



American  
Reading Forum

*Yearbook*

*2012*



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Barnes, H. & Fine, J. C. (2012). Teachers' perception of parental engagement in their children's school-based writing development. *American Reading Forum Annual Yearbook* [Online], Vol. 32.

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## **Teachers' Perception of Parental Engagement in their Children's School-Based Writing Development**

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The three “Rs”, reading, ‘riting and rithmetic have always been regarded as the core of any school curriculum. Over recent years reading and ‘rithmetic have taken center stage despite ‘riting’s critical role in school, college and the workplace (National Commission on Writing, 2003). The teaching of writing in schools has only been a focus of significant research since the 1980s (Prior, 2008). Standardized writing assessment nationwide is conducted only at certain grades, which vary state by state – The Florida Writing Assessment is conducted at 4th, 8th and 10th grades as mandated by the 1990 legislature (Florida Department of Education (FLDOE), n.d.). The writing assessment carries less weight than either the reading or mathematics assessments. Both reading and mathematics are subject to annual assessment. As mandated by the legislature, since 2002 third grade students who fail to achieve above a level 1 in the reading assessment, and do not qualify under one of the six exemptions, are retained and not promoted to fourth grade (Office of Program Policy Analysis & Government Accountability, 2006). Writing is not assessed annually nor does failure carry a penalty such as the potential for retention at any grade.

Presently, standards are generally in transition. The standards which are currently in place will shortly be superseded by The Common Core State Standards (CCSS). The Partnership for Assessment of Readiness of College and Careers (PARCC) and the SMARTER Balanced Assessment Consortium (SBAC) have been awarded contracts by the Department of Education to develop sets of assessments from which the states will select (Long, 2011). To date, 29 states are working with SBAC and 24 are working with PARCC to develop common standards for assessment. The goal of the new standards is to prepare students for employment in a

technology-based, global workforce. Florida officially accepted the CCSS in July, 2010 (FLDOE, 2010) and is among the governing states working with PARCC developing technology-based, comprehensive assessments which will measure the range of CCSS (Hain, 2011). Writing will be particularly affected by the changes since there is a renewed focus on writing as part of the CCSS, "Each year in their writing, students should demonstrate increasing sophistication in all aspects of language use, from vocabulary and syntax to the development and organization of ideas, and they should address increasingly demanding content and sources." (Common Core States Standards Initiative, 2011). From 2012 scoring will be less lenient in regard to structure and spelling; contrived statistical claims and unsubstantiated generalities will no longer be acceptable (FLDOE, 2011). The place of writing in the curriculum will need to change and teachers will need not only to know how to teach to a high standard but it will be important for them to have some knowledge of the support they have from their students' parents and families.

When teachers and parents collaborate student success is facilitated. There have been many previous studies which support the premise that parental involvement leads to student success (Paratore, Krol-Sinclair, David, & Schick, 2010) so teachers are at least theoretically aware that student success is often predicated upon parental involvement and engagement. It is important for both parents and teachers to be engaged to support student learning and it is also important for each to have insight into the other's perspective (Rubie-Davies, Peterson, Irving, Widdowson & Dixon, 2010). The parent's engagement influences the teacher's success in regard to achieving his/her academic goals for the students. Teachers' beliefs regarding parents' involvement and engagement are key but poorly documented (Rubie-Davies, et al, 2010). It is vital therefore to have an understanding of how teachers' perceive parental engagement in children's writing.

In this study, *parent involvement* refers to parents participating in activities by invitation overt or implied, for example, making photocopies or other "office" related tasks, providing, preparing and serving food at a school's spaghetti dinner, acting as a chaperone on a field trip. This is different from *parent engagement*, which refers to a parent's role as a power-sharing citizen of their child's education community (Price-Mitchell, 2009) actively participating in activities which directly lead to academic advancement, particularly related to writing.

*Writing*, refers to a written sample produced by a student following appropriate syntax, vocabulary, genre, and content relevant to an intermediate level elementary student. The purpose of this descriptive study is to explore how teachers perceive parental engagement in children's school-based writing. From the teachers' points of view:

- What do parents do to facilitate their children's writing development?
- What would teachers like parents to do to facilitate their children's writing development?
- What should teachers do to help parents to facilitate their children's writing development?

- What should the school be doing to assist parents to become more engaged with their children's writing development?

Following the theory of self-fulfilling prophecy (Watzlawick, 2011), positive perceptions frequently lead to positive outcomes. It is therefore important for teachers to believe that the students' parents are supportive of their work. If they perceive themselves as supported by the parents and families they will be motivated to provide the students with a rigorous program of writing instruction to the benefit of their students.

### **Method**

#### **Participants**

This study was conducted with ten teachers who were teaching in a variety of schools - public, private and charter all located in South Florida. The participants were a combined convenience and purposive sample. The majority of the participants (60%) were candidates engaged in two different graduate programs offered by a local university. The other participants (40%) were all employees of a local charter school. Each participant was selected based on her status as a qualified teacher with classroom experience. Most of the participants had experience of teaching students at critical grades for writing assessment in Florida (4th, 8th or 10th grade). One was teaching at the primary level and one was teaching at 7<sup>th</sup> grade otherwise they were, or had been, intermediate teachers.

#### **Recruitment**

The teachers were recruited by means of an introductory letter explaining the study. Letters were hand delivered to a total of approximately 30 teachers and the ten who volunteered were included in the study. The graduate candidates' professor acted as a gatekeeper, extending an invitation for me to solicit the participation of her students. One of the teachers at the charter school was known to me. She acted as my gatekeeper in that setting, introducing me to her colleagues. In order that our prior knowledge of one another would not contaminate the data collected she was eliminated from the potential pool of participants. None of the other participants was known on a personal level. Each participant volunteered freely after reading the introductory letter. Interview appointments were made in person.

#### **Data Collection**

Each participant was interviewed at a time of her choosing, in a location conducive to privacy; a classroom, a school media center or an office. Each participant had a pseudonym, generated using the participant's initials. Pseudonyms were used to maintain the confidentiality of the participants (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). The interviews were conducted following a semi-structured, guided conversation format and included relevant questions, together with potential follow up questions and probes (Rubin & Rubin, 2005) all developed prior to the meeting. The questions underwent some modification as data were collected and pertinent areas for deeper research were uncovered. The order of questions was largely in line with the research questions. However the order was not adhered to rigidly; the lead of the interviewee was followed.

Each interview was digitally recorded. The interviewee's permission to record was sought and obtained prior to the interview (Bogden & Biklen, 2007). The recordings were downloaded to a computer and transcribed by the researcher, shortly after the interview. In addition to the transcriptions of the interviews, field notes were taken either in the form of reflective journal entries (Ortlipp, 2008) or as interview notes developed shortly after the interview and prior to the transcription. The reflective journal entries were made in the spirit of examining any biases which might be brought to the situation as the researcher was the principal research instrument (Merriam, 2002). At one point, the researcher became conscious of her "Pedagogical I" (Peshkin, 1988) when she realized that she was responding to what the participant was saying by offering suggestions for resolution based on experience. This generated careful monitoring of responses. The interview notes included descriptions of the setting and the individual participants. Minimal additional data was collected from each participant as regards race, educational level achieved at the time of the study, years of teaching experience and age in order to create rich descriptions of the participants.

Once transcribed, the interviews were coded and an overview of what was said was developed for review by the participant to enhance the accuracy of the interpretation. There were four quasi-a priori codes resulting from the research questions, other codes surfaced as the data were analyzed.

The interviewer, the first author, has spent 18 years as a classroom teacher. She worked in small private Montessori schools where formal, FCAT style testing was not administered. She has been out of the classroom for a period of four years, so whilst she has some insights into the methods of instruction and to how the parents in her own teaching situation were involved, she is researching a different setting and, with the fast pace of change, a different time than that of her experience. The interest in teachers' perceptions of parental engagement in children's writing is in light of the changes in assessment to CCSS. The new standards will provide challenges children will have to meet using all the resources at their disposal, not just classroom instruction but everything they can bring to the task. It is therefore critical for teachers to have an understanding of what students bring from home in the way of support and back ground for the writing process.

The study is being conducted from a socio-cultural, constructionist perspective, viewing "literacy as situated, mediated sociocultural practices, as motivated and socially organized activity" (Prior, 2008). Writing is situated in specific circumstances of time and place (Smith, 1994). It is influenced by social interaction of all the participants: teacher, parents (and family), and the student (Quintanar, 2011). It relies on the cultural experience of all and builds on the background and experiences they hold, their schema. Teachers' perceptions of parental engagement are influenced by their experiences and by their own background both in regard to their expectations of parents and expectations of what children's school-based writing should look like. Lareau (2003) said that parental engagement varies by expectation and experience. She identified that some parents believe that engagement requires concerted cultivation involving significant parental intervention whilst others subscribe to the accomplishment of natural growth, where parents attend school functions but do not proactively interfere in school trusting to the expertise of the teacher as professional. In North America, parent engagement is more a White middle-class value (Guo, 2010). These positions form major socio-cultural

differences in what parents regard as engagement. This is a basic interpretive study designed to develop an understanding of how teachers' perceive parental engagement through the detailed reports of ten individuals (Bogden & Biklen 2005).

### **Review of the Literature**

Writing is a recursive process (Meltzer, 2007; Reif, 2007) where the writer shifts back and forth between writing, revising and editing, finding, developing and clarifying ideas, searching for the clearest meaning (Reif, 2007), though it is often taught in a linear fashion – developing an outline, writing a rough draft, revising and editing a number of times and finally producing a final copy. According to Donald Murray (2007) writing is not thinking first and then writing down what was thought, writing is thinking. Writing helps us to come to terms with our experience so even when teachers can't relate to the experience of the students it is critical to develop authentic relationships with them (Shagoury, 2007). Linda Reif (2006) puts it succinctly when she says,

There has been so much focus on literacy *as reading* over the last ten years that we have forgotten, even abandoned, writing. At an irreplaceable loss. At the expense of thinking. At the expense of reading. We have forgotten that a person can read without writing, but cannot write without reading. If we neglect writing, while focusing our attention almost exclusively on reading, it is also *at the expense of reading*. If we really want to teach kids to be strong readers, we need to teach them to be strong writers. (p34, emphasis in original)

“Teachers, administrators, parents and communities acknowledge the critical role that families play ... and often join together to create ... partnerships to improve children's literacy learning” (Edwards, 2004). Parents and the family (as well as other caregivers) are the child's first teachers (Edwards, 2004, Morrow, Mendelsohn, & Kuhn, 2010). This applies to literacy (Au, 1993, Zygouris-Coe, 2007) as well as practical developmental learning. There are many at home literacy activities which support children's literacy development (Anderson, Lenters, & McTavish, 2008). There are challenges in regard to poor and culturally diverse parents' involvement in their children's literacy growth, both related to involvement and engagement (Edwards & Turner, 2009). Lack of time is a critical hindrance to both parental involvement and parental engagement; however parents perceive other deterrents, including lack of communication from the school, their own lack of knowledge regarding what the school is teaching and resistance from the school (Bridgeland, Dilulio, Streeter, & Mason, 2008). Furthermore teachers have insufficient knowledge of what language and literacies students engage in when they are at home. This is an escalating problem, with the increase in African American and Hispanic student percentages in schools the likelihood of teachers sharing the same cultural background as their students diminishes (May, 2011).

### **Setting of the Interviews**

The interviews were conducted in one of three types of setting. The majority of the participants, teachers who were enrolled in graduate classes at a local university were

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interviewed in the media center of a large high school. The media center was in a large modern High School. It was a spacious room with many tables which were set out ready for the following class session. There were book shelves set up according the Dewey-decimal system occupying approximately one third of the space of the room. The remaining space housed many desks with computers which were available for student use. There was an office at one end. The interviews were conducted in the late afternoon immediately prior to the start of the participant's class session. At the start of the interviews there were very few people in the media center but as the interviews progressed classmates and other students entered the media center. The researcher and participant were seated in a secluded spot where confidentiality of what was being said could be maintained. One of this cohort of teachers was interviewed in a university campus office. The office was furnished with two desks and chairs. There were filing cabinets along one wall. At the time of the interview the office was otherwise unoccupied. Each interview lasted for between 30 minutes and an hour.

The other interviews were conducted in the individual charter school teachers' classrooms once school was over for the day. Three of the interviews were conducted on an early release day at approximately 2:15 p.m. the other interview was conducted in the early evening of a Friday afternoon. The classroom was otherwise unoccupied at the time of the interview. These interviews lasted for approximately 1 hour, one of the interviews lasted for 1 hour 30 minutes.

The teachers were asked prior to the interview if the location of the interview was a comfortable space for them and all responded that it was.

### Descriptions of the Participants

The descriptions of the participants as shown in Table 1 below are taken from both the additional data collected from each and from the interview notes and journal entries. All of the participants were female; one male's participation was sought. He was an eligible participant teaching at the charter school but he did not request inclusion.

Table 1  
*Demographic Data for Participants*

Participant	Gender	Age Range	Teaching Experience (years)	Race/Ethnicity	Level of Education	Location of Interview
1	F	20-29	1-3	White	Bachelors	Media Center
2	F	40-49	4-6	White	Masters	Classroom
3	F	30-39	7-12	Hispanic	Masters	Classroom
4	F	30-39	7-12	Hispanic	Doctorate	Media Center
5	F	20-29	1-3	Hispanic	Bachelors	Media Center
6	F	20-29	4-6	Hispanic	Bachelors	Media Center
7	F	50-59	13-20	Hispanic	Masters	Classroom
8	F	30-39	7-12	Hispanic	Masters	Office
9	F	30-39	4-6	Mixed	Specialist	Classroom
10	F	30-39	4-6	Black	Bachelors	Media Center

The participant's ages ranged from the 20's to the 50's; 30% of the sample was 20–29, 50% was 30-39, 10% was 40-49 and 10% was 50-59. The range of experience also varied 20% had 1-3 years of experience, 40% had 4-6 years of experience, 30% had 7-12 years experience and 10% had 13-20 years of experience. The participants were 20% White, 60% Hispanic, 10% Black and 10% Mixed race. The level of education of the participants ranged from Bachelor's level to Doctoral: 40% held a Bachelor's degree, 40% held a Master's degree, 10% held a Specialist degree and 10% held a Doctoral degree. All of the participants were currently active teachers but not all were currently teaching critical grades, 4<sup>th</sup>, 8<sup>th</sup> or 10<sup>th</sup>.

### Results

The following definitions of otherwise indistinct terms refer to quantities. Enumeration data were used in the results section as follows:

- the word “overall” indicates that 90% or more of the participants gave a particular type of response,
- the word “many” indicates that between 60% and 90% of the participants gave a particular type of response,
- the word “some” indicates that between 30% and 50% of the participants gave a particular type of response and
- the word “few” indicates that 20% or less give a particular type of response (Galvan, 2009).

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**Quasi-a priori codes – those which are a direct result of the interview questions**

#### **What parents do at home which facilitates children's school-based writing**

Overall the teachers perceive that the parents are not engaged their children's school-based writing development. However, many of the teachers believe the parents engage in writing activities which could promote school-based writing. Their first thoughts focused on whether the parents engage with their children's homework activities. Few of the teachers thought that parents helped with homework. Ms. Vincent believes parents don't work “with them [children] when they have homework” and Ms. Collins said “it seems like parents are not very engaged in terms of doing homework with them [children] or even checking it over”. Ms. Weinstein offered suggestions as to why parents might not be engaged saying, “parents that I work with in my school have one, two or three jobs and don't have time.”

When asked to re-direct their thoughts to at-home activities which parents might engage in which involved writing many of the teachers were able to offer suggestions as to what they thought parents might be doing. A few believed no writing was done at home. Ms. Edwards stated quite categorically that there is no parental engagement and that there is no family-based



writing. Overall, the teachers thought that parents used the texting facility on their mobile phones and many believed they used email. Other activities which were suggested included writing various types of lists, engaging in social networking (blogging and Facebook were mentioned specifically), writing a resume or cover letter, and if they were attending any type of schooling their own school- related writing. Some of the teachers believed that parents might be engaging in writing activities, but that children might not be aware of it. Perhaps the children had gone to bed or multiple computers were available in the house so there was a lack of awareness of what others were doing. Those teachers who believed that parents used email and texting did not necessarily think that these helped children's writing. Ms. Collins, along with others, particularly noted the use of abbreviations, e.g. idk for I don't know, as problematic. Some of the teachers observed that these abbreviations impacted the mechanics of school-based writing negatively.

### **What teachers would like parents to do.**

Overall, the teachers would like parents to become engaged in their children's school-based writing or homework, even if this is done indirectly, for instance, going through the book bag or just asking if the child has homework. Basic, at-home writing activities demonstrating the utility of writing that teachers would like parents to engage in included writing various types of lists – shopping, chores, activities, creating a calendar or agenda to record events or activities, writing notes or letters, creating cards for holidays, and keeping recipes. Ms. Perez had a list which included helping with homework, “writing down a shopping list, maybe names and phone numbers of relatives, helping parents write down chores... a weekly schedule”. Some teachers would like to see more pen and paper use, modeling hand-written examples of writing as opposed to using technology. Many of the teachers stressed the importance of dialogue, interaction or conversation and some suggested withdrawing activities which they perceived as detrimental – turn off the TV, video games, DVD player. Ms. Mendez was particularly concerned regarding the dearth of interaction between parents and children, saying it limited oral language development which had detrimental effects to the students in higher grade levels and particularly impacted writing.

A few teachers recommended exposure to real life experiences in contrast to those featured on TV and video games. Ms. Mendez asked, “How can you expect children to write about a visit to the park, or the beach if they have never been?” A recurring suggestion was to take children to the library, check out books, obtain a library card, and share books once they were read. Fifty percent of the participants recommended reading as a way to improve writing. Another often repeated issue was the “value of writing.” Many of the teachers thought that parents did not value or believe that writing was important. Some of them specifically identified this as a result of a lack of testing or intermittent testing with no consequences, as contrasted to retention for poor reading scores in 3<sup>rd</sup> grade. Ms. Rodriguez was most specific in this respect.

**MS. RODRIGUEZ:** There are no repercussions whether or not you fail the writing exam so I guess the parents aren't really as worried.

**INTERVIEWER:** What do you mean repercussions?

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MS. RODRIGUEZ: They are not retained.  
INTERVIEWER: OK

MS. RODRIGUEZ: They are not retained and there are no consequences for getting a level 1, 2 or 3 on the FCAT Writes. However, in 3<sup>rd</sup> grade on the reading, if you score a level 1, you are automatically retained.

### **What teachers can do to encourage parental engagement.**

As one of the teachers so rightly pointed out, parents “would have to want to first of all”, however, overall the teachers believed they could reach out to parents and encourage them to become more engaged with their children’s academics and writing, in particular. Many suggestions were offered including making recommendations of what parents could do along the lines identified in the previous section, send home more assignments focused on writing, and ask parents to help, provide examples, show rubrics to parents or provide them to be kept at home, provide opportunities for the parents to visit the classroom to see what the students are doing, open writing hour to the parents, and ask parents to participate. Ms. Edwards, who thought that there was no engagement on the part of the parents of her students and no writing in the home, advised she is attempting to engage parents by linking to parents’ interest in sports by selling raffle tickets to games and offering sports personality shirts. She identified that she has to help parents before she can help her students since a proportion of them are illiterate. She also stated that she had already begun holding workshops to facilitate improving computer literacy for her parents. Other teachers also suggest classroom workshops.

### **What the school can do to encourage parent engagement in children’s writing.**

Overall the teachers recommend that schools hold workshops which focus on writing. These should include examples of FCAT responses, appropriate spelling and grammar and Ms. Vincent suggested having parents respond to an FCAT prompt in order that they experience what the children are required to accomplish. The teachers reported that many schools already hold workshops on a number of topics including FCAT reading and FCAT mathematics. Some of the teachers reported that parents participate willingly and a few say parents really enjoy workshops. Other suggestions include creating a web site for writing, providing professional development for teachers, offering tutoring in writing, and disseminating literature regarding both the importance of writing and the impact of the Common Core State Standards.

## **Codes that emerged from the data**

### **Opportunities for teacher/parent interaction.**

Overall the teachers identified the major opportunity for interaction as being the parent conference. They also indicated that informal interaction occurred on a varying scale. Many of the teachers reported that parents were able to interact casually at “drop off” or “pick up” (before or after school), or an open door policy existed where parents could make arrangements to meet with teachers at the school almost at their convenience. However, many of them reported that exchanges in this daily setting were largely casual, “How’s my child doing?” rather than

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academic in nature. Overall the teachers reported that phone and/or email contact was readily available. However, overall they also reported that some parents took advantage of the opportunities to interact and some did not. Other means of communication included web sites, the district web site portal, through grading systems and by written note.

### **Parent knowledge and background.**

Overall the teachers believed that the parents lacked knowledge either of writing and/or of the requirements of the test or of the language. Some of the teachers identified that the parents had not experienced FCAT tests themselves so did not appreciate the importance of school-based writing, nor did they understand the scoring, as previously indicated. Some of the teachers thought that SES played a part in parent's lack of knowledge but a few believed this was not an excuse for not being involved, even if engagement was problematic. Ms. Vincent believed that there was a correlation between low SES and oral English language facility.

Another issue was lack of proficiency in English. Some of the teachers reported that parents speak another language other than English and this impedes their ability to become engaged with homework. A few of the teachers believe this is not an excuse for lack of involvement. Parents can read and write in their home language. Additionally, many of the skills employed in writing are the same in all languages – planning, editing, revising etc. Ms. Miller identified that culturally, some parents do not engage because they believe that education is the provenance of the teacher. She said, “that is more like a teacher thing that they [children] need to do more in school and not with the parent” she also said, “parents want to help [but] they feel like they can't because they don't know English” in addition she said, “parents don't know how to write” but she concludes with “I think parents want to help, but they don't know how to but I don't think teachers are helping parents. For the writing I don't think we are helping parents help,” indicating that she perceives that she could facilitate parental engagement.

### **What children are writing already.**

Some of the teachers perceived that children do not write recreationally or at home. Others acknowledge that children like using the computer but the teachers do not perceive this as writing. One of the teachers acknowledged that some children are writing at home, that some of this writing is personal and the children do not want help or interference from adults. She said the children are willing to share if the material is not too personal and some children indicate that they are prepared to engage in peer review. Most of the teachers indicate that children email and engage in texting but they do not perceive this as writing. In fact some of the teachers directly attribute poor spelling and grammar to the influence of technology, particularly texting.

### **The influence of the teacher's own background on her perceptions of parental engagement.**

This code did not develop until the project was well underway, but when it was included, it elicited a variety of pertinent responses. It was addressed by only half the participants. All those asked indicated that their childhood years influenced their expectations of parental engagement. Having engaged parents themselves, gave them an example of not only what they



should be doing with their own children (for those who have them) but, also, set a standard for their expectations of the parents of their students.

Both Ms. Frank and Ms. Mendez believe that low SES and/or lack of proficiency in English are not excuses for lack of engagement in children's schooling and writing in particular. Ms. Frank is aware of this as a bias, which comes directly from her own background, and whilst she is "sympathetic", she perceived her students' parents as not valuing education, not knowing the importance of education and parental involvement. Ms. Collins said her parents were engaged but admitted that changes in society in regards to families with 2 working parents and single parent families may be contributory factors to lack of parental engagement. Ms. Rodriguez also acknowledged these factors and shared that she was educated in a different country with a different culture. She noted that her extended family was engaged in her education and perceived that these factors influence her perceptions. She believed that writing is fun and that children enjoy it. Ms. Vincent observed that a parent was always around and that the family ate dinner together she also acknowledged that families have changed. She identified her influencing factor as being what she does with her own children,

"I keep going back to my own children, I'm sorry but I know that the more involved I am with my children, the more I look at their stuff the more likely they are to [the school bell interrupted her] ... want me to be proud of them"

She went on to say,

"I monitor my children every day..., I look at their phone, I look at their Facebook, I ask them questions about their day, I look at their homework; I try to be as involved as possible with my children... How could I get another parent to be like that, I don't know."

### Discussion

Overall the teachers perceive that parents are not engaged with their children's writing. In fact, they believe that parents engage in minimal writing of any sort in the home. The exception is that the teachers perceive that parents (and children) engage in technology-based writing, primarily texting and writing emails. However, they perceive this form of writing as a hindrance to good school-based writing skills. This would appear to come from a deficit perspective. They particularly focus on the negative impact on both spelling and grammar. Despite their perceived lack of support from the parents, particularly as it relates to school-based writing, there appears to be some sympathy. A number of reasons why parents might not be involved were suggested, including time constraints as a result of employment obligations and responsibility for multiple children. The teachers also perceive that parental engagement generally is largely test driven and, when specifically related to writing, the lack of consequences, infrequency of testing and minimal promotion of writing by schools means that writing is regarded as less important. The teachers also think that parents lack knowledge about the requirements of the FCAT Writes. They believe it is important for parents to be educated regarding writing standards.

The teachers' perception of children's engagement with writing is that it is largely technology-based, though one of the teachers was aware of some of her students engaging in

journaling outside of school. The personal nature of children's writing, at this intermediate age, was also noted and this limited children's receptivity to parental engagement.

The teachers have a range of suggestions as to what they would like parents to do to facilitate their children's school-based writing development. The ways in which they would like parents to be engaged focused on personal interaction – talking, and reading, which they believe are fundamental foundations for writing, though they offered a variety of other activities which would support student writing growth, both from a practical application stance and from a value of the utility of writing stance.

The teachers believe that they could facilitate parental engagement by increasing the level of communication between themselves and the parents. They also believed that schools could be instrumental in encouraging parent's engagement. The most frequent suggestion was for schools to hold workshops or Parent Academies specifically oriented toward writing. The other suggestion was that schools should be disseminating more information, prioritizing writing and explaining the changes in the standards which are forthcoming. They believed that parents would be receptive and would take to heart the importance of writing if schools made it a priority.

### Conclusions

Communication would seem to be the key. Whilst many of the teachers noted many opportunities for teachers and parents to interact, it is critical for there to be a wide range of means of communication offered – workshops would appear to be important but communication via one-to-one meetings are a preferred means. Others include email, phone calls, web sites, county portals, and literature. Ideally, every parent should be reached by one means or another. Teachers can instruct to the highest standards but parent engagement and commitment to what they are doing is critical to student success (Paratore, 2010). This is a reciprocal arrangement. It is important for teachers to view the skills that the children bring from home as a support to literacy (Edwards, 2004), specifically writing, development. Parents will moderate their behaviors based on their observations of what is needed. They will also respond to teacher requests (Rodriguez-Brown, 2011).

Workshops are needed not only for the parents but, also for the teachers. Most of the teachers in this study fall into the digital immigrant category, born before 1982, whereas their students fall into the digital native category, exposed to technology all their lives. Technology is here to stay and innovation in this field will continue. Students need to be totally literate in this area to be successful in a 21<sup>st</sup> century world. As Prensky (2001) says possibly “the single biggest problem facing education today is that *our Digital Immigrant instructors, who speak an outdated language (that of the pre-digital age), are struggling to teach a population that speaks an entirely new language.*” (p. 2). Therefore, workshops related to “writing in the digital age” for the teachers in order to moderate their perceptions in regard to technology-based writing, and its value, are essential. Writing using “text speak”, incorporating commonly understood abbreviations and syntax which deviates from that of school-based writing, is merely writing in a different register. This indicates that an elemental component in writing instruction in today's classroom is what style of writing is appropriate where/when. This issue will moderate as more digital natives enter the teaching profession. Never-the-less with 40%+ of the current teaching population being over 50 (National Center for Education Information [NCEI], 2005), the

problem will persist and escalate as technology gains in importance, for some time. Workshops to facilitate teachers' receptivity to technology-based writing should take place. These ought to be prior to workshops for parents in order to enhance the teachers' perspectives of technology-based writing. Teacher preparation programs would be well advised to incorporate instruction regarding technology-based writing and how this can be incorporated into the curriculum of the classroom to enrich children's writing experience.

The repeated suggestion for schools to institute workshops would fall under the umbrella of family literacy development. There have been many studies supporting such programs particularly in relation to either low SES or diverse populations (Rodriguez-Brown, 2011). This study did not differentiate based on either of these variables. However, there is no reason to believe that, by extension, school-based programs specifically directed to engaging parents in their children's writing success would not be equally successful, since the goals are similar. These workshops would promote an understanding for parents not only of the requirements of the testing but also of the importance of writing for their children in everyday life and their future success.

This study indicates that further research into teachers' perceptions of parents engagement with their children's writing is needed with a broader sample of participants. Other areas for research include teachers' perceptions of themselves as both writers and teachers of writing. Another is broadening the area of research to include parents' perceptions of their understanding of themselves as participants in their children's education. Research into children's writing habits, in general, as well as research into the impact of digital immigrant versus digital native on children's writing development is also indicated. Ways to share the work involved in the teaching of writing in school with parents is also an area of needed research. With the closer examination of writing, the third 'r' will regain its rightful place with reading and 'rithmetic.

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## **Fostering Graduate Education Majors' Dispositions toward Teaching Content Reading through a Transdisciplinary Approach**

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*"Few inquiries have investigated master's students in education as they learn about transdisciplinarity" (Richards, in press). Transdisciplinarity is descriptive of collaborative research and problem solving that crosses both disciplinary boundaries and sectors of society" (Repko, 2008, p. 15).*

*This is a true story about how I introduced the concept of transdisciplinarity to a group of graduate education majors. The graduate education majors tutored at a summer literacy camp as part of their field experience requirements for a capstone literacy course.*

The term *transdisciplinary* has been used to describe a particular approach to teaching and learning (Kaufman, Moss, & Osborn, 2003; Klein, 2004; Nicolescu, 2010; Richards & Kroeger, 2012). Even though transdisciplinarity has been around for decades, interest in transdisciplinary teaching and research in education was minuscule. However, scholars have begun to realize that curriculum needs to become more integrated than it is now because that is how the world works (Prensky, 2011, n.p.). We are in the information age where we can find information to solve our problems online, quickly and efficiently. However, many of our troubles in today's society are complex and cannot be solved by relying on one discipline. Instead, it is necessary to consult a variety of disciplines in order to generate efficient resolutions to solve the problems we face today (Klein, 2004; Madni, 2010).

The notion of transdisciplinarity first emerged in the natural sciences during the Enlightenment Period (Ramadier, 2004). Since then, scientific activity and exploration have led to the overlap of many traditional sciences (Ramadier, 2004) such as Applied Physics, which bridges physics and engineering. Additionally, the term transdisciplinarity expanded into the public domain through journals and other publication outlets (Ramadier, 2004). This extension

then led to collaboration among disciplines (Madni, 2010).

As a doctoral student in a summer literacy camp, I decided, after consultation with my major professor, to adopt a transdisciplinary curriculum to enhance the content literacy of upper elementary students in her summer camp. A transdisciplinary perspective crosses disciplines; is driven by student inquiry, collaboration, and reflection; and emphasizes student choice. These conditions contribute to students' motivation to learn. Therefore, I thought a transdisciplinary approach had the potential to empower upper elementary students from minority families who attended the camp. Equally important, I wanted the graduate education majors to become aware of the power of transdisciplinarity and to become comfortable utilizing this approach in their own classrooms.

Scholars note there are six major canons associated with transdisciplinarity as it connects to teaching and learning (Kaufman, Moss, & Osborn, 2003). These principles are: a) holistic knowledge; b) authentic inquiry focused on an issue; c) collaboration among participants; d) social justice; e) constructivism; and f) reflection. Each of these principles were fulfilled during the literacy camp with the exception of authentic inquiry because of the limitation of time.

### **Objectives of My Inquiry**

The following questions guided my inquiry, my choice of a phenomenological case study as my theoretical framework, and my data collection sources:

1. What understanding about transdisciplinarity did the graduate education majors have at the beginning of the inquiry?
2. What changes occurred over the course of the semester in the graduate education majors' dispositions toward transdisciplinary pedagogy?
3. In what ways did the graduate education majors' transdisciplinary lessons change over the course of the semester?

### **Conceptual Perspectives Informing the Inquiry**

My inquiry was grounded in two conceptual perspectives: social constructivism and a transactional view of literacy.

#### **Social Constructivism**

The summer camp is a service-learning project connected to a capstone master's Practicum in Reading course. The focus of the camp is twofold: (1) to empower students from nonmainstream families in a literacy setting, where they experience literacy instruction in a non-testing, non-threatening environment and (2) allow graduate education majors to work with students in an out-of-school setting, where they can develop best practices in literacy instruction in a non-threatening, non-assessment driven atmosphere. The graduate education majors tutor small groups of children (grades K-6); each group works with the same group of students

throughout the duration of the camp.

The camp is grounded in the social constructivism perspective: a theory that views learning as a social process; knowledge is generated from interactions with others (Vygotsky, 1986). A constructivist teacher allows student inquiry to drive instruction by asking open-ended questions (Brooks & Brooks, 1999). Constructivism is also a tenant of transdisciplinary teaching.

### **A Transactional View of Literacy**

Rosenblatt's theory of a transactional view of literacy guides the small group instruction at the camp. This perspective views reading as a cognitive process, which involves an interaction between the reader and text in order to make meaning (Gipe, 2006; Richards, 2006; Rosenblatt, 1994). This viewpoint also acknowledges and celebrates children's unique contributions to the learning process (Gardner, 1999; Lipson, & Wixson, 1991; Richards, 2006).

### **The Camp Context**

The camp meets one morning a week for 6 weeks in a community center adjacent to a low-income urban housing area close to the university. After meeting on campus for four-three hour sessions, approximately 30 graduate education majors travel to the community center where, the professor of the course demonstrates lessons in best practices in reading and writing. Prior to each tutoring session, the graduate education majors meet in groups to plan instruction. Then, they serve as literacy tutors in the camp for two-hour sessions each week. In addition, the graduate education majors communicate via email, Blackboard Discussion Boards, and Google Docs throughout the week.

The graduate education majors choose the age group of the students they wish to teach. Approximately seventy-five students, aged 6-12, participate in the camp. Most have difficulties in literacy. Ninety percent receive free or subsidized breakfast and lunch in their respective elementary schools. Eighty percent of the students are African-American, 15 percent are Hispanic, and 5 percent are Caucasian. The majority score at or below the 20th percentile on annual reading and language arts standardized assessments (M. Dorvil, University Area Community Development Corporation Supervisor, personal communication, March 6, 2011).

### **The Graduate Education Majors**

Four graduate education majors volunteered to teach using a transdisciplinary pedagogy in to grade 4-6 students. All four graduate education majors had teaching experience ranging from one to ten years and taught in low socioeconomic schools. Three taught elementary school and one graduate education major taught high school social studies.

Prior to the start of camp, these graduate education majors brainstormed what they knew about transdisciplinary teaching.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> All names are pseudonyms.

Hailey: *Transdisciplinary includes all aspects of the curriculum working together on a particular concept. This integration allows students to experience a concept providing for a more concrete understanding.*

Katie: *Transdisciplinary teaching is crucial to building students who are well rounded and able to connect information to multiple places. If students have curriculum reinforced and taught multiple ways they will be more likely to apply that information.”*

Kiesha: *Transdisciplinary teaching is making connections of a topic or theme in all academic areas including art, music, etc.;*

Lindsay: *To be honest, I didn't know much about transdisciplinarity before this class” Then, she quoted directly from one of the required readings. I learned transdisciplinary teaching always begins with an issue or problem, and uses knowledge from relevant disciplines to provide insights about the topic of interest or concern. It is similar to project-based learning.*

After talking to the graduate education majors it also became apparent that some of them had a distorted view of transdisciplinarity and equated transdisciplinary, multidisciplinary, and interdisciplinary as synonymous. Because the graduate education majors did not have a deep understanding of transdisciplinary teaching, we supplied relevant readings for the four education majors and also modeled content reading lessons prior to the beginning of the camp. Lessons included reading and writing strategies, using quality children's literature as well as journaling with the campers. Additionally, each week, the group met, brainstormed for camp, and talked about transdisciplinarity. The graduate education majors decided to use social studies content as a springboard for their transdisciplinary work. They chose to focus on the year 1776 and the American Revolution as the general topic.

### **Methodology**

A phenomenological case study undergirded the inquiry; I wanted to understand the unique experiences of the graduate education majors (Stake, 1995). Case studies are valuable in refining theory and suggesting complexities for further investigation (Flyvbjerg, 2006). This approach allows researchers to investigate complex phenomena within study participants' contexts.

### **Data Sources**

At the first camp session, the education majors and the grades 4-6 students brainstormed what they already knew about the topic. The four education majors e-mailed me weekly regarding their struggles, understandings, and achievements about teaching content reading through transdisciplinary methods. We also debriefed after every camp session. In addition, I mentored the four graduate education majors and co-taught lessons with them for the first two weeks of camp. From then on, I observed and documented the graduate education majors'



lessons. Data for the inquiry were the graduate education majors' e-mail messages, reflections (a tenant of transdisciplinary teaching), documentation of their planning, lesson plans, and observation field notes of their teaching.

### **Data Analysis**

I employed global constant comparative analysis techniques to analyze and systematically characterize the e-mail correspondence and reflections over the semester. Researchers who use global constant comparative methods obtain an overview of the range of key ideas noted in text, and then code and categorize the ideas (Flick, 2002). These initiatives entail systematically comparing words, phrases, sentences, and longer discourse in an effort to develop conceptualizations about possible patterns, themes, and relationships in narrative data (Thorne, 2000).

### **Findings**

The three emergent themes were: (a) a deeper understanding of transdisciplinary teaching, (b) the graduate education majors' receptiveness to transdisciplinary teaching and using it in their classrooms, (c) more time was needed to fully implement a true transdisciplinary model in summer camp.

#### **A deeper understanding of transdisciplinary teaching**

At the start of the camp, it appeared that the graduate education majors did not truly understand the concept of transdisciplinary teaching. Through email conversations, in class planning, and discussion prior to the start of camp, it appeared that the graduate education majors equated transdisciplinary teaching to bringing in a piece of children's literature on a topic and supplementing it with additional pieces of text (e.g. comics, poems, etc).

