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Connection, Community, and Identity: Supporting Diverse Learners in the Core Era

Comments from the Editors

Katherine Egan Cunningham, Courtney Kelly, and Kristin Rainville
Manhattanville College

Debate remains in New York State around the Common Core State Standards, their implementation, associated testing, and the relationship between the standards and the teacher accountability movement. Yet, while debate continues, young people walk into school each day with hopes to learn, to wonder, and to connect. They get on the bus or walk down the block and their families entrust them to us—teachers and building leaders. It is our belief that teachers regardless of the standards seek to build connections, to strengthen communities, and to honor the identities of the young people in their classrooms.

Yet, recently, one of our graduate students, a veteran Social Studies teacher, shared that in her affluent suburban district teachers referred to the “College and Career Readiness Standards” and not the “Common Core” because parents would not accept ‘common’ in the learning for their children. Other districts have interpreted common in a different but similarly limited fashion by treating the EngageNY modules as sacred texts. This issue is intended to question these definitions of common within the CCSS by examining how teachers and teacher educators are working to make space for their students’ lived experiences in their Core Era Classrooms. In particular, this issue focuses on diverse learners and the impact of our instructional practices on learning and engagement. The articles included in this issue offer potential pathways for redefining learning for all students in the Core Era.

In this issue of The Language and Literacy Spectrum, we are pleased to introduce a new section of the journal “Voices from the Field”. Here you will find an essay by Bob Ruder, a retired Middle School Administrator from Poughkeepsie City School District. His essay provides a point of reflection on the power of reading, human connection, and the role of adults to inspire and nourish the reading and writing lives of young people.

In addition, we are also pleased to provide both the print and audio file of an interview with Tammy Ellis Robinson, the 2013 New York State Reading Association Literacy Advocate award recipient. Ms. Robinson, the Founder, Managing Editor, and Executive Director of Skribblers Magazine, has graciously offered to share her remarks from the awards banquet which are included with the interview. If you have not already viewed the Skribblers website and the accompanying video from Ms. Robinson, we strongly recommend it as a site of possibility for student publication.

Also, in this issue:

Elizabeth Yanoff, Aja LaDuke, and Mary Lindner, provide analysis of six professional texts from the field in their article “Common Core Standards, Professional Texts, and Diverse Learners: A Qualitative Content Analysis”. They specifically questioned the degree to which the texts address the needs of diverse learners, defined by the authors as above grade level readers,
below grade level readers, and English learners. Their findings are hopeful in that each text showed evidence of attention to those students though in different ways.

**Thea Yurkewecz** in her article “Observational Tools to Inform Instruction for Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Learners” offers critical insights into observational tools that teacher candidates, teacher educators, and teachers themselves can use to better understand the literacy skills and cultural backgrounds of culturally and linguistically diverse students.

**Carmen Sherry Brown** in her article “Language and Literacy Development in the Early Years: Foundational Skills that Support Emergent Readers” offers a research-based perspective on the importance of high-quality early education for all learners. She specifically emphasizes the need for active engagement and purposeful, meaningful language and early print activities to support emergent readers. She also emphasizes the importance of providing young learners with an understanding of the myriad of reasons why people read and write if we are to provide lasting foundational skills.

**Kathleen Gormley** and **Peter McDermott** provide us with important digital tools including apps and website to support literacy learning for all students in their article “Differentiating Literacy Learning--There’s an App for That!” Suggestions are provided to support teachers and literacy leaders with ways to incorporate these tools into classrooms.

**Laurie A. Sharp** provides further insight into digital spaces for literacy learning in her article “Literacy in the Digital Age”. In this article, she provides an overview of the International Society for Technology in Education (ISTE) Standards and provides literacy educators with an evaluative tool to measure their adeptness with the knowledge and skills needed to teach in the digital age.

**Francine Falk-Ross** and **Brian Evans** in their article “Word Games: Content Area Teachers’ Use of Vocabulary Strategies to Build Diverse Students’ Reading Competencies” provide a research-based context for analyzing the impact of a professional development program focused on developing a language-building approach to support literacy activities for marginalized students. Specifically, notable changes in students’ reading comprehension, vocabulary use, and discourse participation were found, and a significant difference in the students’ achievement following the interventions. Implications for teachers include increased use of language modeling to meet students’ specific literacy needs.

In his article “Building Schema: Exploring Content with Song Lyrics and Strategic Reading”, **Justin Stygles** shares his experience using reciprocal teaching (Palinscar & Brown 1984) within the reading workshop Justin’s students pondered provided song lyrics to activate schema, questions, and a purpose for reading social studies content.

Finally, we are always searching for new ways that research can be and is being shared with authentic audiences. At Manhattanville College, we host an Annual Graduate Student Research Fair. This year, several of our literacy candidates shared their action research projects through self-created websites rather than traditional posters or paper presentations. We found this an exciting and important shift in practice and invite you to review two sites that offer points of reflection for the field by clicking on the hyperlinks associated with their names. **Andrea Rogers**
teaches second grade in Bedford, NY, and conducted research on the blending of writing workshop with the district-mandated *Journeys* program. In her work, Andrea, provides an important model for teachers committed to workshop-based approaches in an era of scripted curriculum. **Meghan Lohrs** is an Assistant Teacher at Rye Country Day School in Rye, NY. Her research focused on the impact of an arts-based approach to her students’ literacy learning, particularly on their comprehension of complex texts. Through the use of artistic approaches, Meghan’s students were able to express their predictions, explanations, and interpretations through pictorial representations.

Please find our call for manuscripts for the 2015 issue of *The Language and Literacy Spectrum* at the end of this issue. We welcome your voices and scholarly contributions. We look forward to seeing you **November 9-11 in Syracuse, NY for the New York State Reading Association Annual Conference**. See www.nysreading.org for details.

Enjoy!
Common Core Standards, Professional Texts, and Diverse Learners: 
A Qualitative Content Analysis

Elizabeth Yanoff, Aja LaDuke, Mary Lindner,
The College of Saint Rose

ABSTRACT
This research study questioned the degree to which six professional texts guiding implementation of the Common Core Standards in reading address the needs of diverse learners. For the purposes of this research, diverse learners were specifically defined as above grade level readers, below grade level readers, and English learners. The researchers employed qualitative content analysis to determine how and to what level of frequency each text addressed the needs of these particular populations of students. The analysis consisted of a coding system that included how often the specified learners were mentioned, as well as the type of information provided and the format in which it was presented. Findings indicated that each text did show evidence of attention to these student populations though in different ways.

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Professional texts can play a significant role in the development of teacher knowledge and expertise (Huber, 2011). Literacy educators are currently in the midst of a contextual shift with the arrival and adoption of the Common Core Standards (CCS). The CCS serve as a professional text, as do the various emerging works written to guide practicing teachers through the process of implementing it into their curricula and classrooms. It is crucial for professional literacy educators to critically review these texts as they develop their understanding of the CCS and its goals.

Allington (2012) speaks to the ways in which national standards have moved toward a paradigm of “thoughtful literacy” (p. 21). Thoughtful literacy practices, as opposed to a focus only on decoding or recall, involve students thinking deeply and critically about texts and
explaining this thinking to an audience. It is imperative for teachers and education professionals to engage in these practices as well, as response to a sociopolitical climate that questions teacher professionalism through various forms of “teacher blame” (Rubenstein, Heckscher & Adler, 2011) and commercial “quick fix” programs that inherently deny the central role of a quality teacher (Allington & Walmsley, 1995/2007).

The standards themselves echo these sentiments about the need for a high quality teacher who is aware of the specific and unique needs of his or her individual students. For example, under the heading Key Design Considerations: What Is Not Covered by the Standards, the Common Core Standards state: “It is also beyond the scope of the Standards to define the full range of supports appropriate for English language learners and for students with special needs” (Common Core State Standards Initiative, 2012). Additional language reminds those adopting the standards of the fact that “the Standards set grade-specific standards but do not define the intervention methods or materials necessary to support students who are well below or well above grade-level expectations” (Common Core State Standards Initiative, 2012). With these statements in mind, we set out to investigate whether or not the crop of professional texts that followed in the wake of the standards would provide these intervention methods and materials missing from the CCS itself.

Our content analysis is intended to serve as a demonstration of this crucial aspect of professional practice through examining how supplemental texts can inform the implementation of the CCS for diverse learners. It is intended to be a tool for literacy educators as they engage in their own thoughtful literacy and professional growth around the CCS and diverse learners. This work was guided by the following research question: How do professional texts address the needs of above grade level readers, below grade level readers, and English learners when presenting information on the Common Core Standards for Reading?

Methodology: How Were The Texts Analyzed?

We utilized the techniques of qualitative content analysis (QCA) (Neuendorf, 2002; Schreier, 2012) in our review. Hoffman and colleagues (2012) define content analysis as “a flexible research method for analyzing texts and describing and interpreting the written artifacts of a society” (p. 29), and the method was ideally suited to answering our research question. Qualitative content analysis (Schreier, 2012) begins with defining research questions, follows with selecting material to analyze, and then building a coding frame by reading the material with your question in mind. The coding frame is refined as the material is coded, and the final steps of the process are analysis and interpretation of the data. QCA allowed us to create coding categories deductively and be more responsive to the varied nature of our texts.

Choosing Our Texts

Our content analysis examined professional texts for teachers which focus on implementing the CCS in reading instruction. Similar content analyses have been conducted with a focus on basal reading programs (Pilonieta, 2010; Witt, 1996) and social studies textbooks (Neumann, 2012).

To find appropriate texts, we turned to well-known publishers in the field: the International Reading Association, NCTE, and Heinemann. We also searched for relevant works in OCLC’s WorldCat database and Amazon.com. While our initial research indicated that several publishers included “correlations and crosswalks” (i.e. Heinemann) for previously published texts, our study focused on texts specifically created to help teachers adapt instruction
to meet the new standards. As we describe in our introduction, it seemed important to evaluate
texts written about the CCS since these newly created texts are guiding the vision for the CCS as
implementation moves forward.

Text selection occurred between September 2012 and January 2013. The following six
texts were chosen for our study:
Calkins, L., Ehrenworth, M., & Lehman, C. (2012). Pathways to the Common Core:

We selected works specifically on the reading standards as well as those encompassing all ELA standards, agreeing to only include chapters on the reading standards, the introduction, and the conclusion in our analysis. When considering volumes in a series (Common Core English Language Arts in a PLC at Work, Supporting Students in a Time of Core Standards: English Language Arts, and Teaching with the Common Core Standards for English Language Arts), we included one representative text.

The Coding Frame and Units of Coding

For the purposes of this research and following from the CCS, diverse learners were specifically defined as above grade level readers, below grade level readers, and English learners. In the development of these categories, we as researchers were often reminded of the ways in which language serves as both an instrument of empowerment and of limitation. Lightfoot (2004) acknowledges this tension in a piece that examines the term “parental involvement,” decodes its many meanings, and reminds educators to be cognizant of their linguistic contributions to problematic deficit discourses:

Our discursive, or language-based, understandings not only result from, but also create, material conditions. In this case, the way we use words to understand various people, and the way they are expected to behave, may, in itself, shape that behavior, and certainly creates differential understandings of various groups of people. (p.94)

In this same vein, we acknowledge that the term “diverse learners” is more complex than the parameters by which we have defined it for the purposes of this study. We also reject its inherent implication that there is one ideal mold or prototype of learner from which all others divert. However, as is the case with the CCS itself and the professional texts in our analysis, we
are limited by our language use. That said, we do use this specific language in order to recognize
the significant bodies of research dedicated to unpacking and ultimately meeting the unique
learning needs of the three subgroups we have named. For this reason, and in order to maintain
focus on our research question, we limited our count to specific references to “English learner,”
“above grade level reader,” and “below grade level reader.” Consequently, we excluded terms
referring to other distinct subgroups such as “students with special needs” and umbrella terms
such as “at risk.”

Similarly, we recognize limitations to use of the terms “English learner,” “above grade
learner,” and “below grade level learner.” We understand that these terms may imply a lack of
understanding of the multiplicity and hybridity of student identities (Nieto & Bode, 2012). For
example, any English learner or above grade level learner will also be a member of a particular
socioeconomic class or racial/ethnic group. Though we acknowledge the intersectionality
(Crenshaw, 1991) of social identities, we focused our study on the groups identified in the CCS.

Each book was read by two readers. We marked every mention of English learner, above grade
level learner, below grade level learner, and any combination, and divided the text into discrete
thought units. We defined a thought unit as a unit of text that communicated a single thought.
For example, in The Common Core Lesson Book K-5 (2012) Owociki gives the following
suggestions specifically for teaching English learners in her text box on interpreting images:

• Use the illustrations to name and discuss specific vocabulary relevant to the text.
• Work with students to use small (one-half-by-two-inch) sticky notes to label key
parts of the illustrations that will appear in the written text and to show the
connection between the images and the text.
• Use transparency tape to highlight a few key words or phrases, and discuss their
meanings before reading. Show the connections between the words/phrases and
the illustrations. (p. 263)

Each bullet gives a distinct instructional strategy or thought and was therefore coded as a
separate thought unit. We also counted the total words in each thought unit.

We examined patterns in the references to identified learners and created additional categories
for coding. We noted that information was shared in three formats: prose, informational text
features such as charts and graphs, and vignettes or narratives about teaching.

Additionally we determined six types of information were provided about the CCS and our target
learners. Each identified thought unit was given one code for type of information. Table 1
illustrates this coding of units.

Some text units were coded as “educational policy” because they made direct references
to educational policy documents including the Common Core Standards (Common Core State
Standards Initiative, 2012) and the Publishers’ Criteria (corestandards.org, 2013). Text units
coded as “educational research” referred to educational research studies that related to the
targeted students. Another type of text unit was coded as “diversity” and this was text that
served as a general reminder for teachers to consider the diverse needs of our targeted learners
when implementing the CCS.

The focus in instruction text units was on classroom application, and some authors
provided references to research to bolster the instructional strategy (coded as “instruction with
research”), while others provided the strategy without a direct reference to research
(“instruction”). We adopted a broad definition of instruction informed by Danielson’s (2007)
“Domain 1: Planning and preparation, Component 1e: Designing coherent instruction.” In this
component of Danielson’s framework are the following elements: “learning activities, instructional materials and resources, instructional groups, lesson and unit structure” (p. 60). We coded thought units as “instruction” or “instruction with research” if the thought unit referred to one of these elements.

Table 1: Types of information units of coding

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of information</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Example</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Educational policy</td>
<td>Connection to CCLS policy documents</td>
<td>“NGA and CCSSO acknowledge that students acquiring English require supports…. [continues and refers to specific ELL policy document] (Fisher &amp; Frey, 2013, p. 23).”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Educational research</td>
<td>Connection to educational research study</td>
<td>“Evidence for particular assumptions regarding text complexity within the CCSS is sparse, and in some cases, nonexistent… [continue to share research evidence] (Pearson &amp; Hiebert in Morrow et al, 2013, p. 11).”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diversity</td>
<td>Reminder of need to consider diversity of learners when implementing CCSS</td>
<td>“And remember, even the phrase ‘written at the fifth-grade level’ means that such a text is appropriate for the average fifth-grade reader, so almost half of fifth graders are likely reading below that level (Calkins, Ehrenworth, &amp; Lehman, 2012, p. 90)!”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instruction with research</td>
<td>Connection to educational research study and specific teaching strategy described</td>
<td>“English learners benefit when teachers do the following (Echevarria 2006): write the new vocabulary word so that students have a visual reference (Owocki, 2012, p. 213).”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instruction</td>
<td>Description of specific instructional strategies</td>
<td>“When engaging Jamal in learning, Mrs. Downing is careful to use a variety of instructional settings, including small group and paired. Jamal seems more comfortable responding in smaller settings (McLaughlin &amp; Overturf, 2013, p. 57).”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1: Types of information units of coding

After creating our initial categories and segmenting our texts into units, we conducted a trial run of our frame. A finalized frame was created from this rereading. An annotated version is in Table 2.
Analysis

Each book was coded independently by two researchers to ensure reliability of the coding (Schreier, 2012). After coding the sections independently, the researchers resolved discrepancies through discussion. Following the coding process, Excel was used to calculate frequencies and illustrate patterns. The researchers collaboratively reviewed the coded units as well to examine trends within each text and across texts.

Table 2: Coding frame

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Subcategories description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Coder</td>
<td>Researcher 1, Researcher 2, Researcher 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Book title</td>
<td>6 sample titles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Page and paragraph</td>
<td>Units were identified by page and paragraph. Units were segmented by thought units—when the meaning changed, one segment ended and the next began.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Word Count</td>
<td>In counting words we were guided by the following: “A word is defined by Works as any set of characters that are separated by a space from another word. Words separated by hyphens, periods, or any other punctuation mark are counted as one word” (Microsoft, 2012).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learner</td>
<td>English learner, above grade level reader, below grade level reader, or any combination</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Type of text</td>
<td>Expository prose, informational text feature such as a chart or list, vignette or narrative about teaching</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information provided</td>
<td>Educational policy, educational research, instruction with research, instruction, and diversity</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Looking Across Texts: What Are the Overall Trends?

In examining the six texts by type of learner, text type, and information provided, it is evident that more of the information provided was about the needs of English learners (ELs). Perhaps this reflects a recognition of changing demographics and the demonstrated need for teachers to differentiate instruction for ELs (Gersten et al., 2007). Also to be considered, however, is the clear identification of these learners in our texts; authors specified when they were talking about ELs, but sometimes implied more generally how to address the needs of
others (which wouldn’t be counted). The texts had 125 units referring to ELs out of 197 units about our identified learners. Figure 1 demonstrates the coverage of the texts.

Figure 1: Coverage of diverse learners in texts

The texts did have a more even presentation of text types with 76 units in informational text features, 69 in prose, and 53 in vignettes. In what might not be surprising in books targeted for practitioners there was an emphasis on sharing instructional information with readers. 152 of 197 total units were coded as instruction (91 units) or instruction with research (61 units). Figure 2 demonstrates this finding.

Figure 2: Thought units of information in texts
Reflecting on our research question and looking across all six books we can say that these texts do provide educators with information on how to teach above grade level readers, below grade level readers, and English learners in a range of text types. Teachers looking for information explicitly about English learners may find these texts especially helpful.

Findings For Each Text: How Did Each Text Address the Needs of Diverse Learners?

In this section, we describe analysis at the level of the book to show how each text addresses the needs of diverse learners. Reviewing the data for each of the books, we see that while all of the authors recognize the need to address the needs of diverse learners, the emphasis on this topic within the text varies. Figure 3 demonstrates the coverage of diverse learners within each text.

Figure 3: Thought units by Book and Learner
Book 1: Common Core English Language Arts in a PLC at Work, Grades 3-5
Book 2: The Common Core Lesson Book, K-5
Book 3: Pathways to the Common Core
Book 4: Supporting Students in a Time of Core Standards: English Language Arts, Grades PreK-2
Book 5: Teaching with the Common Core Standards for English Language Arts, PreK-2
Book 6: The Common Core: Teaching K-5 Students to Meet the Reading Standards
**Common Core English Language Arts in a PLC at Work: Grades 3-5**

Drawing on the Professional Learning Community (PLC) literature, Fisher and Frey (2013) write about how to implement the CCS within this type of professional development group, and teachers working in collaborative groups will find this text particularly useful. The text has many suggestions such as charts and discussion guides to facilitate collaboration within and across grade levels. Our analysis of this text was limited to Chapter 1: Using Collaborative Teams for English Language Arts and Chapter 2: Implementing the Common Core State Standards for Reading as the remaining chapters go beyond our focus on reading instruction. Table 3 summarizes the coverage of the text by learner type, type of information, word count, and thought unit.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Coding</th>
<th>Word count</th>
<th>Thought Unit</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>537</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Below grade level</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prose</td>
<td>417</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Policy</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instruction with research</td>
<td>106</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instruction</td>
<td>247</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English learner</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prose</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Policy</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vignette</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instruction</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3: Common Core English Language Arts in a PLC at Work, Grades 3-5

Despite our limited review of this book, the authors do address the needs of English learners (2 units) and below grade level learners (8 units), with the preponderance of the information being presented through prose (9 units). The majority of the information shared is instruction or instruction with research (7 out of 10 units). The following section of the text was illustrative of the kinds of information shared in the chapter on reading: “For students who struggle with reading, this means that they must be taught with complex texts and asked to read increasingly complex texts across the year. However, it is important to note that the text alone should not be the only scaffold; instruction is critical for these students to progress and accelerate” (p. 32).

While this text does share some information about English learners and below grade level learners, the focus of the text is on the PLC and facilitating conversations with group members. Diverse learners are addressed within this framework, and it would be expected that through reflection and discussion teachers would identify the best way to meet the needs of their own diverse learners. Resources are available for free downloading here: [http://go.solution-tree.com/commoncore/](http://go.solution-tree.com/commoncore/) and would be helpful for any teacher working with the CCS. Overall the text will be most helpful for teachers working to address CCS curriculum with school colleagues.

**The Common Core Lesson Book K-5**

Gretchen Owocki (2012) writes a practical guide to each of the anchor standards for reading, showing how the standard could be addressed through a gradual release of responsibility...
model and including suggestions on how to provide additional instruction for students who have difficulty. Our analysis included the whole book. There were 59 thought units regarding diverse learners as defined by our study, with 51 of those pertaining to English learners. Most of the information was presented in an information feature (41 out of 59 units, all of which pertained to English learners) and the rest in prose. Similarly, instruction or instruction with research account for the majority (50 out of 59 units) of the information shared. Table 4 summarizes the data for this book.

Table 4

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Coding</th>
<th>Word count</th>
<th>Thought unit</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>2105</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Above grade level and below grade level</strong></td>
<td>267</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prose</td>
<td>267</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diversity</td>
<td>267</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Below grade level</strong></td>
<td>135</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prose</td>
<td>135</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diversity</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>English learner</strong></td>
<td>1665</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Informational text feature</td>
<td>1401</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instruction with research</td>
<td>700</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instruction</td>
<td>633</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prose</td>
<td>264</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instruction</td>
<td>264</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>English learner and below grade level</strong></td>
<td>38</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prose</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instruction</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4: *The Common Core Lesson Book, K-5*

Looking purely at the data suggests that educators wanting to support English learners will find this text more useful that those looking for strategies to teach above grade level and below grade students. However, as mentioned in the book’s overview, the work “is designed to support differentiated instruction” with teaching strategies provided for the K-5 range collectively rather than one grade level at a time (p. xxi). The K-5 charts and intensified instruction ideas offered for each anchor standard mean that there are helpful suggestions for those working with above grade level and below grade level students, even if they are not counted in this study.

In addition, it should be noted that the large number of English learner instruction strategies counted does not necessarily indicate an equal number of unique strategies being offered. Because the text is designed with chapters and sections that can be read alone, suggestions for working with English learners are sprinkled throughout the book and strategies are repeated as appropriate. The most common strategy suggested is to “pair English learners with experienced English speakers” (p. 16) during an activity, which accounts for 9 out of 30
English learner teaching strategies presented. Still, with 51 references to English learners and a design that facilitates differentiated instruction, educators will find many useful teaching strategies for working with English learners, above grade level learners, and below grade level learners within this text. Owocki’s spiral-bound volume is recommended for any teacher looking for multiple lesson plan ideas, including reproducible graphic organizers, targeted at each of the Common Core Standards in reading.

The Common Core: Teaching K-5 Students to Meet the Reading Standards

With this text, McLaughlin and Overturf (2013) present an overview of the CCS and practical ideas for implementation while arguing that research based best practices should continue to be used to teach reading even when not explicitly mentioned in the standards. While our analysis was of the entire book, all but 2 thought units were found in the thematic chapter “English Learners, Students with Disabilities, Gifted and Talented Learners, and the Common Core.” The authors give equal consideration to each type of diverse learner – exploring what is known about them, making connections to the CCS, and offering possible instructional considerations for each one. However, for our study about half the thought units (43 out of 84) were coded as pertaining to English learners; the rest are divided almost evenly between above grade level readers (17 out of 84) and below grade level readers (19 out of 84). Table 5 demonstrates the findings for this book.

Instruction and instruction with research account for most of the information presented on diverse learners (64 out of 84), with a complement of policy statements (13 units), a few references to educational research (5 units), and a couple of broad diversity statements (2 units). Text type seems balanced among information features (25 units), prose (25 units), and vignettes (34 units). The following example illustrates instructional strategies for an English learner, Jamal, shared within a vignette: “When engaging Jamal in learning, Mrs. Downing is careful to use a variety of instructional settings, including small group and paired. Jamal seems more comfortable responding in smaller settings. His teacher is also aware that supports, such as pictures, wait time, and short written responses, work well for him” (p.57).

McLaughlin and Overturf’s text may appeal most to educators new to the Common Core, especially the chapters that guide readers through each College and Career Readiness (CCR) Reading Anchor Standard. Each chapter explains how CCS standards build to meet the CCR Reading Anchor Standard, offering literacy skills and strategies to support the reading standard. However, the chapter on diverse learners referenced above can be read on its own and should be of interest to all teachers.
Table 5: The Common Core: Teaching K-5 Students to Meet the Reading Standards

Pathways to the Common Core

This text, written by Lucy Calkins, Mary Ehrenworth, and Christopher Lehman (2012), is intended to provide readers with support in understanding the development and design of the CCS in order to best implement it in classrooms. The authors walk the reader through the language of the literacy standards step by step, including classroom examples and scenarios along the way. In providing examples, it is clear that they are used by the authors to better illustrate a point and show the CCS in practice in a particular context rather than being
prescriptive to all teachers. The centrality of the teacher’s role and ability to adapt the standards specifically to his or her students was reiterated throughout the volume. Also the way the authors offer suggestions, yet refrain from using language that would imply that these suggestions would work for every classroom, keeps with this theme. Our analysis focused on the introduction, conclusion and the chapters on the reading standards (2-5), and Table 6 summarizes the data for this book.

<table>
<thead>
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</thead>
<tbody>
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<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Below grade level</td>
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<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prose</td>
<td>150</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diversity</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instruction</td>
<td>114</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 6: Pathways to the Common Core

In looking simply at the data above, decontextualized from the text itself, it could be easily gathered that this book would not be particularly helpful to teachers looking for instructional strategies, particularly those pertaining to students reading above grade level or those learning English. In applying our coding system and criteria, there are only two thought units in the entire text that speak explicitly to students struggling to read texts that have been matched to their grade level. The authors clearly explain in the introductory chapter that they have intentionally chosen to “tuck research and tips into each chapter where each seems appropriate and don’t repeat that research and those tips in other chapters” (p.21). That said, there are many implicit and repeated references to the importance of teachers knowing the individual strengths and needs of each student in order to best integrate the Common Core into their practice.

In conclusion, this text is best suited to readers who are seeking a guiding text to lead them through their own process of examining the language of the CCS and bringing these new understandings to their classroom instruction, without abandoning the solid, evidence-based, literacy teaching practices that they already know to be effective with their students. The authors strongly suggest that this examination and exploration of the CCS be a collaborative one among teacher colleagues in order for implementation efforts to be more effective and consistent.

**Supporting Students in a Time of Core Standards: English Language Arts PreK-2**

Susi Long and her co-authors (2011) underscore the importance of marrying the CCS with teachers’ existing knowledge of best practices, with particular regard to valuing students’ rich and diverse languages and literacies and making them a core element of curriculum and instruction. Long and colleagues invite us into the classrooms of exemplary teachers who are employing culturally responsive pedagogy in ways that meet the demands of the CCS. Relying on a balance of vignettes (11 units), prose (10 units), and informational text features (10 units), the authors make specific references to particular concerns that may arise for teachers regarding
As is seen in the data above, 28 out of 31 of the thought units are in regards to English learners. The classrooms that are featured in the text describe the work of culturally and linguistically diverse students and teachers, showing the readers different combinations of instruction and assessment that have proven effective in these particular contexts. This book shares these victories with the reader not as a map or blueprint with specific instructions, but shows how individual teachers made the CCS work for their students and classrooms from year to year. This text, through vivid classroom portraits, explicitly and assertively reminds readers that teachers do not have to throw away what they know to be best practice or an effective strategy that meets an individual student’s needs in order to make room for the Common Core. Early in the text, the authors state, “in a nutshell, we write to remind every educator that inspirational and innovative teaching in a time of standards is not only possible, but essential” (p. 6). The remainder of the text provides evidence of the “possible,” by extracting instructional practices from the featured classrooms and showing alignment with CCS and NCTE standards in charts at the end of each chapter.

Table 7

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Coding</th>
<th>Word count</th>
<th>Thought unit</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>2749</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Above grade level and below grade level</td>
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<td><strong>261</strong></td>
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<tr>
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<td><strong>171</strong></td>
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<td><strong>90</strong></td>
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<td><strong>2488</strong></td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>Instruction</td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>1060</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 7: *Supporting Students in a Time of Core Standards: English Language Arts Prek-2*
The authors demonstrate that culturally responsive pedagogy and assessment can and should co-exist peacefully with the CCS. For this reason, this text will appeal most to preservice and practicing teachers seeking specific examples of teachers taking their own unique paths to meet the CCS, and more specifically, paths that are deeply grounded in the unique needs of their particular learners. This text does not read as prescriptive, but rather as a powerful reminder to readers to begin with what they know – namely, their students.

