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Christopher Kaiser R. Abadiano
Farmington, CT
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Helen R. Abadiano
Jesse P. Turner
Lynda M. Valerie
Central Connecticut State University, CT

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Congratulations! Today is your day.
You're off to Great Places!
You're off and away!

Dr. Seuss’ book “Oh, the Places You’ll Go!” captures our enthusiasm as we begin our journey with you as your new editors of The New England Reading Association. We begin our tenure by sharing with you our vision of the adventures we will have as we work towards building a timely, provocative journal that will help prepare teachers to prepare students to meet the literacy demands in an information age, and inviting you to join us in these adventures.

And will you succeed?
Yes! You will, indeed!
(98 and ¾ percent guaranteed.)

KID, YOU’LL MOVE MOUNTAINS!
So...
be your name Buxbaum or Bixby or Bray
or Mordecai Ali Van Allen O’Shea,
you’re off to Great Places!

Today is your day!
Your mountain is waiting.
So… get on your way!

Dr. Seuss

Oh, the places we have been!
Over the past many years The New England Reading Association Journal (NERAJ) has been committed to the traditions of excellence, balance and multiple perspectives, range of content, scholarly and professional debates, and best practice grounded in theory and research. We have always relied on the journal to offer suggestions on current and research-based effective literacy instructional practices, provide an open forum for trends and issues in literacy instruction, promote reflections, and/or validate our own instructional practices and theoretical orientation. Consequently, all manuscript submissions undergo careful and constructive peer review to ensure that articles included in each issue are accurate and meet high standards of quality. Past issues of NERAJ have been consistent in providing the readers with articles that pushed the literacy field forward, contained practical and useful teaching tips and recommendations for best practice that are grounded in theory and research, responded to trends and issues, validated and/or challenged readers’ thinking and reflection around literacy instructional practices, investigated standards, programs, and policies impacting literacy instruction, represented diverse voices, offered fresh and innovative ideas that will support and enhance literacy instruction k-12, as well as captured interest of a new breed of audience. Most importantly, however, NERAJ has always been about the students. It is with the students that we, the editors, and you, our NERAJ audience, hope to make the real difference. We pledge our own commitment to continue the traditions perpetuated by outstanding previous editors of NERAJ and more.
As new editors we have big shoes to fill. The vision and accomplishments of past editor Catherine Kurkjian with her cadre of excellent reviewers who provided expertise, wisdom, and helpful suggestions to authors, as well as the department editors who helped maintain the journal’s standards of quality have enhanced the reputation of *The New England Reading Association Journal* within the professional community, particularly in the field of literacy, and expanded its readership. We are also at a time when there is a growing demand for high quality teachers, especially reading teachers, for an increasingly diverse population, including children in poverty, as well as a wide variety of physical, emotional, and learning problems. In the recent past years, we have undergone progressive waves of education reform impacting the field of literacy education—from guaranteeing access for all students to ensuring the success of all students, such as the NCLB, high-stakes assessment, narrowing curriculum, accountability, to name a few—that have generated controversial response ranging from unwavering support, to indifference, to skepticism, to opposition. *The New England Reading Association Journal* as a professional development resource for teachers to engage in open dialogues about difficult issues and challenges, find answers to their questions, have opportunity to reflect on their literacy instructional practices, and find support in developing and advancing skills and competencies in literacy instruction, is more critical now than at any other time in its publication history.

Our vision is for *NERAJ* to become a journal of hope. We want *NERAJ* to celebrate teachers as intelligent, dedicated, and caring professionals who are willing to advance their knowledge base and instructional skills and competencies in order to meet the growing demand for high quality teachers. We want *NERAJ* to inspire teachers to explore and challenge their thinking and understanding around difficult issues such as inequalities in education (e.g., racial or gender inequality) and their influence on literacy education, pressure to adopt certain trends in literacy curriculum and instruction, problems with funding sources that undermine current support for publicly funded schools and their devastating consequences on students; to become critical thinkers and decision-makers; and to ask new questions and shift away from answers that are typically dependent on either/or dichotomous thinking—this thinking is especially troublesome when applied to theories of learning and teaching as being right or wrong. We want *NERAJ* to empower teachers to meet the demands and challenges of the new literacies, standards, policies and guidelines (e.g., high-stakes assessment, technology in reading and language arts instruction, and accountability) by understanding them and how they are changing the face of literacy instruction.

At the same time, *NERAJ* must continue and build upon the overarching themes of the previous editorial team—enhancing excellence, expanding the journal’s appeal to new audiences and the diversity of the Association’s membership, making a difference through informed, reformed, and transformed practice, and advancing and expanding professional knowledge base. It must continue to address a variety of needs of its broad audience and extend its appeal to new and diverse audiences through articles that clearly illustrate the theoretical perspectives; provide most up-to-date research and literature on current critical issues or themes to further strengthen the integration of theory into practice; including international perspectives on literacy. *NERAJ* must continue to identify and predict trends and issues in the field of literacy education, and encourage manuscript submissions around these trends and issues. For example, we anticipate a stronger focus on teacher certification and professional development and the impact they have had on literacy instruction in schools. While high-stakes assessment and teacher accountability will continue to be one of our hot topics, motivating disengaged readers in our classroom will dominate conversations among our readership.

The editorship of *The New England Reading Association Journal* is an incredible opportunity and we take the responsibility seriously. We promise articles, themed issues, guest features, and columns that will be packed with current and relevant information, a wide variety of topics and writing style, global perspectives, and a balanced amalgamation of research, theory and practice. It is in the spirit of hope that we look forward to our journey together.

**Oh, the places we go today!**

“Today is your day. You’re off to Great Places! You’re off and away!”

Dr. Seuss

The special topic of this issue is: Differentiation of Instruction. Our journey begins with Danny Brassell’s “Dare to differentiate: Vocabulary strategies for all
students.” In his article Danny provides teachers with a broad starting point on the road to their students’ vocabulary development using enticing vocabulary-building activities that focus on the specific needs of each individual child. Then Bruce Campbell introduces us to “To-With-By: A three-tiered model for differentiated instruction,” a framework for differentiation that does not require extensive training or preparation but can still create a classroom infrastructure within which differentiation can successfully occur. Vincent J. Hawkins challenges our commitment to differentiated instruction in his article, “Barriers to implementing differentiation: Lack of confidence, efficacy and perseverance.” In “One size does not fit all: How assessment guides instruction in word study with English language learners” Carrie Rogers and Lori Helman emphasize the role of multiple assessments in planning differentiated instruction in word study for English language learners by sharing the stories of Chue and Tong, two Hmong boys who have the same native language and are both English language learners, but each requiring differentiated materials and instruction. Gerard Buteau and Marianne True’s “Differentiating instructional strategies to support English language learners” complements Rogers and Helman’s article, with an added bonus of nine differentiation strategies that are supported by research and best practice. In “Differentiated instruction: Using a case study” Elene S. Demos and John Foshay draw attention to the need for a continuous, thorough, and balanced assessment using multiple sources of information for effective differentiated instruction. Chinwe H. Ikpeze “documents an account of one fifth grade teacher’s journey as he integrated his students’ personal literacies and WebQuest to foster a culturally responsive teaching” in her article, “Transforming classroom instruction with personal and technological literacies: The WebQuest connection.”

In addition to our themed articles, Cynthia Lassonde in her article, “Transforming philosophy through critical inquiry,” a narrative self-study, models a critical inquiry stance in transforming her philosophy and pedagogy. Jeff Barger eloquently defends the value of a qualitative spelling inventory, “a simple, inexpensive, reliable, and quick way to assess a student’s ability to maneuver through the maze that is the English language.” The theme “standards of conscience” is fundamental to the voices we hear in “Reauthorization of NCLB: A postscript on voices from the field” by Olusegun Sogunro, Judith Faryniarz and Anthony Rigazio-DiGilio. The authors discuss a community’s response to the No Child Left Behind Act, including themes and initiatives to further support student learning. Finally, in “Taking a new look at Lincoln: New books in time for the bicentennial of his birthday,” Terrell A. Young, Barbara A. Ward and Deanna Day make us realize that even after having read numerous excellent books about Lincoln there is still so much to discover, to learn, and to enjoy.

In keeping with our special topic on differentiated instruction, our departmental columns address aspects of differentiated instruction. In Review of Professional Books Sandip Wilson raises the question, “Differentiated instruction: How are design, essential questions in learning, assessment, and instruction part of it?” Her in-depth review of eight books on differentiated instruction engages us in exploring answers to this question. Melissa Juchniewicz’s Book Beat offers the readers “two terrific concept books and a dozen examples of new fiction: some stories are about differences among characters, others may be used in different ways with different students” in the hope that among these titles something is just right for your student in mind. In Review of Research in the Classroom, Diane Kern’s fascinating “Cinderella’s glass slipper and differentiating instruction” takes Cinderella Teacher on a journey to help her get through the hardest of teaching days by giving her the gift of a glass slipper—instructional practices that perfectly fit each individual student. In her column Diane examines a compelling rationale for differentiating instruction in regular classroom, guiding principles in implementing differentiated instruction, and several research-based strategies for differentiated instruction. What is differentiated instruction without the support of technology? Julia Kara-Soteriou introduces us to “Using technology to differentiate instruction across grade levels” to help teachers realize the potential of technology in addressing the different needs and abilities of students through technology-driven differentiated instruction.

In this issue we are pleased to add a new feature to our journal—the NERA News! We plan to share with NERA members highlights of each year’s NERA events and accomplishments at each spring issue of the journal. We hope you will share with us exciting news from your state—special projects, grants, awards for next spring’s issue. Happy reading!
Lesenia arrives to the classroom nearly an hour before the first bell rings. She has completed all of her homework perfectly, organized her desk in preparation for the day’s lessons and helps herself to different learning center activities to occupy herself while she awaits the start of school.

José shows up ten minutes late to class every day. He never has a pencil, and he does not seem to have the ability to sit in his seat for periods beyond eight minutes.

Anthony completes math exercises well ahead of his classmates, but he struggles during reading time and usually acts up.

Welcome to Ms. Kwon’s fourth grade classroom. It could be just about any classroom in America. One of the epiphanies teachers reach within their first week of teaching is how, no matter what, every classroom is filled with students of mixed abilities and interests. Every student is different. This is the challenge good teachers face: how to differentiate instruction to meet the needs of every student. Differentiating instruction is especially critical in enhancing students’ reading aptitudes and attitudes.

What is differentiated instruction? Teachers need to keep in mind that instruction begins where the students are, not at the front of the curriculum guide (Tomlinson, 1999). Differentiated instruction permits all students to access the same classroom curriculum by providing entry points, learning tasks and outcomes that are tailored to students’ needs (Hall, Strangman, & Meyer, 2003). Differentiated instruction is an approach, not any single strategy.

In aiding students’ progress in reading (particularly in their vocabulary and, ultimately, comprehension development), teachers can create classrooms that meet state and federal standards and maintain high student expectations by supporting all students’ learning modalities and differentiating through content, activities (process) and product, based on students’ readiness, interests, profiles of learning and environments. Brassell and Rasinski (2008) describe a simple mnemonic trick to help teachers always keep differentiation in mind: each student is RIPE for learning when the teacher uses his/her thinking CAP. “RIPE” stands for Readiness, Interests, Profiles of Learning and Environments; “CAP” stands for Content, Activities (process) and Product.

Why is vocabulary instruction important? Who are the more successful vocabulary teachers: optimists or pessimists? The answer is “optimists,” and the reason is that optimists keep in mind that if at first they do not succeed they always try again. Optimistic vocabulary teachers display a passion for teaching that infects their students. We need plenty of optimistic and passionate teachers in our classrooms if we want our students to enhance their vocabulary development.

But that is only half the battle. If teachers want to make their vocabulary lessons “stick,” teachers have to create rich and engaging activities that attract the enthusiasm of their students. Good vocabulary teachers need to have “weapons of mass instruction,” a variety of research-based strategies for their vocabulary-teaching arsenals.

Before Carol Ann Tomlinson talked about differentiating instruction, Howard Gardner (1983) proposed that teachers recognize students’ “multiple intelligences.” Essentially, Gardner pointed out what Gary Coleman already preached: it takes...
different strokes for different folks. Some students learn vocabulary best by playing games, and others prefer drills. Teachers need to realize that they have to create classrooms that provide students with a variety of different vocabulary development activities to accommodate all students’ learning interests and needs.

Although research has shown that vocabulary knowledge plays a critical role in students’ literacy development, many teachers devote hardly any class time at all to vocabulary instruction (Scott, Jamieson-Noel, & Asselin, 2003). Moreover, teachers that do devote time to vocabulary instruction often use strategies that fail to increase students’ vocabulary and comprehension abilities (see reviews in Blachowicz & Fisher, 2002; Nagy, 1988). Finally, Graves (2000) and his colleagues (Graves & Watts-Taffe, 2002) have advocated broader classroom vocabulary programs for students that: (1) facilitate wide reading, (2) teach individual words, (3) provide word-learning strategies, and (4) foster word consciousness.

**What does differentiated vocabulary instruction look like?**

A thorough examination of various vocabulary enhancement strategies is detailed in *Dare to Differentiate: Vocabulary Strategies for All Students* (Brassell, 2009). This article is meant to provide teachers with a broad starting point on the road to their students’ vocabulary development. Without sacrificing a large part of time reserved for other curriculum, teachers in an urban Southern California elementary school showed how they facilitate vocabulary growth by utilizing a variety of differentiated instructional strategies with their highly culturally and linguistically diverse students.

**Word Sorts** (Bear, Invernizzi, Templeton, & Johnston, 1996; Cunningham, Moore, Cunningham, & Moore, 1995; Gunning, 2003) is an instructional strategy used to help students see the generative nature of words. Students “sort” words written and chosen by the teacher on individual cards into groups based on commonalities, relationships and/or other criteria (“closed sort”), or students select categories for sorting their words (“open sort”). The strategy is used to: (1) assist students in learning the relationships among words and how to categorize words based on those relationships; (2) activate and build on students’ prior knowledge of words; and (3) allow students to understand recurring patterns in words (e.g., rhyming words, number of syllables, etc.).

Tamiko Hiroshi’s fourth graders were studying a science unit on recycling. She had introduced a variety of books to the class, and in the third day of her unit she selected a couple of passages from the book *Fifty Simple Things Kids Can Do to Save the Earth* (Earthworks Group & Montez, 1990). These passages continued to focus on the three R’s she had been teaching her class: recycle, reuse and reduce. She selected words from the passages that she believed were unfamiliar to most of her students. As a number of words contained similar prefixes, she asked students to work in pairs to categorize each word based on its prefix (closed sort). Knowing that this would be a fairly simple activity for her fourth graders, Mrs. Hiroshi then asked her students to create their own categories for words (open sort).

After students completed both the closed sort and open sort, Mrs. Hiroshi asked them to share their work with the class. Students explained why they placed words in various categories for the closed sort, and they told the class why they had created the categories they had for the open sort. Mrs. Hiroshi allowed students to make any changes they deemed necessary for their final word sorts. Figure 1 shows the target science vocabulary words that Mrs. Hiroshi selected for the class, as well as examples of two student groups’ closed and open word sorts. As the Figure demonstrates, open word sorts particularly lend themselves to product differentiation, as some of Mrs. Hiroshi’s students chose to categorize words by “parts of speech” while others categorized words by their “number of syllables.”

Word Sorts allow students to classify groups of words as they see fit. It is one of the favorite vocabulary activities offered by many teachers, especially elementary school teachers. Pat Thompson, a second grade teacher, says that she uses Word Sorts with her students as a way of seeing how their minds operate. “I use it as an assessment, but not in the way some ‘test-crazy’ folks think,” she says. “When my students sort their words, it allows me to ask them about their thought process…(which) helps me determine new ways to present information to certain students in ways that are meaningful to them.” Like Thompson, many teachers use Word Sorts as a way of relating students’ prior knowledge to new concepts, making target vocabulary words much more comprehensible to students.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Figure 1. Word Sorts by Mrs. Hiroshi’s Fourth Graders</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Key Science Vocabulary Words (selected by Mrs. Hiroshi)</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>recycle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>consume</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>disabled</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>discover</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Vocab-O-Grams (Barr & Johnson, 1997; Blachowicz & Fisher, 2002), also known as “Predict-O-Grams,” allow students to make predictions about how authors use particular words to tell a story. Vocab-O-Grams are used with a charting process that asks students to organize vocabulary in relationship to the structure of the selection. This strategy is used to: (1) allow students to go beyond the definition of a word and consider its application in text, and (2) encourage students to form predictions about a selection based on vocabulary words.

Deron McGinnis planned to read the West African folktale Why Mosquitoes Buzz in People’s Ears (Aardema & Dillon, 1975) to his third graders. He knew that many of the words in the story would be new to his students, so he chose a list of new vocabulary words for the class to review before reading the story. He wrote the list on the overhead projector and asked students to discuss what they knew about the words. Next, he passed out Vocab-O-Gram handouts to the class. Mr. McGinnis organized students into groups of four students and asked each group to predict where each vocabulary word could be found as it related to the story structure.

**Figure 2. Vocab-O-Gram by Mr. McGinnis’s Third Graders**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Setting</th>
<th>Which words tell you about when and where the story took place?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>farmer</td>
<td>On a farm</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characters</th>
<th>Which words tell you about the characters in the story (their feelings, thoughts, appearance)?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>burrow</td>
<td>There’s a donkey and an iguana and a mosquito on a farm.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>farmer</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>iguana</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mosquito</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Problem/Goal</th>
<th>Which words describe the problem or goal?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>alarmed</td>
<td>One of the animals pulls a fire alarm because one animal was whining about mosquitoes biting him and he wants to kill it.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>whining</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>killed</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Action</th>
<th>Which words tell you what might happen?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>whining</td>
<td>The animals fear the farmer because they know if they are loud he will be mad. So when the mosquitoes come and they make noise, the farmer comes and kills the mosquitoes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>feared</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>killed</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>reeds</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Resolution</th>
<th>Which words tell you how the story might end?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>sticks</td>
<td>Maybe the farmer uses sticks to swat the mosquitoes off the animals.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What question(s) do you have?</th>
<th>Why don’t the animals kill the mosquitoes?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Why do mosquitoes buzz in people’s ears?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Mystery words: council, plotting
As an example, he asked students to place the word “village” in the most appropriate category. A group answered “setting,” and Mr. McGinnis then asked students to think of a prediction they could make about a story with the word “village.” A student predicted that such a story would take place in a small town. Mr. McGinnis told students that they would be reading *Why Mosquitoes Buzz in People’s Ears*, and they had to guess where their new vocabulary words fit in the story (characters, setting, problem/goal, action or resolution). If a group could not decide what category to place a word under, they could place the word in the mystery word category.

Students worked in groups for about ten minutes, placing words in categories and making predictions about the story. Mr. McGinnis asked groups to share their predictions and to explain how they came up with them, and then he asked each student to write at least one question about the story, based on previous predictions. He read aloud the story and discussed with students whether their predictions were accurate. Students shared their thoughts about the story and about different ways the author used the words. Their feedback is listed in Figure 2.

Students enjoy predicting how they think stories are going to turn out, and Vocab-O-Grams allow students not only to predict what they think is going to happen in a story but which words to focus on, as well. Teachers comment that the strength in Vocab-O-Grams seems to be in allowing students to work in pairs or small groups to test their different predictions with peers before sharing them with the entire class. Sal Parker asks his sixth graders to come up with different ways to present their Vocab-O-Grams to the entire class. For example, Mr. Parker’s students have created skits, facilitated talk shows, performed puppet shows, shot short videos and even created their own WebQuests. When using Vocab-O-Grams, Mr. Parker points out, teachers can differentiate content, process, product—or a combination of all three.

**Vocabulary Self-Collection Strategy** (Haggard, 1986; Readence, Bean, & Baldwin, 2001; Ruddell, 1992), also known as Vocabulary Self-Selection (VSS), is an instructional strategy that places the responsibility for learning words on the students. It is a group activity in which students each bring one or two words to the attention of the group that they believe the group should learn. Students, rather than the teacher, generate the majority of words to be explored and learned. Students use their own interest and prior knowledge to enhance vocabulary growth. The strategy is used to: (1) help students generate vocabulary words to be explored and learned by focusing on words that are important to them, (2) simulate word learning that occurs naturally in students’ lives, and (3) guide students in becoming independent word learners by capitalizing on their own experiences.

Joyce Tan had been working with her first graders on a thematic unit emphasizing the importance and responsibility of good citizenship. Her students had been reading a number of stories about how to respect themselves and others, play fairly and behave like model citizens. Today, the class had read the book *Dear Mrs. LaRue: Letters from Obedience School* (Teague, 2002), and afterward Ms. Tan asked her students to arrange themselves in groups of four. She told students that she would read the story again more slowly and asked each group to try and find one word from the story that they would like to learn more about. She told her students that the word could be a word that they did not understand very well, a word

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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Word</th>
<th>Student Definition*</th>
<th>Rationale **</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>canine</td>
<td>dog</td>
<td>“The police have K-9 units. Those are the cops with dogs.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>prison</td>
<td>jail</td>
<td>“A prison is where you go when you are bad and can’t get along with other people so they put you alone by yourself.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>discussed</td>
<td>said; talked about</td>
<td>“We’re discussing now!”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>prevented</td>
<td>stopped</td>
<td>“When you prevent something it means you stop it from happening. That’s why they say not to have fires in the forest because they can cause bigger fires… so you can prevent big fires by not making little fires.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>refused</td>
<td>say “no” won’t do</td>
<td>“It’s like when Munro (another story students read) told his parents he wouldn’t take a bath or eat his dinner. He refused to.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>shocking</td>
<td>surprise</td>
<td>“Something shocks you when you don’t know it’s going to happen.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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* Ms. Tan asks students to double-check their definitions by comparing them with definitions found in their dictionaries.

** Ms. Tan does not write students’ rationale for choosing a word on the overhead projector/chalkboard. Rather, she asks students to tell her why they chose a word. It is written here to demonstrate how students feel about certain words.
that they think they needed to know, or a word they were curious to know more about. The most important thing to remember, Ms. Tan emphasized, was for each group to nominate a word, define the word by looking at how the author used it in the story, and tell the class why they thought it was important that the class learned the word.

Some groups came up with a number of words, and Ms. Tan said that was all right because different groups might nominate the same words for the class vocabulary list. After allowing students about five minutes to discuss their nominations, Ms. Tan asked representatives from each group to share with the class the words they chose. She wrote each word on the overhead projector and asked the class to define each word. She also asked students to share whatever they knew about a word.

When she asked students to defend why they chose a word, students discussed why their word was important to know. Once the entire class had shared their words, definitions and rationales, Ms. Tan re-wrote the key vocabulary words on the board with the definitions decided by the class. She passed out “Vocabulary Self-Collection Strategy” sheets and asked students to copy the words and definitions from the class list on the overhead (see Figure 3). Ms. Tan informed the class that they could refer to their new words when they wrote stories later in the day. She also told the class that she would use their vocabulary list to include in future word finds and word jumbles.

Freedom of choice among students is the key to the Vocabulary Self-Collection Strategy. By allowing students to select the words that they are interested in learning more about, teachers are empowering and encouraging their students to take active interest in their own learning. Frederica Pimmel cautions that some students may require some extra guidance in their own learning. Frederica Pimmel cautions that some students may require some extra guidance in their own learning. According to Mrs. Pimmel, “By modeling to students which words in a story play critical importance to comprehending a story, teachers can interest students in discovering ‘the important words to know.’” She says that she uses Vocabulary Self-Collection Strategy as a game where she challenges her third graders to act like “word investigators” who have to uncover the most important words in any passage. By calling the activity a game, she has learned, her students take an immediate interest and even practice the activity outside of school.

Final thoughts
Learning vocabulary can be fun with the right attitude. There are all sorts of ways for teachers to engage their students in acquiring more vocabulary. Introducing students to great books is always the best idea. Games are fantastic. It is necessary for more teachers to realize, though, how they can differentiate the content, process and/or product of any given lesson in order to meet the needs and readiness levels for all of their students.

The strategies discussed in this article are all utilized as part of a number of vocabulary development activities offered at one school, in addition to increased access to books. It should be noted that all teachers at this school considered their extensive classroom library reading resources as critical in attracting their students’ interests in vocabulary activities. Again, a more comprehensive list of strategies can be found in *Dare to Differentiate: Vocabulary Strategies for All Students* (Brassell, 2009). If teachers want to build students’ word knowledge without sacrificing a significant portion of their instructional time, they need to practice more enticing vocabulary-building activities that focus on the specific needs of each individual child. In that way all students may succeed.

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Richard Woodbury of Warsaw Middle School in Skowhegan, Maine is recipient of this year’s Helen A. Murphy Memorial Teaching Mini-Grant.

In the picture with Richard is Lizabeth Widdifield, Rhode Island state delegate and chairperson of the Helen A. Murphy Memorial Teaching Mini-Grant.
All teachers differentiate instruction; it’s natural, it’s intuitive; we couldn’t survive without differentiating. However, we can become more conscious and intentional in the ways we think about our students and in the ways we plan our lessons so that differentiation helps even more students succeed, particularly those struggling with literacy. To do that, an equally intuitive framework for differentiation is in order; one that does not require extensive training or preparation but still creates a classroom infrastructure within which differentiation occurs.

Whether we approach DI from the point of view of differences in readiness, differences in ability, differences in interest, or differences in learning profile, it involves multiple or differentiated resources, a variety of instructional strategies, and a range of options for demonstrations of understanding. Carol Tomlinson (1999) discusses differentiated content, process, and product. This could be interpreted as differentiated curriculum, instruction, and assessment. In other words, we can differentiate the resources we use, the ways we ask students to interact with the content, and the ways we ask students to demonstrate their learning.

I have been a classroom teacher for over 30 years, at every level from grades one through twelve, and in multiple disciplines. If there is one thing I have learned, it is that I have to make that conscious and intentional effort to differentiate on a daily basis. Whether we are talking about using multiple resources, different instructional strategies, or more performance-based assessments, I try always to be conscious of the unique group of students with whom I am working. And I intentionally plan my lessons to not only target state and district standards but also the readiness, abilities, interests, and learning profiles of the students in that classroom (Campbell, 2009).

The basic formula I have used for many years is To-With-By: I teach something to my students, this is usually in the form of direct instruction; then I work with my students, this is essentially guided instruction; then I push them to work more independently or by themselves, this is self-directed learning. Such an approach is sometimes referred to as Teach-Practice-Apply or I do-We do-You do. Regardless of the moniker, the beauty of this approach to teaching is that the teacher can use differentiated strategies at all three stages. Moreover, it is scaffolded for all students to ensure a “gradual release of responsibility” (Bruner, 1983). In other words, the process itself is differentiated in that it works through three tiers or levels that challenge students at progressively higher levels, plus the learning strategies within each tier are also differentiated. (See Figure 1)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Figure 1. Various Perspectives on To-With-By Instruction</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>To</td>
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<tr>
<td>The foundation</td>
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<tr>
<td>Direct instruction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Main lesson</td>
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<tr>
<td>My project presentations</td>
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<tr>
<td>Teacher-focused</td>
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<tr>
<td>Introduction of skills</td>
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<td>Teach</td>
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<td>I do</td>
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There are many strategies under the umbrella of differentiated instruction: tiered lessons, flexible
grouping, anchor activities, learning centers, multi-modal instruction, cooperative learning, project-based learning, and so forth. Using the To-With-By model, I can incorporate all of these strategies into my lessons. For example, multi-modal instruction can be used effectively in the to stage where I introduce a topic; cooperative learning works well in the with stage where students are practicing; and project-based learning is a natural fit for the by stage where students are applying the skills and knowledge they have learned. In the next three sections, I'll describe each of the three stages in more detail and then explain how the process can be used specifically in the context of literacy.

**Direct instruction: To**
Stage one, or tier one, is to. I call this my Main Lesson. I start out each day or each period with a lecture in which I teach something “to” my students. It might be anything from long vowels to the binomial theorem, photosynthesis to the Boston Tea Party. It usually takes 10 to 20 minutes and provides an overview or introduction to the basic skills or concepts with which we will be working.

In the Main Lesson, I am not only introducing basic skills or concepts, I am also intentionally modeling the kinds of teaching that I expect my students to do with each other when they reach stage three: self-directed learning. It is essentially lecture-based, direct instruction but I use visuals (such as graphic organizers or charts), hands-on activities (such as physical models or manipulatives), mnemonic devices (such as chants or jingles), interactive learning (such as “turn and talk” or questioning strategies), or reflective learning (such as journaling or self-assessment).

During the Main Lesson, I often “think out loud” for my students. “We are talking about Thomas Jefferson and John Adams and we’re going to look at some of their similarities and some of their differences. To do that, I’m drawing this visual organizer called a Venn Diagram which we can use to compare and contrast the two men. I’m going to put Jefferson’s name on this side and Adam’s name on this side...” I will go on to explain that they will be expected to make the same kind of visual organizer in small groups at their learning centers to compare and contrast other characters. After that, they will also be expected to use the same type of graphics in their independent project work. It’s to-with-by.

**Guided instruction: With**
Stage two, or tier two, is the with stage. This is guided instruction. Here I like to work with small groups so I set up my classroom with learning centers or what I call “work stations.” Regardless of grade level or subject matter, this stage involves multiple approaches to the same concepts or skills introduced in the Main Lesson, but now students are working in small groups. Many students learn best in small groups.

Nonetheless, the same concepts or skills can be practiced in multiple ways with whole group instruction. In my classroom, students break up into small, collaborative groups and practice what was introduced in the Main Lesson in different (differentiated) ways: hands-on, visual, interactive, narrative, reflective, inductive, rhythmic, etc. This will vary depending on the management system or dynamics of individual teachers. In fact, I find that I have to modify my approach each year with different students.

As in any good collaborative lesson, small group work has three essential components: specific social skills, group interdependence, and individual accountability (Johnson and Johnson, 1994). So students are learning to work together in intentional ways, they are collaborating to meet a common goal, and they are responsible for their own learning. Sometimes each group is working on the same task or taking the same approach. At other times, each group is taking a different approach to the same skills or content. The groups rotate through the stations until each one has approached the learning task from multiple perspectives.

For some lessons, at some grade levels, and in some subject areas, it makes sense to reverse tiers one and two: a more inquiry-based approach where students might “mess around” with a topic first (with) and then come together for a collective debriefing to draw conclusions and clarify the skills or knowledge they have just experienced (to). This is particularly true in science classes but can also be the best way to process a passage students have read, a problem they have tried to solve, or some design or model they have attempted to create. With-To-By is a more constructivist approach as opposed to the more scaffolded nature of To-With-By and, given the circumstances, can be equally viable.

**Self-directed learning: By**
Stage three, or tier three, is the by stage. Here students work more independently. This can take the form of drill and practice, performance-based assessments, or project-based learning. Personally, I consider project-based learning to be the one of the most powerful ways to differentiate instruction. So, in a project-based “by” stage, students choose a topic within the content area of study, research that topic (and yes, even primary students and non-readers can do certain kinds of research), then put together some type of presentation or demonstration of learning for each other.

We cannot just ask students to “do a project” and expect anything meaningful to happen, so there is a need for considerable training and scaffolding first. As noted, I model different ways to express my understanding in the Main Lesson. These are my “project presentations” and where skills and concepts are introduced. The work
stations or learning centers provide ways that students can practice different techniques or approaches. This is the real skill building stage. Early in the school year, I start with what I call mini-projects—one dimensional demonstrations of learning such as a chart, a survey, an interview, or a report. These mini-projects evolve into more comprehensive, multimodal performances that are true demonstrations of understanding. This is the stage where students use their individual strengths and preferences to show others what skills and knowledge they have learned.

**To-With-By and literacy**

The primary objective of reading is to make meaning of the text (Smith, 1985). As all teachers of reading know (and all of us are teachers of reading), that does not happen automatically. The *To-With-By* approach provides the necessary scaffolding for both young children learning to read and older students working with more difficult text so they can all be successful learners who understand what they read (Harvey and Goudvis, 2000). Whether it is basic phonics work, book talks, shared reading (Holdaway, 1979), a read aloud, a reading workshop (Calkins 2001), guided reading (Fountas and Pinnell, 1996), responding to literature (Routman 1991), literature circles (Hill et al., 1995), personal journal writing (Routman, 1991), or nonfiction reading (Harvey, 1998), *To-With-By* makes perfect sense.

Let’s say I’m introducing some new vocabulary words using a big book or chart. For the to stage, I model fluent reading by reading through the text aloud and pointing to the words. Perhaps I stop from time to time to think out loud: “Wait, that’s a new word, that’s a big word, w-h-a-l-e, I wonder what that word is, I think I’m going to like that word…” During the with stage, students might be collaboratively working with some word cards at a learning center; arranging the cards; building sentences. The by stage could involve students independently writing or building sentences using the new words and then reading to the teacher or the class or drawing pictures, e.g., a whale, and labeling them. At each stage, I’ve used differentiated strategies.