#### From My Notes:

*I'm excited to be a doctoral research assistant again this summer at the camp. I love literacy camp; it by far was the best experience I had as a doctoral student in my master's program and I can't wait to get back there and work with the kids. I have to admit, I'm a bit nervous though. I've never taken on this much responsibility at the camp before. With my additional course work and teaching a class this summer, I hope I am able to still give 100% to the camp and help the graduate education majors. I don't want to let anyone down.*

*After working with the graduate education majors for the first few weeks at the University, I'm apprehensive of what is to come. In order to plan for camp, my group asked me to open up a discussion board thread in Blackboard so they can post resources and talk about planning for the camp. Nothing has been posted yet from my group. I guess that is okay*

*because I am taking the lead the first few weeks but still....it worries me. Two of the master's students do not respond to emails I send out as well. That is an additional worry. Will they respond as the semester continues or will I send emails out, asking for suggestions, advice, etc. and get no response? I feel like I'm emailing and its in vain because of the lack of response. With my personality of wanting to take charge and plan ahead, it stresses me out that I'm not getting a response from everyone. How hard is it to answer an email? Hopefully things will get better and I will be less stressed once we start camp.*

## **Week One**

### From My Notes:

*Whew, the first day of camp is over. What a day. Prior to the start of camp, we had a slight mishap with a camper who was the grandson of one of the master's students. He hurt his arm and had to leave the community center. What a way to start camp, eh? Luckily for us, no other mishaps happened today. Now I'm stressing over the fact that we had an injury and the possibility of legal action. Did I really just write that? I can't believe that I immediately jump to the idea of a student taking legal action against the community center, the professor of the course, and myself because her grandson got hurt because she was not watching him. Isn't it sad that this is the first thing I think about after camp is over? I don't think about how great it was to see the kids from last summer or how overall today went well, instead I dwell on the fact that we could get sued.*

*Okay, Stephanie focus. Move onto another topic. The first week of camp went well considering we planned for 10 campers and had 13 show up and none of graduate education majors had experienced camp before. Today's focus was ninety-five percent classic literacy camp model and five percent transdisciplinary. The campers and graduate education majors created camp rules and modeled them after the Declaration of Independence. We listed each camper-devised rule and had everyone sign their "John Hancock" on the page once the rules were read and discussed. Hailey and Katie introduced our inquiry topic through the 'PreP strategy' (Langer, 1981), which allowed the campers to brainstorm about our inquiry topic. I read the text John, Paul, George, and Ben (Smith, 2006) and employed the 'What do I See? What do I Think? What do I Wonder' (Richards & Anderson, 2003) strategy as a during-reading strategy. Our after reading strategy was the Cloze passage (Taylor, 1953). Many of the campers are well-versed in the inquiry topic, since it is something they studied in social studies this year. Our only transdisciplinary component was devising new inquiry questions to use as a guide for the remaining five sessions. New inquiry questions focused on colonial life, Paul Revere and his midnight ride, and schooling during colonial times.*

*They included:*

1. *What games did kids play in the 1700s?*
2. *What chores did the kids do in the 1700s?*
3. *What type of clothing did the kids wear in the 1700s?*
4. *What type of food did they eat in the 1700s? What did they consider to be junk food back then?*
5. *Did the kids go to school five days a week like we do now? How many kids were in each class?*
6. *Did the kids eat in a cafeteria and eat school food like we do now?*
7. *How were they disciplined if they acted up in school?*
8. *Did they go to school all year or have a summer break?*
9. *Why did Paul Revere go on a midnight ride?*
10. *Where did Paul Revere go on his midnight ride?*
11. *How much tea was dumped into Boston Harbor?*
12. *Did George [Washington], Ben [Franklin], Paul [Revere], and John [Adams] participate in the Boston Tea Party?*

*We have a few things we need to work on prior to next week—first of all allocating space to all of the groups tutoring students. Today it felt like we were on top of each other. We need more space. That is priority number one next week. Also, the graduate education majors need to jump in and contribute to the conversation more this next week. I felt like I was doing most of the talking today and I'm not taking the class!*

## **Week Two**

The following week, we addressed our inquiry question on Paul Revere using a transdisciplinary approach. We read the book *Paul Revere's Ride* by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow (1985) and used mapping skills as well as math skills to figure out his route and the distance he traveled. Using the text, we plotted his route on the map, connected the dots with rulers, and then used a ruler to measure the distance he rode to warn the colonists that the "British were coming". Once the campers completed the mapping exercise, we examined various political slogans from the American Revolution (e.g. Don't Tread on Me; Join or Die) and talked about why the colonists would display such slogans. Using art supplies, the campers created their own updated political slogans modeled after the slogans displayed by colonists during the American Revolution. By the second week, it was apparent that the graduate education majors were starting to realize that we needed to incorporate different disciplines within each camp session each week to answer our students' inquiry questions.

From My Notes:

*Ugh. Today was stressful and chaotic. I arrived at the community center*

*and began setting up in the snack room so my group could have more space to maneuver around since we were so crowded last week. Only one of my graduate education majors showed up. ONE. Two of the graduate education majors were at an in-service training at their school and the other was at a Job Fair. The graduate education major that showed up, bless her heart, tried but it was evident she was not pleased to be there. After we set up the room and went over the schedule for the day, we were told we were moving to a classroom for our session. Great, now we have desks and chairs to deal with. One of the best parts of camp is sitting on the floor with the kids. We are not supposed to sit in desks and chairs like school! During our session, the professor of the camp visited our room. Awkward. Camp today felt more like a school day than a summer camp experience. The graduate education major did not participate much today. I had to do most of the talking and introducing the strategies, the book, activities, etc. At the end of the day I was exhausted! If anything positive came out of today it was this: (1) I know I can teach the entire group basically on my own if needed and (2) I cannot wait for the other graduate education majors in my group to come back to camp next week. They were sorely missed!*

### **Week Three and Four**

The third and fourth week of camp focused on the Boston Tea Party. We had two goals to accomplish — answer the campers’ inquiry questions on the Boston Tea Party, and start on our camp book. We spent most of our time engaging in transformation—through a Reader’s Theater, creating our own “tea” artwork, and the camp book. After Hailey and Katie read a short story about the Boston Tea Party to the campers, we talked about postage stamp artwork and had the campers create their own artwork similar to the political slogan artwork from Week Two. After the campers created their postage stamp artwork, they used tea to create an illustration of the Boston Tea Party. The campers created their pages for our camp book; the book was modeled after *The Important Book* (Brown, 1990).

#### From My Notes:

*The camp book is going to be great! It is obvious the campers enjoy creating their own personal page for the camp book. Many of the campers have picked one of the Founding Fathers or Revolutionary to highlight in the book. Other selected the Boston Tea Party. I am impressed with the amount of information the campers have retained since the first week of camp. They truly are excited about sharing their knowledge with others. The graduate education majors seem excited as well. Everyone is sitting on the floor and each graduate education major is working with three campers on their page.*

Katie reflected, “The majority of the students were so engaged in our teachings and activities. Many of the students had background knowledge

*and this seemed to help them be more engaged.”*

From My Notes (Week Three—later in the day):

*Katie and Hailey took over the planning duties for this week. What a relief for someone else to plan. And I was so impressed with their teaching. It is obvious they want to be here and really enjoy the kids. We actually had everyone here today which was a nice change after last week. However, I noticed while I was observing that the other two graduate education majors are not involved in the camp as much as the ones that planned are. I guess they feel like they did not plan the lesson for today so they don't have to be so involved? Lindsay was more involved than Kiesha though. She participated in the Reader's Theater and the artwork. I'm excited to continue the work we started this week next week since we ran out of time.*

*Katie and Hailey are planning for next week as well. They are stellar teachers who truly feel comfortable working with this age group. It's obvious. Lindsay is not currently teaching and it is obvious she has not been around many older kids before. The same thing for Kiesha—she is a high school teacher. She does not look comfortable working with younger kids; she is out of her element. That being said, I've been reflecting on my own experiences at camp as a student and how I related to the kids. I also taught high school and feel more comfortable with older kids. However, working at the camp put me out of my element—something I valued and enjoyed as a graduate student. I was forced to work with a group of students that I normally would not work with because I'm not an elementary teacher. I don't have the personality to teach elementary school. Even though we are both high school teachers, Kiesha and I are very different. Whereas I enjoyed my time here working with a different population than I am used to, it is obvious she is not getting much out of the experience.*

### **Week Five**

For week five, we invited masters' students from the Instructional Technology department at our local university to come in and test an interactive text and game. The graduate education majors wrote a story based off of Thomas Paine's *Common Sense* (Paine, 1776) pamphlet and created an inferring game to accompany the text. The graduate education majors sat with the campers at the laptop computers and assisted them with the text and game. In partners, the campers and graduate education majors created inferences from their reading.

*Katie said, “I love the idea of integrating technology into the classroom. I prefer ebooks when I read, yet still prefer traditional texts for children. Yet, I believe we need to expose them to technology to survive the new generation.”*



From My Notes:

*I am so glad the interactive book project is completed. The kids seemed to have a good time with it but it was obvious the book needed a lot of work prior to it ever being used in a large-scale study. Each graduate education major had some good suggestions, as well as the kids, and I emailed those off to Lucy today. This was a nice collaboration project with the Instructional Technology professor though. The kids also liked the idea of changing it up this week and using technology during camp. They were so excited about using the computers and headsets. It was a treat for many of them because they don't have computers at home and only use them during the school year at school or the community center.*

**Week Six**

The last camp session focused on answering the campers' inquiry questions on colonial life and schooling in the colonies. "Kiesha" read two short stories aloud to the campers and they formulated inquiry questions from the reading. The campers answered the questions using a webquest and other sites on the Internet.

From My Notes:

*Today was bittersweet. Camp is over for another year. The pizza party was fun as usual and the hugs I received from the kids made me happy. The kids were so excited about their lessons today—they got to use the computers again, which they loved. The kids do love having us here. I will miss them.*

*As I drove off to the university to turn in the supplies, I started to tear up a bit. Regardless of how stressful it was, I truly did have a wonderful time at the community center and can't wait for next year. I'm excited that I'm teaching one of my classes there this fall and working with some of the same elementary children in an after school program. I think each of the graduate education majors have a takeaway from this summer. This experience is something they will never repeat again. The same goes for me—each year, I have a different experience at the camp and each year it changes me for the better.*

Over the six weeks, as evidenced in the graduate education majors' reflections, campers investigated answers to questions they posed ranging from historical individuals to life in colonial times. The campers made multiple text-to-self connections throughout each session, thereby fulfilling another tenant of transdisciplinary teaching—social justice. Further, the constructivism tenant was fulfilled each week.

The graduate education majors encouraged the campers to “draw their own conclusions by thinking, analyzing data-bases engaging in classroom discourse, and through their inquiry

sessions with classmates and adults inside and outside the school” (Lenin & Nevo, 2009, p. 446). They collaborated, another tenant of transdisciplinary teaching, with each other, and promoted collaboration among the campers, throughout the entire camp session. Through email correspondence, the graduate education majors planned lessons and identified resources. At camp, the graduate education majors encouraged the campers to work together to find answers to their inquiry questions.

### **Graduate education majors’ receptiveness to transdisciplinary teaching**

As the semester progressed, the graduate education majors became more receptive to the concept of transdisciplinary teaching and began brainstorming ways to use transdisciplinary instruction in their own classrooms.

Hailey said, *“Transdisciplinary can easily be woven into language arts. I can easily envision a transdisciplinary unit on our first social studies theme USA today. This would work nicely with grapping, which is Big Idea 1 in our math curriculum.”*

Katie echoed Hailey’s thought process. *“I think transdisciplinary work can be infused to what I am required to teach by allowing students to create guiding questions to accompany the standards needed to be taught. I have a new principal and would like to talk to her on her view of transdisciplinary teaching and how I could make it work in my classroom with the state and district demands as well.”*

Additionally, Lindsay said, *“I am a first grade teacher and I am curious to see how I could use transdisciplinary teaching in my classroom. I believe students at this age could use inquiry in areas of literacy and numeracy to gain an understanding of numbers with the use of a variety of concrete materials. During investigations teachers could encourage their students to use mathematical and scientific language as they work together to discover answers to their inquiry questions.”*

At the last camp session, Katie noted that she believed students learn and retain more information when it is presented in a transdisciplinary format, especially when the students have some ownership over the topic and guiding questions.

Likewise, Kiesha commented, *“Having watched the students succeed from moving from independent writing, to group reading, to pair webquests, to group discussion made me want to incorporate more technology into my class at school. I think that spending a moderate amount of time on a variety of techniques to teach the same topic proved to be more successful at helping students retain information than having them sit and read the same style material.”*

During camp sessions, the graduate education majors utilized transmediation through

reading comprehension strategies, Readers' Theater, and book making. Reading comprehension strategies used by the graduate education majors included PreP (Langer, 1981), What do I See? What do I Think? What do I Wonder? (Richards & Anderson, 2003), It Reminds Me Of (Richards & Gipe, 1992), Facts and Feelings Foldable (Mullins, 2011), KWL Plus with "I Wonder" Sticky Notes (Bennett, 2011).

Campers, with the graduate education majors' guidance also created a camp book, modeled after *The Important Book* (Brown, 1990). The book topic was 1776 and the American Revolution. Campers wrote their own important book entry on either an event or person from the time period, essentially what they thought was the most important thing they learned during camp. The books were copied and distributed to the campers the last day of camp as a memento.

### **More Time was Needed to Fully Implement a True Transdisciplinary Model in Summer Camp**

Six weeks into camp, everything started clicking. The graduate education majors planned lessons that required the campers to use a variety of sources of information to answer their questions and all of the questions were student-generated.

#### From My Notes:

*Although today was hectic due to the afternoon field trip, the promise of pizza, and it was the last day of camp, today the graduate education majors took another step towards finally embraced the concept of transdisciplinary teaching in its entirety. Today, Kiesha reintroduced the strategy "I Wonder" to the campers and read the two short stories to the campers about colonial life and colonial schooling. As she read, the campers, guided by the graduate education majors, posed their "I Wonder" questions, which were recorded on chart paper by Katie.*

*Once the questions were recorded on chart paper with our original colonial life and school questions, the graduate education majors divided the campers up into pairs and the campers researched the questions that were of interest to them. Each pair of campers recorded down information from a webquest, videos, and articles from online sources that answered their inquiry questions on colonial life and colonial schooling. Once every pair completed their task, the campers and graduate education majors regrouped on the carpet, shared their findings, and recorded them down on chart paper. If they had another month at the community center, I believe the graduate education majors would produce wonderful transdisciplinary lessons. From my conversations with Hailey and Katie, it appears they are starting to realize that transdisciplinary teaching is not simply inquiry-based teaching but delves deeper than that; it is a mode of teaching where you cross disciplines in order to find the answers to your questions.*

This observation reiterates Kaufman, Moss, and Osborn (2003) description of teaching content reading where it is not presented as “isolated discipline-specific areas in which the memorization of subjects takes precedence. Instead, the discipline is defined as a perspective—a way of looking at the world that contributes to a more complex understanding of it” (p. 7). These two graduate education majors were embracing another tenant of transdisciplinary teaching—holistic knowledge, the notion that knowledge is gleaned from several subjects and disciplines, not focusing on one sole discipline.

At the conclusion of the camp session, Hailey echoed the notes I had written down in my journal, *“I wish we had a couple more weeks to explore the clothing, home lives, and other topics covered in the webquest. The students were engaged in their research and I would have liked to have had time for groups to design a presentation to share with other campers what they discovered.”*

### **Limitations**

As with all curricula and methods, there are limitations to transdisciplinary research. Time is a critical factor at the camp, since the graduate education majors only had one day a week, two hours a day, for six weeks to work with the campers. Six weeks was simply not adequate to thoroughly explore in depth all the questions the students had in regards to the “1776” topic. Because of the local school district calendar and the start of summer school at the local university, the length of camp cannot be extended. However, if the graduate education majors had a deeper understanding of transdisciplinary teaching before camp started, they might have been able to teach using the transdisciplinary model within the first two weeks.

Since they were unfamiliar with the method of teaching, it took time for the graduate education majors to become comfortable with inquiry-based teaching and learning as opposed to the compartmentalized approach frequently used in schools. As Hailey noted, *“If we had longer than six weeks, it would have been easier to build background knowledge and vocabulary in order to allow the students to engage in the inquiry process. Two hours [each week] was not enough time to build background, read literature, and complete an activity.”*

Another limitation dealt with the inquiry topic; in a true transdisciplinary model, the students speculate about a problem or issue and the teacher then helps devise questions students wish to investigate. In essence, the teacher and students create an authentic inquiry study, a tenant of transdisciplinary teaching. This was not the case during summer camp. For camp, the topic was pre-selected by the graduate education majors.

### **Conclusions and Implications for Educational Practice**

Despite an apparent lack of time, as evidenced in my observations and via reflections from the graduate education majors, progress was made. Some of the graduate education majors brainstormed ways to incorporate transdisciplinary teaching into their own classrooms and others gained a deeper understanding of a positive learning environment. Regardless of how receptive all the graduate education majors were to the idea of transdisciplinary teaching, two equated it to “simply inquiry-based learning”; they struggled to grasp the concept that transdisciplinary goes

beyond disciplines. Perhaps if we (the professor of the class and I) had whole group discussions on the philosophy behind transdisciplinary teaching, all of the graduate education majors would have understood the difference between inquiry-based learning and transdisciplinary.

Kiesha reflected, “*Overall the biggest lesson that I can take away from the community center is to take cues from the students. If the students are showing a disinterest in the activity, it doesn’t mean that the topic is boring, it only means that there needs to be a new way or multiple ways to present the information in a fun and exciting manner.*”

Implications of the study apply to teacher educators who might wish to further pursue a transdisciplinary model in the classroom. In a true transdisciplinary model, the students would create the questions for their inquiry after identifying a problem or issue of interest. However, as we found at the UACC and in the classroom, in order to gather sufficient resources to answer questions posed by the students, resource gathering must occur before the inquiry starts. The teacher needs time to find individuals who can provide information as well as locate other resources such as books, movies, etc. to help further the inquiry. Thus, in a classroom context, the teacher must have pre-selected an issue or problem.

Additionally, as we (the graduate education majors and I) found in camp, time management is crucial in a transdisciplinary approach. For us, one day a week for six weeks was not enough time to fully implement a true transdisciplinary approach. Likewise, in a classroom setting, time is precious. Thus, a teacher needs to be creative in time management.

Hailey conceptualized transdisciplinarity in this way: “*Transdisciplinarity allows for students to search for answers to real life questions by using a variety of sources and disciplines. Utilizing a variety of sources and disciplines allows students to solidify a more concrete understanding of the question at hand.*”

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## **How Students Comprehend Using E-readers and Traditional Text: Suggestions from the Classroom**

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### **Reading Comprehension of Print and Digital Text**

Since Durkin's groundbreaking research on comprehension in 1978, the quality of comprehension instruction has been a core research topic in reading comprehension research circles. However, the majority of this research over the past 30-plus years has focused primarily on comprehension of print text. We know from research that skilled readers read with purpose, preview the text, activate their background knowledge, make connections between old and new information, ask questions, use strategies to fix meaning when it fails, and self-monitor their understanding (Block & Pressley, 2002; National Reading Panel, 2000; Pressley, 2006; Rosenshine & Meister, 1994). Current research suggests that comprehension of print text are necessary when reading digital text, but not sufficient; digital text requires additional strategies (Coiro & Dobler, 2007; Leu, Kinzer, Coiro, & Cammack, 2004).

The purpose of this paper is to apply lessons learned from previous research to suggest teaching strategies that could improve students' comprehension in digital environments. The strategies were chosen based on research regarding reading in digital environments; including information about comprehension on the Internet and comprehension on the e-reader. In both environments comprehension is seen as a complex process involving multiple strategies.

Current research is redefining reading comprehension in a digital environment and the comprehension strategies for online reading comprehension are emerging (Leu, Coiro, Castek, Hartman, Henry, & Reinking, 2008; Coiro, 2009; Hartman, Morsink, & Zheng, 2010). A common theme of all the research is that reading in an on-line environment is multifaceted and requires knowledge of search engines, authorship, and organizational features within websites (Coiro, 2005). Research on user studies has shown that students who lack knowledge of digital comprehension usually have a difficult time staying focused; thus, causing ineffective tangents and increased frustration levels that result in frequent breakdowns when reading in the digital environment (Brandt, 2000).

E-readers are digital devices that create a new reading environment for the student. They present traditionally static text in a digital format adding features such as embedded dictionaries and electronic searching. By simply clicking on a word the reader can choose to look it up on the built in dictionary or on the Internet. The additional features of e-readers can affect students' comprehension (Wilson, Zygoris-Coe, & Cardullo, submitted for publication, 2012)

A strategic component of comprehending print text is the development of awareness of purpose, a concept that although applicable to print text, can be "problematic and convoluted" in an online environment (Sutherland-Smith, 2002, p. 663). The multi-directionality of the online reading environment can potentially lead immature digital readers astray to follow recursive links and become diverted from their original reading purpose. It is because of situations like this that some researchers advise that students require additional comprehension skills to maneuver through digital text effectively; we need to enable them to read and learn more effectively in a digital environment (Coiro, 2005). A prerequisite for comprehension of complex text, print or digital, is metacognition.

## **Metacognition**

Metacognition is the process by which students critically reflect on and monitor understanding. It refers to readers' thoughts and the awareness of their thoughts as they engage in the reading process and monitor their understanding of text (Flavell, 1970). Proficient readers engage with text by actively thinking about what they are reading, ask and generate questions, make and confirm predictions, reread as needed, problem-solve, and reflect on what they are reading, thereby activating their metacognitive skills (Kamil, Mosenthal, Pearson, & Barr, 2000; National Reading Panel, 2000; Snow, Burns, & Griffin, 1998).

Over the past several years, metacognition has played an important role in teaching students to comprehend text. Lawless and Schrader (2008) explored the work of numerous researchers that demonstrate a strong connection between metacognition and navigation in a digital environment; they viewed navigation as an active constructive process, which includes

virtual movement through cognitive space made up of data and knowledge. In a recent study, Schwartz, Anderson, Hong, Howard, and McGee (2004) found a strong positive and significant correlation between metacognitive ability and successful navigational outcomes (as cited in Lawless & Schrader, 2008) further supporting the idea that students experienced with navigation exerted fewer cognitive resources, thereby allowing the reader to develop stronger metacognitive regulation and control of their learning environment (as cited in Sperling, Howard, Miller, & Murphy, 2002). Virtual navigation requires the user to know where he is at, where he needs to go and how he will get there; metacognition is the cognitive ability to navigate and monitor a path to information or destination.

The variety of strategies used with print text expanded when Coiro and Dobler (2007) explored students' reading of digital text. The authors found that reading Internet text led to the coordination of simultaneous application of strategies such as using prior knowledge, inferential reading and self-regulation in a complex manner not used with print text. Furthermore, Leu et al., (2008) found that digital reading is not congruent with print comprehension and experienced readers are not always competent online readers therefore reading strategies may not transfer cognitively. Thus, the need to be a flexible reader is even more important as students read digital text. As students navigate information in a digital environment they will rely upon these same thinking processes to comprehend, synthesize, and evaluate information from multiple texts. Since digital text is fluid and requires high levels of critical thinking (e.g., accessing information in multiple places, visiting and revisiting various resources, and critically analyzing their next "reading move"), teaching strategies for comprehending digital text should be a core instructional goal.

Although many of the same metacognitive strategies are used with both print and digital text, the strategies differ in their usage (Hartman, Morsink, & Zheng, 2010). For instance, in both settings students need to determine a purpose for reading. In the print environment the purpose determines why the reading is being done. In the digital environment the reader's purpose helps to negotiate a path for retrieving information. This strategy guides the student into a more complex process of understanding and evaluating digital material. The process differs for other strategies as well. Hartman et al., (2010), also pointed out that digital text is multifaceted and requires more complex strategies. The nature of the text means that it cannot be mapped out ahead of time since students do not move from point A to point B in a linear path, rather they are interacting within a recursive environment.

When reading digital text, readers move quickly in and out of multiple levels of critical thinking as they challenge authorship, validity, and accuracy of information while identifying the location and direction of a link or site (Hartman et al., 2010). Students move through this process as goal-oriented learners, metacognitively thinking about the outcome and process while at the same time focusing on the purpose. It is critical for teachers to model the development of metacognitive self-monitoring strategies if students are to become successful, mature, and masterful readers.

Classroom teachers guide students in learning how to comprehend text by making thinking visible; "calls for the externalizing processes of thought so that learners can get a better handle on them" (Ritchhart, Church, & Morrison, 2011, xiv). It requires that teachers share their



problem-solving with students while supporting the development of students' critical thinking skills (Marzano & Kendall, 2008). This is accomplished by making the process of metacognition visible to students by modeling or thinking aloud.

### **Think-Alouds and Comprehension of Digital Text**

Think-alouds provide teachers with an abundance of opportunities to explicitly model their own thinking for their students while demonstrating comprehension strategies and self-monitoring processes. For reading comprehension, thinking aloud is a strategy used to verbalize what one is thinking as one activates comprehension strategies. Summarizing, predicting, and questioning strategies can be modeled through the think-aloud process by reading coaches, classroom teachers, learning strategy specialists, and speech-language pathologists across grade levels to help students read and comprehend digital text through the think-aloud process. Used for transference of reading comprehension strategies from print text to digital text, teacher modeling through think-alouds provides students with eyewitness experiences to both see and hear the transference of reading strategies from print to digital text. Through teacher support students can begin to adapt well-known effective print reading comprehension strategies for use in the digital arena.

Many strategies (e.g., activation of prior knowledge, inferring, summarizing, or predicting) can be transferred with little or no modification to digital text. Hall, Bowman, and Myers (2000) suggest the above strategies (e.g., activation of prior knowledge, inferring, summarizing, or predicting) are comprehension strategies used by mature readers in print environments. If modifications of these strategies are needed, teachers should use the think-aloud process to model the necessary modifications.

After successful modeling of the thinking process in print text, the next step would be to model the same strategies in a digital environment. For example, if modeling the strategy of evaluating the quality of the text in a digital environment, an additional step of validation of authorship would be demonstrated. Above all teachers need to convey clearly the idea that anyone can publish on the Internet but a mature reader seeks validation of authorship.

### **Text Coding and Comprehension of Digital Text**

Text coding is a specific comprehension monitoring strategy that teachers can model in both print and digital text. Text coding helps students keep track of their thinking while they are reading. The students mark the text as they read using a code or note to record what they were thinking during the process. The coding system is simple including symbols or abbreviations for key metacognitive strategies such as connections, self-questioning, and self-regulation of meaning making. The recording of codes helps the students identify strategies and know when they need to go back to areas in the text. The codes are illustrative of students' self-monitoring during reading.

In the print environment students engage in text coding using sticky notes or by writing in the text. The strategy of text coding could help students transfer strategies to the digital environment as it calls attention to the strategy and highlights the steps that students may need to

take during the reading process. Teachers model the use of sticky notes, highlighting, and/or paraphrasing and summarizing of print text using highlighters, sticky notes, or interactive paper-based notebooks. In the digital environment students use the tools in programs such as Portable Document File readers and word processing programs to code to the text. They use electronic features such as digital highlighting tools, sticky notes, and in-text note features. Figure 1 offers a variety of methods for text coding digital text as well as the possible thought processes (i.e., think-alouds) that could underlie certain text-codes.

Figure 1

*Comparison of Reading Strategies Used with Print and Digital Text*

**Print Text**

**Awareness of Purpose**

"I need to find a quote or a fact that will support my ideas about what should be done about acid rain."

**Discovering New Meaning of Words**

"I don't know what that word means. It seems like it is important because it is used several times in the next few sentences. Let me reread that to see if it makes more sense. Was it explained earlier and I missed it or is the definition coming up? If I can't figure this out, I am going to need to get a dictionary, check the back of this book, or ask someone else for help."

**Interpreting the Text and Conversing with the Author**

"I wonder if there is something in this author's background or experiences that has made him write the text this way? I guess I will have to ask the teacher or try to find a biography or another book or article that talks about the author and why he writes this way."

**Digital Text**

**Awareness of Purpose**

"I need to be careful not to get distracted by anything that is flashing, or by chasing links, or even checking my e-mail, because I don't have too much time today. I need to log on to the Web and do a Google search to find information about acid rain. Maybe there will be a chart or graph or something else that will help too. If I can't find that with Google, I might need to use a different search engine that will let me search specifically for multimedia besides just text."

**Discovering New Meaning of Words**

"I am not really sure what that word means. Let me click on it--it's blue so I think there is a link to something else. Hopefully, it will tell me what it means or send me somewhere else where the word is explained better that it is here. I just don't want to go away from this page too far and forget where I am!"

**Interpreting the Text and Conversing with the Author**

"I wonder why the author said that. Maybe there will be an email address somewhere on this page where I can write and ask him. Or maybe there is a bulletin board where I can look to see if anyone else has ever had this same question before..."

*Figure 1. Comparison of Reading Strategies Used with Print and Digital Text. Adopted from "Teaching Online Comprehension Strategies Using Think-Alouds." A. Kymes. 2005. Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy, 48(6), p. 487. Copyright 2005 by the International Reading Association.*

**The Gradual Release of Responsibility Model**

The process whereby teachers help students develop expertise in a concept and then systematically turn over control for learning to them is known as the Gradual Release of Responsibility (GRR) model (Farstrup & Samuels, 2001; Pearson & Gallagher, 1983). According to the GRR model, the teacher pre-assesses student knowledge of topic or task at hand, provides explicit instruction with modeling, allows for guided practice and provides feedback, directs students to independent practice, and finally, assesses student application of skills, knowledge, or strategies.

**Gradual release of responsibility and think-alouds.** Embedded within the think-aloud process, the Gradual Release of Responsibility (GRR) model provides a useful model teachers can use to support students' comprehension of digital text. This approach requires that the teacher transitions from assuming "all responsibility for performing a task.... to a situation in which the student assumes all of the responsibility" (Farstrup & Samuels, 2001, p. 211). The model progresses through multiple, purposeful stages that strategically shift the cognitive load from the teacher as a model to joint responsibility between the teacher and the learner to independent practice and application by the learner (Pearson & Gallagher, 1983). In essence, the student first watches the teacher perform the strategy, then the teacher and student do it together, and finally the student engages in tasks utilizing the strategy as the teacher looks on and provides coaching and counsel as needed.

Support for using the GRR model with think-alouds comes from Pressley (2000) and Wilhelm (2001) who both studied the effectiveness of think-alouds when developing reader comprehension of print text. Gradually turning over responsibility for the components explored in the think-aloud demonstrates to students what thinking strategies look and sound like while engaged in the reading process. Thus, this method should allow students to begin the process of metacognition through modeling and explicit instruction (Kymes, 2005) and assist students' thinking by modeling comprehension strategies through a think-aloud process using both print and digital text examples. Ideally after much practice and scaffold teacher support, students will be able to practice using the strategies independently, leading gradually to thinking aloud on their own (Duffy, 1993).

**Gradual release of responsibility and text coding.** The GRR model works well when teaching students text coding strategies with digital text. The process would start with a teacher using a digital text, then pausing and posing specific questions related to the text and text coding. The effective use of text coding can be utilized in print text using symbols. For example, when a student has a question when reading they would mark the section with the symbol "?" next to the sentence. This symbol signals that they had a question about something they just read. The highlighting as noted in Figure 2 demonstrates how text coding is applied and modeled with digital text. The colors are selected from the MS Word Text Highlighting Tool.

Figure 2

*Examples of Text Codes for Digital Text*

Reader's Thought	Text Codes for Print Text	Text Codes for Digital Text
I have a question about this.	?	I have a question about this. Yellow Highlighting
I agree with this.	=	I agree with this. Blue Highlighting
I disagree with this.	X	I disagree with this. Turquoise Highlighting
This is interesting!	!	This is interesting! Pink Highlighting
This is confusing.	~	This is confusing. Bright Green Highlighting
This is important.	*	This is important. Red Highlighting
This reminds me of...	@	This reminds me of... Teal Highlighting
Important Date	#	Important Date Dark Yellow Highlighting
I wonder....		I wonder.... Gray Highlighting
I have a prediction.	P	I have a prediction. Dark Red Highlighting
I can picture this.		I can picture this. Dark Blue Highlighting
Word I don't know		Word I don't know. Underline

An example of how this strategy is applied is illustrated in Figure 3 in an excerpt from “Hole in My Life” by Jack Gantos (2002); column one shows traditional text coding and column two shows the transference to highlighting digital text.

Figure 3  
*Examples of Print and Digital Text Using Text-Coding*

Print-Based	Digital – Based
<p>At the time this picture was taken, I weighed 125 pounds. When I look at my face in the photo, I see nothing but the pocked mask I was hiding behind. I parted my □ hair down the middle and grew a mustache in order to look older and tougher, and with the greasy prison diet (Text coded with □ ) (salted chicken gizzards in a larded gravy, chicken wings with oily cheese sauce, deep-fried chicken necks), and the stress, and the troubled dreams of capture and release, there was no controlling the acne. I was overmatched.</p> <p>I might have been slight – but I was smart and cagey. I managed to avoid a lot of trouble because I knew how to blend in @ (Text Coded with @) and generally sift through the days unnoticed by men who spent the majority of their time looking to inflict pain on others. I called ~ these men “skulls” and they were freaks for violence. (Text Coded with ~) Here we were, all of us living in constant, pissy misery, and instead of trying to feel more human, more free and unchained in their hearts by simply respecting one another and getting along, many of the men found? cruel (Text coded with ?) and menacing ways to make each day a walk through a tunnel of fear for others.</p>	<p>At the time this picture was taken, I weighed 125 pounds. When I look at my face in the photo, I see nothing but the pocked mask I was hiding behind. I parted my hair down the middle and grew a mustache in order to look older and tougher, and with the greasy prison diet (Blue Highlighting) (salted chicken gizzards in a larded gravy, chicken wings with oily cheese sauce, deep-fried chicken necks), and the stress, and the troubled dreams of capture and release, there was no controlling the acne. I was overmatched.</p> <p>I might have been slight – but I was smart and cagey. I managed to avoid a lot of trouble because I knew how to blend in (Teal Highlighting) and generally sift through the days unnoticed by men who spent the majority of their time looking to inflict pain on others. I called these men “skulls” and they were freaks for violence. (Bright Green Highlighting) Here we were, all of us living in constant, pissy misery, and instead of trying to feel more human, more free and unchained in their hearts by simply respecting one another and getting along, many of the men found cruel and menacing ways to make each day a walk through a tunnel of fear for others. (Yellow Highlighting)</p>

Students can also use sticky notes in a digital environment to text code. Figure 4 shows a screen snapshot of a teacher modeling the use of sticky notes and the possibilities for direct transference of skills with adapted critical thinking.

Figure 4  
Example of Digital Text-Coding on a Digital Device

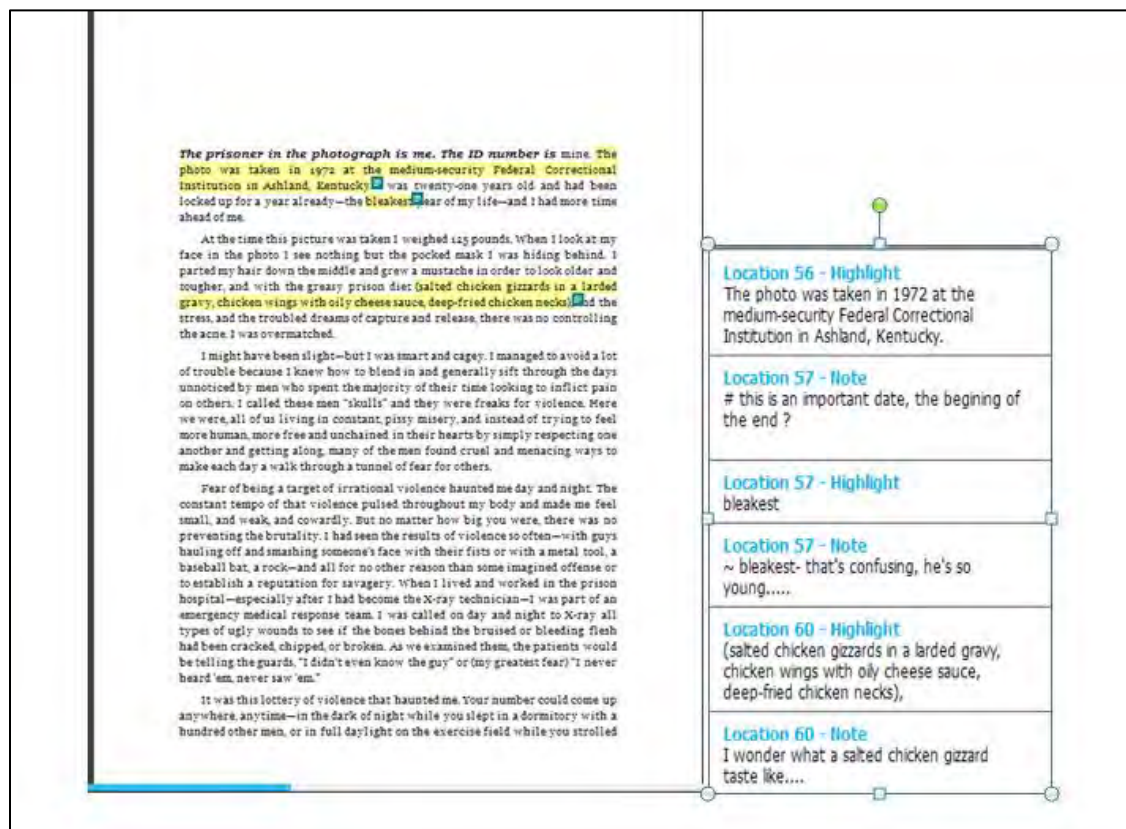


Figure 4. Example of Digital Text-Coding on a Digital Device. Text coding using sticky notes. Excerpt from *Hole in My Life*, Jack Gantos, copyright 2002 by Jack Gantos.

Just as with think-alouds, text coding can also be used as a means of interacting with text while reading in digital environments; text coding can also promote monitoring of students’ meaning making from text.

### Performance Feedback and Self-Monitoring

Several studies have analyzed the inclusion of performance feedback that is frequent, robust (Alber-Morgan, Ramp, Anderson, & Martin, 2007; Allen & Hancock, 2008), complex, elaborative, and tailored to the needs of the student (Gordijn & Nijhof, 2002; Meyer, Wijekumar, Middlemiss, Higley, Lei, Meier, & Spielvogel, 2010). When students are given little or no feedback, few adjustments are made to the development of comprehension strategies. Thus, students fail to redirect their learning and consider other perspectives, or opportunities to enhance their learning. Teachers can model self-assessment and reflection as they preview resources available in a digital environment. Modeling these strategies should streamline the feedback process and make the journey from metacognitive awareness to feedback to



comprehension much smoother.

Currently there are a variety of tools available for feedback in a digital environment: dictionaries, blogs, social network tools, wikis, webinars, etc. In a print environment, readers might solicit feedback about a passage by comparing and contrasting the opinions and comments of peers and teachers with their own. However, in an online environment, a reader can create a blog, post his or her opinions or comments to a discussion board, email an author, participate in a live chat, create a wiki, or attend a webinar on a topic of interest related to assigned readings.

Performance feedback will allow the reader to self-assess and ideally attribute success or failure to their level of effort, choice of strategy, and/or complexity of pre-reading goals (Zimmerman, 1986, 1990, 2002). Self-monitoring and self-assessment can be used by the student to formulate a strategic plan for comprehension. Students can see this process developed through teacher modeling of strategy thinking. As Cleary and Zimmerman (2004) state, students are responsible for their level of effort or the strategies they select for tackling a reading task. Eventually students will begin to identify areas of strengths and needs in regards to their level of comprehension.

Metacognitive self-monitoring that spurs students to actively seek feedback and engage in meaningful self-assessment has the potential to assist readers in designing goals for approaching both print and digital text. This process will begin to guide readers' development of comprehension based on feedback and self-assessment through the metacognitive process and internal thinking strategies. Students will begin to determine whether their reading process was productive or flawed in some way as a result of inadequate effort, ill-conceived strategies, or inappropriate goals (Thiede, Anderson, & Theriault, 2003).

Mature readers whose end-goal is comprehension actively engage with text by formulating questions, making predictions, developing connections to schema, and visualizing what they are reading to further develop thoughts, ideas, and opinions. Readers develop this process to secure performance feedback (i.e., teacher, peer, self) and to initiate meaningful self-regulation of their own reading process.

### **Summary**

In this article, we proposed that digital text places additional reading, cognitive, and technological demands on the reader that far exceed decoding, word recognition, reading fluency, and basic comprehension. Online reading encumbers the reader with more processing demands.

We suggest that teachers can assist students in constructing meaning from digital text through think-aloud modeling and text coding, providing scaffolded feedback, and encouraging students to self-regulate their understanding. Coiro (2009) cautions teachers about the unique and complex nature of online reading comprehension; she calls educators' attention to the different processing knowledge and skills students need to develop to handle the interpage, intersite, and intertextual comprehension of online reading material.

Students need to develop the multiliteracies of the 21<sup>st</sup> century but they cannot do it alone; teachers must cognitively design metacognitive strategies as an essential part of teaching digital comprehension skills (Kramarski & Feldman, 2000). Students will benefit from knowledgeable and metacognitive teachers who will help them to determine their purpose, critically evaluate and synthesize online information, guide them through the metacognitive thinking process, provide deliberate and effective feedback, and teach them how to self-regulate their understanding (Kamil et al., 2000).

