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2004 Call for Artwork & Writing

In October 2004 the world will celebrate the 8th annual Month of the Young Adolescent. National Middle School Association celebrates this month in collaboration with our 58 state and international affiliates and over 40 partner organizations. The celebration features student artwork and writing in the online publication Expressions from the Middle, as well as on our commemorative poster published in Middle Ground magazine. All students receive a recognition certificate. For selections that are published online or on the poster, cash prizes are awarded to the students and sponsoring organizations. Check the Web site for more information including entry forms, the 2003 Expressions from the Middle online publication, and tips and fun ideas for celebrating Month of the Young Adolescent in your school or district.

Encourage your students to join the celebration!

Call 1-800-528-NMSA or visit http://www.nmsa.org/moya/moya2003/intro.html
Teachers Taking Charge, Taking Risks

Often drowned out in the current national discussion about how to improve reading, writing, and mathematics are the voices of middle school teachers. Long before standardized tests reveal students failing to learn what is expected of them, caring, qualified teachers know that these students are not learning. They ask themselves why and seek ways to improve that learning.

This issue of the *Middle School Journal* offers the voices of classroom teachers as they grapple with the challenge of teaching all of their students. A common theme that emerges across the articles in this issue is teachers noticing that in their classes not all students were learning. Lack of success was often demonstrated by disruptive behavior as students tried to hide their own discomfort with failure.

All of the teachers writing for this issue, taking account of the standards that needed to be met, took charge of their own classrooms to change what they were doing on behalf of their students. Amber Hammon (pp. 5-12), along with her co-author Carol Hess, describes her dismay at learning as a new teacher that her students “hated to read.” As she put it, “the fairy tale was over and reality hit.” She transformed her classroom with a balanced literacy program that continues to grow: “My journey has no destination, as it will always be filled with changes that I, as a facilitator, must provide to meet and support student needs while they travel the road to becoming independent lifelong learners.”

Carter Latendresse (pp. 13-20), who fits the definition of a highly qualified middle school teacher in every way, demonstrates how his approach to teaching literacy evolved as he continued to question his practices. Having begun to use literature circles in his San Francisco Bay area urban middle school classroom, he moved on to integrate reciprocal teaching and reader response theory into his teaching. As a third step he added various elements of some of the new literacy theories. Mr. Latendresse concludes, “I am able to address basic literacy skills, students’ relations to texts and each other as readers, and students’ relationships to the races, genders, ethnicities, classes, and cultures in the world.”

Focusing on another urban setting a continent away from San Francisco, Marshall George (pp. 21-26) describes how the cultures of two New York City middle schools were transformed by the establishment of faculty-student books clubs. Teacher-student relationships improved along the way to changing how both students and teachers related to literature. Mr. George reached the conclusions that “students are reading more and are becoming more adept at responding to and discussing works of literature with others in their reading community that includes adults.”

Analyzing data from a standardized pretest, Jacqueline Leonard (pp. 35-40) identified weaknesses of her sixth grade mathematics students. Using her knowledge of young adolescent learners and interdisciplinary curriculum, she designed an interdisciplinary unit that brought together language arts and social studies with mathematics. Sure enough, her students became so engaged with their active learning projects that their scores rose 40 points on the district-wide math assessment.

Scott Greenwood (pp. 27-34) rounds out our focus on literacy by showing how vocabulary building continued on p. 34
On any given day, students experienced extensive and varied reading; had time to enjoy independence, self-reflection, and interactions with peers; learned about authors, genres, and story elements; expressed themselves in oral and written language; made choices; took ownership; and made connections.

By Amber Hammon & Carol Hess

Once upon a time ... a 22-year-old woman set out to fulfill her lifelong dream of teaching. She had just finished her undergraduate work and was eager to put all this newfound teaching knowledge to the test. Her first teaching job included a sixth grade reading class. She felt fortunate to be working with a core of experienced teachers. They shared with her the routines that had worked well in the past and gave her the curriculum and suggested methods for presentation. The curriculum consisted of six different genres, each assigned specific skills to be taught. In the 50-minute class, the students read silently for 25 minutes then worked on skill worksheets for the last 20. This had worked quite successfully for all members of the team in previous years.

The young teacher was excited for her first class to begin and had everything prepared. As the students entered the class, even before the tardy bell rang, one student had raised her hand. Excited by this show of enthusiasm, the new teacher quickly called on the student only to hear a dreaded question, “Please tell me, Mrs. Hammon, that we don’t have to read books in this class! Do we?” Other students, agreeing and discussing how much they hated to read, quickly followed the question. That first class consisted of the teacher trying to convince the class that reading was fun while
the students eagerly waited for the bell to ring. Boom! The fairy tale was over and reality hit.

The 22-year-old woman was me and that is how my first reading class started. I was faced with the reality that my class of 23 students wanted nothing to do with reading. I thought to myself, “Perhaps tomorrow would be different.”

Despite my enthusiasm and attempts to motivate the students, the days that followed were hardly different. Fresh in my mind was the research and studies often discussed in my undergraduate reading classes. Discussions had often emerged from research, which frequently pointed out that middle grade students’ attitudes toward reading begin to decline along with their frequency of reading (Irvin, 1998). Also, an overwhelming number of students who drop out of school are reading considerably lower than grade level (Irvin, 1998). Diggins (1989) stated that, “sixth grade is a pivotal year, when students often are influenced to become either more or less interested in reading, attitudes then carry over into seventh and eighth grades and beyond” (p. 23).

My experiences in those first few weeks certainly lent support to much of that research. Reflecting on this research reinforced the opportunities middle school educators have to influence student attitudes in a positive manner. I became determined to influence my students to become more, not less, interested in reading.

As students make the transition from learning to read to reading to learn, they begin the process of independence. However, literacy teachers at the middle school level must not let independence become synonymous with isolation. “In all curricular areas except reading, schools demonstrate continuous support for young people’s learning. In reading, however, we often act as if students are competent by the sixth grade and place the burden on them to continue to improve their skills and to choose to read without encouragement” (Humphrey, 1998, p. 92). I quickly discovered the literacy program I was using did just that to my students: It isolated them. The program assumed the students were at an independent level so they needed very little encouragement to read. As a result, I spent the majority of my time in reading class dealing with disruptive students and students who refused to read or write. Because the students entered class with a bad attitude, their attitudes started to wear on me. I, too, came to dislike reading class.

As I passed out first quarter report cards, I was well aware that an overwhelming number of my students were below grade level or failing my class. I felt as though I had failed. While discussing my frustrations with my team members, I learned that they also had many failing students. They assured me that this was not unusual due to the lack of responsibility on the students’ part. I, however, questioned whether the structure of the reading class promoted failure or met the needs of the students. A teacher must have some understanding of the needs of middle school students when making decisions about instructional practices. According to Irvin (1998), a teacher needs to accommodate the following needs of students:

1. the opportunity to work in groups (social needs)
2. a vehicle for connecting new information to what is already known, thus helping students to feel more confident about learning new material (cognitive and emotional needs)
3. experiences in abstract thinking that may help students move gradually from the concrete to the abstract levels of reasoning (cognitive and moral needs)
4. an opportunity to move and change activities (physical needs)
5. successful experiences, which help students feel better about themselves as learners (emotional needs)
6. motivation to learn because these strategies involve elements designed to heighten students’
curiosity about the subject (emotional and cognitive needs). (p. 32)

In my heart I knew the current program was not the way I had been taught in my preservice classes or the way I wanted to teach. I wanted my students actively engaged and making connections with their reading. I wanted to provide for their social and emotional needs as well as their cognitive needs. A change needed to be made.

Little did I know I was about to begin on a journey that would force me to challenge the way things had been done before. Being fresh out of college, I feared my ideas would be seen as unrealistic and unstructured. However, Fountas and Pinnell (1996) stated, “Getting students absorbed in meaningful, purposeful literacy activities requires a number of significant changes in the classroom—in the physical environment, in events and activities, and in the nature and quality of the interactions” (p. 43). The students and I were about to embark on a journey of many changes.

There were three very distinct things that changed in our classroom: the structure of the classroom environment, my role as the teacher, and the creation of a balanced approach to literacy development. My classroom became our classroom, and each day as we changed we grew together. The changes did not occur overnight but evolved over time.

**Structuring the Classroom Environment**

Previously, the students came to class to sit in assigned seats for the entire class period except for occasional small groups. I knew I needed to redesign the classroom environment to more fully meet the
learning needs of each of my students. Fountas and Pinnell (1996) suggested that a classroom that is organized for literacy learning be built on the following theories about literacy:

1. All children can learn to read and write.
2. Children learn about written language in an environment that is print rich.
3. Learning is a social process.
4. Learning is a constructive process.
5. An organized environment supports the learning process.
6. Powerful demonstrations are an important part of the learning process.
7. Children learn best when they are responsible for their own learning. (pp. 43-44)

One important aspect of organizing the classroom environment is ownership. I had to be willing to let the students have some control in their literacy development. This began by transferring the responsibility from the teacher to the students. Transferring responsibility can be a slow process but is based on the desire to guide students in exploring their own ideas, accepting others, and reaching new understandings (Scott, 1994). I started by visiting with my students. I let my students talk while I took the role of a listener. I listened to what they liked, disliked, and what they wanted to do differently. During the visits, I kept hearing two important points: Students were bored with their reading and wanted to do something with partners or groups. I needed to create an environment that would provide my students with a chance to experience learning as a social process. By incorporating literacy strategies such as guided reading and literature circles into my program, I could turn my classroom from a traditional approach to a more student-centered approach. I knew with certainty that this time the tomorrows would be different.

I wanted the classroom atmosphere to be one that would encourage students to become risk takers, help them gain confidence, develop social skills, and learn how to effectively work independently. To accomplish this, I worked with the students on topics such as routines for taking turns, ways to have a good discussion, and ideas on ways to respond or react thoughtfully to each other. We developed a list of the suggestions and made posters to hang near the appropriate activity areas. It was my goal that these posters would assist in promoting student confidence. It was also my goal to encourage the students to take risks while sharing responses to their reading. I wanted the students to view mistakes as not a sign of failure, but a natural part of their learning process.

Integral to the success of any literacy program is how the classroom is physically arranged (Pike, Compain, & Mumper, 1997). When arranging the classroom, I kept in mind that students needed to know where to work for various purposes, and where to find and put away the materials they needed (See Figure 1). Supply areas were made accessible for several students to use at the same time. To better provide for accessibility, I purchased and labeled stacking drawers and containers for items students normally did not carry from class to class, such as scissors, glue, staplers, crayons, and various other items they needed for activities and projects.

Movement patterns within the room were established that allowed students to go from one area to another without waiting or crowding. I designated specific areas within the room for whole class activities, small group activities, and independent work. We actually practiced moving from area to area on specific cues.

The whole group area was a gathering place for the entire class. It could be on the floor, in chairs, or at desks. It was in the whole group areas that I presented lessons and gave book talks. If students had projects or writings to share, they did so while sitting in a special chair, uniquely painted or decorated. Small group areas were assigned specific spots and spread throughout the room to cut down on distractions. When working with a small group, I would sit so that I could easily view the rest of the classroom. Knee-to-knee, eye-to-eye sitting and appropriate voice levels were modeled and practiced in the beginning.

Establishing a reading corner in the room made reading come alive and created connections for the students. The more personalized the area, the more students took ownership. I wanted my students to associate reading with comfort and pleasure, so I set
up a corner of the room with a colorful rug and invited them to suggest ideas for making the area cozy and inviting. They quickly became involved by offering to bring beanbag chairs and cushions. Several parents volunteered to sew large, colorful pillows. I added a few plants, and one family contributed a lava lamp, which created a glow and coziness that invited even the most reluctant readers into the corner. When setting up the reading corner, I was careful to include the students’ suggestions for books as well as magazines and newspapers. I found picture books to be a wonderful addition as well as a valuable and quick tool for modeling skills and teaching literary elements. When organizing the books for student use, I made sure they were accessible and easy to see. Arranging them by author, topic, genre, or theme encouraged the students to think about the books in different ways. Display space near the reading corner included guidelines for daily routines and most importantly examples of the students’ projects, activities, and items relating to their reading. At one point, a large inflatable killer whale hung from the ceiling with shells and model ships scattered on the counter. A large fishing net, which had been used at sea by a student’s grandfather, was draped over the tops of the cupboard doors. This was an example of a student connecting an experience to his reading.

One of the problems I faced with the previous reading program was off-task behavior and lack of motivation. “There are two ways to look at discipline. One definition is submission to authority; the other focuses on learning how to care for one’s environment, oneself, and others. Self-discipline is learned; therefore, it can be taught” (Fountas & Pinnell, 2001, p. 103). Once the classroom was organized for space, movement, and materials, I went slowly to spend time teaching and modeling to students how they could manage their time and behavior in the classroom. Throughout the year I retaught as necessary because, “In a learner-centered classroom … we strive to help our students create an internal focus of control, to take the initiative, think for themselves, and assume responsibility for their own learning behavior” (Bridges 1995, p. 26). The changes I made in the classroom environment directly related to the positive improvements I observed in my students’ behavior and motivation.

**The Role of the Teacher**

Middle school reading classes traditionally involved an isolated skills approach based around a reading basal and worksheets. Teachers were the decision makers and did most of the talking. Students seldom connected to their reading, nor were they engaged in discussions with their peers and teachers. (Irvin, 1998; Pike, Compain, & Mumper, 1997).

Despite pressures to pull back, many teachers are expanding their roles and becoming risk takers along with their students. Transferring the power of learning to the student while assuming the role of facilitator is a major goal of middle school reading classes. Teachers provide literacy-rich environments that are predictable and where expectations are known. Teachers show the class that they themselves value and enjoy reading. Teachers provide time to practice reading yet stretch and challenge students without defeating them. “By empowering students in the learning process, they develop a greater sense of connectedness, active involvement, and personal investment in learning” (Voltz, 1999, p. 29).

While changing the classroom environment, I was also changing my role as the teacher. I became more of a facilitator and supporter as the students became more and more involved in the learning process. I also began to incorporate strategies from such programs as guided reading, literature circles, shared reading, and journaling. As a result of these changes, a more balanced literacy program evolved.

Although the transition was slow, my involvement with the students was immediate. We became a team, growing together and supporting each other. The thrill of seeing reluctant readers engaged and connected with their reading gave proof that students can be part of the process. I no longer doubted my role as a reading teacher.
Balanced Literacy Program

Keeping the needs of students in mind, I began to incorporate ideas and strategies from several kinds of reading: (a) independent reading, (b) reading aloud, (c) literature groups, and (d) guided reading.

In independent reading, students read silently from books of their own choosing. Once or twice a week they respond to their reading in a journal. Upon completion of the book, they share it with others through some form of evaluation or project. The teacher moves about the classroom observing and conferring with individual students during this time (Fountas & Pinnell, 2001).

In reading aloud, the teacher models fluency while reading a book to the whole class. A sense of community is established as well as the enjoyment and pleasure of reading. Reading aloud provides opportunities to discuss enriched vocabulary and story elements (Irvin, 1998).

Literature groups can be known by other names such as readers’ choice and literature circles. In literature groups, students are brought together by their choice of the same books. They meet as a group to discuss their personal responses to the pages previously read and assigned to all members. Students are able to make connections between the literature they read and their own experiences and knowledge. They learn how to form opinions and share them with others. The teacher is an observer who guides the process, but the students construct their own meaning (Daniels, 1994).

In guided reading, the teacher selects challenging texts and groups students with similar reading strategies together. The groups are often smaller than literature groups. During guided reading, the teacher engages in discussion with the students, teaches skills within the group, and often extends the meaning of the text after the reading (Fountas & Pinnell, 2001).

A 50-minute time frame made it impossible for me to incorporate all of the organization strategies of the various kinds of reading. However, the suggestions and ideas I applied from methods such as literature circles and guided reading brought positive and exciting changes to the climate of the room and the enthusiasm of the students and myself. One such example was the beginning of the class period. In the past, students were slow about entering the room. While I was taking attendance and checking on missing or incomplete assignments, off-task behavior and visiting took place. However, such behavior changed because, now, as soon as students stepped through the door, they were goal oriented and immediately engaged in instruction or read aloud with me. On a shelf by the door three class lists were labeled: “homework is completed and in the room;” “homework is completed but left at home;” or “homework is not finished but will be by _____ (date).” Upon entering, students circled their name on the appropriate list, set down their supplies at their small group area, and proceeded directly to the reading corner for whole group and the read aloud. Once whole group was finished, the students moved to their small groups. I could then quickly check the lists, enter attendance, and jot down dates which students committed to for unfinished work.

I organized my reading class around three basic groupings: whole group, small groups, and independent. Each day the reading period began with the whole group meeting together in the reading corner. On Monday through Wednesday, 15 to 20 minutes were used for teacher read aloud, book talks, and guided lessons (See Figure 2). Occasionally, throughout the year, I incorporated into the read aloud the concept of shared reading where each student had a copy of the text. I especially relished the whole group time with my students as we laughed and cried together while truly enjoying the voices of literature. I not only read chapter books aloud at this time, but also picture books, collections such as Chicken Soup for the Teenagers Soul, poetry, magazine articles, and feature stories from the newspaper.

Following the whole group gathering, students moved to their small groups for 20 to 25 minutes on Monday through Wednesday. An area for these groups had been assigned earlier and movement...
from whole to small groups was actually practiced along with the expectations. Students were organized into small groups for approximately four- to five-week blocks to complete a book. I alternated using ideas from literature circles and guided reading each time I changed the blocks. If the students were grouped by choice one block, then I matched students to reading strategies the next. I divided the students into three groups, allowing me to spend at least 20 minutes with each group once a week. I also tried to spend a few minutes observing the other groups during this time.