Or, suppose, I’m working with older students on nonfiction text about the underground railroad. For the to stage, I’m going to do a brief lecture on the purpose and function of the underground railroad. I’ll show students the text and describe the context and content. I’ll probably use a map and other graphics to show routes and obstacles. I’ll probably suggest a couple of guiding questions: “What would it feel like to be actually following the underground railroad? What would be the greatest challenges?” During the with stage, I may begin with a narrative pantomime, where I read the text and students collectively act it out as I read. Then they might meet in small groups and go through the text discussing what they were doing at each stage. Finally, during the by stage, students will read the text independently, then perhaps answer some questions, make some inferences, or reflect on the text itself.

There is no limit to the breadth and depth of *To-With-By* in the literacy classroom. At any grade level, in any subject area, students’ literacy skills can be developed and enhanced by this scaffolded (Vygotsky, 1978) model. Teachers can bring a range of good strategies to the table for large group, small group, and independent learning. And, not only will literacy skills and knowledge improve but students will also be pleasantly engaged in a range of differentiated learning experiences.

**Conclusion**

The *To-With-By* model provides a range of learning opportunities for all students. All three stages can be differentiated and all three stages can be personalized for the unique learning needs of students in any classroom. As noted, the curriculum resources can be differentiated, the instructional strategies can be differentiated, and assessments can be differentiated. It is a simple formula that can be applied by any teacher, in any subject area, at any grade level.

The formula is structured, teacher directed, and content based, but it is student centered and provides students with multiple entry points into the content areas and personal choices based on their individual strengths or learning profiles (Tomlinson, 1999; Marzano, 2007). As the year goes on, or as students become more responsive to the system, they become increasingly self-directed and increasingly confident about their learning, so the balance may shift from less to or with into more with and by.

No single method works best for all teachers or for all students, but *To-With-By* is generic enough to be adaptable for any classroom setting. More importantly, it provides a simple framework for planning that even the least experienced of teachers can use to provide opportunities for all students to succeed. It’s not more work to differentiate; it simply means thinking about our students differently and planning our lessons in more conscious and intentional ways. *To-With-By* provides a framework for doing just that.

**References**


Between January and May 2008, a small group of educators in Springfield, Vermont enrolled in a series of workshops on differentiating instruction. As an observer, I became interested in what happens after everyone goes home, summer ends, and a new year begins. To what degree and extent will revised pedagogy reflect knowledge about responsive instruction? What personal struggles took place to accommodate what was learned? This article does not attempt to answer those questions based on those workshops, but rather exposes three major reasons why implementing differential, or responsive, instruction is so difficult.

One of the more pithy concepts advanced by Kong Fuzi (Confucius) was that in order to teach students what they don’t know, you must start from where they are. Indiana University annually conducts the High School Survey of Student Engagement (HSSSE), which reaches nearly 100,000 students in more than 100 high schools in 26 states. Recent results indicate about 30 percent of the students are bored due to lack of interaction with teachers, and 75 percent report that the material taught to them is uninteresting. Two-thirds indicate they are bored in class every single day (Bryner, 2007). If students are unmotivated or disenfranchised, significant achievement is compromised.

The case for differentiating instruction has long been identified as the most logical and fair way to respond to every-increasing students’ cognitive, demographic, and racial diversity and their disengagement regarding purposeful learning. A helicopter view of a successful differentiated classroom to the casual observer may appear that a confident, competent instructor is merely employing exemplary practices within the margins of common sense (Tomlinson, 2003). Indeed, many differential instruction characteristics cited in the literature are the rule, not the exception, to legions of exemplary teachers.

Barriers to implementing differentiation:
Lack of confidence, efficacy and perseverance

Vincent J. Hawkins
Springfield School District, Vermont

There is much agreement about the components of differentiated lessons, what they look like, and optimal implementation (Tomlinson & Allan, 2000; Tomlinson, 2001a, 2001b; Heacox, 2002; Hollas, 2005; Wormeli, 2007). In advocating for responsive, rather than “one-size-fits-all” teaching, Tomlinson (2003) defines differentiated instruction as a proactively planned approach to what students need to learn, how they will learn it, and/or how they can express what they have learned in order to increase the likelihood that each student will learn as much as he or she can as efficiently as possible. As an operational definition, Wormeli (2007) refers to differentiating as a professional and responsive mind set that answers ten questions that are grounded in two premises: (1) do whatever it takes to maximize students’ learning instead of relying on a one-size-fits-all, whole class method of instruction, and (2) prepare students to handle anything in their current and future lives that is not differentiated. Wormeli offers the following:

1. Are you willing to teach in whatever way is necessary for students to learn best?
2. Do you have the courage to do what works, as indicated by data analysis?
3. Do you actively seek to understand your students’ interests and talents, skill and concept knowledge, and social-interaction culture?
4. Do you continually build an ever-expanding repertoire of instructional strategies that support varied ways to convey a lesson?
5. Do you provide a classroom environment that maximizes student learning potential?
6. Do you maintain up-to-date research about learning, developmental growth, and specific content areas?
7. Do you self-reflect on lesson planning, execution and assessment results to modify for improvement?
8. Are you open to peer or colleague review?
9. Do you push, challenge and support students to
become their own education advocates?

10. Do you regularly close the gap between knowing what to do and actually doing it? (p.8)

In effective differentiated classrooms, teachers employ varied strategies and practices including graphic organizers, varied levels of fiction and non-fiction materials, small group instruction, student-as-worker, guided practice, immediate feedback and judicious review, and curriculum compacting, (Sizer, 1999; Kameenui & Simmons, 1999). Numerous research studies hypothesizing the effects of differentiating instruction on student achievement refer to brain research, learning styles, constructivism, challenging learning environments, clarity of purpose, dynamic assessments and constructive feedback, and flexible grouping (Dunn & Griggs, 1989; Marzano, 1992; Brooks & Brooks, 1993; Tomlinson, 1999, 2001a, 2001b; Wolfe, 2001; Dunn, 2007).

A major tenet of differentiating instruction, responding to the cognitive difference of where the student is to where the student needs to be, is derived from Vygotsky's zone of proximal development (Vygotsky, 1962, 1978; Dixon-Krauss, 1996; Riddle & Dabbagh, 1999). Dixon-Krauss (1996) describes the zone of proximal development as “encompassing the gap between the child's level of actual development determined by independent problem solving, and her level of potential development determined by problem solving, supported by an adult or through collaboration with more capable peers” (p.15).

Only when a task is slightly more challenging and beyond a student's comfort level, and appropriate supports are in place, will learning occur (Riddle & Dabbagh, 1999; MacGillivray & Rueda, 2001). The development of higher order functions and cognitive growth requires significant social interactions, although social interaction does not necessarily produce cognitive growth (Vygotsky, 1962, 1978; Resnick, 1991). Vygotsky's theory emphasizes the student-teacher relationship as collaborative, with the learning experience becoming reciprocal (Riddle & Dabbagh, 1999; Flem et al., 2000; Shambaugh & Magliaro, 2001). Within the framework of task modification to accommodate ability levels, differentiated instruction is the pedagogical method to maximize the learning process (Subban, 2006). To learn more about applying the zone of proximal development to language, reading and integrating literature with content areas and their subsequent dynamic assessments, refer to Vygotsky (1962, 1978) and Dixon-Krauss (1996).

Professional development

It is not uncommon among schools and districts to advocate for professional development in differentiating instruction. This is usually a reactive response to data trends indicative of achievement gaps between or among subgroups, especially those involving students with individual education plans (IEPs), recipients of free or reduced lunches (low SES), and those with other high profile demographic differences. The goal of such training is to provide the classroom teacher with the necessary skills and dispositions to effectively respond to diverse student abilities and background knowledge. It is further desired that, over time, teachers will (a) believe that implementing differentiated instruction will provide evidence and subsequent results that support the theoretical constructs and research base, (b) understand that students’ zones of proximal development, the framework for effective lesson-delivery, is a necessary socio-cultural adaptation for varied-ability students to advance cognitively, (c) continually re-invent themselves as teachers through purposeful lesson preparation and analysis, colleague feedback, self-reflection, and on-going professional development, reading, and questioning, and (d) will give themselves permission to fail before they succeed (Tomlinson, 2005; Subban, 2006; Wormeli, 2007).

Teaching in a school is profoundly influenced by that school's culture, rituals and traditions (Deal & Peterson, 1999). Schumm & Vaught (1991) and Tomlinson et al., (2003) found that although teachers may believe in responsive instruction and differentiating, there was concern regarding its feasibility:

• Although teachers may be knowledgeable about differentiating, they seldom employ it;
• Few teachers instruct in ways that are culturally and racially sensitive;
• When differentiating instruction is used, it is reactive and tangential, not planned and substantive;
• Even special and gifted educators, who may be knowledgeable about students multiple exceptionalities, fail to use differentiation to maximize optimal learning; and
• Few teacher preparation programs provide in-depth information on effective, responsive instruction.

Much has been written regarding the challenges associated with changing pedagogical practice, specifically transitioning from traditional teaching practices to differentiating instruction (Tomlinson, 1995). Topics include the historical nature of cyclical (repetitive) teaching influenced by an agrarian calendar (Lortie, 1975; 2002), isolationism (Fullan 1991; 2003), hegemony, instructional minimalism and ineffective teaching (Bocock, 1986; Apple, 1988, 1996; Stronge, 2002), school culture and climate (Harvey & Drolet, 1994; Deal & Peterson, 1999), and public perception (Apple, 1996; Giroux & McLaren, 1999). Research on any of these topics provides a plethora of reasons
contributing to the lack of success in implementing differentiated instruction to the degree it should be.

On-going professional development should consist of three major components: (1) An honest reflection of one’s personal belief system regarding responsive instruction and the challenge of confronting tension that accompanies change, (2) a thorough understanding of, exposure to, and analyses of the differences between a traditional learning environment and a differentiated learning environment, and (3) answers to anticipated questions. Below are representative questions offered by Heacox (2002):

1. Where do I get the instructional strategies and how do I use them?
2. I like the way I teach, which seems to be working. Why change it?
3. My curriculum is standards-driven and predetermined. How can I differentiate when I’m required to teach specific skills and prepare students for high-stakes assessments?
4. With an already full day, how can I find the time to differentiate instruction?
5. How do I explain differentiated instruction to parents?
6. How do I help students understand that assigning different work is not unfair?
7. How do I manage the classroom with different, simultaneous activities?
8. How do I grade fairly when different students are engaged in work of varying challenges? (pp.13-17)

This article attempts to expose three major reasons why differentiating instruction has failed to become common practice in classrooms: (1) lack of teacher confidence; (2) dilution of teacher efficacy; (3) and inconsistent on-going professional development and personal perseverance.

**Lack of confidence**

When asked how he got started in implementing what he learned about differentiating instruction into daily practice, Rick Wormeli was clear about not protecting his fragile ego, giving himself permission to fail, taking risks, understanding and being comfortable with the non-linearity process of adaptation, and having the courage to engage in practices that validated theoretical underpinnings (Heinsma, 2006). If your belief system supports differentiating instruction as a successful pedagogical method that uses student differences of readiness, interests and learning profiles to improve achievement, your confidence level will be sustained by doing the following:

1. Revisit your essential understandings and be clear about where you want your students to be based on your knowledge of them. Numerous templates are available to keep your work organized.
2. Start small, modifying one instructional strategy to incorporate a differentiated lesson you read about, observed, or participated in during a mock lesson during professional development, in one class for one week. Realize that it is impossible to accommodate all the diversity in a class every day. Feeling overwhelmed can activate defensive responses in the limbic system and result in abandoning any instructional change (Sylwester, 1995; Jensen, 1998; Willis, 2006).
3. Collaborate with another teacher and discuss each other’s “start-small” plan. Agree to observe (taping is better) each other and debrief about the degree of success in implementing a differentiated lesson. Discuss what specific improvements would be needed to enhance the lesson and maximize student learning. Discuss the challenges and problems provided selected students. their zones of proximal development, and the degree and extent of social interaction.
4. Revisit those ten critical questions (above).
5. Methodically incorporate and expand those strategies and pedagogical nuances embedded in differentiated instruction.
6. Maintain a realistic, yet regular, regimen of self-reflection, collaborative peer review, and a deeper understanding of differentiating instruction through reading, observing others in real time, watching DVDs and videos, and blogging.

**Lack of teacher efficacy**

Teacher efficacy, or a teacher's confidence in his/her ability to promote student learning, was one of the few identified characteristics related to student achievement in a RAND corporation study (Armor et al., 1976). Since then, teacher efficacy has been correlated to teachers' adoption of instructional, organizational, and accountability innovations, teacher evaluations and competence attributes, classroom management protocols, and teachers' referrals of students to special education (Hoy, 2000).

Ashton (1984) provides eight dimensions of teacher efficacy, each of which are present in either the planning or execution of differentiated lessons. Collectively, they incorporate instructional input and feedback and personal communication interaction (Proctor, 1984):

1. A sense of personal accomplishment: The teacher must view differentiating instruction as having an important purpose, a major thrust in ameliorating cognitive diversity.
2. Positive and realistic expectations for student behavior and achievement: The teacher expects all students to progress toward goals while attending to their zones of proximal development.
3. Personal responsibility for student learning: Self-
reflection and accountability indicates a willingness to critically examine performance.

4. Strategies for achieving objectives: Planning for learning through a purposeful, challenging activity with goal-setting and identified strategies.

5. Positive affect: The teacher feels good about teaching as a profession, about self, and about students.

6. Sense of control: The teacher believes he/she can influence student learning and motivation.

7. Sense of common teacher-student goals: The teacher develops a joint venture with students to develop and accomplish goals.

8. Democratic decision-making: Students are involved in making decisions regarding goals and strategies. (p. 28)

When an instructional milieu is cast over all students in a classroom, the opportunity for the teacher to mediate the child’s learning through social interaction and collaboration is minimized. The result compromises students’ proximal development zones which negates at least some of the above dimensions. Social interaction with a knowledgeable adult or capable peer is fundamental to the development of cognition, and is required to optimize the zone of proximal development. Such a one-size-fits-all practice may significantly reduce potential achievement since either the student’s frustration level has been reached, or the skill or concept does not provide the requisite challenge for measured growth.

When school or district-wide professional development focuses on one instructional methodology, like differentiating instruction, there must be an understanding that a teacher’s place regarding efficacy varies with his/her experience (Hoy & Woolfolk, 1990; Burley et al., 1991; Hall et al., 1992). For example, efficacious, confident novice teachers have been shown to indicate a greater optimism toward teaching, which renders a greater sense of teacher efficacy (Burley et al., 1991; Hall et al., 1992). Numerous instruments to ascertain teacher efficacy exist. Bandura (1977; 1997) includes vicarious experiences and social persuasion. In vicarious experiences, the observer identifies with a model-performed skill. Social persuasion is the performance feedback solicited from a colleague. Positive experiences with these have been shown to contribute to an increase in self-efficacy and risk-taking, including attempting new instructional strategies (Bandura, 1982; 1986). Complementing Burley (1991) and Hall’s (1991) research, Affholder (2003) showed that increased feelings of self-efficacy and a greater willingness to try new instructional approaches results from employing higher levels of differentiated techniques were more popular with experienced rather than younger teachers.

According to Hoy (2000), the greater the teacher support the greater the increase in teacher efficacy. Teachers’ knowledge of instructional innovations, classroom management strategies, and their depth of content knowledge, all contribute to their ability to sustain efficacy.

Lack of perseverance

On-going, persistent personal growth toward transforming traditional instructional practice is necessary. A number of professional development topics are key in overcoming inertia that may be caused by a lack of (a) reflection on students as individuals, (b) clarity about what students should know, be able to do, and be like, (c) adequate repertoires of instructional approaches, and (d) skills to manage and facilitate flexible instruction. Brighton et al., (2006) suggest the following supportive topics:

- Helping teachers regularly reflect on their students as individual learners, including diagnosing achievement gaps and creating responsive solutions;
- Remaining current on best practices and the elements of effective instruction;
- Helping teachers understand and clarify the interdependence among curriculum, assessment, and responsive instruction;
- Modeling for teachers debates regarding various teaching methodologies and the influence they have on students’ cognitive and affective development;
- Ensuring that school teachers and administrators are similarly knowledgeable about, and willing to collaborate on, varied perspectives regarding responsive instruction;
- Ensuring that enough resources, time, and support are available to move forward; and
- Understanding that everyone in a school—students, teachers, support staff, administrators, and parent volunteers bring with them beliefs, attitudes and dispositions that influence the degree and extent of differentiation.

Teachers sharing innovative knowledge and experience embedded within a dynamic curriculum and assessment platform is essential for any systemic change, especially a major one like differentiating instruction. District-level leadership, consistent support over time, and communicating an understanding that change is difficult and slow, it creates conflict, tension and skepticism, and that resistance is normal and expected, all contribute to the implementation process. When doubt and difficulty take center stage, revisit Wormeli’s ten questions and right down your answers, share with a trusted colleague, regain your confidence, and move forward. Differentiating instruction is not a goal, but a journey, albeit a non-linear one.
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One size does not fit all: How assessment guides instruction in word study with English learners

Carrie Rogers
Lori Helman

University of Minnesota, Minnesota

As the school day begins the first graders enter their classroom following familiar routines of putting away homework and finding a book to read. While the students read aloud in English, smatterings of other languages are heard. A boy and girl discuss in Hmong what book to choose while two boys talk in Spanish as they look at a big book on the floor, and a lone Somali boy sits on the carpet reading. The teacher glances at the Hmong children working at a table and says, “I feel like I know my students, but you really don’t know them because there is this whole other level that you can’t access because you don’t speak their language.”

Many classroom teachers across the country potentially feel this disconnect with the English language learners they teach. Yet as our longitudinal research has shown us, there are ways that classroom teachers can connect with and support the growth of English language learners in the classroom. Our descriptive case studies of primary-aged English language learners illuminate some of the unique, yet at times common, issues that teachers are faced with on a daily basis with their students. Through observations, literacy assessments and interviews with teachers our study shows the complexity of instructional issues that arise, and also gives insight into the kinds of instruction that can promote the growth of English language and literacy. The assessments are particularly apt for informing word study instruction in the classroom. Word study approaches are not a “one-size fits all” program (Bear, Invernizzi, Templeton, & Johnston, 2008, p. 8). At the heart of effective word study is the concept of differentiation and meeting children at their level. In our research we have come to learn that even with the same first language English learners’ needs vary when it comes to word study. What we hope to demonstrate through the two cases studies here is that by examining the similarities and differences in language and literacy assessment results, implications for word study instruction emerge. While the two young boys are their own unique individuals, their cases reveal many examples of how assessments can guide teachers to differentiate word study instruction for English language learners.

In the current study we analyze two comparable cases (Merriam, 1988) from a larger longitudinal study involving seven English learners developing literacy in English. The larger study seeks to document and understand the early literacy journeys of immigrant students learning to speak, read and write in English at the same time. We have used both quantitative and qualitative measures with each of the students, as described below.

Classroom context
Our focus students attended a classroom designed for English learners with limited proficiency called a
“Language Academy,” nested in an urban, Midwestern school where 72% of students were learning English as a new language, and 79% of students qualified for free or reduced lunch. The city in which the school is located has the largest Hmong population in the state. The city has received Hmong immigrants from Laos and Thailand in waves of immigration that occurred in mid-1970, the late 1980s, and most recently in 2004. In the most recent resettlement, one-third of the 15,000 refugees from the last refugee camp in Thailand, Wat Tham Krabok, were resettled in and around this city.

The classroom is a combined first and second grade with a licensed ESL teacher for each grade level, plus additional educational assistants and literacy volunteers throughout the day. The teachers implement developmentally appropriate thematic whole group instruction, guided reading, and word study instruction daily.

**Literacy assessments**

Over a year and a half of our study, we used several formal and informal measures to monitor two Hmong boys’ progress in English literacy. For oral language we used the Language Assessment Scales–Oral (LAS–O) (De Avila & Duncan, 1994) which measures the oral language skills needed to function in the classroom. The fall kindergarten Phonological Awareness Literacy Screening (PALS–K) (Invernizzi, Meier, & Juel, 2004) was used to assess phonemic and alphabetic awareness. The components of the PALS–K include rhyme and beginning sound awareness, letter sounds and names, and concept of word. We used the Yopp-Singer Test of Phonemic Segmentation (Yopp, 1995) to measure students’ skills in orally segmenting the phonemes in a word. In addition, the Texas Primary Reading Inventory (TPRI) (Texas Education Agency, 2003) was used to assess students’ ability to orally blend words. The formal reading inventories used to ascertain fluency and reading levels were Rigby PM Benchmarks (Rigby, 2004) and the Developmental Reading Assessment (Beaver & Carter, 2005). To examine students’ orthographic development over time we used the Primary Spelling Inventory (Bear et al., 2008), an individual spelling test that allows teachers to determine the needs of individual students through the analysis of orthographic features. Finally, informal assessments of the students’ literacy and language development were conducted through writing prompts, classroom observations and an end-of-year videotaped interview.

**Chue and Tong**

The two Hmong boys we focus on here both began formal schooling in the United States. Despite similar background experiences and being in the same grade level, the two boys have developed English literacy at different rates and show different instructional challenges.

**Chue**

Chue was born in June 2000 and came to the U.S. in kindergarten, where he attended two different schools. He began his current school at the beginning of first grade. Chue is one of nine children. Hmong is primarily spoken at home. The mother does not read or write in Hmong or English but the father attended school in Thailand and can read and write in Hmong. Chue is generally quiet at school but smiles and speaks vividly in Hmong with other boys. Phonological assessments began in December 2006 but it wasn’t until February 2007 that he demonstrated mastery of beginning sound and rhyme awareness and in the following spring demonstrated mastery of concept of word and letter names. In September 2007, the beginning of second grade, he had still not demonstrated mastery of orally segmenting and blending words. Chue’s LAS-O raw score was 38.8 at the beginning of first grade and then 63.8 at the beginning of second grade demonstrating his movement over the year from a “Non-English speaker” to a “Limited-English speaker.” From the beginning of first grade to the beginning of second grade his reading level moved from DRA Level A to Rigby Level 2. Classroom observations in the fall of 2006 show that Chue is a very quiet student who does participate in large group instruction but engages at a higher rate in small groups.

Over the course of the study Chue maintained his preference for speaking Hmong as he went about his classroom routines. He almost exclusively chose to work with other Hmong speakers. He also was communicating in English in simple words and phrases during small group instruction. During the large group activities he was very animated and participated physically through gestures such as furrowing his brow or acting out an action in a story rather than using oral language.

Chue’s developmental spelling inventory results are displayed chronologically in Figure 1. In early first grade Chue wrote one letter for each dictated word. It is hard to know if he put the most salient sound he heard, or if he was simply confused with beginning consonants. He had two beginning consonants correct, and in subsequent administrations of the spelling inventory he demonstrated that he progressively heard and represented more beginning sounds correctly, with all seven correct on the early second grade assessment. We also noted a major difference in Chue’s spelling inventory between May of first grade and October of second grade. He wrote many more letters to represent the sounds he heard in words. For example, Chue encoded fan as FAN, hope as HON, and sled as SOUA. While he is incorrect in many of his choices of letters, Chue has taken a major step forward in his use of beginning, middle and ending sounds. Chue seems to have particular difficulty with the final consonants in words as he ended the first five words on the inventory with the letter n.
Tong
Tong was born in January 2000 in the U.S. and attended Head Start and kindergarten at his current school. The family has lived in the U.S. for eleven years and he is one of five children. Hmong is primarily spoken in the home. Tong is very talkative in English with adults and other students in the classroom but can be very content working alone. Tong demonstrated mastery of concept of word, letter names and sounds and beginning sound awareness in December 2006 when phonological assessment began. Then Tong demonstrated mastery of rhyme in February 2007 and segmenting in May 2007. He was still unable to master orally blending words at the beginning of his second grade year. Tong’s beginning of first grade LAS-O raw score was 53.8 and his beginning of second grade score was 66.5 demonstrating movement from a late “Non-English speaker” to an early “Limited-English speaker.” From the beginning of first grade to the beginning of second grade his reading level moved from Rigby Level 1 to Level 4.

Classroom observation data show Tong to be a very different student depending on the activity, but demonstrate a very consistent pattern of behaviors. During independent work time he often worked quietly and alone much of the time and during large group time he was often not paying attention to the activities. During small group instruction, however, he becomes extremely talkative in English and engaged in instruction.

Tong’s developmental spelling inventory results are displayed chronologically in Figure 2. In early first grade Tong was able to accurately represent the first seven beginning consonants, along with 5/7 final consonants and 2/7 short vowels. Over subsequent assessment periods, Tong improved in his ability to hear and represent final consonant sounds (from 5/7 to 7/7 correct). He struggled with representing the short vowel sounds correctly, and no progress in this area was demonstrated from the early first grade to the second grade assessment period.

Discussion
Chue and Tong come from the same language background, are members of families with many commonalities, had the same classroom instruction, and yet show profound differences in their literacy development. At the beginning of first grade Chue was significantly behind Tong in the mastery of phonological tasks. Tong had mastered many more tasks in the middle of first grade than Chue, but both boys were still unable to successfully orally blend words at the beginning of second grade.

The boys’ oral language development scores show an interesting learning pattern. In fall 2007 both boys had moved from Level 1 (Non-English speaking) to...
Level Two (Limited-English speaking). If we examine the raw scores, however, we note that Chue made much more dramatic progress than Tong—increasing his raw score of 38.8 to 63.8, while Tong progressed from 53.8 points to 66.5 points. So, although Tong began first grade with higher alphabetic, phonological and oral language skills in English, he seems to have hit a plateau. Chue has struggled with phonological skills, but has made good progress in learning to speak English. Classroom observations show that both Chue and Tong tend to be quieter during whole group instruction while actively participating in English in their small group instruction. Chue tends to speak only to other Hmong children in Hmong and uses English to communicate with the teacher in small group. Tong’s observations show more of a willingness to engage in English with other students as well as his teachers. His English utterances tend to be longer and more complex than Chue’s usage of English.

Chue and Tong both moved from the readiness levels of the DRA into Rigby passage levels by the spring of first grade, Tong was reading instructionally at Level 3 and Chue at a Level 1. In the fall of second grade they both had moved up one level in the Rigby Benchmark system, with Chue staying consistently two levels behind Tong.

The developmental spelling inventories show unique trajectories and challenges for each of the boys. As Chue’s English and early phonological discrimination skills improved, he began to more clearly distinguish and encode specific consonant sounds in words. Tong was able to represent beginning and final consonant sounds in his writing beginning in early first grade—a seemingly good start in reading. Yet he has shown
limited progress in learning the short vowel sounds, and this difficulty is a cause for major concern in his early literacy development. Chue's difficulties seem to be deeply rooted in phonological skills as demonstrated by his inability to successfully blend and segment at the beginning of second grade. Tong's challenges seem to relate to discriminating specific sounds, such as the English short vowels, as demonstrated by his spelling inventories.

Thus we can make the following assertions:

- A complex web of factors influence the early literacy development of these English-learning students.
- A picture of students' development can be fleshed out by analyzing a variety of language and literacy measures.
- While students are learning English, it may be quite difficult for them to discriminate the particular sounds in words such as ending sounds and short vowel sounds.
- Developmental spelling samples help us to monitor progress in word knowledge, and point out specific features that cause difficulty for English learners.

**Word study implications**

Chue and Tong are two examples of English learners who are trying to "catch on" to English literacy, and "catch up" to native English speakers in first and second grade classrooms. Because we have had the opportunity to follow Chue and Tong through a year and a half of schooling and collect detailed information about their literacy progress, we have gained several insights that may be helpful to teachers who work with students learning English, especially newcomers. Our implications for word study are outlined below.

1. Assess students' oral language as well as their literacy skills. Students who speak little English may have difficulty recognizing words and the sounds within them. Students with the most limited oral language proficiency will likely need extra help while working on phonics and phonological awareness skills, as we saw with Chue in first grade. Pictures, audiotapes, and manipulatives provide a support system to help ensure that students are developing vocabulary and engaging in language while they are gaining phonics and phonemic awareness skills. While learning more oral language does not necessarily increase students' early literacy skills, it is apparent that too little English will hamper the learning of even basic skills.

2. Use developmental spelling inventories to not only monitor students' progress in early phonics skills, but also to help you see the confusions that students have in discriminating sounds in English. For example, when Chue moved beyond using a single letter to represent words in his spelling, he seemed to pick a common letter sound /n/ to end many of his written words. Was this the sound Chue heard at the end of each word, or was he using the letter n as a proxy for just any sound? His spelling assessment leads us to explore these questions when we are working with him in small group reading and phonics instruction.

3. Just because English learners come with good early literacy skills at the beginning of first grade doesn't mean they will not require extra attention to master phonics skills in the early grades. Tong is a perfect example of a student who was well

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Table 1. Suggested Word Study Activities

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prepared for first grade, but had disappointing progress the following year. He had great difficulty discriminating and representing the short vowel sounds in English, and this phonological confusion caused him to stumble in his spelling progress. He seemed to be in need of tailored instruction to help him better understand the sounds of the short vowels in English, such as through reading and sorting words that contrast these sounds and spellings.

Earlier in this paper we discussed the idea that one size does not fit all in literacy instruction. Our observations and assessments of Chue and Tong have confirmed that principle. Chue’s spelling inventory shows us now that he is encoding more than a single sound for each word, he needs to work on discriminating and accurately representing ending sounds in English words. Tong needs focused work on discriminating and writing the short vowels in words. Although both students have similar background experiences and have experienced similar classroom instruction, their early literacy assessments paint a picture of their distinct strengths and needs.

In Table 1 we note several specific word study activities that will meet these two students at their level and provide the scaffolding necessary to stretch them forward. These ideas include word sorts, word hunts and ways to practice reading and writing focus words in connected text (Bear, Helman, Templeton, Invernizzi & Johnston, 2007).

**Conclusion**

The teacher at the beginning of this paper described an interest in learning more about what her students know and bring to the classroom, even though they speak little English and cannot communicate these ideas to her directly. After following a group of students, including Chue and Tong, through the first and second grade years, we believe that oral language and early literacy assessments provide teachers with a fountain of information to guide them in their literacy instruction. Assessing students’ developmental spelling gives teachers information that students cannot communicate with words. These multiple resources connect teachers to what students know, and where they are confused. In turn, teachers can plan differentiated instruction to support the word study growth of a range of students learning English. Above all, through multiple assessments teachers can get to know their students and create meaningful learning experiences for each child because even with the same native language one size or type of instruction does not fit all.

**References**


Differentiating instruction enhances learning experiences for all students, by meeting them “where they are” in their own learning and providing them with the supports needed to help them extend their learning. We know that students come to our classroom at different levels of readiness. They always have. As Tomlinson (2003) points out, we must have the flexibility to meet students where they are on their own learning continuum, nudging them toward more difficult tasks without frustrating them.

Differentiating instruction in classroom has become even more critical with the increasing population of students with diverse cultural and linguistic background. Hill and Flynn (2005) point out that “English language learners represent the fastest growing segment of the school-age population” (p. 3). At the same time, they note that teaching English language learners is no longer solely the responsibility of specialists, but rather the collective responsibility of all school staff who interact with them. This shift in responsibility makes differentiating our teaching strategies for the English language learners imperative, as we create opportunities for their success in language and literacy development.

Ms. Campbell’s room
In Judy Campbell’s first grade classroom students are getting ready to “read” Ruth Krauss’ The Carrot Seed. With a classroom ELL population of close to 50%, Ms. Campbell knows the importance of implementing instructional strategies that support language and literacy development of young children, in general, the ELL students, in particular. With this in mind, she asks the children to look at the story’s pictures, encouraging them to make predictions based on visual cues. By her chair she has a carrot with its top still attached. She lets the children touch it and smell it; she asks if they have eaten carrots, and where they think carrots are grown. In this way she encourages the children to “experience” the carrot. She asks the ELL students if they would like to share the word for “carrot” in their native language and writes these words on the easel paper alongside some of the other responses the children have shared about the story thus far. As she continues to read, she picks out challenging words for further student investigation. When students respond to her questions and comments, she paraphrases their responses and asks clarifying questions which require the children to think more deeply about what they are saying.

As she reads the story a second time, she points out patterns in language, identifying words students have been exposed to in other stories, noting similarities and differences between this story and others they have read, and pointing out the similarities between this new author’s style and that of the earlier authors they have studied.

After the second reading Ms. Campbell facilitates a reenactment of the story using props. Children take turns in acting out roles and retelling the story to Ms. Campbell as she writes down their retelling on a large piece of lined paper which is afterward laminated and added to the classroom library.

