

CESA 5 Credit Course Syllabus

EDUC–We Are Literacy (WAL)

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|-------------|-------------------------------------|---------|---|
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SEMESTER CREDITS: 1 graduate credit

COURSE DATES: Monday February 8, 2016 9:00 AM – 2:30 PM
Tuesday February 9, 2016 8:30 AM – 3:15 PM

LOCATION: Wilderness Resort and Conference Center – Wisconsin Dells, WI 511 E Adams St.

DESCRIPTION:

The purpose of this two day conference is to have ANY and ALL educators and administrators attend and gain insight into effective practices in all literacy areas. Speakers ranging from Early Childhood to Adult Learners will be providing guidance and strategies on reading, writing, speaking, listening, and leadership.

2016 Presenters:

Steven Layne: Dr. Steven Layne serves as a Professor of Literacy Education at Judson University in Elgin, IL, where he teaches courses in children's literature and directs the university's Master of Education in Literacy program. He is a fifteen-year veteran of public education – serving as a classroom teacher and reading specialist in a wide span of grade levels.

Barb Novak and Laura Adams: This keynote will focus on speaking and listening and provide an examination of the research, standards, instructional strategies, and assessment ideas related to listening, collaborative discussions, and presentation of knowledge and ideas.

COURSE ASSIGNMENTS AND REQUIREMENTS:

1. Attend both conference days, February 8th and 9th, 2016.
2. Complete an electronic conference evaluation after the conference.
3. Write an application summary paragraph for each day of the conference/training.
4. Read **FOUR (4)** articles and summarize how the information applies to daily work assignments.
(Articles are provided to participants on the conference webpage).
5. **Items # 3 and #4 must be received by Mary O'Brien no later than 4:00 PM on Monday March 7, 2016 in order for the student to receive credit. Please send summaries to my email address,**

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obrienm@cesa5.org No handwritten papers will be accepted.

METHODOLOGY:

Lecture, small group discussion, large group discussion, question and answer sessions, videos, LCE presentations, overheads, sharing sessions, and other related teaching and presentation aids will all be used during the conference sessions.

WISCONSIN TEACHER STANDARDS ADDRESSED:

PI-34.02 Teacher Standards:

2. The teacher understands how children with broad ranges of ability learn and provides instruction that supports their intellectual, social, and personal development.
3. The teacher understands how pupils differ in their approaches to learning and the barriers that impede learning and can adapt instruction to meet the diverse needs of pupils, including those with disabilities and exceptionalities.
4. The teacher understands and uses a variety of instructional strategies, including the use of technology, to encourage children's development of critical thinking, problem solving, and performance skills.
6. The teacher uses effective verbal and nonverbal communication techniques as well as instructional media and technology to foster active inquiry, collaboration, and supportive interaction in the classroom.
8. The teacher understands and uses formal and informal assessment strategies to evaluate and ensure the continuous intellectual, social, and physical development of the pupil.

PI-34.03 Administrator Standards:

3. The administrator manages by advocating, nurturing and sustaining a school culture and instructional program conducive to pupil learning and staff professional growth.
5. The administrator models collaboration with families and community members, responding to diverse community interests and needs, and mobilizing community resources.
7. The administrator understands, responds to, and interacts with the larger political, social economic, legal, and cultural context that affects schooling.

PI-34.04 Pupil Services Standards:

2. The pupil services professional understands the complexities of learning and knowledge of comprehensive, coordinated practice strategies that support pupil learning, health, safety, and development.

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3. The pupil services professional has the ability to use research, research methods, and knowledge about issues and trends to improve practice in schools and classrooms.
5. The pupil services professional understands the organization, development, management and content of collaborative and mutually supportive pupil services programs within educational settings.
6. The pupil services professional is able to address comprehensively the wide range of social, emotional, behavioral, and physical issues and circumstances which may limit pupils' ability to achieve positive learning outcomes through development, implementation, and evaluation of system-wide interventions and strategies.

Viterbo Mission Statement

The mission of Adult Learning at Viterbo University is to be the regional choice for non-traditional students, preparing them to grow as confident professionals in their careers and communities.