Teaching with the Common Core Standards for English Language Arts PreK-2

In this edited volume, Morrow, Shanahan, and Wixson (2013) bring together leaders in the literacy field to reflect upon each of the areas of the CCS. Our review examined the introduction and concluding chapters as well as the chapters on comprehension, informational text, and foundational skills. Findings are shown in Table 8.

Table 8

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Coding</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
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<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Policy</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English learner</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prose</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Policy</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English learner and below grade level</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prose</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Policy</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vignette</td>
<td>887</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Educational research</td>
<td>887</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instruction</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instruction</td>
<td>874</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 8: Teaching with the Common Core Standards for English Language Arts, PreK-2

The authors discuss the needs of below grade level readers and English learners in these sections. The text reports significantly on policy and educational research related to the CCS (5 out of 11 units). For example, in writing about text complexity in Chapter 1, Pearson and Hiebert note that, “Evidence for particular assumptions regarding text complexity within the CCS is sparse, and in some cases nonexistent” (p. 11), and they follow this introductory sentence with research to back up this claim. In addition to the research and policy information, 1 long vignette addresses English learners and below grade level learners and includes instructional suggestions (887 words, 6 instruction units, 1 educational research unit).

The editors of this text suggest that their aim is to address the question, “How should these standards be put into practice for daily instruction?” (xi). Our review of this text demonstrates that they attempt to answer this question for diverse learners with policy and research references as well as vignettes of classroom teaching. As an edited volume written by literacy leaders for a professional audience, this text is best suited for graduate classes and
experienced teachers. While some chapters have introductory information, most chapters are written for an academic audience.

**Reflections**

**The Value of Qualitative Content Analysis**

Qualitative content analysis (QCA) allowed us to examine these texts methodically and purposefully as we worked to answer our research question. QCA allowed us to build our research question and coding frame from the texts themselves allowing for a more valid representation of the content of the texts. Word count was a concrete measure of overall coverage of the topic, while thought units allowed us to count the specific strategies and connections made in the text.

QCA also required us to focus narrowly on our research question and examine the coverage of students who are above grade level learner, below grade level learner, and English learners. Left out of our analysis were more general references to differentiation. As mentioned previously, readers may find this narrow lens both illuminating and limiting. On the one hand, we identified very specifically references to the identified learners. On the other hand, readers could argue that the reviewed texts address the learners more generally across the book.

**Addressing the Needs of Diverse Learners**

For this project we asked: How do professional texts address the needs of above grade level readers, below grade level readers, and English learners when presenting information on the Common Core Standards for Reading? Overall we found that all of the authors demonstrated their understanding that teachers need to address the needs of diverse learners in elementary classrooms, but the emphasis varied when applying the framework of our three coding categories. English learners were most referenced and above grade level learners were only addressed extensively in one text. All texts addressed below grade level learners in some way. The information was shared almost evenly in prose, informational text features, and vignettes. The texts mostly focused on instruction and ways teachers could meet the standards.

We recognize limitations to our coding criteria that may have influenced our results, particularly the prominence of references to English learners as opposed to references to above or below grade level learners. For example, many authors made broad and frequent references to “students” that may have implied student differences without using the specific terminology required by our criteria. As mentioned in our description of the development of our coding categories, we acknowledge both the importance and restrictions of the language used to define diversity and to describe diverse learners in the CCS, the professional texts we have examined, and this piece itself. We promote an examination of language use that recognizes these limitations, but also takes into account the ways language can provide information and introduce effective research-based strategies to preservice and practicing teachers who comprise the readership of these texts.

Predictable for texts for practicing educators, the majority of the information shared in the texts was coded as instruction or instruction with research. The texts varied in their approaches to the content, ranging from providing concrete instructional suggestions to emphasizing the need for teachers to discuss the CCS collaboratively as professionals. The texts could be used by novice educators just beginning their career and more experienced educators who are looking to refine their practice as they implement the CCS.
Though the format and frequency of the discussion of diverse learners as defined by our coding categories varied from text to text, there were shared perspectives on the integration of the CCS into classroom instruction. Teachers were encouraged to continue to use what they already know within the context of past research and practice. Further, readers were reminded that the CCS will be most effective and successful if implemented in a way that centralizes teacher knowledge and does not promote the translation of the standards into a scripted curriculum. None of the texts emphasized a packaged program for addressing the needs of students, including diverse learners.

Capturing the “Shift”

The texts in this review represent the knowledge of literacy professionals at the beginning of the shift to the CCS. As we complete this review, we want to acknowledge that additional texts are being written and published to address questions about the CCS and diverse learners. For example, we are currently utilizing in our literacy methods classes *The Common Core for the Not-So-Common Learner* series (Dove and Honigsfeld, 2013; Honigsfeld and Dove, 2013) which was published after our review was completed. However, the texts in this review are still useful for teachers as they work towards the goals of the CCS. As suggested by the authors of the texts we’ve reviewed, teachers will need to have continual conversations about how to best meet the needs of diverse learners and the CCS. These professional texts can be part of the conversation since the texts describe the current status of educational research and policy and demonstrate best practice teaching for the CCS. Furthermore, all of the texts echo Long and colleagues (2011) who urge teachers to have “high expectations for students” but not to “equate those expectations with standardization or one-size-fits-all views of teaching and learning” (p. 50). The professional texts described in this review help teachers achieve these expectations through differentiated instruction aligned with the Common Core Standards.
References


Observational Tools to Inform Instruction for Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Learners

Thea Yurkewecz
University at Albany, State University of New York

ABSTRACT
This article addresses the need for teachers to use observational tools to identify and understand their learners’ cultural backgrounds and literacy skills, including the importance of preparing teacher candidates to become culturally responsive educators. This topic is critical because one of the new teacher certification exams in New York State, Educating All Students (EAS), assesses candidates’ knowledge of instructional strategies and support for students of diverse populations. To that end, this article provides an observational framework that informs instruction for culturally and linguistically diverse learners.

AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY
Thea Yurkewecz is a literacy specialist and a National Board Certified Teacher. She currently is a doctoral student and part-time faculty member in the Department of Literacy Teaching and Learning at the University at Albany, State University of New York. Her research interests focus on teacher leadership and professional development. Thea can be reached at tayurkewecz@albany.edu

There is a growing population of Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CLD) students and English Language Learners (ELL) in elementary classrooms within the United States. These students represent various racial/ethnic backgrounds, cultural traditions, and languages/dialects (Chu, 2011; Lim, Maxwell, Able-Boone, & Zimmer, 2009). New York State in particular continues to show an increase in diversity within student populations. For example, the number of schools that participated with ELL programs have increased over 21,000 from 2002-2011 (NCES, 2011). This increase requires a subsequent shift in how educators are being prepared to meet the increasing needs of this growing population. In 2005, the National Center of Education Information found that 87.5% of K-12 public school teachers had little or no training in teaching linguistically diverse students (NCELA, 2005). If current educators are not prepared to teach in diverse classrooms, how should we re-envision professional development for current teachers and better prepare future educators?

Challenges and Perspectives
There are challenges that students from culturally diverse backgrounds may face in schools and society. CLD students may experience incongruence between their orientation towards social interactions, learning, teaching practices, traditional classroom routines, and literacy practices (Alvermann & Qian, 1994; Lim et al., 2009). For example, teacher’s unfamiliarity with students’ cultural backgrounds may impact literacy instruction. Many teachers may not be familiar with the multiple aspects and dimensions of their student’s cultural...
Cultural differences can also play a critical role in the interactions teachers have with students. Au and Mason (1981) focused on the positioning of teachers and students from Hawaii during reading instruction. Their study suggested that cultural differences impacted student’s productivity. Two sets of participation structures were observed: volunteer structure and open turn structure. The results favored the open turn structure of participation, which allowed children to negotiate turn taking without teacher intervention. This approach consisted of multiple children overlapping in conversations where they were in control of whose turn it would be. Au and Mason (1981) noted that the volunteer approach placed the teacher in the management role of calling on students who raised their hands and waited for their turn. Students from different cultures, such as the students in this study may not be accustomed to the volunteer approach.

In a study on secondary students, the differences in language and culture also impacted instruction, specifically writing (Alvermann & Qian, 1994). Similarly to Au and Mason’s (1981) conclusions students came into conflict with the dominant culture’s school-based literacies and practices. Their findings suggest that teachers need to be aware of language socialization cues, beliefs of what counts as subject knowledge, and interest levels of diverse students (Alvermann & Qian, 1994). Both of these studies emphasized the need for educators to become more aware of cultural differences in how students learn, interact, and find balance between instructional practices of different cultures.

Teachers who are aware of cultural distinctions and the impact it has on student learning, can develop practices and materials to better meet students’ individual needs (Garcia & Malkin, 1993). These teachers have been described as being culturally responsive (Chu, 2011; Gay, 2000). Culturally responsive teachers are characterized as: (1) involving all students in the construction of knowledge, (2) building on students’ personal and cultural strengths, (3) helping students examine the curriculum from multiple perspectives, (4) using varied assessment practices that promote learning, and (5) making the culture of the classroom inclusive of all students (Villegas & Lucas, 2002). In multiple study case studies on elementary classroom teachers, Ladson-Billings (1995) identified how cultural responsive teaching creates a collaborative classroom community that promotes academic achievement by celebrating the cultural identity and backgrounds of students. The findings resulted in an increase of participation from students and families, as teachers became culturally aware and responsive to their classrooms. Gay (2000) notes that culturally responsive teachers need to identify the strengths that students bring from their cultural backgrounds. Research has highlighted how observational methods and tools can support teachers with this process.

Teachers use observational tools to identify students’ literacy growth over time. These methods have also illuminated information regarding students’ cultural backgrounds. In her case study on bilingual students, Maguire (1999) observed the relationship between students, texts, and the contexts to which they write. Her findings suggest that teachers need to learn more about students’ home lives and home literacy practices in order to develop meaningful instructional practices for these students. In a similar case study, researchers used observations to document and assess the learning process and literacy learning of an English Language Learner over a three-year period (Huddleson, 1999). By understanding the cultural background and noticing rhetoric patterns in writing samples (e.g., writing organization and word choices), new instructional goals we developed to fit the immediate learning needs of the child. The results of
both studies supported observation as method to improve teachers’ insight into their students’ literacy learning.

**Observational Tools**

There is a need to assess both students’ literacy skills and cultural knowledge if we are to recognize who they are as readers, writers and learners. Therefore teachers need observational tools that incorporate a focus on students’ literacy skills and cultural backgrounds. Educators use observational notes in classrooms as a tool to record student learning. Researchers and classroom teachers developed this technique for taking notes on a child's natural literacy experiences (Patton, 2002). Teachers can use observation as an assessment tool to document activities and interactions, while sometimes engaging personally in those activities (Patton, 2002). The goal of using this form of assessment is to “fill in the gaps” and give teachers immediate information. Johnston and Rogers (2002) noted that observational data “explicitly depends on the human expert”. The expert observer is described as a, “kid-watcher” (Goodman, 1985), or “sensitive observer” (Clay, 1993). While observation can increase teachers’ attention towards the CLD students in the classroom, they still need to understand what information they should be looking for. It is important to think about how teachers are training their eye to gain specific knowledge about our culturally linguistic and diverse learners (Boyd-Batstone, 2004).

Participant observations are a valuable resource for teachers in planning and teaching lessons. First, they help teachers to understand cultural differences in perceptions about the roles of students and teachers in learning. For example, a student may come from a culture with different ways of speaking and ideas about teacher-student interactions or student-student interactions that a teacher hasn’t encountered (Delpit, 1995; Peregoy & Boyle, 2008). Second, participant observations help teachers select literature that gives students the opportunity to bring their cultural knowledge into understanding texts (Alford, 2001). Additionally, they help teachers find texts that are engaging and responsive to students’ backgrounds, not portrayals of inaccurate stereotypes about different cultures (Bradford, 2007 & Sano, 2009). Finally, when teachers use participant observations they notice differences in literacy practices within diverse cultures.

These research studies and various perspectives suggest teachers need to increase and understand their cultural responsiveness to students. Previous studies have explored how teachers’ literacy instruction is not aligning to meet the needs of culturally and linguistically diverse learners (Alvermann & Qian, 1994; Au & Mason, 1981; Lim et al., 2009). There are multiple literacy skills and practices that can be challenging for CLD students. Some of these include: comprehension, writing, and conversations around text. Many of these challenges can arise due to choices in texts, topics, and prompts. Currently, the Common Core State Standards (National Governors Association Center for Best Practices, 2010) addresses the need for students to come to know and understand perspectives and other cultures, though criticisms have appeared about the needs of ELL within the standards framework. The standards also address the need for students to become critically and culturally aware. In order for students to build this awareness educators need a method to inform their literacy instruction for all learners. Research has found that observations have become an important method of bringing awareness to CLD students (Souto-Manning & Mitchell, 2001). Although observations can serve as a tool to record students’ behavior, teachers may still need support to identify the various differences and dimensions of students’ background and cultures.
Designing an Observational Tool

There is a need to assess both students’ literacy skills and cultural knowledge if we are to recognize who they are as readers, writers, and learners. Therefore teachers need observational tools that incorporate a focus on students’ literacy skills and cultural backgrounds. Research has supported the process of designing an observational tool that helps teachers to recognize students’ literacy skills, and understand aspects of their students’ cultures that will inform their instruction.

I developed an observational tool intended for teacher candidates and classroom teachers. The goal of this tool is to recognize dimensions of culture and inform their daily literacy instruction. This observational tool encompasses: (a) Patrick Moran’s (2001) model of the five dimensions of culture (b) Fennes and Hapgood’s (1997) Iceberg Model, and (c) Peregoy and Boyle (2008) multiple aspects of culture. Initial construction of this tool was framed by Moran’s (2001) model of specific dimensions of culture. These five dimensions include: products (e.g. tools, food clothes), practices (e.g. verbal and non-verbal language, actions and interactions, taboos), perspectives (values, beliefs), communities (race, gender, religion, etc.) and persons (individuals). These five dimensions capture specific information that addresses various aspects of culture, though many of these dimensions are often not visible in formal observations. To illuminate how these dimensions of culture are beyond the surface level of formal observations, I examined Fennes and Hapgood’s (1997) Iceberg Model. This model helped to situate how an informative tool should be designed to focus on dimensions of culture below the surface.

These dimensions and models supported my rationale for including elements in my design that honored students’ cultural diversity. The model included guiding questions that captured the positive aspects of students’ culture, designed to extend beyond the dimensions of culture that can be observed. Persegoy and Boyle (2008) provided a guide to questioning multiple aspects of culture. Their work has focused on how learning about the identity of CLD students and how they assimilate within new environments. I extended their questions on assimilation and chose specific positive language to capture each dimension. The questions helped to create a portrait of the student that honors their diverse backgrounds.

The final product of my observational tool became a reflective guide for teacher candidates (Appendix A). I developed different approaches and what positive aspects of a student’s cultural background should be focused on during a weekly basis. These approaches included: Dimensions of Culture, Global Literature, Interactions, and Uncovering. For each of approach a guiding question is posed with specific features/questions under each category. The implications for this tool are for teacher preparation programs to support culturally responsive teachers by utilizing this observational framework.

Teacher Preparation

Current educational policy is readjusting the preparation of new teachers to become culturally responsive in today’s diverse classrooms (Beare, Marshall, Torgerson, Tracz, & Chiero, 2012; Wang, Spalding, Odell, Klecks, & Lin, 2010). Under Race to the Top, many states are developing new and revised teacher certification exams and Teacher Performance Assessments (edTPA) for teacher candidates. These relatively new policies identified ELL and CLD student as one of the key groups in need of instructional improvement for closing the achievement gap.
In New York State one of the new teacher certification exams is the Educating All Students Test (EAS). This exam focuses on: Diverse Student Populations, English Language Learners, Students with Disabilities and Other Special Learning Needs, Teacher Responsibilities, and School-Home Relationships. For example, a performance indicator on this exam includes understanding appropriate strategies to enhance the knowledge of students from diverse cultural backgrounds (New York State Department of Education, 2013). In the practice exam questions offered on the State Department website, candidates will need to examine observational notes made by teachers on students to determine instructional strategies to fit the needs of these diverse students.

The goals of edTPA are now focused on improving teacher education programs to result in the improvement of teaching and student outcomes. In order to improve the outcomes of all students, emphasis needs to be placed on developing culturally responsive teachers. Future educators need to be prepared for the increase of CLD students in their classrooms. The observational tools we use in enacting these policies one potential means of improving the daily observation and instruction relative to being response to the needs of a culturally diverse student population.

Educational Importance

There is a need for well-designed observational methods to help us identify the linguistic resources of learners and their cultural knowledge in order to understand students’ previous learning contexts. Critical analysis recognizes participant observational assessment tools as a means of informing teaching and instruction of cultural awareness. This topic is particularly important in terms of pre-service and in-service teacher preparation and professional development for teachers who are increasingly seeking information on the promise and challenges of a culturally diverse classroom. In order to support CLD students’ academic success and outcomes, we first need to reflect on how we are preparing our future teachers to become critically and consciously aware. Observational methods can raise the awareness and consciousness to support and promote culturally responsive and reflective teachers.
Appendix A: Observational Tool

**STUDENT LITERACY AND CULTURAL PARTICIPANT OBSERVATION NOTES**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>For the Week of:</th>
<th>Dimensions of Culture</th>
<th>Global Literature</th>
<th>Interactions</th>
<th>Uncovering</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What dimensions were honored and celebrated?</td>
<td>How were texts chosen or provided representative of global literature?</td>
<td>What conversations and interactions are occurring?</td>
<td>New insight regarding students languages/cultures/backgrounds</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Things to consider:</strong></td>
<td>Surface Literature, art, music, dance, technology, appearance, dress, food</td>
<td>Does the author have clear expertise on the topic?</td>
<td>What do students say they want to work on in reading/writing?</td>
<td>How will this knowledge support and guide my instruction?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Floating Customs, beliefs, traditions, religion</td>
<td>Is the author respectful of all cultures?</td>
<td>Describe the questions students are raising?</td>
<td>What information is important to share with the student’s family?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Below Family, talk and silence, expressions of feelings, learning styles, life cycles (behaviors), roles and interpersonal relationships (status), discipline, time and space</td>
<td>Is additional information provided by author?</td>
<td>What do students say about reading/writing outside of school?</td>
<td>What information is important to share with other colleagues in supporting this student?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Do the relationships between characters avoid stereotypes of racial, ethnic, and class dominance?</td>
<td>How/when/whom do students work with?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Student(s):

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References


Language and Literacy Development in the Early Years: Foundational Skills that Support Emergent Readers

Carmen Sherry Brown, Hunter College, State University of New York

ABSTRACT

For all students, a high-quality early education is critical to ensuring their long-term academic success. Early learners need to understand why people read and write in order to be motivated to excel in their own literacy development. Through active engagement in the reading process, children learn ways to use their growing knowledge and skills flexibly and in combination with all domains of development. All children can develop a strong foundation for literacy and reading development when they are given opportunities to engage in purposeful, meaningful language and early print activities. Effective early literacy instruction provides preschool children with developmentally appropriate settings, materials, experiences, and social support that encourage early forms of reading and writing to flourish and develop into conventional literacy.

AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY

Carmen Sherry Brown, EdD, is an Assistant Professor in the department of Curriculum and Teaching at Hunter College, CUNY. She teaches courses in early childhood literacy and mathematics. She also supervises teacher candidates during their student teaching practicum. Her research interests are coaching, mentoring and professional development for early childhood practitioners in the field of literacy and math development. She earned her doctorate from SUNY at Buffalo. She can be reached at cb95@hunter.cuny.edu.

Reading Development

Reading requires the mastery, integration and application of numerous skills and knowledge. The National Reading Panel (NRP) of the National Institute of Child Health and Development (NICHD) issued a report that identified five areas that were critical for effective reading instruction: phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension (NICHD, 2000). Reading or learning how to read is a combination of all these skills. They are interconnected and interdependent on one another, which makes it difficult to teach them in isolation.

Learning to read is a developmental process. Most children follow a similar pattern and sequence of reading behaviors as they learn how to read: from appreciation for and awareness of print to phonological and phonemic awareness to phonics and word recognition. Foundation skills are reading skills that students typically develop in the primary grades. The skills and behaviors that develop early serve as the base for later competence and proficiency. They are the building blocks that children learn to utilize to develop subsequent, higher-level skills to become proficient readers.
The National Early Literacy Panel (NELP) conducted a synthesis of the scientific research on the development of early literacy skills in children ages zero to five. The panel's primary purpose was to synthesize research to contribute to decisions in educational policy and practice that affect early literacy development and to determine how teachers and families can support young children's language and literacy development (NELP, 2008). The NELP report identified six key predictors for reading and school success. These skills and abilities include alphabet knowledge, phonological awareness, rapid automatic naming of letters or numbers, rapid automatic naming of objects or colors, writing and phonological memory (NELP, 2008). Children who do not acquire mastery of these skills fall behind their classmates and generally are not reading and comprehending at grade level. NELP also concluded that there are an additional five early literacy skills that are moderately predictive of later literacy achievement: Concepts about print, print knowledge, reading readiness, oral language and visual processing. These five skills are usually more predictive of literacy achievement at the end of Kindergarten or beginning of 1st grade than of later reading development (NELP, 2008).

The Common Core Reading Standards: Foundational Skills (K-5) have also outlined a set of skills that children must master before they can become fluent readers and comprehend what they are reading. The foundational skills are focused on developing students’ understanding and working knowledge of print concepts, phonological awareness, phonics and word recognition, and fluency (NGA and CCSSO, 2010). These skills are taught in a developmental sequence to support reading development. It is important to note that although the NRP identified comprehension and vocabulary as critical components of reading instruction, the Common Core Foundational Skills do not specifically identify these skills. Vocabulary and comprehension are the focus of the anchor standards and related grade-specific K-12 Common Core State Standards. Beginning in kindergarten and through the end-of-high school, comprehension and vocabulary are integrated across the Common Core strands: Reading, Writing, Speaking and Listening, and Language.

To support prekindergarten children in acquiring and mastering the foundational skills for reading development, effective instruction that is differentiated must be provided to meet their varied and individual needs. These guided experiences and instructional approaches must include Common Core Reading Standards Foundational Skills.

New York State Prekindergarten Foundation for the Common Core
The preparation and foundation for reading success is formed before children enter school (National Reading Panel, 2000). Preschool education plays a critical and significant role in promoting literacy, preventing reading difficulties, and preparing young children for kindergarten.

In an effort to provide a clear, comprehensive, and consolidated resource for early childhood professionals, the New York State Prekindergarten Learning Standards have been revised to fully encompass the New York State P-12 Common Core Learning Standards for English Language Arts and Literacy at the Prekindergarten level. The revision process has resulted in one document, the New York State Prekindergarten Foundation for the Common Core (NYSED, 2011).

The New York State Prekindergarten Foundation for the Common Core is organized into five broad developmental and interrelated domains: Approaches to learning; physical development and health; social and emotional development; communication, language and literacy; and cognition and knowledge of the world. These domains of child development represent the overarching areas of early childhood education that are essential for school and
long-term success. The five distinct, but highly interrelated domains provide the structure for the New York State Prekindergarten Foundation for the Common Core.

Of the five developmental domains in the New York State Prekindergarten Foundation for the Common Core, Domain 4: Communication, language and literacy directly address how children understand, create, and communicate meaning. Domain 4 is divided into two sections. Part A – Approaches to communication encompasses motivation, background knowledge, viewing, representing, and vocabulary. In prekindergarten, children are expected to demonstrate that they are motivated to communicate, are building background knowledge, comprehend what they observe; express ideas using a variety of methods; and demonstrate a growing expressive vocabulary. Part B: English language arts and literacy is aligned with the New York State Common Core Learning Standards and includes reading standards for literature and informational texts; writing, speaking, listening and language standards. With prompting and support, prekindergarten children are expected to ask and answer question about detail(s) in a text, characters and major events in a story and retell familiar stories. They are also expected to learn new vocabulary words throughout their interactions with a wide variety of texts. With prompting and support, prekindergarten children are expected to compare and contrast stories with the same topic and make cultural connections to text and self.

Part B also includes the reading standards foundational skills. Children in prekindergarten are expected to demonstrate an understanding of the organization and basic features of print; demonstrate an emerging understanding of spoken words, syllables and sounds; demonstrate emergent phonics and word analysis skills; and display emergent reading behaviors with purpose and understanding. These expectations are consistent with the NELP’s findings on the key predictors for reading success.

Language, literacy and reading development in the prekindergarten years proceeds through several levels of foundational skills with skills and behaviors becoming more complex and more proficient as children get older. According to the NICHD (2000), foundation skills include three elements:

- **Phonemic awareness** — the awareness that spoken words are made up of individual sounds (phonemes) and the ability to manipulate these sounds.

- **Knowledge of high-frequency sight words** — the most common words, which students should be able to read quickly and automatically.

- **The ability to decode words** — to translate a word from print to speech (for example, by using known sound-symbol correspondences to sound a word out and decipher it).

**Prekindergarten Foundation Skills That Support Reading Development**

**Print Concepts**

Print awareness is an important part of knowing how to read and write. For pre- and emergent readers the pictures in books is an important element for developing oral language and vocabulary during storybook reading and independent play. Although picture reading reflects a critical stage in literacy development, it is important for children to understand that print can be read and tells the story. In developing print awareness a child begins to understand what print looks like, how it works, and the fact that print carries meaning (Strickland & Schickedanz, 2009). Concepts of print refer to the ability of a child to understand and recognize the ways in which print functions for the purposes of reading, particularly with regard to books. Concepts about print include knowing where the front and the back of the book are located; knowing right
side up from upside down; knowing that the print, not the picture, is what we read; knowing which direction we read in; and knowing the meaning of punctuation marks.

As children are learning about print concepts, they are building the foundation for early reading development. Knowledge of these concepts is essential to conventional reading and writing in English. Children with print awareness will begin to understand how written language is connected to oral language. Oral language skills are linked to the code-related skills that help word reading to develop and they also provide the foundation for the development of the more-advanced language skills needed for comprehension (Cain & Oakhill, 2007). Print awareness also supports children’s ability to recognize words as components of both oral and written communication.

The concepts of word are predictive of how well children will be able to read in the early grades. Concept of word refers to the ability of a reader to match spoken words to written words while reading. While developing print awareness, young children will began to understand that each word is separate, and that words are separated by a space within each sentence. Using strategies to build concept of word will also support children’s developing awareness of the individual sounds within words. Developing concept of word precedes and may facilitate the development of phonological and phonemic awareness (Gately, 2004).

Concepts of print activities should help students understand the mechanics of a text, and may also emphasize the characteristics of a text, such as capital letters and punctuation (SEDL, 2008).

1. Print Concepts (RF PK.1)
Demonstrate understanding of the organization and basic features of print:

   a. Follow words from left to right, top to bottom, and page-by-page.
   b. Recognize that spoken words are represented in written language by specific sequences of letters.
   c. Understand that words are separated by spaces in print.
   d. Recognize and name some upper/lowercase letters of the alphabet, especially those in own name.
   e. Recognize that letters are grouped to form words.
   f. Differentiate letters from numerals.

Table 1: Supporting print concepts in preschool

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Classroom/Home Environment</th>
<th>Adult/Teacher Guidance</th>
<th>Instructional Example</th>
<th>Support for ELL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Label classroom/home materials with pictures and words.</td>
<td>• Provide many opportunities for children to listen and actively participate in read-aloud and</td>
<td>• Use read alouds and dialogic reading experiences to develop print concepts (e.g.,</td>
<td>• Label classroom objects in home language of students</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
• Use environmental print to make books, games and activities (e.g., environmental print lotto and matching)

• Connect functional print to class/home activities (e.g., daily routine and schedule)

• Provide a Word wall, with appropriate pictures and words, for children to interact with

• Appropriate technology (e.g., computer software, iPad, interactive whiteboards) that support print awareness and concepts of print

• Dialogic reading activities

  • Use predictable and patterned books

  • Model reading and writing behaviors

  • Explicitly discuss how a book works by pointing out the cover, back, title, authors, illustrators, and familiar words or names, during read-aloud sessions.

  • Discuss page arrangement and directionality of print with repeated readings and modeling with big books.

  • Take dictation from children.

• “Show me the front of the book” “What does the author do?” “Show me where to begin to start reading on this page.”

• Engage children with materials that promote identification of the letters of the alphabet

• Physically model language to ELLs in classroom routines and instructional activities.

• Provide non-English materials whenever possible in order to support a child’s first language while they learn to speak English.

• Families should be encouraged to read and talk to their children in their native language.