Ms. Campbell’s approach is supported by Goldenberg (2004) who suggests that English Language Learners require instructional accommodations that include visual cues, physical gestures, building upon students’ knowledge and skills in their native language, summarizing text knowledge, repeated readings, targeting vocabulary, and paraphrasing students’ responses. These, as well as other differentiation strategies, help strengthen the growing skills of English language learners in the areas of vocabulary development, reading and writing.

The nine differentiation strategies we share below are supported by research and best practice, and can
serve to enhance the teaching and learning experience in elementary school classrooms.

**Differentiation strategies**

**Cognates**
As he learns new vocabulary words in English, Rudy loves to share the word’s equivalent in his native language, Spanish. Rudy’s teacher acknowledges this, and, while pointing at the picture of a small animal in the text they are reading, asks Rudy, “And do you know the Spanish word for beaver?” Sitting on the edge of his seat, Rudy’s hand shoots up in the air as each new word is reviewed. Rudy’s teacher recognizes the importance of using cognates to enhance Rudy’s English vocabulary development and uses this strategy often.

**All together now**
Choral readings allow the ELL student to practice their reading with support from peers and the teacher. To begin, the teacher selects a story to share with the children. As she shares the story, she pauses and engages the children in a thoughtful discussion of the story as well as pointing out and talking about various words contained within the story. She then reads the story again but this time, the children read along with her. The children continue re-reading the text until they are able to read it fluently. Studies conducted by the Center for the Improvement of Early Reading Achievement (CIERA, 2001) suggest that teachers “choose a book that is not too long and that you think is at the independent reading level of most students. Patterned or predictable books are particularly useful for choral reading because their repetitious style invites students to join in” (p. 27).

**React and rhyme**
Debbie Lee encourages her ELL students to look carefully at the facial expressions of characters in each story she reads. In addition to reading the story several times, she enthusiastically mimics the facial expressions of each character in the story and asks the students to do the same. “What does Billy look like on this page?” she asks her students. “Is he happy?” “No!” her students reply. “How do you know? What does his face look like?” She then furrows her brows and makes a very unhappy face. “He has a FROWN,” she says, slowly and then adds a rhyme. “He has a FROWN. His smile is turned DOWN. Frown. Down. Frown. Down,” she repeats, while pointing to her own frowning face. As the students imitate the character and their teacher, they repeat, “Frown. Down. Frown. Down.” By doing this, Lee encourages letter-sound correspondence and comprehension.

**Be a master thespian**
Acting out stories, often in an exaggerated way, provides students with opportunities to see words in action. While students may giggle as Sue Chappell prances around the room like a horse, flies like a bird or sings like a rooster, the visual cues she uses allow students to make sense of new vocabulary as well as subtle differences between words. While reading a story about hang-gliding, Ms. Chappell walks quickly in circles and flaps her arms rapidly. “What am I doing?” she asks. “Flying!” shout Katal and Nina. “And now?” she asks, as she slows her movement and holds her arms out without flapping them. “Now,” she says, “I am GLIDING.”

**Create an individualized word library**
In Carla Thomson’s classroom, Bessie carefully writes the word “frown” on a piece of paper and excitedly brings it to the classroom aide, who will laminate it for her. This new word will be added to Bessie’s favorite word ring card. By simply attaching laminated words of the student’s choosing with a hole punch to a metal ring, the ELL student is able to create her own individualized word library. Bessie’s reading vocabulary grows and she can incorporate these words into her own writing as well. Perhaps more importantly, Bessie’s word library provides a sense of pride for her as she builds her English vocabulary.

**Create meaningful partnerships**
As with any learner struggling to read and write, arranging for peer support is important. In Bill Dempsey’s classroom, a buddy system is established at the start of the school year for all students. In selecting partners for his English language learners, however, Bill is careful to choose students with strong interpersonal skills, an easygoing demeanor, and a willingness to be patient in paired learning activities. Selecting an “unconditional companion” such as this provides the English language learner with opportunities to grow socially and academically within the context of school.

**Create “language free” activity spaces**
A sensory table, dramatic play area, and water table provide the ELL students in Lisa Pelenti’s classroom with a chance to engage in non-prescriptive activities that don’t require “knowing English.” There, her ELL students can look at the pictures that hang just above each activity table and then explore the materials at hand to learn. Sometimes her ELL students use this as a space to reflect quietly, without the need to speak in English. Other times, their peers may join in their activity, giving them an opportunity to communicate around sharing materials in an informal way. Thus the work is less prescriptive than the direct instruction centered on vocabulary development and reading fluency, but no less important.

**Avoid using idioms**
Avian’s head swings quickly toward the window when
he hears his teacher say, “It’s raining cats and dogs.” The use of idioms is confusing to anyone who is not fluent in the language being spoken. Eliminating idioms in speech during class and avoiding stories that use idioms will help avoid these confusions.

**Recognize cultural differences while encouraging parental involvement**

Families of ELL students face several challenges as they work to support their children in school. It’s important to note the role that culture plays in the ELL family’s approach to school. While in the United States it would not be unusual for parents to question school practices or raise concerns about school matters; in other countries, this may not occur. School is perceived as a separate entity charged fully with the academic preparation of students. For this reason, parents of English language learners may have difficulty understanding why they would be asked to come to school to participate in educational programs, to volunteer in the classroom, or to provide input regarding systemic change. Judy Adams, Principal of Bakersville Elementary School in Manchester, New Hampshire, emphasizes the importance of understanding these cultural differences, while working to integrate families into the school culture. Ms. Adams notes, “Parents of ELL students ask us why we are sending school work home. They do not understand the idea of homework at first, because in their native countries, school work is done at school.” It’s important that we remain cognizant of the fact that this cultural difference does not mean that ELL families are not supportive of their learners. It simply means that they have experienced school in a different way. For that reason, we must differentiate our approach to encouraging family participation in the educational process.

In the Nashua School District in Nashua, New Hampshire, events for ELL families are held to allow families to become more acclimated to the school culture. Pizza nights and morning coffee discussions create opportunities for family members to socialize in a relaxed setting. First and fourth grade teachers Jenny Norton and Jessica Fortin created a girls’ basketball team at Bakersville Elementary School. English language learners delight in learning and playing this game, and their families enjoy watching them. Creating opportunities for families to socialize in a relaxed setting provides them with the knowledge that school is an inviting place for both child and family member. As a result, participation in school events increases. In addition to social events, family conferences with interpreters are held on a regular basis and English classes are offered.

As Tomlinson (2001) points out, “It’s important for every student to have an adult support system that speaks of belief in the student and investment in making sure the belief becomes reality” (p. 91). By using a differentiated approach, we are able to create opportunities to engage English language learners and their families and provide them with a supportive environment in which to do so.

**References**


Classrooms have become increasingly diverse. Nevertheless, we have the same goal for all our students: we want them to achieve high standards by providing them with equal and varied opportunities to reach their potential (Lawrence-Brown, 2004).

Research suggests that differentiated instruction is an approach that can benefit students with a wide range of ability levels (Clark, 1997; Neber, Finsterwald, & Urban, 2001; Tomlinson, 1999), as well as learning styles, and cultural and linguistic backgrounds (Convery & Coyle, 1993). It is grounded in cognitive psychology and supported by research on student achievement. The four guiding principles of differentiated instruction are: a focus on essential ideas and skills in content areas, responsiveness to individual student differences, the integration of assessment and instruction, and an ongoing adjustment of content, process and products to meet individual needs (Tieso, 2003; Tomlinson, 1999). Teachers who differentiate instruction believe that all children are unique and have differing learning styles and preferences for learning and self-expression. They also believe that the curriculum is a driving force in what students learn; therefore, in order to address students who have learning problems, teachers must be able to modify, expand, and/or enrich the curriculum with appropriate learning experiences that acknowledge students’ strengths, rather than their deficits in learning (Noble, 2004), and provide students with choice to develop products, and work with processes that will expand their learning. The teachers must be able to adjust the curriculum to maximize learning for all (Anderson, 2007).

A critical part of differentiated instruction is assessment. Assessment is an ongoing process aimed at understanding and improving student learning (Angelo, 1995). Walker (2004) argues that assessment should be viewed as an interactive process and should consider the reader, the text, the reading and writing tasks involved, and the context in which tasks are performed. Similarly, educators acknowledge that assessment must be balanced and thorough and that no one indicator should be used as the sole indicator of achievement (Collins Block, 2003; Butler & McMunn, 2006). Barr, Blachowicz, Bates, Katz, and Kaufman (2007) recommend the use of curriculum-based assessment to guide planning for instruction. This is further reinforced by the IRA/NCTE Joint Task Force on Assessment (2004), which supports the notion that the primary purpose of assessment is to inform planning for teaching and learning. Teachers who differentiate instruction are cognizant of the relationship between assessment and instruction and believe that, when used in concert, learning can occur. In this age of standards, using assessment data to differentiate instruction is essential (Brimijoin, Marquissee & Tomlinson, 2003). A continuous, thorough and balanced assessment of students’ strengths and weaknesses will allow teachers to plan purposeful and meaningful differentiated instruction for all students, particularly those with special needs.

In working with students with special needs we found using a case study to be very informative and effective in identifying students' areas of strengths and needs in order to assist teachers in planning appropriate instructional procedures to alleviate in some demonstrable degree the reading difficulties individual students may be experiencing. A case study uses multiple sources of data and information to answer the questions: Who is the learner? What are his/her areas of strengths and needs? What would be the appropriate differentiated learning opportunities to help him/her succeed? These sources may include demographic information, reasons for referral for testing, student interview data, parent interview data, school history, testing results, and interviewer's/tester's insights.
Case study: Gayle

Gayle is a 10-year-old third grade boy who attends his neighborhood public elementary school. He has resided in the town all of his life and attended the district’s schools from kindergarten through his present grade.

A public school administrator indicated that Gayle has received additional support services throughout his first and second grades. It was evident to his primary grade teachers that Gayle struggled with reading. Mandatory district reading assessments, teacher-created assessments, and teacher observations revealed that Gayle has been performing below grade level in several reading skill areas. As academic demands began to increase in second grade and Gayle began to experience increased frustration in accessing information from print materials, the Elementary School’s Child Study Team referred him for evaluation for a specific learning disability. This process was completed toward the end of Gayle’s second grade school year.

A district reading specialist interviewed Gayle about his school experiences, likes, and dislikes. Gayle was very cooperative during the interview and shared his interest in basketball, riding bikes, and computers. He disclosed that he does not enjoy reading although he likes mountain bike magazines that his father reads and Internet sites that have sports and game information. He did not mention using any specific reading strategies when asked about reading the magazines or websites. However, he indicated that he tries to sound out words, skips words, and sometimes asks for help when confronted with unfamiliar words.

The same reading specialist who interviewed Gayle also met with Gayle’s mother and father at school. Gayle lives with his mother and father. According to his parents, he is respectful toward others, gets along well with peers, relatives, and neighbors. Gayle’s mother communicated her concern about his lack of progress in reading, specifically mentioning decoding, fluency, and comprehension. She shared that Gayle works hard but becomes easily frustrated, tires quickly, and that both her and her husband read with him each night before bed. Gayle’s mother further indicated her desire for Gayle to receive additional reading services.

Gayle’s referral process for specific learning disability resulted with him being identified for special education services with particular needs in reading for dyslexia and comprehension. He was also retained in first grade. Gayle’s teachers and parents agreed with the diagnosis and supported the decision to retain Gayle in first grade.

The reading specialist administered the QRI-IV Miscue Analysis-Oral Reading, Oral Reading Comprehension and Listening Comprehension tests. On the Word Identification test, Gayle scored independent on the first grade level, instructional on the second grade level, and frustrational at the third grade level. On the Miscue Analysis, he scored instructional at first and second grades, frustrational at third grade. His reading rate was between 30 and 40 words per minute. On the Oral Reading Comprehension he scored at a third grade comprehension level of 67%, which is at the instructional level. On the Listening Comprehension test, his scores were at the independent level for third grade. He answered all inference questions and most text-based questions.

Based on information from Gayle’s school history, student interview, and parent interview, we concluded that Gayle is a hard worker, motivated to learn about certain topics, and needs extensive support to process information from print materials. His teachers described him as friendly with peers and adults, has good social skills and is emotionally mature for his age. In addition, he was nothing less than cooperative with the testing demands and appeared to be able to attend to the demands placed on him during the testing with only brief breaks.

As you might have guessed, the range of information we learned about Gayle came from multiple sources integrated into the case study process. Our sources included Gayle’s demographic information, reasons for his referral, Gayle’s interview data, his parents’ interview data, his school history and testing results, and the interviewer/tester’s insights.

Figure 1 illustrates the various types of information we learned about Gayle and their corresponding sources of information.

Differentiated instruction for Gayle

As one can see from the case study, decisions on Gayle were made from a variety of sources and presented much information about the child that would be useful in planning for instruction. Knowing that Gayle has a severe reading problem and has received special education services, we began to examine the specialized problems that needed attention. Balancing this information with the principles cited by Tomlinson (1999)—that he needs to focus on essential ideas and skills, that the school must be responsive to individual differences, that assessment and instruction must be integrated, and that there must be on-going adjustment of content, process, and products—presents challenges to the school, but also the opportunity to work with Gayle for optimal learning.

From his interviews we learned that Gayle enjoys basketball, riding bikes and computers. Though he doesn’t enjoy reading, he likes magazines and sports Internet sites. Knowing this, we planned to incorporate assignments that followed his interests by looking for Internet sites that are focused on sports, and using sports magazines such as Sports Illustrated for Kids.

We also learned from the interview with Gayle’s mother that he is a hard worker and motivated to learn
## Sources of Information and Corresponding Sources

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sources of Information</th>
<th>Types of Information</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Demographics</td>
<td>10-year-old third grade boy; attends his neighborhood public elementary school; resided in the town all of his life; attended the district’s schools from kindergarten through his present grade.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reasons for Referral</td>
<td>A public school administrator indicated that Gayle has received additional support services throughout his first and second grades; his primary grade teachers observed that Gayle struggled with reading; mandatory district reading assessments, teacher-created assessments, and teacher observation revealed Gayle was performing below grade level in several reading skill areas; Gayle began to experience increased frustration in accessing information from print materials; the Elementary School’s Child Study Team referred him for evaluation for a specific learning disability.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Interview</td>
<td>A district reading specialist interviewed Gayle about his school experiences, likes, and dislikes; Gayle was cooperative throughout the interview; shared his interest in basketball, riding bikes, and computers; he does not enjoy reading although he likes mountain bike magazines that his father reads and Internet sites that have sports and game information; did not indicate using any specific reading strategies when asked about reading the magazines or websites; tries to sound out words, skips words, and sometimes asks for help.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent Interview</td>
<td>Gayle lives with his mother and father; he is respectful toward others, gets along well with peers, relatives, and neighbors; Gayle's mother is concerned about his lack of progress in reading, particularly decoding, fluency, and comprehension; Gayle works hard but becomes easily frustrated, tires quickly; parents read with him each night before bed; Gayle’s mother wants more reading services for him.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School History</td>
<td>Gayle was referred for specific learning disability; he was identified for special education services with particular needs in reading for dyslexia and comprehension; retained in first grade; teachers and parents agreed with the diagnosis and retention in first grade; teachers found Gayle to be friendly with peers and adults, has good social skills, emotionally mature for his age.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Testing Results</td>
<td>Test administered: QRI-IV Miscue Analysis– Oral Reading, Oral Reading Comprehension and Listening Comprehension tests; in Word Identification test scored independent on the first grade level, instructional on the second grade level, and frustrational at the third grade level; on Miscue Analysis scored instructional at first and second grades, frustrational at third grade; reading rate between 30 and 40 words per minute; on Oral Reading Comprehension scored at third grade comprehension instructional level of 67%; on Listening Comprehension test scored independent level for third grade; answered all inference questions and most text-based questions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interviewer’s/Tester’s Insights</td>
<td>Gayle is a hard worker, motivated to learn about certain topics, and needs extensive support to process information from print materials; friendly, outgoing, and cooperative; appeared to be able to attend to the demands placed on him during the testing with only brief breaks.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
about certain topics. We decided to proceed further with the interviews to determine exactly what those topics are and to select materials at his independent and instructional levels. For example, after we gained more insight into his interest in the mountain bike magazines, as well as his father’s interest in mountain biking, we were able to select materials on that or related topics appropriate for his reading level that both (a) capitalized on his motivation to learn about this topic, and (b) provided exposure to words related to mountains, geography, or land forms that he might encounter in language arts activities in elementary school.

We also looked to see what types of assistive technology were available for Gayle. Digital technologies could easily be incorporated into the school setting. These devices can help students like Gayle navigate among an array of information as well as help him with particular texts. Through assistive technology, including computer software programs, Gayle was able to learn word and phrase pronunciations and also increased his fluency. For example, screen-reading programs like JAWS made print materials accessible on-line and allowed for passages to be read aloud. This technology was particularly well matched for Gayle since the assessment results indicated that listening comprehension was a relative strength area for him. In addition, he was able to access and read classroom-based materials through the use of the Kurzweil reader. This program allows individual words, phrases, and passages to be highlighted, read aloud, and even has the definitions of individual words read aloud. We worked collaboratively with Gayle’s special education teacher and classroom teacher to create word lists that the screen reading programs could present in an auditory format for him. We also considered another potential assistive reading technology for Gayle which was the Lexia Early Reading software. This program allows individual readers to practice a variety of reading skills necessary for literacy.

Gayle was described by his teachers and his parents as an outgoing, friendly boy. Thus we built on these characteristics and had him engaged in different group activities but always keeping in mind what we know about his strengths, interests, and needs. We capitalized on his strengths of outgoing personality and listening comprehension skills by encouraging him to take on some leadership role in group activities that were within his background knowledge and experiences. We noted that with some guidance, he could serve as a resource for the group, especially in areas he enjoys. For instance, by using the assistive technologies identified above, he was capable of collecting background information on assigned topics when these were presented in an auditory format; this also allowed him to contribute aurally to the group.

Conclusion

Creating all these opportunities for Gayle to participate in various learning contexts is a good start toward his becoming a successful learner. He continues to progress slowly but surely, and we are confident that through differentiated instruction informed by multiple data sources he will ultimately reach his goal of becoming a good reader.

References

classroom instruction. Preventing School Failure, 52(2), 31-47.

New England Reading Association
60th Annual Conference
“Striving Readers and Writers: Literacy for All for Today and Tomorrow”
September 25th and 26th 2008
Springfield, Massachusetts

Topic:
Continuing the New Literacies Journey:
This Year’s Research and Promising Practices for Teaching Online Reading Comprehension
It was Friday afternoon in Mr. Hade's fifth grade classroom, and students were observing the earned activity period (EAP). EAP is a flexible time during which students participated in any activity of their choice. EAP is also a good time to observe the dynamics of this classroom. On one such occasion, three girls sat at one corner of the classroom reading a magazine, laughing and arguing about a column on fashion written by one of them titled, “Is she really a fashion diva?” The writer of this column and the publisher of the magazine, Shanique, had researched the life of four celebrities: Paris Hilton, Nicky Hilton, Ashley Simpson, and Jessica Simpson to determine who among the four celebrities was the real fashion diva. Her final choice did not go down well with the other girls, hence the argument. The other two girls, Jasmine and Lolly, also had a copy of their own magazines. Jasmine owned a “Newsletter” while Lolly published “Divastars,” which she named after her favorite website Divastarz.com. Jasmine’s newsletter had a themed issue on friendship. Some readers of the newsletter (all girls) had fielded questions for her, such as: “Why do boys not show their feelings toward girls? Why is it that some people claim they are your friends but end up stabbing you at the back? Jasmine tried to solicit input from Shanique and Lolly to answer these questions to be published in the next issue of her newsletter. The three girls and few others shared a listserv and used instant messaging (IM) to disseminate information and news alerts.

Girls like Shanique, Jasmine and Lolly in Mr. Hade’s classroom are the “digitally at home” kids (Lankshear & Knobel, 2003) and their lives revolve around computers, video games and the Internet. Technological literacies such as writing and publishing using the computer, creating and maintaining websites and blogs, research on the Internet, IM, and text messaging among others, are part of these students’ personal literacies and repertoire of learning. While they are conversant with and engaged in these activities mostly outside of school, they are, more often than not, disengaged in school (Millard, 2006). However, these personal literacies can be harnessed to promote a culturally responsive teaching by connecting and integrating them with academic literacies.

This article documents an account of one fifth grade teacher’s journey as he integrated students’ personal literacies and WebQuest to foster a culturally responsive teaching. I examined the learning in Mr. Hade’s classroom through the sociocultural lens.

The sociocultural-historical theory challenges the traditional conception of learning as the transmission of knowledge. This perspective defines learning as “changing participation in culturally valued activity with more expert others” (Larson & Marsh, 2005, p.4). The child is perceived as an active member of a constantly changing community of learners in which teachers and students construct authentic opportunities for learning (Gutierrez & Rogoff, 2003; Larson & Marsh, 2005; Rogoff, 2003). From this perspective, literacy is acquired in a variety of contexts through social interaction and co-constructed through tools...
teachers and students use in everyday life both in and out of school such as traditional texts, multimodal texts like websites, blogs, instant messaging, video games and other computer-mediated artifacts. The notion of co-construction of knowledge implies critical consciousness that recognizes that children possess literate voices which must be acknowledged (Larson & Marsh, 2005). Children learn with more knowledgeable others (teachers/peers/adults) within the zone of proximal development (Vygotsky, 1978), which represents the range of a child's ability characterized by the difference between a child's current level and the level of ability she reaches in solving problems with assistance. The teachers' role is to guide students through various levels of participation including apprenticeship, guided participation and participatory appropriation (Gutierrez & Rogoff, 2003). This theoretical perspective also posits that classroom instruction should be culturally relevant (Alvermann, 2001; Ladson-Billings, 1998), promote both engagement and active learning, as well as reflect and value children's cultural choices in an effort to ensure that schooling is relevant and meaningful to them.

The emphasis on cultural competence by the sociocultural theory necessitates a reflection on the concept of culture. Culture in its simplest view is a particular way of life of a people which expresses some meanings and values not only in art and learning but also in institutions and ordinary behavior (Morrell, 2007). Culture manifests in everyday practices and lived experiences of people. It is not static but fluid and dynamic and reflects societal values at any material time. Popular culture is everyday culture (Alvermann & Hong Xu, 2003). In today's society, the Internet and other information and communication technologies (ICTs) have become the most dominant cultural tool that affects the way we live, communicate and think. They have also become culturally relevant to both children and adults alike. Culturally relevant teaching should therefore include "the integration of new media and Internet in schools in ways that allow youth culture and its varied literacies to flourish alongside, as well as to influence academic genres" (Hull & Shultz, 2002, p. 48). Lankshear and Knobel (2003) observe that the kinds of texts that are important to contemporary children's lives are different from those promoted in the early years of the twentieth century. They argue that culturally responsive teaching should ensure that texts that are created and analyzed within the literacy curriculum are embedded within popular sociocultural literacy practices.

There exists some relationships and intersections between children's everyday literacies characterized by popular culture and classroom learning (Alvermann & Hong Xu, 2003; Gee, 2003; Hull & Schultz, 2002). These popular culture texts (e.g., TV shows, movies, celebrities, video games, websites) and their pedagogies can expand the repertoire of texts in the traditional classroom, spur children to read and write in powerful ways, and facilitate a movement away from transmission oriented pedagogy.

Mr. Hade's classroom
Mr. Hade and I met and became acquaintances before I went into his classroom as a researcher. I had previously interviewed him as part of another study. During the interview which was held in his classroom, I was both surprised and impressed by the number of computers I saw in this urban classroom—eleven in all, located at the back of the classroom. Many were his personal computers but a few were donated by the school district. These computers were very old but Mr. Hade refurbished them and put four of them into good working condition. Two had Internet connection. His actions were driven by his interest in integrating technological literacies in his teaching. Mr. Hade had attended a workshop on technology integration, “The Bridges Program,” but had not really started to incorporate his new knowledge. However, during our conversations, we discovered that we had common interests in learning how new technologies can facilitate teaching and learning and our conversations further motivated him to get started. I spent a total of six months in Mr. Hade’s classroom during which we both learned from each other and from the students. I spent half of the time as an observer and later as a participant observer. I approached my inquiry from an interpretive perspective (Bodgan & Biklen, 1998). I collected data through observations, field notes, individual and focus-group interviews and students' artifacts including writing samples and project papers. I tape-recorded all interviews and videotaped all aspects of classroom interactions. I interviewed both Mr. Hade and the students twice—at the beginning and end of the study, but had numerous informal conversations with them which I also documented. I analyzed the data using open, axial and selective coding techniques (Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

The twenty-six children (13 boys and 13 girls) in Mr. Hade’s classroom came from diverse ethnic and socioeconomic backgrounds (African Americans-16, Caucasians-9, and Asian American-1). Ninety-two percent of the children owned computers at home but only 65% had Internet connection. A ten year veteran, Mr. Hade had complained that motivation among his students was low. He described the situation as “strange because nobody would read and write.” Most assignments were either not turned in or were incomplete. Computer use in his classroom was factored into a system of reward or punishment. Well behaved students used it during the EAP while others did not. However, Mr. Hade was determined to change the situation. He was motivated to rethink the traditional, to use his computers more
purposefully and connect better with his students by tapping into their funds of knowledge and personal literacies.

**From personal to academic literacies**

In this article, personal literacies refer to forms of discourses, engagements, producing, talking, or consumption of texts that is personal to the individual. They are everyday literacies. On the other hand, academic literacies are forms of discourses, engagement, producing or talking about texts that are generally valued in schools (Morrell, 2007). Mr. Hade immediately noticed the three girls who owned private magazines, so he inquired about their writing. He then asked them to pioneer the publication of an all inclusive magazine for the class. This plan initially met with some resistance as the girls wanted to continue to write for a gender specific audience. However, the initial resistance later translated to enthusiasm as they recognized that it was an empowering idea. Students were immediately mobilized to contribute article for the new class magazine. They were encouraged to write on a variety of topics of interest to them. Shanique, Jasmine and, ED (a boy) were appointed as co-editors. With the supervision of Mr. Hade, the students collected articles from their peers, read them and ensured that they were well written. They also organized the articles into sections such as career options, advice column, short stories, book reviews, among others. Mr. Hade initiated more conversations on the topic and then asked students to write a response to that piece using captions, such as: “Why too much video game is not good for kids,” or “Why children should beware of video games.”

Mr. Hade was pleasantly surprised how this one literacy event generated interest in both oral and written discourse as students became eager to write their own piece, read what others wrote, respond to their peers or just discuss the articles in the magazine. Suddenly, everybody was interested to read and write! It was also fascinating to see how the curriculum momentarily became an embodiment of children’s issues and concerns and how Mr. Hade used this opportunity to promote a culturally responsive teaching. While Mr. Hade worked hard to sustain the momentum generated by the magazine and to organize another issue, he introduced a web-based learning activity—WebQuest.

**The WebQuest connection**

WebQuest is an inquiry learning activity in which some or most of the information that learners use come from the resources on the Internet (Dodge, 1997). WebQuest is one effective way to integrate technology in the classroom because it connects content learning with technological literacy by enabling students to learn in multimodal and meaningful contexts. While learning content, students acquire new literacy and technology skills as they navigate through various web pages, interpret navigational cues, select relevant links, integrate and evaluate the credibility and relevance of learning skills. Many students immediately opted to write a rejoinder to this piece while a few decided to write in favor of it. Mr. Hade helped students frame the discourse, “Should video games with violence be banned?” Another article in the magazine that also attracted much attention was a boy’s description of his favorite video game:

**Video games are fun to play and fun to beat...**

My favorite video game is Ratchet & Clank. I beat it six times. I like beating it over and over because it’s fun to play. I also like Tekken 4 and one time, I played Ratchet & Clank for 24 hours and on Friday I played for seventy two hours straight... I really like video games because it is action and adventure mixed.

As soon as students read this piece, they rallied round this boy asking questions such as: When, where and how did you play video game for 72 hours? Where were your parents? Did you not eat? Did you not go to the bathroom? The boy later realized that it was not a good idea after all to spend so much time playing video games. Using this video game piece as a springboard, Mr. Hade initiated more conversations on the topic and then asked students to write a response to that piece using captions, such as: “Why too much video game is not good for kids,” or “Why children should beware of video games.”

When I grow up, I want to be a president. I want to be president because I will make the world a better place to live by being the first woman president and destroying video games with violence in them... I will take away guns, sharp knives, and stuffs people use to kill other people. One day, they will learn that killing, fighting, smoking and drugs are all wrong...

Many students reacted negatively to this short piece because the girl mentioned that video games with violence would be banned if she became president. About 90% of the students disagreed with her. Violence, they claimed, was the spice of video games. Video games save children from boredom and teach them valuable...
information with regard to the task of the WebQuest. There are six essential parts of a WebQuest: an introduction, a task or tasks, list of resources for students, the process they would go through to complete the task, a criteria or rubric to evaluate learning, and a conclusion. Time and materials are utilized effectively because learners follow pre-selected links that lead to sites that discuss various aspects of the topic in question. Teachers can use short term or long term WebQuest depending on the nature of the learning activity. Short term WebQuest usually lasts about two to three lessons and focuses on the integration of some specific learning skills while long term WebQuest lasts between 4 to 12 weeks and requires extending knowledge acquisition and developing complex thinking skills through analyzing, synthesizing, creating and transforming information. WebQuests can be structured to facilitate multifaceted learning activities including critical and thoughtful literacy when tasks are carefully selected, organized and delivered (Author, 2006). WebQuests can also be used to give students opportunity for multiple knowledge representation and multiple perspectives so that they can capture the real world complexities to which their knowledge is applied. Teachers can create a new WebQuest using WebQuest template or search for and utilize an already existing WebQuest from different WebQuest sites.

The Changing Times WebQuest


The Changing Times WebQuest was designed to encourage students to carry out research on a public figure (former US President) and argue why that person was suitable to appear on a new commemorative coin. The assumption in this WebQuest was that the Department of Treasurer wanted to introduce a new 99-cent coin and needed students to help choose a prominent national figure to appear on the coin. The students’ choices must come from four former U.S. presidents: John Adams, Harry Truman, Richard Nixon, and Ulysses S. Grant. The students’ task was to argue why any of them deserved to appear in the new coin. Mr. Hade chose this WebQuest after reviewing it and pondering over some questions. He determined that it was developmentally appropriate and it addressed many important skills he wanted his students to learn including: (1) research on the Internet and ability to read Internet materials critically, (2) aspects of U.S. history, (3) collaborative learning, and (4) literacy skills such as persuasive writing, talking, listening, reading and critical literacy (see Figure 1).

Organizing group learning and simultaneously empowering students in their learning was challenging but Mr. Hade considered it a learning process for all. Before the official presentation of findings, there were rehearsals and mock debates aimed at getting students acquainted with the process and to assess their preparedness for the main presentation and planning and organizing

Mr. Hade created five mixed ability groups and ensured that each group understood their task and could locate their resources on the web. He took his class to the computer lab three times during the research period. During the initial visits, he took time to explain to students about Internet safety, how to evaluate websites, and how to document the source of their materials. He then created a timetable for groups to make use of the two computers with Internet connection in his classroom. Through a ballot system, each group chose one of the four presidents to research on and to highlight why the president deserved the honor of being selected to be on the new coin. Each group had four weeks to do an extensive research using the Internet, encyclopedia, magazines and books for the project. For each president, links were provided on the WebQuest site that took students to several web pages where they read information about the president, his life history, years in office, achievements and the challenges he faced. Mr. Hade created time for groups to meet during class time. During such meetings, the groups synthesized the information they gathered from different sources, strategized on how to effectively present their findings and the role each member would play. However, before the groups internalized this behavior, Mr. Hade had to explicitly teach group processing behavior.