Our research has informed us that reading strategies that work in print environment can be transferred to reading text in digital environments but are not sufficient for meeting the demands of digital text and online reading comprehension. Leu and Kinzer (2000) suggest that because digital literacy is current, evolving, and fluid, there will be a higher demand for critical thinking skills as technologies advance and transform literacy and learning.

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Choice, G (2012). Extending relevant teacher education beyond traditional schooling.  
*American Reading Forum Annual Yearbook* [Online], Vol. 32.

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## **Extending Relevant Teacher Education Beyond Traditional Schooling**

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### **Rationale**

College and University teacher preparation programs struggle with new mandates that tie their effectiveness ratings to their graduates' student achievement scores. As a result, teacher Education and Prep programs are undergoing major reform. According to US Education Secretary Arnie Duncan, "Too many future teachers graduate from prep programs unprepared for success in the classroom" (Our Future Our Teachers, 2011). The US Department of Education's reform proposal addresses one of the strongest criticisms of current Teacher Education programs: Their lack of preparation of willing, young candidates for the challenges into which they are being sent. Deborah Loewenberg Ball, Dean of the University of Michigan School of Education further supports this contention, "This [reform] puts the focus where it should be: beginning teachers' readiness to practice independently" (2011).<sup>1</sup>

The Florida Department of Education (FLDOE) has fully embraced the paradigm that it is primarily the teacher who makes a difference in student success. As the FLDOE seeks to increase accountability for student success, it has expanded its oversight to hold Teacher Preparation Programs accountable at colleges and universities. Teacher

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<sup>1</sup>**Our Future Our Teachers, The Obama Administration's Plan for**

Teacher Education Reform and Improvement, <http://www.ed.gov/sites/default/files/our-future-our-teachers-accessible.pdf> (September, 2011)

Preparation programs are symbiotically tied to teacher and student performance. It is imperative that institutions develop teachers who demonstrate knowledge of teaching domains that positively impact student performance. The Commission for Effective Teaching further exemplifies the point that teacher preparation programs must be judged by the professional qualifications and teaching effectiveness of their graduates and the quality and substance of the preparation program itself (Transforming Teaching, November 2011)<sup>2</sup>

Effective teacher preparation matters for all content areas and has special significance for reading. In general, there are children who struggle with learning to read in the primary grades and in later grades experience difficulty catching up with their peers. Preparing pre-service and practicing teachers to teach reading has become more multifaceted due to the growing number of children from poverty and diverse backgrounds. The 2009 NAEP results revealed that 33% of 4<sup>th</sup> graders scored below basic level in reading. The results also showed an achievement gap between those above and below the poverty level. The demands of our education system are further complicated by the current movement towards Common Core Standards. These standards define college and career readiness and define what it means to be a literate person in the twenty-first century. Students as literate persons, perform close, attentive reading that fosters comprehension and an aesthetic stance of complex works of literature and critical reading of informational texts in both print and digital formats. Preservice teachers will need to be able to use teaching strategies that help students experience deep, thoughtful engagement with high-quality literary and Informational texts to meet these standards.

The complexity of reading instruction and accountability of teachers and teacher preparation programs has added importance and to the supervised field experiences and or practicum. Practicing teachers are often consumed with the routines and schedules of schooling and unwittingly become “fossilized” in teaching schedules and practices. Although field experiences hold great potential for providing preservice teachers the opportunity to practice instructional decision making and reflection, the focus of preservice teaching during practicum often moves toward procedural concerns and routine tasks (Moore, 2003). Preservice teachers can become bogged down with these concerns early in their field experience. This malaise taints their frame of reference for instructional decisions which are primarily based on their own learning experiences. As a result, Moore (2003) purports the occurrence of a phenomenon where these young teachers are less willing to consider new approaches and transform theory into effective practice.

Because of the aforementioned impediments, large numbers of preservice teachers have few opportunities to fully grasp their role in effective reading instruction. A well planned practicum helps teachers of reading fulfill their roles by developing knowledge in the critical areas of reading (Morris, 2011). Several theorists and researchers have identified critical areas that impact reading achievement and support effective reading instruction. Reutzel (2008) refers to these areas as pillars. Reutzel’s pillars are Teacher

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<sup>2</sup> NEA, Transforming Teacher Education,  
[http://www.nea.org/assets/docs/Transforming\\_Teaching%282%29.pdf](http://www.nea.org/assets/docs/Transforming_Teaching%282%29.pdf) (January, 2011)

Knowledge, Assessment, Effective Practice, Differentiated Instruction and Family/Home Connections. Teacher Educators traditionally teach and support these pillars. In many instances only a few of these pillars are taught with a great deal of attention. The rest are relegated to cursory consideration. The least attended areas include family/home involvement and the effective practices that differentiate instruction, address culturally relevant instruction and summer learning loss. Aspiring and practicing teachers need less stressful and restrictive opportunities to work with diverse learners and explore the least attended areas that are critical factors in reading achievement.

### **Home/School/Community Connection**

Overcoming obstacles to parent involvement is of increasing legal importance to school districts nationally because districts receiving federal funds are required to inform parents how they can be involved in their children's schooling and to distribute an annual district report card to parents, under the *Elementary and Secondary Education Act*, commonly known as *No Child Left Behind*. The academic advantages for children living in poverty whose parents are actively involved in schools are well documented. Higher student achievement occurs when parent participation is invited and frequent, with meaningful partnerships between families and schools, drawing upon the knowledge and backgrounds of the family (Epstein 2004). In addition, motivation, a sense of responsibility, school behavior, and self-esteem are increased through active and constructive parental involvement in a child's education (Fantuzzo, McWayne, & Perry, 2004; National Committee for Citizens in Education, 1996)

Christenson and Gorney (1996) found compelling evidence that family involvement is equally significant to minority students. They report that rates of parent participation in elementary school of Low-income African American children increased their likelihood to graduate from high school. Similarly, high achieving Latino youth have parents encourage and emphasize the value of education as a way to escape poverty (Weiss, Caspey & Lopez, 2006). Evidence also suggests that school policies, teacher practices and family practices are more important than race. Therefore, teacher preparation must include best practices to meaningfully involve families in matters of student achievement in reading and all academics. As part of their preparation, preservice teachers must evaluate their own assumptions and beliefs about the families with whom they work, develop effective communication skills, be provided staff time to process with others difficult conversations or circumstances. Preservice teachers should participate in neighborhood meetings to help families understand schools and to help schools understand the culture, background and children's needs (Epstein, 2004).

Effective family involvement results in parent empowerment. Parents are empowered when they are equipped with activities and skills to help their children succeed. Because parent involvement also includes helping families create homes that get children ready to learn, it is important to provide parents with opportunities to reinforce the learning received at school. In addition to academic support from parents, schools have an obligation to refer parents/guardians for support of programs that help with child welfare such as health, nutrition, housing and financial literacy. Children who live in homes owned by their parents have a strong sense of stability and perform better on standardized tests (Aronson, 2000).



### **Needs of Diverse Learners**

“In 2009, White students at grade 12 scored 27 points higher in reading than Black students and 22 points higher than Hispanic students” (Aud, et al., 2011 *Indicator 11-2011*). For years educators have pronounced causes and solutions for this phenomenon. Flowers (2004), suggests a few causes. He asserts that teachers and parents of African American students do not spend adequate time focusing on reading materials that students value. He also cites Delpit’s (1995) argument that teacher knowledge of diversity issues influences their classroom management and lesson plans. As a resolution, he recommends that research be expanded to determine which aspects of teachers’ knowledge and training are detrimental to African American students and which experiences, values, skills and teacher characteristics positively influence African American students’ reading achievement. There are multiple research questions that could add valuable expansion to the knowledge base. For example, would pre-service teachers benefit from taking courses about the black experience in education to foster academic achievement for students and improve parent-teacher relationships? Do after school and summer programs contribute to improving the reading proficiency of African American students? Does what a child read matter as much as how he learns to read?

Researchers who have begun to investigate these topics report the following findings. Ladson-Billings (1992) found that reading materials must reflect children’s lives, experiences and what they want to read. When African American children do not see themselves or their experiences in text they may begin to question where their families and communities fit into the world of reading (Clark, Walker-Dalhouse, 2011). Encouraging students to ponder their lack of cultural literacy identity by withholding culturally relevant text is contrary to the expressed purposes of education in American schooling. Those purposes are to teach children to read and to socialize them to the culture in which they live (Cook, 2012).

Current research highlights the complex nature of culturally relevant literacy instruction. Field based experience, service learning, strength based mentoring, cross cultural conversations and community based activities are pivotal considerations for teacher preparation programs. A requirement when choosing culturally relevant text is that preservice teachers develop an awareness and ability to respond to students’ social and cultural life experiences. Otherwise, their text choices could contain stereotypical, superficially culturally relevant texts that do not support readers because they are not personally relevant. A field experience that includes the aforementioned pivotal considerations for teacher preparation programs will result in preservice teachers using their knowledge of curriculum and culture to empower students.

A major necessity in teacher preparation is building cultural competence. Preservice teachers need cultural competence to provide culturally relevant instruction. The purpose of cultural competence is to establish classrooms where developmentally appropriate teaching and learning procedures guarantee social justice, human rights, educational equity and democratic principles (Gallavan, 2011). When provided the requisite instructional and field experiences, preservice teachers can use the curriculum to empower African American students, especially those who have faced major challenges.

To realize this goal, teachers must have high expectations, make curriculum interesting, comprehensible and relevant. According to Thompson (2010), this can best be done with problem based learning, on a theme or topic such as racism, where students read, discuss and write about it, brainstorm solutions, develop related projects and conduct related research.

### **Summer Learning Loss**

Another impediment to reading proficiency for learners is the traditional school schedule. The 9-month school schedule currently in use in the United States began in 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> Century society when 85% of Americans worked in agriculture. This schedule is irrelevant since fewer than 3% of Americans are currently involved in agriculture. Research on the 9-month schedule shows that students' learning is negatively impacted by the 3-month block of time spent away from school. Recent research shows that the impact of summer learning loss may be greater than shown in earlier studies (Allington & McGill-Franzen, 2003). Allington and McGill-Franzen labeled summer reading loss as the "smoking gun." Allington has reported that the cumulative effects of summer reading loss can mean that struggling readers entering middle school may lag two years behind peers in their ability to read. Additional research (Alexander, Entwisle, & Olson, 2007) links the achievement gap between high-socioeconomic and low-socioeconomic 9<sup>th</sup> grade students to the loss in reading proficiency that occurred over the summer months in the elementary grades. Summer learning loss across the elementary school years accounted for more than 50% of the difference in the achievement gap between students from high-socioeconomic and low-socioeconomic families.

Correlational studies suggest that the more children read they become better in comprehension, vocabulary, and fluency. In *The Voice of Evidence in Reading Research* (2004), Tim Shanahan, recommended that researchers turn their attention to various ways schools might encourage children to read more. Findings from the 1998 National Assessment of Educational Progress confirm that students who are highly engaged in reading can overcome barriers including low socio economic status (Guthrie & Springer, 2004). As we try to narrow the achievement gap, educators must find ways to increase reading engagement to benefit all students regardless of their economic status. We need to promote an equitable solution to increase reading engagement for all learners because the evidence is clear. Students who read the least experience the most reading difficulties. Efforts to increase reading engagement have met challenges. For instance, teachers face schedule impediments that limit the amount of reading done in school. So educators continue to look for ways to encourage more independent student engagement with text outside of school. Educators have tried to encourage reading outside of school with partnerships with libraries and sending books home. Many times their best efforts have not been successful and they must acknowledge that there are many reasons why students fail to do so. Never the less, it remains important to find ways to increase reading volume beyond the traditional school year. An additional way to promote reading is to provide year round access to high-interest reading materials all year long. Providing student access to interesting relevant reading materials encourages students to become year round readers and counters illiteracy.

As educators, we are consumed with accountability concerns. However, our quest to improve standardized assessment performance should merge with preparing students for the pursuit of becoming life-long readers, thus, diminishing the summer learning losses. If this occurs, teachers could gain back the time lost at the beginning of the school year (which represents a 22% time loss), enabling them to begin new instruction earlier (National Summer Learning Association, 2004).

### **An Emerging Concept**

An opportunity to address summer learning loss by engaging students with culturally relevant text during the summer months is available with the CDF Freedom School concept. This program received the Johns Hopkins University's first excellence in Summer Learning award of summer learning opportunities for children and youth in 2004. *CDF Freedom Schools* programs are six-week, no cost to families, literacy-based summer learning programs designed for inner-city children who may be at risk for school failure. The risk factors these students face include poverty, minority status, lower academic achievement as measured by grades and on standardized tests, lower graduation rates, and difficulties with reading and literacy. College Interns and early career teachers receive professional development in implementing reading curriculum, cultural sensitivity and engaging parent, family and community in reading and increased student achievement. Key Elements of the program are related to factors that assist the development of preservice teachers to effectively fulfill their roles as teachers of reading. In particular the key elements of Freedom School address the following factors that are not given a great deal of attention in traditional field experiences and internships in teacher education programs.

#### *Educational Enrichment and Cultural Awareness*

At CDF Freedom Schools, children read books that include a wide variety of cultures and experiences. The text collection reflects students' self-image and focus on the theme I Can and Must Make a Difference! This collection of books is part of an Integrated Reading Curriculum (IRC). During IRC, the learners who are called scholars read the texts and engage in cooperative group discussions and perform related reading and writing tasks that are geared towards problem solving. Servant Leader Interns use the IRC to teach children conflict resolution and critical thinking skills. It is also used to engage learners in community service and social action projects. In the afternoons scholars participate in art, field trips and athletic activities, and Servant Leader-Interns help children to develop an ending program exhibition in which every child is given the chance to show their accomplishments.

#### *Parental Involvement*

Recognizing that parents and families are critical partners in their children's education, the CDF Freedom Schools program offers parents the support and expertise they need to help their children succeed. Parents demonstrate their commitment to the program and to their children's education by engaging in the daily CDF Freedom Schools events. Parents and community members serve as guest readers and support the children's social action

and community service projects. An important feature of the program is parent participation in weekly workshops where they learn about the educational and social development of children, financial literacy, relationships and obtain the necessary skills that empowers them and their families to succeed. Servant leaders interact and communicate with families about health, nutrition and academic concerns. They also have exposure to community agencies that support families in those areas.

### *Intergenerational Leadership*

CDF Freedom Schools programs are staffed primarily by college-age adults, many are education majors. Preservice teachers obtain relevant Training coordinated by the Children's Defense Fund® national staff young leaders provides Servant Leader-Interns with expertise in the integrated reading curriculum, social justice, parent empowerment and cultural competence in the Afro American experience. These concepts, when paired with the IRC, are the basic elements that make up the diverse CDF Freedom Schools experience.

### *Daily Staff Debriefing*

On a daily basis, the Site Coordinator and Servant-Leader Interns meet to share and discuss successes and creatively resolve the challenges of the day. This meeting gives Interns an opportunity to reflect on their individual instructional practices and the effectiveness of their encounters with families, children and peers.

### *Integrated Reading Curriculum (IRC)*

Reading is an important social factor in America. It has been dubbed, “the new civil right”. At CDF Freedom Schools, children read a book collection that reflects a wide variety of experiences, cultures, and characters. The principal theme of the curriculum is "I Can and Must Make a Difference" with sub-themes including "I Can and Must Make a Difference in My: Self, Family, Community, Country, World and Hope.” The goal of the curriculum is to help both readers and nonreaders develop a love for books, perform close reading and instill in nonreaders a desire to read.

### *Servant-Leadership Development*

The staff members of Freedom School are primarily College-age young adults. They serve as positive role models, instructors and mentors. These Servant-Leader Interns attend a ten day training on how to use innovative teaching strategies to engage children in ethical thinking, critical thinking and conflict resolution. The program training model helps Interns become informed about the academic, cultural and emotional needs of children, and teaches them how to effectively respond to the needs of diverse learners.

### **Related Research**

In December 2010, a two year study was conducted for children enrolled in CDF Freed Schools programs in Charlotte, North Carolina and Bennetsville, South Carolina. It was reported that more than 65% of the children tested improved or showed gains in independent reading by the program's end, while 25% did not exhibit summer learning loss. Preliminary data from summer 2011 programs in Charlotte show that 90% of the program participants suffered no summer learning gains for the third year in a row and more than 60 percent made increased gains in reading. In an earlier evaluation of the Kansas City Freedom School Initiative, scholar assessment data demonstrated significant improvement in reading performance.

### **Objectives and Research Questions**

In 2010 an agreement was formed with a local organization to host a *CDF Freedom Schools* program and become a part of a national assessment to measure the impact of the CDF Freedom Schools program. Specifically, CDF is measuring reading achievement as measured by the Gates MacGinitie Reading (MGR) assessment. The MGR assessment is a Norm-referenced reading assessment that provides results on student achievement in vocabulary and reading comprehension.

### **Objectives and Research Questions**

During a six week CDF Freedom Schools program, the goals are to meet the following objectives for the K-8 students (Scholars) enrolled and their Servant-Leader Interns: 1) To provide opportunities for in-service and preservice teachers to gain knowledge and practice to effectively perform their role as effective teachers who provide culturally relevant reading instruction 2) To maintain or to increase children's reading levels from the end of the school year until the beginning of the proceeding school year and 3) To increase children's engagement with text during the summer months. The research questions that guided the evaluation were the following:

1. Did Freedom School Summer Program Scholars show any change in their general level of reading as measured by the Gates MacGinitie Reading Test?
2. Were there positive student reactions to the opportunities for daily independent reading and book discussions as a result of daily engagement with culturally relevant texts?
3. Did Freedom School Instructors increase their performance in their current and future practices of culturally relevant reading instruction?

### **Instruments**

Twenty three scholars were pre-assessed within the first week of the program by independent, non-staff members. Post-assessments were conducted by the same

assessors during the last week of the program. Pre- and Post-Assessment consisted of administration of Forms S and T of the Gates-MacGinitie Reading Tests.

Three servant Leader Interns and a Site Coordinator participated in daily discussion during debrief and the Site Coordinator performed weekly lesson observations to ascertain their position and growth in two indicators of the N and NW compass points on the Gallavan (2010) checklist for Cultural Competence (see Appendix A). Servant-Leader interns were scored as novice, emerging or proficient for each indicator. The N indicators for Notice Culture and Cultural Characteristics of learners are: 1) recognized and accept all students with respect for their individual and shared cultural characteristics and 2) ensure that all learning connects with individual academic and cultural backgrounds. Indicators for the NW indicators for Nurture and Welcome Challenges and Changes are 1) Teach all students how challenges exist through all parts of the curriculum and 2) Teach students skills related to conflict management.

## **Findings**

### *Student Reading Gains*

One of the most exciting reports from the Gates MacGinitie Reading Test is the positive gain that scholars make in reading. While the gains are not large, they are significant. They are also widespread, occurring among scholars in each age group. Children's Defense Fund Statisticians are currently analyzing the data reported from this site and from 39 evaluation sites throughout the United States. The final report is due this fall. The oral report for this participating site is that the fifth grade, Level Two scholars showed on average six months growth in both vocabulary and comprehension subsets of the Gates MacGinitie Reading Assessment. These results are slightly below the expected trajectory when compared with students who participated in Kansas City's summer CDF Freedom programs for three consecutive summers from 2003-2005. The Kansas City students increased an average of 2.2 grade levels over three years.

### *Student Reaction to Independent Reading*

During the first week of independent reading, more than 50% of the students in all three levels showed an actual aversion and off task behavior to independent reading as evidenced by the amount of time they exhibited on task reading behaviors and times Servant-Leaders had to verbally bring students back to the task of reading. Servant leader interns reported more than 90% compliance and on task independent reading for weeks two-six. It is also reported that students' had more favorable views of reading as a recreational and fun activity.

Servant Leader-Interns reported gains in their feelings of efficacy for teaching reading with consideration for diversity and individual student needs on the pre and post evidence boxes on the Gallavan Checklist for Cultural Competence. The pre- program checklist evidence reported for all three of the Servant Leaders showed little or no evidence for noticing culture and cultural characteristics for learning within the context of culture. The examples given by Servant Leader –Interns as evidence of their cultural

competence did not show considerations of teaching by making connections to individual learner academic and cultural backgrounds. Lesson introductions in the curriculum guide provided surface level connections. Debrief discussions and modeling by the Site Coordinator of academic connections deepened Servant Leader-Interns proficiency on this indicator. Interestingly, the servant leaders struggled to move beyond the idea that they must differentiate instruction for cultural background. The Interns more easily accepted differentiating for academic diversity and engaged in instructional considerations for individual academic backgrounds with greater ease. The weekly themes provided in the CDF Freedom School Integrated Reading Curriculum and the accompanying culturally relevant texts led the Servant-Leader Interns to provide information and opportunities in the context of culture and connected learning to individual academic and cultural backgrounds. The Servant Leaders moved from novice to proficiency ratings on both assessed indicators by the conclusion of the program. Observations of the Servant Leader-Interns and the intricacies of their lesson plans support the post program proficiency rating.

The NW indicators on the Gallavan Checklist assessed the Servant Leader-Intern's proficiency in assisting learners in welcoming challenges and changes and managing conflict. Servant Leader- Interns were initially rated at the novice level when asked to provide evidence that they teach students how challenges exist in the curriculum. The IRC curriculum guide did not identify complexity level of texts or activity challenges. So servant-Leader Interns developed a plan to discuss perceived curricular challenges for the next day's lesson during each debrief session. It was noted that by the end of the program, the Interns were proficient in giving supporting evidence of the teacher talk and actions they planned to use to help students recognize and address curricular challenges. They also noted the teacher talk in their lesson plans.

Effective instruction of conflict management is the second NW indicator that was assessed. Conflict Resolution is embedded in a few lessons in the Freedom School Integrated Reading Curriculum guide. Although the guide has suggested ideas for connecting problem solving activities with conflicts in the text story line, Servant-Leader Interns initially skipped these activities and openly complained about the awkwardness of implementing these activities. During debrief, the Interns began to discuss the previous lesson and exchanged ideas and suggestions on how they would teach concepts for conflict resolution. They also shared how they encouraged students to use the same techniques in the classroom to resolve their own conflicts. Servant-Leader Interns moved from novice to emerging ratings for this indicator. The lack of information Interns included in the evidence and planning columns in the Gallavan Cultural Competence Checklist led the Servant Leader-Interns to determine that they need additional professional development to increase their proficiency ratings for the indicators.

### **Implications for Practice and Future Directions**

The staggering attrition rate of between 40 percent and 50 percent within the first five years for new teachers in high-poverty schools has resulted in a lack of staff mentoring and support for new teachers (Darling-Hammond, 2004). Most new teachers in high poverty schools report feeling unprepared to work with parents and families (Cochran-Smith, 2006). Consequently, teacher preparation programs need to aggressively support Preservice teachers in this area. The real life exposure to parents through meetings and community interactions that exist in the CDF Freedom School model enhanced the Interns knowledge. Servant-Leader to Parent relationship discussions recorded on the daily debrief forms showed fewer interactions listed as challenges. The debrief discussions chronicled how Servant Leaders' knowledge about home factors and their student's backgrounds increased. Interns also improved in their use of innovative solutions to resolve challenges in the home school connection. These results from the CDF Freedom School program are particularly encouraging because the Servant Leader-Interns came from social, cultural and income backgrounds that differed from the student participants.

The findings also add to the growing body of evidence that culturally relevant curriculum and instruction can have a positive impact on student performance in reading. Additional factors worthy of consideration for increasing student reading performance include providing opportunities for students to engage with text year round, motivating students' reading engagement by matching students with appealing text and ascertaining the value of and effective contexts for independent reading. A question for future consideration has emerged from this discussion on independent reading: How can independent reading best be used to effectively curb aliteracy?

Servant Leader-Interns' commanding participation and success with the Daily Debrief activity serves as a reminder of the power of reflection. Although reflection is a well-known and accepted component of Teacher Education, there is evidence that it can be used in a matter of fact manner which causes it to become ineffective. How can we reinvigorate reflection by incorporating its use in new and innovative ways?

As educators begin to address the demands of the Common Core Standards and teacher preparation institutions prepare for increased accountability with limited resources, we are confronted with the lack of a resource that has eternally plagued K-12 schools, "time." How can institutions find additional time to provide preservice teachers with experiences that assist them in developing their roles as effective reading instructors? Identifying this time is vital because of the increased emphasis on linking student achievement to teacher pay, promotion and retention. This "new" reality gives Teacher Educators the purview and an imperative to support the use of evidence based practices that expand schooling to engage students with text beyond the traditional nine month school calendar and include deep learning of the salient aspects of educating diverse populations in teacher preparation programs. Advances in these areas of research could lead to the development of new models for afterschool and weekend literacy activities that accelerate learning for all students.



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**Appendix A**  
**Gallavan Checklist for Cultural Competence (Adapted)**

N: Notice Culture and Cultural Characteristics	Evidence	Plan
1. I recognize and accept all students with respect for their individual and shared cultural characteristics		
2. I ensure that all learning connects with individual academic and cultural backgrounds.		
NW: Nurture and Welcome Challenges and Changes		
1. I teach all students how challenges exist through all parts of the curriculum.		
2. I teach all students skills related to conflict management.		

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Davis, M., Flamion, O., & Fine, J. C. (2012). Teachers' instructional time in reading and material usage. *American Reading Forum Annual Yearbook* [Online], Vol. 32.

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## Teachers' Instructional Time in Reading and Material Usage

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Over thirty years ago, Durkin (1978-79) found that teachers in upper elementary grades spent little time on comprehension. Durkin (1978-79) also discovered that the teacher manuals that accompanied basal reading programs provided little instruction to teachers on how to teach comprehension. Beck et al. (1979) attained similar results when they concluded that basal reading programs do not support comprehension. Finally, during this same period, Durkin (1981) concluded that teachers and teacher manuals mainly assessed comprehension by asking questions and not instructing how to comprehend.

More recently, Raphael, Pardo, and Choo (1996) revealed that the push for accountability, determined by high-stakes assessments, has led to more generic reading instruction. Raphael et al. (1996) stated that many states aligned their basal reading programs with high-stakes assessments. Since this research, the student population has become more diverse, reflecting the increasing diversity of the United States of America. According to the U.S. Department of Commerce (2011), the 2010 census data showed that the Hispanic population accounted for 16% of the United States population, Asians for 5%, Black for 13%, and multiracial as 6%. In addition, between 2000 and 2010, both the Hispanic and Asian populations increased by 43% (U.S. Department of Commerce, 2011).

Teachers must meet the needs of all students in the classroom. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to find out the different materials teachers use with a diverse student body. In

addition, the amount of time teaching reading, particularly comprehension, was examined to determine the mean amount of time teachers spend on instruction, apart from testing time, which includes asking students questions. This study seeks to ascertain if teachers devoted more time to comprehension instruction since the studies of Durkin (1978-79; 1981) and Beck et al. (1979) and if they are varying the materials used to teach reading.

## **Method**

The amount of time teachers spend providing instruction in the different components of reading was determined through a self-reported survey, which asked teachers the amount of time used to teach each component and the materials used in each.

### **Participants**

Surveys were given to all elementary reading teachers at three schools, approximately 70 teachers. The participants of the study were 24 teachers from three public schools (one elementary and two K-8 centers) in a large, diverse school district in South Florida. Therefore, only 34% of the teachers in the original sample population returned the survey. The teachers all taught at least one reading class each day to students in kindergarten through fifth grade and had been teaching for a varying number of years (anywhere between one and 20 plus years). While those teachers who participated in the survey are anonymous, the teachers employed at the schools generally reflect the diversity of the student population. The majority of the students are Hispanic, with many English Language Learners. In addition, the schools were located in different socio-economic neighborhoods. One was in a middle class neighborhood, one was in a working class neighborhood, and the third was in a poor neighborhood.

### **Sampling Procedures**

The three schools selected to participate in the study were chosen as they were convenient for the researchers. Permission was received from the principals at the three schools. In addition, approval was received from the university and the school district in which all three schools are located.

### **Measure**

A researcher-made survey was given to all the reading teachers at the three schools. The survey directed teachers to quantify the number of minutes they spend each week teaching the components of reading. The components of reading were listed as phonemic awareness, phonics, oral language, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension. In addition, teachers were asked to list the materials they used to teach each component. Materials were divided into types, namely basal materials, basal supplements, school-bought supplements, computer supplements, teacher-bought supplements, and teacher-made supplements. Finally, teachers were asked how many minutes they spend testing students each week. A copy of the survey can be found in the Appendix.

## Research Design

The surveys were distributed to the reading teachers at the three schools which were chosen for convenience. The surveys were placed in each teacher's school mailbox. The surveys had a cover page promising the teachers anonymity and explaining the purpose of the survey. The teachers were then given a deadline to submit the survey, approximately two weeks after it had been distributed. The teachers were instructed to place their completed surveys in a designated mailbox at each school site, ensuring that their anonymity would be protected.

Once the deadline to receive surveys was reached, the surveys were collected and analyzed, determining average time values regarding the amount of time spent teaching reading and the amount of time spent testing. In addition, the correlation between the amount of time spent teaching reading and the specific amount of time devoted to teaching comprehension was calculated. Finally, the material types were synthesized to provide an overview of the different materials currently being used by the teachers at the three schools.

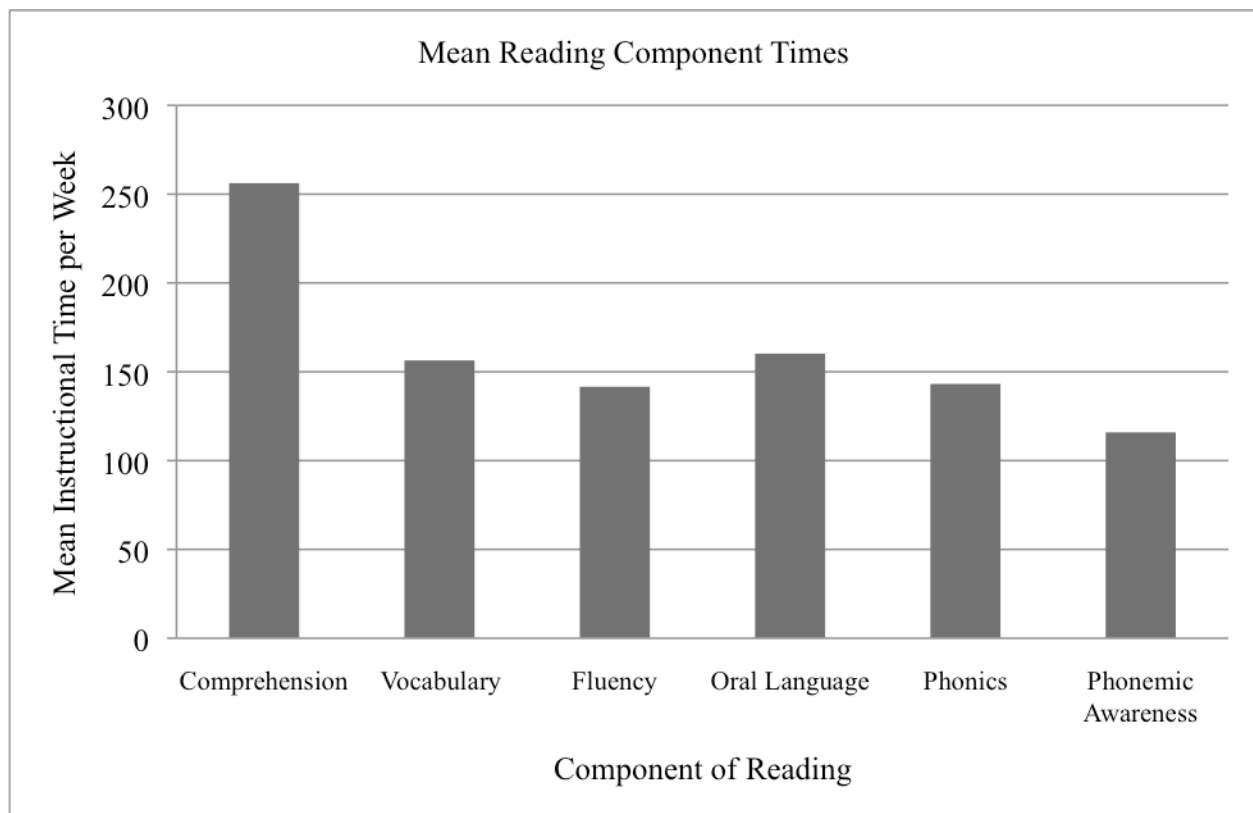
## Results

The surveys were distributed at the three schools on November 7, 2011 and had to be returned by November 18, 2011 to be included in the study. Once all completed surveys were received, they were analyzed for mean instructional times. Not all teachers broke their instructional time down by the components of reading, limiting the data collection from some of the surveys. Twenty-four teachers returned the survey, but only 13 of the surveys were fully completed. The mean amount of time spent teaching reading per week was reported as 973.50 minutes per week, with a standard deviation of 612.52 minutes ( $N = 22$ ). The total amount of testing time was reported as 66.92 minutes, with a standard deviation of 23.23 minutes ( $N = 13$ ). The district in which the schools are located mandates that reading be taught 90 minutes a day, for a total of 450 minutes a week. Using this amount for the required reading block, teachers are using 15% of mandated reading time to test students. Table 1 shows the mean instructional time for each component of reading. Additionally, Figure 1 details the mean of the components in graph form, illustrating that comprehension is the component given the most instructional time, while phonemic awareness receives the least.

Table 1  
*Mean Amount of Time Spent Teaching the Components of Reading*

Reading Component	Number of Respondents (N)	Mean (M) of minutes taught per week	Standard Deviation (SD)
Comprehension	22	256.18	146.36
Vocabulary	22	156.41	111.33
Fluency	22	141.59	114.95
Oral Language	22	160.23	197.76
Phonics	22	143.18	109.19
Phonemic Awareness	22	115.91	99.72

Figure 1



Correlation between total reading time and the minutes spent teaching comprehension per week was 0.62. This correlation is significant at the .01 alpha level of significance. Teachers reported using an average of 4.67 materials, with a standard deviation of 1.17 materials ( $N = 24$ ). The only basal material reported was the Houghton Mifflin reading series, which is mandated by the district. The teachers reported using several of the supplements that come with the basal reading program. Those listed by the teachers were: comprehension flashcards, high frequency cards, picture cards, punctuation cards, leveled readers, vocabulary readers, novels, reader's library, phonic's readers, On My Way readers, guided reading books, big books, cassette tapes, graphic organizers, charts, The English Language Learner Handbook, and the Extra Support Handbook.

Table 2 lists the school-bought and computer supplements used by the teachers completing the survey. These materials are bought with school or district money. Teachers may be required by the school or district to use some or all of these materials.

Table 2

*Reading Materials Bought with School or District Monies*

School-Bought Supplements	Computer Supplements
Voyager	Reading Plus
Novels	SuccessMaker
Comprehension Centers	Ticket to Read
Phonics Books	Starfall Website
Leap Pads	Accelerated Reader
Elements of Reading – Vocabulary	STAR Reading
Extended Foreign Language Program Materials	Waterford
Florida Assessments for Instruction in Reading (FAIR) Comprehension Binder	Imagine Learning Reading
Words Their Way	Riverdeep (QZAB)
	FCAT Explorer

In addition, teachers listed a variety of materials that they had either bought or made themselves. These materials typically require the teacher to use their own time and/or money. They reported using these materials with their students to teach one or more component of reading. Table 3 lists the materials reported by the teachers.

Table 3

*Reading Materials Supplemented by the Teachers*

Teacher-Bought Supplements	Teacher-Made Supplements
Response to Reading Center	Fluency Scripts
Building Thinking Skills Workbook	Vocabulary Tasks
Writing Center	Charts
Listening/Fluency Center	Vocabulary Sentence Strips
Listen & Respond Center	Segmenting Sounds Game
Grammar Bingo	Letter Flash Cards
Lakeshore Nonfiction Cards	Fry Words Flash Cards
Lakeshore Comprehension Cards	Rhyming Words Cards
Writing Activity Pockets	Bingo
Flip Charts	Language Master Cards
Ready Made Centers	Picture Word Recognition
Instant Learning Centers	Classroom Literacy Centers
Phonics Centers	Reading and Vocabulary Tests
Sight Word Cards	Florida Center for Reading Research Centers
Chunk-It Cubes	English Language Learner Strategies
Magnetic Letter Tiles	Graphic Organizers



Phonics Worksheets	FAIR Centers
Nursery Rhyme Worksheets	Online Printables
Flash Cards	Buddy Study for Spelling
Focus Series	
K-3 Student Center Activities	
National Geographic Explorer	
Ready, Set, Learn Reading Comprehension	
Take It to Your Seat Phonics and Reading Centers	
Mailbox Yearbook	

## Discussion

This study found that teachers are using a variety of materials to provide reading instruction to their students, with a large amount of material coming from supplements that teachers have bought or created themselves. This may indicate that teachers do not find the basal reading series adequate for the needs of their diverse students. Unlike the findings of Durkin (1978-79), teachers appear to be spending a large amount of time on reading instruction. In addition, a significant portion of this reading instructional time is used to teach comprehension, as the survey specified that teachers approximate the amount of time teaching comprehension, apart from questioning the students.

Much variance was found in the amount of time teachers spend teaching reading in general and each of the six components of which it is composed. The teachers who responded to the survey reported varying amounts of reading instructional time; there was no one survey that could account for the variance, indicating that teachers do not strictly follow the district-mandated reading times. Some teachers who completed the survey also reported increased reading instructional times as they have incorporated reading instruction into the content areas.

There are several limitations to the current study. First, out of approximately 70 teachers who received the survey, only 24 returned it; this is a 34% completion rate. Out of these 24 surveys, 13 were fully completed. The open-ended responses required on the survey may have inhibited some of the teachers from participating. Finally, the surveys were only distributed to teachers at three schools so generalizations made from them are limited.

Overall, the results of the study are positive as it appears that teachers are spending much of their instructional time teaching reading, especially comprehension, and have incorporated reading into the content areas. In addition, teachers are using differentiated materials to meet the needs of their diverse student population. Finally, teachers were only spending 15% of the required reading time (66.92 minutes out of a weekly minimum requirement of 450) to test the students. Therefore, standardized testing aside, teachers do not appear to be over-testing students.

This study should be replicated with a larger sample size to determine if similar teacher responses are found. Also, some observations should take place to find out if the times reported by teachers are accurate, if the materials are actually being used, and if the instruction provided is appropriate for the student population.

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Survey of Teachers' Reading Material Usage and Time Spent on Reading Components

Number of Years Teaching: 0-5 \_\_\_\_\_ 6-10 \_\_\_\_\_ 11-15 \_\_\_\_\_ 16-20 \_\_\_\_\_ 21+

Grade Currently Teaching: K-1 \_\_\_\_\_ 2-3 \_\_\_\_\_ 4-5 (check all that apply)

How many reading classes do you teach a day? \_\_\_\_\_

**How many minutes per week would you say that you use each of the following materials to teach each component of reading?**

(Please note that when approximating instructional time, do not include time spent questioning students, or quizzing/testing students.)

Material	Name or Description of Material	Approximate Minutes Spent (Per Week) Using Each Material to Teach			
		Phonemic Awareness	Phonics	Oral Language	Fluency Vocabulary Comprehension
Standard Basal (e.g. Houghton Mifflin Reading)					
Basal Supplements (e.g. English Language Learner Handbook)					
School Bought Supplements (e.g. Voyager)					

**Survey of Teachers' Reading Material Usage and Time Spent on Reading Components**

**How many minutes per week would you say that you use each of the following materials to teach each component of reading?**  
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Material	Name or Description of Material	Approximate Minutes Spent (Per Week) Using Each Material to Teach					
		Phonemic Awareness	Phonics	Oral Language	Fluency	Vocabulary	Comprehension
Computer Supplements (e.g. Reading Plus)							
Teacher Bought Supplements (e.g. Lakeshore Ready Made Centers)							
Teacher Made Supplements							
Approximately how many minutes per week do you spend testing all the components of reading (total testing time): _____							

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Furst, S., Gray, S., & Kennedy, S. (2012). From the student's perspective: what makes a great reading teacher? *American Reading Forum Annual Yearbook* [Online], Vol. 32.

