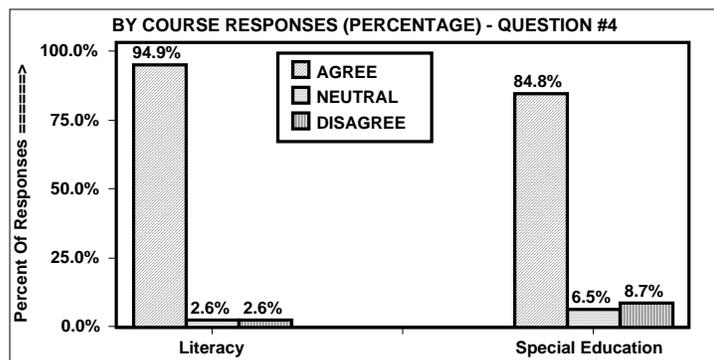
Course Responses: I dislike doing fieldwork when it is course embedded because I think my professor spends too much time observing and not enough time helping the (college) students.



Question 4 asked teacher candidates to evaluate their preparedness for teaching; responses in the literacy course (94.9%) and the special education course (84.8%) were positive in this regard.

FIGURE 4

Responses by Course: I will be better prepared when I teach because of course embedded fieldwork.



Like question 3, question 5 was worded as an inverse. As expected, responses were negative in both cases, with candidates in the literacy course having a response rate of 94.9% and a rate of 89.1% in the special education course.

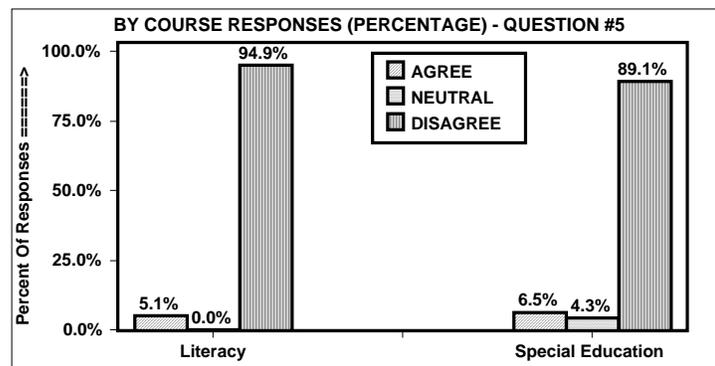
The data for question 5 indicate a difference in responses between students in literacy and special education courses. These differences were most likely attributable to



the context of the field placements. The literacy fieldwork was held in a setting where children had more regular school attendance. The special education fieldwork was held in a setting where the students' attendance was more sporadic. Candidates whose students did not attend school regularly expressed frustration with the erratic attendance.

FIGURE 5

Responses by Course: I have not learned anything from doing course embedded fieldwork. It is a waste of my time.



The qualitative data were obtained from responses to the following questions: The first question posed was *What two things stand out as being the most important to contribute to your own learning about teaching and pupils' learning as you think about your fieldwork in this course?* The second question was *What two things stand out as possible negative experiences when you think about your fieldwork in this course?*

In order to evaluate the data for these two questions, responses were coded into categories that were later collapsed as review continued (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Final categories for responses to the first question about the positive contributions of fieldwork included: classroom management; using methods from class; learning about students in first hand experiences; learning how schools work; and gaining confidence as a prospective teacher. The following categories emerged in responses to the second question about negative aspects of fieldwork: wanted more time in fieldwork; scheduling because of other classes; lack of pupil cooperation; and the absence of children.

In one literacy course fieldwork site, participating children were asked to respond to two open-ended questions. These questions were: 1.) What did you like about working and learning with the [name of college] student? and 2.) Was there anything you did not like about working and learning with the [name of college] student? The responses from the children were overwhelmingly positive. All of the children reported that they enjoyed the experience of working with college teacher candidates and were grateful for the individualized extra help; there were no negative comments. Some of the responses were written in Spanish and translated to English by the classroom teacher.



Sample comments from the children in reply to the first question about what they liked about working with their college friends included the following: “I like the pomes, storys, and the word card games”; “I like when we working and we Reading the books”; and “What I liked about Miss L is she was nice to me, helped me improve on things, and she took her time to help me.” Sample comments from the children in reply to the second question about what could be improved when working with their college friends included: “You don’t need to improve her”; “There is nothing to make better”; and “Yes, because I wanted them to be my spelling teacher forever.”

Answers from the teacher candidates to the first open-ended question used to explore a qualitative response about positive aspects of the faculty supervised course embedded fieldwork included the following sample comments: “You are able to see first-hand how a classroom is run. The fieldwork reinforces the material taught in class”; “Seeing the way teachers approach the early morning activities”; “Teachers at fieldwork were nice and helpful, and provided appropriate information” “Students were in need and required the extra help” “The strategies we used and the poetry we worked on with the students”; “ The most important thing is having experience and accepting criticism and feedback for what good or bad you have done to better improve yourself”; and “Hands on learning is the best! Being in a live/functioning classroom/more confidence.”

Sample comments in response to the second question posed to the teacher candidates about the negative experiences of faculty supervised course embedded fieldwork included the following: “Become close with the student and then leave”; “Sometimes feeling rushed, not enough time”; “negative experiences is not having enough time to get to a school site and not having sufficient time spent with a student in fieldwork”; and “Not all children want to behave/learn all the time. Some days, my child refused to work at all.”

Reflections

This study provides several suggestions for implementation of faculty-supervised course embedded fieldwork for preservice teacher candidates. One suggestion is that in a course-embedded fieldwork model, professional learning is enhanced because preservice teacher candidates are able to develop their skills in a school setting in classrooms of certified teachers (Darling-Hammond, 1998). Another important feature of course-embedded fieldwork is the provision of scaffolded learning for beginning teachers; these teacher candidates gradually gained control of their lesson planning and confidence in implementation of their lessons. The communal context of shared fieldwork experiences provided opportunities for faculty-guided scaffolded conversations that allowed for in-depth analysis of classroom contexts and students. Additionally, this model provides a collegial context for teacher candidates to discuss their profession with peers as a precursor to forming collaborative relationships with colleagues once the candidates complete their college coursework. Finally, students in schools receive the benefits of one on one or small group tutoring when our teacher candidates work in classrooms in course-embedded faculty supervised fieldwork. This service to the surrounding



communities cannot be duplicated in other ways since students in the classrooms where the candidates work receive one on one attention from their college tutors. Teachers in the high needs school districts willingly accept teacher candidates into their classrooms every semester because of the individualized attention their students receive.

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Voices of Critical Literacy: How Do Middle School Students, Teachers, and Preservice Teachers Respond?

Joyce Herbeck, Clara Beier, Judith K. Franzak, Susan Stolp

ABSTRACT

In a test-driven society such as ours, the reasons not to take on the time-consuming and controversial topic of critical literacy are many; however, this article hopes to convince educators at all levels that the benefits of engaging students in questioning, reflecting, and taking action are well worth the effort. The article begins with a classroom example of critical literacy in practice, reports survey results of the attitudes of middle school teachers toward a social justice curriculum, and then addresses critical literacy challenges for future educators.

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Because of where I live and who I'm
surrounded by, I always assumed the majority of the
population had enough food. I can't believe how off I
was! Why am I in the 30% who always have enough to
eat? Why can't we learn to share? When will we start?

~ Sarah

Sarah, a student in Susan Stolp's eighth-grade social studies class, is responding to the book *If the World Were a Village* by David Smith. Most of her classmates, although described by teachers as the "most difficult class in over a decade," had similar insights as a result of this picture book addressing social justice issues on a global scale. Some students were shocked that Chinese was the most spoken language on the planet. Others focused on the unequal distribution of wealth in the world. Many seemed concerned and angry at the injustice portrayed in the book. This powerful reaction to social justice issues by students often perceived as disengaged and disruptive, demonstrates the power of literature to evoke critical analysis of issues.



In this article, we discuss the process that led to Sarah and her classmates' insights, the attitudes of middle school teachers toward a social justice curriculum, and the critical literacy challenge for future educators. In a test-driven society such as ours, the reasons not to take on the time-consuming and controversial topic of critical literacy are many; however, we hope to convince educators at all levels that the benefits of engaging students in questioning, reflecting, and taking action are well worth the effort.

What is critical literacy?

The term critical literacy has generated a wide range of perspectives that problematize literacy practices (Luke & Freebody, 1997), and there is no single version of what critical literacy should and could look like in middle-level classrooms. Across the range of viewpoints about critical literacy, there are some shared commonalities. In general, critical literacy advocates subscribe to the view that critical literacy is social in nature (Lewison, Flint, & Van Sluys, 2002). From this perspective, literacy is always contextually-bound; thus it is important that students engaging in critical literacy work explore the situated context of the literacy act. This means that students and teachers involved in critical literacy activity are exploring how literacies connect them to one another and to others in far removed locations and contexts. A key aspect of this is the valuing of multiple forms of literacy shared by social groups, including the reading, interpreting and composing of print, as well as viewing, listening to, and creating non-print texts.

Critical literacy also recognizes that an inherent aspect of literacy practice is the negotiation of power (O'Brien, 2001). In this view, literacies are never neutral. In whatever form they take, literacies can convey power and can also be used to oppress. Thus, critical literacy asks questions about the power relationships communicated through literacy practices. Such questions include queries about who benefits from the text or practice, who is left out, and how accurate a text or practice is in representing certain groups or cultures. A central purpose of critical literacy is to challenge the status quo in an effort to foster equitable education. This entails challenging assumptions and oppression at the individual, social, and structural level. In this sense, the personal is intertwined with the political in critical literacy pedagogy. Students and teachers do not draw artificial boundaries between their experiences and identities and school experiences and learning. Instead, they acknowledge the existence of in-and-out of school literacies and the bridges that link them, they value personal perspectives and experiences, and they inquire into social justice for individual situations and groups.

In practice, critical literacy is dialogic in nature. From early roots in the work of Paulo Freire, dialogue has been central in the development of critical literacy (Freire & Macedo, 1987). Dialogue is understood as engagement and exchange between people, institutions, and ideas. Although power is never absent in dialogue, critical literacy attempts to name and question power relations. Critical literacy asks questions about language, power, identity, and practice. There is an assumption that the answers to



critical literacy questions are not known beforehand; it reflects genuine and democratic inquiry in which teachers, students, and scholars are equal participants in the process.

A Portrait of Critical Literacy in a Middle School Classroom

Prior to the use of *If the World Were a Village*, Susan hesitated to introduce the concept of social justice to her eighth graders. Although she had several highly motivated and conscientious students, she could not imagine the majority of the kids willingly participating in a discussion about social justice issues:

In an earlier social studies project, we had been discussing the concept of philanthropy, looking at Andrew Carnegie as an historical example. We studied the rise of big business and how some individuals, from very modest beginnings, had become incredibly rich amazingly fast. I had asked the students to write a reflective paragraph on whether or not they would contribute their great wealth (if they had been in this situation) to a philanthropic cause. About eighty percent of the students said that they would not! They would keep the money for themselves! It seemed that social justice was not something about which they had much concern. This is the reason I decided that I should introduce critical literacy to the class.

Wanting to address social justice in the curriculum, but not sure where to begin, Sue invited Joyce who had been researching critical literacy in children's literature, to come to class on two consecutive Friday afternoons. Joyce started the presentation by showing the students a picture of the earth from outer space, saying how this photo, taken within our lifetimes, but certainly not within theirs, had changed the way people viewed the world. The blue orb, seen with no political boundaries, appeared peaceful and calm; we could really feel that we were alone, together, in a vast universe. This was the beginning of what we now call a "global vision." I looked around the room and the kids' interest had been piqued. She had shaken up their world view, created a little disequilibrium, and their heads were ready for her presentation.

Whoa...that thing is huge! It's amazing how peaceful Earth looks from far away. ~ Leah

The picture of the earth is very cool...you're right...it does make you see that there are no boundaries except the ones we drew. I love how you can't see any one person. ~Dani



The world is a bigger place than we think and it's amazing! ~Macy

I don't see races, religion, or anything else. And as you look at this little planet you can understand how little all of our problems on Earth seem.
~Sabrina

We began *If the World Were a Village*, by David Smith by having the students guess the world's population (6 billion, 200 million). As we proceeded through the book, the students were asked to predict the statistics that Smith states in the book, to write their predictions in the packet provided, and then to reflect in writing on each fact before sharing their thoughts. This built-in time for thinking and discussing proved essential for the students to absorb the impact of the statements.

In order to make the numbers more manageable, Smith scales the earth's population down to 100 members of the global "village." Susan's students were asked to calculate how many people each member of the village would represent (62 million). Sue reminisces:

While at first I thought any math connections would be rather elementary (these eighth graders were studying the Pythagorean Theorem and quadratic equations), I also realized that any review of fractions, percents, and ratios was never wasted. As I watched the feverish tapping of calculators and quickly scrawling pencils in the room, I knew the kids were hooked.

The next challenge was for students to guess which countries were the most populated. I asked them to convert the numbers representative of the 100 people in the global village to real numbers based on 1:62,000,000. Not surprisingly, most did not guess China as number one, although it has over four times the population of the United States.

"Languages" was the next category. When students learned that of the 100 people in the village, 22 speak a Chinese dialect, while only 9 speak English, 7 speak Spanish, and French and German do not even register a 1, many were shocked.

