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Retired educator membership is $20.00 per year; Single issues are $20.00 each.  
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New England Reading Association  
Published by Port Press in Portland, ME

text design & composition  
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# TABLE of CONTENTS

New England Reading Association JOURNAL  
Volume 45 • Number 2 • 2010

## EDITORIAL

**The art of motivation:**
Engaging the disengaged readers  
Helen R. Abadiano  
Jesse P. Turner  
Lynda M. Valerie  
Central Connecticut State University, CT

## FEATURE ARTICLES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Page</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Authors</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| 1    | Motivating struggling readers: Three keys to success | Nancy Padak, Kent State University, Ohio  
Cheryl Potenza-Radis |
| 9    | Graphic novels: Composing with sequential art in high school English and history | Nancy Frey  
Douglas Fisher  
San Diego State University, California |
| 17   | Building conscious competence: Reading our students, sharing our practice | James E. Fredrickson  
Boise State University, Idaho |
| 26   | Building comprehension for reading novels: The prereading-schema building process | Nancy A. Anderson  
University of South Florida, Florida  
Clare E. Hite  
Deltone State College, Georgia |
| 32   | In teachers and students we trust: Real education reform is a writer’s workshop | Barry Lane  
Discover Writing Company |
| 35   | Motivating young readers: Theory into practice | Jacqueline A. Parke  
John Marshall Middle School, California  
Cynthia L. Meyer  
Corinna Elementary School, California |
| 43   | Engaging students with global literature: The 2009 notable books for a global society | Barbara A. Ward, Chair  
Washington State University, Washington  
Marianne Saccardi, Co-Chair  
Greenwich, Connecticut  
April Bedford  
University of New Orleans, Louisiana  
Allen D. Evans  
Eastern Oregon University, Oregon  
Janet Hill  
Delaware State University, Delaware  
Belinda Y. Louie  
University of Washington, Washington  
Ruth McKeown Lowery  
University of Florida, Florida  
Marjanne Newman  
South Pasadena Library, California  
Deborah L. Thompson  
The College of New Jersey, New Jersey  
Vivian Yenika-Agbaw  
Pennsylvania State University, Pennsylvania |
| 57   | Engaging the disengaged reader | Elene S. Demos  
John D. Foshay  
Central Connecticut State University, Connecticut |
| 63   | Motivating disengaged readers through multicultural children’s literature | Tami Craft Al-Hazza  
Old Dominion University, Virginia |
| 69   | Working effectively with ELLs: What public school teachers should know | Yanhui Pang  
Bloomsburg University of Pennsylvania, Pennsylvania |
### TABLE of CONTENTS

New England Reading Association JOURNAL  
Volume 45 • Number 2 • 2010

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Page</th>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Authors</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>76</td>
<td>REVIEW OF PROFESSIONAL BOOKS</td>
<td>Engaging readers in the classroom: Research, beliefs, and strategies</td>
<td>Sandip L. Wilson, Gerald Buteau, Sara Hess, Maureen Montgomery, Gael Romei</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>85</td>
<td>NEW ENGLAND WRITE-LIGHTS</td>
<td>Interviews with Ann Turner and Wendell Minor</td>
<td>Spring Hermann</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>91</td>
<td>REVIEW OF RESEARCH IN THE CLASSROOM</td>
<td>Pygmalion in the classroom: Motivating disenfranchised readers</td>
<td>Diane Kern</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>102</td>
<td>COMPUTERS IN THE CLASSROOM</td>
<td>Video games for the disengaged (and not only) students</td>
<td>Julia Kara-Soteriou</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>NOTES ON THE CONTRIBUTORS</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The art of motivation: Engaging the disengaged readers

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

Ur hope and dream: That all our students will have precious moments to share about teachers like Mr. Falker and how these teachers have inspired them to become good readers and to love reading. Patricia Polacco’s story is evidence that there IS a Mr. Falker and each one of us can be THAT Mr. Falker!

Acknowledging that engaging ALL readers, particularly the unmotivated, reluctant readers, is essential to student success, this issue is dedicated to the theme: “Transforming disengaged readers into engaged readers in our classroom.” We are pleased and proud of the breadth and depth of the articles addressing this particular theme by authors who stimulate our thinking, challenge our understandings, and invigorate our teaching.

First, Nancy Padak and Cheryl Potenza-Radis convince us that while “it’s easy to work with readers who come to us intrinsically motivated and full of enthusiasm… it’s our responsibility to provide purposeful and authentic literacy environments for all our readers, especially those who are struggling or disengaged. Their article “Motivating struggling readers: Three keys to success” stresses that “Authentic reading leads to purposeful, engaged reading. Engaged reading yields improved reading. And improved reading leads to more authentic reading.” Then follows Nancy Frey and Douglas Fisher’s “Graphic novels: Composing with sequential art in high school English and history”—a persuasive articulation of the impact of graphic novels in students’ writing. The article argues for students to

TO THIS DAY, I REMEMBER THE FIRST DAY THAT WORDS ON A PAGE HAD MEANING TO ME… MR. FALKER HAD REACHED INTO THE MOST LONELY DARKNESS AND PULLED ME INTO BRIGHT SUNLIGHT AND SAT ME ON A SHOOTING STAR. I SHALL NEVER FORGET HIM…

THANK YOU, MR. FALKER.

~Patricia Polacco, 1998~
be “given the opportunity to marry words with images [so] they create new knowledge for themselves.” James E. Fredrickson calls attention to the need “to make our course content both relevant and possible for students to be successful” if we are determined to motivate the disengaged readers. His article “Building conscious competence: Reading our students, sharing our practice” challenges us to consider a different approach to motivating the disengaged readers—“reading readers and reading our teaching.” In “Building comprehension for reading novels: The prereading-schema building process” Nancy A. Anderson and Clare E. Hite propose an independent strategy—the prereading-schema-building process to activate readers’ prior knowledge and build a scaffold for new knowledge such as vocabulary and historical/cultural settings. Barry Lane not only delights us with his cartoon creations in “In teachers and students we trust: Real education reform is a writer’s workshop” but also leaves us with food for thought: “Writing is more of a shovel, less of a picture frame. Writing is a dynamic tool for learning, not a static template for encasing our thoughts.” Jacqueline A. Parke and Cynthia L. Meyer introduce us to Jared and Henry in their article “Motivating young readers: Theory into practice,” and invite us to shadow these two struggling readers as they engaged in motivational strategies during intervention sessions and began to become actively involved in their own learning.

“When [students] fail to see themselves in books, they may regard reading as an activity for others and not for them.” Concerned about the lack of attention given to global literature and the “dangers in the literary omission of those who are not in the cultural mainstream,” the International Reading Association’s Children’s Literature and Reading Special Interest Group (IRA/CL/R/SIG) formed a committee in 1995 to review and recognize 25 Notable Books for a Global Society. We are fortunate to have the 2009 Notable Books annotated list shared with us by its nine book award committee members: Barbara A. Ward, Chair, Marianne Saccardi, Co-Chair, April Bedford, Allen D. Evans, Janet Hill, Belinda Y. Louie, Ruth McKoy Lowery, Marianne Newman, Deborah L. Thompson, and Vivian Yenika-Agbaw. “Engaging students with global literature: The 2009 notable books for a global society” presents us with enthralling reviews of books for young readers, middle grade readers, and older readers.

The notable books article is also very timely inasmuch as our Book Beat editor Melissa Juchniewicz “retired” (temporarily, we hope) to take on new and expanded responsibilities in her district. For years Melissa had provided us with excellent book reviews appropriate for pk-12 and her column would definitely be missed. Thank you, Melissa, for your valuable contributions to NERAJ!

Complementing Parke and Meyer’s article Elene S. Demos and John D. Foshay’s “Engaging the disengaged reader” permits us to listen in and join in the authors’ conversation about Richard and Jackson, their disengaged readers, including their plans and strategies to assist them to become engaged readers. In the same token, Tami Craft Al-Hazza’s “Motivating disengaged readers through multicultural children’s literature” echoes the IRA/CL/R/SIG’s book award committee’s concern that certain cultural groups in classrooms today may have been “forgotten in the school curriculum and who deserve to have their culture recognized and respected.” Tami brings an added dimension to her piece by focusing on “methods of including multicultural literature, specifically Middle Eastern, in the classroom to increase student engagement and motivation.” Finally, Yanhui Pang shares her stories about Lisen and Yiquing, two young Chinese boys who struggle with their English reading and writing while at the same time also learning to be fluent in Mandarin. In her article “Working effectively with ELLs: What public school teachers should know” she urges us to continue exploring ways of addressing the needs of our English language learners.

In keeping with our special theme on engaging the disengaged readers, our departmental columns address aspects of motivation and engagement as well. In Review of Professional Books, Department Editor Sandip L. Wilson, and a team of reviewers: Gerald Buteau, Sara Hess, Maureen Montgomery, and Gael Romei give us a critical review of nine outstanding books that speak to the connection between engaged readers and engaged teachers. We welcome back Spring Hermann and her New England Write-Lights column. In this issue she shares transcripts of interviews with Ann Turner, an award winning author, and Wendell G. Minor, an award winning author, artist and illustrator. Diane Kern uses Eliza Doolittle in My Fair Lady in her Review of Research in the Classroom as metaphor while she explores “research that relates to teacher beliefs and ways to motivate disenfranchised or marginalized learners, in an effort to help [them] help the struggling learners in [their] classrooms.” Lastly, in Computers in the Classroom, Julia Kara-Soteriou fascinates us with her knowledge of various video games and “their potential to motivate students in the classroom, engage reluctant readers, and provide learning opportunities in different contexts.”
Motivating struggling readers: Three keys to success

Nancy Padak  
Kent State University, Ohio
Cheryl Potenza-Radis

As spring approached, a small band of pioneers set out on a journey unlike any other they had experienced. It was an exhilarating time as everyone knew this adventure was the culmination of months of planning. Along the way, their journey would test not only their preparedness but also their will and even their courage. By all accounts, their experience helped make them stronger than when they started. They learned to support each other and persevere during challenging times, and in the end, a palpable spirit of accomplishment was felt by all who bore witness to their journey.

Who were these pioneers? Surely, a reasonable mental image supporting this text could include scenes from America’s Westward expansion—covered wagons, adventurous spirits and the like. Instead, this was written with different actors in mind; namely, a small group of struggling third grade readers, who, in the spring of 2005, after weeks of guided practice, launched their first peer-led literature discussion.

Hyperbole? Perhaps. But to their teacher and these children, this experience was a successful journey, one in which struggling readers were motivated to participate in the authentic literacy happenings of their classroom. For these students, participating in literature discussions and eventually leading their own peer-led literature discussions were motivating experiences that enabled them to feel proud of their accomplishments and safe among their peers. They were no longer the only students who had to “stay with the teacher” while their more-capable peers were off enjoying independent literature discussions.

The teacher in this third-grade classroom, like many other successful teachers of children who struggle with reading, helped students become motivated, successful readers by attending to three, inter-related goals. First and most important, teachers must develop a classroom environment that focuses on purposeful and authentic reading. Within this environment, teachers must find the time to nurture students’ love of reading. Finally, they must create instructional routines, like peer-led literature discussions, to support students’ reading growth. In this article, we elaborate on each of these issues.

Purposeful, authentic reading programs
The orientation that frames our recommendations in this article is based on two key ideas that underlie many, if not most, theories of literacy development and approaches to literacy education: authenticity and purposeful engagement. We have long known that learning is most powerful when it is connected to the world that exists outside the classroom. When classroom activities reflect students’ lives outside the classroom, students are more likely to want to learn. This is what we mean by authenticity—what students read, how they read, and how they respond to what they read must be real, must be connected to students’ interests and lives and to the real world.

As important as authenticity is, it’s not enough. Students also need to be engaged readers. Too many students, especially struggling readers, live passive school lives. They prefer to allow reading in school to happen to them rather than taking initiative to read for their own purposes and pleasure. Yet progress in reading is...
largely dependent on volume of reading. Our job, then, is to engage students fully and completely, to move them away from passive, mechanical responses toward thoughtful, enthusiastic responses.

These two aspects of successful reading programs are related. Authentic reading leads to purposeful, engaged reading. Engaged reading yields improved reading. And improved reading leads to more authentic reading. It’s as simple—and as tricky—as that! We hope that thinking about the following guidelines, adapted from Rasinski, Padak, and Fawcett (2010), will help you develop a classroom atmosphere that supports authenticity; purposeful engagement; and the development of passionate, avid readers.

• **Use authentic texts and other reading material.** When they read real stories, poems, and essays, students connect with reading that is enjoyable and has meaning in their lives. Moreover, authentic texts have natural language patterns, which help struggling readers use their oral language competence. And authentic texts are more interesting. As Alfie Kohn (2008) wryly observed, “No child cares whether Pat’s rat has a hat” (p. 58).

• **Provide for high levels of engagement.** Students need to read a lot, but they also need support and encouragement to read critically, to engage in what Dick Allington (2001) calls “thoughtful literacy.” Students need to read for their own individual purposes or purposes developed within the classroom community. They need to read to solve their own problems and to satisfy their own hunger for enjoyment and learning.

• **Focus on motivation for and interest in reading.** Students who struggle with reading typically dislike reading. Can you blame them? They associate reading with unpleasant experiences. Classroom activities must help students develop more positive images of reading and of themselves as readers. A focus on academic success; opportunities to read real and personally satisfying materials; and instructional situations that allow students to control the purpose, content, and direction for their literacy experiences can cultivate these positive images. Learning is easiest and most efficient under these conditions.

• **Provide support when needed.** Struggling readers often need scaffolding or support to make reading manageable and meaningful. This may mean suggesting titles that are sufficiently interesting and easy or even reading a text to or with students before they read it independently. Support may also mean instruction in specific skills or strategies, but only if it is clear that lack of these skills or strategies is hampering student progress. As we have said elsewhere, “Readers should never struggle to the point of failure or frustration in any reading task or activity” (Rasinski et al., 2010, p. 10).

• **Know your students.** Think of a student you currently teach. What does s/he like? Dislike? What motivates this student? Under what conditions is s/he less engaged? Answers to questions like these can provide powerful instructional guidance. Spending time talking with students individually and listening to their thoughts about their own reading process and their likes and dislikes can also help shape instructional planning. Equally as important, it shows kids that their voices are valued. Of course, reading progress should also be monitored regularly. Analyzing the results of brief but regular assessments can help you determine instructional effectiveness and decide on shifts in instructional emphasis.

• **Involve parents.** Volume of reading influences reading achievement. Children are out of school for more hours each day than they are in school. Add these two together, and you’ll see the rationale for this final guideline. Research has long shown that parental involvement can affect children’s school achievement (e.g., Padak & Rasinski, 2003; Senechal, 2006). So, how can you develop effective at-home reading routines? Help parents understand the critical role they can play in their children’s reading development. Provide books, poems, and other authentic materials for use at home. Encourage parents to read to their children and to listen to children read to them. Senechal’s (2006) meta-analysis of family reading activities showed that brief “skills” instruction after reading was six times more powerful than simply reading to the child. Although parents are not teachers and should not be responsible for traditional “skills” instruction, we do recommend sharing a list of generic, developmentally appropriate after-reading activities, such as playing word or letter games. Home involvement can complement school instruction. Together, you and your students’ parents can help children grow as readers.

Keeping these guidelines in mind, you will be well on your way to creating an authentic and purposeful reading program, one that will inspire students to read wholeheartedly and enthusiastically. You can help all students, including struggling readers, learn that they can read and motivate them so that they want to read.
Time for independent reading

Time is such a precious commodity in schools; there’s never enough. However, we must make time for what’s important. And time for reading is important! Consider these research results, for example:

- In 93 percent of reading comprehension test comparisons, children who read in class or who read more in class performed as well or better than counterparts who didn’t read (or didn’t read as much) (Krashen, 2004). Replacing whatever went on in classrooms with added reading time was just as effective as, or more effective than, traditional instruction in enhancing reading comprehension (Allington, 2001).
- “Collectively, research supports the fact that during primary and elementary grades, even a small amount of independent reading helps increase students’ reading comprehension, vocabulary growth, spelling facility, understanding of grammar, and knowledge of the world” (Cullinan, 2000, p. 8).
- A meta-analysis of experimental studies of the relationship between “exposure to reading” (independent reading in any format) and reading achievement provided clear causal evidence that students who have in-school independent reading time in addition to regular reading instruction, do significantly better on measures of reading achievement than peers who have not had reading time (Lewis & Samuels, n.d., p. 4).
- Abundant recreational reading (in and out of school) has been linked to higher achievement test scores, vocabulary growth, and more sophisticated writing styles (see, for example, Block & Mangieri, 2002). Moreover, as few as 15 extra minutes of reading make a difference, especially for struggling readers (Taylor, Frye, & Maruyama, 1990). (Morgan, Mraz, Padak, & Rasinski, 2009, pp. 58-59)

We are convinced: Time for independent reading is a good investment in children’s growth as readers. If you are as well, then the next step is to determine guidelines for in-school independent reading. For independent reading routines to succeed, students need support, excellent materials to read, an ample and consistent amount of time, and opportunities to share their responses to reading with others.

Struggling readers may need support to become successful independent readers, but gauging the level of support can be tricky. You want to be supportive without being intrusive or fostering dependence. Observation and informal conversations can help you learn about who needs what kind of support. Glance at children during independent reading times. Who’s consistently day-dreaming or quickly flipping through page after page with seemingly little concentration? Chat with these children. Find out what they like to read and how they select books. Then take action:

- Have individual “what did you read today?” chats;
- Help children learn to select books that are “just right” in terms of content and difficulty level;
- Provide access to listening centers, tutors, buddy reading or other forms of scaffolding.

Books and other texts need to be ample, appropriate, and accessible. Think about how books are organized in your classroom. Easy access to excellent materials will enhance any independent reading program. Time needs to be considered carefully. To begin with, you will want to decide how much time to devote to independent reading. Most teachers we know conduct daily 15-to 20-minute sessions. Next, you will need to think about how to ease students into sustaining the reading for that period of time. You may want to begin with small amounts of time so that everyone can be successful. Then gradually increase independent reading time in 2- or 3-minute intervals until everyone can sustain reading for the amount of time you desire.

Finally, we recommend that you provide a few minutes after independent reading sessions for children to share with one another. Quick response activities add value to independent reading routines by providing opportunities to prompt recall or to help children attend to other comprehension-related issues. They also promote the culture of reading in the classroom. Just think about what we do when we’ve just read a fabulous book. We share it with someone, of course! A word of advice: whole group sharing sessions can be very time-consuming. Ask yourself whether the time spent is worth it in terms of benefits to students. One way to shave time from these whole-group sessions is to rotate among the class—ask four or five students to respond each time. Here are several of our favorite response activities (Rasinski et al., 2010):

- Hold brief sharing sessions in which a few children read their favorite parts aloud (these are marked with sticky notes as students read). You can follow up by asking children why those parts are favorites.
- Ask students to use sticky notes to mark aspects of text for discussion: setting descriptions, especially powerful language, etc. Then invite a brief discussion about one of these aspects.
- Ask students to “say one thing” or “say one thing I learned” about their texts.
- Ask students to write interesting words they encounter on sticky notes. Make a class chart or word wall of these. Talk with students about why these are “interesting.”
- Play “Around the Room.” Announce one aspect
of a story (e.g., time, location, main character) and have children tell just this about their books. To reduce time devoted to this activity, you could alternate between boys and girls or between December—June birthdays and July—December birthdays.

- Use large sticky notes inside front covers of books for children to (a) write brief reviews or (b) indicate how much they enjoyed a book using a star system (4 stars... no stars).
- Ask children to email their pen pals or parents about the books they’re reading.
- Create bookmarks for children to use: “This is the problem in the story” or “This is my favorite part” or “This is my favorite character.” Ask them to write on the bookmarks. You might want to provide new book marks, with new ideas for focus, each week or two.
- Select four students’ names and direct each one to a corner of the room. The rest of the class goes to a corner as well. The selected student gives a short “commercial” for his or her current book.
- Ask students to write in their reading logs or journals: “What happened in my book today,” “What’s going to happen next,” “My favorite character is,” or other general prompts. They can also rate books (using 4 stars... no stars) and write explanations about their ratings.

Nurturing students’ love of reading is a critical goal for any literacy program. Well-planned and supported independent reading routines can provide the time and support struggling readers need to develop and extend these feelings about the value of and joy to be taken from reading.

An authentic and purposeful instructional routine:

Peer-led literature discussions

Peer-led literature discussions or literature circles (Daniels, 2002; Jewel & Pratt, 1999; McMahon & Raphael, 1997; Noe & Johnson, 1999) involve small groups of children discussing what they have read. Three models for organizing these peer-led discussions work well in most classrooms. You can use all three at different times for different purposes. The models (adapted from Fountas & Pinnell, 2001) are:

- Whole group, same text. Students read or listen to a common text. Then help students generate topics for discussion. Post topics where they are easily visible. Small, mixed-ability-level groups can then assemble to discuss these topics. Students can either make notes as they discuss or spend the last few minutes of the discussion time summarizing their thoughts. Afterwards, the whole class reassembles to share results of the discussion. This model works very well as a follow-up to teacher read-aloud. Imagine that you’re reading the beginning of Charlotte’s Web (White, 1952), for example. Possible discussion topics might include (a) should the runt be killed? or (b) what will happen to the runt? (Rasinski et al., 2010).
- Small group, different texts. In this model, each student reads a different book, but the books have something in common. You could form groups according to authors, for example, and have a “Judy Blume” group or a “Kevin Henkes” group. Or you could form groups according to content area topics and have a “Civil War” group or an “environment” group. Groups can be formed somewhat randomly; in fact, this model is an excellent way to promote discussions among students of different ability levels. Imagine a set of books about the environment, varying in difficulty levels so that all readers have access to an appropriate text. Children read their individual titles and then meet together to share with others in their group. These discussions ordinarily focus on the common element that provided focus for the group—what children learned about the environment. As a culminating activity, groups may want to find ways to share what they have learned with their classmates.
- Small group, same text. Although you can assign students to these groups in which everyone in each group reads and discusses the same text, giving students some choice might work better. Groups of five or six children work well, so begin by deciding how many titles you will need. Again, try to include books at varying reading levels to ensure kids have access to reading books that are appropriate and engaging.

Introduce titles by means of brief (no more than a couple of minutes) book talks. Tell children titles and authors. Read an enticing bit of the text or “sell” it in some other way. List titles on the board. Then ask each child to list his or her top three choices. Use these lists to form groups. You will almost always be able to give each child one of his or her top three choices. Making accommodations for struggling readers who have chosen books above their reading level may be necessary. Utilizing buddy reading or audiobooks can help make these texts accessible to all readers and help keep students engaged and motivated.

Getting organized

After groups are formed, they need to learn how to work successfully. It takes time to learn how to discuss with one another. Initial mini-lessons that focus on
how successful groups operate can be helpful. You may also want to ask children what they have learned about good discussions. Some teachers we know post class-generated “rules” for good discussions on classroom walls. Incorporating mini-lessons and guided-practice opportunities to apply discussion techniques including how to start/end discussions, how to include everyone, how to piggyback off of someone’s contribution, how to disagree constructively, and how to change topics, and even how to tell when a conversation is off-task and what to do about it will help discussion sessions run productively. As children are becoming accustomed to working in small groups, you may want to suggest ways to proceed. For example, children might try reading their texts aloud in their groups before discussing them and also try reading texts beforehand (during independent reading time, for example). Then they can decide which model they prefer.

With longer texts, you or groups can decide how much of the text to read at (or before) a peer-led discussion. If children make their own decisions, they will want to check occasionally to decide if they’re reading too much or too little between sessions. Sticky notes can be a helpful tool for children to keep track of issues they want to discuss.

Another technique is to follow a read, respond, discuss cycle. First, students read the text (or portion of text) for that day’s discussion. Again, reading can be completed a number of ways: independent silent reading, buddy reading, audiobooks at a listening center or even reading aloud in groups. After reading, students respond in writing to some aspect of what they’ve read. These “book thoughts” can focus on specific story elements such as, “What’s the problem/solution in the chapter/text?” Or responses can be more aesthetic as students write about their favorite part or character along with supporting explanations. After responses have been written, these book thoughts are then used as a springboard to discussion. Coming to the discussion with a written response ensures each student is equally prepared to start and/or jump into the conversation. This written response provides a scaffold for those who might otherwise be passive observers as students can ask the quieter members of the group about their response(s) to the text. It is important, however, to keep in mind, written responses are meant to stimulate discussion topics rather than be used as a mind-numbing round-robin sharing activity.

**Evaluation**

Observation is a wonderful tool for evaluating children’s performance during peer-led discussions. We recommend that you decide beforehand what you are going to observe—text-related comments, ways children build on others’ comments, evidence of having comprehended, enthusiasm/engagement, etc. You may also want to list pertinent English/language arts/reading standards from your school district or state and use these to guide your observation. Don’t forget to consider standards related to speaking and listening, as well; peer-led literature discussions are a great context for learning about these aspects of your students’ language use.

An easy way to keep track of your observations is to make a blank chart with what you will be observing down the side and spaces for children’s names across the top. Each time new peer-led discussion groups are formed, make and complete a chart for each group. Brief notes or evaluative symbols (O=outstanding; S=satisfactory; U=unsatisfactory) should suffice.

Children can and should evaluate their own peer-led discussion experiences. You could occasionally ask children to talk or write about what went well in their groups, for example. Or you might want to offer statements (perhaps from the “Rules for Good Discussions” poster) for children to consider. Self-evaluation is an important characteristic of successful readers; moreover, by evaluating their own and their group’s performance, children can learn more about effective independent literature discussions.

**What about dysfunctional groups?**

Sometimes, all groups have problems. Suppose you were in a book club and that one book club member consistently tried to lead the conversation away from the topic at hand. Another always seemed disengaged. Still others talked too much or too little. One person even disagreed with others’ comments in a rude and dismissive manner. What would you do? Initially, you might be patient with these problems because you realize that becoming a functional group takes some time. But what if the negative behaviors persisted? Might you decide to leave the group?

Children don’t have the option to leave their peer-led literature discussion groups. Besides that, one goal for the groups is to help children learn to communicate effectively. So you’ll need to develop some strategies for helping children learn to work productively. Although we have no sure-fire solutions for the problem of dysfunctional groups, we do have a few ideas:

- **Be patient.** Watch carefully for a while to see if the group can “right” itself. If this happens, be sure to tell children what you observed and to praise them for their success at self-regulating.
- **Spend more time than usual sitting close to the dysfunctional group.** Don’t join the group because this may hamper peer-led conversation; children will start looking to you to provide feedback or answers. Sit near the group, however, as this sends a subtle signal to children, who will sense your presence and may begin to work more productively. One teacher we know explained to her students that she liked to stay...
in touch with each group but couldn't possibly attend every discussion in every group. To remedy this, she used inexpensive audio recorders to tape the group discussions and listened to them periodically. In this way, groups knew their teacher was listening to their discussion to make instructional decisions, but the presence of the tape recorder also served as a not-so-subtle reminder that they needed to stay on task.

- **Talk privately with group members.** In a nonjudgmental way, tell children what you have observed. Say, for example, “I've been noticing that two people in this group seem to do all the talking, and two others hardly ever make any comments. What do you think about this? Does this seem like a problem to you? If so, how can I help you find solutions?”

- **Hold occasional mini-lessons about positive group dynamics.** Help children learn how to express disagreement agreeably. Ask them to brainstorm solutions to problems they have had. Post solutions on your “Rules for Good Discussions” chart.

**Concluding thoughts**

We began this article with a story of third-grade struggling readers who successfully and joyfully learned how to engage in peer-led literature discussions. To conclude, we return to this classroom, a place where their teacher had created an atmosphere to support all students' growth as readers. These children had plenty of time to read authentic materials in purposeful and engaged ways. In addition, within the context of small guided reading groups, all children in this classroom received reading strategy instruction focused on comprehension, fluency, word decoding, vocabulary, and discussion strategies and techniques.

Over time and with plenty of guided practice, the classroom teacher effectively scaffolded instruction so that peer-led literature discussions were not off-limits to those children who struggled with reading. Instead, these students grew to enjoy reading as their teacher promoted a literacy environment with a “coordinated emphasis on competence and motivation” (Baker, Dreher, & Guthrie, 2000, p. 1). By gradually releasing responsibility to them, these readers learned the importance and satisfaction of being invested in and responsible for their reading.

Perhaps the most valuable insights came from the children themselves as they were asked to talk about their experience. Holly shared, “I liked how, like when we got used to it, then we all started jumping in and then, I like it now that we lead the group and we mostly talk.” And, “I think it’s [more] fun than just regular reading because…you get to share your thoughts because you have a group to share your thoughts and what you think.” Allie contributed, “We can express our feelings about what we thought about the chapter, if we liked it or not, if we thought it was funny and we can talk about what we liked that happened.” And Jim recalled, “I felt really proud of myself and the group because we just, if somebody like, didn't know where to like start off again, somebody just helped them.” Later, he shared, “I feel so good because, like everybody else was out in the hall, [having peer-led discussions], but we weren't, we were still in the room. So, I guess, I’m excited!” (Potenza-Radis, 2008).

Isn’t that what we want to foster – engaged and motivated readers? It’s easy to work with readers who come to us intrinsically motivated and full of enthusiasm. But, it’s our responsibility to provide purposeful and authentic literacy environments for all our readers, especially those who are struggling or disengaged. These readers don't require decisively different instruction from their more-capable peers, but rather more frequent and intense reading opportunities using authentic and whole texts; high levels of engagement in which higher-level thinking is encouraged; and support from teachers (Dudley-Marling, 1994; Rasinski, et al., 2010; Snow, Burns, & Griffin, 1998). This specific group of third-grade readers, who could have at one time been labeled disengaged, benefitted from just such an approach. They were excited to read, respond and discuss texts with others. The journey of these literacy pioneers highlighted what is possible when students are given support, opportunity, time and our trust.

**References**


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Think of the French Revolution and it’s not likely that innovation immediately leaps to mind. In all likelihood, a rummage through the box labeled “World History” in your metaphorical attic of memories might yield some stuff about guillotines and uprisings. Dig a bit deeper and perhaps you’ll recall something about Napoleon’s eventual rise to power. Yet this unlikely topic was the focus of an assignment to create a graphic novel in Ms. Sullivan’s tenth grade World History class. Isaac and Madalyn, two students in her class, paired up to create an imaginative recount of the events in the decade between 1789 and 1799. The result was an inventive amalgamation of 21st century sensibilities and 18th century calamities. Using the literary device of the omniscient narrator, readers were introduced to Zack, a teenager, and Brobie, a robot from outer space. Brobie escorted Zack through the pages of history, explaining the unfolding events. Our favorite device? Brobie’s blog posted in the corner of each page to provide the reader content details (see Figure 1).

An analysis of the content and composition of their ten-page graphic novel reveals an understanding of the topic and a sophisticated command of the elements that bring writing to life: action, dialogue, plot, and what Francine Prose calls the “narrative authority [that] comes from our sense that the writer is in control” (2003, p. 252).

**Graphic novels in the classroom**

Literacy researchers, librarians, and astute classroom teachers have been in on the secret for quite awhile now—graphic novels are not a lesser form of literature, nor are they representative of a lowered standard of expectations for students who can’t be bothered to pay attention to the complexities of prose text (Frey & Fisher, 2004; Graham, 2008; O’English, Matthews & Lindsay, 2006). We'll save the ink normally devoted to justifying the existence of these works to others. Instead, this article is about how the act of composition using sequential art can reveal student understanding. As usual, it is our students at our high school that seem to lead us, rather than the other way around. They continue to surprise us in the ways that they make meaning of their world.

As with all composition, it is necessary to understand the vocabulary of the genre in order to teach students how to use the tools needed in sequential art. A list of the vocabulary of sequential art necessary for composition with this genre are listed in Figure 2. We make sure that students know and use this technical language in their discussion of the writing process.

We will begin with a discussion of how words and images work together to represent ideas. The next major section addresses the role of precision in writing with words and images. The final portion of the article examines content knowledge and sequential art as a tool for writing research papers. Each section will be followed by descriptions of lessons designed to foster composition using sequential art.

**Teaching about images and words**

Humans have used images and symbols to convey meaning since the dawn of civilization. The Chauvet Cave paintings in southern France are believed to be the oldest, created about 32,000 years ago. Scientists believe that they were not composed for the purpose of decoration, but rather to transmit information about hunting and religious ceremonies. Human figures are rare, save for the stencils created by spitting pigment over an outstretched
Figure 1. Brobie’s Blog

Figure 2. A Glossary of Sequential Art Terms

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Feature</th>
<th>Definition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bleed</td>
<td>The technique of allowing image and colors to blend into the center binding of the pages. A bleed is often used to connote space.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caption</td>
<td>Text that establishes the place or time. For example, boxed captioned text might say, “Meanwhile…” or “Ancient Rome” or “2075”.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure</td>
<td>The shape of a living creature in the panel.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grid</td>
<td>Series of panels present on a single page. The grid generally dictates the sequence in which the images and text are read.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gutter</td>
<td>The space between panels, usually white. The gutter is the device used by sequential artists to convey inferential information.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Image</td>
<td>A visual representation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inking</td>
<td>Applying the color and lines of the image. Refers to the traditional technique of sketching first in pencil.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Layout</td>
<td>The placement of a series of panels within a grid.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lettering</td>
<td>The placement of captions, speech bubbles, and text within the panel.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Motion lines</td>
<td>Lines drawn around an object or character to suggest speed and direction of motion. Closely spaced lines suggest higher speed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Panel</td>
<td>Sometimes called a frame, this is a single bordered image that may or may not include text.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Splash page</td>
<td>A panel that takes up an entire page, or a panel that it significantly larger than the other panels on the page. A splash page may be used at the beginning of the story and contain the title, or it may be reserved to portray a momentous event in the story.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Speech bubble</td>
<td>Also called speech balloons, these are the frames that surround the text used to represent the internal or external dialogue of a character. The shape of the speech bubble changes the message. For example, a cloud-shaped one with a series of small circles over a character’s head symbolizes a thought. A jagged speech bubble is used when a character yells or is angry.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Symbol</td>
<td>Use of visual images that connote another idea, e.g., the use of a question mark over a character’s head symbolizes puzzlement.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
hand (Chauvet, Deschamps, & Hillaire, 1996). Despite a vast span of time, these handprints resonate across the millennia as a symbol of the brevity of life.

Until the emergence of alphabetic systems about 3,000 years ago, humans in what is now known as Europe, Africa, and India relied on symbols in the form of cuneiform and hieroglyphics. Even in our own alphabet, we can see the remnants of its pictographic past. The letter “a” comes from the Semitic word aleph, symbolizing an ox (see the horns?) a sign of strength (Ouaknin, 1999). Around the same time, the logographic elements of what would become the Chinese writing system emerged, and remain more or less symbolic of representative concepts, although they also utilize some syllabic components to denote some words with more than one syllable.