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## **From the Student's Perspective: What Makes a Great Reading Teacher?**

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Stephanie Gray  
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A plethora of studies have sought to determine the qualities of a successful reading teacher. Many of these studies examined a teacher's practices and compared them to student performance on some assessment (Gambrell & Mazzoni, 1999; Guthrie & Alvermann, 1999; Kamil, Mosenthal, Pearson & Barr, 2000; National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, 2000). Other studies examined new, innovative ideas teachers implemented in their classrooms and measured the outcomes. While these methods of determining the qualities of a successful reading teacher may prove to be successful, there may be a more obvious way of determining what makes a great reading teacher. Perhaps instead of focusing on what educators, administrators, or researchers believe makes an extraordinary teacher, we should instead focus on what students believe, particularly since students are our teachers' target audiences.

Although the idea of asking students what they believe are the qualities of a great reading teacher may not seem very original, there is a definite lack of research about quality reading teachers from a students' perspective. Matthews (2000) reports less than 1% of schools are evaluated on their performance by the students and parents. It seems shocking that our target audience's opinion is seemingly the last group of people whose opinions are considered. Dillion (2010) supports Matthews by stating that, "Few of the nation's 15,000 public school districts systematically question students about their classroom experiences, in contrast to American colleges, many of which collect annual student evaluations to improve instruction." Why the drastic difference from public school districts to American colleges? Do teachers value their opinion any less?

As licensed teachers and full-time graduate students, the researchers in this study believe

that students should be the first group targeted when feedback is needed. These beliefs have shaped this study on what makes a great reading teacher, from the students' perspective. To measure this, a writing prompt was generated that asks students the aspects of their reading teachers' personalities and practices they like as well as the aspects about their reading teachers' personalities and practices that they don't like.

### **Literature Review**

It is important to understand how student perceptions of teachers can affect instruction, as well as teacher attitude, and how these data can be used to inform instructional practices. Dillon (2010) explained:

Teachers whose students described them as skillful at maintaining classroom order, at focusing their instruction and at helping their charges learn from their mistakes are often the same teachers whose students learn the most in the course of the year, as measured by gains on standardized test scores, according to a progress report on the research. (p. 1)

According to Dillon, students are keenly aware of more subtle aspects of teaching, including classroom management, personality traits and effective pedagogy methods. By becoming more aware of student perceptions, teachers may be better able to meet student needs and provide more effective instruction.

From a teacher's personality and demeanor to pedagogy skills, students are actively processing a variety of teacher qualities. Açıkgöz (2005) conducted a study regarding high school students' perceptions of teachers and found students believed personal and pedagogical characteristics were the most valuable traits in a teacher. Students perceive their teachers, the teacher-created learning environments, the lessons and other aspects of teaching and learning in many different ways, causing them to value different traits. Because of this, the collection and analysis of student data concerning perception becomes extremely relevant.

Understanding how students perceive the teachers in their lives affects not only the teachers, but moreover, the students. As teachers come to a better understanding of how students feel, what they see and what they believe about their environment and the teacher themselves, teachers can react responsively. Rimm-Kaufman (2011) explained, "Improving students' relationships with teachers has important, positive and long-lasting implications for students' academic and social development." (p. 1). The author explains that when learning environments and relationships are positive, students are more apt to be successful. By using what teachers know and understand about student-teacher perception, teachers are better able to create more successful learning environments.

When teachers fail to take into account students' perceptions, there can be a critical misunderstanding about the learning environment and the relationships in the classroom. As described by Brekelmans, and Wubbels (2005):

...teachers made a more favorable judgment about the learning environment than the students...it appears that the more the teacher and his or students disagree in the perceptions of the teacher-student relationship, the more the students perceive the teacher as uncertain, dissatisfied and admonishing. (p. 19)

Misconceptions can cause a variety of problems, the most important of which may affect students' learning and achievement within the classroom and even their sense of security. As Smith LaPlante (2003) explained:

In order to alter the way teachers interact with students, teachers need to have accurate information regarding how students perceive their teachers' relationship with them. Rather than wait for problems to surface or escalate, teachers could seek information from their students with respect to the student view of the need or problem. (p. 2)

Being actively receptive to and reflective about student perceptions, teachers have a much better chance of creating successful learning environments.

### **Methods and Procedures**

The purpose of this investigation, then, was to examine students' perceptions of the characteristics of an effective reading teacher. The option to take part in this investigation was proposed to all Fall 2011 student teachers in the early childhood program and middle childhood program at a Midwestern university. Four student teachers who taught a language arts or reading class participated in the study. Data were obtained from a second grade class which contained 17 student responses, two third grade classes totaling 36 student responses, and a seventh grade class with 21 student responses.

To extract the data of interest, a writing prompt was created so that students could feel comfortable talking about their perceptions of a quality reading teacher. After taking into consideration the wide range of targeted grade levels, researchers settled on a very simple, yet direct prompt. There were two prompts; the exact wording for the prompts were, "One thing I like about my reading teacher is..." and "One thing I don't like about my reading teacher is..." The student teachers who participated were given strict instructions regarding the administration of the writing task. Student teachers were told to read the prompt aloud to their students to avoid difficulty for non-proficient readers. Secondly, student teachers were told to allow 10 minutes for their students to respond to the given prompts. Once students had completed the writing prompt, the data were collected by the student teachers and returned to the researchers.

To analyze the data, the researchers first read through all student responses in each grade level and recorded all student responses into two categories: likes and dislikes. Next, subcategories were generated for each grade based on the student responses in each category (likes and dislikes). Each grade level responses were read through a final time to confirm that all responses had been categorized appropriately (likes, dislikes) as well as sorted into appropriate subcategories and tallied accurately. Category percentages (likes and dislikes) were obtained for each grade level. Percentages were calculated for each subcategory by dividing the number of

responses that fit a specific category by the total number of students who participated in the study at that specific grade level. Some student responses involved numerous thoughts regarding their likes or dislikes and their responses may have pertained to more than one subcategory. In this case, the student response was included in the percentages for all applicable categories.

### Results

The subcategories created from the student writing prompts were similar in all grade levels pertaining to likes and dislikes of the reading teacher but were not the same (see Table 1). Regarding what second grade students like about the reading teacher, the subcategories reported were engaging activities, reading in class, and personality. The dislike subcategories were work, strictness, reading, and homework. The like subcategories in the third grade level were engaging activities, reading, personality, helpfulness, and rewards. The dislike subcategories were work, strictness, reading, and disappointing the teacher. The seventh grade like subcategories included personality, engaging activities, helpfulness, appearance, and classroom management. The dislike subcategories were too much homework, work, unfairness, and strictness.

Table 1

*Categories and Subcategories of Student Responses by Grade Level*

	Likes	%	Dislikes	%
Second Grade n = 17	Engaging activities	47	Work	41
	Reading in class	35	Strictness	30
	Personality	29	Reading	19
			Homework	6
Third Grade n = 36	Engaging activities	39	Work	
	Reading	31	Strictness	6
	Personality	22	Reading	6
	Helpfulness	19	Disappointing teacher	3
	Rewards	6		
Seventh Grade n = 21	Personality	59	Too much homework	52
	Engaging activities	33	Work	24
	Helpfulness	29	Unfair	10
	Appearance	5	Strictness	5
	Classroom management	5		

#### *Second Grade Responses*

When asked what they liked about their reading teacher, 47% of second graders responded they think their teacher made reading fun with engaging activities. Almost half of the responses involved describing activities such as reading groups, games, activities, and mentioned interacting with the SMART board. These responses were tallied into the engaging activities subcategory because their responses indicated they liked the activities implemented by the teacher. The second highest category was reading; 35% of the students liked their reading



teacher because they enjoyed reading in class. Two students said they liked that the teacher read aloud. More than a quarter (29%) of the respondents explained they like the reading teacher's personality. The personality characteristics deemed to be positive (likes) were nice and/or funny. One student responded, "When some of the kids aren't reading *flowincey* he *preatends* to fall asleep and it's funny." The researchers interpreted this to mean the student enjoys watching the teacher act like he is falling asleep when students do not read fluently.

The largest subcategory of dislikes amongst the second grade responses was dislike of work. Of the responses, 41% of the students described disliking that the teacher gave work that was too difficult. Students also reported disliking specific work tasks such as making sentences with words, computer work, and completing worksheets. Thirty percent of the responses indicated the students disliked the teacher because he was strict and mean because of disciplinary elements involved in the classroom. One student disliked raising his or her hand. Another dislike subcategory amongst the second grade students was reading. These students (18%) disliked that the reading teacher made the students read because they didn't like reading. Only 6% of the students mentioned disliking homework. One student reported, "I do not like reading work sheets. I don't really like reading homework. I do not like reading work sheets because they take a long time. I don't really like reading homework is boring."

### ***Third Grade Responses***

The largest like subcategory in the third grade level was the same as the second grade: engaging activities (see Table 1). Thirty-nine percent of third grade respondents liked the engaging activities used by the reading teacher. The students discussed liking the spelling game *Sparkle*, working with vocabulary cards, playing flashcard games, participating in reading groups, and working with partners. The next highest subcategory was reading in general (31%). Similar to the second grade responses, two third grade students described liking when the teacher reads aloud and one student explained he or she likes reading alone. Other students (22%) responded that they liked the reading teacher's personality: adjectives such as nice and funny were used to describe the teacher. Also within the personality category were student responses describing the teacher as fun and generous. A student stated, "I like everything about \_\_\_\_\_. She is so nice to everyone in the class. She is very fun so when she is around no matter what we are doing is fun for everyone especially when we are reading." Another like subcategory reported was helpfulness; students (19%) said they liked that the teacher was helpful by teaching words well and helping students to pronounce words. Two students, 6%, reported liking that the reading teacher gave rewards.

More than half of the third grade participants reported that one thing they did not like about their reading teacher was the work assigned. The third graders said they disliked work that was too boring or challenging. They elaborated on disliking work that involved long works, long books, or hard questions. The students also did not like reading in groups, completing worksheets, and re-reading text. Another subcategory emerged from the third grade students (6%), which was they generally disliked reading. A third grade student responded, "The thing I don't like about reading is that sometimes I get bored of it." Strictness was also a dislike among several (6%) students. The students explained they did not like it that the teacher made them finish all of their work and the teacher did not allow them to put their heads on their desks. The

final subcategory to emerge involved only one student (3%), who explained that one thing he or she did not like about the reading teacher was “when she gets disappointed at us.”

### ***Seventh Grade Responses***

The top like subcategory in the seventh grade was different than the top subcategory in the primary grade responses (see Table 1). Fifty-two percent of seventh grade students described liking the teacher’s personality and discussed the character traits of “nice,” “funny,” and “laid-back.” A total of 33% of the seventh grade students described liking instruction because of engaging activities, such as fun school projects. They said class was fun because it was interesting with a variety of activities. Twenty-nine percent of students liked it that their reading teacher was helpful. The students commented that the teacher was helpful by explaining concepts thoroughly and providing an adequate amount of time for students to complete assignments. One student elaborated, “I like the reading teacher because every time we do projects or essays she explains a lot of things to help us get an A.” One student (5%) reported liking the appearance of the teacher and one student (5%) described liking classroom management aspects implemented by the teacher.

Among the dislike responses in the seventh grade, the top subcategory was too much homework. Fifty-two percent of seventh graders expressed that the reading teacher assigns too much homework. Almost a quarter of the class (24%) responded that they disliked the work involved in instruction such as writing essays and answering comprehension questions. Two students (10%) explained they disliked that the reading teacher was unfair. One student responded, “I could sit in class with my hand raised question after question and she won’t call on me. It was like she had something against me.” Only one student (5%) described disliking how strict the teacher was.

### **Discussion of Results**

Results indicate that although there are a lot of similarities in perceptions of primary and middle school students’ beliefs in important elements and characteristics of effective reading teachers, there are some differences. In regards to what second and third grade students reported they liked best about their reading teacher, the subcategory engaging activities was reported the most. Engaging activities was also shown to be important among seventh grade students but was reported as the second highest subcategory of responses. Students appreciate interactive elements of instruction that involve games, activities, using technology, and the ability to work with peers. Fun instruction that is engaging and includes a variety of activities is valued by students of all ages.

Results demonstrate that older students were more likely to notice and value teacher personality traits. This was the highest subcategory in the likes responses reported by seventh graders, but primary students also described liking their reading teacher because he or she contained certain positive personality traits. The primary and middle school students reported they enjoyed teachers who can be described as nice and funny and the seventh grade students also shared they value teachers who are laid-back. Even though older students may be more likely to notice and value personality characteristics, primary students also deem importance in

teacher ability to make reading class interesting by being fun. Students also value teachers who show they care by being nice.

The second highest subcategory in responses of why primary students liked their reading teacher pertained to an interest in reading. The students either liked their reading teacher simply because they enjoy reading, because the teacher read aloud to them, or because they were able to read in class. It is important to note that seventh grade responses did not contain any mention of an interest in reading in general or in class. Perhaps intrinsic reading motivation is lower among the seventh grade students who participated in the study compared to the primary students. The researchers believe reading teachers of all grade levels need to be sure to strive to identify reading interests of all students and to allow class time for independent reading and read-alouds to promote reading.

Third grade and seventh grade students also described liking teachers who were helpful. When teachers are willing to help students, this is perceived by students as being caring. Students appreciate and recognize that teacher assistance is sometimes necessary for effective learning to take place. The older students identified grades as being significant. They reported the reading teacher as helpful because he or she helped the students to get a good grade.

The two third grade students who reported valuing rewards given by the reading teacher illustrate enjoyment in extrinsic motivation. Liking the appearance of the reading teacher was a unique response given by one seventh grade student. Even though only one seventh grade student's response included a description of classroom management aspects, it is likely that students of all grade levels may be able to perceive when a teacher contains control of a classroom which most likely also results in ability for the other characteristics and elements of a quality reading teacher to take place.

The highest subcategory among dislikes of a reading teacher reported by seventh grade students was too much homework. Primary students are not usually expected to spend a significant amount of time at home on homework. This is most likely why only a small percentage of primary students reported disliking the reading teacher because of assigning too much homework. Second and third grade students expressed they disliked work the most when asked what they did not like about their reading teacher which was the second highest subcategory reported by seventh grade students in dislikes responses. Students explained they disliked when the reading teacher assigned work that was too boring or challenging. This demonstrates that the students may not have understood the reason or significance for completing the activities deemed "boring." Reading teachers should explicitly explain to students the benefits in completing reading activities and why specific skills need to be practiced. In asking for student feedback regarding reading assignments and activities, teachers can analyze whether tasks are actually too difficult for a student's ability level or if the teacher simply needs to work on improving student stamina to complete longer tasks. Student feedback regarding dislikes of certain types of work can also provide the teacher with valuable information in planning instruction. There may be a different method of accomplishing the same student learning objective that would contribute to bringing about variety in instruction, which results from this study demonstrate students value highly. Students are more willing to put forth full effort when they are interested in and motivated to complete schoolwork. For example, perhaps

the seventh grade teacher in this study could use these results to notice that students do not like answering comprehension questions. Perhaps, the teacher could instead implement engaging reader response activities to improve instruction.

The results of all grade levels also contained dislikes responses involving teacher strictness. Students perceive a teacher as strict because of procedures and or rules of the classroom and disciplinary actions. Some second and third grade students explained disliking the reading teacher because of simply not liking to read. A third grade student demonstrated that he or she respects the teacher highly by reporting not liking when the teacher is disappointed in the class. Students are motivated to work hard and want to make the teacher proud when they like and respect him or her. Two seventh grade students' responses included remarks of the teacher being unfair. If students perceive special treatment being given to other students or think they are singled out in not being given fair treatment, they will not like the reading teacher.

### **Conclusion**

The main conclusion derived from this study is that all students, regardless of grade level, value friendly teachers who incorporate engaging activities, those who are explicit in their expectations of students, and those who are willing to help students who struggle with reading or assignments. This conclusion is aligned previous research conducted on positive student-teacher relationships. More specifically, the present investigation is supported by the research of Rim-Kaufmann (2011) who examined characteristics of positive student-teacher relationships. He identified six different aspects of positive student-teacher relationships. Several of his aspects are reflected in the results of this investigation. First, positive student-teacher relationships consist of teachers who show pleasure and enjoyment of students, which is supported by the present investigation. Students at all levels expressed a desire to have a teacher with a friendly personality. Another aspect identified by Rim-Kaufmann was that teachers offer students help in achieving both academic and social goals. This aspect was evident in the present investigation where students indicated they liked teachers who were helpful. A final aspect evidenced in this investigation was that teachers seldom show irritability or aggravation. This aspect was present in students' descriptions regarding teacher personality, but also in their dislikes of teachers they didn't want to disappoint, and teachers who were unfair, or perceived as strict.

### **Implications**

It is important to recognize just how critical these qualities of a reading teacher are to students. Teacher helpfulness and support have been shown to have vital to students' self-esteem. In fact, Reddy, Rhodes, and Mulhall (2003) found, "Students who perceived decreasing levels of support over the course of middle school tended to report declining levels of self-esteem over the same period of time and vice versa" (p. 132). A decline in self-esteem can have long-term effects on a student. Therefore, helpfulness and support are qualities of teachers that are vital to student success and high student self-esteem.

Great qualities in a reading teacher can also positively affect student motivation as well as social and academic behaviors. According to Wentzel (1997), students who perceive their teachers as caring, good models, very democratic, who individualize instruction and attention

and nurturing to students were more motivated in school. The author further concluded that a teacher's positive and encouraging attitude towards a student can result in increased positive social and academic behaviors and outcomes (Wentzel, 1997, 2002). It is apparent that a positive relationship between a teacher and a student can lead to very rewarding outcomes in the academic, motivational and social aspects.

The results of this study suggest that students value a friendly personality, engaging tasks, and helpfulness and support for reading instruction. This information was gleaned through asking students their opinions about their reading teachers through the use of a writing prompt. Although asking for student feedback can sometimes make a teacher feel vulnerable or insecure, it is crucial to go to the targeted audience when desiring constructive feedback. Teachers who ask for their students' feedback may be surprised to see the willingness and constructiveness they display. In fact, the vast majority of the responses that were obtained from this study were constructive. In closing, the authors of this study challenge readers to consider the views and perceptions of their students the next time they are searching for constructive feedback.

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Harris, D., Serro, L., Williams, N. L. (2012). Teachers as readers? Readers as teachers? An analysis of readers' (and nonreaders') performance in literacy courses. *American Reading Forum Annual Yearbook* [Online], Vol. 32.

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## **Teachers as Readers? Readers as Teachers? An Analysis of Readers' (and Nonreaders') Performance in Literacy Courses**

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“It’s almost impossible to catch a cold from someone who doesn’t have one. And it’s almost impossible for a child to catch the love of reading from a teacher who doesn’t have it.” Jim Trelease, 2006

### **Objectives**

We are literacy professors at three universities in a high-stakes testing state. Our students are preservice and inservice teachers enrolled in graduate programs who take a variety of literacy courses. As avid readers ourselves, we seek to instill the love of reading in our students, a process that we conduct both directly through course assignments and activities, and indirectly through discussions and informal conversations. We share books, facilitate book clubs, engage in read alouds, and assign activities such as book bags to foster literacy between school and home. We encourage our students to read not only for course-related instructional purposes, but for personal and professional reasons as well. We hope that sharing our joy of reading with students will inspire them to incorporate good children’s literature in their classrooms and to become positive role models for reading beyond curriculum mandates. We feel that this is critically important as we discovered that not all of our students who currently teach, or will teach reading

in the future actually like to read. While some openly discuss their love of literature, their favorite authors and genres, and eagerly share what they are reading, or recall their own pleasant interactions with books as children, some admit that they do not read except under duress, nor do they care to read. Interestingly, these prospective and practicing teachers who don't like reading still want their own students to enjoy reading, and to engage in recreational reading. They see no problem with the contradiction between their own reading habits and those they hope to foster in their students.

Through our casual observations over several semesters, we noticed that the majority of our students complete all assignments with passing grades, but those who do enjoy reading and who read frequently are most often the students who read beyond the assigned chapters in the textbook, and appear to “get it” more than their non-reading colleagues. That is, these students appear more engaged in class activities and “go the extra mile” on course assignments. This phenomenon is reported in the research on effective teachers (McCool & Gespeass, 2009; Hall, 2009) and spurred our interest in the connection between teachers' reading habits and their performance in literacy methods courses. The question that guides this study, then, is what is the relationship between the reading behaviors of our students and the quality of their assignments?

### **Perspectives**

Our student population has experienced the reading process from two major perspectives. The first group, the preservice teachers (primarily undergraduates) have progressed through schools influenced by the findings of the National Reading Panel and NCLB. They are well experienced in taking standardized tests and are often products of either a scripted curriculum or one that emphasized test preparation over authentic reading and writing. According to informal surveys and conversations we've had with them, they have not been widely exposed to quality children's literature within their elementary school years, and are unfamiliar with classic literature and many genres. For example, when prompted in a class activity many students were unable to retell a fairy tale, could not name a favorite children's book, or explain the qualities of poetry versus prose.

The in-service teachers, primarily graduate students, have had the experience of being on the other side of the desk and have had years of practice administering high-stakes tests and being subjected to the sticks and carrots of the accountability movement. That is, they have been rewarded (sometimes monetarily) for high test scores but threatened with school closings, teacher transfers and elimination of funding if children's test scores do not meet the expectations of the district. These students are more familiar with quality children's literature including a variety of genres and authors, but have not been encouraged to incorporate this medium in their classrooms (Author). Specifically, many report being pressured to eliminate silent sustained reading time, teacher read alouds, or “fun” activities like Reader's Theatre in order to have more time for test preparation.

This outcome is not surprising given that teachers have reported less interest in reading (Applegate & Applegate, 2004; Dreher, 2003; Mour, 1997), and that teachers have been reluctant to stray from a prescribed curriculum (Author; MacGillivray, Ardell, Curwen & Palma, 2004). However, when teachers have been presented with high quality children's literature, they



were enchanted with the stories and illustrations and delighted with prospects for instruction (Author). Further, research indicates that teachers who are readers are better instructors (Benevides & Peterson, 2010; McKool & Gespass, 2009). In an ongoing exploration of our attempts to create “reading teachers who really read,” we began with this study, which examined the connection between the readers (and non readers) and their performance in our literacy courses.

### **Methods**

For the purposes of this study we utilized qualitative methods. As we are three university professors at three separate institutions in the same high-stakes testing state, we designed our study within the context of a collective case study (Strake, 2000). Using this framework we discuss our classroom experiences, including the structure of our courses, assignments, and other relevant information. Reflective Ethnography (Ellis & Bochner, 2000) was utilized to provide an overarching systematic method for analyzing the data. Specifically, we examined our teaching lives, and although all courses were under similar certification requirements, they differed according to the level (graduate, undergraduate) and course content (introduction to reading, struggling readers, and supervision). We documented our conversations, emails, and meetings through researcher notebooks and shared our responses. We also examined the artifacts of our courses including syllabi, websites, and projects following the guidelines established by Patton (2002). We carefully reviewed student assignments and comments posted on discussion boards, other online activities, and response journals. In addition, we reflected on face-to-face class sessions and conversations that we had with our students. We compared these artifacts with the statistics of each course, including final grades. We now discuss our specific cases.

#### **First Author’s Story (Deborah Harris)**

For the purposes of this study, I focused on the first literacy course required in my university’s graduate reading program. This methods course provides an overview of reading development from preschool through high school, and focuses heavily on materials and strategies for teaching reading at different grade levels. Besides increasing students’ knowledge of and skills in teaching reading, I see this first course as also developing the *dispositions* of an excellent reading teacher, which includes having a passion for reading, being a good reading model and a demonstrating a commitment to foster a love of reading in children. I added this component to the class as a result of hearing an increasing number of student comments like “all that matters anymore in schools is making sure kids pass the reading exam.”

In past semesters, students in this class tended to be primarily very experienced teachers. This semester, however, of the 60% who were full-time teachers, half of those were novices in their first or second year. The other 40% of the class was made up of students who had just completed a bachelor’s degree (only half in education), and, because of the tight job market, were going straight through for a master’s degree. In advising conversations with many of them prior to the beginning of class, I learned that most were working full time (if not as teachers then in another capacity), establishing or raising families, and taking multiple classes. They all had very demanding schedules and were juggling multiple responsibilities.

I did an initial survey with the class, asking them to describe themselves as readers, (including their reading habits and interests). Roughly one-third identified themselves as voracious or avid readers, one-third claimed to love/like reading but not have time to do it (other than assigned reading for classes), and the final third wrote that they didn't like reading and rarely did it unless required. Tina's comment is typical of students in this category: "I guess I wish I had time to read, but I don't really miss it. I never was much of a big reader."

Based on students' comments, I felt I needed to embed a variety of reading experiences into the class time itself, and to provide easy access to a variety of reading materials in order to increase the amount of reading students did in and outside of class. Toward this end, I employed the following strategies:

*The Professional Lending Library.*

The PLL was a rolling cart that I stocked with a variety of about 50 professional materials—journals, like *Reading Teacher* and *Language Arts*, and books that included Teacher Narratives (such as Vivian Paley's *The Girl with the Brown Crayon*, Torey Hayden's *Somebody Else's Kids*, and Phillip Done's *32 Third Graders and One Class Bunny*); Professional Trade Books (such as Debbie Miller's *Reading With Meaning*, Kathy Collins' *Growing Readers*, and Lucy Calkins' *The Art of Teaching Reading*), "Inspirational" Books (such as Donalyn Miller's *The Book Whisperer*, and Jonathan Kozol's *The Shame of the Nation*), and other trade books which I called "Ideas You Can Use Right Now," (such as Tim Rasinski's *The Fluent Reader*, and Patricia Cunningham's *Phonics They Use*).

I rolled the cart in to class each day, and six times over the semester, students had to select a book, read a chapter, and post a summary/response to it on BlackBoard for other students to read. Students had choices about which books to select, which chapters to read, when they wanted to read, and how they wanted to structure their response.

All of the students liked the easy access to books, and appreciated the element of choice that was built in to the assignment. Many ended up buying some of the titles they had seen on the cart. Everyone completed the task and received full or almost full credit for the task, but I did note that the students who described themselves as avid readers approached the assignment differently than the students who were reluctant or infrequent readers.

First of all, the avid readers spent much more time than the other students looking at the books on the cart, reading the table of contents page, the back of the books, or skimming chapters. They would come up to the cart before class started, stay during the break, or linger after class to look through the books, making comments to me or to the other lingerers about certain books. They often asked to take home more than one book at once, and typically read much more than the required six chapters. They viewed the PLL as an opportunity rather than as an assignment. The less than avid readers were more likely to select a book quickly, often based on the title alone, the length of the chapters, or another student's recommendation. The written responses produced by the avid readers were generally longer and more insightful than those done by the less avid readers, regardless of the student's level of teaching experience. I encouraged the students to bring in and share quotes from the books during the 5-minute "Lines

we Love” activity I did each class session. These were posted on a bulletin board, and was strictly a voluntary activity, with no grade attached to it. Initially, the avid readers were more likely to have brought in a quote to post, and had longer explanations about what that quote meant to them and why they felt the author’s words were important.

### *Teacher Read Alouds.*

Each semester, in addition to the picture books I read to students, I select a novel and read a chapter each session. This activity exposes students to award-winning novels and helps establish a sense of community as we laugh, cry, and share thoughts about a common book. For the graduate students, their immediate response upon seeing or hearing a children’s book is to consider how they would use it in the classroom. I try with the read alouds to have them first respond efferently, to see that they can engage in natural conversation about a book without a teacher launching directly into question mode (i.e., “What was the author’s purpose in writing this book?” or “What is the problem in the story?”) Students rush to class so as not to miss hearing books like *Because of Winn Dixie*, *All of the Above*, *Esperanza Rising*, or in this case, Karen Hesse’s *Just Juice*, a touching story of a young girl who struggles to learn to read. If a student missed class, they often emailed me or other students to find out what happened in the chapter that was read, or even went out and buy the book so they could read that chapter. Student comments during class (“I looked forward to this all day!”), and responses on their final survey (“I never cried about a book before, but when you read us *Love that Dog* and you were crying and everybody in the class was crying, I was crying too. Now I see what you kept telling us about the power of children’s lit”), indicated that the read alouds were powerful. For the students who had described themselves as non-readers, this was the activity that I felt most contributed to their growing interest in reading. They would come up and ask if I could suggest more books like the one read, or asked if the author had written other books.

In reviewing my field notes, I noted that the avid readers, at least initially, had an easier time “just talking” about the book than the non-readers. As I’d close the chapter and wait for someone to share a response or make a comment, the avid readers were typically the first to talk, ask a question, or to initiate a topic for the group to take up. They more easily made connections between the book and other books or their own feelings and experiences. They had a wider range of responses, talking about the characters, the events in the story, the author’s language, the images they saw while listening. The less experienced readers tended to have simpler responses, focused on a part they liked, or what they thought might happen next.

### *What-We’re Reading-Now.*

At each class session, I asked one or two students to bring in and share very briefly with the class whatever materials they had currently read, were reading now, or were on their bedside tables about to be read, a kind of an adult level “blessing” of the books (Gambrell, 1996). Students signed up to share, and in all cases but one (who “just wanted to get it over with”), the students who signed up first were the most avid readers, judging by the sheer number of materials that they brought in, the enthusiasm with which they shared, and the fact that I had to stop them from talking over their allotted time. The teachers and teacher candidates who liked reading brought in a wide range of things—magazines on all kinds of topics, newspapers,

cookbooks, novels, informational text, children's books—sometimes even needing wheeled suitcases to bring in their materials. As the semester went on and the less enthusiastic readers began sharing, they not only had fewer materials, but they had less to say about the books they did read. Still, the conversation that resulted from this sharing was valuable for all, readers and non-readers both, as they learned more about one another as people, about their hobbies, talents, and interests. They found common ground with people they might not otherwise have talked to (e.g., "Oh I read one that too & loved it), and started exchanging books and magazines. One student wrote on her final survey: "My favorite thing was when we got time to hear about what each other was reading and to swap books with each other. I actually became friends with Michelle after she told us about those Griffin books and let me borrow hers."

### **Second Author's Story (Linda Serro)**

I have always believed that wide reading makes one a more reflective and creative thinker. Everything I read about topics such as literacy, motivation, learning, and creativity lead me to connections and new knowledge about my work with teachers and students. I wanted my graduate students to have the same exposure to interesting ideas beyond their textbook and journal articles. I wanted them to experience ideas from thinkers such as Miller (2009) and Pink (2009). I wanted them to read from other fields and from reflective pieces on teaching while giving them choice in what they read and how it related to their professional lives. I also wanted them to taste just a little bit of many books. Therefore I often read aloud examples of good children's literature. A favorite and admired children's author, Patricia Polacco discusses the topic of struggling readers in several of her books. I read *The Bee Tree* (1998) which centers upon a young reader who is frustrated and bored by the experience until her grandfather helps her to make the connection between work and the sweet reward. Chasing a bee to find the hive (and consequently honey) became a lesson for the young reader who then realized that some things do not always come easily. Her grandfather reinforces this notion by spooning some honey on the book so that she could savor the sweetness. Responses to this book spill into the coursework as students are reminded that for many of their young students, reading is a difficult process. I then continue the importance of a good and dedicated teacher in her work, *Thank You, Mr. Falker*. (Pollacco, 2001).

In addition to sharing examples of high quality children's literature, I emphasize the importance of professional books to supplement the information provided in the selected textbooks. I have used Literacy Bags with many classes but for this study, I focused on two graduate classes in reading: Assessment in Literacy (17 students) and Instruction for Struggling Readers (15 students). I selected books that related to the course content in some way, even if it would require analysis and synthesis on the part of the student to find the connection (see Table 1 for selected book titles). The assignment was completed weekly for approximately 8 weeks and accounted for 5% of their final grade in the course. The literacy bags were colorful canvas bags that included a book and journal. Students chose a new literacy bag each week and were required to read one chapter from the book and reflect on that chapter in a journal.

Table 1

*Selected Book Titles for Graduate Courses for Teaching Struggling Readers*

- Afflerbach, P. (Ed.). (2010). *Essential readings on assessment*. Newark, DE: International Reading Association.
- Allington, R. (2009). *What really matters in response to intervention*. Boston: Pearson.
- Burkins, J. & Croft, M. (2010). *Preventing misguided reading*. Newark, DE: International Reading Association.
- England, C. (2004). *Uphill both ways: Helping students who struggle in school* Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.
- Fuchs, D., Fuchs, L. & Vaughn, S. (Eds.). (2008). *Response to intervention: A framework for reading educators*. Newark, DE: International Reading Association.
- Layne, S. (2009). *Igniting a passion for reading*. Portland, ME: Stenhouse.
- Miller, D. (2009). *The book whisperer*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Johnson, P. & Keier, K. (2010). *Catching readers before they fall*. Portland, ME: Stenhouse.
- Walpole, S. & McKenna, M. (2007). *Differentiated reading instruction*. New York: Guilford.
- Wisniewski, R., Padak, N. & Rasinski, T. (2011). *Evidence-based instruction in reading*. Boston: Allyn & Bacon.
- Wolff, D. (2009). *How Lincoln learned to read*. New York: Bloomsbury USA.
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Before they wrote their response, they read the reflection by the previous student and wrote a rejoinder to that student. Some of the journals covered several semesters and different classes so the current students had an opportunity to read responses from different perspectives. Each entry was signed and dated. At the beginning of class each week, students shared one or two insights they had gotten from the reading and reflection. At the end of the semester, students had the opportunity to re-read journals and see what responses had been written to them. This would often spark a reflective discussion about insights and connections to the books. As the final assignment, students were asked to reflect upon the literacy bag experience and evaluate its value to their teaching and professional growth.

I noticed that the self-identified readers would often read more than one chapter, sometimes finishing the whole book in a week. They would add titles to their “wish list” to purchase at a future date. Readers would make more connections between the course text and content and the book bag chapters. They would also make connections among the books in the literacy bags. In general, readers were more reflective in their written responses and sharing in class.

All of the comments by students at the end of the semester were positive except for two students out of the 22 reviewed. It should be noted that these two students were new teachers with less than one year of experience as a paid professionals. For all students, there was a minimum impact on final course grades. I analyzed the data (class discussions, field notes, and end-of-semester surveys) and noted the emergence of the following themes:

*Joy of discovery.*

Students reported that they enjoyed the exposure to a variety of new books as well as revisiting “old friends.” Many commented upon the fact that they were so busy in their teaching lives that they were not familiar with the newer titles. Through the book bag project, students were able to sample a new book each week and through sharing, were exposed to many more examples of high quality children’s literature.

*Enthusiasm of selection.*

Students discussed how difficult it was to select books from the vast number of books published each year. The journal provided in the book bag contained entries by students over several semesters, providing reviews by local colleagues. Students found these reviews quite helpful as they planned for instruction in their own classrooms. Additionally, they particularly enjoyed the sharing sessions where other students gave a brief oral report of the book that they selected for the week.

*Freedom of choice.*

Students were invited to select a different book bag each week, allowing them choice. They delighted in this opportunity as they often expressed their frustrations with the scripted curriculum that they were forced to use in their own classrooms. Several remarked that they would employ this strategy with their students, particularly struggling readers who often are bored with predictable texts.

Students also commented on the value of this course activity. The majority made positive statements about the sense of classroom community that stemmed from the book shares. This community context also provided a vehicle for the exploration of new ideas. Here students discussed ways in which books may be utilized in the classroom, especially in assessment and remediation of reading difficulties. Their responses, both oral and written, made connections between the children’s book and the content of the course. This process did encourage the readers in the course to read more than the one chapter requirement. Two students, however, opted to read only what was required and reported frustration with the assignment and saw no value to it. One responded with the comment, “I like to read the first chapter before reading the book.”

I believe that the book bag project helped me to meet my goals. Students saw value and enjoyed the exposures to many authors and texts. Further, they were able to apply the ideas to their professional lives. Like Tricia in *The Bee Tree* they walked away with the sweet taste of honey. “The honey is sweet, and so is knowledge, but knowledge is like the bee who made the honey, it has to be chased through the pages of a book!”

### Third Author's Story (Nancy L. Williams)

I have always incorporated children's literature in my classroom as a first and third grade teacher, included them in professional development as an elementary school supervisor, and showcased them in my university courses. For the purposes of this study, I focus on a graduate course required for a masters degree in reading education. This course is one of the capstone experiences in the program and provides an overview of administration and supervision of reading programs. The content of the course emphasizes the leadership role of the reading professional, including coaching and professional development. Among course requirements was participation in a book club. Students were invited to self-select one of five books with instructions to read, reflect, and to make connections to their personal and professional lives. The book clubs met each class session, either in a face-to-face or online format. The books (as noted in Table 2) were selected because they presented unique challenges to teachers in general, and to literacy leaders in particular, and evoked stimulating conversations. All books focused upon excellent teaching in response to mandated (and often), scripted curriculum within the context of high-stakes testing.

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Table 2  
*Books selected for Book Club Participation*

<b>Title</b>	<b>Author</b>	<b>Publisher/Year</b>	<b>Summary</b>
<i>Readicide: How schools are killing reading and what you can do about it</i>	Kelly Gallagher	Stenhouse, 2009	The author makes the case for providing authentic reading opportunities for students in this age of testing.
<i>Why school? Reclaiming education for all of us</i>	Mike Rose	The New Press, 2009	The author provides insights and practical, authentic applications that offer alternatives to a high-stakes testing context.
<i>Possible lives: The promise of public education in America</i>	Mike Rose	Houghton Mifflin, 1995	The author showcases exceptional teachers and their students throughout the USA
<i>The courage to teach: Exploring the inner landscape of a teacher's life</i>	Parker J. Palmer	Jossey-Bass, 2007	The author documents heroic teaching practices in what he calls a "toxic environment."
<i>Holding on to good ideas in a time of bad ones: Six literacy principles worth fighting for</i>	Thomas Newkirk	Heinemann, 2009	The author provides alternative instructional practices in response to what he labels "the curse of graphite" in a high-stakes testing environment.

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Thirty students were enrolled in this class and all were seeking reading certification. 83% were elementary-focused, with the remaining 17% at the middle or high school level. Most had some teaching experience but several (27%) entered graduate school immediately upon completing an undergraduate degree in education and had limited experiences in schools. As the advisor to the reading program and as an instructor of prior courses, I had the benefit of knowing all of the students in this class and was familiar with their prior academic behaviors (including their self-identification as readers).

Prior to the beginning of the course, I posted information about the books online via BlackBoard and invited students to email me with their preference. I found it interesting that the readers were the first to respond and offer their choices; however, the book clubs tended to be balanced between readers and non-readers, and experienced and novice teachers. The students obtained the books in a variety of ways (which in itself was an interesting finding). Most did purchase the book but several opted to borrow it from the library. During the face-to-face class sessions, students were required to bring their book along with notes and/or other means to participate in the book club. Most (with the exception of students who had library copies) highlighted text and had “sticky notes” which prompted them of things that they wished to share with the group. The non-readers quickly completed discussions and did not make deep connections between the content of the course and the content of the book. The readers, on the other hand, tended to have much to say about what they had read and how it connected to their professional and personal lives in addition to course content. This practice continued in the written online responses. Non-readers were brief in comments, and tended to summarize what was read. Readers made lengthy comments that connected to their personal and professional lives. As I examined these comments, reviewed field notes and my reflections, I coded and categorized their responses into three themes: *Community*, *High-Stakes Testing*, and *Making Changes*.