I'm amazed that there are so many languages and the order of the most spoken. ~Britta

It makes me feel stupid only knowing one and a half languages. ~Ian

French isn't on the list!?!? Why am I learning it then?! I won't be able to talk to nearly as many people. I should be learning Chinese! ~Sarah



Many students expressed their surprise over the fact that their guesses were wrong. Several of the students assumed that English was the most widely spoken language on the planet.

Another topic that got the kids actively engaged was the food issue: 50 people within the global village do not have a reliable source of food and are hungry all the time; 20 people are severely undernourished; only 30 people always have enough to eat. However, as the author states, “There is no shortage of food in the global village. If all the food were divided equally, everyone would have enough to eat. But the food isn’t divided equally” (p. 17). The students were stunned, and we saw some very insightful comments on the reflection pieces and questions the students were encouraged to ask:

Because of where I live and who I’m surrounded by, I always assumed the majority of the population had enough food. I can’t believe how off I was! Why am I in the 30% who always have enough to eat? Why can’t we learn to share? When will we start? ~Sarah

Why do we have people who are fat when so many are starving! ~Julie

It’s amazing how many people don’t have enough food. Also about how greedy rich people are, because they are the ones that could help the most. How long can people go without food, If they are already undernourished? ~Rachel

I find this really sad. It makes me angry at the world. ~Iliana

As a whole, the presentation was a huge success. Almost every student contributed to the discussion and to completion of the handout questions and reflections. Even some of my typically disengaged boys voiced their opinions:

I think we eat too much. We should share the food. ~Corey

I think this was interesting. I also think we should take into consideration many of these problems. ~Allan

Although this exercise certainly raised awareness, there was still some reference to survival of the fittest:

Lots of people are starving in the world and they need to eat. But it’s not our job to do it, it’s theirs. ~Nick



But overall, the students' responses, both in discussion and on paper, indicated that consciousness about social justice issues was raised. Many indicated their desire to be part of the change they wanted to see in the world:

I hope we can fix these problems soon! What can I do to help? ~Katy

Maybe people that are rich should really help people that are starving to death. ~Sonia

We need more people like Robin Hood! ~Tim

Critical Literacy, Social Justice, and Teacher Concerns

One important aspect of critical literacy in the classroom context is that students and teachers are engaged in exploring social justice issues. (Cochran-Smith, 2004; Edelsky, 2006; Nieto & Bode, 2007). However, some teachers are reluctant to embrace critical literacy pedagogy due to a variety of perceived hurdles.

These student insights were the result of two 50-minute, Friday afternoon class periods. If students can become this aware and engaged in social justice issues in less than two hours, why aren't more teachers introducing critical literacy through social justice topics? In order to answer this question, we asked those middle school teachers who teach communication arts and social studies to complete a critical literacy survey. Thirty-nine surveys were distributed to middle school teachers in Susan's district. Of these, 15 were returned. Our goals were to determine 1) how many teachers were introducing critical literacy through social justice topics; 2) which social justice topics were being addressed and how; 3) if teachers were not addressing social justice topics, what would make it possible for them to integrate these topics into the classroom.

The results of the survey indicated that only one teacher, of the 15 who responded, did not address social justice issues in the classroom. We were initially elated at this response, until we realized that a positive response on this item merely meant that an issue was addressed at some point throughout the year. This would be the equivalent of a Level 1 in Banks' (2005) Levels of Multicultural Curriculum, since it might focus on an isolated occurrence; for example, many teachers listed Martin Luther King Day as a time to discuss racial prejudice. A higher level of engagement with social justice issues would create a classroom environment where students would be in the habit of questioning a text to know all perspectives, especially from those characters that were silenced or marginalized. Fortunately, additional survey items helped to sort out the presence of specific social justice issues in the curriculum.

Surveys demonstrated that social justice issues addressed included child abuse, homelessness, bullying, poverty, war, disabilities, environmental issues, racial prejudice, gender equity, and religion. Teachers who did not discuss these issues indicated that it



was because of a lack of time or because the content was not specifically required by the curriculum. When asked what would make it easier to address social justice issues, teachers reported that they would like to have more time, smaller class settings, time for discussion, quality materials, specific guidelines, and more information. All teachers felt that parents would respond positively to adding these issues to the curriculum.

What do preservice teachers and teacher educators need to know to implement a critical literacy curriculum?

Susan's students' responses to *If the World were a Village*, her own astonishment at the level of engagement that occurred when the students were presented with a topic on social justice, and her fellow teachers' mostly positive responses to the survey all indicate that a critical literacy curriculum is possible. In addition, it creates a sense of hope for the future...even in the present era of high stakes testing and No Child Left Behind. In particular, it indicates that today's preservice teachers need to know that they will not only encounter peers who are interested in social justice and critical literacy, but more importantly, they will encounter many students who are motivated by involvement in a curriculum that addresses multiple literacies and encourages the exploration of issues pertaining to identity, power, and language.

How can preservice teachers learn about a critical literacy curriculum so that they, too, can encourage their students to ask questions similar to the children in Susan's class and also encourage them to take action? The answer appears to be twofold.

First, just as Susan learned to listen to the questions of her eighth grade students, those of us who are college educators need to listen to preservice teachers' questions as they will enable us to rethink our practice of literacy instruction. Just as the use of children's literature helped Susan's students explore social justice, the use of children's and young adult literature in the college classroom enables preservice teachers to ask questions such as "What IS social justice?" or "Can we REALLY discuss these issues in OUR classrooms?" Such questions help us move away from only addressing content that includes decoding and comprehension strategies (or the "five essentials") and enable us to move to a socio-cultural model of teaching that also includes the "essentials" of critical literacy and the exploration of identities and power (Freebody & Luke, 1999). In addition, it encourages preservice teachers to look at topics from multiple perspectives and with the realization that the content can be complex as well as dynamic (Freebody & Luke, 1999; Nieto, 2002). In so doing, it enables preservice teachers and college professors to begin to ask questions such as, "Whose voice is heard? Who is silenced? Whose reality is presented?" (Vasquez, 2003, p.15). When we model such a curriculum in our own teaching, it not only encourages preservice teachers to reflect on and rethink their practices but it also provides a framework for critical practice.

Second, it is also important to help preservice teachers consider ways that they can address barriers to a critical literacy and social justice curriculum that were mentioned in the survey (time, materials, additional information, adjusting to class size, and the need for guidelines) as well as establishing such a curriculum when high stakes



testing often drives what is taught. Preservice teachers need to know that many of these barriers are surmountable. Therefore, discussions with classroom teachers who include topics related to social justice, such as Susan, or with classroom teachers who have just started to incorporate strategies that promote critical literacy will serve as a springboard to addressing some of the tough, complex, issues and questions that are encountered in a thoughtful, critical literacy curriculum. They will also enable preservice teachers to reflect on and then act on Sarah's initial question "When will we start?"

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Suggestions for Further Reading
Examples of Critical Literacy in the Classroom

Cowhey, Mary. (2006). *Black Ants and Buddhists: Thinking Critically and Teaching Differently in the Primary Grades.*

Mary Cowhey invites the reader into her second grade classroom with stories of critical literacy in action as well as a detailed schedule on one day in the “Peace Class.”

McLaughlin, M. and DeVoogd, G.L. (2004). *Critical Literacy: Enhancing Students’ Comprehension of Text.*

Teachers will appreciate these specific lessons for grades 1-8, based on children’s literature, with reader-friendly explanations of the critical literacy strategies used to discuss the books.

Vasquez, Vivian. (2004). *Negotiating Critical Literacies with Young Children.*

Vivian Vasquez demonstrates that even kindergartners understand social justice issues and are capable of taking action to make their classroom, their school, their neighborhood, and their world better places.



Teaching with Technology: An Examination of Literacy Instruction and the Use of Technology with Teacher Candidates and Elementary School Students

Keli Garas-York, Chantal Wiedemann, Joelle Bennett

ABSTRACT

The article describes teacher candidates' perceptions of the instructional effectiveness of integrating literacy and technology during the field experience component of a literacy methods course. An examination of the impact of the inclusion of technology with literacy instruction on student engagement was also conducted but no significant patterns of increased engagement were found.

AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY

Keli Garas-York is an assistant professor in the department of Elementary Education and Reading at Buffalo State College. She is also the director of the Buffalo State College Literacy Center. Previously, she was a classroom teacher and a reading specialist.

Joelle Bennett and Chantal Wiedemann are currently seniors at Buffalo State College and are majoring in Exceptional Education and Childhood Education (Grades 1-6). Both would like to pursue advanced degrees in Literacy.

The purpose of this project was to take a closer look at the use of technology during literacy instruction. We sought to examine the teacher candidates' perceptions of the instructional effectiveness in integrating literacy and technology and the impact using technology during literacy instruction has on student engagement using qualitative methods such as observations, reflective journals, informal interviews and surveys.

We wrote this article from the perspectives of a literacy methods course instructor, Keli Garas-York (KGY), and two teacher candidates in the literacy methods course, Chantal Wiedemann (CW) and Joelle Bennett (JB). Chantal's and Joelle's experiences are highlighted in this piece, but multiple teacher candidates' perspectives on technology were examined via pre and post surveys and observations of various lessons where teacher candidates incorporated technology into literacy instruction. We also provide data on student engagement as it pertained to the literacy instruction involving



technology. This project was funded by a grant from our school's College and Community Partnerships Office.

As the instructor for a methods course relating to literacy (KGY), I wanted to expose the sixteen teacher candidates in my methods course to current technological devices used in schools and to provide opportunities for them to use technology with students as they planned and implemented their literacy lessons.

The grant money was used to purchase a personal response system (a class set of clickers for student response and the software to use them) and a notepad which served as somewhat of portable Smart Board. These devices were introduced during the first few weeks of the semester while the teacher candidates attended class on campus. I modeled how they could be used and allowed the students to experiment with them on a few occasions. The teacher candidates were asked to work in groups to come up with a lesson using technology to review a book read by the entire class as preparation for their fieldwork. Then the devices were made available to the students when they began working in a local elementary school during the mornings twice a week for the rest of the semester.

The teacher candidates completed their fieldwork in a suburban (middle-class, predominantly Caucasian) elementary school in Western New York. They worked with mentor teachers in Kindergarten through grade three. The school made a computer lab, Smart Boards, and their own personal response system available to the teacher candidates. The teacher candidates were required, as part of the course, to incorporate technology into at least one of the literacy-related lessons they taught during their time at the school.

As we all became familiar with the various devices at our disposal (with no formal training due to time and monetary constraints), we realized that at times, it was challenging to incorporate this technology into literacy instruction. We address these challenges and other challenges that were faced by the teacher candidates as they used technology in their literacy lessons.

Project Overview

Incorporating technology and instruction is nothing new, however; there will always be new technology and students with varied strengths and needs to challenge teachers. Lai, Chang, and Ye (2006) reviewed many studies that discussed the benefits of using computers in reading instruction and found that gains were dependent upon how the computers were used. It is therefore well-known that technology can help students with their reading. Discovering how to apply technology to literacy learning, however, can sometimes be a challenge.

Some of our specific successes and challenges are outlined below. But we also found that sometimes literacy instruction and technology was a less than perfect fit. When faced with developing lessons for both classmates and the elementary students, our teacher candidates struggled to come up with ways to integrate the technology to adapt to both their instructional needs and their students' needs. In informal interviews, the teacher candidates expressed that they felt they were just using the technology because it



was part of their course assignments. It didn't naturally flow with what their mentor teachers expected of them and what the students were currently doing in the classroom. Most of them didn't receive a lot of support from their mentor teachers because technology wasn't consistently used in the classrooms.

After being required to use the technology, many of the teacher candidates indicated in post surveys that they felt more comfortable using it in the classroom.

Successes and Challenges

The teacher candidates used technology in a variety of ways as part of their literacy instruction in grades Kindergarten through three. Some teacher candidates used the school's Smart Boards to introduce their lessons, for instance to show the children what they would be doing on the individual desktop computers in the computer lab. The Smart Board was used to walk the students through the various steps of an activity so they were able to then work independently.

In addition, the Smart Boards were used to show video clips related to the lessons, such as information on a particular author the class was studying. Karchmar (2004) explained how beneficial the Internet can be to build background knowledge, especially for struggling readers. A few of the teacher candidates used websites to help first graders learn more about the authors Jan Brett and Alike. For instance, the students were able to watch a video of Jan Brett's trip to Africa and how it helped her to develop a book.

Finally, the Smart Board was used to have the students practice a skill, such as identifying examples of onomatopoeia. The teacher candidates built sounds into a Power Point presentation for the students and had the students touch the Smart Board and write on the Smart Board during an introductory lesson on onomatopoeia.

J.B.'s Perspective:

I found that the students were more cooperative and engaged during my lesson that involved technology. They were excited and interested while using the clickers for a sequencing lesson. There is a timer counting down when the answer will be revealed as part of the personal response system (clickers) and the students counted with it and became very involved. Some drawbacks to using the clickers were that the students at times became so excited that things got really noisy and I had to keep stopping to make sure the students were focused. As well it took a bit of time to prepare the Power Point presentation that went along with the lesson containing the questions to which the students responded. Despite the few challenges I faced using the technology it was a memorable event for the students who were not frequently exposed to these devices as part of their regular school day. After the lesson, many of the students would ask if they were going to use them again whenever I came into the classroom.