**Phonological Awareness**

Phonological awareness is the ability to recognize that words are made up of a variety of sound units. Phonological awareness is an umbrella term and encompasses a number of sound related skills necessary for reading development (Lane, 2007). As children develop phonological awareness they begin to learn that words can be segmented into syllables and each syllable begin with a sound (onset) and ends with another sound (rime). They also come to understand that words are made up of small sound units (phonemes) and that these units can be manipulated to form different words. By engaging in language and word play, children learn to recognize patterns among words and use this knowledge to read and build words.
Phonemic Awareness

Reading is a complex and multifaceted process that involves learning a complicated and often confusing code of letters and sounds known as the alphabetic principle. Research has shown that some children struggle with this element of reading development because they have difficulty with phonemic awareness (NICHD, 2000; NELP, 2008; Shanahan & Lonigan, 2013). Phonemic awareness is a subset of phonological awareness. Phonemic awareness refers to the ability to recognize, identify and manipulate phonemes in spoken words. Research has found that this element of reading is the single strongest indicator for a child’s success at learning to read (NICHD, 2000).

Phonemic awareness is grounded in oral language and serves as the foundation for reading development. Children who cannot hear and work with the phonemes of spoken words will have a difficult time learning how to relate these phonemes to graphemes (a letter or a number of letters that represent a phoneme in a word) when they see them in written words. This pre-phonics problem interferes with the learning of letter and sound connections.

Knowledge of the alphabet and phonological awareness are both strong predictors of later decoding and comprehension and teaching these in combination has a consistently positive impact on improving students’ later decoding and reading comprehension abilities (Shanahan & Lonigan, 2013). Phonological awareness provides the foundation for phonics. Phonics, the understanding that sounds and print letters are connected, is the first step towards conventional reading.

2. Phonological Awareness (RF.PK.2)

Demonstrate an emerging understanding of spoken words, syllables and sounds (phonemes):

a. Engage in language play (e.g. alliterative language, rhyming, sound patterns).

b. Recognize and match words that rhyme.

c. Demonstrate awareness of relationship between sounds and letters.

d. With support and prompting, isolate and pronounce the initial sounds in words.

Table 2: Supporting phonological awareness in preschool

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Classroom/Home Environment</th>
<th>Adult/Teacher Directed</th>
<th>Instructional Examples</th>
<th>Support for ELL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• A variety of books that emphasize rhyming and alliteration (e.g., Dr. Seuss, repetitive books with predictable phrases)</td>
<td>• Listening games (follow the leader, Simon says)</td>
<td>• Provide activities that follow a sequence of instruction progressing from easier to more difficult tasks and from larger to smaller units of spoken language.</td>
<td>• Intentionally use visual models, gestures and manipulatives to model lessons</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Songs, finger</td>
<td>• Read books that contain rhyming words, emphasizing the rhyming words as you read</td>
<td></td>
<td>• Involve ELLs in peer and cooperative learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Language and Literacy Development in the Early Years</td>
<td>41</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>---</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>plays and nursery rhymes displayed on walls and flip charts.</td>
<td>- Clapping out or using blocks to separate words in a sentence</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Appropriate technology (e.g., computer software, iPad, Interactive whiteboards) that supports phonological and phonemic awareness</td>
<td>- Identifying and making rhymes (e.g., “Cat, hat, bat are words that rhyme.”)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Clapping out syllables in children’s names</td>
<td>- Dividing sentences into words (e.g., While talking slowly and moving a block for each word, “The dog barks has three words.”)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phonemic awareness:</td>
<td>- Dividing words into syllables (e.g., While emphasizing each syllable as you clap, “Ba-by has two syllables.)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Emphasis on first, medial and ending sounds in CVC words (e.g., /d/ /o/ /g/)</td>
<td>- Segmenting and blending onsets and rimes (e.g., /c/ /at/)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Segmenting, blending and manipulating phonemes (e.g., “What word do you get when you change the /h/ in hat to /c/?”)</td>
<td>- Identifying beginning, final, and medial phonemes in spoken words</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teach phonemes along with letters, not in isolation (e.g., “Peter, Paul, and Penelope all begin with the letter P. They all begin with the /p/ sound.).</td>
<td>- Segmenting and blending individual phonemes in spoken words</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Provide additional work on English phonemes that are not present in the students’ home language.</td>
<td>- Provide one-on-one support when possible</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Phonics and Word Recognition**
Research has shown that phonics and word study are valuable strategies for improving children’s ability to recognize words and decode text (Ehri, 2005). The goals of phonics and word study instruction are to teach children that there are systematic relationships between letters and sounds, that written words are composed of letter patterns representing the sounds of spoken words, that recognizing words quickly and accurately is a way of obtaining meaning from them, and that they can blend sounds to read words and segment words into sounds to spell (NICHD, 2000). Knowing the relationships will help children recognize familiar words automatically and decode or sound out new words (Armbruster et al., 2003).

Word recognition is the ability of a reader to recognize written words correctly and virtually effortlessly. Emergent readers need to learn to recognize high-frequency words instantly because many of them are not phonically regular. Children must learn to identify words quickly and fluently so that they can focus on the meaning of what they are reading (Stanovich, 1986).

Words that beginning readers initially sound out through word analysis or phonics come to be recognized as whole units after readers encounter them repeatedly in connected text. Effective phonics and word recognition instruction builds steadily on children’s understanding and use of both spoken and written language.

3. Phonics and Word Recognition (RF.PK.3)

Demonstrate emergent phonics and word analysis skills:

a. With prompting and support, demonstrate one-to-one letter-sound correspondence by producing the primary sound of some consonants.

b. Recognizes own name and common signs and labels in the environment.

Table 3: Supporting phonics and word recognition in preschool

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Classroom/Home Environment</th>
<th>Adult/Teacher Directed</th>
<th>Instructional Examples</th>
<th>Support for ELL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Identify meaningful set of sound-letter relationships (i.e., the first letter in children’s names)</td>
<td>• Explicitly teach common sound-letter relationships that are meaningful to children</td>
<td>• Class books that children create and can frequently interact with</td>
<td>• Systematic instruction and additional time for phonics instruction should be built into reading programs for ELLs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Label personal items with children’s names</td>
<td>• Purposely use games to support sound-letter connections (e.g., tongue twisters)</td>
<td>• Environmental print</td>
<td>• Use wait time to allow children enough time to process questions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Word wall</td>
<td></td>
<td>• Name cards</td>
<td>• Use and encourage the use of think-aloud strategies to</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
technology (e.g., computer software, iPad, interactive whiteboards) that support phonics and word recognition instruction

analyze and solve problems

4. Fluency (RF.PK.3)

Displays emergent reading behaviors with purpose and understanding (e.g., pretend reading).

Table 4: Supporting fluency in preschool

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Classroom/Home Environment</th>
<th>Adult/Teacher Directed</th>
<th>Instruction Examples</th>
<th>Support for ELL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Re-reading familiar books</td>
<td>• Songs, finger plays, poetry and nursery rhymes can be used to practice fluency</td>
<td>• Model fluent reading by reading aloud daily.</td>
<td>• ELLs should participate in interactive read alouds</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Model fluent reading</td>
<td>• Books on tape,</td>
<td>• Use expression</td>
<td>• Use wait time to allow children</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Fluency

Reading fluency is related to oral language proficiency (Rasinski, 2003). Children should be encouraged to use oral language for a variety of purposes, such as answering and asking questions as well as expressing their thoughts. In developing oral language skills, preschool children demonstrate a wide range of fluency. Oral language provides a foundation where children learn about the alphabetic principle and subsequently learn about the structure of spoken English words. Oral language development is a term used to describe the development of knowledge and skills that allow children to understand, speak, and use words to communicate. During the preschool years, children become fluent in the language spoken at home. With appropriate guidance and support, children’s oral language will develop as they begin to use more complex grammar and vocabulary. Children’s oral language skills serve as the foundation for both aspects of reading ability: Word reading and language comprehension (Shanahan & Lonigan, 2013). Oral reading is also a well-documented method of increasing reading fluency in children (NICHD, 2000).

Oral language development provides students with the foundation for comprehending text and communicating effectively. Fluency is inextricably tied to decoding and reading comprehension (Pikulski & Chard, 2005). It serves as the bridge between decoding and comprehension.
• Echo reading
• Appropriate technology (e.g., computer software, iPad, interactive whiteboards, voice recorders) that support receptive and expressive fluency

CD or DVD
while reading
• Read a phrase or sentence aloud then have children repeat the same phrase or sentence
• Act out books and stories to provide additional opportunities to translate written language to oral language.

enough time to process questions
• Listen repeatedly to books read aloud in order to gain fluency in English
• Identify new vocabulary to pre-teach before lesson or activity

The New York State Prekindergarten Foundation for the Common Core will provide an essential beginning for developing and implementing high quality curriculum, creating meaningful and appropriate learning experiences for four-year-olds across New York State, and informing other critical processes such as designing learning environments, planning standards based instruction and assessment, as well as pre-service and in-service training for administrators and teachers, and results-oriented parent engagement (NYSED, 2011 p.6).

Assessment
Foundational skill instruction must include assessment opportunities that measure progress in the Common Core Foundational Skills. Young children enter kindergarten from diverse backgrounds with a variety of skills that it is necessary to develop instruction to their individual strengths and needs. Assessment is used to measure development and learning, to guide teacher and program planning and decision-making, and to report to and communicate with others (McAfee, et.al., 2004). Assessment of early literacy skills is important for identifying children who may need more intensive instruction to achieve success with literacy and become proficient readers.

The method of authentic evaluation and assessment, which includes observations of children, structured interviews, and portfolios, is used to monitor the growth and learning of individual children. A portfolio, with student work samples and other evidence from multiple sources (e.g., observations, anecdotal notes, parents) that reflect real-world activities, documents a child’s efforts, interests, progress, and achievement in language and literacy. Authentic evaluation and assessment is vital for curriculum planning because it supports the creation of appropriate instructional strategies and activities to support children’s development. Data from multiple sources (i.e., standardized assessments, observations, portfolios) provide valuable information for planning whole group, differentiated and individualized instruction.

English Language Learners
Oral language and literacy development is supported by children’s home language. Children whose home language differs from the language of instruction will need additional support to build their oral language skills. Research indicates that English Language Learners (ELLs) acquire literacy skills in English faster and do better in school if they have a strong
foundation in their home language (Espinosa, 2008). Foundational literacy skills developed in one language often transfer to a second language (Cardenas-Hagan et al., 2007). With appropriate instruction, preschool children can develop many of the foundational skills they will need for learning to read, and children in dual language programs are no exception. As children continue to develop language and literacy skills in their home language, those skills provide a scaffold for developing those same skills in their second language. During the early years, ELL’s development occurs through meaningful interactions with others such as instructional conversations and collaboration with peers.

In order to face the challenges that come with a diverse classroom, all educators and administrators need to have both pre- and in-service training opportunities in linguistic and cultural diversity, and in principles of first and second language acquisition. It is also critical for the early childhood educator to understand the linguistic and cultural backgrounds of their children in order to facilitate learning and build cross-cultural understandings with their families.

Conclusion

A lack of foundation skills is a major cause of poor performance in struggling readers (Zorfass & Urbano, 2008). Struggling readers can include students with learning disabilities, English language learners, and others with diverse reading needs who are at risk for failure. Children who enter middle school without strong foundation skills will have difficulty in content areas that require reading, such as English language arts, social studies, science, and math (Zorfass & Urbano, 2008).

For all students, a high-quality early education is critical to ensuring their long-term academic success. Early learners need to understand why people read and write in order to be motivated to excel in their own literacy development. Through active engagement in the reading process, children learn ways to use their growing knowledge and skills flexibly and in combination with all domains of development. All children can develop a strong foundation for literacy and reading development when they are given opportunities to engage in purposeful, meaningful language and early print activities.

Reading is a process that builds upon a wide range of developing skills and is an ongoing process. Every child will move through each of the stages of reading development at their own pace. The foundations of good reading are the same for all children, regardless of their gender, background, or special learning needs. Most children use the same processes in learning to read. Some will need more support than others and may need more instruction in one reading skill than another. Children who have an opportunity to develop basic foundational skills in language and literacy in preschool enter kindergarten ready to learn to read and write (Ballantyne, Sanderman, & McLaughlin, 2008). With foundational skills in place, students will develop and flourish as readers on the K-12 pathway.
References


Differentiating Literacy Instruction—There’s an App for That!

Kathleen Gormley, The Sage Colleges
Peter McDermott, Pace University

ABSTRACT
Given the increased diversity of students within the regular, general education classroom, this article explores the importance of differentiated instruction to meet the needs of all learners in this age of Common Core State Standards. Using digital literacies that engage students, the authors showcase apps and web tools they have used in developing learners’ literacy. Most of the recommended apps are free and suggestions are included as to how teachers might use these tools with students of the classroom.

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The increasing ethnic, language, cultural and socioeconomic diversity of students in general education classrooms has been well documented (Schmitz, Nourse & Ross, 2012). Today’s classrooms have more students with significant disabilities (Bae & Clark, 2005) and immigrants who are learning English as a second or third language than ever before (Lee, 2012; Purcy, Matin-Beltran & Daniel, 2013). Many of today’s students are struggling with issues associated with poverty as well (McGlynn, 2014). Furthermore, many cultures, languages and learning styles are represented in today’s students (Lee, 2005). Concomitantly, the educational gap (Griner & Steward, 2013; McKown, 2013) has been documented between students of means and a lack thereof (i.e., those without and with economic challenges), as well as between white students and those from historically underrepresented groups (Aikens & Barbarin, 2008; Delpit, 1995; Dupere, Leventhal, Crosnot & Dion, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 1995; Rowley & Wright, 2011; Whaley & Noel, 2012), most specifically African Americans and Hispanics. All children
have literacy experiences at home and in their communities, but for some their experiences are more closely aligned with school expectations and teachers’ learning routines (Aldridge, 2009; Bacca & Lent, 2010).

All teachers should expect great variability in their students’ life experiences and literacy backgrounds. While such diversity enriches our classroom communities and prepares students for interacting purposefully with a variety of persons, it also challenges teachers in meeting their students’ learning needs. Simply stated, we cannot teach everyone the same content in exactly the same way due to student differences—‘one size fits all’ is an outdated model of instruction (Fountas & Pinnell, 2012; Knowles, 2009; Watts-Taffe et al., 2012).

The Common Core State Standards (CCSS) (2010) have specified clear literacy expectations, among others, with a goal of closing educational achievement gaps among students. However, meeting these goals in literacy will likely require accommodations based on learners’ needs (Levy, 2008). The question becomes: How does a teacher meet the grade level expectations for CCSS while also meeting the requisite needs of students? Uneasy tensions exist between the pressure to reach grade level expectations and specific students’ current abilities. When the CCSS are examined in depth, the Anchor Standards in Writing certainly allude to composing in a digital environment; similarly, the Anchor Standards in Reading Literature as well as Reading Informational Text note reading online and use of electronic resources. Traditional literacies of reading and writing are clearly woven within the CCSS; however, the digital literacies, which we define as the ability to understand and communicate within an online world, are not explicitly stated and Hagood (2012) argues that this omission is a shortcoming of the CCSS.

We contend that differentiated instruction provides an opportunity to maximize individual student growth and accomplish the CCSS. Succinctly defined, differentiated instruction requires teachers to think about the interrelationships between specific student abilities and background knowledge, curricular goals and objectives as well the ultimate demonstration of understanding. Differentiated instruction necessitates that teachers consider individual learners’ academic strengths and needs as well as the concept density of materials/topics in light of teaching objectives to develop tasks with tools that address learner specific needs. Watts-Taffe et al. (2012) describe differentiation as an approach to instruction that is responsive to individual needs. Simply stated, not everyone in the classroom will be working on the same level or activity, though the content will be related. At first glance this somewhat disparate work may seem at odds with the CCSS, but we agree with Allington (2006) that individual students must interact with books and materials at their appropriate literacy levels. While challenging, rigorous text reading with close exploration (generally seen as careful re-reading) is certainly a plausible expectation (Fisher, Frey & Lapp, 2012; Frey & Fisher, 2013), pupils cannot read at such difficult levels for an inordinately long time (Hinchman & Moore, 2013). Similarly, Dobberton (2012) notes the necessity of alignment of clear objectives with differentiated activities and materials to ensure students learn.

Tomlinson is a leading authority on differentiated instruction at both the elementary (2000a) and secondary levels (Tomlinson & Strickland, 2005). Her initial interest stemmed from her own secondary classroom where she found many of her pupils unprepared for the academic demands of her content area (Wu, 2013). While much of her research focused on gifted learners (Tomlinson, 2003), her more recent work has implications for all learners. Specifically, she discusses the importance of teachers having instructional clarity so they know exactly what students should be learning and can guide them appropriately through differentiation (1999,
Differentiating literacy instruction recently has been a focus of education professionals as they aim to meet the diverse needs of students within their classrooms. Tomlinson and Imbeau (2010, 2012) have contributed to this field by offering many sensible suggestions to address the heterogeneity within classrooms.

Grouping students by ability, need or interest is a vital component of differentiating instruction (Santamaria, 2009; Tomlinson & Imbeau, 2010, 2012). Differentiation is more than giving extra time to complete an assignment or providing learner choice, though these are certainly effective strategies (Zemelman, Daniels & Hyde, 2012). Teachers need to think in terms of differentiation based on student needs in content (what they need to learn), process (how they are going to learn), product (their ultimate demonstration of knowledge) and environment where students learn (Tomlinson, 1999). In terms of curricular content, some students may have learning gaps and need targeted instruction. Students may differ in how they learn, with some preferring visual or auditory input, for example. Moreover, teachers may need to release responsibility more gradually with some students (Zemelman, Daniels & Hyde, 2013) after extensive modeling.

The manner in which students demonstrate their knowledge can vary greatly. Center for Applied Technology in Learning (CAST) (http://www.cast.org), an organization devoted to differentiated instruction and ‘leveling the playing field’ so that students demonstrate what they know, suggests multiple strategies to ensure learner understanding. Specifically CAST suggests that material should be presented in a variety of different ways (i.e., multiple means of representation); students should have the opportunity to show what they know in many ways (i.e., multiple means of action and expression); students should be interested and motivated to learn content (multiple means of engagement). Besides preplanning multiple ways for presenting and assessing student understanding, Parsons, Dodman and Burrowbridge (2013) contend that it is also important for teachers to differentiate in the midst of instruction when students’ performances or responses show a lack of understanding or gaps in knowledge. Such teachers are described as thoughtfully adaptive, a term that resonates with us, because they observe carefully, reflect during teaching and adjust instruction accordingly.

Guided reading of leveled books with flexible groups is popular in elementary schools (Fountas & Pinnell, 1996; Knowles, 2009), and this literacy approach is a highly effective way to differentiate instruction (Allington, 2013). With a focus on how learners process text, Fountas and Pinnell have had a tremendous influence on teachers’ literacy instruction; specifically, they suggest teaching small groups of children to read leveled text and encourage educators to intercede when meaning is lost. Fountas and Pinnell and others (e.g., Glasswell & Ford 2010) stress noting where students where are instructionally, which will be well below grade level for some youngsters, and moving them forward in sensible, organized ways. The importance of a just right book in terms of interest and readability cannot be underestimated (Allington, 2012, 2006, 2002; Fountas & Pinnell, 2012; Robb, 2008). Additionally, choice in reading material has been found to be a significant factor in student learning in conjunction with differentiated instruction (Anderson, 2007; Zemelman, Daniels & Hyde, 2012).

Digital literacies refer to the many ways that meaning is composed, viewed and shared with others through electronic environments (McKenna, Conradi, Lawrence, Jang & Meyer, 2012). Students develop expertise with the digital literacies through rigorous reading, composing and viewing of online materials and other digital texts. In this article we argue that the digital literacies provide great promise in addressing the individual needs of learners when used to differentiate instruction (Cobb, 2010). Further, we suggest specific online apps and web tools that provide the opportunity for differentiation (Cahill & McGill-Franzen, 2013). We have used all of the recommended apps and tools with learners who struggle with literacy in after
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Given school literacy programs, and we have shared these apps with our graduate students, most of whom work in public schools K-12. Overall, these apps have been well received by learners who more readily engage in reading and writing when technology is used (Hutchinson, Beschorner & Schmidt-Crawford, 2012). As members 21st Century cohort, students need to become active consumers and users of communication technology, like these recommended tools and apps (Handsfield, Dean & Cielocha, 2009).

Much success has been noted when teachers differentiate their instruction (Morgan, 2014). Differentiation of instruction has been very successful in low performing schools with high poverty rates and large numbers of English language learners. Cusumano and Mueller (2007) describe the improvement in their students’ academic growth as part of a total school restructuring around differentiated principles, including increased small group instructional time that is based on student need, grade level and curricular content. Others (e.g., Lawrence-Brown, 2004) have found it successful in mixed ability classrooms (Huebner, 2010; Tomlinson, 2006). Watts-Taffe et al. (2012) have reviewed the educational successes relative to literacy growth when instruction is tailored to student needs via differentiated instruction.

Recommended Apps and Tools for Differentiated Instruction

In this section, we have recommended apps and web tools to develop fluency, slide presentations, multimedia composing, online book creations, digital storytelling, collections of read-along books, online whiteboards, digital bulletin boards, and collaboration tools. We have included apps and tools that we have first-hand knowledge of their success with a variety of learners, many who are at-risk learners in state-identified high need school districts. Thus we feel confident in recommending them for teachers’ consideration. Most of these apps can be used a various grade levels [primary, 1-3; intermediate/middle, 4-8; secondary 9-12] depending on students’ familiarity with online tools and associated skills (e.g., keyboarding). Where specific apps are targeted to particular chronological ages, we have noted the target group. Otherwise, the choice of whether or not to use a particular app or tool with a group is, we believe, best determined by the teacher’s knowledge of learners’ digital experiences as well as the educational purpose.

We do not recommend that all learners use the same app in a lock-step fashion. Several tools may be showcased and then learners encouraged to select one that appeals to them or is appropriate for their knowledge level. Apps and tools with fewer ‘bells and whistles’ are most appropriate for learners who are beginning to learn in digital skills in an area. Our vision is that many different tools and apps would be used within the same classroom such that the class is then transformed into a community of learners. Differentiation most often comes in how learners complete tasks and the complexity of their choices. This is not to suggest that learners who struggle with reading and writing will be doing simpler task, rather that there will be much choice in learners demonstrating their knowledge. Our experience has been that learners who struggle with traditional literacy are often freed when other forms of communication are included (e.g., images, voice) (Gormley & McDermott, in press).

Word Recognition and Fluency: Getting students to read fluently means that they can read accurately with prosody (Fountas & Pinnell, 2012; Rasinski, 2012, 2009; Swain, Leader-Janssen & Conley, 2013). Certainly, word automaticity is a major stumbling block for learners with limited sight vocabulary development or those lacking strong English vocabularies (Marcell, 2011). In this section, we recommend several apps for developing word recognition as well as
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promoting fluency with oral reading. The tool selected should be based on learner need. Allow us to reiterate—rarely will all students in the same class use the same app on the same material or in exactly the same way.

*Audioboo* ([https://itunes.apple.com/us/app/audioboo/id304204540?mt=8](https://itunes.apple.com/us/app/audioboo/id304204540?mt=8) or [www.audioboo.com](http://www.audioboo.com)) is one of our favorite free digital recording devices (works on computers, tables, smart phones without a download). We know that unless students have experienced success and authentic purposes for multiple reads, they are often resistant to reading a passage several times. Nevertheless, one the best way to develop fluency is reading a piece again and again (Heisey & Kucan, 2010; Staudt, 2009). Repeated reading develops both immediate word recognition and also encourages smooth reading with appropriate phrasing. Audioboo, an online audio recording tool, allows students (or teachers) to record up to five minutes and then share this podcast via email or by the web address (i.e., URL, which is abbreviated from Universal Resource Locator). The teacher will have to show learners how to use Audioboo (basically open up from a bookmark, click on red button to start, talk or read orally, hit the red button to stop, export, then send the URL via email to teacher’s account).

There are a number of ways that teachers might use Audioboo to differentiate instruction:

1. **Running Record Recording Center:** A teacher might set up a recording center wherein learners record their name, title of reading material, page, date and then set a time to read for 1 minute. Afterwards, they could briefly retell what they had read. Later the teacher can use these boos (Audioboo recordings are called ‘boos’) to conduct running records, gather learner specific data and make instructional decisions. For younger students a frame might assist children to include all the required information (e.g., My name is _____; I am reading _____ on page ____). Obviously, the differentiation in this suggestion comes from the book level that is chose to be read orally as well as other factors (e.g., genre).

2. **Communication Center:** Each day a different student could be assigned the job of summarizing the day’s work and recording a boo to email to parents. Much like watering the plants or tidying the book area, this daily job allows all students the opportunity to communicate with the class members’ families by send out a short boo. This suggestion values each learner and provides authentic opportunities for students to practice oral communication skills. The teacher may plan to differentiate by providing more or less support for individual learners based on their competencies with summarizing and oral reading.

3. **Book Talks:** We know that many students resist formal book reports and rarely do these encourage students to read books their peers are enjoying. A boo summarizing why a student liked a particular book and leaving the listener with a ‘hook’ (e.g., “*If you like suspense and story twists, this is the book for you!*”) may encourage classmates to read the recommended book. We see this as reflecting differentiation based on learner interests as well as reading level. Students can be encouraged to recognize others who like similar books, such as mysteries or biographies, or book formats, such as graphic novels, and appreciate commonalities of interests in their peers. Hopefully, learners will appreciate their peers’ evaluations and seek out books that sound interesting to them.

**Slide Presentations:** Often teachers want students, as individuals or groups, to create slide presentations. These presentations can summarize learning, such as identifying the story structure in a narrative piece. We find that teachers over-utilize PPTs and often without teaching...
students to use limited text and color—we typically recommend a few words or phrases that the presenter can talk about as well as no more than three colors that are clearly different. (See Atkinson, 2007 for more in depth suggestions for improving PPTs.) We have found some ways to make slide presentations more attractive and engaging for learners and viewers.

Differentiation in the development of slide presentations can done in two ways: (1) Tool selection—some tools have more options and are more complicated; (2) Learner choices for what to include on the various slides (e.g., image only, image and text).

Knovio (http://www.knovio.com/) is a very easy web tool to use and it’s also free. Essentially, the student (or teacher) uploads a PPT and then narrates each slide—their image and voice appears along side each individual slide, though the video feature can be blocked. If the creator is unhappy with a particular slide, it can be re-recorded, so the final product is satisfactory from the developer’s point of view. Differentiation with Knovio occurs in slide content; some learners may use images or clip art only, while others may select animations and text.

Here are a few suggestions on how a teacher might incorporate Knovio presentations in their classrooms:

1. **Summaries:** Knovio presentations for review of units of study seem to us to be a good use of this tool. For example, if the class is studying the Civil War, groups of students might review the advantages of the North versus the South, among other topics. Listening to other groups’ Knovios provides a wonderful review opportunity for students, especially those for whom reading is challenging. Differentiation within this suggestion could be based on topic complexity or grouping of students to create a joint presentation considering learners’ strengths and needs.

2. **Informational Writing:** Younger students might develop nonfiction pieces about their hobbies (e.g., soccer), including protective gear, positions, rules, associated images and so forth. Differentiation here comes in the form of learner interest (Zemelman, Daniels & Hyde, 2012) and, thus, valued individuals.

We have some words of advice on using images. Teach students about copyrighting and attribution. In particular guide them to resources that are copyright free with attribution. Our suggestion is that you directly teach students about Creative Commons (http://creativecommons.org/) and how to attribute, perhaps by submitting images of their own. At a very minimum, we think that students, even the very young, need to capture images and their associated URLs.

Haiku Deck (https://itunes.apple.com/us/app/haiku-deck/id536328724?mt=8&ign-mpt=uo%3D8) is a free app for the iPad that has the potential to create engaging presentations (and great charts). There are two features of Haiku Deck that we really appreciate. First, the app directs the user to Creative Common images, so image copyright violations do not occur—if a word, like ‘symphony’ is typed, Haiku Deck automatically locates images associated with that word. Second, Haiku Deck limits the amount of text that can be on each slide. This limitation on words is improves the quality of final presentations because students cannot write long sentences, which are very ineffective in presentations (and deadly, if read verbatim). Many of our suggestions for Knovio will work well with Haiku Deck as well.

Differentiation in presentation development can come from the tool selected; our advice is to select the tool that is aligned with learner needs. For example, if a learner’s parents do not want his or her image online, then using Knovio with the video turned off might be the right choice.
Multimedia Composing: Writing with pen and pencil still has it’s place in today’s classroom, but composing is now a 21st Century skill that involves combinations of words, images, audio and/or video. It is much broader than writing, and for that reason we like the word ‘composing.’ Digital media production, another term for multimedia composing, offers exciting opportunities for supporting students’ learning (e.g., Considine, Horton, & Moorman, 2009; O’Brien & Voss, 2011; Turner, 2011). There are several free tools that allow students to produce multimedia, and we will describe a few that we find most helpful. Differentiation with multimedia tools comes again from the options within tools as well as the individual topic a specific learner chooses to explore. Some tools are more complicated to learn and better serve students who are more experienced or more readily assume challenges.