Teaching group processing behavior

This was the first time Mr. Hade’s students were involved in a WebQuest, and in a collaborative project. Mr. Hade scaffolded students through modeling, questioning, suggestions, helping them locate information and reading the drafts of their essays. He explained to students that group success would be achieved if they interacted well, participated equally, shared a common purpose and continuously reflected on how they were doing. He modeled the role of group facilitators and asked them to be democratic in dealing with group issues and ensure that each member had a role to play. Mr. Hade had multiple roles in this activity. He was a facilitator, teacher and participant as he modeled group processing behavior, and ensured that each group received adequate support for their learning. Many students wanted to be in the same group with their friends but Mr. Hade took time to explain to them that in real life, they will work with people who are not their friends and it is important that they learn the skill of harmonious cooperation.
### Figure 1.
**WebQuest Checklist**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Checklist</th>
<th>Questions to ponder on</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Instructional goal                 | Teacher ascertains his instructional goal.  
  - What type of learning activities will my students participate in?  
  - Will students work individually, in pairs or in groups?                                                                                                        |
| Suitability                        | Teacher accesses the suitability of the WebQuest for his instructional goal.  
  - Is it developmentally appropriate?  
  - Will it provide students with the learning experience I envisage for them?  
  - Can it be used to teach literacy across the curriculum?                                                                                                     |
| Critical technological literacy    | Teacher determines if students have sufficient expertise to effectively use the Web.  
  - Can they evaluate websites?  
  - Can they verify the authenticity of information?  
  - Are they familiar with some Internet metalanguage e.g. URL, wikipedia, search engine e.t.c.  
  - Are all links on the websites accessible?  
  - Can students document sources of their information?                                                                                                       |
| Resources                          | Teacher determines if there are enough computers available for students.  
  - How many times do they need to use the computer lab?  
  - How can classroom computers be utilized?  
  - Which information can be downloaded?  
  - How can distraction be reduced?                                                                                                                                 |
| Time                               | Teacher decides how long the WebQuest will last.  
  - How can time be made available for individuals and groups to surf the net?  
  - How much time can I devote in the classroom for it?  
  - How can students continue to work at home?                                                                                                                                 |
| Modification                       | Teacher considers the possibility of modifying the WebQuest by adjusting the tasks if necessary.  
  - What activities can I add or take away from this WebQuest?  
  - What other resources can students use off the Web to support the information on the Web?  
  - What other instructional goals can I achieve with this WebQuest?                                                                                         |
| Assessment                         | Teacher decides how to assess students’ learning during the WebQuest.  
  - What activities or experiences will demonstrate their mastery of content and is there a rubric for it?                                                          |
debate. He created a debate rubric and distributed it to every student so that they know the rules of the debate, the time allotted to speakers and how they can convincingly present their arguments. He also downloaded a presidential fact sheet, an organizer, from the WebQuest site for students to use to organize their findings (see Figure 2). The gender divide in the classroom almost disappeared because Mr. Hade created mixed gender and ability groups. Students learned how to work together with others, to appreciate each other's talents and to build a life long skill. During this period, Mr. Hade was constantly assessing his students' learning progress though observations, questioning and continuous interaction with students.

**Group dynamics**

There were five groups (groups 1-5) that participated in the debate (two different groups researched on one president). I watched group one more closely during one of their class meetings before the presentations. This group had six members: Shanique, Jasmine, ED, Nicole, Doug, and Sophia (pseudonyms) who did their research on President Nixon. Jasmine was the group facilitator and was instrumental to ensuring that the group's activities were successful. Nicole was the note taker; Shanique was the head of Internet research; and Doug and Jasmine were in charge of the final paper. Each person had a role to play in the group and some aspects of information gathering from the WebQuest site. I listened to their conversation during one of their meetings:

| Jasmine: | What important things did you read about our president? |
| Shanique: | He pulled out US troops from Vietnam. |
| ED: | He made peace with Soviet Union. |
| Sophia: | He had a scandal… |
| Everybody: | No…sh…No! |
| Jasmine: | That will count against us! |
| Sophia: | But you asked for important things about him. |
| Nicole: | Sophia is right. |
| Shanique: | But we want achievements. … achievements! |
| Jasmine: | Ok, what were President Nixon's major achievements? |

---

**Figure 2. Presidential Fact Sheet**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>President</th>
<th>President Number</th>
<th>President From To</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

A. List three important facts about this president's term in office and explain each briefly. If you need more room attach a sheet of notebook paper.

1. ___________________________________  
2. ___________________________________  
3. ___________________________________

B. Give one interesting fact about this president. (ex. Thomas Jefferson died on July 4, 1826.)

   ________________________________________  
   ________________________________________  

C. In three paragraphs, give three reasons why you would choose this president for the new coin and at least one reason (each for the other three presidents) why the other presidents do not deserve to be on the coin. You can attach additional sheet of paper to this

1. ___________________________________  
2. ___________________________________  
3. ___________________________________
This conversation continued until the group was able to get about four major achievements of President Nixon and started to expand on the main points with information they gathered. At the end of the meeting, Jasmine collected each student’s phone number and the group agreed to hold a mock debate using a teleconference before the final presentations.

On the day of the debate, Mr. Hade reminded students about the rules for the debate and the time available to each speaker. Then each group’s speakers took turns to speak and argue why the president they chose should be on the coin while a second speaker from each group argued why the other presidents should not be on the coin by highlighting aspects of their policies that were not very popular. Peer assessment was utilized as each group rated other groups with the debate rubric while Mr. Hade graded all the groups.

Although the debate was successful, helping students take control of their learning and transitioning from mostly direct instruction to constructive teaching and learning was challenging. While two groups worked very well, others complained about one problem or the other ranging from laxity of some members to ineffective facilitators. But with Mr. Hade’s continuous scaffolding, each group was able to accomplish its task. Mr. Hade wanted to know each student’s unique learning experience in his/her group and the group processes that facilitated successful group collaboration and those that did not. He asked each student to write a reflection about their learning experience during the WebQuest. This was not the first time his students wrote reflection on their learning. However, he took time to remind them that the reflection must include information such as their experiences working on the Internet and in groups, the role of group members, and successes or frustration associated with doing the project. They also had to discuss one major thing they liked or did not like about the actions or policies of the president their group researched on and suggestions for future collaborations.

**Understanding students’ learning through reflection**

An important skill for students to develop during elementary school years is ability to reflect and assess their own learning progress. Reflection involves conscious monitoring and evaluation of one’s learning. Mr. Hade taught his students to reflect on their learning so that he would gain information concerning their learning experiences and the students’ perception of their own learning progress. Since the debates were presented in groups, individual reflection was the opportunity for students to write personal narratives on their learning experiences. Reflection was therefore used as an aid to writing, and writing, a tool for reflection. The following are some excerpts from students’ reflections:

**Student 1:** To me, I like the WebQuest and debates are fun and also easy. My teammates were easy to work with. JA was the head of our group. She sort of organized it. She told people what we were going to do … search for, and you’re doing this, stuff like that … The big problem was that we did not get enough time on the computers. Again, speaking in front of the class [is] was [kinda] kind of hard. Altogether, I [taught] thought it was fun.

**Student 2:** Altogether, I [like] liked the debate because I liked to hear the other groups speak about [there] their president, and I learned about the other 3 presidents and their lives. I liked my group because they were independent and good to work with. Sometimes we got into [argrowments] arguments, but we got [throw] through it. For class debate next time, we should be able to work with the people we want to work with and we should have more time to do it.

**Student 3:** The research was hard because there were many websites we visited. I liked the debate because we researched on the Internet and we got a grade for it. I did not like the debate because some people did not do anything and got the grade for free. Next time, we should be allowed to choose our own groups.

Students’ reflections helped Mr. Hade to better understand group dynamics, students’ experiences during their collaboration, perception of their learning, and challenges they faced. Students’ reflections became a tool for teacher reflection and an empowering pedagogy that gave students a voice in their learning. Mr. Hade also used the opportunity of this WebQuest to push students to think critically.

**Facilitating critical literacy with WebQuest**

The Changing Times WebQuest was designed to help students study a public figure and highlight his important achievements while in office. Mr. Hade used this discourse opportunity to engage students in the discussions involving real, local, national and social issues that had ramification for their lives. For example, as they carried out their research, he reminded them to examine each president’s term in office with respect to decisions and policies initiated by the president and how those policies affected ordinary citizens, relationship with other countries, the economy, health, education, race relations, and others. He wanted the students to think critically about what they had read, analyze the presidential legacies and pitfalls and then decide how the decisions or actions they took impacted the society...
or individuals. He also reminded students that the various websites they visited were sponsored by different people and organizations and they needed to take note of the various perspectives of different people on each president. Mr. Hade initiated further discourse on the topic by asking each student to say one major thing any of the four presidents did or did not do well and how it impacted them.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mr. Hade:</th>
<th>Which policies, achievements or actions facilitated by these presidents would you consider important and why?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jasmine:</td>
<td>Helping to secure American independence … President John Adams.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mr. Hade:</td>
<td>Why was it important?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jasmine:</td>
<td>Because the declaration of independence is what our country revolves around … so, in a way, if you are an American, you are the declaration of independence.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kamil:</td>
<td>Support for civil rights for African Americans — President Grant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mr. Hade:</td>
<td>Why was this important?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kamil:</td>
<td>If not for that, we, the African Americans could still be living in slavery. We could still be somewhere in the south working our butts off.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lynn:</td>
<td>Stopping the war in Vietnam — President Nixon.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mr. Hade:</td>
<td>Explain more.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lynn:</td>
<td>If that war was not stopped, many more people would have died and maybe the government would be broke and there would be no money for our schools.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Excerpts from the class conversations indicated that through critical questioning, students began to understand that decisions taken by these presidents could have direct or indirect impact on their lives and the society at large. This is the foundation of critical literacy—being able to analyze one’s social world and understand how texts, actions or inactions of people could position them within the society. The most important thing about the conversations was that it got students to talk and become more analytical on issues that ordinarily, they would not have connected to their lives. Mr. Hade reflected on different learning activities that he introduced:

**WebQuests are great and I will like to continue to use them next year especially in social studies where there are many opportunities to integrate them. It would be a great way for students to learn research and presentation skills… I will like them to do more group projects but have them rotate the leadership… Reflections are also a very useful tool. When students carry out big projects, I get to see the pride in their faces when they present or the confusion in their faces … whatever the case may be, I like the idea of reflection to see how they feel about it… .**

The Changing Times WebQuest transformed classroom teaching and learning in that it generated interest, engagement and motivation in reading, writing, listening, talking and critical discourse. It enhanced a healthy competition in which students learned that to be a winner, they had to work hard and support their points of view with enough evidence. It also helped students’ acquisition of web literacy skills such as search, retrieval, navigational and hypertext reading skills, as well as the ability to evaluate and document Internet information.

**How Mr. Hade transformed his classroom through changing participation**

Transformation and changing participation were three words that readily come to mind as I reflected on Mr. Hade’s journey as he integrated students’ personal and other technological literacies. He started the year as a traditional teacher with strong control over the curriculum but transitioned into a constructive and transformational teaching approach that was more student-centered. Computers in his classroom were no longer used for reward or punishment but more purposely for research and active learning. He took more interest in understanding his students’ personal and out-of-school literacies like playing video games, researching about celebrities, writing personal magazines and connected them to academic literacies as students wrote essays about video games and published a class magazine which focused on academic issues like career options, book reviews, short stories, and advice columns. He realized that there were intersections between his students’ out-of-school literacies and school learning, and he negotiated between these two. Mr. Hade’s actions corroborate the call by literacy scholars that popular culture texts should not be viewed as diversionary or something to be shunned; instead, students should be made to appreciate and critique such texts (Alvermann & Hong Xu, 2003; Hull & Schultz, 2002). References to video games in the class magazine and the interest the discourse around video games generated indicate that video games were a culturally relevant artifact. By writing about a video game with violence either in defense of it or against it or just discussing how much time children should spend playing video games, the students learned to both appreciate and critique this popular culture text.
through a culturally valued academic literacy like composition and classroom discourse. After all, as Gee (2003) observed, video games “reflect the culture we live in and the culture we can change” (p.11).

Mr. Hade also immersed his students in authentic learning activities that made learning meaningful to them. Both the WebQuest and the class magazine were authentic activities because students were able to read and write for real audience and for real purpose. Within this authentic activity, students learned to write in different genres such as narrative, expository, descriptive and persuasive. Besides, students were apprenticed into real life roles as writers, group facilitators and magazine editors. These activities changed classroom dynamics and the role of students from passive receptors of information to active learners constructing their own knowledge (Larson & Marsh, 2005; Rogoff, 2003).

Although Mr. Hade adapted the Changing Times WebQuest from the web, he was very innovative in its implementation. First, it was his instructional goal that determined the type of WebQuest he used. Then, he evaluated the WebQuest to ascertain that it was developmentally appropriate for his students. He used his initiative to modify the WebQuest, making the task a bit more challenging to suit his and students’ needs. Then, he used the WebQuest as a springboard to introduce multifaceted learning activities including reflective writing and critical literacy. Mr. Hade’s approach was transformational because it was characterized by movement and change and because he was attentive to the worlds his students experienced outside of the classroom (Millard, 2006).

In addition, Mr. Hade facilitated critical discussions in which students reevaluated the four presidents they researched on and their policies, to see how they were impacted by these policies as citizens. These discussions helped to situate classroom learning as part of the process of becoming conscious of one’s experience as historically constructed within specific power relations. Furthermore, as Mr. Hade built his community of learners, he went through a layered complexity of participation that occurred in several levels. First, students were apprenticed into real life roles as they learned to work as magazine editors and group facilitators and as Mr. Hade modeled group behavior and role of members. Secondly, Mr. Hade provided guided participation as he coordinated different groups, created a rubric for the debate, helped students to access the relevant resources for their research, managed the use of computers in his classroom, and helped students to co-construct knowledge. Finally, participatory appropriation occurred as students transitioned from teacher facilitated groups to autonomous groups and began to take charge of their learning.

By integrating technology in his classroom, Mr. Hade not only aligned with his students’ personal literacies, he also created opportunity for other students who did not have computers or Internet at home to experience the new literacies of the Internet. He empowered his students and allowed them to have a voice in their learning through reflective writing, collaboration and discussing the popular culture texts. Larson and Marsh (2005) found that successful teachers among other things, employed collaborative learning groups, jettisoned their traditional notions of the omniscient teacher, encouraged multiple forms of representation, emotional expressions and response to texts. These were part of what Mr. Hade did that transformed his classroom instruction.

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New England Reading Association
60th Annual Conference
“Striving Readers and Writers: Literacy for All for Today and Tomorrow”
September 25th and 26th, 2008
Springfield, Massachusetts

Kathy Itterly (left) and Sue Biggam (right) pose for a photo-opportunity with Willa, the child who was “profiled” in their book entitled, Literacy Profiles: A Framework to Guide Assessment, Instructional Strategies, and Intervention, K-4. (Pearson, 2009). Willa made a guest appearance at the end of Sue and Kathy’s NERA workshop where teachers practiced recording assessment data on a profile.

President Catherine Kurkjian welcoming guests and participants

Executive Director Arlene Hawkins with volunteer students
Learning to teach is a process that develops and evolves over an educator’s career (Ehri & Williams, 1996). Seasoned teachers recognize they must continually update and position themselves on current educational issues and research to transform their teaching and grow as informed professionals and mentors. Practitioners’ philosophical perspectives and best practices emerge and progress as we polish the leathered structure of our pedagogy over a career of learning how to teach effectively through critical inquiry into practice.

Valuing a philosophy does not necessarily mean one automatically knows how to incorporate it effectively into one’s best teaching practices. As my teaching has progressed, I have come to embrace critical inquiry as a teaching and personal philosophy. The transformation of my teaching practices to include critical inquiry, however, has been a challenge as I struggle with the practicalities and methods of incorporating it into the courses I teach. Therefore, in the Spring 2005 semester, I studied what happened as I attempted to take on a critical inquiry stance on issues in literacy with an undergraduate, pre-methods teacher-education class at a four-year college. What follows is a narrative reflection that describes what it looked like—what tensions were created, how practice and learning were influenced—when I worked to incorporate a forming philosophy of critical inquiry into my pedagogy. This study will provide insight into how critical inquiry might influence the transformation of a teacher education professor’s philosophy and pedagogy as reflected through the candidates’ learning. Implications for teacher education are also proposed.

**Theoretical background**

Learning is viewed here as a transformation of knowledge that is social in nature and influenced by the context of the situation (Wenger, 1998). It is a new way of seeing something because we have added to or refined what it means to us through some type of text or discourse (i.e., something we’ve read, written, viewed, or discussed with others). For the instructor, knowledge is transformed through critical inquiry, which may include forms of professional development, collaboration, and reflection.

Taking a critical inquiry stance expands one’s reflections on practice and readings of texts to delve into the underlying meanings and interpretations of an issue (Duesterberg, 1999; Anonymous, 2004). Critical inquiry encourages the learner to not only seek information but to look for a sagacious understanding of the world (Jennings & Smith, 2002). Lindfors (1999) describes this phenomenon as the “going-beyond purpose” (p. 61) of reading that evolves as readers probe the possibilities of meaning, understanding, and connections to the world.
Critical inquiry is vital in teacher education if we want to encourage teacher candidates to become agents of societal change in positions that will allow them to empower students (Routman, 2003). When teachers take a critical inquiry stance toward their own teaching philosophies and practices, they become engaged in finding deeper understandings to complex issues as they question their perspectives, biases, purposes, and motivation.

Fecho (2004) describes a critical inquiry classroom as “...a place where inquiry [takes] place in ways that [call] mainstream venues of financial, social, and political power into question, but [does] so in ways that [allow] for a range of interpretations and perspectives” (p. 142). Such a classroom enables students to make informed decisions about their learning and practices. It changes the focus of learning from one of filling empty vessels to one of empowering students to explore their positions on critical issues (Freire, 1970). This perspective fits with Wenger’s (1998) view of learning as a transformation of knowledge. In my classroom, I wanted candidates to take a critical look at literacy theories and practices to determine their positions and perspectives.

Also foundational to this study is the concept of reflection. Reflection is thought to be necessary in the process of constructing new knowledge (Dewey, 1974). Reflection, which should be intrinsic to teaching, requires “systematic and intentional inquiry” (p. 7) into one’s practice (Cochran-Smith and Lytle, 1993). Not all reflection is critical in that not all reflection is transformative. In order for reflection to come full cycle, it must lead to action (Dewey, 1974). In teaching, this action takes shape as change in practice, which reflects the revision of one’s philosophy.

There are other ways to demonstrate transformation and learning. Frequently, teachers experience what Anonymous, Graham, and Hudson-Ross (2005) refer to as “the wobble” in their learning and the reformation of their teaching philosophy. That is, they experience the creation of a new or the refinement of an existing understanding and its application to philosophy and practice through their questioning of discrepancies, inconsistencies, and unexamined issues. When instructors look for the wobble in their own learning, or instances in which their expectations or equilibrium are challenged, potentials for new learning and a need to evaluate current principles and pedagogy become evident.

Transformation involves shifts or wobbles in not only a learner’s thoughts and words, but also evidence of new understandings and meanings as expressed and demonstrated through language and actions (Jennings & Patenaude, 1998). While some studies suggest professional development and participation in single courses have little influence on a teacher’s instruction and philosophy over time (Shepard et al., 1996; Sleeter, 1992), others have indicated that continuous transformation of teachers’ practices and beliefs is evident when tools of critical inquiry and reflection are fostered as part of the intended transformation process (Jennings & Smith, 2002).

Finally, this study uses Bakhtin’s (1981) description of language as socio-ideological and “belonging to professions” (p. 272) to frame its analysis and interpretations of data. The language of social or professional groups is said to unify communities. Therefore, as one learns to use the language related to a profession—and, I propose, to reflect a forming philosophy—in ways that are meaningful to them and others, they become part of a community. Certain meanings that provide a feeling of belonging are shared, and as well some meanings may be altered as new voices are added. In Bakhtin’s explanation of heteroglossia, which Emerson and Holquist translate as “the base condition governing the operation of meaning in any utterance” (p. 428), Bakhtin differentiates between this type of unifying language (centripetal forces of language) and language that provides more personal nuances of meaning (centrifugal forces of language). Centripetal forces may be seen as compliant while centrifugal forces take on a more resistant sense of belonging or conforming to a particular community’s understanding. Therefore, centrifugal forces that may indicate a more critical stance is taken as one seeks to understand an issue or concept and to construct a personal versus a group meaning. This implies that when we are looking for the wobble in teacher education and in personal philosophical reflections, we should look for evidence of conflict and self-questioning.

Perls, Hefferline, and Goodman (1951) write that “where there is most conflict, contact and figure/background, there is most self; where there is ‘confluence’ (flowing together), isolation or equilibrium, there is diminished self” (p. 437). This would indicate that active, transforming reflection must lean toward the centrifugal end of heteroglossia where there is the “most self.”

Methodology

While this is a teacher educator’s self-study of her efforts to assume an inquiry stance while teaching an undergraduate literacy course, it is based on an original teacher research study of her teaching. Self-study, here, takes the form of reflecting upon teaching practices and the ways they transact in the classroom as demonstrated and voiced by the candidates. Therefore, a brief description of the site, the course, and the participants of the teacher research study that was in the forefront of this self-study will help the reader gain perspective of the educator’s foundation.

The site and participants

The site was a state-affiliated university located in upstate New York. The course, one section of Education
Participants were 28 undergraduate teacher candidates, 25 females and 3 males. All teacher candidates appeared of European-American backgrounds and while most were close in age (late teens, early twenties) three women in their late twenties spoke of having children of their own. Three candidates representing various learning styles and backgrounds were selected as focus participants. Laurie was a highly self-motivated and participatory candidate (i.e., contributed often in class) who was completing her third year in the program. Joe was one of the three males in the class. He presented a very interesting perspective of the teacher-learner relationship as one in which the teacher was well respected and looked up to by his students. Annie was an older candidate who had children of her own and had transferred into the program after receiving an associate’s degree from a two-year community college. Selecting and hoping in on data from three focus participants allowed me to determine how my instruction was influencing these specific learners. I was able to follow their progress in relation to my instruction. Participants’ names have been replaced with pseudonyms to protect anonymity.

Several times over the semester, a research assistant observed and took field notes during class time. This assistant was an undergraduate teacher candidate who had successfully completed the same course with me the previous semester. She did not actively participate in the class; however, we did discuss her interpretations of what was going on after each class she observed.

I was the instructor. I am a middle-aged, European-American woman. Having spent over 20 years of my teaching career at the elementary level, this study was conducted during my fourth semester of teaching at the college level. Also, during this semester, I began collecting data for a longitudinal collaborative study. This three-year study sought to examine what happens as teacher candidates move into their first teaching positions in regards to whether and how they take a critical inquiry stance on their emerging pedagogy. Much of the data collected for the collaborative study overlaps with that analyzed here; however, whereas this study focuses on my critical inquiry stance, the collaborative study is exploring the candidates’ efforts and resistances to taking on such a perspective over time. My involvement in the collaborative study has enhanced my interpretation of data for this study in that my colleague Bob Anonymous and I communicated with each other weekly regarding the progress of our courses and candidates’ participation. Bob is Associate Professor at the Anonymous (see Anonymous, 2004). He and several doctoral students from his university—Cheryl McLean, Claudia Mazaros, and Christine Mallozzi—played a significant part in this self-study in that they helped me form my philosophy and shape my pedagogy. The opening paragraph from my teaching journal refers to how this relationship influenced my reflection and pedagogy.

Data collection and analysis
Multiple data sets were collected from January through May of the Spring 2005 semester with the consent of the candidates. Several candidates were interviewed privately about their perspectives of the class among other issues. Also, candidates’ written assignments were copied. As mentioned, a research assistant took field notes of several classes as well and we discussed her interpretations. Finally, I kept a research journal to reflect upon the progress made in each class. The journal included personal reflections about teaching and my attempts to incorporate critical inquiry as well as vignettes. This journal was shared weekly with my colleagues of the longitudinal study, who wrote and shared similar journals about their class with me. Some issues were discussed online and in person. Possibilities of interpretation of several data pieces were explored collaboratively.

Analysis of data sets consisted of inductive thematic coding, which identified recurring themes and dissonances (Miles & Huberman, 1994). This process began by recognizing and assigning descriptive codes to phrases in interviews, field notes, and other data sources. To identify evidence of transformation of my philosophy and pedagogy, I looked for descriptions and inferences of my wobbling, resistance to wobbling, uses of centripetal and centrifugal forces of language, and evidence of taking a critical inquiry stance.

In time, each of these themes generated refining sub-clusters. For example, events across the data were coded as examples of taking a critical inquiry stance. This allowed me to view the influence of my attempts to model and encourage this approach on the candidates’ responses.

During one of the re-reads of the data, a matrix display of how focus candidates and I construed the meanings of events and certain issues was drafted to provide insight into others’ perspectives. Multiple readings and member checks by the focus participants provided opportunities to clarify the meanings of these perspectives through an inquiry stance. Finally, colleagues of the parallel longitudinal study were asked to review and comment on this manuscript as well. Inviting participants and colleagues to preview the manuscript helped objectify and confirm that the
conclusions were more a reflection of the study (the participants and the conditions of the study) than a reflection of the researcher's inevitable biases (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

**Resulting understandings**

Many layers of reflection and inquiry existed simultaneously in this study. As I journaled and collected artifacts, I reflected upon what it meant to take an inquiry stance and how this influenced my philosophy and pedagogy, my teaching effectiveness, and the teacher candidates' shaping philosophy and practices. These layers of inquiry provided rich evidence and windows for analysis. Tensions were negotiated through a critical inquiry stance as candidates and I co-constructed the balance between centripetal and centrifugal forces, conformity, and resistance.

**A growing understanding of critical inquiry: Wobbling along the way**

In previous semesters of Education 284 I had assigned candidates an inquiry project that followed an adaptation of the inquiry cycles represented in my initial readings of texts about inquiry by Berghoff, Egawa, Harste, and Hoonan (2000); Gandini and Edwards (2001); and Short, Harste, and Burke (1996). Adapting these cycles to the process I thought a teacher goes through to inquire about a problem or issue and adding a critical lens, candidates were guided through the following sequence:

1. candidates framed a question;
2. did some initial reading on the topic or issue;
3. refined or even changed their question completely;
4. determined the best way to go about answering their question;
5. collected, organized, and analyzed data;
6. sought and reflected upon alternative perspectives and the tensions that led to revisions;
7. presented and led a critical discussion of their findings;
8. reflected upon their findings to include others' perspectives; and
9. stated how their inquiry could lead to social action and student empowerment.

The process, although numbered sequentially, was taught as being recursive. As resources were gathered, many candidates’ questions changed; thereby, forcing the candidate to revert to previous steps. This was encouraged as a natural course for inquiry. Throughout the whole process, candidates met with collaborative groups to share resources, to discuss the tensions that were forming, and to transmediate answers. They were encouraged to generate an authentic product they could use in a job interview, in their student teaching, or in their future teaching position. The product did not have to represent a finished piece but could be the beginning of a well-organized resource (i.e., a teacher resource kit or a handbook) that would be added to as the candidate developed as a professional.

At the time, I saw inquiry as a way to engage and motivate candidates in that they were encouraged to explore any topic they wanted to learn more about, within the scope of the course. I ultimately wanted them to experience what it might be like as a teacher to be presented with a situation in which they would have to practice inquiry to find a solution. For example, I presented a scenario in which an English language learner was assigned to their class. Where would they seek information on how to best teach this student? When they learned there were several instructional approaches, how would they determine which to use and why? A study of the effectiveness of this project done during the Spring 2004 semester (Author, Muratore, Smith, & Vatovec, 2004) indicated that candidates grew in their understanding of the use of the inquiry process as reflective practitioners. These were my reasons for presenting the inquiry project. However, as I continued to read more about inquiry, I began to see its potential in a much broader perspective than just a one-time project per semester.

Multiple sources of data indicate that over the course of the Spring 2005 semester, my teaching philosophy and pedagogy as well as my personal philosophy were influenced and transformed in complex ways. Just before the semester began, I wrote in my journal:

1/12/05 … As I read more and more, I'm beginning to see inquiry as more than just a way to engage and motivate learners to delve into the topics and issues that they want to learn more about with my guidance as to how to go about that process.… I have students do an “inquiry project” in my courses, but I wasn't setting up the whole class using the approach.… If I am a firm believer that [students] learn best through inquiry, then why wasn't I?... I'm not sure I know how to.

My goal for the semester became to re-evaluate how I was teaching each of the course objectives and to create an environment that spawned critical inquiry. That meant looking at the assignments; candidates' class participation; readings; assessments; and candidates' and my needs, strengths, and expectations. I knew this was a huge undertaking and that it would take time, effort, trial, and error to work toward the type of classroom Anonymous (2004) describes as a critical inquiry classroom. After the first class, I wrote the entry that opens this paper. I was feeling “almost paralyzed by meta-analysis” as I tried to creatively in-

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sert critical inquiry as a way to participate in meaningful ways. However, I was determined to find ways to put into practice my beliefs and intentions because I felt it would be invaluable for candidates to walk away from my class with seeds of critical inquiry germinating in their minds.

Several prominent themes bubbled up from an analysis of the data. Evidence of wobbling and resistance in my philosophy and pedagogy indicated the following recurring elements:

- The questioning and re-alignment of perceptions through an information seeking process.
- A sharpened recognition of signs and language use indicating when candidates were exercising critical inquiry.
- Tensions that influenced resistance were examined.
- Other themes, such as the influence of text selection, emerged as well. However, these three were the most outstanding in the data.

Seeking information. Coding of the data indicated that throughout my transformation, I sought out multiple resources to fill gaps of knowledge about critical inquiry. Initially, I read and re-read parts of Lindfors’s (1999) *Children’s inquiry: Using language to make sense of the world.* As issues came up in my class, I revisited what Lindfors had to say about them. Being able to relate Lindfors’s words to real-life situations, clarified and gave new meaning to her explanations as I reflected upon and re-read texts. For example, in April I began to question what constituted evidence of critical inquiry. After re-reading Lindfors’s description of inquiry acts, I was able to more clearly recognize the wobble:

> 4/25/05 … I’ve recognized that inquiry shouldn’t be coded just by identifying the questions in our students’ dialogue but also the ways they clarify, restate, and reject information. There’s the critical edge... comparing and contrasting what they think they know with what they’re learning. They feel a certain dissonance with new understandings and have to work that out.

This new understanding of evidence of critical inquiry helped me interpret candidates’ responses from a fresh perspective, which will be examined more closely in the next section.

As part of the parallel longitudinal study, Bob and I shared our teaching journals online on a weekly basis over the 15-week semester. The ways Bob, who was substantially more experienced at teaching through a critical inquiry stance than I, described the methods he was using with his students, provided opportunities for me to be a fly on the wall of his classroom. His reflective critical inquiry into his practice exposed the ways he contemplated his students’ responses, what was working, what was not, and why or why not. By modeling a critical inquiry stance in his classroom and about his own practice, Bob helped me view my data in a new light. As I read and reflected on what he saw as indicators of critical inquiry in his classroom (i.e., engagement, resistance, participation, responsibility for one’s learning, transmediating discussions, and seeing a range of perspectives), I re-aligned and broadened my perceptions to consider these components in my data and in my practices.

In a memo from Bob on February 10, he wrote:

> … to me not having anecdotes is endemic [of] a class not fully engaged in inquiry. When we start getting richer and deeper anecdotes, it’s an indication that [students] are starting to operate from the inquiry framework, if not totally embracing it.

After considering this viewpoint, I began to listen mindfully to dialogues among the candidates. This led to a sharpened recognition of signs and language use indicating when candidates were exercising critical inquiry.

Identifying inquiry statements. Stemming from Lindfors’s (1999) description of what it looks like to take an inquiry stance, the following categories and definitions of statements reflecting inquiry evolved through the analysis of data:

- seeking information—searching to fill gaps of knowledge from readings, colleagues, the instructor, peers;
- clarifying and confirming expressions—re-stating, making connections, applying information;
- expressions of confusion, uncertainty, or wondering—stating one’s lack of clarity, misunderstandings, or frustrations;
- alternate or conflicting perspectives expressed—introducing a different perspective than those being stated;
- working through an issue—group talk, self-talk, or writing that shows transition in thinking;
- expressions of politeness, tentativeness, or humor—being careful not to offend by using markers such as maybe, what if, perhaps, I guess, or joking to state one’s perspective; and
- invitation to participate—implicitly or explicitly encouraging someone to join in and help based on expertise or experience.

Of course, many of the categories overlapped. For instance, frequently conflicting perspectives were also
expressions of politeness; and expressions of confusion often developed into examples of working through an issue.

Once I became better at recognizing candidates’ attempts at critical inquiry at their level, I was better able to understand their developing sense of what it meant to be critical inquirers. This particular class was generally very quiet; and, except for a few of them, candidates were resistant to speak their opinions in large-group settings. Participation was much more comfortable when the class broke up into small groups to discuss issues and readings. Until I began to recognize and identify subtle signs of enthusiasm and engagement, I was frustrated with what I presumed to be their lack of progress toward inquiry.

Early in the semester, I began to identify several candidates as risk-takers because they frequently participated and raised alternate or conflicting perspectives. For instance, when commenting on videotape of a teacher reading a book to children (i.e., a read-aloud lesson), Laurie stated that she didn’t think she would have used the props because they distracted the students’ attention away from the story. When candidates stated conflicting perspectives, clarifying and confirming expressions, and expressions of confusion, they risked being questioned or contradicted by their peers. Even the risk-takers in this class used expressions of politeness or invitations to participate when they spoke up in class. Laurie framed her comment about the videotape as an invitation for others to state their thoughts when she began with “I don’t think….”