A symbol connotes more than a single idea—an ox, for instance, not only represented strength, but also stood for the concept of the beginning of life, and for human beings themselves (Ouaknin, 1999). These symbols are steeped in cultural and societal norms and beliefs, and are used by artists as shorthand for complex ideas. As with the Phoenicians, we use symbols to connote larger concepts. Thus, a flower symbolizes youth, while a wreath of flowers represents death (Eisner, 1985). Graphic novelist Will Eisner calls this “images as narrative tools” and states that,

“[C]omic book art deals with recognizable reproductions of human conduct. Its drawings are a mirror reflection, and depend on the reader’s stored memory of experience to visualize an idea or process quickly.” (1996, p. 17)

The symbolism of images persists in modern communication. Advertisers rely on the power of images to evoke emotions. As a single example, consider the use of images of a family sitting together for a meal to sell automobiles, insurance, banks, and pharmaceuticals. The products and services that have nothing to do with food—of images of a family sitting together for a meal to sell to evoke emotions. As a single example, consider the use of an ox, for instance, not only represented strength, but also stood for the concept of the beginning of life, and for human beings themselves (Ouaknin, 1999). These symbols are steeped in cultural and societal norms and beliefs, and are used by artists as shorthand for complex ideas. As with the Phoenicians, we use symbols to connote larger concepts. Thus, a flower symbolizes youth, while a wreath of flowers represents death (Eisner, 1985). Graphic novelist Will Eisner calls this “images as narrative tools” and states that,

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The dorado did a most extraordinary thing as it died: it began to flash all kinds of colours in rapid succession. Blue, green, red, gold and violet flickered and shimmered neon-like on its surface as it struggled. I felt I was beating a rainbow to death. (p. 185)

Not only do we experience the death through vivid word images as the colors “flickered and shimmered neon-like” but we also witness a symbol of Pi’s mixed feelings even as he must kill the fish in order to survive (“I felt I was beating a rainbow to death.”) The description of the fish’s death becomes more important in the hands of a skilled writer who knows that events do more than advance the plot. Even the juxtaposition of words rainbow and death, separated by one small word, are chosen to heighten the conflict the protagonist feels. Whether with words or images, composition ultimately relies upon the tension created by this interplay. If a quality of being human is one’s ability to hold two conflicting ideas at the same time, then good composition must manifest the same. In order for students to accomplish this, they need experiences at closely observing phenomena to heighten their ability to notice.

**Fostering observation for composition**

Students in our high school English classes have not developed the practiced eye of observation, a necessary skill for any writer or artist. We hone these skills through lots of observational exercises. At the beginning of the year, we introduce them to a series of questions they should ask themselves as they read and view:

- What do you notice?
- What are the essential elements?
- What is the artist’s message?
- What feelings does it provoke?
- Do you agree or disagree?

Several times a week, we use quick writes of five minutes in length to write to an image we project on a screen. These images can range from everyday objects such as a glass of milk covered in beads of condensation to startling visual images such as an extreme close up of a tarantula. After writing, they discuss their observations with partners and with the class. We lead a discussion about the techniques used by the photographer or artist, such as point of view, lighting contrast, and subject matter. Finally, we return to their words, recording powerful sentences to serve as captions for the images. The images and captions are posted in the room, and they enjoy viewing the captions written by students from other class periods as well.

Because fair use is always a question, we explain to our students that we use images from websites that are part of the Creative Commons project (www.creativecommons.org). Members of Creative Commons retain rights for the use of their work, but also allow educators to use their images, audio, video, and texts to be shared and reused. For example, www.flickr.com is a rich resource with millions of still images which have been designated as part of the Creative Commons copyright. These are organized in a searchable database that is easy to use.
Within a few weeks, the students’ skills are becoming more refined, and we now move into a unit on poverty in contemporary literature. Using Creative Commons pictures selected from Flickr, we display photographs and images that portray various aspects of poverty in the United States and the world. Students write to each of these images and keep them in a writer’s journal. For instance, one day we showed a photograph of a young child with an outstretched hand in the foreground such that it appeared to be much larger. K.C., a student in our class, wrote:

I see a child with his hand stretched out, pleading for a penny. The artist wants me to see the hand is huge, like it can never be filled. I think that’s his message, that the world’s hand can never be filled. I feel so discouraged by that. Why should we try?

Our students read about the issue of poverty in book clubs, including narrative works like The Grapes of Wrath (Steinbeck, 2002) and The Breadwinner (Ellis, 2001), and informational texts such as Material World (Menzel & Mann, 1995). One group read the graphic novel Blankets (Thompson, 2003) after we received written permission from their parents due to content. The range of texts allowed us to differentiate by reading levels. Each day we read aloud excerpts from Nickel and Dimed (Ehrenreich, 2008) to build their background knowledge about poverty in the US. And all along, they collected their written reactions to the images we showed them, incorporating more of what they had learned from reading the target and selected texts.

Eventually, students manipulated images we had used in class and combined them with excerpts of their own writing to create a one-page photo essay entitled “Poverty in Three Images.” They used the Comic Life software installed on our classroom computers to frame their compositions. The software offers a host of page templates and effects so that they could determine how they would juxtapose their three selected images and alter them using a library of style attributes. Students synthesized their chosen images using original text. Jayson, who chose images featuring hands, wrote:

These three images are telling a story. Each has a hand in it, and it makes me think about “giving a hand” to someone else. Hands can tell a lot about a person. The hands are praying, and demanding, and in a fist to fight poverty. That is what happens with a problem. First we pray because it’s really a bad problem, and then we demand that it gets fixed by someone. People have to see that a problem can be fixed only when we start fighting the problem instead of praying that someone else will fix it.

Another student named Karla chose a different approach. She used images from Make Poverty History, a charitable organization based in the United Kingdom that posts Creative Commons images on Flickr, and combined it with information she had learned through her readings:

When will we decide that it is too costly to maintain poverty? When will we say that enough is enough? 10.5 million children die each year. 121 million children, mostly girls, cannot attend school because their families are too poor. The whole world pays the cost when children die, when they grow up without an education.

Some of our students use the Poverty in Three Images photo essay to write a longer piece, or for the public speaking presentation they are required to do during the school year. The range of responses we have received over the last two years have afforded us the opportunity to view their literacy development through a broader lens. We see evidence of their growing abilities to use words and images thoughtfully to convey ideas and information in digital movies and websites they develop for other courses. However, this isn’t the only time we utilize a sequential art. We have found it to be valuable for teaching reading comprehension through composition, especially inferencing. The ability to infer as readers in turn strengthens their writing and composition.

“Putting each word on trial for its life”:
Writing with precision

Sequential art is typically set up as a series of panels that are arranged according to the logic of the story. The most common layout reads from left to right and top to bottom in much the same way that prose is written. Other templates might be used, such as when a central panel dominates the page, with smaller panels surrounding it and read in a clockwise fashion. In nearly all cases, the panels are separated by a small blank space, called the gutter. It is within this space that much of the story lies (McCloud, 1993). The character Joe Kavalier, comic book artist in Michael Chabon's novel The Amazing Adventures of Kavalier and Clay (2000), calls it “the infinitely expandable and contractible interstice of time that lay between the panels of a comic book page” (p. 253). We tell our students that when they read and compose graphic novels, they need to “keep their mind in the gutter”—in other words, to give deliberate attention to the ideas artists and writers suggest but that are not explicitly identified for the reader.

The pace of an event can be slowed down or sped up depending on the spacing of the panels. A series of narrow and closely packed panels suggests action and speed, while a single image on a page invites the reader
to slow down to ponder what has occurred. Eisner (1985) compares the timing of panels to the time code notations used by musicians to indicate the relative speed of a passage.

Reading sequential art requires the reader to fill in the action and dialogue that occurs between panels. Therefore, the artist must choose which images and words will be used to keep the reader moving forward. In the same way, a writer of prose text must select words that compel the reader to continue. Whether using images or words, both require precision. As Mark Twain famously observed, “Anybody can have ideas—the difficulty is to express them without squandering a quire of paper on an idea that ought to be reduced to one glittering paragraph.”

Bringing precision in one’s writing is always a challenge, and most young writers have been taught that quantity equals quality. It is true that they need to have something down on paper in order to begin editing and revising, but rarely are students challenged to “put every word on trial for its life” (Prose, 2003). Yet if one is going to keep a reader moving from sentence to sentence (or from panel to panel), then the contents of each must be able to stand trial. It is that leap from one to the next that embodies the act of inferring.

Too often, we encounter students who have had precious little experience with knowing what inferring feels like. Bewildered by years of less than helpful advice to “read between the lines” they strain to see what everyone but them seems to perceive. For these students, viewing and discussing sequential art can make it clear. For instance, we will sometimes use one page from a graphic novel entitled New York: Life in the Big City (Eisner, 2006) to illustrate the point. The page contains six evenly spaced panels in three rows of two each. The setting remains the same throughout—we are looking through a street-level window out onto the sidewalk where we can see the legs of two people, a man and a woman. Although completely wordless, the reader understands that the two approach each other, stop to have a discussion, and then a disagreement. It is understood that this is a lover’s quarrel, with the man apologizing and the woman accepting. In the last panel, they kiss.

Students readily recognize the drama playing out across the page and begin to invent dialogue that might fit the panels. At this point, we point out that they are inferring. Although we can only see the characters from the knees down, we can visualize their faces and expressions. Our personal experiences allow us to construct believable scenarios that match the story. We can even imagine the kiss. We then show them that writers do the same with well-chosen words.

Our next lesson focuses on the six-word story. We explain that literary legend has it that Ernest Hemingway, well known for his carousing, had a bar bet with a friend about who could write the shortest story. Ever one to rise to a challenge, Hemingway purportedly claimed that he could write a complete story in six words. To prove his point, he offered: Baby shoes. For sale, never worn.

That’s a story that hits the reader right in the solar plexus. So we talk about why it has such an emotional impact. Students tell us it reminds them of a personal experience in their family, or of a sad story told about someone in their neighborhood or community. Many will imagine a story of a longed for baby that is lost due to miscarriage or stillbirth. Others will tell a tale of an adolescent mother who has had her baby taken away from her because she cannot properly care for the child. Some will tell of a failed adoption. None of these are right or wrong. What the story manages to do is to tap into the human condition through a few incredibly well chosen words. The rest is left to the imagination of the reader, who fills in all the blank spaces with plot, characters, dialogue, and setting.

After discussing their ideas, we began to rewrite the story using sequential art. Using images we collected in advance, we used a write aloud process to compose in front of students. We inserted and manipulated images in a Comic Life template to show them how we make decisions about our choices for determining what will best represent all the inferred events surrounding those words. We also showed them other six-word stories developed by contemporary authors. Wired Magazine sponsored a contest in 2006 and published them online at http://www.wired.com/wired/archive/14.11/sixwords.html. While not all are appropriate for school use, we selected a few to demonstrate:

  - Alan Moore
- He read his obituary with confusion.
  - Steven Meretzky
- Three to Iraq. One came back.
  - Graeme Gibson
- Finally, he had no more words.
  - Gregory Maguire

We then challenged our students to do the same. We didn't expect them to write a whole novel in six words, but rather to craft advice for next year’s incoming ninth grade students. They used images and six words of text to pass on their words of wisdom. Our favorites include:

- Do not procrastinate. You will regret!
  - Sarita
- Teachers don’t bite. Not me, anyway.
  - Veronica

By making the initial writing assignment so constrained, students experienced what putting words on trial really felt like. They next expanded this writing by telling Hemingway’s baby shoes story in 150 words.
This time, while the word limits worked in their favor, they still had to choose their words carefully to encapsulate the arc of the story. Writing assignments such as these provide young writers with experiences in writing with precision, and not just for length.

Writing in prose or with images requires content knowledge as well. In the next section, we will discuss how a World History teacher used sequential art as a scaffold for writing a formal research paper of World War I.

**Building content knowledge for formal writing**

Vital information has long been communicated in ways that are not expressly text-based. Whether it was gossips, marathon-running messengers, or town criers, the immediacy of knowledge has always been highly valued. For much of human history, the scarcity of print meant that it must be shared. For example, Alberto Manguel writes of the *lectores* who read newspapers and books aloud to the cigar-rolling workers of Cuba and Florida. They were

> [E]xpected to interpret the characters by imitating their voices, like actors... Being read to, as the cigar workers found out, allowed them to overlay the mechanical, mind-numbing activity of rolling the dark scented tobacco leaves with adventures to follow, ideas to consider, reflections to make theirs. (1996, p. 114).

In places where literacy levels were low, or even nonexistent, information could be conveyed through visual means. The Bayeux Tapestry, for instance, is 230 feet of embroidered cloth depicting the invasion of England by Normans in 1066. Among the information it contains include the triumph of William the Conqueror, the Battle of Hastings, and the appearance of Halley’s comet. Graphic novelist Bryan Talbot called it “the first known British comic strip” (*The Guardian*, September 5, 2007, p. 5).

In modern times, the graphic novel has been used to pack extensive expository and informational text into vividly illustrated pages. Well known titles include the Pulitzer Prize-winning *Maus* (Spiegelman, 1986), a recount of the Nazi invasion and occupation of Poland, *Pride of Baghdad* (Vaughan, 2008), an allegory about the Iraq War, and *The 9–11 Report: A Graphic Adaptation* (Jacobson & Colón, 2006). In the same way that dense prose text like the 9-11 Commission’s report can be reinterpreted through visual images in order to make the content more clear, students can do the same with their informational texts. The result can enlighten students about the scope of a sweeping range of information, and can in turn provide the artist with a clarified understanding of the content as a means for preparing for formal writing.

The students in Ms. Sullivan’s World History class are required to write a formal term paper as part of the course. This assignment comes at the beginning of their second semester and concerns the causes and effects of World War I on the geopolitical landscape of the 20th century. This assignment is daunting for her sophomores, and she uses sequential art as a means for determining their mastery of the major points that they will need to incorporate into their paper. Students compose several pages of sequential art as part of their preparation for the term paper, and these are eventually combined into a longer graphic novel that serves as an outline. For example, Araceli illustrated the major events that led to the outbreak of the war, including the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand by Gavrilo Princip, the “Blank Check” telegram from Germany that assured Austria of Germany’s support, and the mobilization of Russian troops. Ms. Sullivan’s concern in this case is not with the sophistication of the images, but rather of the accuracy of content. A review of Araceli’s assignment provides Ms. Sullivan with the assurance that her student is ready to write about the events of the summer of 1914.

Ms. Sullivan’s use of sequential art as a scaffolded tool for longer composition has proven to be successful. Her students find their initial foray into academic writing with sequential art as being less intimidating. In addition, it provides Ms. Sullivan with a tool for supporting their subsequent text writing. When Araceli later wrote a confusing passage about the Blank Check incident, Ms. Sullivan was able to return to the page of sequential art the student had originally composed. Together they reviewed the sequence of events and checked it against the written sequence in the text passage. Araceli was able to see that she had not made the details of the affair clear to readers and made the necessary changes to increase the clarity and accuracy of her research.

**Conclusion**

Graphic novel compositions highlight composition processes, and a natural outcome of reading graphic novels is composing them. When students are given the opportunity to marry words with images, they create new knowledge for themselves. Writers with few skills experience a level of success they may not have ever had before, and advanced writers refine their skills in writing for precision. Graphic novels and prose texts do not replace one another—they foster deeper understanding of both.

**References**


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Name of Presenter(s): ________________________________
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Audience Level: Check one
☐ Family/ Community Literacy
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☐ Middle
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☐ Reading Specialist
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Day you would like to present: ☐ Sept. 23 ☐ Sept. 24 ☐ Either
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Building conscious competence: Reading our students, sharing our practice

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When I first began teaching middle school students in the early 1990s, it took at least three years and multiple readings of Nancie Atwell’s (1987) *In the Middle* for me to finally muster the courage to change my classroom culture to one of a reading and writing workshop. Looking back on it now, I can see that it was not just fear that held me back, but also a lack of vision and collegiality. That is, I did not have access or opportunity or time to watch writing workshops conducted by other teachers, largely because I did not know anyone, other than Atwell and Linda Rief (1992), who were leading and organizing classrooms in this way. Once I took the leap, though, there was certainly tweaking and revising and reframing to do, but there was no turning back—because creating a classroom culture where reading and writing and talking about reading and writing allowed me to listen to and learn from my students. It is this listening to and learning from students that changed my conversations with my colleagues from one in which we had talked about what students could not do to a conversation about what students could do. Moreover, a reading and writing workshop provided my students and me with opportunities to talk about the choices we made when we read and wrote. We had to articulate our logic and reasoning, and articulating the thinking behind my pedagogical choices was something that my conversations with colleagues sorely lacked.

It was about this time our growing district added a new middle school and because of this, we shuffled the faculties from the district’s two existing middle schools. In the new arrangement, my colleague Ellen and I would split the school’s eighth graders, and we would have classrooms next to one another. Although we had different styles, different experiences, different expertise, and different expectations of what a classroom culture for eighth graders should look and feel like, we made time to talk to one another about our students’ work, interests, and abilities. Most of the time these conversations were informal, right there in the hallway with students slamming lockers and passing notes and racing to their next classes, but we had them.

I share these details from my past to raise a larger question about the theme of this issue, motivating disengaged readers in our classrooms. More specifically, I believe that the conversations I had with Ellen were helpful in multiple ways and for many people, including our students, our colleagues, and ourselves; however, these were “unconsciously competent” conversations. That is, the conversations were helpful, but we were not able to say, exactly, why or even how. Ellen and I just knew intuitively that when we took some time to talk about what we were seeing and trying in our classrooms we walked away with a new understanding or a different point of view.

As I think about motivating the disengaged readers in our classrooms, I think about how we as teachers “read” our students, how we “read” our pedagogical practice in relationship to our knowledge, and how we “read” the relationships we have with our professional colleagues and community. Moreover, I think about how we make our reading processes visible for our students, but we do not often make our “reading as teachers” visible to our colleagues. I believe that in order to help the disengaged readers in our classrooms, we need to identify what we think we know about them and then share our tentative understanding with our colleagues, especially those colleagues down the hallway, in our department, on our teams, or across our districts. Sharing what we see and what we think it means is not just a way to demonstrate what we know, but a way to discover it, and I think it moves us to being more deliberate and “consciously competent” as we consider our next move with our students and as we reflect and speculate with our colleagues.
Reading readers and reading our teaching
While we can feel uncertain or even lost when we work with disengaged readers, we have a general sense that in order to motivate them we need to make our course content both relevant and possible for the students to be successful. Disengaged readers are each different and, oftentimes, it can feel as though we are entering unfamiliar territory and as though we are strangers in a new land, unsure of what to do next for this particular student. It is at this point that we need to be strategic in how we come to make sense of how this student understands reading, learning, our classroom community, and more. To do this, we engage in a process of collecting information about the student. We read this data, seeing first what is there, then naming the patterns and surprises we see, and then applying them to our next move with the student. Although we could stop there and think only in terms of the relationship with this particular student, I believe we need to add one more layer, and that is simply to talk with colleagues. When we “go public” with our interpretations, we make our assumptions more visible, and we have the opportunity to discover and to better understand how we read the situation of working with disengaged readers. That is, when I think about “motivating disengaged readers in our classrooms,” I believe we concentrate so much on the first phrase “motivating disengaged readers” that we begin to give away to others our authority and knowledge-building expertise of our students “in our classrooms” in our particular teaching context.

Although I absolutely endorse more research and discussion about ways in which we can help disengaged, unmotivated, reluctant, or discriminatory readers see the relevance and possibilities of reading, it seems we know a great deal about how to do so, at least in general. I want to think more about how we come to know our individual students and how we share our understanding of them with our colleagues. It is this dual act of how we come to know our students and how we share our understanding that I think I was unconsciously engaging in when I structured my classroom around a reading/writing workshop and when I talked to Ellen, my teaching colleague, about how I was interpreting my students’ actions and artifacts.

Ernest Morrell, a former high school teacher and literacy professor at Michigan State when I began my graduate studies there, led a discussion in one of our seminars. We spoke of how many of our pre-service teachers tried to understand how young people they observed in the area secondary schools made sense of schooling. The pre-service teachers framed their interpretations around the issue of motivation: “the students seem so unmotivated;” “they just don’t care;” “they don’t see the point in reading X,” etc. Morrell offered a simple equation for addressing student motivation, a formula that is simplified to be sure, but I think it proves useful here. As Morrell explained it, one’s motivation is determined by how one sees the relevance of the task and if one believes it is possible to do it well. That is, motivation equals relevance plus the possibility of success.

When I read and review the literature on “reluctant” or “resistant” or “unmotivated” readers, I see two categories in which the literature might be grouped. The first group revolves around how do we make reading more relevant for our students. For example, a number of people write and talk about authors, genres, and topics that might “hook” readers. Crowe (2000) writes about using young adult literature to teach students to love what we love about our discipline of English studies; Jeffery (2009) writes that despite the popular notion that boys don’t enjoy reading, he sees them as “discriminating” readers when he writes, “The fact is boys will read if we put the right book in their hands;” and, Kittle (2009) cites Atwell (2007) who wrote:

For students of every ability and background, it’s the simple miraculous act of reading a good book that turns them into readers, because even for the least experienced, most reluctant reader, it’s the one good book that changes everything. The job of adults who care about reading is to move heaven and earth to put that book into a child’s hands (p. 40).

In addition to a search for finding a book that is the book that hooks someone into joining the literacy club (Smith, 1988), another approach to making reading relevant is to find out what students are doing outside of school so that we can make connections and parallels to what we hope they will do in school. For instance, in recent years there has been much discussion on the possibilities of “reading” video games (Adams, 2009; Gee, 2007) as a bridge and as a model for helping struggling or reluctant readers to become independent readers of more sophisticated texts (Jolley, 2008). Other activities outside of school such as the reading and writing of popular culture (Mahiri, 1998; Morrell, 2004) or of engaging more broadly in digital environments and new literacies (Kara-Soteriou, 2007; Lankshear & Knobel, 2006) have also been considered as ways to help students see the relevancy of reading in general and quite possibly the reading of particular texts more specifically. For instance, my colleague Jeff Wilhelm (2007) has written about the need for teachers to frame their curriculum around an overarching inquiry question so that the reading of texts is seen as something that more experienced readers do outside of school as they discuss, debate, and pursue the important, enduring questions that we all ask in our lives.

In addition to the strategies briefly listed above, we have also tried to help students see that reading...
intentionally and independently is well within their reach. To do this, we have most often tried to make the act of reading – the reading process and the questions we more experienced readers ask ourselves when we read – much more visible. Writers and teachers (Allen, 1995; Harvey & Goudvis, 2007; Keene & Zimmermann, 2007; Tovani, 2000; Wilhelm, 2001; Wilhelm, Baker, & Dube, 2001) have suggested a wide range of reading strategies and a pedagogy of making those strategies visible for the readers in our classrooms. Ambe (2007) sums up this stance nicely when she writes:

Effective comprehension strategies facilitate construction of meaning and help reluctant readers develop positive attitudes toward literacy events. Generally, effective comprehension strategies are those that encourage student or teacher questioning, connect the text to the reader’s background knowledge, set a purpose for reading, and activate higher-level thinking skills (Polloway, Patton, & Serna, 2005) (p. 636).

Specific classroom activities, such as use of drama (Brinda, 2008; Wilhelm, 2008), can be used to help make reading strategies and the content in the text more visible for students. Once this reading process becomes more visible as a way to help students to envision, question, connect with, predict, etc. then it can help students be successful in comprehending and engaging with texts.

Through this article, I want to extend our vision of how to help disengaged readers by moving beyond our typical, though necessary, concerns of making texts more relevant and of making the reading processes one that our students engage in independently and strategically. Instead, I want to situate those concerns within our working contexts, because if we want to engage all students in our classrooms as readers, then we need to learn from each of them: we need to learn their interests, their relationship with the rest of the group in the class, their experiences with reading – both in the past and in the present. To learn how our students make sense of the world in which we operate – our classrooms – then we will need to take the stance of inquirers, collecting data as ethnographers would do. Moreover, I want to make the case that we need to also share with one another what we think this data means to us. I want us to “go public” with at least one colleague, because doing so creates a rhetorical context where we have to present what we think we’ve seen or heard and to offer our reasons for the interpretations we make based on them. That is, when we “go public,” we hypothesize and theorize; we move from thinking about specific teaching strategies as panaceas to articulating how we are (in) effective at particular moments for particular students in our particular classrooms: we make our process of “reading” of students, particularly disengaged readers, visible to one another, just as we make our process of reading texts visible to our students.

Learning to share our teaching with colleagues:
Boise State University’s VPDS

One of the most visible and concrete moments when teachers talk with one another is when we are inducting and apprenticing new members into our professional community. At Boise State University (BSU) we piloted a new student teaching experience for our secondary English Language Arts pre-service teachers through a grant provided by the National Writing Project. Briefly, the grant allowed us to pair pre-service teachers with Boise State Writing Project (BSWP) teacher consultants for the entire school year. In addition to working together in the mentor teachers’ classrooms, during the first semester pre-service teachers and mentors met as an entire group at night for three hour meetings every two or three weeks. The purposes of these meetings were many, but one of them was to provide pre-service teachers and their mentors research tools to help them better understand individual students and groups of students in their classrooms. That is, teachers discussed and used ethnographic methods (e.g., interest surveys, ethnographic interview protocols, observational strategies, case study protocols, sociograms, etc.) as a way to initiate discussions not only between the mentor and student teacher, but also between pairs of mentors and student teachers.

In addition to helping student teachers and mentors discuss particular students and groups of students, these meetings also had the purpose of scaffolding their working relationship for teacher research project the mentor and student teacher would create and publicly present together in the second semester. More precisely, during the student teaching semester student teachers and mentors would develop, refine, and articulate a research question; they would collect and analyze data; and, they would present their findings in a public forum.

As teachers who have worked with student teachers know well, it is time-consuming and complex work inducting a new member into our professional community, largely because one has to make her or his pedagogical reasoning and judgment visible to another. It is difficult, in part, because we do not make our thinking visible to colleagues often. In our project, we hoped to scaffold and structure these conversations so that mentors and student teachers shared their thinking regularly. While mentors and student teachers spoke with one another often throughout their working days, many pairs also used dialogue journals as a way to capture and share their thinking for more in-depth opportunities. Alex, a mentor teacher, and Reagan, a student teacher, (pseudonyms) cultivated and sustained a conversation with one another, not only in their face-to-face interactions, but also
through a dialogue journal they maintained throughout the entire school year. In the next section, I present two extended examples from their dialogue journal, because these excerpts make their conversation more visible and concrete. In offering these excerpts as examples, I hope to point to what makes their conversation seem to be productive in order for us to be consciously competent as we go public about our teaching with colleagues. The first exchange focuses on a particular student, one who seems to be a disengaged reader. The second exchange focuses on a particular group of students who seem to include many disengaged readers.

Jackie: “I’m a terrible reader”
Reagan, the student teacher, writes to Alex early in the school year about one student, Jackie.

I noticed that one student in the reg. class—a girl, blonde, petite, and blue-eyed, sits in the row nearest the door, but I can’t recall her name now—really struggled with the assignment. She told me that she couldn’t remember anything from the story, I talked with her a little bit about it, but all she could remember was the ending, which the class re-enacted on Thursday. She claimed that she couldn’t remember the beginning or anything that was done on Wednesday. “I’m a straight-F student,” she whined, “I’m a terrible reader; I always get bad grades. I can’t understand a word of this.” On and on she went in this manner. So self-defeating. It kind of startled me a little bit. I encouraged her to start with what she knew (Fortunato’s death in the catacombs and how he died), and then try to figure out why Montressor would do such a thing and how they ended up in the catacombs. I gave her three or four questions to help guide her re-reading; she seemed to perk up and went right to work, with help from her neighbor. Half an hour later, I heard her complain to you, saying that she would just take the “F” instead of even trying. How did you handle that situation? I couldn’t, from the brief 4 minutes I spent with her, figure out if she really is struggling in reading comprehension, if she simply is unwilling to put effort into thinking, or if she just wanted attention. What do you know about this student?

In this passage, Reagan shares specific observations and how she interprets them. More precisely, Reagan sees one student struggling with an assignment based on a classroom reading. Reagan both paraphrases what the student said (the student couldn’t remember details from the story) and cites exactly what the student said (“I’m a straight-F student ... I’m a terrible reader; I always get bad grades. I can’t understand a word of this”). Reagan reports that once she began talking with the student, the student could remember the ending of the story, because the class had re-enacted the ending in class. Finally, Reagan observed the student complaining later to Alex approximately thirty minutes after Reagan had talked with the student.

Reagan does not jump straight to interpreting what she thinks about this student; instead, she begins with specific, concrete words and actions. Reagan does, however, offer her interpretation when she writes that she thinks the student has a “self-defeating” attitude and approach, and Reagan suggests that she believed the task was too overwhelming for the student when she describes how she broke down the task into smaller steps and when she offered a few questions that Jackie might ask herself. Finally, Reagan asks Alex for his read on the situation: How did you handle that situation? What do you know about this student? Is this a student who really struggles with reading comprehension or is it just a situation when a student does not want to do the hard thinking being asked of her? These questions not only invite Alex to share his prior knowledge and experience, but they also provide a chance for him to describe his observations and interpretations. Alex responds:

The blond girl (Jackie) does struggle quite a bit. She’s new to me, too, so I’m still working on figuring her out. She’s a perfect example of a student who was experiencing the old ZPD—without us, she would have given up and taken the “F.” My philosophy is that kids have to work just as hard to get the “F” in my class as they do the “A”...a student like Jackie usually responds well to a little tough love, as in “I won’t give you the satisfaction of taking the easy way out here and letting you have the “F.” After you spoke to her and talked the story out a little bit, I talked to her about the story, too. Basically, I asked her to start with what she could remember, and we went from there. She had the basics down, and I showed her how to use the textbook to figure out names of characters, details, and things of that nature. On her way out the door, I pulled her aside, told her I was as stubborn as she is, and also told her to come and check out a book from me after school...this seemed to relieve her stress a great deal, and we’ll see what she comes up with on Monday. My guess is she’s done at least a little work over the weekend, but may be hesitant to admit it. I think she’ll either come in with some excitement about having accomplished something, OR she’ll come in complaining that the assignment was impossible, and that she wants that F...either way, let’s praise her for thinking about the assignment over the weekend, and let her know that we’re here to help. My gut tells me that she’s the sort of kid who will like this class after she’s been guided to accomplishment, and knows that we won’t take “no” for an answer...whatever she comes at us with, we can re-frame into something like “okay, so NOW what are you going to do to get this task accomplished?”
Alex begins by noting that Jackie is a new student for him as well, noting his interpretations of her. Alex writes that he believes Jackie is an example of the kind of student who struggles and who is “experiencing the old ZPD” – someone who “would have given up and taken the ‘F.’” In these two points Alex is situating his interpretation within two resources: one, his experience in working with similar students in the past; and two, his theory of learning, which seems to be based on socio-cultural theories since he refers to the Vygotskian concept of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). Moreover, Alex previews his “philosophy” by sharing his expectations of participating in his classroom, namely students would have to work hard to not do well in his class. He is going to support students from their current abilities and understanding; students need to help him do so by at least trying the tasks he designs for students.

Alex then moves from his situating his interpretation to describing the moves he made with Jackie: he talks with her about the events in the story, shows her how to use the textbook, pulls her aside after class, tells her that he is stubborn like she is, and let her know that it was a good idea for her to pick up a textbook after school so that she could use it at home over the weekend. From this description, Alex offers a hypothesis about how Jackie will respond. “My guess,” he writes, “is she’s done at least a little work over the weekend, but may be hesitant to admit it.” Then he suggests what this might mean for him and Reagan the next time they see Jackie. “I think she’ll either come in with some excitement about having accomplished something, or she’ll come in complaining that the assignment was impossible.” Alex situates, interprets, describes, and hypothesizes in order to suggest the next move he and Reagan might make with Jackie. He suggests that they praise Jackie and that they guide her to accomplishment. “...whatever she comes at us with, we can re-frame into something like ‘okay, so NOW what are you going to do to get this task accomplished?’”

Reagan and Alex both offer descriptions of the specific words and actions of one student, and after they describe, they interpret. Because she did not include it in her entry, Reagan does not make visible what she bases her interpretation on. Alex, on the other hand, draws from his experience, his expectations, and his theory of learning. Alex seems to offer his descriptions, interpretations, and hypotheses in order to suggest deliberate and intentional pedagogical moves he and Reagan might take next. That is, Alex seems to not just answer Reagan’s questions, but he seems to extend and refine her thinking by making his visible. That is, by sharing his process of “reading” one student, he offers an opportunity for another teacher to learn.

While this exchange may seem to suggest that when we share our thinking with colleagues we are only demonstrating what we know, the next excerpt shows how we might begin to see how sharing our thinking with others can also be a way for us to do more than demonstrate our knowledge: it begins to show how sharing can help us discover knowledge.

### 7th hour is THAT class

One of the common tools we use as teachers to learn more about our students, as individuals and as groups, is providing them with surveys or questionnaires. Reagan asked her classes to complete a literacy questionnaire, asking them to rank literacy activities (reading, writing, texting, surfing the internet, etc.), to note texts and assignments they enjoyed or did not enjoy, and noting any other information they felt was important for her to know about them. After collecting the questionnaires, Reagan then looked for patterns and surprises. She then wrote a note to Alex, sharing her preliminary findings. In doing so, she begins to note some principles that she can rely on as a teacher. That is, by sharing what she sees and what she thinks it means, it provides Reagan with an opportunity to learn. She writes:

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Some of the students gave pretty thorough responses about which English projects they liked/disliked in the past, which is good! It will help me as we design assignments. I was glad to see that. I noticed a pattern of responses, though. Several students complained about how awful 8th grade English was (which I’m assuming is related to the stuff you told me yesterday). Some students’ favorite books/assignments were other students’ most hated ones. Interesting. I haven’t looked close enough yet to figure out a more clear pattern, though. Here are a few preliminary observations and thoughts, though:

1. One assignment never fits all. There’s always a student who dislikes any given assignment, no matter how much creative (or non-creative) freedom it allows them.
2. Teachers need to give choices in type of assignments, at least sometimes. Not everyone learns best from doing art or creative writing or whatever you assign.
3. Many students will enjoy a particular novel or story, but often it turns out that just as many will dislike that same novel/story.

On the other hand, however, it was hard for me to look at some of the responses, particularly a few from the 7th hour. Some of these kids absolutely hate reading and/or hate school with a vengeance. A few complained about never understanding anything they read and declared everything to be “boring” and “confusing.” They just don’t
Now, I know that you can't win every student. I know that. I've been warned about the “Jesus complex” several times in the past. But it’s hard to accept that, especially when it comes to reading, because reading and literacy is so important for everything else they will do in school and in the future.