**Animoto** ([http://animoto.com](http://animoto.com)) is a very easy tool that allows teachers and students to create 30-second videos that combine text, royalty free music and images to create very professional videos (works on computers, iPhones and androids). We find it a great starting tool, though we have seen it used very effectively by experienced producers of multimedia. Basically, once the use has signed up for a free account, images are uploaded and arranged in a logical order. Next, the style of presentation (more than 50 templates are available) and music are select from many choices (slow to fast paced beat). Afterward, the creation is previewed and published. The finished Animoto can be shared via URL or embeded in a learning management system (LMS). Here some ways we suggest starting with Animoto.

1. **Reviews for Units of Study:** Use Animoto to summarize a unit of learning with younger students. You might have students draw images and scan into jpegs (easily done with a scanner), so that they are not violating copyrighting. These jpegs are uploaded into Animoto, and with the input of class members these images are organized to provide a review of content. Select a presentation style, and don’t be surprised if students want to try several choices before deciding on a final style. Add summary text and pick music; again children often want to hear several pieces before they select a final piece of music to accompany their production. Preview and, if children are satisfied, then you have your finished Animoto. We think this tool can help foster the importance of not presenting someone else’s work as their own and teaching youngsters from their first multimedia production not to plagiarize. Zemelman, Daniels & Hyde (2012) emphasize again and again the importance of teacher modeling and shared construction of knowledge. Older students with significant learning or language challenges could then develop shared multimedia pieces as a strategy for differentiation.

2. **Individual Reviews of Unit Sections:** Older students might be assigned to summarize parts of a unit for review. For example, if your students have just completed a study of the Iroquois Confederacy, they might divide the content into appropriate sections. One group might summarize their governance, another their homes and food and so on. Here is where the teacher must expect and require appropriate attribution; the educator might also need to directly teach students how to capture images with their URLs. (An easy way strategy is to capture the image and insert into a word document; then capture the URL or web address and insert under the image in the same word document; finally capture the image and URL together and upload this jpeg into Animoto. We know this adds a few steps, but it teaches learners not to grab from the Internet and thereby violate copyrighting.) Note: Capturing an image can de done through the Snipping Tool, which comes installed on PCs or the Preview Tool that is installed on Macs; both allow the user to select a portion of a screen and save as a jpeg, among other options.
3. **Public Service Announcements**: Students might develop public service announcements using Animoto. Following steps described above, the importance of this kind of activity is that students think carefully about their message (e.g., importance of exercise). In this case you might have students take actual images, though you need to protect learners’ anonymity, and use them as part of their PSAs. Differentiation in this PSA activity will come from the topics that students choose—complexity will likely reflect their current understandings and interests. An English language learner can present their message without having oral language issues, such as the natural tendency to drop word endings, which interfere with the message.

We think the possibilities for Animoto are quite endless (e.g., we have see graduate students develop Animotos to put on their personal website to use in the job searches). Our experience has been that once students learn how to make Animot videos, they often go home and produce many more. So you might want to think about an Animoto or Technology Share Time within your class.

Animoto, like other ‘free’ web tools, is hoping that as a result of working with the free version, users will upgrade to paid versions that have more features. Animoto Pro Education ([http://animoto.com/pro/education](http://animoto.com/pro/education)), which costs $249 for school per year, provides many more capabilities and might be something your school wants to consider. Kay has the Animoto Pro version ([http://animoto.com/pro](http://animoto.com/pro)) at $60 per year that allows her to produce 3-minute videos, which she finds fits her purposes adequately.

**Jing** ([http://www.techsmith.com/jing.html](http://www.techsmith.com/jing.html)): This free screencapturing tool can be used to make videos of your desktop and record your voice for 5-minute multimedia productions. The final video can be saved to computers or stored at the associated cloud location ([http://www.screencast.com](http://www.screencast.com)) without cost. Creating a multimedia project with Jing is really simple, but Jing must first downloaded to the computer desktop. TechSmith, a very reputable technology company, developed Jing specifically for students and, thus, it is a very safe and intuitive web tool. Basically, the program enables the user to record whatever is selected from the desktop and then record voice, provided the computer has a built-in microphone. (If there is no built in microphone, an inexpensive one with a USB connection will work just fine.) Here are some ways to use Jing to create a multimedia projects:

1. **Video Presentations**: Student developed presentations are a sensible way to start. For example, suppose your students are studying habitats in science. They could develop presentations (see earlier section on Slide Presentation) that include images with attributions and summary text. After rehearsal of what they want to say—and students should be cautioned AVOID reading slides— the user then clicks on Jing and records their presentation. Students could view other peers’ multimedia productions for a review of habitats, such as desert. [PPts are easy to develop, and Google Drive ([http://www.google.com/drive/apps.html?usp=ad_search&gclid=CJKowYWP9LsCFTEV7Aod-wcAqQ](http://www.google.com/drive/apps.html?usp=ad_search&gclid=CJKowYWP9LsCFTEV7Aod-wcAqQ)) makes it fairly simple with their free presentation tool, if Microsoft Office powerpoint is not installed on a computer.) Video presentations will by their very nature be differentiated by complexity of topic and learners’ approaches to presenting their understanding. Differentiation on this suggested idea is related to the amount of support a learner might need to produce a video. A teacher might differentiate through various pre-production strategy instruction (e.g., creating story boards using sketches, words or a combination thereof).
2. *Developing ‘How-To’ Videos*: Creating ‘how to’ videos is another strategy that can be helpful. A student can explain how they solved a math problem and also show their work as they discuss their approach to a specific word problem. Explaining the reasoning and thinking process is helpful for other class members as well as for assessment purposes. The potential for differentiation here is quite obvious. Some learners may need strategies for developing effective PPTs—some learners may start with images, others with words, and still others may move back and forth between images and words. Planning to group students by approach is another way to differentiate and asking the groups to report out on how they approached the task (see tutorials below) will help learners recognize there are many starting points to developing effective multimedia.

3. *Tutorials*: Students can visit a website and demonstrate how to use a specific web tool. These tutorial videos can comprise a library of helpful videos for others in the class to use and can be posted on the class LMS for easy access. We envision tutorials as being learner and teacher developed; as such they foster a community of learners with many resources in terms of class members.

*Screencast-o-matic* ([http://www.screencast-o-matic.com/](http://www.screencast-o-matic.com/)): Another screencasting tool from TechSmith is Screencast-o-matic, which captures up to 15-minutes of whatever is designated on the computer desktop. The user selects the portion of the screen they wish to record (drag and resize) and selects file quality including HD that allow uploading to YouTube ([http://www.youtube.com](http://www.youtube.com)). Again the producer has the ability use a built-in or external microphone (checking the volume) as well as a webcam. (With middle and high school students use of the webcam may be appropriate, but we tend to recommend that elementary students not use a webcam in consideration of cybersafety.) The process is quite simple: hit the red record button, talk and pause when necessary—for example, changing the desktop screen from a PPT to a website. When finish, click the ‘done’ button. Publication options include Screencast-O-Matic, YouTube or personal video file (MP4, AVI or FLV) that can be embedded in LMS. Again, TechSmith is hoping users will purchase their Pro version that includes more editing features (e.g., blurring of faces), but we think the free version is acceptable for most educational purposes.

We offer a word of caution about Screencast-O-Matic. The recording time is WAY TOO LONG, and we **strongly** suggest limiting student productions to 7-10 minutes, depending on the age of learners. Our sense is that this tool is most appropriate middle school or secondary students. Ideas for using this tool include the following:

1. *Research Presentations*: Using a rubric that limits the time for screencasts, we think this program works well to present research information to others, which is aligned with the CCSS for middle and secondary students. Suppose, for example, that students have been studying the Harlem Renaissance. They could develop presentations on related topics (e.g., jazz, Zora Neal Hurston, Langston Hughes) and share these with their classmates. Differentiation in this suggestion is largely based on learner interest, which is a very important consideration (Zemelman, Daniels & Hyde, 2012).

2. *Alphabet Books*: Students could develop ABC books related to units of study. Suppose your class has been studying the solar system and outer space. Students could develop their own online ABC books (e.g., A = Astronaut; B = Black Hole; C = Comet) that summarize their learning. These books could include attributed images with words and recorded voice. For many students who struggle to write what they know about content, the use of visual image and voice allows them to show what they know about content.
Differentiation in screencasting occurs in the flexibility of the tools to support specific learners. Animoto, for example, has fewer options and requires no recording of voice, so this tool might be the best option for students who struggle with online composing and ensures a highly polished final production. Screencast-o-matic might be a better choice for a learner who is confident and has a great deal of information to share with their peers.

Creating Online Books: Ebooks, electronic books, are becoming more popular and it is common to see learners reading on various devices, such as the iPad or their smart phones. Getting students to write ebooks is very motivating because the final productions include image, text and often voice. Of course, you can develop books using PPt and recording narration, though unless you use a screencasting program, like Jing or Screencast-O-Matic, or a compression program the final book file may be a very large, unwieldy size. We have tried a number of ebook development tools with urban, at-risk learners and here are some that we have found very effective. Note: we use the term ebook and digital book interchangeably with the idea that these books can be read online. For most purposes, the ebook programs we are suggestion are read in a linear fashion, much like a traditional book, though they may have additional features (e.g., the pronunciation of a word with a click on the target word). Positive results have occurred with primary youngsters on reading online (Ciampa, 2012; Taylor, 2012).

Scribble Press (http://scribblepress.com/) is a free online tool that allows the creation of books using students’ images or stickers (500+ available), background options and text. Templates and categories of stickers (e.g., NYC) are included, so a learner can compose with related digital stickers. The final book can be posted in iBooks and shared on associated devices, such as iPads, for others to read. There are controls for teachers (e.g., turning off particular areas) as well, and the tool has received many awards. Here are a couple of suggestions for use:

1. **Collaborative Book Writing for Young Children:** Many young children struggle to draw a recognizable item. Stickers are a great way to by-pass this limitation. Students, as small groups or as individuals, might, for example create a book on shared interest topics.

2. **Writing Center:** We think this iPad app works well in centers to encourage students to compose with images and text.

Differentiation with Scribble Press is very much related to the learner’s developmental level and their understandings of writing. For example, a very young child might or a student in the early stages of English acquisition might develop a book with only images or stickers on Things I Like, whereas others might include sentences as well as images on more complex topics (e.g., Ways to Recycle, Reduce and Reuse). Dyads are another way to differentiate with this tool and learners can assist each other through the creation of an ebook.

Book Creator (https://itunes.apple.com/us/app/book-creator-for-ipad/id442378070?mt=8&ign-mpt=uo%3D8) is another tool (iPad only) to assist students in developing their own books using images, audio, video and text in their creations, which is more complex than the previous ebook tool. Students develop pages that include movies and text or text alone; moreover there’s an audio feature so that books can be recorded (iBook) and shared with others when complete. It’s a bit costly at $4.99, but it’s an impressive app and one that teachers might consider. Here are some ways that you could use this app:

1. **Bilingual Texts:** A text could be developed and recorded in both English and Spanish with a Hispanic student reading the latter. This values the student’s native language and allows students to hear and view the book in two languages. It also provides a way to differentiate based on learners’ writing and reading strengths and needs. For example, an
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1. **Easier Book**: An easier book might be one on foods with both the English and Spanish version (e.g., apple/la manzana). A more challenging book might describing how do a particular task in both English and Spanish with images to illustrate the sentences (e.g., making a peanut butter and jelly sandwich).

2. **Informational Books**: Nonfiction texts might be developed with student generated images to illustrate the text itself. For example, if students were studying volcanoes, they might label the parts of a volcano, explain how volcanoes occur and then include a video of a simulated volcano from baking soda, vinegar and food coloring. Students books would be very different based on their composing development and content knowledge, so again differentiation will largely occur based on learner choices.

3. **Class Cookbook Publication**: A series of class recipes might be gathered to showcase the variety of foods eaten as well as nutrition factors. Such books celebrate and honor the foods from various families as well as teach content, such as the healthy food plate ([http://www.choosemyplate.gov/](http://www.choosemyplate.gov/)). Again these recipes are differentiated based on background with students serving as experts on their own cultural foods.

**Digital Storytelling**: The ability to tell stories from students’ lived experiences allows them to build from authentic experiences. Success with the use of digital storytelling has been found with regular education students (Heller, 2007; Wawro, 2012), immigrant students (Ranieri & Bruni, 2013) and struggling readers (Sylvester & Greenidge, 2009). We have used digital storytelling effectively with urban students and recommend it with great enthusiasm (Gormley & McDermott, in press). Differentiation in storytelling, as we are using the term herein, is very much based on learners developing stories from their background knowledge rather than some movie they have viewed or a computer game the like. Hughes-Hassell (2013) stresses the importance of storytelling for youngsters whose cultures may be underrepresented or stereotyped in books; although she addressed the issue with older students, it provides a foundation for the importance of storytelling particularly for students from non-dominate groups.

**StoryKit** ([https://itunes.apple.com/us/app/storykit/id329374595?mt=8](https://itunes.apple.com/us/app/storykit/id329374595?mt=8)) is a free app that has a drawing tool that helps illustrate a story or students can use photos they have added to an iPod or iPad. (Unfortunately, there’s no app for computers.) It is very easy to use and even the youngest students can develop digital stories to share. Here’s a suggestion for using StoryKit:

1. **Personal Narratives**: Students can write authentic family stories to share with their peers. We find that StoryKit is easy for students to manipulate and develop a digital drawing. Different cultures have different ways of storytelling and much can be learned about students and their cultures from storytelling (Sanchez, 2009).

**i Tell a Story** ([https://itunes.apple.com/us/app/i-tell-a-story/id420367212?mt=8](https://itunes.apple.com/us/app/i-tell-a-story/id420367212?mt=8)) is a digital storytelling app that teachers should consider for the iPad. The audio recording and editing tool make it very appropriate for younger students, most likely grades 1-5. They can add a title, image and send it off for others to hear, and teachers can make classroom audio libraries of students’ stories. Here’s an idea for using this tool with students.

1. **Name Stories**: Often there is a history in how students were named. For example, Kay’s name is Kathleen Anne—Kathleen was the name of her mother’s favorite doll and Anne was her maternal grandmother’s name. It’s an opportunity for students to find out their name stories (or name stories of family members) from interviews. Again this values individual learners and highlights that cultures differ greatly in how children are named. Some cultures name children based on attributes (e.g., Native
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Americans) and others for deceased relatives as a honor of the past, though there are many different examples. Differentiation will come in how students tell the story (e.g., circular, linear story structure) as well as the language patterns that are used to express their stories. Some children will be complete storytelling in their native language, which is not English; their story could be translated by another bilingual student or adult.

Read Along Books: Often struggling students can benefit from hearing stories and then reading along with them. Boeglin-Quintana & Donovan, L. (2013) found evidence that students benefitted from hearing stories fluently read on iPods in terms of motivation for reading. There are many free online books available and we recommend them with enthusiasm. Obviously, differentiation can occur by the books chosen or assigned electronic audio books that can also be read.

Tumblebooks Library (https://www.tumblebooks.com/library/asp/home_tumblebooks.asp) and its associated websites [Tumblebook Cloud Junior (http://www.tbcjr.com/About.aspx) for grades 3-8 and Tumblebook Cloud (http://tumblebookcloud.com/) for high school students] are favorites of ours. These collections include fiction, non-fiction, graphic novels and videos—the latter two are not available for younger readers on Tumblebook Library. While these are typically used on computers they can be used on iPads and mobile devices as well (http://www.tumblebooks.com/library/ipad/book_details.asp?category=Story%20Books%20%28iPad%29). Schools can subscribe to this library of books for a fairly reasonable fee ($599/year, which is less than $1 per pupil for an average size school). It provides a number of resources, including book report forms and quizzes that we do not typically use but might be of interest to classroom educators. What appeals to us most is that the books are read to learners, and this feature can be shut off. We often suggest that our graduate students, who tutor at-risk learners in urban schools as part of their coursework, search the Internet for access to Tumblebooks through a public library. (Go to Google, search ‘Tumblebook Library” and “public library’ and a number of options will appear.) This resource provides hundreds of books that can be read to students; after several listens, the sound can be turned off so that students can read silently. A click on an unknown word results in that specific word being pronounced, which is helpful for struggling learners with word recognition challenges and English language learners. There are a number of ways to use TumbleBooks with learners.

1. Author Study: A Robert Munsch author study could begin by listening to his books on TumbleBooks. Students love hearing Munsch read his books, such as 50 Degrees Below Zero and The Fire House, and students can begin to notice words and writing features that he often uses (e.g., YIKES!!!). A minilesson with a group of students (similar reading level or interest in humorous books) is one way to differentiate. Thereafter, this group could visit his website (http://robertmunsch.com/) and write books based on his style of storytelling. Another way to differentiate is by selecting easier and more challenging books and matching these to specific readers, with all students having some access to Munsch’s books.

2. Listening Centers: A listening center during the literacy block makes great sense for students who struggle with silent reading, English language learners as well as younger students. TumbleBooks provides a gradual release of responsibility to students as they initially listen to books and then reread them by themselves, fostering independence.
3. **Digital Book Access:** For students with limited access to actual books, TumbleBooks can provide a library for those students. We have found that many of our economically challenged students have family smart phones and computers, so they can access these books at home.

**Tar Heel Readers** ([http://tarheelreader.org](http://tarheelreader.org)) is another source of books for students with significant learning issues or those just beginning to read. Originally designed for students with developmental disabilities, this website has free books for students that can be audio enabled. Be sure to preview the books used because some of them have content appropriate for older students (e.g., dating). There are many nonfiction books, but we suggest reviewing the books for language – some are better written than others and some have more supports built in (e.g., similarity in language structure). It is possible to search by topic (e.g., sea turtles) or broad categories (e.g., history, holidays). For example, when *sea turtles* is searched 18 books are displayed. Students can select the book to read, choose the color of page and color of text as well download the books or the teacher can differentiate by targeting specific books for specific learners by linking online. Collections of books and favorite listings can be made. Another option with TarHeel Readers is to write a book and we think this is a great publishing option for an individual student, group of students or classroom of students, while the teacher can vary support based on the specific needs of the learner(s). Using Flickr ([http://www.flickr.com](http://www.flickr.com)) students select images that are attributed to use in their books and the production is very structured and clear.

**Mee Genius** ([https://itunes.apple.com/us/app/mee genius!-kids-books/id364734296?mt=8](https://itunes.apple.com/us/app/mee genius!-kids-books/id364734296?mt=8)) is a free resource using iPad or iPhone that also reads books to learners. Once the app is downloaded the user has access to hundreds of books, though there’s a fairly hefty yearly fee (nearly $60); however when you consider that it provides access to more than 700 books, the price seems reasonable. We suggest that you write a small grant to create a library of books that you students can read.

Access to books can be particularly challenging to urban learners and economically challenged students. Some families are unable to support learners by reading to them for many reasons. The Read Along Book options reviewed in this article provide learners opportunities to hear (and read) many books. Local public libraries and schools can consider purchasing options for their use, but even if these purchases are not possible students still have the potential for using Tumblebooks Library and TarHeel Readers through the Internet. Allington and McGill-Franzen (2013; Allington & McGill-Franzen, 2003; McGill-Franzen & Allington, 2003) and others (Kim, 2004; Kim & White, 2011) have extensively described the losses in reading abilities over the summer months for students with economic challenges and online books are a potential way to combat such loss by keeping learners fully engaged in reading/listening.

**Online Whiteboards:** Teachers and students use whiteboards in classrooms with ease and there is some beginning evidence that online whiteboards are effective in tutoring situations (Nash, 2012). We have found that online whiteboards are very helpful for quick demonstrations, which can easily be differentiated based on small group needs.

**Educreations** ([http://www.educreations.com/](http://www.educreations.com/)), which is a recordable whiteboard, is one of our favorite free tools. Students might solve a mathematical word problem by writing and discussing their thinking as they progress through the example. Such demonstrations showcase students’ approaches and can be used to model successful and logical reasoning in problem solving. The recording of the whiteboard with voice can be highly effective.
**ScreenChomp** ([http://www.ScreenChomp.com](http://www.ScreenChomp.com)) is another free online whiteboard app for iPads. It is a drawing board with markers and recording device, so it’s easy to draw quickly, record voice and share as a re-playable video. It’s another tool from TechSmith, developer of Jing and Screencast-O-Matic. We find this tool works great for quick explanations, responses to questions and so forth. The final video is uploaded to ScreenChomp and shared via a short URL link or it can be downloaded as an MPEG-4 file.

**Online Bulletin Boards:** Little is known about the effectiveness of online bulletin boards, but there is evidence that collaboration among students can positively affect student learning (Gouseiti, 2013) and by implication provides support for our recommending online bulletin boards. Just as students used to make collages and posters to demonstrate their understanding and display information learned, today students can use more dynamic electronic bulletin boards to include images, symbols, text, video and audio components, such that they become multimedia.

**Popplet** ([www.popplet.com](http://www.popplet.com)), a free tool that can also be used as a graphic organizer, allows users to embed video, audio, text and images. Popplets can be embedded in websites (first frame of the Popplet is shown) or the URL can be emailed. We see much potential for differentiating instruction with this tool. Here are a few ideas:

1. **Multimedia Non-Fiction Products:** Suppose a class is studying New York State history, specifically historical and current canal systems. A teacher might group students to explore specific related topics. Imagine that one small group is researching the Erie Canal system. The students could search for images of how the canal system worked in the late 1800s, or they might post images from Flickr of the remnants of this canal system. They might research information about Governor DeWitt Clinton and post that content as well as his image. The students might actually record themselves singing a song about that canal system (“Low bridge, everybody down. Low bridge ‘cause we’re coming to a town.”) They might include jpegs (scanned images that they have drawn related to the topic), and if they live close to Schenectady they might post an image of the current bike path (Erie Canal Bikeway) where at the height of the Erie Canal system the horses and other animals actually pulled the barges. All of these items could be placed on a Popplet and shared through the class website with the embed code. Collectively, all the Popplets created on the topic of historical and current canal systems could then provide a multimedia review of the content covered in the unit of study. Differentiation in this example is related to choice of topic and presentation choices afforded learners (Zemelman, Daniels & Hyde, 2012) and the creation of materials at their developmental levels.

2. **Research Projects:** Individual students might research a topic related to a specific unit of study, such as American patriots, and display their findings on a Popplet. A student who was assigned Patrick Henry might post a summary of his contributions, a quick Audioboo (see earlier section on audio files) of his famous sayings, an image (with attribution) found on the Internet as well as student produced drawings. The same learner might create a quick Jing (see section on screencasting) that reviews websites dedicated to his accomplishments. All these could be posted on a Popplet and shared with the class. Differentiation with Popplet occurs in the amount of advanced options elected as well as the number of postings and, moreover, the teacher could differentiate options for documenting understanding ([www.cast.org](http://www.cast.org)).
Glogster Edu ([http://edu.glogster.com/](http://edu.glogster.com/)) is another popular and free online bulletin board. [Don’t get confused and select Glogster ([http://www.glogster.com/](http://www.glogster.com/)) without ‘EDU’ because that website is available only to students who are 13 years of age or older and often contains risky content such as inappropriate images or topics for younger students.] Glogster Edu is very appealing to students and accounts are created by a classroom teacher and shared only as they designate. Students can change the background color, insert images and icons, link to YouTube videos, add text and more. There are many ways to use this tool:

1. **Multimedia Book Report**: Suppose you have a student who has read many Gary Paulsen books including *Night John*, the powerful story of a slave teaching others to read which warranted great punishment if caught. A student might develop a bulletin board on Glogster Edu that showcases this favorite book by Paulsen. The learner might include an associated book jacket, pictures of Gary Paulsen, connections to YouTube videos (e.g., museums on slavery), an audio file (e.g., Audioboo) that summarizes the appeal of the book, a link to Paulsen’s website ([http://www.randomhousekids.com/brand/gary-paulsen/](http://www.randomhousekids.com/brand/gary-paulsen/)) and a short interview with Paulsen (e.g., [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UXRa3-oIOn8](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UXRa3-oIOn8)). The learner might also include background choices that connect to the book or small images that relate to the books (with attributions, of course), such as slaves reading underground. Collectively, a one page Glogster Edu could serve as a multimedia book report. Differentiation in this type of project would depend on individual book choice as well as the elements elected for use.

2. **Concept Explanations**: Dyads could create a Glogster Edu to showcase their understanding of a mathematical concept, such as patterning. They might create a short video wherein they capture images of patterning within their school; perhaps the tiles in the hallway are made with a specific pattern of placement, which might be used as an example. They might make a video on patterns they found on the Internet and discuss why these are examples of patterns. Another video might include patterns they have created with buttons and regrouping (e.g., shiny/not shiny, holes/no holes, small/medium/large) to show their flexibility with reasoning mathematically. Their Glogster Edu background might include patterns they develop. Finally they could include an audio definition of patterning and why it’s important in mathematics. Differentiation occurs in how students elect to demonstrate their understanding ([Zemelman, Daniels & Hyde, 2012](http://www.randomhousekids.com/brand/gary-paulsen/)) and choice is a very powerful motivator.

Our experience has been that students of all ages love to create glogs, the terminology for Glogster bulletin boards. We find they often produce far more intricate products than we anticipate and show tremendous stamina for working on these multimedia productions. The possibilities are endless and we recommend Glogster Edu to you without reservation.

**Padlet** ([http://padlet.com/](http://padlet.com/)), another free web tool (available on computers and tablets, iPad), is one of our favorite tools because of its ease of use and ability to display much information with sticky notes. Basically, there is a blank wall, and students drag and drop whatever they wish to add from text, images, audio and video, so the Padlet displays related information clearly on one page. Padlet can also be used for collaboration around a topic or question and allows for differentiation by the teacher (required options for completion of assignment).

1. **Reader Response**: Students might post their responses and connections to a book or text they have read in common. For example, suppose the class is studying immigration and have read *Letters from Rifka* (Hesse, 1992). They will probably be surprised at the
separation of families on Ellis Island and will surely have a reaction, which might be captured on a Padlet.

2. Thought Provoking Question: A teacher might post a thought provoking question and have students respond by explaining their position on a controversial issue (e.g., euthanasia).

Collaboration Tools: Interaction with others is a major feature of online communication. Students can communicate with class members and the larger community by using various online tools that encourage collaboration (Gouseti, 2013). Moreover, Henry, Castek, O’Bryne & Zawilinski (2012) found that struggling readers emerged as coaches and leaders when sharing new strategies online. Fostering respectful interactions is a precursor to effective digital communication and we think that students are well-served by using such tools.

VoiceThread (http://voicethread.com/): VoiceThread (available on computers, iPads and iPhones) is a multimedia tool that allows others to comment and/or collaborate on published threads. Originally designed for students with special needs, we have found VoiceThread works well with students K-12. The creator develops slides (much like a PPT) and uploads them to the website. Then on each slide the creator can add a message—audio, video from a webcam or typing. Viewers of a particular VoiceThread can respond similarly with audio, webcam video or typed comment. There is even an option to phone in a response, which works well for students with limited access to computers. Here are some suggested ways to use VoiceThread:

1. Poetry Display with Author Recordings: Students might write poetry accompanied by their own drawings and record their original work. The class could upload all drawings and associated author recordings into a class VoiceThread. The URL could be shared with families to encourage feedback on learners’ work, or it might be shared with a larger online community.

2. Egg Hatching Project: Many first grade or kindergarten classrooms hatch eggs. A VoiceThread summary of their work might be uploaded as a class project and then feedback requested from the school community. If pictures of youngsters are included, the teacher might want to embed the VoiceThread with their class website and all the described features will be available only for those with access to the website. Differentiation herein could come from what learners are asked to contribute (e.g., drawing, image)

3. Digital Persuasive Essays: Older students might develop persuasive essays on topics of personal importance, and these VoiceThreads could be shared with peers with the requirement that students must respond to a specific number of their classmates using the various features. For example, if students are concerned about recycling, they might take pictures or videos of areas in their schools where opportunities exist for more green, sustainable measures. Such productions could encourage advocacy and action plans to engage others in the improvement of their communities. Differentiation here comes in the form of what learners elect to explore.

Not surprisingly, VoiceThread has a paid option. Users are limited to three VoiceThreads on the free version. To develop more, a user simply removes an earlier VoiceThread. Kay actually pays for the pro version ($60/year) because she embeds this tool in her online graduate classes. However, we think the free version is a good choice because all features are available to users.

Subtext (http://www.subtext.com/) is another free collaboration tool that encourages commenting on shared digital texts. It allows students to exchange comments and thoughts as
they read the same digital texts (available for iPads only) with discussion groups, among other options. Subtext can tie clearly into the Common Core State Standards by asking students to provide text based evidence for answers and, thus, can encourage close reading. The annotation feature of Subtext encourages students to comment substantively. There are many other options available with this tool, and we encourage teachers with access to iPads to explore this app further.

