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Central Connecticut State University, CT

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A call for teachers as literacy leaders: Bringing about change in communities

Helen R. Abadiano
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Lynda M. Valerie
Central Connecticut State University, Connecticut

It's a call to teacher leadership in literacy. And it's about time! As our schools grapple with the challenges of standards, high-stakes testing, and accountability we need resonant leadership at all levels of the profession, but more importantly at the very heart of classrooms where teacher leaders can make enormous impact on student learning, particularly in learning to read and write, and reading and writing to learn. Teacher leaders in literacy are effective teachers because they have the strategy, vision, and powerful ideas to improve their students’ literacy learning. They can inspire colleagues to do their best work and foster a climate of distributed leadership and collegiality where creative innovations thrive amidst increasingly overwhelming roles and responsibilities, with unfunded mandates, and limited support and resources.

In this issue we focus on the theme: “Teachers as literacy leaders: Bringing about change in communities.” Our purpose is to further meaningful conversation around teacher leadership that puts emphasis on the strengths of teachers as “experts” in literacy and who can take on the expanded literacy demands of a technological society.

Our conversation begins with Elene S. Demos’ “An interview with David Berliner: On leadership and high-stakes testing.” In his interview, Berliner, known for his publications on *The Manufactured Crisis: Myths, Fraud and the Attack on America’s Public Schools* (1995) and *Collateral Damage: How High-Stakes Testing Corrupts America’s Schools* (2007) emphatically notes that “the key element of leadership is the development of school culture... every kid can learn [by] putting into effect a rigorous curriculum and making sure everybody [learns]. Backup systems when kids drop out so they can’t drop out. It’s all about a culture of success.” He also challenges us to examine the accountability factor in depth—at what level are teacher leaders willing to accept “collateral damage” as a result of high-stakes testing? Then Michael L. Shaw welcomes us to the world of reading specialists and literacy coaches in his

If your actions inspire others to dream more, learn more, do more and become more, you are a leader.
John Quincy Adams
article, “Teaching and empowering reading specialists to be literacy coaches: Vision, passion, communication and collaboration.” Shaw discusses three overarching principles for successful literacy leadership—vision, passion, and communication and collaboration. Through his graduate students’ reflections we watch reading specialists transform into literacy coaches who are change agents and who have created a “culture of success” in their schools. In “Literacy leaders: Changing student achievement,” Rosemary T. Taylor and Glenda G. Gunter echo Shaw’s belief that literacy leadership in schools is essential to improving student learning. The authors also provide us with an expanded perspective on literacy leadership—that of “distributed” literacy leadership: “For all learners to improve in literacy and content learning there must be many literacy leaders.” Carol Ann Tomlinson’s article, “Intersections between differentiation and literacy instruction: Shared principles worth sharing” explores four powerful principles from the theory and research that inform differentiated instruction with an emphasis on literacy and adolescents—students differ as learners, teachers must study their students to teach them well, effective teachers “teach up”, and responding to student readiness, interest, and learning profile enhances student success. “They are principles that teacher-leaders and administrative-leaders in the field of literacy would do well to spotlight, model, and support development of in the work of those whom they lead because of the capacity of the ideas to benefit student achievement.”

In addition to our themed articles, Cathy Collins Block, Jan Lacina, Susan E. Israel, Nicole Caylor, Dixie Massey, and Katy Kirby report on the outcomes of their examination of the evolution of the report card and documentation of the newest paper and online reporting of student reading achievement as well as share with us their vision of what an innovative report card might look like. In their article, “Examining literacy report cards”, the authors argue that in today’s population of Generation X parents and stakeholders who are tech savvy, it is time for schools to “re-examine the function, and breadth, of paper-based school report cards which measure students’ literacy growth.” Michaela Colombo and Patricia Fontaine’s “Building vocabulary and fostering comprehension strategies for English language learners: The power of academic conversations in social studies” describes in detail a Historical Tutoring program piloted in fall 2008 semester aimed at providing ELLs and other students in fourth grade social studies with opportunities to receive language-rich and engaging instruction “that helps prepare them for citizenship and social responsibility and at the same time builds academic literacy and comprehension strategies.” The authors conclude that academic conversations have potential in facilitating student learning as evidenced by the positive responses from their ELLs and other fourth graders. “I think I can: Developing children’s concept of themselves as self-regulated learners” by Judi Randi complements Colombo and Fontaine’s article, with added emphasis on the use of literacy curriculum which provides “an ideal context in which to teach self-regulation through literary models, much like the stories some children may have heard at home.” Finally, Jan Lacina, Cathy Collins Block, and C. Tierney Weed take us on a journey through the International Reading Association (IRA) conferences from 1975 to 2006. “A historical perspective of the reading profession: A comparison of peer-reviewed presentations at the 1975, 1976, 2005, & 2006 International Reading Association conferences” gives us a glimpse of the range of peer-reviewed presentations during four selected years over the last 30 years of the IRA Annual Conference, and helps us understand and appreciate “how rapidly our field is moving forward, how often new topics were introduced, how many issues have sustained attention for a 30-year period” and the impact of literacy trends on our profession.

In keeping with our special topic on literacy leadership, our departmental columns address aspects of literacy leadership as well. In Review of Professional Books, our guest columnists Barbara A. Ward and Terrell A. Young’s “Professional books for literacy leaders” critiques eight books that “in different fashions... call upon teachers to look within their own classrooms, to reflect upon the instructional decisions they are making, and consider the best practices that will result in a generation of readers and critical thinkers rather than a generation taught to read merely to find the right answers.” Melissa Juclhniwicz’s Book Beat has “Growth: A goal for leadership” for its theme. The column presents some new fiction and some favorites that feature characters “who experience positive growth. Some are influenced by conscientious leadership; others make personal discoveries that result from gentle guidance.” In Review of Research in the Classroom, Diane Kern’s “Reading teachers as leaders: The promise of literacy coaching” describes three research studies, one each at the elementary, middle and high school levels, that focus on the changing roles of reading specialist—from teacher of struggling readers to literacy coach. Lastly, in Computers in the Classroom, Julia Kara-Sotiriou’s “Promoting technology integration through the leadership of school administrators” describes two survey studies that “investigated school principals’ practices and perceptions that are influential to the level of technology integration in their schools.”
David Berliner, an educational psychologist and Regents’ Professor of Education at Arizona State University, is a noted author, testing expert, and critic of the No Child Left Behind Act. He has written two highly controversial and enlightening books on testing in America’s schools.

The first book, *The Manufactured Crisis: Myths, Fraud and the Attack on America’s Public Schools* (1995), co-authored with B.J. Biddle, suggests that contrary to popular opinion, many of our schools are performing very high, while some of our schools are doing very poorly. The authors argue that the educational debate has been high-jacked by what they call the “far right,” the “religious right,” and the “neoconservatives,” with the help of conservative think tanks such as the American Enterprise Institute and the Heritage Foundation. The authors, who are both prominent educational researchers, painstakingly pick apart the claims made by the critics of the schools. Their basic argument is that American education is not in crisis, and in fact it does a pretty good job under increasingly difficult circumstances, and that the critics are motivated by ideology and not a concern for the nation’s children. Berliner and Biddle bring a sense of outrage to their analysis—as researchers themselves, they are shocked that others would fudge the data, provide incomplete analysis, and on occasion deliberately mislead the public.

In *Collateral Damage: How High-Stakes Testing Corrupts America’s Schools* (2007) with S.L. Nichols, the authors discuss the corruption surrounding high-stakes testing and the threat to the American educational system as well as the destruction and harm that occurs to a countless score of students, who are either held back or leave school because they cannot succeed. The book is a synthesis that pulls together a good deal of the background literature on high-stakes testing, combines it with some of the latest research on testing practices, and the myriad press accounts of the reactions to NCLB testing policies from teachers, administrators, parents, and students. The authors have marshaled a wealth of information to support their contention that high-stakes testing, far from having the uplifting effects promised by advocates and the policy makers who have embraced it as a reform lever for U.S. schools, is undermining the educational sys-
tem and corrupting all those who are touched by it. They also clearly demonstrate the discrepancies between the results of high-stakes testing and the NAEP test results, whereby states and school districts set extremely low cut off scores for the high-stakes tests to make themselves look good, but when tested using the NAEP, dismal data is presented to refute the former data.

In both of these books the authors provide a coherent, thoughtful, and comprehensive analysis, backed by extensive research, of the state of America’s public schools and the implications of our over reliance on high-stakes testing. These are must-read books for educators, policymakers, prospective and practicing school personnel, and concerned citizens—everyone who cares about the schooling of our children.

On March 21, 2009, David Berliner was the keynote speaker at the 3rd Literacy Essentials Conference at Central Connecticut State University in New Britain, Connecticut. I had the pleasure and privilege of interviewing him about his books and his views on the roles and responsibilities of teachers as leaders.

**Demos:** What do you consider as key elements for effective leadership in schools today?

**Berliner:** Well, every school that is successful with low-income kids develops culture and it seems to me that the key is the culture of achievement. The reason some schools are successful is the culture of achievement. They’re not terrific schools in many ways, as schools I admire. But there are many schools I do admire. But it’s all about culture and it seems to me if you develop an oppositional culture or a culture where the problems of neighborhood and family can outweigh the culture of the schools you lose. The school I’m thinking of is a high school of 75 percent Hispanics, 50 percent or more of free and reduced lunch, it’s a high school of lots of English language learners and 82 percent of them go to college every single year and they’ve been doing that for 20 years. And these are very unassuming educators. They just said we have to figure out how to make these kids successful and they do. So I would say the key element of leadership is the development of school culture and not just saying the words, you know, every kid can learn but putting into effect a rigorous curriculum and making sure everybody does. Backup systems when kids drop out so they can’t drop out. It’s all about a culture of success. That’s the key element, I think.

**Demos:** Reading consultants and/or literacy coaches are school leaders. They often present staff development, develop curricula, assist with district policy, and interact with teachers, administrators, and parents. What kind of leadership training should they receive in their college programs and their school districts to support change in the schools?

**Berliner:** The key issue for reading of course, is reading. After you break code which with normal kids is done relatively rapidly, the sooner you have them reading for fun and for what might be called critical literacy, I guess, the sooner the school’s job is over. I mean, the school’s job is not to teach reading; the school’s job is to enable reading in whole conversations around rich materials. What you want is kids to want to read and the school’s job is to interrogate them so they understand character, plot, theme, author intent, the writing that goes with the reading, but the teaching of reading strikes me as about as quick and simple a process as possible with normal kids under normal circumstances. It’s figuring out what books, what topics are of interest to kids and I just don’t know kids who won’t read if the topic is picked for them that they’re interested in. Whether it’s insects or airplanes, or low riding cars, it doesn’t seem to matter to me and I think our failure is to pick materials that engage youth at all levels. Kids who can read in 7th grade and don’t are just as much of a problem as kids who can’t read in 7th grade.

**Demos:** You have been a prolific writer over the years. Your two most recent books, The Manufactured Crisis with B.J. Biddle and Collateral Damage with S.L. Nichols, present a critical examination of high-stakes testing. What is it you want readers to take from these books?

**Berliner:** In the first one, The Manufactured Crisis the real issue was not that our schools were doing badly as all the critics were saying at
the time, but that some of our schools were doing badly. That difference is enormous. What you got was a right wing conspiracy to make America’s schools look bad when in fact you got a problem that the schools of many of those people were doing just fine, thank you. The schools north of Chicago were among the best in the world in international tests. The twenty districts north of Chicago scored as high as the highest scoring nations in the world. They were beaten by nobody in science and beaten by one nation in math in one of the last analyses. So the schools for wealthy kids in America were doing fine.

The schools for poor kids in America were doing awful. A combination of the newest teachers, the weakest teachers, the weakest leaders, inadequate school administration, parents in distressed neighborhoods with distressed poverty, etc. so the message of The Manufactured Crisis was we have a problem but it’s not nearly as widespread as people think and it is concentrated and it’s mostly due to poverty. And if we face the issues of poverty we might reduce some of that achievement gap.

The message in Collateral Damage is related to high-stakes testing, not assessment, not testing. I come out of a test and measurements background, I have training in psychometrics, and I find information important. Tests provide information. There’s nothing wrong with assessments of all kinds. The minute you put high-stakes on assessments, the minute you make the scores highly consequential for people, they can lose their jobs, schools can be reconstituted, and kids can fail to graduate high school. The minute the consequences go very high then people do all sorts of strange things and both the scores on the tests and the people themselves are corrupted. The scores are corrupted, you can’t trust them, and I don’t trust any of the high-stakes tests in the states and the people get corrupted. When I say I don’t trust the scores what I’m saying is that if you look at the percent proficient in Mississippi and you look at the percent proficient on the NAEP in Mississippi you have a discrepancy of huge proportions. So the state is perfectly happy to say we’re meeting all the requirements, our kids are all doing wonderful and an outside audit exam reveals that may not be true. Now I don’t trust either one in defin-

ing what proficient is but the gap between the two tells us that states are really for the most part gaming the system and are finding ways to corrupt the score.

Another part of that is not just the score but also the people themselves get corrupted. And it seems to me when you ask teachers who you want to be the moral leaders of a community, who you’ve given a certain societal function to that has to do with raising our youth in ways that raise them morally for citizenship and for leadership, when you put those people in untenable positions and ask them to cheat or game the system and have their students join them in that you’re corrupting the system. It’s like purposely putting sin in the way of preachers. You’re bound to get some to succumb and when we find our preachers are human we should not be surprised but we always are and the same thing is true of teachers. We want them to be moral leaders in our American communities and yet we have set up a system in which literally we have asked them to be corrupt. A teacher who admitted cheating to me, said: “Why should my job depend on how a 12-year-old kid feels that day and whether she got breakfast or not?” And it seems to me that’s a very hard question to answer. This is a mother of a couple of kids, a single mother and her job depended, literally, on how a 12-year-old kid felt that day and you can’t do that to people.

Demos: Much of the data in your book paints a rather demoralizing and bleak picture of high-stakes testing and some of the professionals associated with education. Though I believe the majority of the profession is honest and forthright, I believe many ethical and moral questions arise from the data, in fact, much of what you describe sounds similar to what has occurred in the financial markets and in some industries. As a profession, what must we do to refocus and do what is right for our nation’s children and youth?

Berliner: The reason what I present looks so much like the financial markets is because we all operate under the same law. The law was enunciated in 1975, here in New England for the first time by Donald Campbell, and the law reads: the more any indicator, whether that be a test or a stock price or the percent growth of the corporation that
year, takes on too much value, it is overly valued. Then that indicator gets corrupted and so do the people around it. So when you have a social science law it’s not surprising it applies to education and finance and everything else, human beings are going to be corrupted. If you start paying baseball players for home runs you know what, you get a lot more home runs and you get a lot more strikeouts. It’s the home runs that become the valuable indicator, not singles, doubles, or triples or hitting between shortstop and the third baseman. When the indicator takes on too much value and it’s too consequential, then people start gaming the system and they start, sometimes, cheating. Gaming is borderline, like drilling kids forever and spending a lot of time on the test. You don’t know if that’s cheating or breaking validity but it’s certainly gaming the system. That always happens and it happens on Wall Street as well.

Though the majority of the profession is honest and forthright as you said, the cheating rates we found in our look at what surveys will reveal, and they don’t reveal much because people aren’t going to admit to cheating, the best guess we have is somewhere between five and ten percent of teachers actually cheat on these exams. Now, depending where you’re sitting that’s a small or a large amount. I would call that a very large amount. And I do worry about that. I think we put people in untenable positions and they do those things. As a profession what must we do to refocus and do what is right for our nation’s children and youth?

You have to remember that once upon a time when we wanted to know if a test was any good we used teacher judgments as the criteria. And then in our age of science and our age of objectivity, as if there is such a thing, we’ve decided that the test was the better indicator and the teachers can’t be trusted. Now that’s a funny change in society and I have data that suggest that at least with young children, let’s say 2nd to 4th or 5th grade where my data is quite suggestive of just the opposite. We asked teachers to rank order their children in the classroom on the assessment test that the state was using for high-stakes because the state told us that they wanted to know which children needed help. That’s what the real goal was, they said, it’s what they always say and they don’t provide it. We got correlations running .8 and over between teachers’ ranking of their twenty-five kids and the state’s measures of those twenty-five kids. Well, if you can come almost as close as the reliability of the test by teachers’ judgments, then why would you need the test? If the real reason to give these tests is not to punish schools and teachers but to find out which kids need help, teachers will tell you that in a minute. You could save yourself millions and millions of dollars, lots of time, lots of anxiety, and identify exactly the same children. There’s something else going on that has to do with this absolute lack of trust of teachers’ professional judgment and that’s what we need to work on.

Demos: A number of educational leaders, psychologists, sociologists and professional associations have expressed grave concern as to what is occurring to a substantial number of children and schools that fail during high-stakes testing. It seems that one test can make or break a student or a school. What can educators do to illustrate that these tests might in fact be doing more harm than good? And how can we collectively work to change the current situation?

Berliner: The only model that I know of that is totally successful is the British Columbia model which just said, I’m not going to give the test and the British Columbia teachers don’t give the test and they say if the administrators want to give them, that’s fine but they’re not going to give them and parents have stood by the teachers. That’s what I found so remarkable. Parents understand that this is not the way to go particularly for young kids. I don’t have a problem with some forms of exit testing as feedback on schools to know that they’re doing their job. I don’t have a problem if you’re sampling a state with items to know that the state is actually meeting its obligations to provide worthy high school degrees to people, worthy elementary school attainments, you can sample kids, you can sample schools, and get that kind of data but when you hold every kid accountable, when you leave kids back it just seems to me that we’re imposing a model of testing that’s inadequate. Nobody wants a pilot who can’t pilot a plane, nobody wants a driver on the road who can’t drive a car, but is the difference between a score of 66
on a driving test and 64 on a driving test, does that make one a better or worse driver? I mean the cut scores are so arbitrary, and to hold a kid hostage for this, hold a school hostage for this is inappropriate.

The other way is to talk about growth models. The kid comes into school and you do some sort of assessment in second grade, and develop a growth model to see how the kids do by sixth grade, if they stay in the schools, you could judge whether a school is adequately meeting its responsibilities or not. Growth models on kids are a pretty important way; it seems to me, of finding out if the school is in fact producing pretty close to the expected growth patterns that you’re going to get. I have no problem sampling schools and learning that, finding out if the administration is adequate, that teachers are getting the professional development they need, etc., it’s when the stakes become high that everything gets corrupted, anxiety for kids, leaving kids back, the ninth grade bulge, all the kinds of things we see around the country, just a horrendous undercutting of the moral authority of our profession.

Demos: Though the U.S. has set a national goal of narrowing the achievement gap between lower income and middle income students and between racial and ethnic groups, there are a number of what you call out-of-school factors that play a powerful role in creating these achievement gaps. What are some of the significant out-of-school factors that educators must respond to, so we can have a nation of literate individuals?

Berliner: Well, you’ve raised a question how can educators respond to it and the real issue is that educators can only provide a wonderful, safe psychological and physical environment for children to learn in. That’s pretty much what I want from teachers. Then we have to go out and convince society that we have some real problems that need fixing and that are outside the purview of the teacher. My solution is what I call the fourth night solution. On the fourth night you do correction of papers at home. Every fourth night, don’t do it. Buy a rubber stamp; mark the papers “Good”, tell the kids to work harder next time with a rubber stamp. Get it done in three minutes and then go out to the Republican Club, the Democratic Club, the Lions, the Elks, the Women’s Auxiliary of the Moose. Go somewhere and tell people what’s going on with the lives of children. When you find out that five percent of your kids, a very slight number in a school of 500 spend their weekends hungry, people have to understand that on Monday you can’t teach well. When you have parents who can’t pay their rents and are moving around so that in the Hartford area alone kids will be in three schools in three years, you can’t educate them well. It’s impossible. So you have to stabilize people in their homes. That’s not a teacher function, that’s a societal function.

When you have 11 million kids without health insurance you’re going to have kids absent from school. There is nobody in the United States who believes you can learn school curriculum by staying home. Nobody believes that. Well, I guess the home schoolers believe that... If you’re going to learn some social studies and geography you might learn that at home with your parents but you’re not going to learn algebra at home. That’s a school subject. And if you have asthma that’s keeping you home because you have no health insurance, you have no breathing machine, you’re not going to learn it and so you just simply can’t run a school system in which poverty is concentrated and not expect inordinate burdens to be placed on that school system.

If the mental health rate is three percent, three percent people in the community have serious mental health problems, schizophrenia, paranoia, that sort of thing and you have an elementary school with 400 to 500 kids you’re going to have three to five parents who are crazy. Well that is a burden for a school. They have to deal with those parents. They drift in and out of their mental health. It’s a sad comment, but if the rate of mental illness goes to seven and eight percent as it does in poor communities, then what you’re seeing is 15 parents who are wacko, and you ask the teachers and the principals about wacko parents and how much time it takes to deal with them, and the suburban person and the inner city person is dealing with completely different social problems in their community because we have gathered our poor and our minorities into little ghettos and those schools that serve them are just going to have more people with problems. The drawing of school boundary lines has hardened, the ghettoization of people has hardened, and the gated
communities have increased. What you are seeing is a big social class, a ghettoization of America, and then of course, it’s racial as well and ethnic. Once you do that you’re concentrating all the problems of poverty in certain schools and then giving them exactly the same resources as those that don’t have those problems. So, in our craziness for equity in this country we give the same $8,000 per child per year to the schools that have enormous differences in their needs. Most of the rest of the world doesn’t do that. They give more money to schools that have harder to teach kids. The United States gives the same amount of money and that is incredibly unfair.
Teaching and empowering reading specialists to be literacy coaches: Vision, passion, communication and collaboration

Michael L. Shaw
St. Thomas Aquinas College, New York

Welcome to the real world of reading specialists and literacy coaches… Individually and collectively we hold tremendous potential for shaping our world… As literacy leaders, we are working in changing times with evolving professional roles

Vogt and Shearer (2007) give voice to the power of the role of the reading specialist/literacy coach as a literacy leader who works with both teachers and students to raise achievement. (Note: I use the designation reading specialist/literacy coach throughout this article because this is the title of this role adopted by the International Reading Association Standards for Reading Professionals: Revised 2003 [International Reading Association, 2004]). For the first time the dual roles of reading specialist and literacy coach were linked because IRA recognized the changing role of the reading specialist. Today, the reading specialist must not only be able to teach students, she or he must also be a knowledgeable, skilled literacy coach who mentors teachers.

Vogt and Shearer (2007) along with Walpole and Blamey (2008) also give voice to the complex nature of this evolving leadership role. They cite the vast body of research that shows that effecting schoolwide change is difficult because of multiple school, district, and community factors that impact on instruction. And the complex nature of this dual role is continuing to evolve. In the current draft of the revised International Reading Association 2010 Standards for Reading Professionals (International Reading Association, 2009) the reading specialist/literacy coach is being required to include greater focus on assisting and supporting teachers to provide effective instruction for students with diverse cultural and language differences along with focusing on new 21st century digital literacies.

Literacy coaching continues to be a very hot topic (Cassidy & Cassidy, 2009) because there is a strong body of evidence to demonstrate that collaborative and supportive professional development increases teacher effectiveness and results in higher student achievement (Joyce & Showers, 1995; Darling-Hammond, 1999). Many studies focus on the roles and responsibilities of reading specialists/literacy coaches that lead to higher achievement. Bean, Swan, and Knaub (2003) focused on schools that have won the International Reading Association (IRA) Exemplary Reading Program award, Title I schools that had been identified as having exemplary reading programs, and schools that were identified as having “beaten the odds” based on student demographics. They found that coaches in these schools serve as change agents who make a schoolwide impact by being a resource to teachers. They provide materials, make instructional suggestions, model strategy instruction, conduct professional development, mentor new teachers, coordinate the reading program, and oversee the school’s assessment system. They also serve as a liaison...
to the community and work with parents to build strong school/home connections.

Allier and Elish-Piper (2007) also found that reading specialists/literacy coaches led to increased student achievement in K-3 Reading First schools that had large percentages of students who were African-American or Hispanic, had low income, and were English language learners. They found that the most important roles included individual teacher conferences, using assessment to analyze data and plan instruction, and demonstrating effective instruction.

Blachowicz, Obrochta, and Fogelberg (2005) found that literacy coaching that provided professional development and support to teachers resulted in underachieving students in a diverse rural school district raising grade level benchmarks from 55 percent in 2000 to 80 percent in 2003. The reading specialists/literacy coaches in this study focused most on in-class demonstrations, modeling, support for instructional innovations, and feedback.

Biancarosa, Bryk, and Dexter (2008) found that students in 18 elementary schools serving diverse population made a 16 percent increase in year one of a literacy coaching initiative and a 27 percent increase in year two. The reading specialists/literacy coaches in this study focused on mentoring teachers to implement instruction developed by Marie Clay and expanded by Fountas and Pinnell.

These studies show that reading specialists/literacy coaches make significant impact on student achievement because they have a vision for effective literacy instruction based on theory, research and experience; they have passion to mentor teachers, and they are effective collaborators and communicators. In each study the reading specialist/literacy coach was committed to building a professional learning community that transformed instruction.

In recognition of the research on the impact of professional development, President Obama has followed up on a campaign pledge to significantly increase funding for education, including a strong focus on professional development (McNeil & Klein, 2009). I strongly support this commitment. As a contributing author (Shaw, 2008) to a newly published book, What Research REALLY Says about Teaching and Learning to Read (Kucer, 2009), I had the opportunity to make a presentation at a Congressional briefing along with other contributing authors to promote major changes in the educational policy that will be enacted by Congress. We focused on a significant body of research that was ignored by the National Reading Panel in its report (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2000), including motivation, differentiating instruction, using authentic assessments, teaching readers who struggle, responding to diversities in language and culture, and creating reading/writing connections. Among our seven recommendations, two focused specifically on the role of the reading specialist/literacy coach as a literacy leader who provides effective professional development and is in charge of teaching readers who struggle:

- Ensure highly qualified teachers by providing effective ongoing professional development that impacts student achievement and by supporting teachers as learners who are empowered to control their own learning.
- Reading instruction for readers who struggle, and the literacy coaching of teachers, should be provided by qualified teachers such as certified Reading Specialists.

IRA has also embraced the position of literacy coach as a literacy leader in its position statement on the Roles and Responsibilities of the Reading Coach in the United States (International Reading Association, 2004). This position statement supports the definition of coaching formulated by Poglinco, Bach, Hovde, Rosenblum, Saunders, and Supovitz (2003), which states:

- Coaching provides ongoing consistent support for the implementation and instruction components. It is nonthreatening and supportive — not evaluative. It gives a sense of how good professional development is. It affords the opportunity to see it work with students (p. 42).

The IRA Position Statement also establishes qualifications for coaches that will enable them to support teachers to make a school wide impact on reading achievement that I embrace. These qualifications include:

- Excellent classroom teachers of reading, preferably at the levels at which they are teaching;
- Have in-depth knowledge of reading processes, acquisition, assessment, and instruction;
- Have expertise in working with teachers to improve their practices;
- Are excellent presenters and group leaders; and
- Have the experience or preparation that enables them to model, observe, and provide feedback about instruction for classroom teachers. (p. 3)

Most importantly for preparing reading specialists to be literacy coaches, the IRA Position Statement further identifies three levels of coaching that reflect an increasing level of intensity and “risk” as coaches gain experience and trust. Figure 1 summarizes coaching activities at each level. IRA recognizes that being a literacy coach is a developmental process that develops over time as the coach gains the trust of teachers and the expertise to be effective in a wide range of multiple professional development initiatives.
Unfortunately, under the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2001 (Public Law No. 107-110) policy of the Bush administration, many coaches in Reading First schools were not able to provide the types of coaching initiatives identified in Figure 1. Instead, they were directed to focus their efforts on raising test scores through scripted instruction and year-long test preparation rather than collaborating with teachers to become more effective teachers of literacy. One teacher told me that in her school they call the literacy coach the test-prep czar. I have also heard sad stories from literacy coaches who are totally disheartened because they have not been permitted to use their knowledge and expertise to improve literacy. One literacy coach told me:

I feel like I can’t use my expertise to really help teachers the way I want. The principal told me I have to focus on raising test scores. When I told him that the way to accomplish this is to improve the quality of instruction, he said that he was “under the gun” to get the kids ready for the test. I feel like I have one foot nailed to the floor. Even when I take a chance to demonstrate an approach that engages students, teachers look at me with great trepidation and say, “That was a fantastic lesson. My kids loved it. Do I have permission to do what you showed me?” I then show them how they can incorporate my strategies while still meeting school mandates. It feels like I’m kind of playing a game, but the result is that teachers are going beyond skill/drill test prep. (Shaw, 2007)

This literacy coach was an experienced, successful classroom teacher and reading specialist with a strong record of increasing student motivation and raising achievement. She refused to give in to the testing pressures. She found ways to break down the barriers so that teachers could teach meaningful literacy “in the cracks.”

It has now been shown that the Bush NCLB policy and its focus on scripted, code-based instruction and using literacy coaches to be test-prep czars has been a failure. The most recent Department of Education study of Reading First schools (Manzo, 2008) found that while students became better decoders and recognized more sight words, there were no gains in reading comprehension, which is the overarching goal of reading instruction. In other words, while students were learning to name letters, decode, and read words, they didn’t get it when they read.

I am hopeful that now is the time for scripted reading instruction and the culture of testing to end so that we can prepare all reading specialists/literacy coaches to be transformative change agents for increasing student motivation and achievement based on the IRA Position Statement.

Preparing reading specialists to be literacy coaches: A developmental approach

The key for preparing reading specialists to be effective literacy coaches who become literacy leaders begins in the preparation that teachers receive in graduate reading/literacy programs. It is essential that these programs align their assessments with the current 2003 IRA Standards for Reading Professionals: Revised (2004) so that emerging reading specialists are also learning to become effective coaches. I further believe that it

<table>
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<th>Figure 1. Three Levels of Coaching</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Level One</strong></td>
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<td>Informal: Includes conversations with colleagues to identify issues or needs, setting goals, and problem solving; developing and providing materials for colleagues; developing curriculum with colleagues; participating in professional development activities with colleagues; leading or participating in Study Groups; assisting with assessing students; and instructing students to learn about their strengths and needs.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Level Two</strong></td>
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<td>More Formal: Includes co-planning lessons; holding grade level or reading teacher meetings; analyzing student work; interpreting assessment data to help teachers plan instruction; holding individual discussions with colleagues to support teaching and learning; and making professional development presentations for teachers.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Level Three</strong></td>
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<td>This include modeling and discussing lessons; co-teaching lessons; observing classroom instruction and providing feedback; analyzing videotaped lessons and providing feedback; doing lesson study with teachers to identify important learning goals and methods for achieving goals.</td>
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is important to implement a developmental approach based on IRA’s three levels of coaching identified in its position statement (International Reading Association, 2004) in order to ensure that emerging coaches build the essential knowledge, skills, and dispositions to be effective.

We are recognized by IRA as being a model program (http://www.reading.org/Resources/ProfessionalDevelopment/Accreditation/Support.aspx) because we created a comprehensive, developmental approach for implementing coaching initiatives that effectively prepare reading specialists/literacy coaches. We implement Level One coaching initiatives early in the program. Examples include preparing curriculum materials, creating a Handbook of Best Practices, and sharing a multicultural, multimedia webquest with grade level colleagues. We implement Level Two coaching initiatives in the middle of the program. Examples include conducting a professional development workshop for grade level colleagues (first in class and then in their school), co-planning lessons, and analyzing assessment data to help teachers plan. We implement Level Three coaching initiatives in our capstone course Organizing and Supervising the Literacy Program. Examples include analyzing their school’s literacy program and creating an action plan for improvement, modeling instruction, and facilitating a study group. (Note: The IRA Position Statement identifies leading a study group as a Level One coaching initiative, but we believe that in order to be an effective facilitator, the emerging reading specialist/literacy coach needs to have developed a substantial knowledge base, effective communication skills, a sense of empowerment that can only be realized at the end of the program.)