C.W.'s Perspective:

I experienced similar results when incorporating technology into my lessons on character traits and fact and opinion. I had the students develop character trading cards



based on an idea I found on the International Reading Association's readwritethink website. It was a two part lesson. The students had some instruction regarding character traits and listened to a read aloud. Then they selected a character from the book about whom they wanted to create a trading card. An outline of the card was completed prior to going to the school's computer lab to actually make the card. The students were told they would have the opportunity to complete the trading card in the computer lab and this served as a motivator to complete the outline. The students were thrilled to be working on the computers.

During the time in the computer lab, the students were very engaged and worked hard to complete their character cards. The students' outlines already showed evidence of what they had learned about character traits. I did encounter some difficulties. First of all, because the students rarely used technology, their keyboarding skills were limited. Typing even the short phrases on the character cards proved to be time consuming. In addition, the site containing the template for the character cards did not allow the students to save their work. They had to finish and print within the session or all was lost. The class only had a limited amount of time in the computer lab, so I had to retype many of the character cards for the students who were unable to finish.

I also utilized the clickers as part of a lesson on fact and opinion. The class had used the clickers one time before my lesson, so they knew how to operate them. As far as the students were concerned, the lesson went well. They paid careful attention as I reinforced the concept I was teaching by providing guided practice. Each child had a chance to respond individually and receive immediate feedback. Unfortunately, there were technical difficulties and I was not able to receive the responses from each student (the students were not aware of this). I did not have access to important data that would have allowed me to assess the students and then provide further instruction to those who needed it. Typically, I would have been able to print a list of responses and look at students' scores. Although this was disappointing, the use of technology was still beneficial for student motivation and focusing their attention.

Student Engagement

Student engagement appeared to improve during lessons when technology was being incorporated. We collected some specific data related to student engagement using rubrics previously developed by Lutz, Guthrie, and Davis (2006). The rubrics helped us to examine affective, behavioral, cognitive, and social engagement. Four focus students were selected by their classroom teacher for observation of engagement. She chose students with different ability levels in the area of reading (three boys and one girl). They were John, David, Bobby, and Monica. The students were observed on six occasions. Their affective, behavioral, cognitive, and social engagement was rated every minute during fifteen minute sessions. They were given ratings of one, two, three, or four using the criteria set forth by Lutz, Guthrie, and Davis. A rating of four denoted the highest level of engagement.

The students were first observed and rated on their engagement during a lesson taught by their own classroom teacher. The rest of sessions were taught by the teacher



candidates with three of the five lessons involving technology. I used the rubrics to rate the focus students' engagement while the teacher candidates provided instruction (KGY). The scores for each student during each session were averaged in the four areas of engagement. The scores do not vary much as far as the areas of engagement, but there is some difference in engagement among the lessons. Upon examination of this qualitative data, no specific patterns emerged. We cannot say that the use of technology does increase student engagement due to the nature of the data and sample size. Both teacher candidates who served as co-authors of this paper felt that the excitement the use of technology brought led to a need to refocus the students more frequently. However, our assessments determined that the students comprehended what was taught during the lessons using technology.

What Now?

We have determined through our experiences during the semester that we, as well as practicing teachers, still have a lot to learn about integrating technology and literacy. We sought to examine the teacher candidates' perceptions of the instructional effectiveness in integrating literacy and technology. Through our observations, informal interviews and surveys, we learned that the teacher candidates (and many of their mentor teachers) were initially reluctant to use the technology in their literacy lessons. After some initial exposure to the technology available in schools and positive feedback from mentor teachers and students, teacher candidates felt more comfortable integrating technology into their literacy lessons by the end of the semester. The teacher candidates reflected that there were some challenges that came with the use of technology, such as time constraints and difficulty getting the technology to work, however; the consensus was that the benefits outweighed the challenges involved in using technology to teach literacy.

In addition, we sought to explore the impact using technology during literacy instruction has on student engagement. Although the teacher candidates reported higher levels of student engagement and excitement during technology-based literacy lessons, no significant findings emerged through the use of observations and an engagement rating scale that would indicate that the use of technology leads to higher levels of engagement during literacy lessons.

Further research on the integration of technology and literacy instruction is recommended. Future studies may yield more information pertaining to the impact of technology on student learning and engagement in the area of literacy while helping to iron out some of the initial challenges presently faced by teachers and teacher candidates as they implement technology-based literacy lessons with their students.

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Contemporary Forms of Memoir: How to Use Blogs and Zines in the Classroom

Christine Woodcock

ABSTRACT

Technology is changing the ways we write memoir, and teachers can be incorporating new forms into their teaching of writing. Newer forms of memoir such as zines and blogs are also becoming part of classroom practices, and, as teachers, we must be ready to engage and support students in such endeavors. This paper addresses three topics, all of which will be meaningful to teachers. First, I will provide definitions of blogs and zines so that teachers may have a rich understanding of their functions. Second, I will explore the various, complex roles that blogs and zines play in the lives of students, and hence, in their learning. Third, I will offer several tangible examples of how to meaningfully integrate contemporary forms of memoir into everyday classroom practice, with considerable attention paid to the safety issues associated with children and adolescents using new media and technologies.

AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY

Christine Woodcock earned her Ph.D. in Reading at the University at Albany. She is currently an Assistant Professor at Southern New Hampshire University. Her research interests include children's literature, gender studies and how they relate to literacy theory, and applications of feminist methodologies to the field of literacy.

"I hope I will be able to confide everything in you, as I have never been able to confide in anyone, and I hope you will be a great source of comfort and support." -Anne Frank (as cited in Gilligan, 2002, p. 81).

As Anne Frank closed herself off from her parents and her friend Peter, she found a significant outlet for herself in her writing by creating an imaginary friend, Kitty, in the form of a diary. Like so many children and adolescents coming of age, Anne used her literary engagements as a source of friendship as she figured out the complexities and harsh realities of growing into adult life.

As we embark on the twenty-first century, the modern day equivalent of diaries may be interpreted as blogs (weblogs). As educators exploring contemporary forms of memoir, it is imperative that we devote much-needed attention to this technologically savvy generation, in the ways they use blogs and zines (similar to magazines) in powerful and sophisticated ways to reflect on their lives. Although most adults are not nearly as media savvy as today's youth, it is our responsibility as educators to be prepared to support students in using new media, and to provide them with a safe environment within which to experiment and grow, while we learn with and from them (Editors, 2006). Today's students can broaden the tools of their time, extending ideas from their homes, to the entire world, just as Anne Frank did as her legacy.



Introduction

Technology is changing the ways we write memoir, and teachers can be incorporating new forms into their teaching of writing. Katie Wood Ray (2006) defines memoir as “a type of autobiographical nonfiction where a writer takes a reflective stance in looking back on a particular time in his or her life” (192). Traditional forms of memoir such as literary narratives and photographic essays are important in contemporary classrooms as a way to encourage student ownership in writing and to connect to the literary history of memoir (Calkins & colleagues, 2003; Graves, 2004; K. W. Ray, 2006). However, newer forms of memoir such as zines and blogs are also becoming part of classroom practices, and as teachers, we must be ready to engage and support students in such endeavors (Borja, 2005; Cohen, 2004; J. Ray, 2006; Richardson, 2005).

In today’s test-laden educational culture, many would agree that it is essential that we challenge the narrow and artificial writing that testing mandates often produce (Romano, 2000). Sadly, the personal passions of children and adolescents are rarely the focus of today’s school curricula. Yet, we know from countless studies of literacy learning, and our own common sense, that no one can become literate, autonomous with literacy, and love literacy, without personal involvement in literacy education (e.g. Cohen, 2004). “Curriculum begins in voice... Personal and social knowing is the heart of the curriculum... To be declared a writer one not only has to know how to write but has to have something to say” (Short, Harste, & Burke, 1996, pp. 50 & 54).

Writing memoir is one important way that we can write about what we value, about our passions and our lives, in a vibrant way. We cannot expect students to produce reflective writing by giving them rigid assignments. A lesson on memoir cannot be secluded from the flow of real life experiences in and outside of our classrooms. When we write memoir, we create freedom, contribute to a critical consciousness, and honor all students’ voices (Bomer & Bomer, 2001, p. 172). Sadly, the voices of children and adolescents are grossly underrepresented in our culture, and contemporary forms of memoir such as blogs and zines are significant ways to have their voices heard.

Surprisingly, there is not a lot of refereed published material on the subject of blogs and zines as new forms of memoir, especially with specific regard to the role of blogs in education, and hands-on ways for teachers to implement such media (e.g. Williams & Jacobs, 2004). There is a need for more information so that effective practice-theory bridges can be crossed, especially in the ways forms of memoir such as blogs and zines pose challenges to us as educators. In this paper, I will address three topics, all of which will be meaningful to teachers. First, I will provide definitions of blogs and zines, so that teachers may have a rich understanding of their functions. Second, I will explore the various, complex roles that blogs and zines play in the lives of students, and hence, their learning. Third, I will offer several tangible examples of how to meaningfully integrate contemporary forms of memoir into everyday classroom practice, with considerable attention paid to the safety issues associated with children and adolescents using new media and technologies

**Tabula rasa: Blogs are empty, malleable spaces, just waiting to be filled**

'Blogging' is actually a contraction of the term 'web logging,' with 'weblog' having been shortened to 'blog' and the author or weblog editor referred to as a 'blogger' (Blood, 2000). Some even refer to blogs that are educational in use as edublogs (J. Ray, 2006). Williams and Jacobs (2004) believe that blogging is best described as a form of micro-publishing. Since it is easy to use and accessible from any Internet connection, blogging has become decisively recognized as a web-based communication tool. In other words, blogs are no passing fad. Richardson (2005) reports that there is a new blog created every second, and that there are more than 900,000 posts daily, with two million blogs updated weekly. "Blogs are one of the many new disruptive technologies that are transforming the world. They are creating a richer, more dynamic, more interactive Web where participation is the rule rather than the exception. Like it or not, our classrooms and schools are about to be enveloped by these changes as well" (Richardson, 2005, p. 2).

The blogging craze has evolved from its early foundation as a medium for the publication of simple, online personal diaries, to the latest unruly technology. Blogs have the capability to engage people in collaborative activity, knowledge sharing, reflection, and debate (Hiler, 2003). Several blogs have sizeable and dedicated readerships, and blog clusters have formed, linking fellow bloggers in relationship to their mutual interests (Williams & Jacobs, 2004). According to Blood (2000), the original weblogs, which emerged in 1998, were link-driven sites, each a fusion in unique proportions of links, commentary, and personal thoughts and essays, with dated entries, listed in a reverse chronological format. However, since 1999, with the launching of the free, do-it-yourself blogging website *Blogger.com*, blogs have exploded as a sort of short-form journal. "These blogs, often updated several times a day, were instead a record of the blogger's thoughts... a quick reflection on some subject or another" (Blood, 2000, p. 3). While these new blogs were similar to their predecessors, they differed in some important ways.

Today's blogs allow a more creative response from the author, fostering a freer flowing, creative and contextualized discussion that is more like a conversation (Instone, 2005). It is a form of public conversation, and it can be fascinating to see how bloggers position themselves in their new blogging communities (Blood, 2000). So, why did we experience this blogging explosion? "With a click, *Blogger* will post the... whatever... on the writer's website, archive it in the proper place, and present the writer with another empty box, just waiting to be filled... an infinitely malleable format" (Blood, 2000, p. 4). A tabula rasa, indeed, with countless possibilities for educators!

Zines: Not your average magazine

The world of zines (rhyming with spleens) has a rich history, with its derivation coming from the words 'magazine' and 'fanzine.' Although definitions of the word vary significantly, most publications that refer to themselves as zines have many characteristics in common. For example, most zines are: self-published, with a small print-run and low budget, reach outside of the mainstream, and are usually motivated by the ability to express oneself rather than to make money (Freedman, 2005). A zine is essentially a publication containing a selection of writing pieces designed to appeal to



and inform a particular audience. Despite the fact that zines began as a somewhat underground form of publication, today many people of all ages engage in these self-published periodicals, since zines allow people to write for wholly personal reasons, to share their knowledge with a small community of readers (Cohen, 2004).

Those less familiar with zines often ask what distinguishes a zine from a blog, or from other more traditional forms of classroom publishing. For teachers, one major strength of a zine is that it provides students with the opportunity to extensively explore a single topic about which they feel passionately, by writing across several genres (Cohen, 2004). Zines are often more classroom-friendly than blogs because there is no need for any special equipment or knowledge, and as a result, they are less expensive, and, in essence, more portable, since there is not an absolute need for computers or an Internet connection. One aspect of zines that may be interpreted as having both downfalls and benefits, is that they are finished products, whereas blogs have the capability of constantly changing, and tend to foster more interaction (Freedman, 2005).

Voice and space: The complex roles of blogs and zines in students' lives

“Like all human activity, literacy is essentially social, and it is located in the interaction between people” (Barton & Hamilton, 1998, p. 3). By articulating and sharing insights about contemporary forms of memoir, such as blogs and zines, it is my intention to inspire educators to empower students to critically reflect on their literacies, and to create learning environments more conducive to the relational dimensions of knowledge construction (Vygotsky, 1978). In reconceptualizing the relations between literacies and the societies in which they operate, we can potentially glean keener insights to more effectively educate people. Blogs and zines have several dimensions that are conducive to students' voices, empowering them, and supporting them to become more critical and analytical in their thinking (Williams & Jacobs, 2004). By producing a memoir in a blog or zine format, students may develop and nurture a unique writing voice, formulating and standing by their opinions, while acknowledging and considering the views of others. Ideally, a blog or zine author will “become less reflexive and more reflective, and find his own opinions and ideas worthy of serious consideration” (Blood, 2000, p. 6).