I read this article for one of my classes last weekend; in it, the two authors argued in favor of throwing out the concept of the whole-class novel and instead letting the students read novels of their choice. (I've attached it for you to read, if you haven't already seen it.) On Saturday, when I read it, I disagreed with it flat-out. I mean, you've got to teach the “classics,” no two ways about it. That's where the good, challenging stuff is! HOWEVER... now, after perusing the literacy questionnaire, I’m not so sure of my opinion anymore. Some of the students, especially in 7th hour, really need to just read. And sometimes the only way to get them to read is to let them choose what they read (as much as I dislike pop fiction authors like Nicholas Sparks, or *shudder* the newly popular paranormal romances, if that’s what they enjoy to read, then so be it). I’m struggling right now to figure out how to KEEP the whole-class novel (both because we have to teach them and because they are works of lit that are definitely worth studying) and to give the students some choices in what novels they read.

My primary thought about this article, though, is that its argument is mostly geared towards the “traditional” way of teaching English rather than an inquiry-based stance. Using the inquiry approach to engage students, I think, deflates several of the arguments in this article. But still... if one of our goals is to get these kids to read outside of school, then shouldn't we consider some ways to let them choose what they read? Your thoughts?

Several things are going on in Reagan's entry for Alex. As in the previous excerpt, she begins by describing what she sees (i.e., the patterns) and then she offers what she thinks it means about students and for her teaching. She offers a couple of hypotheses about why students might hate reading and/or school (e.g., they don't care, bad experiences in the past), and she identifies the questions that the students’ responses raise for her, namely, “How are we going to get these particular kids to read (and appreciate) things like To Kill a Mockingbird, let alone Romeo & Juliet?” Reagan does not stop here with her descriptions, interpretations, questions, and hypotheses; instead, she begins to do the kinds of things that Alex had done in his previous responses. More specifically, she begins to situate her interpretations, and she makes her reasoning process visible by sharing with Alex the kinds of connections she is trying to make. She makes two kinds of connections: one, she mentions advice she has received from others (i.e., the “Jesus complex”), and two, she refers to the discussion in the larger professional community (i.e., the journal article advocating for student choice in reading). While Reagan stops short of making specific suggestions for next moves in their teaching, she does suggest that framing a unit of study around a question “deflates several of the arguments” that seem to ground a “traditional” approach to teaching English, an approach that focuses not on a question, but on a text. This suggestion illustrates how Reagan is developing her own stance and positioning herself within the professional communities in which she works. For instance, Reagan allows herself to develop her stance by describing and then interpreting the patterns she sees in the students’ responses to her literacy questionnaires. Moreover, by suggesting an inquiry approach to framing units around an overarching question rather than by focusing on a specific text, she is situating herself within the larger professional conversation (in response to the journal article), and she is positioning herself within the local professional community of Boise State Writing Project in general, and this student teacher-mentor group in particular, which advocate for an inquiry approach.

Finally, Reagan extends an invitation for Alex to respond to her. In doing so, she reiterates what she sees as one of the larger goals of teaching English, namely, getting “these kids to read outside of school.” She wonders what they might do to help provide some choice in what their students read. Alex responds in his entry:

I'm glad that the kids are being honest with you on their questionnaires, and that you’re learning a bit about each one of them through their writing—I can't wait to read them once you're done. And yes, there are some tough cookies, especially in that 7th hour class. Here are a few of my thoughts on those kids who hate English class:
Alex begins to reveal the different contexts he sees that focuses on what she and Alex might do for students, or challenge Reagan's interpretations. Whereas Reagan offered alternative hypotheses that can refine, extend, for why Reagan saw the things that she did. That is, more words on his interpretations or on his hypotheses had this discussion face-to-face. Instead, Alex spends the texts they read in their course, and perhaps they Reagan posed about how teachers and students choose Interestingly, Alex does not directly address the question 4th graders are a pretty emotional bunch, and have a tough time looking beyond today, sometimes; your snapshot—for some of them—might reflect their attitude on the day they filled it out, which may or may not have been cheerful. We did the questionnaire on a Friday, which for some kids is a pretty tough day. For us, we know we have a break coming where we get to do fun things, but for many of the kids (especially in 7th hour) weekends are a time when they either sit at home doing nothing, or spend two days in a home where bad things can happen... for many of them, school is the most safe place they’ve got, whether they admit it or not.

2. East (pseudonym for the school) has some of the most amazing people on the planet working here, and I know for a fact that every kid at East has at least 1 adult—faculty member, custodian, counselor, etc.—that they connect with. Every year, there are kids who come into my class hating English, and every year, we whittle one or two of them down to believers. Some don’t come around to MY class, but they find another one they like, or at least a PERSON at East that they admire. To me, this counts as a small victory... it takes all kinds, right?

3. Last year was rough on a lot of the 8th graders, and it shows in their writing and reading right now. As Jeff is fond of saying, so much of what kids do in school is SO boring and mundane, that even a little novelty/spice/inquiry is enough to make them take another swing at the class... every day, I try to provide at least one little thing that will make the kids smile/wonder/gasp; today I kicked the door as hard as I could when Rainsford heard the crack of Zaroff’s .22 pistol. Several of the kids levitated out of their seats, but by the end of the day, they’d all heard what was going to happen, and wouldn’t let me get away with NOT doing it. So the little things matter, whether it’s a meaningful writing assignment, or just a joke to a kid as they come in the door.

4. The 7th hour class you see is less about 5 kids, who were the lowest of the low (skill-wise) and whom we finally succeeded in getting a modified English class for. This class enables them to read novels other than TKAMB and R and J; they’ll use alternate texts entirely for TKAMB and rely solely on graphic novels/Shakespeare made easy for R and J. This class is a big step, because in the past, we’ve had nothing for these kids and they’ve had to just suffer through. In our current 7th hour class, TKAMB will be slow, but I’ve got some tricks up my sleeve to turn this book into something approachable for them. We talk about scaffolding assignments to equal a unit, and what I do is basically scaffold my units so that by the time TKAMB comes along, it doesn’t blow them out of the water. As for R and J, this play is actually pretty fun to do with kids, so long as you talk about love, relationships, listen to cheesy boy band songs, act in role, and view resources like the movie, the graphic novel, and use Shakespeare Made Easy to help them through the really tough parts. While they DO all have to be able to answer questions about these works on the EOC [End of Course exams common across the district], there is nothing that says we can’t add or delete some things here or there to make the class more approachable to them.

5. Finally, I guess there’s a little part of me that thinks that if the kids have a good enough relationship with ME, they’ll be less reticent towards my subject. I pass up no opportunity to tell them how cool I think English and reading are, and they like to see that. Sometimes it feels a little cheesy, but they’re far more likely to listen to someone who is excited about a subject than someone who accepts their complaints and says something like “you don’t have to like it to do it”... I think you do have to like it to do it, and I try to impress upon them that they might not like EVERYTHING we do, but that they WILL like what they learn and HOW they learn it. We’re a success based room, and I make sure the kids know that if they really, truly, genuinely try to grow, I’ll make sure I do my part to help them pass. Also, when they see you try to cater to their needs by sending out different kinds of assignments, trying new things in the classroom, etc., they’ll know you’re working for them, and they’ll be more likely to work for you.

Like Reagan’s entry, Alex’s response is layered. Interestingly, Alex does not directly address the question Reagan posed about how teachers and students choose the texts they read in their course, and perhaps they had this discussion face-to-face. Instead, Alex spends more words on his interpretations or on his hypotheses for why Reagan saw the things that she did. That is, he offers alternative hypotheses that can refine, extend, or challenge Reagan’s interpretations. Whereas Reagan focuses on what she and Alex might do for students, Alex begins to reveal the different contexts he sees that might help to explain how students responded to the literacy questionnaire. For example, he describes, in general, 9th graders as being emotional. In doing so, Alex suggests that the day that students completed Reagan’s questionnaire might have been difficult for many of the students who were adamant in their hate for reading and/or school. Similarly, Alex offers different dimensions of a students’ school experience as a way for Reagan to begin to understand students. For example, he suggests the home-school relationship; he suggests the adult-young person relationships within a school community; he
suggests the grade-to-grade movement for students and how an experience in one grade level can shape students’ expectations of all classroom experiences in a discipline; he suggests the infrastructural responses and decisions a school community can take to support students who struggle; and, he suggests that his relationship with his discipline is contagious because he has healthy relationships with students.

While Alex does not address Reagan’s question in particular, he addresses it by offering her what he thinks are important dimensions for her to consider as she begins to understand their students, particularly the students in their 7th hour class. Through this dialogue with Reagan, Alex challenges her to think about students’ entire school experience, rather than seeing them as students who dislike reading. He is implicitly suggesting that Reagan (and he) begin to investigate how these different dimensions in a students’ school experience may or may not be affecting them in their particular class. That is, Alex makes the case that students do not read and do not experience their English classroom in a vacuum. Students are in a very particular and immediate context.

Certainly, as the school year progresses and they inquire more and more into their students’ experiences as readers and students, Reagan and Alex can test the hypotheses and interpretations they forward here. Perhaps they discover that some students do not have a meaningful connection with an adult in the building. Perhaps they learn that students’ 8th grade experience differed from those in previous years. Perhaps they provide students with choice in what they read, and there are still students who do not enjoy or value reading. Regardless of what they discover later, Reagan and Alex have set themselves on a course to investigate together, and they have cultivated a process of talking with one another that includes the following steps:

- describe what you see and hear;
- share what you think it means;
- offer alternate hypotheses that might challenge initial interpretations;
- suggest possible pedagogical moves you might make next.

In short, it is through their dialogue that Reagan and Alex begin to discover what they know about the learners in their classroom, about their subject matter, and about themselves as teachers.

**Sharing how we read our students helps us learn, too**

To be sure, many might argue that sharing with colleagues is unnecessary because you can understand students without doing so. Some might also take issue with the mentor-student teacher dialogue journal being substantively different from a conversation you might have with a more experienced colleague. I would agree that you can gain some understanding of your students without sharing your thinking, and I would agree that a mentor-student teacher conversation is different from other conversations; however, I think that by not sharing how we “read” our students limits our understanding of specific students and damages our professional authority more generally. What I am suggesting here is something along the lines of what Gutewsky (2001) describes when she writes of the “attitude adjustment” that she needed to reach the students in her classrooms. She writes of seeing herself as a reader and refining her own reading philosophy, of identifying her students’ reading philosophy, and of fusing reading research and curricular expectations. In short, she moves from trying to find knowledge for her teaching practice to a shift in seeing herself as a participant in a learning community who listens to and learns from both her students and her colleagues. To put it another way, Gutewsky learned to listen to and learn from her students. Cochran-Smith and Lytle (1999) might describe Gutewsky’s shift as her embracing a stance of inquiry. They write that an “inquiry-as-stance “positions teachers and others who work together in inquiry communities take toward knowledge and its relationships to practice” (p. 288). While Cochran-Smith and Lytle describe communities among colleagues, something that Gutewsky does is to begin to develop her inquiry community within her classroom with her students.

When we see our classrooms as places for us to learn about teaching reluctant readers, and once we begin to collect some information, it becomes just as vital to share what we think we have learned with our students and our colleagues. Inquiring into our practice means that we build our own knowledge, our own theories. Rather than relying on the “right” answer or the answers that others dictate for us, we can do what no one else can, namely learn from our students and share our lessons with others. When we go public with what we think we have learned, it allows us to put that knowledge in conversation with others and their knowledge, which in turn, creates opportunities for refining and expanding our knowledge. Imagine, for instance, a professional development day or a department meeting or just a conversation with a colleague in which you offer a description of what you saw or heard from one student, an interpretation of what you think it might mean, a connection to an experience with a similar student and to an idea raised within the larger professional discussion represented in a specific journal article or book. Then, imagine a colleague or a group of colleagues offering alternate hypotheses or interpretations, challenging you to see other possibilities and suggesting a series of next steps you might take until the next time you meet with one another. By making more visible your process of reading your students, in your classroom, in your school, you would begin to build a network of trusted colleagues.
who would have something at stake in you reaching and understanding your students (and you would help them with their students).

When I think about motivating disengaged readers in our classrooms, I think not only about how we can make reading more relevant for them and how we can make the reading process more visible for them to model, I also think about how we can create hope for ourselves. Instead of only scouring journal articles and bookshelves for the perfect book that would “hook” readers or of only seeking the strategies that others have tried, tested, and written about, I imagine conversations with colleagues about our students – conversations focused on what we have seen and heard; conversations about what we think those observations mean. We have the opportunity to listen to and learn from our students, something no one else can do but us. Sharing what we learn and how we learned it puts each of us into conversation with one another, and in the process, we can learn from one another.

References
Building comprehension for reading novels: The prereading-schema building process

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Anderson (2005) speaks to the woes of being expected to comprehend a challenging book with no scaffolding by the teacher.

My eighth-grade English teacher assigned the class to read Ivanhoe (Scott), a book with a medieval setting first published in 1820. My library copy had no illustrations—not even on the cover! While slowly reading the first page, I asked myself, “What the heck are they talking about?” I reread the first page. I knew the meanings of nearly all the words, but I could not decipher the sentences. I looked at the back and saw the book was 352 pages! In tears, I went to my older (and smarter) sister and said, “I can’t understand this!” She gave me a brief description of the plot and told me to reread the first page once more. This time, when I started reading, I knew where and when the story took place and who the main characters were, and things began to make sense. When I finally finished the book, I actually liked it! (p. 19)

Anderson’s initial dislike of the book was due to being overwhelmed because of her lack of background knowledge. The teacher had failed to help her students develop sufficient background knowledge to read and enjoy Ivanhoe. Fortunately, Anderson had an older sister who had already read the book, but it is not likely all the students in that class had someone to help them.

Schema and reading comprehension
If readers have little or no prior knowledge of a book’s subject, comprehension and enjoyment are impaired. In order to interact meaningfully with text, a reader must bring something to the reading process. Cognitive psychologists call this something schema, a system of cognitive structures that are stored in memory and are abstract representations of events, objects, and relationships in the world (Harris & Hodges, 1995). In order to comprehend—and therefore fully enjoy—a book, readers must be able to connect new information in the text with their network of prior knowledge.

As readers acquire new information, it is either assimilated into, or accommodated by, their existing schemata—the individual bits of stored knowledge that are interconnected and intertwined. Reading then becomes an active process of constructing meaning (Anderson, Spiro, & Anderson, 1978; Anderson & Pearson, 1984). The purpose of this article is to describe and model a comprehension strategy that secondary and postsecondary students can initiate on their own to build schema for enjoying a new novel.

In the case with Ivanhoe, the reader started with an insufficient schema for comprehending the text. However, comprehension can also be impaired when readers fail to activate the relevant schemata they already possess (Levin & Pressley, 1981; Pressley, Wood, Woloshyn, Martin, King, & Menke, 1992). Schemata assist readers in comprehending a new piece of text, and then readers integrate the newly comprehended material into their existing schemata in an ever-developing process. The greater the experience base (both direct and vicarious) that the reader can actively draw upon, the richer the person’s comprehension and enjoyment of a book will be.

Anderson (2004) hypothesized that schemata serve six functions in the reading process:

- To provide ideational scaffolding for assimilating new information;
- To help allocate attention selectively;
• To assist in inferring beyond the literal level;
• To allow searching one’s memory in an orderly manner;
• To help summarize information being read; and
• To permit reconstruction of inferences

**Strategies used by effective readers**

In his review of over 170 studies, Aaron (1997) identified seven processes of effective reading. Two of the most critical were prereading processes: activating relevant schemata and making predictions. He noted that effective readers *constantly* engage themselves in the reading process. Effective readers scan the text before reading and mentally predict what it might be about. Then as they begin reading, they revise their predictions, based on what they have read as well as their prior knowledge of the subject. In an active mental process, effective readers think about the text before, during, and after reading it (Duke & Pearson, 2001; Rumelhart, 1984).

Research suggests that direct instruction in strategies to improve comprehension can lead to improved comprehension in kindergarteners (Morrow, 1985), first-graders (Bauman & Bergeron, 1993); learning disabled students (Idol-Maestas, 1985); and at-risk students (Dole, Brown, & Trathen, 1997). Students Achieving Independent Learning (SAIL) is a program that includes predicting, questioning, and making associations, and several studies have indicated the success of these strategies (Brown, Pressley, Van Meter, & Schuder, 1996; Pressley, El-Dinary, Gaskins, Schuder, Bergman, Almasi, Brown, 1992).

Activating prior knowledge is a particularly effective strategy. In all but one of 14 studies that Trabasso and Bouchard (2002) reviewed on encouraging students in first through ninth grades to activate prior knowledge, reading comprehension was significantly improved. What is not clear is exactly how activating prior knowledge supports reading comprehension. Likely, it does so by providing a framework with which to understand new information. Additionally, it may stimulate interest in the text, leading to more attentive reading.

Previewing a text prior to reading not only activates schemata, but it also helps readers establish a general expectation of the text, which then becomes the source of predictions (Afflerbach & Walker, 1990). Therefore, predicting establishes a purpose for reading, and it focuses readers’ attention when they seek to confirm or disprove these predictions, resulting in increased comprehension monitoring.

**Direct instruction in comprehension strategies**

There are a number of teacher-directed strategies used in elementary school that are successful in improving readers’ comprehension, such as story mapping, prereading discussions, and teacher previews (Graves, Prenn, & Cook, 1985). In a series of studies using “story impressions” (Denner, McGinley, & Brown, 1989; Denner, Rickards, & Albanese, 2003; McGinley & Denner, 1987), teachers selected a series of key words or phrases related to characters, setting, and plot. Using these clues (in the order of their occurrence in the text), readers were encouraged to compose their own stories. Then when they read the text, they mentally made comparisons between their version, which served as a prediction, and the actual text.

Similarly, Neuman (1988) investigated the positive effects of a teacher preview for fourth-grade students. However, both story impressions and teacher-supplied previews are teacher-dependent strategies, which do not directly support the goal of developing effective independent readers.

**Need for independent strategies**

In their study with fifth- and sixth-grade readers in at-risk populations, Dole, Brown, and Trathen (1997) demonstrated success in teaching students to use strategies independently. Initially, the teacher explained the strategies and modeled them. Then students used them in small groups or in pairs. Finally, the students were successful in independently utilizing the strategies. The researchers suggested that some of the success of their approach was because the students became more actively engaged in, and responsible for, their own learning.

Teachers are able to help their students build schema for comprehending when everyone in the classroom is reading the same book and when literature circles are reading select books. However, it is impossible to do this for independent selections. Therefore, we propose the *prereading schema-building process* (Anderson, 2001), whereby teachers can show students how to construct their own schema independently before starting a new book. It is an easy process to teach, and it is simple and short enough for students to do on their own after a short period of teacher guidance and practice. Additionally, literature circles can complete the process on their own, serving as coaches for one another until all students can perform it independently.

The purpose of the prereading schema-building process is to activate readers’ prior knowledge as well as to build a scaffold for new knowledge such as vocabulary and historical or cultural settings. It differs from the teacher preview-of-text strategy used in elementary schools in several significant ways:

• It is self-directed rather than teacher directed.
• It is used with novels instead of picture books.
• Readers begin at the end of the book and complete the process before they view the first page of text.
An explanation of the three stages of the process as well as a teacher think-aloud demonstration of the process follow.

Prereading schema-building process

**Begin at the end**

Starting with the last text page, look at each page until you reach the back cover. These back pages often contain critical information for understanding the book, such as glossaries, maps, or afterwords that will provide helpful information to refer to while reading. Usually authors make no mention that they provide these aids at the end, and most readers typically overlook them (until they finish the book and it is too late).

**Cover the cover**

Sometimes information such as a brief biographical sketch of the author is printed on the inside back cover of a paperback book or the inside flap of a hardcover book jacket. Always look and read it, but if there is no information, turn the book over to the back cover. Most paperback books will have a short synopsis of the story there. It does not reveal the ending, but it usually does provide information such as the name and age of the main character and the setting. Sometimes there are excerpts from reviews, and these might add a bit of additional information such as the theme or genre. (On hardcover books, the inside flaps of the book jacket contain the synopsis, reviews, and information about the author and illustrator.)

Next, look at the front cover. On paperback books and hardcover book jackets, there is usually an illustration. If not (for example, a hardcover book with the jacket missing), turn to the first illustration in the book. Think like a detective and look for clues on what the story might be about. Some questions that will help you make predictions are:

- What kind of story might it be (fantasy, realistic, humorous)?
- What do you think the characters might be doing in the illustration?
- What clues can you find that tell about the setting of this story—where and when it happened?
- What does the title tell you about this story?
- What do you think might happen in this story?
- What other books have you read by this author?

**Finish at the front**

The final stage of building a story schema is reviewing all the front material—the pages that precede the first page of text. First, locate the title page with the title, author, and publisher. Look at any illustrations on the title page, which may give clues to the story’s theme.

On the back of the title page is publication information, including the copyright date. There could be more than one edition of the book, so look for the year of original publication—the oldest date. This gives you an idea of when the author wrote the story. While reading a book, it is sometimes important to know the decade in which the author wrote it, particularly for contemporary fiction, which may not seem contemporary to readers who are younger than the book.

Look for a dedication or acknowledgment that might contain clues about the author and why he or she wrote the book. Some authors include a foreword that provides information to help readers understand historical settings. If the book has a list of chapter titles, these often reveal much about the plot.

**Modeling the process**

Following is an example of a think-aloud activity that you can use to demonstrate the process of previewing a book to enhance comprehension. Using the paperback edition of *Children of the Longhouse* (Bruchac, 1998), we describe the thoughts a reader might have while previewing it using the prereading schema-building process.

The name of this book is *Children of the Longhouse* by Joseph Bruchac. It sounds like it’s about a big family of children that needs a really long house to live in. After the last page of the story, there is an “Afterword,” and in the first paragraph, I see that although the book is fiction, it is about real people who live in a real place. The author also says he learned a lot from his Mohawk friends, so this story must be about the Mohawk, which is an Indian tribe I read about in social studies. This afterword is almost four pages long, so I think I will finish reading it after I read the story.

Following the afterword, there is a page titled “Suggested Reading.” I guess if I am really interested in the people in this book, I can look at these for more information. Maybe I could even write an interesting report about the Mohawk for my social studies class.

Next is the “Glossary and Pronunciation Guide.” Well, the glossary will be helpful for figuring out what the Mohawk words mean, but I’m not going to try to pronounce them now since I am reading it silently. Maybe I will try to figure some out if I decide to give an oral report in social studies.
On the back cover is a short summary. I was right about the characters being Mohawk. The main character is Ohkwari. It says he is peace loving, but he has made an enemy of Grabber and his friends because he kept them from doing something bad. It also lets me know that the boys are going to be playing in a village-wide game of lacrosse. What is that? The summary says it can be a brutal game, so it must be like ice hockey that I've seen on TV. There is only one review on this back cover, but it lets me know that these Native Americans lived centuries ago, so this is a historical fiction book.

The front of the book has an illustration of a boy that must be Ohkwari. I know it is a boy by the way he is dressed, but his long hair makes him look more like a girl. Except, now I see a girl in the background waving at him, and she is wearing her hair in braids. I guess that is how the Mohawk children wore their hair a long time ago. The boy is holding a long stick with a net on the end, and he is trying to use it to catch a ball in the air. I guess these are used in playing lacrosse. The background shows an outdoor summer scene with the tribe watching on the sidelines. The only thing I can't figure out is why the boy has a bat painted on his forehead.

The first page in the book is an excerpt, which lets me know that Grabber's best friend is named Greasy Hair, and they were planning a raid on another tribe's village. I think that Ohkwari heard and told on them, and they got in trouble. No wonder they are mad at him. I remember how mad my big brother was when I told Mom he was planning to skip school. He wanted to clobber me! The next page has really small print, but I remember my teacher said to look for a summary at the bottom. For just one sentence, the summary has a lot of information: Ohkwari is 11 years old, has a twin sister (must be the girl in braids), and lived in the late 1400s. I was right about it being historical fiction.

Next is a chart titled, “The Great League of Peace of the Iroquois Nations.” It is like a family tree, but the names are the five Iroquois tribes (which must all be peaceful according to the title) and the villages and clans of the Mohawk. After that is a map titled “Territories of the Five Nations of the Iroquois, Late 15th Century.” Now I can see where all the tribes lived in what is now New York State.

The map is followed by a page titled, “Part One: The Way of Peace.” Well, it looks like peace is very important to the Mohawks because this word appears in several parts of the book.

Now I am ready to read the story.

Conclusion
Following is the wealth of information readers are able to glean about the plot of *Children of the Longhouse* from spending only five to ten minutes using the prereading schema-building process:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Prereading schema-building process for <em>Children of the Longhouse</em></th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Genre</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Type of Conflict</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Main Character</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Setting</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Problem</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Prior Knowledge</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Resources</strong></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

The information gained by previewing the end pages, the book’s back and front covers, and front material can provide enough background to allow readers to more fully enjoy a novel. The prereading schema-building process is easy and quick to learn, but best of all, it is something students can do by themselves—in or outside of a classroom.

We conclude this article with an outline of the prereading schema-building process for quick reference while teaching it to your students.
Steps in the prereading schema-building process

| Begin at the End | • Starting with the last text page, look at each page until you reach the back cover.  
|                  | • Look for critical information such as a glossary, map, or afterword. |
| Cover the Cover  | • Look on the inside back cover for a biographical sketch of the author.  
|                  | • Turn the book over, and on the back cover look for a short synopsis (on paperbacks). Search for clues about the characters, setting, problem, and theme of the story. (On hardcover books, look on the inside flaps of the book jacket.)  
|                  | • Turn to the front cover and study the illustration for clues on what the story might be about. Ask yourself, “What does the title mean?” “What are the people in the illustration doing?” “What might happen in this story?” |
| Finish at the Front | • Open the book, and review all the front material.  
|                  | • Look on the back of the title page for the copyright date to approximate when the author wrote the book (possible time setting for contemporary fiction).  
|                  | • Look for a dedication, acknowledgement, foreword, or chapter titles that contain clues on what the story might be about. |

References


A few years ago I was visiting a school and met a fourth grade teacher who was also the high school football coach. He was a large man who spoke with authority and passion for the rights of kids to read and write with choice. He bravely spoke out against the basal reading program used by the district and made his case that even literature based basal readers are not the same as kids just reading books of their own choice.

"I have a different way of teaching reading," he said. "We find great books, they read them, and then we talk about them." After his simple pronouncement another teacher at the school raised her hand to ask the billion dollar question, the question that is the foundation of the multi-billion dollar reading industry in America. "But how do you know they really read the book?" The large man did not miss a beat. He looked at the woman squarely in the eye and said, "I ask 'em." Then he went on to say that he was actually interested in teaching more than reading. He wanted to teach honesty as well.

This simple encounter got me thinking how many educational programs and initiatives are built on a fundamental distrust of students and teachers and an exaggerated trust of data and systems of education. The Gates Foundations recent two billion dollar study has shown that a student’s reading level can go up one and a half grade levels in a year under an effective teacher. This is a far greater influence than socio-economic background, class size, or even curriculum. I know what you are thinking. Why did the Gates Foundation spend two billion dollars to find out what you already know? Personally, I would have told them that for 20 dollars, but they don’t trust teachers or fans of teachers like me—they only trust data, and therein lies the problem. If the Gates Foundation trusted teachers in the running of schools and not just data based on testing that often only measures a narrow range of educational abilities, they would have started with the assumption that teachers are the greatest influence and then asked effective teachers what they needed to do their job better. Perhaps that two billion would have been spent to support schools, not the corporations and data gatherers who specialized in undermining them.

At a recent in-service a young first year teacher turned to me with a bewildered look on her face and asked, “I don’t understand why they don’t just ask US how to improve schools. It’s like they think we classroom teachers know nothing.”

I told her what I always say, “Education in America will only improve when teachers are given a seat at the management table.” Gates Foundation may take another two billion dollars to get there. Their next study will shoot video of effective teachers and create a library resource for teachers to draw on. A step in the right direction, perhaps, but why don’t we create teams of teacher researchers whose job it is to create schools of the future? The answer is quite simple: to give teachers the power to change schools would mean that billion dollar test companies and textbook companies would have to step aside and unchain the oars of education. They would have to acknowledge that the secret wish of the standards movement is to micromanage classrooms and understand that this approach is counter productive to improving schools. In short, they would have to adopt the stance of a progressive teacher of writing.

Here are two of my cartoons from my latest book, *But How Do You Teach Writing: A Simple Guide for All Teachers.*

The first cartoon shows the schools I grew up in. "Write an essay about freedom for Monday," the teacher says. And if you notice the children are all chained to the oars. (See Cartoon #1)

In the second illustration the teacher asks, “What are you going to write about for Monday?” On this boat all the children are doing different things. They are full of wonder and curiosity. They don’t have to write about...
freedom; they are living it. (See Cartoon #2)

When we teach writing well it is no longer a subject like math or science or social studies. It is a core skill, like thinking, and it is something we can do in all subjects.

We learn to trust our student’s ability to find subjects and model our own sense of ourselves as a writer. Once at a workshop a teacher said to me that she doesn’t write with her students because she is a bit insecure about her own writing. What is the best thing you can share with them but your own insecurity. When I was in school writing was taught in the manner of the next cartoon. Imagine a pottery class where the teacher just walks around with a perfect vase saying helpful things like, “Close.” (See Cartoon #3)

When we write with our students and share our failures, we teach them that it is acceptable to fail and learn from that failure. When we learn to trust in ourselves as writers who fail and succeed, we simultaneously learn to trust our students’ ability to make choices and find subjects to write about. Writing becomes a tool for discovery and learning because we are no longer trapped by our need to encapsulate ideas perfectly. Writing is more of a shovel, less of a picture frame. Writing is a dynamic tool for learning, not a static template for enclosing our thoughts.

Educational reformers could learn a lot from the best writing teachers. If education reform were run more like a writer’s workshop, everyone would be a trusted member of the class and have a seat at the table. Teacher and student choice and creativity would be the norm, not something that is seen as a liability to a data driven program. Ideas would flow freely and be evaluated for their success or failure by each other’s reaction, not by data collectors working for other outside interests with a stake in the results. Student success would be a common goal that grows out of repeated failure and support, not a benchmark of perfection used to keep schools continually failing. Schools and children would thrive
because their true voices would be heard and real reform would grow out of this re-flowering of democracy.

American schools will be transformed only when we realize these truths. Till then we must endure more meaningless studies that undermine schools and hurt students and teachers even as they proclaim their good intentions. When all teachers take action like that football coach and 4th grade teacher, we will transform schools through the inevitable power of our own common sense. Until then we are all chained to the oars trying to compose our essay about freedom for Monday. It is your job as a writing teacher to unchain your students’ minds from the mediocrity of a failing school system and open their minds to greater possibilities in the larger world. Mahatma Gandhi proclaimed, “You must be the change you want to see in the world.” This is the only standard public school teachers need to live by.
We waited nervously in the lobby of the Educational Psychology Clinic of a southern California university to meet our clients for the first time. The clinic, which has been in operation for over thirty years, provides educational and psychological services to the student population and local community at a moderate cost. Services include marriage and family counseling to adults, as well as counseling, psychoeducational testing, and tutoring to school-aged children.

As we sat together reviewing the files of our new clients, we learned that both Jared and Henry (pseudonyms) were referred for intervention due to reading difficulties. More importantly, they had not responded to previous attempts by their teachers to motivate them.

In Jared’s case, his kindergarten and first grade reports showed he was already struggling with simple letter recognition, sight word retention, and decoding. His first grade teacher was quite concerned and had recommended the clinic to Jared’s mother. The teacher indicated he was having difficulty with cooperation, friendships, and confidence as he was falling farther behind his classmates. The file confirmed there were no physical issues or learning disabilities, although further testing for ADD was recommended. It was clear that he was approaching reading from a higher and higher frustration level. His teacher specifically requested advice on methods to assist Jared in learning his letters and numbers that would help him be and feel successful.

Henry, on the other hand, was referred due to the concerns of all of his middle school content area teachers and his parents. Although Spanish was his first language, none of the referring adults felt this was the reason for Henry’s continued poor performance. He had previously been assessed for ADD and an underlying learning disability, neither of which were found. His report card indicated that he was far below grade level in the areas of reading, especially comprehension, and writing. His standardized test scores showed him to be at the basic level. His report card comments stated that Henry did not ask questions, had difficulty following directions, and was not retaining information. More importantly, he was beginning to show negative behaviors in class, in order to camouflage his frustration.

As reading specialists our objectives clearly included providing these students with strategies to increase their reading skills and to motivate them to use the strategies for self monitoring of their progress. We agreed that helping Jared and Henry build new skills to access words and texts, and retain what they were learning, would create some internal confidence and ease the potential of them falling farther behind their classmates.

**Motivation to read**

Students enter the classroom with differing life experiences, which influence their attitudes about the school environment. Ruddell & Unrau (2004) discuss how teachers also enter the classroom with schemata that influences instruction and focus of intention. They compare the processes of the reader’s reading and the teacher’s instructional design. These processes include: development of self, instructional orientation, and task-engagement resources. Both the students’ and teachers’ sense of identity, schema, self-efficacy, and expectations determine how they feel about reading. If students have a strong connection to the text, and expect to succeed, they will be highly motivated. If teachers believe themselves capable of delivering effective instruction, they in turn are highly motivated. Teachers can increase their students’ motivation by helping them to increase their self-efficacy. Readers’ self-efficacy plays a crucial role in motivation as it predisposes their belief in whether or not they will be successful.
There is not much research on motivation in children between kindergarten and 3rd grade, however, a qualitative study with kindergarteners (Nolan, 2001) yielded some interesting findings, which are relative when discussing this topic. The researcher found that all readers are motivated depending on the definition of success for reading activities and tasks carried out in the classroom. Furthermore, in classrooms that focus on carrying out multiple tasks in a social context of mutual support and cooperation, there are more opportunities for students to experience individual interests. This is corroborated by the research of Guthrie & Wigfield (2000), as cited in Lipson & Wixson (2003), which indicates that engagement for multiple purposes in a socially supportive context that provides motivation and instructional strategy positively affects student performance and achievement.

Nolan found that issues for struggling readers seem to become exacerbated when they compete for incentives by having to complete tasks under time constraints. They lose interest in completing the tasks because it is taking them longer than their classmates. One would expect this to have a negative impact on struggling readers. However, Nolan notes most kindergarteners still have a strong interest in reading and writing at the end of the school year. She cites Nicholls (1989), who equates this to the resilient optimism of young children who maintain hope that they can learn to read and write through effort. As children get older and become aware that, by comparison to their peers, they are falling behind, they lose hope.