Ensuring opportunities for successful coaching experiences

We also recognize that our coaching initiatives for emerging reading specialists/literacy coaches are first steps in the lifelong process of learning how to be a literacy leader. This process begins with understanding and supporting adult learning (Lyons & Pinnell, 2001; Snow, Griffin, & Burns, 2005). Our class discussions emphasize essential communication and collaboration skills that respect and value all colleagues. We focus these discussions on the seven principles developed by Friend and Cook (2000):

1. Adults have vast knowledge, experience, and a great number of skills.
2. Adults have ideas, beliefs, values, and passions about learning.
3. Adults are goal oriented.
4. Adults are more likely to be flexible learners.
5. Adults have high expectations.
6. Adults have many commitments and demands on their time.
7. Adults are generally motivated to learn. (Lyons & Pinnell, 2001, p. 3)

Based on these principles, we focus instruction and class discussion on the importance of valuing and respecting all teachers, building trust, being open-minded, being flexible, being supportive, and being patient and persistent. We also emphasize that adult learners DO NOT want their time to be wasted!

We also recognize that most graduate students are new, or relatively new teachers, who have not yet developed the expertise and experience to coach more experienced, senior teachers. Thus, most of our coaching initiatives focus on grade level professional development that is implemented with supportive colleagues.

In addition, we also recognize that we are dependent on the support of principals to provide opportunities for our graduate students to implement our coaching initiatives.

Thus, I send a letter to all principals that explains the IRA requirement for reading specialist to coach and ask for their support to provide opportunities for our graduate students to complete these coaching requirements. In virtually all cases, principals have been very supportive because they welcome grade-level and schoolwide initiatives to improve literacy instruction.

Most importantly, we developed our coaching initiatives to support three overarching principles for successful literacy leadership.

Vision

Lyons and Pinnell (2001) state that reading specialists/literacy coaches “construct a vision of what is possible and make solid plan for realizing it” (p. 8). The reading specialist/literacy coach is often the person charged with creating a transformative vision for literacy instruction. In the ideal situation, this individual has met what Frost and Bean (2006) identify as the gold standard for being a reading specialist/literacy coach:

- Has experience observing in classrooms.
- Has experience working with teachers;
- Is an excellent presenter;
- Has experience modeling lessons; and
- Has experience observing in classrooms.

Thus, the literacy coach can be thought of as the conductor of a schoolwide orchestra who brings all teachers, students, and administrators together to create a rich, harmonious symphony of literacy learning. This conductor works with teachers, support personnel, administrators, and parents to create:
• High standards for success;
• Effective communication and collaboration to achieve high standards through authentic, meaningful, differentiated reading, writing, and oral language communication experiences;
• A schoolwide system to assess effectiveness and monitor progress; and
• A professional learning community that includes teachers, support personnel, administrators, and parents.

She or he inspires, motivates, mentors, instructs, facilitates, models, collaborates, and, ultimately, shares in joyful celebration of effort and achievement. (Shaw, 1996). The reading specialist/literacy coach as literacy leader is best expressed, perhaps, in the words of the ancient Chinese philosopher Lao Tzu (4th century BC/1963) who said of the best leaders, “When his task is accomplished and his work done, the people will say, ‘It happened to us naturally’” (p.73).

Vision is an essential ingredient for literacy leadership.

**Vision: Principles into practice**

Our program begins with the preparation of literacy leaders in the initial literacy specialist course, Language Development: Foundation for Literacy. This course focuses on the theory and research foundations for language and literacy development, including seminal studies. The major assignment is completing a research-based paper called, “Defining a Vision for Language and Literacy Development.” Graduate students then work together in grade-appropriate groups to begin the process of becoming reading specialists/literacy coaches by creating a Handbook of Exemplary Literacy Practices. They first share these Handbooks in class. Then, they share them with teachers on their grade level and their principal. The Handbook includes sections on balanced literacy, creating a literate environment, essential roles of the teacher, teaching 21st century digital literacies, and reaching out to parents. It also includes an annotated list of exemplary children’s literature for teaching specific reading strategies and an annotated list of exemplary websites for teachers that can be used to enrich their instruction. This Level One coaching initiative is a non-threatening first step in creating a vision for their school.

In the capstone course Organizing and Supervising the Literacy Program this vision becomes a Level Three initiative: Analyzing and Supervising the School’s Literacy Program. Graduate students conduct an ecological analysis of their school’s literacy program based on the IRA ten standards for winning an IRA Exemplary Reading Program award by interviewing the principal, department chairs in middle school and high schools, reading specialists, support personnel, experienced teachers, and parent leaders. (Find standards and guidelines for applying for this award at http://www.reading.org/Resources/AwardsandGrants/professional_exemplary.aspx) Based on their findings, they create an Action Plan for Improvement where they make a commitment to take a leadership role in developing one schoolwide initiative that will enrich and enhance the literacy program. They must identify detailed steps they will take to build a team approach. Examples have included strengthening parent involvement, implementing grade-by-grade curriculum mapping, developing grade level benchmarks, developing a schoolwide word-study approach, and mapping curriculum to create grade-by-grade standards. As a result of this initiative, we have already had two of our graduate students help their schools win the IRA Exemplary Reading Program Award.

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**Graduate Student Reflections:**

**Developing a Vision for Language and Literacy Development**

Lauren (fifth grade suburban teacher):

I can honestly say that I now feel very confident in my knowledge about language and literacy. It is so important for teachers to have a language rich environment in their classrooms. We can create this environment by promoting classroom discussions of topics of interest to our students, allowing opportunities for our students to see how print is used in multiple ways, and asking our students thought provoking questions. If we establish a balanced literacy approach in our classrooms we will be able to match students’ needs with appropriate materials and we can use a variety of instructional approaches to meet diverse learning needs. By implementing a balanced literacy approach, teachers… will have a classroom that promotes high quality language and literacy development.
Rob (high school English teacher):

Before I began this program I thought teaching English meant introducing students to great literature and teaching them how to write an organized, grammatically correct essay. My whole perspective has changed. I now teach my classes how to become strategic readers and writers. I explicitly teach reading strategies and have expanded my writer's workshop by focusing on a wide variety of genres and providing choice. I now focus on building prior knowledge and providing many more opportunities for literature discussions and peer writing conferences. I also teach my students to reflect on their reading and writing. I feel that I now teach students rather than just teaching the curriculum.

Graduate Student Reflections:
Analyzing a Schoolwide Literacy Program and Developing an Action Plan for Improvement

Stephanie (suburban middle school science teacher):

When I shared my school analysis findings with my instructional supervisor and principal, they were enthusiastic not just about my plans for the coming school year, but because of the overall reflection involved in this analysis. Sometimes it helps to see the forest through the trees. In other words, as teachers and administrators struggle to provide students with the best possible instruction in language arts, sometimes we get bogged down in details... Sometimes we get so focused on what is not working, on the challenges or the gaps, that we don't see successes. I know that before I engaged in this project, I could only see what isn't working. It was empowering to be able to enumerate all the parts of the plan that are moving forward and to be able to see that we are turning our program, slowly but surely, into a true balanced literacy program.

Dina (urban third grade special education teacher):

In the two years of working at P.S. XXX, I have been so focused on my readers and writers and the literacy instruction within my classroom that I never really devoted much attention to what was happening throughout the school... I found this analysis to be very effective because it allowed me to identify specific strengths and weaknesses in the literacy program. I was encouraged to take an active role and create an action plan for improvement of the program. By doing this, I feel that I am actually taking a step forward in my educational career and stepping out of the confines of my classroom. All educators in my school have the common goal of preparing students to become lifelong readers and writers by promoting student success in reading and writing. It is my responsibility as a literacy teacher and specialist to facilitate actions that will enhance the achievement of this goal.

Passion
The process of transforming expertise in teaching reading/literacy to students begins with passion. Literacy coach Jennifer Allen writes:

I am fast talking, fast walking, and full of life. I spring out of bed each morning ready to tackle new challenges, and flop into bed at night depleted of all energy. My mind is always at work, churning with new ideas and thinking.

(Allen, 2006, p. 1)

Similarly, Lesley Oransky, English language arts coordinator of a very successful school district, says:

When I interview teachers for a reading specialist/literacy coach position, the first thing I look for is passion. Is this a person who lives and breathes a commitment to make a difference. Is this a person who children will run up to share what they are reading and writing because they know they will get a big hug? Is this a person who can excite teachers to want to learn?

(Oransky, 2005)
Passion is infectious! It inspires students and teachers. It builds enthusiasm, commitment, and energy. Passion is an essential ingredient for literacy leadership.

**Passion: Principles into practice**
Passion is a disposition, which makes it difficult to teach and assess. We focus on passion in our coaching initiative to conduct professional workshops that are included in both our Diagnosing and Teaching Students with Literacy Difficulties course that takes place in the middle of our program and our Organizing and Supervising the Literacy Program capstone course. These workshops first take place within our classes as dress rehearsals for the opportunity to conduct them on-site in their schools. Graduate students work together to create professional development workshops that focus on topics that have made a great impact on their teaching.

Graduate students also developed a workshop evaluation form for feedback from colleagues that identifies keys for effective presentations based on their experiences as workshop attendees. They know what works, and this includes the presenter's passion.

We have experienced many workshops that have enlarged our vision to make a major impact on instruction. Examples include Comic Relief for Readers and Writers: Using Comics and Graphic Novels to Teach Reading and Writing; Watch Out, Oprah! Launching Book Clubs in Our Classrooms; and How Can a Secondary Teacher Use Picture Storybooks in His or Her Classroom?

**Communication and collaboration**
Puig and Froelich (2007) state that one of the key principles for effective literacy coaching is building relationships with teachers. They emphasize that literacy coaching is a team-building activity. Similarly, Lyons and Pinnell (2001) note that in order to effect change, it is important for the reading specialist/literacy coach to create a culture for collaboration that supports teacher learning. They emphasize the importance of building trust, valuing contributions from all teachers, and developing shared responsibility.

Communication and collaboration are essential ingredients for literacy leadership.

**Communication and collaboration: Principles into practice**
During our Organizing and Supervising the Literacy Program course graduate students must shadow a reading specialist to gain insight into the multiple dimensions of this position. Students observe the specialist in a variety of contexts and have ongoing discussions. In their written reflections, they identify the qualities they observed that support communication and collaboration. The qualities that are most frequently identified include valuing and respecting all teachers, building trust, being open-minded, being flexible, being supportive, and being patient and persistent.

The communication and collaboration skills graduate students learn are then applied in two Level Three communication and collaboration coaching initiatives:

- Facilitating a mini-study group that focuses on a need identified by grade-level colleagues. Our graduate students then find a teacher-friendly article that forms the foundation for the study group. They distribute the article at least two weeks in advance of the scheduled study group in order to give teachers sufficient time to read and think about the article. They then plan a 45-minute discussion during a lunch period or shared preparation period, making sure to include snacks because we all know snacking is essential for thinking and planning. They are also responsible for developing discussion goals that focus on taking steps to make an impact.

**Graduate Student Reflections: Conducting a Professional Workshop**

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<th>Danielle (suburban 2nd grade teacher):</th>
<th>Jessica (urban third grade teacher):</th>
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<td>I was so nervous before presenting my workshop. But, once I began I could tell that my colleagues were really interested [in teaching nonfiction reading text features]. I created lots of opportunities for discussion and hands-on activities. I was thrilled that teachers noted in their evaluation forms that I gave them great ideas to use with their classes. One teacher even wrote that I inspired her to use all of my suggestions.</td>
<td>I had never shared my comic book reading and writing approach with my colleagues. They LOVED the idea. They saw how my struggling readers became so motivated to read and write. I felt that I really made an impact.</td>
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on instruction. Finally, they facilitate the discussion to achieve these goals. Our mini-study group initiative includes an evaluation form that is completed by participating teachers.

- Conducting literacy coaching by pairing up with a colleague to co-plan and model a literacy lesson that is then followed by co-planning and observing the colleague’s lesson. Graduate students also have the option of working together with a colleague to plan and co-teach two lessons, the first in the graduate student’s class and the second in the colleague’s class. Our literacy coaching initiative includes a Reading Lesson Protocol that is used as a tool for supporting post-lesson discussions to support professional development.

Noted below are examples of students’ written reflections.

**Melissa (suburban first grade teacher):**

Not only does Liz have the responsibilities of staff development, instructional planning, curriculum design, pulling students for Academic Intervention Services (AIS), pushing into classrooms, peer observations and screening new entrants, I also observed many teachers popping in and out wanting help on various aspects of balanced literacy, asking questions, and needing materials for particular lessons. Liz graciously stopped what she was doing and assisted anyone who walked through her door, I truly have a great deal of respect for what she does and her contributions to our school.

**Katie (suburban fifth grade teacher):**

From this experience I learned the importance of working as a team player. The reading specialist is not only a leader but a team player as well. She has the responsibility to lead her colleagues and guide them based on their questions by using her knowledge of literacy. She also has the responsibility to work as a team with each teacher who has students that she services in order to provide consistent instruction... I found it important to know what is going on in the classroom. If the class is learning poetry, the specialist can incorporate poetry into her instruction to teach strategies... I have learned that the role of the reading specialist plays an important part in the school. Her teaching skills and knowledge impact on many teachers, students, and families. When everyone works together it is a powerful tool for success for our struggling readers.

**Graduate Student Reflections: Conducting a Study Group**

**James (suburban high school special education teacher):**

At the end of our study group, it was obvious to me that we did reach our goals. We discussed how we currently integrate character education into our classroom and analyzed why we are not able to consistently do this. Also, we discussed the fact that literature could be used in content area subjects to promote character education... Overall, this was an extremely valuable experience for my future role as a literacy coach and reading specialist. First, carrying out this study group made me feel that I had a strong voice. It also made me feel good that my rationale was supported by fellow teachers. Secondly, it helped me understand that when you lead a study group you sometimes have to prompt teachers with questions in order to facilitate participation. At first, many of my colleagues were reluctant to speak about how they integrate character education into lessons. Therefore, I had to use my own experiences to facilitate the discussion. This taught me that providing others with examples puts them more at ease with their own ideas and encourages participation. Next, I learned that providing teachers with a highlighted portion of the text was useful in facilitating our conversation. Many of the teachers told me that they did not have time to read the entire text, but they were able to quickly scan and skim the highlighted portions to understand what we would be talking about... This experience taught me that when carrying out a study group, the literacy specialist must consider the areas that teachers feel would be most beneficial to discuss and focus on. Finally, I also learned that study groups must be carried out in a pleasant, non-defensive manner. Our group worked very well together and the discussion went very smoothly. However, this came about because we all respected one another's opinions and experiences... Overall, this was a valuable experience that made me feel that I can have a voice in curriculum and education in my school. Furthermore, it made me feel confident for my future as a literacy specialist.
Carolyn (suburban sixth grade teacher): In planning my study group I was very nervous. I was unsure as to what to expect... After conducting this study group with a group of my colleagues I feel that this is something we should do more often.... I felt that my study group was extremely effective. My group was very receptive and loved the chapter I provided for the topic of discussion. At the end of our discussion we were already planning on additions and changes we can make in our guided reading groups... I learned many things about working with a group of colleagues. First of all, I learned that you must be flexible, it is important to choose a time slot that works for all interested parties and to provide plenty of time for everyone to read the article. I also learned that as a group leader I need to keep us focused and on topic. It is also important to find a relevant topic... In working with a group of colleagues it is important to set goals but also be flexible. In discussing a topic conversation can very easily turn into an appropriate yet different direction. You must be flexible and allow the conversation to flow. Lastly, I learned that it is important to listen to everyone’s ideas. Everyone has something worthwhile to contribute; therefore, everyone must be heard.

Graduate Student Reflections: Literacy Coaching

Linda (suburban first grade teacher): The experience of working as a literacy coach was eye opening. It allowed me to apply the knowledge and skills I have acquired. I listened to the teachers’ concerns, identified area to work on, helped create a plan based on the identified needs and guided the teacher through the lesson... With my ability to evaluate and create plans to meet children’s reading needs, I can see myself becoming very involved with guiding the school community on better reading and writing practices.

Laura (sixth grade suburban special education teacher): My lessons focused on aspects of the unit that Susan felt she needed modeling on and helped her through the strategies that she struggled most to teach... The whole literacy coaching was riveting, Susan and I truly enjoyed the learning experience... It was a truly beneficial experience. I was happy that we turned the experience into a month long expedition.

Linda concluded her reflections with a list of Essentials for Effective Coaching:

- Have an open mind.
- Discuss with the teachers you're working with the areas they want to work on and make suggestions when appropriate.
- Encourage teachers to observe you teaching your class.
- Point out positives you observe in a teacher’s class prior to and after the coaching lesson.
- Explain and provide research on the topic you are coaching.
- Select the appropriate materials.
- Develop a rapport with teachers.
- Follow up after lesson is over and provide support.

Epilogue

All coaching initiatives are included in a leadership portfolio. At the end of the course Organizing and Supervising the Literacy Program, graduate students must write an epilogue that looks back at all their reading specialist and literacy coaching initiatives to reflect on principles and practices that establish a commitment to professionalism and lifelong learning. Lauren, a suburban middle school teacher, gave voice to many of reading specialists/literacy coaches when she wrote (in bold):

For my students:
- To always listen attentively
- To be a mentor
- To be a positive influence
- To make learning exciting
- To encourage
- To be a role model
- To introduce “best” practices for being a great reader and writer
- To never stop caring
- To help them “Raise the Bar”

For my colleagues:
- To always listen, process, and then speak
- To share ideas and collaborate in regards to students, learning and our education
- To turn-key professional development seminars
- To maintain a family-like atmosphere
- To be a mentor and a friend
- To help them “Raise the Bar”

For parents/community:
- To work together and adhere to the belief that it takes a whole community to raise a child
- To listen to concerns, questions, comments
- To build connections between home and
school
• To encourage attendance at workshops that will help them with their children
• To make learning important/meaningful for their whole family

Summary
We made a major paradigm shift in our preparation of reading specialists in response to the 2003 International Reading Association Standards for Reading Specialists, Revised (International Reading Association, 2004) that linked the teaching of reading specialist skills with the development of literacy coaching skills. To meet these new standards, our graduate literacy program faculty examined every major assignment in every course and planned how we could build on the strengths of those assignments by adding literacy coaching initiatives at the appropriate developmental level as graduate students moved through the program. We also realized that since we were adding new coaching assignments, we needed to eliminate assignments that were not top-priority to prevent our graduate students from burning out.

Both faculty and program completers unanimously agree that the steps we took have significantly strengthened our program. We built on the qualities we already had in our program to prepare reading specialists who work with students, and then added coaching initiatives to prepare literacy coaches who support and assist teachers.

Ever since we initiated our coaching initiatives four years ago, virtually all completers have noted in our Program Completer Survey that they would recommend our program. (Two completers wrote that they could only recommend the program if graduate students were prepared to complete the very heavy required assignments.) Using a five-point Likert scale for the survey, 96 percent of completers in these last four years either strongly agreed or agreed that they feel prepared to “Use understanding of the organization and supervision of the literacy program to be able to take a leadership role in enhancing, enriching, and reforming education by supporting teachers and paraprofessionals.” A sampling of open-ended responses include:

• The faculty is amazing. They really care and do all they can to help you succeed. The program is intense but it really covers all you need to be a successful literacy specialist and literacy coach.
• I feel very prepared to be the literacy specialist in my K-6 building!
• I feel prepared and have no questions as to what I will be doing as a reading specialist/literacy coach.
• Overall, this program prepares you for the many responsibilities that a literacy specialist has in today’s schools.

We also continue to expand our literacy coaching initiatives and appropriate preparation based on suggestions from practicing reading specialists/literacy coaches. We have added assignments that focus on writing a grant proposal with the result that two graduate students recently won awards; One received a Smartboard from a District grant and the other received outdoor playground equipment for kindergarten classes in her school from a corporate grant. We have also added a curriculum mapping assignment that focuses on meeting with teachers across the grades to create a school-wide developmental continuum of skills and strategies along with benchmark performances. At the middle school/high school level this mapping focuses on identifying essential reading strategies that will be taught in all content-area classes.

I strongly believe that the commitment to prepare reading specialists/literacy coaches will make a significant impact on student achievement. It gives voice to the belief that, “It takes a village” to educate a child, and to the reading specialist/literacy coach as a mentor who:

• Is a role model;
• Motivates and inspires;
• Teaches, informs, and explicitly demonstrates;
• Guides and supports;
• Provides specific, positive feedback;
• Respects each teacher as learner and responds to each individual by continually assessing strengths and identifying needs to address;
• Uses the Gradual Release of Responsibility model (Pearson & Gallagher, 1983) to guide teachers to independently apply the strategies they are learning; and
• Celebrates effort and achievement.

Similarly, Nancy (who became a reading specialist/literacy coach a year after she completed our program) wrote, “What I will do as a literacy coach”:

✓ Listen to the teacher’s ideas and thoughts about their approach to teaching literacy.
✓ Be respectful while offering suggestions that will enhance their current practice.
✓ Carefully select my words and suggestions to create a positive learning experience that will benefit the teacher and help them learn.
✓ Be a helpful voice to provide positive suggestions and constructive feedback that will benefit the teacher.
✓ Be open to the ideas and strategies of others.
✓ Take time before observing or making suggestions to get to know the teacher and the needs of the students in her class.
✓ Become a resource for teachers who have questions about literacy instruction.
In 1996 when I was a literacy coach (then called a “staff developer”) in the Bronx, New York, I co-taught a unit of inquiry with Rita, a third grade teacher, that focused on having students research their family histories. I had won a small grant from the Board of Education to fund this project by allowing us to purchase disposable cameras and audiotapes so that students would be able to photograph their families and record interviews. At the end of the unit students published books of their research that included the photographs and celebrated with an author party and a multicultural food festival for families. Students, Rita, and myself also kept reflective journals during this project. In her final reflection, Rita wrote:

When Michael called me and asked if we could collaborate on a Family History project together, I jumped at the chance. We had worked successfully on previous projects with my third grade class but, in truth, I had no idea what a Family History project entailed. I wondered what my students would write about. How would we motivate them to succeed? Would we achieve the goals set forth in the grant proposal? Did we achieve our goals? You bet we did! The Family History project motivated the reader and the non-reader alike. They gained ownership of their own lives and learning. When we find the connection between ourselves and the world around us, whether it is through photography, reading books, writing prose or poetry, or talking or singing into a tape recorder to hear our own voices, we are becoming part of something bigger than ourselves. We are becoming a part of history.

I truly believe that preparing reading specialists/literacy coaches to be literacy leaders who have vision, passion, and communication and collaboration skills gives us great hope for the future.

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National Institute of Child Health and Human Development. (2000). Report of the National Reading


# NEW ENGLAND READING ASSOCIATION
## 62nd ANNUAL READING CONFERENCE
### Striving and Thriving: Journeying into Literacy

**September 23 & 24, 2010**
Crowne Plaza Hotel
Nashua, New Hampshire

**Please Note:**
✓ Presenters are responsible for travel expenses as well as handouts/copies for presentations.
✓ One-day conference registration will be provided to accepted presenters.
✓ An overhead projector and screen will be provided. All other technological materials must be provided by the presenter(s).
✓ Presentation lengths include:
  - Full- 60 or 75 minutes
  - Institute-2 hours

E-mail proposals to:
Eileen Leavitt
leavitt@worldpath.net
by February 1, 2010.

E-mail correspondence is preferred.

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## Proposal Form
**Deadline: FEBRUARY 1, 2010**

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| Early Childhood
| Elementary
| Middle
| Secondary
| Reading Specialist
| Literacy Leader
| (Teacher Leader, Administrator or Higher Education) |

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| Reading Research
| Family/ Community Literacy
| Technology
| Assessment
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| Trends & Topics
| Instruction
| Coaching |

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<td>(Bio should include, but is not limited to previous experience presenting as well as courses and grade levels taught.)</td>
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For updated information visit:
www.nereading.org
For all learners to improve in literacy (reading, writing, listening, speaking, thinking, and viewing, communicating with multiple symbol systems) and content learning there must be many literacy leaders. For purposes of this article a literacy leader is a teacher, administrator, teacher assistant, parent, or community member who knows the research on literacy learning and uses that research to advance learning of all students. The teacher could be a designee with specific responsibilities such as an instructional coach, literacy coach, interventionist, or classroom teacher who collaborates with others to improve student learning. With the need for all students to read, write, speak, and think at higher levels while learning rigorous content in all grades from kindergarten through twelfth grades, it becomes clear that distributed literacy leadership throughout the school community is essential.

Trend: High expectations for all learners
From research conducted during 2007 and 2008 in schools and districts which have made significant gains in student achievement as measured by state accountability assessments, themes have arisen regarding teachers and their work. One of the most important findings is that high expectations are present for all students. To accomplish consistently high expectations curriculum, instruction, and classroom assessment are aligned by teachers planning together. This alignment specifically targets vocabulary, fluency, and comprehension in addition to target content learning objectives—such as the causes of the revolutionary war and more.

First of all, teachers who teach the same grade or course plan their instruction, use of both text and technological resources, and assessment together. They have regularly scheduled planning sessions at least weekly. Typically, elementary reading teachers develop their stations or centers together focusing on vocabulary, fluency, comprehension, and writing. Middle and high school teachers, regardless of content area responsibility, plan together to align curriculum, instruction, and rigor related to expectations of student work.

In addition to planning horizontally, these teachers periodically plan vertically with the teachers of grades or courses that precede theirs and with those that follow. This type of alignment assists in creating a clear mental model of what “on grade level” or “appropriate rigor” means. Such horizontal and vertical planning supports teachers in expectations for vocabulary and comprehension so they are encouraged to not use less than on grade level vocabulary or texts with students. It is also a good idea for teachers of the same grade or content responsibility in various schools to have collaboration related to appropriate rigor and look at examples of what “on grade level” looks like. This type of among school collaboration prevents lower level mental models of appropriate rigor from being created or challenges it if such thinking already exists.

In schools that make fewer gains, common planning often does not include assessment. In the schools making gains in student achievement, the classroom assessments are developed by teams of teachers teaching the common curriculum to be sure high expectations are consistently measured at that level. Then, teachers can compare student performance and collaborate on next steps.

Trend: Empowerment through professional development
Professional development, respectful of the adults and of their learning needs, is essential for literacy leaders in assisting others to become expert in literacy infusion. Based on observations and structured interviews with 60 district and school leaders, the way professional development is conceptualized has changed from didactic to experiential, thoughtful, collaborative, and immediately applicable to the classroom. Amongst the many barriers to successful literacy infusion that have been
found to exist, ineffective teacher professional development has been cited by many studies as one of the biggest (Shelly, Cashman, Gunter, & Gunter, 2008). Properly designed professional development aims to make changes in instruction with integration of literacy and technological knowledge into their curriculum, and most importantly to improve student achievement and skills in literacy. Integrating information technology combined with literacy effects attitudinal changes in teachers and students.

A meta-analyst of over 200 research experiments concluded that technology used to deliver content improvements attitudinal outcomes, increases student achievement, and has the opportunity to create interest in reading. Digital media has remarkable potential for teaching and learning; however, they are worthless if quality literacy strategies are not available and teachers do not have the proper professional development and leadership. An important starting point is recognizing that a substantial barrier to changing instructional literacy strategies is based on the teachers’ lack of confidence, collaborative opportunities, and leadership abilities. Literacy leaders through professional development can provide the support teachers need to build their confidence. Collaborating with literacy leaders affords opportunities for teachers to learn with technology, observe literacy infusion in classroom-like environments, and teach with innovative tools in expert-supported nurturing environments. These strategies can extend the definition of the term literacy through expanded newer forms of mediated interactions (Gunter and Kenny, 2008), meeting not only the 21st century skills necessary to compete in a global economy by developing students proficiency with the adult needs of choice and self-efficacy—believing that I can influence student achievement. An example, elementary, middle, and high schools have had whole school book studies on Improving, Reading, Writing, and Content Learning (Taylor, 2007) and report that such a text supports the on-going expectations of infusing research-based literacy in all classes. A relatively new text, Ahead of the Curve (Reeves, 2007) is being studied by a high school in our community to initiate the conversation about assessment and grading. As schools progress with embedded professional development book studies tend to be voluntary with literacy leader taking the lead on different chapters, trying out ideas, and discussing how implementation worked at the next book study session. These types of professional development empower teachers and encourage change through deep thinking about their practice and provide a safe culture for trying out new strategies or instructional resources.

**Trend: Expectation of collaboration**

In addition to the trends of high expectations for all students and empowering professional development, another consistent trend is the expectation of collaboration by all of the adults within a school. Collaboration is not left to chance, although teachers may choose the focus of their collaboration. Successful collaboration requires literacy leadership across the school so that the basis for the collaborations are grounded in research and supported by data. A common example of collaboration is for regularly scheduled data meetings for grade levels or those teaching the same course to study their students’ monitoring data. Monitoring data may be fluency, comprehension, vocabulary, or classroom assessment. It may also include students’ daily work like writing or responses to questions. At Castle Creek Elementary School the teachers meet weekly to study their data, to see how each teacher’s student work compares to another, and to seek solutions for students who are not reaching the expectation of performance.

An example of quality collaboration is the experience we have had as literacy consultants to a middle school social studies grant, sharing with teachers research-based strategies, then they implement the strategies and collaborate with one another on how these strategies work. This grant includes mentor teachers to visit with others who would like a mentor to assist with instructional planning, model lessons, and coaching.
Recently, we visited one of the novice teacher’s classes with a mentor. We discovered she was doing a masterful job of implementing stations with text reading and high level questions exhibiting such expertise that any observer might have thought her to be an experienced teacher. She and the mentor plan together, then the novice observes the mentor’s instruction so the novice can see how the students respond and what she might expect. The result is extremely high professional performance by a novice teacher. We should add that at least weekly these social studies teachers send emails to us that they are being recognized in their school as role models of literacy learning, when just a short time ago they balked at the idea of using literacy strategies!

When we look at secondary school curricula and instruction, many times there is disconnect between subject-specific content and literacy skill building. The focal point in many successful schools is to focus on the merging of literacy into other subject areas (i.e., reading and writing across the curriculum) to assist students in not losing their motivation to read. In recent studies (Gunter & Kenny, 2008), students in middle school were particularly vulnerable at losing motivation to read and ability to visualize text. This research focuses on ways to increase motivation of students to read and write, develop their ability to visualize text, to see the innate benefits from reading regardless of context. In particular, the researchers found that this age group needed literacy leaders who focus on building on students’ strengths and to overcome their weaknesses. Several schools that were successful in these endeavors have teams of teachers that have become the literacy leaders by making literacy part of their curriculum and instruction by developing innovative digital projects for the students that focus on reading and writing. These teachers serve as role models to others by providing avenues and lessons learned. None of their successes would be possible without a strong commitment to collaboration.

We would be remiss if we did not offer a high school example since many high school teachers work in isolation. With collaboration as an expectation and the results for collaboration are shared, teachers in a local high school select their focus for collaboration and work on it throughout the year. The mathematics teachers determined for the 2008-2009 school year they would work on mastery learning since mathematics is sequential and often students who stumble early in the year give up and then do not proceed to higher level coursework. The mathematics teachers have eliminated giving zeros and allow students to retake tests until they show mastery. Student motivation has improved as have their grades. The students are exhibiting more endurance in a learning task, which is important since lack of endurance is often what reduces individual’s performance on accountability assessments. One of the greatest challenges in higher level mathematics is vocabulary and comprehension of mathematical text, therefore literacy leaders in mathematics are essential to improving student achievement.

**Trend: Technology infusion with digital media**

Technology infusion or integration can be fulfilled with leadership from the teacher and the administration within the school system. As leaders they are critical to the successful curriculum and technology integration that will increase student literacy. Leadership takes on many forms, one of them being teachers’ and administrators’ willingness to take on new challenges and learning innovative ways to motivate students. These techniques may involve the use of technologies that the students may actually be more proficient in than they are, but the effort is worth it. Technology used as a learning tool provides students with prevalent cognitive tools. Acquiring technology skills alone only fulfills a minimum level of the skills needed for the future. Students need to learn how to use technology in an intelligent and creative manner for communication and media literacy to meet the 21st century and current governmental legislative standards. Teaching literacy through the creating of digital movie trailers is a process that uses technology while combining learning objects and cognitive skills that allows students a new methodology of learning literature. In studies conducted by Gunter and Kenny (2008) they found that combining technology and digital media with the integration of stories and narrative provide the intrinsic motivation for otherwise reluctant and striving readers to begin to read. For the past five years they have been evaluating forward-thinking teachers who, under their supervision, learn to use external stimuli to inspire internal motivation to read. These teachers have implemented new curriculum models such as the Digital Booktalk Curriculum Model that integrates video and reading into various curriculum areas. During the course of instruction using Digital Booktalk these teacher literacy leaders have found increased students’ motivation to read books for the purpose of creating video book trailers. In the book trailers, students re-enact the most important scenes and record them onto 2-3 minute video shorts. Like movie trailers, these book trailers present important scenes and create a means for the students to express their ideas as to themes, settings, and overall story structure of the book.