“What I'm most attracted to in web logs is the empowerment of the student voice... Many of our students... don't often feel like they're heard. And here they have a tool that gets them noticed,” reflects Mr. Clausen, a K-12 teacher in Montana (Borja, 2005). Likewise, in a piece entitled ‘A Young Blogger Finds the World Waiting to Listen,’ eleven year-old Dylan Verdi remarked that she, too, feels very positive when she shares her experiences of being a middle-class kid in New York on her blog. “(It's like somebody else cares about what I have to say” (Editors, 2006, p. 100). Indeed, well-known blogger Rebecca Blood (2000) insists that she discovered aspects of herself by engaging in blogs that she otherwise may not have known. “First, I discovered my own interests... More importantly, I began to value more highly my own point of view... I began to feel that my perspective was unique and important” (p. 5).

In the worlds of zines and blogs, everyone is an author, which provides students with an incomparable sense of audience and purpose. This is even further heightened in



blogs, which are interactive. By writing their own stories, and reflecting on the stories of others, students may engage in a journey of self-discovery and intellectual independence. It is no secret that many students do not like to write. Yet, when engaged in exciting opportunities like blogs and zines, possibilities are endless, and enthusiasms are sparked. Mr. Clausen's 10th, 11th, and 12th graders in Montana "were spilling out their thoughts on an assignment both to him and their classmates" (Borja, 2005, p. 1). Even the previously sullen and quiet students were passionately sharing their stories in this interactive, online conversation hosted via *The Digital Life*, their class blog.

In her graduate-level literacy methods course for teachers in New York, Professor Cohen (2004) created the Zine Project as a way for teachers to find their own writing voices. By asking teachers to author their own zines, about any topic about which they felt passionately, Cohen found that the teachers' zines served as a prototype for a classroom writing project that could be adapted for students at any grade level. Cohen's Zine Project encouraged the teacher-authors to write with a personal focus, while Cohen provided a clearly defined format, and emphasized that the teachers would publish for a real audience. At the conclusion of the Zine Project, Cohen reflected, "If these adult students could write with passion and sensitivity about the important things in their lives, wouldn't it be wonderful if we could accomplish this same thing with children in the elementary school?" (p. 136). Indeed, that is precisely what happened. Cohen found that some of her graduate students did, in fact, go into their elementary school classrooms and shared their zines with their own students, thus inspiring a string of zines across grade levels. As one of Cohen's graduate students, also a second grade teacher, so eloquently put it:

I learned that anything is possible when you write from the heart! I was surprised at how my ideas and words seemed to flow naturally. Writing about what you know and love is what real writing is all about. I shared my zine with my own students and they were so excited and impressed to see my writing. I hope to help them discover their passions and their unique writing voices as I did (Cohen, 2004, p. 137).

In addition to fostering voice, blogs and zines are also obviously a marked space to author one's self into the world in a meaningful fashion. Writing memoir through the media of blogs and zines can create a palpable, cohesive classroom community. The space provided by a blog or zine can provide a sense of belonging. Since blogs and zines are published to an audience of some sort, authors know they will go under some degree of peer review. When handled effectively by teachers, this can be a powerful conduit for autonomy and community in authors. The freedom of both the writer's self-expression and readers' responses provides writers with a trusted space to feel a cooperative spirit.

In learning, we take constant risks, and to take risks, we must feel safe. Indeed, Dewey (1916) contended that meaningful learning must take place in community, in cooperation and interaction with others. He illustrated that in community, students have freedom and support to explore curiosities, and can also use that sense of community as a springboard into eventual independence. Blogs and zines are a wonderful way to approach this type of pedagogy.



Taking the plunge... and is it safe?: Practical suggestions for classroom practice

Blogs are powerful tools in a deceptively simple form (Hardy, 2005). While establishing a blog is easy, using it effectively, and in a way that enhances learning, can be more complicated (Borja, 2005). Many would argue, however, that the blog's benefits outweigh its concerns. In this section, I will explore both the multitude of exciting approaches to using blogs, as well as the ways of addressing online safety.

Blogs are Non-linear Webs of Information

When teaching with blogs, remember that perhaps their greatest benefit is that they are essentially non-linear webs of information. Their possibilities are endless, which is both exhilarating and overwhelming. When it is new, try to start small, simply exploring with colors, layout, and some graphics, which can provide a sense of autonomy and online identity (Hardy, 2005). Cristina Runkles, a third grade teacher in Maryland, has maintained her edublog for three years, and she loves the non-linear web it offers her students (J. Ray, 2006). Runkles asks her students to explore various geometry websites, and then requires them to post comments on the edublogs, explaining what they learned.

Blogs Are Collaborative

Of the educators who do use blogs, most immediately cite the inherent collaboration as the best part. For example, at Richardson's (2005) school, blogs are used as collaborative spaces where students, teachers, and guests can co-construct content. Whether his students are communicating with students in foreign countries, or with the authors of books they have just read, they "create meaningful content for audiences wider than just a teacher and a small group of peers. In the process, they learn to negotiate meaning and knowledge in real and relevant ways, preparing them for the connected world they will find once they graduate" (p. 1). Richardson's students have engaged in such stimulating projects as communicating with Pulitzer Prize winning authors, and Holocaust studies with students in Poland. It quite simply brings their curriculum to life. In these ways, blogs foster diverse perspectives and bloggers can be linked into blog communities (Hardy, 2005). Of course, it is not just students who can collaborate! Teachers can also use blogs to collaborate with fellow educators to share curriculum or professional development (J. Ray, 2006).

Blogs Foster Communication

Blogs are obviously communication tools, so perhaps their greatest benefit is the pathway of communication they create. Some teachers think of their blogs as electronic bulletin boards (J. Ray, 2006). Teachers can showcase, publish, and forever preserve students' work effortlessly on a blog. There is no denying the sense of pride and ownership that comes with publishing. The blog publishing could then naturally lend itself to authentic writing mini-lessons, especially since there is a meaningful audience and purpose in mind. Some teachers even use simple software to publish photographs of students' various learning initiatives and field trips for parents to enjoy. Likewise,



teachers can use blogs as a way to maintain communication with parents, especially to avoid the hassles of schedules, reminders, and homework hurdles.

The Functionality and Format of Blogs

Since blogs are structured in specific ways, they can be a useful tool for teachers. For example, since blogs are organized by date, they can be used to see various types of change over time, such as students' writing, interests, and other such qualities that teachers need to assess in an on-going fashion (Oravec, 2003). In addition, blogs can actually help to minimize plagiarism because the discussions are open and are linked directly to the students' classroom audience (Oravec, 2002). Furthermore, the linking that is common in blogging can help scaffold learners by steering them towards relevant and safe sources of information (pre-selected by the teacher), which organizes their browsing experience (Oravec, 2003). When students create their own links, meaningful lessons can arise in how the link does or does not provide rich context to their writing, and it can also be a further lesson in avoiding plagiarism, since they cannot repost what someone else has already said (Oravec, 2002).

Safety Issues and Pitfalls to Avoid

As educators, if we would like blogging initiatives to be successful in our classrooms, we must be bloggers ourselves. It is unfair and unrealistic to ask our students to engage in such technologies if we are not experiencing them ourselves (Hardy, 2005). This requires a commitment of time and purpose. Blogs that are infrequently updated and boring are not successful. If an author is blogging and receives no feedback, his or her interest will rapidly wane (Hardy, 2005).

Blogs that are used for any purpose, but especially for memoir writing, contain sensitive information which must be handled responsibly by teachers. While there is no denying the risk that online sharing involves, we can keep our students safe with thoughtful teaching and clear policies (Richardson, 2005). Blogs can be set to varying levels of privacy and anonymity, which enable personal journaling capabilities (Hardy, 2005). Students and teachers can decide together what to share, and what to keep private.

It is also relatively easy to bypass certain adult blogs with a school's surf-filtering software. Blog activity can and should be additionally monitored to discourage inappropriate language, or to ensure there are no "intruders" making inappropriate comments. Of course, while we want to encourage free expression in our young memoir writers, we also want to be sure that they are not revealing too much personal information, such as contact information, which could be potentially dangerous. Again, teachers should be thoughtful about what to make public, and what to keep on a safe, private website.

A great suggestion is to have your school district host your class blog, as opposed to a third party website; this way, school officials can maintain proper oversight, and students will not be able to post an inappropriate comment on a class blog outside of school hours (Borja, 2005). "Districts can download blogging software, such as *Movable Type*, on their servers, and teachers can control who reads and comments on a blog through sites geared to education" (p. 3). Finally, teachers can always consult "Kids'



Rules for Online Safety” established by the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children, which protects children from online predators, harassment, bullying, and more (J. Ray, 2006).

In conclusion, the planning and care required to set up safe blogging and zine sites to extend classroom literacy interchanges seem to be well worth it. Memoir writing is far too valuable an educational tool, not to explore new ways and formats for it. It is our responsibility as educators to scaffold students as they traverse this complex new terrain.

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Revitalizing Language Arts Instruction Through Inquiry Projects

Joanne Marie Robertson

ABSTRACT

This descriptive narrative presents a university/school partnership that led to an inquiry-based approach to language arts instruction, resulting in increased opportunities for reflective teaching and learning, students' environmental awareness projects, the integration of science, and the individualization of instruction at the middle school level.

AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY

Dr. Robertson is an Associate Professor in the Department of Human Services and Counseling, Literacy Program, in the School of Education at St. John's University. Her current research explores students' perception of self-efficacy and early reading and writing development, and the integration of inquiry based instruction and action research projects to support students' critical thinking in the elementary grades.

Introduction

Improving teaching and learning tops current reform initiatives, and classroom contexts have been reconfigured to meet federal and state mandates for increased student achievement through explicit, systematic, and evidence-based teaching and assessment. To address these goals, some districts have sacrificed enrichment activities such as fieldtrips, to devote more time to "test prep." Preparing students for the "one right answer" on a standardized exam just doesn't make sense. Involving students in problem posing activities with real world applications that promote their critical thinking, literacy development, and sense of global stewardship (Caine & Caine, 2007; Clyde, Miller, Sauer, Liebert, Parker, & Runyon, 2006; Freedman & Johnson, 2004; Berghoff, Egawa, Harste & Hoonan, 2000), prepares them for the substantial demands they will face in the 21st century.

This article frames a year-long inquiry project that integrated language arts, science instruction, and inquiry work to support fifth-graders abilities to analyze, problem solve, and persuasively write. Field notes describing students' questions and concept development; descriptions of individual and group projects; photographs; students' writings, drawings, and sketches; make visible a student-centered and teacher-guided integrated approach that enabled students to problem-pose and problem-solve, apply theory to real world applications, and to convey their thoughts through writing and oral presentations.



Theoretical Background

Inquiry or Project Approaches to Instruction

The project approach is a method of teaching in which an in-depth study of a particular topic is initiated and explored by a student or a group of students over an extended period of time (Katz & Chard, 1989; Trepanier-Street, 1993). Inquiry projects are usually initiated from the child's point of view or question about events and happenings in their world. During student inquiry projects students make on site visits to further stretch their thinking. They take field notes, draw, and write notes while on site, take stock of their own learning, and plan future explorations. Students rewrite and reconstruct as their knowledge base continues to grow. They explore topics that are self-selected and of interest to them. Teachers structure and support individual or small groups of students to fine-tune their questions, to locate resources that will help them find answers to these questions, and to formulate theories about what it all means in their world. Students use a variety of resources to extend their inquiries. These resources might include web quests, interviews, or conversations with experts.

Ethnographic Research

Ethnographic research is “an approach to the study of everyday life that is driven by cultural theory” (Zaharlick, 1991, p. 205). Rooted in anthropology, such explorations focus upon the social nature of learning to describe and understand the ways participants in a discourse community construct meaning and make sense of their daily experiences. Ethnographic researchers immerse themselves within a culture to gain “emic” understandings about the ways shared values, beliefs, and practices are constructed by community members. Ethnography is an interactive, reflexive, and interpretive research process. This narrative describes the culture of a fifth-grade inquiry project that took place during 2004-2005. The location of this inquiry, at the Sands Point Preserve on the Long Island, New York, enabled this group of students to appreciate the fragile nature of the earth's ecosystems and their collective responsibility to protect it.

Methodology

Participants

In August of 2004, Iⁱ conducted an exploratory meeting with school administrators, teachers, as well as a community representative to discuss the possibility of university partnership to utilize the Sands Point Preserve as an “outdoor classroom” and site for student inquiry.ⁱⁱ A mutual agreement was formed and tentative plans for the following year were developed that matched each teachers' objectives for instruction. In September, before the first fieldtrips, I conducted focus group discussions with interested teachers (8-10) to explore ways to integrate language arts with an inquiry approach.ⁱⁱⁱ During subsequent meetings over the 2004-2005 year, I provided planning resources and guidance to this teacher cohort. I accompanied their classes on most fieldtrips to the Preserve offering feedback and suggestions. Ultimately, however, it was only the fifth grade teacher, Ms. DePerto, and her 22 students who were able to successfully envision



and implement an inquiry project. Therefore, the following narrative represents her class's story.^{iv}

Research Questions

The first purpose of this study was to determine if a long-term inquiry approach could be successfully integrated with language arts and science standards for instruction, as outlined by New York State. The second purpose was to determine if integrating inquiry work significantly increased students' motivation to learn, their meta-cognitive awareness, and their sustained involvement with literacy tasks over time. The final purpose was to explore under which instructional conditions families would feel comfortable participating in their children's inquiry projects.