### ***Community***

Students enjoyed meeting weekly in their book club and made strong connections between the text, and their personal and professional lives. One student captured this concept by stating:

*I have enjoyed the Book Club experience and have appreciated the opportunity to gather around this book with a wonderful group of fellow students. We have shared our joys and frustrations as we have looked for ways to connect with Dr. Palmer’s message and have learned to respect our differences and celebrate our common commitment to teaching with excellence.*

Another student voiced her opinion about the power of community and the importance of reaching out beyond establishing a classroom community for your students.



*I believe that some of the most profound things that I read were about creating a community not just within your classroom, but, with all other educators. It is so easy to forget that teaching is a profession that is isolated. It is a profession of collaboration.*

Finally, one student opted to use this forum to make a public apology for her (perceived) misbehavior.

*Hey everyone...I don't know if you all will be checking this since we are done with our book but I just wanted to say Thank you to listening to me for the last few weeks. I know that I was a "Debbie Downer" at times and complained a lot.*

### ***High-Stakes Testing.***

Students had a lot to say regarding this topic, particularly as most of the books addressed it and offered alternative teaching practices. The more experienced teachers bemoaned the practice of the administration of so many standardized tests, along with the consequences of failure. One student commented.

*My old principal used to try to treat TEST as a bad four letter word that we should not utter until a few weeks before the test, but the reality is that we we're measured as a school, teachers and intelligence of our students based on the high stakes tests. I think we need to figure out a new system to evaluate the learning and teaching occurring in the classroom as well as the student achievement. There needs to be a way to combine all aspects of the classroom environment and not solely rely on a single test given at a single moment in time.*

Interestingly, the students did not dwell on this topic. They were clearly frustrated about the process but after an initial verbal “purge” they began to focus on how things can be improved and the changes that they would make in their own classrooms.

### ***Making Changes.***

The students were invited to share how the reading and sharing of these texts through the book club influenced them. The comments were overwhelmingly positive and full of hope, and anticipation of continued community.

*...there is hope for literacy education in the future if enough people decide and believe change is possible.*

*I know with my personality, resistance does not energize me, but change does. I like change; however, I know I need support to help me go through the process.*

*...what we can offer to one another are of inestimable value. I trust that we can continue this relationship during the coming weeks and months as we anticipate the beginning of a new school year, with its unique collection of opportunities and challenges.*

*...after reading the book and getting everything out I am ready and excited to start the new school year. Hopefully my class will be a little less boring and lot less quite, but I just wanted to say thanks for helping me through it!*

One student (who is an avid reader and outstanding student) commented about her teaching practices.

*This chapter made me reflect about my own independent reading time in my classroom and the one on one reading conferences I have with my students. When I first started doing these conferences three years ago, I stressed to the kids to come with a few "sticky notes" to share. Well, the students did attempt to do this, but complained to me that when they are reading they want to read and not stop and write down on a sticky note any comprehension breakdowns or any connections. So I stopped asking them to use sticky notes. The result has been very successful. Our conferences are lively discussions about the books they are reading. The IR time is the one part of the Reader's Workshop that I refuse to give up. My students enjoy this time and I have to give a 5-minute warning so they can come to a stopping point.*

This same student summed up her experience with reading and sharing within the book club with this eloquent statement.

*We need to point out that as our job gets harder with the addition of extra curricula, we have to remember that teaching and learning is not all about the testing as many of our administrations and politicians enforce. It is about the small, everyday miracles of learning and discovery. Educational value can and should still be found in a group of children pouring over books together, partners talking out a resolution to a conflict, or students helping each other water the classroom plants. It is about teaching students that it is okay to wonder and marvel, and not about how many problems they can compute in a minute. As the world of high-stakes testing continues to forge ahead, we have to be vigilant about creating a generation of children who are still in love with learning despite the drill-and-practice, regurgitation model that is happening as schools prepare students' for these exams. If we're going to critique public education, we have to provide alternative measures so that education does not become equated with mundane tasks.*

I was impressed with the process of the book club. Students quickly bonded and were eager to share their thoughts about the world of high-stakes testing, and possible alternative teaching practices. Through reading these professional texts, the students were able to make connections to the content of the course and to their personal and professional lives. Again, the readers were more thoughtful in their comments, made more frequent responses (responding to their colleagues online) and wrote longer responses. They were eager to return to their classrooms and make changes.

### **Our Collective Points of View**

We analyzed the collective findings of our individual case studies and noted several similarities across all three campuses and courses. First, our combined student population was representative of the overall teaching population (Author) in that most are young, female, white, and hail from the middle class. All were admitted to our respective colleges of education within a graduate elementary education program or a masters program in reading (K-12) education. As such, these students met initial admission requirements and were expected to maintain above average academic performance. Therefore, all of our students as identified in this collective case study successfully completed all requirements of the courses. The question guiding our study, “What is the relationship between the reading behaviors of our students and the quality of their assignments?” does not have a simplistic answer. Our basic assumption, that readers were better students does seem to hold true, although a limitation of our study is that we were not able to discern a higher numeric grade for these students due to the structure of rubrics developed for each assignment. In these instances, most of the readers went beyond the ceiling of the rubrics provided for each class assignment. For example, students were invited to participate in many joyful reading activities without stating specific length of responses, the number of connections needed to personal and professional lives, and a specific definition of what constituted joyful reading. We purposely created these rubrics to encourage reading rather than mandate it as simply another assignment. As we wished to “practice what we preach” and adhere to philosophies presented in the texts we advocated (i.e. Miller, 2009; Newkirk, 2009). Specifically, we did not wish to devalue the appreciative nature of the tasks with highly targeted questions and guidelines.

Some of our students self-identified as avid readers and reinforced this position through thoughtful statements and writings. Further, they were willing to do more than what was expected on class assignments. For example, when invited to read one chapter, several read the entire book, or wrote lengthy responses. Others corresponded with us via email or initiated informal conversations before and after class about books that they were reading. Conversely, we observed that the non-readers made fewer connections between books and their personal and professional lives and were hesitant when invited to share their pleasure readings. These non-readers often shared that reading was not an important pastime in their homes, that they were too busy, too active, or simply not interested (i.e. I’ll wait for the movie to come out). In short, reading was valued as a critical process for academic success but pleasure reading was not part of their personal or professional cultures.

Our classroom practices, including text selections were similar. For example, we all emphasized the importance of choice. Students were invited to read from a wide selection of high quality texts through book clubs, book bags, and various classroom activities. The participants read for a variety of reasons and a variety of texts. Some read professional books for inspiration; some read children and young adult literature for instructional ideas. Still others read simply for pleasure. Readers were enthused about authentic course activities and were eager to share good books with others, and sought ways in which they could extend the community experience. For example, one group was inspired to create a website to share with others long after the course was completed. Another group formed a book club that met bi-weekly at different students' houses for dinner where they and the first author would bring children's books to share. Our text selections were also remarkably similar with books authored by favorite children's authors (i.e. Polacco, DiCamillo), and professional texts (i.e. Allington, Gallagher, Miller).

Students across all three cases were keen to make personal classroom connections and voiced positive views of improving their teaching lives. They delighted in the communities and friendships established through the sharing of books and the participation in the classroom assignments and activities that we established.

However, we also advocate that affective accountability (Author, 2006) must be considered when preparing literacy leaders and teachers. Affective accountability recognizes the joy of learning, particularly with the use of authentic reading materials such as high quality children's literature.

### **Educational Importance**

We believe that we have modeled the role of good literature in the personal, professional and instructional lives of our students. In this continuing climate of accountability, we consider the research which supports our discoveries; that the love of reading has easily been "put on the back shelf" in favor of sanctified scripted curricula. Further, we hold the orientation that the pleasure and inspiration that is generated by good books can result in both academic and affective accountability that the benefits of good literature extend beyond the passing of a high-stakes test.

As we continue in our work as teacher educators, we notice that this journey as colleagues and friends improves our own instruction. We share ideas that foster joyful and pleasurable reading- particularly as it relates to our students' professional lives. We provide opportunities that celebrate the power and delight of reading for fun as well as instructional purposes. We continue to share our success stories about students who entered our courses with little enthusiasm about pleasure reading but by the end of the semester began to value this pastime, and who now proudly proclaim themselves as readers. We confirm that the readers who enter our classrooms do tend to be better students, but we also know that the non readers who may not have been mentored by book-loving parents and/or teachers, can and should be exposed to course activities and assignments that foster the love of reading. Therefore, we believe that it is essential for teacher educators to "go beyond" the academic accountability that is demanded

by certification requirements and incorporate joyful reading in every course.

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Meyer, C. K., Stewart, T. T., Moorman, G. B., & Brozo, W. (2012). Discipline literacy: Looking back to move forward. *American Reading Forum Annual Yearbook* [Online], Vol. 32.

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## **Discipline Literacy: Looking Back to Move Forward**

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### **Introduction**

A few semesters ago, a secondary History teacher candidate approached a professor after the final class of their discipline literacy course. The student shared with her that he found the course to be very valuable. He told her how the course helped him recognize the role of literacy in the history classroom and how he hoped to incorporate the things learned in his classroom someday. She was thrilled the student found the course beneficial and reminded him to include what he learned in the unit for his internship. However, the student informed her that his History methods professor instructed the class not to include anything taught in the literacy course in the unit. She was crestfallen and spent a great deal of time pondering why the History professor would say this.

The above anecdote highlights the conflict between literacy specialists and content-area teachers and professors that inhibits efforts to help students reach their potential. Draper, Broomhead, Jensen, Nokes, and Siebert (2010) have argued that the perception that instruction should be either literacy-driven or content-driven has created a *literacy-content dualism*, which divides teachers instead of uniting them in their efforts to facilitate learning. It seems to us that the conflict is a result of breakdown in communication. Our example with the literacy professor, History professor and student exemplifies this breakdown. When communication between the content expert and the literacy expert breakdown, misunderstandings and misgivings flourish. By collaborating, the literacy professor and the History professor could have modeled an environment in which their teacher candidates observed instruction fostered by collaboration and designed to meet the needs of the student. Literacy specialists must remember that the content

teacher is the expert in the discipline, and therefore is literate in the discipline. It is crucial that literacy specialists do not appear arrogant about how instruction should take place in content-area classrooms. Meanwhile, content-area teachers must recognize that their facility with the content, processes, and principles of their disciplines can often cause them to overlook the reality that their students will often require scaffolding to successfully “read” content-specific texts. For example, a Trigonometry teacher’s ability to interpret a graph without consciously thinking about the processes he or she used to interpret the graph need to be overt to the neophyte student. Opening the door to communication and collaboration makes it possible for literacy specialists to share their knowledge about literacy and offer insight into the instruction necessary for students to become literate in the disciplines. It is crucial that content-area teachers realize that Middle and High School students (and college students as well) are generally in need of assistance in coping with content-area literacy tasks.

### **Conceptual Framework**

We approach our work from a perspective that recognizes that each discipline brings unique literacy demands to the learner. We believe that instructional strategies can be adapted to specific disciplines. In our view, content-specialists and literacy specialists would benefit from clarification of a number of key conceptual elements related to content-area literacy. Moreover, we find it helpful to remember that each discipline has a unique Discourse (Gee, 2008) that must be demystified when someone seeks to become literate in that discipline. These “Discourses are ways of being” that are central to the culture of a discipline or social group (p. 3). These ways of being include the content-specific vocabulary, processes, and procedures that experts in a discipline have mastered through years of immersion and study. The key, in our view, is to foster collaboration between content-specialists and literacy specialists that can enhance instruction in ways that make these Discourses available to students.

To facilitate this collaboration, we have found it useful to distinguish between “acquisition” and “learning”. This distinction is common in the literature on second language acquisition (Krashen, 1988). In fact, we see many parallels between learning a second language and learning how to read. For example, both rely on the metalinguistic knowledge of the native language. Acquisition is the primary way children master their native language. It is informal, implicit, based on experience, concrete, practical and context dependent. In contrast, learning is formal, explicit, based on instruction, abstract, flexible, and generalizable. For older children and adults, complex knowledge and skills are usually both learned and acquired, with some emphasis on one or the other. In order to foster collaboration and assuage the concerns of content-area teachers who, quite often, feel overwhelmed by unclear mandates that they teach literacy skills, it is important to clarify two key concepts related to notions of reading and literacy

The key point is that reading—the ability to decode text and arrive at a basic level of comprehension—is primarily learned. Acquiring this skill requires instruction by a teacher (or parent, or sibling, etc.) and attention and effort on the part of the learner. We see literacy as the ability to purposefully use reading and writing, as well as other communicative skills. Literacy is primarily acquired, requiring participation in activity that is personally and socially relevant. It is important conceptually to recognize it is not the role of content-area teachers to help their students *learn* how to read. They are not professionally prepared and it is not part of any set of



reasonable content goals. However, it is their role, and within their professional expertise, to help students *acquire* literacy within their discipline.

A second important conceptual distinction is the difference between content literacy strategies and discipline-specific strategies. Content literacy strategies tend to be thought of as generic approaches to reading in content areas because the strategies were design to work across the disciplines. According to Brozo, Meyer, Steward, & Moorman (2011), the generic approach may be thought of as “outside-in” because the strategies are pushed into the process of reading and learning (see Figure 1). On the other hand, a discipline-specific literacy approach tends to require highly developed specialized understanding of text. This approach requires teachers to become aware of the nuances of the Discourse of their disciplines. As such, also according to Brozo et al, the discipline-specific approach may be thought of as “inside-out” because the text itself and the goals for reading the text dictate the reading processes (see Figure 2).

Figure 1.  
*Outside-In Skills*

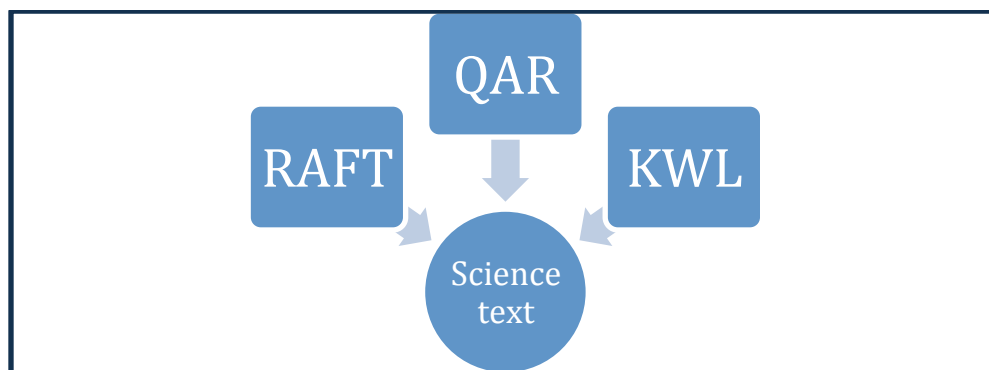
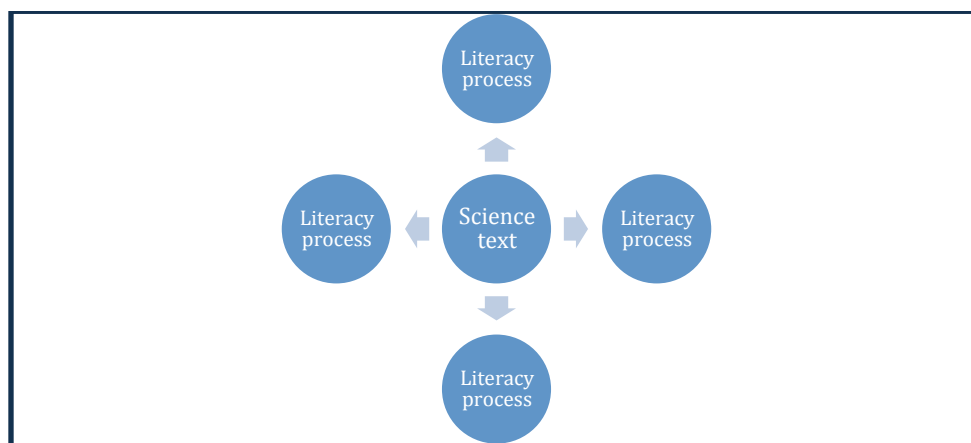


Figure 2  
*Inside-Out Skills*



Finally, a third conceptual consideration we feel needs attention is the theoretical lens needed to foster communication and collaboration. We feel any conversation about discipline-specific literacy must be situated in classrooms and educational contexts (middle, high school and university). As such our viewpoint is framed using a pragmatic lens (Dillon, O'Brien, & Heilman, 2000) that attends to socially-situated problems whose solutions contribute broadly to a more democratic way of life. A pragmatic lens merges the contributions from the research literature and school-based practices in the search for solutions to existing challenges. Pragmatism allows us to explore discipline literacy without the constraints of a single theoretical lens in search of a practical solution.

### **Historical Background**

At first glance, tensions between content-area teachers and literacy specialists seem to date back to the beginning of the content-area reading movement in the early 1970s. However, a stroll down memory lane indicates this is an old and recurring debate. In the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, scholars debated how students best learned to read. Gray (1919) contended that reading could and should be transferred to specific subject areas. Thorndike (1917) and Yoakum (1928) both argued that reading in the content class would help students address the differing demands of the discipline.

The 1920s saw the emergence of content reading as topic of research. In 1925 Gray conducted content reading research and in the same year, the *Yearbook for the 24<sup>th</sup> National Society for the Study of Education* focused on reading across the content fields (Whipple). Interests in content-area reading continued through the 1930s and 1940s. McCallister (1936) published the first book on differentiated reading needs in content areas. McCallister argued that every teacher should provide guidance in reading, and Bond & Bond (1941) published *Developmental Reading in High School*. In the 1950s, with the onset of the Cold War, education began to focus on keeping pace with the Soviet Union. During this era Flesch (1955) authored *Why Johnny Can't Read*, which ushered in an era that narrowly focused reading instruction on phonics. Comprehension generally and content-area reading specifically became secondary issues.

The 1970s saw a reemergence of interest in content literacy. In 1970, the late Hal Herber authored *Teaching Reading in the Content Areas*. During the same decade Herber at Syracuse University established the Reading Research Center, and within the literacy community scholars emphasized the application of generic strategies to various disciplinary texts. During the 1980s, cognitive psychology played a large role in the evolution of learning strategies across the content areas. In this movement, strategic processes for reading and thinking about text (e.g. QAR, micro- macro-text structures, summarizing) encouraged students to approach content reading in a deliberate and systematic manner. At the same time, the field was beginning to recognize the importance of domain-specific knowledge.

### **Recent Developments**

Serious criticism of content-area reading and support for a disciplinary literacy alternative have begun to emerge. Moje (2007) asserted that the only way to create a socially just disciplinary curriculum is through practices that imbue youth with expertise and critical dispositions to challenge the authority and hegemony of disciplinary knowledge. She argued that generic literacy strategies are inadequate for this goal. In addition, Shanahan and Shanahan (2008) raised several concerns about generic content literacy strategies. First, they questioned whether generic strategies are efficacious for secondary disciplinary teachers. Shanahan and Shanahan also asserted that generic literacy strategies are behind the resistance from secondary teachers to embrace literacy in the content areas and argued that secondary pre-service teachers need to know the unique literacy demands of each discipline. Draper (2008) asserted that high-quality secondary content teachers utilize inside-out literacy practices that are organic to their disciplinary topics and cannot be improved upon with generic literacy strategies. However, at this point in time, research to support the claims of these critics of generic literacy strategies is anemic.

We agree with the critics that the over-generalization of content literacy strategies is problematic. However, we argue that using both the discipline-specific approach and generic strategy approach can be effective in assisting students to become discipline literate. The discipline-specific approach offers several advantages. First, literacy instruction integrated with a specific discipline avoids forced application of strategies that may be inappropriate for the text. Instead, reading strategies are informed by the text, which encourages cognitive flexibility. In addition, the discipline-specific approach offers opportunities to emphasize critical reading of text to challenge how knowledge is constructed, and to increase engagement by privileging student identities and experience.

Nevertheless, the discipline-specific approach may create challenges that prevent adoption in the secondary classroom. The discipline-specific approach requires teachers to understand and be able to teach processes used by experts in the discipline. These processes are generally acquired as experts engage in discipline-specific activity. Therefore, experts may not be consciously aware of these processes. As a result, it may be difficult to render them as strategies, difficult to model and difficult to teach to students. In turn, time spent modeling could take away from time spent engaged in reading and discussing text. Finally, because the strategies are unique to each discipline, strategies are not transferable to other disciplines, which could create confusion for some students.

Likewise, the generic-strategy approach has both its advantages and disadvantages. One advantage of the generic approach is that teachers and students can develop expertise with a core of evidence-based literacy strategies that in turn creates a common reading vernacular. In addition, because students repeatedly encounter the strategies, they can develop independent strategic reading routines. However, as critics have pointed out, since these strategies may not be specific to the disciplines, teachers and students may fail to make appropriate modifications to the strategies to fit specific text and reading expectations.

Over the past decade, state and national standards have evolved to reflect the literacy

demands of the 21st century. The newly adopted Common Core State Standards (CCSS) exemplify this focus on literacy. The literacy strand of CCSS not only emphasizes the importance of literacy in the English Language Arts classroom but within a variety of subjects as well (i.e. science, social studies, and technical areas). Given the increasing expectations placed on secondary teachers in public school settings, it is not unreasonable to suggest that we as secondary teacher educators must reevaluate how we prepare content-area teachers. Those of us committed to literacy instruction in the disciplines welcome the opportunity to discuss how we might create 21<sup>st</sup> century pedagogy to better address the specific literacy demands placed on our students who will be teaching in secondary disciplines.

### **Problems Court Discussion**

The discussion portion of our Problems Court provided much insight from our colleagues. Vocabulary and the ability to actively engage in dialogue or text about the disciplines, seemed to be the major focus of conversation. Many participants emphasized the nuances of the disciplines, the role language plays and the unique Discourse of each discipline. Without question, the audience believed an understanding of the language precedes students' ability to participate in the Discourse of the discipline. Another thread of the conversation explored the challenges of teacher knowledge in regard to the disciplines. Several participants shared anecdotes about teachers who have a solid understanding of their disciplines but do not fully understand how to scaffold their students' literacy growth in the discipline. We see this as indicative of the reality that many content teachers have not had the opportunity to consider how their intimate knowledge of their content allows them to unconsciously work within the Discourses of their disciplines. In our view, this represents an important issue that literacy specialists can address in their efforts to collaborate with content teachers.

Other participants in the Problems Court shared stories of teachers who, they believe, do not have strong understanding of their disciplines and overly rely on generic strategies that may or may not foster literacy in that particular discipline. In our view, these anecdotes served as reminders that literacy specialists can be important resources for teachers who are struggling to master the Discourses of their disciplines. When this dynamic exists, literacy specialists can work with these teachers to help them develop the content-specific knowledge needed by helping these teachers unpack and explore the nuances of their disciplines. In sum, the participants in the discussion recognized a need for change; a move away from the century of varying perspectives and rift that has not served our students. As one participants stated, "We are holding onto the model of conflict from the 20<sup>th</sup> century. How can we revisit the past, make changes, and make the learning come alive for the students?"

In recent years, some members of the literacy research community have urged researchers to view literacy development more comprehensively (e.g., Dillon, O'Brien, & Heilman, 2000; Purcell-Gates et al., 2004; RRSF, 2002; Tracey & Morrow, 2006). For instance, in their critical essay, Dillon et al. (2000) censured the literacy community for its division -- the result of differing theoretical perspectives. Dillon and colleagues urged the literacy community to move beyond the internal discord and embrace research that is not limited by a single theoretical perspective. This message did not go unnoticed. Purcell-Gates and colleagues (2004)

advocated a model that embraces literacy development situated in socially constructed literacy practices. In other words, Purcell-Gates et al. did not view literacy development through a single lens. Instead, they attempted to create a new model in which both cognitive and sociocultural practices affect literacy development. We feel that such a widened lens may be necessary to develop a model for discipline literacy in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

### **Enacting a Collaborative Perspective**

We believe that developing a widened lens for viewing the nuances of content literacy is crucial for the development of a more collaborative relationship between content teachers and literacy specialists. For example, the sociocultural perspective reminds us that we must remain aware of the need for teachers to help students make connections between school-based knowledge and literacies and their lives outside of school. As Draper et. al. (2010) noted it might be difficult “to demonstrate how adolescents might use their new understandings of molecular bonding outside of school settings, even though science teachers agree” that it is important to do so (p. 13). Using a collaborative model, a science teacher and a literacy specialist might create a project in which students develop presentations (e.g. Webpages or digital stories) that highlight the destructive effects a chemical spill might have on a local watershed. Engaging in a project like this would help students make connections between their newly developed knowledge of molecular bonding and their community. The science teacher would be able to assist the students in their efforts to explore and describe the effects of the chemicals leeching into the watershed. Similarly, a literacy specialist would be able to help uncover some of the nuanced vocabulary and processes that would need to be explicated to make the presentations accessible to community members. Myriad possibilities exist for collaboration between both teachers and the students on this sort of project. Moreover, engaging students in such a task would enable them to make concrete connections between complex, discipline-specific content and their lives outside of the classroom. Imagining possibilities like these and bringing them to discussions of how we can improve content area literacy instruction is an important first step in moving away from a divisive model of discipline literacy in order to create an atmosphere of collaboration and inclusion that will help students and teachers reach their full potential.

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Meyer, C. K., Vines, N. A., & Shankland, R. K. (2012). Designing high-quality professional development: Scaffolding secondary content-area teachers' discipline literacy instruction. *American Reading Forum Annual Yearbook* [Online], Vol. 32.

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## **Designing High-Quality Professional Development: Scaffolding Secondary Content-Area Teachers' Discipline Literacy Instruction**

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### **Introduction**

The study described in this paper is part of a larger grant project funded through the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction. Partnerships comprised of Institutions of Higher Education (IHEs) and school districts that were identified as “high needs local educational agencies” (LEAs, defined by Title II, Part A) were eligible to apply for this competitive grant. The grant competition sought applications that focused on the development and delivery of professional development in one or more areas of critical need including literacy, mathematics, and science. Regarding literacy, the Request for Proposals stated that projects should assist “K-12 teachers to become highly qualified, appropriately licensed, highly knowledgeable about and pedagogically skilled in effectively instructing students in literacy” (NC QUEST Cycle VIII RFP, 2009, p. 5). In addition, each project was required to incorporate two professional development “threads”: a) instructional interventions for low-performing students, and b) the development of teacher leaders who would share instructional techniques, tools, and strategies with other faculty members.

The provision of high-quality professional development was a requirement of this grant. Funded projects were required to provide on-going professional development sustained over the grant cycle (18 months). This was defined as an “intensive instructional experience” with the goal of 15 – 20 days of professional development over the grant cycle focused on a smaller number of participants. Short-term workshops or conferences were allowed only if they were a part of the overall professional development plan.

### **Professional Development Literature**

Effective professional development is critical to providing teachers with the scaffolding necessary to provide appropriate instruction for adolescents of the 21st century (Wenglinsky, 2000). If teachers are to benefit from professional development, the quality of professional development must be carefully considered (Porter, Garet, Desimone, & Birman, 2003). Unfortunately, much of the professional development offered in schools has been criticized as being superficial, ineffective, or irrelevant (e.g. Guskey, 1986, 2002; Huberman, 1995). Professional development efforts are often hampered by lack of buy-in by teachers, minimal administrative support, and scheduling and communication issues that result in poor outcomes with little to no impact on student learning (Bryant, Bryant, Boudah, & Klingner, 2010).

Professional development that results in a change in teachers' beliefs and practices requires careful planning and a long-term commitment (Guskey, 1991, 2003). Data should support and guide professional development planning (Guskey, 2003). Professional development should be well matched to the needs of participants and sensitive to the organizational context (Bryant, Bryant, Boudah, & Klingner, 2010), and it should be both intensive in the way that it works to cultivate depth of teacher knowledge of learning and pedagogy (Guskey, 2003) and extensive in that it is sustained over time (Guskey, 1991). Successful professional development also should be designed to create a learning community through which teachers work together to learn and develop content knowledge and pedagogical skills (Snow, Griffin, & Burns, 2005). Finally, professional development should be supported by the administration (Bryant et al., 2010; Garet, Porter, Desimone, Birman, & Yoon, 2001).

Guskey (2003) analyzed 13 published lists of characteristics of professional development. The lists were typically derived from surveys that solicited the opinions of researchers and/or educators. Results of the analysis yielded characteristics/principles of professional development that were cited in the 13 published lists (See Table 1).

Using Guskey's (2003) analysis of characteristics of effective professional development as a frame when reviewing the literature, we identified the following characteristics of high-quality professional development: (a) collegiality and collaboration, (b) teacher beliefs, (c) content and pedagogical knowledge, (d) compatibility of the professional development, and (f) commitment to professional development which we then used to design our project.



Table 1

*Characteristics of Effective Professional Development*

1. Enhances teachers' content and pedagogic knowledge
  2. Provides sufficient time and other resources
  3. Promotes collegiality and collaboration
  4. Includes procedures for evaluation
  5. Aligns with other reform initiatives
  6. Models high-quality instruction
  7. Is school or site based
  8. Builds leadership capacity
  9. Based on teachers' identified needs
  10. Driven by analyses of student learning data
  11. Focuses on individual and organizational improvement
  12. Includes follow up and support
  13. Is ongoing and job embedded
- 

### **Collegiality and Collaboration**

Core components of high-quality professional development are collegiality and collaboration. In their report on teacher education, Snow et al. (2005) discuss the importance of collegiality in the learning community. The authors identify teachers' ability to carefully analyze their own teaching as well as the teaching of their peers as important to the professional development process. Furthermore, Snow and colleagues assert that teachers must work collaboratively to generate shared knowledge. In a qualitative case study examining the relationship between school culture and the professional development process, Hamilton and Richardson (1995) contend schools that maintain a collegial atmosphere foster a community of learners.

### **Teacher Beliefs**

Not only do collegial environments play a role in high-quality professional development, the beliefs held by teachers contribute to the quality of professional development. In their report on teacher education, Snow, Griffin, and Burns (2005) contend professional development must address teachers' beliefs and practices. Snow and colleagues maintain that professional development must promote a secure avenue through which teachers can explore beliefs and practices. They contend that acknowledgement of long-held teacher beliefs and practices and reflection upon them encourages teachers to consider and try new ideas. Likewise, in her report for the Alliance for Excellent Education, Sturtevant (2003) also asserts that recognition of teachers' beliefs and practices is an integral part of high-quality professional development. In a study designed to look specifically at teachers' beliefs, Timperley and Phillips (2003) examined the influence professional development may have on teachers' beliefs about their

students' ability to learn and their beliefs about how they can impact that ability. They found that teachers who adopted new approaches to instruction had significantly changed their beliefs about students' ability to learn.

### **Compatibility of Professional Development**

Another theme taken from professional development literature is compatibility of professional development components and school-based programs (e.g., Fisher & Frey, 2007; Frey, 2002; Snow et al., 2005; Welsch, Rosemary, & Grogan, 2006). Snow and colleagues assert that the goals of professional development and the needs of the schools must be aligned. In too many instances, schools are overwhelmed with professional development programs which are neither cohesive nor compatible. As a result, professional development may have little or no impact on teacher and student learning (Schen, Rao, & Dobles, 2005). The work of Fisher and Frey (2007) and Welsch et al. (2006) demonstrates the importance of a cohesive, compatible professional development program in order to reap student achievement benefits. In their study, Fisher and Frey (2007) investigated the effects of a focused professional development plan that coordinated with the goals of the school. The authors reported that effort to align the professional development with the goals of the school may have contributed improvements in student achievement data. Likewise, when Welsch and colleagues (2006) investigated the implementation of high-quality professional development and its influence on statewide literacy practices, the project took measures to ensure professional development programs were embedded in the contexts of schools and classrooms. Qualitative data indicated that the cohesive organization of the program may have helped realize one of the main themes of the professional development. Across the board, the program emphasized the importance of student learning in guiding instruction.

### **Commitment to Professional Development**

An overarching theme of all the literature reviewed is the commitment required to establish high-quality professional development. In all the reviewed studies, the minimum duration of the professional development is one school year; in no instances were the teachers provided with one professional development session and left to their own devices (e.g., Hamilton & Richardson, 1995; Porter et al., 2003; Timperley & Phillips, 2003). Moreover, comprehensive reports on teacher quality maintain sustained, high-quality professional development as the fundamental requirement for improving teacher quality (National Commission on Teaching & America's Future, 1996; Wenglinsky, 2000). The literature indicates commitment to professional development not only ensures the longevity of the program but also improves a less tangible component -- school-level support. According to Snow et al., (2005) time and school-level support both play a role in developing high-quality professional development and without a commitment to these facets, professional develop may be ineffective.

### **Theoretical Framework**

We believe that institutional change requires a collective effort. As such, we aimed to avoid the conventional image of the secondary classroom – the lone teacher working behind a closed door. Instead, we strove to develop a community of learners through which the participants in our study could learn and grow together. For this study, we draw upon the theories that embody the social nature of learning. We believe that learning, in our case, professional development, must be situated in communities of practices (Lave & Wenger 1991). In particular, we identified expansive learning theory to frame our work. According to Engeström, “The object of expansive learning activity is the entire activity system in which the learners are engaged. Expansive learning activity produces culturally new patterns of activity,” (2009, p. 59). We compare expansive learning theory to yeast; as new ideas rise, they grow and expand throughout the community of practice. Moreover, in their chapter, Wells and Claxton (2002) recognize expansive learning theory as a viable professional development model. Therefore, we designed our study to provide professional learning opportunities that foster new patterns of activity within the community of learners.

### **The Current Study**

The local district with which we partnered contacted faculty in the College of Education and proposed a partnership. During the previous year, high school faculty analyzed discrepancies between the results of End-of-Course (EOC) assessments and the middle school End-of-Grade (EOG) assessments. Faculty members were concerned about the significant difference between the reading achievement of students at the end of 8th grade and the lower scores on content-area assessments at the high school level. High school data from the 2008-09 assessment cycle indicated that fewer high school students achieved proficiency on the English I, Biology, Physical Science, Physics and US History EOCs than their peers in the state, yet more middle school students from the county schools attained proficiency on the reading, mathematics and science EOGs than their peers statewide.

With the requirements of the grant and the needs of the district in mind, guided by the literature on effective professional development, and grounded in expansive learning theory, a steering committee which included key personnel from the LEA and faculty members from the University developed a professional development plan that would focus on reducing these discrepancies. The focus of the project was to provide high-quality content literacy instruction for *all* students. Overarching goals of the project included increasing middle and high school teachers’ understanding of literacy in and across the disciplines, engaging teachers in designing multifaceted approaches to literacy in the content areas, and providing effective learning activities for student readers and writers. During this two-phase professional development initiative, teachers enhanced their understanding of writing across the disciplines, multimodal literacy, and content-area reading strategies. The project also included professional development for selected teachers in interventions for struggling adolescent readers and writers. Questions that guided our work included: (a) To what extent does high-quality, long-term, professional development increase middle and high school content-area teachers’ implementation of effective instructional pedagogy to meet the literacy needs of 21st century learners? (b) How do middle

and high school content-area teachers implement and integrate instructional approaches shared through professional development?

### **Site and Participants**

The current study takes place in a small, rural area of North Carolina. The school district is nestled in the northwestern mountain region, isolated from outside influence due to limited Internet access and hiring practices. The majority of the teachers in the sample are originally from the area.

Of the 1,500 students in the district, approximately 66% receive free or reduced lunch. The sample of teachers represents two middle schools and the high school in the district. The total enrollment of secondary students is 794. District middle schools are housed in the same facilities as the elementary schools, essentially creating three prekindergarten through eighth grade sites.

The sample consists of 18 teachers across disciplinary backgrounds. Physics, mathematics, social studies, English, masonry, automobile technology, art, Spanish, and business education are the areas represented. Years of classroom teaching experience range from 2 ½ to 26. Sixty percent of the participants have bachelor's degrees, 33% have master's degrees, and seven percent have additional certification or some college. The seven percent represents those who teach career-technical classes as these teachers are experts in their specific fields and may not have attended a traditional four-year college. Participants from the university include a literacy professor, special education professor, two English professors, and one doctoral student. Those involved from the university are considered participants because of their close work with the sample of teachers from the school district.

### **Professional Development**

Professional development opportunities comprised mainly of three formats: summer institutes, workshops and cooperative planning sessions, and instructional coaching sessions. Professional development spanned from June 2009 through June 2010 beginning and ending with a summer institute. We used the initial summer institute as an opportunity to build a community of learners and open line of communication between teachers and university faculty. Lasting approximately six hours a day, summer institute days typically consisted of an interactive presentation by university faculty followed by discussion with teacher-participants. Discussion typically focused on the implementation of the instructional strategy presented and dissected the feasibility of the strategy in the variety of classrooms. We recognized the importance of the discussion component because while we are experts in our fields, we are not experts in the various content-areas represented in the study. As such, we recognized the importance of developing a community in which the participants did not only learn from us, but one in which we learned from them as well. Topics discussed during the first summer institute included: (a) discipline literacy, (b) graphic organizers, (c) vocabulary, (d) multimodal composition, and e) writing across the curriculum. In addition, we allotted time for participants to analyze course content and discuss the process of integrating new strategies.

Professional development continued throughout the school year with monthly workshops/planning sessions as well as instructional coaching sessions. The purpose of the monthly workshops/planning sessions was to support teachers as they began to refine and implement strategies into their classes. Every workshop session began with an opportunity for teachers to discuss strategies used in the classroom -- what worked and what didn't work. The discussion typically lasted about 30 minutes and allowed teachers to discuss both positive and negative aspects of implementation as well as share ideas about how to refine strategies to align with the disciplinary demands of their classes. Next we would share information more deeply, exploring a previous shared strategy or a related strategy. The remaining time was allotted for supported planning. Participants would identify a strategy to be implemented in the classroom and, working with university faculty, would plan a series of lessons.

We also provided instructional coaching support to the participants. Teacher-participants scheduled time for university faculty to meet for individual planning, observations, and follow-up feedback. After the conclusion of the school year, participants attended a three-day summer institute. We designed the institute to continue the dialogue about literacy in the disciplines, identified new technologies to be integrated, and planned for the following school year. Professional learning hours totaled 168.5 with individual teacher-participants learning hours ranging from 69 hours to 75.5 hours.

### **Data Collection**

Data collection included both quantitative and qualitative methods. At the onset and conclusion of the study, we asked participants to complete a 20-question survey. We used *Zoomerang*, an online survey tool, to develop and distribute the survey. Prior to distribution, current in-service teachers reviewed the survey. Modifications were made to the survey based on feedback provided. During the first section of the survey, we used a Likert scale to gauge how often participants engaged in a variety of literacy practices in their content areas (See Figure 1 for example items). In the second section of survey, we used short answer questions to collect more specific practice data (See Figure 2). Over the course of the study, we also collected qualitative data. Qualitative methods included professional development notes, coaching observation notes, teacher interviews, and teacher and student artifacts.