One such success story is Christine, a middle school teacher in a large school district in central Florida. Christine was introduced to the Digital Booktalk project by her media specialist, who attended one of the Digital Booktalk sessions at a media conference. Christine not only embraced the book trailer concept but her whole school has done so, too. Her principal has provided opportunity to show the resulting videos in a
Figure 1. Classroom Guide for Literacy

Check the box for each line that best represents what you see in the classroom.

PR = Progressing  
P = Proficient, and  
RM = Role Model.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The classroom has…</th>
<th>PR</th>
<th>P</th>
<th>RM</th>
<th>Notes</th>
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<tr>
<td>Literacy-rich and print-rich environment</td>
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<td>Attractive, risk-free, safe environment</td>
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<td>Smooth schedule, groups, transitions, student known routines &amp; resources</td>
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<td>Student engagement not compliance</td>
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<td>Maximized time for literacy learning</td>
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<td>Integration of literacy learning with content standards</td>
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<th>The teacher….</th>
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<td>Incorporates the seven processes of literacy</td>
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<td>Models joy of reading to and with students daily</td>
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<tr>
<td>Provides daily accountable independent reading K-5th, 6th-12th level 1 &amp; 2 students</td>
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<tr>
<td>Assists students in selecting reading materials</td>
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<td>Incorporates 4 levels of questions (QAR), cognitive complexity, or critical thinking</td>
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<td>Promotes reading of non-fiction</td>
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<td>Monitors reading improvement with student data</td>
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<tr>
<td>Develops comprehension: Teaches, models, &amp; practices literacy strategies before, during, after reading</td>
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<tr>
<td>Provides research-based vocabulary development</td>
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<tr>
<td>Develops fluency in all texts</td>
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<tr>
<td>Integrates test prep with content teaching periodically</td>
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When coaching and giving feedback we do not rate the teachers, but instead indicate items that a teacher seemed particularly excellent in, such as using before, during, and after reading strategies. When consulting with these teachers we might make note when a teacher used research-based vocabulary instruction or indicate that she might consider it. This tool is helpful for providing feedback on a few role model items, a few that are progressing or proficient, and to offer one or two suggestions for improvement. There is no expectation of completing the form or making a comment on each line as might be with an evaluation instrument. This tool is intended for personal professional reflection or for coaching by literacy leaders—not as an evaluation instrument. Collaborative partners or mentors and mentees could easily use this tool to provide helpful feedback and acknowledgement of excellent instruction.

Another tool that may be helpful for literacy leaders is the Teacher Reflection Guide (Taylor, 2007). (See Figure 2). This guide assists one in thinking about literacy infusion while designing instructional plans. Whether the reflection is by one’s self or with a colleague the tool can assist in checking for inclusion of key literacy components to improve student achievement. The literacy leader may want to modify the items or just attend to one part at a time. It may be that focusing on questioning will be the literacy strategy to take literacy learning to the next level, but that is a professional decision for the user.

**Literacy leadership in the larger community**

To maximize students’ literacy learning literacy leadership has to expand beyond the school walls. This means that relationships not only within the school are positive, but also external in the school community. Such relationships are grounded in the confirmation that all students’ achievement is of concern and that data on their achievement is transparent. Transparency indicates that literacy leadership is willing to be honest about literacy goals, the steps to accomplish those goals, and outcome results. In addition to the traditional invitations to learn about data and efforts to improve, schools making gains have technological solutions that provide on-going access to data.

Literacy leadership in the larger community also means partnerships for literacy learning. Local libraries or learning centers such as a history, science, art and/or universities can be substantive partners. By partnering, resources can be maximized to reach students, families, and community members who might not be aware of how they can assist with literacy improvement. Furthermore, these entities often have resources for professional development and by partnering with them grant funds may be more readily available.

Another example of literacy leadership with the community is a Title 1 elementary school with the majority of students coming from homes where the language spoken is Spanish. Oakshire Elementary School, for example, consistently has high student achievement. In addition to attributing the achievement to the teach
ers, the principal attributes it to the families. The school
provides families with instruction in literacy learning so
they can support literacy learning in the home. Many
families attend classes on learning English at the school
and not only are they family members of students; they
are students themselves in a school culture which em-
braces them.

**Reflection: Literacy leaders**
**change student achievement**

Literacy leaders believe in the capacity for all students
to learn at higher levels. They also believe in all teach-
ers throughout a school developing expertise based on
sound research to improve student literacy learning.
Through empowerment and professional development
literacy leaders can be strategic to use data to improve
learning for all students. Technology infusion and in-
tegration can be a powerful tool for student motivation
and enhancement of literacy learning. The literacy lead-
ership role taken seriously by everyone in the school can
be pivotal to the improvement in literacy learning and
student achievement. By embracing the community be-
yond the school, literacy leaders expand their resources,
political support, and enhance student achievement.

**References**

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porary Issues Technology and Teacher Education—Current
Practices, 8*(1). Available at: http://www.citejournal.
org/vol8/iss1/currentpractice/article1.cfm.


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**Figure 2. Teacher Reflection Guide**

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<th>Part 1. Reading Comprehension</th>
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<tr>
<td>1. What did students do to develop vocabulary today?</td>
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<td>2. What did student do to improve fluency?</td>
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<td>3. How did students strategize to comprehend the text?</td>
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<td>4. What will I do differently next time?</td>
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<tr>
<th>Part 2. Framing Print Instruction with Before, During, and After Reading Strategies</th>
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<td>1. What strategies did I use today?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Before reading /During reading/After reading</td>
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<td>2. Which ones worked really well?</td>
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<td>3. What will I try next time?</td>
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<tr>
<th>Part 3. High Levels of Thinking</th>
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<td>1. What levels of thinking did students work on today?</td>
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<td>2. Which questions were related to analysis, synthesis, and evaluation?</td>
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<td>3. What levels of thinking will students work on tomorrow?</td>
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<td>4. Who developed the questions—the students or the teacher?</td>
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<th>Part 4. Questioning</th>
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<td>1. What questioning strategies did I use today?</td>
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<td>2. Which questioning strategies worked well?</td>
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<td>3. Which ones will I use tomorrow?</td>
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<td>4. Did I call on every student?</td>
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<td>5. Did I validate every student?</td>
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<td>6. Were incorrect responses corrected and confirmed, clarifying meaning?</td>
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<th>Part 5. Writing</th>
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<td>1. How was writing used to develop vocabulary?</td>
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<td>2. How was writing used for students to show their comprehension?</td>
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<tr>
<td>3. How was writing used before reading, during reading, and after reading?</td>
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<td>4. For student generated questions, did students write down their questions before we answered them?</td>
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<td>5. Did students peer-review writing and provide feedback?</td>
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<td>6. Do students have a rubric for grading? Is it always consistent?</td>
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Crowne Plaza Hotel, Warwick, Rhode Island

Featured Presenters & Authors … and more to come!

James Barton  
Rita Bean  
Sue Biggam

Julie Coiro  
Penny Kittle  
Kathleen Itterly

Joseph Bruchac  
Doreen Rappaport  
Mary Lee Prescott Griffin

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It’s a common occurrence when I’m talking with educators for someone to say, “You know, that idea reminds me of the work of (fill in the name) that I read years ago,” or “That’s like what we talked about in my master’s program in (fill in the subject) last year.” Those conversations remind me of two important truths. One is that people benefit from connecting ideas to their own experiences. The second is that sound educational ideas have a long shelf life. The reason for the latter, of course, is that the science of education is rooted in human development which remains relatively constant, even though our understanding of it evolves. Further the art or practice of education retains those things that benefit learners. Again, educators may refine a particular practice over time, but there is often a durable constancy at its core, linked to the constancy of the human condition.

It is not surprising, then, that there are many ideas shared by the fields of literacy instruction and differentiated instruction. After all, they share a common science and contribute to a common art. Nonetheless, it’s reinforcing when the science and art of education appear to be in synch, and particularly when they cross the boundaries of “specialty” that can isolate us.

This essay explores four powerful principles from the theory and research that inform what we call differentiated instruction that are echoed, applied, and illustrated in literature related to literacy instruction—with an emphasis on literacy and adolescents. The principles, of course, are also rooted in the science of reading and many other facets of education as well. They are principles that teacher-leaders and administrative-leaders in the field of literacy would do well to spotlight, model, and support development of in the work of those whom they lead because of the capacity of the ideas to benefit student achievement.

**Shared principle #1: Students differ as learners**

A key premise of differentiation (Tomlinson, 1999, 2001, 2003) is that the differences students bring to the classroom with them are not only many, but they bear strongly on learning. Almost any contemporary classroom will contain students who come from backgrounds shaped by poverty and those whose circumstances are more economically privileged, students who are behind in the learning curve and those who are ahead, students who are learning English as a second (or third) language and those who may speak English comfortably but whose culture differs from the majority culture of classroom peers, students from secure homes and students whose homes are sources of tension or worse. On the classroom door is a sign that says, “Fifth Grade” or “Biology” and reinforces the inclination of educators, policy makers, and society as a whole to view the students as essentially alike because of their age and/or grade placement.

Differentiation advises that it’s rare to find two individuals of the same age who learn the same things in the same way according to the same timetable. To assume such homogeneity in a room populated by twenty, thirty, or more students, and to proceed accordingly with instruction is a prescription for failure. We are better positioned to teach when we acknowledge that reality. We teach more successfully when that reality is at the core of our instructional planning and execution.

The principle of the primacy of student differences in effective classrooms is no stranger to literacy instruction. It is articulated clearly by Cunningham and Allington (2003).
Simply put, children will always vary in their reading levels. Some will read at grade level, some a little above or below grade level, and a few will read way above or way below grade level. The goal of having all children read at grade level is not a reasonable goal (and getting the above-level children back down to being just average readers would take massive amounts of truly terrible experiences!). What is reasonable is the expectation that all children grow in their reading ability (p. 134).

The authors remind us that responsible parents and doctors strive to feed children healthily, work to prevent and address medical problems, and measure the growth of children to make sure they are progressing. They do not pursue the goal of making all young people of a certain age the same height. Nor, they might have added, do they require all young people to eat exactly the same food or same amount of food, to take exactly the same medicine in the same dosage, or even get exactly the same amount of sleep. We cannot, and should not try, Cunningham and Allington caution, to teach in ways that make all students alike. What we can and should do, they continue, is to use instruction that offers a wide range of possibilities to address the wide range of needs our students inevitably bring into the classroom with them.

Said another way by another writer in the field of literacy, the role of the teacher is “to help specific human beings—not some generalized fiction called the student…” learn to read and derive joy from reading (Rosenblatt, 1978, p 34).

Shared principle #2:
Teachers must study their students to teach them well

Just as educators accept the more convenient premise in instructional planning that students in a given class are essentially a matched set, we also fall prey to the common proposition that we teach too many students to know them well. Either belief diminishes both student and teacher potential.

If students’ differences impact learning in significant ways, as differentiation proposes, then teachers must systematically study students in order to understand their learning needs and to be able to match instructional approaches to particular student needs. Effective teachers are relentless students of their students exactly as they are perpetual students of the content they teach.

A truth is, of course, that we will never have full knowledge of our students as individuals. Another truth is that if we persistently and intelligently work to know them, we will learn enough to teach each student better each day than we could the day before.

The compelling voices from the field of literacy education position that second truth at the heart of their work. Jeff Wilhelm (1997) came to understand that “the special knowledge of a teacher is made up of an accretion of thousands of daily events, discussions, observations, and reflections” (p. 29). Thus, he says, he became a researcher of his students:

I study every student who comes into my classroom. To do less would be not to take each student with the seriousness she or he deserves. I share with each student what I have noticed about what she does as a reader, and ask her to share with me what I have missed. We identify and celebrate what they do and push back the boundaries of what might be done. I ask my students what they are trying to do next, and set goals that I will help them meet (p. 28).

A key element in knowing students well is engaging in systematic assessment of student progress toward clearly articulated and substantial learning goals. Janet Allen (2000) reminds us of the centrality of on-going assessment in guiding instructional decision-making. She notes that there is currently much emphasis on processes and data that have little impact on what students learn and that to the degree that educators invest their efforts in those pursuits, they may be solving the wrong problem. “Solving the right problem is finding multiple ways of determining and documenting what students are able to do and using those discoveries to guide us in our teaching decisions” (p. 228).

Both Allen and Wilhelm provide an extensive toolbox of strategies for understanding students as individual learners. Among those are student surveys, observations, interviews, literary letters, think-alouds, anecdotal records, checklists, progress notes, exit slips, performance tasks, and reading portfolios. Both authors also remind us that processes and procedures for getting to know students should involve helping students get to know themselves more deeply as learners so that students, too, can make increasingly informed and wise decisions about their own learning.

Teachers who study their students come to value and respect them in ways that are evident. The teacher’s respect for individuals shapes the way students react to one another. The classroom becomes a place where it is safe to be oneself—where it is safe to risk learning. A teacher’s unequivocal respect for and investment in the success of each learner will also impact how the teacher thinks about curriculum.

Shared principle #3:
Effective teachers teach up

On many levels, the way we do school and the structures of school invite teachers to “teach down.” We rou-
students who experience difficulty with standard approaches to teaching reading, Janet Allen (2000) began her year with a class of "remedial" learners by telling them that while they had had reading problems in the past, she knew that each of them could become great readers and writers. She also told them that she would be their partner in making that happen. She didn't know the students yet, so of course she couldn't know which approaches would work with them individually. What she did know was that she had to transmit her belief in their capacity unequivocally and keep her promise of partnership for success. To that end, she specified what she believed to be the attributes of successful readers, shared those goals with her students, began to establish classroom routines and procedures that began to change students' attitudes about reading and about themselves as readers, and set out to prove to each learner that successful reading was an attainable goal.

If a student needed to read an "easy" book, Allen dignified it by reading it herself and putting it on her own list of completed books. She also often used those books to illustrate ideas and share examples with the class as a whole. All reading has value, she explained to her students.

For Alfred Tatum (2005) who writes about teaching reading to black male adolescents who have given up on reading and, in large measure, school, teaching takes a slightly different approach. These young men, he explains, come from lives of poverty that can sour their lives. Reading, he says, can sweeten them.

Black male students, like all others, he insists, should be given quality instruction that increasingly positions them as readers, writers, and thinkers.

Once the kindergarten teacher places a child in the low reading group, she is doomed to stay there forever, regardless of what she does. Once the label has been given, a child begins to look at herself in a different light. And so does the school. Instruction changes, behavior changes, relationships among peers change, treatment among peers changes (p. 9).

In contrast to the practice of "teaching down" to students who experience difficulty with standard approaches to teaching reading, Janet Allen (2000) began her year with a class of "remedial" learners by telling them that while they had had reading problems in the past, they had the potential to become great readers and writers. She also told them that they would be her partner in making that happen. She didn't know the students yet, so of course she couldn't know which approaches would work with them individually. What she did know was that she had to transmit her belief in their capacity unequivocally and keep her promise of partnership for success. To that end, she specified what she believed to be the attributes of successful readers, shared those goals with her students, began to establish classroom routines and procedures that began to change students' attitudes about reading and about themselves as readers, and set out to prove to each learner that successful reading was an attainable goal.

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They should learn how to ask thought-provoking questions and how to analyze written (and non-written) material in the context of their daily lives. It is essential that these young men be prepared for higher education and that they not dissociate being smart from being black and male (p. 42).

To make that possible, teachers must understand the need of the students to achieve academic literacy, cultural literacy, emotional literacy, and social literacy. To that end, they introduced students to complex writing that helped them explore the conflicts and feelings that permeated their lives. Those writings were filled with meaning for the students who were hungry to explore the ideas in them. At that point, the students wanted someone to help them become "real" readers and writers.

Educators work from a faulty set of assumptions about students who struggle with reading. Among those are: (1) such students learn better in homogeneous settings when, in reality, such settings are a literacy dead end street, (2) reading is a sequence of increasingly complex skills—when, in truth, that approach to teaching leaves real reading on the sidelines,
(3) some children need a slowed-down and more concrete type of instruction—when, in fact, slowing down instruction guarantees that students who experience this approach will always remain behind students who learn at a typical or at an advanced pace and complexity of instruction, and (4) such students should be taught by special teachers—when, in actual practice, good quality regular classroom instruction is likely to be more coherent and consistent (Allington & Walmsley, 1995).

Shared principle #4:
Responding to student readiness, interest, and learning profile enhances student success

The practice of differentiation stems from a large body of theory and research indicating that: (1) attention to student readiness is essential for academic growth, (2) attention to student interest enhances motivation to learn, and (3) attention to how students learn best—or student learning profile—is important for efficiency of learning (Tomlinson, et al., 2003). Readiness has to do with a student’s proximity to specific learning goals and is not a synonym for ability. Interest refers to ideas or pursuits that capture the attention and investment of the learner. Learning profile refers to preference mode or approach to learning and is shaped by learning style, intelligence preference, culture, gender, and interactions among those elements. The field of literacy instruction is replete with illustrations of the efficacy of addressing student readiness, interest, and learning profile.

The concepts of independent, instructional, and frustration level have been central to best practice reading instruction for decades, guiding teachers to ensure that students of every age have materials to read that are at their instructional levels—that is, materials that are a bit too hard for a particular student along with a support system to guide the student from uncertainty to competence. Fullan, Hill, & Crevola (2006) refer to this match as focused teaching.

Instruction is powerful only when it is sufficiently precise and focused to build directly on what students already know and to take them to the next level. While a teacher does and must do many things, the most critical is designing and organizing instruction so that it is focused. Without focus, instruction is inefficient, and students spend too much time completing activities that are too easy and do not involve new learning or too little time on tasks that are too difficult and involve too much new learning…” (pp. 33-34).

That view is echoed by Allington and McGill-Franzen (2003), who say:

<table>
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<th>Creating classroom environments in which successful reading is the norm—for all children—will mean creating classrooms in which children are well matched to the books they are reading. One-size fits-all curriculum plans—expecting every child to read the same books—cannot produce a consistent pattern of successful reading (p. 74).</th>
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The importance of attending to student interests is also a recurring theme in the field of literacy education. Along with Tatum’s (2005) emphasis on the use of reading materials containing ideas and information of high relevance to African American adolescent males, Smith and Wilhelm (2002) make a strong case for reading instruction focused on student interests. They studied a group of twelve adolescent boys who, by their own description and that of their teachers, were non-readers. Over time, the researchers found that in fact all of the boys read outside of school. They simply saw no connection with those uses of print and what they were asked to do in school. The boys ultimately described what they thought an implicit social contract between teachers and students should entail. One of the five items in the contract was that a teacher “should attend to my interests in some way” (p. 99). The boys were not asking for favors, but rather were explaining that their interests could have formed a bridge over the considerable gulf between the boys’ beginning points and the destination their teachers wanted them to reach.

Nancie Atwell (2002) elicits from students actions from their own lives that could be poems, and students respond: the feeling of fresh laundry when the laundry is done, not getting dressed until 4:00 on Sunday, a younger sister cuddling in the lap of an older sister with sharp bones intersecting, removing toenail polish that was applied before a trip to Captiva and waving goodbye to February vacation. Ken Macrorie (1998) replaced the potentially remote term paper format with an I-Search designed to help students see inquiry as a tool in service of their own wondering.

Many voices from the field of literacy education also affirm the wisdom of attending to student learning profile in the classroom—in other words, of providing many ways for students to access content, explore it, and express what they have learned. Smith and Wilhelm (1997) and Allen (2000) use various forms of drama, reader’s theater, visualization, recorded text, and art to ensure that each student would enter text and choose to remain. Both writers’ workshop and readers’ workshop provide whole class, small group, and independent work configurations.

Sara Kajder (2006) used technology as a mode of exploring and expressing meaning with students who did not respond affirmatively to the printed page.
When a student refused to write an autobiographical statement about his experience as a reader, she gave him her digital camera and asked him to capture an image that would convey his feelings. He brought in a photo of a bulldozer and talked at length about how reading tore things apart for him. Another student produced from his bookbag pages of comics he had drawn about school and told his teacher that that wasn’t real writing—not at all like the stuff in school. Over the course of a year, she and her students used visual read-alouds, visual interpretations of text with student annotations, graphic notes, digital word walls, photo blogs, vlogs, two-minute movies, digital essays combining video and sound, and on-line yearbooks of each learner’s journey as a reader. One student, previously alienated by reading, used graphic notes in a comic book format to explore a piece of literature and wrote, “I don’t know what it is about this assignment, but I have never taken so much time to read something before. I think it’s because I’m taking time to allow the pictures to unfold in my head” (p. 90). Another wrote:

What I used to think about reading is like the pencil sketch that is underneath the painting. What I hear and see when I read provides some of the layers, and I'm adding layers all the time when I figure out something new, or something happens that changes the me that is doing the reading. To me this is real reading, and I finally see what it looks like” (p. 98).

Had Kajder insisted on teaching for literacy in the same modalities and formats that had failed for her students in the past, the result predictably would have been additional layers of academic scar tissue. By opening up to the students a variety of additional routes to engaging with and exploring literacy, a group of discouraged students, for the first time in their school careers, began to let go of what Mueller (2001) calls their tortured relationship with literacy and to contemplate the possibility that reading and writing belonged to them.

**A final thought**

Several years ago, I talked briefly with a retired first grade teacher in Idaho. She listened intently as I tried to explain to her what “differentiated instruction” is. When I finished, she thought a moment and said, “That term is new to me, but I think I might have done that when I was in the classroom.”

“Really?” I replied, “Tell me about it.”

“Well,” she began, “When I was studying to be a teacher, they told us how to teach reading. When I got into my own classroom, I began doing what I was taught to do. I worked hard at it and many of my students learned to read. But some didn’t, so over the summer, I developed a new way to teach reading and when the first way wasn’t working for a student, I taught them the second way, and more of my students learned to read. But there were still a few who didn’t learn, so I figured out a third way to teach them.”

She reflected for a minute and then continued, “If I remember right, by the time I stopped teaching, I was up to seven ways to teach reading. And all of my students learned to read.”

That’s differentiation. It’s also effective teaching—in the area of literacy as in all other areas of learning. Its philosophy is simple. Its practice is less so. Nonetheless, as the authors cited in this article testify in their work, it is what excellent teachers who understand the science and art of teaching do to connect young people they value with ideas and skills that are transformative.

Here is differentiation in a nutshell, articulated by two of those scientist/practitioners in the field of literacy education. “We must attend to our students and how they are learning. We must make adjustments and change our strategy as needed. We must teach as if we are surfing on the crest of the future’s breaking waves” (Smith & Wilhelm, 2002, p. 187).

**References**


Examining literacy report cards

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Today’s population of parents is made up of Generation Xers, a very different parental group than the Baby Boom Generation parents of the past (Strauss, 2005). Generation Xers are those parents who were born between 1965-1980, and they are a tech savvy group. They grew up playing Atari video games, used personal computers in school, and continue to use technology throughout their work and home life. They text message, use ipods, and many in this generation are digital natives, with technology their primary means of communicating with others in both business and social networks (Prensky, 2001). This new generation of parents are known for being skeptical of schools, and authority, but they value a balanced life with their family—unlike the baby boomers who emphasized “self” (Strauss, 2005; Stephey, 2008). Savvy politicians, such as President-Elect Obama, sought ways to attract votes from this unique group. In particular, Obama promised to reform and strengthen America’s schools through his Technology Investment Plan (www.barackobama.com). In this plan, Obama encourages states to use technology to provide regular reports to parents on student performance. For the Generation X group of parents who value time with their family, accountability from schools, and instant communication, it is time for schools to re-examine the function, and breadth, of paper based school report cards which measure students’ literacy growth.

Throughout American history few studies have documented the types of report cards and methods for measuring student literacy growth (Tyack & Cuban, 1996). Since 1980, report cards (e.g., *The Nation’s Report Card* of NEAP Data and Statewide Report Cards of NCLB Test Results) have become more frequent. No Child Left Behind legislation (2001) also focused attention on district wide, school wide, and individual student achievement, particularly in mastery of basic skills. We need to develop more accurate, specific, and complete information concerning the depth of literacy competencies so parents, teachers, and students can become a more literate, compassionate, and citizenry society (Israel, Block, Bauserman, & Kinnucan-Welsch, 2005; Johnston, 2000; Tierney, 2000; Tomlinson, 2001). For instance, as one reviewer of this article stated, “If more accurate, fuller information [could be included in report cards, the data could assist to counteract] the very simple solutions offered by [some] media and politicians as to what it takes to become an avid lover of reading.”

It is important to study how educators communicate literacy achievement to students, parents, and the public through report cards. Essentially, paper report cards have been the most predominate form of communication with parents since the 1800s (McGuffey, 1879; Smith, 1968). Instead of changing formats or content, many report cards across the United States have remained the same for decades, despite monumental advancements to the curriculum and instruction upon which reports of reading success are based (Afferbach, 1993; Afferbach & Sammons, 1991; Bray, 1986). Instead of representing the complexity of the reading tasks and the depth and breadth of instruction used to build literacy skills, present report cards reduce the students’ performance to a single all encompassing letter grade (Afferbach, 2007; Afferbach, 1993; Bray, 1986; Robinson & T imperley, 2000; Tuten, 2007). Such simplistic reporting must change if parents are to become more informed partners in their child’s literacy development and understanding the purpose and result of new instructional methods used in highly effective reading programs in the 21st century (Valencia, 2000). Just as troubling, teachers are...
seldom asked to give feedback on the development of report cards (Goacher & Reid, 1983), and as a result, teachers face a challenge in conveying students’ reading development into limited space on a report card (Aflerbach, 1993). Reading Report Cards need to parallel the changes being made within the classroom to better report and convey the new areas of learning.

In this study, we examined the evolution of the report card by identifying the past and present content and use of report cards in the United States and Canada. We documented the newest paper and on-line reporting of student reading achievement by tallying the changes to report cards that have been made by representative districts within the last ten years in order to more fully report what their students are learning. Finally, we envisioned what an innovative report card might look like.

Review of Literature:
Historical and contemporary research perspectives

Historically, reading achievement was assessed by listening to children read and asking them to talk about what they read (Hoole, 1660; Smith, 1968; Tuer, 1896). This type of authentic assessment began in the 1600s in the USA and Canada and was mainly conducted through children reading religious texts such as the Bible and their errors being tallied (Clews, 1760; Smith, 1968; Tuer, 1896). By the 1700’s, however, children moved from one school district to another, leaving teachers no way of orally reporting to one another about pupils’ literacy competencies (Clews, 1760). It then became extremely necessary to create a paper report which relayed students’ progress to other teachers as they moved from place to place. In the 18th century, educators began to record a description of the qualities of individual students’ reading performance on paper in the form of a letter grade. This practice evolved such that students who moved from one school district to another, could provide teachers with a report of the number of days present and grade level attained at their previously attended school (McGuffey, 1879, Smith, 1968).

In the early 1900’s, the industrial revolution began and it became fashionable to document a pupil’s progress in six-week time segments, corresponding to the time clocked climate in the work force. As new industries began, more content disciplines needed to be mastered. Schools began to report students’ competencies in skill areas and disciplines beyond “The 3 R’s: Reading ‘Ritting, and ‘Rythmetic” (Gray, 1919). This segmented design influenced literacy achievement reports as well. By 1932, the “first R” “Reading” was reported by different grades (i.e., the ability to read, write, speak, and listen). The practice of listing the title of the grade-leveled text that a student could read fluently was discontinued (Counts, 1932/1969). The exact items listed on report cards from 1930-present, varied from state to state and city to city. Each grade on a report card was considered important to the people to whom it was sent. Some were chosen to reflect a specific community’s pride, individuality, and unique values. For example, people in some townships and municipalities wanted to demonstrate the rigor of their schools. To achieve this level of individuality and high-level, they focused their attention on community report cards which contained orals in penmanship, spelling, art, music, agriculture, homemaking, grammar, and conduct (Cuban, 1990).

Throughout the fifty years from 1960 to today, few formats, content or philosophical changes have occurred in the way literacy achievement is reported to parents and the community. There are several new needs in the 21st century that require a closer look at what our report cards communicate to parents (Ahearn, Jamison, Olivarez, 2000; Aidman, Gates, Sims, 2001; Allington & Cunningham, 2002). In the areas of reporting exemplary literacy practice, policy, and assessment, an examination of innovations in report cards used today could move us forward in our profession. Just as important, today’s technologically savvy parents, and students, need a report card that gives comprehensive literacy progress in a technological format.

Present issues that impact literacy report cards

Historically, changes in assessment practice have primarily been politically driven rather than empirically-based (Bayles, 1999). Moreover, in spite of numerous changes made in our theory and understanding about how children learn to read, report cards have not kept up. They do not document the individualized diagnostic teaching and assessment practices that occur in our classrooms today (Bothel, 2002). If we are to ethically portray our profession at the highest level of practice, at which we presently perform, we must change the quality of our individual pupil reports to the public. Five major issues were selected to be in need of review as schools consider innovations to their report cards (Lutz, 1997; Munk & Bursuck, 2001; Olsen, 2004). These issues were based on the ideals both teachers and those in the education profession saw as necessary to convey in order to create a more effective and well defined report of students’ progress.

Issue #1. The need to develop a report card that is personalized to individual learners so individual growths and learning strengths can be documented. According to Tierney (2000), the new millennium should be seen as a more enduring shift toward learner-centered assessment. It is our proposition that we must create a reporting system that captures all children’s exact literacy abilities as well as their rates, depths, and breadths of self-initiated and teacher-led growth. Computer adaptive tests (CATs) offer one possibility (Christie, 2002; Dec, 2004; Reeves, 2002). According to the
Center for Advanced Research on Language Acquisition at the University of Minnesota (1999), there are many advantages of CATs. Among the most referenced benefits are that CATs: (a) need fewer test items to arrive at a more accurate estimate of test takers’ achievement than paper and pencil tests, (b) assess finer distinctions than merely the total number of correct answers, including the error patterns in items that are more difficult, (c) decrease testing time since test items that are not in the test taker’s proficiency level are omitted, and (d) increase security, since each test taker can potentially take a different set of test items.

In like manner, it is important to survey what message report cards are communicating to children, colleagues, policymakers, and parents. It has been argued that standardized tests only measure curriculum (Fletcher, 2002). Report cards should be the measured-report of personalized specific growth of individual students, all that they have achieved and, when possible, the method used and rate of growth they experienced by several different instructional approaches (Ricketts & Wilks, 2002). Report cards must become places to record and store single performances that occur in the classroom (Valencia, 2000). It is also imperative that today’s report cards measure the important high-level thinking and creative processes that today’s students will need in order to become successful adults in the future (Friedman & Frisbie, 2000).

**Issue #2. The need to report achievement of what is learned.**

If we more broadly delineate and specify the spectrum of abilities that we teach and report, report cards could capture the fringe growths and emerging ideas that students are developing. To identify the broadest range of abilities, the format for reporting these growths should become more flexible, allowing new items to be added frequently (Thomas, 2003). Such new indices could then emerge from contemporary, generational interests and higher literacy abilities to function in our technologically-advanced world (Moore, 2003; Woodfield, 2003).

Present report cards cannot document the speed and effort with which a child can solve problems using Internet resources, or judge the credibility and validity of Internet data (Dee, 2004).

Not only is it difficult for teachers to properly express what the student has learned by these minimalist reports, they are also unable to accurately reflect their teaching ability and success in teaching (Afflerbach & Johnston, 1993). Teachers can be confident in the success they have achieved with the students yet are unable to communicate that success if it is not equivalent to a whole letter grade.