To divide groups according to their choice of book, I presented book talks and posted a sheet containing the title of the book and a fixed number of lines. Students could then sign up for the book of their choice until the sheet was full. If for some reason I felt a group was too large for positive, constructive discussions, I split them into two smaller groups. The students continued to use the same book, and I would bring them back together when meeting with me.

The basic routine for small groups was to discuss and share individual responses and then continue to read the assigned pages. The small group brought students together to share their responses and discuss the assigned reading pages with each other. I generally assigned the pages; however, later in the year some groups were able to assume this responsibility.

Students wrote their responses in journals, which were easy to manage and gave me the opportunity to connect with my students. When reading their journals, I did not correct them, but wrote questions that would cause the students to respond. I also shared my own reactions and experiences with them. Journals provided a means of evaluation as I watched their writing and opinions develop.

Discussion within the group emerged from the students’ personal responses to text or from an assigned task. I encouraged the use of sticky notes so the students could mark areas of text or jot down ideas or questions that arose while reading. As it was important that only one person at a time was talking while the others were listening, together the students and I established procedures for taking turns.

Students could read silently or aloud within small groups but often needed to finish the reading as homework. Families generally think of homework as worksheets or text assignments so, I found it important to work with parents on the need for quiet, uninterrupted reading time at home. I enlisted their support in encouraging and creating time for their child to read each night.

Some of the ideas I found helpful for small group management when I was not meeting with the groups were the tape recorder, extra copies of books with discussion ideas for students to refer to, bookmarks with suggested lead sentences for journaling, and visual aids at each meeting area that showed guidelines for discussions and responses to each other.

The students returned to whole group the last five to 10 minutes of the period on Monday through Wednesday. It was at this time that students could reflect and share. For example, in connection with the story element of character, one group shared the character map they were adding to throughout their discussions. At another time, while reading the book *Hatchet* by Gary Paulsen, a student shared a model airplane similar to the one in the story.

On Thursday and Friday we followed a different schedule (See Figure 3). First thing in the morning, the whole class met briefly for a “status check,” a quick look at student expectations for the day (Atwell, 1998, p.140). At this time students or groups signed up for share time if they had projects or presentations to present to the whole class.

After a quick status check, the students spent the next 25 minutes on independent reading, journaling, and project work. Most of the time decisions about projects were left to the students and groups. I posted a list of suggestions they could refer to along with examples from previous students. Projects included such things as book jackets, poems, dioramas, posters, skits, character charts, plot graphs, pop-up books, and videos of mock talk shows relating to the characters or plot of the story. During this

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**Figure 3**

**Reading Schedule Thursday Through Friday**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Activity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5-10 min</td>
<td>Whole Group Status Check</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20-25 min</td>
<td>Independent Reading</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Journaling</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Projects</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20-25 min</td>
<td>Sharing / Evaluating</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
time, I conducted individual conferences, retaught skills to those needing it, and did spot check evaluations. The ownership and pride students placed upon their projects and presentations amazed me. Certain students who would seldom turn in homework assignments in other subjects rarely failed to do so in reading. The period ended with 20 to 25 minutes for sharing and evaluations. It was during this time that I tested skills when needed.

A much stronger literacy balance was achieved by breaking the week into two blocks. On any given day, students experienced extensive and varied reading; had time to enjoy independence, self-reflection, and interactions with peers; learned about authors, genres, and story elements; expressed themselves in oral and written language; made choices; took ownership; and made connections. On such a day, I might have taught a lesson, given a book talk, conferred with students individually or in small groups, read aloud, responded to ideas, evaluated, and offered encouragement.

One very important element in making any change successful is to take time in the beginning to teach, model, and practice all expectations. Students do not assume responsibility for their own learning behavior overnight. I found it very helpful to take time to practice such things as how to enter the room, move between groups, take turns, respond both orally and in writing, and use tools such as webs and story maps.

This journey was as much about my learning as it was about my students and the influence I have on their attitude toward reading. As I sat with the other teachers in my core during a student-parent conference, I truly realized the importance of guiding students in making a personal investment in their learning. During the conference, one of the mothers shared that she did not know what had been done differently in reading but the difference it had made in Kara, her daughter, was remarkable. Her mother shared her surprise and delight at the increased time Kara now spent reading at home. Before, it had been difficult to get Kara to pick up a book, but now she seldom put one down.

My journey has no destination, as it will always be filled with changes that I, as a facilitator, must provide to meet and support student needs while they travel the road to become independent lifelong readers. Some changes on this journey were more successful than others. More than anything, this journey taught me that by providing support and encouragement while actively engaging the students, I could influence their attitudes toward reading in a positive manner.

Once upon a time … a 22-year-old woman set out to fulfill her lifelong dream of teaching.

References

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To get ideas for using the articles in this issue for staff development visit www.nmsa.org and click on “Services and Resources,” “Middle School Journal,” and “Using Middle School Journal for Professional Development,” January 2004 issue.
Literature Circles: Meeting Reading Standards, Making Personal Connections, and Appreciating Other Interpretations

This reading instruction is applicable to widely diverse classrooms because it weaves together dynamic strands from three approaches to teaching reading: literature circles, reciprocal teaching, and modern literary theories.

By Carter Latendresse

Stage One: Opening Up the Door and the Texts

My first job teaching in 1994 was teaching reading to seventh and eighth graders at an urban, public middle school in the San Francisco Bay area. After one week it was clear to me that I could not teach the same novel to every student. Some students were reading far ahead of grade level, some far below. Some were just learning English as a second language. What could I do? Because we were a K-8 bilingual school with a reading specialist, I sought out the advice of my seasoned colleagues. I wanted all of the students in my class to enjoy reading good books at their own reading levels. I began collecting books from the elementary grades. From grades three and four, I collected five copies each of After the Goat Man, Abel’s Island, and Sadako and the Thousand Paper Cranes. From grades five and six, I collected five copies each of M.C. Higgins the Great; The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe; Island of the Blue Dolphins; Tuck Everlasting; Number the Stars; Journey of the Sparrows; and The Great Gilly Hopkins. From seventh, I would stick with my original list, plus add Maniac Magee, The Outsiders, Hatchet, and Scorpions.
At the same time, being heavily influenced by Atwell (1987), Rief (1991), and Daniels (1994), I believed, like them, that students should be given a chance to choose their own texts.

How should I structure this classroom with readers reading different books? That year I very quickly read the first edition of *Literature Circles* by Daniels (1994). Relieved and excited, I knew that he was giving ideas that would enable all students to achieve reading success in my classroom. Daniel’s ideas, though running counter to traditional middle and secondary school teacher-centered education, opened up spaces in the classroom for readers of all levels to enjoy reading. In the second edition to his book, Daniels (2002) illustrated how the features of literature circles are applicable to all reading levels:

1. Students *choose* their own reading materials.
2. Small *temporary groups* are formed based on book choice.
3. Different groups read *different* books.
4. Groups meet on a *regular, predictable schedule* to discuss their reading.
5. Kids use written or drawn *notes* to guide both their reading and discussion.
6. Discussion *topics come from the students*.
7. Group meetings aim to be *open, natural conversations about books*, so personal connections, digression, and open-ended questions are welcome.
8. The teacher serves as a *facilitator*, not a group member or instructor.
9. Evaluation is by *teacher observation and student self-evaluations*.
10. A spirit of *playfulness and fun* pervades the room.
11. When books are finished, *readers share with their classmates*, and then *new groups* form around new reading choices. (p. 18)

His notions that discussions should be reader-based and free-flowing, associative and natural, were liberating. To provide temporary props, I used the “role sheets” Daniels provided. These asked each student to focus on a different concept each night such as summarization, connecting the text to one’s own life, and drawing a key scene.

Despite Daniel’s cautions that the role sheets were a temporary prop to be used to stimulate open, natural conversations about books, I was a new teacher intent on addressing district standards. So I went to the district’s scope and standards for reading fiction, and I altered 13 of these so that the students would have a new job to do every night as they read. The standards the students became responsible for included setting, imagery, mood, summarizing plot, character, point of view, figurative language, making predictions from the text, inner conflicts of characters, giving advice to the main character, symbol, connecting the text to one’s own life, and theme.

I then borrowed several bookkeeping sheets from Daniels: *a team reading contract* to be filled out weekly by students, which identified the pages the group would read each week (signed by parent, student, and teacher) and a daily team reading record, which allowed me to rove around the room during their 20-minute group book talks and quickly assess if each student had brought her book, had done his job for homework, and was participating in discussion. Finally, I used Daniels’ “Grading Sheet for Team Reading Participation,” which allowed me to combine the weekly grades from the first two forms into a larger rubric that included comments and a space for student self-evaluation.

How did students share their different readings of the pages? Students selected pages to read and were given a job to do, such as plot summarization. At night students read the pages they selected—probably around 15—then they wrote a bit, probably about half a page. In class the next day the four people in the group went around and shared their half page of writing, then the conversation unfolded naturally, led by a rotating “discussion director” each day. It was that person’s job to not only share his or her own half page written for homework, but to keep the conversation from continually returning to talk about the party last Friday night. Sharing and discussion lasted 15 minutes, and once this was over, students turned in their half page of writing to me, at which point they were assigned new jobs for that evening. Finally, they reaffirmed the pages they agreed to read. Then, as a follow-up to the group work, students wrote for 10 minutes (a) a summary of what they read the previous night, (b) any questions that had not been answered, and (c) a short prediction of what they thought would happen in that night’s reading. The remaining 20 minutes of
my 45-minute period were spent on writing, acting, grammar, or whatever else was on the daily agenda. I was extremely pleased with the literature circles method. Many of the students told me that they enjoyed English and reading for the first time in years. I also observed that the class scores rose on the standardized district reading test given each spring in the seventh grade. It did not occur to me at that time that asking kids to read for particular literary elements each night would restrict their literary experience in any way.

All seemed well—these students seemed to be enjoying themselves and improving—but when I asked myself if all these kids were fully literate, I had to admit that they were not. Several had asked if they might read an autobiography or other nonfiction book for a literature circle—to which I answered a sheepish “we’ll see.” I was limiting their reading choices to fiction and also limiting their reading foci to the literary elements identified by district reading standards. Limiting their reading foci—I was only partially aware at that time—was a misapplication of Daniels’ theories. While it was true that all the students were reading at their own reading levels and, therefore, felt a part of the class and successful, the discussions centering around the role sheets were superficial. The students would generally spend five minutes reading off their sheets on setting, character, or irony, followed by an uninspired silence that lacked questions or comments. Then, having placated the English teacher, they would move on to what they liked in the reading and what confused them. I noticed that the tail end of their discussions, the part not centered around standards and role sheets, was the best.

Stage Two: Opening Up the Door, the Texts, and the Reading Process

Over that first summer after trying literature circles, I learned about another teaching technique called “reciprocal teaching.” I was looking for other ways to teach reading that might meet the needs of students reading below grade level. Reciprocal teaching is a dialogue and literary analysis technique developed by Palinscar and Brown (1986), primarily for nonfiction, that centers book talk around the use of four strategies: questioning, summarizing, clarifying, and predicting. These roles were reminiscent of Daniels’ literature circle roles, and they served to remind me that readers should not only meet district standards when reading, but they should also remain conscious of their own metacognitive processes when reading.

Underlying the reciprocal teaching technique is “reader response theory,” that empowers students to engage with a text and, in the interaction, produce meaning. One basic premise of reader response theory is that “the literary experience must be phrased as a transaction between the reader and the text” (Rosenblatt, 1983, p. 34-35). A second basic premise is that “what the student brings to literature is as important as the literary text itself” (Rosenblatt, 1983, p. 82). What does this mean for the middle school reading teacher? We must recognize that each of our young adolescent readers walks in the door with a unique personal history that includes phenomena in many areas: self-consciousness, home life, mother and father, family group, cultural and gender roles, moral and religious codes, social philosophy, attitudes about society and politics (Rosenblatt, 1983, p. 82-107). All of these phenomena, which are particular to each student, will make his or her interaction with the text different from every other student’s interaction. When the student then interprets a text, she does so with the full weight of her unique background, and in that interpretation, she will come to reinterpret her own unique experience in light of the text, since it has provided her with a new way of thinking and feeling. When this happens, says Rosenblatt, “there has been a full interplay between book and reader, and hence a complete and rewarding literary experience” (1983, p. 107). Not only does each reader create her own meaning in the literary experience, the same text will have different meanings at different times in the reader’s life (Rosenblatt, 1983, p. 35).

Both literature circles and reciprocal teaching techniques naturally support a type of reading instruction that makes accessible to all students in the classroom a complete and rewarding literary experience. Both strategies aim to increase literal
reading comprehension, the ability to make inferences from implied meanings in texts, the ability to articulate one’s thoughts during literary analysis, and the ability to listen to and build on the thought of others during literary analysis. Implicit in both theories is the notion that students gain from acting in a variety of roles in the classroom and by using a variety of learning styles and intelligences in the classroom. Students can be both teachers and learners to each other while they talk, draw, persuade, confer, and bring each other to see their varying points of view. Students also get a chance to observe their own metacognitive processes, how they learn and think. Finally, by having a group read a text of their own choice, at their own reading level, and according to their own reading schedule, success and self-esteem are possible for all students.

I rolled the four reciprocal teaching strategies into the literature circles list of nightly jobs so that the students were not just dealing with district scope and sequence literary elements. … Again, our scores went up on the standardized test.

The questioning strategy, the student was asked to write down three open-ended questions that do not have one answer. For the summarizing strategy, I asked students to write half a page explaining the five key events. For the clarifying strategy, students were asked to pinpoint new vocabulary, unfamiliar or difficult concepts, and important or confusing parts in the text, and then explain these by giving examples, making connections to real life, or drawing analogies. For the predicting strategy, students were asked to write half a page explaining what they think would happen next in the text, giving evidence from the text to support their prediction (Davis, Johns, & VanLiersburg, 1994, p. 205).

The goal of reciprocal teaching is flexible and independent student use of the strategies. On a typical day in class, the questioner asks the group the open-ended questions, to which the group responds. Then the group adds any questions members might have. Those are discussed and answered in turn, if the conversation tends that way. Perhaps the summarizer then shares the summary, after which group members might add onto or change any part of the summary that needs it. Then clarification is sought for new vocabulary, troublesome syntax, important but obtusely stated information. Finally, predictions are made, which the group creates together.

The literature circle and reciprocal teaching techniques worked for several reasons. First, they allowed students to choose reading groups and texts in different genres. Second, they promoted literal reading comprehension (summarizing). Third, they promoted making inferences (predicting) from implied meanings. Fourth, they helped students oversee their own learning (questioning and clarifying). Fifth, they helped students consciously bring meaning to the text in a way that formalizes and ritualizes Rosenblatt’s literary experience. Sixth, they encouraged each student to take a turn as group leader and facilitator of group discussion.

During my second year of using this expanded version of literature circles/reciprocal teaching, the reading portions of classes were even better than the first year. Again, our scores went up on the standardized test for the district, and the kids were happy to be included in the text selection and the making of meaning with the texts. They especially liked the freedom to talk to each other and have their own, valued interpretations of texts. There existed substantially less pressure when asking questions with peers than with a teacher, and the students spoke more clearly, often, to each other than with me.
Again, all seemed well—these students were reading both the texts and themselves with increasing success and enjoyment—but when I asked myself if all of these kids were fully literate, I had to admit that they were not. Although I no longer felt that I was turning reading into a standards drill and kill exercise, I now felt that sometimes the students were reacting to a text without really thinking critically about it as literature. They often seemed to be using a text solely as a spotlight to look at their own lives. While this was one of the things I wanted in my class, I also wanted them to use their own reading lives as a spotlight to analyze the text in terms of theme, supporting detail, symbolism, imagery, tone, unity, and the other text-based concerns.

While it was true that the discussion was now centered around processes that readers actually use—questioning, summarizing, clarifying, and predicting—and while it was true that the students did not rush through their discussions as much to get to the “good part” at the end of the discussion, the sharing of the role sheets was still perfunctory. There still existed an over reliance on the role sheets that led to unnatural book talks. Many students, again, wanted to read the sheets quickly so they could move on to saying what they liked and what confused them. Also, I had to admit, most of the talk was still reader response.

Stage Three: Opening Up the Door, the Texts, the Reading Process, and the World

Over that summer I revisited much of what was best in my graduate school course work—the Cultural Studies, Marxist Literary Theory, New Historicism, Reader Response Theory, and Feminism and Gender Studies—within the field of English. I wondered why I so rarely applied the lessons I learned in graduate school in my actual teaching. If I was preparing students to take college English classes, why was I not at least refamiliarizing myself with the lessons I learned there?

Later I came across and read Critical Encounters by Appleman (2000) and Young Adult Literature and the New Literary Theories by Soter (1999). Both books reminded me of what did not work when I was doing literature circles/reciprocal teaching. I recognized that the disconcerting comments I occasionally heard from my students’ literature circles were echoed in one of Appleman’s classrooms: “The text is not relevant to me; therefore, I found no meaning in it” (Appleman, 2000, p. 52). This kind of comment is an ironic, occasionally depressing by-product of teaching solely with reader response theory. If we teachers open up the texts to our students and invite them to interact with them, we should not be surprised when occasionally some students either dislike a book and therefore dismiss it, or cannot relate to the world of the book and therefore dismiss it (Appleman, 2000, p. 52). But let us also be clear that neither should we judge books solely on the degree to which our students personally relate to them. If we judged books solely using this criteria, literature study might become cliquish and faddish, subject to unintentional cultural xenophobia or to the natural moodiness of many middle school students.