Design of the Study

The design of this study is emergent and based upon grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1973). Theories were inductively developed over the course of the fieldwork as notes and literacy artifacts were reviewed, reread, sorted and resorted into domains of analysis. This article highlights and describes the three phases of this year-long endeavor, the ways students processed and presented their theories, recommendations, and plans for improving the ecology and habitats of the Sands Point Preserve, and the ways project work promoted students' critical thinking, speaking proficiency, and written expression.^v Vignettes are included to enrich the narrative and make visible moments of teaching and learning.

Phase One: September to November, 2004

Several fieldtrips were taken to the Preserve between September and November of 2004 to familiarize the fifth-graders with the terrain and animal habitats, and to generate enthusiasm for the inquiry projects they would complete. The teacher and I, as well as an expert in the Preserve's history and unique features as a wildlife sanctuary,^{vi} accompanied the children through the marshy pond areas, shoreline, and trails. We did a lot of listening in these early months to find out what they children knew, and inserted a few guiding questions to further clarify our impressions. We tried to fine tune that "third ear" that would enable us "to hear the implied meanings of children's words" (Forman and Fyfe, 1998, p.245).

I watched the students chat, skip stones, and collect shells as the teacher guided them along the shoreline that first day. They eagerly searched for sea glass (sand tumbled and polished pieces of glass) smoothed by the waves (Figure 1). These treasures were placed in large plastic bags to transport back to the school for display and further analysis. Students were highly motivated and engaged in these initial explorations. Some of them took photographs, while others jotted down notes or drew pictures in their science journals. To sustain and to support their critical thinking Ms. DePerto asked focusing questions while walking on the nature trails and beach. For instance, to make



Figure 1. Fifth graders visit the Preserve in September of 2004

the students aware of negative influences upon the ecology of the Long Island Sound she drew their attention to the oil barges just off shore and the lifeless horseshoe crabs on the beach.

Throughout these initial fieldtrips,^{vii} the teacher and I were excited about the potential of this approach and the ways the fifth graders would connect scientific theory to real world settings. We talked about the schematics, renderings, models, and written pieces they could create. We brainstormed our ideas on large chart paper in workshops with the students. Our biggest challenge, however, in these first months was defining what a student inquiry project would look like. We were certain that the students could problem pose, but, could they problem solve as well? If so, how might we support their conceptual development? We decided that our goals needed to be realistic and that students' final projects should reflect their true understandings. We also agreed that the fifth graders needed more guidance and structure to develop their projects.

Throughout October and November, Ms. DePerto asked her students to clarify their thinking by revisiting their preliminary research questions. Students read extensively online and off, searched Google and Ask websites, had conversations with Preserve environmentalists to find answers to the questions they formulated and reformulated at the Preserve. They wrote and rewrote as their knowledge grew. To



supplement their research, Ms. DePerto utilized video streaming to show clips related to the topics they studied.^{viii} Through sustained inquiry they developed an awareness of the social and environmental issues facing anyone who sought to affect change at the Preserve. For example, when discussing improvement plans for a new walking trail this group began to ponder the life forms they would extinguish in the renovation process (Figure 2).



Figure 2. Students consider life inside a dead tree.

The fifth grade teacher collected, assessed, and evaluated students' work in individual and group conferences throughout this period. She began to communicate to the students (and to parents) the format of their culminating display (a town forum) to showcase their efforts in June. Simultaneously, her fifth graders' project ideas, photos, and even drawings were submitted to county executives in an effort to secure grant money for the Preserve to expand educational resources. Their collective voices were beginning to be heard.

Phase Two – December, 2004 - March, 2005

As the winter approached in mid-November, field trips became less frequent. Students continued their explorations, however, in the Preserve's indoor facilities. They remained on task and enthusiastic during this period. Small groups of five to seven students were formed in early December, and topics were teased out that matched the existing curriculum in science and language arts and reflected students' areas of inquiry. Inquiry projects revolved around five topics: The ecology of the pond; pollution; shoreline erosion; nature trails; and, alternative energy sources. To sustain and extend students' motivation and in-depth study of their topics, Ms. DePerto integrated their work at the Preserve with the annual science fair in January. In this forum, the fifth graders



had their first opportunity to present and to articulate their preliminary plans for the models they would construct in the spring.. They explained the purposes, hypotheses, materials, and procedures they would use to actualize their inquiry at the Preserve. The results and conclusions, they added, were to be completed after they built their actual models and conducted their experiments in May.

Phase Three – April to June, 2005.

When students returned to the Preserve in the spring, Ms. DePerto asked them to literally and figuratively fine-tune their observational powers, thereby taking their analysis to another level of scrutiny. Armed with instamatic cameras, they snapped instances or objects that reflected their topic of inquiry. In Figure 3, you see one such example of a student's focus upon the seawall.



Figure 3. Student documentation of seawall erosion.

Exercising the mind and the body.

Throughout the inquiry project research at the Preserve, ample time was provided for free play. These times invigorated and sustained the students in their projects, and enabled them to focus their attention upon the tasks they were required to complete for their projects. This exploration enabled me to see its benefits of unsupervised, open-ended play in natural settings for the middle school student as well. Many of the students' best ideas came to them away from their classroom desks.^{ix}

During this final phase, Ms. DePerto teacher held conferences with each of the groups to clarify her objectives for the inquiry projects. This reeling in, grounding, and



release of responsibility to group members was effective in stabilizing the fifth graders' creative energies and endeavors (See Figure 4). The teacher discussed with each group the materials they would need to construct their models in May. They were encouraged to look at home for many of the items, and a fund was set aside to purchase supplies for the students should they need it. Parents were assigned specific groups to work with, and given instructions about the nature and purpose of students' tasks at the Preserve.



Figure 4. Ms. DePerto's on site conference with a group of students.

“It’s my same curriculum,” Ms. DePerto told me, “but the kids are doing the teaching.” It was clear that she had internalized the exact fit between the curriculum, students’ inquiry projects, and her role in supporting their growth and development in the research process. She guided the students with “fact sheets” to jot down their hypotheses, inferences, predictions, and investigations. Her goals for this activity were closely aligned with the follow New York State Standards for Science: Identifying questions that could be answered through scientific investigations; designing and conducting a scientific investigation.; using appropriate tools and techniques to gather, analyze, and interpret data; developing descriptions, explanations, predictions, and models using evidence; thinking critically and logically to understand the relationship between evidence and explanations; recognizing and applying alternative explanations and predictions; and communicating scientific procedures and explanations



Data Collection, Analysis, and Results

Vignettes describing two student projects designed to combat pollution and improve the ecology of the Long Island Sound will be the focus of analysis. Katie and Colleen partnered in their exploration of the effect of pollution upon the horseshoe crabs (Figure 5). Each girl kept a journal tracking the evolution of her thinking through illustrations and written explanations.

Katie's and Colleen's Science Notes

The following excerpt comes from Katie's notes.

“On my trip to the Preserve I noticed many horseshoe crabs washed up on the beach. They were all broken in pieces. I figured out what was causing this. My theory is pollution. Many washed up cans, parts of boats, food, and even sneakers were all over the beach. I think these materials are polluting the water and making it unsanitary for horseshoe crabs to survive...My second theory isn't about their habitat, it's about their food. If the pollution isn't affecting the horse shoe crabs alone it is possibly affecting their food...I will have to research their meals each day. If that isn't the theory then it could have notion to do with pollution! I also noticed oil leaking into the water. After finishing my first experiment I will have to investigate my other theories.”



Figure 5. Katie and Colleen examine the quality of the water they collect from the Long Island Sound.

Colleen wrote in her notes, “So far I went to the Sands Point Preserve two times. The first time I went I noticed there were about forty dead horseshoe crabs...Horseshoe crabs have been around for a really long time and if they die out that is not good. That's why I am trying to save them.”



The girls describe their plans:

“Our plan is to collect different materials such as two fish tanks, two horseshoe crabs, a bucket of water from the Sands Point Preserve and a bucket of fresh water mixed with salt. We am planning to create a habitat for each horseshoe crab...We will prove our theory when the project is completed. If the one with water from its natural habitat dies then my theory our correct and we will have to enforce rules at the preserve and come up with other ideas to prevent this.”

Their list of construction materials was simple: two plastic tanks, two small crabs, two wood pikes, two 2' by 2' pieces of wood, and non-toxic blue paint. Their directions were equally as simple:

“Fill one of the tanks with dirty water from the Sound. You may also want to put some garbage in it to represent pollution. Then under the tank, write a sign that says ‘This is what happens when you don’t take care of the Sands Point Preserve.’ Fill the second tank with clean water and say, ‘This is what happens when you take care of the Sands Point Preserve.’ You will notice that there will not be a dead horseshoe crab in the clean water tank. Suggest ways to keep the water clean. Possible ideas: garbage cans, recycling bins, etc.”

Connor, Michael, and Domenick’s “Garbage Disposal 3000”

Connor, Michael, and Domenick focused their attention upon pollution in the Long Island Sound caused by oil spills. Their group’s project revolved around the creation of a boat equipped with a solar powered engine and its own garbage disposal unit. They named their idea the “Garbage Disposal 3000.” They wrote, “Oil spills can kill lots of creatures like fish and birds. We want to stop that from happening.” Connor presents a visual argument for adoption of his group’s invention in Figure 6.



Figure 6

Connor, Michael, and Domenick outlined the procedures to build the solar powered Garbage Disposal 3000. The materials for construction of the engine were simple; a cardboard box, tin foil, scissors, and tape. The boys write:

“To make a model of a solar powered engine, you need a toy boat, tin foil, and a cardboard box. First you cut four rectangular pieces from the cardboard box. Then take the tinfoil and cover the four rectangles. After, you take the four covered rectangles and attach them to the back of the boat. Finally, you have a solar powered engine! The solar panels will attract sunlight and transfer the energy into electricity.”

Directions for the Garbage Disposal 3000 were as follows:



“You’ll need these materials, a long cardboard rectangular shaped box, two pieces of long wood, and a drill. First, you’ll need to drill holes on the tip of the long wood. Next, you attach the part of the wooden pieces with no holes at the end of the cardboard box. That is where the water will flow through. The garbage will not get through the holes in the wood, but the water will. The garbage will go into the cardboard.”

In Figure 7, the boys use the materials and directions they specify in their instructions. Their efforts were focused throughout, and I listened to their explanations of the ways they hypothesized their invention would work.

“When garbage gets in it there,” Michael explained, “and the water goes through the mesh and it is filtered back into the water. Our solar power engine decreases the amount of oil used by boats.”

“It also decreases the amount of oil in the water,” Connor added.

“The solar powered engine saves on electricity,” Domenick stated.



Figure 7



Finally the big day arrived, and the students prepared to present their projects to family, friends, and community members at their town forum. They had practiced their speeches with each other, and to ensure good attendance posted flyers and distributed personal invitations. They were not to be disappointed. The turn out was fantastic, and a small group of parents brought desserts and beverages for the presenters and guests.

When asked by a local reporter that day how her students got their ideas for the projects, Ms. DePerto proudly stated, “They came here, found problems, and worked hard on finding solutions. As their science teacher I am thrilled that the students were able to apply the principles they learned, such as the scientific method, and to explore in depth subjects covered in class.”



Figure 8. A local newspaper photographer captures students' presentations.

In the reporter's article, entitled “*Students not only study problems, but suggest solutions,*” he cited several of the students.

“Most of the horseshoe crabs are dead because of the garbage in the water,” Colleen explained. She continued to describe the ways crabs were valuable for developing medicines and for eye-care research.

Michael showed the piping system he designed to reduce the algae in the pond, which he stated threatened both animal and plant life. “It was good to learn about this,” he added. “It was also fun to do.”

“It's good that we can find ways to help,” Jack added.

“It's a beautiful place and we want to preserve it,” said Elizabeth.



“Everyone got to work together,” said Gianna.



Figure 9. Parents and siblings stroll through the exhibits.

In an email a couple of days later the fifth grade teacher wrote, “I received so many compliments from the parents. They said they didn’t think it would turn out as well as it did.”

Implications

Among the most important insights of this exploration, is that using the environment as the “third teacher” enabled the fifth grade students to explore areas of interest; read and write for authentic and multiple purposes; demonstrate knowledge by applying their learning to real world situations; and use a variety of technical and informational resources to gather, synthesize, and communicate their understanding about improving the ecology to community and friends. Their experiences at the Preserve supported their abilities to analyze, hypothesize, and problem solve through hands on inquiry projects. They also fine-tuned their language arts skills by producing organized, interpretive, and persuasive reports with attention paid to facts, details, and the conventions of grammar and usage that would engage their audiences and effectively communicate their ideas. Families were eager to participate in the projects and assumed a variety of roles.



I would hope that students in more diverse communities are afforded the opportunity to explore this approach using local resources. Future “outdoor classrooms” must be conceptualized for the strength of this democratic nation and its economic viability will be determined by the forward thinking of this generation of students.

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ⁱ In keeping with the tradition of ethnographic and qualitative research, in which the researcher is present and contextualized within the writing, the first person “I” is used throughout. I am the author of this piece, an associate professor in the Literacy Program of the Department of Human Services and Counseling, at St. John’s University, School of Education.

ⁱⁱ The term “outdoor classroom” was coined by the parish rector, who accompanied the children on several of their fieldtrips.