Fletcher (2002) commented that computerized report cards might overcome these deficits and increase the pace at which students learn, while accommodating for individual differences in learning and playing a vital role in efficiency of recording such abilities:

These [learning] differences can be accommodated by instruction [and reporting] that takes into account both ability and prior knowledge. Such advancements could take advantage of what students know and concentrate on what they have yet to learn. However, tailoring instruction and reporting in this way represents a difficult, almost impossible, challenge to classroom teachers working with 20-30 (or more) students using traditional hand-scribed paper report cards. Technology-based instruction and reporting on the other hand, have been tailoring or individualizing instruction practically from its beginning (p. 27).

**Issue #3. The need to have a more appropriate and advanced report card so teachers can adequately report more reliable and valid evidence on the new competencies their students are developing.**

This need includes the more precise reporting of how pupils are most rapidly learning new literacy skills, as well as the impact of their work on each student’s motivation, effort, and successes in becoming a better reader. Such new additions must not add to teachers’ overload in paperwork (Rich, 1998). We must use new, easy-to-complete report card formats. They could become a more accurate reflection of the advancements that have been made in literacy instruction since parents and older community leaders were in school.

For example, on present report cards, teachers cannot document how a child meets our professional goals and expectations. When all a teacher can do is to check “Good” on a current report card, our profession is not validating the depth and quality of our professional decisions and contemporary teaching methods. Report cards are expected to serve a variety of audiences while functioning simultaneously to inform parents of students’ progress, involving parents in the educational process, maintaining school records of students’ progress, and motivating and directing teachers (Goacher & Reid, 1983). A simple “check mark” does not seem to adequately fill these roles. By being given more opportunity to properly convey this through more precise categories of reading on report cards, teachers can be more precise on what they are grading and how each student is perceived.

Present report cards also hamper our ability to communicate the depth of assessment, performances, and observations that support our evaluations of each student’s multidimensional growths. A closely related need is to develop new, more reliable report cards; two teachers should always have options that report the same conclusions once they interpret the same raw data. We propose that when more specific abilities are reported, precision and validity...
will improve. Through this, over extrapolation and subjectivity are minimized (Glass & Stanley, 2005).

Specific to literacy, a detailed description of what is learned and the impact of that learning on students would be included in a detailed description of multiple mastered literacy skills, strategies, inclinations and aspirations. When all we report is only one letter grade labeled “Reading”, most parents will interpret that what is going on in the schools is the same type of instruction they received when they went to school. Parents will also have less information to accurately understand the individual processes of literacy their child has learned (such as knowing 107 of 120 basic first grade vocabulary), including levels of knowledge in higher literacy skills and visual arts. We must report what students are choosing to read as well as at what level. We must also document students’ abilities to independently comprehend different genres, and their desire to do so; and, their abilities to use technological tools.

**Issue #4. Present literacy report cards do not build home-school connections.**

Many parents do not understand what is being reported about their child’s literacy abilities and present report cards (Dornbusch, 1994; Dornbusch, Glassglow, & Lin, 1996). They do not have the opportunity or options to verify or disavow information that is reported (Rich, 1998). Similarly, teachers do not have a standardized format by which they can receive information about what is happening at home for those being home schooled (Glass, 2000). For instance, present report cards do not enable caregivers to give feedback about (a) what or how much a child has transferred literacy abilities to out-of-school settings, (b) how teachers can advance the learning process for their child from their perspective, and (c) how to improve the information that was reported.

If report cards are structured so that they more accurately reflect information that is reported, it would be easier for caregivers to support more innovative and instructional approaches. A variety of methods of reporting (e.g., walking report cards, parent observations, and parent accessed computer report cards methods) could overcome this need. Unfortunately, today’s parents are not a part of the reporting process as much as they desire to be (Rich, 1998), and they could understand it better because they were involved in it (Cushman, 1998). Our report card should evolve enough so that a parent can just look at it and know what the teacher’s expectations were for the grading period, how they were measured, and whether or not their child met those expectations (Rich, 1998).

**Issue #5. Report cards presently marginalize many English as Second Language Learners and Special Education students.**

De Atilies and Alexsahl-Sinder (2002) highlight the need for more comprehensive approaches to reporting achievement, especially for children whose primary language is not English. They call for assessment reporting that documents students’ strengths instead of only weaknesses. Delpit (1995), Schulman, Berlin, Harkss, Kerner, et. al. (1999) and Young (2000) report the same need for students who live in impoverished environments. Munk and Bursuck (2001) point out similar needs for changes in reporting achievements of students with disabilities. They surveyed parent perceptions of grades given on report cards and found that parents of students with disabilities and parents of students without disabilities identified the same purposes of a literacy report card grade as more than what it was intended to report. When asked if report card grades were effective in: communicating general achievement, communicating student’s effort and work habits, communicating student’s strengths/needs, and providing feedback on how to improve—significant differences were found between the perceptions of parents of high achieving students and the perceptions of parents of students with disabilities. Parents of students with disabilities commented that grades did not reflect their child’s effort or progress, and did not describe the specific strengths of students (Munk & Bursuck, 2001).

According to Fletcher (2002) online models offer many means for adapting to these concerns in literacy report cards and the differing needs for parents. He further states that such technologically-driven literacy report cards could easily adapt to new information:

> The student model is created by analyzing a student’s responses in interactions as they occur and inferring from these what the student knows and does not know by mapping his or her responses onto the expert [computerized report card] model (represented by the ideal model of the subject matter)… The assessment is accomplished continuously and transparently (p. 31).

When these and other needs are met we will begin to improve the Reading Report Card during the 21st century and our ability to assess and evaluate learning processes. To better understand which of these six issues the schools were and were not attending to in their literacy reporting, we developed a survey and a sampling system to document the format and content of present report cards in the study described below.

**Methods and results**

The first step in our study was to identify a representative sample of the report cards that exist in the United States and Canada. “Representation” was judged to be achieved if 20 percent of the 50 states (10 states) and five major provinces of Canada (1 province) were included in our sample. More specifically, two states needed to be represented within each of the geographical regions
of the United States. These being: (1) Non-contingent territories and states, (2) Western, (3) Northern Midwest, (4) Southern Midwest, (5) Southwest, (6) Central Southeast, (7) Southeast, (8) East Coast, (9) Northeast Coast, and (10) Great Lakes Region. Canada's region of representation was the only one randomly selected—the Province of Ontario.

This study was designed following standardized, stratified sampling survey methodology (Glass & Stanley, 2005). In the process of collecting present report cards, we also designed our study to identify innovations in the reporting of reading achievement that has occurred this past decade. To find these exemplars, we contacted a representative within the State Offices of Education and Provinces in the United States and Canada in our sample. Each official was asked to recommend three school districts within their regions that had recently revised their report cards. These State Offices of Education were then to select districts which they judged to have the most “innovative” and effective literacy report card. We specified three criteria to define innovative: (a) the district’s reporting format was most often cited as a model for others to follow; (b) other schools referenced that district’s report card when developing their own; and (c) a feature was added to the reading report card that was not present in that state’s or province’s previous ones.

One-hundred-six nominations were received from the state offices of education. All of these school districts were asked and agreed to participate in our study. We had 100 percent return rate, after two subsequent mailings. The reason for this high return rate is largely due to the fact that the state offices of education supported our research and had a close working relationship with the directors of these state offices. A total of 188 report cards were mailed and analyzed by the authors (List of school districts represented can be obtained from authors).

Every report card was read by three of the authors. Each item on every report card was listed as a separate item of analysis. If an item appeared on more than one report card, a tally was made each time that item appeared on a report card. All three researchers made independent tallies, with an inter-rater-reliability of 94 percent. Item discrepancies were resolved through discussion. Table 1 summarizes the scope of literacy curricular processes reported by all represented districts. The percent of report cards that contained each item is also reported. Items appear in the category in which they appeared or at least in one report card, as not all cards divided individual items into categories represented in our total samples, which are: Decoding, Comprehension, Vocabulary, Fluency, Writing, Spelling/Conventions, and Affective Development.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DECODING</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>COMPREHENSION</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Recognizes letters sound, words and/or sentences</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>Demonstrates understanding of comprehension skills and uses a variety of strategies that are grade level</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Concepts of Print</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>States how information directly affects them</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uses word attack skills</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>Retells a story to include character setting, problem, solution, main idea and supporting details</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discriminates between rhyming and non-rhyming words</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>Recognizes main ideas, sequences, applies critical reading</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recognizes nouns and verbs basic parts of speech</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>Locates specific information and details</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recognizes environmental print</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Skills inference cause effect draw conclusions</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Orally blends word parts and phonemes</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Participates in reading activities and discussions</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Applies strategies to decode unknown words</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>Can read designs and graphs</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Table 1.
Specific Items and Percent of Representation of Each Item on Present Reading Report Cards (continued)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DECODING</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>COMPREHENSION</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Knows long and short vowels</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Gives topic and gist of what's been read</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alphabetizes words to 3rd letter</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Understands what he or she reads</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Can locate words in dictionary by using syllables</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Can summarize and interpret stories</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hears and identifies syllables</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Can describe sequence of events and predict outcomes</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adds s, ing, ed to known words to make new words</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Gives setting and/or time</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recognizes synonyms, antonyms and homophones</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Names characters and describes their traits</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Has knowledge of card catalogue and Dewey Decimal system and encyclopedia, almanac, atlas and thesaurus</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Answers 3 comprehension questions when a one paragraph story is read</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figures out some unknown words in context</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Generates several predictions</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recognizes contractions</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Asks questions about text</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recognizes short vowel words that have one vowel (cvc) pattern</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Identifies problems and events leading up to problem</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recognizes an increasing number of words</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Articulates own purposes for reading</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recognizes silent vowels, vowel digraphs and “r” control on vowels</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Uses prior knowledge before/during reading</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uses pictures, context &amp; phonetic clues to attack new words independently</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Adjusts own thinking and reading behavior</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Notes own errors and self-corrects</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Surveys text before reading</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Reads for sustained periods</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Notices how text is organized</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Identifies author's purpose for writing</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Identifies information new to reader</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WRITEH</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>SPELLING/CONVENTIONS</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is well organized and sticks to topic</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>Uses capital letters and punctuates effectively</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prints own name or/and copies names and familiar words</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>Learns assigned spelling words</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WRITING</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>SPELLING/CONVENTIONS</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>----</td>
<td>-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>----</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is well organized and sticks to topic</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>Uses capital letters and punctuates effectively</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prints own name or/and copies names and familiar words</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>Learns assigned spelling words</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Follows steps of the writing process</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>Writes simple compounds and complex sentences maintaining tense and subject verb agreement throughout</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Has clear focus</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>Knows subject and predicate</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Displays tone or voice</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>Edits own writing with prompting</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Initiates writing and chooses to share writing with an audience</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>Spells basic color words and one token eleven to twenty</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writes words based on sounds</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>Spells plural forms correctly</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writes independently</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Uses known spelling patterns</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uses details effectively</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writes random recognizable letter or relies on pictures to convey meaning</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>AFFECTIVE DEVELOPMENT</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Labels pictures and uses spaces between words</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Chooses, books and has favorites</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scribbles</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Sees self as a reader</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Can write a thank you letter, friendly letter invitation, and address a letter</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Applies reading skills to subject matter</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Creates original poetry</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Participates in shared reading experiences</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shows interest in writing</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Uses and responds to a variety of media</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uses personal pronouns</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writes dialogue and imaginary stories</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Begins to organize thoughts for note taking and outlining</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Can change word order to alter the meaning of a written sentence</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writes in a variety of formats and genre</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writes simple rhymed verse</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writes and interprets metaphors, similes, personification and jargon</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writes phrases</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Takes risks with writing</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The total number of separate indicators of instructional processes, skills, and content domains represented in the 188 cards was 100. No single instructional process was reported on all report cards. Because of the range of single literacy processes and literacy content items reported, the likelihood that any set of single items appearing on more than a single report card in the larger domain of report cards from which our sample arose, drops to a statistical level of probability of only one percent (1%). Any single line-item of “Reading Ability” represented in Table 1 is not likely to occur on more than 1 of 100 cards, with no two report cards containing the same set of literacy sub-skills. No two report cards used in the United States or Canada were the same.

The most frequently occurring specific content item [Applies conventional spelling through writing] appeared on 31 percent of the report cards. The second most frequently occurring specific content item was comprehension [Understands what he or she reads]. This item appeared on 25 percent of the report cards in our study.

The next step in data analysis was to identify innovations in reading report cards. As stated previously, these innovations were added to the report card within the last ten years. To be considered a revision, the item could not appear on previous report cards. Table 2 reports the results of this analysis. Only twelve new features were found among the 188 cards. Innovation occurred in only 16 percent of all recently-revised report cards in our sample. These data suggest that the majority of report card revisions in the United States and Canada are only at the editorial and revising levels of change rather than reflections of a new creative method of reporting reading achievement.

### Conclusion and discussion

This study was designed to examine five needs in advancing the methods and content of reporting students’ literacy achievement. Data from our study led to the following conclusions. First, report cards examined in this study that had been revised within the last ten years, and had also been used as models for other district revisions, do not contain enough new feature to address the issues and needs identified in our review of literature. The rate of change in our report card format is more troubling. Unless major changes occur, our present system of one letter grade reporting will continue to poorly represent a continuously expanding set of skills.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 2. New Innovative Forms of Reporting Reading Achievement on Report Cards in Sample</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Noted ability levels after items (gifted/on level with modification, below level modification) and only a checklist was sent out for less able students.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Noted the rate of learning: Attempts, progressing but not yet consistent, meets the standard easily, or satisfactorily progressing, reinforced appropriately.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Title of Benchmark book levels that a child was reading were circled. Other titles at that level and slightly above were listed for parents to use at home.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Multiple grades on a single skill were given—a grade was given for a child’s level of growth in vocabulary, for example, a grade or rating scale was reported for the amount of effort that student invested to reach this level of vocabulary growth. A grade or rating scale was given as to the students expressed or behavioral demonstration of desire to increase his or her vocabulary abilities. A grade or rating scale was given as to that pupil’s interest in learning longer, more complex vocabulary.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Reports were made as to how frequently a reading behavior was self-initiated without teacher prompting such as “exhibits behavior regularly”, “Making progress”, or “Has not yet exhibited self-initiated behavior.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Instruction is occurring, reporting of progress will occur later.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. ¼ to full pages are provided for parents’ written comments/teachers’ comments.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Students are given ½ page to write their own self-assessment of their literacy progress as well as to report which instructional methods are working best for them, why they believe they are making the progress, and what they judge that they need to grow more.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Teachers’ comments are handwritten or computer generated.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Future Instructional Targets of the next reporting period for each student are reported, such as:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(a) Needs more time on the writing process</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(b) Needs to learn to set a purpose for reading</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(c) Needs to learn author’s organizational patterns</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(d) Spelling needs to improve</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(e) Idea development through imaging text without pictures</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(f) Word Choices need to improve in writing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(g) Mechanics</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
example, as mentioned in Issue #1, there is a need to develop a report card that reports on students’ individual growths and strengths. Parents today want learner-centered classrooms, and learner-centered assessments (Tierney, 2000). They also want report cards that will measure higher-level thinking and creative processes in order that their children will be educated for a world of technological advances (Friedman & Frisbie, 2000; NCTE, 2007). As noted in an NCTE research brief, today’s employees are engaged in a technologically driven and fastly changing world (2007). More than 80 percent of kindergarteners use computers, while more than half of all children under the age of nine also use the Internet (NCTE, 2007). With a continually changing world, schools must think of new ways to report on student progress, moving beyond mere paper-based report cards. 21st Century literacy teachers must teach students how to “access, evaluate, synthesize, and contribute to information” (p. 5). This type of teaching involves having students create podcasts to publish their writing (Lacina, 2008), use wikis to develop a multimodal reader’s guide to a text (NCTE 2007), and including a broad range of genres and media in class texts (NCTE, 2007), among many other strategies for including new literacies within classroom instruction (Coiro & Dobler, 2007; Henry, 2006; Leu, 2001). With the use of technology requiring students to use higher level skills, and information seeking strategies (Coiro & Dobler, 2007), report cards must also examine how to assess and monitor student growth over time.

There were three types of innovations present on more than one report card in our study, which could become the catalyst for more comprehensive changes in future reading report cards. First, more attention being given to the documentation of specific types of skills students are using and have mastered. Secondly, a few newer report card innovations (e.g., new computer-based features) on report cards have been created to build stronger home-school connections, and thirdly, more explanations of specific reading processes are being presented which note individual students’ progress on individual skills as well as their speed in developing these skills.

Fourth, many report cards in our study continued the practice of reporting only a single, one line grade of “Reading.” This type of reporting does not help parents or provide them with any useful information for helping and guiding their child. Similarly, Issue #3 addressed the need for report cards to be flexible—and to report literacy growth (Thomas, 2003). Moreover, present reading report cards, even those that are considered to be the most innovative, do not provide an explanation of the language used on the card. Report cards in our sample appeared to be written with educators’ level of knowledge in mind, but not all parents are cognizant of specific report card terminology.

When such changes are made, more parents could become more involved in the literacy development of their child. As noted in Issue #4, report cards must build on home-school connections. When parents understand their children’s literacy abilities, and how these abilities are reported on report cards, they can better provide support from home (Cushman, 1998; Tuten, 2007). Generation X parents of today want to be involved in their children’s literacy development. This group is known for their skepticism toward schools (Strauss, 2005; Stephey, 2008), and in order to forge their support, schools must think of ways to avoid educational jargon on report cards, and find ways to better design report cards to display students overall literacy development.

Lastly, report cards must also be redesigned to better meet the unique needs of English as a Second Language and special education students, as described in Issue #5. Online models of report cards offer much hope for reporting student growth since parents could receive ongoing feedback on their child’s progress, and report cards could be more individually designed to show student growth instead of deficit. In particular for these students, specific strengths need to be described, and an online narrative section could more easily note such student strengths (Munk & Bursuck, 2001), as well as provide specific, and individual student, goals for literacy advancement.

Recommendations for the future
The analysis in this study revealed what reading report cards have been, what they are currently, and what they could be. The analysis also demonstrated how changes in reading report cards can increase their ability to bridge the communication gap between schools and parents. More progress can also be made when report cards:

- Document levels of curricular rigor, and worthwhile literacy behaviors.
- Better report on student learning engagement, motivation, drive, and effort can be reported.
- Better report what teachers are doing personally to advance individual pupils’ literacy and their personalized interaction with children.
- Document more skills that students will need to succeed as adults (such as imagination, team work, hard work, tenacity, self-start behavior), and the active role that students assume to maximize their own progress along the literacy continuum.

When schools engage in developing a new reading report card, several school districts represented in our study offered words of advice. They recommended that school districts create a district-wide vision to meet the needs identified in this article. Secondly, representative school districts suggested that districts organize a Present Report Card Evaluations committee—and
obtain copies of report cards currently being used in exemplary schools. Teachers, students, administrators and parents should be invited to make recommendations for improvement for each grade level by writing directly on report card prototypes or by responding to a questionnaire. Then, the committee should prepare innovative report cards that meet committee criteria, while also piloting report cards with various grade levels, and revising as needed. To better report on students’ literacy growth, a comprehensive review, analysis, and design of report cards is needed. By including teachers, students, administrators and parents in this process—a more holistic evaluation and design of report cards will result. Lastly, to better meet the needs of families and to forge a stronger school/home collaboration, districts should consider including online report cards. School leaders must keep in mind the demands of a new population of parents—and the call from President Obama to provide regular reports to parents on student performance through technology. As Billy Idol and his band Generation X sang, “Your generation don’t mean a thing to me,” educators do not want to leave behind another generation by not taking into account, and reporting to parents, students’ unique literacy development.

Summary
In summary, this study provides a state-of-the-art report on report cards. Prior to the analyses, data contained within this case was not available as to recent changes that have been made on reading report cards. A review of literature revealed six major advancements that are needed today. These advancements have not yet occurred but when we are able to prepare more efficient report cards, we will more likely provide information that is of value to all stakeholders in the educational process; and enable report cards to become more valid mirrors of the depth and breadth of literacy learning that is occurring in school today.

References


NEW ENGLAND READING ASSOCIATION announces
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**HOW?** Submit:
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**TO BE AWARDED:** in JUNE

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Building vocabulary and fostering comprehension strategies for English language learners: The power of academic conversations in social studies

Michaela Colombo
Patricia Fontaine
University of Massachusetts Lowell, Massachusetts

Stacey and Lin, high intermediate and transitioning English language learners (ELLs) and their pre-service teacher tutor are in the middle of their seventh one-hour Historical Tutoring session.

Stacey: They had to stay in the back but this lady Rosa Parks sat down because she was tired and they took her to jail for that.

Lin: I have a connection. My cousins used to pick on me because I wasn’t the same as them.

Tutor: Why don’t we talk about what you wrote, Lin?

Lin: I wrote I would play with Betty [a doll in the photo] if I was white. I would feel mad to walk to school or sit in the back of the bus. I would be mad not to have a desk. I have a connection to playing with Betty because my cousins used to pick on me and I had to play with my dog.

Stacey: I would feel disappointed at the fact that they wouldn’t play with me and they would point and me and laugh at me. I have a connection with the black because I am the only Cambodian in my class and my friends laugh at me when I always answer.

Meaningful interactions, such as this exchange between Stacey and Lin, enable ELLs to develop academic vocabulary, English language abilities, (Tharp, Estrada, Dalton, & Yamauchi, 2000), as well as strategies for making text connections, and inferences, all associated with reading comprehension. Yet, curricula have narrowed as Annual Yearly Progress, which is measured almost entirely by student results on standardized testing, has become a growing concern in many schools across the country. Prepackaged reading programs, designed to improve test performance, may be replacing thoughtful conversations between students and between students and teachers. Thought-provoking and language rich social studies content, which has the potential to enhance literacy while building citizenship and social justice in classrooms, is often missing from the curricula (Checkley, 2006; Dillon, 2006; Whelan, 2006). While the nature of social studies—many facts, dense vocabulary, abstract historical concepts, and the multitude of characters found in expository texts, often makes access to history content difficult for elementary school student and especially for ELLs, whose home cultures and experiences differ from the dominant middle-class population, engaging literature about relevant content told through the perspectives of children makes social studies come alive (Colombo & Fontaine, 2009).
In this paper we discuss the Historical Tutoring program, the purpose of which is to ensure that ELLs (and other students) receive language-rich and engaging social studies instruction that helps prepare them for citizenship and social responsibility and at the same time builds academic literacy and comprehension strategies. We examine the academic conversations about complex social studies content that take place between tutors and fourth grade ELLs, and the influence these conversations have on the development of academic literacy and comprehension.

The pilot program we describe was conducted during the fall 2008 semester. Seven pre-service teachers and 14 fourth grade ELLs (all with at least intermediate English language proficiency as determined by scores on state measures) met for eight one-hour sessions across the semester to read, discuss, and write about the experiences of children during the U.S. struggle for school integration. Through readings and discussions, ELLs developed an understanding of history as it relates to social responsibility and citizenship, made personal connections to history, developed vocabulary and strategies for reading comprehension, and expressed their understanding of complex topics in ways that were personally meaningful to them.

Study framework
Nearly 30 percent of English-speaking students in U.S. classrooms may be completing reading assignments without understanding what they have read, and the percentage of ELLs who fail to understand what they have read is much higher (Biancarosa & Snow, 2006). The high percentage of students who struggle with content-area reading and writing suggests the need for literacy instruction that strengthens students’ strategies for reading comprehension across content areas.

In this study we focus on three broad areas of reading comprehension, which present particular difficulty for ELLs and other children whose cultures and experiences differ from that of the dominant middle class: academic vocabulary, text connections and inferencing.

An extensive and well-developed vocabulary is important across all domains of academic literacy (Carkin, 2005), and is closely correlated with reading comprehension (Beck, Perfetti & McKeown, 1982) and reading achievement (Nagy & Scott, 2000; Stahl & Nagy, 2006). Given the large number of academic words that ELLs must learn in a short period of time, vocabulary presents a special challenge (Nation, 2001; Stahl & Nagy, 2006). Because learning a word requires approximately 12 intermittent retrievals (Stahl & Nagy, 2006), vocabulary development is likely to be facilitated when students attend to the word within text, access the word using tools such as vocabulary cards, and then hear and use the word in meaningful conversations, journal entries, and authentic correspondence (Nation, 2001).

Making text connections requires that students have prior knowledge related to the topic, and students who can connect their reading to appropriate and relevant prior knowledge are likely to better comprehend passages (Anderson, 1994). The ELLs in this study attend integrated schools, but live in neighborhoods that remain homogeneous. Children’s discussions indicate that they, themselves, have experienced being different and prejudiced against because of their skin color and ethnicity. The social studies content and texts used in the Historical Tutoring project are thus relevant to our fourth grade students and facilitate students’ abilities to make text-to-self connections.

According to research, the inferencing strategies of students who read below grade level are improved by two types of questions: (1) pre-reading questions that enable students to make connections between their experiences and reading and hypothesize what might happen within the reading selection, and (2) post-reading questions that require students to reference information (Hansen & Pearson, 1983). The pre-service tutors in this study approached each tutoring session with both types of questions.

Throughout the study pre-service tutors worked with fourth grade ELLs to develop ELLs’ academic content-area vocabulary and the ability to make text connections and inferences. Results indicated that when tutors engaged ELLs in meaningful conversations, ELLs’ use of targeted vocabulary and text-connection and inferencing strategies increased.

Methodology
We used a qualitative research paradigm to investigate the teaching strategies of tutors and the outcomes for ELLs in the Historical Tutoring project. Using naturalistic inquiry (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), we observed the interaction between tutors and ELLs during sessions, audiotaped and videotaped sessions, collected ELLs’ journals, and monitored the project Wiki.

Participants
All pre-service tutors were participants in a Methods of Teaching American History course, a requirement in the elementary education certification program in a fifth year program offered at the participating university. We met with literacy coordinators and fourth grade classroom teachers in the two participating schools and provided them with guidelines for choosing ELLs to participate in the program; ELLs were required to have intermediate or above proficiency in English as measured by state-required testing (Massachusetts English Proficiency Assessment [MEPA]) and Massachusetts English Language Assessment-Oral [MELA-O]). Teachers selected 14 ELLs they believed would benefit from instruction. Two ELLs were assigned to each tutor.
Preparing pre-service tutors project, tutors and students will read is a real person. As part of the project, students wrote to-world as they came to understand that Ruby Bridges connections between critical period of desegregation by reading The Story of Jackie Robinson (Denenberg, 1990). During (Coles, 1995), and Remem ber: A Journey to School Integration (Morrison, 2004), The Story of Ruby Bridges (Coles, 1995), and Stealing Home: The Story of Jackie Robinson (Denenberg, 1990). During the first eight sessions tutors and ELLs read and discussed Remember, a poignant visual essay, where photos convey the emotion of the times; brown and white pages fill with black and white pictures mirror the colors of segregation. Fourth grade students easily connect to the book’s characters, who are also children.

ELLs further deepened their understanding of the critical period of desegregation by reading The Story of Ruby Bridges. They learned to make text-to-text connections between Remember and Ruby Bridges, and text-to-world as they came to understand that Ruby Bridges is a real person. As part of the project, students wrote and mailed letters to Ruby Bridges. In part two of the project, tutors and students will read Stealing Home.

Preparing pre-service tutors
One 2 ½ hour class period of the history methods class was dedicated solely to teaching and discussing the history of segregation and integration in the United States. Pre-service tutors viewed a PowerPoint on the history of Civil Rights as it relates to segregation. Readings and discussion involved two important Supreme Court cases, Plessy v. Ferguson and Brown v. Board of Topeka Kansas. Out-of-class assignments included watching videos of I Have A Dream (King, 1963), Ruby Bridges (Hopkins, 1998) and Separate But Equal (Swanson, 1991). Pre-service tutors read Morrison (2004) and Coles (1995) and then engaged in focused discussion about how to use good literature to develop conceptual understanding of history and how to guide elementary students in academic discussions that would enable them to express personal connections to history.

To prepare tutors to effectively work with ELLs, we provided a two-hour session focused on strategies for teaching academic vocabulary and making social studies concepts accessible, including glossing words in text, teaching students to use word cards to learn vocabulary, and perhaps most importantly, engaging students in academic conversations that would prompt the authentic use of new vocabulary to express complex concepts and ideas. Using a reading guide designed by one of the literacy coordinators, pre-service teachers reviewed the academic vocabulary words that were most important to comprehension. They copied each academic vocabulary word on one side of an index card and the child-friendly definition on the reverse side. They secured the index cards with book rings. Each tutor made three sets of vocabulary rings, one for each fourth grader and one for themselves. They used these vocabulary rings to introduce and reinforce vocabulary throughout the reading.

We showed tutors how to gloss the same vocabulary by highlighting words in the actual text and printing the same definitions they used on the index cards in the margins of the text. We also modeled the use of Post-Its to mark vocabulary words in text, question aspects of the text, summarize, and make explanatory notes. As a normal part of the methods of the Methods of Teaching Social Studies course, pre-service tutors were taught how to help students make inferences from visual images and to use open-ended questions to extend student understanding of text and promote academic discussion. Additionally the guide created by the literacy coordinator served as a model for questions that promoted text connections and inferencing. Tutors were encouraged to use questioning strategies in the tutoring sessions.

Program implementation
Pre-service tutors met with ELLs for eight sessions from September through December 2008. They began the first session using the rich visual images in Remember to teach inferencing, asking questions such as, “What is happening in this picture?”, “What do you think this means?”, and “Why do you think that?” They taught vocabulary words in context, first asking ELLs to identify words that were highlighted and glossed in the text, then calling ELLs’ attention to the same words written on vocabulary cards, and finally engaging ELLs in conversations using these words. Tutors promoted text-to-self connections with questions such as, “How does that make you feel?” and text-to-self/text-to-text/text-to-world connections by asking, “Can you make a connection to this?” At the end of each session ELLs and tutors wrote in journals for a time frame ranging from 5 to 15 minutes. During this time ELLs were encouraged, but not required, to use their journals to generate questions about the text, connect to the text, and cap-

Informed consent
Following the approval of the University Institutional Review Board, one of the researchers, who did not and would not teach the pre-service tutors, explained the project to them and obtained informed consent. Prior to participating in the research study, ELLs signed assent forms, written in child-friendly language. Consent forms to be signed by the parents of ELLs were distributed to parents in English and in the home language. The parents of two ELLs did not provide informed consent. These students were paired with one pre-service teacher and data were not collected for this group.

Procedures
Choosing materials for Historical Tutoring project
One goal of the Historical Tutoring project is that pre-service teachers learn to use good literature to teach compelling history content that is relevant to students. In contrast to many history textbooks that talk about history, good literature breathes life into history by telling the stories of those who lived it. Three books were selected for the Historical Tutoring program: Remember: A Journey to School Integration (Morrison, 2004), The Story of Ruby Bridges (Coles, 1995), and Stealing Home: The Story of Jackie Robinson (Denenberg, 1990). During the first eight sessions tutors and ELLs read and discussed Remember, a poignant visual essay, where photos convey the emotion of the times; brown and white pages fill with black and white pictures mirror the colors of segregation. Fourth grade students easily connect to the book’s characters, who are also children. ELLs further deepened their understanding of the critical period of desegregation by reading The Story of Ruby Bridges. They learned to make text-to-text connections between Remember and Ruby Bridges, and text-to-world as they came to understand that Ruby Bridges is a real person. As part of the project, students wrote and mailed letters to Ruby Bridges. In part two of the project, tutors and students will read Stealing Home.
ture ideas that were most important to them.

With the support of technical staff, we created a project Wiki, a web-based server that allows users to create and edit web pages, and has been shown to engage students in the writing process (Morgan & Smith, 2008). The purpose of the Wiki was to extend discussions through the purposeful interaction between ELLs at different schools and between ELLs and tutors, thereby scaffolding vocabulary and the understanding of content. We worked with a technology specialist at each school to ensure that participating ELLs had access to the Wiki. Each week the Wiki featured photos and prompts, such as, “Here are some of the questions we would like you to write about: Explain what you think segregation is. Can you think of examples of when people are segregated? What do you think about segregation? Is it good or bad? How is your school different from the schools in the book?” (Wiki, Session 1).