Zambo (2005) recommends the use of picture books as a teaching tool in diverse adolescent classrooms. She explains the importance of students’ ability to make connections to characters in order to discuss social issues. Zambo highlights the long-term negative effects on the attitude and motivation of struggling readers in her discussion of the picture book *Thank You, Mr. Falker* by Patricia Polacco. The story is about a girl who starts school very hopeful that she will soon read, but as she falls behind her classmates she becomes aware that all her effort is not helping. Her classmates tease her relentlessly. The negative effects on her confidence become apparent.

One of the critical factors to students from 4th grade through high school is motivation. Without motivation and a clear purpose, most students will be detached from the topic or the task. The mismatch between student interests and content instruction continues to be an issue. Even with several approaches that attempt to integrate content literacy in the classroom using student-controlled learning, there is conflict between socially constructed knowledge and the traditional classroom. Frustrated teachers eventually fall back on teacher-centered instruction to cover the content. The learner should be purposefully engaged in the text to gain something other than evident knowledge. Objectifying the text does not embrace the creativity and diverse nature of man or challenge critical thinking in any way.

As reading specialists, our greatest challenge was to keep these two young readers motivated both intrinsically and extrinsically. Jared needed strategies to help him recall and decode that would also keep him excited about learning to read. Henry needed strategies to increase his fluency while keeping him excited about reading to learn.

**Jared’s ladder**

**Jacque meets Jared**

Jared, a first grader, followed me cheerfully into our session room. I got through all but two assessments, struggling for control and being curious at the same time. Nothing was as I had planned because I was taking my lead from Jared. I showed him a magnetic board and some scrambled letters and asked him to put them in the correct order. After a strong start he became confused. He realized he made mistakes half way through and wiped the board to start over. I asserted myself gently so we could move on. He struggled with sight words, trying to sound out every letter. But when I assessed his phonemic awareness, he scored high. Previous experience told me it was easier to converse with boys while they are involved in an activity rather than directly, so as I was getting a writing sample I asked Jared what he knew about reading and what a good reader does. I loved his self-confidence and how he believed he was a reader. That would be his saving grace if no one discouraged him. He still maintained hope despite his confusion and struggle to recall.

Despite the fact that Jared had preschool experience from the age of four, and his mother supported his literacy by reading to him at home, his first grade report card showed that he was below grade level in letter recognition, letter sounds, sight word vocabulary, and decoding. His teacher recognized his efforts, but noted among other things that he had difficulty with staying motivated, cooperating with others, academic self-confidence, staying on task, and recalling. Jared was bright, however I suspected that he was starting to realize that success with reading was something he strived for, but of which he was somehow falling short.

I interviewed Jared about his concepts of reading and writing. The pattern of his assessments showed some specific consistencies that corroborated the report card indicating he was below basic and needed improvement in literacy and basic word knowledge. He could not identify a word, two words, and the first and last letters of words. Further testing on phoneme segmentation showed that Jared had difficulty with digraphs and blends. He scored well in auditory discrimination. It was one of the few times I saw him smile during assessments.
I determined that his phoneme awareness was at late emergent to early letter-name alphabetic. Jared read sight words with sixty-five percent accuracy and insisted on sounding out the ones he missed. He was concerned about the inaccuracies, so I let him count the words he read correctly. That seemed to empower him. I tested him using Wordless Picture Reading. He followed the sequence in order and described what was happening in each box. Jared asked for his story to be read back to him but made no attempt to read it himself, which may have been an indicator of his declining confidence.

**Meeting Jared where he is**

My working plan for him included recognizing the concept of a word, spaces between words, and beginnings and endings of words. I decided to concentrate on segmenting blends and manipulating onsets and rimes, increasing sight vocabulary by identifying basic sight words without hesitation, and reading texts incorporating high frequency sight words and word families. I attempted to begin and end sessions by reading picture books to him. I found that as we progressed, however, that I needed to adjust my plan according to Jared’s needs, so lessons were short and to the point. At times I pushed him to his frustration level, but would quickly switch to a lighter activity to ease the tension before returning to the prior focused activity.

Mathewson (2004) discusses the use of external motivators as influences on reading readiness. External motivators are defined as desirable objectives (incentives), purposes, behavioral expectations (norms), and settings (contextual influences). Although there is debate regarding use of incentives, Mathewson believes that if they serve to create the conditions of functional autonomy, then it is a means to an end that can be personally rewarding over time. With regard to intention to read, it may be a necessity to support the internal emotional state of a very young struggling reader that has not yet given up hope and effort.

With regard to staying motivated to learn to read, this is where I saw Jared. Based on the information I found about his interactions with fellow students, I had reason to be concerned that his confidence was starting to deteriorate. His enthusiasm was still intoxicating though, and to keep up his intention to read, I included in my instructional strategies incentives that created those emotions of personal reward while he tackled the larger issues of recall and decoding.

**Fostering self-confidence as a reader using motivation**

During one of our first working sessions, we played a word game. The objective was to count the words in a sentence. I provided pennies to place on each word. I demonstrated using a strip that read, “My name is Jared.” Together we counted the pennies. Then I switched the strip to another sentence with a line from a nursery rhyme. Jared struggled at first. I saw him placing pennies on letters and words. On longer words he would place two or three pennies. I had a sinking feeling.

I used a strategy to help Jared differentiate between words and spaces using two fingers. I showed him how he could place two fingers between the words and count those as spaces. Next, I asked Jared to count the spaces between the words and place pennies on them; he counted correctly. Since Jared liked trains, I told him words are like the cars on trains and the spaces are the part that connects the train cars. The first word in the sentence is like the engine, and the mark on the end is like the caboose. Then I asked him to place pennies on the engine and the cars on the sentence train. I watched nervously as Jared placed the pennies correctly. This was engaging and fun for him.

I chose twenty sight words to work on for our next activity. I had them printed on plain index cards. He had the most difficulty remembering words with the schwa sound. He kept trying to sound out “was” with the short “a” like “as”. I stopped him and asked that he read the word without sounding it out. Words he did not read correctly were placed in one pile. Words he said almost immediately were placed in another. He counted the words he knew, then the others. He was disappointed. There were more words in the “need to learn” stack. With frustration in his voice he said, “I want to try again,” but our time was up.

I was concerned about the frustration in his voice as we ended the last session. I had to keep him motivated and feeling good about even the slightest progress. I brought a sticker card that I called “Jared’s Ladder” and some colorful stickers. The idea was that with each success, no matter how small, Jared was able to choose a sticker to place on his card. He took his card home at the end of each session. After reading to him we tackled the sight words again. This time I chose only six words with which to start. He knew at least two of the words. The rest were from “need to learn”. I decided to create sight words on bright yellow stars and placed them on a word wall. Next I used a method to help Jared tell the difference between the levels of lower case letters. I modeled how to lift both arms straight up in the air for tall letters like b, d, and t, straight out in front for mid-height letters like a, c, and e, and straight down for letters with a tail like g, j, and p. It was full of active involvement and I thought it might just help him do some mental pegging. My arms kept moving. He began to smile. We continued the activity together with a few more words. Then he tried it alone. “Great job!” I said. “Choose some stickers for your card!”

We moved on to word concepts using the sentence strips. He was still having some difficulty, but then remembered the two-finger method. He was also
transferring our previous activity to the sentence strips and pointed out some high-medium-low letters. When he began to get fidgety, we moved on to some phonics. At this point I had to firmly tell him to sit down. He was losing focus. He was also having fun.

Jared was having trouble recognizing capital and small letters. I used some plastic letters from a magnetic board set and had him trace the capital letters with his finger. Then I asked him to write the letters. I shaped my hands into small letters “b” and “d” by placing all my fingers on my thumb, except for my index fingers, which remained straight up. I put them together and showed Jared how they are like glasses. First we put “b” up to one eye, and then “d” to the other eye. I placed small plastic letters on the table in front of him. He traced the letters with his fingers and wrote them. “Get some stickers, Jared!” He was delighted.

I pointed to star words on the wall and he had forgotten the high-medium-low movements, but I only had to remind him by demonstrating with one of the sight words and he jumped right in. I noticed that he was still having difficulty with the schwa sound and the idea of using a sound phone came to mind. I needed him to hear the sound difference between “as” and “was”. He got through all six words using the new strategy. He left with a smile that day carrying his sticker card and the letters he had written.

Our next session went well. Jared demonstrated he knew the word concept strategy. He remembered the high-medium-low approach as he went through all the sight words on the word wall. When we got to the word “was”, I had him sit down and use the sound phone. As he looked at my lips, I said the word “was” and asked him to repeat it. “Listen to the sounds,” I said, “w-a-s”. Say it.” He said it. “Do you hear it?” I asked. He shook his head affirmatively. “Say it again,” I said. I placed four new “need to learn” words on the word wall that day. He was smiling as he used the high-medium-low letter strategy to spell and say the words.

At this point I introduced a word sort using –an and –ap words and pictures. I placed the pictures on the table in front of Jared and asked him to match words to pictures. As he did so, I asked him to read each word. We continued with a sound box game focusing on the short /a/ and endings -n and -p. We ended with sight words, stickers, and a smile on Jared’s face.

During a holiday break, the university clinic was closed for a two-week period. I agonized over this because I was concerned that Jared would forget the strategies and the new sight words he had learned. The next time he saw me he had a big smile and was talkative as we walked to the session room. There were now thirteen stars on the word wall. We started with a small picture book and simple sentences made up of some of the sight words and onset and rimes we had worked with before. He pointed to the words and read the sentences. Afterward I gave him a worksheet in which he had to match words to pictures and write in the words under the pictures. “Choose some stickers!” I said with delight. Jared was equally delighted.

I pointed to the stars on the word wall. Jared jumped up and started the high-medium-low strategy immediately. He had a very small glitch when I pointed to “was”, but he picked up the sound phone and knew what to do. He put it to his ear and heard that he was making the wrong sound. He corrected himself. I was definitely excited, but reserved. With each word to which I pointed, his arms were up and down and out as he spelled them and said them. “Wow!” I said. “Choose some stickers! I am so proud of you! You remembered all the words.” He chose his stickers with great delight. I then added three new words. Those rubbery arms were flying!

Now I was definitely excited. He practiced writing some of the –an and –ap words from the onset and rime activities. I spelled and wrote a word in the center of a page then said the word. I covered it and asked Jared to spell the word, and write it in each corner of the page, then say it. He was so confident that he covered up each word as he finished before he would write the next one. I then showed him a picture and asked him what he saw. “It’s a man,” he replied, “he’s reading a map.”

“I want you to write that. Write: The man reads the map,” I said. I dictated the sentence to him again and he carefully printed each word correctly and neatly. “You are awesome! You have earned a lot of stickers today.” He gleefully picked up his sticker card and asked if he could take his writing to show his mother. “Of course!” I smiled.

Jared’s success
Our last session was upon us. I conducted an informal post-assessment on areas of intervention only. As Jared read each star word, I took it off the wall and attached it to his shirt. He was beaming! Results showed that he had increased his sight vocabulary accuracy to eighty-one percent. He also made gains in literacy knowledge. I prepared more small picture books using the words Jared had learned from our sessions. He matched sound to text with high accuracy. He read at a pre-primer instructional level and demonstrated self-correcting behaviors. In the initial assessments I was unable to complete a Basic Reading Inventory due to Jared’s lack of word knowledge. Not this time. Keeping him motivated with lots of praise and rewards kept his self-esteem high while he was learning to read.

Henry’s home run
Cynthia meets Henry
Henry, a sixth grader, followed me sullenly to our session room. He walked slowly and, when greeted, responded with quiet, one or two word phrases. Once in
the room, he sat at the table with slumped shoulders. He was cooperative but seemed to be counting the minutes until he could escape. Henry stated that he believed the purpose of reading was to take notes in school and to read instructions for playing video games. He felt that he was able to pronounce words correctly when reading and that he “got the words right”. When asked what he wanted to learn, he said he would like to read more quickly and understand what he read. He did not know what it would take to read as well as he would like. The only person he believed to be a good reader was his teacher because she explained stories. Since I could see he did not view himself as a good reader and lacked motivation to succeed, I realized this was where I would need to start. I found he enjoyed sports, which we had in common, so I planned to use this to motivate him.

Henry was a reluctant participant during our first two sessions, which I used to conduct assessments. I asked him if he read at home for fun. He replied, “No, I don’t think reading is fun. I play baseball with my brother for fun outside.” He shared that he did not observe his parents participating in recreational reading. He did not feel that he could read at grade level so he would never choose to read. The assessment results concurred with his beliefs. Henry performed well recognizing words in isolation for grades three through six. His scores were perfect for third through fifth; ninety-six percent for sixth grade. The running record scores, however, did not match those of the word lists. Henry was able to read independently at fourth and fifth grades. He scored independent/instructional at third and sixth grades. While Henry was able to decode with very few errors, he had difficulty with comprehension. His scores were even lower than those for the reading passages as they were independent at third grade, and instructional/frustrated for grades fourth through sixth. While he scored unsatisfactorily on the fifth and sixth grade assessments, his retelling skills at third and fourth were satisfactory. This was likely due to his lack of ability to read fluently or with expression. He was able to give a general summary, with few details. For instance, after reading one passage, Henry was not able to remember the character’s name. Tests further showed that he would benefit from gaining a deeper understanding of word meanings. Henry asked, pointing at the word blistering, “What does this mean?” When I responded that I was unable to assist him during an assessment, he became frustrated. Afterward he said, “I don’t know anything. That story confused me because I don’t know what that word is.” I explained he would be learning new strategies to help him.

Meeting Henry where he is
My first goal for Henry was to increase his positive self-perception. In order to achieve this, I included his goals as well. I needed to increase his ability to read with expression, his ability to comprehend a variety of text and to increase his vocabulary development. Being able to draw conclusions through personal connections to the text, and visualizing could help him with memorization. I decided to select and implement reading strategies that were of high interest, using appropriate materials.

According to Edmunds & Bauserman (2006) motivation often makes the difference between temporary and permanent learning. They discuss the various factors in keeping children motivated to read. They found that using extrinsic rewards was not an aspect in fostering lasting change. Instead, after surveying children, they determined that there are three factors to consider when motivating them to read: personal interests, book characteristics and choice. Children place great value on personal interests, most likely because it aids in internalizing text. Edmunds & Bauserman also concluded that children make book selections according to recommendations made by their peers, family members and teachers.

Since he stated that he did not enjoy nor choose to read, I was concerned that the lack of practice contributed to his lack of progress. Henry enjoyed using a computer to research information about sports figures, so I intended to use it to keep him engaged and motivated. I chose themes centering on sports to help him make connections. He was a visual learner; therefore, I would use photographs, posters, sports cards, the Internet and graphic organizers to help achieve the goals we both set.

Fostering self-confidence as a reader using motivation
As usual, when Henry entered the room he sat directly in the chair closest to the corner, slumped against the wall with his head in his hands. Because I strongly believed that Henry needed a purpose for each lesson, I gave him both a content and language objective. In that way, he knew the expectations beforehand. I read aloud Thank You, Mr. Falker. Our discussion centered on the main character’s reading difficulty. Henry was provided with a graphic organizer in order to compare himself to the main character. It was at this point that Henry’s demeanor completely changed. He stated that he understood how the character felt because he felt the same way in school. He never wanted the teacher to call on him. He often felt “stupid” when he was required to read aloud. When asked to expound he replied, “Sometimes I pretend that I’m sick so she will pass me if it’s my turn”. I asked him if that strategy worked often for him. He said that it did and added, “Probably because she doesn’t want to wait for me either. I read slow and the other kids go like this.” He demonstrated how the students loudly sighed or huffed deeply. My heart sank. I explained that everyone encounters reading that is too difficult, however, they have learned strategies to help them decode words. We discussed how the character
was in fact the author, Patricia Polacco, an accomplished writer. Henry realized that there was hope for him. We reread the story. This time he chose to follow along in his own copy looking intently at the illustrations. On chart paper, we brainstormed the problems Henry routinely encountered and strategies he would later learn to help him become a fluent reader. He was enthusiastic about getting started. I ended the session by reading aloud a section of *Baseball in April*. For the first time Henry said, “I’ll see ya next week”.

The following session brought great changes in Henry. Right from the beginning he walked with me side-by-side. Unlike previous conversations, when I said good morning, he returned the greeting and told me about how he was tired because his baseball team played in a tournament the day before. I had a star with a word on it around my neck. “What’s that for?” he asked. I told him that we would have a star word every session for which he would learn the meaning. The word that day was *expression*. I told him that I would show him how to read with expression and that this would help him to comprehend text better. Once seated, I began by reading another section of *Baseball in April*. Henry, a Spanish-speaker, laughed at my pronunciation of the Spanish words and translated the ones I did not understand. He was connected, engaged and enjoyed the interaction. It was the first time I had seen him laugh during a session. After previewing the content and language objectives, we set to work. We read a picture book of *Casey at the Bat* together. Afterward, we viewed a short video of a twelve-year-old boy performing the poem “Casey at the Bat”. Discussion of how fluent the boy sounded led Henry to comment that he wanted to sound the same. I presented Henry with a reader's theater script for “Casey at the Bat”. He chose his characters and I read the remaining roles. Using chart paper taped to the wall, Henry compared his reading to the performer and me. We discussed a strategy, phrasing, which he decided to try. After the first reading, Henry wanted to switch roles. He then compared his first reading to the last and was happy with his progress. On his own, he borrowed the book to read to his younger brother. Wow! He decided to read for fun!

Henry arrived early for our next session, which he had never done before. He talked about how he read the book to his brother. The word that day was *phrasing*. He remembered what phrasing meant from our strategy brainstorming session the previous week. After the usual read aloud we discussed the content and language objectives. At Henry’s suggestion, we reread the “Casey at the Bat” script. He read it fluently and his broad smile told me that he was very impressed with himself. I presented Henry with phrases I had preprinted on several colors of paper. We randomly placed them in a pocket chart attached to the wall. I modeled how the phrases on each color should be chunked together. After some guided practice, Henry began to read the phrases independently. His voice changed appropriately each time. We discussed that readers read with expression, and he stated that he was becoming a reader because he was reading with expression. More importantly he could now recognize that reading words other than in isolation provided clues to meaning. Henry stated that reading was more easily understood when done in phrases.

To increase his self-esteem, it was important for Henry to recognize the progress he had made. We compared and contrasted his previous reading performances. He stated that he read “choppy” on the assessments and now he could read with better expression, even though he still struggled at times. Our word this week was *rhythm*. I asked him to listen closely to changes in my voice while I read aloud a section of *Baseball in April*. After reviewing and reading new phrases in the pocket charts I presented Henry with a copy of *Sports Illustrated for Kids*. I asked him to choose anything in the magazine to read aloud and take a few minutes to preview it before reading. He chose an article that was appropriate for his comfort level. He chunked phrases and used rhythm. He was finding much success while reading without assistance from me. He enjoyed this so much that he continued to read aloud. When I told him it was time to move on, he responded, “But I want to read this one too!” I decided to order him a subscription because he could not put the magazine down.

Henry needed to gain a deeper understanding of vocabulary. Our word this week was *meaning*. Being provided with word study opportunities would serve him well due to his lack of word meaning knowledge. I began by reminding him that I look at prefixes and suffixes when encountering unfamiliar words. Using a pocket chart and cards with prefixes, suffixes and root words, I modeled how adding or taking away prefixes and suffixes change word meaning. Henry wrote new words on chart paper and laughed when he came up with nonsense words, but understood that they had no meaning.

Because it was Henry’s belief that the only purpose for reading was taking notes in school and reading instructions, it was important that he was provided with examples of several texts and, therefore, several purposes. The word, of course, was *purpose*. I brought in my laptop, a menu, newspaper article, baseball cards, textbook, and several other texts. On chart paper we brainstormed the purposes for playing sports. Henry gave several reasons such as: for fun, for exercise, and to be on teams with friends. We focused on the reading material. On the laptop we researched information on my son, a college soccer player. We read the menu together to find our favorite meals. On another chart we brainstormed purposes for reading the varied texts.
Finally, Henry concluded that the purpose for reading is to find meaning in words. I was thrilled with his conclusion. He said, “So now I will always try to figure out why I have to read something.” He stated that this would better help him understand information.

**Henry’s success**

Henry was reassessed for reading fluency and comprehension using a sixth grade running record, which he passed at the independent level. His only miscue was a substitution of the word ‘medal’ for ‘metal’, which did not affect his comprehension. In comparison to the initial assessment results, Henry grew in the area of reading fluency. He was able to make self-corrections when his miscues did not make sense to him. The use of this strategy reduced the total number of miscues. Henry improved in the area of comprehension also. He now comprehended independent/instructional at sixth grade. His retelling skills became satisfactory as well. Unlike the initial assessments, he volunteered much more information during the final tests. For example, one question required him to make an inference. He stated, “I know the answer because I felt that way too!” His understanding of the purpose for reading different texts helped him in making decisions about how to read it in order to increase his comprehension. Before reading the passage, he stated that he would have to remember details because there would be questions “like on a test”. Henry showed the most growth socially. His self-perception is positive. He became an active participant in his learning. This has been the key to his success.

**Implications and recommendations**

It has been accepted widely that motivation is a factor in student success as much of the research cited has indicated, but we have found as reading specialists that it is more than just a factor. It is crucial to a reader’s success. In putting theory into practice we were able to provide instruction in strategies that our students needed to find their own success. There is no factory formula for creating a cadre of readers. For each individual student, it is whatever works for him or her. That is why it is extremely beneficial to become aware of children’s varied personal interests and learning styles as we ask why students struggle.

One way teachers can achieve this is by conducting surveys and graphs daily or weekly. Include a daily interest question in morning messages. Be sure to include class discussions about common interests. For example, ask what their favorite television shows are and use that information to conduct reading instruction by bringing in books based around the series’ characters. Another method is to do a survey at the beginning of the year to find out personal reading preferences and interest. This includes magazines, graphic novels, Internet sites, and other varieties of texts other than chapter books. Teachers can find many opportunities to provide students with texts and activities that are highly engaging. Allowing the choice and making it relevant is difficult because it often departs from the textbook program. By building on students’ interests, however, we access their background knowledge which gives them confidence to proceed.

In the beginning, we were not looking at learning styles as a means to motivation, but we found that using a variety of strategies that incorporated auditory, kinetic, and visual cues enhanced student motivation. Based on our findings, we recommend that teachers not rely solely on a given reading program’s approach when lesson planning. Use multi-sensory strategies to connect readers to text. For example, use eyes to print with audiotape. This helped Henry monitor his own fluency. Furthermore, use of a sound phone with Jared enabled him to hear his own voice in order to self-correct. Both were taught manipulation strategies to increase word structure knowledge. These simple strategies help foster confidence, which makes the experience of reading more rewarding.

Henry and Jared were successful during the sessions because of the increase in their positive self-efficacy as a result of the extrinsic and intrinsic rewards they experienced while using the new strategies in their reader’s toolbox. Teachers should not exclude extrinsic rewards when students are working towards a goal as these help students gauge their progress. This in itself creates opportunities for intrinsic motivation. The materials presented to Henry were strongly connected to his personal interests and gave him a purpose for reading. The extrinsic rewards presented to Jared helped him to internalize his successes, no matter how small. Both became more responsible for their own learning.

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42 | Feature Articles
Engaging students with global literature: The 2009 notable books for a global society

Most reading experts, teachers, and tutors (i.e., Guthrie, 2008; Guthrie & Hoa, et al., 2006; Guthrie & Wigfield, et al., 2004; Lesley, 2009; Richards & Lassonde, 2009) would agree that finding books that engage readers is one of the keys to reading success. In fact, teachers often find that student achievement increases when students read books and stories that are familiar or culturally relevant (Abu-Rabia, 1998; Kenner, 2000). Indeed, there is increasing evidence that engagement and comprehension are linked closely. Several studies even suggest that “language-minority students’ reading comprehension performance improves when they read culturally familiar materials” (Hampton & Resnick, 2009, p. 13).

Once a reader is hooked on a book or involved in its plot or storyline, he/she surely will want to finish reading the book. The more readers read, the more skilled they become, and the more vocabulary words and concepts they acquire. How to engage reluctant readers and keep them engaged is something that continues to be debated. Few would argue, though, that what captures one reader’s fancy will leave another disenchanted.

For reluctant readers, often repelled by books that describe lives that are completely disconnected from their own experiences, global literature provides a way to foster self-identity. Reading about characters just like them appeals to many readers. Many teachers rely on classic children’s and young adult literature for use in their own classrooms, often turning to the books they read as children and teens. While the books that remain teachers’ favorites may mirror their own realities, they may not paint realistic pictures of the lives of many of their students, leaving students disconnected and disengaged from reading.

Global literature allows today’s readers to travel the globe vicariously, sometimes seeing themselves in the books they read and often learning more about places they’d love to visit and individuals they might be interested in meeting. Through global literature, they come to realize that there are many perspectives on issues. Additionally, teachers have often found that readers love to see themselves and their own experiences depicted in books. When they fail to see themselves in books, they may regard reading as an activity for others and not for them. There are dangers in the literary omission of those who are not in the cultural mainstream. “If children never see themselves in books, they receive the subtle message that they are not important enough to appear
in books and that books are not for them. Conversely, if children see only themselves in the books they read, the message is that those who are different from them are not worthy of appearing in books” (Galda, Cullinan, & Sipe, 2010, p. 43).

Concerned about the lack of attention given to global literature, the Notable Books for a Global Society, a special committee of the International Reading Association’s Children’s Literature & Reading Special Interest Group, has cited 25 notable global books annually since 1995. The annual list gives teachers and librarians a starting place from which to build a collection of literature that crosses geographic and intellectual borders to expand the worldview of readers while telling the stories of those who are often marginalized. These books describe the stories of the Earth’s citizens, not just the citizens of the United States. This year, the nine book award committee members selected the final list after reading critically more than 400 trade books published during 2008. Committee members pay special attention to the following criteria as they make their final selections:

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**The books on the final list should meet one or more of these requirements:**

- Portray cultural accuracy and authenticity of characters in terms of (a) physical characteristics, (b) intellectual abilities and problem solving capabilities, (c) leadership and cooperative dimensions, and (d) social and economic status;
- Be rich in cultural details;
- Honor and celebrate diversity as well as common bonds in humanity;
- Provide in-depth treatment of cultural issues;
- Include characters within a cultural group or between two or more cultural groups who interact substantively and authentically;
- Include members of a “minority” group for a purpose other than filling a “quota.”

**The books on the final list must meet all of these requirements:**

- Invite reflection, critical analysis, and response;
- Demonstrate unique language or style;
- Meet generally-accepted criteria of quality for the genre in which they are written; and
- Have an appealing format and be of enduring quality.

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Each of the titles designated as a Notable Book for a Global Society has the potential to attract a new generation of readers to the world of books, providing endless possibilities for teachers to create text sets around themes or geographic areas as well as allowing readers to ponder the infinite possibilities of points of view around controversial topics. Once readers have examined the contents of any of these books, they are sure to clamor for more books. The words “Where can I find more books like this one?” are music to any teacher’s ears.

**Books for young readers**


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Few pairings could be more delightful than a bilingual poetry collection paying homage to a South American rain forest whose inhabitants speak eloquently on its behalf. Echoing the mood of the rain forest, the vibrantly realistic illustrations depict the special niche of each creature in this lush and lovely natural habitat. Bringing the magical beauty of the rain forest to life with evocative language, the poet also describes how humans can enjoy its simple pleasures without doing harm to the environment. An introduction and back matter provide additional information about this ecological treasure especially precious to the citizens of Argentina, Brazil, and Paraguay.
There is much more to the East African country of Ethiopia than citizens plagued by war, drought, and famine, and this picture book is certain to revise the assumptions many have about it. Narrated by eleven-year-old Tsion, who lives with her family in the Ethiopian capital of Addis Ababa, this informative picture book is made especially appealing through its colorful photographs and simple narrative. Tsion’s descriptions of her country, its vital people, and her school provide an excellent view of a child’s life in a culture quite different from the cultural mainstream. Reminding readers of their own daily routines, Tsion’s matter-of-fact descriptions will help children realize that they have much in common with Tsion and others around the globe.

Almost all babies have ten fingers and ten toes, which seem to fascinate them endlessly, providing a source of amusement for them and the adults in their lives. In fact, one of the first acts of new parents all over the world is to count those fingers and toes as they examine the newborns. The simple rhyming text of this delightful picture book accurately portrays the charm of this universal parental behavior. The artist introduces the next generation frolicking across the pages in harmony, delightfully conveying the message that we are all more alike than different. Although humans across the globe are quite different from one another in many important ways, they also possess important similarities. Readers will particularly enjoy trying to identify the locations for the babies who hail from all over and finding the tots who resemble them the most.

After studying in the United States for five years, Wangari Maathai was unpleasantly surprised by the changes in her beloved Kenya home while she was gone. Gone were the trees that had always sustained
her people, replaced by commercial farms. Undaunted, she turned to the women of her country for help. Seedling by seedling, they painstakingly reclaimed the land. Planting 30,000,000 trees in 30 years, their grassroots efforts gave birth to the Green Belt Movement, which continues planting trees today. Eventually, Maathai’s volunteers were joined by others, including school children, soldiers, and even prisoners. The lush watercolor paintings illustrate a tree-covered land despoiled by progress and then restored by its citizens to its former life-sustaining bounty. This inspiring story reminds readers that one determined individual with courage, vision, and determination, can make a significant contribution toward healing the planet. A lengthy author’s note describes the sacrifices made by Maathai and her peaceful army.


Uncertain about the meaning of her name, curious cat Wabi Sabi first asks the other household pets and then travels into the outside world to find an answer. Perhaps the wise monkey who lives atop a mountain will be able to help her. After sharing tea with the monkey, she feels somewhat enlightened. Returning home a bit wiser, she begins to realize the meaning of her name and the concept of wabi sabi. Her quest for knowledge is told through beautiful prose and haiku. Ed Young’s complex yet seemingly simple collages make use of time-worn human-made and natural materials to enhance the very essence of the story. The bilingual haiku in Japanese and English and the splendid illustrations sprinkled throughout the pages result in a rare literary and artistic gem, one that will have young and old readers puzzling over the Japanese concept of wabi sabi, a term that almost defies definition.


A fan of soccer, loud music, and dancing, Ali also has a unique and unexpected passion: calligraphy. He eagerly uses his brush to form letters that move to the music in his head as they flow gracefully across the page. This love sustains him when, like the famous calligrapher Yakut, who used calligraphy as comfort during war eight centuries ago, Ali distracts himself with calligraphy during the 2003 bomb assault on Baghdad. Enhanced by computer and rendered in charcoal and pencil, Rumford’s beautiful collages include the silhouette of a mosque rising above palm trees and stretching across sand-colored ground. The book’s pages are made even more beautiful through the use of Arabic calligraphy and geometric shapes similar to those decorating mosques and tiles. Readers will recognize the difficulties of achieving peace in our often war-torn world as Ali puzzles over how easily he can write the word “war” while the word “peace” is far more difficult.

Books for middle grade readers


Born into slavery in Missouri near the end of the Civil War, the talented Carver was a baby when slavery ended. He learned to make nearly everything from whatever materials were available on the farm of his former masters. On his own, he began to read, paint, and practice horticulture. Thwarted by racial barriers but also nurtured by mentors who recognized his gifts,
Carver received an education thanks to hard work and determination, eventually accepting an offer to teach at Tuskegee Institute in Alabama, and to live for the first time in the Deep South. There he observed depleted land and impoverished farmers and sharecroppers nearly starving. Consequently, he dedicated his classes and his research to help poor rural folks improve their own lives. This fresh look at a complex visionary makes use of beautifully reproduced period photographs, prints, and some of Carver’s own paintings to showcase a man who was one of the first to be concerned about feeding those who lacked nourishment, a pioneer in ecology and rural outreach education.


This stunning photo-essay featuring 25 families in 21 countries and the 525 meals they consume is eye-opening as well as eye-popping in its scope. Using a mix of compelling family stories, provocative statistics, and coveted recipes, the author provides an overview of how much and what the world’s citizens eat, documenting the stunning differences in nutrition and food availability among those individuals who live in highly industrialized nations versus those who live in the poorer developing nations. For example, an examination of the statistics on caloric intake explains why the United States has become a nation of overweight and obese citizens since the average American consumes close to an astounding 4,000 calories a day. On the other hand, a family in Ecuador spends the equivalent of about $32 to feed a family of eight. Young readers will surely be stunned to realize that despite the world’s abundance of food, children often go to bed hungry, suffer from malnutrition and die of starvation on a planet that is equipped to feed its billions of citizens.


With his bat-like ears and webbed toes, Jake has more on his mind than many 10-year-olds. Concerned
about starting fifth grade, being teased by his peers, and taking special reading classes, most of all, he worries about his parents' constant fighting and tries to protect his little sister, Cassie, from their escalating disagreements. Jake finds comfort in helping an elderly neighbor and in learning cool facts about bats from his best friend, Luke. When his father loses his job and becomes abusive, the neighbor steps in to protect the family. While the family learns to survive without their father in the home, the children still hope that he will get help and join them again so they can be a family.

Told in first person narration, Jake's story is a realistic, heart-wrenching example of the resiliency of young children in the face of adversity (Ward, 2009, p. 35).


Although much has been written about the 6,000,000 Jews murdered in the Holocaust at Adolf Hitler's behest, there still remain untold stories about other groups who faced Hitler's persecution. Little has been written about the estimated 200,000 individuals with physical or mental disabilities that were murdered during the Holocaust. In T4—the street address of the program of the Nazi's efforts to eliminate those they deemed unfit (Tiergartenstrasse 4)—this first-time author tells a harrowing tale of one potential victim, Paula Becker (Ward, 2009, p. 37). A young deaf girl who enjoys much of life despite her disability, Paula leads a relatively worry-free existence until Hitler's purification campaign. Paula's life is threatened once the Nazis decide to euthanize those they considered "unfit." To save her life, she is taken away from her loving family and hidden. This spare, free-verse novel engages the reader from beginning to end. Although the story ends happily, the fear and heartbreak Paula endured as she fled the evils of the Nazi regime are palpable throughout the book's pages, and readers will race through them to make sure she survives.


This simple but engaging story relates how an impoverished boy manages to change his future through hard work, a little luck, and the support of his community. “Kojo’s first break comes when his mother gives him some spare change to buy something for himself” (Ward, 2009, p. 38). Rather than spending the money on something disposable, the long-sighted boy buys a hen whose eggs he eventually sells and makes a small profit. Having proven that he is responsible, he obtains a bank loan, enabling him to expand his poultry...
farm. The language and examples simplify microfinance so that even young readers are able to understand the value of investment and saving money. The book’s pages are filled with colorful and playful illustrations with most of them spanning a page and a half each. Useful back matter includes a section on the real Kojo who inspired the story as well as a glossary of unfamiliar words at the end of the story, adding details to this inspiring story about one boy’s dream of making a difference in his own community, one egg at a time.