If we judged books solely by the degree to which our students relate to them, literature study might become cliquish and faddish, subject to unintentional cultural xenophobia or to the natural moodiness of many middle school students.
After reading Appleman’s and Soter’s books, I became able to articulate for myself a few more drawbacks of the assumptions underlying my literature circles/reciprocal teaching classes.

When we do literature circles, students focus on several levels at once: the textual level; the personal level; and a wider, societal level.

First, I was treating nearly all responses to the text as equal, as long as they provided even a sliver of support. This notion does not allow much room for evaluating readings of a text or of evaluating the author’s intention, which are obviously two of the reading teacher’s jobs (Appleman, 2000, p. 28). I had to have a way of shedding light on shallow readings of an author’s intention and then redirecting certain readers to specific lines and passages in texts—a near impossibility when I was roaming and assessing all students during those 20-minute sharing sessions.

Second, I was so focused on readers connecting the texts to their own lives that I often let students treat their personal experiences as unassailable, static arenas—therefore, not allowing the texts to inform or redefine the students’ past experiences (one of the great joys of reading). I was simply so happy that kids were responding personally to the text that I was not insisting on evaluations of those connections.

Third, I tended to ignore those students in groups of four who were uncomfortable sharing their personal histories and tastes. I would put the student in an awkward situation to have to refuse sharing personal connections because that student might see the literature circle as a potentially antagonistic environment—perhaps the student is poor and the others are middle class, or perhaps the student has dyslexia while the others do not, or perhaps the student is female while the others are male, or perhaps the student is Tongan while the others are Latino (Appleman, 2000, p. 29-30).

In short, it was time for me to move students out of their own personal connections to the texts and to a place where they could survey connections that others make with the same text. I wanted them to be able to view the text—and ultimately our culture and the world—from several different viewpoints, using several different lenses, not simply his or her own viewpoint using his or her own lens. Up to that point I had been opening up texts to readers and even having them notice their reading responses, but I was not having them recognize any weaknesses or limitations in their viewpoints. Hence, I was not really asking them to change or to grow (Appleman, 2000, p. 20). Nor was I giving them the tools to analyze their own readings of the texts. I was not asking them to contextualize the book, their readings, the class, their selves, or their teacher in relation to the world. It was time to open up the class to the world.

I wanted to use modern literary theory as another layer in the evolving literature circles/reciprocal teaching group model so that I might pose the types of critical thinking questions that, as Soter notes, “encourage interpretive exploration and push students to consider the books from a perspective different from the one that influenced their first response to them” (1999, p. 2-3). I decided to layer into reading class the explicit teaching of modern literary theories (New Historicism, Reader Response, Feminism and Gender Studies, Marxist Literacy Theory, and Cultural Studies) with the goal that the theories would later be applied to the texts.

The Reader Response lens asks the reader to write 3-4 sentences on those aspects or events from the reader’s personal history that influence his or her response to the book (e.g., reader’s past, race, gender, class, family life). Second, they are to write 3-4 sentences about how the text influenced his or her response to the book (e.g., imagery, tone, narrator’s reliability, diction, syntax). Third, the reader writes 3-4 sentences on the meaning of the pages read regarding conclusions about plot, character, theme (Appleman, 2000, p. 159).

The New Historicism lens asks readers to do some quick research (15 minutes on the Internet is usually enough) on what was going on socially, politically, and culturally in the writer’s society and world during the time when the writer wrote the book. How could it be argued that the writer was a product of his or her time in terms of the issues presented in the book? (Soter, 1999, p. 57) Then the student is asked to write half a page in answer to these questions.

The Feminism and Gender Studies lens asks the reader to write a quarter page each on two female characters in the book. The reader is to write about both
female characters from a traditional masculine viewpoint, then from a feminist viewpoint (Appleman, 2000, p. 171). Readers are encouraged to compare the female characters to women today.

The Marxist Literary Theory lens asks students to plot some of the characters on a five rung “social ladder” in terms of who has power and who does not. Then the students are to put an asterisk next to the characters who are involved in power struggles that are by nature class conflicts (Appleman, 2000, p. 165). Then the student is asked to write his or her own name to the side of one of the ladder rungs, imaginarily transposing his or her current life over that of the world in the book. Finally, the students write half a page explaining, in detail, the power struggles in the book that are by nature class conflicts.

I have to spend some minutes while introducing this lens explaining how Marxist Literary Theory has little to do with the politics or spread of communism (Appleman, 2000, p. 72).

The Cultural Studies lens asks the reader to record in an “Insider- Outsider” t-chart elements of the text that require insider knowledge versus elements with which any reader could identify. The reader writes three questions about the following cultural characteristics: language, ethics, technology, division of labor, trade and money, transportation, music, art, literature, games, food, clothing, shelter, government, family groupings, religious beliefs, death rituals, phenotypes (skin, eyes, hair, cheekbones, nose, lips), country of origin, ethnic pride, and racism. Then students are to explain in 5-6 sentences how they see themselves in relation to the culture represented in the book (Soter, 1999, p. 102).

Just at the point that I was integrating literary theory into my reading instruction practice, I moved and took my current job teaching English 7 and 8 at a private college preparatory school. Because my new classes were at a private school that emphasized literary experiences over standardized tests, I began to embrace Daniels’ intended notions regarding literature circle discussion.

I still wanted to teach standard literary elements (setting, plot, and the rest) and the literature circle/reciprocal teaching jobs, but now I also strove to teach each of these five modern literary theories with brief overviews and activities, having students apply each several times to a number of short stories Appleman, 2000, gives a great introduction to these theories, plus others. Soter, 1999, also has a good, brief overview of these theories and others. These lessons took an additional week, so that the entire introduction to the reading program in my class now takes three weeks.

Once the introduction is complete, and students understand all of the different role sheets for each of 15 jobs (Figure 1), we put away the short story anthology, and they choose books. I pass out all of the books and each student gets to peruse each one for a minute without talking and gesturing to anyone else. They are to read the covers and first page and make a list of their top three choices. Once I get the lists, I place students in groups, trying to honor each student’s first or second choice. The next day I announce the book groups, and then I hand out a blank calendar. I ask that groups of four readers read a book every three weeks—so that over an eight week quarter each student will read two books and still have time to compare the texts with a paper and a project. Because I have read every book, and I want to keep a close watch over the students’ progress, I have also written weekly quizzes for each book, which the students are required to complete. Quizzes

Figure 1
15 Nightly Jobs Support Literature Circle Discussion

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1. Summarize text.</th>
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<tr>
<td>2. Write half a page in detail about a key event from character’s point of view.</td>
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<tr>
<td>3. Travel (setting) tracing: write half a page describing in detail (or by drawing a map with labels) all the places where the action takes place. They could also draw in a character involved in a key action.</td>
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<tr>
<td>4. Theme: write half a page explaining author’s message about life or human nature, using examples from text.</td>
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<tr>
<td>5. Imagery and Atmosphere: write half a page describing in detail the sights, sounds, smell, touch, and taste images the author uses to establish a key atmosphere in key scene.</td>
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<tr>
<td>6. Irony: write half a page describing in detail at least one example, if possible, of each of the three types of irony: verbal, situational, and dramatic.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Clarification for new vocabulary words, confusing or important passages</td>
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<tr>
<td>8. Open ended questions about text</td>
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<tr>
<td>9. Predict what is next in text.</td>
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<tr>
<td>10. Connect text to real life: students write for half a page describing in detail some aspect of the text (e.g., plot, character, setting) with which they could personally relate and why.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. New Historicism lens</td>
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<td>12. Reader Response lens</td>
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<td>13. Marxist Literary Theory lens</td>
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<tr>
<td>14. Feminism/Gender Studies lens</td>
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<td>15. Cultural Studies lens</td>
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are short and consist of true/false (literal comprehension) and short answer (inferences from implied meanings) questions. Once each group decides its reading schedule and homework, they photocopy a calendar for me so I can hold them to that schedule and begin writing quizzes for each group.

Once I model good practices in literature circle groups—doing the reading, doing the role sheets, listening, asking questions, making connections, not socializing, sticking to the text—we spin a homemade spinner. On the spinner, each of the 15 roles are represented, along with two “read only” possibilities. Each day we spin this spinner at the end of class and each student gets a new role and is then responsible for getting the role sheet before leaving.

Texts for my seventh and eighth grade literature circles groups include the following: *Skellig; Go Ask Alice; The Golden Compass; The Contender; Watership Down; Redwall; The Outsiders; That Was Then, This Is Now; Homecoming; Dicey’s Song; I Know What You Did Last Summer; Killing Mr. Griffin; The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe; A Wrinkle in Time; The Giver; Z for Zachariah; Speak; A Step from Heaven; The Pigman; The Pigman’s Legacy; The Lord of the Rings; King Arthur and His Knights of the Round Table; Mythology and You; Night; Farewell to Manzanar; Into Thin Air; Into the Wild; The Joy Luck Club; The Bean Trees; Across Five Aprils; To Be a Slave; I Am the Cheese; The Chocolate War; The Pearl; Of Mice and Men; The Alchemist; Bless Me, Ultima; Cold Sassy Tree; Their Eyes Were Watching God; Always Running; Angela’s Ashes; The Autobiography of Malcolm X; The House of Spirits; Ellen Foster; A Prayer for Owen Meany; and The Chosen.*

The daily agenda still roughly follows the model borrowed from Daniels, but now I am more deliberately following Daniels’ advice about book talks. To this end, I still have the students read and then discuss the predetermined pages for about 15 minutes, but before they do so, they turn in their role sheets. I do not want them using the sheets at all during discussion. The sheets, I have seen, stultify discussion. Students now do not have to go in any order or even mention the role sheets they filled out the previous night. Discussion may be initiated by any person in the group and can naturally lead to other insights and memories, as long as these are related to the book. The basic guideline is to always connect the discussion to the book. References to page, paragraph, and line are best. Once the discussion is over, group members take 10 minutes to clear up questions not answered and to make a prediction. At the very end of the period, we break out the spinner and role sheets. On days when we do literature circles, it takes the whole 45 minute period, so we tend to do the circles only two or three times a week. That way we also have time to write fiction, poetry, and essays on other days of the week.

Today, when we do literature circles, the students focus on several levels at once: on the textual level, looking for literary elements; on the personal level seeing connections in their own lives; and on a wider, societal level finding and articulating alternative and equally appropriate readings of texts. In these ways, I am able to address basic literacy skills, students’ relations to texts and each other as readers, and students’ relationships to the races, genders, ethnicities, classes, and cultures in the world. In addition, the students are naming and critiquing the Reader Response lens to augment it with four other reading lenses. Not only is their interpretive tool bag growing, but the willingness to allow alternative interpretations is growing as well. They are finally reading the text, themselves, and the outside world at the same time.

**References**


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Teachers Speak Out on Creating Literate Young Adolescents

Faculty-Student Book Clubs Create Communities of Readers in Two Urban Middle Schools

Students in two urban middle schools are reading more and becoming more adept at responding to and discussing works of literature with others in the reading community that includes adults.

By Marshall A. George

During the school day, teachers are often isolated, rarely having the opportunity to have professional conversations with one another (Lortie 1975; Keedy & Rogers 1991). The culture of many schools is such that teachers stay in their own classrooms, do their own things, and go home at the end of the day without having had meaningful interactions with other teachers. However, it has been suggested that, “For reform to occur schools need to create cultures conducive to learning for teachers and students. ... This learning environment needs to be extended to incorporate all members of the learning community” (Keedy & Rogers 1991, p. 314).

In some middle schools, the limited interaction that does occur between teachers often takes place among faculty members in the same academic department, or at the same grade level or interdisciplinary team. Rarely do sixth-grade math teachers and eighth-grade language arts teachers get the opportunity to interact socially or intellectually. Likewise, interactions between students and teachers are often limited to those in the classroom, where teachers are usually considered the “more knowledgeable other” (Brown & Palinscar, 1989; Wells, 1990) or in hallways and cafeterias where they serve as authoritarian rule enforcers.
An additional problem facing many middle schools is building curriculum that, rather than being integrated, separates and isolates content areas. There have been repeated calls to integrate content areas through interdisciplinary and thematic planning; however, the culture of many middle schools has been to maintain the model of content segregation. For example, middle schools’ cultures often impose rigid (if unwritten) rules that the study

We critiqued author’s writing styles, discussed important universal themes and issues facing the young characters in the novels, and made connections between the texts and our personal experiences, other texts, and current events.

turally and linguistically diverse students in grades 6-8. In contrast, the student body at “Park Middle School” is made up of only 400 diverse students. There are approximately 75 full time faculty members at East, and 12 at Park. The book clubs were initiated at East in the late 1990s, and were introduced to Park in 2000. Other schools in the district have also begun the practice as part of ongoing professional development efforts in the district.

Because both schools have an open-campus lunch policy, giving all teachers and students the same lunch period, we chose to hold the faculty book club meetings during lunch. A fairly aggressive advertising campaign announcing the faculty book clubs was undertaken at both schools. All faculty members were invited to participate, but we especially encouraged language arts and social studies teachers to attend. Held in various classrooms, the meetings were “brown bag” affairs, for which we provided beverages and dessert for the participants. On average, the book clubs met once a month; however, at East enthusiasm grew to the point that we were having the book club meetings biweekly.

At East a core of seven teachers joined the group in the beginning, and they regularly participated throughout the year. Thanks to the enthusiastic response of these participants and an ongoing promotion campaign (i.e., weekly invitations in mailboxes, posters around the building, announcements over the intercom) our group grew significantly. One week we had 17 participants, including eight teachers (representing four different departments and all three grade levels), a school psychologist, two assistant principals, three student teachers, a staff developer/college professor, the librarian, and an administrative intern. When some students saw their teachers reading the same books that they chose to read in their independent reading, they asked to become involved in the faculty book clubs. Therefore, we expanded our reading community to include three or four students each week. It was amazing to see seventh graders engaged in serious literary discussions with their teachers and administrators alongside a college professor and his students.

Participation at Park was also steady. A core of four language arts and social studies teachers (including one from each of the three grades), two administrators, and the staff developer attended the book club meetings without fail. From time to time, three other faculty members from various grade levels and

Setting Up Book Clubs: Our Story

Situated in an urban school district in Manhattan, “East Middle School” serves approximately 1400 culturality and linguistically diverse students in grades 6-8. In contrast, the student body at “Park Middle School” is made up of only 400 diverse students. There are approximately 75 full time faculty members at East, and 12 at Park. The book clubs were initiated at East in the late 1990s, and were introduced to Park in 2000. Other schools in the district have also begun the practice as part of ongoing professional development efforts in the district.

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of literature is under the purview of the Language Arts Department, and that is that. Furthermore, despite the suggestion that adolescent literature should be the heart of the middle school curriculum (Stover, 1996), researchers (Applebee, 1993; Bushman, 1996) have found that middle school language arts teachers often stick to teaching the canonical literature found 20 years ago in junior high schools around the country, ignoring the ever-growing body of outstanding literature written for and about adolescents.

Over the past several years, as a staff developer in two middle schools in New York City, I have worked with administrators and teacher-leaders to address these problems by bringing about changes in these two schools’ cultures, which were exacerbating these problems. Based on the idea that reading is a social process (Bloome, 1985) and influenced by the experiences described by Flood and Lapp (1994) and Murphy and Lick (1998), I helped to initiate and facilitate faculty and faculty-student book clubs, in which adults and students met together on a regular basis to discuss works of adolescent literature.

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departments joined in. As was the case at East Middle, once the rituals were established the community was expanded to include students, and on two occasions the young people in the group outnumbered the adults.

Guidelines for and dynamics of book club meetings

Over the past three years, our communities in these two schools have read more than 20 books. These books have been selected in a number of ways: Some were chosen because of the availability of multiple copies in the school book rooms, while others were purchased on the recommendation of teachers or students in the group. While the focus of the book clubs was on literature written for young adults, at East, we decided one semester to occasionally include books written for adults.

The rules for our meetings were quite simple. Participation in book clubs was voluntary, and people were invited to come even if they had not read or finished the book being discussed. It was perfectly acceptable to come to the meetings on a sporadic basis, and attendees could sit and observe, or participate in the discussions. It was acceptable, even expected, that we would have differing points-of-view about various aspects of the books, but we agreed to be respectful of each other’s opinions. After the first meetings, at which I “got the ball rolling,” there was really no group leader. Usually, one of the participants was so eager to react to the book being discussed that she or he initiated the conversation and it took off from there.

Our discussions were quite lively. In addition to sharing our personal responses to the books, we critiqued author’s writing styles, discussed important universal themes and issues facing the young characters in the novels, and made connections between the texts and our own personal experiences, other texts, and current events. We reacted to portrayals of gender, race, and religion in the various books we read. Mostly, we adults responded to the books as readers, rather than as educators. From time to time, however, we did don our “teacher hats” and discuss activities and strategies we might use if reading these books with our classes, or issues that might arise if the books were taught to whole classes. When the students participated in the discussions, they gave us invaluable insight into adolescents’ perspectives on the books. The adults in the group seemed genuinely interested in the viewpoints of the young people and respected their contributions to the group. In short, our reading community engaged in meaningful, relevant, and thoughtful discussion, as we made connections between our reading and our own life experiences: exactly the kinds of discussions in which we hoped to engage our students during class.