Unfortunately the Wiki, while promising, did not prove to be effective in this pilot project. Although technology specialists at participating schools worked to accommodate the project, they also had curricula to complete during the semester, and thus ELLs had limited windows of assigned computer time to access and contribute to the Wiki. There is a learning curve involved in using the Wiki for communication, which we are attempting to address during this semester’s tutoring sessions by initially incorporating Wiki use into the tutoring sessions.

Data collection
We collected five types of data during the semester: observations of tutoring sessions, audio recordings of tutoring sessions, video recordings of partial sessions, student journals and student letters to Ruby Bridges. Because the focus of this paper is to examine the power of academic conversation and the strategy use of pre-service tutors and fourth grade ELLs during the tutoring sessions, we will report on findings based on our analysis of observations of sessions, audio recordings, and video recordings.

We encountered several technical difficulties with audio recording. For example, one week the teaching assistant forgot to bring the recorders in time to record the session. On another occasion two audio recordings were accidentally erased by participants, and still another session revealed that although pre-service tutors thought they were recording, several had actually stopped the recorder or the recording was inaudible. Sound quality of the audiotapes varied. In all, 42 hours of audio recordings were transcribed.

Sessions were also video recorded. One videographer attended sessions in which several tutor-tutee groups were working, thus capturing approximately 15 minutes of each tutor-tutee session. Video recording began on the fourth week of the eight-week project.

Data analysis
Our research assistant and we reviewed observation notes, audio recordings, transcriptions of 42 hours of audio recordings, and five hours of video, and identified themes and trends in the data. The transcripts of four pre-service tutors and ELLs with at least six full audio-recorded sessions were then uploaded to NVivo 8 qualitative software for more in-depth analysis. Using a constant comparison method (Charmaz, 2006; Miles & Huberman, 1994) we coded transcript data using the following nodes for student outcomes: prediction, inference, social justice, questioning text, summarizing, text-to-self, text-to-text, text-to-world, and vocabulary use (Table 1). We then coded data using the following nodes for teacher talk: promotes strategy use, uses open ended questions, scaffolds vocabulary (Table 2). Transcripts were coded by one of the researchers and a research assistant who was familiar with the project.

Findings
Our analysis revealed that the social studies content used in this project, the specific reading selections, and the ensuing academic conversations between tutors and ELLs provided a fruitful format for the development of vocabulary and comprehension strategies. Observation data and videos showed that ELLs were actively engaged with the content and made many personal connections to it. Judging from their attentiveness during session observations, ELLs appeared motivated by the conversations with tutors.

As illustrated in Table 1, the following student outcomes were the most prevalent: use of academic vocabulary, use of strategies for learning vocabulary words, and use of comprehension strategies such as inferencing and making text-to-text and text-to-self connections. Evidence of social justice, while less relevant to the purpose of this paper, was also prevalent throughout most transcripts.

Academic vocabulary
The use of academic vocabulary was apparent in our analysis of conversations between Tutors 1, 2, and 3 and ELLs they tutored (16 of 18 tutoring sessions analyzed in NVivo provided evidence of ELLs’ meaningful use of vocabulary in conversations). Multiple occurrences of authentic vocabulary use were present in each of these sessions. To illustrate examples of student use of vocabulary, the vocabulary words in the following passages are italicized.

During a picture walk through Ruby Bridges, Tutor 2 asked, “What do we call those special police who came to help?” Juan answered, “Federal marshals” and then continued, “They protect her from the whites because some whites hated the blacks and some whites did like the blacks, but some whites came and tried to hurt her. The federal marshals protected her from these
Table 1. Student Outcomes - Nodes and Occurrences

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Nodes–Students</th>
<th>Illustration</th>
<th>Occurrence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Vocabulary Use</td>
<td><em>Segregation</em> is bad. We’re separated from another group.</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inferences</td>
<td>A little girl is sitting on a suitcase. She might be moving [from her house.]</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Justice</td>
<td>But that isn’t fair!</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Text-to-self</td>
<td>I’d feel mad because walking through that everyday and you can’t pray before you go in and stop without any people yelling at you.</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Text-to-text</td>
<td>Now it is just like the book, <em>Remember</em>, at the very beginning.</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Text-to-world</td>
<td>Martin Luther King asked that time: Why white kids cannot go to school with black kids?</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summarizing</td>
<td>When the black students came to school, they thought the white students were already in class. Then when they walked in the class, the white students were there. The class started and the white students were still not there. The white kids weren’t there. During integration in school in class, the white student’s parents told them to stay home</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Questioning Text</td>
<td>Why is it called Brown v. the Board of Education if her last name is Ruby Bridges?</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prediction</td>
<td>Yes, I was right! <em>(After ELL’s prediction about Ruby is confirmed)</em></td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2. Teacher Talk - Nodes and Occurrences

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Nodes–Tutors</th>
<th>Illustration</th>
<th>Occurrence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Promotes Strategy Use</td>
<td>These are really great inferences. Who do we see in this picture? What do you think is happening?</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Open-Ended Questions</td>
<td>What do you think she is thinking? Why do you think this is happening?</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scaffolds Vocabulary</td>
<td>Student: Worn down? It’s like all rags or something. Tutor: Yes, clothes can seem worn down. What about if a person feels worn down? Student: It can mean they are sad or something. Tutor: Yes, they are sad and tired. Maybe near the end of the school year you are getting worn down. Can you use worn down this way? Student: Ruby felt worn down when they yelled at her.</td>
<td>88</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

whites.” Li who learned the word *irrate* in an earlier session, later used the word while making a text-to-self connection: “That’s what I would do. I would get *irritated* that everybody was like, ‘Get out of school’ or yelling at me.” Later, Li discussed the photo of Ruby Bridges praying outside of school and said she wondered “how Ruby Bridges can do this.” She made text-to-self connections and explained, “But then when I’m *irritated*, like really *irritated*, I would not pray.”

When Tutor 1 asked Stacey and Lin, the two ELLs in her group, about the Supreme Court Decision, Lin replied, “So they had to have a decision if blacks could be with the whites or if the blacks had to be *separated*.” “And, what did they decide?” asked the tutor.
Lin responded, “They banned school segregation.” Looking at photos in Remember that showed two drinking fountains, Stacey added, “Even though segregation was banned, but [sic] they are not feeling like it’s banned.”

A data query revealed that ELLs most often used vocabulary words purposefully and meaningfully when tutors scaffolded vocabulary development. In nine sessions when tutors actively scaffolded vocabulary, ELLs responded by correctly using vocabulary words in context. For example, Tutor 2 asked Juan and Li to define the word persuade, which they were initially unable to do. She then told them, “Persuade means to like convince somebody.” She asked, “Were you going to give an example? Li responded, “I am persuading you to do something. Like, you are persuading someone... to convince someone.” The tutor answered, “You are convincing, exactly.” Later in the session Tutor 2 asked, “What is the word that means to convince... like a bully is trying to convince you?” Juan responded, “Persuade.” The tutor scaffolded Juan’s response, “Exactly... so let’s use a sentence with the two vocabulary words in it right now... Okay, Juan, go ahead.” Juan replied, “I am trying to persuade my friend to budge outside.” Tutor 2 then modeled, “... to come outside (to replace the word, budge).”

Evidence of strategy use in learning vocabulary words
Tutors taught and reinforced several strategies that ELLs could use to learn vocabulary words; tutors and ELLs each had sets of vocabulary rings. During each session, Tutors 1, 2, and 3 modeled the use of cards as they introduced each new word. (Tutor 4 spread the cards on the table and asked ELLs to read the definitions, but did not model the process.) Observation data combined with analysis of video and audio recordings indicated that ELLs who worked with tutors who modeled the use of vocabulary cards, regularly and often seemingly without prompting used the cards to retrieve words for use in conversation and writing. Audio-recorded transcripts also reveal several incidences when tutors did prompt ELLs to use their cards. For example, Tutor 3 asked students, “What was inferior again? You can look at your cards” and then said, “Let’s look at that definition.” Tutors also encouraged ELLs to write their own definitions on cards. When Tutor 3 explained the meaning of separate as to keep apart, her tutee added, “to move away.” She asked, “Do you want to write ‘to move away’ on your card? Will that make it easier to remember?” Several times during sessions with all four tutors, ELLs were observed writing their own definitions on the back of their cards. Only Tutor 3 regularly encouraged students to use the Post-it notes we provided to write definitions in text and to make notes. Observations of her tutoring sessions indicated that both the ELLs studying with her used Post-it notes productively to note vocabulary words and to edit their journal writing.

Reading comprehension strategies
The tutors used the visual images and text in Remember and Ruby Bridges to teach and scaffold comprehension strategies with ELLs. As illustrated in Table 1, the most prevalent strategies observed were making inferences (46 occurrences), making text-to-self connections (35 occurrences), and making text-to-text connections (15 occurrences).

Making inferences
Twelve of the audio-recorded transcripts show multiple occurrences of student inferencing, as illustrated in the following example. Referring to the photo in Remember, Tutor 1 asked Stacey and Lin, “What do you think the other kids in class are thinking?” Stacey answered, “They are thinking, ‘Why can’t we go to school with each other?’” to which Lin added, “They wish they could have desks and more books just like the white kids have. They want to be equal.”

The occurrence of student inferences was greater when tutors actively taught inferencing to ELLs and provided practice during the sessions. For example, Tutor 3 told Chara and Ana, “Okay, let’s look at this picture. Look at her face,” She then asked, “What do you see? What is a fact about her face?” Chara responded, “She has her mouth open.” “Yelling,” added Ana. The tutor continued, “So, you look at her face and you can see her mouth opened, so this is the fact, but the inference is?” “She is angry,” replied Chara. “We can probably say that she is angry” the tutor responded. “And, another inference is that she is angry because?” Ana responded, “Because she didn’t want her kids to go to school.”

Open-ended tutor questions or prompts also were associated with inferencing. As Chara and Ana looked at a photo showing segregated fountains and entrances, Tutor 3 asked, “How do you think that affects segregation?” Chara responded, “They cannot drink in the same fountain.” Ana added, “There is a colored entrance and an entrance for the white. White people didn’t allow black people. I suppose from the first one (picture) that if the white people had the better schools and fountains and the black people didn’t, then in the movies the white people had better places [to sit] and the black people had to sit in back.” Tutor 3 reinforced, “Great, so you are inferring... .”

Text connections
When ELLs were provided with time to talk, they made connections between their experiences and the experiences of children in both Remember and Ruby Bridges. They also made text-to-text connections between books. The content seemed to inspire connections without much prompting by tutors.
Text-to-self connections
We coded 35 occurrences of text-to-self connections in the transcripts. ELLs often speculated how they would feel if they were the characters in the book. Looking at a picture of Ruby Bridges sitting alone in school with her teacher, Li explained, “It would be more like a feeling that I do something wrong.” She later asserted, “The first day of that happening (referring to the people yelling), I would be kind of scared but then the other days I would be relaxed. You just ignore the people and what they say.”

Lin explained, “If I were Ruby Bridges I would feel mad because if I were going to school I wouldn’t want tons of people like following me and before I go to school stop a few blocks and pray..., I would feel sad, too, because having the federal marshals walking me in and walking me out, and they have to listen to me pray.”

Juan connected with the fight for integration illustrated in Remember, “This could happen. We could fight against it and the black and white could be together again.” He explained to Tutor 2, “I felt really sad when my friend couldn’t play because there were many other people that could have played too. It is unfair because everyone should get to play.”

Tutors did not always appear comfortable with some of the text-to-self questions raised in the text, such as, “What did they do to Asian people?” and “What if you are a caramel color?” “I wonder what happens if you are half Puerto Rican and half [Asian].” Rather than asking ELLs to elaborate, tutors pressed on with content.

Text-to-text connections
Fifteen occurrences of text-to-text connections were identified. When looking at an illustration in Ruby Bridges, Juan explained, “That’s the courtroom about their case—Brown vs. Education.” Li told Tutor 2, “Now it is just the book Remember... because the white and black is still doing it but in that town. It is banded (sic), but in that town (town in Ruby Bridges) it is not banded (sic). Later, Juan made a connection to another book he has read, “I read in a baseball book that the black people had to be in different leagues than the white people.” Chara also made text-to-text connection with another book she has read, “The north didn’t want the slavery but the south wanted it and for this reason they fight. It was a history of a boy of Georgia.”

Importance of the amount and type of teacher talk
A simple word-count was used to measure the percentage of tutor talk in sessions, which averaged between 67–68 percent for tutors 1–3. Although this percentage seems high, much of the teacher talk consisted of explaining new vocabulary and concept and scaffolding ELLs’ use of vocabulary. Tutors 1-3 posed open-ended questions and prompts to stimulate ELLs’ use of strategies, and ELLs responded by using vocabulary words in context, making inferences, and making connections. In contrast with Tutors 1 through 3, Tutor 4’s teacher talk averaged 88 percent. Tutor 4 explained the content and the vocabulary, but did not provide time for ELLs to discuss it. Even when she posed questions that in themselves might be considered open ended, such as, “What do you think is happening at the lunch counters?” Tutor 4 paused only briefly for students to respond, and then either supplied the answer or continued with additional explanations, as is illustrated in the following exchange:

Tutor 4: Water is water, right? It came out of the same pipes but they just all thought it was better ... (39 tutor words deleted from quotation)... I wonder what they mean by that. Now they have all of these people. What do you see here?

ELL: Lunch counter discrimination.

Tutor 4: What do you think is happening at the lunch counters? The same thing at the sinks and the same thing with the doors; you sit on your side of the restaurant and we will sit on our side of the restaurant. Then they would even put a rope sometimes. They are saying, enough. End this, this isn’t right. Who is saying that?

ELL: The black and white people.

Tutor 4: The black people; mostly the black people... (105 tutor words deleted from quotation)... But even though they protested, there was always somebody trying to make it not work. Correct?

ELL: Yeah.

Unsurprisingly, there were few occurrences of meaningful vocabulary use, inferencing, text-to-self, or text-to-text connections evident in analysis of the tutoring sessions for Tutor 4.

Implications
Although it is not possible to generalize from a project of this size and duration, this pilot project provided promising data regarding the potential of academic conversations. The social studies content presented through books in which the major characters were children provided a forum for thoughtful academic discussions between tutors and ELLs. When tutors engaged
ELLS in conversation through open-ended questions and prompts and supported ELLs' understanding of text by scaffolding vocabulary and supporting ELLs' inferences and connections, student outcomes for the use of academic vocabulary and strategies for vocabulary development and reading strategies were positive. Although ELLs' statements were not always grammatically correct, they often made sophisticated inferences and connections to the reading. When provided with scaffolding and the time to respond, ELLs also used sophisticated vocabulary words in meaningful constructions. While the sample size is very small and does not account for differences between students and other possible confounding variables, the difference in student outcomes when tutors engaged them in conversation (Tutors 1, 2, and 3), rather than provided them with content (Tutor 4) suggests a need for research into the quantity and quality of teacher:student talk with larger teacher:student samples, and within regular classrooms.

The interest that ELLs showed in the social studies content was also powerful—ELLS made personal connections to the children in the books and seemed to relate to the fundamental unfairness of segregation. Another avenue for future research is to explore the use of social studies literature to improve academic vocabulary and reading strategies for ELLs.

Although the tutor:student ratio was only 1:2, the Historical Tutoring project is replicable using cross-age tutoring, where secondary students read with elementary-aged students, or in after-school programs where the ratio of teacher to students is much lower than in the classroom.

During the spring 2009 semester, 12 pre-service tutors are meeting with the same group of ELLs and continuing the conversations about integration using Stealing Home: The Story of Jackie Robinson (Denenberg, 1990). We dedicated class time to discussing how to respond to ELLs' connections about race and differences, and regularly address this topic in meetings with tutors. We intend to incorporate the Wiki into sessions to facilitate student use. We have also purchased enough low-end camcorders to video-record each session, which we believe will provide richer data on tutor-ELL interaction. We are exploring working with the district to expand the Historical Tutoring to after school programming.

References


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Striving to accomplish a goal like the Little Blue Engine is an important skill for students to learn. In school, “reaching the top of the mountain” typically means rising to meet the complex cognitive demands of academic tasks to become successful students. In today’s political climate, teachers are expected to help all students achieve high standards, and as high-stakes testing looms in the distance, students are often expected to climb “faster and faster.” Successful learning requires sustained effort, often in the face of conflicting priorities that compete for learners’ attention. One example teachers often provide is the need for sustained effort or “stamina” to persist at challenging tasks, such as reading in content areas or in testing situations, which often require learner independence. Educational psychologists explain this kind of persistence or “follow-through” as volition, which helps students find a way to accomplish academic goals (Corno, 2008). For many children, reading motivational stories such as The Little Engine That Could may be one of their first experiences with models of volitional strategies.

According to social cognitive theory, children learn from interactions with adults around meaningful tasks; these situations provide both models and support for learning (Vygotsky, 1978; Bandura, 1986). Put another way, children can acquire work habits and approaches for tackling difficult tasks without explicit instruction. Learning through literary characters is one example of how children learn implicitly through models provided in the environment. For some children, these attitudes and habits are shaped before they enter school, such as when parents read stories, do household chores with children, or otherwise model productive work habits at home. Other children have fewer such opportunities, and so they must acquire these skills in school, if they are to be successful students.

Self-regulated learning

Teachers, like parents, can model and encourage productive work habits within a supportive environment. One way to support students as they pursue academic goals is to teach students self-regulated learning strategies they can call upon when tasks are particularly novel, challenging, complex, or even monotonous. Self-regulated learning involves the deliberate use of metacognitive strategies such as planning and self-monitoring as well as motivation and emotion control strategies that keep students focused on goals (Corno & Kanfer, 1993). Some students, for example, imagine themselves as particularly good at a task, or promise themselves rewards for a job well done. Self-regulated learners also control the task situation by such tactics as making redundant tasks more interesting or controlling the task setting, by such means as asking for help, gathering appropriate resources, or even asking peers to control their behavior (Corno & Randi, 1999; Randi & Corno, 2000).

Readers especially benefit from using self-regulated learning strategies, including planning, monitoring, and evaluating (Schreiber, 2005). For example, strategic readers plan by setting a purpose for reading; they monitor their comprehension by asking themselves what

“Puff, puff, chug, chug, went the Little Blue Engine. ‘I think I can – I think I can – I think I can – I think I can.’ Up, up, up. Faster and faster and faster the little engine climbed, until at last they reached the top of the mountain.”

(The Little Engine That Could, 1979)

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they understand; and, they evaluate the effectiveness of strategies they used to achieve their reading goal. Strategic reading is especially important in independent reading, including reading on the Internet (Coiro & Dobler, 2007).

In the classroom, whether students are engaged in reading or in other academic tasks, self-regulation manifests itself as “good work habits” (Corno, 2004). Modern psychological theory posits that students with good work habits enjoy productive engagement in academic tasks and their efforts are recognized in the classroom learning community. Full participation and engagement in the classroom community, in turn, fosters increased motivation to learn (Corno, 2008). But how can teachers ensure that all students are productively engaged in the classroom learning community? After all, not all students bring “good work habits” to school. These students may especially benefit from instruction in self-regulated learning to enable engaged participation in the classroom learning community.

Research has provided evidence that stronger students have work habits that distinguish them from their weaker peers; stronger students use self-regulated learning strategies to accomplish academic tasks (Boekaarts & Corno, 2005). These students may have learned these strategies implicitly at home, especially when parents encourage children to take responsibility for their own learning. Doing homework in a supportive family setting, for example, may be one situation that affords opportunities for acquiring self-regulated learning strategies (Xu & Corno, 1994). This study found that, in some families, parents encouraged their children to take responsibility for their own learning. Doing homework in a supportive family setting, for example, may be one situation that affords opportunities for acquiring self-regulated learning strategies (Xu & Corno, 1994). This study found that, in some families, parents encouraged their children to take responsibility for their own learning. Doing homework in a supportive family setting, for example, may be one situation that affords opportunities for acquiring self-regulated learning strategies (Xu & Corno, 1994).

Teaching self-regulation through literature

Our approach for encouraging “good work habits” seeks to capitalize on students’ propensity for learning self-regulation implicitly through role models and supportive environments that afford students opportunities to take charge of their own learning (Corno, 1994; Randi & Corno, 2000). We have found that classrooms, like families, can implicitly promote students’ acquisition of self-regulated learning strategies by deliberately structuring the environment to enable self-regulated learning to occur (Corno & Randi, 1999). In addition to a carefully structured learning environment, students, particularly those who may not have benefited from home situations supporting self-regulation, also need models to demonstrate how to persist at tasks and overcome obstacles to achieve goals.

In short, both a supportive environment and an intellectual understanding of self-regulated learning are important, if students are to acquire productive work habits. To develop an understanding of self-regulated learning strategies, rather than “add on” to the curriculum, we looked for models of self-regulated learning within the existing curriculum. Within the literature curriculum, we found numerous texts (e.g., quests and survival stories) that focused on such themes as self-reliance, independence, resiliency, persistence, courage, and survival. For example, quest heroes mobilize internal and external resources to accomplish extraordinary feats. We thus began to see how the curriculum itself might provide a model for self-regulated learning. We then developed what we termed a “curriculum-embedded approach” for teaching self-regulated learning. In this approach, students are led to experience self-regulated learning vicariously through literature and to learn self-management strategies inductively through an analysis of literary characters exemplifying personal traits that are characteristic of self-regulated learners (Corno & Randi, 1999; Randi & Corno, 2000). Students are then encouraged to apply these learning and self-management strategies to accomplish academic and personal goals.

This curriculum-embedded approach was initially implemented in a secondary humanities course in which students learned to draw upon self-regulated learning strategies to persist through the college application process. The following is an example how teachers can guide students to apply self-regulated learning strategies to accomplish academic goals.

An example from a secondary literature curriculum

In one12th-grade humanities curriculum (for a fuller description of this curriculum, see Randi & Corno, 2000), students read classical epics, including Homer’s Odyssey and Virgil’s Aeneid. As students read the literature, they were guided by the teacher to identify the strategies the characters used to overcome multiple obstacles without losing sight of their goal. Students were asked to enumerate, categorize, and label the various strategies that Odysseus used in his quest for homecoming. Students identified instances where Odysseus used elaborate planning strategies (metacognition), such as when Odysseus planned how he would trick the one-eyed Cyclops and escape from the cave where he and his men were held captive. Students also recognized that Odysseus was adroit at motivation control, giving himself directions and imagining his goal – homecoming. Students also found that Odysseus practiced emotion...
control when, for example, he deliberately recalled how he had endured and overcome similar obstacles before. Notably, this approach to teaching self-regulated learning also accomplished language arts curriculum goals as students were required to identify and label the character's traits, citing evidence from the text to support their analysis of Odysseus as a "self-regulated" hero.

Thus, this approach to teaching self-regulation is consistent with contemporary reading comprehension instruction whereby teachers encourage students to interact with the text to gain meaning and make connections from the literature to their own lives (Randi, Grigorenko, & Sternberg, 2005). Again, independent use of such reading behaviors requires self-regulation. It may be said that the character analysis task promoted "bi-directional" learning. That is, the task of searching for ways characters accomplished goals gave students a purpose for reading, and the literary analysis, in turn, provided strategies students could subsequently apply to their own personal situations requiring goal-directed behavior.

After literary analysis, students were asked to identify a quest in their own lives and to describe how they overcame obstacles to achieve their intended goal—college acceptance. In one pre-writing activity, students worked in groups to plan an essay describing their quest for college admission. The following example from this planning task illustrates how students applied the quest theme to their own journey toward college acceptance:

Call to action:
• Parents want you to further your education
• Need a college degree for a better job
• Need to do well in high school to get into college

Adventures:
• Filling out the applications.
• Writing essays that portray your personality
• College interviews
• Research into which college is the right one for you
• Visiting colleges could present many obstacles on the way (airport delays, traffic, getting lost on campus)
• Going to college includes many adventures (grades, studying, courses, dorm living, etc.)

The essay task described above served as an assessment of students' understanding of self-regulation as it applies to academic tasks. Students' essays were coded for strategy use. The following examples illustrate students' reported use of self-regulation in academic tasks:

- I couldn't remember what I was writing. I didn't know where to begin. I took a deep breath and tried to start again (emotion control strategy).
- Getting into West Point has been a dream of mine ever since I could remember (motivation control strategy).
- As a senior, I know getting into college is not the end of my journey because I still have some remaining months of school to finish (metacognitive strategy: self-monitoring).
- After writing down my ideas and mapping out my options... (metacognitive strategy: planning).

Clearly, these students' essays demonstrated an understanding that self-regulation strategies were essential to goal achievement.

In this humanities classroom, the curriculum-embedded approach for teaching self-regulation through literary analysis enabled students to learn strategies from literary models and then transfer those strategies to their own lives. Literary analyses, class discussions, and assigned tasks reinforced the message that learning often requires "Herculean effort" and that individuals can accomplish such difficult tasks through persistent striving after goals.

Given that these students probably entered this humanities class with a history of academic success, these secondary students may have previously developed strategies for accomplishing academic tasks. Without direct instruction in self-regulated learning, these students most likely learned these good work habits implicitly, at home or in school. One lesson learned through this work with secondary students is that even college-bound students can benefit from instruction that brings strategy use to a conscious level. This preliminary work with secondary students raised questions about how younger children learn to be productive students: Do younger students bring into the classroom an implicit understanding of self-regulation? Can younger children benefit from instruction in self-regulated learning to promote strategy use directed toward the achievement of academic goals?

Teaching young children self-regulation

An opportunity to study how fourth graders can be taught self-regulated learning strategies occurred within the context of large-scale, national study investigating the impact of Teaching for Successful Intelligence (TSI) in fourth grade classrooms (Sternberg & Grigorenko, 2002) TSI is an instructional approach that integrates analytical, practical, and creative learning experiences. In this approach, in addition to remembering content, students are encouraged to learn new content by encoding and elaborating the content in three different ways: analytically, creatively, and practically. In language arts, for example, students analyze texts and the authors' craft, make text their own with personal, practical connections, and create their own interpretations, original ideas, and texts.
The “practical” aspect of the TSI curriculum provides an especially appropriate context for teaching self-regulation. TSI encourages “practical thinkers” to draw upon certain personal qualities that enable them to overcome “stumbling blocks” to succeed in school as well as in life (Sternberg & Grigorenko, 2000). For example, like self-regulated learners, “practical thinkers” tend to persevere, act on plans, complete tasks, set priorities, control impulses, and manage self-pity (i.e., emotion control).

In the TSI project (Sternberg & Grigorenko, 2002), units of instruction were developed for fourth grade mathematics, science, and language arts. As the project’s language arts curriculum developer, I used the previously described curriculum-embedded approach for teaching self-regulated learning in one of the units, *Journeys*. This literature-based unit was offered to participating teachers as an additional option, if they found it appropriate for their curriculum. In the TSI project, students recorded their ideas and responses to assignments in “workbooks.” A total of 41 student workbooks from three teachers in the same school district were made available for the self-regulated learning study.

In *Journeys*, students read quests or “journey tales” such as The Labors of Hercules. As in the secondary humanities curriculum, students were guided to identify the strategies (i.e., character traits such as perseverance and self-discipline) that helped characters accomplish their goals. After analyzing how characters overcame obstacles, fourth graders were asked to compare the quests to the writing process. Required to write their own original journey tale as a culminating assessment, the students set writing goals and identified obstacles they might encounter during the writing process (e.g., writer’s block, lack of time or resources). They then enumerated strategies they might use to overcome these obstacles and accomplish the writing task.

Implementation of the *Journeys* curriculum provided an opportunity to investigate how fourth graders develop as self-regulated learners. Could these young students be led to acquire self-regulatory strategies, such as goal setting, and monitoring and managing behavior to accomplish one’s goal? Recognizing that some students may already have developed self-regulation strategies outside of school, we began the curriculum by assessing students’ awareness of themselves as self-regulated, and then moved students toward self-regulatory behavior in academic tasks.

The student workbooks provided a means for tracing students’ development as self-regulated learners as they progressed through the curriculum. Specifically, student responses to four tasks intended to prompt self-regulation provided evidence of each student’s personal “journey” toward self-regulated learning. Students were asked to (1) identify a personal “wish” and a “goal” to ensure that they understood the difference (a goal was defined as something they could work to achieve, as opposed to an unrealistic and unattainable “wish” such as “I wish I could fly!”); (2) complete a before reading activity in which they identified which character traits they thought they possessed and why they thought so, after being provided with definitions of particular character traits: i.e., perseverance, self-discipline, courage, responsibility, and resilience; (3) complete an after reading activity, in which they identified a personal goal, enumerated potential obstacles, and generated strategies for overcoming these obstacles en route to their goal; and (4) establish a writing goal, identify potential obstacles, and generate strategies to overcome these obstacles and achieve their writing goal. Thus students were led from a naïve understanding of self-regulation to articulating and applying self-regulated learning strategies to an academic task.

In the first task, students were asked to make a wish. Students responded with a variety of imaginative wishes and dreams (e.g., become a millionaire, visit all the planets, or own all the bunnies in the world). Students were then asked to identify a goal—something they could make happen if they worked hard. This prompt produced a variety of realistic goals, such as winning at sports, learning to swim, or becoming a great dancer. This task was intended to prime the students to understand the difference between a goal they could work to accomplish and an unrealistic wish. Note that, in this task, students were afforded an opportunity to evaluate their goals—one of the strategies self-regulated students typically draw upon as they strive to succeed.

In the second task, students were taught the definitions of five character traits: perseverance, self-discipline, courage, responsibility, and resilience. They were then asked to identify a trait they believed they possessed and to explain why they thought so. In this task, 32 students initially reported some self-regulatory behaviors (See Table 1). Self-regulation occurred more often in out-of-school contexts (24) than in academic tasks (8). For example, students reported perseverance at sports or hobbies, courage in their daily lives, such as being “daredevils” or protecting friends from bullies, self-discipline in practicing piano or refraining from fighting with peers, and responsibility for doing chores at home. Reported examples of self-regulation in pursuing academic tasks includes perseverance doing math problems, self-discipline for doing homework before watching television, and responsibility for turning in homework on time. Of the 41 students in the sample, nine were unable to provide a specific example of how they exhibited the trait. For example, some students reported that they had courage because they were brave, or that they had perseverance because they did not give up easily.

The third task was assigned after students read and analyzed The Labors of Hercules. Reading activities included the identification and discussion of Hercules’ character traits, obstacles he encountered, and strategies he used to overcome these challenges. After the liter-
### Table 1. Students’ Reported Examples of Self-Regulatory Behavior Before Instruction

#### Number of students reporting self-regulatory behaviors

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Students Reporting</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Students reporting self-regulation behaviors in out-of-school contexts</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students reporting self-regulation behaviors in academic tasks</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students unable to provide specific examples of self-regulatory behavior</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total number of students</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### Examples of self-regulatory behaviors provided by students

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Character Trait</th>
<th>Out-of school contexts</th>
<th>Academic tasks</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Perseverance</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Examples:</td>
<td>Persisting at sports and hobbies</td>
<td>Persisting at math problems or trying to get good grades</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Courage</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Examples:</td>
<td>Dare-devils; protecting friends from bullies; standing up for what’s right; taking risks</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-discipline</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Examples:</td>
<td>Practicing instruments; refraining from fighting; taking care of oneself at home</td>
<td>Finishing school work before play or TV</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resilience</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Responsibility</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Examples:</td>
<td>Chores; babysitting</td>
<td>Turning in homework on time</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1Some students reported on more than one trait.

### Table 2. Students’ Personal Goals

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Out-of school contexts</th>
<th>Academic contexts</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Students reporting personal goals in out-of-school contexts:</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sports and athletics</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>hobbies, arts, and leisure (e.g., drama, dance, art, cooking, travel)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
<td>(23)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students reporting personal goals in academic contexts:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Homework</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College and career</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
<td>(16)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students not completing the task</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total number of students</td>
<td>41</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
ary analysis, students were tasked to establish a personal goal. Reminded about the difference between a goal and a wish, they were asked to evaluate their goal to assure that it was realistic. Of the 41 students in the sample, 23 reported goals related to sports or hobbies, 16 reported school-related goals, such as homework or college acceptance, and two did not complete the task (see Table 2). Students were then asked to identify potential challenges and offer strategies for reaching their personal goals. To analyze students' awareness of self-regulation behaviors after literary analysis of the quest character’s traits, student-generated strategies were coded as self-regulation behaviors: metacognitive, motivation, and emotion, as well as control of the task situation and setting.