Books for older readers


Promised freedom at their former mistress’s death, thirteen-year-old Isabel and her young sister Ruth are sold into a brutal Loyalist household on the eve of the Revolutionary War. As the Patriots’ cries of freedom and liberty fill the streets of British-occupied New York, no one seems interested in the fate of two slave girls. Fighting for her own independence, Isabel becomes a spy for the Patriots, who betray her as well. Meanwhile, Ruth is sold South, and Isabel, determined to find her, boldly liberates herself from her harsh life and depart from New York City. The author’s meticulous research and attention to historical detail effectively plunge the reader into the life of a slave girl in New York in 1776, surely sparking many conversations about justice, liberty, and freedom during the time of the American Revolution.


In order to pay off his family’s debt in 1839, nine-year-old Ethan becomes an indentured servant to Mr. Lyman, a wealthy Farmington, Massachusetts, shopkeeper. Instead of learning a trade under the harsh man’s care, Ethan quickly experiences first-hand his physical and emotional abuses, “and he yearns to return home to the safety of his family” (Ward, 2009, p. 29). Together, he and Daniel, a teenager who is treated inhumanely simply because he is Irish, form an unlikely friendship. As they endure their unfair circumstances, they eventually find a way to turn the tables on Mr. Lyman. The eloquently written survival story provides a historical context to the mistreatment of many immigrants due to their racial, ethnic and socioeconomic statuses.
How does someone know when it’s time to stand up for what is right and against what is wrong? This fictionalized account of one boy who gave his life against oppression is inspiring from its opening pages through that last, fateful call to the executioner’s block. First introduced in the author’s award-winning *Hitler Youth: Growing up in Hitler’s Shadow* (2005), Helmuth Hübener “was a German teenager executed for his resistance to the Nazis” (Ward, 2009, p. 29). The author draws on historical data and artifacts to tell his engaging tale. As Helmuth awaits execution in a Nazi jail, he recalls the innocence of his childhood when he initially embraced Hitler’s early reign of terror. However, listening to BBC broadcasts telling different versions of what was happening in Germany impelled him to join the resistance despite the dangers. This gripping story of how young Germans resisted the Nazis in courageous ways, risking their lives to save their fellow citizens during the Holocaust, may provide inspiration for future generations to take a stand against the wrongs in their own lives.

There are many perspectives to the question about what to do with Palestine. This examination of the current status of the Palestinian/Arab residents of the West Bank territory provides a detailed and emotional description of the experiences of Amani, a teenager who wants to follow in her grandfather’s steps and become a shepherd, contrary to her family’s wishes. The struggles of West Bank Arab families such as Amani’s become more frustrating as they face the relentless destruction of their crops, animals, land and homes as the Jewish settlements continue to expand. As Amani tends her sheep, she encounters Jewish strangers and authorities who are both friendly and hostile. Eventually, after several heart-rending losses, she must draw courage from within as she and her people face an uncertain future with renewed hope and resolution.

Californian Danny, a Mexican-American spending the summer in San Diego, faces many internal and external challenges to his identity. Everyone he meets seems to have assumptions about him that are based on their own biases about someone with his skin color. Having a blonde and blue-eyed mother fails to gain him acceptance from the white student population in
his private school. Although he has Hispanic ancestry, it is ironic that he does not speak a word of Spanish. As he spends a summer with his father's Spanish-speaking family, Danny yearns to speak “the language that will allow him to experience the intimacy of this tightly knit community” (Ward, 2009, p. 33). His confusion about his own cultural identity causes him to lose confidence in himself. Although he is an outstanding baseball player, he can hardly perform when he is on the mound. The summer is packed with unexpected challenges, unpleasant realizations, and surprising rewards. At the end of his sojourn, Danny finally knows who he is and seems ready to embrace the positive future that the world holds for him.


Removed from their lands in 1852 by the federal government, Omakayas (Little Frog) and her family travel through Minnesota in search of a home. On a canoe trip, Omakayas and younger brother Pinch become lost and must find their way back to their family’s camp. Pinch finds a porcupine who will stay with the family throughout the year of surprises, betrayal, and loss. The author joins this Ojibwe family first encountered in The Birchbark House (1999) for the third time, revealing the stories of cherished friends and family members. The fierceness of a Lake Superior winter and the gnawing ache of hunger are palpable and certain to make readers thankful for their own easier life. With strength from her ancestors and from within, Omakayas prepares to navigate what may lie ahead.


A delightful pairing of art and poems that were written in response to the art, then translated into and from multiple languages, this collection celebrates the infinite varieties of art and poetry. The excellent reproductions of the art along with the calligraphic quality of languages such as Arabic, Hebrew, Korean, and Tigrinya (from Ethiopia) produce a brilliant collage of image and text. The collection is divided into four sections. “In the first, Stories, the poets’ imagined stories emerge from the art” (Ward, 2009, p. 35). In the second section, Voices, the poems speak from the voice of the subject in the art work. In the third section, Expressions illuminates the transactions created between the artworks.
and viewers, and in the fourth section, Impressions, the poets describe and define the art itself. The variety of languages, coupled with the translations, make this an essential acquisition for multilingual classrooms. The inclusion of brief biographies of the poets, translators, and artists as well as a world map help readers pinpoint the thirty-three countries on six continents represented in this book.


Filled with cautionary true-life stories about poor choices and explorations of the meaning of justice, this eye-opening book will leave readers haunted by the young men introduced in its pages. Describing the lives of teenagers on Death Row, the author begins her report on crime and punishment with the story of Roy Burgess, Jr., told mostly in his own words. Convicted of murder and sentenced to death for a crime committed when he was sixteen, Roy had three accomplices; the others fingered Roy as the gunman and have never spent a day in jail. “The book continues with the stories of two other young men, also in prison for murders that occurred” when they were teens (Ward, 2009, p. 36). In Chapter Four, Napoleon Beazley’s family relates the story of his “conviction and execution for a murder committed when he was seventeen” (p. 36). In another section of the book, siblings speak about their brother William, a sixteen-year-old homicide victim. Finally, defense attorney Bryan Stevenson describes his young clients and his determination to address the cycle of violence. Based on Kuklin’s interviews and carefully documented, this powerful book exposes the inequality and inhumanity of the prosecution, sentencing, and imprisonment of violent young offenders in the U.S.


Today’s army is not what young Robin (Birdy) Perry thought it would be when he joined up in Harlem in 2003, to his parents’ dismay. His assignment involves serving in civilian affairs, where he is charged with befriending the Iraqis. In his trademark style, the author deftly “juxtaposes scenes of humor with scenes of pathos” (Ward, 2009, p. 38) and humanizes the troops and leaders on whom Birdy must rely if he is survive his time in Fallujah. Although he wants to do the right thing and make a difference, Birdy has no intention to die to do so. In his letters home to his parents and his uncle Richie who served in Vietnam, Perry describes his struggles to survive and understand this strange place and the strange conflict in which he is engaged. As the
lines between friends and foes become less clear, Perry realizes that not only is heroism defined differently than he had imagined, but he himself may not have what it takes to be a hero.

The plight of Indians in Uganda during Idi Amin's reign as president is described in this intense story. While several Indians are skeptical about their new leader, fifteen-year-old Sabine and her father are optimistic that the tension will dissipate and life will return to normal. Although Amin orders all Indians to leave Uganda within ninety days, Sabine's father seems determined to wait things out and hope for the best. Since Uganda is the only home Sabine has known, the teenage protagonist is confused by the political events in her country. Even her best friend, Zena, an African Ugandan, seems to be changing. As the ninety days dwindle down, Sabine and her family must leave the country before they are caught in the turmoil. Unsure as to why they should leave, “she reluctantly disguises herself as a boy for this journey to the unknown. To ease Sabine's frustration, her grandfather explains Uganda's complicated history” (Ward, 2009, p. 39). Written as a log with dates at the beginning of each chapter, the book lures readers into Sabine’s suddenly unfamiliar world. Readers will enjoy the easy flow of the language, conjuring beautiful images of Ugandan landscape, diverse cultures and contradictory social practices. The map at the beginning of the book provides readers with a visual sense of the geographical setting.

Just about any baseball fan knows about certain baseball teams and their legendary players. The Chicago White Sox, New York Yankees, Fenway Park, Wrigley Field, and the American and National Leagues are all familiar parts of American culture. But much lesser known are the Indianapolis ABCs, the Detroit Stars, the Dayton Marcos, and the Negro National League (Ward, 2009, p. 40). This stunning book about the history of baseball as it was played in the Negro leagues brings to life the stories of the great, mostly forgotten players who never had a chance to play in the big leagues or gain...
the attention they should have received due to baseball’s segregation. The author lovingly combines narrative text with exquisite, captivating paintings and the awareness that if Negro players were to have any chance at playing professional baseball they would have to do it on their own in their own leagues. The title pays tribute to Rube Foster, founder of the Negro National League, who declared, “We are the ship; all else is the sea.” This is a must-have for every baseball fan’s historical collection.


Two lives, spent on different sides of the tracks, collide and become intertwined in this engaging and thought-provoking novel. Fourteen-year-old Henry Smith has spent his life far away from Trouble. Insulated by wealth and ancestral entitlement, he has only a passing acquaintance with Trouble until the day his older brother, Franklin, is hit by a truck owned by a Cambodian immigrant. On the other hand, Chay Chouan, has spent most of his life smack in the middle of Trouble. A refugee from the Vietnam War, he has known hunger, pain, violence, and despair. Once his family settles in Massachusetts, Trouble manages to find him, forcing him to endure racial prejudice from classmates, including Franklin, and, eventually, the whole community. Because of his recent acquaintance with Trouble, Henry sets out to climb Mount Katahdin, a journey he had originally planned with his brother. Through an accidental turn of events, he meets up with Chay (Ward, 2009, p. 43). What the two find out about each other parallels what they learn about themselves. The author crafts a truly complex American story—filled with tragedy, humor, and hope.


The punch lines of the once-popular “Little Audrey” jokes always contain these words: “She just laughed and laughed.” But eleven-year-old Audrey White is tired of the jokes containing her name and finds little to laugh about in her bleak existence. In the late “spring of 1948, her family ekes out a living in Jewell Valley, a coal camp in western Virginia” (Ward, 2009, p. 44). As she recovers from scarlet fever, she wonders how she will ever get well when there is little to eat at home for everyone, including her three greedy younger sisters. With a hard-drinking father and a withdrawn mother, Audrey draws some comfort from her new friend Virgil and his jokes, her beloved teacher, and books. Told in the voice of the author’s older sister, this short autobiographical novel uses lively colloquial language to describe the family’s constant struggles with poverty, hunger, and tragedy.
Despite the painful moments, the book ends as Audrey realizes she may have the last laugh, after all.


When a suicide bombing at a neighborhood café in Jerusalem takes eight lives, including a twenty-year-old young woman on the eve of her wedding, seventeen-year-old Tal Levine struggles to understand her feelings, her future, and the future of her country. As she articulates her thoughts in a letter, Tal desperately wants to reach out to “someone” and wants to send the letter to “someone.” Placing the letter in a bottle in the time-honored fashion, she convinces her older brother, an Israeli soldier stationed in the Gaza, to throw it in the sea so that someone there will find it. “The reply she receives from the anonymous ‘Gazaman’ is initially mocking and condescending” (Ward, 2009, p 45), but Tal’s relentless persistence and optimism slowly break through his emotional wall. Both young adults, on opposite sides of the conflict, attain profound new understandings of each other, themselves, and their future. Readers will quickly grow attached to both characters as they reach out to one another through their correspondence while gaining empathy for the Palestinians and Israelis caught up in a seemingly endless conflict.

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Many struggling readers soon become disengaged readers. They think they don’t have the ability to succeed. They frequently give up to avoid unpleasant tasks. Teachers can work on developing in these students a sense of efficacy and to motivate and encourage them to overcome difficulties and to take on challenging tasks.

The National Association of Educational Progress data over the past 30 years document a somewhat fluctuating but persistent reading achievement gap between white students and African American, Hispanic, and Native American students. For example, the average reading scores of white students are higher than those of black students at ages 9, 13, and 17 (Donahue, Voekl, Campbell, & Mazzeo, 1999). These gaps decreased between the early 1970s and the late 1980s. Since then, the gaps have remained relatively stable or have increased. Recent studies conducted by the National Center for Education Statistics (2002) document large gaps in student achievement on school tests as early as kindergarten. For example, 73 percent of white kindergartners were proficient in letter recognition, but only 59 percent of African American and 49 percent of Hispanic kindergartners were proficient. There were similar differences among ethnic groups in the recognition of beginning and ending sounds of words and for print familiarity—skills typically identified as important for success in school (NCES, 2002). Diverse learners are more likely to be referred for additional testing and placement in special education programs because achievement tests typically do not assess literacy skills that they may have acquired outside school, and these skills often differ from the ones these children are expected to have when they enter school. If, indeed, the issue is reading, the more appropriate educational response is to match children’s individual learning capabilities and needs with the most appropriate reading instruction within the least restrictive environment, such as the children’s classrooms.

In 2007, the Census Bureau reported there were 3.9 million eighth graders in the United States. Twenty-six percent of these eighth graders did not attain basic levels of literacy and only 31 percent reached proficiency. This means that approximately one million eighth graders were at basic literacy levels and another 1.7 million were not proficient. Across the nation achievement gaps have been observed by race, class, and gender. This means that children of color, children from lower socioeconomic classes and males performed least well (Lee, Grigg, and Donohue, 2007; U.S. Census Bureau, 2007).

These numbers likely underestimate the problem, since students with disabilities and English-language learners, who have testing accommodations, are at even greater risk of not developing appropriate literacy skills. The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP, 2008) tests only print literacy and does not tap into higher level, complex skills that focus on digital literacy that is needed for success in today’s world and in the future (Coiro & Dobler, 2007).

The most severe symptom of disengagement from school exhibits itself among school drop outs. There are several indicators of withdrawal such as poor attendance, unsuccessful school experiences, whether academic or behavioral. These behaviors typically involve feelings of alienation, a sense of not belonging, and a general dislike for school. It is well documented by Barrington and Hendricks (1989) that this pattern may begin as early as the first grade.

Identifying these students is important because the costs for students who drop out of school are significant. Youth who do not complete high school are more likely to experience unemployment or be underemployed, incarcerated, and dependent on social services. It is estimated that nearly $766 billion a year or
close to $800 annually per taxpayer is needed to provide for these needs (Joint Economic Committee, 1991). Individual and societal costs point to the critical need for prevention and intervention strategies (Lair, Sinclair and Christenson, 2004).

**Motivation and engagement: What research tells us**

Due to the serious implications of low motivation for academic tasks and disengagement from learning in schools, the fields of education and psychology have studied the topics broadly. First, we will present the signs and causes of disengagement identified in the literature, then second, we will present the instructional techniques educators can use to overcome the effects of disengagement.

Underachievement is commonly associated with disengagement. According to Siegle and McCoach (2005) there may be underlying physical, cognitive, or emotional problems that could explain the decline of motivation for school-related activities. Our graduate students have reported turmoil in the family, situational stressors that would challenge well-adjusted individuals who possess excellent coping strategies, and an unknown scratched cornea that explained gradual decreases in school success.

A poor match between the individual student and the school setting may result in the student’s perception of school as irrelevant. Solberg (n.d.) indicated that when students perceive school as lacking relevance and are not appropriately challenged, a gradual progression over time of decreased motivation and disinterest in school will likely result. Student attitudes toward the self, the school environment, and the utility of school for life are factors in achievement (Siegle & McCoach, 2005). Studies on underachievement often measure disengagement by behavior, conduct, grades, homework completion and via attitudinal measures.

Difficulty with reading and gaining information through text is also often associated with the disengaged student (Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory, 2000). The relationship between reading and disengagement may include little enjoyment from reading, a history of frustration with reading, and selecting activities other than reading to occupy recreation or leisure time. Given the importance of reading to school achievement, limited success with reading is likely connected to poor grades, difficulty with curricular demands, and pervasive disenfranchisement with school requirements.

The Center for Applied Special Technology (CAST) has devoted attention to the universal design of learning and instruction. The universal design approach identifies known barriers to learning, strategies for overcoming these barriers, and developing educational materials that promote access to instruction. Several of these barriers are directly related to motivation and engagement including relevance, interest, boredom, and outcomes. The universal design of learning guidelines offer several important and related principles including multiple means of engagement, options for increasing choice, autonomy, and enhancing relevance and authenticity (CAST, 2008). Conversely, the engaged student often experiences success in academic tasks, higher grades, higher test scores, and lower dropout rates (Klem & Connell, 2007). Student engagement is related to positive academic outcomes, achievement, and persistence (Center for Mental Health in Schools, 2008).

Given the signs and causes of disengagement, there are instructional skills and techniques known to be effective in these situations. Several of these approaches are relatively generic and could easily apply to the educator's daily work habits, while others require alterations to the lesson planning process. The majority relate to the presentation of the lesson by the teacher.

Since disengagement and low motivation includes a psychological component with possible components of lack of confidence due to repeated frustration and failure and a perception of lack of meaningfulness of school toward life in general, then struggling students need both overt motivation and encouragement. One approach is for the teacher to model enthusiasm for the learner and the learning. Teachers can grab attention by communicating why students can become interested by the lesson. Casey (2008) implemented a learning clubs technique that grouped students by interest in certain curricular topics. Developing, facilitating, or capitalizing on student enthusiasms is clearly one approach to student engagement.

Since disengagement often includes an academic component, often with reading difficulty, then struggling students may benefit from skills instruction. Continuing attention to the development of reading and study skills may assist in engagement. Non-traditional formats including graphic novels, audio books, and other assistive technologies may support the struggling, disengaged student.

Challenging and authentic tasks, student choice-making, and supportive teachers assist in the engagement of learners (Center for Mental Health in Schools, 2008). If teachers provide a small array of appropriate pathways and students select one direction, then the teacher knows all of the pathways in the array are valid and the student may become empowered by actively selecting the direction of their own learning. In reading, this approach is commonly used when students select meaningful texts, books, or topics, however the choice-making does not have to be limited to book selection, it can be related to activities, centers, or groupings based on topic.

One solution to the apparent divide between a teacher’s curriculum and student interest is by selecting
seemingly diverse materials with universal themes and then teach or have the students explore the connections between the disparate materials. For example, Lynch (2007) linked Chaucer, Eminem, and social issues for urban high school students. Students studied Chaucer, who employed rhyme to examine social and political issues, then connected Chaucer to rap music’s similar features, never abandoning Chaucer as the primary focus of the unit. In a similar fashion, in England, Palmer (2008), drawing on personal experience as a student, used football (soccer) as the basis for several projects ranging from reading selected books where the sport or its athletes figured prominently to the development of interactive reading game that blends reading skills with the sport. Both of these examples used student interest to reach academic goals.

Guthrie and Davis (2003) identified six practices as part of an engagement model of instruction for middle school students: knowledge goals, real-world interactions, an abundance of interesting texts, support for student choice and self-determination, direct strategy instruction, and collaboration support. Many of the previously mentioned instructional strategies including linking Chaucer and rap (knowledge goals and interesting texts), using football as entree to reading skills (direct strategy instruction) and learning clubs based on shared interest (collaboration), embody Guthrie and Davis’ engagement model.

Engaging the disengaged readers: Case scenarios

Case scenario 1: Richard

Richard is a fourth grader, who is currently struggling with his textbooks and is beginning to disengage from his schoolwork. His mother reports that he has been a good reader until now, read in the past, but can’t seem to handle his current texts. He says that the texts have gotten longer, he struggles with vocabulary, his reading has slowed down and he cannot understand what he is reading. His past reading scores showed him at grade level in reading but he has started missing more school and is now starting to fall behind. He seems to have lost his confidence in reading and is unmotivated to do his work, except when he has time with the computer. Previously he would read mystery books and science related stories. But now, he has pulled away and reads nothing. He seems unmotivated and has also begun to distance himself from his peers.

In order to help Richard break his downward spiral and get him back on track as his teacher you might try the following steps:

First, have a conversation with Richard. Spend some time talking with him to determine what makes him tick. Try to get at his interests, his strengths, what’s going on in his life, how he views reading, what might be difficult for him, what he likes to read—we know he was a reader in the past and we suspect that the move to more advanced texts is presenting him with a real challenge. You might ask him to bring in a magazine he enjoys, or a science book that he previously read and enjoyed.

Second, Richard’s self concept is low right now and he doesn’t believe in himself. Your job is to help him feel that he is capable of succeeding at a task and that success is important to him now and in the future. If you can get him to see that he can succeed then he might be encouraged to work with you. Now you have to find the right materials and provide him with assignments that he finds meaningful. You would gradually bring in some more difficult assignments and when he can handle those, keep pushing him. Knowing he likes science, you might start with that, build in activities that he can complete, start charting his progress and try to hook him up with a buddy. You could use that “buddy” to work with him on vocabulary and share some of the assigned reading. You would also chart his progress provide him a visual record of his success and allow him to see what he can do, rather than what he can’t do (Margolis & McCabe, 2006).

Third, we know that literacy is a big part of the everyday world of children. Students are more facile than some adults in text messaging, blogging, e-mailing, and using computers in general. Research suggests that connecting with a learning activity can be triggered by using the latest technology. Further, if one expects strong academic outcomes, one must be able to maintain interest which will then support persistence and effort required for skills to be acquired. Richard seems to shine when he can access the computer. Try to find a computer software that works on vocabulary and comprehension and would make him feel successful and redirect him if he does make an error. Since Richard has a buddy in reading, why not make him someone’s “buddy” working on the computer—that certainly would add to his self-confidence, re-engage him and help him feel successful.

Fourth, capitalize on his interest in science. To do this, you can use as many real world experiences with Richard. These hands on experiences evoke visualizations, are personal experiences, and can motivate and help students make connections. Children enjoy looking, asking questions and discussing what they see. This in turn can lead to writing, keeping a science log, and reading text. We know that active learning is both stimulating and leads to knowledge acquisition. This is a powerful force for student learning—especially for Richard. According to Anderson (1998) and Ross (1988) science experiments
and computer simulations can lead to content understanding and aroused attention, which can lead to increased comprehension and stimulation (Guthrie and Cox, 1988).

These methods will not provide a quick remedy, but will establish a framework for increasing self-efficacy and providing motivation. Using and teaching to his interests, combined with strategic goal identification and specific reading strategy development, can help Richard move back to his texts and the classroom environment.

Case scenario 2: Jackson

Jackson is an outgoing seventh grade student who struggles with reading and has shown significant signs of disinterest in school. His reading problems have persisted for several years starting in third grade. His past reading scores show him at below grade level and at the frustration level. Reading comprehension is a particular skill of concern to his parents and teachers. His father reports that Jackson occasionally reads for pleasure, primarily on-line text related to his interests of college basketball and music; however, it has been several months since the family observed Jackson reading school-related material at home. Jackson's teachers indicate that his attendance is becoming inconsistent, his homework completion limited, and class participation sporadic.

Recognizing the signs of the disengaged student, particularly one who struggles with literacy, is the first step in intervention. Next, if Jackson's teachers possess limited knowledge of his background and interests, then their capacity to design engaging lessons is reduced. To address Jackson's situation it is important to first learn as much as you can about the his interests, motivations, preferences, and views on school. If Jackson fails to share his interests, then steer the conversation toward known interests presented by his family. Connect his favorite topics to the curriculum, to texts, and to school. Re-establishing his connection to school by associating it with his interests may help him see a reason to attend class. Using examples of his preferred topics of college basketball and music in class content may spark enthusiasm. Integrating preferred topics into homework or course content may further maintain his participation in school. Capturing the attention of learners like Jackson with methods of this nature may facilitate engagement.

Since reading comprehension is a known concern in Jackson's case, then his teachers should turn attention to building this skill. According to Guthrie and Davis (2003) strategy instruction should be contextualized in the sense that strategy instruction should not occur in isolation, but rather within the framework of their engagement model, which includes learning goals, real-world applications, interesting text, and student choice-making in their learning. In this context Jackson may not feel continued frustration with learning skills in which he has previously encountered failure, but instead may be practicing those skills in the context of familiar topics and events.

Last, remembering that disengagement has psychological components and knowing that Jackson is an outgoing seventh grader, Jackson's teachers may find success in using learning clubs. Grouping Jackson with other students who also enjoy college basketball and music may promote access to lesson plan goals, especially if they are on thematic units that combine those interests with curricular goals, but also may connect him to learning because of the shared preferences of peers. Sharing positive reading experiences with peers may help diminish Jackson's attempts to remove himself from the classroom and school.

Conclusions

Knowing the gravity of the situation and realizing that motivating struggling readers is a major concern of teachers (Ganske et al., 2003) teachers must develop strategies and plans to assist the struggling, disengaged reader. Applying motivation principles is critical as many struggling readers resist reading and reading instruction, become passive, or begin to act out or isolate themselves from reading and classroom activities (Ganske, Monroe & Strickland, 2003; Guthrie & Davis, 2003). If students have little or no motivation, they will not become involved and there will likely be little, if any engagement which will only exacerbate reading problems and provide no success for the students (Margolis & McCabe, 2004; Guthrie & Davis, 2003).

As teachers, we must help students succeed; for when that occurs, kids have evidence that they can be successful, which leads to a sense of self-efficacy (Bandura, 1995). And as students begin to see themselves as successful, they will attempt to do more and gradually become engaged. Coupled with success, students must also find the materials interesting. Fortunately, research shows that by linking new work to recent successes, teaching needed learning strategies, reinforcing effort and persistence, and identifying or creating personally important goals—these have been successful with struggling readers (Margolis & McCabe, 2006).

When asked how they would work effectively with a disengaged reader, graduate students in our clinical practicum course echoed the sentiment of motivation and engagement researchers such as Guthrie (2000), Guthrie and Davis (2003), and Margolis and McCabe (2006). We leave you with a few of their thoughts.
Work on reading strategies with non-print texts like music, art, film, etc. Then move to print or vary the two and let’s not forget the computer. This is a real motivating tool for many children.

~Meghan Jones~

The best place to start is with a conversation with the reader. Talk about topics other than reading to get a feel for the student’s interests. I read a lot of children’s picture and chapter books. By reading a lot of kid’s books, I can usually find some sort of connection to what the student likes. I may try audio books or use song lyrics as a means of motivating them to read. Magazines are a popular way to try and get students to read. I have to tap into the student’s likes rather than why they are in my reading class. I think once they see you are trying to connect with them—they are more likely to work with you.

~Betty Murratti~

Be sure that the student has a book that is at their appropriate independent reading level. This is important because it will allow the student to access the text with little to no difficulty. Be sure the student is reading something of interest to them and appropriate for their age and grade level. Offer incentives to the reader. Allow students to buddy read to a peer or a younger student.

~Karrie Rinaldi~

The key is to develop the student’s confidence. Often, students who find reading difficult don't feel good about themselves. Teachers must build up their confidence so they are willing to try and take risks. I try to use computer games and texts that interest them. I use a lot of praise. I try to impress on kids that reading is a necessary skill beyond school. I encourage parents to bake with their children, help them assemble models, read maps, chart the weather, for example. This helps them realize that we also use reading outside of school.

~Allison Vicino~

References


Motivating disengaged readers through multicultural children’s literature

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No matter what book teachers give some students, they just don’t want to read it. They flip through it, maybe read a few pages, and then just put it aside. It is difficult to arouse their interest and to motivate them. This same sentiment has been echoed many times in teachers’ lounges across the country. There are countless students sitting in American classrooms today who are not engaged or motivated to read. Educators, both teachers and librarians, struggle to try to find ways to spark student interest, through book talks, journaling, blogging, interesting projects, author talks, and countless other activities.

Motivation to read is multifaceted (Brozo & Flynt, 2008), and includes such factors as teachers acting as allies in the reading process (Guthrie, 2008), having an abundance of texts available (Brozo & Flynt, 2008), giving students’ choice (Turner, 1995; Freeman, McPhail & Berndt, 2002), and connecting school literacies with literacies in the student’s personal life (Brozo & Flynt, 2008; Ferger, 2006; Guthrie, Wigfield, & Perencevich, 2004).

However, one vital component of reading that is often overlooked is what the student brings to the reading experience. The meaning of the printed word is not just what is written on the page but is also created from the meaning that the reader brings to the text. Rosenblatt (1978) captured the essence of this thought when she states, “... text, once it leaves its author’s hands, is simply paper and ink until a reader evokes from it a literary work...” (p. ix). Rosenblatt’s Reader Response Theory is well embedded in the educational fabric of American society. Most educators accept the premise that it is not only the author who brings meaning to the pages but also the reader. A reader’s personal store of prior experience, background knowledge, cultural expectations, and personal interpretations shape meaning from the written word – in essence – the reader’s response to the written word is what impacts the meaning of the text.

The National Council for Teachers of English (2004) has incorporated the spirit of Rosenblatt’s theory into a position statement on literacy and has added a cultural component: “Reading is a complex and purposeful sociocultural, cognitive, and linguistic process in which readers simultaneously use their knowledge of spoken and written language, their knowledge of the topic of the text, and their knowledge of their culture to construct meaning with text” (p. 1). Other educators have also supported the concept that culture is integral to readers’ responses and interpretations of texts as well as their motivation to read texts. Cleary’s study (2008) on Native Americans indicated that these students were more motivated to read when choice in reading materials and representations of their culture were provided. In an interview with native students, Cleary (2008) found that when students were asked how teachers could improve their instruction students repeatedly said that teachers should find stories that relate to their lives and stories about their culture and their people. Guthrie, Wigfield, & Perencevich (2004) also found that introducing texts that relate to students’ culture may help to motivate them to read.

This article will focus on methods of including multicultural literature, specifically Middle Eastern, in the classroom to increase student engagement and motivation. Also included are a brief overview of Middle Eastern culture and the people that populate the Middle East, suggestions for outstanding Middle Eastern children’s books that can be added to classroom and school libraries, and creative teaching ideas.

Multicultural literature

Stories, whether transmitted orally or through a written medium, are a powerful tool that adults use to convey cultural values. Through stories, right and wrong, good
and evil, and the actions and deeds that society values are passed on to the next generation. When children read literature about their ethnic or cultural group, they engage in accretion of their identity, define who they are, and validate their place in society and their personal worth (Heflin, Barksdale-Ladd, 2001). When a dominant cultural group is repeatedly highlighted in the classroom and only a few token minority stories are included with very little discussion of cultural values and traditions, diverse children begin to question whether society values their culture, and they may begin to doubt their own value in society and the community in which they interact. Shields (2004) goes so far as to assert that, “When children feel they belong and find their realities reflected in the curriculum and conversations of schooling, research has demonstrated repeatedly that they are more engaged in learning and that they experience greater school success” (p. 122). An enormous burden is placed on children who spend twelve years in school sitting through classroom libraries, listening to read alouds, watching picture walks, and checking out books from the school library and never encountering a book that contains pictures of people who look similar to them or to their families, and never reading a story about people who are from their culture, share their religion, or have similar ideas. Many Middle Eastern children sitting in classrooms today have had that experience (Al-Hazza, 2008). Hefflin and Barksdale-Ladd (2001) capture in an interview why it is so important for children to see people like themselves in the books they read:

The joy of reading is in stepping into the experience of the characters. When the characters look like, talk like, think like, and act like us, it’s easy to share in the experience. I think that after we’ve had that experience a few times, it becomes easier to understand the experiences of people who are less like us. But in becoming a reader, and learning to love reading, experiencing books that mirror our own lives is extremely important—which for me began when I became an adult. (p. 811)

American classrooms are becoming more diverse; therefore, the literature read and included in school and classroom libraries should reflect this rich diversity. The mention of multicultural literature a few decades ago was often taken as code by many as referencing literature reflecting African American life or authors, and this body of works was accepted with no small measure of reluctance since it somehow threatened an overwhelmingly Anglo cannon. Patience among educators grew over time; however, as teachers across the country came to believe that a wider, more egalitarian perspective of what was “good” for the youth of America. So these same educators felt mildly put upon when critics of schools began to insist that the literature of another quickly growing minority also be included in the curriculum: that body of works written about Hispanic culture or by Hispanic writers. At this time, teachers were expected to become knowledgeable of another set of creative works, and the potential for dilution of acceptable literary standards surfaced yet again. So now in time’s shadow of 9/11, teachers are being encouraged yet again by a small constellation of educators to broaden their view of important works and give attention to the literature of the Middle East, a challenge that looms with the potential for political tension—or the discovery of a rich vein of life not fully understood in this country. According to the 2008 U.S. Census, there are over 1,560,000 people of Arab ancestry living in the United States and approximately 776,000 people from other parts of the Middle East. These demographics reveal a substantial cultural group in classrooms today who are often forgotten in the school curriculum and who deserve to have their culture recognized and respected.

Introducing multicultural literature and culturally relevant curriculum into the classroom helps readers from the mainstream culture and readers who are not from the Middle East understand commonalities of shared values, beliefs, and customs of people, whether the cultural commonalities are the same or dramatically different. This inclusion allows Middle Eastern students to learn from a familiar cultural base, to acknowledge their ancestors’ accomplishments, lifestyles, traditions, and customs. This exposure can strengthen self esteem and help create positive ethnic identification. Adding Middle East literature also allows students from the Middle East to see their culture reflected in the literature of the classroom, thereby helping to validate their importance in society. Moreover, including multicultural literature can help children from diverse groups develop more positive values, attitudes, and even lifestyle choices.

All people experience fear and struggles, face conflict, have universal experiences of growing up, and this commonality of experience can help create understanding between vastly different cultural groups within our classrooms. Regardless of whether children from the Middle East are sitting in your classroom, there are a plethora of benefits for including Middle Eastern children’s literature into your classroom and school library. By including this literature, children learn to value all cultures, recognize that differences are an addition, promote understanding of cultures which are very diverse from their own, enhance their understanding of the world, and help develop an appreciation of cultural differences that exist in our global society.

The Middle East
The Middle East is a wide expanse of area covering two continents, Africa and Asia. The majority of people in this region are Arab; however, the countries of Turkey,
Iran, and Israel also reside in this part of the world. Within each of these countries, there are significant members of other minority populations such as the Copts in Egypt, the Druze in Lebanon, and the Kurds, who live on the borders of Iraq, Turkey, and Iran.