Impact of Book Clubs on School Culture

Examining data through many lenses, I have surveyed and interviewed participants, as well as studied transcripts of book club meetings. Clearly, the data have shown the book clubs to be positive experiences on many different levels, indicating that when members of the school community regularly engage in book clubs, the culture of the school is affected in a positive way. I recently examined all of the data that I have collected looking for examples of ways in which school culture was affected by the book clubs. Following are some of the ways that the cultures of a very large urban middle school and a very small one appear to have changed as a result of faculty and faculty-student book clubs.

1. More teachers are reading and talking about what they are reading with each other. Several people that I interviewed suggested that people from across departments and grade levels were suddenly talking to each other on a personal and professional level, as they had not done previously. One math teacher commented, “I always thought [those sixth grade English teachers] one dimensional. I discovered that they are not only interesting people, but they are more intellectual than I ever imagined!” Another teacher informed me that she was regularly joining for lunch a group of teachers she had not previously known as a result of getting to know them in book clubs. Another member of that regular lunch group reported that the topic of conversation during those casual lunches often turned to discussions of books they were reading independently outside of book clubs. Indeed, especially in the large school, the artificial boundaries of grade level and department were lowered by the book clubs. With the ever-increasing focus on reading and literacy in middle schools, having teachers become a community that talks about reading in positive ways is a plus.
2. Teachers and students share their “independent reading lives” with one another in and out of classrooms, creating a “culture of literacy” in the schools. Like the teacher mentioned above, several other teachers reported that they began regularly talking about the literature they read at home with their students and their colleagues. One stated, “I feel like they are not just my students, but they are fellow readers who want to hear what I think about a book. It has really improved my relationship with so many of my kids.” Another commented, “As I read at home, I think about which children I want to share the book with when I get to school the next day.”

Likewise, students seemed to feel more comfortable talking about books from their personal reading with teachers and with other students. A number of student book club participants brought books in to loan to teachers from the book clubs as well as classmates, including those whom they had not previously known. One afternoon, a seventh-grader marched up to me and handed me True Believer, a sequel to Make Lemonade by Virginia Euwer Wolff, saying, “you have to read this. I know you will like it, since you liked Make Lemonade so much. I think Lavaughn [the main character] is much more believable in this one than in Make Lemonade.” That night, I followed her suggestion, and she was right!

A “community of readers” certainly did emerge in both schools. When young adolescents in a middle school read anything independently, much less read a novel critically enough to show insight into character development and to suggest that another person, especially an adult, might make personal connections with the book, a school’s “literacy crisis” is being addressed.

3. Teachers began reading and incorporating more adolescent literature into the curriculum. This was one of the major objectives in initiating the faculty book clubs, as many language arts teachers had been ignoring the collection of adolescent literature available for use in their classes in favor of books from the high school canon, such as The Crucible, The Great Gatsby, and Shakespeare’s Sonnets. Indeed, each of the core members of the groups at East and Park Middle Schools took books that we read in book clubs back into their classrooms and incorporated them in one way or another into instruction: read alouds, small reading groups, or whole class study. Two social studies teachers integrated historical adolescent fiction into their courses for the first time after participating in the book clubs, and one math teacher reported huge success at building a word problem around Harry Potter in his seventh grade math class. While several teachers abandoned works that seem more appropriate for high school students all together, others followed the model suggested by Kaywell (1993) and paired works of adolescent literature with classic works of fiction. One teacher, Robin, paired The Crucible with two works of adolescent literature with similar settings and themes. She commented to me later, “They got [The Crucible] better this year than they ever have before. Using the adolescent literature as a complement to the harder work made it more accessible to more students. I am so glad that we read Beyond the Burning Time in book clubs.” Prior to the faculty-student book clubs, it had been difficult to convince a number of language arts teachers that adolescent literature was appropriate and “worthy” of inclusion in the curriculum. Once they were introduced to this genre, many teachers changed their stance about its value and importance.

4. Teachers seemed more empathetic to the issues facing adolescents, and students began to recognize the humanness of their teachers. Because most of the books we read addressed issues facing young adults, and they were able to hear the adolescent members of the faculty-student book club relate to the range of issues that emerged in our discussions, several teachers reflected that they had become more tolerant of the young people in their classes. Adolescent literature focuses on issues facing adolescents, such as peer pressure, academic pressure, sex, alcohol, violence, and issues of injustice and inequity. One seventh-grade teacher commented, “I had not realized just how tough it is being a teen today. I think I give my students a little more ‘slack’ since reading some of those books and hearing the kids in the group talk about them.” Indeed, all of the teachers who sat in the circle with students from their classes reported improvement in their relationships with those students, as their awareness was increased regarding the challenges facing young people today.
Similarly, students interviewed at the end of the first year suggested that they had a better understanding of, and increased respect for, their teachers. “It’s like they are real people!” one sixth-grader exclaimed. Another suggested that he understood why his teacher was sometimes quiet when stories related to young people’s dying came up in discussions, as she had lost her younger brother in a car accident. When images of teachers and students being at each others’ throats are commonly shown in movies and on TV, it is important to recognize that teacher-student relations can be brought to the level we saw in our faculty-student book clubs.

5. More teachers began using book clubs as an instructional strategy. Much has been written about the effectiveness of book clubs (a.k.a. literature circles) as an instructional strategy in reading and language arts class (Daniels 1994; McMahon & Raphael 1997). Most of the language arts teachers from East and Park attempted to incorporate book clubs into their curriculum after having participated in the faculty book clubs. With support from the staff developer and from each other, these teachers have had a great deal of success in this endeavor (see George 2000). At Park Middle School, one teacher began using book club discussions around an adolescent novel in her weekly small group advisory, sparking “the best discussions of the year.” In a follow-up interview, one of the teachers, Megan, said of book clubs:

I had been trying all year to build a sense of community in my sixth grade class. The group this year just did not jell. It was not until we started doing book clubs that the kids seemed to understand the importance of small communities within the classroom and began seeing the class as a community itself. Now they always ask when we will be doing book clubs again. The sense of community that book clubs creates is marvelous. They are the best way I have found to really address the standards (reading, writing, speaking, listening) and at the same time get the kids turned on to reading.

The National Middle School Association (n.d.) believes that learning experiences should “address [young adolescents’] varied intellectual, physical, social, emotional, and moral development.” The effective implementation of book clubs in the middle school classroom is one way that teachers can accomplish this important task.

6. Administration and staff developers modified the faculty-student book club model and extended it to the entire faculty as they read and discuss professional literature during professional development days. After seeing how engaged participants in the faculty-student book clubs were, administrators decided to adapt the strategy for half-day inservice workshops. At both schools, all faculty members were asked to read articles or book chapters from professional education journals or books in preparation for an inservice professional development day. During those days, the book club format was used to generate discussion of the assigned readings. Regular participants in the faculty-student book clubs emerged as leaders in the discussions, but a number of faculty members who were usually disengaged during these professional development events participated actively in the discussions. A number of teachers who had not participated in the faculty book clubs commented that this active approach made the inservice meetings more meaningful, and they liked being active participants rather than passive subjects during the professional development sessions. At East, where the faculty is very large, participants in the inservice workshop were broken up into several groups to discuss selected pieces of professional literature. At Park the entire faculty engaged in book club discussion, creating a culture of inquiry never experienced by the group before. The book club model helped make professional development more meaningful for those involved. As teachers often complain about these sessions, this positive response was quite rewarding.

7. Conversations about literature became increasingly common in the halls of both middle schools, even among non-book club participants. Several adult members of the school community have reported that they have been indirectly influenced by the book clubs, even though they were not participants. One of the book club participants suggested in a follow up interview that, “It is amazing how many teachers in the school have started telling me about books they
are reading. They know that we all talk about books during the book clubs, so they are more open to approaching me to talk about literature in general.” Indeed, the principal of one school suggested to me that the book clubs had helped to promote a more collegial culture across the school and felt that, “Our school is a more literate space. People are talking about literature more readily and more comfortably.” Atwell (1987) has suggested that adolescents need to know adults who read. When adults in a community are readers, the kids in the building are more likely to be readers.

Conclusion
Faculty and faculty-student book clubs can, indeed, be one effective means for establishing a culture of literacy and learning for teachers’ professional growth at the middle school level. At East Middle School, where faculty book clubs began in 1998-99, teachers, students, administrators, and staff developers reported a “positive change in school climate.” Likewise, at the end of the first year (2000-01), adult and student participants in the book clubs at Park Middle School suggested that the experience changed the way they interacted with each other and led to improvements in teaching and learning in the building. If, as Sparks and Hirsch (1997) have suggested, “Staff development’s success will be judged not by how many teachers and administrators participate in staff development programs or how they perceive its value, but by whether it alters instructional behaviors in a way that benefits students” (p. 5), then faculty-student book clubs can be judged a success in these two schools. Students are reading more and are becoming more adept at responding to and discussing works of literature with others in their reading community that includes adults. I would suggest that Sparks and Hirsch’s statement be broadened by adding the statement, “Staff Development can be judged as successful when it alters school culture in a way that benefits all members of the school community.” Faculty-Student book clubs have shown to do just that in these two urban middle schools.

References

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Content Matters: Building Vocabulary and Conceptual Understanding in the Subject Areas

Direct instruction leading to the independent application of learning strategies can improve reading comprehension and writing skills while avoiding the pitfalls of drill and kill.

By Scott Greenwood

The most logical place for instruction in most reading and thinking strategies is in social studies and in science rather than in separate lessons about reading. The reason is that the strategies are useful mainly when the student is grappling with important but unfamiliar content.

Anderson, Hiebert, Scott & Wilkinson (1985) Becoming a Nation of Readers

The mantra of “reading across the curriculum” has been spoken repeatedly for many, many years. Unfortunately, despite the great strides that have been made in terms of what we know about best practice, the fact remains that many young people “hit the wall” when it comes to content area reading at the middle level. In my own experience all or some of the following often (sadly) happen in the middle grades:

- Content area teachers say it is not their job to teach reading.
- Language arts teachers say they are not “reading specialists” and that they lack the expertise to teach struggling readers.
• There is a lot of “pointing down” at the elementary level for not getting the children ready (enough).

• Attitudinal issues for students intertwine with frustrations and burgeoning discipline issues.

• Downward spirals continue as the “load” (of vocabulary, of conceptual demands) increases.

Meanwhile, accountability demands and high stakes testing are leading us to “discover” more struggling readers while the definition of functional literacy is being ratcheted up.

Research and experience are clear about the relationship between an extensive vocabulary and good comprehension (Davis, 1994). Overzealous practitioners may assign a lot of vocabulary with good intentions, trying to bolster their students’ comprehension. There is a great divide between what we know about good vocabulary instruction and what we (often, still) do.

Basic Tenets and Understandings
Few would argue with the point that an extensive vocabulary is a good thing for middle level students. However, how to expand students’ depth and breadth of word knowledge is a trickier proposition. The relationship to wide reading is clear, but not all students engage in independent reading as extensively as we would like.

Strike a balance: Direct instruction and active learning
As teachers seek the goal of improving overall comprehension and precision of writing, there is a place for direct instruction of vocabulary. Early studies in this area were equivocal, but more recent studies (Cooper, 2000; Johnson, 2000) have found that direct instruction of selected words results in small but significant improvements in comprehension. Many of us remember being asked to memorize 20 isolated definitions (chosen by someone else) to regurgitate (and thereafter forget) for the Friday test. We also know that active involvement on the part of students ensures mental engagement and builds high interest in vocabulary strategies. Indeed, vocabulary is both “caught” and “taught.” Consider when it is best to provide direct vocabulary teaching: before, during or after reading? Traditionally, most vocabulary study takes place before reading (Blachowicz, 1986). However, researchers (Johnson, 2000) recommend that teachers teach vocabulary before, during and/or after reading depending on the text to be read and the students involved. Cursorily introducing new words before reading is simply not justified. Middle level learners thrive when they have structure and choices. They are becoming more and more metacognitive, yet they still need scaffolding and targeted direct instruction. These kids need to talk about, select, and apply their developing word knowledge in repeated, meaningful contexts.

Teach word learning independence
It is important for content area teachers to move their students along the continuum of vocabulary independence. Teachers must model and explicitly teach requisite strategies, but then relinquish control after guided practice. Having kids “look it up” or “use context clues” are not good enough, when they are simply admonishments.

Context clues are rarely precise enough to predict the exact meaning of a word. When words are encountered repeatedly the meaning units of old and new contexts overlap, and they become more strongly associated with each other. Though important, such learning from context is inherently gradual and imprecise. Yet the research (Graves, 2000) estimates that of the 3,000 new words a child learns in a year, only a paltry 300 are learned via direct instruction. This certainly reinforces the case for wide reading, but immersion in print must be buttressed with context clue modeling and thinking aloud, dictionary skills, and a variety of strategies such as the Vocabulary Self-Collection Strategy (VSS) (Ruddell & Shearer, 2002) that encourages students and improves their chances of accurately learning the meaning of a word. It must be remembered that context alone is not rich enough to ensure deep word knowledge; learning a word from a single exposure is only about 20% at the upper end of the range (Adams, 1990). So almost as important as the sheer number of encounters is the richness and variety of contexts.

Be careful of packages
Middle level learners need much more than the mechanical ritual of someone else’s word of the week, with someone else’s definition. Materials do
not teach children as well as teachers do. Be very cautious about vocabulary-building products and packages. Many well-intentioned teachers have purchased programmed vocabulary books, created exhaustive word lists, and graded endless sets of vocabulary tests—only to find speaking and writing vocabularies pretty much unchanged despite their hard work and good intentions. As you read about the strategies that follow, be constantly mindful of your students’ needs as well as your own. Remember that there is no silver bullet; remember to involve students actively; remember to teach to the application level (it is not the end to know the definition of words—that is just the start.). And if you are going to err, err on the side of wide reading, which is still the greatest mechanism for vocabulary growth (Baker, Simmons & Kameenui, 1995).

Specific Strategies
Following are six specific, yet flexible vocabulary teaching strategies for the content area subjects. They are particularly powerful for social studies and science teaching, but are certainly be applied to mathematics, special area subjects, and the language arts. They do not require any advanced degrees or “specialist” training. They do require a teacher who is thoughtful. A few require some planning, but most can be plugged in without advance preparation to take advantage of teachable moments.

Word maps and graphic organizers
If a content area teacher were to do just one of the six strategies very well, my priority would be for the grouping put together under this heading. These are all visual organizers that show kids and that actively involve them. Words being simply labels for concepts, teachers must determine the crucial concepts for their subject areas.

Middle schoolers must be actively involved in mapping/webbing/organizing—no advanced preparation is required. In fact, since process is crucial, it is not a good practice to hand a completed graphic organizer out in advance.

The word map technique is useful for helping students develop a general concept of definition. It makes them aware of the types of information that make up a “definition” and how that information is organized. In Kristen Mansmith’s sixth grade social studies class, the children were doing a unit on the 1960s. An area that arose as interesting to the children was that of assassinations and assassins. Having read about the deaths of John F. Kennedy, Robert F. Kennedy, and Martin L. King, the children conjectured about the difference between terrorists, assassins, and snipers. Kristen considered doing a Venn diagram, but first decided to involve the students in creating a word map on assassins. She told them that a word map is a graphic representation of a word and focuses on three questions: What is it? What is it like? What are some examples?

First Kristen introduced the map to the students as a picture of what they needed to know to deeply understand a key word, in this case “assassin.” Then she demonstrated the use of the map by putting the word in the central box. She then asked questions to suggest words or phrases to put in the other boxes which answer the three questions. Lots of rich discussion ensued. Students were paired to discuss; students asked questions, rather than being interrogated. Kristen raised some questions of her own, telling the students about things she thought they might know about assassinations and assassins, but were not sure of (Figure 1).

Next, she taught for transfer, having the paired students doing their own maps on an easier term, “automobile.” They then shared. As Kristen’s students encountered new words in their independent or assigned reading, they were encouraged and reminded to ask themselves the questions “What is it?”, “What is it like?”, and “What are some examples?”

![Figure 1: Word Map](image-url)
Graphic organizers are charts that use content vocabulary to help students see interrelationships. They are visual representations of groupings, hierarchies, or commonalities. Young learners invent categories to reduce the complexity of their world. These evolve, particularly in science, into hierarchies consisting of superordinate and subordinate concepts.

When doing these strategies, students should have pencils in hand, should be talking and contributing, while the teacher does a master-map on the board or on the overhead. Eventually, students should learn to create their own.

In Grady Brown’s seventh grade science class, students were experiencing some confusion about categorizing members of the animal kingdom. As a form of review that overlapped as a prior knowledge activator, Grady used the board and involved the whole class in starting an organizer. There was lots of talk and questioning of each other and the teacher as students reviewed what they indeed already knew and prepared to go deeper. Grady then turned over some ownership to flexibly-grouped students, as they “blew out” details on turtles and lizards (not detailed in the whole-class organizer) and shared with their classmates (Figure 2).

Word analogies

Analogies require students to infer a relationship between two often disparate terms and to then apply that relationship to another pair. They provide an excellent opportunity for children to be flexible in the way they look at words—for so many words out of context can mean so many things (e.g., switch, pupil, rebel, pass). Until fairly recently analogies were mainly seen as useful in testing vocabulary. The case has been made that, particularly for interdisciplinary study, analogies are useful for attaching the known to the new, and are great tools for teaching vocabulary.

The work of Greenwood (1987, 1989, 1995) documents the utility and flexibility of word analogies to connect vocabulary and meaning across the curriculum. Once students are familiar with the process of analogy creation, they make great connections across the curriculum.