Identifying uses of language. Candidates who were risk-takers felt more comfortable than their peers in creating, working through, and expressing their own meanings and understandings on issues. Relating this to Bakhtin’s (1981) heteroglossia, these risk-takers questioned compliance with the unifying language of centripetal forces more frequently than others as they negotiated the tensions they felt to create their own nuances of meaning conceived through the language of centrifugal forces.

Evidence indicates that candidates were more likely to use centrifugal language in the following contexts:
  • when texts presented alternate or multiple perspectives;
  • in small-group discussions vs. large-group forums;
  • when their thinking was pushed by discussion and/or guided reflection;
  • when given opportunities to re-discuss or re-write;
  • when they recognized I would not provide the answers for them but wanted them to generate their own meanings; and
  • after their field experience.

One of the course requirements was to work with an emergent reader and writer in the context of a field experience. After reading and writing with the student, the candidate was to write a case study report of the child’s current literacy development with recommendations for instruction incorporating best practices based on observation and multiple assessments. It was evident through candidates’ drafts of their case study reports that they were posing and answering their own questions about how to best teach the student they assessed for the report. As I provided feedback on their drafts, candidates revised and resubmitted their reports. From one draft to the next, I could see through their uses of centripetal and centrifugal language how they were taking risks as they interpreted their observations and assessment data and created instructional designs for their student.

Contrasting Laurie’s case study with Joe’s helps clarify this meaning-making process by illustrating how they each interpreted their results. Laurie’s drafts provide evidence that she grew in her use of centripetal language as she conformed her assimilation and application of the concepts she had been learning in the course to the results of her case study. She was taking on the jargon and meanings modeled by teaching profession, and she did so in a very timid way. Her writing is interspersed with polite phrases, such as “I think,” “I feel,” and “I believe,” as she supports her risk-taking proposals with citations from Cunningham (2000), the New York State Department of Education (1998), and others.

Joe, on the other hand, was quick to draw conclusions based on her data. In his first draft, he used centrifugal language to interpret his students’ reading confidence as going “… to her head at times…” and wrote that she participated “… when she was in the mood.” My responses to this way of identifying his student led him to use more compliant phrases, such as “read with confidence” and “was self-motivated.”

Laurie and Joe’s case studies and my responses to them led me to reflect on my expectations for conformity. There were times when I thought candidates should conform and others when I wanted them to create their own meanings based on the analysis of multiple perspectives. I realized I wasn’t accepting their efforts to take risks and be resistant even though that’s what I thought I wanted them to do.

The tensions. Learning how to take a critical stance was, at times, frustrating. The books I was reading helped me form my philosophy; however, I continued to struggle all semester with how to apply these new meanings to the day-to-day expectations and objectives of my curriculum and lessons. I desired the how-to’s. It would have been much easier for me if I had someone to mentor me as I planned my lessons so I could efficiently prepare strategies that would model and inspire critical...
inquiry. Although I valued constructivist approaches in teaching that fostered the learner's construction of knowledge, I found myself longing for someone to just tell me how to do it. I felt I was losing efficiency and, with all of the other demands on my time, I could have progressed much further and faster with a handbook of how-to's. This transformed my thinking about constructivism and guided practice. I would be much more careful in the future to weigh the value of expecting learners to construct knowledge; under what conditions I would expect them to construct; and when I thought explicit teaching, modeling, or guided practice would be more effective ways of learning. This issue came up in a class discussion in early March. Candidates came to the consensus that some basics, such as letter sounds, should be taught rather than expecting learners to struggle and become frustrated.

Colleagues I worked with, however, held different philosophies about what should be prioritized. Critical inquiry was viewed as something they didn’t “know much about” and for which they “didn’t have time.” Generally, the philosophy of the department was that it was important to efficiently spend class time teaching the candidates the things they’d need to know how to do in the classroom. This was evident in the scope and sequence chart that was in place for the three required literacy courses. This chart indicated which strategies, methods, theorists, and assessments each of our courses was to “cover.” However, there were no parameters indicating where candidates would discuss, evaluate, and construct positions on current issues in literacy education; how they would incorporate what they were learning into their developing teaching philosophy; or how they would decide which methods, assessments, etc. they would use based on their forming beliefs about literacy learning. In short, there was no critical edge or inquiry stance expected. It was felt there just wasn’t enough time to teach everything, so we’d teach the methods and theories that we deemed important to know.

Time was a challenge in a couple of ways. First, my classes were 50-minute meetings, three times per week. Frequently, it was challenging to work our way into in-depth conversations or activities in that amount of time, especially when the class was resistant to taking risks and speaking out.

Another way that time was a challenge was that I felt pressured by the expectations, based on the scope and sequence chart, that certain concepts and practices had to be taught in EDUC 284. It would be expected that candidates would build upon these ideas in the second course of the literacy sequence. How could we spend a week discussing their views on various approaches, for example, when we had so many other concepts and objectives to cover? If I were going to transform my best teaching practices to represent critical inquiry, I realized I had to look at time spent wondering and wandering (Lindfors, 1999) as priority, not luxury.

And finally, the physical space of our classroom hindered movement and discussion. Every seat in the room was filled. Desks with connected chairs were pressed together with narrow aisles between each row. It was difficult to move the desks into small groups or into a large circle due to the mere size of the room. The close proximity of small groups allowed for little privacy and made it difficult to hear the people in your own group over those right next to you. The small desk tops interfered with creating group charts, projects, or demonstrations. In general, the room was set up for a lecture-style class making it difficult to convert it into a physical space conducive for group discussions and hands-on projects.

Critical inquiry as practice
The challenge became to find time where critical inquiry could realistically fit into the curriculum. So, I began to think of it as a whole approach rather than activities that included inquiry. That is, rather than thinking of critical inquiry as “what kind of lesson can I do to teach candidates to be critical inquirers,” I began to look at it as “how can I revise this lesson so that the expectations are that they will be practicing critical inquiry by engaging in the lesson.” In essence, I was switching from transmissive teaching to constructivism. By engaging in the lesson, they would construct for themselves what it meant to be a critical inquirer.

The first weeks of class my attempts at inserting inquiry included:

- Encouraging class participation via small-group and whole-class discussions sparked by individual free writes regarding what the readings made them contemplate; and
- Providing choices of online readings based on prior knowledge and interest to prepare for a class discussion.

These approaches reflected my initial view of inquiry as a way to encourage engagement, interest, and risk-taking. I discovered, however, that although I was attempting to make the class more candidate centered and inquiry based, I was doing little more than giving assignments and candidates were doing little more than fulfilling my expectations. Because my expectations were not typically what other instructors assigned, not only was I not achieving my goals for inquiry but also I was confusing them with unfamiliar requirements and tasks. I received several emails asking what I wanted them to do.

Reflecting on how Bob designed his classes, I began to ask the candidates to do more of the talking in the class. I tried approaches such as the jigsaw approach in which candidates become “experts” through small-group examination of a reading. Then the experts switch
groups to continue the exploration of the issues. We also tried shared writing of lesson plans with partners and various group presentations of readings. I found that the more I put the teaching of each other into their hands, the more engaged they became as a whole. However, just when I thought I knew what I was doing, something happened that rattled my philosophy.

It was the case studies again. When the candidates started working in elementary classrooms tutoring children, their inquiry flourished as they searched for answers and ways to respond to their child’s needs. They asked questions in class, told me they talked about their children with their roommates and classmates, brought multiple books to the field placement to find the child’s reading level, and searched online and in our texts for appropriate activities to do with their children. The attitude they took toward their tutoring was the attitude I had been hoping to achieve in the classroom toward the readings and discussions we had: an explosion toward inquiry. But I had never seen them that motivated, engaged, and curious about the readings. There had been times when they had demonstrated excitement while demonstrating various activities and methods that had come close to their attitude with the case studies and field experience. It seemed to be the practical applications of the readings that highly engaged them. They were anxious to be teachers and to be out there with children. Is it possible their interest in being students was diminishing due to this new identity as preprofessionals that they were beginning to assume? As Laurie had described herself in her interview with me, she was a “teacher in learning.”

My learning. The idea of taking a critical inquiry stance crept into my very soul. It provided a new perspective on living, teaching, and learning for me as I learned to wonder about the world, interpret events, and listen to what people said through a more critical lens.

I began to see parallels between the candidates’ learning experiences and expectations and my own. Just as they were learning the foundations of literacy, I was trying to learn the basics of teaching through a critical inquiry stance. Both the candidates and I needed the foundational knowledge before we could reach the higher levels of thinking and applying that would be necessary to fully succeed in being inquirers seeking our positions on critical issues. We both needed more time, more guidance and support, more knowledge, and more confidence before we could grow to the next levels of learning. However, we had both made progress over the semester. Through trial and error we had taken risks. Some had been more fruitful than others, but all had led to some progress and growth. No one had exactly the same philosophy of teaching that we had brought with us. We had taken some steps.

As critical inquiry had crept into the soul of my teaching, it also affected my thinking as a member of the larger community. As I worked on finding subtextual and personal meanings and positions to issues in education and other areas of my life, I considered what I should do about these newfound understandings. Should I, or could I, take action in some way to improve the world around me or myself in small or large ways?

Implications for teacher education

To me, taking an inquiry stance didn’t happen in isolation. It’s not like I can say I wanted to start teaching in a certain way so I read some books, learned how to do it, and then did it. Not so. The way I developed as an inquirer was highly reflected by the way I was able to help the candidates become inquirers. I didn’t feel I was successfully portraying an authentic stance in my practices until I recognized that my students were doing it. Partially, that was because I learned how to recognize the multiple ways they demonstrated quests for deeper understandings and clarification. Therefore, I propose that this implies that if we want to teach through an inquiry stance, we must do so explicitly. Talk about it with our students as we are implementing new approaches, discuss our goals, and ask for their insightful responses.

Transformation of one’s teaching philosophy and pedagogical practices would seem to be most effective and long-lasting when teacher candidates and their professors are provided opportunities and support in learning to

- use professional language to express their evolving philosophy and understandings (“talk the talk”);
- incorporate more effective methods into their pedagogy based on their new understandings (“walk the walk”); and
- inquire and reflect in critical ways that focus exploration of productive growth and action in the instructional environment and provide opportunities to revisit and rethink decisions, philosophy, and practices (“revisit the walk”).

To encourage teachers to take on a critical inquiry stance, it is necessary to provide opportunities for them first to learn the vocabulary and concepts related to the issues and content of the course (centripetal) and then to be able to use them meaningfully to discuss and clarify their forming views and opinions (centrifugal). Next, they need to be able to incorporate this forming philosophy into their practices (i.e., in the lessons they prepare and their fieldwork), or to walk the walk. Finally, discussing and re-discussing this construction of philosophical and pedagogical perspectives as they revisit the walk would help them confirm their positions and understandings.

To take on a critical inquiry stance, we should seek opportunities to do the following to improve our
own teaching and to model for teacher candidates. We should

- Reflect and critically inquire about the wobble in our practices and philosophy so we can effectively transform instruction as needed to improve candidates' learning.
- Set up support systems that facilitate collaboration, feedback, and mentoring among colleagues and encourage them to share current research and issues.
- Advocate for curriculum, space, and time allocations that are conducive to inquiry.
- Build our knowledge about critical inquiry so we have a strong foundation from which to create best teaching practices. Just as we cannot expect candidates' attitudes to shift as the result of one course, we cannot expect our own to change based on our desire to do so. It takes effort and support.
- Look at a course's and then a program's curriculum priorities critically. Determine where critical inquiry should be integrated in meaningful ways.
- Consider the value of re-writing, re-reading, and re-discussing (unpacking and unpacking again) critical issues and positions so that we continue to grow in our understanding of effective pedagogy.
- Empower candidates by facilitating their ability to reflect upon the internal processes that make them teachers.

This self-study has helped me recognize how I have grown in my understanding of critical inquiry, its place in my classroom, and what it needs to flourish in an undergraduate teacher education classroom. By reflecting upon my evolving philosophy and practices, I know now that this form of collaborative teacher research has helped me to recognize how students reflect an inquiry stance, what methods best foster inquiry in how I understand it at this point, and the influence my shifting philosophy has had upon my teaching practices.

I know I still have much further that I want to go. I still need to gain more confidence, for example, in knowing how to spur on conversations that will lead to critical exploration of educational issues among candidates. Over the next few semesters, as I continue to read, write, reflect, and observe, I plan to restructure many more of my lessons to incorporate more student- and inquiry-based methods. Also, I want to start to set up some of those support systems I suggested in the Implications section to make inquiry a priority in my department’s curriculum. Inquiry isn’t something that is ever fulfilled, reached, or obtained. One is never done inquiring when it has become your way of living.

References


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New England Reading Association 60th Annual Conference
“Striving Readers and Writers: Literacy for All for Today and Tomorrow”

September 25th and 26th 2008
Springfield, Massachusetts

Diane Kern (left), NERA President-Elect: “Vocabulary Strategies for Struggling Readers”

Ellin Oliver Keene (right), National/International Literacy Consultant: “Making the Dimensions and Outcomes of Understanding Come to Life in the Classroom”

Donna Maxim, Boothbay Region Elementary School, Maine: “Nonfiction in the Classroom”

Matt Copeland, Consultant for the Kansas State Department of Education: “Socratic Circles: Empowering Student-Directed Discussion”
Using spelling inventories to inform instruction

Jeff Barger
Cameron Park Elementary School in Orange County, North Carolina

What if there was an inexpensive assessment that could be administered to an entire class in less than thirty minutes, scored in about sixty minutes, have high predictive validity, and provide relevant information for reading and writing instruction (Invernizzi, Landrum, Howell, & Warley, 2005)? This description may sound like an educational infomercial, but I am actually describing qualitative spelling inventories.

What is a qualitative spelling inventory?
A qualitative spelling inventory is a series of word lists (Templeton & Morris, 1999) based on grade level (Schlagel, 1989) or one list that features several developmental levels (Bear, Invernizzi, Templeton, & Johnston, 1996; Ganske, 2000). In administering the inventory, a teacher says the word on the list, gives a sentence with the word in it, and repeats the word. The students attempt to correctly spell each word on the list. I was recently invited to administer the Words Their Way Upper-Level spelling inventory (Bear et al., 1996) to a class of eighth grade students in a rural North Carolina middle school. It took about twenty-five minutes to use this inventory with twenty-nine students. I like to administer the inventory at the beginning, middle, and end of the school year to measure student progress. The same list of words is used each time so you can compare the same words. It is important to note that students are not given the list of words before taking the assessment (Bear et al., 1996).

Scoring the inventory
Unlike traditional spelling tests, where the only data yielded is whether a student spelled the word correctly or incorrectly, qualitative spelling inventories also score knowledge of particular features of words (Bear et al., 1996). Each word is scored and several categories of spelling features are checked as well. For example, disloyal gives information on student mastery of vowels (oy), unaccented final syllables (al), and affixes (dis). A student could spell the word disloyel which would be incorrect, but instead of only dismissing this spelling as wrong, we can also tease out the correct use of ambiguous vowels and prefixes. This quality of the inventory was helpful to me when I shared it with parents in my previous work as a third grade classroom teacher. I was able to place a positive spin on a student’s knowledge of word structure instead of saying “Johnny only spelled six out of ten words correctly on his spelling test this week.” Along with knowing which features their students are using but confusing (Invernizzi, Abouzeid, & Gill, 1994), teachers also learn where students fall along a developmental stage continuum. The Upper-Level spelling inventory feature guide has three developmental stages: Within Word, Syllables and Affixes, and Derivational Relations (Bear et al., 1996). Two other developmental stages (Emergent and Letter Naming) are contained in lower level spelling inventories. After administering the inventory to the class of eighth graders, I discovered the students fell into all three developmental stages listed on the feature guide. Fourteen of the twenty-nine students fell into the Derivational Relations stage which is the highest stage on the continuum. Eight students were in the Syllables and Affixes stage while the other seven students were still in the Within Word stage. This data shows there is a wide range of knowledge in the class and therefore a need for differentiated word study instruction. A study done by Morris, Blanton, Blanton, and Perney (1995) illuminates this point by showing how undifferentiated, whole group instruction was ineffective in meeting the needs of low-achieving spellers (Invernizzi & Hayes, 2004).

In the study, the top third of the students were able to spell most of the grade level words correctly at the end of the year. Unfortunately, the bottom third of the group in their study was unable to spell even half of the words correctly. My administration of the inventory to the class of eighth graders revealed a range of power scores (words spelled correctly) from a high of thirty, out of thirty one words spelled correctly, to a low of six words spelled correctly. The top half of the class is ready to work with features such as Greek and Latin root words, while the
bottom fourth still needs instruction with r-influenced vowel patterns and doubling of consonants. As witnessed in the Morris study (1995), whole class instruction in word study with these eighth graders would probably not be beneficial to the bottom fourth of the class.

**How the inventory informs instruction**

When reviewing student responses on the inventory, it is easy to get seduced by the scores on individual features (i.e., complex consonants, affixes) and decide to target only those features where students scored low. Just because a student scores high on a particular feature does not necessarily mean they have mastered that feature. The better view to take is to look at the stage where the student’s knowledge begins to break down and work on features related to that stage (Marten, 2003). Instead of fixating on a particular short or long vowel, we can focus on a student’s ability to work with short or long vowels in general. *Words Their Way* (Bear et al., 1996) contains a scope and sequence for instruction in each stage and this is a helpful guide for the teacher. You can take the results of the inventory and start teaching the different features for a particular phase in the stage. For example, with the lowest group of eighth graders in my study, knowledge begins to break down in the late Within Word stage. This informs me that we should start concentrating on diphthongs (i.e., ou, oy) and complex consonant (i.e., dge, tch) patterns with this group. It would also be a good idea to review r-influenced patterns as well. The middle group of eight students showed a breaking down of knowledge in the middle to late sections of the Syllables and Affixes stage. With this group, I would start investigating final unaccented syllable patterns (i.e., –ar, –er, –or) and two syllable homographs and homophones. The top group of fourteen students is clearly in the Derivational Relations stage so we could start looking at patterns in consonant alternations (i.e., sign/signal) and vowel alternations (i.e., crime/criminal) where the pronunciation of consonants or vowels change in the base of derivationally related words, but the spelling does not change. Instruction with all of the groups would follow a word sorting approach (Bear et al., 1996). In this method, students (individually, with partners, or whole group) can use open sorts where the sorter has to determine the feature categories and sort the word cards according to the categories they have chosen. Closed sorts are where the categories are predetermined. Other activities include games based on highlighted features, word hunts in texts being currently read, and word journals where the results of different sorts are recorded.

**Conclusion**

Qualitative spelling inventories are useful assessments that can be easily overlooked when choosing a way to measure student knowledge of the English language. One of the reasons could be the traditional view of spelling instruction where a list of words is given on Monday and a test given on Friday. Parents are comfortable with this method and appreciate being able to help their child memorize the weekly list (Bloodgood & Pacifici, 2004). Reviewing the results and features of a spelling inventory during a parent conference will not produce the same comfort at first, but through careful review and explanation by the teacher, an inventory will give parents a richer picture of their child’s orthographic knowledge. A former superintendent of mine related to me his experience during a conference with his child’s teacher. The teacher was pleasant and effusive with praise for the superintendent’s child. Strangely, he left the conference feeling unfulfilled. He had been told that his child was doing very well in class, but very few details were given. Qualitative spelling inventories not only give teachers data that can drive instruction, but also provide parents with a clear sense of their child’s progress. This information also gives us insight beyond instruction in spelling. Research has shown that reading and spelling rely on much of the same underlying knowledge. It also stands to reason that stronger orthographic knowledge allows a child to concentrate more on the higher levels of writing composition and less on how to spell a particular word (Moats, 2005). A qualitative spelling inventory is a simple, inexpensive, reliable, and quick way to assess a student’s ability to maneuver through the maze that is the English language.

**References**


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Enacted on January 8, 2002 by President George W. Bush, Jr., the No Child Left Behind Act was commissioned to revitalize the deteriorating status of American education by raising the educational performance of all school children in America. In its intent and caprices, the NCLB is a brain child of the Elementary and Secondary School Act (ESEA) of 1965 which has come with more intensity to link Federal funding to specific result-oriented educational goals. However, hardly had the euphoria that greeted the enactment of the law died down than grievous inadequacies in the law started unfolding. In other words, while the NCLB philosophy has been ideally embracing and fascinating, its objectives have been unrealistically unattainable in many regards. The situation is likened to a very good prescription following a diagnosis of an ailment but without provision for adequate and affordable medication to cure the ailment.

The NCLB Act was a Federal Government policy crafted as a reactionary measure to the following decadence in American public education:
- That about 70 percent of inner city fourth graders is unable to read at a basic level on national reading tests.
- That American high school seniors trail most countries on international math test.
- That the academic achievement gap between the rich and poor, Anglo and minority gets widened at an alarming rate (Bush, 2001).

Consequently, the policy continues to be implemented nation-wide through mandatory standards, accountability and sanctions. However, without adequate funding, the outcomes of the policy’s high expectations for academic success are rather becoming counter-productive. Thus the most contentious and recurring question is, “Does this legislation offer real opportunities for all American children to learn at challenging levels, or has it ironically resulted in ‘Lost Opportunities Left Behind?’” This poses a critical concern in salvaging the debasing nature of American education. The crux of the matter is that while not all the states have the capability to assist the increasing number of underperforming schools, the federal government is not providing adequate funding to assist the states to alleviate the problems.

On Friday, April 15, 2004, under the auspices of the Central Connecticut State University’s (CCSU) Chapter of Phi Delta Kappan, two groups of Connecticut public school administrators (superintendents and principals) representing diverse school communities across the state were engaged in two sessions of focus group interviews to voice their opinions regarding the law and its impact on their schools and districts. The event was jointly coordinated by the Departments of Educational Leadership and Reading and Language Arts at CCSU.

Focus group discussions and interviews
Eight focus groups were used to engage participants in a face-to-face dialogue over some of the pertinent issues, concerns, and challenges from their varied experiences in implementing the NCLB policy. As recommended by Worthen, Sanders, and Fitzpatrick (1997), our role as organizers was “to facilitate discussion through posing initial and periodic questions and by moderating the responses of more vocal members and encouraging response of quieter members” (p. 383).

School superintendents and principals across the
state of Connecticut constituted the two main groups of school leaders involved in the focus group interviews and discussions held on April 15, 2004 at Central Connecticut State University. With the intention of forming two sub-groups of each main group, 12 superintendents and 12 principals were selected randomly from among the state's 169 school districts representing rural, suburban and urban school settings. The selection also reflected the state's nine Education Reference Groups (ERG). Other than the ERG and location factors, the focus group of principals was a composition of representatives from elementary, middle, and high schools. However, since only 9 out of the 12 superintendents and 7 out of the 12 principals invited were in attendance, the superintendent's group was divided into two sub-groups of five and four while the seven principals present formed a separate focus group. The superintendents' session was held in the morning (8-10:30am) while the principals’ session was held in the afternoon (11am-1:30pm). Both sessions were preceded with breakfast and lunch, respectively. Each session was assigned one moderator. The task of the moderators was to facilitate the discussions by clarifying the purpose of the forum, setting ground rules, posing stimulating questions (as already identified) and guiding the trend of discussions to ensure fairly equal participation of all members.

Each focus group discussion ran for about 90 minutes. The superintendent sub-groups met for about one hour each and another 30 minutes for a joint session to summarize common themes and ideas. Each of the sessions was paper and tape recorded. Flip charts were also used to record discussion highlights. Transcripts from the focus groups were content analyzed by coding, categorizing, and theming. The emerging and recurring or isolated themes and issues are discussed later in this paper.

Following the superintendents' and principals' focus groups of April 15, 2004, data were also collected from eight convenient samples of teachers in the Spring, Summer, and Fall semesters of 2004. These groups of teachers were enrolled in the master's degree program in Educational Leadership at CCSU. In all 176 teachers were engaged in discussions in four focus groups. In other words, each class represented a focus group. That is, 28, 20, and 18 teachers from the Administration class in Spring, Summer, and Fall of 2004, respectively; 19, 22, and 27 teachers from the Supervision class in Spring, Summer, and Fall of 2004, respectively; 25 teachers from Education Motivation and the Learning Process class in Spring semester of 2004; and 17 teachers from the Curriculum Leadership Class in Fall semester of 2004.

Fifteen parents from Title I inner city schools in Hartford, New Britain, and New Haven were involved in one-on-one interviews. Seven of the parents were Black, six were Latino, and two were White. There were five Black, three Latino, and two White Males in the parent group. Single parents from the group were three Black (one man, two women), three Latino (three women) and one White woman.

**Emerging themes**

**Inadequate funding of supporting initiatives**

Concern for how NCLB might negatively impact schools and communities, or require interventions for which there are no funds, was expressed across the eight focus groups. Both superintendents and principals saw the need for extended instructional opportunity. As one principal noted, “We’re not an agrarian society any more and we need to look at the architecture of the school calendar to support learning.” The superintendents discussed extended year models currently being implemented in urban districts. There is no doubt that the burgeoning of initiatives requires adequate funding in order to be successful. In addition, educators were concerned about the law’s impact on school initiatives that support other types of valuable learning experiences, such as critical thinking and problem solving, developing school culture, or educating the whole child. At the school level, principals and teachers asserted that addressing the emotional needs of children was also a necessary priority, especially for students who live in “generational poverty.” One of the principals pointed out, “Schools should not be expected to make bricks without straw.”

**NCLB’s impact on children and schools**

Both superintendents and principals concurred that while NCLB might be well-intentioned, implementation of the provisions of the law was problematic and, in fact, “antithetical to the intent.” Both groups expressed the concern that educators had limited input into the design of the law and felt that mandates at the federal level were “too far removed from the classroom,” where the most effective assessment and instructional decisions are enacted.

Focus group participants reiterated that the mechanism by which the law seeks to improve student performance is an array of sanctions, based on the belief that penalties will improve the work of educators, in their words “punishing toward excellence.” Unfortunately, the effect on children, teachers, and administrators has been less than motivating as more and more schools, even high performing schools, make the “list” for one inadequacy or another. Superintendents noted that energy and resources were beginning to shift from instruction and learning to meeting the provisions of the law. Principals also expressed concern about the increased stress for teachers and the negative effects on children. “When students lack skills, and the school does not have the resources to intervene, and the students continue to fail, the law becomes discriminatory,” said one principal, who
noted the need for social reform, not just educational reform. Another school building leader remembered picking up a child at home to bring him in for testing in an effort to meet NCLB’s standard for participation rate. “It was the first time I’ve seen fear on the face of a child who was afraid to fail,” recalled the principal. Children and teachers care about their school and are anguished when their own performance is poor and their school carries a negative label, despite their efforts to succeed.

**Teachers’ perceptions about NCLB**

Following the discussions in the classrooms with eight focus groups of 176 teachers, about 93% of the teachers were concerned about the compelling pressure of the NCLB Act on their work. Apathetically, the general feeling was that it is just one more thing they have to do and perhaps one more thing that may not last. As one teacher put it, “The NCLB Act has come like a powerful hurricane of category 7 magnitude! It came overnight to discredit virtually all our efforts. Now we are being asked to work harder than ever before without adequate remunerations.” Another teacher agreed, “When students do not do well, accusing fingers are pointed at us as if we don’t teach well enough. They forget that it is one thing to take a presumably thirsty horse to water, it is another thing to make the horse drink it.” This teacher further lamented,

> “Some students are just not prepared to learn. For example, in an attempt to enhance learning, we were told to adopt the principle of constructivism in teaching, especially in an attempt to encourage students to self-discover learning and be more responsible for their own learning. Whereas for constructivism to be effective, it requires small classroom settings where individualized attention and differentiated instruction are practicable. One could imagine how hectic it is to teach five subjects in a day with an average class size of 25-30 for each of the classes!”

In buttressing the above conjecture, a teacher asked, “If we believe in a constructivist teaching and its effects on enhancing learning and we have research to support our ideas, why do you think it has not been embraced by the US education system and why do we continue to focus on standardized testing and teaching to the test?” Another teacher added, “The NCLB Act is not making us teach the whole child anymore. The high-stake testing and unending demands for accountability are only good at making us teach to the test simply to make students pass the standardized tests and avoid our schools being labeled as failing or in need of improvement.”

About 95% of the teachers were concerned about the role of media being indulged in orchestrating standardized test results, especially through haphazard and misleading ranking of schools. One teacher argued, “The portrayal of teachers in negative images is just not fair. While these make us lose our integrity to the public, the real estate agents often use the ranking of the test scores to boost the housing business, especially for districts that have been publicized for doing better than others.” Another teacher claimed that the publicity of state and district achievement data is also responsible for the apparent “flight” of parents and their wards from low-performing to high-performing school districts. “The media’s negative image of low-performing schools and the ensuing flights of students present an ugly impression that teachers in such school districts are ineffective and marginal.”

**Parents’ perceptions about NCLB**

Parent perceptions about NCLB range broadly among different districts and communities. Some focus group participants felt that many parents do not fully understand the law. Other parents are frustrated when NCLB provisions, such as requesting a transfer to another school, do not result in marked differences in educational opportunity. Still other parents worry about increased time for testing and decreased time for learning. Parents in one community even felt that the law was irrelevant—only one more tool designed to encourage skepticism toward public education. In one-on-one interviews with 15 parents (7 Blacks, 6 Latinos, 2 Whites), especially from Title I inner city schools in Hartford, New Britain, and New Haven, concerns were expressed that the NCLB sanctions against low-performing schools would soon engulf their children’s schools. One hundred percent (100%) of the parents claimed that the low-performance of their children were due to inequitable access to educational opportunities, including funding inequalities and substandard conditions of teaching and learning in their school districts.

Superintendents and principals agreed that at the end of the day, the score that meant the most to students and parents was the SAT (Scholastic Aptitude Test) score, something not reported under NCLB. In the words of one superintendent, “When high school students are applying to the colleges and universities of their choice, they ask for three or four things, and the SAT is usually one of them.”

**Lost opportunities**

While NCLB focuses on sanctions, there were other ways to have crafted the legislation in order to achieve its objectives. According to participating superintendents, the law does not embrace the notion of systemic reform. A superintendent described the school as the largest unit of reform and each school exists within a community context with local strengths and needs best understood and addressed by local decision makers. Thus, efforts
toward school improvement must not only be grounded in valid, relevant research and practice, but must also reflect the contextual needs of each school.

Another point of discussion was the respective organizational capacities of the federal government, state government, and school districts to collaborate efforts on behalf of student learning. One participant asserted that, far more than states or districts, the federal government has “a tremendous capacity to do work in terms of creating and disseminating effective research” to improve instruction. He noted that although exciting things were happening through grants and other initiatives, for example, in reading, this information rarely reached the typical first grade teacher who could “integrate it, understand it, and apply it.” Developing a repertoire of scientifically-based but varied pedagogical methods would also allow classroom teachers to contextualize their decisions regarding instruction and assessment to the needs of their students.

Worse yet, superintendents and principals worried that debating the pros and cons of the specific provisions of the law diverted energy and resources away from student achievement, another consequence of the burden of implementation detail. “The irony is that we may lose [NCLB] as a public policy and sustaining that public policy because of the weight, the political weight, of the detail,” noted one superintendent.

Impact of NCLB on CMT and CAPT
The irony of NCLB within the Connecticut context was also not lost on local superintendents. They recalled the state’s informed and inclusive efforts to develop the Connecticut Mastery Test (CMT) and the Connecticut Academic Performance Test (CAPT). An understanding of these assessments begins with their history, which included input by both local educators and outside professionals. Today, in contrast to the commercially developed assessments used years ago, the CMT and CAPT are recognized by Connecticut educators as relevant, “psychometrically clean examinations” which measure important content and offer a basis for comparison across the state’s schools and districts. As a result, the tests are the centerpiece of assessment in Connecticut and inform the development of district and classroom assessments across the state. Superintendents and principals alike worry that the demands of NCLB will sidetrack Connecticut’s vision and direction.

No politics left behind
The breadth of the political support for NCLB was clearly understood, as evidenced by comments in the focus group discussions among Superintendents. The fact that 80% of the legislatures at the national level passed the law demonstrated that the legislation was grounded in the “fundamental beliefs that are ... embraced by America today,” including equitable educational experiences and school accountability. At first, it appeared that support was bi-partisan, as well, until educators began to learn more about why political leaders voted for passing the law. One superintendent recalled hearing a speaker at a recent conference address the issue directly: “The Republicans were behind this because of the voucher model; Democrats were behind it because they thought it would initiate court-mandated funding changes.” Superintendents were also concerned that “the more virulent provisions of the law. . . [were] a kind of set up, leading to privatization in general.”

In Connecticut, congressional legislators have been convening superintendent task forces and focus groups to obtain feedback about the continuing implementation of the law. Participating district leaders noticed that, while some politicians seemed more defensive of the law, others continue to agitate for its modification.