Arab countries dominate the region; therefore, it necessitates a closer examination of who these people are and which countries constitute the Arab world. There are 17 Arab countries, each with a distinct dialect of spoken Arabic and with customs and traditions specific to their region. It is best to think of the Arab countries in three regions: North African Arabs (Morocco, Tunisia, Libya, Algeria, Sudan, and Egypt), the Mediterranean Arabs, (Syria, Lebanon, Jordan, and Palestine – although Palestine is not recognized as an independent country at this time it is a distinct region and is currently struggling for independent recognition), and the Gulf Arabs (Iraq, Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar, United Arab Emirates, Oman, Yemen and Saudi Arabia). Even within these regions vast differences in customs and traditions exist. For example, the inhabitants of Morocco are of mixed Berber lineage and have undergone years of French and Spanish occupation which have modified their customs and traditions. However, Egypt, another North African Arab country, has a rich history dating from pre-Islamic times when the Pharaohs ruled and this history has caused their culture to differ dramatically from other North African Arab countries. In essence, while the Middle East countries have a great deal in common, there is also a great deal of diversity among its inhabitants.

**Middle Eastern children’s literature**

Children’s imaginations flow from reading ancient stories woven in intricate detail that delight the mind’s eye. There is no more invigorating way to vicariously experience a culture’s history and their narrative than from reading elaborate tales such as *Sinbad’s Adventures* or *Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves*. Below is a selection from *Sinbad’s Secrets* by Ludmila Zeman which is rich in details to excite young readers’ minds:

Suddenly the sky darkened and violent rain fell. Our ship danced on the sea like a feather in the air. Monster fish and enormous serpents encircled us. A serpent as high as a mountain opened her giant muzzle and slithered towards the ship. Fear so great possessed me that I jumped straight into the roaring waves. I slid underneath the serpent and felt her rubbery skin extending and constricting as she devoured the ship.

Sindbad’s adventures are woven into a trilogy of stories with an exciting narrative of outlandish adventures that will amaze children. Similarly, children will become enchanted with another well-known Middle East character named *Goba* who is also known as a wise fool. His hilarious antics are brilliantly narrated in a series of short stories. All children deserve to be exposed to literature so vastly different from their everyday experiences that they escape into worlds beyond their borders. Reading multicultural literature of this region broadens children’s cultural views, and helps them relate to characters, settings, and plots that are infinitely different from mainstream literature. Appendix A is a compilation of several of excellent Middle East stories for elementary students. A more comprehensive list is available in the book titled, *Books about the Middle East: Selecting and Using them with Children and Adolescents* by Tami Craft Al-Hazza and Katherine Toth Bucher.

**Teaching ideas**

Teaching at its best is an art and effective teachers are artists. The methods that teachers utilize when teaching with multicultural literature to introduce new books can greatly enhance children’s comprehension of the book, concepts in the book, and understanding of the culture. One creative teaching method that has been found to be very effective is guided imagery (Samples, 1977). Guided imagery helps students remove themselves from their immediate environment and allows them to explore freely another time and setting through their senses. Guided imagery is usually done by verbally describing a unique setting that will prepare students for the story they are about to read. When introducing Middle East literature into the classroom, many skilled teachers like to extend the guided imagery experience to more than a narrative and engage as many senses as possible to help create an authentic experience. Perfumes, spices, and incense have traditionally played an important role in every aspect of Middle Eastern life; therefore, some teachers try to recreate this aroma. Of course, it is not always easy or economical to acquire authentic incense or perfume from the Middle East; therefore, regular kitchen items such as cardamom or saffron, and cinnamon could be boiled in water at home and kept warm in containers and brought into the classroom with the lids of the containers removed to release their exotic aroma into the air.

To contribute an authentic experience, background music from that culture can be played from a website; pictures or slides that show the country can serve as a visual backdrop while the students are waiting for the narrative. The teacher can even engage the student in artwork from that culture to help children understand artistic aspects of the culture. Of course, if the teacher is inspired, the entire classroom could be transformed into a Middle Eastern environment with children creating mosaic pictures in art class. Other pictures filled with images from the Middle East can be displayed on the walls and bulletin boards and material can be draped from the ceiling to create an exotic atmosphere.
Once the background mood has been created, the teacher can begin to read her guided imagery narrative. Any unusual vocabulary words should be explained in advance. In the narrative below you would explain that *souk* means a market and *chi* means hot tea. If teachers were working with a book such as Zorah’s Magic Carpet, an adorable children’s book set in Morocco, they could use the guided imagery narrative below. A website that teachers could use is Soundboard. It features sounds from a Moroccan market, people singing, and sounds from other aspects of Moroccan life. The address is http://www.soundboard.com/sb/Sound_of_Morocco.aspx. Two excellent selections are number one, a family singing at Djemma El Fna Square or selection number six, the sounds from Marrakech Mosques. Another good source for music is from the website titled, Moroccan Music located at http://www.focusmm.com/morocco/mo_musmn.htm. The paragraphs at the top of this website explain the history of Moroccan music and below this are a plethora of links for different soundtracks. Some useful links on this page are Abdel Halim Hafez with the soundtrack titled, Ala Hezb Wedad and Ragaa Belmeleeh with the soundtrack, Sabri Alake Tal. Both of the soundtracks by these artists will create an exotic backdrop to read your guided imagery opening. To accompany this music and develop a visual context for their subsequent reading experience, the teacher might well begin a narrative of her own much like the following:

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Close your eyes, it is a little past noon and you are sitting in a café in a crowded souk in Morocco sipping chi. You live outside of town in a small village and once a week you bring goat’s milk and cheese to the market to sell. You hear Moroccan music playing in the distance, the jingle of ankle bracelets as women pass by and the voices of people bartering as they buy and sell their goods. You feel the hot desert wind caressing your skin and the heat from the hot sun warming your body causing sweat to drip down your neck. You are surrounded by the scent of spices, perfume, and incense that engulf the air. Your eyes are bombarded with glimpses of brightly colored clothes made of red, purple, yellow, and turquoise swirling in the desert wind. Your taste buds dance as you sip the spicy sweet tea and nibble on the fig-filled pastry. A tall dark mysterious man standing in the middle of the souk calls in a loud voice that an ancient Moroccan story is about to be told by a well-known storyteller in the center of the market and all who want to hear should gather on the carpets. You excitedly move to the carpets to hear the story knowing that the tale about to be told will transport you to magical lands.

Another interesting technique that can be used in the classroom to enhance children’s knowledge of the Middle East is a Venn diagram comparing two characters (Thompkins, 2003). Since children and adults alike love Cinderella stories, a creative technique to help children understand and compare the different cultures within the Middle East is to read two or more of the Cinderella stories such as Shirley Climo’s *The Egyptian Cinderella* and *The Persian Cinderella*. A Venn Diagram can then be used to compare either the two stories or the two main characters from each book or even a third story can be added and three circles created for comparison instead of two. Appendix B shows an example of a Venn diagram comparing two Middle Eastern Cinderella stories.

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**Conclusion**

Today’s classrooms are a mixture of children from diverse backgrounds, and in that mélange of ethnicities and cultures are youngsters of Middle Eastern backgrounds, and they too deserve our instructional attention. This introduction to Middle Eastern children’s literature and related teaching techniques is designed to offer teachers an alternative perspective on multicultural literature, a view that for too long has fallen to a narrow range of literature. This literature will inspire students to read and be transported to another time and to begin to develop an understanding and appreciation for another cultural group. Stories among those listed here are those you might wish to incorporate into your classroom libraries, school libraries, and into the language arts curriculum. Your students will fall in love with the delightful characters, intriguing storylines, and riveting plots found in these novels rich with Middle Eastern tales, antidotes, and adventures.

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### Appendix A

**Suggested Middle Eastern Children’s Literature**

### Arab Literature


### Iran


### Israel


### Other People’s of the Middle East

### Kurds


### Turks

Similarities
Both girls hearts are kind.
Both girls are not treated well by the other females around them.
Both girls married a prince.

Setting:
Persian/Iran

Main Character:
Settareh

Family Status:
Mother died

What did she lose?
She lost her diamond bracelet.

Magical Element:
A pairy (fairy) from a blue bottle helped her.

Cinderella Stories

Setting:
Egypt

Main Character:
Rhodopis

Family Status:
Slave

What did she lose?
She lost her slipper.

Magical Element:
She did not have a fairy godmother or a pairy.

Appendix B
Venn Diagram Comparing Cinderella Stories from the Middle East
Lisen, an eight-year-old boy, who came to U.S. with his mother, a visiting scholar in a state university, has stayed in the U.S. for one and a half years. Although Lisen has learned English for two years in China before he came to the U.S., his English is very limited especially in speaking and reading. He was enrolled in a second grade class at a local elementary school.

Yiqing, a twelve-year-old boy, who immigrated to U.S. with his family for two years, was enrolled in sixth grade at the local middle school. Having learned English in elementary school for three years in China, Yiqing also feels very challenged in English reading and writing class in the U.S.

Both Lisen and Yiqing’s native language is Mandarin and they felt challenged in English reading and writing when they first immigrated to the U.S. with their families. According to KewalRamani, Gilbertson, Fox, and Provasnik (2007), approximately 10.8 million elementary and secondary school students, or 20 percent of all such students, spoke a language other than English at home in 2005. About one quarter of these English language learners (ELLs) have difficulty speaking English. The non-native English speaking population is increasing. In 2005, the minority made up 33 percent of the U.S. population, while between 2005 and 2020 this population is expected to increase by 32 percent, compared to four percent for the White population (KewalRamani et al., 2007). With an increased number of English as Second Language (ESL) students enrolled in U.S. public schools, providing quality instruction to these students becomes an imperative task for public school educators/para-educators. The greatest challenge affecting those who teach ELLs is how to teach the ELLs to achieve the reading level necessary to function at the appropriate grade level (Wallace, 2007). Hickman, Polland-Durodola, and Vaughn (2004) also pointed out that ELLs are one of the largest groups of students who struggle with literacy in general, and vocabulary and comprehension in particular.

Read-Alouds
Read-alouds, can help ELLs develop both receptive and expressive language skills (Lombardi, 2008). Hickman, Polland-Durodola, and Vaughn (2004) discuss how the read-aloud practices were designed to address and promote vocabulary and comprehension skill development for first grade ELLs with reading difficulties. Both the English and the native language materials used for read-aloud practices are part of their core instructions for ELLs. Teachers choose the books that are of interest to the ELLs, and assist three or four ELLs to work in small groups. First, teachers preview the story and the vocabulary, then read aloud the story, ask students questions related to the story, and facilitate the discussion. Next, teachers review the new vocabularies the ELLs learned in the lesson and practice using the new vocabularies to express their own ideas and share their experiences. Finally, teachers summarize the new vocabularies they have learned, and the main characters in the story as well as the main events and ideas in the story. The duration of each read-aloud session is 30 minutes. Usually for a text or story of 900-1,000 words, the “vocabulary and story or texts can be presented, read, and reviewed in five days” (Hickman et al., 2004, p.723).

The read-aloud practices were applied to both Lisen and Yiqing. Short stories of their interests were chosen for the read-aloud practices. The story was briefly previewed such as when and where the story happened. The function and usage of the potential new vocabularies were explained in both Mandarin and English. Lisen and Yiqing were asked to make new sentences using these vocabularies. The synonyms and antonyms were also taught to expand their repertoire.
of vocabularies. Vocabulary card with visuals were also made for Lisen to help him master the meaning of the words.

It is very important for ELLs to be given pictures or visual illustrations of the new vocabularies as much as possible (Wallace, 2007). In addition, the instructional materials can be modified and supplemented to meet their learning needs (Hite & Evans, 2006). For example, once Lisen’s teacher brought in real peppers to show him the differences between bell pepper and Jalapeno pepper. Vocabularies were also explained to him using the prefix and suffix knowledge. Lisen was told that in the word “careful”, the root is “care” and “-ful” is the suffix. Further, he was told that “careless” is the antonym of “careful” because they have different suffix and the suffix “-less” means “not”. This enriched Lisen’s understanding of vocabulary and increased his generalization of the usage of the vocabulary. So the next time Lisen came across a new word with suffix of “-less” or “-ful”, he knew how to unlock the unfamiliar word.

Actually, the learning of new vocabulary took a whole learning session of 30–40 minutes for both Lisen and Yiqing on the first day of the instruction. On the second day, the story was read aloud in English first, and then translated in Mandarin. The translation was not literal, rather, it was focused on the overall meaning of the story. Lisen and Yiqing individually read aloud the story several times until they were reading fluently. Then they were asked several comprehension questions related to the story. Lisen and Yiqing showed that they comprehended the story by answering the questions in their own words. If they failed to answer the questions, the story would again be read and explained to them the following day until they were able to demonstrate their understanding of the story in English. Finally, the teachers summarized the main characters, the main events and ideas in the story. Lisen and Yiqing were paired with native English speaking peers to summarize the story, and share what they have learned from the story. They also did a retelling of the story. Additionally, their native speaking peers quizzed Lisen and Yiqing about the vocabulary they have learned, including the meaning and the usage of these vocabularies.

Creating visual representations
Creating interactive activities, using graphic organizers, tapping prior knowledge, and encouraging student participation can motivate ELLs in second language acquisition (Lombardi, 2008). Encourage the ELLs to paraphrase, summarize, and categorize information, and create visual or graphic representations (i.e., lists, tables, graphs, charts, mind maps, word walls, writing models (Hite & Evans, 2006; Lombardi, 2008), and form associations throughout the lesson (Lombardi, 2008).

After the read-aloud practices, both Lisen and Yiqing were asked to retell the story, summarize what they have learned from the story that they can apply in their life, analyze the causes and effects in the story by drawing the charts, and list the main characters, including their favorite characters. Prompts were provided the first time when both Lisen and Yiqing performed the after-story summary tasks. However, they gradually learned to analyze, summarize, categorize, and generalize the information after the read-aloud practices.

Table 1 shows the list that Yiqing made after reading about the causes of the endangered gorillas in Congo and the solutions to this issue in “Looking for Miza” (told by Juliana Hatkoff, Isabella Hatkoff, Craig Hatkoff, and Dr. Paula Kahumbu).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Causes</th>
<th>Effect</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hunting</td>
<td>Gorillas were endangered in Africa.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deforestation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diseases</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Solutions:
1. Train and assign more rangers to work in the rainforest of the Africa and protect the gorillas.
2. Educate the local people about the protection of the wild animals including gorillas.
3. Send more volunteers to work in the rainforests and protect the gorillas.

One of the main characters in the story was a ranger and Yiqing, having come from a metropolitan area of China had never heard of the rangers before he moved to the U.S. His mother borrowed a movie about rangers from a local public library. Although the movie had captions in Mandarin, his mother explained the movie to him before he watched it. Yiqing’s teacher also introduced him to some picture books about rangers. The teacher even involved him in the boys scout one summer and arranged for him to work with rangers. All these activities, although time consuming, compensated for his lack of knowledge about rangers from his prior life experience.

Often, the ELLs have difficulty reading not only because of their limited English proficiency, but their cultural differences, lack of living experiences and family educational background. According to KewalRamani, Gilbertson, Fox, and Provansik (2007), in 2005, among the minority groups in the U.S. the Asian/Pacific Islander children ages 6 to 18 were more likely to
have parents with higher levels of educational attainment than were Black, Hispanic, and American Indian/Alaska Native children. Fortunately, both Lisen and Yiqing's parents were well educated before they immigrated to the U.S. and focused on their children's academic achievement. Actually, part of the reasons why Lisen and Yiqing's families immigrated to the U.S. was because both families wanted to provide a global experience for their children and expose their children to a diverse world at a young age.

The story that Lisen read was Merry Christmas, Curious George by Margaret and H.R. Rey. After Lisen read aloud the story and answered the comprehension questions, he retold the story by listing the main ideas of the story (see Table 2). Afterwards, Lisen's mother also took time to accompany Lisen to watch the movie about Curious George. Lisen's mother mentioned that Lisen associated what he read from the story to the movie. He admitted that he had a better understanding of the story after he watched the movie.

Table 2. Review of the Book entitled, Merry Christmas, Curious George

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>When:</th>
<th>Before Christmas</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Where:</td>
<td>Christmas Tree Farm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Who:</td>
<td>Curious George, the monkey, his friend, children, nurse, and farm workers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What:</td>
<td>Curious George mistakenly took a ride to the hospital with two farm workers who sent a Christmas tree to a children's hospital. The story is about what happened to George at the children's hospital.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Involve families to provide first hand experiences

As mentioned earlier, both Yiqing and Lisen's parents were well educated before they came to the U.S. and they believed that their immigration to the U.S. created a better education for their children. However, many immigrant families are not fortunate enough to have received a good education before they immigrated to the U.S. It is less likely for these adults to be able to create a good literacy environment for their children. Markham and Gordon (2008) summarize the risk factors that challenged the ELLs in developing English proficiency, which include prior educational experiences, socioeconomic class, cultural heritage, and levels of language and literacy proficiency in both their native language and English. The cultural beliefs and thinking patterns that ELLs hold before they come to the U.S. may cause cultural shock or conflicts when they encounter the mainstream culture of the U.S. schools. The prior education experiences and literacy proficiency in their native language also make a difference in these students' adjustment to the school culture and academic achievement in the new settings. For example, students learning to read in their first language should have already acquired 5,000 to 7,000 words before they begin formal reading in school (Wallace, 2007); ELLs whose parents are not well educated may not be able to acquire so many words in their native language, which in turn can limit their achievement in English speaking schools.

Peregoy and Boyle (2000) argue that prior experiences are critically important in effecting the reading quality. According to them, a good reader should have the ability to "activate prior knowledge of the text topic by imagining what they know and do not know about the topic, predicting what the text will be about, and generating questions the text might answer" (p. 238). In addition, the prior experiences "interact with language proficiency during reading, alleviating the comprehension difficulties stemming from the language deficiencies" (p.240). Thus, Peregoy and Boyle recommend that educators should provide students with first hand experiences such as science experiments, museum visits and manipulatives to facilitate success in reading among the ELLs. Although schools are committed to providing ELLs with first hand experiences, for example, through field trips, they are limited due to the lack of district or school resources and lack of qualified teachers in the public schools (Markham & Gordon, 2008). Families can help in providing enriching opportunities for ELLs to access English literacy resources through visiting museums and the local libraries, using the community facilities, and connecting their children with other immigration families and English speaking families. Additionally, communication between teachers and immigrant parents are critically important in that it helps the parents "understand the requirement of the classroom and the demands on the students and provide the teacher with insight into the students' background, both personal and cultural" (Hite & Evans, 2006, p.101), as well as their needs.

Both Lisen and Yiqing's parents had good, regular communication with the teachers, and were very active in volunteering to help in school and community activities.
Lisen's mother volunteered in the school library one morning per week; she also helped in school cultural festivals, and other community activities. When Lisen's mother enrolled him in a summer reading camp, a free tutoring program provided by students from a local university for young readers with reading difficulties, both of his parents volunteered to participate as well. At the summer camp Lisen was instructed to read one book that interests him every week. He took home the book at least three days prior to the tutoring. He then learned the vocabularies using visuals, read the story himself, and tried to answer questions related to the story. The tutor would read the book together with him. Lisen was encouraged to ask questions during the tutoring. Most of the time his parents would help him learn the vocabulary and read the book before the tutoring. At the tutoring, the parents would sit beside him and observe, and at the end of the tutoring, the tutor would discuss with them what Lisen needed to overcome the difficulties and challenges that might limit his understanding of the book/story. For example, once Lisen read a story about a baseball game and he found it very hard to understand because he never played or watched others play baseball. The tutor recommended that Lisen's mother take him to a local ball game. Lisen ended up as a volunteer for the team and learned the baseball rules during his volunteer job.

Similarly, Yiqing's parents also created opportunities to increase first hand experiences for their son. They brought him to the museums in Washington, D.C. to learn about U.S. history and the making of the country. This gave Yiqing deeper understanding of many of the historical events. Yiqing's parents also brought him to a bible study group at a local church as Yiqing became more and more curious about religion. His parents would borrow numerous books and CDs and DVDs about the bible from a local library. They also purchased a laptop for him and right now Yiqing likes to search on Internet when he has any questions about religion. Yiqing worked as volunteer in many community and school activities. For example, he helped the Red Cross raise money for the Sichuan (China) Earthquake last year. Besides improving their English proficiency, all of these experiences bring Lisen and Yiqing to the community, help them develop a deeper understanding of the culture, and develop a sense of belonging to the community.

Creating a friendly, caring and belonging environment

Besides creating first hand experiences to facilitate the mainstreaming of the ELLs in English speaking cultural environment, teachers can start lessons with examples to which the ELLs could relate (Hite & Evans, 2006). This way, the ELLs can “anchor the concept with something that was familiar and from which to build” (p.97). Teachers can also invite the family members of the ELLs to the class and talk about their cultural heritage. This will improve their self-confidence and recognition of their native culture, thus increasing their self-esteem. Many times the ELLs remain quiet in an English speaking environment because they lack confidence, they feel inferior to the main culture in the classroom, and/or they are unfamiliar with the American culture. This can be addressed by sharing experiences in the classroom that are familiar to ELLs, or inviting a guest from their cultural community to present something that ELLs can relate to and make them feel welcomed and part of the class.

Both Lisen and Yiqing's parents offered to talk to the class about their own cultural traditions such as festivals, and brought some traditional foods and post cards that represent their home country. Yiqing's teacher also asked him to make a presentation on the Yangtze River in the class before the class discussion on rivers in the U.S. Yiqing's mother reflected that when she went to school to pick up Yiqing the day after her son's presentation, all of Yiqing's classmates ran up to her and asked her, “Are you Yiqing's mom? He made a presentation today about the Yangtze River. It is so cool.” Some of them were very proud to show Yiqing's mother that they got Yiqing's signature. Although it was only a five-minute presentation, it completely changed Yiqing's life. He became more active in school, sharing and discussing questions with peers; he learned so much from his peers. Hite and Evans (2006) found that peers can scaffold peers; a capable peer is a more effective language model than the teacher. Yiqing's mother observed that her son spent longer time with peers and felt more confident in sharing his opinions with them. Once Yiqing spent about double the amount of time in the cafeteria with his native English speaking friends, talking about how healthy Chinese foods are.

Lisen's teacher also asked his mother to come to the class and talk about Chinese traditional festivals, the Spring Festivals. Lisen's mother also volunteered to participate in the international cultural festival held in the school. She invited other members of the Chinese community to join in the festival and share some Chinese values and traditions. For example, an old Chinese couple came to play Taiqiquan, some demonstrated how to write calligraphy, and still others brought Chinese decorations to the festival. It was a great opportunity for the local elementary school children to learn Chinese culture, and a greater opportunity for Lisen to demonstrate his own culture and build self-esteem among his peers. Lisen was very busy at the festival as he volunteered to serve Chinese foods to his peers. He even described the ingredients of the food when asked. After the festival, Lisen made three good friends—Megan, Piper and Anne. According to Lisen's mother, her son loved to go to school since then. He made birthday gifts for his friends, attended their birthday parties, and also invited them to his home. Lisen's teacher also admitted that
since then there was always smile on Lisen's face, and he no longer felt intimidated to answer questions in front of his peers. Lisen's teacher also asked his good friends to tutor him in reading and writing, while Lisen helped his friends in math and science.

Unlike Hite and Evans’ (2006) study that failed to find evidence to support the idea that native English speakers can also benefit from ELLs, which “is of concern as it may position the ELLs as not possessing knowledge or ability of potentially benefit to their native English speaking peers” (p.103), Lisen's peers admitted that they have received so much assistance from Lisen in math and science. Lisen's teacher observed that after Lisen and his peers started working together, they made remarkable progress; they helped each other but did not do the work for each other, and when helping, they gave the others time to think. Lisen made thank-you cards every semester to show his appreciation for his friends’ help. He also received little gifts such as erasers and stickers from his good friends for his assistance in math and science. His teacher found that Lisen and his friends have become inseparable since then in both curricular and extracurricular activities and were further motivated to learn and help each other. The teacher started to use this buddy/pair technique for other ELLs and native English speaker with learning difficulties. Thus, a caring, welcoming classroom atmosphere was created which also increased students’ sense of belonging. Lisen felt more bonded to his peers and he was more willing to help when needed. In fact, he volunteered to represent his class at the annual book fair, which was organized and held in his school to raise money for a classroom library.

In both Yiqing and Lisen's case, the teachers built a caring and friendly learning community by bringing something the ELLs are familiar with, inviting the parents or people from their cultural community to introduce their cultural heritage, and involving the ELLs in the peer assistance system. This way, the ELLs felt included and valued in the classroom. Involving parents or other community members to share the cultural heritage in classrooms also made the ELLs feel their native culture was honored by the teachers and peers, which also helped them improve their self-esteem and feel more socially grounded in the class (Lombardi, 2008). In addition, by involving their family members and increasing the communication between the teachers and parents—these promoted the understanding of the school mainstream culture and the ELLs’ native culture, and helped the parents understand classroom requirements and their child’s progress. Hite and Evans (2006) believe that “building bridges between the learners’ home culture and school culture certainly serves to lower the affective filter and allowed the child to identify with the target language culture without having to give up its own culture” (p.100).

Maintaining the native language

Both Lisen and Yiqing’s families expected their child to be fluent in both Mandarin, their native language, and English. Although both the two families sought whatever opportunities were available in the community to improve their child’s English language proficiency, they both believed that maintaining the language ability in the native language is equally important. Cardenas-Hagan, Carlson, and Pollard-Durodola’s (2007) study found that the native language skills have a positive impact on later second language acquisition process. This is especially true when the native and second language share similar phonological code such as in Spanish and English. Although Mandarin and English do not share phonological characteristics to facilitate Lisen’s and Yiqing’s effort to learn the English language, the boys’ prior knowledge and skills such as logical thinking and analytical capabilities contributed to their academic progress in the English speaking learning community. Lombardi (2008) applied the brain-based approach in teaching the ELLs; he believed that tapping prior knowledge can motivate the ELLs in learning the second language.

Mays (2008) discusses the role of bilingual instruction in promoting the development of language and literacy skills in English. She suggests labeling items in classrooms in both languages. When transitioning from one lesson to another, teachers can try to speak the native language of their ELLs or allow the ELLs to address the class using their native language. Some participants in Hite and Evans’ (2006) study encouraged the ELLs to share the language with the class such as counting in a different language. Hite and Evans (2006) propose that an English language learner with mastery of numeration and seriating skills in the native language also has the ability to master these same skills in English. This appears to have been the case for both Lisen and Yiqing, who came to the U.S. with a strong background in mathematics. Lisen’s mathematical skill was proved to be at fourth grade level, two grades higher than his age level, after the initial assessment when he enrolled in his current class; Yiqing was on grade level in math. Both were immediately immersed in the English speaking environment in the public school, and received additional help such as translation of a story in English into Mandarin. At home, besides tutoring their children in English reading and writing, the two families also tutored their children in Mandarin. In addition, Lisen’s parents tutored their son in fourth grade math. Although still struggling with English writing especially the use of tense and preparations in English composition, Lisen had already made tremendous progress in English reading and speaking. He is currently enrolled in a gifted program in math and he serves as a math tutor for his peers in class. Meanwhile, Yiqing has mastered both English and his native language Mandarin on his
second year in the U.S. He still contacts his friends in Mainland China on a regular basis, sending emails to his friends in Chinese. His parents also send him home to China once a year every summer.

Conclusion and discussion

Many factors pose risks to the English proficiency development in ELLs when immersed in English speaking only learning communities—factors such as the prior education experiences, socio-economic class, cultural heritage, and levels of language and literacy proficiency in both their native language and English (Markham & Gordon, 2008). Many of these factors including the socioeconomic class and cultural heritage are innate cultural capital that can not be changed, while other risk factors such as previous education experiences or levels of language and literacy proficiency can be improved by the collaborative support of educators, family members, community members, English speaking peers, and the ELLs themselves.

Providing the ELLs with effective instructions on reading through vocabulary increase and comprehension skills improvement would help them to become good readers. Another way is to involve family members in immersing ELLs in the mainstream culture while continuing the study of their own native culture, and creating a caring and welcoming English learning community that would make them feel honored and valued. Additionally, teachers and parents or primary caregivers should maintain good communication with each other. By doing so teachers would develop an understanding of the ELLs’ native culture that could lead to closing, or at the very least, minimizing the gap between the native culture and the school culture. On the other hand, parents would develop an understanding of their children's schooling, school requirements, their child's progress, and how to facilitate their child's social adjustment and academic achievement in schools.

Both Lisen and Yiqing's example has implications for ELL instruction in U.S. public schools. Both of these two children had very limited English proficiency when they immigrated to the U.S. with their families and both of them have been in the U.S. for only a short period of time (Lisen, has been in the U.S. for one and a half year; Yiqing, has been in the U.S. for two years when the study was conducted), but they both made a tremendous progress in English reading and speaking. More importantly, both of them gained their confidence and self-esteem among their English-speaking peers, and were successful in immersing themselves in the new culture. There are a few similarities shared by both families. First, both parents had high educational attainment and created excellent learning opportunities for their child. Second, they planned weekly meetings with their son's teachers to check on their child's progress, and to find out what they can do at home to reinforce the skills their child learned in school as well as to prepare him for the next week's lessons. Lastly, both parents continued to learn English together with their child, which in turn motivated Lisen and Yiqing to become fluent in English. Actually, Lisen's mother decided to pursue a master's degree in curriculum and instruction and plans to acquire an ESL teaching certification.

Lisen and Yiqing are excellent examples of ELLs who made tremendous progress in academic subjects especially reading as well as social adjustment to the school culture. Although social adjustment and academic achievement are not positively correlated, the social adjustment promotes academic achievement. Many ELLs may be academically successful, but they may find adjusting to the mainstream culture challenging. Consequently, they may isolate themselves in school, or hang out only with other ELLs with similar cultural or family background.

Social adjustment, and not only academic achievement, is an issue that deserves close attention. To facilitate the social process for ELLs teachers should create opportunities for them to demonstrate and share their native culture; teachers should encourage and inspire them to volunteer for school activities and/or pair up with peers in mutual assistance. Teachers should expand interaction opportunities between ELLs and their English-speaking peers by rearranging chairs in a classroom so that ELLs would not have to sit and work in isolation (Hite and Evans, 2006). Teachers should have high but appropriate expectations for ELLs and provide them with support and resources to achieve their academic goals.

References


Markham, P.L., & Gordon, K.E. (2008). Challenges and instruction approaches impacting the literacy


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Engaging readers in the classroom: Research, beliefs, and strategies

Sandip L. Wilson  
_Husson University, Maine_

Gerald Bûteau  
_Plymouth State University, Massachusetts_

Sara Hess  
_Pittston Consolidated Elementary School, Maine_

Maureen Montgomery  
_University of Maine, Maine_

Gael Romei  
_University of Maine, Maine_

The authors of the books reviewed here have shown that engaging disengaged readers and writers touches on every aspect of the life and culture of the school, from the bridges that are built between school and world experience or home life, to students’ perceptions of choice and competence in the classroom, from the planning that a teacher does for her students, to the purposes of coaching practices that teachers determine as a community. When we began reading the books we discovered that the topic of engagement touched more aspects of teaching and learning than we had anticipated. The books suggest that engaging readers involves engaging teachers in professional development and study groups. The idea of word consciousness and word play to invigorate vocabulary learning as discussed by Blachowicz and Fisher in their book reviewed here, has more meaning when engaged teachers share their learning with students and colleagues. Certainly, word play and a world in a word have more value when teachers and students are engaged in the work.

The books suggest that motivation, usually coupled with engagement, has as much to do with students’ perceptions of success as it does with teachers’ providing activities that connect new learning with life experience. Engagement, perhaps often thought of as a quality engendered among adolescents in middle and secondary classrooms, involves the reading, talking, writing, and listening among the youngest learners and students who are English language learners. All the books presented here share practical ideas for instruction that teachers can take with them into the classroom and memorable stories of experiences with students that teachers can share together.


For the past several years, most teachers have had to think long and hard about how to successfully teach students who are developing both conversational and academic English. Christina Celic, a practicing master teacher, consultant, and coach, offers a thoughtful selection of strategies that are designed to help both the experienced and novice teacher reach and teach English language learners. Rather than a random menu of strategies that the reader can pick and choose from, Celic offers a tightly constructed and comprehensive set of interrelated strategies that begin with how to set up a classroom for English language learners.

Research and practical experience strongly suggests that organizing classroom environment in a way that maximizes linguistic and academic skills is at the heart...
of teaching. In Chapter 1 Celic outlines five points that provide a highly useful framework for designing a learning community. She recommends that teachers:

- take into account the needs of the English language learner,
- plan a class layout that makes sense to the ELLs,
- form a classroom library with appropriate resources,
- provide collaborative work areas, and
- create centers that help ELL's learn both language and content.

At first glance, the reader might think that this list is best practice for all learners and that the recommendations are intuitive. However, included in this chapter, as is the case for the entire book, Celic looks closely at these areas through the eyes of the English language learner. For instance, visuals, graphic organizers, texts in multiple languages, safe havens for students to “take a break” if the language requirements become too overwhelming, are all described in a way that helps teachers understand the need to make accommodations that address the unique needs of the English language learner. Classroom layouts, diagrams, photographs of classroom libraries, bilingual word walls and students engaged in meaningful learning experiences enhance the text and provide the reader with authentic examples of how to teach the English language learner. The photographs of students working in classrooms, many from Celic’s own teaching experiences, help to empower teachers to critically examine their own classrooms with a fresh eye and thus make thoughtful instructional modifications.

The remaining five chapters of this highly readable and practical text include: Getting Ready to Teach English Language Learners from Day One, Classroom Management with English Language Learners, Integrating Literacy and Content-Area Instruction, Teaching Academic Language Through the Curriculum, and finally, Snapshots of Differentiated Instruction with English Language Learners. Sprinkled throughout each of these chapters are classroom vignettes from primary intermediate and upper elementary grades that provide the reader with real life teaching scenarios. Furthermore, at the conclusion of each chapter, Celic poses guide questions that are designed to help teachers think critically about their work. For instance, she poses the questions, “Do I assess my ELLs in reading and writing to see how their current level compares with what is expected of the grade level?” Another one is, “Do I reach out to families during the first days and weeks of school through notes home, phone calls, or in-person conversations?” In many ways, critical reflection is more likely to occur as a result of interesting questions than how-to statements, which make this book all the more helpful to the classroom teacher who aspires to grow as both a teacher and learner.

Finally, the seven appendices: Whole Class Profiles, English Proficiency Levels Chart and Checklist, Family Survey, Conference Forms for ELLs, Planning an Integrated Unit, Developing Language Through Reading Comprehension Strategies, and Using Graphic Organizers with ELLs, provide the reader with specific, comprehensive tools to practice their craft with English language learners. Celic has written a book that will help inform and empower teachers, both novice and veteran, to understand, develop relationships with and successfully teach all children, with particular emphasis on the English language learner. Moreover, she acknowledges differences in individual children and their learning and inspires us to continue to grow as teachers.

Donalyn Miller truly is the book whisperer. She engages her audience with a story of a knowledgeable teacher who turns her sixth grade students into lovers of reading literature. Her inspiring journey is packed with classroom tales teachers will want to replicate while offering them step-by-step practical protocols for achieving success in our own classrooms.