To reason analogically both requires and develops vocabulary depth and breadth. Students can eventually create their own analogies, once they are familiar with the process. The connections in the first set of examples below were generated by my own middle school students. For example, “tundra” in the fourth example was part of an analogy based on some social studies content. Similarly, the first example resulted from a science content connection. I recommend working with students in a “fill in the blank” format to encourage divergent thinking as well as proper spelling.

bread : mold :: iron : _(rust)___
Venice : gondola :: San Francisco : _(cable car)___
Alaska : tundra :: Argentina : _(pampa)___
Popeye : Brutus :: Rikki tikki tavi : (Nag)

Dropping back in on Kristen and Grady, we found both of them involving students in creating some analogies to further reinforce what they have learned.

Following up on the previously-introduced word web on assassin, Kristen’s students could reinforce what they have learned this way:

Reagan : Hinkley :: Wallace : (Bremer)
Lincoln : Booth :: Lennon : (Chapman)

Kristen’s students did research to create their own analogies. They even started to distinguish between “attempted” assassins (i.e., those who did not succeed at all, Squeaky Fromme for example) and those who wanted to but failed to kill (John Hinkley for instance). They conjectured about “unproven” assassins (Lee Harvey Oswald) as opposed to those who were documented on television. They wondered aloud whether Jack Ruby qualified as an “assassin,” since Lee Harvey Oswald was not really a famous person.

Similarly, Grady’s kids enriched their scientific understandings through student-created analogies such as:

turtle: reptile:: frog: ___________
python: constricts:: cobra: ___________

**Frayer Model**

This is the most time consuming and labor-intensive strategy so that it should be reserved for the most difficult vocabulary. Since it takes at least half an hour, only key content words warrant this much teacher and student time.

The Frayer model (Frayer, Frederick & Klausmeier, 1969) was developed to analyze and test concept attainment. It can be used as a word categorization activity. The developers consider it essential to present concepts in a relational manner because it helps identify concepts by components in the learning process. For example:

- relevant and irrelevant attributes
- examples and non-examples
- superordinate, coordinate, and subordinate aspects of concepts.

Down the hall from Grady, in eighth grade science, Tom Sechrist’s students were about to study raptors. The students talked a bit about the Toronto Raptors and conjecture about raptor prehistoric reptiles and raptor birds followed. Mr. Sechrist put a large piece of chart paper on the board, with four gradients surrounding the keyword. The kids were given blank sheets of their own. Tom modeled thinking aloud and supplying the first item in each list. He then turned the job over to the triads of students. They covered up their group creation, and a low buzz permeated the room. Tom then called for examples—he put them in place, encouraging active talk and questioning (Figure 3).

**Semantic Feature Analysis**

Later in the year Tom Sechrist’s science students were overlapping some study of classification—with their unit on birds. Key terms (e.g., “essential” characteristics) were in need of review. To try to make implicit processes explicit (making the invisible, visible) Tom worked to involve his kids in SFA—or Semantic Feature Analysis (Figure 4).

Semantic Feature Analysis (Pittelman, Heimlich, Berglund, & French, 1991) focuses students’ attention on the relationship of words within categories. It illustrates how words are both similar and different and emphasizes the uniqueness of each word. Steps in the process include these:

1. Show students a list of words on the board that share some common feature.
2. Have students list some characteristic, quality, or ability possessed by one of the items in the list. Put these words across the top of the board to create a matrix. Then have students fill in the matrix with pluses and minuses as illustrated. Where items are not completely dichotomous, a number scale can be substituted.
3. When the grid has been completed and discussed, have students expand the matrix by suggesting additional items.

The SFA example from Tom’s class intentionally overlaps with the Frayer Model example on raptors. Tom and his class were genuinely puzzled by the grey areas. They knew that the roadrunner is a bird of prey (it eats lizards and snakes) but they could not...
classify it as a “raptor.” A partial graphic organizer helps to pinpoint their uncertainty (Figure 5).

They knew pretty much about raptors, but there are other carnivorous flying birds (herons, egrets) and they were truly not sure about, say, vultures. To complicate matters, some raptors are scavengers as well. Another issue goes back to the road runner. It is the only carnivorous flightless bird they knew of.

**Vocabulary self-collection strategy**

For sixth grade English class, Karen Grimm had five groups of five students reading sets of books centered around the theme of survival. Two of the titles were *Sign of the Beaver* and *Hatchet*. All groups were keeping double entry journals and participating in literature circles, having grand conversations. Additionally, all students had a systematic format for using vocabulary self-collection strategy (VSS).

For a thorough discussion of VSS, see Ruddell and Shearer (2002). Martha Rapp Ruddell (formerly M.R. Haggard) originated VSS in the early 1980s. Karen followed this version of the VSS procedure:

1. She told students to bring to class words they believed everyone should learn.

2. In turn, students presented their words to the group by defining them, explaining why the group should learn them, and telling where the words were found.

3. Through discussion, the groups reduced the list to a predetermined number of most important words by eliminating duplicates and words already known by many.

Karen provided direct instruction on how to self-select important or interesting words. Students kept large bookmarks made from strips of construction paper, about 4” x 11,” for their readings. They choose “their” words by marking the book in pencil, lightly, or using Post-it Notes. They later captured the word in context using ellipses and jotted down a dictionary definition. They then

- Made up word cards
- Kept a word bank
- Added words to their writers’ notebooks
- Turned in their bookmarks for credit/extra credit.

**Word sorts**

Vacca and Vacca (1999) suggested providing students with lists of words previously discussed in class and

---

**Figure 3**

**Frayer Model**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ESSENTIAL CHARACTERISTICS</th>
<th>NON-ESSENTIAL CHARACTERISTICS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>powerful talons</td>
<td>wings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>powerful beaks</td>
<td>feathers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>fast flyers</td>
<td>warm blooded</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>good eyesight</td>
<td>found world wide</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>kill much of own prey</td>
<td>size varies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>meat eaters</td>
<td>some are also scavengers</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**RAPTORS**

**EXAMPLES**
great horned owl
peregrine falcon
barn owl
golden eagle
red tailed hawk
bald eagle

**NON-EXAMPLES**
sparrow
penguin
gull
ostrich
emu
directing them to sort the terms into groups or categories. Working individually or in pairs, students look for the shared features of words.

“Closed Sorts” have students put words into predetermined categories. For example:

Categories: jobs, tools, cleaning products

- plumber
- hammer
- doctor
- lever
- carpenter
- wrench
- sailor
- soap
- ammonia

“Open Sorts” require students to create and discuss their own categories. For example, given the following list of famous American surnames, they would be directed to generate as many categories as possible containing at least two items each.

Lincoln    Washington    Roosevelt
Jackson    Franklin    Eisenhower
Johnson    Jefferson    MacArthur
Ford       King        Kennedy

Category examples: Presidents, automobiles, cities, civil rights leaders, military leaders, etc.

To extend the activity, the teacher might choose to add several new words that could be related to the knowns (e.g., awl, jackhammer, disinfectant). Another possibility is to add some words (e.g., anthropology, manuscript) that do not fit into any of the categories.

Sorting is useful for all content areas and is non-threatening. Reusable and expandable, it is hands on and active.

### Figure 4

**Semantic Feature Analysis**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Animal</th>
<th>Has talons</th>
<th>Has feathers</th>
<th>Has wings</th>
<th>Can fly</th>
<th>Is endangered</th>
<th>Migrates</th>
<th>Is a bird of prey</th>
<th>Is extinct</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Blue Jay</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Great Horned Owl</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Roadrunner</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pelican</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
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Code: ✔ = yes    ✔ = no    ? = don’t know

### Concluding Reminders

The following recapitulate the key points about vocabulary and concept building:

1. Teachers need to model an interest in vocabulary, relating their own curiosity about words and sharing their curiosities and anecdotes.
2. Teachers must learn to “think aloud” when instructing directly, making the invisible visible.
3. Students are to be trusted to discern what their needs are.

### Figure 5

**Partial Graphic Organizer**

![Image of BIRDS diagram]
4. Students need to apply what they learn in authentic contexts.

5. The power of wide reading is not to be forgotten; if teachers are to err in any direction in the transmission vs. transaction debate, the research supports using the extra time for engagement in reading.

6. Above all, teachers need to carefully evaluate the aforementioned time-cost, maximizing instructional time.

As mentioned earlier in this article, the good intentions of conscientious teachers concerning traditional vocabulary instruction have often had pernicious side effects: drill and kill that turned kids off to reading and word study. That trend can be reversed through careful attention to the needs and predilections of our students as well as conspicuous consideration of the ramifications of time-cost. As always, the need for balance exists: Direct instruction goes so far, as does the important (yet not sufficient) benefit of wide reading. Every teacher needs to be a teacher of reading.

References


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strategies can be employed to increase understanding in the various subject areas. Mr. Greenwood provides guidance to the reluctant subject area teacher who worries that, “I am not a reading teacher.” Since there is such a close relationship between reading ability and success in middle school classes across the spectrum, no teacher can avoid being a reading teacher to some extent. Mr. Greenwood shows us how we can adapt strategies to our own classes to improve student learning.

Looking through the eyes of reflective teachers into engaging classrooms offers a compelling perspective on what it takes to get better academic performances in diverse classrooms of active young adolescents.
Integrating Mathematics, Social Studies, and Language Arts with “A Tale of Two Cities”

Starting from a tested skill deficiency among her students in mathematics measurement, a sixth grade teacher set out to build skills across three core subjects by using the Internet and hands-on construction projects.

By Jacqueline Leonard

The National Middle School Association (NMSA) and the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics (NCTM) encourage teachers to make use of real-world connections to increase students’ interest, motivation, and success in mathematics (National Council of Teachers of Mathematics, 2000). It is most important to make these connections in the middle grades where student impressions of mathematics may influence future course selections and thus influence career options. Middle school mathematics teachers can help to build scaffolds that link students’ background knowledge with such important mathematical processes as problem solving, communicating, reasoning, and representation.

A useful concept that teachers can use for scaffolding is construction. Architectural models provide a context to build students’ knowledge of measurement and geometry. Moreover, opportunities abound for students to apply mathematical processes, learn social studies as they explore previous civilizations, and make oral reports on people of different cultures. Architecture has been and still is a means of expressing power, prestige, and wealth. Monumental architecture reinforces the social structure and ideology of societies. Temples
and palaces for society’s elite have been pervasive throughout history. The stark contrast between public monumental structures and residences for common people convey the political nature of the allocation of resources and can inform students about equity and fairness in housing as well as architectural style. Thus, construction projects provide a context to integrate mathematics with the rest of the core curriculum.

To examine student learning in an integrated context, I conducted an action research study in my mathematics classroom in 1997. Action research allows teachers to field-test research findings on teaching and learning in their own classrooms (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1990). In this action research study, I wanted to learn how an integrated project-based curriculum could enhance students’ learning of mathematics and social studies content. Teachers have the opportunity to blend research and practice and share that knowledge with others in the field of education. “A Tale of Two Cities” is a thematic unit, which was developed and used with three classes of sixth-grade mathematics students (95 total) as part of an action research study (Leonard, 1999). The purpose of this article is to share with other middle school teachers the results and learning outcomes, which were improved motivation, time on task, and student attitude toward mathematics.

**Learning From Action Research**

Based on a standardized pretest that was given by the school district, I learned that one of my students’ greatest weaknesses was measurement. In order to address this weakness, I developed a construction project where students would actually use measurement skills to create their own structures. If students learned how to use measurement tools and practiced their acquired skills to measure real objects, perhaps they would become more proficient with estimating linear measurement and weight.

The project involved planning a unit that would cut across the content areas of mathematics, social studies, and language arts. Furthermore, the students would construct two cities—one ancient and one futuristic—as the culminating activity. The mathematics content standards included number and operations, geometry and measurement; the mathematics process standards included problem solving, communication, and making connections (National Council of Teachers of Mathematics, 2000). The thematic social studies standards were culture and cultural diversity; people, places, and environments; and the disciplinary standard of history (National Council for the Social Studies, 1994). The English standards included reading a wide range of texts to build an understanding of cultures and generating ideas and questions by examining the social strata of these cultures as evidenced by their architecture (International Reading Association/National Council of Teachers of English, 1996). In designing these two cities, students learned about the past and used this knowledge and that of the present to create models for future urban development. I believed such a project would not only be fun but would also develop students’ knowledge about diverse cultures and how architecture is not only related to mathematics but also to political and economic power as well. Thus, I decided to test my assumptions by implementing the thematic unit.

**Getting started**

Prior to building the model cities, I used the Internet and videotapes to provide information to the students about the people, history, culture, and architecture of three ancient cities: Tikal (Maya), Pompeii (Italy), and Split (Dalmatia). A lesson plan about Mayan Temples, located on the Internet, was downloaded to provide images for the students (Kubik, 1996). The objective of the lesson was to help students gain an awareness of the architecture of the Mayan culture and the part it played in the religious and social order of the time. Through a website called MayaQuest (MECC, 1996), we learned that 1.2 million Maya still lived in the southern part of Chiapas, Mexico, and nearly 5 million are spread...
throughout the Yucatan Peninsula in the villages and cities of Belize, Guatemala, Honduras, and El Salvador. The Maya people are a spirited, diverse group that has endured political and economic oppression in recent centuries. Ritual and religious practices dominated Mayan society, which could be seen in the religious architecture. Specifically, Temple I in the city of Tikal, situated in present day Guatemala, was shown to students. Moreover, the students were able to see a reconstructed view of the Central Acropolis where they were able to observe the stark differences in the dwellings of the elite and the common people. The homes of the elite were built on platforms and massive compared to those of the common people whose dwellings were smaller and lower to the ground (Fagan & Michaels, 1996).

A search of the Internet also yielded information about the Pompeii Forum Project (Dobbins, 1994). The Pompeii Forum Project focused on the urban center of Pompeii and was intended to document the standing remains of Pompeii with two purposes in mind: first, to interpret the developments in the broader context of urban history and, second, to identify at Pompeii the recurring patterns of urban evolution that could be applied to contemporary American urban life. However, the Web site was used in our unit primarily to show the students floor plans and images of Pompeii's architecture (Dobbins, 1994). The students also saw a video on the history of Pompeii that depicted life before the volcano eruption and after the devastation.

Finally, the students saw images of the Palace of Diocletian at Split (Greenhalgh, 1994). Split, also known as Spalato, is one of the extraordinary places of the later Roman Empire. It is famous for the palace that was built for the retirement of the Emperor Diocletian around 300 AD. Its importance lies in the fact that there are few other examples comparable to it in the Roman world. The structure of the palace tells us about the imperial ceremonies and god-like pretensions of the royalty at the time. Again in contrast to the palace, the poor village of Salona contains the remains of a theatre, broken arches, and marble columns. The emperor Diocletian designed the palace, which was located seven miles away from the village. The magnificent structure contained both a court and a palace.

After an introduction to these cities and cultures of the past, the students were allowed to conduct independent research on ancient cities of their own choosing. The students self-selected one or two partners to work with as a team. To find out additional information about these and other ancient cities, the teams of students were given time to search the Internet on a classroom computer or to visit the school’s media center. Some of the books that the students found in the media center included, *Aztec, Inca, and Maya* (Baquedano, 1993) and *The Incas* (Newman, 1992). All of the students collaborated

Having been a very traditional teacher who had taught primarily using the direct instruction method, I found the synergy and enthusiasm that this unit generated to be a pleasant surprise.

and worked together for two days of fact-finding. After the fact-finding was completed, the students wrote letters that were read and evaluated by a committee of six students who decided which ancient city the class would build. Thus, the language arts component of this unit included reading books about various cultures and writing a persuasive letter. In addition, the students gave oral reports, reflecting upon their research of the ancient cities. After reading the letters, the committee chose the ancient city of Rome because it was a metropolis of diverse people and cultures. However, prior to actual construction, the students needed to learn about measurement and some of the properties of geometric structures.

Learning to measure

The use of rulers indicated students’ limited knowledge and experience about measurement. Many students did not know the metric side from the standard side of the ruler. Moreover, they had few experiences measuring with metric units. Therefore, I decided that centimeters would be used as our basic unit. Following a whole-group discussion to help students get a concept of how long 20 centimeters was, the students engaged in a lesson that allowed them to explore several kinds of geometric shapes. They needed to design a structure that would stand about 20 centimeters tall and hold the weight of a mathematics textbook (Public Broadcasting Services, 1990).
Exploring geometric structures
Prior to building the 20-centimeter structure, the students completed an earlier lesson on geometric shapes. In that lesson, toothpicks and gumdrops were used to explore the strength of the following objects: tetrahedron, hexahedron (cube), octahedron, and dodecahedron. By doing this activity, students learned that some structures were stronger than others. The cube was fairly strong, but not as strong as the tetrahedron. From making these objects, one student suggested that “The triangle is the strongest polygon.” She was able to come to this conclusion because she was able to see for herself how sturdy or weak the toothpick structures were. However, during a classroom discussion other students brought out that the angles of a tetrahedron are similar to those of a triangle. The structure is strong because the angles are less than 90 degrees so that individual pieces are compressed or wedged together when weight is placed on them. Another student concluded that the Egyptian pyramids are shaped like a tetrahedron and they are still standing after thousands of years. After the lesson on geometric structures, the students were ready for simple construction.

The structural engineering task
The purpose of the structural engineering task was for students to apply the knowledge they had learned about different geometric figures to create a structure out of simple materials that met certain height requirements and could bear weight. The materials used for this task included 50 index cards and tape, 50 straws and string, or 50 pencils and rubber bands. The activity was challenging but motivating as students tested their knowledge about polyhedrons. The following text describes the thinking of one group who used straws to complete the task. Pseudonyms are used.