Figure 1  
*Example of Likert Scale Questions*

Allegheny Teacher Survey Spring 2011

File Edit View History Bookmarks Window Help

<http://www.zoomerang.com/Survey/WEB22C8V5BATKN/Preview> Google

Apple Yahoo! Google Maps YouTube Wikipedia News (191) Popular

10 Please read the following statements and respond according to your typical instructional-planning practices.

1	2	3	4
Daily	Weekly	Monthly	Never
Professional literature guides my instructional practices on a ___ basis.			
1	2	3	4
I plan with colleagues on a ___ basis.			
1	2	3	4
I ask colleagues for input when creating lessons on a ___ basis.			
1	2	3	4
Colleagues observe my lessons on a ___ basis.			
1	2	3	4
Colleagues provide feedback about my lessons on a ___ basis.			
1	2	3	4

SUBMIT

Figure 2  
*Examples of Short Answer Questions.*

Alleghany Teacher Survey Spring 2011

Short Answer

13 How do you determine what literacy skills to teach in your class?

14 In what ways do you encourage your students to respond to reading?

15 How do you select reading materials for the classes you teach?

## Data analysis

Qualitative data analysis involved multiple steps. First, one author transcribed all observations and interviews. During analysis, we grouped questions together based on concept. Once the questions were grouped, individual responses to the questions were broken into idea units, which were coded using an inductive process of comparing and contrasting. When uncertainty in coding occurred, we discussed the codes and data until a consensus was reached. Codes were then grouped, named, and defined: (a) presence defined as university faculty providing ongoing support; (b) expertise, defined as teachers implementing newfound knowledge; and (c) time, defined as professional development time devoted to sharing and developing ideas through a community of learning. Because of the size of the sample, quantitative analysis of the data was limited to basic descriptive and frequency statistics.

## Results

After a year collaborating with the teachers in our project and analyzing our data, change in instructional practices became apparent and our three themes presence, expertise, and time, help to tie the change in our project to the literature on professional development. Our work provides encouraging data which researchers and teacher educators might draw upon when

developing professional development through which the goal is to foster “...culturally new patterns of activity,” (Engeström, 2009, p. 59).

### **Presence**

We know that long-term commitment is necessary when developing high-quality professional development (e.g., Hamilton & Richardson, 1995; Porter et al., 2003; Timperley & Phillips, 2003). Our data indicate while a time commitment is necessary, a physical presence contributes to teachers’ willingness and ability to change instruction. During a discussion about new vocabulary strategies, Charlie, a first-year masonry teacher commented, “The format of the project did help. Probably wouldn’t have stuck with it if the support had not been here. Having someone check in, give feedback, and answer questions was key.” Jack, a veteran social studies teacher, shared during an interview, “Interacting with university folks on a regular basis really helped me stay focused and try the strategies discussed during workshops.” Coaching interaction and workshop notes also illustrate how the university presence helped to overcome resistance to professional development. Billy, a social studies teacher, did not readily engage in project activities. However, after repeated coaching visits, offers of support, and planning sessions, Billy designed lesson plans that integrated a multigenre newspaper, an instructional strategy presented by the university participants. During discussion, Billy acknowledged that without regular interaction with university participants, he probably never would have implemented new strategies.

Data indicate that teachers particularly benefited from frequent support when incorporating multimodal techniques into instruction. Notes from a workshop session describe a collaborative effort in which Landon, an English teacher, and a university participant, collaboratively redesigned lessons to incorporate an opportunity for students to develop a Prezi presentation in lieu of a traditional report. Maura, a physics teacher, shared that having support encouraged her to explore Web 2.0 tools, such as VoiceThread, to supplement physics labs. With the help of the university team, she created an activity in which students reported the results of their lab using VoiceThread, a Web-based digital-story telling tool. Joey, an agriculture teacher, shared during an interview that, “Yes definitely, because it [faculty presence] definitely got me out of my routine a little bit. We are using technologies that I probably never would have used.” Data from our study supports the literature on professional development and is congruent with expansive learning theory; a long-term commitment to professional development is necessary for change to take root.

### **Expertise**

Along with presence, expertise also emerged as a major theme. The participants emphasized how the project helped them synthesize new instructional strategies with their new understanding of content and pedagogy. Dana, an art teacher, was quick to adopt strategies shared through the project and modify them appropriately for a visual art course. She recognized vocabulary as an important component of her content. As she learned various methods to teach vocabulary through workshops, she identified possible strategies to use. However, instead of simply using the strategy as presented, she adapted the strategies to better align with her course. She merged visual art with vocabulary instruction and in one instance had her students



create vocabulary totem poles. Growing expertise helped some participants revisit long-held beliefs about instruction. Jack, one of our veteran social studies teachers, insisted that the pacing of the course he taught did not allow for “projects.” Instead, his courses consisted of a healthy dose of reading chapters and completing quizzes. However, as Jack’s understanding of how his content aligned with different instructional strategies progressed, he began to design instruction which refined and utilized strategies appropriate for his content. During an interview Jack stated, “My instruction has changed because of this project. I use a variety of projects and approaches now” (i.e., VoiceThread presentations, primary source document analysis, creating artifacts, and perspective composition). When given the freedom to identify instructional strategies that meshed with the goals of his course, Jack recognized the value of the shared strategies and the impact the strategies appeared to have on his students’ level engagement and learning. “They really get into the projects, and they’re thinking deeply about really difficult topics.” By inviting the teacher participants to identify and refine strategies that align with the literacies required in their courses, we alone were not the experts. For the project to be successful, a symbiotic relationship between university participants and teachers was necessary. In other words, everybody in the project brought his unique expertise to the table and together, we developed a new understanding of literacy in the various disciplines.

## **Time**

In conjunction with presence and expertise, we identified time as a major theme. Time was a key component in our effort to develop a community which generated culturally new approaches to instruction and learning. Professional development sessions incorporated structured time in which teacher participants worked and planned together. During these sessions, university participants were available to assist and scaffold ideas for implementation. Data from professional development notes indicate that teachers used the time to share their newfound expertise with their colleagues in the grant. Maura, equipped with knowledge of VoiceThread through work sessions with a university participant, was able to collaborate with fellow participants, Melanie and Jack. Their collaboration led to the implementation of VoiceThread in Melanie’s Spanish courses and Jack’s social studies courses. Structured work time also led to Landon’s assistance with incorporating the use of Prezis in colleagues’ classes. Time allowed for the sharing of successes among participants, which encouraged experimentation with new strategies and collaborative work for implementation.

While the small sample size does not permit advanced statistical analysis, trends that emerged include the daily use of graphic organizers increasing from zero percent to 10%; an increase in the teaching of components of the writing process from 21% to 60% on a weekly basis; collaborative writing and collaborative projects in the classroom increased from zero to 10% on a daily basis. Shared writing also increased from zero to 20% on a daily basis and from 40% to 70% on a monthly basis. See Table 2 for additional trends.

Table 2  
*Trends and Practices*

Practice	2010 (Baseline)	2011 (End of first cycle)
Use of Reading Inventories on a monthly basis	20%	60%
Discipline-specific writing genres on a weekly basis	36%	70%
Use of technology a daily basis	33%	60%
Use of technology to communicate on a daily basis	0%	30%
Sharing writing via technology on a daily basis	7%	20%
Use of professional literature to guide instruction on a weekly basis	20%	40%

### Implications

The data collected for this project indicate that professional development that strives to incorporate characteristics relating to collegiality and collaboration, teacher beliefs, content and pedagogical knowledge, compatibility of the professional development, and commitment to professional development helps to foster a learning environment in which new ideas rise, grow, and expand throughout the community of practice. At the onset of the project, our teachers perceived themselves as conveyors of content. However, the project allowed teachers to explore, identify, and create literacy strategies specific to their content areas. This project not only enabled teachers see themselves as literacy experts in their courses but helped them see the value of collegially in working with their peers.

This project offers teacher educators a rationale for implementing professional development that uses expansive learning theory as a framework. We believe that our work illustrates that teacher educators can develop professional learning opportunities that provide new information while building upon and incorporating existing teacher expertise. The frame of our project promotes teachers as valued members of the learning community and as such, encourages joint construction of knowledge. Because teachers view themselves as part of the change process, their new conceptualization of literacy and implementation of related strategies is voluntary and not forced.

### Lessons Learned

Our inquiry into how to ground professional development with expansive learning theory has demonstrated how thoughtfully designed professional development can scaffold teachers as they construct a new understanding of literacy in their disciplines. Because we embraced

characteristics of high-quality professional development when designing the project, we avoided the pitfalls associated with many traditional professional development efforts (Guskey, 1986, 2002; Huberman, 1995). Teachers in this study did not see our project as a passing fad but welcomed it as an opportunity to learn and grow as professionals.

Our theoretical frame emphasizes the social nature of learning and joint construction of knowledge within a community of practice. We believe that teachers and teacher educators alike would benefit from engaging in similar professional development. We offer the following suggestions: (a) provide learning opportunities that will expand teachers' content and pedagogical knowledge, (b) provide multiple and varied learning opportunities which include all participants, (c) provide protected time for collegial explorations of strategies, (c) value teachers for their expertise, (c) and respect the culture of the community of practice.

We recognize our project cannot be separated from our context, yet we believe it can offer insight for teacher educators as they develop professional development that addresses the needs of the school while recognizing the role teachers must play in the change process in their unique community of practice.

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This project was supported by a NC QUEST grant funded through the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction. NC QUEST is a program of subgrants awarded by the US Department of Education through state agencies of higher education (SAHEs) to eligible educational partnerships, under the *No Child Left Behind Act* {Title II-A, Subpart 3}, US Dept.

of Ed Award # S367B060048.

## 2012 American Reading Forum (December 5-8)

**Theme:** Dynamic Text Discussions: Pushing Curricular Boundaries in Contemporary Classrooms. Conference Co-Chairs: Randi Stanulis and Janine Certo Michigan State University.

For more information visit: <http://americanreadingforum.org/conference/index.shtml>

### Keynote Speakers



**Susan Florio-Ruane** is professor of teacher education and senior researcher at the Literacy Achievement Research Center in the College of Education and a winner of the Distinguished Faculty Award at Michigan State University. Her research interests include the preparation of elementary literacy teachers to work in urban classrooms and the social and historical role of culture, literacy and autobiography in educational research and practice. Her book, *Teacher Education and the Cultural Imagination*, won the National Reading Conference's 2001 Edward B. Fry Book Award. Susan is co-editor of the recently published book, *Standing for Literacy: Teaching in the Context of Change*. She serves as Co-Senior Editor of the Journal of Literacy Research. Her publications include articles in *The Reading Teacher*, *Language Arts*, and *Research in the Teaching of English*. Susan is currently researching literacy teachers' local knowledge and problem-solving in the context of mandated educational reform.



**Linda B. Gambrell** is a professor of education in the Eugene T. Moore School of Education at Clemson University and past president of the International Reading Association. She served as a member of the Board of Directors of the International Reading Association from 1992–1995 and, in 1998, she received the IRA Outstanding Teacher Educator in Reading Award. In 2004, she was elected to the Reading Hall of Fame. Her current research interests are in the areas of reading comprehension strategy instruction, literacy motivation, and the role of discussion in teaching and learning. She has written books on reading instruction and published articles in journals such as *Reading Research*

*Quarterly, The Reading Teacher, Educational Psychologist, and Journal of Educational Research.* Linda and Susan Neuman were recently appointed as co-editors of *Reading Research Quarterly*.



**Yolanda Majors** is Associate Director for Adolescent Literacy and Learning, and Visiting Associate Professor at the University of Minnesota. Her work is a part of recent efforts in culture, language, and literacy research that examines how users of African American English (AAE) fare in contexts of cultural community settings. She explores the cultural and academic underpinnings of how people come to make meaning through processes of reasoning, including argumentative reasoning. She investigates culturally-situated literacy practices across African American and

Latino communities and classroom contexts. Her goal is to make the case for utilizing culturally-based processes for reasoning as literacy learning and instructional tools in secondary classrooms. Her publications include many articles as well as book chapters in *The Handbook of Literacy, The Handbook of Adolescent Literacy and The Handbook of African American Education*.

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Stafford, T., Wilson, N. S., Sanabria, I. (2012) The role of *questioning as thinking* on readers' ability to interact with text. *American Reading Forum Annual Yearbook* [Online], Vol. 32.

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## **The Role of *Questioning as Thinking* on Readers' Ability to Interact with Text**

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### **Introduction**

Adolescent literacy has become a major focus of educators in the United States. The Alliance for Excellent Education estimates that as many as 8 million middle and high school students read below grade level (Heller & Greenleaf, 2007). When 21<sup>st</sup> century skills that include learning and thinking skills are included, the number of at-risk adolescents further increases (Partnership for 21<sup>st</sup> Century Skills, 2006). There is a critical need for instruction of thinking skills in high schools today. Instruction in thinking skills requires transactional strategy instruction focused on metacognition. Transactional strategies instruction (Pressley, 2002) is when the teacher guides students to independently orchestrate many strategies during a single reading task. In order to assist students in doing this the teacher must also teach students to be metacognitive. Metacognition is the ability to monitor, assess, and repair understanding during the reading process. In this study high school students, thinking skills were enhanced through the transactional strategy of *Questioning as Thinking* (Wilson & Smetana, 2009).

*Questioning as Thinking* integrates student and teacher think-alouds, the Question-Answer Relationships (QAR) taxonomy (Raphael, 1986), and self-questioning in order to assist students in becoming more metacognitively aware and interacting with text. Students who learn with transactional instruction have the ability to orchestrate many strategies during a single reading task (Pressley, 2002). These students learn to be aware of their thinking as they read, understand the types of questions that they ask when reading, and monitor their understanding of



text by increasing text interaction by searching for answers to questions that arise during the reading process.

### **Literature Review**

Transactional strategy instruction was coined by Pressley and colleagues (1992) and can be defined as the instruction of multiple strategies at one time (Pressley et. al, 1992). Research in elementary and secondary classrooms has suggested that the instruction of multiple strategies at one time can be more effective than conventional teaching (Brown, Pressley, Van Meter, & Schuder, 1996). Students who receive this type of instruction improve in word-level skills, performance on standardized reading comprehension tests, use more strategies during think-alouds, and can recall more information from text (Collins, 1991; Anderson, 1992; Brown, Pressley, Van Meter, & Schuder, 1996).

While the *Questioning as Thinking* (QAT) framework is a relatively new instructional method, the strategies under this umbrella are well-researched and practiced across all grade levels. The framework relies heavily on a metacognitively mature teacher. The heart of the instruction lies in the direct instruction of student and teacher think-alouds, as the teacher models her thinking throughout the reading process by using the language of QAR and the voice of self-questions.

*Questioning as Thinking* (QAT) instruction begins with the teacher think-aloud then transitions to the student think-aloud. Students need explicit instruction in think-aloud strategies in order to become thoughtful and purposeful readers (Duffy, 2003). Student think-alouds aid students in recall of information, detecting errors, comprehension monitoring, and in ability to answer comprehension questions (Loxterman, Beck, & McKeown, 1994; Baumann, Seifert-Kessel, & Jones, 1992). Think-alouds can be effective when taught as a sole strategy but are typically included as part of a package of comprehension strategies (Duke & Pearson, 2002).

The second phase of instruction under the *Question as Thinking* umbrella is the instruction of the QAR taxonomy. This taxonomy provides a common language for questions and categorizes questions based on where the answer may be found. The taxonomy includes categories of Right There, Think and Search, Author and Me, and On my Own. The Right There category of questions requires the reader to locate important information directly in the text. The Think and Search category of questions requires students to locate information across the text, including synthesis and summarizing. The Author and Me category of questions requires the reader to put his own thoughts together with parts of the text to develop and answer, with the final On my Own category requiring the reader to rely solely on his prior knowledge without the use of the text.

Research on this strategy has been conducted for over thirty years. Raphael (1981) and her colleagues initiated the research and many educators since have successfully utilized the taxonomy in various classrooms including elementary, middle, and secondary students (Raphael & McKinney, 1983; Raphael & Pearson, 1985; Raphael & Wonnacott, 1985; Kinniburgh & Prew, 2010; Ezell & Kohler, 1992; Graham & Wong, 1993; Ezell et al, 1997; Brabant, 2009 ;

Ezell et al, 1996; McIntosh & Draper, 1995; Kinniburgh & Shaw, 2009; Mesmer & Hutchins, 2002; Okebukola & Owolabi, 2007).

QAR instruction can be framed around the reading cycle (Raphael, 2006). *Before reading* students should activate prior knowledge, which can be prompted by Author and Me and On My Own questions. Students may reference the title, table of contents, pictures, etc. when answering Author and Me questions prior to reading. Questions that students encounter *during reading* rely heavily on the text. *During reading* questions include Right There, Think and Search, and Author and Me questions. *After reading* questions include Author and Me and Think and Search questions, as students think about what they learned and how it relates to them and the world around them.

The final phase of instruction under the *Questioning as Thinking* umbrella is self-questioning. Just as the think-aloud and QAR strategies are supported heavily by research, researchers have also suggested that self-questioning is a favorable strategy for enhancing reading comprehension (Taboada & Guthrie, 2006; Davey & McBride, 1986; Wong & Jones, 1982; Nolte & Singer, 1985; Cohen, 1983, King and Rosenshine, 1993). When taught under the QaT umbrella, self-questioning ties in the student think-aloud and QAR language in order to prompt students to interact with text. Students are prompted to ask questions before, during, and after reading by thinking aloud and using the QAR language. The use of the QAR language assists students in finding answers to their questions, thus allowing them to become more interactive with text.

The QaT framework sets up transactional strategy instruction based on previous research that engages students in thinking skills when reading texts. The integration of think alouds, QAR, and questioning during reading creates a classroom climate that encourages metacognition.

### **Purpose**

In this study the Question-Answer Relationships taxonomy was manipulated under the larger *Questioning as Thinking* (QaT) umbrella. Under the QaT umbrella students learn to be metacognitive through think-alouds, QAR, and self-questioning. The purpose of the pilot study was to determine the effectiveness of the QAR strategy when taught in a summer transition program and using QaT. The study took place in two classrooms, one control (n=21) and one experimental (n=23), of rising ninth graders who were struggling academically.

### **Method**

Quasi-experimental design was selected for this pilot quantitative study, as there was a control group in place as well as an experimental group. Selection of students was non-random because students were pre-enrolled in the program and divided into groups by the lead teacher. Quasi-experimental design allowed the researcher to adhere to scientific methods of research, although randomization was not possible in this educational setting.

The summer transition program requires students to rotate between three classes: Algebra, Biology, and English/Reading. This study took place in the students' English/Reading class. All class periods were approximately one hour and 15 minutes in length.

### **Instruments**

Students in both the experimental and control group received a pre- and post-test that included assessment of their ability to *ask* and *answer* questions about text. Prior to both the pre- and post-tests, students were instructed to read a passage from FCAT 2.0 and write any questions that come to mind while reading. Using the same passage, students also answered comprehension questions. Comprehension questions included questions that were written by the state as well as a few additional questions that were written by the research team. Instructions were given by the teacher that explained that asking questions is a natural process that aids in comprehension of text. The researcher provided a script for the teacher to ensure that instructions for the pre- and post-tests were identical. The students in both groups also received a posttest that evaluated the instruction of the QaT umbrella of strategies based on the students' abilities to interact with text by asking questions during reading.

Instruction of the Question-Answer Relationships taxonomy was the independent variable in this pilot study. This variable was manipulated in the study by allowing only the experimental group to receive the instruction. Dependent variables included student ability to answer comprehension questions and student ability to ask text interactive questions.

In order to try and obtain a deeper understanding of student learning, toward the end of the study, the researcher assessed students' ability to interact with text through a think-aloud exercise. Five students from each group were randomly selected to perform silent think-alouds. The silent think-aloud required students to write out the questions that they generated during reading, then write why they had the questions, and finally the category of QAR that the question fell into. This was completed as an extension of the self-questioning posttest.

The researcher used two ninth-grade passages from FCAT 2.0 for pre- and posttest measures. The researcher worked with another expert in the field in order to balance the pre and post-tests, according to categories of question-answer relationships. Originally, the pretest consisted of 10 questions: two "right-there," five "think and search," and three "author and me," one of which was a literary device question. The posttest originally included eight questions: four "think and search" and four "author and me," one of which was a literary device question. Since the curriculum did not include literary device practice, these questions were removed from the test and replaced with questions created collaboratively by the researcher and expert. Questions developed for the pretest included one "author and me." Questions developed for the posttest included two "right there" and one "think and search." The purpose of this was to increase the number of pre- and posttest questions to 10 and to balance the levels of questions. Caution was given in the development of the questions so as to ensure that they were FCAT appropriate. Documents from the Florida Department of Education were used to guide the development of question stems and verbiage.

## Participants

In the participating county, students who are low-achieving 8<sup>th</sup> graders are required to complete a summer transition program prior to entering high school. Students are recommended for the program based on previous achievement and standardized test scores. The transition program at the participating school typically draws in between 100 and 150 students.

In order to quickly assess such a high number of students the lead teacher developed an Algebra pretest. Students were divided into two large groups based on their mathematics pretest scores. Students with the bottom 45% of total scores were assigned to Team A and students with the upper 55% of total score were assigned to Team B. The separation of students by mathematics only is not perfect, particularly for reading, but does allow a general separation of students and meets the needs of this short six week summer program. The researcher utilized two classrooms from Team B for this study. The reasoning is that students on Team A may need to work on lower level reading skills before moving on to *Questioning as Thinking*. Participants included a convenience sample of 44 rising 9<sup>th</sup> graders who were divided into experimental and control groups.

Students in the experimental group received an informational handout that explained the QAR taxonomy and received approximately four weeks of instruction of the QaT strategies. *Questioning as Thinking* instruction included direct instruction of think-alouds, practice asking questions using the taxonomy, and self-questioning. In addition to the questioning as thinking (QaT) strategies, the experimental group received instruction in strategies that were included in the summer school curriculum.

Students in the control group did not receive the handout, nor did they receive QAR instruction. Although the control group did not receive QAR instruction, the teacher was permitted to model think-aloud strategies and provide instruction in self-questioning. The control group used the same practice and passages as the experimental group, with the exception of the QAR language. For example, when the experimental group practiced asking the different categories of questions, the control group practiced asking questions without the additional task of categorizing them. This allowed the teacher to provide metacognitive instruction without the language and practice of QAR. The control group also received instruction in strategies that were included in the summer curriculum.

## Data Analysis

The purpose of this study was to determine the effect of QAR within the *Questioning as Thinking* umbrella. *Questioning as Thinking* requires instruction that balances think-alouds, Question-Answer Relationships, and self-questioning, in order to improve reading comprehension. Data was analyzed to determine the effect of instruction of the three strategies under the QaT umbrella, as well as to interpret the strength of QAR within the QaT umbrella.

When analyzing students' ability to answer comprehension questions, the researcher had to be conscious of the varying levels of difficulty of the questions. Questions on pre- and post-

test measures were blind reviewed by the research and another expert in the field in order to determine which category of QAR they belonged. Questions categorized “right there” by the research team were assigned a value of 1 point. Questions categorized “think and search” and “author and me” were assigned a value of 2 points. “On my own” questions were not included in the comprehension questions; however were assigned a point value of zero on the self-questioning assessment.

When analyzing students’ ability to *ask* questions, the researcher and expert performed a blind review of student responses to determine the type of questions that students asked during reading for the pre- and post-test. Point totals were awarded per student for each measure (self-questioning and question answering) using the point system described above, and a repeated measures analysis was computed based on the total derived from correct responses.

Data was entered into SPSS software and analyzed by repeated measures analysis, correlation analysis, and mean scores. Repeated measures analysis was computed to determine significance of treatments on self-questioning and comprehension. Pearson’s product-moment correlation coefficient was computed to determine relationships between students’ comprehension and self-questioning scores. Mean scores were computed to determine the ability of students to interact with text.

## Results

Results from this pilot study represented quantitative measures from the three separate measures. First, pre- and post-tests of students’ ability to answer reading comprehension questions after reading. Second, pre- and post-tests of students’ ability to generate questions about text while reading. Third, students’ ability to interact with text by measure of their ability to answer their own questions during reading.

A repeated measures analysis was conducted on the data to determine any effects for time, group, comprehension, and questioning. A significant main effect for student (experimental and control together) self questioning was found  $F(1, 42) = 5.079, p < .05, e^2 = .108$ . The student self questioning pretest mean ( $M = 2.03, SE = .593$ ) was significantly less than the student self questioning posttest mean ( $M = 3.94, SE = .974$ ). This result indicates that the students’ self-questioning skills improved for both groups. No significant differences were found when comparing self questioning for experimental and control groups, which suggests that think-aloud and self-questioning practices were as effective with or without QAR instruction. Additionally, no significant main effect was found for students’ (experimental and control) comprehension. This finding indicates that while both group improved in self-questioning skills, neither group saw an increase in performance in their ability to answer comprehension questions.

A Pearson Product-Moment Correlation analysis was performed on the data to identify any relationships between all students’ (experimental and control combined) pre-comprehension and post-comprehension and their pre-self questioning, and post-self questioning. Pre-comprehension was significantly correlated with post-comprehension ( $r = .455, p < .05$ ). This result suggests that individual student performance on the comprehension pre-test mirrored their performance on the post-test for comprehension. Pre-self questioning was significantly

correlated with post-self questioning ( $r = .502, p < .05$ ). This result indicates that individual student performance on the self-questioning pre-test mirrored performance on the self-questioning post-test. In other words, students who did well at the beginning of the study also did well at the end of the study on both measures. Likewise, students who struggled at the beginning of the study also struggled at the end of the study. No statistically significant correlation was found between comprehension and self questioning for either pre- or post-tests. This means that there was no consistency when comparing these two measures.

A Pearson Product-Moment Correlation analysis was also performed on the data to identify any relationships between all experimental students' pre-comprehension, post-comprehension, pre-self questioning, and post-self questioning. Pre-comprehension was significantly correlated with post-comprehension ( $r = .688, p < .05$ ). This result suggests that individual student performance (in the experimental group) on the comprehension pre-test mirrored their performance on the post-test for comprehension. Pre-self questioning was significantly correlated with post-self questioning ( $r = .610, p < .05$ ). This result indicates that individual student performance (in the experimental group) on the self-questioning pre-test mirrored performance on the self-questioning post-test. In other words, students who did well at the beginning of the study also did well at the end of the study on both measures. Likewise, students who struggled at the beginning of the study also struggled at the end of the study. No statistical significant correlation was found between comprehension and self questioning for either pre- or post-tests. This means that there was no consistency within the experimental group when comparing these two measures.

A Pearson Product-Moment Correlation Analysis was run on the data looking for relationships between all control students' pre-comprehension, post-comprehension, pre-self questioning, and post-self questioning. Pre-comprehension was not significantly correlated with post-comprehension ( $r = .241, p = .292$ ). The result indicates that individual student performance on pre- when compared to individual student performance on post was inconsistent and varied. In other words, there was no consistency in individual student scores between pre- and post-tests for comprehension. Unlike the experimental group, where students who performed well on pre also performed well on post, the control group students' results were scattered when comparing pre and post comprehension scores. Pre-self questioning was not significantly correlated with post-self questioning ( $r = .318, p = .16$ ). The result indicates that individual student performance on pre- when compared to individual student performance on post self-questioning was inconsistent and varied. In other words, there was no consistency in individual student scores between pre- and post-tests for self-questioning. Unlike the experimental group, where students who performed well on pre also performed well on post, the control group students' results were scattered when comparing pre and post self-questioning scores. No statistically significant correlation was found between comprehension and self questioning for either pre- or post-tests. This means that there was no consistency within the control group when comparing these two measures.

Results from the think-aloud post-test suggest that the control group out-performed the experimental group in ability to ask questions and interact with the text. Participants in the control group asked a mean of 4.8 questions each. Of the twenty-four total questions asked 5 questions were "right there", 9 were "think and search", 7 were "author and me", and 3 were "on

my own”. Students also wrote down why they asked the questions and whether or not there was an answer to the question in the text (text interaction). In the experimental group three of the five participants did not wish to participate and did not ask any questions. The remaining two students asked a mean of 2.5 questions each. Of the 5 questions asked by the two students 1 question was a “think and search”, 1 question was an “author and me”, and 3 questions were “on my own”.

### Discussion

Findings of the pilot study indicated that the instruction of QAR did not have an effect on overall comprehension, self-questioning, or students’ ability to interact with text. Although self-questioning improved in both groups, there was no indication that QAR was the reason for the increase. The researcher determined that there may have been three possible reasons for this occurrence:

First, the pre- and post-comprehension passages that were used in this evaluation were too difficult for the students. The passage was at a ninth-grade reading level. Though the students in this study were transitioning into the ninth grade, they typically are not tested at their grade level until the end of the school year. Also, the participants were enrolled in a remedial program and were likely not reading at even an eighth-grade level. It would have been beneficial to acquire the reading levels of the students prior to the study and to choose a passage closer to the average reading level of the group. These data were not, however, available.

Second, the short term of summer school is not enough time to properly train remedial students on three metacognitive strategies and to adhere to an already existing curriculum. For the pilot group, it would seem appropriate to continue these strategies throughout the school year.

Third, the *Questioning as Thinking* framework is one that requires training and practice for effective teaching. The teacher in this study had previous experience with the three QaT strategies individually, however since QaT is a recently developed transactional strategy (Wilson, 2009), this study was the teacher’s first run of the three as one transactional strategy. In addition, the researcher’s observations revealed that the teacher was a novice in true metacognition instruction, in that her think-alouds were very procedural and she had difficulty linking the three strategies together. The main reasons for her difficulties were the short time span of summer school coupled with the varying levels of students that she was working with. The teacher in this study felt that the strategy could be effective with struggling high school readers but she would need more time to work with the students individually.

Think-aloud data is available as a post-test only. This was due to an oversight by the researcher, thus it is recommended that future research conduct pre-and post-test think-alouds for all participants. Five students from each of the groups (control and experimental) were randomly selected by the researcher to participate in the think-aloud post-test. The purpose of the test was to measure the students’ ability to interact with text through self-questions during reading.

Prior to the test, the teacher modeled the task as a whole-class model for both groups. This was a one-time model that occurred the day before the post-test. Text interaction is required in all categories except for the “on my own”, which does not require the text for an answer. Although “on my own” questions are not answered in the text it is still important that students ask this type of questions because they require students to think about their own prior knowledge while reading.

Findings from the think-aloud post test do not mirror findings from the self-questioning post test. The researcher believes that the sample of participants selected for the think-aloud posttest posed serious validity threats. A potential reason for this is reactivity to the experimental situation in which a group of unmotivated students reacted negatively to the instruction. The original low statistical power of the think-aloud test (n=5, N=10) combined with self-selection attrition resulted in non-significance and extremely low power of the think-aloud posttest. Since the number of participants for the think-aloud was much lower than the number of participants in the pre- and post- self-questioning test, the think-aloud results are not valid.

Findings from this pilot study indicated that four weeks is not ample time to teach the QaT strategies. It is recommended that teachers who wish to utilize this umbrella of strategies set aside a time span of closer to 12 weeks for initial instruction. Students would benefit from *Questioning as Thinking* as a year-long implementation. *Questioning as Thinking* is an in-depth way to teach students to think while reading. It is imperative that 1) the teacher herself be metacognitive and have a full understanding of metacognition instruction prior to implementation and 2) the proper amount of time is allotted for implementation of all three strategies.

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Standerford, N. S., Sabin, J. M., Anderson, D., Edge, C., Lubig, J., & Cameron-Standerford, A. (2012). Minding the gap: Navigating chasms of confusion and fogs of frustration—A Problems Court. *American Reading Forum Annual Yearbook* [Online], Vol. 32.

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## **Minding the Gap: Navigating Chasms of Confusion and Fogs of Frustration-- A Problems Court**

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### **Introduction, Questions, and Objectives of the Study**

Federal and state mandates have taken on a larger role in designing curriculum and assessment in the last two decades. Following a long tradition in American schools, today's policies designate the schools as both the origin and the solution for societal problems. Most policies in the last three decades have focused on curriculum and assessment with the belief that instruction improves as teachers know what to teach (curriculum) and know that what they teach will be measured on required, state tests (assessment). Teachers' voices are largely excluded from these policy decisions. Yet, teachers make hundreds of instructional decisions each day; their expertise would provide valuable perspectives that might narrow the gaps between policies and practice.

In the 1950's fear that the U.S. was falling behind the Soviet Union in science brought about numerous "teacher-proof" programs and guides. Over time these programs proved less successful because they ignored the role of classroom teachers in student learning. Research on approaches to literacy instruction shows that teachers are the major factor affecting student learning (Bond & Dykstra, 1997; Goddard, Hoy, & Woolfolk Hoy, 2000; Wright, Horn, & Sanders, 1997). Commercial programs, curriculum guides, and standards must be interpreted and

implemented in varied classroom settings, with vastly different resources, and for diverse groups of students. A gap often exists between what policymakers envision and what happens in classrooms (Standerford, 1997); yet, teachers' voices continued to be excluded from large-scale policy discussions and decisions. This study considered gaps between policy intentions and the realities of policy implementation from a variety of perspectives. How can teachers and teacher educators "mind these gaps" while providing the best instruction to individual students and improving student achievement for all students?

Recognizing the multiple layers of any term, we use the term "mind the gap" to indicate that each teacher, like each learner, comes to teaching with a certain set of beliefs and skills from which he/she operates. Teacher education, for both preservice and inservice teachers, provides varied opportunities to expand beliefs and develop additional skills. Some teachers have a seemingly natural ability to relate to learners; an understanding of how to structure the learning process; and an ability to reflect and further their own learning (Bereiter, 2002). Other teachers attempt to strictly follow scripted plans and commercial materials, and their teaching appears choppy and disconnected (Simon, 2002). In this paper, we explore this gap between the former teachers and the latter, between teaching as script and teaching as improvisational performance (Sawyer, 2004).

As a profession, we accept that learners begin with their own experiences and understandings and make sense of new ideas and experiences through those lenses. Knowledge is constructed both interpersonally and intrapersonally (Vygotsky, 1978). Teachers are expected to differentiate instruction and meet students' varied needs. However, teachers seldom have similar opportunities to grow and expand their professional knowledge and skill in differentiated, ongoing ways. Instead, "experts" typically employ transmission models of teaching in which teachers are simply told what to change and provided with some "tricks" for making those changes. Teachers are expected to "jump the gaps." They are the recipients of others' visions about teaching and learning with few resources available to support them in learning about and making complex changes in practice (Darling-Hammond, Wei, Andree, Richardson, & Orphanos, 2009). However, teachers seldom succeed when left to their own devices to recognize, learn, negotiate, and implement complex changes without additional support (Fullan, 2001; Gabriel, Day, & Allington, 2011; Guskey, 2002; Guskey & Huberman, 1995; Richardson, 1990).

This paper presents data from the field on how policy changes and mandates have affected, continue to affect, and may affect teaching and learning in the K-12 schools and the teacher education programs across the nation in ways that fail to mind the "gaps" between policies and practice.

Our guiding questions are:

*How has increasing policy guidance within varied teaching and learning contexts affected our work as teachers and teacher educators?*

*How can we better support ourselves, our colleagues, and our students to successfully negotiate the gaps and avoid the chasm of confusion and fog of frustration created by the mismatch of policies and practice?*

In our work with K-12 schools and in university courses and institutes we frequently witness low morale and growing frustration among teachers in response to district and school practices that seem driven by questionable science (e.g., one-minute fluency assessments used to screen for ability grouping within schools) and scripted lessons (e.g., government approved and computer-based commercial materials designated as “THE” reading program). We sought to help teachers find their ways out of the fogs of frustration when they see such practices as limiting their abilities as learners who look within themselves for the artistry that makes their teaching truly outstanding (Afferbach, 2007; Altwerger, Jordan, & Shelton, 2007; Garan, 2002; Trelease, 2012 ). Alternately, many teachers believe these approaches produce strong student growth in reading skills and abilities, evidenced by strong scores on commercially prepared assessments and students’ abilities to read books selected by matching readability of texts with assessed reading levels of students (e.g., lexiles). Are the gains reliable and valid in creating readers who tackle multiple reading contexts successfully? Or, do such practices create students who learn a narrowed approach to reading and demonstrate that on limited assessments that align with that approach? Another more disturbing conundrum appears with teachers who lack the knowledge and skills to meet their students’ needs, but have little interest in improving what they do in their classrooms. We puzzle over such questions and wonder how to best “mind these gaps” as we teach future and current teachers.

The National Writing Project (NWP) offers an approach to education reform that begins with teachers as primary learners in their classrooms. Sites of the NWP follow three key principles: 1) to teach writing well, teachers must be writers themselves; 2) teachers are often the best teachers of other teachers; and 3) teachers must become and remain active members of a network of motivated, knowledgeable colleagues to continue their own learning. In our opinion, the key to success of the NWP programs is empowered teachers who look within themselves to learn and improve their instruction and who are supported across time in their learning by dedicated, knowledgeable colleagues. A limitation of the NWP approach is that it requires highly motivated teachers to commit the time and energy that such learning requires. A more recent limitation of the NWP approach is that the federal funding, dedicated in the federal budget with bi-partisan support since 1973, has now been removed from the federal budget leaving more than 200 local sites in danger of closing, another policy decision that ignored the voices of educators. If teachers are the key to improved instruction and teachers need continued learning opportunities to continue growing, how do we sustain high quality programs for teacher learning in a time of austerity for programs in education?

Politicians across the country see themselves as “education leaders” (e.g., Achieve, <http://www.achieve.org/> ). Each has an agenda, whether backed by scientific evidence or political beliefs, and each attempts to lay that agenda on public schools. The results appear to be driving wonderful, creative teachers out of the classroom while tightening the types of education our children receive from the teachers who stay. As teacher educators, we worry about the optimistic young people entering the teaching profession and how the current reforms may push them from the profession before they have negotiated their own gaps in knowledge and skill with the support of a network of highly qualified professionals and multiple learning opportunities. As Jim Gray, founder of the National Writing Project, wrote in his memoir (2000), teachers are indeed at the center of education reform and only they hold the keys to meeting the goals of high quality and lasting education reform.

### **Methodology, Data Sources, and Analysis**

We chose self-study methodology for two reasons:

- 1) each member chose a different policy-practice gap to study based on personal expertise, experience, and interest and
- 2) self-study is a process approach intended to challenge and broaden personal assumptions through social construction of knowledge among critical friends (LaBoskey, 2004).

Our self-study grew out of discussions among a group of faculty and K-12 colleagues as we attempted to understand and implement policies from the state and federal levels that often seemed at odds with “best practices” in classrooms. After two months of formal and informal exchanges and discussions, we formalized our study by conducting a book study of *Teaching and Its Predicaments* (2011) by David K. Cohen. As each member read the book we conducted both formal meetings of the whole group, informal conversations among various members, and email correspondences and discussions. As the study of the book progressed, each of us selected a passage or theme from the Cohen book to guide individual explorations of a gap based on his/her area of scholarship and experience. Members also attended public hearings on new policy initiatives in our state and shared news articles and public opinion essays on the various gaps. As our individual focus areas took shape, a collective theme emerged and became the focus of our group study for a Problems Court at the American Reading Forum Annual Meeting in December 2011. This paper details our individual gaps and the actions to bridge those gaps that grew from the Problems Court as well as presenting the overall theme that emerged from our study.

### **Theoretical Framework**

Cohen (2011) situates teaching and its predicaments within a broader view of professions designed to improve the lives of others. He terms this group of professions as one of “human improvement” (p. 4). In particular, “teachers try to improve their students’ minds, souls, and habits” (p. 4). Cohen outlines three predicaments that confront teachers in this work within public schools in the United States:

1. Teachers must have knowledge to do their work, but knowledge is not sufficient to be successful. Teachers also need to understand how to structure learning for inquiry and construction of knowledge (p. 6).
2. Teachers are dependent on their students for success in their work. This dependence requires mutual commitment from the teacher and the students to take the risks that deep learning requires despite the possibility of failure by both the learners and the teachers (p. 10).
3. The dependency on students pulls teachers in opposing directions about their work. Teachers who require construction of deep knowledge from students

increase the uncertainties and risks of failure. Teachers who transmit what is known create less risk for students and themselves, but they also narrow the learning (p. 13).

The complex interactions of these three predicaments make teaching an “impossible” profession (p. 15) in that teachers and students must constantly find ways to manage these predicaments and often find no long-lasting or successful solutions in their quest to improve students’ lives.