She chronicles how the joy of reading becomes the central learning outcome while increasing achievement in a test-driven curriculum. The requirement of reading 40 approved books a year chosen with approval from her vast collection, school or local libraries forms the basis of her curriculum. Miller’s in-depth knowledge of literature coupled with her ability to understand the types of books her students enjoy allows her to recommend developmentally appropriate books. But her “Rights of Readers,” the foundation for her classroom management, reflects her realistic approach and respect for her students as readers.

Miller convinces readers to exchange the proverbial book reports, whole class novels, vocabulary lists, quizzes, and worksheets for personal choice of literature, a reading log and notebook, reading reflections, book talks, and reviews and commercials among the strategic and practical approaches she introduces. The references include excellent student exemplars for each strategic approach. Favorite selections for reading aloud are supported with characteristics of each genre that she suggests are highlighted in the thinking aloud during the reading. Content suggestions for a Reader’s Notebook include tally list, reading lists, books-to-read list, and response entries.

The book is appropriate for classroom and reading teachers as well as pre-service teachers. As teachers discover their inner reader in reading the book they
will find self-reflection activity suggestions and useful websites to keep abreast of new publications and alternatives to the traditional practice of the whole-class novel reading project. She admonishes teachers that they teach readers, not books. She gives helpful suggestions for teaching literary elements and universal themes in short stories, excerpts or poems. Alternatives to whole class oral reading include, buddy reading, audiotapes, CD’s, and podcasts. Like any well-rounded text Miller concludes with student reading evaluations. She has been told on her blog that she “is not preparing her students for the real world” by letting students read whatever they want. She confesses that that point is true, if the real world means years of comprehension worksheets and test practice. The book shows that much more is possible and needed in reading and sharing books than such a practice. If developing lifelong readers is a goal for teachers as they work to engage all their students, The Book Whisperer is a jewel that screams, “Read me.”

In her acknowledgement, Sloan tells us that the inspiration for this book came from teachers' pondering the efficacy of writing workshops with the essential question, “How do we run a successful writing workshop for our students?” By “our students” she is referring to all students and throughout her book she speaks both thoughtfully and passionately about how to engage all students, including, “Lonnie who loves to read and write, but needs a quiet place, away from others… or Jason who struggles to sit in a chair” (p.2). Furthermore, she suggests that engaging children in the writing and reading processes (she reminds us that writing leads to reading and that we should challenge the myth that children naturally read before they write) requires students to have choices, something both Donald Graves and Alia, a struggling first grade student in her multi-age classroom, have taught her. Such a reference to the professional literature and to her students shows how Sloan integrates the two sometimes disparate worlds of theory and practice.

Sloan speaks from both experience, with her twenty-three years as an educator, and her voracious and enthusiastic reading of works by such teachers as Donald Graves, Ralph Fletcher, Regie Routman, Georgia Heard, and Lucy Calkins. She acknowledges their contributions to how students develop as writers and synthesizes their work throughout the book. For example, her description of the Elements of Writing Workshop includes eight points:

- writing workshop occurs at a specific time of day,
- students choose the topic for an authentic audience,
- high energy minilessons on various aspects of writing open the writing workshop,
- students have adequate time to draft,
- writing in the workshop include writing across the content areas,
- students write in a variety of genres,
- teacher-student conferences occur daily, and
- sharing and reflection serves as closure to the writing workshop.

Related to each point accompanying the text are photographs that authentically depict students engaged in the many facets of the writing process. Equally important is her inclusion of writing samples, which provide the reader with evidence that writing is a process that requires perseverance and diligence from both teacher and student.

In addition to an entire chapter entitled, “How Do I Keep Assessment Easy? Observations, Conferences, and Looking at Student Work,” she integrates assessment in other parts of the book. In the first chapter she has a list of questions that teachers can utilize to “discover students.” For example, she challenges us to find out who the quiet learner is, who asks questions, who loves to share, who is reluctant to get involved, who is a natural caretaker of others, and who can mentor peers? These are helpful questions teachers can ponder in becoming more effective educators; moreover, these questions will help them identify and better appreciate and understand our disengaged writers.

Although this book is best described as a comprehensive, highly engaging and practical guide for both novice and seasoned primary grade teachers (I use this book in my undergraduate reading and writing course), it is built upon the premise that the teacher is a model for writing. One of its most intriguing and relevant chapters is titled, “Have You Seen the Range I Teach? Inspiring a Diverse Set of Learners.” In this chapter, Sloan poses the question, “How do I teach writing to a diverse set of learners?” She draws inspiration from Ralph Fletcher who believes that teachers do not teach writing, they teach writers. According to Sloan, “We need to know our students, what motivates them, what topics interest them and then we can begin to shape writing workshops that both reach and teach all learners” (p. 46).

In this chapter, she provides insights on how to teach ELL students, reluctant writers, and boy writers. Also included is a section explaining how to challenge exemplary writers. The chapter is an example of the book. Once again, photographs of children practicing their craft of writing and numerous teaching tips all combine to make the chapter and the book a treasure.
that will be tattered by many references and numerous post-its. Sloan has written a winner that will help teachers help their students develop as writers.


The role of reading specialist has evolved in the last decade from providing direct services to students to collaborating with teachers in developing changes to literacy programs. More recently as the topic of motivation has become increasingly prominent in current educational issues, it has also intertwined itself into the role of the reading specialist. As Bean explores the changing role of the literacy specialist, she also makes clear that other school personnel such as the literacy specialist, not just the teacher, play a vital role in fostering student motivation in becoming readers and writers.

In the second edition Bean continues to argue that contemporary concerns related to reading instruction have highlighted teacher quality and expertise through professional development, yet teachers are bombarded with new projects and activities without “attention to the implementation process” (p. 88). Just as the first edition did, this book explores the role of the reading specialist in regard to implementation of professional development, supporting teacher growth through sustained interactions in the context of classrooms, assessment, grant writing, and the sustained scholarship and learning of the literacy specialist. The book makes a major contribution to the conversation about professional development, and suggests that reading the book is germane for all teachers. In the second edition the greater attention to middle and secondary teaching practice means the conversation has relevance to more teachers. As an update to the first edition, this book also explores how response to intervention (RTI) and literacy coaching have affected the role of the reading specialist.

As Bean explores the instructional role of the reading specialist, she also investigates controversial concerns such as the effectiveness of pull out programs. Without making judgments about current thinking, she discusses benefits and potential problems of various approaches including in class and pull out models. She makes the observation that in class programs have languished in recent years and argues that our current models of schooling “have not promoted the collaboration and shared teaching” (p. 38) that support in-class programs. Bean argues that collaboration with colleagues is necessary to ensure effective instruction. “Where to work (in class or pullout) is not the key question to ask regarding instruction for struggling readers. Rather, reading specialists need to think about and identify their instructional goals and how best to achieve those goals, given the climate and culture of the school and the needs of the students” (p. 42). In addition, Bean suggests that the RTI initiative has generated even more need for collaboration of school personnel to meet the needs of all learners.

As an addition to the second edition, Bean has added the chapter titled, What Coaches Do to Improve Instruction: Working With Individual Teachers. Whether new to a school or a veteran, a literacy coach faces challenges. Bean’s new chapter offers ways to meet the challenges. Coaches facing new challenges have said “they had to begin quickly establishing themselves in this role, and at the same time, move slowly enough that they could develop a sense of trust between teachers and themselves” (p. 125). Bean offers advice to make oneself accessible, initiate activities and seek responsibilities, and build a sense of trust. The new chapter outlines the additional approaches to coaching known as on-the-fly and combination coaching—approaches that are more opportunistic than systematic. Just as teachers have unexpected learning moments, literacy coaches also have them when schedules, demands, and differing needs do not always allow for a systematic approach.

One of the many roles of the literacy specialist may include participating in curriculum development with teachers. In the analysis of program effectiveness, student motivation is one of the variables. Often, the materials of a school’s reading program become a defined curriculum. Strict adherence to the materials “may lead to a narrow program in which there is little adjustment for the needs of the specific students in the school” (p. 162). Disengagement occurs when student needs and interests are not met through the content and quality of materials. Bean notes principles of engagement from the book *Literacy Instruction for Adolescents: Research-based Practices*, edited by Woods and Blanton (2009): teachers “create conditions in classrooms that promote self-efficacy, promote interest in new reading, connect out-of-school with inside-school literacy, make sure an abundance of interesting texts are available, [and] provide for choice and options” (Bean, 2009, p. 162). Instruction and coaching are avenues for a literacy specialist to support reading achievement and to instill motivation and interest in reading and Bean refers to the research related to older readers to make her points. Curriculum development presents additional opportunities for literacy specialists to help transform disengaged readers to life-long readers.

Like the first edition, the second edition contains vignettes in each chapter. Guidelines and the templates for observations, reading programs, selection of materials, and writing grants included in the book will be valuable resources in developing school programs. The second edition still explores the multiple roles of a literacy specialist—mentor, leader, peer, cultural broker,
knowledge sharer, collaborator, and supporter. Bean has published this second edition to reflect significant changes in the role of the literacy specialist in the past five years, such as motivation and RTI. Creating engaged readers is currently a dominant issue in education has become part of the role of the literacy specialist, which Bean has addressed in her second edition.


Joyful is not a term disengaged readers choose to describe literacy. However, a Schoolwide Enrichment Model for Reading (SEM-R) creates a framework of choice and independence to foster engagement and motivation. SEM-R is a three-phase process that releases responsibility from teacher to student within and across phases. SEM-R is “not a complete language arts program; rather, it is intended to enrich and replace the grouped reading instruction that teachers carry out each day in their language arts block” (p. 3). Designed to expose students to high quality literature, help develop reading skills and strategies, and to give opportunity for creative extension of reading opportunities, SEM-R is a new way of looking at current reading practices.

The SEM-R process was developed by Sally Reis and her colleagues at the University of Connecticut as an application of Joseph Renzulli’s Enrichment Triad Model and the Schoolwide Enrichment Model. The core of these models is comprised of enjoyable, challenging, and interesting experiences. In Reis’s book the SEM-R process focuses on reading achievement and motivation. The book is formatted to allow the reader to learn about SEM-R in a natural way. The three sections give the reader the background of the model, comprehensive information about each phase of the model, and ideas to consider for successful implementation. In addition to these three sections, the appendix offers reproducible materials and samples to aid in the execution of the model. While the first and last sections of the book are important to understanding and initiating SEM-R, the middle section allows the reader to intimately understand and envision a working example of the model in his or her own classroom. The middle of the book is broken down into the three phases of SEM-R. For each phase Reis establishes the big ideas, provides supporting details, defines student and teacher roles, and identifies indicators of high-quality implementation.

Phase one of SEM-R is a different way to conduct the classroom practice of reading aloud. Rather than using an entire book, the teacher uses sections of books to expose students to literacy of various genres, authors, themes, and topics. SEM-R refers to these alternative read-alouds as book hooks. Reis compares book hooks to a “film trailer for a book. In the same way that a film trailer is designed to hook, inform, and entice viewers to see a particular movie, a book hook is designed to entice children to read” (p. 66). Book hooks are also a time when the teacher incorporates higher level thinking opportunities. To help teachers plan book hooks, and to help students participate in them, book marks list different reading strategies and thinking skills. Phase One is intended to introduce students to literature they may not otherwise select independently, and to use the literature as a connection to reading strategies and advanced thinking skills; all the while “being an enjoyable and engaging experience” (p. 69).

Phase Two of SEM-R is best described as supported independent reading (SIR). In contrast to the common independent reading formats of Drop Everything and Read and Sustained Silent Reading, SEM-R includes a support component to increase student achievement of fluency and comprehension. According to Reis, appropriate book choices for Phase Two are those that students can read independently for the most part while encountering some challenge of readability or complexity. Phase Two essentially provides time for students to read self-selected books independently, but also to conference with the teacher. During these conferences teachers utilize differentiated instruction to help students with anything challenging about the book, fluency, and comprehension.

Finally, during Phase Three students have the opportunity to explore their own academic interests. “The ultimate goal of Phase Three is for students to progress from teacher-directed learning opportunities to independent, self-chosen activities” (p. 115). This final part of SEM-R is small, but important. There is such a high degree of variation amongst possible Phase Three activities that it is best thought of as a period of academic choice. Examples of activities can include extended independent reading from Phase Two, individual investigations, and small-group work. Phase Three “creates a safe environment in which students can investigate their own topics and activities of interest” (p. 117).

SEM-R is not a new invention of reading instruction, nor is it a cut and dry program. Rather it is a new way of looking at a part of reading instruction. Reis presents SEM-R as a flexible approach to providing opportunity to read, increasing motivation, and improving reading achievement. Reis cautions that SEM-R is not a replacement for a Language Arts program; rather it is intended to enhance instruction as a part of, or addition to, a literacy program. Throughout the book Reis takes a flexible approach to implementing the model. From describing different scenarios of actual implementation at elementary and middle school levels, to clearly stating the nonexistence of a formula for determining what
is an appropriately challenging book, this book lays the groundwork for individual teachers, groups of teachers, and schools to use SEM-R as a way of increasing both student reading achievement and motivation.


Reis has written this book to be a tool kit for implementation of SEM-R. Following an introduction to the model and brief descriptions of each phase, the book is then divided into sections delving deeper into descriptors of the three phases, all the while providing abundant ideas, tools, and other resources. Each section of the book also covers strategies and ideas for implementation, and includes sections of frequently asked questions.

On its own this book provides the reader a background and foundational explanation to SEM-R, but, as its title suggests, it is primarily focused on providing tools and resources that might accompany *Joyful Reading: Differentiation and Enrichment for Successful Literacy Learning, Grades K-8*. When reading this book alone, an educator is likely to ask where the research is to support a shift in practice towards the SEM-R model. However, when used as intended, this book is a true companion and resource kit to her other book. When used together as Reis has intended, these two books serve as a flexible resource kit to an attractive approach of remodeling teacher and student roles in literacy to create motivated and engaged readers at all levels.


If teachers are looking to purchase a professional book for someone working on an undergraduate degree in education, or for a young colleague in the first years of teaching, Sitomer's *Teaching Teens & Reaping Results* would be on the list of possible titles. It’s a fast read filled with, as its byline proclaims, “stories, strategies, tools & tips from a three-time teacher of the year award winner.” Readers are advised not to be put off by the “in a wi-fi, hip-hop, where-has-all-the-sanity-gone-world” part of the title. Although this makes it seem like the intended audience is older, perhaps more for people new to digital innovation than well versed in it, and out of touch with current popular music genres, young pre-service and practicing teachers may be its best audience. Sitomer’s style is energetic, peppered with current cultural lingo, and designed to be entertaining and accessible.

Each chapter is a glimpse into Sitomer’s classroom and the strategies are presented as methods for teaching teens to “bounceback” (chapter 1); “craft a vision” (chapter 2); “tend to their tude” (chapter 3); “be tenacious” (chapter 4); appreciate “that education pays” (chapter 5); “to go where their inner fire burns” (chapter 6); “to take ownership” (chapter 7); and “to seek excellence” (chapter 8). Sitomer is confident that how he manages and motivates his students is respectful, realistic, and effective. He's clear that “the atmosphere in [his] room is casual” (p. 95) and to a more conservative colleague or guest some days it might look “more like a teenage mosh pit than it does a standards-based, academically rigorous institution of fundamentally sound learning” (p. 95). He does add that the “casual atmosphere does not mean there is no structure” (p. 95). The book may not be appealing to all readers but for the uninitiated or newly initiated teacher, Sitomer’s frankness is accessible and encouraging. He reminds readers that “every teacher develops an individual style of classroom management, and trying to replicate [his] could end up as a complete and total disaster for someone else” (p. 99).

A twenty-three page appendix includes two or three page discussions on topics ranging from the “physical classroom as a living breathing collage” to instructional practices. The “secret sauce” for Sitomer’s students is believing that education pays. Suggesting that as students move from middle school to high school we become less effective at pursuing truant students, Sitomer begins with the belief that if students are sitting in his room they want to be there because it’s easy enough to skip school. He’s collected data to show his students how education pays, how race and poverty are entwined, how the national graduation rate is about 68 percent but that Black graduation rates are 50 percent, Hispanic are 53 percent, and White and Asian are 77 percent (p. 113). Sitomer includes data on how education literally pays by comparing the earning potentials of high school dropouts, bachelor’s degree holders, and those with graduate degrees.

Although he does include two pages of reference material this is not a typical “how-to” literacy strategy book. This book offers an option for differentiating the professional reading of young teachers who often enter the profession with energy and idealism and become the students who have benefited from being in a classroom like that of Alan Sitomer. They are the hip-hop listening, wi-fi connected generation transforming the world and our schools. He’s got the data to show that his approach to teaching works for his students. Between 2004 and 2007, for the English section of the California High School Exit Exam, 95-98 percent of his students passed. Numbers for the entire state are lower: 75-77 percent passed the exam, and for all students.
Principles related to three topics: adolescent literacy, and observations in classrooms of evidence related to instruction that would enhance print and online resources. In school settings and is followed by an appendix with chapter examines ways to support principled practices and celebrating how the vignette embodies the principled practice, and discussion questions for readers. The final includes a brief discussion of one of the principled practices, a classroom vignette illustrating that particular practice, a scholarly response examining and celebrating how the vignette embodies the principled practice, and discussion questions for readers. The final chapter examines ways to support principled practices in school settings and is followed by an appendix with print and online resources.

In contrast to Sitomer's breezy style that introduces a variety of instructional practices, *Principled Practices* begins with a discussion of why the framework of principled practices makes sense across middle and high school grades and content areas and an overview of research in adolescent literacy. Each chapter from three through ten includes a brief discussion of one of the principled practices, a classroom vignette illustrating that particular practice, a scholarly response examining and celebrating how the vignette embodies the principled practice, and discussion questions for readers. The final chapter examines ways to support principled practices in school settings and is followed by an appendix with print and online resources.

Based on field research, a one-year study reviewing evidence related to instruction that would enhance adolescent literacy, and observations in classrooms of highly regarded teachers, the authors developed eight principles related to three topics:

**Principles related to contexts for learning:**

1. Adolescents need opportunities to participate in active learning environments that offer clear and facilitative literacy instruction.
2. Adolescents need opportunities to participate in respectful environments characterized by high expectations, trust, and care.

**Principles related to instructional practice:**

3. Adolescents need opportunities to engage with print and nonprint texts for a variety of purposes.
4. Adolescents need opportunities to generate and express rich understandings of ideas and concepts.
5. Adolescents need opportunities to demonstrate enthusiasm for reading and learning.
6. Adolescents need opportunities to assess their literacy and learning competencies, and direct their future growth.

**Principles related to connections between literacy in and out of school:**

7. Adolescents need opportunities to connect reading with their life and their learning inside and outside of school.
8. Adolescents need opportunities to develop critical perspectives toward what they read, view, and hear (p.4).

For two years I've used *Principled Practices* as a text in a graduate course on literacy across the curriculum. The book is appropriate for teachers who have experience in the classroom, have considerable content knowledge, enough opinions about teaching and learning to be challenging students, and the motivation to learn about what works, and for newer teachers who have yet to navigate literacy practices in the schools and professional development or graduate programs. Yet the principles may seem intuitive to teachers in training, those who have yet to try “penetrating their classroom with literacy-rich methods for engaging students in content learning” (p. 146) in an educational setting. The salient tradition in middle and especially secondary schools, where many teachers have a tendency to think of [themselves] as content specialists only, is challenged by the principles that encourage teachers to think more deeply about teaching.

Standards from National Council for the Social Studies, the National Council of Teachers of English, and the National Science Teachers Association are all quoted at the start of the investigation of principle 5: adolescents need opportunities to demonstrate enthusiasm for reading and learning. Readers are invited into Ari Nicole Joseph's Grade 12 history classroom to learn about an “interdisciplinary study that integrates literacy, historical research, and technology (p. 82). “The Birthday Project” (Tchudi & Huerta, 1983) requires students to research the “everyday experiences, traditions, and beliefs of ordinary people, and what society was like during [students’] birth year[s]” (p. 83). Ms. Joseph reminds students that historians “learn much about history by studying the lives of everyday people as well as facts and dates” (p. 83). Over the course of four weeks her students read old issues of news magazines, local newspapers, family resources like baby books, pictures and interviews with relatives who remember students' birth years. Because the focus is on what was happening in the world in that year, students do not necessarily have to have access to family and personal mementos. Over the course of their research, students select an area on which to focus. Foci might include: social studies, geography/history, home-economics, science, mathematics, music, physical education, or art (p. 86–87). The school library media-specialist supports the students by introducing them to data bases, government documents, and archival resources.

Students are given options for how they will demonstrate their learning: (a) written narrative, (b) radio script, (c) videotape, (d) *Time* magazine essay, (e) then-and-now electronic or paper scrapbook, (f)
or PowerPoint presentation (p. 84) or other formats as negotiated with the teacher. One student’s radio show, History and Disc is a “postmodern sound collage” (p. 90) and another’s iMovie Documentary, The Electrifying 80s (p. 91) explores fashion, TV shows, cars, movies, cartoons, games, popular music groups, and news events.

In his scholarly response, Vacca notes that “enthusiastic readers are made, not born” (p. 93) and the role work like “The Birthday Project” plays in fostering such enthusiasm. He notes that the instruction is planned to use literacy, make content relevant to students’ lives, and integrate technology and historical research for every student (p. 93). With many opportunities for choice, presentation format, and reflection, students’ “self-efficacy and motivation” (p. 94) are nurtured.

This book makes for thoughtful professional reading. Its use of classroom vignettes and scholarly response is the kind of helpful praxis that allows teachers to see theory in practice and practice understood through the lens of theory. The authors of the book claim that it is intended for “pre-service and in-service upper elementary, middle, and high school literacy methods courses and graduate courses related to adolescent literacy, and as a resource for school district personnel, policymakers, and parents” (back cover). It’s a book we’d recommend sharing in its entirety with colleagues in literacy.


Blachowicz and Fisher have designed an inquiry into the nature of vocabulary study in which readers explore their own knowledge of instruction and practices. For readers who have read earlier editions, a new section on vocabulary instruction for diverse English language learners and struggling readers incorporates activities for learning words and encourages practices to develop word consciousness yet suggests opportunities for literacy practice in students’ native languages. “It is important to honor the various languages that may be represented in the classroom. One way is for students to learn the words for regularly used concepts, not just in English but in some other languages” (p. 185). It includes vignettes of classroom discussion and student interactions in the discussion of classroom practices. Central in the authors’ argument is the practice of developing vocabulary during critical conversations while reading that encourage thinking about interesting, stimulating or critical topics for students.

The organization of the book makes it a useful reference with key questions at the beginning of each chapter asking readers to rank their knowledge of the content in the chapter. For instance, in the second chapter related to learning vocabulary from context, readers find the following questions: What do we know about learning from context? What do we know about learning vocabulary from storybook reading? How can we help students learn strategies for problem solving with context? On the following page is a strategy overview guide listing instructional strategies discussed in the chapter, how they are used, a goal the strategy serves, and comments, such as a comment on the group for whom the strategy offers rich and substantial experience. For instance, in the chapter on learning vocabulary in the content areas are strategies for teaching new words for known concepts and new words for new concepts. The strategy is appropriate for the whole group practice, extended study, older readers, and it is useful in generating group discussions.

Blachowicz and Fisher argue that vocabulary is learned through exposure to different situations and activities in instruction that involves reading, discussion, and the media that develops oral vocabulary, the first avenue of learning from context. The authors write, “We can help students develop the ability to problem-solve using new words and their contexts. This type of instruction involves modeling the thinking processes we use when trying to figure out word meaning” (p. 21). To problem-solve with context the authors present seven kinds of information to look for, the presence of a synonym in the text, what a word is like or not like, language about location or setting, something about the function of the word, what kind of action it involves, how something is done, and general topics related to the word. In problem solving new words in familiar situations or familiar words in new situations the authors include sections of teaching strategies for learning words and instructional practices for teaching specific new words; they also include a long section on the morphology and etymology of words.

They have taken a critical look at the traditional use of dictionaries and thesauruses in arguing that defining a word is an unnatural act, usually a response to a question about meaning is related to the context in which the question about the word is asked. However, they note, “Although defining a word when asked its meaning may be an unnatural act, the ability to define words is an intelligent act” (p. 190). In this distinction they refer to how we refine our understandings of words with use, “we are learning the characteristics that differentiate that concept from another in the same category” (p. 190). In this, as in other discussions in the book, the authors give an illustrative example of understanding the difference between couch and bench. As the two terms are used and their characteristics expanded and refined, their meanings become differentiated. “This ability to list the characteristics that separate a member of a category from other members is the ability to define something” (p. 190-191). The chapter not only includes
a brief history of the dictionary, but also related activities such as the word map and the concept ladder.

Blachowicz and Fisher have embedded intensive work in the context of reading aloud, thinking aloud, shared reading, and reading where students talk together, with literature. They illustrate the research and classroom experiences throughout the book with instructional practices and have included a chapter on assessment, including assessment of usage, word learning strategies, and vocabulary breadth. The book is a resource for teachers of young and older students and the authors provide alternatives to tailor the strategies to work with diverse students and students with special needs. The authors in this large-format edition, even more than in the third edition, have developed a practical book based in research that is engaging, entertaining and useful for professional development among teachers and classroom work with students.

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Interviews
with Ann Turner and Wendell Minor

Spring Hermann
Author

Ann Warren Turner was born in 1945 in Northampton, MA, has degrees from Bates College and University of Massachusetts, and has primarily been a book writer for her career. Her first book was Vultures in 1973, illustrated by her mother Marion Gray Warren. Ann's 44 juvenile books include picture books, historical novels, and poetry. Shaker Hearts was an ABA Pick of the List, and Abe Lincoln Remembers was a Notable Children's Trade Book in Social Studies, among her many awards.

Hermann: Because you have written so many books, I am going to focus on just a few. Let's start with your “I Can Read” title, Dust for Dinner. Your narrator is an 8-year-old boy who talks about the devastation of the dust bowl and the Depression on their farm family. It's rather dark material?

Turner: Yes, it is dark. I tried to keep it positive in that this family is surviving. I like stories about people who survive.

Hermann: Did you come up with this subject for “I Can Read”?

Turner: Yes I did. I know the book is high-level second grade, low-level third grade. My interest in the Depression is strong because my father's family lost everything in the 1930s. They were substantial New Englanders, but they got to the point where they were picking up coal along the railroad tracks.

Hermann: Where did you picture the family in Dust for Dinner?

Turner: I saw them as farmers in Oklahoma. You could make a go of it on a small farm in those days.

Hermann: What were Harper’s requirements for their “I Can Read” books?

Turner: Very strict. They actually had a clear plastic overlay for each page, to be sure you had a certain number of words per line and lines per page, and they had to fit in each illustration. The books were challenging to write – but they stay in print forever!
Hermann: I’d like to hear about your experience writing for the “Dear America” series in your book Girl Who Chases Away Sorrow, in which the child narrator tells the story as if in a journal or diary. Since your subject was a Navajo girl in the 19th century, you could not have her writing a journal – because Navajos did not write. In your book, Sarah is a grandmother, looking back and relating her childhood saga orally. How did you get such a wonderful sense of Navajo history and style of speaking?

Turner: I learned a lot from Tony Hillerman! [an adult fiction writer whose mysteries are set in today’s Navajo culture]. He’s really very good. Also I researched a great deal about the period when the U.S. army tried to round up and capture the Navajo, using primary source transcripts of Navajos who survived. We made a trip to Canyon de Chelly which is historic and sacred Navajo land. It was amazing!

Hermann: I thought the first half, in which Sarah and her little sister traveled the desert alone to find captured relatives, was heart-stopping. Your descriptions were almost unbelievable. These girls were real survivors!

Turner: Yes but this was the 19th century, and all Navajo children learned to get along on the land.

Hermann: Tell me about working with the “Dear America” series as an author.

Turner: The editor, Tracy Mack at Scholastic, had a list of historical authors – and I called her with my idea just before she was about to call me! We must stay true to the history, but have some hope at the end. My book probably appeals to grade 5 up into high school. This book sold more than any other of my books – I’d do another one in a heartbeat!

Hermann: The concept of your historical picture books that you do at HarperCollins is interesting. The words on each page are strictly limited, but the ideas and history behind the story are pretty sophisticated?

Turner: I would say these books appeal to the grade 4-6 market [certainly older than a regular picture book]. They have simple reading skills but high level interest.

Hermann: So children don’t fully “get them” until they have studied some American history. I liked Drummer Boy: Marching to the Civil War [1998] and When Mr. Jefferson Came to Philadelphia [2003]. Your boy’s experience in the Civil War was quite gruesome. It takes an older child to absorb it. It was also full of historical detail about the role of boy drummers. How did you choose Jefferson for a subject?

Turner: I talked with Antonia Markiet, the editor at Harper, about what makes a leader great, and we traded ideas. The marketing department chose the title, so booksellers could see the subject of the book.

Hermann: Your next two books I’d like to discuss are your “memory” picture books: Abe Lincoln Remembers [2001] and Sitting Bull Remembers [2007]. They are both illustrated by Wendell Minor and edited at HarperCollins. Who came up with the memory concept for an older-child picture book?

Turner: Looking back, I would say it was me. I set the point in each life from which I wanted them to look back. For Abe Lincoln, it was just before he went to the theatre with Mary. I set Sitting Bull during his incarceration. He was still so popular and had great standing among the Lakota people. The irony is that he was actually killed by reservation police. Wendell first suggested doing this book with me. It was really difficult for me to write and took me several years – it ends in blood and tears, after all.

Hermann: You are right there. Where did you get such fine detail about Sitting Bull?

Turner: All the primary source materials on Sitting Bull are in basically one collection – and one author, Robert M. Utley, got them all in his book The Lance and the Shield—the Life and Times of Sitting Bull.

Hermann: Your third book that you did with Wendell Minor is the absolutely beautiful Shaker
Hearts. It is twelve verses that work in tandem with Minor’s paintings to explain life for the Hancock, Massachusetts Shakers in the 19th century. Were you pleased with the look of this book?

Turner: Oh yes, I think Wendell’s renderings were perfect – they were accurate and yet had almost a medieval look, especially the women’s gowns. The idea of doing it in poetry just popped out of my head. I wanted the book to explain for children the concept of “simplicity.” Being simple used to mean being stupid. I want children to see that simplicity is beautiful.

Hermann: Your poetry certainly achieves true simplicity. Can we have a look at what you are writing now?

Turner: My book in progress is called The Father of Lies. This title is non-negotiable! If you look in the Bible in John 8, verse 44, you see that this is the definition of the Devil.

Hermann: We all look forward to The Father of Lies to find out how Lidda survives her illness during this frightening period. Thanks again, for this wonderful interview.

Wendell G. Minor, a graduate of Florida’s Ringling School of Art and Design, is author, artist and illustrator. He earned over two hundred awards and honors including the Notable Children’s Trade Books in Social Studies, National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS)/Children’s Book Council (CBC) for Mojave, Heartland, Sierra, and The Seashore Book; John and Patricia Beatty Award, California Library Association, and Teachers’ Choice designation, International Reading Association, and Outstanding Science Trade Books for Children, NCSS/CBC for Sierra and The Seashore Book; Merit award, New York Art Directors Club for Heartland; and Award of Excellence, Communication Arts, for illustrations from Red Fox Running.

Hermann: [I noticed Wendell had a series of small sketches in graphite on his studio wall.] Are these drawings for a new book?

Minor: Yes, Henry Knox, Bookseller, Soldier, Patriot by Anita Silvey. It’s for Clarion Books next year. Anita believes Knox’s story is important, as do I.

Hermann: This is Knox’s life story?

Minor: Yes, I got very interested in Henry Knox when I read about him in David McCullough’s 1776. Knox was self-educated, and owned his own bookstore in Boston. Every time Washington got into difficulty, Knox was there. Knox performed one of
the most incredible feats of the revolution by transporting 59 cannon more than 300 miles from Fort Ticonderoga to Boston to drive out the British. Washington would not be known as the father of our country without the help of his generals, Nathaniel Green and Henry Knox. They were his foundation.

Hermann: *Are these illustrations for the book in pastels? The colors are so bright and creamy.*

Minor: These are acrylics on wood panels to give them the feel of the period. Most of my other work is watercolor and gouache.

Hermann: *Let’s talk about Yankee Doodle America* [Wendell’s 2006 alphabet book in which each “Letter” page is illustrated by an old inn sign].

Minor: I’ve always been very interested in early American folk art. Traveling from one inn or tavern to another is how colonials got the news of the day. Hand-painted wooden signs marked these establishments. Therefore, I painted each image on a wooden sign replica. Each sign illustrates a letter of the alphabet and represents a person, place or event from the American Revolutionary War period.

Hermann: *When young people read this book, they see the letter and the object, plus get a record of history?*

Minor: Yes. Inn signs were also one of the first ways an artist could earn a living in early America.

Hermann: *Did something in your childhood lead you to a career as an illustrator?*

Minor: I was dyslexic, and attended special reading classes through 6th grade. Since reading was difficult, I was more comfortable with the aural and visual world. I had a great teacher who read to my class every day. That aural experience combined with the pictures saved me. When someone read to me, the story and the images came to life.

Hermann: *Do you ever do computer-generated images?*

Minor: I use the computer as a design tool and to scan, enhance and transfer my paintings digitally. I do, however, believe our brains are analog – not digital. Unless you can develop your craft conventionally, all the computer power in the world won’t make you a better artist. Children’s picture books may be the last ink-on-paper art form. I think of them as the last pond on the Serengeti for an illustrator.

Hermann: *Are you afraid the world of illustration will end up on computers?*

Minor: A great deal of it will be, in the future. Most of the students at my alma mater, Ringling College of Art and Design, in Florida, are studying computer animation. But students have to learn to draw first, and they must read! Reading is essential to the creative process. It’s where we get ideas, and ideas are where we acquire content for our images. The human brain is the most powerful computer of all. The only software it needs is the 26 letters of the alphabet.

Hermann: *As an illustrator, your role is to try to help children become more skilled in the reading process?*

Minor: Yes. Children’s imaginations are being robbed by today’s rapid-fire entertainment. Read to them. Lift the words off the page and bring them to life. Let their imaginations grow and develop with that auditory experience. Picture books can whet their appetite for life-long reading.

Hermann: *An example of what you are talking about is Shaker Hearts, a book you did with Ann Turner about the Shaker society in Pittsfield, Massachusetts. In one of the twelve poems that make up the book, Turner wrote: “Sisters weave at looms that thump, hands to work, hearts to God.” You have made the loom that thumps come alive on this page. The majority of children will never see or hear a loom. Your picture is the next best thing.*

Minor: Thank you. I have always been interested in Shakers: their simplicity, their work ethic, their ability to see light and design. That has taught me to pare down to the essentials in my paintings.