ⁱⁱⁱ I met after school in October, March, April, and June with the cohort of teachers to reflect upon their goals and objectives, monitor student progress, clarify questions, and provide guidance. We discussed what was working, what was not, the points of tension, and additional resources needed.

^{iv} Ms. Merilee Deperto, fifth grade teacher at St. Peter’s of Alcantara and her students are depicted in this photographic essay. Originally there were twelve teachers who expressed interest in this initiative.

^v New York State Standards for Language Arts and Science will be highlighted throughout this narrative in endnotes.

^{vi} Robert Berens, a board member of Sands Point Preserve.

^{vii} Four fieldtrips were taken in the fall and early winter, and three in the spring.

^{viii} Teachers at St. Peter’s used “United Streaming” to show video clips in the content areas.

^{ix} Children identified as ADHD show improvement after play activities in natural settings, and that the “greener” a child play area (that is, the more it takes place outdoors), the less severe their symptoms (Taylor, Kuo, & Sullivan, 2001, Coping with ADD: The surprising connection to green-play settings, *Environment and Behavior*, 33 (1), 213-220.



Using Thinking Skills as a Bridge between ELA and Science Teaching Strategies

Robin Lee Harris

ABSTRACT

This article presents five activities that demonstrate how developing thinking skills in students, uses comparable ELA and science skills. The thinking skills of Blooms Taxonomy are the organizer. Skills and processes gleaned from NYS ELA and Science Standards included in article are: categorizing, comparing, following procedures, sequencing, questioning, explaining, and making informed decisions.

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Introduction

One way to promote integration of content disciplines is to look at the skills and activities that overlap according to discipline standards. The ways that students learn these skills best does not change by discipline. Thinking skills are one set of skills that can be taught across many disciplines. Some skills lend themselves better to certain content areas. Research says that no matter what skills students are taught they should have multiple opportunities in different situations to practice these skills in order for deep learning to take place (Caine and Caine, 2004; Bransford, Brown & Cocking, 2000).

Few books offer ways to bridge the disciplines, but *Science and Writing Connections: A Handbook for Teachers* focuses directly on how the writing process can enhance student learning in science (Harris-Freedman, 1999). I have had many opportunities to cross teach, being certified in both Language Arts and Science. I have found that one way to open profitable lines of communication between disciplines is through discussions of thinking skills at points where NYS standards overlap.

One way of organizing these connections is by extracting like statements from ELA and Science standards and place them side by side using Bloom's Cognitive Taxonomy. The standards statements are vague in that there are no specific examples on how you might teach skills that match them. The five activities described in this article fit both ELA and science standards and are specific examples on how these thinking skills might be taught. I have included graphic organizers as they are an effective pre-writing tool and help students to organize their thoughts (Harris-Freedman, 1999). *Table 1* shows



relationships between ELA and Science skills and processes using Blooms Cognitive Taxonomy as an organizer.

Table 1. A Comparison of ELA and Science Thinking Skills to Bloom’s Taxonomy

Bloom’s Taxonomy: Cognitive Domain	Language Arts skill/process Excerpts from ELA standards 1,3, & 4 at the 8th grade level 2005 revision	Science skill/process Excerpts from the Intermediate level Core Curriculum 5-8 USNY/SED 1996
Knowledge—the facts (Activity 1)	Connect, compare, and contrast ideas and information.	Categorizing
Comprehension—interpret and explain (Activity 1)	Compare and contrast information from a variety of different sources. Make, confirm, or revise predictions.	Comparing
Application—apply concepts to new situations. (Activity 2)	Read and follow written multi-step directions or procedures.	Follow procedures
Analysis—discriminate and divide (Activity 3)	Ask and respond to questions to clarify information.	Questioning
Synthesis—combine and integrate (Activity 4)	Identify appropriate format for sharing information with intended audience and comply with the accepted features of that format.	Communicate scientific procedures and explanations.
Evaluation—appraise and judge with evidence to support judgment (Activity 5)	Form an opinion or judgment about the validity and accuracy of information, ideas, opinions, issues, themes, and experiences.	Make informed decisions.

Connecting Activity 1: Bloom’s-- Knowledge and Comprehension Using a Dichotomous Key

STANDARDS: ELA: Connect, compare, and contrast ideas and information
Science: Categorizing

In this activity students practice their abilities to observe, connect, compare and contrast using observable characteristics of things. Practice helps with the development of rich language details and helps students develop a working knowledge of the differences between observable characteristics, e.g. wings (what you see) and inferences, e.g. appendages for flight (what it does). It is a learning lesson on the way to hierarchal reclassification abilities, and building specific vocabulary. In ELA this type of activity can help to build rich descriptions, in drafting essays and for poetry.

For younger learners, classification skills begin simply by sorting various items, first by a single characteristic, then by several characteristics, finally by several characteristics simultaneously. For older students, use several different sets of objects to



help them practice their abilities to separate objects according to observable characteristics with: tree leaves, fossils, plastic animals, lab equipment, different metals, beans, nuts and bolts, army men, school supplies and players on the Buffalo Bills NY Yankees. Sorting, ordering, sequencing and identifying characteristics are all part of the knowledge base necessary to create a dichotomous key, a basic scientific tool used in science to identify living organisms.

Learning In the ELA Classroom

1. Enlarge and laminate the graphic organizer so that there is space for a question, and then spaces to place items. These organizers help students separate objects by observable characteristics. Depending on your topic, gather up sets of 8 items for each group of students. Define dichotomy, observable and inferred characteristics. Students will use the graphic organizer to sort items into two groups using a question at each juncture. Dichotomous (dichotomy) means division into two parts. A Dichotomous Key is designed so that when each question is answered, the examined items are divided into two parts. The question format in science is: Does _____ have this particular observable characteristic? If the characteristic is present the item is sorted to the **Yes** side, if not, it is sorted to the **No** side.

2. Have students separate items by observable characteristics. The discussion that accompanies this task should be rich in descriptive language. They should use their journal to duplicate the graphic organizer and make a list of what items were sorted at each level. They should list the question first; then, which items had the characteristic and which didn't. Repeat with each group of separated items until all items stand alone.

3. There are two ways to check for correctness. (1) At each juncture, make a list of items that have and have not the specified characteristic. (2) When all items are separated, orally share each route the object took.

4. Discuss. Include in your discussion the power of vocabulary and how knowing roots of words and special descriptive words builds capacity for this thinking activity.

Assessment

Assessment takes the form of using appropriate vocabulary to describe an item, and to be able to successfully divide several items by different observable characteristics. There are many correct ways to complete this assignment. In fact one learning tool is to ask students if they can sort the items another way?

Connections to Science Instruction

Dichotomous key skills are tested in the performance sections of the Elementary Level Science Test (4th grade) and Intermediate Level Science Test (8th grade). Students are better able to understand the structure of dichotomous keys and begin to learn the specific words that describe the items in which they are interested, when they have a chance to sort with many different sets of objects i.e., rocks, minerals, gems, trees, fossils, plants, animals and others. One effective science classroom assessment consists of students' first making a key using several items. Then these keys and sets of items are switched between groups or classes for a check from other students.



Figure 1. Dichotomous Key Graphic Organizer
Classifying by Observable Characteristics

Group Names _____

Question 1: _____

1a. Yes! Has the characteristic	1b. No! Does not have the characteristic
Question 2a	Question 2b

2a Yes	2a No	2b Yes	2b No
Question 3a	Question 3b	Question 3c	Question 3d

3a Yes	3a No	3b Yes	3b No	3c Yes	3c No	3d Yes	3d No
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Connecting Activity 2: Bloom's—Application Following Procedures using *Origami*

STANDARDS: ELA: Read and follow written multi-step directions or procedures

Science: Follow procedures

Success in application tasks depends on student's abilities to be able to follow multi-step directions. Focus on following one-step-at-a-time procedures is hard for students because of all the distractions that disrupt their concentration. One way to help students learn to focus without distractions on following procedures is by connecting kinesthetic and oral learning with cognate learning through *Origami* (Marks-Tarlow, 1996).

The Japanese word *Origami* is from *ori*, to fold, and *kami*, paper. The young readers' novel, *Sadako and the Thousand Cranes* by Eleanor Coerr is used in many curriculums for young readers during the time when they are studying World War II. This novel has introduced *origami* into many elementary classrooms. You can use the art of *origami* to teach sequencing. You can also create paper art for your classroom. This past winter we saw a holiday tree trimmed with origami animals made by a group of fifth graders.



The two activities described help students see that there is a sequence that must be followed to achieve success in paper folding. This success leads to a completed figure. If the procedure at any step is changed a different figure may be made. Constructing *origami* figures may be used as a metaphor to help students develop ideas from simple to complex, yet still remembering the sequence of development. They might also be used in story writing and reading where you stop and ask *what happens next? What if we change this event, how will the rest of the story change?* Stories have so many possible endings, so it is with *origami* from the basic bases to variety different figures.

Learning in the ELA Classroom

A. Introductory Activity.

1. Prepare several *origami* figures, one paper for each step of the figure and place them in a plastic bag or envelop. Use about 5 different figures so that participants can compare ideas. *Origami* figures with 5-7 steps will work for this activity (Gross, 2001; Petty, 2006).

2. Group students.

3. Before you hand out the bags, state the rules. The group is to remove the several pieces of folded paper from the bag and sort them into a sequence that makes sense to them. They are to do this SILENTLY, no verbal communication. Hand out materials. Say, "Begin." You must be SILENT as well.

4. Wait for all groups to complete task. Discuss the sequencing and the reason for silence. Questions you might use to encourage discussion include:

Why is it important to follow exact directions?

What would happen if the sequence were done some other way?

How can we be sure that our work is completed sequentially?

Why is it important to follow procedures exactly? (medicine, automobiles, computer startup)

B. Building Capacity Activities for other days.

1. Hand out and/or show students the basic folds and bases of *origami*.

2. Record directions for folding a specific figure on a tape as in the *Connections to Science Instruction* section. Play it when you have time or desire for students to practice following directions. Remember that as your students become better at listening and folding, the figures should become harder and with more steps. Initially, five to seven steps to a complete figure are sufficient.

3. (Extension) For those who enjoy *origami*, you may wish to set up mystery figures, with students creating directions to show how it is folded. You might start with a base fold and ask for several figures that could be folded from a base such as bird, frog, kite, or water bomb bases.



Assessment

No assessment is necessary but your observations regarding an improvement in students' abilities to follow procedures are desirable. I make cranes, especially golden cranes for perfect attendance and silver butterflies for exceptional work.

Connections to Science Instruction

One chemistry teacher used paper folding to teach her students, (a) to listen to oral instructions and (b) to follow instructions quickly and accurately. She audio recorded directions for a paper figure and at the beginning or end of a class, played them to her students. They all were required to fold the object to the best of their ability. She had already given them simple directions to the names and kinds of folds used in paper folding. She found that after the 4th figure students were quick, and anticipated the next instruction. She also found that all students were better at not only following procedures in her laboratory work, but they improved in writing procedures. This was her objective!

A multi-paper element *origami* structures can be used to model the importance of precision and tolerance limits. Each piece must be folded within certain standards to fit with others. I used this assignment to (a) demonstrate experimental error, (b) working to specifications within tolerance ranges and (c) repetition of work at a given standard. It was amazing how a little paper folding activity provided examples of these important scientific concepts (Gross, 2001; Petty, 2006).

Connecting Activity 3: Bloom's—Analysis using 6 W & H Question Prompts

STANDARDS: ELA: Ask and Respond to Questions to Clarify Information

Science: Questioning

Analysis, the ability to discriminate and divide ideas is a higher order thinking skill that takes a lot of practice to develop. This activity gives students prompts, 6 W & H, to aid them in practicing analysis.

Six W & H questioning is a strategy in which students generate questions starting with the words: *who, what, where, when, which, why, and how*. Simple “yes” or “no” questions are eliminated from this activity. Who, where, which, and when can produce descriptive, recall, ordering, and comparative questions. What, why, and how can produce higher-order thinking questions. Newspaper reporters have a way of producing an article by answering the 6 W & H questions. For students, you can use this technique to develop a short essay or an analysis of a topic or concept.

In ELA you might do this activity with political cartoons or book covers to find out prior knowledge from your students regarding concepts and theories. Depending on your purpose for analysis, you might have the same or different visual prompts for your students.

Learning in the ELA Classroom

I have described this as a preview activity. It could be used as a starter for a research project or as a review activity. In reviewing, index cards instead of whiteboards could be used so that the cards could be passed from group to group or class to class.



1. Introduce your students to this analysis activity by having them list the 6 W & H question starters. Discuss different elements of analysis, discriminate and divide, and how questioning can lead to higher order answers in clarifying information.

2. Use small groups. Hand out a whiteboard and markers to each group. They should write the question starters on the board, leaving room to fill in the blanks with completed questions.

3. Identify your concept or topic in a pictorial way. Allow time for students to ask questions to clarify the topic. Then as a group, they develop as many of the 6 H & W questions that they can about the contents of the picture. They should write about what they know or what they would like to know.

4. After the allotted time, have small groups share the generated questions with the whole class.

5. Discuss results. As a way of evaluation, ask for comments on the visual prompt and use of whiteboards for this activity. Students may do this in the form of an exit slip. An exit slip is a question or request for information that students fill out and turn in as they leave class (Harris-Freedman, 1999, pp 34).