Cohen’s predicaments of teaching helped our group consider why efforts to reform teaching and learning in U.S. schools have historically been less than successful and that reforming education is steady work (Elmore & McLaughlin, 1988; Tyack & Cuban 1995). Cohen suggests that “the growth of formal education evidences expanding faith in the possibilities of human improvement and increasing doubt about teachers’ capacity to deliver the goods” (p. 8). Current educational policy initiatives seem in agreement with Cohen’s assertion. Asking teachers to change their paradigms of learning and teaching raises issues of “promoting learning in adults” (Elmore & McLaughlin, 1988, p. 42) and of creating self-efficacy in teachers so they believe they have the power to make changes in their teaching practice (Freedman, Jackson, & Boles, 1983; Fullan, 2001; Reeves, 2009; Sarason, 1990; Standerford, 1992). Teachers require the will and the capacity to change their teaching (Kaasila & Lauriala, 2010; McLaughlin, 1987; Parise & Spillane, 2010). The capacity to improve sometimes occurs through trial and error, learning as they go; the will to change depends on teachers having enough autonomy in their work and the individual personal characteristics that enable them to embrace the challenges of changing routines and approaches (Standerford, 1992). Teaching as a profession relies on the ability of teachers to make professional decisions (Kaasila & Lauriala, 2010; Zumwalt, 1988), and professional teachers who hold the belief they can improve student learning continue trying new approaches, reflecting on results, and seeking professional relationships that support their efforts (Duffy 1982; Opfer, Pedder, & Lavicza, 2010). Success with new approaches brings about feelings of self-efficacy, encourages teachers to continue learning across their careers, and develops confidence to take risks and reconceptualize their professional roles (Ashton, 1984; Elmore & McLaughlin, 1988; Runhaar, Sanders, & Yang, 2010; Zumwalt, 1988).

Teachers committed to improving their teaching need also consider how they approach their work. Cohen (2011) asserts there is a difference between teaching and “teaching practice” with the latter requiring teachers 1) to be deliberate and attentive; 2) to attempt to connect teaching to student learning; and 3) to seek to understand students’ thinking as they structure their instruction (p. 26). As the study progressed, our team found our discussions going deeper into the framework that Cohen and others have constructed about why educational reform has such a dismal past. New questions emerged from each discussion about why current reforms feel as if they are going in the wrong direction to many teachers across our region and the nation. The following sections of this paper summarize our individual “gaps and confusions” and how we are wrestling with bridging seemingly disparate paradigms. Despite our deliberations and introspections, however, we uncovered more questions than solutions.

## **Suzanne's Gap**

Suzanne is a university teacher educator of 21 years who taught all grades in the elementary school for over 17 years, including working as a K-5 Reading and Math Specialist, before moving to the university role. She is concerned with proposed changes in certification requirements in the state.

The Michigan Legislature, the Michigan Board of Education, and the Michigan Department of Education have proposed retaining the requirement for on-going learning requirements for educators; however, the nature of these learning opportunities would change under the proposed Administrative Rules (p. 15 of Administrative Rules at [www.michigan.gov/documents/mde/2011-018\\_ED\\_Teacher\\_Cert\\_Rules\\_10-11-11\\_366135\\_7.pdf](http://www.michigan.gov/documents/mde/2011-018_ED_Teacher_Cert_Rules_10-11-11_366135_7.pdf)). Prior to the proposed changes, teachers have been required to complete specific numbers of university credits within a planned graduate program every six years as well as a state approved course in reading instruction. The proposed changes in the certification rules would eliminate the requirement for any higher education or university courses, other than the reading course, and authorize teacher professional development to be entirely based on workshops and/or district provided inservice programs. In fact, some read the proposed changes as eliminating university education as an option. So, teachers could receive a Professional Teaching Certificate, the next step beyond a Provisional Certificate, with no further study at an institution of higher learning other than one course in reading instruction.

The gap Suzanne sees in the proposed changes is based on 38 years as a professional educator and having worked both sides of the district professional development programs, i.e., as an attendee and as a presenter, and having delivered numerous workshops and conference presentations for teachers. Suzanne sees a significant difference between the learning expected in university courses and in workshops. For instance, workshops are most often focused on one specific aspect of instruction and usually provide a prescribed set of approaches to “fix” or improve that aspect. Such workshops are enjoyable as teachers leave with something they can try the next day in their own classrooms, and they have time to chat with colleagues about their practice during such workshops. After the workshop, teachers often find that the ideas offered do not work as described and there is no follow up support for reflection or for understanding the problems in adapting the approaches to their unique classroom needs. In addition, workshops often offer “one-size-fits-all” suggestions, leading to teacher-centered instruction that is provided to all students rather than differentiated instruction to meet diverse student needs. Finally, many workshops are provided by commercial companies and are designed to showcase their particular materials rather than to give teachers opportunities to think carefully about their own teaching and their specific students’ needs.

In contrast, university courses seldom offer prescriptive or commercially prepared materials for teachers to use in prescribed ways. University courses are developed around theories of teaching and learning based on research in the field. Participants in these courses study the issues of teaching and learning with a research-based lens and spend hours reflecting, discussing, and producing products that demonstrate their evolving understandings. As the theories are applied in practice, the university courses offer opportunities for the network of



educators within courses to reflect, discuss, and problem-solve as a community of learners. The result is intended to create deeper understandings of why specific approaches work and when to use specific approaches with individual students. Removing the need for higher education courses at the graduate level leaves teachers with limited opportunities to develop their teaching as a teaching practice (Cohen, 2011, p. 26). Professional teachers, as life-long learners, need to continuously develop their knowledge and skills through study of theories, practice, and content knowledge. They also need support from a variety of sources to take the risks required to apply their learning in classrooms and to solve the dilemmas that changing their practice present.

If teachers extend knowledge in [demanding ways], they increase uncertainty and difficulty for themselves and their students. They must have courage to manage uncertainty and the patience to work through complicated material. They must be daring enough to extend knowledge in ways that increase students' difficulty, even though that can increase the risk of failure or resistance. (Cohen, 2011, p. 123)

In the Problems Court, the consensus of the audience was that similar policies were being put in place in other states as well, much to the dismay of those who contributed to the discussion. For example, teachers from Indiana who enrolled in a master's degree program by July 1, 2011, could count those courses toward their professional development requirements. Those who were not in degree programs by that date get points for attending professional development opportunities; one teacher in the audience stated, "almost anything counts." The audience suggested there seems to be a general disconnect between the values of educators and those outside of education who may not understand the value of higher education for continued learning. A few suggestions for "minding this gap" were offered such as surveying parents to ascertain their support or concerns with policies and becoming better at articulating the value of teacher education programs for improving teaching and learning in schools. Overall, the group felt that policies which weaken expectations and opportunities for on-going and rigorous teacher learning widen the gap between increasingly rigorous teaching and learning for all students in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.

### **Jan's Gap**

Jan is a Title I Literacy Specialist in a K-4 school and was previously a Literacy Coach in a fourth and fifth grade building. Jan has nearly 30 years of experience in elementary schools. She also directs the local site of the National Writing Project and teaches university courses as an adjunct instructor. Her concern focuses on the requirement in Title I for constant documentation and reporting that reduce time to work as a Literacy Specialist with both students and teachers.

Currently, Title I federal programs are required to spend inordinate time and effort collecting data, documenting work on multiple cost objectives of the grants, and completing evaluation reports. The time specialists spend on this type of documentation limits the time available for work with teachers and students in the building. Approximately one third of Jan's day is devoted to these administrative tasks. Data is meant to drive teaching practice by better identifying student needs; yet, collecting, analyzing, and reporting data is not meant to limit time for teaching, learning, and collaborating with colleagues in support of higher achievement for all students. Jan's challenge each day is to provide resources, demonstration lessons, student

assistance, and small group instruction while meeting all of the policy's administrative requirements. She believes that to grow learners and improve school achievement, student and staff relationships and actions must be developed, mentored, nurtured and maintained through extended face-to-face contact time. Children and educators, rather than paperwork, need to be front and center. Jan feels what is being done in the name of accountability is not true accountability in showing student learning through mostly numerical data. Numbers do not address the social and emotional state of the learners. Numbers tell only family income, but ignore the stories of students' home environments. A reading fluency score cannot share the brilliant ideas of an insightful fourth grader. Numbers at the end of computational problems do not give insight into the thought process and steps a student used to tackle the task. Working directly and intentionally with students in scaffolded lessons connected to real world applications creates engaged learners and builds functional knowledge and skills. Portfolios of student work share thinking, processes, and growth over time. These best practices fall to the wayside as data collection and reporting assume primary focus and reduce the story of teaching and learning to a single spreadsheet. Thus, this focus on documenting and reporting fails to reflect the complex and difficult work of literacy specialists or the specialized knowledge they might offer to their colleagues and students. Cohen (2011) suggests "[Accountability policies] assume that the causes of weak student learning lie chiefly in teachers' deficient sense of responsibility, determination, and hard work" (p. 196). Putting the focus of highly specialized professionals on paperwork rather than on instruction will fail to realize the goals of increased rigor and more authentic, problem-based learning opportunities for students.

The audience in the Problems Court discussed some of the ways Title I mandates are met in Florida. It was stated by a participant that one district provided 20 unpaid trainings for their teachers, mostly on Saturdays. The focus of the trainings was on test preparation for the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test (FCAT) rather than on how to improve rigorous, authentic reading and writing instruction. Another educator spoke of the difficulty of forming professional learning teams due to a lack of trust when some administrators believe teachers would "slack off" and fail to identify and accomplish goals of instructional improvement. The group's attention turned to issues of trust, support, and time for teachers to learn and work in collaborative ways for the benefit of student learning. Literacy specialists are caught between the very real fear administrators have about the possibility of low state test scores and the need for teachers to trust that high quality instruction will produce high test scores. Three conclusions emerged from the discussion: 1) teachers need opportunities to develop their self-efficacy to believe in themselves and their professional decisions; 2) power relationships need to be balanced to enable teachers to make instructional decisions based on their specific students' needs; and 3) educators need time and commitment to become politically active and make their knowledge more visible and their voices more included in policy decisions.

### **Derek's Gap**

Derek became a university teacher educator six years ago after teaching middle school social studies for ten years. He worries about the content of social studies, science, and the arts being marginalized because they are not tested by the state while elementary classroom instruction is heavily focused on test preparation under federal policies such as *No Child Left Behind* (NCLB) and *Race to the Top*. Within the busy day of a classroom, time is always at a

premium. As some subjects are more heavily tested, decisions to spend less time on subjects not tested at that grade level can become standard practice.

Derek suggests that social studies cannot and should not be reduced to a fixed set of facts that students memorize. Social studies is a living discipline within which each subject area is connected to the past, present, and future as well as to each other. Social studies is about big ideas, social action, and civic involvement. Since *NCLB* was enacted, social studies has become marginalized, and some advocates push for social studies to be tested like reading and math in the elementary grades. In fact Michigan has long had state assessments in both social studies and science; however, these two subjects are tested less often across the grade levels. Under the new *Common Core State Standards (CCSS)*, the focus of English Language Arts in the secondary schools includes Literacy in History/Social Studies, Science, and Technical Subjects” (*Common Core State Standards*, <http://www.corestandards.org/the-standards/english-language-arts-standards>), but it is yet unclear how these standards will be assessed when the new assessments are implemented in 2014-2015. If the assessments require specific factual information to succeed, the gap that Derek sees will become a major concern for teaching and learning in social studies, and since these standards do not begin until sixth grade, the effect of marginalizing social studies in the elementary school remains unclear. Cohen (2011) suggests that teaching a fixed set of knowledge limits rather than enhances student learning, “When teachers combine seatwork with a fixed conception of knowledge, they constrain instructional discourse” (p. 148).

The Problems Court discussion suggested that as teacher educators we ask our students to take a “leap of faith” and teach in ways we model for them with the belief that such teaching will indeed produce success on state-level assessments. The group consensus was teacher educators need ways to show candidates this is true. Finding data to support our contention that rigorous teaching leads to higher test scores could be a rich area for future research as social studies assessments become wide-spread. Another vein of conversation was the need to collect data that clearly shows the limits on teachers’ time for teaching due to other duties their roles require that take away from their instructional focus and time. Most laypersons and policymakers have little knowledge about the many roles teachers fill each day in addition to teaching their students; making these limitations on teachers’ time visible could provide support for either more resources for filling ancillary duties or less punitive types of policies toward teachers. It is clear that teachers’ limited time for instruction requires decisions about what to teach each day. Derek’s concern needs further exploration in classrooms and with elementary teachers to inform policymakers about the effects of large-scale testing on subjects beyond reading and math.

### **Christi’s Gap**

Christi worked as a graduate fellow, teacher consultant for secondary teachers, and doctoral student for five years before joining this team of educators. In addition, she taught high school English for eight years before leaving that role for full-time doctoral studies. Christi’s concerns arise around issues of dual consciousness and helping preservice teacher candidates maintain their abilities to see learning through the eyes of students while seeing teaching through the eyes of a teacher.

Christi sees the gap through a lens that recognizes teachers’ rich reservoir of knowledge

and experiences as both an asset and a limitation. Most teachers were successful at school learning; their successes made their learning strategies somewhat invisible to them as students. Yet, as teachers, they will need to understand how students might interpret their instruction and where possible roadblocks to student learning are likely to occur. In other words, while they must use their knowledge to guide their teaching, teachers must also distance themselves from their own knowledge in order to consider how students are making sense and to connect their teaching to their students' learning needs (Cohen, 2011). Teacher education must help prospective and practicing teachers "rediscover" and "re-see" knowledge and processes for knowledge construction in ways that make the invisible processes of learning more visible to themselves and to their students.

Christi sees a gap in the policy initiatives in Florida and Michigan where recent policy changes for teacher certification, professional development, and evaluation ignore teachers' specialized knowledge and the need for time to reflect, refine, and develop their professional classroom literacy. In other words, teachers must learn to "textualize their experiences" to "read" those experiences and comprehend what they mean for teaching and learning their own students (Edge, 2011). Christi involves her secondary education preservice teacher candidates in multiple opportunities to practice the dual consciousness she believes they need to connect their teaching to student learning. She creates numerous opportunities for students to *textualize* their learning experiences by distancing themselves from the lived experience in order to reflect and examine it in a way similar to the way a reader might objectify a text's construction, their own reading experience, or the process of understanding a text. Preservice teachers reflect individually and collectively on their own teaching and connect it to their students' learning as they plan lessons to teach in a local high school and as they reconsider what happened during these teaching experiences for them and their students. Christi's earlier research documented specific teaching events during which participants described simultaneous attention to their own knowledge and the lesson as planned, while also attending to students' verbal and non-verbal communication as guides for instructional decisions. Durkin (1993) describes a reader attending to an external or printed text while simultaneously constructing an internal text as he/she continues to interpret the printed text. Christi's participants described how they attended to the happenings in the physical space of the classroom and to their own interpretations in the conceptual space of their own mind at the same time they adjusted their teaching in response to students' communicative responses. As a teacher educator Christi aims to support her students in moving beyond an apprenticeship of observation (Lortie, 1975, 2002) to the development of a teaching practice by helping them make decisions based on dual consciousness and enacting the knowledge they have constructed while maintaining dual consciousness in their teaching. Cohen (2011) addressed this issue:

[Teachers] must cultivate a sort of dual consciousness: on the one hand intellectual selflessness as they seek to learn what sense students make of material and use that learning to inform teaching, but on the other deep knowledge of the material and a clear view of the nature of good work. (p. 185)

In the Problems Court, participants raised points about the contrast between tacit knowledge and knowledge that teachers recognize and articulate. As a group we assumed teachers who recognize why they make instructional decisions and who articulate their thinking

process in such decisions are more intentional and successful at connecting their teaching with student learning, thus improving student achievement. However, this assumption was questioned by one participant who collected data in a *Reading First* school for six years. When these teachers reached the point where they could recognize and articulate their decisions based on research during the sixth year, student test scores actually declined from the previous five years' scores. The audience suggested possible reasons for this decline, but came to no clear conclusions. One explanation could be that the sixth year was a year when the school's participation in the federal program and their external funding were ending, thus ending the "Matthew Effect," i.e., those who are being observed and recognized perform differently than those who are not or the fact that getting special attention brings about higher levels of effort and success. The question of whether developing teachers' dual consciousness actually improves student learning is one for further research and better means of assessment that consider correlations between teacher decisions and student achievement.

### **Joe' Gap**

Joe has been a teacher educator for eight years. He has served in the role of secondary education methods and literacy professor, Director of Field Services, and now as the Associate Dean for Teacher Education. He taught middle school social studies for thirteen years before coming to the university. Joe worries about the ways in which classroom discourse is limited by the current focus on standardized tests as the means of evaluating both student learning and teacher effectiveness.

Joe sees a gap between policies that push teachers to a one-way delivery of information rather than encouraging open discourse among students and between students and teachers. It is in such discourse communities that student thinking can be pushed beyond questions which have only one right answer. If we truly believe that learners must construct knowledge for themselves, discourse in a learning community cannot be limited to questions for which we already know the answers. Students who generate their own questions, investigate authentic issues, and connect new ideas to their background knowledge create deeper understandings. Teachers can capitalize on students' curiosity and need to understand their world by providing opportunities for discussions in which multiple perspectives are uncovered and explored (Rosenblatt, 1994; Vygotsky, 1978). As students articulate their thinking for public exploration, their emerging ideas grow into grounded understandings of subject matter and of the metacognitive processes through which meaning is constructed (Belenky, Bond, & Weinstock, 1999). Yet, current policies focused on assessing teacher success and student learning wholly or predominantly on student test scores reduce discourse to a transmission model of teaching. In the transmission model, discussion is limited to short responses by each student speaking directly to the teacher; responses can usually be judged correct or incorrect. The gap between policy and reality limits the rigor and authenticity of students' learning opportunities. Cohen (2011) suggests, "[U]ncertainty becomes central to instruction, in part because the explanation and justification of ideas open up different ways to think about issues and make those differences central to the class's work" (p. 159). Under policies that limit the discourse, uncertainty is reduced, as are student learning and teacher effectiveness.

Problems Court participants discussed teaching experiences where students explored ideas and worked collaboratively to solve problems. The group shared their approaches for fostering substantive conversations about important issues with teacher candidates, thereby demonstrating for them the power of student discourse for learning. As a result of the discussion, we recognized a common need to communicate how this disparity between the complexity of learning and the limitations of evaluating achievement with standardized tests limits teachers' pedagogical options. How to best prepare students for our rapidly changing world is uncertain. Teaching and learning for such a world demands that students wrestle with questions that have no simple answers and which engage their creative and critical thinking skills. The time spent exploring Joe's gap made the chasm of confusion between policies and realities clearer to all.

### **Abby's Gap**

Abby is a doctoral student, a middle school special education teacher with 12 years of experience, and currently, the Interim Director of Field Experiences at the university while on leave from her teaching position. In addition, she has taught university teacher education courses as an adjunct. Abby's concerns focus on the ways in which current policies tie student learning and teacher effectiveness to standardized test scores and marginalize an already "at-risk" population receiving special education services.

Abby sees the gap between policies that tout leaving no child behind and making sure all students are "college and career ready" (*Common Core State Standards*, <http://www.corestandards.org/the-standards/english-language-arts-standards>) with the reality of expecting students with special needs to reach the required scores on standardized assessments without appropriate accommodations in place. Students are identified for special education services because of learning needs that go beyond those that can be met only in the general education classroom. Students receiving special education services can be included in general classrooms when appropriate supports are in place, but the supports identified in their Individual Education Plan (IEP) must be considered in placement decisions. Inclusive educational opportunity for all is the law under which all students have the right to an education in the least restrictive environment possible (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, 20 U.S.C. § 1400, 2004, <http://www.law.cornell.edu/uscode/text/20/1400>). Abby sees the likelihood of a gap developing when teachers are evaluated on their students' test scores and the stakes are so high that low test scores can result in loss of job and benefits for teachers<sup>1</sup>. How will students with special needs receive an equitable education when the personal stakes for teachers are so high and the power to ensure suitable test scores are beyond what can potentially be controlled from the classroom? Within this environment, how will the risks to teachers be reduced so that they willingly accept and nurture all learners?

Additionally, Abby sees a gap in teachers' abilities to produce high test scores without students' commitment to learning and success. Public schools accept all students rather than selecting only students who meet admittance criteria or only the number of students that fit into identified class sizes, as is the case in many private and charter schools. When students must apply and be selected to be a part of a school, there is more commitment expected of the student



and his/her family for learning. In some schools, if students do not commit and succeed at the levels required by the private or charter school, they can be dismissed from the school. Public schools have no such selection or retention processes. Thus, students lacking commitment to put in the effort and take the risks for learning to occur produce a serious threat to the teachers with whom they must learn. In public schools, we overstate the power of a teacher to produce student learning without the student's commitment. Cohen (2011) sums up the situation as follows:

The assumption is that students' poor performance is due chiefly to teachers' weak effort, and that if teachers are made to take more responsibility for students' learning and work harder, students will do better (p. 74).

In the Problems Court, the final suggestion from the audience was to actively educate parents by asking, "Are you sure a multiple choice test is the way you want your child to be evaluated?" Another issue that surfaced was the movement from a "student achievement" to a "student growth" analysis of test scores. The change will continue to put students receiving special education services at higher risk as it assumes that all students can achieve a certain level of growth in test scores within a specified time frame and based on limited opportunities to show growth. Clearly, there are many issues of how to fairly include and evaluate students who have IEPs to meet their learning needs. Pitting the needs of students needing special services against the risks for teachers of successful test scores while striving to provide appropriate instruction for all students leaves both students and teachers wandering in the fogs of frustration.

### **Conclusion**

The intent of the Problems Court was to raise important questions and to enlist audience participation in exploring current gaps between policies and realities in our nation's schools. The problems raised by our team are based in the state of Michigan; however, many states have recently implemented similar policies in their race to meet federal mandates and to qualify for state and federal funding opportunities. The lively participation of the audience affirmed that the gaps identified in our study are of equal concern to educators from numerous other states.

One especially important suggestion emerged from the discussion; teacher educators will need to carefully prepare teachers to understand and analyze assessments taken by their students. What is the instrument assessing? In what other ways might students demonstrate the same learning? How could we document learning in ways that would either support or call into question the validity and reliability of single test scores as true and adequate measures of student learning? Teachers need to become careful evaluators of assessments and collectively show parents and policymakers the ways in which standardized test scores fail to adequately demonstrate student learning.

Cohen (2011) offered some hope that encourages our continued efforts to improve teaching and learning in our public schools. He states the increased attention on education in the government and in communities is positive because it calls attention to problems that need addressing in our schools. The research and focus on education has encouraged both public and private agencies to work toward improvements and has shown the many inequalities that continue to exist in our nation's schools and our children's opportunities to learn. Yet, he also

notes that current reforms fail to consider the predicaments of teaching in public schools (p. 197). Cohen's final words capture the essence of our Problems Court and book study well:

Significant improvement in teaching is more likely to be a long march than the quick fix that most recent reforms envision...Education should be much more lively, thoughtful, and humane. Understanding what that kind of education will require from schools, government, and society can only help. (p. 205)

The largest gap that our study uncovered in current policy discussions and decisions is the exclusion of professionals' voices, those who could inform the discussions as to the complexity of reform in real classrooms and in the everyday lives of students and their teachers. How can educators regain their rightful place at the table when issues of importance and reform are discussed and decisions about the future of teaching and learning in our schools are made? This is the real problem to be solved if the U.S. hopes to bridge the gaps between policies and practice in our schools for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.

#### **Footnote:**

In Michigan the current plan is to base 50% of teachers' evaluations on student test scores by the year 2015-2016. This plan is further complicated by a change in state assessments expected to occur in 2014-2015 when the new CCSS assessments are implemented. Hence, teachers will have one-half of their evaluations based on these new assessments of their students' learning and their jobs are at risk if student scores are deemed too low.

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## **Digital diet: Adolescents investigating the politics of food and farming through 21<sup>st</sup> Century storytelling**

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The Framework for 21<sup>st</sup> Century Learning provides a compelling vision for blending the specific content and skills students need to learn to be successful in schools with the more ephemeral things students need to learn to be successful in our ever-changing world. We see this framework as an interesting and useful tool for navigating the complicated landscape of the increasingly standards driven world of U.S. schools. The danger, of course, is that this framework will be seen as simply another iteration of standards-based reform to be adopted in the quest to standardize schools. What is need is a set of powerful, authentic examples of the framework in action that show its rich potential for reforming teaching and learning practices. In this paper, we offer an example of how the principles of the Framework for 21<sup>st</sup> Century Learning can help teachers and students can work together to create rich learning experiences focusing on multiple literacies in a variety of settings.

The Framework for 21<sup>st</sup> Century Learning serves as yet another example of reform in modern public education. School reform is a topic that has concerned educators for over a century. As far back as the 1890s “finding ways to modernize [or improve] the public schools was an urgent matter to many citizens” (Lagemann, 2000, p. 19). Much of the talk generated in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century about school reform was directly related to a movement seeking to include education in the realm of science. As Lagemann argued, this push can be directly linked to early trend of basing decisions about education on “controlled experiments and precise quantitative measurements” (p. 59). While there is much value in empirical research and concrete sets of standards to guide teaching and learning, we believe that frameworks for learning and courses of study are, too often, reduced to prescribed sets of standards that make curricula inorganic. Ultimately education is a multi-faceted and human endeavor that needs to honor the nuances of teaching and learning and individual differences. Therefore, we believe that it is critical to carefully consider how of school reform initiatives can be implemented in ways that attend to the realities of the complex nature of teaching and learning.

## **Theoretical Framework**

We see infinite value in making schools places where students will learn to think critically and be prepared to contribute to a democratic society. We believe that students will be more successful in learning to think critically when they have the ability to learn to answer authentic questions (Nystrand, 1997) instead of questions with prescribed answers that do not allow dialogue to drive the process of making meaning. As Harste (2001) has argued, inquiry-based education can create opportunities for students to explore topics of social and personal interest in a collaborative environment. The importance of allowing students to follow their interests resonates throughout the literature discussing teaching and learning (Beach, Appleman, Hynds, & Wilhelm, 2006; Hillocks, 1982; Lensimire, 2001; Kohn, 2000). Maxine Greene (1978) offered what we see as one of the most compelling discussions of this crucial element of teaching in *Landscapes of Learning* as she pointed out:

Students must be enabled, at whatever stages they find themselves to be, to encounter curriculum as a possibility. By that I mean curriculum ought to provide a series of occasions for individuals to articulate the themes of their existence and to reflect on those themes until they know themselves to be in the world and can name what has been up to then obscure.” (pp. 18-19)

This model of teaching and learning requires that we conceptualize the work being done in our schools as something more than just teaching students to read, write, and answer questions on standardized tests. However, we believe that teachers are unlikely to be successful in creating this sort of classroom environment without a framework and clear examples of its implementation.

The Framework for 21<sup>st</sup> Century learning provides a road map for helping students engage in dialogue with the world around them. Moreover, this framework has the potential to support a pedagogy that positions education as inquiry. What worries us, though, is that the frameworks that result from reform movements (e.g. the North Carolina Standard Course of Study) reduce the skills and concepts they discuss to discrete entities that fail to connect to real-world learning experiences. With this in mind, we have examined the work we have done with students at an expeditionary learning school in order to demonstrate how truly interconnected the Framework for 21<sup>st</sup> Century Learning can be if implemented in a thoughtful manner with a project that lets students engage the wider world.

## **A School Community**

Our interest in authentic, project-based learning led us to Arthur Morgan School, which is a small middle school in the mountains of North Carolina with both boarding and day options. Founded in 1962, this school calls itself a “living learning community” and positions real-world work and communal decision making at the center of its curriculum. In fact, Dewey’s (1897) belief that education is a process instead of preparation for living is a guiding principle of the Arthur Morgan School. This focus on process, as well as the overall flexibility of the program, made the school an ideal place to develop a project that might serve as an example for

others of the integration of 21<sup>st</sup> Century skills in an authentic environment. Thus, with the school preparing for 18-day service learning field trips in the winter of 2011, we began to meet with a group of students who would be traveling and working together on one of these trips. Our goal was to help them develop digital storytelling skills as a part of their plan to document the experiences they had on their trip.

Extended field trips are a mainstay of each year's curriculum at Arthur Morgan School. Each trip has an educational theme, and students spend the first part of the winter learning about this theme and planning and preparing for the trip. The students with whom we chose to work were learning about the politics of farming, issues of food choice, and the consequences of modern approaches to food production and nutrition. In conjunction with this course of study, they would be traveling throughout the Southeastern United States visiting farms of all sorts, from small intensive organic farms to large scale industrial agricultural operations. During their trip, they would interview a variety of farmers, do service projects on farms, and learn first-hand as much as they could about the many of ways food is produced in modern America. In addition, students on this trip would be involved in planning and managing their experience, making contacts with organizations, developing budgets, and planning for food and lodging during the trip. Thus, the project provided a rich context for us to explore some of our ideas about 21<sup>st</sup> century learning. In particular, we were interested in helping the students and staff use media tools to expand their connection to the people and ideas they would be encountering on their trip and to bring back stories to share with the larger school community.

It is important to note that as we began our work at Arthur Morgan School, we did not set out with the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Framework explicitly in mind. However, upon reflection, we found remarkable congruence between what happened during this project and the precepts laid out in the framework. This helped us see the value in this document, not as a mandate but as an organizational structure by which one can conceptualize and further develop ideas about effective learning. Thus, this project is useful both as an example of authentic learning in and of itself and as an example of 21<sup>st</sup> Century Skills in practice in an educational context.

### **Seeding the Field**

One of the key tenets of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Framework is: "to be effective in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, citizens and workers must be able to exhibit a range of functional and critical thinking skills related to information, media and technology." A significant element in this facet of the framework is helping students learn to create media products that represent their ability to understand and use appropriate media tools. In this context, the media literacy skills students develop are analogous to writing the media. The students' overall increased media savvy would help them analyze—read—the media, which become critical consumers of media messages developed by others. The field trip the AMS students took offered an excellent opportunity to help them learn how to document their learning about a topic of organic interest while also developing the media production and analysis skills required to be responsible citizens in a democratic society.

As the students at AMS prepared for their field trip, we began working with them one day a week to help them learn to use digital tools to document their learning. More importantly,

perhaps, we hoped to help them see these tools as a way to focus their attention on the world around them and make connections to things they would encounter on their journey. We began by introducing the students to digital audio recorders and helping them learn to effectively record interviews with people they would meet on their trip. Sessions included a focus on how to set sounds levels, position microphones, and select recording spaces that would help them capture crisp sound. We also taught the students to use digital SLR cameras to document their experiences. In addition to teaching the technical aspects of using the cameras, we helped them consider what kinds of images would help them tell an accurate and compelling story about what they experienced on their trip. As part of the process, the students practiced recording sounds by interviewing people on campus and, in one entertaining case, the resident dogs at the school. The students also practiced taking photographs of their interview sessions.

During this time, we also engaged the students in discussions about how to develop interview questions that would help them learn about the politics of farming. As the students learned to develop interview questions, they were also gaining the opportunity to critically examine the rationales and agendas that are inherent in the process of conducting research and interviews. We believe this process is inextricably linked to the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Frameworks' goal of understanding how and why media messages are created. We believe that teaching the students to develop interview questions that would support their inquiry also taught them to develop an awareness of the ways in which the questions an interviewer asks can influence the stories that appear in the media. This awareness is a key aspect of becoming an effective interviewer. Once again, students were also learning to deconstruct and evaluate the media messages that people encounter in their daily lives.

We were excited to see the students' progress in learning to use these tools as a way to focus their attention during each of our weekly sessions with them. However, we became most excited about what was happening at AMS when we took the students to a local organic farm to give them the opportunity to put their new skills into practice in an environment that was similar to what they would encounter during their trip. For one of our final sessions with the students before they set out on their trip, we took them to Green Toe Ground, a local biodynamic farm run by an enthusiastic couple, Gaelen Corazine and Nicole Delcagliano. The students spent the morning exploring the farm, taking photos, and interviewing Galen about his farming practices and his life as a farmer. The students went about the business of documenting their trip, and we were impressed with the seriousness with which they approached the task. There was, of course, the normal adolescent horsing around that you would expect to occur when students find themselves in a new place. This trip helped us see the way that digital tools (e.g. audio recorders and cameras) can help students focus on the experience at hand. Having the audio recorders running and the camera shutters snapping gave the students an authentic purpose for paying attention to what they were doing. It was impressing to watch students walking around the farm with headphones on, checking sounds levels on the recorders, and seeming to hang on Galen's every word. Similarly, as they explored the farm with their cameras, students could be seen attending to details of greenhouse construction, manure piles, and the layout of the barn.

### **Planning for the Open Road**

During the period when students were learning to use the cameras and audio equipment

and practicing interviews, the group was also preparing for the trip in a range of ways, working collectively to make decisions about the trip finances, itinerary, food, and lodging, as well as learning as much as they could about food and food production. This process, like so much of what happens at AMS, can be seen through the lens of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century learning goals captured under the rubric of “Life and Career Planning.” These skills, loosely organized in the framework by the terms “Flexibility and Adaptability,” “Initiative and Self-Direction,” “Cross-Cultural Skills,” “Productivity and Accountability,” and “Leadership and Responsibility,” are skills that can only be attained by doing work in the world. Indeed, what set our group’s efforts off from many other attempts to integrate life skills into education was that something real was at stake. Theirs was not an imaginary trip with a pretend budget, but a real one, with a van and travel trailer and maps and blocks of cheese. There were people to contact about tours and service projects, and arrangements to be made for camping or sleeping on the floors of school alumni, Quaker meeting houses, or other organizations. Since the group was small – just three adults and eight students – everyone could have a meaningful role in pulling off the trip, and, as the trip came together, even the least confident of them could point to specific aspects of the itinerary that he or she had helped bring into being.

Interestingly, there is one aspect of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Skills Framework that did not apply to the work of the school in general – or the farm and foods trip in particular – at least in tone. In the “Life and Career Planning” section of the document, there is a clear indication up-front that part of the rationale for these skills is to help students succeed in the “globally competitive” 21<sup>st</sup> Century. While students at AMS certainly were gaining skills that would make them competitive, the energy surrounding the preparation for the trip was decidedly cooperative and inclusive. Indeed, there is a subtle paradox in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Skills document, where the focus on interpersonal skills and problems solving is rationalized by the suggestion that these skills will make us better suited to the struggle inherent in a globalized economy. The trip leaders promoted a subtly different and more open approach to their work, locating their goals less in the language of competition and more in that of mutual understanding and open inquiry.

### **Making Organic Connections to Core Subjects**

Once the students returned from their trip, we began working with them to create digital stories that would document what they had learned over the course of their 18-day adventure. The creation of these stories offered an excellent opportunity to make concrete connections between the Core Subjects (e.g. English, Science, Geography) and the rest of the Framework for 21<sup>st</sup> Century Learning. As Dewey (1902) argued, authentic learning is active and “involves organic assimilation starting from within” (p. 9). The digital stories we began helping the students create served as a chance for the students to tell *their* stories. Instead of simply presenting information gathered from a traditional research project, the AMS students had personal research experiences that they could now connect with the traditional Core Subjects that form the backbone of traditional schooling.

The students spent the day with us in one of the computer labs on campus at Appalachian State University as we helped them edit the audio they had captured, narrate their experiences, and use the photographs they had taken to create web-based digital stories that would share what they had learned about the politics of food and farming on their trip. Much like students in a



traditional English Language Arts classroom, the students had to consider the various facets of narrative structure in order to create the stories they wanted to tell. They had to decide on a theme that would serve as a framework for their stories, compose their narrations, edit text they wanted to include, and be clear about the messages their stories would convey. Thus, the process as a whole required the students to demonstrate their ability to engage in the collection of primary source documents and synthesize the information they collected much like they would in a traditional social studies classroom that was based on a framework, such as the North Carolina Standard Course of Study. However, this project extended far beyond these tasks.

The Framework for 21<sup>st</sup> Century Learning is set up in a way that requires students to move beyond basic competency in core subjects by “weaving 21<sup>st</sup> century interdisciplinary themes into core subjects” such as Environmental Literacy. This focus goes deeper than one might normally encounter in a traditional science classroom. Instead of helping students simply learn about the environment, this framework asks students to carefully consider human impact on the natural world. The AMS field trip and this project provided students with a unique opportunity to blend learning in their core subjects with an inquiry into how the politics of food and farming influence their environment and society. Creating these digital stories helped the students see the connections between the dietary choices people make, the business of farming, and the environment. At the same time, the students had an opportunity to draw upon their personal research experience to develop arguments for the things they saw as important after meeting and talking with the various people involved with the production and consumption of food. For example, the project connected their reading and research on the politics of meat production with first-hand experiences in an organic slaughterhouse. At the end of the process, students could articulate some of the complex emotional and environmental issues surrounding the consumption of animals.

### **Long-term Values**

Though the trip leaders certainly had a point of view with respect to political and social issues around food, we found it remarkable how open they were to letting students explore these ideas themselves and come to their own conclusions. It was notable that the trip went both to small organic farms and to the agricultural giant Monsanto, whose controversial promotion of genetically engineered crops the students had studied prior to the trip; similarly, students had a chance to work alongside migrant farm workers and to discuss labor issues with farm owners. This chance for students to see multiple sides to an issue, develop ideas on their own, and to express these ideas, is perhaps what was ultimately most valuable about the trip. In fact, we saw these values play out long after the trip was over and students were invited by their language arts teacher to write letters to the editor of the local paper on topics of their choice. Two of the students from this group chose to write about ecological issues they had encountered on the field trip. One of these letters brought on a spirited back and forth in the paper, with a well-known local conservative voice taking on the student and challenging his reasoning. Significantly, in keeping with the school’s attitude about the value of dialogue, the opposing letter writer was invited to the school to present his views to the students in person and to engage in a healthy debate with them. Though on the surface, this person’s values were antithetical to those expressed by the school, several weeks later, he wrote back to the paper to publicly thank the school for their hospitality and for being willing to give him a chance to

express himself to them.

Here again, we find that the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Skills Framework is useful in thinking through what was happening at Arthur Morgan School. Under the heading “Communication and Collaboration,” we see the goal of getting students to “articulate their thoughts and ideas effectively” as well as “listen effectively” and “communicate in diverse environments.” While these goals were certainly promoted throughout the project, it was heartening to see how they wove their way into the life of the school in the months after students returned from their field trip. This example also shows how an effective authentic learning experience intertwines many of the goals of the framework, as the student letter writer incorporated traditional literacy skills, such as writing for an audience, with interpersonal and problem solving skills, creativity and media savvy.

### **The Value of Authentic Implementation of a Reform Framework**

Over the last several decades, the increased value placed on high stakes testing has led to the development of a narrow view of what counts as learning and teaching in U.S. schools (Franciosi, 2004; Luke, 2004; Nichols & Berliner, 2007; Schultz & Fecho, 2005). This narrow perspective complicates teachers’ efforts to incorporate students’ interests into curricula and create authentic learning experiences. However, we believe that these complications do not have to limit teachers as they seek to make their classrooms places where natural curiosity and the love of learning can flourish. By approaching the current climate of schools with creativity and a framework for learning that values integration of core subjects and relevant 21<sup>st</sup> century themes, we believe teachers can capture students’ interests and engage them in exciting learning experiences. Our work with the students at AMS demonstrates what can happen when students and teachers engage in the exploration of topics of organic interest while intentionally seeking to make clear connections between core curricular areas and the skills students need in order to grow into responsible and compassionate citizens in the 21<sup>st</sup> century and beyond.

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Tonegato, N. & Hendricks, C. (2012). The top ten qualities of an effective reading teacher. *American Reading Forum Annual Yearbook* [Online], Vol. 32.