Summary

There are many, many, many apps and web tools available for teachers, and we have just touched the surface with the choices we included. We believe the apps and web tools that we recommend in this article have the potential to assist teachers in differentiating instruction and engaging diverse learners in classroom literacy instruction. We argue that it is not the tool that differentiates, though some tools are easier to use and others provide more complicated options. Rather, the teacher’s decision on how to use tools and choices given learners are where differentiation truly occurs. We recommend these resources because we have used them with many teachers and students and can attest to their usefulness. That said, educators are key in their successful use. Teachers need to identify student needs and then adjust instruction to meet their specific learning requirements—succinctly stated, matching student need to tool/app used is critical consideration.

We find that group work is something students benefit from, especially if group members are held accountable for their individual contributions. Modeling is important as is releasing responsibility to students to ‘have a go.’ Moreover, allowing work in dyads or small collaborative groups provides opportunities for students to learn from each other (Lapp, Fisher & DeVere, 2009). Sharing out findings and show casing students’ work are also significant opportunities to increase learning and generalization to other projects.

Preparing students for 21st Century communication requires that they become facile with technology (Handsfield, Dean & Cielocha, 2009). Certainly, there is support for the inclusion of web tools and apps in the Common Core State Standards (2010), especially the writing anchor standards that discuss electronic communication and research. The use of the web tools and apps recommended in this article provide a solid resource for helping teachers differentiate their instruction and for improving the academic achievement of all of their students.
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Differentiating literacy instruction


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The definition of “literacy” has recently been expanded to include “digital, electronic, and visual expressions” (Gentry & McAdams, 2013, p. 4253), and educational institutions are expected to meet learners’ needs through the integration of 21st century skills. According to the Assessment and Teaching of 21st-Century Skills Consortium (2014), success in the 21st century requires mastery of the following critical skills: information literacy, creativity and innovation, collaboration, problem solving, communication, and responsible citizenship. Learners today are sometimes referred to as “digital natives” (Prensky, 2001, p. 1) and “Net Geners” (Turner & Carriveau, 2010, p. 17) because of their exposure to digital tools throughout their entire lives. However, exposure to digital tools does not equate to mastery of the six critical 21-century skills. Moreover, many literacy educators fail to acknowledge or utilize these new practices, and research holds the importance of educators to connect learners’ digital knowledge and capabilities to academic content (Considine, Horton, & Moorman, 2009).

The International Society for Technology in Education [ISTE] (2012) developed the ISTE Standards (formerly known as the National Educational Technology Standards [NETS]), which define best practices and standards of excellence with technology for various stakeholders in education: students, teachers, administrators, coaches, and computer science educators. Students’ increasing levels of proficiency with digital knowledge and skills, as well as the accessibility of technology both inside and outside of school environments, require transformation of traditional educational practices. Literacy educators play an important role with this transformative process and are becoming increasingly more proficient with digital
technologies resulting from several national technology initiatives and participation in professional development experiences (McAdams, 2013).

The purpose of this article is to provide an overview of the ISTE Standards for Teachers and provide literacy educators with an evaluative tool to measure their adeptness with the knowledge and skills needed to “teach, work and learn in an increasingly connected global and digital society” (ISTE, 2012, para.1). ISTE Standards for teachers outlined five standards:

1. Facilitate and Inspire Student Learning and Creativity,
2. Design and Develop Digital Age Learning Experience and Assessments,
3. Model Digital Age Work and Learning,
4. Promote and Model Digital Citizenship and Responsibility, and
5. Engage in Professional Growth and Leadership. (ISTE, 2008)

Within each of the ISTE Standards for teachers, four performance indicators further defined digital knowledge and skills required when designing, implementing, and assessing effective learning experiences for 21st century learners.

**Overview of the ISTE Standards for Teachers**

**Standard 1: Facilitate and Inspire Student Learning and Creativity**

Prensky (2010) asserted that teachers must merge their knowledge of pedagogy, subject matter, and technology to create an enriching learning environment. Learners arrive at school “deeply and permanently technologically enhanced” (p.2). Thus, many learners enter classroom already skilled with technology tools and functions to interact with their peers, connect to the world, and access information. However, Leu, O’Byrne, Zawilinski, McVerry, & Everett-Cacopardo (2009) pointed out that students’ access to the Web varies greatly and pronounced inequities exist among schools and school districts. With this in mind, Greenhow, Walker, and Kim (2010) suggested that teachers develop a thorough understanding of contextual factors by answering the following questions about the students in their classes:

- Are students accessing the Web?
- Where are students accessing the Web (e.g., home, school, public library)?
- How often are students accessing the Web?
- How are students using the Web?
- What perceptions do students have regarding their own proficiency with using the Web?

Teachers must also look beyond the use of technology as a means for delivery of information and capitalize on innovative uses of technology to revolutionize instruction and transform learning experiences (Resnick, 2002). Within the context of literacy instruction, Bogard and McMackin (2012) defined innovation with technology as “practices for making meaning that transcend language and include photography, art, music, video, or audio representations” (p. 314). Examples of innovative uses of technology during literacy instruction include student-produced products, such as digital story expressions (McAdams & Gentry, 2014) and movies (Young & Rasinski, 2013); instructional use with electronic devices, such as smartphones (Bromley, 2012) and tablets (Hutchison, Beschorner, & Schmidt-Crawford, 2012; Northrop & Killeen, 2013); and incorporating interactive Internet-based tools, such as online book clubs (Scharber, 2009) and Twitter (Morgan, 2014). Through these innovative approaches, literacy instruction includes language and social practices.
Standard 2: Design and Develop Learning Experiences and Assessments

Effective teachers design, develop, and evaluate authentic learning experiences with the aid of technology (ISTE, 2008). Technology tools are diverse, and many can be fully customizable (Hobgood & Ormsby, 2010). For assessment purposes, handheld devices are excellent tools to collect and analyze data to monitor students’ literacy skills, such as reading fluency (Tovar, Hansen, & Puckett, 2011), as well as preserve anecdotal records through use of note-taking applications (Bates, 2013). Instructionally, apps on tablet devices are capable of targeting a plethora of literacy skills, including early literacy skills (Northrop & Killeen, 2013); writing skills (Clary, Kigotho, & Barros-Torming, 2013); and reading skills (Hutchison et al., 2012). Through effective technology integration, teachers can monitor students’ performance and differentiate instruction based upon the learners’ needs.

Today’s learners are viewed as expert multi-taskers and natives to technology, so teachers must be prepared to craft learning experiences geared towards these learners’ needs (Prensky, 2010). With this in mind, teachers must also keep in mind that learners often arrive in classrooms appearing self-sufficient and adept with their personal use of technology (Thompson, 2013). However, learners still require scaffolding from their teacher in order to move beyond their comfort level and explore technology tools more suited for the academic environment. Therefore, teachers must continue to rely upon their pedagogical understandings when infusing technology into well-designed learning experiences and assessments.

Standard 3: Model Digital Age Work and Learning

The ISTE Standards for Teachers (2008) articulated the importance of teachers demonstrating technological fluency, as well as the ability to apply current digital knowledge to new situations and new technology tools. In order to be digitally fluent, teachers require knowledge related to the use of technology tools, in addition to how to use these tools to create relevant products (Resnick, 2002). While most teachers possess a level of proficiency with basic technology tools and functions, such as using a word processor, reading and sending emails, and locating information on the Internet, some teachers still lack fluency and mastery with more advanced digital tools and functions.

In order to maximize the full benefits available to learners with technology, teachers must be digitally fluent (Clements, Nastasi, & Swaminathan, 1993; Keengwe & Onchwari, 2009). According to Keengwe and Onchwari (2009), learners in classrooms with digitally fluent teachers showed gains in verbal and nonverbal communication, increased with problem solving abilities, and improved with abstraction and conceptual skills. Effective integration can be a difficult task, and teachers may not have adequate preparation at first to fulfill that task (Woodbridge, 2004). Keengwe and Onchwari (2009) asserted the importance of equipping teachers with frequent technology training and skills to support effective technology integration into classroom instruction.

Standard 4: Promote and Model Digital Citizenship and Responsibility

According to the ISTE Standards for Teachers (2008), teachers must promote and model digital citizenship and responsibility. In addition to being a good citizen with technology use, digital citizenship includes user security and safety, legal and ethical technology practices, and enhancement of academic content (Hollandsworth, Dowdy, & Donovan, 2011). Ohler (2011) emphasized the importance of schools addressing this “digital health initiative” (p. 26),
particularly with a significant rise with inappropriate digital behavior among young persons, such as cyberbullying and sexting.

Teachers must ensure that learners understand the rights and responsibilities associated with technology use (Hollandsworth et al., 2011). This includes presenting learners with a digital code of conduct that clearly outlines appropriate and inappropriate uses of technology. Students must be taught how to protect their privacy, as well as how to exercise freedom of speech responsibility in a virtual environment. Students must also be taught to respect the intellectual property of others online and how to obtain media from the Web legally. In this same manner, teachers must also provide explicit instruction to learners with how to use technology as a tool to advance their learning. Addressing responsible digital behavior among students must begin in kindergarten and continue throughout each grade thereafter.

**Standard 5: Engage in Professional Growth and Learning**

The final standard for teachers concerns professional growth (ISTE, 2008). Professional growth derives from the consultation of current research coupled with the evaluation and reflection of teaching practices. Effective use of technology first requires a specific purpose in mind to foster learners’ understandings of content using Web 2.0 tools. Web 2.0 takes the “read-only” aspect of Web 1.0 and facilitates a “read-and-write” atmosphere for users (Greenhow et al., 2009, p. 247). Greenhow et al. described how the Web could serve as an “information repository that could promote richer inquiry experiences for learners” (p.246). The integration of Web 2.0 tools during classroom instruction fosters active participation, collaboration among peers, and distributes technology practices among learners (Knobel & Lankshear, 2006).

However, Leu et al. (2009) asserted the importance of framing the Web as a literacy issue, rather than a technology issue. In doing so, educational policies are likely to support the integration of technology standards throughout content area standards, which paves the way for integrating instruction with the Web during content-area instruction. Thus, all teachers assume a responsibility for teaching and assessing students’ knowledge and skills related to the Web.

With this in mind, teachers must engage in continuous professional growth and learning. Koehler, Mishra, and Yahya (2007) proposed a framework to describe the required digital knowledge for teachers: technological pedagogical content knowledge (TPCK). TPCK occurs from the intersection of technological knowledge, pedagogical knowledge, and content knowledge, which according to Koehler et al., are developed best through collaborative, constructivist, and project-based approaches. Bourgeois and Hunt (2011) also described a school-based teaming approach, the Digital Learning Collaborative. In this approach, three essential elements are present: (1) teachers consider the use of technology in the classroom, (2) teachers learn how to master use of a technological tool, and (3) teachers work in collaborative teams consisting of three to five members for support. According to Bourgeois and Hunt, learning requires time and is optimal in a social context. Most importantly, in order to be meaningful, sound instructional practices must be woven throughout all learning experiences.

**An Evaluative Tool for Literacy Educators**

Developing a more thorough understanding of the best practices outlined in the ISTE Standards for Teachers enables literacy educators to identify strengths and areas requiring improvement. With this in mind, the following evaluation form, “Best Practices for Digital Age Teaching: An Evaluation Tool for Literacy Educators,” (see Appendix 1) was created by the author as a mechanism for literacy educators to measure their perceived level of proficiency with
each knowledge and skill for digital age teaching articulated in the ISTE Standards for Teachers. Once literacy educators complete the “Best Practices for Digital Age Teaching” form, they may analyze data, either individually or collectively, to determine areas of strength, as well as areas requiring improvement, with each of the five ISTE standards.

Individual analysis of data from the “Best Practices for Digital Age Teaching” form may serve as a guide for a literacy educator’s plan for professional development. Literacy educators at a school campus might decide to conduct a campus-wide analysis of results from completed evaluation forms to serve as data for the development of their school’s campus improvement plan. Likewise, school districts may also engage in strategic analysis of data from the “Best Practices for Digital Age Teaching” form provided by literacy educators throughout a school district when deciding how to best allocate funds to support schools with technology initiatives. Moreover, results from this evaluative form would provide colleges of education with specific information to better prepare literacy educators for public school service and ensure that university curricula address the required knowledge and skills prospective literacy educators require for effective digital age teaching.


References


Appendix 1: Best Practices for Digital Age Teaching: An Evaluation Tool for Literacy Educators

Directions: For each statement below, select a rating that best describes the level of frequency you apply each knowledge and skill during your professional practice.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Standard 1: Facilitate and Inspire Student Learning and Creativity</th>
<th>Never</th>
<th>Rarely</th>
<th>Sometimes</th>
<th>Often</th>
<th>Always</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I promote, support, and model creative and innovative thinking and inventiveness.</td>
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<td>I engage students in exploring real-world issues and solving authentic problems using digital tools and resources.</td>
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<td>I promote student reflection using collaborative tools to reveal and clarify students’ conceptual understanding and thinking, planning, and creative processes.</td>
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<td>I model collaborative knowledge construction by engaging in learning with students, colleagues, and others in face-to-face and virtual environments.</td>
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<th>Standard 2: Design and Develop Learning Experiences and Assessments</th>
<th>Never</th>
<th>Rarely</th>
<th>Sometimes</th>
<th>Often</th>
<th>Always</th>
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<tr>
<td>I advocate, model, and teach safe, legal, and ethical use of digital information and technology, including respect for copyright, intellectual property, and the appropriate documentation of sources.</td>
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<td>I address the diverse needs of all learners by using learner-centered strategies providing equitable access to appropriate digital tools and resources.</td>
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<td>I promote and model digital etiquette and responsible social interactions related to the use of technology and information.</td>
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<td>I develop and model cultural understanding and global awareness by engaging with colleagues and students of other cultures using digital age communication and collaboration tools.</td>
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<tr>
<th>Standard 3: Model Digital Age Work and Learning</th>
<th>Never</th>
<th>Rarely</th>
<th>Sometimes</th>
<th>Often</th>
<th>Always</th>
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<tr>
<td>I demonstrate fluency in technology systems and the transfer of current knowledge to new technologies and situations.</td>
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<tr>
<td>I collaborate with students, peers, parents, and community members using digital tools and resources to support student success and innovation.</td>
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<tr>
<td>I communicate relevant information and ideas effectively to students, parents, and peers using a variety of digital age media and formats.</td>
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<td>I model and facilitate effective use of current and emerging digital tools to locate, analyze, evaluate, and use information resources to support research and learning.</td>
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<tr>
<th>Standard 4: Promote and Model Digital Citizenship</th>
<th>Never</th>
<th>Rarely</th>
<th>Sometimes</th>
<th>Often</th>
<th>Always</th>
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### Standard 5: Engage in Professional Growth and Learning

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Never</th>
<th>Rarely</th>
<th>Sometimes</th>
<th>Often</th>
<th>Always</th>
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<tr>
<td>I design or adapt relevant learning experiences that incorporate digital tools and resources to promote student learning and creativity.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
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<td>I develop technology-enriched learning environments that enable all students to pursue their individual curiosities and become active participants in setting their own educational goals, managing their own learning, and assessing their own progress.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
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<tr>
<td>I customize and personalize learning activities to address students’ diverse learning styles, working strategies, and abilities using digital tools and resources.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I provide students with multiple and varied formative and summative assessments aligned with content and technology standards and use resulting data to inform learning and teaching.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
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</table>

**Directions:** Tally your scores within each standard below:

- **Standard 1: Facilitate and Inspire Student Learning and Creativity**
- **Standard 2: Design and Develop Learning Experiences and Assessments**
- **Standard 3: Model Digital Age Work and Learning**
- **Standard 4: Promote and Model Digital Citizenship and Responsibility**
- **Standard 5: Engage in Professional Growth and Learning**

Analyze your results and respond to the following questions:

- What are your areas of strength?
- What areas require improvement?
- Do you require more professional development with content related to a specific knowledge or skill?
- Do you require more professional development with how to implement a specific knowledge or skill effectively?
Word Games:
Content Area Teachers’ Use of Vocabulary Strategies to Build Diverse Students’ Reading Competencies

Francine Falk-Ross and Brian Evans
Pace University

ABSTRACT
Five content area teachers participated in this year-long qualitative research study focused on developing a language-building approach to support literacy activities for marginalized students. A mixed methods design evaluated the impact of the professional development program with the teachers. Data included structured interviews with the teachers, classroom observations (including videotapes), anecdotal notes, and students’ standardized test results before and after the applications of the new content area literacy approaches, which revealed notable changes in students’ reading comprehension, vocabulary use, and discourse participation, and a significant difference in the students’ achievement following the interventions. Implications for teachers include increased use of language modeling to meet students’ specific literacy needs.

AUTHOR BIOGRAPHIES
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Brian Evans is an associate professor and chair of the School of Education for the Manhattan campus, where he teaches math education courses infusing literacy strategies. He teaches preservice and practicing teachers at the graduate level. He can be contacted at: bevans@pace.edu

Students' learning in the classroom is tied to the instructional language routines that are set by the teacher and used by peers to question and respond to new information (Cazden, 2001). These instructional language patterns provide a context that influences learning and literacy development (Gutierrez, 1995; Hynde, 1999; Lemke, 1989). Research focused on the importance of holistic views of language learning and use emphasizes the role that language plays in social interactions and literacy, especially at the middle grade levels, where personal communication and social interaction are foundations for building learning in positive learning environments (National Middle School Association, NMSA, 2010). The Common Core Learning Standards (CCLS, 2010) developed by New York State and infused into state mandates for achievement address the needs of English language learners and detail standards for English language arts and literacy for content area instruction, including science. For middle school students specifically, they highlight competencies for speaking/collaborative discussion (Standard 1, ELA), language/vocabulary development (Standards 4 and 6, ELA), and use of scientific academic language (Standard 6, Literacy in Science).
Middle level students need preparation for cooperative learning through appropriate dialoguing, led and guided by teachers. In fact, the need for more talk, the vocabulary for talking, and the nature of language in the classroom requires careful learning in order to support critical questions that extend middle-level students’ thinking (Falk-Ross, 2007; Santman, 2005). Therefore, students with language difficulties or language differences are at a disadvantage in classrooms where language participation is valued and used for evaluative purposes (Wells, 1999). As a result, collaborative support between teachers and students, and among students for the purpose of development of students’ language needs, has gained attention.

The purpose of this university-initiated professional development research study was to document the effects of supporting teachers’ efforts focused toward the inter-relationships and intersections between language and literacy as they impact students’ reading instruction in classrooms and remedial settings in middle schools. The study was intended to replicate the collaborative nature of action research with sharing of information among stakeholders within a school (Holly, Arhar, & Kasten, 2009) even though action research is technically inquiry by the teachers for themselves in the absence of outsiders (Mertler, 2012; Mills, 2014; Stringer, 2008). Our underlying concern was that students at the middle level are immersed in mostly content area classes with expectations for considerable reading responsibilities. This research project investigating teachers’ pedagogic discourse in the classroom focuses on the qualitative and quantitative results of implementing a language-building vocabulary program to support literacy activities for marginalized (i.e., ESL and reading disabled) students. In short, content area (i.e., science and English language arts) teachers were supported and studied in their development of language/literacy knowledge through resources (informational texts) and strategy modeling. Inquiry questions that drove the study were: What new information is gained about language support for literacy activities through interactive sharing of knowledge and strategies? What language strategies are chosen by teachers to integrate into word identification, vocabulary, and reading comprehension activities? Does the use of increased language interaction for vocabulary create a significant change in students’ reading competencies?

Theoretical Framework

Three areas of research development impacted this study: the role of language (i.e., discourse), aligned with CCLS Standard 1 within content area instruction; content area teachers’ use of literacy strategies in classroom instruction, aligned with CCLS 4; and the impact of academic vocabulary knowledge, aligned with CCLS 6 on diverse students’ school achievement. A first frame of thinking represented in research literature that supports this study is that as the student population within schools becomes increasingly more diverse, in general, literacy instruction requires creative and substantive approaches to teaching for middle graders. Critical and careful readings of government initiatives and assessments (e.g., U.S. Department of Education, 2002), national standards (e.g., CCLS, 2010; International Reading Association, 2010; International Reading Association/National Middle School Association, 2005) and educational statistics (Perie & Moran, 2005) mandate that we consider students’ individual literacy and learning needs that stem from cultural and linguistic diversity. More specifically, educators need to focus on the academic (i.e., word meaning) and social vocabulary (i.e., word use) that students develop, contributing to their reading comprehension and writing competencies. Enhancing oral vocabulary instruction in classroom experiences and activities has been shown to be beneficial for developing the academic and content-rich vocabulary for later learning (Neuman & Roskos, 2012). This is especially important for the increasing number of
schools in which language difference is a factor in learning (Brown, 2007; Garcia, Jensen, & Cuellar, 2006). Yet, in the hustle to keep students’ achievement high and programs of instruction viable, this foundational element is often not given the attention it deserves (Nystrand, 2006) and talking is not always a part of reading and learning activities (Alvermann, 1995). And yet, issues focused on the role of language for literacy instruction gain importance as educators communicate, teach, evaluate, and socialize in classrooms (Adger, Snow, & Christian, 2002; Falk-Ross, 2007; Richgels, 2004). With this in mind and the CCLS as a base for guiding educators’ teaching, it becomes important to consider the literacy factors, specifically oral vocabulary knowledge and the resulting reading comprehension, that impact achievement in content area classrooms with a specific look at the roles that language plays (i.e., through discourse routines, syntactic elements, and semantics for word use) in students’ vocabulary and deeper concept development (Burns & Helman, 2009; Fecho & Botzakis, 2007).

A second major framework for conducting this study is that teachers are likely to use new knowledge and strategies that build on their everyday existing practices and through classroom observations (Danielson, 2012). This practice is one form of educational professional development, which is meant to support teachers at all levels “to improve the quality of classroom instruction; enable individuals to grow professionally; [and] introduce practitioners to the practical applications of research-validated strategies “ (NYC Department of Education, 2013). The use of professional development activities through modeling experiences are important to introduce and support new attention to literacy instruction in content area classrooms (e.g., Gillan & McFerrin, 2002; McKenna & Robinson, 1990; Sturtevant & Linek, 2007), and especially in science instruction (Fang, 2006; Smart & Marshall, 2013). To meet states’ teaching/learning standards’ mandates, and to develop appropriate lessons, teachers require more information on the processes and strategies for integrating literacy activities into content area instruction (Alvermann, 2002; Flanigan & Greenwood, 2007; Unrau, 2007).

A third frame for our thinking as the study was developed is that content area learning is embedded in vocabulary-rich instruction, which may be an obstacle to students marginalized by cultural or linguistic difference (Ogle, 2010; Proctor, Dalton, & Grisham, 2007) or disabilities (Tam, Heward, & Heng, 2006). Instructional activities using language-based activities are effective for developing academic language for specific content area learning (Thier & Daviss, 2002). Teachers who receive professional development in classroom environments to understand the specific needs of struggling readers can be better equipped to provide effective content area instruction. It has been found that teachers who interacted with struggling readers in urban settings changed their perceptions about these students (Falk-Ross & Wolfe, 2004). Studies of teachers working with second language learners have shown that they learn to improve their instruction through reflective practice and classroom observations (Farrell, 2011; Lewis, Maerten-Rivera, Adamson, & Lee, 2011). Giving teachers these opportunities for interaction shaped their beliefs about urban student learning. Continuing to find ways to assist teachers in their efforts to support marginalized students is consistent with a theme of working for the public good to provide greater access comprehension and, thereby, access to print resources for learning.

**Methodology**

The year-long professional development research study was situated in a semi-urban city. In recent years the spillover effect, following a conventional pattern of concentric migration, has greatly increased the number of English Language Learners (ELLs) within the district,
particularly students of Hispanic decent. According to the district’s Report Card, the percentage of Hispanic students enrolled in the District was 94% of the total population of over 13,500 students. The current percentage of ELL students enrolled in the district is almost 47%, or nearly 6,000 students. The low-income rate is 76%, double that of the state figure of 34.9%. Students’ scores on the state tests were below 50% in reading and mathematics.

Participants included five middle level content areas teachers’ (i.e., science and English language arts) 7th grade classrooms, and their students. The students’ English language proficiency was mixed, all of whom were bilingual in English and Spanish; however, not all were bi-literate. None of the teachers were fluent in Spanish, and all were European-Americans. The focus of the study was on the teachers’ integration of new strategy use following professional development, and although parent consent and student assent forms were collected for all students, the classroom teachers’ interactions were of prime concern.

The university researchers (i.e., the authors of this article) are Literacy program coordinator and department chair, respectively, and as such directed the study and collected all data. As active participants in funded university-school partnership projects nationally for an average span of 15 years, the researchers were qualified to direct this professional development action research study, and the teachers were satisfied with the researchers’ qualifications. The first author served as a coach in each classroom for the purpose entering classroom discussions to model new language and literacy-building strategies for the teachers as they transitioned into using these strategies themselves.

A mixed methods design was chosen to evaluate the impact of the program with the teachers. A mixed method approach combined qualitative and quantitative data for the “purposes of breadth and depth of understanding and corroboration,” (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011, p. 4). In this study, quantitative results were obtained through standardized test results of the students of the teachers to indicate the impact that the professional development had on students’ achievement and to inform future program development. Qualitative analysis of focus group discussions, teachers’ anecdotal notes, researchers’ observations, and a structured survey were analyzed through coding to uncover trends in thought and achievement (Strauss & Corbin, 2007).

Initially, informal surveys were administered prior to the delivery of professional development resources and modeling (i.e., pre-intervention) to teachers to learn more about their knowledge of language and literacy-related approaches to discourse in the classroom. These data were gathered in order to address their needs for meeting the CCLS 1 for ways to strengthen their approaches to building and using collaborative discussion in their classrooms. Open questions, which were focused on an inquiry question each teacher wished to pursue related to vocabulary and language in the classroom, were gathered informally at the beginning of the study to guide individual class investigation. Classroom observations were conducted in each class for 50 minutes each, twice per month. The observational process included completion of field notes focused on a summary of activities in the classroom and videotapes of the class as back-up records.

Teacher focus group meetings were held twice per month, and individual follow-up meetings were conducted if a teacher was not able to attend the weekly focus group meeting. Focus group meetings were documented through agenda handouts, field notes by the researcher, audiotapes of each meeting, and journal entries by the teachers. The time during these focus group meetings between the teachers and the researchers was divided up into periods for discussion of the reading, chosen by the researcher, and discussion of the teachers’ next steps in
applications in their classroom in order to increase language knowledge through research readings on topics focused on language diversity, word identification (linguistics) and comprehension (questioning) strategies, and to share effective approaches to discussion in classrooms. Thus, these focus meetings targeted the CCLS anchor standards 1 (for language and diversity), and CCLS anchor standards 4 and 6, targeting vocabulary development.

Specifically, additional reading resources for professional development, which are focused on these standards, were introduced at each focus group meeting (i.e., one reading resources at each meeting) with a specific target area of study. These resources included excerpts from texts on language and literacy (Freedman & Johnson, 2004), vocabulary development (Echevarria, Vogt, & Short, 2004), and writing (Strong, 2006) for middle graders. Research journal articles focused on language transitions from Spanish to English (e.g., Falk-Ross & Carrier, 2005) and classroom talk (e.g., Ketch, 2005) provided an evidence base. Several literacy strategy workbooks (Johns & Berglund, 2006; Lively, Snow, & August, 2003; Walker & Davidson, 2004; Wood & Taylor, 2006) were purchased for teachers with their input from a small university grant written for that purpose.

As a follow-up to these focus group meetings, in-class modeling of the strategies by the lead researcher occurred once per week for one full class for each teacher. As the classroom teacher began the class, the researcher was present at the front of the room to indicate to the students that the lesson would be co-taught. The researcher stepped in after approximately 10 minutes and taught the whole class using the new strategy, and then the researcher and classroom teacher split up the class into two smaller groups and assisted students in complementary hands-on activities.

Qualitative methods for evaluation and interpretation were used to further understand trends in teachers’ focus group discussions and their reflective field notes, and student-teacher interactions for literacy instruction. Transcriptions taken during observation by the lead researcher of classroom teachers’ and students’ comments were analyzed for major themes in vocabulary and comprehension instruction using open and then axial coding to develop the constant comparative method involving multiple readings (Strauss & Corbin, 2007) and to provide a determination of grounded patterns in the content. Coding included reliability checks by two highly trained professional reading teachers and one of the participant teachers, indicating just over 95% agreement concerning the structured interview questions. The area of concern was the ordering of the questions, and the more direct questions regarding second language learners were moved to the beginning of the survey. Quantitative analysis of the Illinois Standards Achievement Test (ISAT) scores, which measures individual student achievement relative to the Illinois Learning Standards, was used to gauge changes in students’ reading achievement. In order to determine if there were differences between student scores on the pre- and post-tests on the ISAT, data were analyzed using paired samples t-tests.

Results

In general, qualitative data revealed changes in teachers’ perceptions and practices related to language-into-literacy strategies for their struggling middle-grader English language learners. These changes occurred in the teachers’ understandings of new scripts for language development through professional development and modeling activities. Quantitative changes in students’ achievement in reading comprehension also occurred following restructuring of instructional practice using literacy strategies focused on vocabulary development.