Hermann: *Ann Turner said she tried to achieve...*
the same thing with the poems. The concept of simplicity is being lost, and it is so important. You both came together perfectly in this book.

Minor: Yes, Ann did a terrific job, and it was our first project together, twelve years ago.

Hermann: Tell me about your “big-kid” picture books. These books have a content and vocabulary far above kindergarten, but the format is a picture book format.

Minor: I believe these books can be for a reader of any age—adults, a pre-reading child, an early reading experience, or a fourth grader with reading problems.

Hermann: So, if a 3rd through 6th grade child has reading level problems, yet they have some background in American history, they can enjoy this type of book. Will they resist this larger format as not being cool?

Minor: There may be some problem, but these books have solid content that does not talk down to them.

Hermann: How did you research the Abe Lincoln Remembers? Being raised in Illinois, you were in the “Land of Lincoln.” [I also asked Wendell about the covers he has done for adult authors’ books, such as David McCullough, Fannie Flagg, Pat Conroy, Mary Higgins Clark, as well as the David Herbert Donald biography of Lincoln.]

Minor: I did my research at New Salem Village near Springfield, Illinois. I hired an actor, Michael Krebs who plays the role of Lincoln and possesses a remarkable likeness of our 16th president. He was a wonderful model for my illustrations. I have done almost two thousand book covers to date. Each novel teaches you something about a period in time, or place. I read them and researched them, before doing any cover, which proved to be great basic training for my children’s picture book career.

Hermann: I loved your artwork in Sitting Bull Remembers, also a memory piece you did with Ann Turner where the subject looks back at his life. It has the quality of him remembering the drawings that the Sioux produced on their clothing, shields and tipi walls. Ann said it was some of your finest work.

Minor: Ann’s text provided great inspiration. Sitting Bull was an artist in his own right. On the frontal piece and the title page piece of the book, I incorporated copies of his drawings in my art. Sitting Bull’s originals are in the Smithsonian. The pictographic “sitting buffalo” was his early signature.

Hermann: Children in grades 4-6 like the idea of remembering, because they are old enough to look back on their own life. In that way, they can relate to Sitting Bull.

Minor: Yes. And children will also learn that Sitting Bull really believed he communicated with animals. They will be fascinated to hear he thought a meadowlark once warned him of an attack by a Grizzly bear. This book reflects my great respect and love of Native American culture and of nature.

Hermann: What’s happening with your new book Look to the Stars with astronaut Buzz Aldrin?

Minor: We are going to have a book tour in the fall. 2009 marks the 40th anniversary of the first moon landing, by Apollo 11. [Aldrin also did Reaching for the Moon, his personal life story, with Wendell as illustrator in 2005.]

Hermann: In Look to the Stars, it’s wonderful how much technical material Aldrin got in one short page.

Minor: Each spread is a jumping off point for curiosity. I was always fascinated by aviation and space exploration as a kid. I loved to lie on my back on a clear night and gaze at the stars.

Hermann: In Look to the Stars, your work verges on technical drawing. You really had to study rocketery.

Minor: Yes, I am the one who convinced Buzz to do these books, and tell his story to inspire the next generation of young explorers. Look to the Stars contains tons of information. It was an incredible experience to work with a real rocket scientist.

Hermann: Look to the Stars is the history of how one
stage of flight and exploration is joined to the next. That took a lot of research for both you and Buzz.

Minor: An illustrator once said to me, the reason most artists don’t do what you do is it takes too much time and effort.

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Pygmalion in the classroom:
Motivating disenfranchised readers

Diane Kern
University of Rhode Island, Rhode Island

You most likely are familiar with the story of Eliza Doolittle, the flower girl and main character in the musical My Fair Lady (can you imagine Julie Andrews singing “The Rain in Spain falls mainly on the plain?”). This musical was originally written by George Bernard Shaw and titled Pygmalion, a play about the professor Henry Higgins who set out to teach a girl with a lower class English “Cockney” accent the proper way to speak, and in turn, to help her pass herself off as a lady. Higgins’ belief that he can teach Eliza and Eliza’s self-knowledge that she can succeed lead to the eventual conclusion of the play—Eliza is viewed as a lady at the Embassy Ball. In this Review of Research in the Classroom column, we will explore research that relates to teacher beliefs—like those of Professor Henry Higgins—and ways to motivate disenfranchised or marginalized learners, like Eliza, in an effort to help you help the struggling learners in your classrooms.

My Fair Lady
Researchers have concluded that teachers’ beliefs about teaching struggling readers influence their teaching behaviors. In her study of pre-service teachers’ beliefs, Scharlach (2008) found that only two of the six beginning teachers involved in her case study research “believed that they would be able to teach all of their students to read proficiently” (p. 163). Furthermore, all six participants believed the children they tutored struggled with reading acquisition “because they lack motivation to read and because of poor behavior” (p. 169). Experienced teachers of reading know their students who struggle with reading may appear to lack motivation or display poor behavior as a result of innumerable negative experiences with reading. Clearly, experienced teachers, principals and teacher educators must attend to the results of Scharlach’s study and find ways to improve not only teacher education but also teacher induction so that all struggling readers have the opportunity to learn with teachers who demonstrate an attitude of “it can be done” and “it is my job” (Walmsley & Allington, 1995).

I think I can, I think I can
Perhaps because I am writing this column on a train from the National Council Teachers of English (NCTE) conference in Philadelphia to my home in New England, I have called this segment of this column “I Think I Can, I Think I Can” to help us conjure up the image of The Little Engine that Could (Piper, 1954) in an effort to examine ways to nurture a “can do” attitude toward teaching our most disenfranchised struggling readers. In their recent study of early reading success, McTigue, Washburn and Liew (2009) explore the role of socio-emotional development in reading success, in other words, ways to foster a “can do” attitude with our struggling learners. They identify six principles and supporting teaching practices for promoting reader self-efficacy in the context of research-based literacy skill and strategy instruction. Self-efficacy is defined as “a belief that one’s actions can produce the results that they desire” (Pajares, 2005). Below, you will find a brief summary of the six principles:
1. Create a warm and accepting classroom environment;
2. Include measures of academic resilience;
3. Use direct modeling of literacy and self-efficacy;
4. Provide feedback that emphasizes effort that is specific and accurate;
5. Set goals with students; and

I invite you to read more about the six principles that McTigue, Washburn and Liew (2009) suggest, and before we move to the next research article, I want to summarize two practical implications discussed in their study. The first is to incorporate Responsive Classroom practices into classroom practice and the second is to reframe our “teacher talk.”

Responsive Classroom (2009) provides a well-researched framework for creating a classroom and school learning environment that is conducive to the needs of all of our students. One feature of the Responsive Classroom is a Morning Meeting, which consists of greeting, sharing opportunity, group activity, and news and announcements. McTigue, Washburn and Liew (2009) provide a glimpse into morning meeting that may help you to decide if this research-based practice is right for you and your disenfranchised learners. When I was a classroom teacher of grades 2-6, I conducted Morning Meetings in my classroom. Middle and high school teachers may want to also explore advisories as a way to foster student self-efficacy. I have provided a website from Brown University’s Education Alliance (2009), that I hope you’ll find helpful.

McTigue, Washburn and Liew (2009) provide a second important suggestion to help you re-engage your disenfranchised students. They provide specific ways to restate feedback to promote students’ self-efficacy. For example, instead of telling students, “I’m proud of you,” we might try saying, “You must be proud of yourself…” (p. 429) because this statement has the potential to help students see the importance of effort and may foster intrinsic motivation.

**Flowers for the lady**

As noted in the last section, the rewards teachers offer students may have an effect on student achievement. Next, we’ll examine recent research on extrinsic versus intrinsic motivation by Marinak & Gambrell (2008). I think you’ll be very interested in the results—the “flowers” in this study were books for children, not stickers or other extrinsic motivators! This study was conducted at three elementary schools in a large suburban school district serving 12,000 students. The participants were 75 third-grade students who were selected from a pool of 288 students who scored between the 30th and 50th percentile on the Stanford Achievement Test, 9th edition. The most important finding of this study was that “students who were given a book (proximal reward) and students who received no reward were more motivated to engage in subsequent reading than the students who received a token (less proximal reward)” (Marinak & Gambrell, 2008, p. 22). In other words, students were more motivated to read when given a book to read or no reward at all. The researchers suggest we should consider rewards for reading that foster intrinsic motivation and those closely related to reading, rather than extrinsic motivators such as prizes or pizza parties.

**Mirror, mirror on the wall**

Did Eliza Doolittle become the “fairest of them all” when she was transformed into a lady or was she already “beautiful” before she worked with Professor Higgins? Matthew Knoester (2009), in his research on urban adolescents’ reading habits, would likely suggest that Eliza was finally welcomed into the dominant Discourses valued in society and given opportunities to succeed, only when she risked rejection and failure once she moved away from her primary Discourse. Gee (1996) suggests that people’s identities are formed based on two specific variations of Discourses—primary and secondary discourses. Primary discourses are those identities that people are exposed to early in life, such as those of our family and earliest peers. Secondary discourses are those which we are exposed to once we begin to move into local, state, and national groups and institutions outside our early homes and peers. Knoester (2009) explored the connection between reading of adolescents, peer relationships and identity development. This research suggests students’ independent reading decreases significantly in the middle grades. This decrease is particularly strong for boys and students of color. His study explores the connection between interest and engagement among teen and preteen students in an urban school setting. Knoester (2009) shares 10 case studies of 11- to 13-year olds and discovered that students choose to read or not to read based not only on issues of ability and support, but also “on complex questions of identity and interest in the cultivation of particular peer and adult relationships” (p. 677). In other words, to read or not to read may be based not only on ability to read, but also on whether or not the individual will gain social acceptance for reading from valued peers or adults.

Knoester (2009) points out that Delpit (1995) found that students may not see themselves in books and topics at school. In a recent keynote talk by Junot Diaz at the NCTE 2009 conference in Philadelphia, Diaz used the metaphor of “mirrors” to argue a similar point. He stated, and I paraphrase, that students like him—immigrants from the Dominican Republic going to public school in New Jersey—lack “mirrors” as they read books and strive to find their identity (NCTE, Philadelphia, November, 2009). There were few characters just like him in the texts many teachers required. Diaz emphatically noted that the support and expertise of a librarian, who suggested books based on what the reader liked and wanted to learn, made the difference for him. Like Diaz, Knoester (2009)
suggests teachers and schools can make a difference for disenfranchised readers. In the words of Eliza Doolittle, “Wouldn't it be loverly,” to think we could make that difference for those students we most worry about.

References
Video games for the disengaged (and not only) students

Julia Kara-Soteriou
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A few years ago, I was looking to buy a present for my brother but I could not decide what to get him. Instead of taking the risk of choosing something he would not like, I called him to ask point-blank what he had on his wish list. He was financially independent and he did not have to wait for presents in order to fulfill his wish list, but I managed to persuade him to answer my question. He replied that he was planning to soon buy the Age of Empires and the Age of Mythology. My silence on the other end of the line prompted him to clarify that those two were titles of computer video games! Indeed, my silence revealed my ignorance about some very popular video game titles and the wide use of video games by people of different ages. Even though I was very familiar with educational CD-ROMs, my interaction with video games was limited and was reflected only through my addictive relationship with Tetris (which had ended a few years before that phone call), and the occasional use of one or two video games that came with my computer.

My initial silence to my brother’s response was followed by surprise. Driven by my then wrong assumptions that video games were a waste of time, I found it incomprehensible that my brother, a young professional in his early thirties, was still playing video games (that were not already installed on his computer). Yet, I bought him the two video games and used my visit to him as an opportunity to begin to learn first about the video game world and then the extent to which it could be integrated in education and the classroom world.

My then misconceptions about video games are still very common among parents and educators. According to De Aguilera and Mendiz (2003), many politicians, educational leaders, and media professionals and critics express concern about video games and blame them for the growth of a culture of violence. Further, De Aguilera and Mendiz claim that, when serious incidents occur with young video game players, public opinion leaders quickly pass judgment, blaming those who play video games and “alluding to the games’ violent, sexist, or addictive characteristics” (p. 2). Similarly, Prensky (2003) asserts that the press encourages these beliefs with “headlines about ‘killing games’ when in fact two-thirds of all computer and video games are rated ‘E’ (everybody), and 16 of the top 20 sellers are rated either ‘E’ or ‘T’ (teen)” (p. 4).

While several groups in our society tend to have a negative opinion about video games, students are fascinated by well-designed games. The computer and video games industry has managed to do what schools have difficulties doing: motivating students to participate in learning experiences. Our students, even the most disengaged ones, are transformed into highly motivated and engaged players when they are faced with a challenge and the need to problem solve in the world of their video games. These same students who complain about and, many times, ignore homework devote several hours strategizing and interacting with other players online, in order to reach new objectives and new successes in their games.

In this column I discuss video games and their potential to motivate students in the classroom, engage reluctant readers, and provide learning opportunities in different contexts. Instead of presenting a debate on the advantages and disadvantages of using video games in and out of school, I take the position that there is a place for video games in today’s schools. I begin with a brief explanation of what I mean when I use concepts such as video games and gaming and what types of...
games the Internet gamers play. I continue with a brief description of learning principles that are incorporated in good video games and then I discuss barriers to the inclusion of video games in schools. I conclude with some suggestions on how teachers could begin to use video games in their instruction.

**Video games: The concept and the gamer**

In this article, I use the terms *game* or *video game* or *computer game* to include any games that can be played online or offline, either on computers (PC or MAC) or game platforms, such as Microsoft's Xbox or Xbox 360, the Sony PlayStation 2 or 3, the Nintendo Wii, and various handheld devices, such as the Nintendo DS and the iPhone.

Similar to play, video games afford the player the freedom to fail, experiment, try new identities, alternate between intense and relaxed effort, and make interpretations without feeling the presence of a controlling or judgmental adult (Klopfer, Osterweil, & Salen, 2009). Therefore, when defining the parameters of what constitutes a video game, play is an important element to consider. According to Klopfer et al., the link between play and game is gaming, which includes all “the activities, knowledge, literacies, and practices activated in and around any instance of game … across media time, social spaces, and networks of meaning” (p. 5). Further, in their definition, Klopfer et al. clarify that gaming includes engagement with other players, family members, paper game guides, the history of games, digital Frequently Asked Questions, and the games themselves. Gaming also requires players to apply a series of multiliteracies and be willing to take risks, create meaning, follow rules, and problem-solve.

The advances in the computer and video game industry have led to the development of many educational games that are now accepted in more places (i.e., museums and senior centers) and reach a wider audience. However, there are still false perceptions as to who the game player is and what skills are required in order to play the games. For instance, for many, a video game requires plenty of hours of practice on a high-end computer and involves executions of difficult missions in dark worlds, as well as continuous explosions and violence (Klopfer et al., 2009). However, these types of games and gamers represent a small minority in the video game community. Other types of players also exist, as were identified in a study conducted by Parks Associates (2006). According to the study, the Internet gamers fall under the following distinctive categories:

1. **Dormant gamers**: they represent 26 percent of Internet gamers and, even though they like to play complex and challenging games, they play very little due to family, work, and school obligations.
2. **Occasional gamers**: they represent 24 percent of Internet gamers and play word games, puzzles, and board games.
3. **Leisure gamers**: they represent 14 percent of Internet gamers and like to play casual games that can be played for a few minutes at a time and are easily learned.
4. **Social gamers**: they represent 13 percent of Internet gamers and like to play games because they view the game as a way to interact with friends.
5. **Incidental gamers**: they represent 12 percent of Internet gamers and play games mainly out of boredom.
6. **Power gamers**: they represent 11 percent of Internet gamers and are the ones who play the action games that also involve difficult missions and violence.

These categories reveal that only a small percentage of Internet gamers actually enjoy playing the power games that many cite as their reason for not supporting the use of video games in or out of schools. This is very important information for teachers, in particular, given that their students could be representing a wide range of video gamers and have something in common with the teachers themselves, such as playing “casual games” (i.e., on cell phones for a few minutes at a time). The biggest growing demographic for casual online games are women between the ages of 35 and 50 (Klopfer et al., 2009). This means that it is not unlikely for a teacher to like to play a casual game that her students also have on their cell phones. To get an idea of what games students might be playing, in the section that follows I describe briefly some games that have been popular with students of different ages.

**Video games your students might have played or would like to play**

1. **Knights of Honor** *(Paradox Interactive/ Black Sea Studio, 2005)*

   ESRB rating: Everyone 10+; Genre (classification by GameSpot.com): Historic/Real-Time Strategy

   The *Knights of Honor* is a strategy game that takes place in Middle Ages. The players choose to run one of more than 100 different European countries from three different eras, the Early, High, and Late Medieval. The players' objectives are to survive, expand their country, and accumulate sufficient political and military power to win the game either with the highest score or by being crowned the ruler of Europe. In order to achieve their objectives, the players make diplomatic and trade agreements, arrange marriages to ensure an heir for their family, make wars, and spy on their enemies. Further, players take decisions on the use of domestic resources (i.e., sheep and cattle) and the
function that each city will take (i.e., what buildings to have). The number of players ranges from one to six and, when played online, the players are forced to interact with each other and therefore modify their plans based on what the others are doing.

This game requires several hours of engagement and therefore might be difficult, even though not impossible, to include within the classroom instruction. However, one could argue for the possible learning opportunities for those students who play the game outside of school. Given the context within which the players operate, teachers can relate school objectives and activities to the game. Learning objectives in social studies and literacy, for example, could be addressed with the use of this game.


ESRB rating: Teen; Genre (classification by GameSpot.com): Virtual Life

Players create characters, the “Sims”, and place them in a virtual household with other Sims. Players decide what the relationship of these Sims will be (i.e., roommates, family, etc.) and how they will spend their days (i.e., during the day children go to school and adults go to work). Players develop their Sims’ distinct personalities, by deciding on character traits, appearance, memories, aging, childbirth, marriage, death, and friendships. All these decisions impact the Sims’ future behaviors. Being virtual life simulators, *The Sims 2* and *3* require from players to attend to all the different needs of their Sims, including hunger, socializing, having careers, and anything else that real people might need. The creation of this virtual world and the decisions involved in addressing the life objectives of the virtual players encourage creativity and offer opportunities to develop social skills and understand what is involved when characters interact with each other.


ESRB rating: Everyone; Genre (classification by GameSpot.com): Fantasy Action Adventure

Based on the sixth book in the Harry Potter series, this multiplayer game features the exploration of Hogwart’s grounds, mixing of magical potions, and wizard dueling. Along with other characters, including Ron and Ginny, Harry plays Quidditch, duels with other students and learns new spells, and discovers more secrets about Hogwart’s. Further, Dumbledore prepares Harry for the final battle with Voldemort.

While the graphic landscapes are impressive and bring Hogwart’s to life, the game is too short on storytelling (Oldenburg, 2009). This lack of dialogue, however, can be seen as an opportunity for teachers to integrate the video game in their classrooms’ study of the book and ask from students to fill in the blanks in the video scenes before a task begins.

4. *Digging for Dinosaurs* (LeapFrog Enterprises, 2009)

Age rating (classification by LeapFrog.com): 5-8 year olds

This video game for younger students is played on a Leapster Learning Game System (by LeapFrog) and involves a lot of learning about dinosaurs and fossil digging. Through six adventures, players explore how different dinosaurs looked and behaved, what they are, and where they lived. Players get points when they advance from one level of difficulty to another and when they reach 100 points they get to dig for dinosaur bones. At the end, players put a dinosaur skeleton together in an exhibit and learn even more about the dinosaur. This game is a great opportunity for teachers to motivate their dinosaur enthusiasts to practice literacy skills (i.e, reading, writing, viewing, visually representing) when they learn more about the scientific process while studying maps and dinosaur facts.

5. *Zoo Tycoon: Complete Collection* (Microsoft Game Studios/Blue Fang Games, 2003)

ESRB rating: Everyone; Genre (classification by GameSpot.com): Business Strategy

This game is a collection of three best-selling titles, the original *Zoo Tycoon* with the two expansion packs (*Dinosaur Digs* and *Marine Mania*) and an all-new *Endangered Species* theme pack. In this game, which includes more than 100 animals (land, water, prehistoric, endangered) and more than 500 building objects, players build their own zoo, making use of limited resources and a lot of imagination. The arrangement of animals and buildings cannot be done randomly, though, as different animals/species have different needs, such as the climate in which they can survive. Also, the players’ decision-making influences the extent to which zoo visitors will like the zoo or not. This is a great game for players who like animals and the challenge of taking care of large numbers of them. Teachers can easily bring this game into their class and integrate it with instruction by addressing science and literacy standards.


ESRB rating: Everyone 10+; Genre (classification by GameSpot.com): Historic Turn-Based Strategy

Players choose from three civilizations -the Norse, the Greeks, and the Egyptians- and begin to build settlements with the objective to help their civilization thrive. Players learn to construct stables, mills, barracks, and other buildings, gather resources, and use soldiers to fight their enemies.
By participating in the game, players are given the opportunity to learn, among other things, what resources these civilizations had available to them, which gods they worshipped, and how different the civilizations were.

In spite of their popularity and their potential for student learning, teachers have been reluctant to use these and other video games to support and/or extend their instruction. However, advocates for game-based learning believe that the skills that gamers develop through their engagement with video games (i.e., socializing and problem-solving) are skills that are needed in the 21st century and are not addressed aggressively by schools that are still following the 19th century factory model (for a discussion on this, see Klopfer et al., 2009). Further, Gee (2007) argues that when students learn to play video games, they are learning a new literacy, whose definition is not restricted by the traditional definition of literacy as only reading from and writing on print. Instead, video game players are developing multiliteracies, by interacting with a multimodal text, the video game. For example, gamers are practicing their viewing skills, by looking at diagrams, images, movement, and other visual symbols, which need to be interpreted correctly in order for the gamer to perform well in the game. Similarly, gamers are practicing their listening skills when the video game requires interpretation of music and other sounds. Further, while a gamer’s response could come in the form of print, many times the response involves careful selection and presentation of visual symbols and/or sounds. Many gamers also apply their more traditional skills of reading and writing by reading and/or contributing to the online discussion forums and the Frequently Asked Questions section of several websites devoted to video gaming.

In addition to multiliteracies, gamers have the potential to develop critical thinking skills when the video games are designed in such a way that critical thinking is expected and rewarded in the game. In the section that follows, I describe several learning principles that are incorporated in the design of a good video game and encourage the development of higher order thinking skills.

Learning principles incorporated in good video games

In What Video Games Have to Teach Us About Learning and Literacy (2007), Gee describes many learning principles reflected in good video games. Several of these learning principles overlap and not all of them are necessarily present in a single video game.

The Active Learning Principle is the one based on which a video game is designed to require from its players to apply active (versus passive) learning and to exhibit reflective thinking. This kind of thinking happens when players interact with the game and produce information as a result and a cause of this interaction. Players solve problems and then receive feedback from the game in the form of a response to the initial solution to a problem. In a way, the game “speaks” to the players by reacting to their actions and the players “respond” to the game with a new reaction. The players have a say in the game by producing solutions that are not necessarily the same for each player and these solutions become the cause for even more interaction with the game.

The Identity Principle along with the Committed Learning Principle encourage the players to take on a new identity and make a commitment to participate in the game as their new identity, which most of the time is very different from their real-world identity. In some video games, the players take on the identity that was designed for them as part of the overall design of the video game. In some other video games, the players’ new identities are created through extensive input from the players themselves (i.e., the players decide how their virtual character will behave, what she will do for a living, who her friends will be, etc.). Regardless, the players learn to interact with the video game from the point of view of their new virtual identity by applying content knowledge appropriate to the new identity’s virtual world.

Akin to play, good video games encourage the players to take risks and not feel intimidated by the consequences of failure, as there is no authority figure between the player and the video game to pass on judgment about the failed efforts of the player. As a result, the players can try several times and learn from their failures before they master a particular skill. Along with risk taking, the Practice Principle allows for plenty of practice, mainly because the video game highly motivates its players, and the Ongoing Learning Principle allows for continuous learning through the different types of problem solving that can take place as the players move to higher levels within the game.

Finally, the Situated Meaning Principle is incorporated in video games that enable the learning of concepts and signs (i.e., symbols, texts, actions) through the specific experiences of the game. Instead of trying to memorize definitions out of context, the players internalize the situated meanings of different concepts by applying them in specific contexts, which are authentic and meaningful.

While active and critical thinking is possible with video games that are built on good learning principles, not all players will take advantage of the wide spectrum of learning possibilities. In addition to the good learning principles, there is at least one other way to encourage reflective thinking: the interaction players have with people around them, players or not (Gee, 2007). When, for example, players discuss with
other players issues surrounding their games, players are intrinsically motivated to reflect on the content, design, and objectives underlying their video game. Interaction with non-players also encourages reflection and learning, even with a simple discussion where the players explain the content and objectives of a particular video game.

Classroom teachers who spend several hours a day with students could offer the socializing and interactive opportunities for their video game players so that they, the players, are more likely to realize the learning that could take place through their video games and use it to support other learning that could be taking place in the classroom. However, teachers are not usually the non-players who interact with the video players. In today's schools, many teachers do not wish to use video games in the classroom because of several barriers that restrict them from doing so (Klopfer et al., 2009). If you are a teacher who has debated the issue of bringing video games in the classroom, you might recognize some of the barriers discussed in the next section.

**Why teachers are reluctant to use video games in instruction**

There are several reasons why teachers are reluctant to use video games as part or as an extension of their classroom instruction. One is the volume and implementation process of content standards and curricula in their school district. The school curricula do not explicitly outline the use of video games in the classroom or link video games to content standards. As a result, video game integration is not considered a requirement for teachers. Given that the approved curriculum is already too demanding, teachers cannot see how video game integration is possible. This situation is exacerbated by the fact that standardized assessments do not usually assess content knowledge that is supported through the use of video games. Given that these assessments are high stakes for schools, teachers feel the pressure to teach the curriculum that aligns with the required assessments. Further, the implementation of school curricula is such that students have rare (once or twice a week) and for short period of time access to a computer lab at school; whereas teachers of older students, in particular, develop their lesson plans with time restrictions in mind (i.e., 45-minute periods) that discourage video gaming.

The negative attitudes of many parents, educators, and school administrators also impose barriers for using video games in schools. At a time when curriculum and assessment pressures already make it difficult for teachers to integrate video games in their instruction, these negative attitudes, which could easily escalate into a legal action against the teacher and the school district, serve as an additional reason for teachers not to even try to convince parents and administrators to support the use of the video game as a learning tool for students. This battle will be difficult, particularly given that the research community has not produced enough studies to support the effectiveness of video games (Klopfer et al., 2009). As Klopfer et al. further claim, students’ attitudes might also be negative, when the students are not willing to embrace video games that are introduced to them as educational (versus simply entertaining).

Even when they are positive toward the use of video games, teachers usually lack the content knowledge and pedagogical skills to do so. It is uncommon for a school district’s professional development to focus on video games as educational tools (i.e., see Connecticut Association for Reading Research, 2008); therefore, teachers are expected to develop the expertise to use video games in the classroom on their own. Currently there is a limited set of models of implementation (Klopfer et al., 2009), which makes it even more difficult for teachers to use a model that could work with their students.

While these barriers are understandable, the status quo should not be acceptable. As educators we should at least be disappointed that many of our students are willing to invest the time outside school to play video games and develop several learning skills, but are not willing or have the capability to learn these and other skills through classroom instruction. So, what can we do, as teachers, to break these barriers and bring video games in our instruction?

**Video games in the classroom:**

**One step at a time**

The first thing we can do to begin the process of incorporating video games in our students’ school based experiences is to educate ourselves about the world of video games. While this might sound overwhelming for someone who is unfamiliar with the terminology and wide variety of video games and platforms, it might be the easiest to do when we compare with the task of changing the attitudes of society and the content and logistics of schooling.

As a start, several websites can help to introduce educators to the rich world of learning games. In Appendix A, I included a rich description of six websites that I consider to be very useful in this process of educating ourselves. These websites provide information on software ratings, parents’ video game choices, descriptions of video games, frequently asked questions and discussions among gamers, and links to more information that teachers might find helpful for their own learning and for when they need to provide parents with information on video games. Moreover, in Table 1, I provided a few additional readings for those who would like to read a book, an article, or a research report on video games and their relationship to learning and schools.
Another way to learn about video games is to include our students in the process of educating their teachers and many of their classmates about the video games they are using. As I argued in the past (Karasoteriou, 2006), teachers should not feel intimidated by the fact that many of their students know more about certain computer and other technologies than they do. Instead, teachers should welcome their students’ interest in new technologies and use it to benefit classroom instruction and learning. So, for instance, teachers can survey their students to find out what kind of video games they play and then have informal conversations to learn more about the content of these games. If the teachers feel that the rating and quality of the video game make it an appropriate topic for a presentation, then they could ask their students to do a presentation in front of the whole class about the content and objectives of their video games, as well as the learning principles (Gee, 2007) that are incorporated in the video game. The structure of the presentation will have to follow curriculum requirements so that the teachers continue to address the school district standards, while the students are practicing literacy skills through an authentic and motivating experience. For example, students can do an oral presentation on the chosen video game using the expository structure of description, including appropriate signal words and visual aids, such as artifacts and snapshots from the video game. Students can even get in teams and do oral debates on different video game titles, or categories of video games, or even video game platforms. This is not impossible because some teachers have already succeeded in using students’ interest in games as vehicle for practicing literacy (e.g., describing favorite games) and analytical skills (e.g., evaluating a particular game) (Kirriemuir & McFarlane, 2003).

In addition to learning about video games, teachers need to try out a game or two for themselves. After they decide on a possible video game that could be used to support instruction in a specific content area (student input is instrumental in making this decision), teachers can play the game on their personal, and hopefully, laptop computer that is easy to bring to school. Students who are familiar with the game could be invited to offer a quick tutorial to their teachers, so that their learning curve is not very steep and their familiarity with the game’s rules and actions is achieved earlier than later. By becoming players of a particular video game, teachers get to experience first hand what their students are experiencing and then consider the specific ways the game could be incorporated in
classroom instruction. Teachers who are novices in the video game integration might even decide to use video games that others have used with their students, in order to avoid reinventing the wheel. One example is RollerCoaster Tycoon, which has been used by high school teachers to teach physics (e.g., gravity and velocity) and business concepts (running a theme park) (Kirriemuir & McFarlane, 2003).

Admittedly, the prospect of adopting a video game requires several hours of committed learning and video gaming by the teacher and requires reconceptualization of the types of materials and instructional tools that have the potential to impact learning. Further, lengthening the class period, by reorganizing when and how frequently each subject is taught, should also be considered along with plans regarding the number of video game licenses the teacher will need and the funding that is required in providing all students with access to the video game. Understandably, the process of using video games in the classroom is not easy for teachers, particularly those who know nothing about video games. However, it is worth the effort if disengaged students will develop the motivation needed to participate in the learning process and apply their knowledge and skills in more authentic environments.

References


Appendix A
Websites With Information About Video Games

1. The Education Arcade at http://www.educationarcade.org/
   This is the online site of The Education Arcade, which was established by leading scholars in the field of digital games and education, with the objective to explore games that promote learning through authentic play. According to their website, the research and development of projects undertaken by The Education Arcade focus both on the learning that naturally occurs in popular commercial games and on the design of games that address the educational needs of players. The website provides access to two white papers authored by The Education Arcade and to a listing of publications for further reading. The immediate access to the two white papers provides the readers with a wealth of information on video games, including their history, relationship to play, gaming platforms and other terminology that many who do not play video games will find extremely useful. The website also provides access to the Education Arcade’s projects and games, which have been used to develop math, science, history, literacy, and language learning for students in college, middle school, and high school.

2. Video Game and Young People: Learning, Literacy, and Libraries at http://capping.slis.ualberta.ca/cap05/heather/
   Developed by Heather Robertson as a course requirement at the University of Alberta, this website takes the form of an online article with clearly defined sections in the vertical navigation bar on the left of the page. In the introduction, the author reflects on an instinctive response she was about to give to a question on why libraries do not carry video games at a time when they carry other multimedia items, such as video tapes, DVDs, and educational CD-ROMs. Her reflection led to other questions and to a study of broader issues surrounding video games. While her paper does not provide a comprehensive study on video games and young
people, it helps readers begin to build a knowledge base on issues such as video games and learning, video games and literacy, video games and violence, as well as video games and their relationship to play. This website, with its user-friendly structure and list of citations, is a reliable and easy to use source for those who feel they would like to begin to learn about video games and maybe reconsider any biases against video games.


   This is the official website of the Entertainment Software Rating Board (ESRB), a non-profit, self-regulatory body that was established in the mid-90s by the Entertainment Software Association ([http://www.theesa.com/](http://www.theesa.com/)). Annually, the ESRB website provides access to ratings for content (not quality) of over 1000 computer and video game titles. The ESRB website’s frequently asked questions provide information on how the rating is conducted and what each rating category means. The website also provides access to resources (in the form of website links) for parents who wish to learn more about computer and video games, online safety, and demos/reviews/screenshots of games. The search engine of the website allows users to do a quick search on a specific video game title or to look for titles that meet specific criteria (rating, platform, and content).


   This link from the Public Broadcasting Service (PBS) website is a resource for parents on the use of different media by and with their children. The website has links to video games for preschoolers, grade-schoolers, pre-teens, and teens. The links do not offer information on specific video game titles, ratings, or reviews, but “tips” on how parents can make the most of electronic games. This website could be recommended to parents of young children, in particular, who are beginning to use video games and need guidance on how to advise their children on issues such as time restrictions, social aspects of game play, and critical review of a game’s content.


   Being a nonprofit guide to children’s media and toys, Parents’ Choice provides parents with reviews on books, toys, music, television, software, videogames, websites, and magazines that children and families of all achievements and backgrounds could use. The website’s link to Parents’ Choice Awards is a great source of information on video game titles for parents or teachers who are just beginning to learn about video games and need a quick access to titles that are considered to be appropriate for children, as these titles are approved by other parents.


   This website provides reviews and ratings of video games for different types of game platforms (i.e., PC, Xbox 360, Wii, PS3, handheld devices). The website also provides links and quick information about the game’s publisher, developer, genre (i.e., modern action adventure), release date, and ESRB rating. Further, the website users can access a brief summary of a video game, news releases, images, videos, and even “Hints and Cheats” that could make it easier for a player to perform better in the game. While the website offers a lot of video game information for free (including access to forums and downloads from the website’s servers), a paid subscription provides members with additional information for each video game, as well as with access to live event coverage, free downloads of game guides, access to prize tournaments and contests, and high-speed downloads. This is definitely a website that video gamers find useful, particularly for gathering and sharing of information on new video game releases. However, the website, with its ratings, summaries and images, can also be very useful to parents and/or teachers who wish to learn about the video games their children and students currently use or would like to use and then consider whether instruction and video game use could be integrated.
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