Future advocacy for NCLB
In the present economic climate, districts and schools are caught in the crosswinds of constricted local budgets and un-funded or under-funded federal and state mandates. Nonetheless, while advocating for the reauthorization of the NCLB Act, superintendents and principals in the CCSU focus groups did not hesitate to suggest some modifications that might more positively support student learning. These included:

- stronger equitable fiscal support for all schools to serve the needs of all students;
- clarification of our educational goals. How do we want children to learn and grow?
- preservation of the intent of NCLB;
- an understanding of what we need to do to scale up improvement of student performance;
- stronger dissemination of research-based instructional strategies to close the achievement gap;
- implementation of a family-oriented resource model which would provide high quality interventions for parents and high quality early interventions for their children;
- a strong federal role in universal pre-school programs, beginning as early as 1.8 years of age;
- extended instructional opportunities for low performing students to prevent learning loss;
- stronger policy support for the mandates of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act;
- making all public schools more attractive to parents and students, especially through provisions of standard learning conditions, equitable resources, and high quality teachers;
- reducing average class size to below 20 pupils across all schools in the state in order to reap the benefits of small classes, including enhanced learning conditions and student achievement.
Further to this advocacy, the organizers of the event have called for further research into alternatives to closing schools and assigning students as well as strategies for achieving the seven performance-based titles addressed in the NCLB blueprint: improving the academic performance of disadvantaged students; boosting teacher quality; moving limited English proficiency students to English fluency; promoting informed parental choice and innovative programs; encouraging safe schools for the 21st century; increasing funding for impact aid; and encouraging freedom and accountability (Bush, 2001).

Conclusion
In this paper, we have presented the voices from the field regarding the challenges of the NCLB Act. Although we are keen advocate of educational excellence, we would not want to claim that the NCLB Act as implemented today, readily offers any appreciable fundamental solution. Rather, it manifests a knee-jerk reaction.

As generally agreed upon by the participating school administrators at the CCSU’s focus group interviews, each of the evolving themes and initiatives requires advocacy for more manageable policies and adequate funding. In addition, accomplishing real and meaningful progress in reducing the achievement gap and attaining 100% proficiency on state tests for all students by the 2013-2014 school-year as mandated by the Act will demand significant changes to the fiscal structure in Connecticut and at the federal level. Whether or not the states and the federal government are able to make these resources and programs an imperative may well be the deciding factor in whether this ambitious law will be left behind.

Overall, while the authors of this paper agree with the intent of the NCLB policy to strengthen American educational system and make schools more accountable for the education of every child, we detest the law that forces schools to “teach to the test” just for the sake of not losing funding. For all practical and positive result-oriented purposes, the authors believe in an educational system that is driven by achievable goals and what Susan Ohanian (2004) has referred to as “standards of conscience” rather than deceitful philosophical slogans. Finally, without necessary modification and adequate funding, it is apt to conclude that the NCLB is simply a white elephant which does nothing other than to put a cog in the wheel of the American educational system.

References


Anniversaries are excellent reminders of men, women, and events from the past, and publishers quickly capitalize on anniversaries as noted by the flurry of books published in 1992 to celebrate the quincentennial of Christopher Columbus’s arrival in the Americas, again in 2003 to honor Lewis and Clark’s grand expedition to the west, and in 2007 to celebrate the 400th anniversary of the settlement of Jamestown. Likewise, this is the case with the approach of February 12, 2009, the 200th anniversary of the birth of Abraham Lincoln, perhaps the most popular president in the United States.

Many may wonder why we need more books about Lincoln since there are already many excellent books about the 16th president of the United States of America. Indeed, biographies of Abraham Lincoln have won the two most prestigious awards for children’s literature: Ingrid and Edvard Parin d’Aulaire received the Caldecott Medal for their Abraham Lincoln (1939) in 1940, and Russell Freedman won the Newbery Medal for his Lincoln: A Photobiography (1987) in 1988. Other well-known nonfiction authors have focused on Lincoln. For instance, Jean Fritz composed Just a Few Words, Mr. Lincoln: The Story of the Gettysburg Address (1993), Albert Marrin authored Commander in Chief: Abraham Lincoln and the Civil War (1997), Raymond Bial penned Where Lincoln Walked (1998), and Melton Meltzer edited Lincoln: In His Own Words (1993). Given the abundance of quality books on Lincoln, why, then, do we need new books about the man?

Two prominent children’s trade book authors recently addressed this question. Candace Fleming noted that “... Lincoln study is a living, breathing process, one in which new facts are revealed and old facts reconsidered” (Fleming & Hopkinson, 2008, p. 45). Fleming’s four years of research in preparation for writing her new book, The Lincolns: A Scrapbook Look at Abraham and Mary (2008), enabled her to see that “there are still unknown, meaningful discoveries waiting to be revealed. And these discoveries are dramatically altering some of our best-known and accepted Lincoln stories” (p.44). Moreover, she noted that many “historical gems continued to be unearthed” (p.45). These previously unknown artifacts include 25 letters written by Mary...
Lincoln and discovered in a “forgotten steamer trunk beneath the eaves of a Maryland attic” (p.44) and 570 notations written in Lincoln’s handwriting unearthed at the National Archives.

Deborah Hopkinson suggests that the new books about Lincoln “will encourage even young children to begin to think about the past in new ways” (Fleming & Hopkinson, 2008, p.46). As children listen to and read multiple texts they will see that history is much more than facts and dates. They are not only exposed to facts and various viewpoints about Lincoln, but prompted to think about them as historians.

History that focuses on events, issues, and people is fascinating and inviting to children, while a focus on names and dates simply bores them. In this article, we examine a selection of the new biographies and picture books published in anticipation of the bicentennial of Lincoln’s birth.

**Lincoln from birth to death**

Jim Aylesworth wrote a rhyming biography for kindergarten through second grade children, *Our Abe Lincoln* (2009). In his author’s note, Aylesworth explains that “Old Abe Lincoln Came Out of the Wilderness” was a Lincoln-era presidential campaign song sung to the tune of “The Old Gray Mare.” The author’s retelling introduces young children to the life and death of one of America’s greatest, kindest, and wisest presidents. An example of the rhythmic rhymes follows: “Smart Abe Lincoln read late by the firelight/ Late by the firelight/ Late by the firelight/ Smart Abe Lincoln read late by the firelight/ Many dark nights ago.”

McClintock’s stylistic pen and ink drawings portray school children in costume presenting a delightful musical pageant celebrating Lincoln’s life and accomplishments. This book is sure to engage even the youngest school children in “singing history.”

Children will learn about Lincoln’s childhood, political ambitions, marriage, family and presidency in Janet Pascal’s *Who Was Abraham Lincoln* (2008), a clear and simple biography for children in grades three through six. There are over 100 black-and-white illustrations and maps that add a pictorial account. Sidebars on important topics ranging from Whigs and Democrats to abolitionists appear throughout the book. There are many anecdotes that will appeal to young readers such as, “By the time he was eight, he could pick up an ax and split wood as well as any man” (p. 7). Another, “He was famous for practical jokes. He once managed to have two men who were getting married on the same day delivered to the wrong brides” (p. 12). And last, Lincoln’s son “Tad once made a sled out of a chair and had a goat pull him right through the middle of an elegant party” (p. 59). This text will bring history alive and expand all readers’ knowledge of this beloved American president.

- Readers can compare the information found with another biography such as David Adler’s (1990) *A Picture Book of Abraham Lincoln*.
- Students can create their own Lincoln timeline or a lifeline that has key events in Lincoln’s life on one side of the line and world events on the other.
- Readers can collect additional stories about the growing up years of presidents and create a table that illustrates similarities and differences in their early days and Lincoln’s.

**The young Abraham Lincoln**

There are moments in everyone’s lives that are turning points, moments when lives change based on a single choice or influence. Judith St. George illustrated many of the pivotal moments that Abraham Lincoln faced throughout his life in *Stand Tall, Abe Lincoln* (2008). One of the most important was the death of his beloved mother Nancy when he was ten. Had it not been for his new stepmother, who brought love and books into the household, who knows what might have happened to the young Abe? Filled with smiling images of a young boy torn between obedience to his father and his desire to learn more, this picture book depicts a loving, inquisitive
Abraham Lincoln living, learning, and playing in the backwoods of Kentucky and Indiana. Readers will feel warmed by the author’s account of Abe reading stories by the fire to his family, and will be inspired that a poor farm boy could rise to be president of the United States. Matt Faulkner’s gouache illustrations skillfully capture the dramatic events of the young Abraham Lincoln.

Teachers will find this picture book divided into short chapters appropriate for kids in grades one through four.

- Students can create Venn diagrams to compare and contrast the childhood of Lincoln with that of the newly elected president.
- Students can create visual representations of Abe’s homes in Kentucky and Indiana.
- Students can write a letter from Abraham to his stepmother on the eve of his inauguration.

**Family matters**

Students (and teachers) will enjoy reading books about Lincoln’s family. We first highlight two books about the Lincoln's sons and then a detailed scrapbook look at the Lincoln family.

Most of us think of Abraham Lincoln as being solemn, weighted down by the burdens of a union being split in half, concerned about the battles raging around him. Staton Rabin’s 40-page picture book, Mr. Lincoln’s Boys: Being the Mostly True Adventures of Abraham Lincoln’s Trouble-making Sons, Tad and Willie (2008), points out that he was also the father of four boys, two of them mischievous spirits who loved to tease the White House staff and distract their father from his presidential responsibilities. This picture book biography shows the human side of Lincoln as he played with his two sons, Willie and Tad, and even issues a pardon for their toy soldier, punished and buried continuously in the rose garden. The text reveals the patience Lincoln had for his boys, while Bagram Ibatoulline’s glowing acrylic and gouache illustrations warm the White House mansion and its residents. With a slight curve of his mouth, Lincoln welcomes his children’s escapades for the sheer joy of life they bring. Back matter includes a cast of characters and additional resources for readers to
explore. The fact that Willie would die in 1862, not long after the events described in the book, offers a poignant reminder of the fleetingness of time for third through fifth graders.

In *Lincoln and His Boys*, Rosemary Wells (2009) creates dialog to support her impeccable research on the relationship between the famous president and his two youngest sons. (The eldest, Robert, was a student at Harvard.) The three chapters are written from the viewpoints of his boys, Willie and Tad. In the first chapter, Willie tells the story of his first train trip and about his father’s decision to run for president. “Father smiles that big grin that changes his whole face, and his eyes come back to me. ‘Next year I will skunk Senator Douglas!’” (p. 25). Willie and Tad then recount their days in the White House, interrupting Cabinet meetings, and trying to raise their father’s spirits during the early days of the Civil War. Finally, Tad recounts his train trip to Richmond after the South’s surrender. Back in Washington, “Papa-day tells the crowd there is no room for anger or hatred in our land” (p. 90). The book covers the time period of 1859 through 1865 and ends on April 11th, only three days before Lincoln’s assassination. P. J. Lynch’s beautiful, evocative oil paintings lovingly portray Abraham Lincoln and his family members from different angles and different lightings. This short chapter book will be welcome reading by students in grades three through seven.

Most lives are filled with mundane details, but what once seemed pedestrian becomes intriguing when someone becomes famous. This is certainly the case with Abraham and Mary Lincoln. Candace Fleming’s (2008) brilliant *The Lincolns: A Scrapbook Look at Abraham and Mary* provides an intriguing visual and written history of this famous couple. Avid historians and history teachers will want to browse through at will, gleaning rarely revealed tidbits about the courtship between Abraham and Mary Todd and how their love match was almost not made. Readers will want to savor the anecdotes in this book ever so slowly, prolonging the process of reading enjoyment. Everything about the book is nostalgic, from the font chosen to the many black and white illustrations and borders that separate the different entries. Turning through this scrapbook is akin to leaning over a family scrapbook lovingly maintained by proud parents. Fleming includes enough details and interesting information to please even the most ardent Lincoln scholar, such as the recipe for Lincoln’s favorite white cake, his love for dogs, and Mary’s early days as a schoolgirl. The scrapbook even follows Mary after the death of the President through the “betrayal” by her adult son Robert. We feel this book is sure to be a welcome addition to classroom libraries for students from fourth grade through high school.

- Students can research and report on other child occupants of the White House.
- Students can create a scrapbook with key events in the life of another president.
- Students can write a multigenre report about Abraham Lincoln.
- Students can conduct further research to account for the discrepant events found in various books.
- Students can research and report about other first ladies.

**Powerful words**

Sarah L. Thomson weaves Lincoln’s actual words into this simple biographical account of key events in his life. In *What Lincoln Said* (2009), Lincoln’s spoken words are always printed in red or yellow to distinguish them from Thomson’s own text. The author highlights Lincoln’s values and positive traits: “Leave nothing for tomorrow that can be done today,” and “Resolve to be honest at all events.” In response to the plight of nearly four million slaves in the United States, Lincoln stated, “If slavery is not wrong, nothing is wrong.” Yet, Thomson emphasizes that to Lincoln, the Civil War was more about holding the Union together than about ending slavery. James Ransome’s humorous, winsome acrylic paintings emphasize Lincoln’s long legs, warm smile, and folksy charm. The book includes a Lincoln timeline and an afterword on “Lincoln and Slavery.” We feel that all elementary students—even those in Kindergarten—will enjoy listening to this engaging book. The book lacks source notes for the selected quotes.

*Abe’s Honest Words: The Life of Abraham Lincoln* (2008) is one of the most beautiful new books this year for students in grades two through five. Doreen Rappaport reminds readers that Abraham Lincoln loved reading books and listening to storytellers, lawyers, and preachers—he loved voices and words. “He stored these different voices in his heart and wove them into his own words.” Doreen Rappaport weaves Lincoln’s own words into this free-verse biography describing the life
of one who overcame many obstacles and challenges to become an icon of honesty, integrity, hard work, and compassion. Kadir Nelson's powerful paintings are equal to Rappaport's inspiring text and Abraham Lincoln's noble life. Back matter includes a Lincoln timeline, recommended readings for youth wanting to learn more about Lincoln, selected research sources, and the text of "The Gettysburg Address."

Gettysburg, the Graphic Novel (2008) by C. M. Butzer helps fourth through ninth grade readers understand the events leading up to "The Gettysburg Address," including the horrific battles and lives lost. Using the various sizes of panels familiar to fans of graphic novels, the author/illustrator depicts the battle sweeping into the town itself, inadvertently drawing its reluctant citizens into the bloody conflict. The stark black and white illustrations of the dead will make readers aware of war's human toll. Butzer's reliance on primary sources such as letters, diaries and speeches lends credibility to his efforts. In one two-page spread, as Lincoln states that this government "shall not perish from the earth," the president's presence is particularly evident (although many in the vast audience were unaware that his brief speech had occurred). Later, as he walks through the cemetery and notes the many tombstones, there is a palpable sense of sorrow. The author's notes at the end provide explanations for the panels and offer additional detail for curious readers.

- Students research and share other presidents' "famous words" and speeches.
- Students can create a comic book report about a major event in the life of Abraham Lincoln or a US president of their choice.
- Adapt a Lincoln speech for readers theatre or choral reading so students can become familiar with Lincoln's eloquent words.

**Little known friendships**

Deborah Hopkinson's *Abe Lincoln Crosses a Creek: A Tall, Thin Tale (Introducing His Forgotten Frontier Friend)* (2008) is ideal for reading aloud in grades one through four. This story, based on an actual event from Abraham Lincoln's childhood, is told in a conversational tone, accompanied by illustrations in pen-and-ink and watercolor. Two best friends (Abe and Austin) follow some birds into the woods and forget Abe's mother's advice—"Don't go too near the creek!" Even though neither boy can swim, they decide to attempt a crossing. Hopkinson asks questions of the reader as the story unfolds. "I mean, would Abe and Austin really have WALKED across a log over that whirlpool? They weren't that foolish were they? No, I'm almost sure they would have crawled! So let's try again." You can imagine what happens next, but to add a twist to this historical account, different versions are shared. Thankfully, there is only one ending—Benjamin Austin Gollaher rescues seven-year-old Abe, and our country benefits from his heroic act. Hopkinson reminds readers that they should "Remember Austin Gollaher, because what we do matters even if we don't end up in history books."

Nikki Giovanni recounts another friendship for children in grades two through six in *Lincoln and Douglass: An American Friendship* (2008). This colorful book opens with President Lincoln's second inaugural reception as he awaits a special visit from abolitionist Frederick Douglass. The story then flashes back to scenes from each man's humble beginnings—Douglass' escaping from slavery and Lincoln returning five cents to a clerk who gave him too much change. Both learned how to read by kerosene light. A trip to New Orleans opened Lincoln's eyes to the cruelty of slavery, and the men formed a bond over this shared hatred of human trafficking. The book then returns to the grand occasion at the White House where the richly painted pages open up to a large illustration of the Civil War with the words, "the grimness of war hung over the festivities." Finally, Frederick Douglass arrives at the celebration and both men conclude that, "All journeys are long." Their unique friendship definitely helped shape our country. Collier's stunning watercolor and collage illustrations enhance the author's engaging text. Although the book will bring well-deserved additional attention to Douglass, it would be stronger if it included documentation.

- Encourage students to write about how good friends have positively influenced their lives.
- Mary Lincoln put a great deal of time and energy into restoring and improving the conditions and appearance of the White House. Students may
want to conduct research to see what changes other first ladies have made to the presidential mansion.

- Students can research and share about the things Mary Lincoln did for Frederick Douglass after the president’s death.

**Love for animals**

In Ellen Jackson’s *Abe Lincoln Loved Animals* (2008), the author traces Lincoln’s lifelong love of animals and shares several anecdotes that reveal the compassionate nature the president had for all living things. Each anecdote is brief and supported by a bibliography so that curious readers can find out more. Young readers will be intrigued to learn that Lincoln was the first to sign a presidential pardon for the Thanksgiving turkey, a tradition that lives on even now. Photography buffs may be interested to note that Fido, a beloved family dog whose photograph is on the title page, was the first presidential pet to be captured on film. In its brief pages, this picture book paints a sentimental image of the kindly, caring president that is complemented by the soft pastels of the artwork. We feel that this book is especially suited for children in grades two through four.

- As a class, students can create a booklet listing the pets of other presidents and their children.
- Students can create a graph illustrating the most popular White House pets.

**A highly photographed president**

Martin Sandler’s *Lincoln Through the Lens: How Photography Revealed and Shaped an Extraordinary Life* (2008) is a fascinating book for students in grades five through nine. Filled with more than 100 archival photographs of Lincoln and the ravages of the Civil War, this book examines how photography both revealed the president’s personality and shaped the public’s perception of the man. There are many presidential photos and
full-page shots of Civil War battlefields. The text offers insight into Lincoln, whose somber visage was partly the result of the slowness of early camera work. This book is as much about photography as it is about Lincoln. His love for his family is particularly evident in a photograph of Lincoln taking time to read with his son Tad. Photographs taken by Matthew Brady and Alexander Gardner offer vivid proof that pictures are worth much more than words. Especially chilling is the photograph of Lincoln’s second inauguration with several conspirators standing nearby:

- Ask students to choose a recent president and to find pictures to show how he changed while in office.
- Students can search for photographic images of the candidates who sought the nomination for president from their political parties and compare how they were depicted in the media.
- Students can locate editorial cartoons depicting a president and/or a presidential candidate and compare those images with presidential photographs.

**Tragic death**

In Robert Burleigh’s (2008) picture book, *Abraham Lincoln Comes Home*, Luke and his father travel at night by horse and buggy to meet a train with a unique burden: the body of an assassinated president. Elegant words and Wendell Minor’s stunning, somber gouache and watercolor images portray grieving Americans paying their last respects to their beloved president while giving today’s readers a sense of being there as the funeral train makes its thirteen-day trek from Washington, DC to Springfield, IL. “Luke could see Abe Lincoln’s picture above the cowcatcher. He felt the ground shiver under his feet. In the eerie orange glow, tears were streaming down his father’s cheeks. Luke had never seen his father cry before.” As the train journeys through the hearts and lands of America, readers are left hopeful that the nation itself will endure even after the demise of its leader. An afterword provides both a factual account of and interesting facts about the funeral train. This picture book is appropriate for children in grade two and higher.

Readers will be drawn to Barry Denenberg’s striking biography, *Lincoln Shot: A President’s Life* (2008), for many reasons, including its size (18 inches tall) and newspaper format composed in the style of a commemorative edition marking the first year anniversary of the president’s death. Readers are likely to feel as though they are opening the pages of a century-old newspaper complete with headlines with somber fonts that stretch across two pages in places. Bing’s variously shaded woodcut illustrations, along with archival photos on paper designed to look like yellowed newsprint, add to the appearance of a 19th-century newspaper that appears to have aged with time. Weaving Lincoln’s life story throughout the book, Denenberg takes readers back to the day of the Lincoln assassination, providing them with a sense of immediacy as if they themselves are experiencing those tragic events. In addition to accounts of the conspiracy and assassination, articles about the president’s family, and even faux advertisements provide upper elementary and middle school readers with the experience of reading the news and trends of yesterday today.
James Swanson’s (2009) Chasing Lincoln’s Killer: The Search for John Wilkes Booth will have great appeal for students in grades five through nine. How the assassin of President Abraham Lincoln managed not to get caught for twelve days is the real mystery in this book for young readers. From John Wilkes Booth’s botched attempt to kidnap Abraham Lincoln to his opportunistic assassination of the president at the Ford Theatre to his somehow getting lost as he tried to escape across the river to Virginia, the assassin and his fellow conspirators seem determined to be caught. When Booth makes his last stand in a farmhouse set on fire by government agents, the reader is somewhat relieved to have the whole sordid episode draw to a close with Booth’s death. The book describes vividly how Booth drew together a ragtag collection of men who helped him undermine Lincoln’s administration. Readers may shudder at the justice that was meted out in those days with four conspirators hanged, including Mary Surratt, whose guilt was never actually proved. The use of fonts that complement the somber tone of the book, as well as the inclusion of photographs of the men at the heart of the conspiracy, add to the compelling quality of this historical page-turner.

- Older students can research the assassins of Presidents James Garfield, William McKinley, and John F. Kennedy.
- Students can compare the events following Lincoln’s death with that of Kennedy’s.
- Students can create their own newspaper articles about the events following the assassination of Abraham Lincoln.
- Middle school students who want to learn more about Lincoln’s assassination and his assassin may want to read Rick Geary’s compelling graphic nonfiction account of The Murder of Abraham Lincoln (2005), or James Cross Giblin’s Good Brother, Bad Brother: The Story of Edwin Booth and John Wilkes Booth (2005).
- Students may enjoy searching for music that would have been appropriate to play at Lincoln’s funeral or along the funeral train’s path.

**Conclusion**

We conclude with a quote from Deborah Hopkinson: “The 2009 Lincoln bicentennial presents a wonderful opportunity to explore historical inquiry with children through an array of books about the Lincolns” (Fleming & Hopkinson, 2008, p. 46).

**References**


**Children’s books cited**


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Differentiated instruction: How are design, essential questions in learning, assessment, and instruction part of it?

Sandip Wilson
Husson University, Maine

The authors of the books reviewed here have different perspectives on differentiated instruction. Wormeli (2008) points out that differentiated instruction is preparing students for a variety of learning and life situations they will encounter. In part differentiated instruction is adjusting both the curriculum and students’ skills to promote dexterity, critical during students’ formal schooling (p. 9).

Perhaps, a simple way of looking at differentiated instruction, from the various perspectives, practices, definitions, and protocols discussed in all the books is that differentiated instruction is about making space, making space for meeting the individual needs of students to become even more powerful readers, making space for varied ways of demonstrating learning and achievement, making space for students to build knowledge of the world through questions that engage their imagination, and making space for practitioners to continue their own learning to refine instruction so that each student has opportunities to learn and show achievement.


In their engaging book, Tomlinson and McTighe argue that differentiated instruction and backward planning go together. Combining them is the foundation of instruction in a sound curriculum. With backward planning teachers establish outcomes, what they envision students are able to do and know as a result of the instruction and learning. They design various kinds of evidence to demonstrate that learning, and finally, devise and revise instruction that enables students to achieve the outcomes. The authors focus their discussion on how each stage works, in a diverse classroom, complete with templates for thinking, talking, planning, and instruction. They explain the teaching involved, including grouping, assessment, and recording and reporting achievement. The authors outline simple principles, or axioms, based on current best understandings of teaching and learning, and then provide a lengthy classroom vignette illustrating one. “Simply put, quality classrooms evolve around powerful knowledge that works for each student” (p. 3). The goal of backward planning is “guiding application of sound principles of curriculum design” (p. 2) and the goal of differentiated instruction is “ensuring that teachers focus on processes and procedures that ensure effective learning for varied individuals” (p. 3). The book is a practical guide showing how the two work together.

Tomlinson and McTighe acknowledge the challenge of addressing curricular outcomes and note findings of researchers who examined 160 national state-level standards that yielded 255 standards and 3,968 benchmarks. The researchers calculated that with 30 minutes of instructional time allocated for
each one, thousands of extra hours of school would be needed for students to learn them all. The question the authors address is: How can teachers make time and instruction count? What is essential? What does the most work to deal with so many demands? The authors present ideas that will challenge readers, perhaps provoke opposing views. In their chapter devoted to teaching in academically diverse classrooms they tackle the issue on the pressure of covering content that teachers frequently talk about while lamenting the lack of time. The authors play with the word “cover,” meaning to skim the surface, and propose a new job description of uncovering content. “When we speak of uncovering content, we refer to teaching methods that go into depth to engage students in making meaning of content” (p. 28).

To become “uncoverers” of content the authors begin with generating essential questions, and determining outcomes based on what they call “six facets of thinking as part of learning experiences” (p. 116). Students explain, interpret, apply what they learn. They take perspectives by analyzing, comparing, criticizing experience and information. They exhibit empathy by assuming roles, expressing beliefs, being open to ideas, imagining; and they develop self-knowledge, increased awareness about experience, self-assessment. The authors suggest a framework for instruction, which they name WHERE TO, an acronym that has embedded questions. For instance, the “W” includes such questions as: “Why is this worth learning? What evidence will show their learning?” (p. 121). The framework makes a useful heuristic for the process of design and instruction and the self-reflection that goes with it.

The authors argue for the inclusion of essential questions, big ideas, in the curriculum that can capture constellations of benchmarks and integrate a variety of content in classroom instruction. For instance, in studying climate, geography, and natural resources, a question that could touch many cultures and places is: “How does where people live influence how they live?” (p. 26). The authors suggest big idea, essential questions, open-ended and contestable for different content areas. “Cultures share common features while retaining unique qualities,” they write. “What makes a civilization? Are modern civilizations more civilized than ancient ones?” (p. 26). Designing essential questions is a challenge for teachers and yet, for Tomlinson and McTighe, the process is at the root of instruction. The book is a must read for reading specialists, curriculum coordinators, teachers, librarians, and an excellent book for professional development study groups. Abundant anecdotes and vignettes illustrate principles, and metaphors explain concepts. The book will provoke much stimulating conversation. It includes sites, resources, templates for planning and self-reflection, and many ideas for teaching.

In the beginning of their book, Walpole and McKenna define the meaning of differentiated instruction as instruction “that targets a particular group of children’s needs directly and temporarily” (p. 2). The authors argue that differentiated instruction, as they define it, applies a developmental model and assumes that different children have different needs in different areas of reading. One child needs instruction, for instance, in fluency, or comprehension, or in certain aspects of word recognition. They further argue that in order to “reach higher-level reading comprehension goals, we must first help children achieve automatic access to words” (p. 2). And finally, differentiated instruction “supplements high-quality, grade level, whole-group instruction” (p. 2). The supplemental instruction follows three instructional tiers through which students receive increasingly intensive instruction, modeled after Reading First of No Child Left Behind that provides funding for kindergarten through third grade.

Readers of this book may challenge the limited, yet, largely defensible definition of differentiated instruction. The chapter on assessment provides useful questions for instruction regardless of the readers’ position on reading instruction. The discussion of four kinds of assessment is less critical for teachers than the questions that can guide next steps based on the assessment. For instance, in their checklist for forming groups related to word recognition they write, “When a sight word inventory has revealed that the child cannot recognize high-frequency words… a needs-based group can be formed and instruction planned” (p. 26). In arguing for multiple kinds of intervention, they write, “Because a limited sight vocabulary does not imply adequate phonics knowledge, screening in the area of phonics is also indicated, and teachers might develop groups for work in both areas” (p. 26). For vocabulary, phonics and phonological awareness, and comprehension the authors have outlined a useful sequence of questions to explore with students in determining what instruction and support they need.

Following the introductory chapters, each chapter focuses on a different reading component presented in the same organizational format beginning with a section on research and reviews, which is conversational in tone, a section on foundational teacher knowledge, issues and information to think about, sometimes sensible and encouraging, such as, “No program in phonemic awareness activities will be perfect for all children; teachers must make important decisions at the level of implementation” (p. 34), and a discussion
of the importance of teacher expertise and judgment. The last section is encouraging to teachers who feel the constraints of scripted instruction that leaves little room for judgment, and would rather be able to tailor their instruction to individual needs and contexts. Yet, at times the research and reviews include ideas that might challenge teachers in their planning. For instance, in the chapter on fluency the authors write, “Repeated reading to an adult was more effective than repeated reading to a peer, both in building fluency and comprehension... to improve fluency on a particular passage, students should be told directly to read to build fluency” (p. 71). Such research data challenges teachers to increase time spent with individual students and suggests that setting purposes for building fluency is as important as it is in reading for meaning.

In each chapter the authors discuss which students might best benefit from the focus of the chapter, the research base for the activities, materials needed, implementing the activity for the focus, including a section suggesting ways the teacher will know whether the activities—instruction and intervention—are helping the students. At the end of the book are chapters devoted to making plans for small group instruction in three primary grades. As much as this book is a review of the literature and a handbook of instructional strategies, it is a book with something for everyone, some of it reinforcing, some of it affirming, some of it new. On the one hand it offers instruction that accommodates contemporary reading initiatives and on the other it reinforces the need for teacher judgment, insight, intuition, and understanding of materials, instruction, and students.


In this companion volume to another whose focus is the younger reader in K-3, Tyner and Green take a developmental reading approach to the structure of the book. They describe the characteristics of the evolving reader, one who is in the second to the fourth grade, the maturing reader, one in the fourth to the late sixth grade, and the advanced reader, one from the late sixth to the eighth grade. For each set of characteristics they suggest the major emphasis for instruction and practice, and define reading components for the lesson from highly teacher scaffolded to independent reading.

Tyner and Green write that differentiated instruction has two definitions—the development of the simple to the complex tasks, and a difference between individuals that are otherwise similar in certain respects, such as age or grade. They argue that, in the intermediate classroom, readers “are often grouped together with little discrimination between abilities” (p. 3). For the authors, small group instruction “allows teachers to accommodate diverse needs of heterogeneously grouped students,” (p. 4) that takes into consideration developmental reading stages and the “print demands readers encounter at each stage” (p. 4). A notable feature of the book is that the authors articulate and dramatize instructional sequences that include the five components of reading, fluency, word study, and comprehension, expanding on what Walpole and McKenna have done in their book, also reviewed in this column. Tyner and Green have also included motivation as essential to success and they write, “In our experience, students become motivated when they are given text or activities they can successfully read and master” (p. 14). The instructional sequences they dramatize, using both narrative and expository text, include before, during, and after reading activities.

While the authors define kinds of practices, such as questioning involved in comprehension, they do not go into the instructional strategies for helping readers become adept at asking the different kinds of questions, such as those that ask for recall of information, those that are inferential, and those that are, according to the authors, application questions. What is a sequence of instruction for teaching how to question? How do students know how to ask an inferential question, when they may not know what an inferential question is? And are all inferences equal as critical to comprehension? Why do students need to know how to make inferential questions of different kinds of text, both narrative and expository? Although the authors discriminate between those asked by the teacher and those asked by the students, key points to remember appear to focus on teacher initiated questioning, needing to plan carefully, giving immediate feedback and explaining why an answer is correct. With questions that are inferential or more critical such as those asking for application, how can correctness be judged? As an aside, the challenge is to teach students procedures for recognizing clues for the kinds of questions that might be asked and to guide them in thinking about what inferences mean, how do people make them in their lives.

The authors pay attention to other aspects of comprehension, such as summarizing and finding important ideas. They write, “We believe summarizing is the most necessary comprehension component because it requires students to provide a general analysis and synthesis of key text components whether using a narrative or expository text selection” (p. 28), however, they do not provide procedures to help students learn what is needed to summarize, what they need to know about how text works, aside from answering questions of “who, what, when, where, and why” (p. 23). Such critical underpinning of differentiated instruction is material for another book.
Readers of the book will need to make a distinction between the reading and instructional strategies the authors present. For instance, they write, “If a teacher wants to activate prior knowledge, he or she may choose a K-W-L chart as the strategy to achieve this comprehension goal” (p. 9). Teachers will find many useful and engaging instructional strategies to support individual students. For instance, in word study, they describe word hunts, vocabulary word maps, and in understanding text structure as part of comprehension they describe activities called “the perfect setting” and secret sequence (p. 124). Appendices contain abundant handouts and masters for protocols, instructional strategies, assessments, word lists, and word study protocols divided into groups of the different developmental levels. The large format makes the book useful for professional study groups.