New Knowledge Gained through Professional Development
Informal knowledge survey. Comparisons of the responses to an informal survey of teachers’ knowledge of language differences between English and Spanish was enlightening. Focus group meetings. The informal survey at the beginning of the study indicated teachers were initially unfamiliar with differences in the students’ first and second languages. One misunderstanding that teachers had was not realizing that there were syntactic structure differences between the two languages, which could confuse vocabulary usage. For example, in English, it would be appropriate to construct the sentence, “Eva is very intelligent,” but not, “Is very intelligent Eva”; however, in Spanish, both Eva es muy inteligente (Eva is very intelligent) and Es muy inteligente Eva (literally, Is very intelligent Eva) are acceptable. Teachers were not familiar with the differences in phonemic features between the languages. For example, because there is no difference between the Spanish /v/ and /b/ sounds, students may replace the word berry or very, and since there is no initial ‘sh’ consonant in Spanish, students might use or ‘hear’ the word chop to replace shop in a sentence. Specifically, out of a possible 60 points on the survey, the average score for the teachers was 32.4 points, with the weakest areas being knowledge of phonemic (i.e., sound) differences between languages and understanding of word cognates (i.e., similarities in word appearance such as the word once, pronounced /wan(t)s/ in English and means “one time,” and pronounced /on.se/ in Spanish which means “eleven.” These misconceptions/misunderstandings were explained throughout the professional development study, and all teachers scored the full points when the study ended.

Informal field observations. Initially (i.e., prior to the beginning of the study), through the use of informal field observations, using classroom observational notes and videotapes (the combination of the two for overlap and consistency of information), teachers’ strategy use for language and vocabulary development in reading and content area reading activities revealed teacher-driven approaches for practice and applications. Specifically, early focus group meetings uncovered traditional discourse routines (such as teacher initiation-student response-teacher evaluation, or IRE, Cazden, 2001) to be used in context area vocabulary review rather than student-centered and expanded forms that allow students opportunities to develop personal connections and social contexts specific to their background knowledge. As part of the study, professional development opportunities followed and consisted of focus group meetings during which readings of research and practical strategies were introduced and modeling of those strategies by the researcher of differentiated content-area vocabulary instruction in the classroom. Teachers were asked to use these new strategies in their classrooms, and this a focus of classroom observations. Analysis of classroom observations revealed that following models from the researcher in the teachers’ classrooms of research-based strategies integrated into content area instruction for reading, teachers became interested in vocabulary strategies that clearly combined language and literacy elements. All teachers increased the use of visuals and graphic organizers to display new learning. Specifically, the themes that described the teachers’ choices were that the strategies they used needed to be flexible (i.e., fit the classroom needs by being useful in several ways such as choosing words that were good examples of high frequency or multiple-meaning words, and be central to the text-based instruction), concise (i.e., not involve more than a few steps to complete), and age/grade appropriate (i.e., academic words that were not simplified for lower level or less mature readers).

Focused on students’ behaviors, Analysis of classroom observations revealed that for second language learners and struggling readers, increased language interaction through use of the new strategies which provided experiences with language use (i.e., children were immersed in collaborative discussions on topics they did not consider at home in English). A second theme
gleaned from the data was that the new strategies provided a forum for development of background knowledge for content area topics; for example, when the class discussed levers, the students learned vocabulary words focused on crowbars and common tools for building and sports, and learned action vocabulary words (i.e., verbs) for developing/refining content-area reading and writing competencies.

A third theme developed from the data in this area of findings was that the use of new language-based literacy strategies provided safe outlets for students to experiment with new ideas in small and large group discourse opportunities. The strategies encouraged students to formulate questions and responses in reading and writing with the teacher and class mates in a low stakes forum. Field notes also revealed the initial use of traditional IRE discourse routines to be used in context area vocabulary review with changes to more student-centered and expanded forms, such as those in Figure 1, which allowed students opportunities to develop personal connections and social contexts specific to their background knowledge.

**Language Interaction Strategies for Vocabulary Development**

Teachers chose from a series of language/literacy strategies to integrate word identification, vocabulary, and reading comprehension into classroom activities. For example, one instructional format that was a combination of language and literacy applications was Language Experience Approach (Stauffer, 1970). For this activity, the teacher had the students retell an experience and wrote the sentences that the students articulated on the board for the class to follow. Although this strategy is most frequently used for younger students, the struggling readers in this class were exposed to spellings, context, and use of vocabulary words, and were encouraged to revise the sentences with more detail.

An example of one teacher’s attempts to integrate the elements of a Language Experience Approach with the qualities for instruction that were chosen following professional development follows in Figure 1. For this class, the teacher, Ms. Randolph, intended to develop a deeper understanding of the concept of the central terms of *work* and *force* through several overlapping but simple activities in the classroom. She used a multimodal approach including visual, discourse, and personal problem solving elements in content area instruction follows. The students in this science class had been struggling with comprehension as seen in their homework assignments. A video on this topic from BrainPop (www.brainpop.com), an animated educational website for students, was viewed, followed by small group development of a negotiated definition of *work*, and then a class discussion to evaluate and revise understandings.

*Figure 1: Ms. Randolph’s Development of the concepts Work and Force*

Teachers: Okay, we are going to add to our learning journals today, but we are going to do it after we talk a little bit more about the terms work and force. This will be for our vocabulary page. There’s a lot of words again in this chapter that we need to know to understand out simple machines. So it will be different from how we did vocabulary from last chapter. So it won’t be like memorizing a word and definition. Watch this video with explanations and then we will divide into groups [to talk more about these].

2. (BrainPop video excerpt is shown.)
3. Teacher: Now in your groups, when I asked you what you guys were watching, you used the words *work* and *force* a lot. That’s what you should have gotten from this video. Now the next thing I want you to do in your groups is take out your notebooks and work on writing up definitions together. Team leaders make sure
everybody shares their definitions and then in five minutes I want a group 
definition of work. I do not want a textbook definition.
Okay, team leaders, did everybody share?

4. Team Leaders: (nod yes)
5. Teacher: All right…so what is the definition your group came up with?
6. Linda: (reading her group’s definition): A force used to move an object.
7. Teacher: Okay, Luis. (Writes this definition on the white board). And Maria?
8. Maria: (reads aloud her group’s definition). Force that exerts on an object that can cause it to move.
9. Teacher: Okay, Maria. (writes this on the board). Now Andrea.
10. Andrea: (reading aloud): Force you use to exert an object.
11. Teacher: (writes the third definition on the board). From your definitions, it seems that it’s going to be about force and moving an object. If you definition doesn’t address, or talk about, force and movement, take a minute to rethink your definition.
So let’s go ahead and look at the top of page 106. I’m going to read a little bit of the section titled, “What is work” to you aloud and you read along. AFTER A HEAVY SNOW STORM A NEIGHBOR’S CAR GETS STUCK IN A SNOW DRIFT. HE SHOVELS SOME SNOW AWAY FROM THE CAR AND TRIED TO PUSH IT BACKWARDS. THE SPINNING TIRES WHINE AS THE DRIVER ATTEMPTS TO MOVE. ALTHOUGH YOU TRY AS HARD AS YOU CAN THE CAR WON’T BUDGE. AFTER 10 MINUTES OF STRNUOUS PUSHING, YOU ARE NEARLY EXHAUSTED. UNFORTUNATELY THE CAR IS STILL LODGED IN THE SNOW. DID YOU DO ANY WORK?

12. Marcos: No, no.
13. Maria: Yes, you’re pushing the car!
14. Teacher: Who says it’s work? (some students’ hands are up) Who says “no, it was not work?” (some hands up). Okay, tell me why it was work or not!
15. Linda: Because work is when you push or pull something.
16. David: Shoveling snow is when you have to pick it up.
17. Teacher: Okay! Good answers. But you might be surprised to discover that in scientific terms you didn’t do any work at all on the car.
18. Marcos: Why not?
19. Teacher: Because it didn’t move…in order for it to be work there has to be movement as a result of the force! All right, if you push a child on a swing, for example, you are doing work on a child. If you pull your book out of your book bag, you do work on the book. Okay (understand)?
20. Luis: If you list a bag of groceries out of a shopping cart, you do the work on the bag of groceries.
22. Linda: Cool.

The important element in this transcript of the lesson was that the teacher used language through discourse within small groups and written follow-up on the board to encourage and support reading for high-frequency word recognition and topic comprehension. This lesson allowed students to share their own experiences with peers and with the teacher, and the content remained text-based, which was one of the elements that teachers preferred for their strategy
selections. This seventh-grade lesson was age appropriate and used authentic examples to help students connect with the content material.

Another literacy/learning strategies that was effective for the group of teachers in supporting language and literacy was using Writing/Discussion Frames in which first words are used as prompts to initiate early drafts of writing assignments. This strategy developed students’ use of key words typical of specific genres of text, in this case persuasive writing, and assisted in reading comprehension in subsequent literacy activities. Second, the introduction to Anticipation Guides (Smith, 1978) was used by the teachers to motivate students to activate prior knowledge for the purpose of defending their ideas. For this strategy, statements about the content of the informational text or narrative passage are introduced prior to the students’ actual reading, requiring students to activate their prior knowledge of related content or experiences (i.e., schema scripts) to prepare for the reading. In some cases, students may be asked to select whether they agree or disagree with the statement; in other instances, the teacher may set up a mock debate for students to argue and defend their reasoning.

Achievement Changes in Reading Competencies

Initially, prior to the beginning of this study, there was a lag in standardized test scores behind those of national and state-wide averages for these beginning seventh-grade students that varied among the classrooms’ however, all were below average. Following professional development focused on vocabulary development through language-into-literacy as the intervention in this study, a positive change occurred in the students’ reading competencies (which includes but is not limited to vocabulary) scores. Specifically, a statistically significant difference was found on student reading scores on the state achievement tests using a paired-samples t-test, and the effect size was found to be moderate using Cohen’s d. Post-test scores were significantly higher than pre-test scores (see Table 1), which means there was an increase in reading competencies.

Table 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assessment</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>t-value</th>
<th>d-value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pre-test</td>
<td>209.62</td>
<td>19.182</td>
<td>-4.709*</td>
<td>0.49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post-test</td>
<td>218.99</td>
<td>18.682</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*N = 74, df = 73  
* p < 0.001

Discussion and Implications

When the results are aligned with the original inquiry questions, a clearer picture of the knowledge gleaned from the data is revealed and implications emerge. In response to the question, “What new information is gained about language support for literacy activities through interactive sharing of knowledge and strategies?,” it appears that teachers need explicit instruction in discourse strategies for vocabulary development and literacy instruction within content area instruction. The changes that occurred in classroom discourse and students’ achievement indicate that when they were able to choose resources and have them explained in focus group meetings, their instructional practice was more focused on students’ needs for vocabulary instruction. In addition, teachers need clear models for language interaction during
content area instruction. The lead researcher’s coaching was an important step for the teachers in learning to integrate their new knowledge. After learning about language differences between cultures, teachers changed their talking format, and therefore, teachers need to share language interventions that work with specific local populations with one another in small groups, a theory that aligns with CCLS 1.

In response to the second inquiry question, “What language strategies are chosen by reading teachers to integrate into word identification, vocabulary, and reading comprehension activities?,” teachers chose instructional formats that were a combination of language and literacy applications that were simple enough to add or modify existing activities in the classroom. For example, the use of writing frames were used prior to the usual writing activities; however, the teachers realized that the students’ initial difficulties with writing were due, at least in part, to their lack of vocabulary to self-start a descriptive paragraph or essay. Another example is the addition of Anticipation Guides to activate prior knowledge for activities that the teachers already used. The teachers found this addition to boost engagement in the activity and participation in discussions. Teachers, in general, make these decisions based on reflection about students’ needs (Miller & Veatch, 2010), a reflection which seemed to be heightened by this study’s emphasis on discussion within focus group meetings and aligns with the teachers’ instructional alignment with CCLS 4 for vocabulary development.

In response to the third inquiry question, “Does the use of increased language create a significant change in students’ reading confusions?,” the changes in students’ interaction following modifications in discourse format increased language interaction provides experiences with language use and background knowledge for content area topics. Specific attention to language during reading activities is not the usual approach for teachers of middle graders because there is an assumption that the emphasis is on reading to learn, not so much on learning to read through language-into-literacy modes. Allowing for increased time for language and vocabulary instruction and practice using words was found by the classroom teachers to be very supportive for second language learners and struggling readers. For middle level students, increased language interaction provides safe outlets to experiment with new ideas in small and large group discourse opportunities. Specifically, word cognates (such as Apollo, which in English is the name of a space mission; however, in Spanish, taken apart, means ‘a chicken’) are confusions that may not be understood without open questioning and interactive discussion during lessons involving reading, as emphasized by the CCLS 1 for discourse and CCLS 6 for academic vocabulary.

Results for this study are further supported by the research of August, Carlo, Dressler, and Snow (2005) focusing on the important role of vocabulary development for marginalized students, in this case second language learners. Educational implications focus on continuing to pinpoint teachers’ specific knowledge of the language-into-literacy needs of all students and assist them in finding and applying interactive strategies for enriching struggling students’ prior vocabulary, especially for those students also struggling with second language learning. Teachers can take a few extra minutes to introduce literacy activities through extended discussion and to intersperse within a literacy lesson frames for language use to set the students up for success. This study provided ideas for teachers to use in their classrooms that meet the CCLS goals to develop students’ interaction through language, which leads to successes in literacy development.

Results also point to the need for teachers to share their understandings with one another to refine their knowledge of school-specific literacy challenges. The results from the analysis of
the ISAT scores indicate that increased language interaction for vocabulary created a significant change in students’ reading competencies. Teachers can develop strategies that build on the ones they already know by supporting one another in grade level meetings, such as common planning time, and inservice opportunities.

In addition, teacher educators in content area instruction can use this study’s finding to collaborate with school-based teachers to develop and provide videos and print-based models of case/class studies situated within content area activities to preservice and practicing teachers. They also can provide explicit instruction in discourse strategies for vocabulary development and literacy instruction within content area instruction. When students struggle with school literacy activities, teachers struggle alongside them as they search for solutions. Taking time to build students’ language can help teachers support their students’ strengths.
References


Building Schema:
Exploring Content with Song Lyrics and Strategic Reading

Justin Stygles, MSAD #17 Oxford Hills School District

ABSTRACT
Teaching with song lyrics has many popular variations. The Common Core State Standards discourage pre-teaching, leaving students somewhat adrift. Song lyrics possess the potential to scaffold students’ schema in select social studies topics. Using reciprocal teaching (Palinscar & Brown 1984) within the reading workshop students ponder provided song lyrics to activate schema, questions, and a purpose for reading social studies content. By analyzing student work, instructional needs are determined, to strengthen schema and position students to deeper reading with subsequent texts. In this example, students closely read the eighties rock-classic “Cherokee by Europe” (1987) to build a context and create understanding around the Trail of Tears.

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Lyrics are a staple of communication in American culture. From the Star Spangled Banner immortalizing Baltimore in 1814, to My Old Kentucky Home, from encoded slave chants to social activism, songs and their lyrics traditionally express emotions in a concise yet ambiguous manner. Students seem naturally attracted to song lyrics. Many lyrics are an open invitation for learners to explore perspectives, culturally significant events, and the underlying message of humanity.

Carefully chosen song lyrics contain an equal opportunity to use reading strategies, decipher text to create deep meaning, and explore the author's message or perspective, within the reading workshop. Song lyrics contain universal messages, metaphorical meanings, devoid of levels and lexiles labels, offering readers an alternative approach to reading instruction.

With the Common Core State Standards (2010) in place, the argument of pre-teaching and background knowledge has become a passionate topic among teachers. By reading and interpreting song lyrics, students can create background knowledge to social studies topics without extensive pre-teaching. This learning experiment demonstrates how students apply reciprocal teaching to develop schema and how student responses provide formative assessments to prepare for later learning.

Research
Bill Harp (1988) states, "Music and reading go together because singing is a celebration of language. Using songs to teach reading is consistent with the nature and purposes of language and puts readers in touch with satisfying meanings." (p. 326). John A. Smith (2000) validates the use of song lyrics to teach basic literacy. Rasinski, Homan, and Biggs (2009) explain the connection between song lyrics and fluency. Carol Lloyd (2003) may have started the discussion
about learning perspectives in song lyrics and the role of small-group discussion regarding student interpretations. McLaughlin and DeVoogd (2004) discuss lyrics and critical literacy suggesting, students who engage in critical literacy become open-minded, active, strategic readers, who are capable of viewing text from a critical perspective. They understand that the information presented in texts, magazines, newspapers, song lyrics, and websites has been authored from a particular perspective for a particular purpose. (p. 56)


**Instructional Premise**

Song lyrics, as a reading instruction text, possess a recursive nature, meaning songs can be used before, during, and after the study of complimentary text(s) such as poems, short stories, primary documents or corresponding non-fiction book chapters. For three reasons lyrics, therefore, are suitable short texts with respect to the Common Core (CCSS, 2010) because:

1) Close reading (Reading Anchor Standard #1)
2) Analyze text structure (Reading Anchor Standard #5)
3) Multi-media analysis (Reading Anchor Standard #7)

A single song can be interpreted in several ways, through several contexts and yet, the author's purpose or reason for writing the song can be completely different. Song lyrics provide a forum for students to acquire, practice, and master reciprocal teaching within the reading workshop, via discussion, and as a scaffold to independent reading. For a reader, there are three “learning-to-read” opportunities that are available through lyrics:

1) Strategic reading, notably Reciprocal Teaching (Palinscar & Brown 1984)
2) Schema building (Semino, 1995)
3) Metaphor and themes

As an example, my sixth-grade class uses the Rolling Stones's *Sweet Black Angel* (1971) to relate to *Nightjohn* by Gary Paulsen (1995) to introduce the tragedy of slavery. Originally about Angela Davis, the imprisoned Black Panthers leader, the song, upon close examination of the lyrics, can be applied to a number of situations regarding many attempts by African Americans to obtain freedom and equal rights because of the lyrics’ metaphorical nature. Ambiguity within each line allows for a multitude of instructional situations and pathways for student to present their thinking and learning, whether discussing civil rights or slavery. A reflection of the experience is seen at the author's blog: ([http://mrstygleclass.blogspot.com/2013/04/sweet-black-angel-and-nightjohn-lyrics.html](http://mrstygleclass.blogspot.com/2013/04/sweet-black-angel-and-nightjohn-lyrics.html))

**Appropriate Songs, Appropriate Text**

Theoretically, such text is inappropriate for middle-grade readers. However, text complexity is not necessarily dependent on text level. “The most complex factor in a text is the transaction between the reader and the text” (Beers & Probst 2013, p. 34). Lyric appropriateness can be measured with three determinants based more on transaction than reading level:
Building schema

1) Level or lexile
2) Content and maturity
3) Figurative language, metaphorical meaning and ambiguity.

Most song lyrics do not fill all three categories perfectly for any given grade level. If you consider a song such a Boomer's Story (1972) made famous by Ry Cooder, lexiles are very low. Boomer's Story is a 540L, making the text appropriate for second grade. The lyrics are nearly appropriate for intermediate and middle school students based on themes, depending on schema students bring to the song. The ambiguity of text is appropriate for fifth-to-eighth graders because readers may not be ready to infer the context of the song. Initial reactions to the song might include a boyfriend who ditched a girlfriend. Some infer the song to be a biography about a hobo. Others feel this is a story an old man tells about his regrets. Access to metaphorical meanings and a variety of themes make lyrics an excellent choice to work at close or strategic reading, and interpretation skills.

Thought in contrast to CCSS grade-level bandwidth expectations, low-leveled text, like song lyrics are, consistent with certain models of instruction (Clay, 1998) because readers focus on strategic reading rather than word recognition or fluency. This practice provides students a comfort zone to explore ideas and express logically-based opinions.

Gallagher (2011) reveals how he uses Bob Dylan to link reading and writing. High schoolers can handle the more abstract nature Dylan offers. Intermediate students are safer waiting for such experiences. As fifth through eighth graders arrive at school singing the next hit, many of them seldom understand the lyrics. Lehman and Roberts (2013) discuss how they teach close reading and encourage student responses to lyrics with pop songs. In conservative school settings, such lyrics may be questioned from various sources. Roar by Katy Perry (2013) has gained the affection of people in many circumstances, from hospitals to classrooms, due to theme. Such songs are cross-cutting and relative in a variety of instructional situations. An example connecting reader to text by comparing character qualities can be found here: http://readingqueen14.blogspot.com/2014/01/i-got-eye-of-tiger_8.html.

Safely using lyrics implies that a teacher will only use lyrics that are defensible to the direct and indirect audience, including parents and administrators. This eliminates most pop music due to sexual connotations and explicit language. There is a reason songs are considered “adult contemporary.” Teachers need to be conscious of themes that are meant for instruction and themes that students might discuss outside of the classroom, which makes choosing the right song a challenge. Songs need to contain a message, a story that links to text and won't send students home whispering, “Did you hear what they said in that song?”

Building Schema, Exploring Themes

In the sixth grade classroom, we use songs to build schema. When the song is introduced to the class, students need space to work with any potential meanings to express their thoughts, develop a “sense” of the topic, even if thinking is “off-topic” in early stages. Because text worlds are constructed in the interaction between readers and the language of texts, it is important to consider the role of linguistic choices and patterns in the activation, instantiation and potential modification of schemata (Semino, 1995). If students are “in-the-ballpark” with a song, that is, they are expressing ideas related to a subject's central ideas and themes, no written response is considered right or wrong.

When the class analyzes Sweet Black Angel, one question students respond to following
the reading is, “Which character best represents an Angel?” From time to time, a student turns up an unexpected interpretation. Most students held the line that Mammy was the angel. Both chapter five of *Nightjohn* (1995) by Gary Paulsen and the Rolling Stones’ lyrics connected the female archetype through “have her in chains” connection. One student's diverted thinking suggesting John took on the roll of the angel, linking evidence from the book with the song lyrics, thereby clarifying lyrics' meaning. This “a-ha moment,” expressed with the class, revealed several crucial aspects of this instructional technique – no right or wrong answers, evidenced based answers, and an invitation to explore perspectives and possibilities.

**Building Schema: Instructional Outline**

Many times the purpose of a song is to create a context (schema) for students, a scaffold into topics they may not have experience with. One example is demonstrated through a study on the Trail of Tears. Most likely, students have had little experience with this topic, other than class discussions related to Native Americans. Two former pop songs are possible by the 1980's hairband Europe's *Cherokee* (1987) or the 1960's pop sensation Paul Revere and the Rider's *Indian Reservation* (1971). Lyrics can be obtained from several lyric websites. (For example, [http://www.metrolyrics.com](http://www.metrolyrics.com)) Before students read the lyrics, the teacher makes adaptations for purpose and content. For example, in *Cherokee*, repeated choruses are deleted. (This depends on whether or not the song's meaning is changed, thus a repeated chorus takes on a new meaning.) Utterances, including “yeah's,” “ahh's,” bearing no meaning are eliminated. Subsequently, *Indian Reservation* is eliminated due to derogatory references.

Students are introduced to Europe's *Cherokee* because the lyrics develop a story line with lyrics that readily connect to non-fiction passages. Measuring *Cherokee* against previously mentioned appropriateness standards, the lyrics, rewritten into narrative receives a 650 lexile, roughly two years below grade-level. There is no suggestive or offensive material that might lead students to make inappropriate connections or lead to discriminatory discussions. Linguistics are not incredibly ambiguous, rather each line is straightforward with tangible connection to primary sources. There is no figurative language permitting complete focus to center on building background knowledge. However, a tense shift appears. In the first stanza, the song read *they had*. In the final stanza, the lyrics change to *they have*, showing a passage of time. The teacher should observe students reaction to the change and potential interpretations. Evidence may appear in written strategies, conversation, or written responses.

Using the gradual release model, the song is broken up by stanzas to scaffold readers' independence. Teacher modeling shows how students should approach the lyrics using reciprocal teaching. The second stanza is read aloud as students attempt to apply strategies through guided practice. Small-groups are formed in the third stanza for students who need quick support or need a forum to express their thinking orally, before writing. Student work independently on stanza four, reading alone and adding another set of strategies for the stanza. Assessment occurs during the last two stanzas to determine “in-the-ballpark” understanding and strategic reading application.

To begin the process, the teacher reads the lyrics aloud and model strategic thinking. Effective practice is to demonstrate on-the-spot thinking. During modeling, the teacher needs to be as sincere as possible, that is, at-that-moment thinking, since a few students always insist the teacher knows the answers. Demonstrating analysis of a stanza typically spans five minutes.

On the second stanza is our foray into guided practice. Again, the teacher reads the stanza aloud. Students then try each of the strategies. Since there are typically four lines in a stanza,
the teacher guides students by pondering possibilities resulting in stating one prediction, asking one question, and make attempting to clarify metaphorical terms or ambiguous concepts. For example, the teacher may ask students, “What is confusing in this stanza? Are you confused by...? If so, what do you think that phrase means? Write that down as a clarification.” (More attempts at each strategy are acceptable; fewer suggests teacher intervention needed.) Finally, the teacher initiates a mini-conversation reviewing the stanza, leading students to write a summary.

With the third stanza students attempt to work in small-groups, in the same manner as described above. Students in this instructional situation are at the edge of their zone of proximal development. Support is critical. Small-groups are determined by assessment from guided practice stanza. Some are devised by tables collaborating. Students who show visible distress, confusion, or simply raise their hand and say, “I don't know what is going on,” are invited to work with guidance to boost confidence. Typically, support is needed with clarifying and summarizing. This is an important acknowledgement because the content is still new. Readers believe there must be right or wrong answers; shifting this paradigm is a challenge. Students tend to shy away from clarifications because they “don't know” what words mean or what is going on in a line. Since the construction of ideas is the main instructional objective, supporting students moving towards “in-the-ballpark” thinking is more valuable than judging relevancy. Asserting guidance through small groups prompts students to make reasonable attempts to summarize or clarify what a phrase or word means, confidently. Teachers need to support students because this action positions the readers for maximized learning in forthcoming reading.

Students work independently on the fourth stanza. Most students have taken control of their learning process by this point. The teacher prioritizes conferences with individuals who struggled in small groups or have not received teacher interaction. Often, these students need acknowledgement that what they come up with is a compliment to their thinking and a step in building confidence. Mental or observational notes should be taken to determine who needs additional support (i.e. the next day) or re-teaching to enable equal access to later learning.

As students work independently with stanza four, the teacher should take a minute or two to check in with students, offering advice, prompting thinking, jotting notes indicating the types of responses students write, preferences towards strategies, and any “thinking” students choose to share. The written strategies are a formative assessment tool. Further, by walking around the room and reading responses, the teacher may take note of instructional needs students required before the final two stanzas or determine if students need invitations to small-group discussions.

Following stanzas two through four, students have a chance to converse with one another. Students expand thinking through conversation, sharing perspectives, which is essential to solidifying concepts and clarifying uncertain ideas. Students have clear discussion norms including posing their question to the group and soliciting possible answers from peers. Students share predictions, in which peers may agree or disagree with an explanation; express words or phrases they are confused by and seek clarifications. At the end, a quick whip around yields each person's summaries. Finally, a quick minute is spent in a whole class share where students have the choice to express their thinking. This segment reveals students’ background knowledge and allows students to agree with one another on ideas they have come up with. Afterword students respond to writing prompts to demonstrate their understanding.

To extend or modify students’ interpretation of lyrics, music video adds a visual element, which elicits additional questioning, modify predictions, clarify inferences, and supplement summaries. This step is optional and entertaining for the students. Video is shown after the written responses so students’ initial interpretations are not impacted. Once students can move
past the appearance of 1980's leather-clad rockers, readers can focus on the director's use of apparitions in the background to show hostile removal of the Cherokees. Afterwards students revisit the writing prompts to explain how video impacted their interpretation.

**Building Schema: Students in Action**

**Modeling.**

The lesson begins with a think-aloud demonstration. On the page containing the lyrics to Cherokee, the following example is written on the right hand side of the page:

Q(uestion) = What were the promises? Who made the promises?
P(rediction) = The US Army is going to attack the tribe.
P(rediction) = The Indians were told they would not be harmed.
C(larifying) = “Mighty tribe” might be the Cherokees.
C(larifying) = “Winds of Change” must mean life changing events will happen
S(ummarize) = This stanza is about the Cherokee's lifestyle beginning to change because of lies.

The song does not state who is involved in the Trail of Tears, unless presumed from the title. This sets students up to read non-fiction texts and discover more tribes involved. I model this thinking to show students the legitimacy of asking questions that guide thinking, making predictions to confirm or refute ideas, extending learning by clarifying concepts, and summarizing as a means of “chunking” information (Marzano, 2007).

For example, when the song speaks of “promises were lies,” I model questioning with “What were the promises?” and “Who made the promises?” so students see that I am trying to parlay my curiosity and establish a purpose for reading related non-fiction texts.

The two predictions pose different levels of prediction. The first is considered an easy one for sixth graders, since the likely aggressor was the US Army. The second prediction is based on patterns in text and trends in history, as students are told. I model my thinking by explaining recollections from readings on the Holocaust or Cortez’s conquest of the Aztecs, trying to encourage students to work from previously known themes in class studies or independent reading. The primary theme here is, when promises were made, they were broken and the promises became lies.