Assessment

Normally, you would not grade grammar on white-boarding as these questions are the results of brainstorming. If you are working on generating questions for research or areas of study, don't grade them at all. If you are looking for participation and cooperation grades, then participation in this activity could add to that grade. Student responses on the exit slips can be used to evaluate your instruction. Areas of strengths and weaknesses can be identified and changes in instruction made.

Connections to Science Instruction

This technique can be used when previewing a topic or concept. Sets of different or like photographs can be used to generating ideas or to find out student's prior knowledge. It can be used to generate questions for research or other assignments. After a preview, the teacher's job would be to use the gleaned information regarding student prior knowledge to guide instruction.

For review, students would create questions with answers. I used this activity to have students make up many review questions and then pass them out when we had a few extra minutes at the end of a period, or they used them as review the day before an exam. When the questions were student made, they seemed to pay more attention to them than when a teacher generated review sheet was used (Harris-Freedman, 1999, pp. 31-33). Somehow many of these questions found their way into more than one unit exam!

Connecting Activity 4: Bloom's—Synthesis Using Different Points of View

STANDARDS: ELA: Identify appropriate format for sharing information with intended audience

Science: Communicate scientific explanations



Synthesis is about combining and integrating ideas. This activity uses the same basic knowledge collected from research and investigations and integrates it in different ways; in this case writing from two or more points of view. Students like to think that there is only one point of view, theirs, and only one audience, themselves. Changing the audience in order to share learned information forces students to move from their egocentric point of view. They must learn to use different formats for writing. In this activity the task is writing from three different points of view (Harris-Freedman, 1994).

To challenge student's abilities to synthesize knowledge and show comprehension use *Fact* and *Fiction* writing side-by-side. Then add the style of *Persuasion* to bring more depth to students' abilities to explain and present information. Keeping to the *Facts* uses the lower-order thinking skill of description. Students show their knowledge and comprehension capabilities when writing in this style. Students might use the 6 W & H format for presenting the facts. *Fiction* writing makes use of students' ability to synthesize information. Students will have to keep to a short story format for this style of writing. *Persuasion* writing adds the format of developing logical arguments, arguments that must be supported by reliable evidence. All formats can be used separately until students are competent, then they can move on to the following.

Learning in the ELA Classroom

1. Explain that for this culminating activity students will be writing from two (three) different perspectives—factual, fictional and persuasive. Have students review the characteristic formats and audiences required for each style of writing. Then have the students list how they would show their understanding or learning using these multiple writing styles. These lists become the basis for a scoring guide. Doing this in class reinforces students' knowledge of the accepted writing style formats.

2. Design a scoring guide with students before they begin writing. Hand out writing prompts. Go over prompts so that the directions are clear for all. Depending on the time frame for this assignment, work would be done in class or at home. You may allow students to prepare drafts of their writing and then bring those in for the day of the exam.

3. If the assignment is intended as an exam, have students write in class. Otherwise, you can assign the writing as homework or use several days of class for students to develop their piece. For the kinds of details you would like in a final work, students might write a rough draft as homework and be able to use it to create a finished written and/or oral product in class.

Assessment

Point of view writing might be used for any number of essay assignments. Start students with a presentation of facts question. Then ask them a fictional one in which they have to apply the concepts. Then ask them to use their knowledge to persuade others to accept their point of view. This activity can be done as a summary for a unit, or at the end of a long-term investigation. Score student writing according to the scoring guide generated by students or one of your own making. Collect all drafts of student writing.



Connections to Science Instruction

In some science classrooms, students do little writing beyond laboratory reports and test essays. Writing from different points of view, expands their abilities to communicate in writing to several different audiences, something they will have to be able to do all of their lives. I've included prompts for science that you might share with a science teacher in your building. I find that asking for fictional accounts adds creative elements in students' writing that never show up in essay tests. Some students show better science understanding through their fiction writing than through any of their other traditional test answers.

Example Writing Prompts for Science

Concept: The Sun's energy

Fact: Draw a diagram and describe the processes involved as Sun's energy leaves the surface of the Sun, travels through space to the Earth's surface. Does 100% of the Sun's energy reach the earth? Explain.

Fiction: Write a story about what might happen to some of the Sun's energy as it leaves the Sun and travels through space to arrive at the Earth. What happens when it reaches the atmosphere? Maybe it travels to the surface where it is recorded by one of our science experiments. Pretend you are a bit of the Sun's energy. Describe your journey. Where do you come to rest, or do you? (Harris, 1994, p. 59).

Persuasion: You are the director of a solar energy company. Write a pamphlet that will persuade your county to invest in solar energy use.

Concept: Geologic Time and Earth's history

Fact: Earth's history is divided into four major eras: Pre-Cambrian, Paleozoic, Cenozoic, and Mesozoic. Use the research and activities we have completed in class to describe ONE era. Remember to include information about biological and physical changes in the environment that affected life during that era. Include major events that determined the beginning and end to the era you choose (Harris, 1994, p. 45).

Fiction: You have set your time machine for one of the four major eras in Earth's history. Identify the era, when and where you have landed. Describe your first ten minutes in that era.

Persuasion: You are a paleontologist and would like to continue to be able to collect fossils and have them stay in the possession of your university for research. Write a report that supports your case for intellectual and academic freedom. Address it to the US Senate Committee that is preparing a bill to stop all fossil collecting.

Concept: Space Exploration ISS

Fact: Describe the history and current status of the International Space Station (ISS). How much money has been spent? Please show the budget outlay of each country. What is currently happening with the ISS and how can we involve ourselves with this project?



Fiction: Pick one of the astronaut-specialists that is/ or was working on the ISS in 2025. Write 10 daily journal entries for this person. Include what is happening at their job.

What are their daily challenges? What are they thinking?

Persuasion: You are the chair of NASA's ISS committee. Congress wants to cut funding. With your group's help, set up a presentation to persuade the congressional committee not to cut funding, but in fact to increase federal funding.

Connecting Activity 5: Bloom's—Evaluation: Organizing and Validating Information that is used in Decision Making

STANDARDS: ELA: Form an opinion or judgment about the validity and accuracy of information, ideas, opinions, issues, themes and experiences.

Science: Make informed decisions.

We make many decisions during the course of a day. How many of these do we think about the risks, consequences, costs, actions and evidence to support each element before we make a decision? If we went into such great detail with each decision, we would not accomplish very much, but when we have a difficult decision or a specific problem to solve we need to make the best choice that we can with the information we know or can find out.

Making informed decisions based on evidence is logical and complex. It includes (a) making a judgment and (b) supporting it with valid evidence. Students have a hard time sorting out the subjective from objective, and their misconceptions from reality. This is especially true in science. There are simple ways of organizing information, so that it can be helpful in decision-making and problem solving. Graphic organizers are one way to help organize information.

Graphic organizers can be used whenever there is more than one aspect to an issue, problem or a decision. What is important is that (a) the elements of a graphic organizer be set up in advance of the research; and (b) that important aspects can be added to the graphic organizer when they are discovered. For younger and less sophisticated learners a simple Pro and Con template will get them started in evaluation skills. Two points of view are harder to present than one!

Learning in the ELA Classroom

Before the lesson: Use pre-made or class developed graphic organizer to organize research material. This may be from investigations, secondary research or by other data gathering activities. Use the class generated credibility table to evaluate your sources. Discuss the elements of making informed decisions and then supporting your ideas with credible evidence.

1. In your course of study, you may present an issue or problem that needs solving. You might use this graphic organizer for students to sum up the major events in current readings before students read the next section of a story. They might also research a *what if the author chose a different ending* type of assignment. Some beginning or sample prompts might include:



- Personal decisions as simple as, “*What could happen to me if I went for a walk?*”
- Societal, “*What should be done about waste disposal (toxic, everyday garbage, as a by-product of technology)?*”
- Historical: *What could we have done better in the treatment of returning Viet Nam Veterans?*
- Current: *What can we do on a personal level to minimize global warming?*

2. Pass out the Credibility Scoring Guide. Discuss the validity and why some information is more credible than other.

Credibility Scoring Guide developed by Graduate Students for use in their classrooms at Buffalo State College, Spring 2003 (Penick and Harris, 2005, p 48).

	4	3	2	1
Reflects my topic, supports my topic	In the title, and permeated throughout the article	In some sections	Mentioned	Found in word search
Credible	Written by established expert in the field, Data analysis	Peer reviewed	Cites established experts	Journal or organization has a positive reputation in the field
Data to support claims	Level of significance Description of population inferences	Methods, what kind of data is collected, reliability and validity information	Mismatch between claims and data	No data at all, Or got it from an IM from a friend
WEB-Credibility	On line Peer reviewed journal or publication	Reputable sponsor References national organizations such as NSF, NASA, NOAA,	Associated with college or university	Amazon.com Local newspaper, found in a blog, or in wikipedia

Note. Level 4 is the most desirable level of credibility

3. Pass out the Evaluation Information Data Sheet graphic organizer and discuss how to use it to organize information. The one included in this article pertains to the resolution of an issue that has many elements that must be considered before making a decision (adapted from Nagel and Seigel, 2004). Student groups would complete all three parts.



Evaluation Information Data Sheet

Names of Group Members _____

Identify Issue _____

A. Fill in table with your research regarding:

Element /Risk	Associated consequences	Possible Actions	Evidence that does/does not support this action	Costs* associated with this action

* Loss of quality of life, loss of abilities, financial, social, cultural
(Note, add more rows and expand the cells of the table as you identify more elements.)

B. When you have identified and researched each element/risk, prioritize the actions by prescribed criteria provided by your teacher.

C. Outline your Evaluation by stating the problem or decision to be made, the associated risk/elements, supported by evidence. Present your groups' evaluation on what should be done first, second, third, or never in regards to this issue.

4. Students conduct investigations and research to acquire information.

5. Before groups make their decision and write up their explanation with evidence, they should weigh the credibility of their evidence. Focus questions you might use could be, "Should you choose your course of actions based on a specific piece of evidence? What is that evidences credibility rating? Is there other evidence that supports your choice?" Discuss why evidence with level 1 rating should not be the only basis for making a difficult or challenging decision.

6. Students make their decision and present it in the format decided by the teacher. Posters are one way to share information with a large group and facilitate oral presentations. Graphic Organizers are turned in with the final product.

Assessment

Assessing graphic organizer work before the completion of a final presentation, will add to the quality of the final work. As any drafting writing is scored, look for ways of improvement and make your comments as questions. For the final product and the graphic organizer, you should have a scoring guide that includes both quality and quantity elements. I use three pieces of evidence, with credibility scores of 4 or 3, from three different sources to support any decision.



Connections to Science Instruction

Graphic organizers help students organize information and can be used for many pre-writing and research based activities. They help students to visualize (a) the many parts, (b) the risks and benefits in supporting a decision or the (c) trade-offs, in solving a problem.

Elements of graphic organizers will change depending on the simplicity or complexity of an issue, problem or decision to be made. The graphic organizer presented here is a composite that should provoke discussion. What is important is that we are providing a template to organize information that will aid in evaluating issues and making decisions.

Conclusion

ELA and Science standards have similar ideas and concepts that are taught in our classrooms. Translating them into day-to-day activities in more than one discipline can lead to building connections in skills and process in students' minds. As students learn and practice these skills in a variety of settings, their personal knowledge is increased. This article presents five ways to bridge the disciplines of ELA and Science through thinking skills.

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- _____ The Origami Kit. ISBN 1-58663-229-9, this multi-media package contains paper and a book titled *Origami: Easy-to-make Paper Creations* by Gay Merrill Gross.



Book Review: *How to Write Your Life Story*

Elizabeth Years Stevens

How to Write Your Life Story. Ralph Fletcher, 2007. New York, New York: HarperCollins. 102 pp. Hardcover. ISBN 978-0-06-050770-1. \$15.99.

“**Lie #1:** You have to be a famous celebrity. **Lie #2:** You must have an amazing life. **Lie #3:** You can’t write your life story until you are old and gray. **Lie #4:** Nobody will read it, so what’s the point?” (Fletcher, 2007, p. 5-8) Ralph Fletcher generated the idea to write *How to Write Your Life Story* while composing his recently published memoir, titled *Marshfield Dreams: When I was a Kid*. Fletcher, himself, admits defying “lies” about writing a personal history as he narrates his experience for a community of writers, teachers and students alike.

Ralph Fletcher purposefully shares what he learned about writing a life story. Through his many how-to-write books, Fletcher takes his reader gently through the writing process. Each chapter builds on the last, and this scaffolding helps the readers, now positioned as writers, conclude with a final written product and feelings of success.

As in his texts like *A Writer’s Notebook* and *How Writers Work*, Fletcher speaks to the reader in a kid friendly voice, beginning with a childhood memory. The first chapter, “The Buffalo,” hooks the reader with a taste of what this book is about. Through a very motivating “anyone can do it” introduction, Fletcher gets his reader ready to write but not before suggesting how to navigate a path through the book. He suggests reading, sampling, trying some autobiographical writing, and coming back for another nibble. Whether he is speaking to a child, or to an adult *facilitating* children writers, he encourages his reader to sample and savor each chapter of this text.

Its Place in the Classroom

I believe *How to Write Your Life Story* would be most useful to intermediate elementary teachers and students conducting a genre study on writing a personal history. As Lattimer (2003), another popular author on literacy learning, defines it, “A genre study is an inquiry into a text form. The goal of the inquiry is to develop habits of reading and writing that enable students to master the genre itself” (p. 4). While everyone involved studies the same genre, students gain a clear understanding of expectations through many models. The teacher even participates and models the process right along with the class. Individuals’ work takes its own shape. And aligning with Fletcher’s suggestion of sampling, writing, and coming back for another nibble, Heather Lattimer (2003) states, “They [students] need to explore texts, reflect on their learning, and experiment in their writing” (p. 4).