The authors convince readers that differentiated instruction includes many perspectives and where other books suggest instructional strategies that meet particular student's reading strengths and needs, Opitz and Ford offer strategies, frameworks for instruction, and research-based rationales. Organized with an overview of research at the beginning and frequently asked questions at the end, the authors present four models for instruction—reading groups without tracking, jigsaw groups, connected literature circles, and reading workshop. They write, “Differentiation during reading instruction needs to address the complex relationships among four critical elements: Reader, text, activity, and context” (p. 4). Teachers may not be able to control the kinds of differences they encounter in their students, they “do have some control over which texts to use with given students” (p. 5). According to the authors, “Differentiation should target key outcomes of a balanced literacy program that include local, global, and affective knowledge of reading” (p. 5). This view agrees with Tomlinson and McTighe, Smagorinsky, and Wilhelm, whose books are reviewed in this column. Opitz and Ford also suggest that differentiation takes into consideration contemporary classroom demands, English language learners in instruction, and note, “Teachers matter” (p. 17) in their expertise and decisions. “A teacher who provides dense instruction by addressing multiple goals for different students in same lesson is more able to differentiate instruction. Knowing where students are at, knowing where students need to be, and being able to provide a bridge between those points is a key for differentiating instruction “ (p. 20).

They distinguish their reading workshop from what they refer to as the studio approach in which students have a period when they select, read, and respond to books, and the focused model during which the teacher encourages readers to practice text and complete specific tasks. They integrate the scaffolding model of release of responsibility in the reading groups for each model, those who need high and low instruction, and those who need high and low indirect instruction and support, the last group being the strongest readers in a particular lesson and strategy for reading. The authors are circumspect as they offer advantages and disadvantages to each approach and grapple with the frequently asked question by teachers, “How do I manage everyone when I work with one or a few?”

In each chapter, one devoted to each model of reading instruction, the authors include a thorough lesson for early elementary students and one for older upper elementary students. They include intriguing book lists appropriate for each age group of strong and less strong readers that cut across genres and themes at the end of the chapters. Each lesson contains three parts—a frontloading section which is broadly construed to include accessing prior knowledge and building conceptual knowledge, as well as reading and thinking aloud and clear demonstrations, or modeling of reading strategies and practices. The second part is reading and response, and the third section is dedicated to extensions during which the whole group come together. Each section of the lesson looks different depending on the model, the strategy demonstrated, the text read, response, and extensions. The lessons are presented as though the reader is sitting in and listening with authors’ commentary in sidebars that draw attention to particular moves the teachers and students make. In its large format the book contains many charts with instructional strategies and general teaching suggestions. The combination of research and instructional practices make the book a valuable resource for elementary and middle school teachers.


Wormeli argues that differentiation is more than meeting student needs and interests and adapting instruction and outcomes that give them opportunities to demonstrate their learning. “We prepare students for the variety of learning and life situations they will encounter. So, while we may show students that they have a proclivity for visual-spatial thinking and suggest that they might want to record the lecture notes as a series of drawings and visual metaphors, we also teach them how to get better at expressing their thinking through the written word” (p. 9). Wormeli envisions a dexterity in adjusting both curriculum and students’...
skills to make sure students learn successfully, preparing them to handle anything in their current and future lives and to be “their own learning advocates” (p. 9).

The book has four major parts—a discussion of differentiation, a lengthy, in-depth walk through of a plan for a differentiated lesson, and exploration of instructional ideas based on cognitive science with tips for differentiation, and a section of differentiated learning experiences from multiple content areas. The in-depth lesson goes through planning before, during, and after instruction. It features a careful exploration of pre- and post-assessments that drive the lesson, enduring questions, examples of how to develop outcomes that reflect the curriculum—a hypothetical one for the purposes of the book, but certainly adaptable to specific teacher interests—and differentiated activities. In thinking about differentiating instructional activities, Wormeli notes, “Try to maintain a roughly equivalent work load for all students, regardless of their readiness. By workload, I refer to the time and energy needed to complete the tasks... Stay focused on changing the nature of the task in most cases” (p. 67).

In his discussion of structures and strategies for the differentiated class, Wormeli introduces the concept of the respectful task, as a task that breaks off chunks of the lesson into tasks that they can do with progressive complexity and that is related to the objectives of the instruction. If the objective is to undertake historical analysis, simply finding an alternative task, such as developing a travel brochure about the historical era under study, is not related to the work of learning about analysis. As an introductory task, students, in a small group, might tackle one aspect of the period, and present their findings in different ways. In his discussion of cognitive structures and tips for differentiation, Wormeli addresses a range of topics from grouping structures and ways of teaching students to look for similarities and differences, examples and non-examples of building connected knowledge, to ideas for memory and the value of emotional content.

The final section of the book, scenarios in different subjects make the book perfect for content area teachers. He includes general differentiation strategies, such as connecting new concepts with familiar ones, providing visual cues, breaking concepts down to smaller steps, creating a road map or flow chart of the steps involved, and specific strategies depending on the content. Scenarios come from mathematics, sums of interior angles, to literacy and writing, editing text, and more general scenarios, how to get more from lectures. Like Opitz and Ford, Wilhelm, and Smagorinsky, Wormeli gives differentiation a larger perspective for working with students at the same time that he demonstrates the ideas and procedures of Tomlinson and McTighe in backward planning.

The back matter contains an extensive bibliography of books on differentiation with specific titles for teachers just starting out on differentiation. Additional resources include related books on cognitive science, videos, and websites dedicated to differentiated practices. Additional videos and website resources and many appendices of activities, planning sequences, and visuals, such as his components of a great lesson are part of the back matter.


Smagorinsky challenges teachers to consider cultural context as well as the development and interests of each student in designing instruction. He argues that the design addresses overarching concepts such as a theme, a recurring idea or question (p. 47). Negotiating transitions is a concept that positions readers to think about content, reading, writing, and their lives. A concept is a strategy to reinforce a particular way of approaching reading and writing, attention to learning processes. Stance is yet another concept, which he notes, is a “perspective taken toward living and learning” (p. 47), such as determining and evaluating the speaker’s perspective in a story. Such a concept, central to instruction situates all readers in a conversation about reading and response. In talking about how students learn, he returns to the topic of overarching concepts in chapters on assessment, planning units. Smagorinsky provides many useful ideas that can be applied to any grade. Throughout his book, he places activities and lessons in a larger perspective that certainly can integrate standards for reading and writing. For instance, in his chapter on the basics of design he suggests that teachers attend to the constraints and outcomes of their curriculum, and understand the community of their students. He notes, “Understanding culture, while important, can also be dangerous if the understanding results in limiting stereotypes” (p. 132).

Smagorinsky’s cautionary note that teachers consider the developmental level of their students is no news for teachers, but his suggestions of a sequence of actions that reflect development are worthy of note in designing learning experiences. Students go from simple to complex, from concrete to abstract, from personal orientation to impersonal or multi-personal, from spontaneous activity to thought with less activity, from conception of objects to conception of their properties, from literal to symbolic, and from absolute to relative (pp. 132-133). As much as these are cognitive points of reference, they are considerations for instruction as Wilhelm points out in his book, also reviewed here. For instance, if the concept is identifying and evaluating perspectives, a teacher might provide students with an activity in which they...
discuss perspectives of an event during lunch time, before reading a simple text, such as comic strips or newspaper photos, for examining author perspective, and later proceeding to longer text in which the perspective is clearly stated, before undertaking more complex text of implied perspective.

He distinguishes conceptual units from simple topics, in how they involve students in "a conversation that deepens as they progress through the texts, activities, and discussions" (p. 112) as they investigate and interact with the concepts over time in different situations with different text. Within the unit, he makes distinctions between lesson and an activity. A "lesson is a shorter unit of instruction within the larger conceptual unit" (p. 114). A lesson includes different parts of the unit, a discussion of text such as a set of fables, an activity in which they compose a fable, using a heuristic for writing them and the conventions of fable, a tool of writing, and an assessment (p. 114). A lesson, then, includes a number of activities which are “related to the unit concepts and helps to prepare students for reaching the unit goals” (p. 115). The activity usually involves “interaction among people, production of text, the manipulation of ideas and/or objects, inductive development of strategies for learning, and open-ended tasks” (p. 115).

Smagorinsky discusses a variety of products through which students might try to demonstrate their response and learning—multimedia projects, process portfolios (which include pieces that demonstrate process as well as those that are considered inferior), various kinds of written work, art work, performance of music, plays, and electronic representations. For each of these demonstrations he provides guidelines and a sequence for teaching the processes students need for completing the product. For instance, if one of the outcomes is interpretive critique, he demonstrates activities that show students how to infer meaning. He suggests a variety of activities in which students can participate during the lessons, that encourage students to work individually, in pairs, and in groups. Each chapter is full of definitions and applications of terms that are familiar, such as the term activity, but, in his discussion, definition, and examples, he has polished their purpose and meaning.


The books I reviewed in this column have discussed differentiated instruction as ways to meet the needs of individual students at a particular time. It is dynamic; it changes as students become stronger in areas where they have been weak. Tomlinson and McTighe, and Smagorinsky show how all students can demonstrate learning and achievement to fulfill the outcomes. Both Smagorinsky and Wilhelm share a quality that enriches the instruction and design of the other books. In line with Tomlinson and McTighe’s question, “Why is this [topic] worth learning?” Wilhelm writes, “Teach so it matters” (p. 14) and examine reasons for why teachers and students read a text and keep in mind that inquiry has to do with being part of a community. Each disciplinary community—in science, history, composition—considers problems that organize the subject. He writes, “Go top down working on real problems of concern to [the students] and to the discipline. They must be connected to how knowledge is made and how knowledge can make a difference to the world” (pp. 14-15).

Wilhelm argues that to engage students in learning, instruction is situated in the purposeful exploration of questions. Inquiry, he says, is learning for living in the world, pursuing solutions and answers to relevant questions. Developing an inquiry starts with the question, then teachers identify final projects, such as, written arguments, multimedia displays, a living museum to explore the issue, and finally, teachers plan backwards, the activities and learning experiences that will “take them from where they are at the beginning of the unit to where they need to be to apply understanding” (p. 59). He suggests teachers consider principles of good sequencing, as Smagorinsky has noted, “Move from current knowledge to what they need to know, from talk and reading, ‘close to home’ to ‘further from home,’ from visual to non-visual, from concrete to abstract, from shorter texts to longer ones, from directly stated ideas and information, to implied ideas” (p. 60). Each step along the way allows for differentiated reading, talking, debate, and displays of learning.

Wilhelm provides an abundance of tips for generating questions: “Consider the heart of the matter” (p. 49). When studying character in a narrative, for instance, and thinking about how character is revealed in narrative—through responses to problems she faces—pose the question, “How do people reveal their essential character?” (p. 50). “Ask questions of application,” Wilhelm writes, “or ethical and moral questions. Historical periods can be reframed as inquiry” (p. 53). For instance, in relation to the American Revolution, “Is it acceptable to revolt against an established government?” (p. 53). Other topics, such as relationships, can be turned into inquiries. Instead of the question, “Where do our marriage customs come from?” an inquiry asks, “How do different cultures define good relationships, and how are particular customs designed to promote them?” (p. 57). Instead of a unit on civil rights, with its question, “How did we
Moran argues that adults need differentiated learning for the same reasons and in the same ways as young people do. She shows that when thinking about classroom instruction we overlook the importance of integrating different ways to support professional development for teachers into literacy programs. Moran writes, “It’s an essential ingredient in educators’ efforts to increase student achievement, and it has the potential to nurture a culture by valuing current professional knowledge and enhancing pedagogical practice” (p. 3). At the same time, Moran takes a measured look at literacy coaching in her review of the various models that are practiced in the United States. They are variations of purposeful collaboration conducted over a period of years, based on data collected related to student growth. While implying a rich area for research into coaching exists for practitioners, she notes that little evidence has been gathered to show direct links between kinds of professional development and reading achievement. However, national legislation admonishes teachers to participate in it, and they are frequently reassured of its value. Her summary and her caveat lend credibility to the rest of the book, the practices, templates included in the appendices, the protocols (agreed upon procedures for meeting outcomes), and the abundant resources for study and discussion.

Moran argues that whatever focus people take in their learning, coaching is based on three essential principles—that it helps establish a school culture in which collaboration is an asset, it helps develop individual and group capacity to problem-solving, and it provides a continuum of professional learning opportunities to support adults “in their acquisition and use of specific knowledge, skills, and strategies” (p. 6).

In professional learning she has suggested a range of formats that “assumes... a progression in the intensity of learning supports that are necessary to sustain a teacher’s efforts to become a more reflective practitioner” (p. 13). She lists them along a continuum from collaborative resource management, literacy content presentations, focused classroom visits, co-planning, study groups, demonstration lessons, peer coaching, to co-teaching at the other end. Moran writes that the support provided in resource management is “far less intrusive than the assistance that would be apparent in co-teaching” (p. 13). Each chapter, focusing on each type of format includes reference to learning sequences. For instance, in the chapter on study groups, she discusses first principles for study groups—that members experience productive disequilibrium and increasing comfort with ambiguity, that it focuses on improving skills of negotiation and communication, and that members achieve a kind of “generativity,” the knowledge of how to go on sustaining the learning and work of the group. She discusses the role of the coach— providing information, planning the focus, locating resources, establishing groups with shared leadership. She then discusses the types of study groups, and processes, generating a question of inquiry, and possible action plans. She suggests a variety of online and print resources for study and learning sequences, including
paired reading, jigsaw reading, and a guided protocol for data analysis.

One criticism of the book is that, although teachers in the different learning formats are to analyze data, suggestions for how to do this, getting the most out of data, finding ways to dig into it and create action plans from it are not included. Also, including steps for trouble shooting for problems in the learning groups would be a good addition to the book. The format of the book with its buff colored paper is appealing. The book is a fine resource for promoting a culture of differentiated professional development and the modules are applicable to not only teachers working together but to students collaborating in different learning formats.

NERA makes a difference!

This photo of the girls at the Zabuli School in Afghanistan holding the books purchased from a NERA grant was sent by Razia Jan to Cynthia A. Rizzo, Massachusetts state delegate, with a note: “We are so grateful for the New England Reading Association’s kindness to provide these books for our children. Thank you all.”
Different paths: Books in the differentiated classroom

Melissa Juchniewicz
Northern Essex Community College, Massachusetts

For differentiated instruction to work, we first have to know our students. We have to have strong background knowledge of learning styles, multiple intelligence theory, and methods of authentic assessment. Then we have to work within national and local structures to determine lesson content, the process of delivery, and the intended outcome, or product, of the lesson. We who put books into children’s hands have always met such complex challenges: it’s what we as teachers do.

When we select or recommend a book for a student, we first have to know that student. We think about matching interest and ability as we match books and readers. We have to have knowledge of standards, as well as genres, and the latest titles. But we also have to go beyond a sole focus on text. Since the late 1980s, we have had the benefit of leveled books, as well as more literature-based programs and readability formulas. But reading level should not be the only criterion for book selection or recommendation. Textual difficulty may limit not only choices, but also the development of new interests or more conceptual interpretation. For instance, a lower level book might not challenge ability, but may challenge perceptions about story or linear narrative; a higher level book might provide opportunity for growth and success, even if textual nuances are missed.

Students differ not only in terms of learning, but also emotionally, socially, and spiritually. Reader response theory reminds us that what a reader has experienced in life is a major factor in interpretation, as is the amount of experience with different texts. Taking all of these areas into account when we provide books is a daunting task, one which teachers meet every day. We can differentiate not only by reading level, but through story structure, ratio of words to other visuals, by theme, or by genre. Folk tales, for instance, can be presented and interpreted in a multitude of ways, fantasy can encourage a variety of interpretations, and realistic fiction can provide a connection to a character, or open a new door to the unknown.

We who put books into children’s hands know that reading has to add significance and importance to their lives, if children are to learn to love reading. Book Beat this time offers two terrific concept books and a dozen examples of new fiction: some stories are about differences among characters, others may be used in different ways with different students. We hope you discover among the titles something just right for your students.

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


This is a concept book that works on so many levels, and yet is delightful in its simplicity. Based on the age-old question of which came first, a high concept in itself, the book begins by answering, with the words that provide the structure for the book: first the egg, then the chicken. But not so fast: by the end, we have circled back around, and we have first the chicken, then the egg. Each new “first” – a tadpole, a seed, a caterpillar – is presented on a two page spread with a cutout providing a window to the “then” page, the frog, the flower, and the butterfly. Even better, Seeger acknowledges the same sequential predictability with creativity, first the word, then the story; first the paint, then the picture.

The patterns in the book can be followed in many
The illustrations are textured with the canvas showing through the colors, which reminds us of that question, “Was the egg or the chicken first? Even the dust cover takes part in the fun, as its cutout of egg becomes chicken on the book cover, and the title changes to match. An emergent reader could manage this one alone, but it will be especially fun in a group with a variety of levels. Award-winner Seeger received a Caldecott honor and Theodor Seuss Geisel honor for this, her fifth book for children.

Another Theodor Seuss Geisel honor winner, this clever book turns the everyday into a grand adventure. The format is a standout: its color and texture are that of a gloriously plain cardboard box, and the markings on the cover (Net wt. 11.5 oz. and This Side Up) carry the mood. The endpapers are also plain brown “cardboard” but on the title page we see the character, a bunny that couldn’t be drawn with simpler lines, discovering a box. The story begins with text on the left page asking, “Why are you sitting in a box?” When we turn the page, the bunny and its box are in the same position, but we see the box is actually a race car. On each left facing page the adult voice continues to ask questions about the box, and with each new picture of an imaginative use for it, the bunny’s answer is always, “It’s not a box.”

Children will have fun seeing the simple bunny and box within the imagined costumes and settings. Using only the cardboard brown and a muted red, yellow, and earthly green, this book allows the reader or listener to make discoveries and share in the secret knowledge of the box’s potential. In the bunny’s few words, Portis has created a memorable character. When the final question is asked, “Well, what is it then?”, the bunny thinks for a moment, then takes off from earth, soaring in a rocket ship to limitless possibilities. This is a terrific book: the fun of the presentation is matched by the joy of the message. A sequel, Not A Stick, was published in 2008.

At least fifteen new titles are being published this year to celebrate the bicentennial of the birth of Abraham Lincoln (1809–1865), and this one adds a new dimension to the familiar accounts of his youth. Working with a few crumbs of primary source material, Hopkinson and Hendrix have created a non-linear, multilayered, story-within-a-story that is as much about storytelling and artwork as it is about Lincoln. An oral history published in 1921, a grave marker that reads “Lincoln’s Playmate,” and a record of a comment by Lincoln in 1865 about his boyhood friend provide the bones for this story of the boy who saved seven-year-old Lincoln from a fall into a raging whirlpool. But how much is true, and how much is made up? Hopkinson and Hendrix collaborate in this rollicking tale to remind us what is needed for a story: “All right, that’s what we need to begin—a time, a place, and our characters: two boys named Austin and Abe,” and when to put on the brakes: a warning sign is splashed across a two-page spread reading, “Hold on for one minute!” when things get too implausible.

As the author scolds the illustrator for not drawing Austin when Lincoln needs his help, we see the hand that holds the pencil drawing possible solutions, and author Deborah allows illustrator John (both as much a part of the story as the characters) to decide which drawing to paint. Meanwhile, the story goes on and we see Lincoln the man in Washington. We learn that after moving to Illinois Lincoln never saw Austin again, and the final, wistful portrait of the man, seated before draped windows with a book at his elbow, remembering his old friend, humanizes him as well as anyone ever has.

A non-sequitur ending “moral” about the perils of crossing creeks is challenged, and a far more profound message is offered, one that reminds us that what we do matters, even if no one else is there to see. It has been said that “Tall Tales tell us something about who we are, by telling us who we think we are.” This book is a celebration of American story and the creative spirit that sustains it.

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A non-sequitur ending “moral” about the perils of crossing creeks is challenged, and a far more profound message is offered, one that reminds us that what we do matters, even if no one else is there to see. It has been said that “Tall Tales tell us something about who we are, by telling us who we think we are.” This book is a celebration of American story and the creative spirit that sustains it.
with a solution that includes Davey in the game, and makes everyone cheer.

Tilbury House Publishers continues its mission of releasing quality children's books that convey messages of affirming diversity, social justice, and environmental and global responsibility, in contemporary and realistic stories. *Keep Your Ear on the Ball*, written in a direct, first person style, is based on a true story that Petrillo recounts on the back jacket flap. The illustrations are vibrant watercolors that depict believable children in their own settings. The story presents a cooperative classroom, one in which differentiated instruction would be successful, but one caveat of differentiation emerges: well-meaning children sometimes “help” a classmate into helplessness, or silence. In this case, the children develop a solution whereby Davey and his classmates learn the power of interdependence as well as independence; in other situations, the teacher's vigilance is needed to be sure every student is reaching for their best. This book could help to send that message to all students in the differentiated classroom.


In another great title from Tilbury House, two best friends encounter a familiar problem: a new girl, Rolinda, has arrived and one friend finds her irresistible. This first person narrator tries to convince the reader that anyone would want to be friends with the new girl, even after having told us that Jenny is her best friend and is clever in so many ways. Rolinda elicits the worst from her aspiring friend, such as wearing fancy shoes that prohibit jump roping, ignoring Jenny on the bus to the field trip, and ultimately betraying Jenny's trust in a cruel way, by telling her biggest secret in the lunchroom to win Rolinda's favor. The creative and artistic narrator feels terrible, and realizes she doesn't want to lose her best friend in the whole world. But finding Jenny and making up with her is not easy. It requires a new set of rules for a friendship that is built on respect.

Moss and Tardif capture an easy, conversational style to tell this story. Moss, a former civil-rights lawyer whose mission it is to interrupt potential hate violence early in children’s lives, collaborates with high school student Tardif in Moss’ second book about speaking up and stepping up. The text is complimented by Geis’s illustrations: whimsical drawings and paintings that switch between the artist's rendering of school and playground settings, and the character’s drawings of her friends, complete with margins of notebook and graph paper filled with flowers and birds. The details of daily school life are abundant and believable. For this and all of their children's books, Tilbury House Publishers provides teachers guides in the Teachers Take Note section of its website at www.tilburyhouse.com. These guides offer classroom activities and games, discussion points, literature links and further resources online and in print for each of their books, many award winners, designed for a range of ages.


A poor fisherman in the time of the Aztecs hopes for a fish—even two—but catches a turtle. The turtle grants him a wish in exchange for his freedom, and the fisherman makes a simple wish. Upon returning home and telling his wife the fantastic story, she insists he find the turtle and make a grander wish. When he does, and his wife eventually becomes bored with the result, she makes him return again and again to wish for more and more. Eventually she goes too far with her wishes for wealth and power, and her final wish results in a return to poverty, the simple life that the fisherman wanted to return to all along.

This is a familiar tale, best known in its Grimm Brothers’ incarnation. But, like many folk tales, this story can be found in many forms from many cultures, western and eastern as well as Indian. In this book, we get a look at ancient Aztec culture in terms of food, costume, housing, and daily activities, along with some authentic language. Aviles’ artwork is bright and expressive; she incorporates motifs from Aztec art as she depicts the fisherman, and fish as well, contented and at peace until the wife stirs up the fuss, when the green sea grows gray, dark and menacing and all the characters and creatures except the wife are troubled. Even then, the wise turtle’s expression doesn’t change—he knows what will come of it all. Along with opening up discussion about the universal nature of folklore, this book has clear messages about values, greed, and even the dangers of peer pressure.


In this new twist on the old tale, both hare and tortoise are unhappy with their celebrity, the result of their first famous race. The lazy hare is tired of being ridiculed by everyone, including every fictional rabbit such as Peter Rabbit, Jack Rabbit, the White Rabbit, and the Easter Bunny, and even by his own mother. The tortoise on the other hand has had enough of being challenged by every young tortoise who wants to make a name for himself, and just wants to return to “a normal life of sleeping long hours, slurping juicy worms, and working at the shell station, shining turtles’ backs.” Funny puns abound as
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(Introducing His Forgotten Frontier Friend)  
by Deborah Hopkinson.  
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**Our Friendship Rules**  
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the pair agree to a rematch, and history looks like it’s about to repeat itself.

Bernstein manages to preserve the familiar message about slow and steady winning the race, with an unexpected turn of events highlighting the tortoise’s ingenuity and knowledge that people see what they want to see. Everyone believes the hare has won and the tortoise has lost, and only the tortoise knows the truth. He even sends the hare the silk pajamas he asked for when they made bet about the outcome of the race. The confused hare just accepts the congratulations from everyone, even his mother, and no one is the wiser besides the tortoise and the reader. This is a laugh-out-loud book, with the hare’s multitude of alarm clocks that don’t quite do the trick as he naps along the race route, and the tortoise’s engine-powered rabbit suit stuffed in his yellow backpack “just in case.” Experience with this Aesop’s fable is presumed for the full enjoyment of the story, but the jokes and pictures are funny in their own right.

Books for intermediate readers (grades 3 - 5)


In this oversized book by spouses Alley and Alley, the folklore wolf appears and is foiled in five tales that intersect and take a few new spins. In comic panels, we start with the three pigs off to make their way in the world, when the wolf appears and begins the rhyming interchange that ends with his threat to “huff and puff and blow the house in.” The first two pigs escape, and the third clever pig is subject to some new attempts at wolf trickery, which take him into the apple orchard and out to the fair. The pig prevails and the wolf gives up, looking for greener pastures and finding them with the boy who cried wolf. The boy is simply bored, aching for someone to talk to, and returns to the pasture as a wolf in sheep’s clothing. The clever sheep come through again and the next stop is the house of the seven little goslings, who also manage to trick the would-be trickster. The wolf finally gives up and in one final, full page spread, muses about becoming a vegetarian as he spies a sign for Farmer MacGregor’s Garden. This is a rollicking journey through these five stories, with lots of present-day references to amuse readers at a variety of levels. Familiarity with the stories and with folk tale structures will add depth to the fun, but the banter and amusing pictures, many reminiscent of Maurice Sendak, are enjoyable on their own.

With fanciful illustrations, some of the most entertaining and important examples of Greek mythology are introduced to a new generation. Gorgeous endpapers of black and brown with stylized waves and sea birds set the mood for stories that are just believable enough to take root in a reader’s or listener’s imagination. Warm brown, golden, and earth tones prevail throughout the book, with the occasional blue or purple garment. None of the magic or power is missing from these retellings, despite the author having made compromises to some of the more violent or overtly sexual aspects of the myths. Kimmel does not “dumb down” the content, but chooses to use or eliminate words that will go down a bit easier with new audiences. For example, Prometheus’ punishment for stealing fire from the gods to give to humans includes a hungry vulture which tears at his flesh, but the part about the vulture eating his liver for eternity is left out, while in Theseus and the Minotaur, leaving out the details of the queen’s lust for the bull does not dim enjoyment of the story.

Each new story is connected by character or event to the one before it, although each can stand on its own as well. Moreover, Kimmel does a nice job of connecting each story to present day life, making the message, the magic, or the social interactions relevant for young readers. In the story of Daedalus and Icarus (where we see a return of the endpaper birds), Daedalus is credited with inventing the potter’s wheel, the saw, and the compass for drawing circles which “are still used today.” In Echo and Narcissus, the boy’s vanity is not featured, only the cruel way he has treated Echo, and the result of his fate we see in the daffodil. Other myths in this collection include Pandora’s Box, Persephone and Hades, Arachne, Pygmalion and Galatea, King Midas, and Jason and the Golden Fleece. The book will be a gateway into the world of Greek mythology, which, as the author’s note states, are not only wonderful stories, but are a foundation of our language and literature, that provide inspiration for us to strive for things we can only dream about.
Author Kinney acknowledges that his book's "hero" Greg Heffley was never intended to be a role model. Greg is arrogant, jealous, cruel to his little brother Manny and best friend Rowley, and has a woefully short attention span. If he doesn't get caught, he believes he has done no wrong. But Kinney says "kids are sophisticated enough to understand" that Greg was not created to inspire. Greg does have some genuine middle school insights, such as being able to figure out what reading group you're in when they don't come out and tell you, just by the covers of the reading books you get, either "Einstein as a Child" or "Bink Says Boo." And he genuinely hopes that everyone who came to the school play was as entertained as he was after he, as an enchanted tree, ruined the performance by throwing apples at Dorothy until her glasses broke, and getting the other trees and even the first-grader playing Toto into the act. In a diary format illustrated with what can only be called crude line drawings, Greg and all the other kids in his world experience the dubious ups and miserable downs of middle school.

Greg terrorizes kindergartners as a would-be safety patroller. He regifts to Rowley the terrible Christmas gift his heavy-metal older brother has given him. He makes up a game of throwing things at Rowley who ends up with a broken hand. He even escapes a horrible fate of being force-fed the dreaded Cheese (which has been on the blacktop for who knows how long) by lying, and leaves Rowley to take the punishment. One thing we have to say for Greg Heffley is that he always feels O.K. about himself, no matter how things turn out. The book has been a big hit, landing at number one on the New York Times Bestseller list, and scoring an embargo laydown (a coordinated midnight release) for the fourth book, Diary of a Wimpy Kid: The Last Straw. A 20th Century Fox movie version is in the works.

Kinney pushes the irony of this anti-hero with the format of the diary-sized book, its cover of red and yellow a nod to Salinger's Catcher In The Rye, commenting, "A lot of kids in literature are just miniature adults. Harry Potter is an adult stuck in a kid's experience." Kinney goes on to say, "I didn't want to poison the story with an adult message, but I wanted to be responsible." Despite his lack of redeeming qualities, Greg's adventures here and in sequels will be gobbled up by kids who can relate.

This book takes the reader to a time and place few have ever known. It is the middle of the 19th century, and 12-year-old Aquila's father is a lighthouse keeper. The two are alone now on Devil's Rock five miles off the coast of Maine, since her mother died. The routine of their life is interrupted when Aquila discovers the most surprising of any flotsam from any prior shipwreck: a baby, lashed between two mattresses in an attempt to save its life. Aquila and her father name her Celia and adapt to a new life with the little girl. Aquila has never been off the island, and the people she has met are few. Mr. Callahan is the lighthouse inspector who arrives every few months, and Mr. Richardson is a fisherman who sometimes comes their way from the mainland. One day Mr. Richardson brings a guest, Margaret Malone, who wants to stay on Devil's Rock to bid goodbye to a sister who was shipwrecked. Miss Malone's connection to Celia and similarities to Aquila's mother make Aquila hurt and angry, even cause Aquila to take Celia on a journey that might have been fatal if magic had not intervened. But eventually Miss Malone becomes a friend and much more to the little lighthouse family.

This hauntingly authentic story is laced with ghosts, folklore, and fairies. Traditional tales, songs, and dances with Celtic origins are as much a part of life as the occasional adventure. Still, the tone accentuates the routine of day-to-day activities, such as preparing meals, tending to Celia, and the central concern of keeping the light on. This is an unusual life, but Aquila is a girl with curiosity and interests like anyone her age. Even as it is hard to imagine the isolation of Devil's Rock, it is easy to relate to the emotional connections among the richly-drawn characters. Pedersen's pencil sketches provide pauses in the narrative, opportunities to imagine the realities of Aquila's life. Otherwise, it's difficult to put this book down, although a reader may well return to it over and over again: there is a lot to discover between the lines.

Books for middle school and older readers


Berry is a teenager in a lot of pain. Her parents are divorced, and her extraordinary older sister has been killed in South Africa where she had been volunteering at a school. Berry takes solace in competitive swimming, though she craves the feeling of being underwater more than winning; she also has a secret inner life, in which she ritualistically piles stones upon her chest and removes them, to feel the pressure. Her boyfriend is self-absorbed and inconsiderate, her mother doesn't pretend they have more than leftovers, and her father is the source of all hypocrisy. Berry is sinking deep into her inner life when her father announces she will be
accompanying him to South Africa for a tour and the dedication of the memorial to Laura.