Two examples of clarifying are shown, like the predictions, to signal the variations of clarifications; establishing a safe entry point and a desired level of clarifying. My safe clarification is a linking “Mighty Indian Tribe” with the Cherokees simply to stay on topic. With the second clarification, “Winds of Change” knowing this is a common idiom, I bring special attention to this occurrence since students may recognize the phrases and subsequent meaning from other readings. I explain that I think “Winds of change “ is a life-altering event. I connect students to our previous whole-class study of Mary Poppins (Travers, 1997), i.e. the winds changed marking her arrival and departure. Therefore I clarify by writing about “life changing events.” As a note, the phrases in quotations indicate exact wording of the lyrics, showing students one method of quoting text.

Students learn to summarize by the model that only includes one statement. The summary is built by linking key ideas from each line in the stanza to create a central idea. The class is reminded that is this new learning and the summary statement is not wrong or right, but a synopsis of their current thinking. The summary statement serves as a baseline for future
readings, in that the “thinking” becomes a concept that can be affirmed, discounted, or revised by acquiring more information.

Additionally, because reciprocal teaching is recursive in nature, summarizing can lead to predictions or questions, perhaps even a clarifications depending on the depth of the students’ thinking. The same can be said for clarifying. Once a concept is understood, more questions and predictions can surface; summaries shift. Summaries and clarifications should be a spring boards for “Aha moments.”

**Guided practice.**

As the students work through the second stanza, guided practice, the lyrics are read aloud and they begin to write their own strategies with mild prompting. When prompting predictions, I asked, as an example, such as, “If they have no place to return, what will happen to the people?” Students replied:

1) They got kicked out of their homes and had to move.
2) I predict people will starve if they have no place to return.
3) They lost the battle for their land and their home and were homeless.

To prompt clarifications, I asked, “What is confusing you? What do you think the song is trying to say?” Students replied:

1) They had lost their faith means they had to give up hope on settlers.
2) Made the nation bleed is war
3) They moved out of a place and couldn't return

To summarize, I asked students “what do you think this stanza is about?” or “What would you tell someone this stanza is about?” Students wrote:

1) The white men have so much greed there is no place to go.
2) The Americans stole and tricked the Indians off their land because they were searching for gold and the Indians learned there was nowhere to return to.
3) The Indians traded land with the English and they got bad land and had no place to go.

**Small-group and independent practice.**

When students reached the third stanza, some worked independently, others in small groups. In the small-groups, students had the stanza read to them as this is one opportunity for students to concentrate mainly on their thinking, with prompting, before tackling the final stanza independently.

Looking at the responses as students worked in small-groups created a sense of who would need guided-reading type instruction following the lesson.

Student A: for example added the following in stanza three:

Q(uestion) = Why did the winds of change tell them the promises were lies?
P(rediction) = I predict they were scared of white soldiers.
C(larification) = American soldiers ordered them around.
S(ummary) = The Indians are being bossed around by white soldiers.

Student B:
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Q(uestion) = What does that mean, they did not know that would happen?
P(rediction) = They will go to war
C(larification) = They looked for new land
S(ummary) = (Not included)

Student C: (note, Q, P, C, S are absent because the students did not use them or identify them with any particular stanza)
  What were the Indians driven to?
  Moons = months

During small groups and independent practice, mental and observational notes must be taken to determine next instructional steps. First, I need to see what students can come up with. The evidence shown above suggests Student C needs some support organizing his thinking. Students B & C need assistance in summarizing. Because this is the first reading of this text and perhaps the first (ever) exposure to this topic, I am essentially asking them to summarize something they have no knowledge of. Consequently, for all students, just by acknowledging what they come up with is a compliment to their thinking and a step in building confidence, a feeling students must have to engage in such work. Further instruction to develop background knowledge can be handled in more focused small-group instruction in following lessons. Overall, at the end of this lesson, most students have a plethora of information on the page to work with in future reading.

The takeaway for students is an attempt to closely read and self-monitor for meaning in an authentic context. Self-monitoring is one of the most important qualities of a lifelong reader (Fisher & Frey, 2013).

After this particular close reading process, students responded to two writing prompts, which served as a formative assessment tool. The prompts (shown in the next segment) seem simple. However, the intent is to leave the questions open enough for students to express what they know. Their responses provide bearing on the learning directions they are taking, what information they are retaining, or any specific interests students may be taking on this topic.

**Assessing learning: Formative assessment prompts.**

Students responded to the following two prompts:
1) What is the Trail of Tears?
2) What happened to the Cherokee?

The answer to the first question can provide an insight into the students’ construction of learning. Starting this lesson with no working knowledge, this question provides a landmark, a glimpse into their current thinking. With this information, students can be organized into small group with non-fiction text to revise misconceptions or provide the learning students are curiously hungry for.

The second question is more of an elaborate prediction. By this point students have developed an idea around the “Trail of Tears;” they know life was changed, and they are in despair. With this information, what could have happened? This becomes a major driving purpose for learning throughout the unit, through constant revision and expansion of knowledge. With this learning, students can develop understanding of themes including justice, genocide, prejudice, government authority, and human rights.

The following student responses answer the first prompt, “What is the Trail of Tears?”
A) White men said I will give you all land for gold and the Indians agreed and gave the gold and Indians traveled many moons and when they got to the place they had to learn English.

B) A path that the Indians walk after the war in misery. They walk the path to find a new place to go live but they couldn't find land.

C) The Trail of Tears is about the white men took the Indians land and forced them to live tin a certain spot and if they didn't listen they would be shot and killed. The Trail of Tears is also about war and how the Indians fought for their land.

Example A reflects the student’s prior knowledge from the Aztec unit and Cortez's quest for gold. The misconception in place is that the Indians gave gold, in turn receiving land. The instructional focus for this student will be introducing the Indian Removal Act of 1832, diaries from the expulsion, and independent reading of secondary sources to enrich this response.

Example B: This student takes a literal understanding (trail = path). The question surrounding the students' understanding is, “Does the student realize the Cherokee were forced off the land?” The response,” They couldn't find land” reflects a misconception. Based on the answer, this student becomes a candidate for small-group instruction. In a small group, the students collaborate and closely read, with the teacher's guidance, a secondary source to rectify the interpretation. Next the students, with teacher support would return to the lyrics to generate deeper predictions, questions, clarify phrases, and write a richer summary statement before moving on to primary sources.

Example C: The student shows solid developing knowledge around the Trail of Tears. Conferring with the student showed that he connected the Cherokee to atlas (geography) work we had done two days prior. His remark about war refers to the Black Hawk war and other battles discussed in the atlas and recalled from the one-page blurb Donner Dinner Party (2013) about the Black Hawk war. This student is prepared to engage in independent exploration. Further instructional needs, i.e. “building on the known” will be met through conferring and peer collaboration.

The second prompt, “What happened to the Cherokee?” is meant for students to infer the suffering and inhumanity Indians endured in their travels. Although somewhat connected to the first prompt, because the Army drove the tribes along the “trail”, student responses indicate if students are focusing on the travel or the outcome of the journey. Examples of student responses are:

A) Based on this song, I think that the Cherokee tribe had to move by what the government said because the Americans wanted the gold, like in the line, “The white man's greed, in search of gold, which means the white men wanted to get the gold which means money so they told the tribe that if they move to another place but when they did it was a really bad place and that the government tricked them.

B) Based on the song, the Cherokee got slaughtered, disrespected, and punished. I think the Cherokee tried to live free.
C) The Cherokee had to give their land to the white man but tricked the Cherokee so the Cherokees were left in despair with nowhere to go and nowhere they could turn. They also were driven hard by the plains.

Response A focuses on one lyric, essentially rewriting literal meaning of the lyrics. This response reflects need to explore possibilities. Small group instruction to connect with previous learning and reading may help this student become more comfortable to ponder hidden meanings behind the lyrics.

Response B is short and to the point. This student has the opportunity to expand on the terms he uses, such as disrespected and punished. The students could also explain what “live free” means and anticipate how the Cherokee lost that freedom.

Response C is another example of a student reworking the lyrics. The strength these students possess is answering literal comprehension questions with “right there” answers. With two of three examples demonstrating this same behavior, more lessons on inferring are needed, a focal point in proceeding small group instruction. Interestingly, the inability to infer is correlated to a lack of clarifying, suggesting students need further support considering possible interpretations or feeling free to logical construct potential text meaning.

However, despite lack of depth in the second prompt, students are in a perfect position to learn from non-fiction text. Instruction with lyrics is intended to build schema, not produce mastery. From this point, students will be taught and asked to look for connections in primary and secondary sources that embellish the lyrics encoded message. When the subsequent text studies are complete, students return to the lyrics and repeat the process. At that time, mastery will be assessed. The prompts will be re-administered measuring the learning, serving as tool for students to note their growth in interpretation skills and knowledge acquisition.

Conclusion

Sometimes to teach reading, we have to provide obvious, but unique opportunities. Thus, song lyrics are a perfect stepping stone to reading and meaning making. When reading song lyrics, students rarely think about reading, rather, they think about possibilities through strategic reading and exploration of concepts. Song lyrics, rich in messages and metaphorical meanings, provide an alternate path to learning. By using “easier” texts, readers build curiosity through lyrics, students find a new purpose for reading non-fiction – linking texts together to clarify, find answers, confirm predictions, and expand on knowledge base – an important scaffold and motivator when introducing, often “boring” social studies concepts and themes. Students, after learning a song, are empowered to read text with vigor.

Learning with lyrics allows students to paint a portrait of their understanding. Rather than fact-based, worksheet, or question/answer response investigations, students develop hypotheses and beliefs about social studies topics and themes. When looking at the Trail of Tears through Cherokee, students learn about the inhumane ostracizing of Native Americans, while showing how they develop understanding. Perhaps this instruction opens an avenue for students to create a value system as citizens, who learn from history’s mistakes, and make the future brighter.

Above all, students gain a sense of self and a belief they can read, a belief that thinking is open-ended, endless possibilities – the backdoor to the purpose of reading.
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Book Review:

Jennifer K. Johnson
Teachers College, Columbia University

ABSTRACT
Sunday Cummins’ *Close Reading of Informational Texts: Assessment-driven instruction in grades 3-8* is a practical resource for teachers seeking ways to promote close readings of informational texts across disciplines in accordance with the goals of the Common Core State Standards in reading, writing, speaking and listening. Cummins methodically illustrates strategies and techniques in preparing and implementing lessons and assessing student progress that can be adapted to suit a variety of learners in various learning spaces. She provides thoughtful guidance on how teachers can select informational texts, activate students’ prior knowledge, model strategic reading of all textual features, facilitate classroom dialogue and group work, scaffold independent reading, and support students in synthesizing information within and across texts at multiple stages of instruction.

AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY

Jennifer K. Johnson is a doctoral candidate in English Education at Teachers College, Columbia University. She is also an adjunct professor of literacy at Manhattanville College and the founding director of the Teachers College Columbia University Debate Institute at the Institute for Urban and Minority Education. Jennifer can be reached at: Johnson222222@exchange.tc.columbia.edu.

The Common Core State Standards (2010) established numerous learning objectives for student reading. From these standards, we know what is expected but not how to get there. In *Close Reading of Informational Texts*, Sunday Cummins (2013), literacy consultant and facilitator for the New Schools Project at the Erikson Institute, shares her experiences with coaching students and teachers in how to promote close readings of informational texts in order to access the what students are supposed to be able to do which includes being able to: read independently and proficiently; strategically read within and across myriad informational texts, including all of their accompanying features; identify and synthesize key ideas and supporting examples; and critically analyze texts in order to make well-reasoned decisions as civic actors.

Although “close reading” is a term fraught with controversy in literary criticism (Rabinowitz, 1992), Cummins reappropriates the term “close reading” and applies it to the reading of informational texts. She provides thoughtful guidance on the selection of informational texts for read-alouds and independent work, modeling note-taking and strategic reading of all textual features, scaffolding independent reading, and synthesizing at multiple stages of instruction. As her work is rooted in sociocultural theories of teaching and learning,
Cummins methodically details techniques in preparing and implementing lessons and assessing student progress that can be adapted to suit a variety of learners in various learning spaces. Lessons also emphasize drawing upon students’ prior knowledge such that students do not have to coat-check their lived experiences at the door when they enter the classroom.

In her first chapter, Cummins explicates her notion of close reading. She defines close reading as analyzing multiple levels of a text: words, phrases, sentences, and accompanying features; and by “considering the weight of the meaning” of these features, “the student can begin to see how important details fit together to support the author’s central idea(s) in a section of the text of the whole text” (p. 8). Being able to identify central ideas and their supporting evidence provides a “basis for critiquing the author’s ideas, thereby moving into deeper thinking about the text as a whole” (p. 8). Cummins also identifies five strategies for close readings that she develops throughout her book: knowledge of text structures and topical vocabulary, establishing a purpose for reading, self-monitoring for meaning, determining what’s important in the text, and synthesizing. She also emphasizes the importance of using her lessons with content-area texts. Chapters four through eight detail these complementary strategies. A focus on synthesis is woven throughout each chapter as Cummins sees synthesizing as the goal of close reading which is supported by the other strategies. Instead of teaching synthesis sequentially as the last strategy taught in close readings, Cummins substantively introduces it in Chapter Three, arguing that synthesis must be introduced up front and in conjunction with each reading strategy. Within all subsequent chapters, Cummins offers suggestions for synthesizing, while Chapter Eight provides a guide to synthesize across multiple texts. She argues that knowing how to engage in this type of close reading is essential for students to meet CCSS Reading Standards for Informational Text K-5 and 6-12, as well as the standards for Literacy in History/Social Studies, Science, and Technical Subjects.

Beginning with Chapter Two and continuing throughout her text, Cummins provides numerous if-then scenarios that teachers might face in the process of implementing lessons. She takes into consideration the new demands presented by the growing number of English Language Learners in classrooms as well as students with learning disabilities. Understanding that classrooms are not homogenous, and that students are at many different levels of development, through extensive tables, examples of student work, and detailing classroom lessons and follow-up reflection, Cummins offers ways for teachers to assess which stage of development a student is at, and how to tailor teaching strategies to support students in transitioning to the next stage of development moving from attempting and approaching to meeting and exceeding learning objectives. Throughout all of these stages, Cummins’s approach embraces the practice of teacher modelling, making the reading process transparent through such practices as thinking-aloud, writing-aloud, and note-taking aloud. Cummins is also clear that in modeling close-reading strategies and techniques, teachers must be fully present, patient, reflexive and committed to continuously finding ways to scaffold learning by tapping into students’ prior knowledge. Guidance in implementing lessons throughout the chapters includes ways that teachers can frame and establish the purpose of a lesson, introduce and activate students’ background knowledge, select and execute a particular reading strategy by explaining its importance with real world and relatable examples, read and think aloud with the students, coach students as they engage in guided practice, and support independent or group work. Each strategy includes direct instruction and ongoing dialoging during the practice, the latter comprising most of the lesson. Each method is also complemented with extensive tables detailing different teaching and learning scenarios with possible coaching language and actions. The concluding activities are designed to help
students reflect on and synthesize new information learned and what was accomplished. In other words, adhering to a theory of a gradual release of responsibility (Vygotsky, 1978) Cummins models reading aloud the main idea as well as the key words and phrases in supporting evidence; she then invites students to participate in co-construction by reading, note taking and talking with each other and the teacher. The lesson concludes by releasing the textual analysis to the students at the end with a probing question. Lastly, Cummins provides suggestions for teacher assessment of students’ work and planning for the following lesson.

In her second chapter Cummins provides a thorough explanation of an assessment-driven structured approach to teaching, which is used throughout the text. This strategy includes assessing students’ strengths and needs, preparing lessons and ways to study texts, developing a focus lesson that explains objectives and models close reading strategies, and providing opportunities for guided and independent practice and student self-assessment. While the teacher initially has a large role to play in reading and thinking with students, this is in the interest of promoting students’ ability to work independently. Toward this end, she acknowledges that this means “The teacher, always cognizant of the students’ needs, has to engage in a dance of stepping in and stepping back to support students along the way” (p. 30). Borrowing from Johnston (2004) Cummins emphasizes the importance of teachers being very mindful about how to speak with students at all times in order to “nurture each student’s identity and self-efficacy related to academic achievement” (p. 31) in order to build a community of learners who are comfortable and confident in sharing what knowledge they bring to the community and what still needs to be understood.

Chapter Three emphasizes the importance of providing opportunities for students to synthesize details within a text. To begin, teachers should select an excerpt of text, like a two-page spread, that is emblematic of the central theme of the whole text or provides information that helps students think about the key ideas in a unit of study. Writing responses that synthesize information requires that teachers develop and provide students with text-dependent questions related to content while students are reading so students can strategically read and develop a deeper meaning of the text. Other text-dependent questions can be shared that students can incorporate into their independent reading processes in pursuit of synthesis include: What is the main idea(s)? What is the author trying to convey? What details does the author provide, and which are the most important in working together to support the main idea(s)?

To teach the process of synthesizing, Cummins shares artifacts from students. This process begins with students referring to their notes and underlined portions of the text to orally share the main idea and supporting details followed by a statement about the relationship between the details and the initial message/idea. Here, the students synthesize the information from their notes using oral language as a first draft in synthesizing what they have learned before writing it down. Making connections is in the interest of developing deeper understanding of the text. Assessing students’ various stages of development is necessary for subsequent lessons. For example, if students are able to identify supporting evidence but not all of the details, students may not have the vocabulary necessary for synthesis, indicating a need for a follow-up lesson using a text that uses domain-specific terms to call attention to missing details, and using theme-related vocabulary to draw out the main ideas.

Finding supporting details also requires being able to understand domain-specific discourses and textual structures. Non-narrative informational texts are structured differently than stories that have a plot, setting, characters, conflict and resolution. Cummins wants students to understand the various features of informational texts, from the organizing details found in an
index or table of content, to images and captions, graphs and tables. She also wants to convey the flexible nature of text structures, as there are many different structures students encounter.

Chapter Four provides lessons to raise student awareness of macrostructures of the text: introductions, sections and headings within the body of the text; and the microstructures of texts: temporal sequencing, cause and effect, comparison and contrast, and descriptive structures that are used by authors to create certain effects and convey ideas. Cummins walks educators through ways to model how to take notes on textual features to illuminate the various textual evidence that supports the main idea of a text. As one strategy, Cummins models the use of sticky notes to help students see how all of the features of the text work in tandem to support and extend an author’s ideas and provide myriad ways for students to make meaning of texts. All of her strategies are presented with a visual accompaniment so that readers can see how Cummins visually scaffolds close reading strategies for her classroom students.

Cummins wants her students to move beyond students’ general comprehension of texts. Using Nick Bishops’ (2008) text about frogs, she explains that a general understanding of the text would be that it’s about frogs eating. She is interested in cultivating more fine-tuned readings that will elicit additional details from the text like how frogs, and their many varieties, acquire food and how this shapes their overall lives. For example, a teacher can help students understand how to look at words, phrases, organization, and textual features in ways that helps students see supporting evidence in the text that goes beyond general claims to paint a much more nuanced picture. For example, statistics can signal that there is more information to glean from the text that can assist students in going beyond the general claim that frogs eat, to more detailed reports about when, how and what frogs eat and the ways the author might structure a text to indicate a time sequence, or an encoding of contrast indicating variations between different types of frogs. For example, awareness of the significance of signal words like “other frogs”, or signal phrases indicating a new location, provide clues that there is a contrast coming up about different frogs.

Core standards for reading informational texts include: finding evidence and textual support for claims and referring explicitly to specific details in the text for answers to questions (this means that the text is the first source for answers, but not the ultimate source). Determining a main topic or multiple topics in a text requires understanding how an author intentionally structures a text to convey this information. Knowing how certain words and phrases are signals foreshadowing significant information enables the reader to stay focused on seeing what follows because it will be an elaboration, contrast, indication of significance, etcetera. “For example” would signal that the author is not necessarily introducing a new claim, but is about to provide an explanation of something already stated in the text. Chapter Five provides strategies for previewing informational texts, including the use of the THIEVES mnemonic borrowed from Manz (2002): bringing attention to titles, headings, introductions, every first sentence in each section, visuals and vocabulary, end-of-article or end-of-chapter questions and summarizing thinking (p. 103). The goal of using the mnemonic THIEVES is to help “students activate their background knowledge and make predictions about the content they will be encountering while reading” (p. 102). Cummins argues that students must understand their purpose for reading because different purposes create different meanings; reading for pleasure will elicit a different meaning than if one reads for information about how to do something. She also stresses that a reader must own this purpose: they must understand why they are reading and what they are trying to get out of it. At the same time, if a student knows they are reading to ascertain why an author is writing about a particular topic or concept, or if they are reading to see if the author can
convince them with sufficient warrants, evidence and significance, this does not guarantee that this new knowledge is meaningful in the sense of serving a purpose in the students’ lives. Consequently, teachers are on their own for explaining why the subject matter is important and relevant to the lives of their students.

Chapter Six explains the importance of self-monitoring: the ability to know what we understand and what we do not. This also includes being able to analyze the text at multiple levels: words, sentences, paragraphs and sections. For example, students should be able to identify words that signal a shift from one idea to another, as is indicated by the word however, as well as decode unfamiliar vocabulary words. Monitoring also means being aware when we start to lose focus. I can relate. I remember times early on in my education that I would read several pages before I realized I had no idea what I was reading; I was thinking about work, family, if I had enough clean laundry to last for another week and so on. The words on the text might as well have been binary code. Chapter Six helps teachers ascertain if and when this walkabout takes place and how to respond to assist students in self-monitoring their reading practices to look out for times when they are looking at the text on a page, but not reading. To implement this instruction, a teacher must be metacognitively aware of her or his own techniques, perhaps even challenging previous notions about how to read strategically. Toward this end, Cummins employs the coded method (Hoyt, 2008) in her primary and follow up lesson.

Awareness of one’s reading practices through self-monitoring does not guarantee capturing the central ideas in a text. I had to clean my parents’ garage because they were planning on moving. I came across a box of my papers from high school. Some were atrocious! I couldn’t believe how off the mark I was in assessing the key ideas in a text and supporting evidence. I ran across my annotations of articles, with claims that seemed to come out of thin air; they might have incorporated some facts, but they were at times random and not necessarily supportive of the author’s main ideas. Sometimes there were claims, but no warrants. Sometimes there were warrants, but no central idea. I could have benefited from close-reading. Chapter Seven takes up that task by walking students through the process of being able to understand how informational texts are structured to zero-in and take notes on the most important sentences, paragraphs, and sections, as well as other features in the text from side bars to illustrations and captions, as well as tables and figures, and synthesize these observations with summaries. By demystifying text structures she documents ways to teach students how to “strategically read feature-dense texts” (p. 134). This process, like those preceding it, begins with assessing students’ strengths and needs based upon teacher-student dialogue about their process of reading and what they take away from the text, as well as examining what students write about the texts they read. The goal is to enable students to keep moving toward higher stages of development. Cummins reminds us that the Common Core State Standards (2010) expect students to be able to “determine a central idea of a text and analyze its development over the course of the text, including its relationship to support ideas as well as provide an objective summary of the text” (p. 135). Here she makes “pasta.” The pasta consists of the keywords and phrases to underlined in a text, whereas the underlined portions make up the water that is necessary to cook the pasta; one cannot make pasta without boiling it in water, but the water is ultimately not consumed. The pasta holds the clues about the central ideas of a text, their warrants and examples. When modeling, she explains why she underlines certain words and phrases and not others. This modeling takes time and thoughtful planning, but it is a transportable skill. Coupled with self-monitoring, understanding the process of close reading can free students up to use these strategies independently, transforming them into fully incorporated second-nature skills.
Chapter 8 builds on the previous chapters and provides a guide to research and synthesize across multiple texts to write a mini-research paper. The Appendix provides an additional study guide for each method.

While I was impressed with the logical sequencing and thoughtful lesson-plan development with extremely detailed tables, extensive visual examples of student work, and teacher modelling to illuminate close-reading strategies and assessing student development, I found myself thinking about what else was left to be considered. What still remains a critical task for teachers is to determine how we get students hooked so that they are interested in trying out close reading strategies. How do we make learning fun and relevant to the lived realities of our students? Given the amount of time required to go over a small amount of text to ensure close reading, a teacher must also think about their performance and how that comes into play when helping to sustain student engagement with the text being analyzed. Additionally, a teacher’s textual selection is important. If one fails to properly set up a text, or fails to make connections between the text and the lived realities of the students, even the most well-thought out lesson on close reading of an informational text might result in eyes glazed-over.

An additional consideration is the risk in supporting close readings of texts absent critical interpretation, especially given the ideological nature of texts (Street, 1993; Gee 2001). Close reading does not necessarily ensure our students will learn the skills to unpack the ideologies within texts or evaluate the veracity of warrants or their sources. Can a close reading include a questioning of the underlying assumptions of a text, reading between the lines to linger on what is not said? How can teachers support students in critical close reading? At the same time, how can students engage in a critical reading of informational texts without reading the texts closely?

A close reading as defined by Cummins, positions the reader as active. Reading is as a process of composition, wherein a reader constructs meaning through their transaction (Rosenblatt, 1969) with the text individually and collaboratively. This collaborative process makes it such that the more a text is re-read, re-thought, and discussed, the greater the potential is for readers to generate new meanings, interpretations and counter-readings. Through a close reading, students can get at what the author has to say while also co-constructing meaning with the text.

Considering this co-construction, reading-as-composing must allow for “tentativeness, for confusion, for sustained attention, for failure, for metacognitive awareness, particularly if what is foregrounded and honored in the course of instruction is the efficacy of the reading process rather than any predetermined product or content knowledge that a teacher feels obligated to transmit” (Blau, 2003, p. 21). Cummins certainly emphasizes the process in her lessons; however, her emphasis on using content-area texts carries the risk that teachers adopting her strategy will privilege a particular reading, a “right” reading that reflects “the content that a teacher feels obligated to transmit”.

Critical literacy, or disciplined literacy (Blau, 2003), requires students’ sustained, active, independent and collaborative participation in meaning making; students do not passively defer to a teacher’s interpretation of a text. Students are invited to make their own interpretations that may agree with or contest other interpretations, and develop critical awareness of the epistemological and ideological assumptions within the text and its conclusions. However these interpretations are directly informed by the evidence in the text, which requires close and sustained focus in developing a deep understanding of a text, a process that takes time. Initial lack of understanding cannot be equated with the lack of capacity to comprehend a text; rather expert readers “are more willing to endure and even to embrace the disorientation of not seeing...
clearly, of being temporarily lost...Instead of ignoring or rushing in to plug up such gaps with weak evidence or rationalizations, they will probe them, opening up the possibility that their own formerly comfortable reading will collapse or require reconstruction” (Blau, 2003, p. 19). Resilience is necessary, as is developing the courage to be reflexive, vulnerable, and take a chance in referring to evidentiary reasoning in a text to make a case for initial interpretations, honest responses, revised interpretations, and challenges to other readings, even if those interpretations, responses or challenges might be contested. Courage is also required to change one’s interpretation when other readings open up new perspectives and meanings.

To do this, one must be able to self-monitor their reading process. This metacognitive awareness is necessary for a student to know when to re-read, how to read strategically, reading her own reading to learn about her capacity as a reader in addition to information gleaned from a text, or content-based knowledge developed. Toward this end, the process must be made visible by the teacher. Students must be encouraged to systematically identify what they don’t understand in the text (vocabulary, phrases, paragraphs, supporting features, etc.). The classroom must be a collaborative, co-generative space for communities of practice and process, and not just producing products.

Thus close reading is an individual and collaborative process of composing meaning. Viewing reading as a process of composing, wherein a reader constructs meaning through their transaction with the multiple features of the text, the more a text is re-read and rethought, generating new meanings, interpretations and counter readings. What might be important to consider are ways to facilitate students accessing a full range of readings with content-driven texts. Also, in finishing a close reading, educators might check in with students to see if they think this means the case is closed, or that the truth has been reached. In other words, do readers feel encouraged to find definitive readings of text and then the world, reducing its complexity? Or are students learning that meaning making is dynamic, a process into which they can jump and shape by using the strategies of close reading? Either way, Cummins’ text provides a useful resource for anyone interested in understanding not only the *what* but the *how* of close readings of informational texts.
References


Voices from the Field:
It Started in Poughkeepsie

ABSTRACT
Sometimes people and places come together for a variety of reasons. This article connected four individuals under the umbrella of literature and sport as well as who-knows-who. The ultimate result is the important value of reading as embraced by a nationally known author and his equally well-known and talented friend within the world of professional sport.

AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY
Bob Ruder is a retired middle school administrator who lives in Lancaster, PA. His professional career began in 1968 in the Poughkeepsie City School District where he was a special education teacher for eleven years. After serving as the assistant principal of the Poughkeepsie Middle school for three years, Ruder moved to Lancaster, PA where he became the principal of John Reynolds Junior High School in the School District of Lancaster for eight years. He then moved to the Manheim Township School district where he served as middle school principal for twelve years before he was assigned to the Neff 6th Grade school. Ruder holds a BS in education from Millersville University, MS from SUNY New Patlz and a EDD from Temple University.