Additionally, students’ use of adaptive help-seeking was noted. Adaptive help-seeking is a self-regulated learning strategy that helps students cope with challenges; adaptive help seekers know when they require assistance and seek appropriate support from others (Newman, 2008). The idea here is to seek appropriate support, not simply a request for help to avoid a difficult task. Students’ responses show that some of these young students already

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SRL Strategy</th>
<th>Examples of student-generated traits and strategies</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Metacognitive control strategies | • Make time/a schedule for practice  
| Planning/organizing | • Make notes to myself so I won’t forget my HW  
| Evaluating goals | • Keep homework in backpack, room, safe place  
| Self-monitoring | • Keep a homework folder  
| | • Change career plans (I want to be a vet now but I could change my mind when I grow up)  
| | • Work more slowly to avoid careless errors  
| | • Listen to myself; use my mind  
| Motivation control | • Attend school every day  
| Self-reliance/self-discipline | • Practice/do homework before other activities  
| | • Concentrate  
| Emotion control | • If I do my homework, I can have fun on Friday  
| Visualization | • If I learn to swim, I can be a lifeguard  
| | • Take a laptop with family pictures to college (to control homesickness)  
| Control the task situation or setting by: | • Save/earn money to buy materials/sports equipment  
| managing resources | • Use the computer  
| altering the task | • Ski on bigger hills  
| managing distractions | • Wear a swim cap or cut my hair  
| | • Tell friends and family to be quiet  
| Adaptive help-seeking | • Ask football player to teach me  
| | • Get a mentor to teach me acting  
| | • Ask friend for help to learn (hobby)  
| | • Ask teachers for pass to use the internet  

Table 3.
Examples of Self-Regulated Learning Strategies Generated by Fourth Grade Students to Achieve Personal Goals
understood the value of mentoring as an adaptive help-seeking strategy (e.g., get a football player to teach me), while others simply requested “help with homework.” Table 3 presents a summary of the self-regulation strategies students generated for achieving personal goals. Notably, after learning self-regulation strategies vicariously through actions of literary characters, almost all (39 of 41 students) were now able to identify specific self-regulation strategies, and 16 of the 41 students generated strategies for accomplishing academic goals.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SRL Strategy</th>
<th>Examples of student-generated traits and strategies</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Metacognitive control strategies</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Planning/organizing</td>
<td>• Think aloud; think about a title</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Read (to get ideas)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Use graphic organizers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Plan ahead</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Remind myself to use more dialog</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evaluating</td>
<td>• Only use a few ideas (if too many ideas)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• List characters and delete some (if too many)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-monitoring</td>
<td>• Revise/edit/check my story</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Take my time or sit up straight (to avoid poor handwriting)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Motivation control</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-reliance/self-discipline</td>
<td>• Take a stretch break; rest my hand</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Do my best</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Stay with it; practice every day</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Come back to it later</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Take every minute to finish my story</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Limit play time; make/take more time to write</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Get it done!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Start again in the morning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotion control</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visualization</td>
<td>• Just calm down! Stay calm.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Close my eyes and think</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Control the task situation or setting by:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• managing resources</td>
<td>• Use dictionary or thesaurus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Use the computer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Sharpen pencils; get paper ready</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Look at a book for ideas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• altering the task</td>
<td>• Write on all the pages</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• managing distractions</td>
<td>• Go somewhere quiet</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Ask people to be quiet so I can concentrate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Use ear plugs; turn off TV</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adaptive help-seeking</td>
<td>• Ask teacher/adult for help</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Ask a friend for ideas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Talk about it in class</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Edit with peers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Listen to the teacher (to know what to do)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The final task promoted transfer of self-regulation behaviors to an academic task. After students were assigned a culminating assessment (to write the 13th labor of Hercules), students were asked to establish a writing goal, identify potential challenges, and generate strategies for accomplishing the writing task. As in the third task, students’ strategies were coded and categorized to identify the types of self-regulated learning tactics they planned to apply to this academic task (see Table 4).

In the fourth grade curriculum study, students began with naïve understandings of self-regulation behaviors. Their conception of themselves as self-disciplined, responsible individuals was largely derived from experiences in out-of-school contexts, such as responsibility for doing chores or the courage to “do the right thing.” Although a few students reported being persistent or self-disciplined at academic tasks, most did not, and some students were not able to provide examples of self-regulation, at home or at school. Notably, as instruction proceeded and students’ attention was focused on literary role models exhibiting self-regulated behaviors, students began to identify academic situations where self-regulation might be useful (see Table 2). Subsequently, instructional tasks were structured to provide students with opportunities to identify strategies for accomplishing both personal and academic goals, and in particular, to identify and draw upon these strategies to accomplish the unit’s culminating writing task.

This work with fourth graders has shown that some younger children bring to school an awareness of themselves as self-regulated learners. As other research has shown, children sometimes have opportunities to learn self-regulation strategies implicitly in home situations (e.g., Xu & Corno, 1994), and so, without explicit instruction, children’s concept of themselves as “self-regulated” may be narrow, and limited to situations in which they have had models and opportunities affording strategy use, such as doing household chores, or practicing music and sports. As transfer theory reminds us, learners do not automatically apply their knowledge to new and different situations. The transfer of self-regulation behaviors from out-of-school contexts to academic situations requires “high road” or mindful transfer in which learners consciously attend to and manage their own thought processes (Perkins & Salomon, 1988). The curriculum-embedded approach for teaching self-regulation promoted “high road” transfer by bringing strategy use to a conscious level and providing students opportunities to apply those strategies to academic tasks. Although some fourth graders may have already developed a naïve understanding of what it takes to accomplish a personal goal, most are unlikely to apply those strategies to school work on their own. Thus, children can benefit from instruction in self-regulatory behaviors, especially when academic tasks are tailored to promote students’ strategy use.

**Conclusion**

Although some students may enter school with some understanding of self-regulated behaviors such as responsibility and persistence, they may be more likely to think of themselves as possessing these traits in out-of-school situations. Others may have little or no concept of themselves as self-regulated, unable to provide specific examples of themselves as responsible or persistent. Others may have little or no understanding of what it means to strive toward goal achievement. The literacy curriculum provides an ideal context in which to teach self-regulation through literary models, much like the stories some children may have heard at home. Like parents, teachers can structure a classroom environment that offers opportunities for practicing self-regulation under the guidance of significant adults. Unlike in most family situations, however, the literacy curriculum facilitates the kind of instruction that can lead to an intellectual understanding of self-regulated learning strategies that students can call upon to succeed in school and beyond. For, without modeling and instruction, it is likely that students have, at best, only a naïve understanding of the concept of self-regulation, and so they cannot call upon and apply self-regulated learning strategies when they are most needed.

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A historical perspective of the reading profession: A comparison of peer-reviewed presentations at the 1975, 1976, 2005, & 2006 International Reading Association conferences

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Cathy Collins Block
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An opportunity has arisen to study the history of the reading profession through a comparison of the peer-reviewed, research-based sessions that occurred at the International Reading Association Annual Conferences in 1975, 1976, and 30 years later in 2005 and 2006. The purpose of this study is to analyze and compare the topics addressed in these presentations over a 30-year period. The data in this article also demonstrates the special benefits that can be derived from longitudinal studies.

The annual IRA convention is the yearly event where reading specialists, literacy researchers, policy makers, and practitioners from numerous academic fields meet to present their most recent reading research and exemplary literacy practices. Because the peer-reviewed papers presented at these meetings relate to long-standing as well as newly-emerging issues, a deeper understanding of our profession might be gained by comparing convention topics that have been addressed over a long period of time. A longitudinal survey of presentations at IRA conventions could also provide a unique perspective of the reading profession, and indicate which topics received the most and least attention at different periods in our history.

Through such an analysis, new researchers and teachers can learn about issues in reading research that have persisted for more than 30 years. We are pleased that we have the opportunity to step back and view reading over a long period of time. Such a benefit can provide insights that might not be possible had earlier data analyses in 1975 and 1976 not existed (Stallard, 1976, 1977). Many people have said that it takes fifty years for an innovation to take hold in the field of reading. If this is true, in 2025, fifty years after 1975, another longitudinal study might begin in which we could determine where we are, at that time, in the field of reading.

Over the past 30 years we have seen consistencies and irregularities among topics discussed at the Annual IRA Convention. Data in this article show (a) increases in the number of topics presented over the past 30 years, (b) topics that might profit from more attention from today’s researchers and practitioners, and (c) concerns that have carried some level of presence throughout our last 30-years history. Our goal is to highlight most frequently studied topics and issues that are not being addressed by as many as 14 different groups of reading professionals. We close our discussion with an interpretation of how these data can advance the field in the future.

Method
The procedures followed in this study adhered to those that were completed by the second author in 1975 and 1976 (Stallard, 1976; 1977). To begin, the authors listed every title of peer-reviewed sessions and every pre-convention institute during the 1975, 1976, and 2006 IRA Annual Convention. In this listing, only refereed sessions were tallied. Any session that was not peer-reviewed was deleted from our analysis. Specifically, we omitted: (a) all IRA non-open to public sessions (such as board meetings and committee meetings), (b) delegate assemblies, (c) award programs, (d) publishers’ presen-
tations of new products, (e) Children’s Choice Award Sessions, (f) IRA Alpha Upsilon Honor society meetings, (g) Children’s Book Council sessions, (h) all children’s and young adult authors’ presentations, in which they described how they wrote their books, (i) meetings for specific groups within IRA’s Executive Office, and (j) publisher sponsored luncheons or breakfasts.

Once all titles of the peer-reviewed sessions had been listed, a total number of presentations for each year was computed. Once the total number of presentations was identified, both authors independently tallied every session as to the topic(s) that was being discussed and presented at that session. The authors computed the inter-rater reliability of their ranking (.94). Differences were eliminated through discussions.

To determine how many topics were addressed in each session, the abstract of each presentation was read. If a main topic was discussed in a session, a tally was made beside that topic. References to more than one main topic in a single presentation were treated as separate main topic entries. To illustrate, the title of one 1975 paper was “Beyond Black English: New directions and linguistic considerations for the reading teacher.” The abstract for this paper indicated that improving reading instruction for African American students was one topic that would be discussed and linguistic considerations for the reading process would be the second topic to be presented. For this reason, a tally beside both of these main topics was made so that both discussions that would occur during this presentation would be represented validly in the data pool.

Once topics were identified and the number of times each topic was addressed was tallied, the authors computed the percent of attention that was allocated to that topic in its respective year of presentation. Percents were recorded so that comparisons between 1975, 1976, 2005, and 2006 could be made. Since a different number of presentations occurred in each of the four years, a comparison of frequencies alone would be a misrepresentation. Percentage of attention each topic received in 1975, 1976, 2005, and 2006 are reported in Table 1.

After percentages were recorded, the authors computed the amount of change that had occurred in each topic from the 1975/1976 to the 2005/2006 conventions. This percentage of change was recorded as either an increase (+) or decrease (-) in the amount of attention given to that topic 30 years later in 2005 and 2006. Next, we computed the average percent of time that each topic received over all four conference years.

Results and data
In 1975, a total of 330 peer-reviewed presentations occurred at the Annual IRA Convention. That number increased to 451 in 1976; 782 in 2005; and, 700 in 2006. Over this 30-year period, the number of peer-reviewed presentations at the IRA convention doubled. Viewing these data from a different lens, 30 years ago it would have taken two consecutive years for the same number of topics to be addressed as presently occurs in only a single annual conference of the International Reading Association.

Table 1 reports that there were 18 topics that received an average of at least two percent of attention over the four years of the conferences. These topics are ranked beginning with the most frequently appearing topic overall. Column one describes the topic, columns 2-5 represent the exact percent of attention received in 1975, 1976, 2005, and 2006, respectively. Column 6 reports the amount of increase (+) or decrease (-) in attention relegated to each topic from 1975 and 1976 to 2005 and 2006. It is important to note that 16 topics (or 89%) presented in 1975/1976 have continued to increase in the amount of research attention they are receiving today. Integration of language arts research and instruction has increased 30 percent in the last 30 years, computer assisted instruction increased by 20 percent, content area /nonfiction topics increased by 15 percent, English Language Learners and comprehension/metacognition both increased by 14 percent, struggling readers increased by 12 percent, and adolescent literacy by 10 percent. Only two major topics of 1975/1976 or 11 percent of total topics which occurred 30 years ago is receiving less attention today: (a) “History of reading instruction/Reviews of reading research” and (b) “Brain based literacy instruction (Neuroscience).”

In column 7 of Table 1, the average amount of attention that a major topic received over the last 30 year period was recorded. As you will notice, there were 18 topics that have received more than two percent of the total conferences’ attention (or 14 or more sessions per year) continuously over the last 30 years. By contrast, as shown in column 7 of table 2, 34 topics have received two percent or less of the total conference time over the same 30-year period. Table 2 also reports individual data for each of these topics in the same manner as was reported for most frequently occurring topics in Table 1.

Table 3 reports the total number of topics in IRA pre-convention institutes in 1975 (N=21), 1976 (N=27), 2005 (N=21), and 2006 (N=24). Because pre-convention institutes are peer-reviewed, focus a full day’s attention toward a single, major issue and educators have to pay extra to attend, the topics addressed in these sessions can be judged to be among the most critical issues in the profession. The percent of attention given to any topic in 1976 and 1975 was compared to the amount of attention that topic received in 2005 and 2006. The eighth most frequently studied topics at pre-convention institutes and the percent of attention they received over the 30-year period are listed in Table 3.

The most frequently occurring topics over the entire 30-year period are: (1) Integration of reading instruction in the Language Arts Curriculum/ News-
Table 1.
Percent of Attention to 18 Most Frequently Appearing Peer Reviewed Topics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topics</th>
<th>1975</th>
<th>1976</th>
<th>2005</th>
<th>2006</th>
<th>Change in % 30 Years Later</th>
<th>Average % for all 4 Years</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Integrating writing, listening, speaking, spelling &amp; reading using language experience approach, balanced literacy programs, books/text sets, thematic units, children's literature, newspapers and research/literature projects</td>
<td>6.6</td>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>17.6</td>
<td>21.9</td>
<td>+29.6</td>
<td>12.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional development</td>
<td>6.3</td>
<td>7.6</td>
<td>8.8</td>
<td>9.3</td>
<td>+4.2</td>
<td>8.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Content area instruction/ nonfiction/reading for information</td>
<td>5.7</td>
<td>.4</td>
<td>9.9</td>
<td>11.3</td>
<td>+15.1</td>
<td>6.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>District-, state-, country-wide reading programmatic models</td>
<td>4.8</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>8.3</td>
<td>7.4</td>
<td>+9.5</td>
<td>5.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading comprehension and metacognition</td>
<td>3.9</td>
<td>&gt;.1</td>
<td>8.6</td>
<td>9.1</td>
<td>+13.8</td>
<td>5.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Computer assisted technology/ instruction/ internet/ multimedia</td>
<td>&gt;.1</td>
<td>.4</td>
<td>9.3</td>
<td>11.3</td>
<td>+20.2</td>
<td>5.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disabled readers (at risk, meeting all students’ needs, improving instruction or intervention for struggling reading)</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>.4</td>
<td>6.6</td>
<td>9.0</td>
<td>+12.2</td>
<td>4.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Urban literacy and instruction for multiculturally-diverse students</td>
<td>5.1</td>
<td>&gt;.1</td>
<td>7.3</td>
<td>6.7</td>
<td>+8.8</td>
<td>4.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English as a Second Language (ELL or EL instruction)</td>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>&gt;.1</td>
<td>9.0</td>
<td>7.1</td>
<td>+13.6</td>
<td>4.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preschool reading, reading readiness, beginning reading, &amp; emergent reading</td>
<td>5.7</td>
<td>&gt;.1</td>
<td>6.8</td>
<td>5.3</td>
<td>+6.3</td>
<td>4.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading assessment</td>
<td>1.8</td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>4.8</td>
<td>4.9</td>
<td>+5.2</td>
<td>3.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading attitudes, motivation, and self-efficacy</td>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>&gt;.1</td>
<td>5.2</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>+5.8</td>
<td>3.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adolescent literacy</td>
<td>&gt;.1</td>
<td>.4</td>
<td>4.7</td>
<td>5.9</td>
<td>+10.2</td>
<td>2.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>History of reading instruction/ reviews of reading research</td>
<td>5.4</td>
<td>&gt;.1</td>
<td>3.7</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>-.3</td>
<td>2.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle school reading programs</td>
<td>1.8</td>
<td>&gt;.1</td>
<td>2.9</td>
<td>4.4</td>
<td>+5.4</td>
<td>2.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Music, storytelling, drama, play, readers theater, art, &amp; songs used to teach reading</td>
<td>&gt;.1</td>
<td>.7</td>
<td>3.9</td>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>+7.4</td>
<td>2.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Influences of the home environment on reading achievement (parent assisted instruction, community influences)</td>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>.4</td>
<td>2.9</td>
<td>2.6</td>
<td>+2.7</td>
<td>2.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brain based literacy instruction (neuroscience)</td>
<td>5.7</td>
<td>&gt;.1</td>
<td>1.27</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>-3.1</td>
<td>2.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Topics</td>
<td>1975</td>
<td>1976</td>
<td>2005</td>
<td>2006</td>
<td>Change in % 30 Years Later</td>
<td>Average % for all 4 Years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>------</td>
<td>------</td>
<td>------</td>
<td>------</td>
<td>----------------------------</td>
<td>--------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vocabulary development</td>
<td></td>
<td>.4</td>
<td>5.1</td>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>+7.1</td>
<td>2.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sociolinguistics/ linguistics/ psycholinguistics and reading</td>
<td>6.0</td>
<td>.9</td>
<td>.8</td>
<td>.44</td>
<td>-5.7</td>
<td>2.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Word recognition and word attack instruction/ word analysis/ decoding/ phonemic awareness &amp; phonics</td>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>&gt;.1</td>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>4.6</td>
<td>+5.4</td>
<td>2.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fluency</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3.7</td>
<td>4.1</td>
<td>+7.8</td>
<td>1.95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning centers, (literature circles &amp; guided reading)</td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>&gt;.1</td>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>1.6</td>
<td>+2.1</td>
<td>1.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hands-on learning</td>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>.4</td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>1.7</td>
<td>+1.9</td>
<td>1.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NCLB/research-based instructional practices</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>4.8</td>
<td>+6.2</td>
<td>1.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Combination of high school and college curricula/ advanced placements courses/ programs for less able adult readers</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>.3</td>
<td>.3</td>
<td>-4.2</td>
<td>1.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Critical and creative reading instruction</td>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>&gt;.1</td>
<td>1.7</td>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>+2.7</td>
<td>1.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New uses of school libraries</td>
<td>1.8</td>
<td>.4</td>
<td>1.9</td>
<td></td>
<td>-3</td>
<td>1.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coaching standards and successful literacy coaching</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>+3.6</td>
<td>.90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Objective-based instruction</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>.64</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>-2.4</td>
<td>.90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adult education programs</td>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>&gt;.1</td>
<td>.5</td>
<td>.7</td>
<td>-1.1</td>
<td>.85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bibliotherapy</td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>&gt;.1</td>
<td>.3</td>
<td>.3</td>
<td>-2.2</td>
<td>.85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Effects of television on reading</td>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>.3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>-2.1</td>
<td>.70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use of tutors in the reading program/ partner reading, mentors, buddy reading/ team reading</td>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>.53</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>+.43</td>
<td>.65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Study skills instruction</td>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>&gt;.1</td>
<td>&gt;.1</td>
<td>.14</td>
<td>-2</td>
<td>.61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sex roles in readers/ gender/ male issues</td>
<td>.3</td>
<td>&gt;.1</td>
<td>.77</td>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>+1.5</td>
<td>.60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher as researcher</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>+2.1</td>
<td>.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 2: Peer Reviewed Topics at IRA Conventions in 1975, 1976, 2005, and 2006 Averaging 2% or Less Attention (continued)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topics</th>
<th>1975</th>
<th>1976</th>
<th>2005</th>
<th>2006</th>
<th>Change in % 30 Years Later</th>
<th>Average % for all 4 Years</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Visual perception and visual discrimination</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>&gt;.1</td>
<td>&gt;.1</td>
<td>.3</td>
<td>-1.2</td>
<td>.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bullock Report</td>
<td>1.8</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>-1.8</td>
<td>.45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Readability formulas (current developments)</td>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>&gt;.1</td>
<td>.1</td>
<td>.14</td>
<td>-1.0</td>
<td>.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paraprofessional Training</td>
<td>.9</td>
<td>&gt;.1</td>
<td>.3</td>
<td></td>
<td>-.7</td>
<td>.30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Open space classrooms</td>
<td>1.3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>-1.3</td>
<td>.30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children’s modality preferences effects upon reading</td>
<td>.9</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>-.9</td>
<td>.22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gifted readers (avid readers)</td>
<td>.2</td>
<td>.5</td>
<td>.14</td>
<td></td>
<td>+44</td>
<td>.21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Career education</td>
<td>.6</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>-.6</td>
<td>.15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading recovery</td>
<td>.13</td>
<td>.29</td>
<td></td>
<td>+.42</td>
<td>.10</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interpersonal student/ teacher relations</td>
<td>.4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>-.4</td>
<td>.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summer programs</td>
<td>.38</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>+.38</td>
<td>.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading and the deaf</td>
<td>.13</td>
<td>.14</td>
<td></td>
<td>+.27</td>
<td>.06</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The impact of Brown v. Board of Education</td>
<td>.23</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>+.23</td>
<td>.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vygotsky and Bakhtin: monologistic vs. dialogic pedagogy</td>
<td>.13</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>+.13</td>
<td>.03</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

papers/Oral language/ Language experience approach/ Using trade books (23.5%), (2) Reading/Learning disabled child/Case study approach to diagnosis and correction in the classroom (15.7%), (3) Reading assessment of linguistically/ culturally different populations (14.9%), (4) Reading Comprehension (9.6%), (5) Teaching English to speakers of other languages (9.3%), (6) Literacy coaches (7.9%), (7) Approaches to improve attitude toward reading (7.6%), and (8) Teaching secondary school or content area reading (7.3%).

**Discussion**

Data revealed that today more than 700 topics are being researched and presented annually at the IRA Annual Convention. This number is more than twice the number of investigations that occurred 30 years ago. This finding is encouraging, as it suggests that more specific and diverse fields of study are occurring in reading research over the last 30 years.

One of the most important findings of this study relates to the scope and breadth of topics explored within the last 30 years. Despite the tremendous increase in number of specific investigations, only 18 topics received a significant percentage of convention time. All of these topics have sustained our attention for 30 years, suggesting that the issues literacy researchers and practitioners are addressing are complex and not yet resolved. These data are surprising.

Prior to this analysis, some educators may have believed that our body of knowledge was processing much faster than was evident in our data. One might have hoped that more topics researched in 1975 and...

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Table 3:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topics</th>
<th>’75%</th>
<th>’76%</th>
<th>’05%</th>
<th>’06%</th>
<th>Change in % 30 Years Later</th>
<th>Average % for all 4 Years</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Integration of reading instruction in LA curriculum/ Newspapers/ oral language/ Language experience approach/ using tradebooks</td>
<td>23.3</td>
<td>35.5</td>
<td>14.2</td>
<td>20.8</td>
<td>-23.8</td>
<td>23.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading/ learning disabled child/ case study approach to diagnosis and correction in the classroom</td>
<td>17.5</td>
<td>21.3</td>
<td>23.8</td>
<td></td>
<td>-15</td>
<td>15.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading assessment of linguistically and culturally different populations/ reporting in a district wide program</td>
<td>5.8</td>
<td>21.3</td>
<td>28.4</td>
<td>4.1</td>
<td>+5.4</td>
<td>14.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading Comprehension</td>
<td>17.6</td>
<td>7.1</td>
<td>9.5</td>
<td>4.1</td>
<td>-11.1</td>
<td>9.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teaching English to other language speakers</td>
<td>14.2</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>4.1</td>
<td></td>
<td>+8.9</td>
<td>9.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Literacy coaches</td>
<td></td>
<td>19</td>
<td>12.5</td>
<td></td>
<td>+31.5</td>
<td>7.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Approaches to improve attitude toward reading</td>
<td>7.1</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>4.1</td>
<td></td>
<td>+16</td>
<td>7.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teaching Secondary School or Content Area Reading</td>
<td>5.8</td>
<td>14.2</td>
<td>9.4</td>
<td></td>
<td>-10.6</td>
<td>7.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children/Young Adult Literature</td>
<td>5.8</td>
<td>7.1</td>
<td>9.5</td>
<td>4.1</td>
<td>+.7</td>
<td>6.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional Development/Competency Based Teacher Education</td>
<td>5.8</td>
<td>7.1</td>
<td>4.7</td>
<td>8.3</td>
<td>+.1</td>
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Newest studies are becoming more specific as abreast of recently emerging topics in literacy research. Data from this study proves that it is imperative to stay abreast of recent topics in several areas. For this reason, it is likely that researchers will choose to attend new presentations in disparate fields. Through the diverse and broader perspectives such participants would experience, our field may more quickly cross-polinate concepts. In doing so, more widely-adaptable, valid, and effective answers to our more challenging theoretical, practical, and policy-related issues might be reached more rapidly.

Second, international and national literacy conventions like the IRA Annual Meeting and other professional association conventions and meetings could provide more venues for participants of similar and diverse interests to interact in more productive ways to address major issues simultaneously, through multiple lenses of expertise. For instance, we commend conferences, like the IRA, who use “special interest group,” discussants, or debate formats. These traditional methods of engaging in rich discussion have served an important purpose in the history of our profession. Based on the research in this article, however, new formats must be created where people with advanced knowledge in different aspects of our profession can more often engage in powerful discussions. Data in this article indicate that the majority of people around the world are focusing their attention in fewer than in two dozen areas of immense concern. We recommend that annual conventions become the venues in which new, more diverse networks can be built. Such venues would provide (a) equal time for people to share what they know, and (b) an equal number of sessions for presenters to describe what they want to learn more about to advance their own research, practices, and policies. A simple change would be to require more time for discussion during each session. At present, many sessions spend only three to five minutes in an hour-long session to ask for audience feedback. If more time for interaction was required, presenters could more adequately describe where their research is heading and the specific types of limitations that they are experiencing. If session time could be divided more equally between presenting and asking for help, our field might become a stronger learning community.

The immense capabilities of computerized registration open many other new possibilities for future IRA Conventions and other professional association conventions and meetings to advance our field during the conference itself. At present, annual conferences are among the most successful and effective venues for professionals to (a) learn lastest advancement in our field, (b) share one’s own greatest successes in research, curricula, and instruction from the previous year’s work, and (c) build networks with colleagues of similar interests. In the future, annual meetings could go beyond these goals and actually begin to create new knowledge. New
First, data from historical analysis indicate that the most frequently-occurring topics in our profession will be presented at an annual conference by 14 to 154 different groups or presenters. If at the submission stage of their conference papers, each of these teams could make a special request (in the description of their presentation) for up to three different types of researchers, practitioners, or policy makers to attend their session, all presenters would be assured that present in their audience will be experts who have information which might address an immediate need being faced at the present stage in either their theory building, research investigations, or implementation of literacy practices. By making such specific requests, a follow up discussion could be held so that presenters could project specific questions to the audience for which they were seeking answers. These inquiries would be ones that they themselves could not answer using the specific types of information that they had just presented at their session.

In a similar vein, at the time at which a peer-reviewed paper was accepted for presentation at the convention, presenters could distribute through some feature in the computerized conference program’s website, specific “not yet known” bodies of knowledge that they were encountering which was creating difficulties for them, relative to the information that they would be presenting at the annual conference. If this type of request could be made prior to the conference, those who attended each session would be able to bring one or two printed documents or website locators that could be given to the presenters, during a 45-minute, follow-up round table discussion in which only a select number of people (or anyone who would like to attend on a first come basis) would attend. If this format were initiated, presenters and participants could move the present practices of allowing for questions and answers at the end of each session to a more advanced and effective format. Specifically, presenters would know that immediately following their presentation they could receive what would be the equivalent of many discussants’ interpretation of their data from several perspectives, consecutively, without having to spend an entire day on a specific topic. The benefits of this method would be that presenters would have the opportunity to network with experts outside their specific domain of expertise, a practice that does not occur often enough in our profession.

Third, in the future, many creative means could be created in which the 18 most frequently selected peer-reviewed presentations for an annual conference could be coded prior to the conference. If this occurred, participants could see at a quick glance the issues that would occupy a significant percent of convention time. Of equal importance, conference attendees would be able to identify those sessions that would receive less than two percent (2%) of the time at the conference. While space does not allow for us to describe many different ways in which networks between these majority and minority voices could be united through computerized convention program features, we would like to propose one example. Strand categorization that occurs in many professional conferences, like those present at IRA conventions and other professional association conventions, could be structured in more effective ways. Each session might be required to be coded as to the depths of information that will be reported. If such coding occurred, conference attendees could select certain sessions that were designed to provide a background review of research in a literacy domain that was new to that participant. Other sessions would be coded and designed to be at a mid-level of expertise, so that those who are working in that domain but do not feel as if they were an expert in that field could benefit from sharing with others who are at their same level of expertise. Another group of sessions could be designed for those who are creating new methods and attempting new advancements in a specific domain. People who choose to attend this category of session would know that now as much time would be spent building background and explaining present practices.

Last, in the process of submitting peer-reviewed presentations or once papers were selected, the chair of each session could pose key questions that they would like to be addressed by people who were selected by the president to present as guest speakers at the following year’s convention (since guest speakers are contracted more than one year in advance). If the guest speakers were presented with a summary of the most common, as-yet-unresolved-issues facing our profession one year in advance, featured presenter presentations could address concerns (and offer suggestions to resolve large issues) at the next year’s conference so that a large portion of convention attendees could hear issues discussed all together. Most members of the entire conference community could hear the latest research and the latest limitations in a specific domain from more than one featured speaker (expert in the field) over the same four-day period.
Summary
The purpose of this article was to provide data of the types of peer-reviewed presentations made during four selected years over the last 30 years of the IRA Annual Conference. Our goal was to examine how rapidly our field is moving forward, how often new topics were introduced, how many issues have sustained their attention for a 30-year period, and to interpret the data’s relevance to our field today and in the future. Through our work, we realize that the IRA Annual Convention and other professional association conventions and meetings hold the potential, in and of itself, to advance our field before, during, and after each professional annual meeting. We also found that the data informed our thinking in many ways as to the speed with which issues within our profession are resolved. We hope that the data in this article will enable every reader to find new ways to inform their present practices and lead all of us to a more advanced and highly effective profession.

References
Professional books for literacy leaders

Barbara A. Ward
Terrell A. Young
Washington State University, Washington

The authors of the eight books reviewed here would probably all agree that today’s informed, savvy teachers and administrators should be the literacy leaders in their classrooms and schools. By guiding novice teachers, by staying informed on current trends in educational practices, by questioning the status quo or pondering the relevance of research, and by examining and modifying their own literacy practices, teachers can assume positions of leadership and help bring about change in communities. After all, nothing succeeds like success, and when students are reading and clamoring for more books to read simply because they are caught up in the act of reading and not for Accelerated Reader points, then teachers in nearby classrooms are sure to want to know the secrets to that success. In different fashions all of these titles call upon teachers to look within their own classrooms, to reflect upon the instructional decisions they are making, and consider the best practices that will result in a generation of readers and critical thinkers rather than a generation taught to read merely to find the right answers. Each book offers a different way in which teachers may serve as instructional leaders and bring about change in their communities.