Tara: (Holds straws.) We have to use the string, okay. Hey, we need to cut these in half.
Jacob: I know what we gotta do! Let me borrow a few straws. I gotta see how many of these it will take. (Measures with the ruler.)
Tara: Straws are in there. Here’s the scissors.
Jacob: None of these equals 21 cm.
Tara: Hey, why don’t we put the other straws inside the straws and make it stronger.

Jacob: We can’t. The thing is a half a centimeter short. This [straw] by itself is a half centimeter short of 21 cm.
Tara: Could you bend it. Pull it up.
Jacob: No, ’cause then it ain’t so strong. It ain’t as strong as it could be.
Tara: If you can stick one in, you could slide it out.
Jacob: You have to cut up the straws. How many straws do we have anyway? (Pause.) Fifty. All right, we have to make as many of these little things as big.
Lana: (Tries to fit one straw inside of another.)
Tara: Start tying them together or something.
Jacob: No, I’m thinking! (Measures a cut straw.) This one is 20 cm.
Tara: It [the height of the structure] can be less than 20 cm.
Jacob: It’s okay. (Gives string and directions to Lana.) You can use this ruler and cut [the string] to 20 cm.
Lana: Measures and cuts string.
Jacob: (Overhears another group discussing the height. Reads the directions.) Don’t cut anymore. It can fall between [18.5 and 21.5 cm]. All we have to do is go like this. (Shows with hands how to make pillars.)
Tara: Tie them together!
Jacob: Yeah! (Chuckles).

The foregoing dialogue shows how three students, with few directions, were able to complete the task of designing a structure that was a specific height and could bear weight. This knowledge was important because the students needed to construct actual buildings later on during the culminating activity. I wanted the students to know what kind of shapes would be necessary to create strong buildings that would safe. I related the real-life story of a skywalk that fell at the Hyatt Regency Hotel in Kansas City. I wanted the students to see the serious role of the architect, which required the consideration of safety as well as creative and beautiful designs.

All of the students, regardless of the materials that they had to use, were engaged and on-task as they worked cooperatively and collaboratively, using trial
and error to complete the task of building a structure that stood about 20 centimeters tall and could hold the weight of a textbook. The students found that the pillar or cylinder shape was also very strong. Thus, they understood why so many of the ancient ruins are still standing. The architects of the time used columns as part of their architectural designs. The students left this phase of the unit understanding that triangles as well as cylinders were very strong shapes that could be used to build the structures for their cities.

Constructing an ancient and future city
After making the decision to build a replica of ancient Rome, the students were placed into one of two groups, depending upon whether they would work on Rome or a futuristic city. Each of the three classes would construct 10 buildings: 5 for the ancient city and 5 for the future city for a total of 30 buildings. Therefore, teams of three to four students were needed to work on a particular building. The students self-selected the team they would work with. The students who worked on the ancient city focused on reconstructing some of the more interesting pieces they found in their research such as amphitheaters, bathhouses, temples, and coliseums. Students who worked on the future city wanted the city to contain homes that poor people would be happy to live in. The students drew their ideas from science fiction movies such as Star Trek and Star Wars. Our school was also located within 20 miles of Columbia, Maryland, which was a community designed by James Rouse to attract affluent as well as lower-middle class persons. Many of the students were familiar with Columbia and its unique rustic style homes, parks, lakes, and bicycle trails. They eagerly worked together to ensure that their buildings were both affordable and appealing.

Student work sessions took place primarily during class periods (two days per week). However, an all-day Saturday session was held to finish the project within the six-week period. Before constructing their artifacts, the students made drawings of the structures they intended to build. For the buildings to be relatively the same size, the students used a scale of 1 cm = 1 ft. Most single story buildings were 10 cm in height. Foam board was used as drywall, Popsicle sticks as two by fours, and balsa wood for shingles and shutters. Either parent volunteers or the student teacher used Exacto knives to cut the templates the students had drawn with pencil. Then the students used miniature hot glue guns to put the pieces together. Once the buildings were glued together, students decorated the inside with either wallpaper or paint, and tile or carpet pieces were glued down on the floor.

The students’ scores on the district-wide assessment rose an average of 40 points across the board.

When the project was concluded, the students had crafted the desired number of 30 buildings (15 per city). The types of structures included in the ancient city were a coliseum, temple, town house, bathhouse, and single-family homes. Structures for the future city included high-rise apartments, single-family homes, a restaurant, a church, and a synagogue. Most of these artifacts were first displayed in the school foyer and later in the media center.

Summary
Having been, for the most part, a very traditional teacher who had taught primarily using the direct instruction method, I found the synergy and enthusiasm that this unit generated to be a pleasant surprise. I had been afraid to take too many risks with this unit. My concern was first for students’ safety when using hot glue guns and Exacto knives. While the students were able to use the hot glue guns without too much difficulty, only an adult was allowed to use the Exacto knives. I learned that parents were eager to donate supplies and volunteer to help their children with the construction project. More than a dozen parents came throughout the six-week period, allowing each group of students to have supervision, ask questions, and receive assistance with the construction if needed. Second, I was concerned that students may not be on task or that they might use the time to disrupt the class or goof off. To my surprise, the students were highly engaged throughout the entire 50-minute classroom work session. Moreover, several students came early and/or stayed after school to finished their buildings. I also found that both boys and girls were highly engaged in these activities, suggesting that hands-on tasks of this nature are gender equitable.
Last I was concerned with whether or not this time was well spent. Did students’ learn better when I engaged in inquiry-based instruction? Research suggests that if students have a high level of involvement, they are more likely to remember the skills and concepts they learn and thus improve their mathematical achievement (Stein, Grover, & Henningsen, 1996). While the students’ scores on the district-wide assessment rose an average of 40 points across the board, I did not have a control group for comparison since all of the sixth-grade students in the school engaged in the activities. More controlled classroom studies are needed to confirm the power of project-based learning to improve student performance in mathematics and social studies.

“A Tale of Two Cities” was not just a fun project; it empowered the students to make decisions about their own learning. They decided what ancient city to construct and how to create a more economically diverse future city. They then used process and conceptual skills to make connections between mathematics and social studies. Other middle school mathematics teachers can capture the synergy. Teachers and students in the southwestern United States may be interested in creating replicas of Pueblo villages. Museums such as the Indian Pueblo Cultural Center in Albuquerque, New Mexico, and the Heard Museum in Phoenix, Arizona, may provide the inspiration to create clay models to represent Adobe structures. In the Midwest, the Cahokia Mounds are renowned for being the largest Native American burial ground. Silver Dollar City in Missouri offers teachers and students a perspective on the architectural style of the West. If visits to museums and historical towns are not possible, the Internet can be used as a resource for students to learn about the architecture of any time period and culture. One especially useful site for middle grades unit ideas is: http://emuseum.mankato.msus.edu/information/lessonplans/archaeology.html. Architecture is a useful concept to link the core curriculum to real-world situations and motivate middle school students to achieve at higher levels.

References


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Educating young adolescents is a complex venture. Students come to a middle school class with experiences in school, in families, in communities, and as part of a society that shape their thinking and their feelings about themselves as learners. In addition, families, communities, and legislators all have an opinion about what teachers should or should not do. These opinions often differ, but the term “research-based” seems to accompany each argument.

Becoming literate is also a complex venture. The demands of reading for middle grades students no longer consist of decoding simple stories and increasing vocabulary, but understanding complex narrative and expository text dense with sophisticated concepts, and the requirement that readers use prior knowledge to construct meaning and perform somewhat difficult tasks to demonstrate comprehension.

The authors of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (2002) concentrated on K-3 literacy and limited their review of research to “scientifically-based research” that involves the application of rigorous, systematic, and objective procedures to obtain reliable and valid knowledge relevant to education activities and programs, and

- employs systematic, empirical methods that draw on observation or experiment
- involves rigorous data analyses that are adequate to test the stated hypotheses and justify the general conclusions drawn
- relies on measurements or observational methods that provide reliable and valid data across evaluators and observers, across multiple measurements and observations, and across studies by the same or different investigators
- is evaluated using experimental or quasi-experimental designs in which individuals, entities, programs, or activities are assigned to different conditions and with appropriate controls to evaluate the effects of the condition of interest with a preference for random-assign-
ment experiments, or other designs to the extent that those designs contain within-condition or across-condition controls

- ensures that experimental studies are presented in sufficient detail and clarity to allow for replication or, at a minimum, offer the opportunity to build systematically on their findings

- has been accepted by a peer-reviewed journal or approved by a panel of independent experts through a comparably rigorous, objective, and scientific review.

This “scientifically-based research” offers much to the field of education and informs the practice of teaching students to read and write well, but when the “acceptable” research base is limited to experimental or quasi-experimental studies with a randomly selected sample assigned to a condition, the view of literacy becomes myopic. I suggest that other methodologies that are equally rigorous and systematic and produce reliable and valid results also have useful implications for the field of adolescent literacy. As I read well-respected journals such as *Reading Research Quarterly* and well-documented reviews of literature in the three volumes of *Reading Research Handbook* (Barr, Kamil, Mosenthal, & Pearson, 1991; Kamil, Mosenthal, Pearson, & Barr, 2000; Pearson, 1984), I cannot but wonder why the authors of the *National Reading Panel* (National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, 1999) and the authors of the *No Child Left Behind Act of 2001* (2002) chose to exclude research that did not meet these narrow criteria.

Adolescent literacy has a rich and growing research base in some areas of practice and a slim one in others. I believe that as educators working with adolescents, we need to consider a broad base of research when making decisions about what is best practice for students. At a research session at the 2002 International Reading Association Conference in San Francisco, P. David Pearson, John A. Hannah Distinguished Professor of Education at Michigan State University, said regarding various research methodologies that “if you are going to have a family dinner, then, you have to invite all of the relatives.” Pearson was suggesting that if you are going to claim that education is “research-based,” then all rigorous, valid, and reliable research methodologies must be considered in the family of educational research. In this article, I discuss two overarching questions pertinent to educational research in general, present a continuum for thinking about research trends in reading, and then I review four studies along different points of the continuum that I feel have made a significant impact on the practice of adolescent literacy.

**What Can Be Studied in a Middle School?**

I was recently in a middle school observing in reading classrooms. On the short walk from the office to the hall across the commons, I was accompanied by the assistant principal, Karen, who was talked to, touched, and questioned by at least 20 different students. They simply could not get enough of her. She responded to each one of them with respect and dignity while we inched toward the classrooms. Her comment was “they seem to need me more in the mornings.” I do not know how to measure such caring behavior, but I know it is good for young adolescents and I delight that Karen chose education as a profession.

My colleague, Barbie, who is in her early 30s, can be seen on many afternoons watching her students play softball, volleyball, or soccer. Imagine how valued her students must feel with such after school and voluntary support from their teacher. I do not know how to measure such caring behavior, but I know it is good for young adolescents and I delight that Barbie chose education as a profession. These examples, and many like them, are repeated daily in thousands of schools across the nation.

Much of what students learn about themselves and their world is not covered by state standards or the curriculum. How adults and other students treat them in school shapes their opinion of themselves. Seeing teachers read and discuss books helps them value reading as a social interaction. Having choice in books and writing topics helps students explore their interests and reinforces that adults value their ability to make good decisions. Researchers, simply, cannot hope to capture all of the factors, good and bad, that influence student learning.
Can causality be proven?
Given the complex lives of adolescents and the many factors that influence them, can we ever say in education that a particular instructional practice causes improved literacy learning? Individual differences such as the unevenness of prior knowledge and family influences, community differences such as poverty and unsafe neighborhoods, and school differences such as the complex social interaction of classrooms, the massive size of some schools, and school culture are all factors that have an effect on literacy learning. How does a researcher control for these variables?

Researchers can come close to proving causality with discrete skills such as testing student ability to pronounce nonsense syllables, then teaching them to pronounce nonsense syllables, then retesting their ability. It remains difficult, however to document long-term gains or how a newly acquired skill relates to such complex literacy tasks as understanding a science textbook or synthesizing information into a concept map for discussion. The more complex the literacy task, it seems, the more difficult to prove that a cause and effect relationship exists. It is for this reason that I believe that research methodology that extends beyond the “scientifically-based” criteria must be used to answer the complex questions that puzzle middle grades educators.

Trends in Reading Research

Figure 1 shows trends in reading research with the theorists and concepts generally associated with these different orientations. Trends in reading research have evolved since 1965 from only quantitative (scientifically-based) to encompass the cognitive structures of readers and consider the classroom and school culture that influence proficient reading (Gaffney & Anderson, 2000).

“A basic part of the research process is to conduct multiple studies of the same phenomena using different conceptualizations of the problem, samples of participants, measures of success, and so on” (Shanahan & Neuman, 1997, p. 206). Indeed, harm can result from making decisions based on one particular study. I propose in this article that research from multiple perspectives best informs the practice in the field of adolescent literacy. In the next sections, I will describe one quantitative study that moved thinking in reading along the continuum toward a more cognitive view, one survey study that used mixed quantitative and qualitative methods, one study that was ethnographic in nature, and one study that employed a cross-site case study design. I do not present a lot of detail about the methodologies because each is impeccable in their design. I do, however, present the major findings and discuss briefly the implications for practice. In addition, I present the results of the Langer study in more detail than the rest because of the large and diverse sample and because I believe all middle level educators have much to learn from this study.

While I particularly like each of these studies, they are representative of others that I feel have made a significant impact on practice in adolescent literacy. I present only empirical studies—“investigations in which the researcher collected or analyzed data” (Shanahan & Neuman, 1997, p. 203).

Quantitative research

Numbers, sample sizes, variance, factor analysis, and regression are terms normally associated with quantitative research methodology. Significance is determined by statistically demonstrating a difference between a treatment and control group. Numbers are often large so that, given the same characteristics as the sample, the results can be generalized to an entire population. This type of study meets the criteria for a “scientifically-based” study.

Pichert and Anderson (1977) asked participants to read a narrative about a house from one of two perspectives: a potential house buyer and a burglar. This study was the first to demonstrate that prior knowledge and perspective of the reader influenced learning and remembering. It certainly was not the only study that demonstrated the importance of what the reader knows, but served as the cornerstone of future work in schema theory and lead to greater emphasis on instructional strategies to activate prior knowledge before reading. Building background information, and activating and organizing knowledge, are gener-
ally seen as essential for students to connect new learning with existing knowledge.

**Survey research**
Survey methodology has generally been considered as a quantitative research methodology, but may incorporate qualitative aspects as well. The most useful aspect of survey research is the ability to gain insights, perceptions, and information from large numbers of people in a reasonable amount of time. Samples are generally large, yet information about the context is limited. Survey research is particularly useful to track trends, practices, and issues over time and across numerous sites.

Ivey and Broaddus (2001) administered a survey to 1765 sixth-grade students in 23 schools to find out what students valued most and what they wanted to read in their English/language arts classes. The survey included open-ended questions, checklist items, and short response items, and the researchers conducted follow-up interviews with 31 students. The overwhelming first and second choice of reading material that motivated these students to read was (a) free reading time (like DEAR or silent reading time), and (b) the teacher reading out loud. The materials they said motivated them to read most were magazines, adventure books, mysteries, and scary stories. More importantly, they overwhelmingly declared they wanted choice in what they read.

Motivation to read is a major consideration in middle and high schools. Ivey and Broaddus concluded that students should have a choice in what they read and then have time to read in school. Students enjoy being read to by their teachers and students reported that “teachers who read-aloud made texts more comprehensible and interesting to them” (p. 369). Clearly, autonomy and control over their environment are important developmental tasks for adolescents, which make choice over reading material an important consideration for a middle grades teacher.

**Ethnography**
When conducting ethnographic research, the researcher actually “lives” within the context being studied. Field notes, journals, impression logs, anecdotal records, and student work all comprise the data collected and analyzed. The data are generally organized into themes or categories. No claims are made about generalizing to other contexts, but the goal is to describe fully the context and elaborate on the meaning of the data collected.

Probably the most well known ethnographic study was Atwell’s (1987) yearlong study using logs of observations and portfolios to document how she and her students tried out and tested their beliefs about written language. This study was first published as a book titled *In the Middle: Writing, Reading, and Learning with Adolescents* in 1987. This study was written from the perspective of inside the classroom and her research described the complexities of literacy teaching and learning.

As a result of the research, Atwell recommended mini-lessons, status reports, and the reading/writing workshop approach. These recommendations have been adopted and adapted widely in reading/language arts classrooms throughout the country. She demonstrated, at least in the small community of Boothbay, Maine, that authentic literacy experiences for students could replace the textbook dominated curriculum.

**Case study research**
Case study research is another methodology that is usually considered qualitative. It is an empirical inquiry that provides for the opportunity to study one phenomenon within its real-life context across multiple sites that can be compared and contrasted depending on the sampling criteria.

Langer and the work with the National Research Center on English Learning and Achievement have contributed much to the knowledge base of secondary literacy. One study, in particular, reported profound implications for teaching adolescents to read and write well. This five-year study involved 25 middle and high school English programs in Florida (Miami), New York (New York City and Hudson), and California (Los Angeles)—all large schools serving highly diverse and ELL populations. Eighty-eight classrooms and 44 teachers were studied over a consecutive two-year period. Funded by the Office of Educational Research and Improvement, these schools exhibited diversity in population, educational problems, and approaches to improvement. The purpose of this study (Langer, 2002) was to specify features of instruction that make a difference in student learning by comparing high-achieving and under-achieving schools which are otherwise similar. Three populations were compared:
1. **Effective Teachers in Effective Schools** were teachers whose students were “beating the odds” and were in schools that scored typically when compared to demographically similar schools.

2. **Effective Teachers in Typical Schools** were teachers whose students were beating the odds but were in schools that scored typically when compared to demographically similar schools.