Ruder has written extensively for middle level publications including the Middle School Journal, Middle Ground, the Pennsylvania Middle School Newsletter and Midlines, the electronic publication of the New England League of Middle Schools. He has written for School Business Affairs regarding school safety, ethics and plant construction. He is also a frequent contributor to Principal Leadership and Principal magazines, the Pennsylvania Journal for Health, Physical Education, Recreation and Dance, The Pennsylvania Administrator, Leadership for Student Activities, The Michigan Journal for Health, Physical Education, Recreation and Dance and Curious Parents. Ruder has also served as ad hoc reviewer of manuscripts for the National Association of Secondary School Principals' Bulletin, a book reviewer for Middle Ground and a manuscript reviewer for The Middle School Journal. He can be reached at bobruder@gmail.com

This account of unusual connections involving diverse and colorful individuals begins at the Poughkeepsie Middle School in 1969. I was a special education teacher and Don Murphy was a math teacher. Our friendship involved our spouses and our children and has survived the test of time despite my moving to Lancaster, PA in 1982.

In retirement both of us chose to escape the cold of the northeast and spend our winters in different locations in Florida. During a recent visit, Don noticed a James Patterson novel on our dining room table and shared with me that he and James had attended the same high school in Newburgh, New York.

While this revelation was not earth shattering, the fact that I was reading Patterson’s, “Middle School The Worst Years of My Life” caused me to pause and reflect at the series of rather mundane life events that brought Don Murphy, James Patterson and me together under the rather unique umbrella of middle level education.
The only reason I picked up Patterson’s book at the local mall was because of my interest in middle schools and middle level students. What piqued my interest was how would a well-known mystery writer with colorful and adventurous characters such as Dr. Alex Cross, transcend the enormous gap between shoot-em-up sometimes gory narratives describing diabolical murderers and their victims and a pre-adolescent kid whose name is Rafe Khatchadorian and his imaginary pal, Leo. Rafe and Leo by-the-way are both lost in the morass of middle school life and all the hormonal spikes and valleys that are part of that journey. Some will call it coincidence, others will rely on the Six Degrees of Separation espoused by Kevin Bacon, while others will use the Yiddish word *bishert*, or it was meant to be to explain the coming together of three disparate real life individuals along with three fictional characters in the personas of Alex Cross, Rafe Khatchadorian and Leo.

While this short essay might satisfy the literary requirements of Rafe Khatchoian’s English teacher, Miss Ruth(less) Donatello a.k.a the Dragon Lady, at the Hills Valley Middle School, more interested readers might be asking if there is more to this story. The answer is a resounding yes that further embraces Bacon’s Six Degree Theory.

The day after Don’s visit to south Florida, Sun Sentinel correspondent Oline H. Cogdill shared with the newspaper’s readers a wonderful partnership between author James Patterson and Miami Heat super-star Dwyane Wade. Unlike the bond shared by Alex Cross with his colleague John Sampson or the Rafe’s puppy love interest Jeanne Galetta, this union was about two real people who have committed themselves to embrace literacy among school children.

How these two superstars managed to combine forces in the name of literacy isn’t quite clear. What is clear is that Wade, a standout with the Miami Heat, and Patterson, a high scoring mystery writer who is a part-time south Florida resident, have united to provide students in Miami and Chicago with books. Patterson and Hachette Book Group are donating books along with Wade and the Heat who have committed to giving 18,000 books to students. This number of books came about after Wade pledged to donate 1000 books for every point he scored during the March 27th game between the Heat and the Chicago Bulls. While the Heat lost the game, Wade contributed 18 points.

Bringing this literacy press to center court was to be a nationwide online broadcast entitled One on One: Fundamentals with Dwyane Wade and James Patterson. The One on One webcast was free to libraries and schools and to home viewers through Jamespattersonevents.com which provided information regarding how questions could be submitted to Wade and Patterson prior to the broadcast. The overarching theme was the importance of reading.

Writer Coghill captured Wade’s motivation behind his literacy push beautifully as shared in an email he sent to the correspondent, ”What I would want for kids to get from this webcast is seeing two guys from different walks of life and how we come together for this one thing: reading.” Wade continues,”Reading is so important: The role it played in our lives, the success that we’ve had – all of this comes from the fundamentals of reading. I want kids to know how much fun you can have doing it, but also how important it is for your vocabulary, for your writing skills, and how it helps you with confidence in so many ways.”

Patterson’s email to Coghill also captures his commitment to literacy as he writes, “I hope that parents, who are an important cog in the process, understand that it’s their job - not the schools - to go out and find books for their kids. If kids don’t read, life just becomes so hard. I wouldn’t have made it as a writer, obviously, and Dwyane Wade wouldn’t have gotten into Marquette, which started his career - it all starts with reading.”
Most striking in Patterson’s email is his comment related to taking action, “My hope with this webcast is to stimulate people to action; right now a lot of people like to sit around and talk about these issues, but they don’t do anything.” School leaders, sports superstars, movie and recording icons as well as government and business leaders who have not heard Patterson’s assessment need to pause, read and understand the power of his statement. Alex Cross and other Patterson heroes and Dwyane Wade and superbly talented athletes have chosen not to sit on the bench but rather have established themselves as dynamic fictional or real life leaders who advocate for the individual and societal power associated with reading.

One needs only to dream for a moment of the amazing potential world class heroes hold in their words and actions if they were to support literacy initiatives across the nation. If other sports and literary celebrities would endorse and replicate the actions of Wade and Patterson, the hands of school children would be holding books along with basketballs, hockey sticks and baseball bats.

Who assumes the responsibility for pushing the literacy movement ala Patterson and Wade forward is not an easy question to answer. Nonetheless, it can be done be either following the model that was created by the author and the sports star or by crafting other strategies that provide books to schools and role models to students. Who reaches out first isn’t necessarily important. What is important is that someone grabs the ball or novel and runs with it.

The final score, thanks to the efforts of Dwayne Wade and James Patterson will be more students holding books in their hands, embracing literacy and realizing the power that reading will bring to their lives. Accomplishing this task would even make Alex Cross’ not-so-easy-to-please grandmother proud and may get Rafe Khatchadorian a kiss on the cheek from Jeanne Galetta.
The 2013 New York State Reading Association Literacy Advocate Award

Tammy Robinson, Editor of Skribblers Magazine
Interviewed by Katherine Egan Cunningham and Courtney Kelly, Manhattanville College

ABSTRACT

In February 2014, co-editors of the LLS Katherine Cunningham and Courtney Kelly interviewed Tammy Ellis Robinson, winner of the New York State Reading Association Literacy Advocate Award in 2013. Below please find courtesy of Ms. Robinson her remarks following her award’s acceptance as well as the transcription and audio file of the interview. The interview transcript was lightly edited for clarity.

Tammy and Skribblers can both be found online at: http://www.skribblersmagazine.com/

It is an honor, a joy and above all an inspiration to receive this Literacy Advocate Award. I share this honor with the Skribblers board members and volunteers, my family, community supporters, like CapCom Federal Credit Union and Macedonia Baptist Church, all of the parents, teachers, kids and all of my fellow literacy advocates celebrating here together tonight. The best way to express humble gratitude for an honor such as this is with righteous action. The theme of this conference, Literacy for all Learners is a reminder of that and invigorates me to use the adrenaline of this moment to power forward in the name of social justice and the infinite beauty of words.

Molly Friedenfeld wrote in The Book of Simple Human Truths, “There is great power in our words, because they are thoughts to which we have given additional energy by speaking them aloud so another person can know them.” I am going to speak them aloud. The power of this recognition, the Literacy Advocate Award, is in the meaning of the words. The very words represent the spirit behind Skribblers and the work of literacy advocates like us. Together… power …and love. Literacy advocate award… I’ll handle them in reverse order. Award? Well, that’s about togetherness. It has brought us here tonight in the name of celebration of our community and common righteous cause. The New York State Reading Association looked at the connections and importance of the work of our publication and this award means you all stand together with us. The very feeling that we hope to instill in our young writers and artists when we publish their work and write them personalized feedback letters is represented here. We strive to let them know that they are a part of a bigger community in which they can fully participate and take action and that words can help them do that.

The word advocate … well that’s the power part. In supporting our young people as they develop their reading and writing skills we empower them to lift their voices with the truth that they see. As we step up for children we bring them into their power, for it is through their connection to one another that they create the future. By sharing the power of words with them we give them the tools to build everything from I-phones to peace treaties. Words are a vehicle to the future. To a future where connections are made and differences are bridged. William Faulkner said “Never be afraid to raise your voice for honesty and truth and compassion against
injustice and lying and greed. If people all over the world...would do this, it would change the earth.” When we advocate for our youth we bring them to that power.

Together, Power and ...Love. Literacy is an act of love. On every level from reader to writer, from teacher to learner, sharing the magical power of literacy is an act of love that shows we are listening and we are sharing. We will hear and young people CAN speak their thoughts and lift their voices with plans and dreams and show us the world that they want, that they see. When they have the power of words at their disposal and they know that we are with them in togetherness, and that we love them, young people can find the truth in our stories and share the truth in their own. I would like to close with the words of one of our young writers. Brittany Rose Egnot was 10 years old in 2006 when she wrote this poem. Her piece is invigorating on two levels. Within her efforts we recognize her power unfolding and her very words connect to the power of love and togetherness.

New Dawn

In the blackest night
I take flight
Soaring through my dreams
Weave and fly
Dip and dive
Almost magical it seems.
Free at last
I leave the past
And those dark clouds of sorrow
I can’t wait to see what the future holds
I’m ready for tomorrow.
Thank you.
An Interview with Tammy Alice Robinson

Interview with Tammy Alice Robinson being interviewed by Katie Cunningham and Courtney Kelly of Manhattanville College (Editors of the New York State Reading Association (NYSRA) Professional Journal, The Language and Literacy Spectrum)

Click here to listen to the interview.

Katie: And Tammy is here with us as the winner of the Literacy Advocate Award that NYSRA awards each year. Tammy is the 2013 winner. And we are so appreciative of you taking your time this morning.

Courtney: And, congratulations!

Katie: Yes, and congratulations on the award!

Tammy: Thank you.

Katie: Certainly well-deserved.

Courtney: So Tammy, can you share the story behind Skribblers and tell readers about its purpose in the lives of young writers?

Tammy: Certainly, Skribblers was actually created from my desire as a parent to show the needs of my son. There was this passion born in him for storytelling, and when he was in the first grade he wrote a story called “Good Versus Evil”, and then he asked me how he can get it published. Since I also had always written stories and wanted to publish my own fiction, his question kind of got me excited and made the possibility and desire to nurture this storytelling urge in him, and the joy that he had in telling a story made me want to really foster that. So, we decided to create, I guess this is what every parent does, a story writing circle for him. I gathered a number of kids who were also seven and eight-years-old. We met once a week and they wrote stories, and we shared and talked about these stories and ideas and essays. And then from that we decided that we wanted to share these ideas with the rest of the world because they all wanted to be heard, they all were interested; they were avid readers. They were all interested in the idea of getting what they had to say out there for other people. So we made the first Skribblers Magazine from their work, and we made about seven copies and distributed it to ourselves. And then my husband got a new job, and we moved and started another circle in a new community, in Clifton Park. The first one had been in Albany. We met for a year, once a week, the same thing, and when it came time to publish they didn’t want to just publish the kids in that circle; we wanted to invite kids from the first one. And from there it kind of hatched the idea of not only sharing their voices but connecting the community of kids, from one to the other. So Skribblers was kind of more of an opportunity not only to publish their writing but to extend the hand to other kids and say ‘look we’re a community and here is what we all have to say together’. So it exists now, born from that original purpose, I guess, to give kids an authentic venue to share their message from a place where they will be read, not just with other kids, but adults; the parents who are reading Skribblers, the teachers that are reading Skribblers too. And it serves as a
celebration and a recognition that writing has a communicative purpose. A purpose that is
invigorating and liberating but then also powerful. *Skribblers* acknowledges and respects that
the voices of the young kids, of young people matter, probably matter the most.

**Katie:** Oh how wonderful, I am so excited the NYSRA readership will read and hear your words
about the origins of *Skribblers*. As parents of two young boys, Courtney and myself, think a lot
about how to inspire young people to put their story out there in the world and to see writing as
the sharing of your ideas and your idea has value. So, wow, what an incredible beginning of
such a powerful writing site for young people. It’s so wonderful. The story writing circle is a
great idea. I love that. So, we have another question about how the editorial process works at
*Skribblers*. How do you choose work for publication and support young authors to make any
necessary revisions?

**Tammy:** Sure. So, the process, it ends up being complicated but pretty easy to understand. I
think our goal may be different from you, in that we’re, at this point, we’re a regional location.
And we want to publish messages that are powerful and will reach other people. But also to be
reaching back and encouraging those very kids that we’re publishing, so we are really seek to
publish as much as possible. We receive hundreds of submissions for each issue, and what we
do is we categorize them by age group. We look to present original messages that show best
effort, unique ideas, interesting topics, and stories. The ones that make us cry, that compares to
others in the age group. And really want to fill up the space with just as many different ideas
with as many different characters we can. We focus on message, and we make a lot of simple
editing fixes ourselves. So, a couple of spelling errors, we may just make those for them and then
let the kid know, ‘Look, we fixed a few spelling errors because your message meant so much to
us’. But for more substantial changes, and actually for upper students, we write them a
personalized letter that is very specific to whatever they’ve written or drawn and sent to us, and
we let them know what we saw as the strengths of the piece, what we like best. We encourage
them to keep writing, and then we offer very specific ideas about how they might revise the piece
if we had printed it. So if we’re not going to print, we might say, you might want to, usually it’s
not something as simple as editing, usually it might be, ‘You know, we wondered what happened
next to this character because there’s a character that kind of falls off and it’s confusing’, or we
would ask a very specific question after we provide a lot of positive feedback, and invite them,
then, to revise and resubmit so that we can publish it in the future. So that it’s kind of never a
‘well, we’re not publishing you’. Those letters are written by a committee of volunteers who are
parents, myself, teachers, other educators, some people who are studying to become teachers.
We get volunteers from the teacher colleges who are interested in kind of honing their creating
feedback for students. We provide examples of how we’ve done this in the past; it seems to kids
respond well to the feedback letters. And then of course the kids who get printed, the feedback
seems to be easier to take if we make suggestions, ‘You know we’re printing your piece, we
would really love to see a sequel because we want to see what happens next to Joe, who, was you
know, at the top of the mountain’, that type of thing. So, we try to make it dialogue between
ourselves and the student.

**Courtney:** What a powerful window into the authentic revision process. I don’t think I had that
experience until I had my PhD and was actually trying to publish in journals. And it’s
something that I know from my own students who are in college and in graduate school, I try to
give them, but often they haven’t had that, and to have young writers getting it at such a young age, the idea that writing is an ongoing process.

**Tammy:** That’s true, absolutely. I think that a lot of the teachers, who send us their students work, also, sometimes the teachers’ voice becomes less, I don’t know, empowered because they are always hearing it and it’s no longer this new and invigorating idea. But to have the voice and this communication from people who they don’t know, from somebody who has only seen their work and it’s not about them, it’s not about the thing they are saying, that they misbehaved after lunch, it’s not about any of that, it’s just about the writing. It seems to really offer a different type of look into that process, which I do think is more authentic, like you’re saying.

**Courtney:** Yes, so we are going to move onto the next question. What advice do you have for literacy advocates who want to start a project similar to Skribblers?

**Tammy:** I would say that anyone can start a publication that is for students. It is really important to communicate that message of communicative writing, of authentic writing to the students; that we are creating a place for your voice to be heard, and to seek the assistance and support of the parents, teachers and providers. We print this work that is submitted to us not just from schools but also from parents. And that writing that kids do at home that sometimes never see the light of day, a lot of times it’s the child’s, it’s the writing that they have the most attachment to, it’s about the thing they really care about the most. So we are really speaking to an entire community, not just to their school community. And, additionally, in terms of finding the support to actually physically create it or fund it, the community and businesses are really eager to support young people. I was, I don’t want to say, completely surprised but just thrilled to find how many businesses out there are just completely willing to support young people. It makes sense, but we always ask them. And then finally, to make it really work for us, it’s about providing a variety of options for students. You know that’s a challenge on what to like, but saying look, ‘Here’s a whole bunch of things that are happening in the world, here are places you could look, there are different types of genres, what do you want to say?’ And really listening, you know, what is it that the kids want to get out there, in the creation of it. Because sometimes we’re too limiting, we want to provide them structure, but we also want to hear what’s really inside them, and what really wants to come out.

**Katie:** Wonderful. We were wondering, Tammy, about certainly there is such value in Skribblers being on news print and being a hard copy of something and holding that in your hand, and we were wondering about your perspective on the significance of publication for a young writer, and also how you see technology changing the process of publication.

**Tammy:** For young writers publication is just a really important motivating factor because it highlights, again, for them that purpose that writing is a way of communicating and bringing your message to lots of people. You’re not just writing it for yourself. And also, the process provides students with validation and the feeling that what they do matters to a lot of other people. And knowing that what you do matters just really is the driving force for helping you to continue to do it, especially if it’s something that’s not necessarily that easy. We really struggled initially when we started Skribblers, there was already the Internet and a lot of online venues and print publications were dying. Newspapers have been folding or switching their gears to being
online venues. We struggled initially with the idea of do we want this to be in print at all. And then given that we really worked, first of all, we wanted it to reach kids in a variety of venues. And everybody doesn’t have a computer even now today. Some classrooms have one in the classroom. So for us, we really wanted a print version. We wanted a version that can get in kids’ hands, people who don’t have access to the computer or even if they do have access aren’t necessarily guaranteed that their access is going to result in finding a publication that is for literacy purposes online instead of playing Minecraft. So we also thought, for young kids, just that the multisensory opportunity to hold it in their hands, cut it up and the need to do some workshops with teachers of young students and say ‘Go ahead and cut up that paper, rearrange the letters’ and really use it in a way that makes it be for the students. But, technology in general for publication has really just made the process so much easier. I don’t know that we could do it without technology as it is today with desktop publishing. I certainly don’t have the training and we certainly use a lot of volunteers, and with the new desktop publishing opportunities and programs like Photoshop it makes it so people who have an interest can really support us both graphically and in the process of publishing. Even in writing those letters we speak to a lot of our volunteers work virtually, some of whom I have never met. There were teachers from teachers’ colleges where we would send people’s writing and talk to them about the process over the phone, but they are able to send you those letters over the Internet. It also makes it easier for kids to submit work, for parents to be sitting with their child and they’re writing a poem, they type it in and send it off in an email in a way that kind of keeps it from having to become the chore of putting it in an envelope with a stamp, which seems simple, but I think with busy parents, it makes a difference that a lot of online submissions that way. We also do publish a version online, which allows us to publish even more kids’ writing. We publish, you know, a twenty-eight page print publication, but then online there’s not a limit to how much we can include. It can include color, and it can include making things move and bells-whistles. So online makes it such a really come alive for students more so. And we want to promote that online literacy as well, we want readers to go on and look at an online version because that’s really how they are experiencing that world and that’s how their writing is going to be. They can change the world with a blog, they can change the world with a Facebook post, so really recognizing that writing both in print and on the Internet is important and is important to us.

Courtney: That’s actually a great segue to our next question, Tammy. In your acceptance speech you repeatedly use the phrase “Righteous Action”. How can teachers and parents and other literacy advocates support young people in using literacy to take action for social justice?

Tammy: “Righteous Action” is one of my catch phrases I think, but I think it’s important to recognize and explicitly discuss what it means to share your voice, it’s not just story for story sake all the time. Education is for students, to provide them with the tools to grow and pursue their dreams and prepare them to take the reins of all facets of society; from politics to business to education. I think it’s our responsibility as educators to ensure that students recognize this as the enfolding purpose that they are prepared to take their place as responsible stewards of society. It’s huge, and as educators we need to instill in them the overarching message of equity and responsibility to fellow humans, that they will be the future. So, as we make them aware of the passage of that mantle from generation to generation we do it through literacy. That’s the power of humans, that what makes us different is those words. Leading the trail and exposure to what interests them and what’s happening currently in their world, both their world in their
classroom and the world at large. We can help students to see themselves as actors in the broader social framework. They don’t have to be passive participants, ever, even as they’re learning. They can raise their voice and have it heard. And it may start by being involved in their school, making themselves aware of policy in their community and helping them to become aware through our actions as teachers. It’s part of the message of a democratic nation that we all must take notice and bring our ideas and values to the table and that’s really, we’re really giving them an education to become part of that conversation. When teachers encourage students to build their literacy skills and become informed citizens then they share with the students that power that can be theirs. You know as students gather information from books and magazines and research, that’s when we encourage them to be social actors. We ask them questions, what should be done and then take it to the next step further, what can you do? So we talk about awareness and action and communication and power, it’s kind of the language and the words that are shared between people that advance ideas. When students can access the words, they can interpret the ideas and then build new ones about all kinds of aspects of the social world from business to politics to health care to the environment and bring that message to others. To see injustice and understand it, read more about it and then do something. That’s the big thing, you know, writing and speaking out and then taking letters and building causes on the stage of instantaneous access of information via the Internet. Students can seek and find problems and then build purpose and learn their solutions to the conversations and all kind of venues using written communication to do so. And we can show them that and really start them off in that path.

Katie: Listening to speak actually is reminding me of Walt Whitman’s poem, you know, you’re using the language of social actors and stage and this idea of the powerful play goes on and that we all contribute a verse. And actually the new Apple commercial, whatever people think of Apple, but it’s such a powerful message that about every young person has an opportunity to contribute a verse to this larger play that is taking place all around us and what will that verse be.

Tammy: Absolutely.

Katie: Yeah, so our last question is, what advice do you have for young people who want to be writers or artists or see their work published?

Tammy: So, for young people who want to share their writing and that work, above all, I encourage them to keep doing it. Keep writing, keep drawing and creating and keep reading and consuming new ideas, always. That’s the conversation with their own brain. It feeds brain and gives them the opportunity to keep building on what’s there. But then more practically, I encourage them to, or I should say, in addition to that much, more practically, I encourage them to share their work with others and re-read and perfect their craft, and the products they want to send out. It doesn’t have to necessarily start out with sharing that story with the publication. Please start, go ahead and have your friend read it and let tell them what they think and revise and make sure that what you want, to my young writers and artists, you know, what you want that message to be is what they’re getting out of it. That’s what the revision process is about. Once you get it to the point where others are reading it with you and saying ‘Yeah, ok, I see what you’re saying’, we’ve been looking at the artwork and they’re seeing what you want them to see in it, then they can go looking for potential publishers and see the message that they want to be in
their writing or artwork without being distracted by mechanics or not following particular guidelines. So then, I encourage them and you know, please ask your parents, go to your teachers and ask for help to check out the many venues that exist in publication that are at work right now because with the advent of the Internet and even before then, there are many. It’s just a matter of finding them and sending out information. We on our website, on the *Skribblers* website, have links to a number of publications that we’ve checked out that are for kids, where they can send in their writing and artwork. And then of course I encourage them to send their work to *Skribblers*, especially for our New Yorkers. Above all, keep trying and being persistent and creating new work and just keep sending them out and having people read it and send it out because finding that perfect fit takes a lot of tries. We talk to published authors and they talked about sending their work out seventy times before they hit it big. It doesn’t mean that there was anything wrong with their work anywhere; it just means that somewhere that they’re looking for exactly what that kids’ writing or that kids’ drawing. And that persistence is what really pays off in trying get their work published. But really just be persistent and believe in yourself because I believe in them.

**Katie:** Good advice for anyone any age who wants to be a writer. Well, Tammy, thank you so very much for sharing your thoughts and ideas that are so powerful. I know I’ll be sharing this audio cast in courses of mine and asking people to think about the great work at *Skribblers* and what it means to them as teachers and students.

**Tammy:** Thank you.

**Courtney:** Yes, what an inspirational start on this snowy Wednesday after so many snowy days this winter. I feel really energized hearing your passion for this subject, Tammy. And your work is so important. Keep doing it.

**Tammy:** Thank you, thank you.

**Katie:** Thank you so much Tammy, I hope that we get to meet in person sometime.

**Tammy:** Me too.

**Katie:** Okay, Take Care.

**Courtney:** Have a great day.

**Tammy:** You too.

**Katie:** Thanks.
The New York State Reading Association is pleased to announce the winners of the 2014 NYSRA Charlotte Award.

Named for the main character in E.B. White's Charlotte's Web, the purpose of the NYSRA Charlotte Award is to encourage students to read outstanding literature and ultimately become life-long readers. The award has been given every two years by the New York State Reading Association. A committee of educators from across the state determines a ballot of excellent fiction and informational texts published in the previous two years. The winning authors and illustrators are chosen by NY students.

Books are voted upon by students in four categories: primary (preschool through grade two), intermediate (grades three through five), middle school, and high school. Over 7,000 votes were cast in this school year by NY students for the 2014 award.

Penguin and Pinecone written and illustrated by Salina Yoon and published by Walker Children’s Publishing won the Primary Grades Charlotte Award. Young students across NY enjoyed Ms. Yoon’s story of friendship and her playful illustrations. Readers were excited to know they could read more about Penguin’s adventures in Ms. Yoon’s latest Penguin books.
Dogs on Duty: Soldiers Best Friends on the Battlefield and Beyond won the Intermediate Grades Charlotte Award. Published by Walker Children’s Publishing, Dogs on Duty was written by Dorothy Hinshaw Patent and illustrated with amazing photographs of military dogs in action. NY readers were engaged by Ms. Patent’s research on the many ways that dogs have served our country.

Wonder by R. J. Palacio and published by Knopf Books for Young Readers won the Middle School Charlotte Award. Wonder tells a timely tale of difference and acceptance and captivated
readers of many ages in our state.

*Cinder* by Marissa Meyer and published by Feiwel and Friends won the High School Charlotte Award. *Cinder* combines science fiction, fairy tales, adventure, and romance for a fast paced tale which leaves readers anxious to read the next books in the Lunar Chronicles series.

Winners will receive the NYSRA Charlotte Award at the NYSRA annual conference November 9-11, 2015 in Liverpool, NY.

As we celebrate the 2014 winners, reviews are already underway for the 2016 NYSRA Charlotte Award and nominations for that award will be announced in 2015.

Members of the 2014 NYSRA Charlotte Award committee are Stan Cianfarano, Debbie Dermady, Karen Kondrick, Eileen LaSpaluto, Caterina Stanczuk, Helen Stuetzel, Dawn Sweredoski, Ellen Wilcox, and Liz Yanoff (chair).

For more information about the NYSRA Charlotte Award visit: [http://nysreading.org/content/nysra-charlotte-award-2014-charlotte-ballot-update](http://nysreading.org/content/nysra-charlotte-award-2014-charlotte-ballot-update)

For more information about all of the nominated books including author interviews conducted by NY students visit: [http://charlotteaward.wordpress.com](http://charlotteaward.wordpress.com)

You may also contact the 2014 NYSRA Charlotte Award Chair Liz Yanoff (acarcny@gmail.com) or the 2016 NYSRA Charlotte Award Chair Karen Kondrick (nysra.charlotte@gmail.com) for more information.
Call for Manuscripts
Deadline: January 15, 2015

The editors of the Language and Literacy Spectrum, the New York State Reading Association’s Journal, invite submissions of manuscripts for peer review. This issue is drawing from the 2014 theme of the New York State Reading Association’s annual conference “Literacy within the Disciplines: Seamless Integration of Literacy and Content”.

We are seeking manuscripts that consider:
• innovative curriculum enactments that bridge literacy and other disciplines
• community outreach and partnerships that foster connections between literacy learning and other disciplines
• the impact of new technologies on the intersection between literacy and other disciplines
• evidence of student learning as a result of the integration of literacy and other disciplines

While theoretical and research articles are invited, please keep in mind that this is a journal for the NYSRA memberships, which consists primarily of practicing teachers and literacy specialists. We encourage articles and essays from K-12 practitioners as well as articles written by authors and presenters from the 2014 conference. We also welcome book reviews on professional texts as they relate to the issue’s theme.

Submission Guidelines
• Manuscripts, abstracts, and cover letters must be sent electronically.
• As a separate attachment, include a cover letter that specifically outlines how your paper addresses the call for manuscripts.
• Your name and institutional affiliation should only appear in the cover letter.
• Only original manuscripts that have not previously been published and are not currently under review at another journal will be reviewed.
• Manuscripts are ordinarily between 10-20 pages long and must be submitted as Word documents that are double-spaced in 12 pt Times New Roman font. Abstracts should be 125 words or less.
• All submissions must adhere to APA format.
• All submissions should include an author biography of 50-75 words that includes an email address where readers can contact them.

Manuscripts may be submitted to:
tlalspectrum@nysreading.org
Literacy within the Disciplines

New York State Reading Association

Seamless Integration of Literacy & Content

NOVEMBER 9 - 11, 2014
Holiday Inn Syracuse/Liverpool, Liverpool, NY