Response to Intervention (RtI) has become a hot topic in state departments of education, school districts, and classrooms as teachers look for the best ways to meet the needs of their struggling readers in accordance with the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), the law that provides federal rules for special education. Allington explains that the intent of the RtI is to reduce the number of students who are classified as pupils with disabilities (perhaps by 70 percent), identify struggling readers at an early age and then provide intervention, provide effective, intensive, evidence-based early intervention, produce accelerated reading growth to meet annual yearly progress criteria, and provide high-quality professional development to teachers of the lowest-performing students (p. 19). The author suggests that Response to Instruction might be a better name for the practice than Response to Intervention since it takes expert, intensive reading instruction to help struggling readers meet grade-level expectations. Allington maintains that struggling readers need that additional instruction and reading time in order to remove their reading deficits. Calling for radical changes in how struggling readers are tutored presently, Allington calls for “a full day, at least, of high-quality lessons if they are to match or even exceed the reading growth patterns observed in their higher-achieving peers” (p. 3).

Analysis of reading research suggests that current special programs for struggling readers do little to help students catch up with their achieving peers. For instance, Title I remedial programs add about two months’ growth per year, while special education appears to add no growth. Likewise, providing paraprofessionals for struggling readers has little effect on improving students’ reading achievement. Yet, using the available data from research studies, Allington says that “it is reasonable to expect that almost all students who initially struggle can be caught up by third grade” (p. 6).
Struggling readers need to double or triple their reading growth if they are to make such progress.

In the book’s ten chapters, the author presents the following topics while synthesizing research to support each topic: Why Struggling Readers Continue to Struggle; Beginning an Intervention Plan; Matching Reader and Text Level; Dramatically Expand Reading Activity; Using Very Small Groups or Tutoring; Coordinating Intervention with Core Classroom; Delivering Intervention by Expert Teacher; Focusing Instruction on Meta-Cognition and Meaning; Using Text that Are Interesting to Students; and Questions and Answers about Interventions. In his book Allington constantly reminds readers that expert teachers, not commercial programs, make the difference for struggling readers.

Throughout the book, Allington cites several research studies that show that struggling readers in exemplary teachers’ classrooms read as well as average students under the guidance of more typical teachers. He suggests that struggling readers fail to benefit from grade-level materials and need intervention designs that “focus on the match between the student and curriculum materials, all day long” (p. 34). Likewise, more effective classrooms balance whole group instruction with small group and side-by-side instruction. Too often struggling readers are placed with teachers who rely solely on a whole-class instructional model, which is clearly not beneficial for them. Similarly, struggling readers greatly benefit from an emphasis on developing meta-cognition and comprehension. Allington writes, “In other words, we have both research and a long tradition of providing decoding-emphasis interventions that did not produce students who could read with understanding” (p. 130). Thus, students benefit from balanced approaches that develop their decoding abilities while focusing on comprehension, and they need effective teachers. Teachers who serve as instructional literacy leaders in their schools will want to reconsider their approaches to the students in their classrooms who struggle with reading. Excellent teachers and appropriate books are the most important ingredients in the recipe for successful instruction with these students, according to Allington.

Reports that 14 percent of beginning teachers quit their jobs after the first year. The numbers don’t get any better during the next few years. After two years in the classroom, 24 percent decide to leave; after three years, 33 percent leave; after four years, 40 percent; and 46 percent after five years. If beginning teachers can hang on until that sixth year, then perhaps their retention is assured. Not only is the cost in dollars spent preparing new teachers high but also is the cost at the school building level as one by one, hopeful teacher candidates fall by the wayside, necessitating more time spent recruiting, interviewing, and inducting new teachers. Experts in the field of teacher education are beginning to see the value of support during and after this initial introduction to the world of teaching. It has become clearer that what happens during a teacher’s beginning years and the support he/she receives during those initial years are as crucial to a long teaching career as the student teaching experience is. New teachers express loneliness, a feeling of isolation, unreal expectations, and an overwhelming workload. Experienced teachers have likely gone through similar experiences and can offer ways to survive the treacherous aspects of teaching. Mentoring these new teachers is one way to address several of the factors that contribute to teachers leaving the teaching profession. Today’s school boards and principals have come to see that the problem is not so much recruiting teachers as it is retaining teachers once they have accepted teaching contracts.

Although many inservice teachers are asked to guide the next generation of teachers, there are few books available on exactly how to do so. This book fills that need, providing detailed information about what new teachers can expect in their new jobs as well as tips for how the experienced teachers who will mentor them can foster relationships with their charges. Mentoring Beginning Teachers should be required for anyone working with a beginning teacher as well as for beginning teachers themselves. The authors’ thoughts about teaching are echoed in the book’s subtitle: Guiding, Reflecting, Coaching. The authors dismiss any misguided notion that teaching is something formulaic or that the role of mentors is simply to tell new teachers what to do. Instead, they characterize mentoring as an active process in which the mentor and mentee negotiate a relationship around their teaching experiences.

Thirteen chapters that focus on common questions about mentoring form the framework for this guidebook to mentoring. The chapters begin with what the authors consider to be key concepts or questions and then answer those questions in several different ways. For instance, the authors define a mentor as “a veteran teacher who works with a novice during the beginning teacher’s early experiences in the classroom” (p. 9). In the past the novice teacher worked with an experienced teacher during student teaching but only rarely dur-

As sure as spring weather brings budding trees and warmer weather, it also brings boxes of standardized tests that mysteriously appear and then disappear from school buildings all over the nation. A secretive air seems to surround the tests with booklets being locked away, and teachers often becoming somber or anxious while administering them. Even the content of these tests may be puzzling to students and teachers, and there is often a disconnection between how the teacher delivers reading skills and strategies and how the students are expected to apply those same skills on a reading test.

Drawing on his years of writing reading tests as well as his conversations with teachers, Fuhrken demystifies reading tests by describing how they are constructed and what they contain. Fuhrken contends that the more teachers know more about how tests are constructed and the standards, the more informed and the more able to interpret standards they will be, passing on their understanding to their students, who can then, in turn, apply their knowledge of reading to the test items inside those ubiquitous test booklets. The book is divided into four sections: “Building Understandings about Tests,” “Exploring Strategies for Reading Tests,” “Putting Strategies to Work,” and “Demonstrating Understandings with Reading Activities.” Written in engaging fashion with many excellent examples of test lingo and test items, the book engages readers from its opening pages which debunk commonly held beliefs about tests. After taking a test on testing, readers will then be able to read the reasons behind the correct answers, as Fuhrken models good test-taking strategies. Some of the correct answers are surprising; for instance, “All standards are assessed equally.” Fuhrken explains that reading standards are not assessed equally, a fact which may influence how teachers spend their instructional time. In chapter two, Fuhrken continues to test readers’ knowledge of test taking and disputes some commonly held notions about test behavior; for instance, “many times the longest option is the correct answer” and “do not choose an option that contains the word all, always, or never, because that option will never be the correct answer,” and “your first instinct is the right answer” are all false, the stuff of urban legends about tests.

After putting readers at ease about these common testing misconceptions, Fuhrken moves into a practical section of the book with chapters on vocabulary, important ideas, literacy elements, literary techniques, and interpretations. For each of these, he provides a sample test passage and sample test questions on nearly every other page, and carefully walks readers through strategies that will help them guide their students through similar test items; he suggests recognizing the item type and locating important information in the item as being particularly helpful.

The book’s pages are a wonderful resource for teachers. There are nine sample items for vocabulary practice. For comprehensiveness, he provides four sample
questions and responses. Particularly useful are his alternate versions of graphic organizers and the reminder that these visual tools help readers see the relationships between ideas. He provides six samples for literacy elements: character, plot, setting, conflict, resolution, and theme, six samples that focus on literary techniques, including figurative language, simile, metaphor, hyperbole, personification, and alliteration. Additionally, he provides six test samples related to interpretation: cause-effect, chronology, conclusion/inference, prediction, fact/opinion, supporting evidence. Text matters have three items that focus on the author’s purpose, text type, and the author’s organization.

As definitive as these first two sections are, the next two offer instructional delights for teachers. Section 3 provides many test preparation materials that teachers can adjust to meet their students’ needs. Section 4 “Demonstrating Understandings with Reading Activities” will quickly become a teacher favorite, crammed as it is with more than thirty activities designed to help students build self-confidence. What is more, Fuhrken never talks down to his audience or writes as though testing and test scores are all that matters in the classroom. For him, what is essential is the thinking that occurs as students wrestle with test items or different types of texts. He goes to great pains to incorporate literature with all of the activities, and if the 76 children’s books from which he draws test items and activities aren’t as current as might be desired, they certainly provide a wonderful starting place for teachers searching for a way to link their instructional practices to today’s reading tests while also incorporating good children’s literature. A thorough index and appendix add immeasurably to the book’s usefulness as a quick reference for teachers. Teachers looking for ways to handle test preparation may find this title a treasure—especially since Fuhrken’s suggestions encourage critical reading and critical thinking.


Kelly Gallagher is worried, and when he worries, he expresses his concerns through writing. Gallagher, a teacher in a California school district, has been observing trends in literacy during his 22 years as a classroom teacher, and what he is noticing now should be deeply disturbing and provocative to anyone associated with education. Instead of helping kindle the love of reading in today’s students, many current literacy practices kill that love and ensure that graduating students will never voluntarily pick up a book again. In despair, he has coined the term “readicide” to identify “the systematic killing of the love of reading, often exacerbated by the inane, mind-numbing practices in schools” (p. 2). From the epigram that opens the book—Confucius’s cautionary thought that “Learning without thinking is labor lost; thinking without learning is dangerous”—to its closing chapters, Gallagher reconceptualizes the purposes behind education and alerts the rest of us to what is happening to the next generation of readers.

By turns, Gallagher takes aim at four culprits culpable for readicide, first blaming our current obsession with creating students who are good test-takers rather than developing readers, writers or thinkers. Additionally, he worries that schools provide few authentic reading experiences for their students. Finally, teachers are guilty of either over-teaching the books used in their classrooms or under-teaching them, Gallagher claims. Those authentic reading experiences in which readers get lost in the books they are reading are becoming rarer and rarer in today’s highly scripted, test-driven, boil-the-magic-of-the-book-experience-into-questions that focus on the unimportant. Although he recognizes and discusses briefly the decline in reading due to poverty, parental education, print-poor home environments and second language issues, Gallagher also blames today’s tendency to rush children through learning experiences as well as the more alluring entertainment options that draw them away from books.

To back up his fiery comments, Gallagher relies not only on his own observations within the classroom but cites the National Council of Teachers of English Principles of Adolescent Literacy Reform (2006) as well as the National Assessment of Educational Progress, both of which show that secondary school students are reading significantly below expected levels. He is concerned with a report from the National Assessment of Adult Literacy which saw high school graduates’ literacy scores drop between 1992 and 2003.

The statistics Gallagher cites are startling. One in four secondary students is unable to read and understand the material in textbooks. Every day, 3,000 students with limited literacy skills drop out of school. Perhaps most dismayingly, the 2005 ACT College Readiness Benchmark for Reading found that only half of the students tested were ready for college-level reading, and, according to the American Institutes for Research, only 13 percent of American adults are able to perform complex literacy tasks.

Gallagher offers more food for thought about the generation of alliterates being created in today’s classrooms. The National Endowment for the Arts’ (2004) report indicates that only four percent of those surveyed consider themselves avid readers while three-fourths of the respondents consider themselves to be light readers or nonliterary readers. The newspaper USA Today reported that more than a quarter—27 percent of the adults in our nation—did not read a single book during 2007. As many teachers know, the enthusiasm kinder-
gardeners have for reading gives way to indifference in the fifth grade; that indifference turns to hostility by twelfth grade. By the time many students leave high school, they have sighs of relief that they will never again have to read a book.

In the book’s five chapters, Gallagher first gives an overview of readicide and then, one by one, uses the subsequent chapters to address its causes. Not surprisingly, he concludes that focusing on test preparation and multiple choice responses inspires only shallow teaching and learning. This sort of test preparation means that struggling readers will continue to struggle. Teaching to the test is not the problem, according to Gallagher. The problem comes from teaching to a shallow test. Students who are taught to be good test takers never learn to read and write well, although they may learn how to score well on tests. Gallagher suggests that the problem begins in how schools define reading and what they value when it comes to regain. He urges school teams to examine what they mean when they say that their school values reading and how their instructional literacy practices impact those definitions and are impacted by the definitions as well.

Schools fail to provide interesting reading material to students, according to Gallagher, often removing novels and other challenging texts so that more time can be devoted to test preparation. Oddly, he also pondered the ludicrousness of schools where students rarely read and questions instructional decisions sure to erode any sprouting interest in reading for pleasure. He worries that teachers do too little with some challenging books, allowing students to muddle their way through books that require some guidance from the teacher and some discussion about controversial issues. This under-teaching or avoiding of challenging books is just as detrimental to creating lifelong readers as over-teaching may be.

In a wonderfully apt comparison, Gallagher likens over-teaching books to stopping a film numerous times in order to look at the scenes closely. Disrupting the flow of the film or the book causes a disjointed experience and leaves readers disconnected from the text. Gallagher sees little use in analyzing every page in a book. For him, the value comes from the deep thinking such books may foster in their readers. The value of teaching great books is how they provide places to examine critically today’s issues. Gallagher wants his students and the nation’s citizens to be thoughtful and critical consumers.

Gallagher describes current literacy practices as part of what he calls “the-kill-a-reader casserole.” Taken separately, these practices may be perfectly harmless, but blended together with similar ingredients, they constitute an unhealthy reading diet and guarantee that our schools will inspire few readers. His solution for what ails us? Give students access to great books and uninterrupted time to read them. Help students see themselves as readers so that reading becomes a lifelong activity and not merely an activity suited for school. Divide school reading into half academic, half recreational. Readers need interesting books, time to read the books inside school, and a place to read their books, according to Gallagher.

Gallagher challenges teachers to swim against the swiftly moving current of educational practices that eradicate the love of reading in young readers. He reminds us that a generation of readers—or nonreaders—hangs in the balance. This book is bound to make readers angry enough to toss their basals in favor of engaging chapter books, novels, and nonfiction texts designed to elicit response from students. Although Gallagher writes primarily about older readers, every word in this book is applicable to younger readers.


Instructional leaders are always concerned about students’ comprehension and understanding. After the publication of Mosaic of Thought (Keene & Zimmerman, 1997), Ellin Keene noted that in too many classrooms the comprehension strategies seemed to take on a life of their own—in many classrooms the focus had moved from understanding the text to applying the current strategy. Not only did this concern Keene, but it was a criticism that some researchers expressed about her own workshop model. While working with students in one of the nation’s poorest school districts, she was surprised when one student lamented that she did not even know what the phrase “make sense” meant. Keene struggled to find the appropriate language to explain what she and other teachers meant when they used the phrase. It’s a good question, she realized. What does it mean to make sense of a passage? To Understand is Keene’s response to that young girl, and she uses her book to explain how to keep the focus of comprehension strategies on students’ understanding of text. Indeed, being able to do that and help students understand what it means to make sense of whatever they are reading are at the heart of comprehension. After much consideration, Keene’s focus became three models: Dimensions and Outcomes of Understanding, What Is Essential for Literacy Learning, and Literacy Studio. Keene believes these three models will lead to a richer, more memorable intellectual life for all students.

As Keene observes in classrooms, she says she frequently notices a culture of low expectations. Further, she noted that in many classrooms in the United States, making sense is too often assessed by answering questions, retelling, or identifying the new vocabulary learned. Keene felt that students needed language, in-
struction, and support to help them to use the strategies so they could make sense and comprehend at high levels. She suggests that teachers must focus on what is important, use research-based teaching and learning strategies, teach essential concepts over a long period of time, and give students numerous opportunities to apply these concepts in a variety of contexts and texts.

Keene is interested in having students notice what happens in their minds and in their lives as they begin to understand the texts they were reading. Her dimensions of understanding focus on what happens in their lives. She describes these dimensions in the following ways: fervent, dwell in ideas, struggle for insight, revise their thinking and take action, become Renaissance learners who are passionately interested in topics and ideas, engage in rigorous discourse about ideas, have emotional connections to enrich their understanding, and remember. Moreover, she notes 16 outcomes of understanding and details them over three pages to illustrate how they work in narrative and poetry, and in expository text. The outcomes include such things as empathy, stamina, confidence, and recollection. Additionally, Keene provides suggestions for how teachers can help students identify the outcomes and dimensions in discussions and conferences.

As classroom teachers readily know, the curriculum is a glass filled and overflowing. Keene suggests that teachers use Rumelhart's model with three surface structure systems that help readers identify words and read fluently, and three deep structure systems that enable readers to comprehend literally and deeply, probe ideas, and extend and apply their understandings. The surface structure includes graphophonic, lexical, and syntactic systems. The deep structure systems include semantic, schematic, and pragmatic. Students use all six systems simultaneously to become efficient readers, writers, listeners, and speakers. Typically, teachers are more comfortable with teaching the graphophonic, syntactic, and semantic systems. Keene suggests that in the early grades there should be a 50-50 balance in the surface and deep structure systems. In the upper grades, more attention should be given to the deep structure systems.

Keene noticed that many students and teachers were merely going through the motions during reading workshops with limited passion, little engagement, and no fervency about what they were reading. Since such workshops resulted in little in-depth learning, she developed the Literacy Studio to replace the workshop model that was not working. The Literacy Studio is comprised of crafting, composing, invitational, and reflecting sessions. Detailed descriptions of effective sessions and the teacher's role in each session are carefully provided in the book. Schools seeking to revitalize their literacy programs would be advised to form a teacher study group to read this book for specific suggestions on how to make the changes Keene suggests.

A popular International Reading Association publication entitled What Research Says about Reading purports to offer readers definitive answers to several essential questions about literacy today. This alternative collection from members of the National Council of Teachers of English's Commission on Reading has its tongue firmly planted in cheek as the various contributors dispute the official line of thinking about how we learn to read and how reading should be taught. The book challenges the findings of the National Reading Panel, and criticizes the thinking behind Reading First and No Child Left Behind. With an introduction by Yetta Goodman, the book contains four sections, the first containing two chapters devoted to providing historical context for current literacy practices. The second section's seven chapters examine what reading research actually tells us about such disparate topics as early literacy, adolescent literacy, motivation and multilingual learners. Particularly noteworthy is chapter four “What We Know about the Learning and Development of Reading K-12: Thirteen Core Understandings about Reading and Learning to Read” by Jane Braunger and Jan Patricia Lewis. The authors remind readers of the importance of background knowledge and prior experience as well as the active and social nature of reading. Arguably the most important statement is number 10: “Children learn successful reading strategies in the context of real reading” (p. 73).

The book's third section examines critically the Commission on Reading's documents about literacy, and the fourth section provides the Commission on Reading's essential statements on literacy. Readers may want to peruse this section before and after reading the rest of the text.

Taken together, the twelve chapters provide many instructional suggestions, much food for thought, and far more evidence than most of us will ever need to question popular and political assumptions about reading. This is an important book, and one that might just change the direction of how literacy programs are funded if it came to the attention of the right readers—or enough readers willing to take a stand and make a difference in their classrooms.

If test preparation has you down, this book provides the perfect antidote for your doldrums. In it, author, Texas

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**References**


teacher and blogger Miller shares her beliefs about good books and pleasure reading. Called “the book whisperer” for her purported ability to match children with the books that will captivate them, Miller has written a book brimming with strategies to inspire lifelong reading. The book’s seven chapters are all equally engaging and provide hope to those of us who had just about given up any thought that teaching literacy in school could be fun once again. Even the chapter titles are clever and written to engage teacher readers and serve as a mantra for one of the purposes of literacy instruction: “There and Back Again,” “Everybody Is a Reader,” “There’s a Time and a Place,” “Reading Freedom,” “Walking the Walk,” “Cutting the Teacher Strings,” and “Letting Go.” The chapter titles and their content bear testimony to Miller’s passion for reading and her mission to connect all of her students with books that they will enjoy reading. Miller reminds teachers of the importance of choice and independent reading and inspires them to reexamine how they teach reading.

Miller disdains the labels often used for readers who aren’t on the same reading level as their classmates. She prefers terms such as developing readers for readers who are not reading at grade level for whatever reasons, dormant readers instead of reluctant readers, and underground readers. Because dormant readers are able to read and pass state tests, teachers often ignore them. But since they aren’t readers, they need teachers and classmates who engage them in reading. Miller uses the term underground readers to describe those gifted readers who consider the reading that they do in school as quite separate from their own reading lives.

Since many school districts spend most of their resources on developing readers, paying little attention to gifted readers and dormant readers since they pass the annual federally-mandated tests, Miller’s comments are particularly salient. While her terminology may be a matter of semantics, it also helps seasoned teachers view their readers with fresh eyes and a new determination to reach those students who have been ignored in the past.

Drawing from her own teaching experiences, Miller also provides plenty of ideas for integrating independent reading into even the most rigid of schedules. This book needs to be read, discussed, and its ideas incorporated if we are going to reverse the anti-reading mandate many of our nation’s schools seem to be following.


It’s encouraging to find instructional leaders who point out sound ideas worth hanging onto during today’s shifting educational climate, and that’s precisely what Newkirk does in this engaging book. Drawing on personal anecdotes from his own forty years of teaching, Newkirk reminds readers why they were drawn to the teaching profession, a noteworthy feat considering what schools and teaching have become today. Experienced teachers are sure to find themselves nodding their heads in agreement as he describes an over-stuffed curriculum that would take a lifetime to complete and the ever-diminishing place of writing in the classroom. Novice teachers will find much honesty and encouragement as well as suggestions for reading and writing activities that Newkirk found effective. Dismayed by the thought that teachers are often depicted as having to sacrifice themselves for their students, he even takes on Hollywood and its films featuring teachers who succeed, but at high costs to themselves.

His first two chapters provide the historical context for today’s educational reform, reminding readers that what is happening today is part of a century-old pattern in which experts likened education to a factory model. The six chapters at the book’s heart tout six principles Newkirk values: parity between reading and writing, expressive writing, using popular culture as a literacy tool, the purposes behind reading and writing, uncluttering the curriculum, and the silences in our teaching stories. In his final chapter, Newkirk ponders the pleasures of reading both he and his father shared.

The book’s green cover with a student writing on a chalk board and sandwiched in between the cogs and wheels of the machinery representing the factory model of education to which many of our political leaders subscribe is a perfect choice to depict the model upon which our current educational system is built. The wheels of the machine grind smoothly, and uniform products are spit out, time and again. But children aren’t products and are not uniform so this model hardly works for teaching and learning.

Newkirk’s nine chapters with an extensive bibliography and index cover a lot of important territory, and he thoughtfully engages the issues that currently plague teaching today.

The first pages pay homage of sorts to Raymond Callahan’s description of the cult of efficiency prevalent during the twentieth century. Just as that model seemed to have disappeared, it experienced a rebirth, thanks to the standards movement. Consequently, Newkirk worries about the current emphasis on research-based instruction and scripted teacher materials and the ignoring of what he calls “the wisdom of experience.” Fearing that educational research is often misused and disdainful of those who rely only on formal research to inform their teaching practices and ignore the value of years of experience, Newkirk frets because despite the attractiveness of uniform systems of instruction, standardization “often leads to sameness, not necessarily quality, and rarely to excellence. The intellectual passions, temperaments, teaching preferences, even eccentricities of individual
teachers are the material with which a diverse curriculum is built” (p. 9).

Newkirk provides some startling information on several of the influential reading reports on which national and state decisions about reading have been made. For instance, he criticizes the National Reading Panel’s *Teaching Children to Read*, the most consequential research summary ever compiled, omitted qualitative studies, longitudinal studies or correlational studies of reading. Focusing on phonics, phonemic awareness, fluency, vocabulary and reading comprehension, the report completely ignored the importance of independent reading. Since the panel concluded that there is no scientific evidence that programs that encouraged students to read had any beneficial impact on reading proficiency, Reading First funding is now earmarked for direct instruction, essentially dismissing independent reading as a validated practice. These findings were disputed by the National Endowment for the Arts (2007), which described how reading transforms the lives of individuals.

Newkirk reminds readers that good teachers are creative, take chances, and don’t follow the script. He describes an exercise in which his students describe a teacher who made a difference in their lives. Never do they praise someone for merely following the script.

In Chapter 3 “Balance the Basics: An Argument for Parity Between Reading and Writing” Newkirk makes a case for including writing in literacy. Since reading educators have co-opted the term “literacy,” writing has trouble claiming space in schools where the professional dominance of reading is so pronounced. This is somewhat disconcerting, according to Newkirk, since Americans are doing more writing for their jobs. He suggests strongly that teachers encourage students to write across the curriculum, learning to think and write like historians, for instance. By learning about the different kinds of thinking behind writing genres, students can learn to practice different types of writing.

In Chapter 4 Newkirk suggests several writing exercises that help students become writers. His intriguing idea of downloading song lyrics that are special to each person and then writing about memories and associations while interspersing lines from the song seems especially promising.

In Chapter 5 “Popular Culture as a Literacy Tool,” Newkirk urges teachers to be more accepting and supportive toward drawing since it can keep some reluctant writers engaged with literacy. He also tells teachers not to be so dismissive of young writers’ media-oriented writing. Instead, draw on that interest, he says, and introduce units on comic book writing and fiction to first graders. Although there are skills and texts that teachers are committed to teaching, they must connect in some way to the attitudes and tastes students bring into class.

Chapter 6 “Literacy and Pleasure: Why We Read and Write in the First Place” describes the pleasures of literacy for readers and reminds teachers that nothing seems more unnatural to the nonreader than the isolation reading seems to demand. As the amount of time spent reading drops as students move through elementary into middle and high school, Newkirk cautions readers that this loss is devastating on many levels. Not only does reading books build stamina and fluency, and foster confidence to handle extended text, the practice is closely related to academic success. For Newkirk, teachers who want to be instructional leaders need to turn to materials other than their textbooks since those typically fail young readers in four ways: authorship, form, venue, and duration.

Filled with praise for the joys of a life spent reading and writing, this book will lift the faltering spirits of teachers oppressed by scripted lessons and a reliance on basals and remind them why reading and writing were once so appealing.
Teachers traditionally—and appropriately—take leadership roles in their classroom. The style, purpose, and messages sent by their leadership vary with the individual teacher, and often depend on the particular class. Taking the lead among colleagues or in the larger community is, of course, different in terms of others’ expectations, prior experience, and motives. “Ask a teacher,” we say, because not only are teachers able, but best suited for educational leadership. We have many goals in education, but essentially our common goal is to lead learners to experience positive growth.

Leadership is sometimes instinctive, and may emerge when needed; sometimes it is intermediary and the leader may even be reluctant. It can be natural, but it can also be learned. In our field, there are many opportunities for leadership roles, including literacy coaches, reading specialists, literacy coordinators, instructional coaches, and language arts directors, as well as small- and large-scale political leaders. Even in social movements that seem to germinate spontaneously, leadership is necessary for coherent, systematic, and effective change.

Growth and change are also central goals of satisfying fiction. We expect complex and interesting main characters to face conflict and grow through the experience. All the choices an author makes when creating imaginative fiction are in support of just that: where and when the story takes place, the way the story unfolds, the other surrounding characters, and the underlying theme all advance the focus on the growth of the main character. After all, growth is perhaps the one common issue shared by all young readers.

Leadership is sometimes most effective when the leader creates an environment which allows others to make discoveries and advance for themselves. A truly powerful leader has the generosity to allow those others the joy of discovery. In that spirit, Bookbeat presents some new fiction and some favorites that feature characters who experience positive growth. Some are influenced by conscientious leadership; others make personal discoveries that result from gentle guidance. Here, then, are a handful of books worth recommending to young readers, which remind us of the sometimes exciting and sometimes painful process of change and growth.

Books for younger readers
(pre-K through grade 2)


It may seem funny to begin with a book about growth in reverse, but this is a very funny book with a significant message for young readers. Otto is just turning six, and his birthday would be great except for the presence of his new little sister Anna. Even as he is about to blow his candles out she is getting all the attention as his parents make him shake her rattle — his old rattle in fact, the one that sounded like underwater bells — to settle down her crying. He makes a wish: that Anna was never born! When strange things start happening, like his birthday candles lighting up again and finding himself rewrapping and giving back his presents, he realizes time is going backwards. Each day, things get stranger, as he slides up the slide, and helps carry the garbage in the house, until his wish comes true and Anna is returned to the hospital. But it doesn’t end there: he
has his fifth birthday again, then his fourth, and by his first, he realizes he will never grow up. Even though he can only talk baby talk now, he realizes that if he shakes his rattle as he blows out his one candle, he can make another wish that will come true. And it does: he is six again, and he knows he would rather grow up with Anna.

Clinical psychologist Sussman’s first book for children is spot-on in its success capturing the voice and emotions of the new older sibling. He includes some of the positives of time going backwards, like reconnecting with the friend who moved away, and even addresses a child’s likely curiosity about going to the bathroom. The text is beautifully paced and believable in storybook logic. Magoon’s illustrations are vivid and grand, and also wonderfully capture the emotions of Otto, Anna, their parents and Otto’s friends. The text arrangement and bright colors all add to the mysterious fun, and the endpapers lavishly begin and end the story, with a crying Anna in front, and a fondly gazing big brother Otto in back. This book will entertain children whether or not they share Otto’s experience, and would be a great choice for a bibliotherapeutic purpose as well. Sussman is off to a great start writing for children, and we can look forward to more such gems: a new one called Bella Bellows is in the works.


Jamaica and her friend Brianna are delighted that their substitute teacher, Mrs. Duvall, is nice and promises the class they will have fun as they work. To top it off, Jamaica is the one to find the hidden item in the classroom; then she gets all her math right, and is complimented by Mrs. Duvall on her reading aloud. Jamaica feels like singing, until it’s time for the spelling test. She has forgotten to study for it, and peeks at Brianna’s paper so hers can be perfect. Next is art, but Jamaica doesn’t even feel like drawing a picture. When she speaks to Mrs. Duvall and tells her that she copied, Mrs. Duvall explains that everyone in her class is special whether their work is perfect or not.

If you haven’t met Havill’s wonderful character Jamaica, you have a treat in store. This is an appealing little girl, portrayed in an accurate and realistic way as a child who faces a moral dilemma and makes the right choice. O’Brien’s realistic watercolors in warm tones depict the best of a nurturing classroom. There are a half dozen books about Jamaica, her family, and her best friend Brianna, all of which provide Jamaica with an opportunity to make a good choice and take those small steps toward growth. A new one, Jamaica is Thankful (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2009, ISBN 978-0-618-98231-8), is due out this year.
This is a stunningly beautiful book that tells just enough story to allow the reader to absorb a vast amount of truth. In the voice of Clover, we experience the innocent puzzlement about why a fence separates her from a little white girl who lives on the other side of it. Clover is curious about the little girl who sits by herself on the fence, orsplashsin the puddles when it rains, while Clover’s mother makes her stay indoors with rainy day toys. She sees her in town sometimes when both are with their mothers, but still they don’t speak to one another. One day, after a lot of rain, Clover goes back outside and feels brave and free. She goes to the fence and joins the little girl, Annie, who tells her how much one can see when sitting on it. After Clover’s friends cautiously agree to play jump rope with Annie, they all decide to sit on the fence, and realize that someday someone will tear it down.

As much of a parable as any picture book, Woodson’s characters represent the inevitable changes to “the way things are” that a new generation brings. The only direct reference to segregation times is Lewis’ two page spread of the girls in town, both in mid-twentieth century style clothing and hand in hand with white-gloved mothers. And although Clover expects her mother, whose face we don’t see as she hangs laundry and watches the girls, to tell her to get down from the fence, her mother doesn’t; she only comments that Clover has a new friend. Lewis’ paintings are frequently over the shoulder or from behind a character, making the moment when we see the faces, such as when the girls meet, a powerful one. This is a gentle and genuine story that portrays a time in our history, providing an opportunity for discussion of the complicated and ongoing movement toward a diverse and equitable society. Lewis has said “a picture book is a thirty-six page art gallery,” and that statement is as true in this book as it is in his gorgeously illustrated version of Langston Hughes’ *The Negro Speaks of Rivers* (New York: Disney/ Jump at the Sun, 2009, ISBN 978-0-7868-1867-9) published this year. *The Other Side* is a book to be cherished; it creates a tone that can’t be ignored, just as social change can’t be reversed.