Told in the first person and present tense, it would be hard to like Berry if we didn’t hear her internal monologue. She answers questions with sarcasm, is loaded with attitude, and doesn’t give her father a chance during their time together. The strain of their relationship is set against the backdrop of Johannesburg, Soweto, Cape Town, and Kruger National Park. They are confronted with the intense loss that has touched everyone in this country, as well as the power of hope embodied by Mandela and those he has influenced. Berry knows that “this whole trip is metaphor city—everyone everywhere trying to forgive each other and get on with it: South Africans, us about Laura, Dad and me. I get it, I just don’t get how.” We hope there is some way Berry can find out how, and in the end we have a glimmer that she will. A powerful book, this is a good way for readers to begin to understand Apartheid and what it still means to the present day.


Peck’s thirtieth novel for young adults is a story of the World War II homefront and an America willing to sacrifice. Davy Bowman lives in a neighborhood of characters and outlandish types, his father among them. His father is a veteran of *The Great War*, a filling station owner with one good arm, who never misses a chance to play with the neighborhood kids or get his mischievous tricks in. Brother Bill is Davy’s hero, and Davy hangs on his every move when he is home from flight training. When he is sent overseas, the “war effort” Davy and his friend Scooter have been making takes on a different dimension, and Davy’s mother hangs a blue star in the window.

A big part of the war effort is collecting scrap, and in the course of this activity Davy and Scooter meet two formerly scary “old” people: Mr. Stonecypher, who they learn lost his son in World War I, and Miss Titus, with a disintegrating classic car in her barn, who steps in to be their teacher when others have fallen by the wayside. Grandma and Grandpa, with limited rations and nowhere to get supplies, come from the country to stay, to Davy’s mother’s dismay, but we learn that their motives are noble. Mothers are going to work at the plant, leaving “8 to 5 orphans” and the government is asking for milkweed, spiders’ webs, paper, and always more metal. In a moment of uncertainty about Bill’s fate, Davy’s father reveals the frustration he shares with Mr. Stonecypher: “I thought my war meant he wouldn’t have to fight. I thought I’d failed him. I thought I’d let him down.”

Readers may need help with some of the colloquialisms and understanding the reasons behind such things as blackouts, ration cards, and buying war stamps during the 1940s at the homefront. Nevertheless, Peck’s narrative clips along, infused with humor. This book is an ideal way to initiate discussions about what wartime means to everyone, and the differences and similarities between that time and the present.


With only two or three exceptions, there is a smile on every page of this novel. Abdel-Fattah has a natural, lighthearted narrative style that skips along as Amal searches for her identity among her “hyphens”: she is an Australian-Muslim-Palestinian teenager living in a trendy Melbourne suburb and going to a prep school after having spent her elementary years in a more diverse suburb and attending Catholic school. To complicate her life even more, as the book opens, she has decided to be a “full-timer” — what she and her Muslim girlfriends call those who wear the hijab all the time, not just for religious purposes. She knows she will be subjected to taunts and stares, but her mind is made up. Along with the veil, she must prepare herself for prayer while in school, which requires some special accommodations. The administrators and Tea, the ubiquitous mean girl, don’t make this easy.

Amal is equally loyal to her Muslim friends and her new circle. She somewhat sheepishly admits that hers is a happy family. She has a crush, but at the moment of truth declines his advances, explaining to him the confidence she has in the decision she has made to be true to her beliefs. The painful moments in the book mainly concern her friends and a lonely neighbor named Mrs. Vaselli. School friend Simone’s family has drummed it into her head that she is fat and will never amount to anything, and Muslim friend Leila’s brother is a repressive misogynist. Mrs. Vaselli has given up contact with her only son because of religious differences. Amal doesn’t heal everyone, but she oversees gradual, positive changes all around her over the course of her identity struggle. Amal certainly encounters prejudice, and she responds to it in predictable ways for a teenager. But her self-esteem and confidence are solid, and those carry her along through fear. American readers will be able to relate to Amal, while discovering that they are not the only ones on earth who struggle with diversity and identity. They will also gain insight into Muslim culture and the religious beliefs of Islam, and perhaps those readers who have been conditioned to fear the unfamiliar will take time to understand.
Cinderella’s glass slipper and differentiating instruction

Diane Kern
University of Rhode Island, Rhode Island

Let’s start with reality for Cinderella Teacher. (Cinderella Teacher can easily become Prince Charming Teacher throughout this article by simply substituting the pronoun he for she.) She has many arduous tasks to manage such as “No Child Left Behind” (NCLB; Elementary and Secondary Education Act, 2001), inclusion, limited or nonexistent resources for gifted students, poverty, adequate yearly progress, and high-stakes testing. There are more than three ugly stepsisters to contend with in this teacher’s castle.

To get through the day, Cinderella Teacher clearly needs some hope, a fairytale to believe in to help her get through the hardest of teaching days. Enter Cinderella’s Glass Slipper—instructional practices that perfectly fit each individual student—Differentiating Instruction. In this Review of Research in the Classroom column, we’ll examine a compelling rationale for differentiating instruction in the regular classroom (George, 2005), guiding principles to help you implement differentiated instruction (Lewis & Batts, 2005), and several researched-based strategies to try out in your own classroom (Brimijoin, 2005).

Transforming pumpkins to a horse-drawn carriage

Paul S. George, a Distinguished Professor of Education at the University of Florida, argues that differentiating instruction in heterogeneously grouped classrooms today may be the core classroom experience that is the “key to the survival of the American public school as society has come to know it” (2005, p. 186). He asserts that instruction in heterogeneously configured classrooms must be differentiated for the following reasons, which I briefly explain after each key point:

Human's essential diversity: Differentiation of instruction involves the appropriate alteration of content, instruction, and assessment to meet the needs of each unique learner.

For gifted learners: We must differentiate instruction if gifted learners are placed in regular classrooms. If a single curriculum is taught to all learners, many students may find school learning uninspiring and not real.

For less able students and those with learning disabilities: With mainstreaming and inclusion practices, students with more and more diverse learning needs are in the regular classroom. Teaching strategies to differentiate instruction become essential tools in a teacher’s toolkit.

Instruction for democracy's future: Differentiated instruction in a heterogeneous classroom helps to radically shift the culture of one-size-fits-all curriculum, depend on the teacher for everything, and learning to “keep up (or back) with the rest of the class” (p. 190).

For knowledge and information: In today's information age, students must experience an education that involves active engagement, real work, and challenge to meet the information literacy demands of the future.

The nature of the learning process: Lastly, Dr. George (2005) turns to the scholarship on how people learn and argues that we must differentiate instruction because we know that each human's needs, interests and motivations are specific to that person.

After considering this compelling argument, Cinderella Teacher clearly must escape the drudgery of her current reality, change into a beautiful gown, hop
into her horse-drawn carriage, and get to the ball. She’ll definitely need the help and experience of her fairy godmother to pull this challenging feat off.

**Fairy godmother’s advice**

As you must know, every good fairy godmother bases her advice on experience in order to work her magic. Therefore, we’ll turn to a study of North Topsail Elementary School (Lewis & Batts, 2005), a Title I School in Pender County, North Carolina to guide us to understand how to find the right fit instruction—the metaphorical glass slipper.

In 1998, the administrators in North Topsail found that most of their teachers were employing whole-group instruction methods, taught to the average student in the class even though the student body was quite diverse. In addition, they found that very few teachers knew how to use assessment to inform their instruction. Test scores in the district began to demonstrate a pattern that did not meet the state’s accountability requirements, so the North Topsail began a collaborative professional development effort, including focus on differentiation of instruction. Lewis and Batts (2005) share the following guiding principles for differentiating instruction: (1) provide ongoing assessment; (2) use multiple teaching strategies; (3) vary group configurations; (4) emphasize student strengths; (5) recognize learning modalities; (6) consider student interests; and (7) offer clear criteria on tasks for students.

Knowing the guiding principles for differentiating instruction in a regular classroom, Cinderella Teacher is ready to try on those glass slippers and dance at the ball.

**Dancing at the ball**

In her case study research, Kay Brimijoin (2005) found that while there were no specific dance steps or rules for differentiating instruction, several strategies were flexibly and effectively used by the Cinderella Teacher in her study, Katherine Martez. You will note that Katherine teaches in a reality classroom much like the one described in the opening of this column. This research helps us to consider differentiating instruction in a high-stakes testing environment and examines best teaching practices. These include:

- **Compacting:** Using results from informal and formal assessments to identify students’ strengths, Katherine allows students who already show mastery in aspects of the next unit of study to enter into a contract with her to either explore the content in more depth, more breadth, at an accelerated pace or through interdisciplinary study.

- **Tiered lessons:** Katherine uses this practice regularly to design activities that achieve the same content or standard with varying levels of support or challenge.

- **Graphic organizers:** This tool helps Katherine to meet the needs of visual learners by demonstrating how information is conceptually connected. She often provides scaffolded instruction to demonstrate her thinking while using graphic organizers.

- **RAFT:** This method originally developed by Nancy Vandervanter, an English teacher who participated in the Montana Writing Project, utilizes 4 steps: Role (R), Audience (A), Format (F), and Topic (T). For step-by-step support to implement the RAFT method in your classroom, be sure to also read Janet Allen’s Tools for Content Literacy (2004).

- **Anchor activities and task cards:** Katherine uses anchor activities and task cards to provide meaningful activities for her students to engage in while she works with small groups of students differentiating instruction. You might think of these activities as the glue that keeps Katherine’s glass slippers on her feet. Anchor activities are those that the students know to return to if they finish their work early. The task cards provide students with step-by-step instructions for enrichment or remediation activities related to the area of study. These activities and tasks offer Katherine a way to create a classroom environment that is conducive to differentiating instruction.

There are many more strategies to differentiate instruction in your classroom besides the few mentioned here from Katherine’s classroom. The fairy godmother that taught me the most when I first learned to differentiate instruction in my classroom was Carolyn Tomlinson in her seminal work *The Differentiated Classroom: Responding to the Needs of All Learners* (1999). The Montgomery County Schools’ website (see References) on differentiated instruction also provided many, many practical ideas to help me plan lessons.

**The clock strikes midnight**

Each of the research articles discussed in this column provide compelling reasons for each of us to strive to find the glass slipper that fits your teaching style and the individual needs of your students before the clock strikes midnight. George (2005) warns in a "pessimistic forecast" (p. 185) that if we do not differentiate instruction masterfully in our classrooms, public schools may become “little more than pauper schools serving the few remaining uncategorized students” (p. 185). To provide what may seem like the fairytale magical support needed to learn to differentiate instruction in diverse classrooms today, Brimijoin (2005) asserts, “Funding for education initiatives should be earmarked to provide time, resources, collaborative learning, and recognition for teachers who polish their ability to differentiate” (p. 260). In addition to teachers’ efforts to differentiate instruction, we’ll need strong educational leadership—the topic of our next *NERA Journal*!

And Cinderella Teacher and her students lived happily ever after.
References


Recently, I was introduced to Clickers by a colleague who decided to begin to utilize them in his undergraduate and graduate classes. A clicker looks like a TV remote with few buttons, which are used to indicate each user’s response to a presenter’s multiple-choice questions. The presenter can easily be an instructor who poses questions in a specially designed PowerPoint presentation and who can then see the students’ responses in real time. Students can also see the summarized responses to each question, but cannot see each student’s individual response. Only the instructor has access to this information.

My colleague was very excited about the fact that these Classroom (or Student) Response Systems, as they are frequently called, were soon going to be integral to his classroom interaction with his students. He explained how he could facilitate discussions, by polling the students’ opinions and discussing the reasons behind their opinions. He described how he could encourage peer instruction, by allowing students to discuss their answers with each other before they respond to the question. He even talked about how he could save time, by asking students to use clickers during a class exam. What made me even more excited about this technology, however, was the fact that the real-time information provided by the students can also be used by instructors to modify their instruction and address the needs of their students before they leave the classroom. I immediately thought of the impact a Classroom Response System could have on helping teachers differentiate instruction in real time for those students who are too shy to reveal their lack of understanding in front of their classmates.

According to Tomlinson (2001), differentiated instruction is based on the premise that instruction should be adapted to the students’ different learning styles, interests, and ability levels. Therefore, teachers who use differentiated instruction are expected to show flexibility in the ways they teach their students and organize their curriculum. In a classroom where differentiated instruction is the foundation of instructional decisions, teachers adapt their instructional activities and selection of materials to each student’s linguistic and cultural background, academic ability, interests, and learning style.

Information and Communication Technologies, like Classroom Response Systems, for example, when used appropriately, may enable teachers to utilize differentiated instruction and address the many different needs and abilities of their students. In Differentiated Instruction Using Technology (2005), Amy Benjamin highlights six features of technology, beyond motivation, that support differentiated instruction:

1. **Privacy**: Technology affords the privacy that is required in order to support the self-esteem of students who are working on a task that is considered by the rest of the class as “too easy.”
2. **Collaboration and communication skills**: Online technologies, such as email and discussion boards, encourage communication and collaboration among students, which are essential elements in forming and maintaining learning communities.
3. **Organization**: A number software helps students organize their work (i.e., create graphs and...
not stay in one classroom, the technology station with common in middle and high school, because students do number of students. Given that learning centers are not creating a technology station for exclusive use by a small to facilitate the adoption of some of these ideas is by the differentiation of instruction. Another mechanism include an electronic center with Internet connected to set up learning centers for independent work and some of these ideas in a classroom is by thinking of how to differentiate their instruction. Even this column I briefly describe several ways teachers can utilize technology to differentiate their instruction. Even though there are many choices among new technologies, I am presenting technologies that are relatively easy to access in schools. While Classroom Response Systems, for instance, can encourage differentiated instruction, currently they are relatively expensive and not widely known to teachers. On the other hand, Microsoft Office is well known to most teachers and, like some other technologies that I describe here, is currently being used by teachers for both professional and personal reasons. The familiarity with some technologies, however, does not imply that using the technology to differentiate instruction is a simple undertaking. On the contrary, it still requires considerable effort and efficient time management skills, particularly at the beginning of this effort. Implementing one idea at a time, for example, and using technologies that can be accessed easily and with no additional training, is a smart approach to beginning the differentiation of one's instruction with technology-driven activities.

An effective way to envision the integration of some of these ideas in a classroom is by thinking of how to set up learning centers for independent work and include an electronic center with Internet connected computers and other technologies that can support the differentiation of instruction. Another mechanism to facilitate the adoption of some of these ideas is by creating a technology station for exclusive use by a small number of students. Given that learning centers are not common in middle and high school, because students do not stay in one classroom, the technology station with Internet access would work best when different students are assigned to it, depending on the lesson's objectives and the specific needs of each student. Finally, making use of a teacher's personal computer can help teachers overcome unexpected obstacles to technology access.

Email communication with students
Taking advantage of the privacy of email, teachers can communicate with individual students at any time during the day to share information about classroom performance and future expectations. Email communication allows teachers to offer differentiated instruction without embarrassing the students who still need to work with less sophisticated material and require further support on how to complete a task. Email communication also provides a way for teachers to send quick messages of praise to individual students for their exemplary work or worth noting progress on a learning unit, and thus motivating them to continue the hard work.

Different websites for the instruction of the same concept
With more than 430 million web hosts (Zakon, 2006) ready to share information with Internet users, teachers are in a very good position to identify a few different websites that can be used by students of different abilities to study the same topic. This way, the use of varied websites allows teachers to lead their students to the understanding of the same concept through the presentation of different content. The Internet Workshop (Leu, 2002) is an appropriate instructional framework that encourages the study of content from websites when students work individually (or in small groups) on their computers (either in a computer lab or taking turns in the classroom's computer center). Through an Internet Workshop, teachers ask students to study a specific website (bookmarked on their computer) and respond to questions on paper or a word processing document on the students' desktops. When they are done answering their questions, students have a whole class discussion on the topic. Teachers can create a few different Internet Workshops on the same topic, in order to differentiate instruction among students who will work independently and with the relative privacy their classroom computer will afford them. During the sharing phase of the Internet Workshop, all students will be able to participate despite how easy or difficult their assigned website was.

PowerPoint presentation
Teachers can employ PowerPoint presentations for whole class instruction, as well as for small group and individual instruction, with the objective to teach the same concepts through the differentiation of the content of instruction. Any PowerPoint used for whole class instruction of a unit can later on be posted on the
classroom web page or emailed to students for support and reinforcement they might need while they work on a related project. Before emailing it to students who need additional support, teachers might even revise the PowerPoint to add more scaffolding activities, without other students knowing. In a similar way, teachers can add more challenging slides for those students who might benefit from the interaction with the additional information. This same privacy afforded to students through the emailed PowerPoint can be achieved when the PowerPoint is employed as a center activity for the reinforcement of a new concept. As a center activity, the PowerPoint will be modified to address the specific needs of different students, who will then be asked to use a specific PowerPoint file from a list of three or four prepared and saved on the computer desktop by the teacher ahead of time.

**Classroom web page**
A classroom web page that is updated frequently can serve as a virtual library of resources for students who either require more support or are ready to take the next step and do more challenging work. For example, a well-organized web page can give students access to the PowerPoint presentation the teacher used during the whole-class presentation of the new material, so that they can refresh their memory before they begin to work on a related project. The web page can also include links to websites that provide additional information on the topic. These websites’ readability levels can range from easier to more difficult, with more or fewer visuals and sound effects, so that all students can find a website they can use to support their learning. Students can also be instructed to link the website of their choice to the site Voycabulary (http://www.voycabulary.com), which will link their web page to a chosen online dictionary and allow them to look up any unfamiliar word while reading the information from the website. The classroom web page may also include an option for the students to contact the teacher, as well as options for student collaborative work to take place online.

**Audio books on iPods, MP3s, CDs, or tapes**
Audio books have traditionally been used by teachers of English language learners, learning-disabled students, struggling readers, and nonreaders (Johnson, 2003), mainly with the objective to give these students the opportunity to listen to a text they cannot read independently and follow along on paper. However, audio books can also be used with average and high readers, as well as with gifted students, who might be interested in a book that is beyond their reading level, but that they would still like to listen to for pleasure. Teachers can use audio books to differentiate the process of instruction for students who might otherwise find a difficult text boring and unreachable during Literature Focus Units, where all students are reading the same book, or during Literature Circles and independent reading. In these cases, audio books help with the decoding aspect of the reading, while introducing students to fluent and good interpretive reading.

Audio books can also differentiate instruction for good and avid readers who are ready to be introduced to new literature genres, try to improve their own reading fluency, and make more connections with the text and the author. Even though audio books are relatively expensive, more and more public libraries offer free access to downloadable audio books. The use of iPods and MP3s, just to mention a few new technologies, make audio books more attractive to students of all ages.

**Wikis for group projects**
A wiki is “a page or collection of web pages designed to enable anyone who accesses it to contribute or modify content” (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wiki, retrieved September 10, 2008). Therefore, the content of a wiki is constantly changing, as long as the visitors of the wiki participate in the editing of its content. Then the wiki becomes a website for the creation, browsing, and searching of information.

As such, a wiki is ideal for online collaboration among students with the same learning task. Students who are asked to work as a group to complete a project do not have to physically meet. Instead, they can work online on their project by visiting their teacher’s wiki. They can edit and save their changes at different times, without even losing past versions of their work that may end up being better than the latest version. Moreover, the teacher can keep track of how much work each group member is contributing, in order to inform her decisions with respect to follow-up instruction and assessment. The wiki can offer the privacy for assigning different projects to different groups of students, while encouraging collaboration and development of small learning communities within the classroom.


**Literature Cyberlesson**
The Literature Cyberlesson is an Internet-based instructional framework that encourages the integration of literature, technology, and reading comprehension strategies (Kara-Soteriou & Kurkjian, 2006). Teachers can create a literature cyberlesson around a trade book that the whole class will be studying or trade books that are more appropriate for certain groups of students in the classroom. The literature cyberlesson is usually created as a PowerPoint presentation that focuses both on the content of the book and specific reading comprehension
strategies for before, during, and after the reading of the whole book (if short) or selected pages (if longer, such as a chapter book for older students).

Teachers, for example, can create a literature cyberlesson on a book that all students will be studying. Then the teachers can create two to three versions of that initial literature cyberlesson in order to address the needs of students who either need to be introduced to more challenging reading comprehension strategies or students who still need to internalize previously taught reading comprehension strategies. In these cases, where different students are working on different literature cyberlessons, the work is done independently in a computer lab or during different sign-up times for classroom computers. Again, the differentiated literature cyberlesson offers privacy and allows teachers to modify the content of instruction, while meeting the same broader goals. (For a selection of teacher-developed literature cyberlessons, go to http://www.reading.ccsu.edu/Kurkjian/Default1.html and click on Cyberlesson Internet Project Showcase.)

**Digital Language Experience Approach**

The Language Experience Approach (Stauffer, 1980) is an instructional framework that encourages differentiation of instruction, even without the use of computer technologies. Based on this framework, students, mostly in groups, discuss and describe a common real life experience (i.e., the Mayor’s visit at their school), while the teacher transcribes the students’ description on the board, the ease, or a transparency. During the writing of the students’ description, the teacher focuses on the students’ ideas and encourages their development. When the student dictation is over, the teacher reads the final product once before they read it together. Then, for a few days, the written product serves as a springboard for specific literacy concepts that the teacher wishes to reinforce.

The Digital Language Experience Approach (D-LEA) (Labbo, Eakle, & Montero, 2002) is still based on the students describing a common experience, but this experience addresses additional learning styles, by involving the use of a digital camera and other technologies. The D-LEA starts with the teacher and students selecting the stimulus experience (i.e., event, activity, materials) and discussing how the students will take the necessary pictures (i.e., how many, when and which activities, candid or posed). Then the students engage in the activity, while the teacher or some students take pictures with a digital camera. Later on, the students refer to the digital photos (already uploaded on a computer) to recall the activity, decide on a sequence of events, and describe the experience. The students either dictate the story to the teacher or share the keyboard to complete the description of their photos and the writing of their story. The students might even add multimedia effects to enhance the story on the screen (i.e., music, animation, sound effects). The teacher, or computer software, or the students themselves read the typed text a few times before the teacher engages the students in follow-up literacy activities. The D-LEA encourages differentiation of instruction because it allows students of different learning styles to use different media to express their ideas and show their understanding.

**WebQuests for all students**

Developed by Bernie Dodge, with early input from Tom March, a WebQuest is “an inquiry-oriented lesson format in which most or all the information that learners work with comes from the Web” (http://www.webquest.org/index.php, retrieved September 8, 2008). For more than a decade, WebQuests have been developed and used by many teachers. As a result, there is a wide range of WebQuests available for all teachers to use with their students of different age and ability groups. A website that provides free access to a WebQuest search engine is WebQuest.org (at http://www.webquest.org/index.php). In this site, users/teachers can use keywords to find WebQuests related to their topic of instruction. Another website that offers free access to a WebQuest search engine is Best WebQuests.com (at http://bestwebquests.com/default.asp), where the WebQuests are arranged by content area and learners’ age. Like Literature Cyberlesson, Internet Workshop, and other Internet-based instructional frameworks and activities, the WebQuest can be used to offer differentiated instruction to individuals, in the privacy of their computer (in and out of the classroom), or to small groups of students, with the beneficial effects of collaborative work and the support of the technology’s organizational structure.

**Software with customized programs**

While a number of software can motivate even the most reluctant students to participate in the learning task, not all software enable teachers to easily differentiate instruction and keep track of each student’s performance. Selected software, however, can offer teachers the option to customize each student’s interaction with the software, based on what the students can already do and what they still need to work on. For example, Earobics (by Houghton Mifflin Harcourt/Learning Technology), whose focus is on literacy skills, allows teachers to customize the program by skipping certain activities or changing the sequence of activities, choosing the language of directions from a list of 10 different languages, and adjusting the response time. After students, who are assigned individual passwords in order to access the software, complete their assigned work on the software, teachers can go back to the software and read a report on each student’s performance. A new customization of the program can then take place, as a response to the student’s performance data.
Word processing and graphics software

Even though customization is not usually an option, word processing and graphics software are great tools in designing differentiated instruction. The use of word processing enables young students to overcome any print production difficulties with pencils or markers (Cochran-Smith, 1991) and makes it faster for students of all ages to revise their drafts and showcase the final product to the whole class. Further, graphics software designed especially for children and adolescents allows students to visually represent their ideas and understandings through a combination of imported pictures, coloring, and a few words, instead of long essays or long answers to comprehension questions. Software such as Kid Pix (by Broderbund), The Color Wizard (by ImagiSOFT), Curious George Paint & Print Studio (by Simon & Schuster Interactive), and Comic Book Draw (by Arts & Letters), to mention a few, can then be used to encourage students who struggle with writing to participate in the learning process using different activities (content) and methods (process), from the rest of their classmates. This approach to written responses does not have to be implemented daily, but it should be seen as an option that teachers frequently make available to their students.

Conclusion

In the hands of teachers, certain technologies can serve as advanced tools for targeted learning, quick and private communication, educational games, and purposeful data analysis and assessment, with the ultimate goal of designing differentiated instruction and helping all students meet their different needs and potential. Tomlinson (1999) suggests that differentiated instruction is designed with content, process, and product in mind. This means that teachers develop different activities (content) for different students, allow students to learn through different methods (process), and encourage students to show their understanding through different means (product). While they expect all students to learn the same concepts, teachers do not have to differentiate all three variables in order to offer differentiated instruction. In this column, I shared several ideas on how teachers can utilize familiar technologies to differentiate instruction by differentiating mostly one of the variables listed by Tomlinson (1999).

In order to implement this kind of differentiation, however, teachers need to have access to at least one Internet connected computer (and audio technology) in their classroom. Even though studies reveal that most teachers work in schools with at least one computer lab, access to the lab is neither frequent nor uninterrupted (Connecticut Association for Reading Research, 2008). Therefore, access to at least one classroom computer is essential in order for teachers to differentiate instruction for at least one student or a few students who will be sharing the computer or taking turns during independent work. Continuous access to several computers would be great, of course, as these computers could serve as the classroom’s electronic center. What is most important, however, is that many more teachers realize the potential that technology has in addressing the needs of students who are ready to be challenged more and in helping students learn what they could not learn without technology-driven differentiated instruction.

References


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JEFF BARGER is a literacy coach with Cameron Park Elementary School in Orange County, North Carolina. His previous article, “Building Word Consciousness,” appeared in the November 2006 issue of *The Reading Teacher*. Jeff can be reached at <barger.jeff@gmail.com>.

DANNY BRASSELL is Associate Professor in Teacher Education at California State University-Dominguez Hills. He began his teaching career as a second grade ESL teacher in Compton, California. His work with nationally and internationally recognized researchers in reading, vocabulary, and second language acquisition strongly complements his practical teaching experience. He is an experienced classroom teacher, author and presenter who has published numerous articles and books, including *Vocabulary Strategies Every Teacher Needs to Know* and *The Ultimate Reading Fitness Guide, Grades K-8*.

GERARD BUTEAU is Associate Professor in Early Childhood Education at Plymouth State University in Plymouth, New Hampshire where he teaches courses in early literacy development and how to effectively develop and manage reading and writing instructional programs in the elementary grades.

BRUCE CAMPBELL has been a teacher for over 30 years. He began teaching in the Peace Corps in North Borneo in 1967 and started in the US in the 70s as a first grade teacher. Over the past 15 years, while still a teacher in the Marysville School District, he has taught at the graduate level as associate faculty for Antioch University and has also worked as a consultant teaching teachers in all 50 states and in countries all around the world. He lives near Warm Beach, Washington overlooking Puget Sound with his wife, Linda, and their two Tibetan Mastiffs, Humphrey and Oso.

DEANNA DAY is Assistant Professor of Literacy Education in the Department of Teaching and Learning, Washington State University at the Vancouver campus. Before this she taught in Arizona for 15 years as a classroom teacher, English as a second language teacher, and a reading specialist. Her research interests include children’s literature, literature circles and content area reading. She chairs the NCTE Notable Children's Books in the Language Arts committee.

ELENE S. DEMOS is Professor of Reading and Language Arts at Central Connecticut State University in New Britain, Connecticut. She teaches courses in clinical practice, reading research, trends and issues in reading, and the diagnosis of reading and language arts difficulties. Previously she served as Director of the Miller Research and Learning Center at Edinboro University of Pennsylvania where she also administered and supervised the Parent Child Development Center, the Children's Component, and clinical services of the Center.

JUDITH FARYNIARZ has served as a public school educator for 29 years, including 18 years as a school principal at the elementary and middle school levels, and later as Assistant Professor of Educational Leadership at Central Connecticut State University. Her research interests are assessment of student performance to improve learning, teacher and administrator supervision and evaluation, the educational implications of computer technology, gender equity, and education to prepare children for the future world of work.

JOHN FOSHAY is Associate Professor of Special Education at Central Connecticut State University in New Britain, Connecticut. His expertise within special education includes developmental disabilities, and assistive technology. He has written and presented on various assistive technology devices, the use of video as an authentic learning context, and computer-mediated supports for individuals with developmental disabilities. In addition, he is co-host and co-producer of the public television show “The Central Educator.”

VINCENT J. HAWKINS is Director of Curriculum, Instruction and Assessment for the Springfield School District in Vermont. Vin has served as a mathematics teacher, mathematics and science supervisor, adjunct instructor at Roger Williams University and the University of Rhode Island, assistant superintendent, editorial manager for D.C. Heath & Co., and Assistant
Professor at the University of Hartford. He has authored a mathematics textbook and over two dozen articles in professional journals. His current interests include closing achievement gaps through data trend analysis and reorganizing instructional protocols. He may be contacted at vhawkins@ssdvt.org or vincentjhawkins@netzero.net.

LORI HELMAN is Assistant Professor in the Department of Curriculum and Instruction at the University of Minnesota, Twin Cities. Her research focuses on the reading and spelling development of students learning English as a new language. Lori was a bilingual teacher, a district literacy coordinator, and a new teacher leader in her region before coming to higher education. She teaches classes in reading development for diverse students, effective instruction for students with reading difficulties, and leadership skills for reading specialists.

CHINWE H. IKPEZE is Assistant Professor of Literacy at St. John Fisher College in Rochester, New York. She teaches undergraduate and graduate courses in literacy assessment and instruction, literacy methods and materials, emergent literacy, literacy acquisition and capstone project (Research in Education). Her research interests include the use of new literacies and technologies in and out-of-school, among elementary and teacher education students. Others include teacher learning, online and distance learning. She has published articles in *The Reading Teacher, Journal of Literacy Research, Journal of Technology and Teacher Education,* and *The Language and Literacy Spectrum.*

CYNTHIA A. LASSONDE is Associate Professor in the Elementary Education and Reading Department at the SUNY College at Oneonta, New York. She teaches undergraduate and graduate courses in literacy. Her research interests include writing practices, teacher research, and self-study in teacher education practices. She is author, co-author, and co-editor of several books on these topics with the International Reading Association, Barron's Educational Publishing, Jossey-Bass, and other publishers; and she is editor of the New York Association of Colleges for Teacher Education's professional journal *Excelsior: Leadership in Teaching and Learning.*

ANTHONY RIGAZIO-DIGILIO is Professor and Chair of the Department of Educational Leadership at Central Connecticut State University in New Britain, CT. He is a former elementary principal and a director of a hospital-based educational program for disturbed adolescents. He works with many school districts in the areas of team performance, teacher leadership and teacher evaluation.

CARRIE ROGERS is a doctoral candidate in Curriculum and Instruction: Elementary Education at the University of Minnesota, Twin Cities. Her research focuses on teacher development and teacher education especially in the area of responding to the needs of diverse learners. She is a former urban elementary and currently she teaches reading and general methods classes in the elementary education licensure program at the University of Minnesota.

OLUSEGUN A. SOGUNRO is Associate Professor of Educational Leadership at Central Connecticut State University in New Britain, Connecticut. His research interests include leadership, training, evaluation, supervision, curriculum, multicultural and development education.

MARIANNE TRUE, a former English teacher, is Associate Professor and Coordinator of Childhood Studies Education at Plymouth State University in Plymouth, New Hampshire. She teaches courses in curriculum, instruction and assessment with a focus on the development of integrated curriculum utilizing the Understanding by Design model.

BARBARA A. WARD is Assistant Professor of Literacy Education in the Department of Teaching and Learning, Washington State University at Tri-Cities campus. She spent 25 years teaching in the public schools of New Orleans where she enthusiastically integrated social studies and language arts. She has taught at every grade level, and takes care to infuse literature with social justice themes throughout her work with students and preservice teachers. Working on this Lincoln project reminded her of her fourth grade year with a talented, innovative social studies teacher who encouraged her to find out as much as she could about the nation’s First Ladies. She chairs the IRA Notable Books for a Global Society committee.

TERRELL A. YOUNG is Professor of Literacy Education in the Department of Teaching and Learning, Washington State University at Tri-Cities campus. He teaches undergraduate and graduate courses in reading and children’s literature. He is especially interested in how children respond to literature, the teaching of nonfiction, how vocabulary and comprehension can best be taught, and how English language learners develop literacy while learning a new language. He was awarded the 2006 Outstanding Teacher Educator in Reading Award by the International Reading Association.
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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