3. **Typical Teachers in Typical Schools** were teachers whose students scored typically and they were in schools that scored typically. These were not “bad” teachers or “bad” schools, just typically scoring.

**Finding 1: Approaches to Skill Instruction.** Langer categorized instruction into three categories: **separated** (direct instruction of isolated skills), **simulated** (application of concepts and rules within a targeted unit of reading or writing), and **integrated** (use of skills and knowledge within embedded context of purposeful activity). Figure 2 shows that the effective teachers overwhelmingly used all three types of instruction while the typical teachers used primarily a separated or teaching the skills in isolation approach.

![Figure 2](image)

**Finding 2: Approaches to Test Preparation.** All schools engaged in test preparation with students. In the higher performing schools, though, teachers spent time deconstructing the test and becoming very familiar with the skills, strategies, and knowledge students needed to perform well on standardized tests. Then, they integrated those skills, strategies, and knowledge into their everyday teaching which Langer (2002) called an **integrated approach**; that is, time devoted in class for practicing the test separate and apart from the rest of the year’s work and goals, generally directly before the test was taken (Figure 3).

![Figure 3](image)

**Finding 3: Connected Learnings.** Effective teachers made connections for students “among knowledge, skills, and ideas across lessons, classes, and grades as well as across in-school and out-of-school applications” (p. 23). As Figure 4 shows, high performing teachers made all three types of connections.

![Figure 4](image)

**Finding 4: Enabling Strategies.** Effective teachers overtly taught strategies for thinking as well as doing. They considered the content as important, but also stressed strategic awareness to learning and performance. By contrast, typical teachers focused on the content or skill at hand, while effective teachers “overtly taught the overarching strategies for planning, organizing, completing, or reflecting on the content or activity” (p. 28) (Figure 5).

![Figure 5](image)
Finding 5: Conceptions of Learning. Effective teachers focused on deeper understanding not just the immediate goal. Once students exhibited mastery of a skill or content in typical teachers’ classrooms, they moved on to another lesson (Figure 6).

Finding 6: Classroom Organization. Effective teachers viewed literacy as a social activity incorporating meaningful cooperative learning, engaging students in thoughtful dialogue, and constantly pushed students to sharpen their understandings with, against, and from each other. With typical teachers “students work alone or interact with the teacher. When cooperative learning occurred, the activity focuses on answering questions rather than engaging in substantive discussion from multiple perspectives” (p. 36) (Figure 7).

When Langer (2002) compared the three types of groups, she found the following:

1. Effective teachers in effective schools received support from the district and/or school context, which helped to sustain their effectiveness.

2. Effective teachers in more typical schools achieved their success due to professional contexts unrelated to the school and/or district.

3. Teachers who were more typical were dedicated to their students but working within a system of traditions and expectations that did not lift them beyond the accomplishments of other comparable schools.

Langer (2002) concluded that school-wide approaches and support are imperative to produce high literacy performance for all students and not just in the “pockets of excellence” that may be found in most school communities. “An excellent teacher without a well-coordinated program can do only so much. In these situations, even the best of teachers can offer students only isolated moments of engrossed learning and rich experience in an otherwise disconnected series of classes” (p. 11).

Langer’s overall findings clearly indicate that high literacy performance can be attained by teachers who become very familiar with the demands of the test and then design and implement instruction that incorporates these skills, strategies, and knowledge while engaging students in meaningful, integrated, and deep learning. Students should be encouraged to make connections between their own knowledge and newly acquired knowledge and across contexts within an interactive social community.

Conclusion

How children learn to read is currently being hotly debated at the federal, state, and local levels. Literacy learning for young adolescents has not received the attention or funding that has historically been directed toward elementary aged students. Recent emphasis on literacy learning for older students will hopefully reverse the neglect of past decades.

Numerous well-designed and executed studies inform the practice of adolescent literacy. Each study contributes a piece to the overall picture. Building a research agenda around the many issues of teaching adolescents to read and write well completes the picture so that thoughtful educators can use the results of research to inform their practice.

It is my hope that as attention and funding increase in the area of adolescent literacy, a research agenda will ensue and that all rigorous, systematic methodologies producing valid and reliable results will be considered as districts set policy and develop programs for young adolescents. Our students deserve no less than a broad and comprehensive consideration of ways to help them to become competent readers and writers.
References


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Let’s reexamine student work to improve our own instructional techniques and learn more about data analysis to better isolate weak program areas and increase teaching efficiency. As more of our students reach proficiency, greater appreciation and understanding among the K-12 community will surely spread. This year we will be looking at how we govern ourselves. Over three decades, our needs have changed. How we encourage our members to become more involved and the way we elect our board will be reviewed. We must stay current with the times. I want to thank our board and staff for the courage to do that. This will be a challenging year, but with challenges come opportunities.

THIRD EDITION OF THIS WE BELIEVE RELEASED AT NMSA ANNUAL CONFERENCE!

National Middle School Association held a press conference on November 5, 2003, to announce the release of the third edition of its landmark position paper entitled This We Believe: Successful Schools for Young Adolescents and its companion document Research and Resources in Support of This We Believe. These two timely and important books became available at the 30th annual conference in Atlanta and through NMSA’s Web site.

The new 3rd edition of This We Believe: Successful Schools for Young Adolescents, also includes an expanded list of young adolescent characteristics and an expanded Call to Action for all middle level stakeholders. Research and Resources in Support of This We Believe discusses the growing research base about young adolescent growth and development and successful practices in middle level schools.

As part of NMSA’s advocacy commitment, copies of both books were sent to every state governor, state commissioner of education, state and federal legislators serving on education committees, and U.S. Department of Education and White House education leaders. We urge school systems to use these documents as the foundation for mission statements to improve middle level schools and for campus improvement plans. Share these documents with school boards and encourage discussion regarding the impact of implementing the 14 recommended characteristics. Both books are important professional development tools to build knowledge and commitment among educators. They can be important communication tools between middle level schools and their families and business partners. Additionally, we believe colleges and universities should include these documents as part of their programs to prepare future middle level educators.

Visit NMSA’s Web site to view a brief summary of This We Believe and order your personal copy today. It is critical that these documents be read, understood, and used by students, teachers, principals, parents, policymakers, and other citizens concerned about the education and well-being of young adolescents.
NMSA REWIND

• National Middle School Association would like to thank everyone who took part in the 30th Annual Conference & Exhibit in Atlanta, Georgia. Over 7,000 dedicated and enthusiastic middle level educators came together in Atlanta to learn from one another, network with colleagues, and celebrate middle level education. A special thanks to the local committee chairs Linda Hopping and Vicki Denmark and the local committee for their hard work and dedication to NMSA and the annual conference. Also, a hats-off to the committee chairs, attendees, presenters, staff, and sponsors that helped make this conference a huge success.

NMSA ANNOUNCES NEW DISTINGUISHED EDUCATOR AWARD

Every day middle level educators devote time and energy to making a difference in middle level education and the lives of 10- to 15-year-olds. That is why National Middle School Association is initiating a new award program that will honor those who have made a significant impact on the lives of young adolescents through leadership, vision, and advocacy.

Candidates must have 10 or more years of practical application, implementation, influence, or involvement in middle level education and currently be employed in the field of middle level education on a full-time basis. To be considered for this recognition, candidates must be able to demonstrate contributions in at least three of the following areas.

• Positively impacting the lives of young adolescents on a daily basis
• Implementing middle level change and reform
• Implementing recommendations outlined in This We Believe
• Mentoring, coaching, or teaching educators in middle level practice and philosophy
• Providing knowledge, advocacy, and support to the middle level movement
• Exhibiting exceptional leadership as a team member or team leader
• Providing a voice for middle level education throughout their school, district, and state
• Expressing middle level beliefs via written or oral communication

For further details, including nomination information and deadlines visit the NMSA Web site at www.nmsa.org/about/awards/distinguished_winners.htm or call 1-800-528-NMSA.

J. HOWARD JOHNSTON
16th RECIPIENT OF NMSA’s LOUNSBURY AWARD

J. Howard Johnston is the 16th recipient of NMSA’s highest honor, the John H. Lounsbury Award. This honor was bestowed by the NMSA Board of Trustees and presented to him by John Lounsbury at NMSA’s 30th annual conference in Atlanta on November 8, 2003. Johnston has been engaged in education for the past 34 years as a junior high and high school language arts teacher and as a college professor. He received this award in recognition of his accomplishments as a teacher, author, researcher, speaker, and for his service to the field of middle level education. Lounsbury summed up Johnston’s recognition during his presentation by saying, “for your long-standing commitment to young adolescents, particularly those typically underserved, for your manifold and valued services to the cause we share in common, whether expressed in writings, oral presentations, consultations, research studies, scholarly treatises, or classroom teaching, all emanating from a personhood of decency and quality—you can rightfully be characterized as a giant in American education.”
Measuring the Literacy Needs of Students with ADHD in the Middle School Classroom

A number of teaching strategies have been used effectively to help maximize the learning of students with ADHD.

By Karen D. Wood & John Beattie

Over the past two decades, the term ADHD has become a household word used by teachers and parents alike (Armstrong, 1999). It has been estimated that 7.5% of the school-aged population will be diagnosed with ADHD, although the American Psychiatric Association (2000) has suggested that the figure is more likely 3% to 5%. Regardless of the figures used, ADHD affects a considerable number of students being served in our schools today.

While the prevalence of ADHD is indeed significant, it is particularly alarming that many teachers, parents, and other professionals working with children do not truly understand the disorder itself. Further, many individuals who are charged with the responsibility of working with these students on a day-to-day basis are unfamiliar with specific strategies that have proven to be effective in working with students with ADHD. This column will provide criteria used to identify students with ADHD as well as specific strategies that have been effective in helping maximize the learning opportunities of these students.

ADHD in the Classroom

Definition and identification

ADHD is considered to be a neurological disorder marked by developmentally inappropriate attention skills, impulsivity, and/or hyperactivity. These inappropriate behavior patterns are typically identified through direct observation of the student. These observations usually occur in the school and home settings although other data may be provided if relevant to the student’s daily activities. The information provided by the teachers and parents generally reflects the criteria published by the APA. The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, Fourth Edition (American Psychiatric Association, 1994) identifies behavior patterns involving inattention and hyperactivity/impulsivity (See Figure 1). In addition, the DSM-IV emphasizes that at least six of the behaviors must be observed, that the behaviors must be present over a six-month peri-
od, and that the behaviors are inconsistent with the individual’s developmental level. As you review these behaviors, it is likely that you could identify most of the students in your classes, some of your family, and yourself as an individual with ADHD. The keys to the interpretation of the DSM-IV data are that the behaviors must be beyond what is considered to be typical appropriate behavior, they must occur over an extended period of time, and there must be more than one or two behaviors present. If these criteria exist, it can be assumed that the patterns of behavior are “disordered” to the degree that medical, behavioral, and/or other interventions are necessary.

Given the prevalence figures noted previously, the great majority of teachers will have the opportunity to work with students with ADHD in a classroom setting. In an attempt to facilitate this work, we have listed several characteristics of students with ADHD that pertain to classroom instruction (Armstrong, 1999; Pfiffner, 1996; Weaver, 1994). We have responded to these characteristics with a variety of ideas and suggestions that have helped classroom teachers modify their instruction or otherwise accommodate students with ADHD in the classroom setting. The suggestions that follow, while directed toward addressing the needs of students diagnosed with or suspected of having ADHD, are also recommended for any students who may have difficulty keeping up with grade level assignments.

**Characteristics and Instructional Recommendations**

**ADHD students may appear to daydream frequently, are easily distracted, and may miss important directions and requirements.**

To take the burden of this off the teacher, assign a buddy to ensure that the student has written down all assignments/tests/project due dates correctly in the agenda or assignment book. This can become a regular routine at the end of each class period or at the end of the day. A simple directive such as “Before leaving, pair up with your partner and make sure you have the assignments written down correctly” could be the first step toward future success.

Circulate and monitor, in essence, look over students’ shoulders during test times and in-class assignments to ensure that they are following directions. Sometimes simply pointing out an inconsis-

---

### Figure 1

**Criteria for Attention Deficit Disorder**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>A. Inattention— must exhibit six or more symptoms for six or more months:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. no close attention/careless errors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. difficulty sustaining attention</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. does not seem to listen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. does not follow instructions and fails to finish work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. poor organization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. avoids activities requiring sustained mental effort</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. loses things</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. easily distracted</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. forgetful</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>B. Hyperactivity/Impulsivity— must exhibit six or more for six or more months:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hyperactivity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. fidgets or squirms in seat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. leaves seat when s/he shouldn’t</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. runs/climbs inappropriately</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. difficulty playing quietly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. “on the go” or “driven by a motor”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. excessive talking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Impulsivity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. blurts out answers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. difficulty waiting for turn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. interrupts</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


---

**tency on a test or assignment (e.g. commas inserted instead of apostrophes, skipping over a section, etc.) “awakens” the student, alerting him or her that they are off-track.**

**Because it is difficult for many ADHD students to stay on task for long periods of time, their work habits are not as meticulous and consistent as other students.**

A long established best practice in teaching is the need to “talk aloud,” model a process or illustrate a sample response either orally or visually to ensure that students know exactly what is expected. While this is an excellent whole class approach, modeling or talking aloud can be done spontaneously and one-on-one while monitoring and circulating around the classroom. If modeling is just used as a verbal statement to the entire class, the ADHD student could easily miss the directive.

One student with whom we have worked enjoyed *The Chronicles of Narnia* and could retell many parts of the story with ease. On his literature worksheet,
however, he sometimes gave short, to-the-point answers that, while correct, did not include sufficient content from the targeted page and did specifically answer the question. When we showed him, modeled, and talked aloud one or more examples of what the teacher expected, he understood and was able to complete subsequent questions with relative ease.

While additional individual or small group modeling sessions are one solution, teachers may also want to consider alternative forms of assessment. If students are unable to achieve an acceptable score on teacher-made or commercially made assessment instruments, but they can retell the events of a story or selection in their own words, they clearly learned the material. Traditional tests with their true-false or multiple-choice formats may not capture what students really know about the content being studied. The problem, then, is not with the student but with the test.

Assessments that allow for more “freedom of recall” and address the “I knew all the answers, but the teacher didn't ask the right questions” dilemma can be beneficial to all ability levels of students. The Free Associational Assessment strategy (Griffin & Wood, 1995; Wood, 1985; Wood & Harmon, 2002) is an alternative method for teaching, studying, and assessing content area material through the use of free recall and associational thinking. Free Associational Assessment encourages students to study information in clusters, centering their note-taking around topics, then instead of traditional questions, they are given the selected topics/concepts studied and asked to tell/chart/describe everything they know about each concept.

ADHD students are not lazy, disinterested, or “stupid.” However, after a consistent record of poor grades and overwhelming assignments, they often suffer from low self-esteem. As is true of all students, ADHD students often respond positively to lots of praise and encouragement—they want to succeed. Most are aware they have a problem, but they often do not understand it themselves. Over time, these students can begin losing faith in their abilities and may become behavior problems. Called self-efficacy, it is the belief in one’s ability to organize for and undertake a task successfully (Bandura, 1997). Self-efficacy develops as a result of feedback and interactions at school, home, and the community as well as the degree to which students feel they have autonomy and control over life situations (McCabe, 2003). Self-efficacy determines the degree to which a student is sufficiently motivated to stay on task and complete an activity or assignment. While ADHD students typically experience a diminished sense of self-efficacy, they are often willing to “jump through hoops” when their efforts are appreciated, when teachers genuinely show that they believe in their abilities, and when they are engaged in assignments in which they experience success.

Figure 2

Arrangement of Test/Quiz Items by Topics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>World History: Section 3 The Roman Empire</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Quiz # 1 - The First Emperors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Augustus Caesar (27 B.C. to A.D. 14)</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tell about the reign of Augustus Caesar.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Explain what he meant by the claim he “found Rome a city of brick and left it a city of marble.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What is the Pax Romana and how long did it last?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>The Julian Emperors (A.D. 14 to A.D. 68)</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Why are they called the Julian Emperors?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Choose one of the following emperors and describe his reign: Tiberius; Caligula; Claudius; Nero</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In general, what can be said about the emperors of this period?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>The Good Emperors (A.D. 54 to A.D. 96)</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Describe some of the changes that took place under the rule of the Good Emperors.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quiz # 2 - Roman Rule under Augustus (from 27 B.C. to A.D. 14)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Imperial Government</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tell what Augustus did to change the government.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tell what Augustus did for religion in Rome.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>The Law</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In what way(s) did Roman law influence our laws today?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>An Imperial Army</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What did Augustus do with the army that caused problems in later years?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quiz # 3 - Roman Civilization (from 31 B.C. to A.D. 180)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>The Empire’s Economy</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Describe two reasons why the economy of Rome flourished during this time period.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Life During the Pax Romana</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tell how the following fared during this time:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family life</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The wealthy class</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The poor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Public Amusements</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Why didn’t the poor rebel during this time?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What did Romans do in their spare time?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Architecture, Engineering, and Science</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Describe some buildings erected during this time.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tell about the following:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Appian Way</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aqueducts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How did these features contribute to Roman life?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
ADHD students may have difficulty switching from one concept to another. Consequently, lengthy unit or chapter tests may pose great problems for them especially when the information is presented randomly on a test.