Henson tells a story of a little-known phase in librarianship, that of the pack-horse librarians of the 1930s, who travelled by horse or mule to remote areas of the country exchanging books every two weeks without fail. Through the eyes of Cal, the oldest son of an Appalachian family who live high in the mountains, the Book Woman’s mission is impossible to understand. She arrives with more “chicken scratch,” new books which his sister Lark sees as treasures, and she won’t even take a poke of berries from Pa as payment, which Cal himself picked for a pie, not books. Cal reckons that horse of hers must be brave to carry her up that steep mountain in rain and fog and cold. Even during the coldest winter when the family is tucked safely inside, she returns and makes the book exchange, and it dawns on Cal that maybe it isn’t only the horse who is brave. He suddenly yearns to know what makes that
Book Woman take those risks, and Lark, without laughing or teasing, makes a place for Cal and they begin to read.

Told in a lyrical, poetic dialect, we not only have the well-drawn character of Cal, but Small’s illustrations provide us with the more complete story of the routines and conditions of the family: the twins clinging to their pregnant mother’s legs as she shares sassy tea with the Book Woman, the tender pride on Pa’s face as he sees how important books are to Lark, and the cramped house in the winter, shared by people and animals, including the chickens to remind us of what Cal thinks – or thought – of the written word. Through the words and pictures we watch Cal transform: he is a practical boy, but always scowling, in fact it is not until he realizes the Book Woman’s bravery that we see a different face reflected in the snowy window, and only in the spring when he reads for her do we see him smile. He has found the stories amid the chicken scratch, and that is payment enough for her.

Books for intermediate readers
(grades 3 - 5)


Emmaline is a happy little girl who wants a bunny more than anything. She has seen bunnies on TV and in books, but never in her town of Neatasapin. Everyone and everything is tidy in Neatasapin, under the angry, watchful eye of Mayor Orson Oliphant. He has banished bunnies, as well as mud pies, jelly donuts, “puddle jumping, skateboard bumping, snowball whumping and bubble gum chumping.” Trees are leaf-litterers, wild creatures dig where they shouldn’t, and Mayor Oliphant has covered everything he can with concrete. Emmaline loves to hop and shout, and other children who see her twig-tangled hair are too tidy to play with her. Emmaline is lonely; she makes a burrow under the table, drawing pictures of bunnies. It is there that she hears the grownups talk about a very untidy place, with trees and shrubs and wild animals. Emmaline ventures out to this forbidden place, and makes the acquaintance of a bunny. When a wise, magical person there makes her understand that the bunny won’t be happy back home with her, she goes home and loses her joy for living. Her parents finally realize how important it is for Emmaline to find her joy again, and stand up to Mayor Oliphant. They create a home that welcomes birds, bushes, and, eventually, her bunny. Emmaline, her parents, and others in the town learn that nature has to be invited to return to a world of people.

Storyteller Katherine Hannigan’s pictures are as delightful as her words as she tells this cautionary tale of a too-tidy world that is overshadowed by an authoritative and shortsighted voice. With a poetic syntax and a smattering of made-up words, she creates a character whose spirit is so uplifting that her loneliness is tragic. The soft watercolor illustrations leave just enough to the imagination and are a fitting complement to the text. In twenty short chapters, Hannigan has created a novel that is accessible for younger readers, while entertaining for older children. The wordplay and rhythm would make for a great read-aloud, and the environmental theme is handled in a playful, temperate fashion.


Clementine is used to visiting the principal’s office. She is also used to hearing people tell her to pay attention, although she is always paying attention, just not to what she “should”; thus she notices things nobody else does. As her father says, he counts on her to see things from a new angle. Clementine is full of self-assurance and (almost) always means well, but as the reader follows the twists and turns of her train of thoughts that make perfect sense to Clementine but no one else, we can also feel her pain of being misunderstood. We join Clementine for the ups and downs of a week in her life, as she helps sometimes-best-friend Margaret solve a glue-in-the-hair problem then cuts her own off to match,
changes the color of both their hair with her artist-mother’s permanent markers, yells at the principal, gets into her mother’s chocolate frosting and hopes it looks like a beard, and spins her baby brother around in a wok in their version of “go for a wok.” She also solves her building-manager-dad’s pigeon problem with a discovery only Clementine could make. Despite that success, she fears she has gotten into so much trouble this week that her parents are going to do something about what she and Margaret have agreed is a rule, that every family has an easy one and a hard one, children that is, after Clementine once heard someone say her parents were lucky to get an easy one, her brother, after the hard one, her. Her fears turn into a sobbing promise to her parents that “I won’t be like me any more. Then I’ll be the easy one, too.” Her parents reassure her with a sandwich hug and a surprise that folds her into the enormous love of her family and friends.

Pennypacker has made a great success in her effort, as she has said, to present a character that has the attributes of a child with attention troubles who will always hear positives alongside the negatives. She created Clementine based on a combination of her two children, now grown, one of whom had ADHD; Clementine displays both sides of this condition. The narrative clips along in Clementine’s beguiling and genuine voice, and through her eyes we see the order and sense amid the chaos. Frazee’s pen and ink illustrations, reminiscent of Garth Williams’, exceptionally provide the more objective view of circumstances that Clementine sees in her own way. If readers and listeners become instant fans of Clementine – and they will – there are two more books available, The Talented Clementine (New York: Hyperion, ISBN 978-0786838714) and Clementine’s Letter (New York: Hyperion, ISBN 0786838841), and more on the way.


Here is a book for Harry Potter fans and citizens of Red Sox Nation – does that cover everyone? Baggott has created a world of magic as accurately as she has the world of baseball, and the result is a winner that provides much more than meets the eye. Oscar Egg is a twelve year old of mixed race parents who has been adopted, but his adoptive parents are separated. His struggles with identity are a foundational theme of the book, as he gradually learns that his father, with whom he is to stay as his mother futilely seeks a better life for them, is part

Clementine by Sara Pennypacker.
Illustrated by Marla Frazee.
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The Prince of Fenway Park by Julianna Baggott.
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human and part fairy. His father reluctantly takes Oscar for the first time to his home, a secret world beneath Fenway Park, where a fantastic assortment of cursed beings manages to exist under “the curse of the Bambino,” which has also kept the Sox from taking a world series since 1919. Although his father fears for Oscar’s safety amid the weasels, the banshee and the dreaded Pooka, it dawns on his father and the three wonderfully mad old Aunties that Oscar is the one who can break the curse. He is given a magical gift as birthday present, the ability to read signs, and this, along with another gift, a key to the past, provides him with the way to assemble the most marvelous team ever: all of the best players of all time, such as Jackie Robinson, Willie Mays, and of course Babe Ruth, all at twelve years old. They play against other great players as twelve-year-olds who later made moral mistakes, like Pete Rose, Gaylord Perry, and Ty Cobb, along with other assorted cursed beings. In a game played in a parallel world at the exact same time as the Red Sox against the Yankees in 2004, the curse is broken.

Baggot has truly done her research in assembling this cast of real-life characters along with the imaginary ones. Her accuracy not only with statistics but in the descriptions of the workings of Fenway Park will stand up to the inevitable scrutiny of Red Sox true believers. But more than that, she captures the likely experiences of the great players at twelve years old with truthfulness that is often painful. The history of baseball is also a history of racism, and the author shines a light on the fact that the Red Sox had the worst record historically for their racist practices. “The curse would have died if it hadn’t been fed,” Oscar’s father says, by the nastiness of managers, sportswriters, and even fans who cultivated the racism. In addition, through the Aunties who had emigrated from Ireland, we are reminded of the mistreatment and broken promises suffered by the Irish in Boston a century ago. This book will also serve as an introduction to Irish lore and history. Don’t miss this one: library waiting lists have been long, but it is well worth the wait.

**Books for middle school and older readers**


When the story begins, Miriam and Deborah are preparing for Artie’s arrival, by cleaning the attic, the place they used to play. Miriam touches each stuffed animal on the head before throwing it away, and can’t get Deborah to answer her questions about why they are no longer close. They live in Carlton, a working class town, and their parents’ high aspirations for the girls only isolate them more. Their mother’s art expresses her own pain about the choices that have brought her to Carlton. She, the teachers, and all other adults in the story are oblivious to the cruelty that is taking place, not only with Miriam, but with Jenny as well. When Jenny commits the ultimate offense of destroying Miriam’s journal, the ensuing fight brings them to the principal, who remarks that they aren’t so different at all.
It is Miriam’s realization of this, and her act of standing up for Jenny at a party where Jenny is being sexually assaulted by older boys, which provide more hope for Miriam than the other, seemingly well-adjusted characters. Pixley spent ten years completing this novel, which describes her own experience of having been bullied. She has stated that until she could find love for the character of Jenny, who is based on her own tormenters, she could not find the heart of the story. Pixley has created a character in Miriam who is naïve but somehow self-confident in her developing understanding of her place in the world. Miriam’s voice keenly expresses the perplexity of seventh grade, and the supporting cast of characters will ring true to young readers in all of the middle school social strata.


City boy and self-described skater punk Ben Campbell has gotten in trouble once too many times on a quest for self-destruction since his father announced he was gay three years before. Now his father and Ben’s “mom-dad” Edward have taken seventeen year old Ben to rural Montana, to Edward’s home town, to get away from the pervasive bad influences” in Spokane. Ben finds himself in the unfamiliar world of small-town people and their beliefs, under the strict eye of Edward’s hard-as-nails mother, Miss Mae. There is one bright spot, however, Kimberly Johen, with whom Ben has fallen in love at first sight. Ben compromises his style and attitude to please Kimberly, but as he tries to fit in he uncovers raw cruelty among some of the residents, which is sometimes covert and sometimes simply ignored. It isn’t prejudice against Edward and his father’s relationship that fuels the story; that occurred in Edward’s youth, and most residents are now surprisingly open-minded about their presence. But the father of the boy next door is dangerously abusive and the otherwise friendly sheriff takes a hands-off attitude, and a teenage friend of Kimberly has a mean streak and an unnatural attraction to her. Ben is accepted by residents after saving Kimberly’s uncle from a tractor accident, and also by turning the tables on Kimberly’s brother Dirk, prank for prank. Even as things get better for Ben in the town, they get worse between his father and him. At an impasse, Ben’s father asks him to leave, which turns out to have the best outcome for Ben and his newly discovered individuality.

This is a well-crafted book and a rewarding story, as we watch Ben transform from a perpetually sarcastic and self-interested teenager to an earnest young man who wants to honor his promises. The troubled relationship between Ben and his father is not unlike that of any father and teenage son, but their conversations illuminate the complex emotions of families with gay members, with all sides expressing an equal share of right and wrong. Ben is a believable character with a terrific, if sometimes crude, sense of humor, who can’t help himself when he blurs out funny remarks, just as we can’t help ourselves when we laugh with – and sometimes at – him. Harmon handles the gay relationship respectfully, it is part of Ben’s situation and Harmon doesn’t moralize by giving Ben an epiphany; by the end of the story, they are simply getting along better. Harmon captures the essence of teenage life as well here as he did with his first novel, Skate (New York: Laurel-Leaf, 978-0553495102). This year he has published his third, this time with a girl protagonist who is similarly displaced, entitled Brutal (New York: Knopf, ISBN 978-0375840999). Language and drug references may make The Last Exit to Normal unsuitable for younger readers, but it is a fine coming-of-age story.
Reading teachers as leaders: 
The promise of literacy coaching

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This quote is from a reading specialist friend of mine, who participated in a professional development series along with 100 other Rhode Island teachers over 10 years ago. I’m certain you know a reading specialist a lot like her—student-centered, dedicated, intelligent, up-to-date with knowledge of research-based, best practice, the person other teachers go to for great teaching resources and ideas. Reading specialists often saw themselves primarily as teachers of students, although many surely played a leadership role among peers in their schools. That was then. Today, the role of the reading specialist is changing to include not only teacher of reading to students, but also literacy coach to teaching peers. In this column, we’ll examine emerging research on literacy coaching and its promise for teacher leadership in the 21st century.

In 2003 the International Reading Association’s Standards for Reading Professionals (IRA, 2003) added the role literacy coach to the reading specialist standards. What resulted was a reexamination of reading specialist teacher preparation in colleges and universities across the United States. In addition to demonstrating foundational knowledge, understanding of curriculum, instruction, assessment and diagnosis in the teaching of reading, reading specialists of today must also demonstrate the ability to lead colleagues, teacher assistants, and other school community members in improving classroom and school-wide literacy achievement. Around the same time, Reading First grants provided the large-scale funding to hire literacy coaches in schools across the country. This context set the stage for the increase in research on and practice of literacy coaching in the classroom.

Rita Bean (2004) suggests three levels of coaching in her study of effective literacy instruction. Level 1 coaching is an informal relationship between teacher and coach that includes conversations and supports such as aiding in assessing students or providing a professional book or article. Level 2 coaching is more formal and includes professional collaborations such as co-planning, team meetings, analyzing student work and professional development presentations. Level 3 coaching is a formal coaching relationship in which the reading specialist provides model lessons, facilitates discussion, co-teaching, visiting classrooms to provide teachers with feedback and lesson study.

While there are few empirical studies of literacy coaching published to date, there are many studies being conducted and shared at conferences as well as on professional websites, such as the Literacy Coaching Clearinghouse (LCC), an informative project co-
sponsored by the International Reading Association (IRA) and the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE). In this review of research to inform your classroom practice, we’ll take a look at three studies, one each at the elementary, middle and high school levels.

**Elementary level literacy coaching**

Walpole and Blamey (2008) suggest that literacy coaches serve as leaders in schools who must balance the coordination of reading programs with the role of professional developer of teachers. Reading specialists of today need to be not only excellent reading teachers—knowledgeable of how people learn, reading interventions, curriculum and assessment—but also, knowledgeable of adult learning theory and practices. After reviewing the literature on elementary literacy coaching, Walpole and Blamey (2008) found seven case studies, three randomized experiments, two surveys and an evaluation report to inform their assessment of literacy coaching.

The evaluation report by Deussen, Coskie, Robinson, and Autio (2007) addressed literacy coaching in a Reading First project, grades K-3. The authors found that Reading First coaches did not spend the majority of their time coaching; 28 percent of their workweek was spent supporting the learning of teachers. The remainder of the Reading First coaches week was spent either collecting or analyzing student data (25%), planning or providing student interventions (10%) or on duties the authors considered “unrelated” to their coaching role, such as attending meetings, planning or completing paperwork (36%).

Walpole and Blamey (2008) next share their current research study and findings on the multiple roles of literacy coaches. Their findings suggest that literacy coaches balance many roles along a continuum between director of reading programs and mentor.

In the role as director, literacy coaches must manage the curriculum, purchase new materials, schedule instruction, and group students. In addition, literacy coaches must train teachers to implement materials and assessments with fidelity and coach teachers across grade levels to offer curriculum with consistency.

In the role as mentor, literacy coaches must teach teachers and role model. As a teacher of teachers, coaches design and deliver professional development and facilitate study groups. As role model, coaches provide demonstration lessons in-class and outside of class.

Finally, in a “between roles” position, literacy coaches are also asked to serve as an observer of teachers and an assessor of students. The literacy coaches in the Walpole and Blamey (2008) study were often asked to summarize school-wide reading achievement data and to provide formative, confidential feedback to teachers.

**Middle level literacy coaching**

Marsh and colleagues (2008) used a mixed-methods approach to evaluate the implementation and impact of middle school reading coaches from eight Florida districts in 2006-2007. Survey data and student case study data were used along with longitudinal student achievement data. Key findings include:

- Literacy coaches spent the majority of their time divided among many activities and less than half of their time in the classroom coaching teachers.
- Principals and teachers reported that coaches had a positive role in the school and on instructional practice; however, evidence based on student achievement data is mixed.
- The greatest barrier to coaching was time.

The Marsh study (2008) suggests that coaches need the support of administrators to focus their time on supports for teacher learning, that a pipeline of qualified candidates for literacy coaching positions needs to be developed and that school administrators need further guidance on how to identify high-quality coach candidates.

**Secondary level literacy coaching**

While at the International Reading Association’s 2009 annual meeting in Phoenix, AZ, I attended a research conference session facilitated by Douglas Fisher from San Diego State University in California. Dr. Fisher shared his current research on literacy coaching at the high school level with colleagues Diane Lapp and Nancy Frey. He also shared a series of video clips on high school teachers’ best practice with think aloud, which are available as podcasts at the Heinemann publishers website and found by searching for his newest book title Word Wise and Content Rich: Five Essential Tips for Teaching Academic Vocabulary. My favorite clip is of a high school social studies teacher who activates prior knowledge and shares his thinking while reading a challenging history text. The students are captivated, engaging in active discussions with the teacher, especially when he uses his cell phone to text a friend for the definition of ‘ratified.’

Fisher, Frey and Lapp (2009) also studied literacy coaching as part of their research. They found that a school wide approach to teaching content literacy was an effective way to raise student reading achievement. The current study employed a formative experiment and design in which the researchers provided ongoing professional development, coaching and technical assistance to teachers at “Western High School,” with over 2,000 students, 60 percent of whom are eligible for free lunch. The authors provided professional development and coaching in four key areas: think-alouds, Cornell note-taking, writing to learn, and dedicated reading time.

The first most evident positive outcome of the intervention was increased reading by adolescents. This resulted in a somewhat surprising negative outcome of the
study—the vice principals felt they had less to do, less information on students and less power because before teachers would turn to them for information. Teachers spent more time with literacy coaching staff than disciplinarians; therefore, administrators began to sabotage the teachers’ involvement in the project. Students’ adequate yearly progress (AYP) was still the primary concern of school personnel. At the beginning of the study, only 12 percent of students were proficient in reading on the state assessment. Two years later, 47 percent of the students achieved proficiency on the same measure.

Conclusion
The changing role of reading specialist—from teacher of struggling readers to literacy coach—merits further research, requires careful decision-making in designing programs, suggests professional development for administrators and significant changes in reading specialist teacher education programs at the university level. The International Reading Association is once again revising the Standards for Reading Professionals, which is due for publication in 2010. You can stay updated on changes to the reading specialist/literacy coach standards at www.reading.org. One thing is certain—reading specialists will no longer say that the leader is at the end of the hall in the principal’s office. Reading specialists today are not only excellent teachers, but also valued teacher leaders in our schools.

References
Literacy Coach Clearinghouse http://www.literacycoachingonline.org/aboutus/director.html
Promoting technology integration through the leadership of school administrators

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Tim Ferguson is a school principal who models and supports effective use of technology throughout his day (Clukey, 2004). On a typical day he responds to emails, checks his calendar in the Web-based management system on the district portal site, retrieves documents and presentations from the school server and, when out of the office, uses a handheld computer to verify his appointments. In his meetings with his staff, Ferguson encourages the staff to post online comments on the school server in response to draft documents and other important issues that require collective decisions. He also makes presentations that utilize district data and digital pictures/movies and uses a wireless tablet to enter his comments when observing a teacher’s lesson. Further, as the school principal, Ferguson actively participates in the process of acquiring new technologies for his school, such as document cameras, wireless projection devices, networked printers, and new software titles that are expected to make a difference in the students’ learning and the teachers’ instruction. Briefly, Ferguson is a school administrator who uses technology to improve productivity, communication, and school management goals, as well as access evaluation data that tracks teacher and student performance (Clukey, 2004). Tim Ferguson could be characterized as a visionary principal (Hope & Stakenas, as cited in Brockmeier, Sermon, & Hope, 2005), because he has established a context for technology in the school and he understands how technology can transform the learning environment for teachers and students.

However, Tim Ferguson is not the typical school administrator. In my many presentations on New Literacies (Leu, Kinzer, Coiro, & Cammack, 2004) and particularly on professional development that best addresses the teachers’ needs in regards to technology integration (Kara-Soteriou, 2008; Kara-Soteriou & Kurkjian, 2008), I frequently meet teachers who feel that their administrators at the school and district level do not model effective technology integration. Further, in the discussions that accompany my presentations, many teachers complain about the lack of a support system that they hoped to find from their districts’ administrators. For example, some teachers talk about professional development choices that are made at the administrators’ level and are not aligned with the technology that teachers can actually access in their schools. Other teachers talk about the outdated technologies and the absence of support personnel.

In a study on new literacies, the Connecticut Association for Reading Research (CARR, 2004) found that these challenges were only some of the many challenges that teachers face when they attempt to integrate technology in their literacy classroom. Based on its findings, CARR provided recommendations on how school and district administrators could support and encourage teachers to integrate literacy and technology. The recommendations included, among others, the development of a technology plan, incentives to take courses on new literacies, flexible scheduling and structures that facilitate teacher collaboration and time to develop new literacies skills, and professional development that is ongoing and addresses the needs and interests of the teachers. Given that the study revolved around teachers’ and not administrators’ new literacies skills, all the recommendations focused mostly on the “services” that administrators can offer to the teachers in order for the teachers to improve their use of technology in the classroom. However, administrators can play an even more important role in determining how well technology is
used in schools, by gaining a thorough understanding of computer technology’s capabilities (Brockmeier, Semon, & Hope, 2005), embracing the use of technology in their own professional lives, and by taking a leadership role in using technology effectively and efficiently.

Therefore, in this column I focus on leadership in the integration of literacy and technology as can be reflected through the administrators’ multiple roles, practices, beliefs, and initiatives. I first describe the Collaborative for Technology Standards for School Administrators (TSSA Collaborative) and its connection with the International Society for Technology in Education (ISTE) Standards for Administrators. Then I present two survey studies that investigated school principals’ practices and perceptions that are influential to the level of technology integration in their schools. These studies reveal how school principals feel about their own technology skills and uses, what technology training they need, and how they view their role and their teachers’ roles in the integration of technology at the school and classroom levels.

**Technology standards for school administrators (TSSA)**

Recognizing the important role of administrators in the integration of technology in the classroom, less than a decade ago, several organizations collaborated in the development of technology standards for administrators with the objective to reach a consensus on what administrators need to know and be able to do in order to fulfill their leadership role in the effective use of technology in schools. Some of the organizations in the Collaborative included the American Association of School Administrators, the National Associations of Elementary and Secondary School Principals, the National School Boards Association, and the International Society for Technology in Education. Faculty from higher education, teachers, consultants, district Technology Coordinators, and not-for-profit organizations also participated in this process. The outcome of their collaborative work was represented through the Technology Standards for School Administrators (TSSA Collaborative, 2001).

According to the TSSA Collaborative, the standards focus on the role of leadership in enhancing learning and school operations through the use of technology. However, the standards do not represent a comprehensive list or assurance for effective technology leadership (TSSA Collaborative, 2001). Further, the standards do not define the minimum or maximum level of skills required by administrators. As such, the standards can be used by administrators in different positions at the school and district levels and within the contexts of their local school responsibilities.

The TSSA Collaborative presented their work as six standards with specific performance indicators for each standard, as well as role-specific technology leadership tasks for superintendents, district program directors, and school principals. The six standards are listed below and are described briefly:

1. **Leadership and vision:** Educational leaders inspire a shared vision for comprehensive integration of technology and foster an environment and culture conducive to the realization of that vision. Based on this standard, educational leaders facilitate the development and implementation of a technology plan that is based on input from all stakeholders. Educational leaders also promote date-driven leadership decisions, and advocate for research-based effective practices in use of technology, as well as for policies, programs and funding that will support the implementation of their district’s technology plan.

2. **Learning and teaching:** Educational leaders ensure that curricular design, instructional strategies, and learning environments integrate appropriate technologies to maximize learning and teaching. Based on this standard, educational leaders promote technologies that enhance instruction, address the needs of diverse student populations, and improve student achievement. Further, educational leaders facilitate collaborative technology enriched learning environments and ensure that teachers participate in high quality professional development that will improve their own technology skills, as well as their teaching with technology.

3. **Productivity and professional practice:** Educational leaders apply technology to enhance their professional practice and to increase their own productivity and that of others. Based on this standard, educational leaders model effective use of technology. They use technology to communicate and collaborate with teachers, staff, parents, and students, and make sure that they create the right conditions for teachers to use technology to improve their productivity, as well. Further, educational leaders maintain awareness of emerging technologies and use technology resources for job-related professional learning.

4. **Support, management, and operations:** Educational leaders ensure the integration of technology to support productive systems for learning and administration. Based on this standard, educational leaders introduce policies to ensure compatibility of technologies, implement technology-based management and operations systems, and allocate enough resources (financial and human) for the implementation of the technology plan and its integration with other improvement plans. Educational leaders also facilitate and support the continuous improvement of technologies in the district.

5. **Assessment and evaluation:** Educational leaders use technology to plan and implement comprehensive systems of effective assessment and evaluation. Based on this
standard, educational leaders use technology to collect and analyze data, interpret results, and communicate findings related to instruction and learning. Educational leaders also assess their staff’s abilities to use technology and, based on the assessment results, offer appropriate professional development. Further, educational leaders evaluate appropriate uses of technology resources for learning, communication, and productivity.

6. Social, legal, and ethical issues: Educational leaders understand the social, legal, and ethical issues related to technology and model responsible decision-making related to these issues. Based on this standard, educational leaders enforce copyright law, privacy, security, and online safety when teachers, staff, and students make use of technology. In addition, educational leaders ensure equity of technology access and enforce environmentally safe and healthy practices with technology use.

A year after the development of the TSSA Collaborative standards, the International Society for Technology in Education (ISTE) published its National Educational Technology Standards (NETS) for Administrators (ISTE, 2002b). Given the leading role that ISTE had in the development of the TSSA Collaborative Standards, ISTE adopted the TSSA Collaborative work and built on it by developing a list of essential conditions for implementing the NETS for Administrators (ISTE, 2002a). These conditions included, among other, skilled personnel and technical assistance, professional development, support policies, student-centered teaching, and equitable access to technology.

**Study 1: Principals’ relationship with computer technology**

(Brockmeier, Sermon, & Hope, 2005)

Brockmeier, Sermon, and Hope (2005) examined the state of school principals’ relationships with computer technologies, by investigating the following questions: (1) Are school principals prepared to facilitate the integration of computer technology into the teaching and learning process? (2) Are principals prepared to use computer technology for administrative and managerial tasks?

The researchers’ sample consisted of 268 school principals from elementary, middle, and high school level schools in Florida. The participants responded to the Computer Technology Survey (CTS), which consisted of 40 Likert scale questions that were grouped into the following five subscales with respect to computer technology: curriculum integration, perceptions, acquired expertise, needs assessment, and professional development.

The researchers found that there was race difference regarding the participants’ overall score on the survey, with the Hispanic principals having higher scores in all five subscales of the survey than the white principals. More specifically, the Hispanic participants reported having more expertise in facilitating teachers’ integration of computer technology, more positive perceptions about the use of computer technology, and more expertise with using computers themselves. They also reported that they were more likely to recognize the need for more computer technology professional development opportunities, and more likely to have had professional development on computer technologies. Further analysis of the principals’ overall score on the survey showed a significant difference among participants with different computer technology expertise. Those principals who were considered to be novice in their technology expertise agreed less with the survey items than the principals with higher levels of technology expertise.

Two thirds of the principals reported that they spent a significant amount of time assisting teachers in integrating technology in their instruction and 76 percent agreed that facilitating curriculum integration of computer technology was one of their important instructional tasks. While 82 percent of principals agreed to providing teachers release time to become familiar with technology devices, only 55 percent agreed to providing release time for teachers to evaluate software for integration into the school curricula. This is a very important finding, because familiarity with technology devices and computer software is essential in the integration of technology and this integration will be inhibited if teachers are not provided the time to learn how to use new computer technologies in their instruction (Brockmeier, Sermon, & Hope, 2005).

Another important finding of the study is that only 60 percent of participating school principals believed that the Technology Standards for School Administrators (TSSA Collaborative, 2001) could actually help in facilitating computer technology into instruction. Further, the principals requested more professional development opportunities on how to assess technology’s influence on student achievement, on how to use technology to collect and analyze data, on how to integrate technology in the school curricula and in their administrative and managerial work as principals. The findings were clear in that school principals requested less professional development on ethical and legal issues of computer technologies applications and more professional development on enhancing their own skills of computer technology.

Overall, the study revealed that while school principals recognized the importance of giving teachers time to develop the expertise to integrate technology in their instruction, a significant percentage of principals also recognized the need for their own professional development to facilitate technology integration.
in their schools. Moreover, while many principals have acknowledged the value of technology, they did not feel prepared to call themselves technology leaders and they were not willing to share decision-making about technology with their teachers. Also, while principals used certain technologies, such as email and word processing, for their daily work, they still needed more training on the use of technology for research, budget development, database creation, and presentations. Therefore, more training on how to integrate technology in the classroom is needed not only by teachers, but by their principals, as well, who understand the capabilities of technology in the teaching and learning process.

**Study 2: The influence of principals' technology training on the integration of technology into schools** (Dawson & Rakes, 2003)

According to Dawson and Rakes (2003), school principals are not well informed about or involved in the role technology plays in their schools. Further, Dawson and Rakes take the position that many principals have little firsthand experience with technology. Based on a theoretical framework provided by Crandall and Loucks’ work (as cited in Dawson & Rakes, 2003) Dawson and Rakes investigated whether technology training received by principals influences the integration of technology into the classroom. Specifically, the researchers examined the levels of technology integration into the schools’ curricula with respect to the amounts and types of technology training received by K-12 school principals, as well as the participants’ age, sex, years of administrative experience, school size and grade level.

The researchers measured the principals’ overall level of technology integration in the schools’ curricula using the School Technology and Readiness (STaR) Chart Assessment (CEO Forum, 1999). This instrument is an online data-collection survey that many schools/districts use to assess their own progress in integrating technology in the curriculum. The assessment provides information on the following five areas: (a) Connectivity (school’s access to the Internet, World Wide Web, and email communications); (b) Hardware (presence and maintenance of computer technologies); (c) Content (regularity of student use of digital content software); (d) Professional Development (technology training provided to teachers/staff); and (e) Integration and Use (the pattern of technology use by students and teachers in the majority of schools).

The researchers employed a purposive sample of approximately 400 K-12 public and private school principals who were Internet users and represented all states in the US. More than one half of the study’s participants worked in elementary schools, one fourth in high schools, and one fifth in junior high/middle schools. The majority of the participants (53%) had received less than 13 hours of training, whereas 7.8 percent had received over 51 hours of training. The level of their training was categorized by the researchers as follows: (a) basic technology tools and applications; (b) basic technology tools and applications with Internet fundamentals; (c) integrating technology into the curriculum; and (d) training customized to the needs of the school principals. Most of the participants received training that focused on technology integration. Training customized to the needs of the participants was reported as the second most received training type. This is very important, because it indicates a switch to workshops that focus more on strategies and procedures that help the principals become better leaders in the integration of technology in their schools’ curricula and less on technology fundamentals (Dawson & Rakes, 2003).

According to the researchers’ data analysis, there were no significant differences in the types of technology training received with respect to school level. Also, the school level and size, as well as the principals’ years of administrative experience and gender were not found to be statistically related with the levels of technology integration in the curricula, as reported in the School Technology and Readiness (STaR) Chart Assessment by the participants. However, data analysis showed significant differences in the levels of technology integration into the schools’ curricula with respect to the age of the participants, with the 41-55 year olds reporting more technology integration than the participants who were below 41 years of age. Further, it was found that the amount of technology training received was related with the level of technology integration. For example, the schools whose principals were offered between 13 and 25 hours of technology training reported more technology integration than the schools whose principals were offered less than 13 hours of training. According to the researchers, this result supports those who argue that long-term training is worth the effort and expense.

More data analysis indicated that the school principals who received training on how to integrate technology into the curriculum were found to lead schools with higher levels of technology integration in the curriculum than the school principals who received any of the other types of training. Also, principals who received customized training lead schools with higher levels of technology integration than those receiving basic technology tools and applications training or those receiving basic technology tools and applications with Internet fundamentals.

In summary, the results of this study supported the view that school principals are more likely to lead schools that integrate technology in the curriculum if they are offered sustained training with a focus on how to integrate technology in the school’s curricula and with consideration of the principals’ technology and school needs. Seeing the influence a school principal
could have on the integration of technology in his/her school, the researchers call for school superintendents to encourage and support the principals to become more involved with technology initiatives at the school and district levels.

References


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The Editorial Board of the New England Reading Association solicits manuscripts of interest to educators on a broad array of topics related to literacy and classroom practice. We welcome submission in a variety of writing formats such as articles, interviews, essays, and research reports. The NERA Journal is peer-reviewed and is published in winter (issue deadline September 15th) and in fall (issue deadline: February 15th).

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