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## **The Top Ten Qualities of an Effective Reading Teacher**

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Many wonder and meditate on the recipe for a student's success. Some assert that intrinsic qualities determine success for an individual. Others postulate that success is a direct result of external factors or environment. However, research continually points to one central determinant of growth and success in a student, the teacher (Hattie, 2003; Wren, 2006). It is true that the teacher plays a central role in the overall success of a student. Whether in the general classroom, or in a reading center, the teacher impacts the educational well being of every student with whom he or she comes into contact. Wren (2006) posits that highly-qualified teachers are not necessarily high-quality reading teachers. He argues that there is a great deal of confusion between highly qualified and high quality teachers. Highly qualified simply refers to the degrees, certifications, or qualifications of the teacher, whereas high quality teachers have talent, knowledge, and skill. With this distinction in mind, it behooves researchers to explore what we know about high quality teachers of reading. Synthesizing the qualities that effective reading teachers employ provides critical insight as to how others may replicate the success these expert teachers have experienced.

### **Methods**

To best collect relevant research regarding high quality reading instruction, a search was initiated to review a wide base of educational research. The process began by reading numerous research journals and texts to compile a working list of important qualities or practices successful reading teachers employ. These resources were accessed in journals and texts, from a variety of authors, over the past 20 years. These resources were accessed from physical as well as electronic databases. As the list developed, traits were singled out that most frequently were identified by authors as key components in an effective teacher of reading. This list was then tweaked and whittled down to present ten of the most frequently cited qualities or practices of an effective reading teacher.

## **Results**

As the literature base was reviewed, a number of personal qualities were noted. Qualities such as kind, patient, caring, friendly, etc., were frequently cited as necessary for effective teaching, in general, not specific to reading teachers. Therefore, these characteristics were eliminated from our list. Then, we categorized and classified those characteristics that were most specific to high quality reading teachers. These qualities should be viewed as individual brush strokes contributing to an overall portrait of a high quality reading teacher. Rather than competing, these qualities work together to form the best in the teaching profession. In fact, it could be concluded that it is the combination of these qualities that lead to highly effective reading teachers. What follows are ten research-based qualities or practices that effective reading teachers employ. These ten qualities/characteristics/practices are not in any particular order and should not be considered an exhaustive list of the many traits of a high quality reading teacher.

### **1. Provide Direct, Explicit Instruction**

Effective teachers of reading utilize direct, explicit instruction (Denton, n.d). According to Blair, Rupley and Nichols (2007), “Explicit instruction means imparting new information to students through meaningful teacher-student interactions and teacher guidance to student learning” (p. 434). Reading teachers must always assess the needs of their students. In some cases students need clear, direct explanations of how to successfully complete a skill. Furthermore, direct instruction is intended to meet the needs of all students, including those who are experiencing difficulty in learning to read (Tierney & Readence, 2005). Focused on skills, the teacher must have clear observable goals and know exactly how he or she will present the strategy to the students. Blair, et al. state, “Teachers should provide instruction that reflects the students’ level of reading development” (p. 433). Taking this into account, the reading teaching is able to plan instruction to focus directly on the selected strategy to be used. This makes the learning goals clear to the students and allows them to focus on the task at hand. The key to explicit instruction is the active communication and interaction between teacher and student (Blair et al.).

### **2. Exhibit Flexibility**

Flexibility is a key component of an effective reading teacher. How many teachers have developed the “perfect” lesson? Every detail was combed through, not a single variable left to chance, only to realize during the lesson that students just weren’t grasping what was expected. At this point some might panic. Some possibly wouldn’t know how to proceed. However, the effective reading teacher knows that, through careful planning, accommodations can be made to change directions during a lesson to meet students’ needs. With respect to the reading teacher, the International Reading Association (IRA, 2000) asserts, “They know when to organize children in large groups for direct, explicit instruction, when small group or individual instruction is more appropriate, and when children will learn more efficiently on their own” (p. 239). Quality reading teachers aren’t afraid of the unexpected. They realize that flexibility is part of the job. They adapt to classroom variables and help their students overcome

adversity when needed. High quality reading teachers analyze how these variables influence students' reading and make changes when necessary. A good reading program should not be regimented and inflexible; rather, it needs to be flexible to allow the teacher to make necessary changes to make the program succeed (Blair et al., 2007). Elite reading teachers handle unforeseen occurrences with confidence and a knowledge that plans can and should be adapted when needed.

### **3. Model Behaviors**

Modeling is an important task for the quality reading teacher. Modeling includes dramatizing how and when to use the skill or strategy in authentic reading instruction (Blair et al., 2007). Reading teachers work with whole class, small groups or one-on-one, modeling how to use a strategy. This could be modeling effective comprehension practices while using a think aloud during a writing activity, or modeling fluent reading while conducting a class read aloud. Through modeling, teachers also explain why it is important for students to use the strategy or skill (IRA, 2000). Through modeling, students are able to witness authentic examples of how and when to use a specific strategy or skill and then draw from this experience when they have an opportunity to authentically employ its use. When teachers model engaged reading to their students, they place emphasis on the role that reading has for their own lives, as well as the impact it can have on students (Turner, Applegate & Applegate, 2011). As teachers model authentic reading or a specific strategy or skill, they enable a student to concretely visualize how he or she might successfully complete a similar endeavor.

### **4. Scaffold Instruction**

Any high quality teacher is familiar with scaffolding. Falling within the student's zone of proximal development, scaffolding provides the necessary supports students need until they have mastered a task (Vygotsky, 1978). The zone of proximal development (ZPD) is the level of difficulty at which a student can complete a task with adult or peer assistance. For reading to be within a child's ZPD, a teacher inserts scaffolds to support the child through the activity. In reviewing the actions of effective teachers, Metsala, Wharton and McDonald (1997) found, "Effective teachers used a great deal of scaffolded instruction" (p. 520). Effective reading teachers know when to insert scaffolds and closely monitor their student's progress.

Effective reading teachers guide students in their use of skills and strategies, gradually diminishing support and assistance and eventually require students to assume greater responsibility as they become more skilled (IRA). Scaffolding instruction can take place in many parts of a reading lesson. Effective reading teachers "provide students with scaffolded instruction in phonemic awareness, phonics, vocabulary, fluency, and comprehension to promote independent reading" (Gambrell, Mandel, Morrow, & Pressley, 2007, p. 19).

### **5. Link Reading and Writing**

There is an undeniable link between reading and writing. Many of the skills necessary to succeed in reading are also present in writing. There is reciprocity between the two that expert reading teachers note and actively seek to connect in their daily lessons. If a child struggles with

reading fluency, he or she is likely to also lack the qualities of a fluent writer. If his/her word recognition is weak in reading, it is likely he or she will lack the ability to employ rich vocabulary in writing. Excellent teachers understand how reading and writing development are related and they work to integrate both skills into instruction to take advantage of the student's development in both areas (Denton, n.d.; IRA, 2000; Leu & Kinzer, 2003). These links are continuous, and effective teachers often incorporate both across the curriculum (Metsala, & Wharton-McDonald, 1997). Many teachers are adept in recognizing the reading and writing connection; however, effective teachers not only recognize this connection, they actively connect the two daily in a variety of methods.

## **6. Balance Literacy Instruction**

Debates over phonics instruction, whole language and balanced literacy have long been observed. However, based on current research, one can see that many of the most effective reading teachers are taking a balanced approach to reading instruction. Students need to experience skills-based instruction as well as authentic reading experiences. Students benefit from practice in individual skills such as phonics and phonemic awareness, but must also read authentic texts for real purposes. Students succeed when they are able to master individual reading skills, while then having the opportunity to put those skills to use in an authentic way. In a review of effective teaching practices, Metsala, and Wharton-McDonald observed, "Highly effective teachers reported using both immersion in authentic literacy-related experiences and extensive explicit teaching through modeling, explanation, and mini-lesson re-explanations, especially with respect to decoding and other skills" (1997, p. 519). Reading teachers comprehend that students need to have the explicit skills-based instruction but also time to put those skills to practical use. Blair et al. (2007) assert, "The more time students spend on actual reading in which they can be highly successful, the more they probably will learn" (p. 436). Authentic experiences add value to the students' learning and only foster greater development. Quality reading teachers realize that the balance of instruction shifts across the developmental span and shifts for individual students (IRA, 2000).

## **7. Maintain High Expectations Of Students And Self**

Reading teachers must expect the most out of themselves as well as their students. These teachers believe in themselves and believe that investing substantial effort in their work will result in all students learning. These teachers also maintain the mantra that failure is not an option (Blair et al., 2007). Students will achieve more when they are held to high standards and made aware of what is expected of them. The higher the standards, the greater achievement the students will experience. These expectations, however, need to be realistic. Reading teachers who hold themselves to high standards will create an environment of success while modeling successful cognitive strategies to students. High-quality reading teachers establish clear goals and expectations of which all students are aware. Teachers who articulate specific reading behaviors to be achieved prior to teaching and who teach relevant content, frequently have students who achieve at higher reading levels (Rupley, Wise & Logan, 1986). If students know what is expected of them, they will work to achieve said goals. Students need direction and an idea of where they are headed. This clarity and knowledge that the teacher has great expectations for them allows students to feel a sense of pride, self worth and spurs them to take

control of their scholarly efforts. Additionally, effective reading programs have teachers who believe in themselves and expect their students to succeed in learning (Johnson, Livingston, Schwartz, & Slate, 2000). Without these expectations teachers as well as students often fail to reach their full potential.

## **8. Employ a Variety Of Assessments**

Assessment should be undertaken to guide instruction. Assessments must be continuous and appropriate for every student. Teachers who continually assess students are able to accurately guide instruction towards the needs of the students (Leu & Kinzer, 2003; Wren, 2006). Reading instruction becomes more student-centered and effective when it is based on assessment results. The ability to differentiate instruction is dependent on accurate assessments of the students' needs. Incorporating both formal and informal assessments in the reading classroom enables the teacher to assess students based on a number of measures for a complete view of their abilities and needs. Effective reading instruction is dependent on assessment that helps teachers and students move toward and attain daily and annual reading goals (Gambrell, Morrow & Pressley, 2007). This calls for a balance between formative and summative assessments. This balance will enable the reading teacher to effectively assess every student by looking at daily needs and overall growth (Gambrell et al.). Additionally, excellent reading teachers are familiar with a wide range of assessment techniques. These techniques range from end-of-the-year standardized tests to daily informal assessments (IRA, 2000). High quality reading teachers are well versed in utilizing a variety of assessments and they use their assessments to guide instruction and impact student learning.

## **9. Motivate Students**

Every teacher must be able to motivate students to succeed. However, this is particularly true with reading teachers. Students who are motivated to learn are often more engaged, experience higher levels of achievement and internalize learning goals (Blair et al.). Students often lack motivation to read and teachers who can provide motivational experiences in the reading classroom provide students with more opportunities for success. Affective bonds can be strengthened for students when their teachers provide assistance during lessons by creating tasks that influence a child's motivation (Richardson, Morgan, & Fleener, 2012). When teachers key in on student interest and allow them a chance to engage in affect building activities, their motivation often increases. It has been found that one of the key factors in motivating students to read is a teacher who values reading and is enthusiastic about sharing a love of reading with students (Gambrell, 1996). This enthusiasm and love for reading can compel students to explore and try reading out for themselves. Teachers become explicit reading models when they share their own reading experiences with students and emphasize how reading enhances and enriches their lives (Gambrell). Time and time again research demonstrates that it is the teacher more than any other factor that leads students to success (Hattie, 2003). Without the teacher as a motivator, many students would fail to engage in new or different reading experiences.



## **10. Maintain A Rich Classroom Library**

Effective reading teachers immerse students in an environment of reading. When they are surrounded by an abundance of reading materials, students have the ability to select books to cater to their interests, while also exposing them to new genres. High caliber reading teachers allow for students to have access to high quality literature, across many genres (Gambrell, Mandel, Morrow, & Pressley, 2007; Wren, 2006). Excellent reading teachers include a variety of reading materials in their classrooms, and are not limited to books. This can include magazines, comic books or newspapers (IRA, 2000). Students who are able to explore diverse texts are able to experience varied reading opportunities, thus expanding their literary horizons. Students need to have access to reading materials to construct a positive attitude towards reading, and often these attitudes are cultivated in the classroom. Creating a print rich environment is a key component in developing lifelong readers. Students who have this exposure are more likely to pick up a book and read. Accessibility to high quality literature is necessary for every student to become a successful reader. Elite reading teachers understand the importance of a high quality classroom library and provide their students with daily access to all of the titles within their collection.

## **Conclusion**

It is clear that high quality reading teachers embody numerous characteristics. The preceding list addresses only ten qualities or practices effective reading teachers employ. It is not the authors' intent to view as one of these qualities as more important than another; rather, they are to be viewed as a collaborative collection of beliefs, practices or attributes that contribute to the effectiveness of a reading teacher. There are, indeed, many other traits not represented that deserve equal attention. This list is a mere snapshot, garnered from the most frequent citations in educational research. Going forward we must praise our educators who employ these practices and encourage others to follow suit. No matter where we may differ on our list of traits or reading priorities, let us not forget our one common goal -- that every teacher of reading must have the best interests of his or her students in mind, and strive to create engaged lifelong readers.

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Williams, K. & Hopkins, M. (2012). Meeting of the minds: A comparison of thinking processes exhibited during reading and math think-alouds. *American Reading Forum Annual Yearbook* [Online], Vol. 32.

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## **Meeting of the minds: A comparison of thinking processes exhibited during reading and math think-alouds.**

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Elementary teacher candidates and first year teachers often find themselves immersed or, more likely, submerged in a sea of standards, practices, and taxonomies of processes and behaviors across disciplines. As they plan for assessment and instruction, they have to learn and apply terminology that addresses processes and behaviors across reading, math, science, social studies, and more. In addition, in these early years, they have to learn how to manage a classroom that meets many diverse needs, and they have to learn how to account for standards and educator practices to children, parents, administrators, legislators, and themselves. Candidates and new teachers often ask how all of the different standards, taxonomies, and practices fit together; many are too overwhelmed to even ask or recognize the question.

A typical teacher education program will include a taxonomy of teaching and learning (Anderson et al., 2001; Marzano & Kendall, 2007). During recent years, teacher preparation programs and school districts have added effective teaching frameworks (Danielson, 2007; Marzano, 2007). Added to these lists of behaviors and practices are state requirements such as Florida Educator Accomplished Practices (Florida Department of Education, 2012) and standards such as Common Core State Standards (Council of Chief State School Officers & National Governors Association, 2010). Of course, each discipline has its own list of key principles, practices, and/or processes. An elementary teacher typically teaches two or more disciplines. The new teacher who aims to excel might consult professional literature for best practices in reading, math, science, social studies, arts, and health. An experienced teacher can handle the addition of new layers through the years, but for a novice to have to address all of those items at once is quite a daunting task.

The ultimate goal of the current study is to offer a solution that would combine tasks or processes across disciplines in an effort toward more efficient teaching and learning in elementary classrooms. More specifically, the researchers investigated the possibility of common thinking processes used in reading and mathematics tasks. If there are common processes, then teachers may be able to teach the processes in one discipline and make quick connections and applications within the other discipline thereby shortening the overall lists of tasks to accomplish. In an attempt to create a common list of reading and mathematical processes, this study was designed to answer the question: “What thinking processes do reading comprehension and mathematical problem-solving have in common as exhibited through experts’ think alouds?”

### **Perspectives/Theoretical Framework**

Before comparing reading and mathematics thinking processes, the separate sets of processes were determined. Mathematical problem solving processes emerged as early as 1957 (Polya) and have continued to be refined throughout the past 55 years, first as a part of the mathematics curriculum (Garofalo & Lester, 1985; Hyde, A.A & Hyde, P.R. 1991; Whitin, D.J., et al., 1990) and most recently as the goal of mathematics instruction (NCTM, 2000; NCTM 2006). Table 1 includes a synthesis of prevalent mathematical problem solving processes.

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Table 1  
*Mathematical Problem Solving Processes*

#### **Problem Solving Processes Used in Mathematics**

Looking for relationships  
 Analyzing patterns  
 Finding out which methods work and which don’t work  
 Justifying procedures  
 Justifying results  
 Evaluating and challenging thoughts of others  
 Drawing on knowledge in order to develop new knowledge  
 Exploring  
 Taking risks  
 Questioning  
 Monitoring to check understanding  
 Adjusting process based on monitoring  
 Representing the meaning of the problem  
 Recording/describing solution strategies  
 Choosing a representation/model that’s most appropriate to the problem  
 Making connections between math concepts  
 Making connections to daily life  
 Predicting usefulness of strategy/concept for future problem-solving experiences  
 Speaking, writing, reading, and listening  
 Conjecturing (informed guessing)

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Proficient reader research (Duke & Pearson, 2002) supplied the most prevalent list of thinking processes that is used in the development of reading curriculum and instruction throughout the country. This list of processes has been applied and reported in numerous practitioner resources (Keene & Zimmerman, 2007; Harvey & Goudvis, 2007; Miller, 2002). Table 2 includes the list of thinking processes that stem from proficient reader research.

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Table 2  
*Reading Comprehension Processes*

**Cognitive Processes Used During Reading (from proficient reader research)**

Monitoring/Metacognition/Fix Up

Visualizing

Inferring

Connecting

Questioning

Determining Importance

Synthesizing / Summarizing

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Most recently researchers have begun to explore possible relationships between processes used in reading and mathematics (Hyde, A., 2006; Fogelberg, et al., 2008; Siena, 2009; Brummer & Macceca, 2010; Sammons, L., 2010; Halladay & Neumann, 2012). Careful inspection of recent literature reveals, however, that whereas authors are suggesting the use of reading processes to teach mathematics, there is scant evidence that thought processes used to unlock meaning of text are the same as those used to solve mathematical problems.

The investigators of the current study proposed a synthesis across thinking processes in reading and mathematics in a rough attempt to identify a possible alignment. Table 3 communicates that proposed alignment.

**Method**

The current descriptive study was designed to compare and contrast cognitive processes used by reading and mathematics experts during reading comprehension and mathematical problem solving tasks. Processes identified for exploration are identified in Table 3 above. “Experts” were defined as teacher education faculty who taught reading or mathematics methods courses for elementary teacher candidates. Teacher education faculty were selected because they focus on how to teach thinking processes; therefore, researchers assumed the experts would be aware of these thinking processes in their own reading and problem solving. Four experts, two reading faculty and two mathematics faculty, participated in two think aloud tasks: reading the first pages of an adolescent/adult novel and solving a mathematical story problem. Both tasks were selected to be sufficiently challenging to the adult expert in order to try to tap into thinking processes that were not automatic or tacit.

Table 3

*Proposed Alignment: Mathematics – Reading Thinking Processes*

<b>Mathematics-Problem Solving</b>	<b>Reading Comprehension Processes</b>
Looking for relationships	Synthesizing
Analyzing patterns	Synthesizing
Finding out which methods work and which do not work	Monitoring/Metacognition
Justifying procedures	Monitoring/Metacognition
Justifying results	Connecting/Monitoring
Evaluating and challenging thoughts of others	
Drawing on knowledge in order to develop new	Connecting/Synthesizing
Exploring	Asking questions
Taking risks	(Affective)
Questioning	Asking questions
Monitoring to check understanding	Monitoring/Metacognition
Adjusting process based on monitoring	Monitoring/Metacognition
Representing the meaning of the problem	Visualizing
Recording/describing solution strategies	Visualizing/Monitoring/Metacognition
Choosing a representation/model that's most appropriate to the problem	Connecting/Visualizing/Synthesizing
Making connections between math concepts	Connecting
Making connections to daily life	Connecting
Predicting usefulness of strategy/concept for future problem-solving experiences	Connecting/Visualizing/Synthesizing
Speaking, writing, reading, listening	
Conjecturing (informed guessing)	Inferring

The think aloud method was used to try to capture experts' spontaneous thinking. While there are issues with self-reporting one's own thinking processes (Pressley & Afflerbach, 1995), think aloud methodology seemed the least invasive technique for imposing thought processes on the reader or problem solver.

The reading task involved thinking aloud while reading the first two chapters of *The Book Thief* (Zusak, 2005). This text was selected because there is mystery from the beginning about who is telling the story and who the book thief is. The text offers possibilities for predicting, connecting, inferring, monitoring, and questioning. The mathematics task involved a ratio problem that also lends itself to inferring, questioning, connecting to prior knowledge of mathematics, and monitoring.

Each expert was asked to think aloud while "solving" the reading text and mathematics problem. The reading faculty performed the reading task first; the math faculty performed the mathematics problem solving task first. All four experts performed both reading and math tasks while reading and talking aloud; think alouds were recorded and transcribed. Three scorers listened to audio recordings of the think alouds, analyzed, and labeled processes independently and then met to discuss until they reached 100% agreement. Labels for processes were selected from the right column of Table 3 since it was easier to map the math processes onto the shorter

list of reading processes than vice versa.

## Results

Table 4 includes the results of the analyses of the think aloud tasks. While no consistent patterns emerged, the analyses did indicate that there are processes used in both reading comprehension and mathematical problem solving. The processes used most frequently in both reading and mathematics were monitoring, inferring, connecting, and questioning. Monitoring was identified by phrases such as “I’m confused by”, “I got it!”, and “I don’t understand.” Inferring was indicated by phrases such as “I’m guessing”, “I’m inferring”, “That means.” Connecting was implied by phrases such as “I know” or “This reminds me of”. Questioning was identified by phrases such as “I wonder” or “I am questioning” and the insertion of a question with rising intonation. Visualizing did occur in reading but was used more frequently in the mathematics problem solving. Monitoring, questioning, and visualizing were used with more frequency in mathematics than reading; while connecting and inferring were used with more frequency in reading than in mathematics problem solving.

Table 4  
*Results of Think Aloud Analyses*

	Cognitive Processes During Think Alouds							
	The Book Thief				Teacher Ratio Problem			
RE=Reading Expert ME=Math Expert	<u>RE1</u>	<u>RE2</u>	<u>ME1</u>	<u>ME2</u>	<u>RE1</u>	<u>RE2</u>	<u>ME1</u>	<u>ME2</u>
Monitoring	9	6	3	0	27	13	6	9
Visualizing	0	2	2	0	14	6	4	1
Inferring	16	10	16	7	3	5	6	1
Connecting	22	4	8	3	7	1	4	0
Questioning	9	5	4	0	18	4	1	0
Evaluating Language	0	1	0	1	0	1	0	0
Synthesizing/	0	0	0	1	0	2	0	1

Summarizing

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**Conclusions**

Results indicated that there are common processes across reading comprehension and mathematics problem solving. Future research will address various text genres, include additional types of mathematics problems, and add experts including teacher educators and experienced classroom teachers. In addition, future research will investigate the effects on children's reading comprehension and mathematics problem solving after instruction in the use of these common processes across both disciplines.

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## **Uncovering Teachers' Beliefs Through the Development of a Vision Statement**

Nance S. Wilson

Teachers are constantly making decisions. They make decisions regarding the classroom materials, organization, formative assessment, student feedback and more. Classroom decisions made by teachers are rooted in teachers' beliefs about literacy and how children learn (Mills & Clyde, 1991). However, it is difficult to capture teachers' beliefs because self-reporting is unreliable, "but self-report is better for reporting explicit cognitions rather than implicit ones, such as beliefs" (Gill & Hoffman, 2009). Therefore, finding alternative ways to capture teachers' beliefs is important.

Listening to teachers plan or develop curriculum is one way to gain an understanding of their beliefs (Gill & Hoffman, 2009). The purpose of this study is to investigate teacher talk during shared planning to provide insight into teachers' beliefs regarding the nature of literacy instruction. Four teachers gathered for six shared planning sessions aimed at developing a K-12 literacy vision. The elementary, intermediate, middle school, and high school teacher engaged in dialogue sharing instructional practices, rationales behind their decision-making, and how they defined key literacy elements such as comprehension and writing. Through these conversations the research gained an understanding of the teacher's conceptual beliefs regarding literacy.

### **Perspective/Theoretical Framework**

Despite the methodological limitations involved with measuring teachers' beliefs, the topic still remains an important area of study because beliefs are at the center of teachers' curricular and pedagogical decisions. Teachers' beliefs of literacy instruction are defined by Harste and Burke (1977) as principles that guide teachers' expectations regarding student behavior during reading lessons. Beliefs strongly influence teaching practices and classroom management (Gill, Ashton, & Algina, 2004; Goddard, Hoy, & Hoy, 2004). Typically beliefs have been studied using surveys or questionnaires (Richardson, 1996); both types of assessments are problematic methods because they are not contextualized in teacher practice (Kane, Sandretto, & Heath, 2002; Speer, 2005). The studies about teachers' beliefs have examined a variety of areas including, but not limited to, general pedagogy (Snider & Roehl, 2007), reading instruction (Richardson, Anders, Tidwell, & Lloyd, 1991), and beliefs regarding

content area reading (Hall, 2005).

In a general study of teachers' beliefs about pedagogy, Snider and Roehl (2007) found that teachers believed in practices consistent with constructivism, small class sizes, and the value of learning styles. This large-scale survey research across a variety of socio-economic and geographic settings demonstrated unified beliefs regarding pedagogy in general. The teachers surveyed believed that student learning was linked to factors such as home environment and or learning problems rather than good teaching. Finally, the teachers' survey in this study saw teaching as more of an art than something effected by education and training.

Richardson et al., (1991) studied fourth, fifth, and sixth grade teachers' beliefs about reading instruction. They uncovered that teachers who believed in a bottom up philosophy of reading instruction were more likely to use a skills approach where those with a whole-language philosophy used authentic literature. This research demonstrated that teachers' beliefs about reading instruction affected classroom decisions regarding materials and instruction.

Hall's (2005) research into pre-service and in-service teachers' beliefs regarding content area reading found that teachers' beliefs regarding their lack of knowledge affected there decisions. Although both groups felt that teaching reading in the content could be worthwhile, they did not express confidence in their knowledge to do so. Pre-service teachers felt that since they did not have the knowledge to do so they should not have to teach reading; where in-service teachers felt that they should teach reading.

As these three studies illustrate, teachers have distinct beliefs regarding teaching and learning. They function to define the tasks and goals that teachers implement throughout the pedagogical decision making process (Nespor, 1987). These decisions affect the day-to-day teaching that occurs in the classroom. However, the traditional way of measuring teachers' beliefs through self-reporting is often viewed as inaccurate and superficial (Kagan, 1990).

Gill and Hoffman (2009) report that, "Measures of self-report have questionable construct validity because of bias, the interdependency of variables, and the uncertain representation by teachers concerning the distinction between knowledge and beliefs" (pp.1245-1246). Therefore, it is important to consider another lens for examining teacher beliefs about literacy instruction. Munby, Russell, and Martin (2001) suggest the method of practical argument for uncovering teacher beliefs. In this method teachers not only describe what they do, but why they do it, putting the focus on the justification for the causes of their behavior and decisions.

In this study, it is believed that teachers' beliefs about literacy instruction could be uncovered through the observation of shared planning time in which the teachers are working to develop a shared K-12 literacy vision. Teachers' discourse during this period affords the opportunity of recording teachers' rationales for their curricular and pedagogical decisions as well as their comments regarding their peers shared experiences.

Vision statements are developed by stakeholders to show where one is going with his or her vision. The statement identifies beliefs regarding literacy practices, clarifies direction over

time, coordinates the actions of stakeholders, and motivates people to work toward a particular goal (Vogt & Shearer, 2011). In the development of a literacy vision the key questions to be answered are ‘what is literacy?’ and ‘how does a successful graduate meet this vision?’ The creation of a vision is highly dependent upon the teacher’s literacy beliefs. Teachers’ beliefs include their personal identity, choice of pedagogical methods, ideas about subject matter, students, and efficacy (Goddard, Hoy, & Hoy, 2004).

### **Research Questions**

- (a) What are the common expressed beliefs about literacy instruction across teachers?
- (b) To what extent does the vision statement of the faculty align with comments in the collaborative sessions?

### **Methodology**

This study used qualitative case study methodology with the teachers as a group, making a single case (Yin, 2009). This was appropriate because the focus of the study was to develop an understanding of the teachers’ literacy beliefs as a whole. Case study methodology permits the researcher to study a group or individual as they engage in an activity to uncover what is common and pervasive (Yin, 2009). A qualitative approach was used because of its suitability in analyzing teacher dialogue, the need to incorporate a wide-angle lens (Spradley, 1980) and the socially constructed nature of teacher planning. This study examined teacher discourse to uncover common literacy beliefs between primary, intermediate, middle grades, and high school teachers as they developed a shared K-12 literacy vision.

### *Setting*

The study took place at a small southeastern suburban preparatory school located in a progressive city. The school has 630 students with no religious affiliation. The teacher-student ratio is 1:19. The school mission statement regarding instruction is “our goal is to ignite the full academic potential of every student. We use a “whole child” approach that promotes intellectual, emotional and social growth, while emphasizing problem solving, critical thinking and high-order reasoning.”

### *Participants*

The participants formed a convenient sample of teachers from a wide range of grade levels who were available to meet during a specific time. The group included a first grade and fifth grade teacher with 20 plus years of teaching experience in a variety of elementary grade levels. The two other participating teachers were a middle school Language Arts teacher with 15 years of experience in middle school and a high school English teacher with experience with middle school and advanced placement courses. All of the teachers had been members of the school community for at least 6 years and had experienced the same administrations and profession development opportunities regarding instruction during this time.

### *Research Design*

Although research was an outcome of this work, the design was established to assure that the teachers would be able to attain the school's goal of developing a K-12 Literacy vision. The design allowed for teachers to engage in self-reflection regarding their own literacy beliefs prior to meeting, to discuss areas of literacy instruction and how they implement them, and to reflect on the relationship of the vision statement to their classroom instruction. Therefore, each teacher completed a survey, met for six 45 minute periods and had time outside of the meetings to gather his or her thoughts and provide feedback to the group via email or the next meeting.

### *Uncovering prior beliefs and knowledge*

Teachers took the Literacy Orientation Survey (Lenski, Wham, & Griffey, 1998). They completed the survey prior to the first meeting. The purpose of the survey was to gather self-report data to correlate with the data collected in the shared planning sessions. The survey also assisted the teachers in thinking about their instruction and their beliefs about literacy instruction prior to the first meeting. This survey was appropriate because it has a constructivist view of literacy, the view expressed by the administration of the school and of which the teachers' had received multiple professional development opportunities over time.

### *Teacher Work Sessions*

The teacher work sessions took place during the course of the school day. The teachers used their planning period during this time and volunteered to participate in building a literacy vision. After each session, the researcher shared session field notes shared with the teachers for feedback and correction to assure that the teachers' statements were reflected accurately. In each meeting, the researcher used a tape recorder and field notes to record the team's discussions and reflections.

The sessions were planned with the final goal of creating a vision statement in mind. The first four sessions focused on a particular literacy topic to gather a range of teachers' beliefs regarding literacy instruction and to guide in the creation of the final vision statement. The focus of the first meeting was to have the teachers share a Language Arts lesson they recently did with their students; the researcher helped guide the discussion by asking the teachers about their learning goals for that lesson. The second meeting addressed a discussion about a unit teachers had taught; the researcher helped guide the discussion by asking the teachers about their learning goals for that unit. The third meeting focused on teaching comprehension. The fourth meeting focused on writing instruction. Each of these sessions were focused on sharing teaching practices and beliefs in order to set the stage for the final two sessions.

The final two sessions were focused on the creation of the vision. The fifth meeting was a brainstorming session regarding the goals of K-12 literacy instruction. The final meeting was the creation of the K-12 literacy vision. After the creation of their literacy vision the teachers each received a copy of the vision and asked to follow up with revisions and or comments in the form of emails.

### *Data Analysis*

Data was analyzed in a recursive (Stake, 1995) manner to uncover themes relating to literacy beliefs. Initially all the data was read and coded relating to general views about literacy, views about classroom instruction, and then views about development. After the first stage of analysis and organizing the data in a taxonomy supported by relevant examples from the transcripts, four categories consisting of beliefs about pedagogical techniques and curricular choices emerged. The data was then analyzed again to uncover the nature of the teachers' beliefs within these themes. The final pass at the data was aimed at clarifying the specific themes and developing the supports for each theme.

### **Results**

The analysis led to two broad categories of teacher beliefs considered important to literacy instruction and learning. The beliefs consisted of literacy as a meaning making process and teacher as facilitator of literacy instruction.

#### *Literacy as a meaning making process*

Literacy as a meaning making process was consistent as a theme throughout the sessions. The conversations regarding this theme highlighted important topics such as the reason for reading is comprehension and that in writing author's purpose is key.

The teachers defined comprehension as "going beyond the text." In the initial discussion regarding what is literacy and reading, the fifth grade teacher described comprehension as "so much more than being able to read a book." To which the first grade teacher responded, "Yeah, I mean it's not just word recognition." The teachers' understanding of comprehension changed from going beyond searching for a right answer to demonstrating an understanding of the text as a whole. The high school English teacher expressed frustration in helping her students see reading as a process of understanding when she shared,

*"can support it. But they're still thinking there's one right answer in the teacher's head, if I can predict what it is I'll get the grade."*

The fifth grade teacher also supported the above view in a follow-up comment,

*"They have very good word recognition, they do understand the words they're reading. They can say the word but they're not visualizing the mean behind the words."*

The conversation was further supported by the middle school teacher who shared,

*"Absolutely right but that's the first level of understanding--is the multiple choice; your child needs to take the information that they were given and make inferences and make comparisons and that would be, to*

*me, that would be more comprehension at my level; is that they can take the information they've been given, they can recall those words, they can recall those facts but can you take what you've read and make a comparison, can you make inferences, can you um support a fact from it?"*

The teachers' consistently defined literacy as requiring more than a retelling of what was "right there" in the text.

The teachers' also envisioned writing as a complex meaning-making event. In discussing different forms of writing instruction the teachers went beyond describing what they did; but described how they saw that the proper organization of writing led to students who understand the value of audience and the communication of ideas to add create meaning. In opening this conversation the first grade teacher described how she teaches her students that writing is about meaning making.

*A lot of the writing that I'm doing now is not as much individual writing but it's shared writing. . . I'm modeling and they're adding thoughts and ideas; um, this morning the idea was to make, you saw it on the board, the math story. It goes along with the reading, it has to make sense and have details.*

The fifth grade teacher followed this conversation by describing what she expected her students to achieve by the end of fifth grade so that they would demonstrate the ability to communicate through writing beyond the listing of basic facts.

*When students can write a good paragraph with details and support I want them to move on to write more so that each paragraph can flow into the next. The main idea, three supporting details, three supporting sentences, a closing sentence will all be a part of multiple paragraphs to provide more than just a simple retell but to provide like details.*

The high school teacher followed up this need for details and support in writing as a key element, when she shared that she wanted her students to be able

*to do a literary analysis research paper on their own with proper MLA formatting um, correct thesis statements, support, transition, away from a stereotypical five paragraph essay; I want them to be able to prove their point, if it's four paragraphs it's four paragraphs, if it's six paragraphs, its six...*

The overall consensus of these teachers throughout the meetings is that writing was more than simply putting ideas on paper, but a place for students to demonstrate deep knowledge and understanding about a topic.

As demonstrated in the excerpts above, the overall theme of literacy as a complex meaning making process was referred to throughout all of the meetings and supported by all of the teachers in a variety of ways. The support included complex definitions of what it means to comprehend and what it means to write; in both situations teachers described the process, as going beyond what is right there.

#### *Teacher as facilitator of instruction*

The second theme that was prevalent throughout the teachers' discussions was the role of the teacher. Each of the teachers saw themselves as facilitators of learning. They described their role as providing the appropriate instructional context within which students will grow and learn.

In the area of reading, the teachers believed that by providing a range of learning opportunities from literature circles, to learning centers, to dramatization, and analysis techniques students would come to meet the learning goals. They described these activities across grade levels and in a variety of contexts. For instance, the first grade teacher used guided reading and learning centers throughout her literacy instruction and took the time to explain how this works to the other teachers. The fifth grade teacher used a combination of whole class and guided reading to support students reading development supporting each instructional setting with probing questions to develop students thinking. The middle school teacher described how she taught the students literature circle roles and how she guided them in becoming independent with these roles. The high school teacher described how she had students read with a literacy analysis idea or a probing question in mind so that they could discuss the literature from a variety of perspectives.

A core belief of these teachers was that writing to communicate was at the heart of literacy. They saw a need to immerse students in writing but frequently lamented that there was never enough time. The teachers shared the belief that it was their role to facilitate the writing process and help students to write for a particular audience. The teachers talked about providing time for writers' workshop and journal writing. In addition, they talked about the need to grade for a purpose rather than to grade everything. The high school teacher described this as "*focusing you critique to assure that students get what you want them to do better.*"

#### *The final vision statement*

The final vision statement reflected the teachers' beliefs regarding literacy instruction (See Figure 1). The statement highlighted teachers' position that literacy is complex; teachers described comprehension as going beyond the concrete or 'right there' to something that needs to be applied. Furthermore, their vision statements (a) reflected the need for writing with support and (b) recognized the role of the audience.

Regarding the facilitation of instruction, the vision statement is less explicit. However, it does highlight the need for the writing process and for the study and analysis of multiple genres two items that require the teacher to facilitate learning.



FIGURE 1:  
Literacy Vision Statement

*The vision of language arts teacher leaders is for high school graduates to be careful, thoughtful, reflective, critical readers and writers.*

*To accomplish this vision each graduate will be:*

- *A reader who comprehends beyond the written or spoken word*
  - *A reader who applies what they read*
  - *A reader who can engage in analysis across a variety of genres and texts*
  - *A writer who is proficient in all stages of the writing process*
  - *A writer who selects and uses appropriate support*
  - *A writer who follows the conventions of language*
  - *A writer who recognizes the role of audience*
- 

### **Discussion**

The purpose of this study was to examine teachers' beliefs regarding literacy instruction through the formation of a school-wide vision statement. Teacher's beliefs were uncovered through the conversations and the teachers' statements supported explanations of these beliefs. The use of teacher dialogue during a meeting was an effective approach for uncovering teacher beliefs. The discourse provided the opportunity to uncover the teachers' rationales for their curricular and pedagogical decisions.

The shared experience had additional benefits. The teachers were able to learn from each other. The teachers were brought together explicitly for this process and were initially concerned about the lost planning time. However, the benefits of the process were most clearly expressed by the first grade teacher in a conversation prior to the start of the third meeting.

*I'll be honest with you.... my first response was oh dear God, here I have to go to another meeting. But now I have enjoyed listening to how everything is relevant at each level; it just is your perspective of the level and I think you know I'm not familiar with high school kids or middle school kids so for me to look at it in those terms it's been interesting; I've enjoyed it.*

### **Educational Significance**

This study supported the hypothesis that teachers' creation of a common vision statement provides a lens for understanding teachers' beliefs about literacy learning. Furthermore, teachers'

planning time provided a forum for teachers to display the rationales underlying their decision-making, rationales that are usually hidden from view, especially from the view of a researcher. Teachers normally hidden planning process was thus rendered visible, and hence open to investigation. Through the investigation it was uncovered that teachers beliefs about literacy instruction can be uncovered during through dialogue about instruction and planning. This finding aligns with the research by Gill and Hoffman (2009) and encourages questions regarding future work on teacher beliefs.

This study was limited by the lack of corresponding classroom observations to verify the teachers' belief statements with teacher action. Gill and Hoffman (2009) found that some teachers stated beliefs in meetings did not always related as clearly to teaching actions as others. This research would be strengthened by follow up with classroom observation. In addition, the nature of this research in developing a vision statement would allow for observation as teachers explain and train other teachers in understanding the vision statement. This would provide further understandings of teachers' beliefs regarding the key points of the vision statement.

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