One possible solution for this problem is to present information on tests topically rather than in random order. The illustration in Figure 2 shows how test questions can be grouped by topics to enable students to stay engaged and focused on one particular area before moving on to another. In this case, each topic is actually a subheading taken directly from the textbook chapter to be tested. The test is divided into three sub-quizzes (The First Emperors, Roman Rule under Augustus, and Roman Civilization) that are given after the reading and teaching of each sub-topic. Questions are developed under each heading to help students stay engaged with a subtopic and not have to switch their thinking around as is customary with traditional tests. In addition, the teacher included the dates of occurrence to help students understand the timeline of events. This particular textbook chapter, as is often the case, jumped back and forth from one 50-year period to another and was very confusing to follow. Textbooks have long come under criticism for their disjointed and “unfriendly” or “inconsiderate” presentation (Armbruster, Anderson & Meyer, 1991), which can pose problems for even the most proficient readers.

Arranging tests topically is also helpful after scoring to help both teacher and student see in which areas students may need review and reinforcement. In this way, the student can easily look back in the text or related materials under a topic area missed and fill in with the correct information.

ADHD students often have difficulty concentrating on what they are reading and visually focusing on the print.

Being assigned large amounts of reading at one time is often overwhelming for ADHD students. In such an assignment, students may be asked to read an entire chapter and answer the questions at the end. In this case, students do not know what is expected of them until they get to the end of the reading. One possible solution would be to “chunk” a reading assignment, that is, topically divide up the amount of reading to be done. This can be accomplished through teacher-developed reading or study guides where questions or activities are designed to accompany each topically significant segment of the text (See Wood and Harmon, 2002 for examples of specific guides). A generic guide can also be used to assist students in reading a portion of text and then jotting down the main concepts and significant terms, dates, events, or people mentioned (often set off by boldface or italics). In the student-developed guide excerpt shown for history in Figure 3, students who are having difficulty comprehending are paired together and asked to write down the page numbers and subheadings of a text then read the segment and fill in with important information learned. Teacher modeling of the process is essential and peer assistance is recommended.

ADHD students may have difficulty staying focused during silent reading.

Distracted readers may benefit from subvocalizing during reading. By quietly reading to themselves, they are more able to maintain attention and focus on understanding the meaning of the text. Adding the auditory modality to the experience provides another support for learning.

To develop strategic reading skills for independent use, students should be taught to “chunk” their own reading, much like the function of the reading guide mentioned previously. Teachers can model for students the strategy of reading a paragraph or segment of text and then mentally asking themselves the
question, “What did I read here?” Then, they can retell in their own words the content of the passage.

ADHD students are often creative and curious and benefit from having a voice in their assignments.

Many distracted readers will benefit from multi-sensory experiences that enable them to express themselves in a non-print format. Alternative experiences that allow them to use other forms of expression such as drawing, charting, and mapping concepts and information often tap the creative nature of ADHD learners. They also benefit from having a voice in their assignments and opportunities to select a way to respond to a given task.

Figure 4 is an example of a Multiple Source Research Form (Wood, 2001) in which students are assigned to pairs to research a topic in health class. The students are able to select their sources as well as the manner in which they express their understanding of the topic, in this case, a combination of writing, labeling, drawing, charting, and listing of information.

ADHD students may require more time to formulate an answer.

Calling on students randomly on the spot and expecting an immediate answer can be overwhelming and humiliating for ADHD students. One strategy that gives students more time to respond is the Think, Pair, Share strategy developed by Kagan (1994). Think, Pair, Share is a discussion strategy in which students first think individually about how to answer a question, solve a problem, or undertake a task, then they share their thinking with a partner and finally the whole class. Discussing their thinking with a partner serves as a “dress rehearsal” before being asked to “go public” with their response in front of the class. It also maximizes participation, focuses students’ attention, and helps to engage them in the learning task. Think, Pair, Share was originally intended to be used as an oral activity, but, as illustrated in Figure 5, it can also be adapted as a means of integrating writing into a lesson (Wood, 2001).

Summary

Students with ADHD constitute a significant percentage of our schools’ population. While medication is currently the most frequently used treatment for ADHD, the mere application of the medication does not guarantee academic success. Additional interventions must be implemented to facilitate the academic growth and progress of students with...
ADHD. Regardless of the specific strategy being used, the focal point should always be on meeting the needs of the student(s). With this in mind, the ideas and strategies provided in this column have been successfully implemented in a variety of classroom settings. However, these instructional considerations are not presented as an all-inclusive list. Rather, they are an accumulation of activities that may serve as a strong foundation for your future work with students with ADHD. As teachers incorporate these, and any other strategies, into their individual classroom environments, the strategies may be employed with no changes or they may be modified to meet the needs of individual students.

References

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NO NAME-CALLING WEEK March 1-5, 2004
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www.nonamecallingweek.org

National Middle School Association is proud to be a coalition partner.
During the 30-year history of the middle school movement, educators have been on a quest to establish an appropriate and effective education for young adolescents. Among the many components of middle school organization, four stand out: grade configuration, interdisciplinary teaming, scheduling, and specialized programs. The purpose of this column is to share snapshots of organization during the first three decades of the middle school movement and provide recommendations for the future.

**Grade Configuration**

Alexander (1968), the “father of the American middle school,” defined a middle school as “a school having at least three grades and not more than five grades, and including at least grades six and seven” (p. 1). Across the history of the middle school movement, there have been a variety of grade configurations. A more recent national study found that 76% of middle level schools had made the transition to 5-8 or 6-8 configurations and that 45% of those middle level schools made the transition during the 1990s (Valentine, Clark, Irvin, Keefe, & Melton, 1993). In the 2000s the 6-8 grade configuration is considered the most likely to meet the needs of young adolescents (McEwin, Dickinson, & Jenkins, 1996).

**Interdisciplinary Teaming**

A teacher and student team (interdisciplinary teaming) is defined as a core of two to five teachers and the students they commonly teach. Interdisciplinary teaming is designed to provide opportunities for getting to know students, collaborative planning, fostering collegiality among teachers, and establishing a community of learners. During the early years of the 1970s, schools that had not transitioned to the middle school concept were generally departmentalized.

**Interdisciplinary teaming and 5-8 or 6-8 grade level structures have been the most successful organizational changes brought to middle level schools over the past 30 years. Advisory programs and exploratory courses have fared less well.**

By Katherine F. Thompson & Elaine R. Homestead

In my school no teacher was on a team; we were members of a department. There were 12 teachers at each grade (i.e., 3 math, 3 social studies, 3 English, and 3 science). —Cheryl, pseudonym
As the middle school movement began to spread during the 1970s and 1980s, some schools established interdisciplinary teams and some, new to the concept, elected to have teams of students, not interdisciplinary teams of students and teachers.

**1980s** In 1985 my “team” had approximately 165 students. Teachers referred to their students collectively as their team of students, but interdisciplinary teams of four to five teachers planning curriculum, instruction, and assessment were not evident. Teachers on my team never met together to plan or to discuss student needs. Planning was done in isolation during our one planning period. We rarely had grade level or cross-grade level content meetings. For the most part I planned and taught in isolation.

—Bettye, pseudonym

The presence of teaming in middle schools has increased significantly across the years. By 1988, 30% of middle schools had organized teachers and students into interdisciplinary teams with 52% doing so by 1993 (McEwin, Dickinson, and Jenkins, 2003).

**1990s** During the 1990s there were a variety of interdisciplinary team configurations in my school, ranging in size from two to five teachers. There was an expectation that we were to collaborate and communicate with one another. By 1999, sixth and seventh grade academic teams had four teachers (mathematics, language arts, social studies, & science). In the eighth grade, however, team structure began to look more like a junior high again. While students were assigned to a particular team, most students were “cross-teamed” at some point during the day due to scheduling or staffing issues in specialized classes (e.g., Algebra II and Spanish).

—Lorie, pseudonym

As illustrated in the reflections of three teachers who taught in different schools during the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s, teaming was either nonexistent, implemented in structural format only, or late in arrival. Cheryl talked about working in a departmental organization, while teaming applied to students only in Bettye’s school. Lorie, in the 1990s, was the first to mention being a member of an interdisciplinary team, one that more closely met the intent of teaming. Interdisciplinary teaming is now one of the most widely practiced components of middle schools. According to McEwin, Dickinson, and Jenkins (2003), 77% of middle schools had organized teachers and students into interdisciplinary teams by 2001. This progress may be deceptive. With many students on large teams, how well can teachers really get to know them? Are teachers really engaging in collaborative planning or are they up to their elbows in paperwork? Have we really fostered collegiality? Have we taken the necessary steps to establish a community of learners?

Our recommendation regarding interdisciplinary teaming for this decade, the fourth of the middle school movement, is simple. Refocus attention on the purpose of teaming—meeting the needs of adolescents, planning collaboratively, and creating a community of learners. Teachers on teams should have compatible educational philosophies, be willing to take risks, and be supportive of each other in meeting the needs of their students, both academically and emotionally. Smaller teams of teachers and students would provide more opportunities to get to know the strengths and needs of the students and team members. It is easier to plan developmentally appropriate curriculum with fewer teachers. With fewer students on a team, there could be more opportunities for students to be involved in their learning in meaningful ways (e.g., team meetings, decision-making, curriculum planning). Experiences like these are necessary for creating a community of learners, the original intent of interdisciplinary teaming.

**Scheduling**

Research indicates that the 40-50 minute class is not adequate time to present content, practice skills, and reinforce concepts (Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development, 1989). Rather than traditional scheduling (six to eight periods), block scheduling is preferred in middle school organization. Block scheduling, whether same-day or alternate-day, refers to large academic “blocks” in which students have extended periods of time to delve deeper into content and work on projects. Flexible use of time (e.g., extended class periods or day-long studies) is yet another option in meeting the needs of young adolescents.

In looking across the teachers’ reflections, it is clear that block and flexible scheduling as common practices have been difficult to implement in middle
schools. Schools often cite the following as barriers: special needs classes, exploratory classes, lunch rotation, special courses (algebra), the “cross teaming” of students, and legislative policies mandating instructional time in subject areas. Compounding these scheduling obstacles in recent years is the pressure to “cover” standards in preparation for standardized tests. Teachers who feel this pressure (either real or perceived) may be less willing to adjust instructional time in their subject areas.

We offer four recommendations for this component. Look for creative ways to overcome scheduling conflicts—perhaps having lunch in classrooms, implementing special education inclusion, or extending the school day. Another recommendation is for schools to revisit their mission statements to ensure that they are organized to meet their stated goals. The following phrases are often found in school mission statements—life-long learners, quality educational experiences, intellectual exploration, and stimulating learning environment. Is traditional scheduling the best way to achieve these goals? Is intellectual exploration best attained in six 55-minute segments? Do we promote life-long learning when class periods are so inflexible that they ignore student excitement toward learning? Can we provide quality educational experiences day in and day out using a six-period school day?

We recommend favoring depth of content over breadth of content. More meaningful learning can occur if teachers are not pressured to teach for coverage but rather teach content for understanding. Perhaps teachers would be more inclined to engage in flexible scheduling with their colleagues if they did not feel pressure to superficially cover vast amounts of content in short periods of time.

We also recommend that educators make their voices heard to politicians, for several of the aforementioned scheduling barriers relate to budget issues. If it takes more teachers (e.g., core, special education, exploratory) to make block and flexible scheduling work, then we must hire them. Who is paying attention to what young adolescents need in order to learn? Educators need to communicate more effectively to federal, state, and local officials that quality educational experiences are best achieved through sustained, meaningful periods of learning, within a trusted community of peers and colleagues.

Specialized Programs

Specialized programs, such as exploratory and advisory, are also an important component of middle school organization. The middle school philosophy embraces the notion of exploration—the idea that young adolescents should spend a part of the school day in elective courses in which they can discover and explore various topics.

In the early history of the middle school movement, many middle schools retained vocational classes from the junior high model. These courses were intended to provide students with life skills. Middle schools usually offered a music curriculum that was limited to band and chorus. Art classes were also generally part of the elective course offerings.

In the 1980s many schools began to take into...
account student interests when creating an exploratory program. While traditional elective course offerings were the mainstay of exploratory programs, schools added self-selected mini-courses (2- to 6-week courses) to the exploratory curriculum. Students enrolled in these classes according to their interests, curiosities, or hobbies.

By the 1990s exploratory courses had become an important component of the middle school day, encompassing a variety of explorative offerings.

It appears that while teachers and students value exploration in elective classes, some politicians have placed music, physical education, art, foreign language, and drama at the low end of the funding list.

1980s In the early to mid-1980s, in addition to art, band, choir, and physical education, exploratory classes in my school were based on the interests of the teachers. Students chose from mini-courses like Mexican food cooking, cross-stitch, photography, and fly-fishing. By the middle of the 1980s the mini-courses were dropped. During the late 1980s a study skills exploratory class was required of all students. —Bettye

1990s Vocational exploratory classes were removed from the curriculum at my school as directed by the district office in the mid- to late-1980s. In 1990 fine arts and physical education were the heart of the exploratory program, but each academic teacher also taught an exploratory class (e.g., careers, vocabulary, study skills, etc.). I learned of schools where teachers taught exploratory classes that were of interest to them such as cross-stitching, photography, word puzzles, and archery, but we could never talk the principal into letting teachers teach courses like these. By 1994 all exploratory classes were taught by exploratory teachers. Over the next few years, there were several course and staffing changes in the exploratory program. Orchestra was added to the curriculum, with the orchestra teacher sharing time between two other schools. At various times, drama, aerobics, chorus, study skills, cultural diversity, cooking, outdoor education, and foreign language were added and/or deleted based on staff expertise and funding. In the early 1990s, exploratory teachers were viewed as necessary to the holistic development of middle school students. By the late 1990s exploratory courses were viewed as expendable by politicians in my state so some programs were cut. —Lorie

When school budgets need reducing, these courses are frequently targeted for elimination. In Georgia, for example, state officials proposed reducing, and in some instances eliminating, time spent in physical education, so that students could spend more time in reading and mathematics. Fine arts courses (music, art, foreign languages) have experienced the same fate as school districts face budget cuts. With increased pressures to improve test scores, some schools are using exploratory classes for remedial coursework and test preparation rather than for their original purpose.

Middle schools based on learners’ developmental characteristics address students’ needs to investigate, seek answers, and try new things, and provide a curriculum that allows for these experiences not only in their core content areas, but also in their elective classes. We urge both educators and politicians to resist the temptation to cut these valuable programs from the middle school curriculum and find ways to fund daily physical exercise, musical experiences, and encounters with new ideas. These experiences add to the healthy, holistic development of young adolescents by encouraging and maintaining physical, cognitive, and socio-emotional growth. We must remember that middle schools should be places of exploration for young adolescents to discern their interests or dislikes, discover hidden talents, and develop awareness of the world. Therefore, schools should offer courses of interest as determined collaboratively by teachers, students, and parents. We must be vocal about the benefits of exploratory classes and fight for their inclusion in the school day.

Another component, advisory, consists of small groups of students assigned to an adult for the purpose of developing trusting relationships and discussing young adolescent issues and concerns.

As is intimated in the reflections above, implementing structured advisory programs has been problematic. Between 1988 and 1993, the percentage of schools implementing advisory programs

1970s If a student had a problem I would just talk to him or her about it. It was just something we did. The school had no formal advisory program. —Cheryl
in the 1980s, while homeroom was not referred to as an advisory time, it was supposed to be a place where students and teachers could connect. Our homeroom/advisory time was mostly used for announcements, housekeeping, and homework completion. The closest thing to an advisor/advisee period I experienced was the Breakfast Club (after a popular movie of the same name). We met before school on Wednesday mornings in the mini-gym. Anyone could come and just talk—to me or each other. The Breakfast Club was a safe place for students to pose questions and voice opinions and was quite popular.

—Bettye

The implementation of advisory programs plateaued. Schools today continue to struggle in their attempts to incorporate effective advisory programs. It appears that some schools believe in the benefits of advisory programs while others do not.

Across the 30-year history of middle schools, however, teachers have taken it upon themselves to build advising into their teaching. They serve as advocates for, as well as role models and advisors to, their students. We believe that middle school teachers, because of their interest in the age level, will continue, individually, to do their best to guide students, whether formal advisement activities are established or not.

Our recommendation is for schools to make a conscious effort to ensure that every child has a meaningful relationship with at least one adult in the school. If schools do not have a designated advisory time (e.g., homeroom, lunch, hallway, extracurricular activities) to develop meaningful teacher-student relationships.

—Lorie

The 1990s

Throughout the decade, we discussed the concept of an advisory program, but it was never implemented. Instead, teachers used non-instructional time with students (e.g., homeroom, lunch, hallway, extracurricular activities) to develop meaningful teacher-student relationships.

Across the 30-year history of middle schools, however, teachers have taken it upon themselves to build advising into their teaching. They serve as advocates for, as well as role models and advisors to, their students. We believe that middle school teachers, because of their interest in the age level, will continue, individually, to do their best to guide students, whether formal advisement activities are established or not. Our recommendation is for schools to make a conscious effort to ensure that every child has a meaningful relationship with at least one adult in the school. If schools do not have a designated advisory time (e.g., homebase or team time), then it is imperative that schools create opportunities during which students and teachers get to know, respect, and develop compassion toward each other. These opportunities may include interdisciplinary units, service learning, extracurricular activities, and social activities. Middle school students need safe environments where students can discuss issues and concerns while receiving feedback from trusted adults. Are we not negligent if we do not provide advisory for our students?

Conclusion

These snapshots of teacher reflections represent only three schools in the history of the middle school movement. We acknowledge that there are exemplary middle schools where many organization elements are already in place, some that have made a little progress, and some that are backtracking. Creating and maintaining middle schools that respect the nature of early adolescence in an era when the larger society seems not to value such a commitment presents a stiff challenge to middle level educators. What type of school organizations will young adolescents inhabit 30 years from now if those who understand them do not continue to advocate for them?

References


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