Other Professional Resources

In addition to Lattimer’s (2003) *Thinking Through Genre*, many additional professional texts reiterate the value of genre study in the classroom, and author Katie Wood Ray’s (2006) message has to be among the most passionate. She states,



“When I think about an inquiry stance, I always feel like this reason alone- *inquiry teaches students to read like writers*- is reason enough to teach from this stance as often as possible. Why? Because so many professional writers give the same advice when asked what a person should do to become a writer: *you have to read*, they say.” (p. 25)

Her book, *Study Driven*, provides a framework for planning units of study in the writing workshop, and it delves into types of autobiographical writing with newspapers, magazines, picture books, vignettes, and personal essay collections as sample sources to study. Notably, Fletcher (2007) also provides several pages of suggested memoirs at the end of his book stating, “...I strongly suggest you delve into some published autobiographies and memoirs. Don’t just read *what* it’s about but also *how* the author puts his or her life story together and made it engaging for readers” (p. 98).

Finally, one last professional resource that would serve as a handy companion to Fletcher’s *How to Write Your Life Story* is *Nonfiction Craft Lessons* (Fletcher & Portalupi, 2001), which Fletcher authored with his wife, also a teacher of writing. This text may serve as a guide while preparing specific minilessons. For easy perusal, lessons are categorized by grade level appropriateness. Some lessons are on revealing a subject through the narrator’s eye, sharpening leads, using time as an organizer, and so forth.

In all, I imagine a practitioner using Ralph Fletcher’s *How to Write Your Life Story* as a guide or prompt through a genre study of personal history writing. While the chapters stand alone, a teacher and students may work through Fletcher’s book chapter by chapter. Additionally, there are a number of professional resources available to support this genre study in the classroom.

Features of the Text

In the chapter on crafting your story Fletcher goes to some length to show the reader that this type of writing may take various shapes. He adequately defines biography, autobiography, and memoir as genres. Fletcher includes examples of memoirs that vary in form from vignettes, snapshots, mental photography, to poetry. The book does well immersing the reader in this type of writing with samples from aspiring fourth and fifth grade writers. Fletcher also includes snippets of published life story writing from Cynthia Rylant and his own writing of *Marshfield Dreams*.

This book uses *real* authors to articulate the process of life story writing. Chapters are interrupted with interviews with acclaimed children’s book authors who have also found success as autobiographical writers. In an interview with Jack Gantos, Gantos states, “So for me, prewriting is synonymous with the moment of inspiration” (p. 21). Gantos goes on to tell Fletcher and the reader that his story was like an “interior movie” until he put it on paper, and he describes the importance of finding truth in memories and in the memoir. The author devotes two more chapters to interviews with Jerry Spinelli and Kathi Appelt respectively.

How to Write Your Life Story, as a whole, reads fluidly with a narrative tone. As a reader and writer, I was engaged with Ralph Fletcher himself. The simple vocabulary is a notable limitation. Even when they are addressing a young audience, it is appropriate



for authors to extend their vocabulary to challenge the reader somewhat. Others may view the simplicity of the language as a strength, however.

Tips for Writers

Among its strengths, *How to Write Your Life Story* is organized well and provides many examples for young writers. Many tips should resonate with readers. Fletcher places emphasis on writing small and pruning writing. While advising the reader to write in “chunks,” Fletcher states, “It’s not enough for each section you write to be interesting: You’ve got to make sure that it fits smoothly with the whole” (p. 29). The author advises the writer to look for common themes, allowing the chunks to come together seamlessly. He assures his audience that it is okay to write small and allow the reader to infer bigger meaning. Along the same lines, he devotes a whole chapter to the “so what?” question in which the reader learns that strong autobiographical writing reflects on why the subject (person, place, or event) is significant. A life story should follow the theme, “Your reflection needs to whisper, not shout” (p. 67).

Throughout *How to Write Your Life Story* Fletcher demonstrates the importance of chunking, weaving a common theme through the story, and pruning writing. Ralph Fletcher says, “In fact, pruning...will almost always strengthen your writing” (p. 72). He describes a good autobiography as having warranted “invisible time.” Fletcher concludes the book with the following:

If you look at the cross-section of a tree trunk you’ll see rings, each one representing a year in that tree’s life. We don’t grow a new ring each year, but as you grow up you’ll gain layers of wisdom and perspective. In the future you will be able to look back and reflect on the events in your life you’re experiencing right now. (p. 97)

The message is clear: as an ongoing explorer of your own life story you don’t have to be famous, have an amazing life, or be old and gray. Certainly, life story writing gives an opportunity to look within and find meaning in the memories of life. In completing a genre study on personal history writing, each reader will take away some expertise on his or her own life.

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Book Banter

2008

“If you fill your homes with books, you can create an early reader. If you become an early reader, you are a reader for life. Television and computers give you sound bites. **Reading is the only place to get a breadth of knowledge. It’s where your mind clicks into place.**”

David Baldacci

Primary

A-Rod has become an eminent name in baseball today, but a less well-known aspect is how he got started in the sport. In **Out of the Ballpark** (Harper



Collins, 2007) *author* Alex Rodriguez tells the story of a boy named (are you ready for this?) Alex—who lives for baseball, lets no opportunity go by to play, and is

constantly working to improve his game. Co-author Frank Morrison’s colorful illustrations and interesting perspectives make the sports narrative vivid, and show the young Alex in an attractive and inspiring light. Baseball fans will love this story, which in its broad lines is of course based on A-Rod’s own childhood. As a special bonus, inside the jacket is included a baseball

card....signed by this future Hall-of-Famer!

Janey absolutely cannot wait to meet Lily May Appleton, the famous author of the *Bob the Dog Detective* books. While her class is on a field trip to meet other celebrity authors, Janey gets so involved in the latest *Bob the Dog* book that



she gets separated from her class. The timing couldn’t be worse because just at that moment the class is on its way to meet Lily Mae Appleton! Mary Downing Hahn’s ironic tale **Janey and the Famous Author** (Clarion, 2005) will appeal to anyone who has shared the experience of getting completely absorbed in a book and losing track of time, *or* anyone who has felt the



excitement of looking forward to meeting a favorite idol.

Who is the coolest, funniest, and zaniest kid in school? Why it's Ruben Plotnick, of course! Everyone would love to be Ruben's best friend. However, one day Ruben invites himself over to David's house, and that gets David worried. Why? Well, David's Grandma Rosie, who lives with David and his family, occasionally says and does some strange and unexpected things... such as asking anyone who happens to be in the room to waltz with her. How will Ruben react to this? Will he make fun of David's Grandma Rosie to the other kids in school? This is a perfect story for teaching the true meaning of friendship, and of tolerance; and of discretion.

Getting to Know Ruben Plotnick is an absorbing novel written by Roz Rosenbluth (Flashlight Press, 2005).

Any who grew up in the '50s and lived on or near a working farm will be able to relate to **I Grew Up On a Farm**, published by Moo Press (2005). This is an autobiographical story written by Alan Lewis and illustrated with black and white photographs, supplemented by



full color drawings by Bob Fletcher, that tells the story of growing up on a farm in Middletown, New York. This book would be excellent for teaching about life on working farms in New York State during the last quarter-

century, and also for encouraging young people to create stories of their own, to save for the future. The black and white photographs are so striking that the book could also be used as a means of encouraging children to learn more about photography.

Intermediate

Seeing a ghost would be a terrifying experience in itself. But imagine a ghost who appears without warning, and talks with you...*all* the time! This is the normal situation for Sparrow, the lead character in **The Secret Life of Sparrow Delaney**, by Suzanne Harper (Greenwillow Books, 2007). Sparrow, who lives with her mother, grandmother and six sisters, keeps this BIG secret from the rest of her family. Actually, all her family members seem to have various

connections to the spirit world.

Séances, channeling, and

mysterious

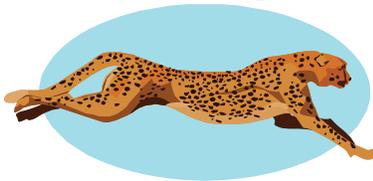
spirits are common occurrences in the household. Since Sparrow is the seventh daughter of a seventh daughter, she is assumed to have special gifts. While her family watches closely, waiting for those gifts to emerge, Sparrow manages to hide her connection with her friendly ghost so she can blend in, and be treated as a normal kid at home and at her new school. However, a persistent spirit has an urgent message that needs to be communicated to one of Sparrow's new friends. Will she risk revealing her gift?





Stay tuned! This is an imaginative and clever little book that raises the question of the “right thing to do,” versus the “safe thing.” Young readers will enjoy it, and should enjoy the discussion afterward as well.

Readers get to travel to Africa and live among the cheetahs in **Caring for Cheetahs: My African Adventure** by Rosanna Hansen (Boyd's Mills Press, 2007). Hansen is a professional



caretaker for the big cats, at the Cheetah

Conservation Fund's preserve in Namibia. This book includes numerous colorful photographs of cheetahs at the preserve, and documents the work veterinary doctors do to save them. We get to meet Chewbaaka, rescued as a cub and now living at the preserve, who serves as a kind of cheetah-ambassador, serving as a model to educate people how we can assist these animals, and take steps to sustain their habitat and end the wanton poaching for their pelts. The book includes captions and additional facts about these amazing animals, and Hansen's photographs show clearly their magnificent beauty and power.

For those in need of a new bedtime story, **What you Never Knew About Beds, Bedrooms and Pajamas** by Patricia Lauber (Simon & Schuster, 2006) tells the history of sleep through the ages.



Looking at the Stone Age, the Greeks, and the European Middle Ages, readers learn where people slept...and the survey includes some real surprises. One particularly interesting chapter of the book, “Great Moments in Nightclothes,” details some of the fashions worn in the bedroom. John Manders' illustrations and caricatures will have children laughing as they learn about bedtime across the ages. And they'll learn some interesting information along the way.

Readers become Revolutionary War soldiers in **By the Sword: A Young Man Meets War**, by Selene Castrovilla (Calkins Creek, 2007). The story gives a first hand account of the Battle of Long Island through the eyes of Benjamin Tallmadge, a young teacher. We can feel Benjamin's anxiety at the thought of killing another human being—and his bravery as he risks his life to save his horse, Highlander. The warm pastel drawings of Bill Farnsworth plunge the reader into the story; we



struggle alongside Benjamin as he tries to understand—and

survive—the events engulfing him. This is a perfect story to accompany lessons on the Revolutionary War as it will help students understand what a soldier's life was like during the Eighteenth Century; the book points up as well that many of the dilemmas facing soldiers then and now are similar.

Has anyone been looking for that perfect book to teach about Veteran's or Memorial Day, or possibly the July 4th holiday? How about an alphabet book



that describes the American Armed Services? Military families everywhere will relate to this book that portrays honor, patriotism, and the sacrifices such families live with every day. It would also be an effective book to show civilians what it really means to respond to the call to duty, and that service to secure and preserve our freedom often brings momentous changes into the military family's life. **His for Military Honor** was written by Devin Scillian, the son of a career officer, and published by Sleeping Bear Press (2005).

Young Adult

Runaway, by Wendelin Van Draanen (Alfred A. Knopf, 2006), shows, through the eyes of an intelligent and brave teenager, what it's like to be homeless. After the mother of main character Holly dies, she comes to be placed in one bad foster home after another. Her frustration and resentment are revealed through entries in the journal one of her courses in school requires her to maintain (and which we also get to read). Holly is disdainful of her homework assignments, especially those from Ms. Leone, her English teacher. How could writing in a journal and being forced to read poetry possibly help her cope with her situation? When she finally can't take the latest foster home any longer Holly decides that life would be better in California. The warm weather and sand beaches beckon, but how can a teenager without money make the long journey? She sets out, bringing her journal along, raging at Ms. Leone through her writing, and gradually reveals details about her past, and

the disappointments in her life. The author brings Holly to life poignantly, and makes the reader feel her strength, as she girds up to take fate into her own hands. This is a thought provoking and emotionally involving read. Teenagers of both genders will be drawn to Holly and admire her, and doubtless find ways to identify with some of her frustrations; and some of her dreams.

The Dream of Freedom: The Civil Rights Movement from 1954 to 1968 (Scholastic, 2004) was written by Pulitzer Prize winning author Diane McWhorter. A comprehensive timeline in the prologue of this important history of the Civil Rights Movement helps establish a context for 1954's famous Brown v. The Board of Education Supreme Court decision, and the socially divisive events that followed. The oversized 130-page book describes the formation of instrumental Civil Rights organizations, the subsequent peaceful demonstrations, and the often violent protest reactions. This text is compelling, and sensitively illustrated with extraordinary photographs that capture the movement, its leaders, and the bravery and sacrifice of African Americans struggling for democratic freedom in pursuit of equality.

This text would serve as a wonderful companion to related trade books in the classroom library such as the historical novel **The Watsons Go to Birmingham**, by Christopher Paul Curtis; and to biographies of activists such as Rosa Parks, Malcolm X, and Martin Luther King. The reading level is suitable for Upper Elementary through High School.



**Thank you...*authors*, for creating,
and publishers, for supplying, these
excellent tools to encourage our children to
love reading.**

**NYSRA Children's Literature
Committee**

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