GPAE Goals

- To foster an appreciation of the lifelong learning in program participants.
- To teach using active methods of learning through discussion, student involvement, and relevance to the learners' lives.
- To prepare learners for careers or for occupational advancement or change through acquisition of current knowledge and skills.
- To offer courses at times, locations, and in formats convenient to working adults' schedules.
- To provide learning opportunities for adults across Wisconsin and beyond through the use of technology.

Accreditation

Viterbo University is committed to meeting the highest academic standards measured by the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Institutes of Higher Education (HLC). The university offers excellent opportunities for students transferring from similar colleges and universities which have met the stringent guidelines of their regional accrediting commissions. We have a liberal transfer policy for students transferring from any of the six accredited institutions. Most often, these are nationally accredited, proprietary/for profit institutions. We urge all students to verify that the institution where they take courses is regionally accredited to ensure that their coursework can be considered for transfer to any regionally accredited university or college at the graduate or undergraduate level.

Viterbo University is accredited/approved by:

- National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education
- Wisconsin Department of Instruction
- Higher Learning Commission of the North Central Association

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OUTLINE OF CONTENT:

1. Course description and outlined expectations (see conference brochure)
2. Current professional journal articles, Wisconsin State – wide Project materials, and on-line resources.
3. Written project describing the application of knowledge and skills acquired through the conference to address an identified professional learning and/or district need.

COURSE OUTCOMES:

1. Participants will learn and understand the concept of presuming competence.
2. Participants will learn the importance of exploring and creating effective literacy interventions/techniques to guide all learners during their literacy journey.
3. Participants will learn a variety of techniques to support a literacy model within their classrooms.
4. Participants will learn and understand the power of the mind and body, as well as how to use them as motivating factors in both personal and professional circumstances.

GRADING/METHODS OF EVALUATION:

Grading Rationale

- * Participants in this course are expected to attend the full 2 –day institute. (NOTE: No papers will be accepted at the conference).
- * After careful reading and reflection of the articles and completion of the written assignment, papers may be sent via email, US Postal Service, or faxed to CESA 5. **(But must not be hand written)**
- * All activities are to be completed to the satisfaction of the instructor.
- * All project expectations and evaluation criteria, including the due date, will be discussed at the institute.

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Grading Scale

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|-----|--------------|
| A | 35-40 points |
| A/B | 30-34 points |
| B | 25-29 points |
| B/C | 20-24 points |
| C | 15-19 points |
| C/D | 10-14 points |
| D | 5-9 points |
| F | 0-4 points |

OR failure to turn paper in by due date: **March 7, 2016**

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Grading Rubric

Written summary paragraph for each attended (the keynote would be counted as two (2) sessions) session and summaries from four (4) articles.

Each session paragraph 10 pts each = Total 20 pts.

Reading summary paper 5 points each = Total 20 pts.

40 Total points

| Grading Criteria Total of All Available points 40 | Poor 1 | Below Average 2 | Average 3 | Good 4 | Excellent 5 |
|--|--|--|--|---|--|
| Session – Summary #1____ Summary #2____ 10 pts./each Total 20 Points _____points | Paragraph unorganized, no complete sentences, OR no mention of professional connection not made. | Several of the points of the paragraphs are ambiguous OR professional practice connection not made. | Paragraphs have little organization; and a poor connection to professional practice statement. | Paragraphs follow a logical organization but may drift from the session’s topic and/or benefit connection to practice statement is acceptable, but could be stronger. | Paragraphs are clear, logical, organized around a developed session’s topic. Includes strong benefit to practice statement. |
| Summary of Reading #1____ Reading #2____ Reading #3____ Reading #4____ 5 pts/each Total 20 points _____points | The summary does not explain how the article content relates to the application in school or daily work. No paper submitted or submitted late. | The evidence provided does not support the topic of the article; little relation to the school setting, no connection to daily work or examples. | The application and summary attempts to support the topic of the article and its relevance to the school setting only one example given. | The summary explains how the article topic supports the applications to the school setting with at least two examples. | The summary demonstrates a strong relationship between the article topic and application of the topic to the school setting; several strong examples are included. |
| Total points/ GRADE | | | | | |

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BIBLIOGRAPHY and SUGGESTED READINGS:

Becnel, Kim and Robin A. Moeller "What, Why, and How They Read: Reading Preferences and Patterns of Rural Young Adults" (pages 299-307) Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy November/December 2015

Villarreal, Alicia, Sylvia Minton, and Miriam Martinez "Child Illustrators: Making Meaning Through Visual Art in Picture Books" (pages 265- 274) The Reading Teacher Vol. 69 Issue 3

Overholt, Rebecca and Sandra Szabocsik "Leadership Content Knowledge for Literacy: Connecting Literacy Teachers and Their Principals" (pages 53-58) The Clearing House 2013

Padgham Jo and Helen Chatto "Principals Leading Literacy – What Works and Why?" (pages 1-8) Newsletter of the Australian Educators' Association February 2013

Hudson, Debra and Kristine Gritter "Four Mantras: Teacher Language That Honors Students With Disabilities" Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy September/October 2015

Branscombe, Margaret "Showing Not Telling: Tableau as an Embodied Text" (pages 321-329) The Reading Teacher Vol. 69 Issue 3

What, Why, and How They Read

READING PREFERENCES AND PATTERNS OF RURAL YOUNG ADULTS

Kim Becnel & Robin A. Moeller

Rural young adults have reading preferences, behaviors, and desires that are distinct from their urban counterparts. Teachers and librarians can increase rural teens' engagement with literature by leveraging their knowledge of these factors.

In “Rural: The Other Neglected ‘R’: Making Space for Place in School Libraries,” Azano (2014) identified the troubling tendency of popular culture and media to rely on pejorative stereotypes, such as the hillbilly and the redneck, to represent the diverse array of complex human beings who live in rural areas. To combat this trend, she makes a powerful case for a critical and place-based pedagogy that would encourage students to examine the role of place in their own lives and in the narratives they engage with on a daily basis.

In addition to teaching students to critically examine the materials they consume, we believe that it is vitally important for teachers, librarians, and others immersed in the world of youth literature and literacy to disrupt their notions of what it means to live a rural life by taking the time to listen to what rural youths actually have to say about their relationships to various types of texts, reading,



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and the characters they encounter in order to promote a discussion about how to best teach and serve these teens and provide them with materials that will resonate with their particular concerns and interests. Further, inviting these teen voices into the larger conversations about the reading preferences and patterns of youths may be an important first step in ultimately transforming the ways in which rural concerns and people are characterized in at least one segment of popular culture and media: materials created for and marketed to a teen audience.

Much of the research into teen reading habits, preferences, and identity as related to reading has heretofore been conducted primarily in urban environments (e.g., Agosto & Hughes-Hassell, 2010; Barry, 2013; Knoester, 2009; Morris, Hughes-Hassell, Agosto, & Cottman, 2006). Although this research has provided invaluable insights into teen reading culture, Moje (2008) reminded us that “who gets studied and in what numbers matters a great deal to what we know about who young people are as readers” (p. 63). Thus, we must acknowledge that our current conclusions and assumptions regarding teen readers do not reflect all teens, particularly those residing in rural areas of the country.

The U.S. Census Bureau (n.d.) includes two types of areas in its classification of urban: urbanized

areas (50,000+ people) and urban clusters (2,500–50,000 people). The U.S. Census Bureau defines *rural* as those territories “not included within an urban area” (para. 3). As of 2010, approximately one in five Americans (19.3%) lived in rural regions. A central purpose of this study, then, is to investigate the reading behaviors, patterns, and preferences of rural teens in order to shed light on a significant and generally neglected subgroup. Specifically, we studied teen populations in North Carolina, where 45% of people reside in rural areas, marking it as more rural than the U.S. average; of North Carolina’s 100 counties, 85 are considered by the U.S. Census Bureau rural (North Carolina Rural Economic Development Center, n.d.).

The significance of this study is its contribution to our evolving understanding of young adult reading habits and preferences. Specifically, it introduces the voices of several groups of young adults from a portion of the teen population that has historically been understudied, compared with their peers in urban and suburban areas.

Literature Review

Teen Literacy

Studies focused on urban areas (Hughes-Hassell & Rodge, 2007; Knoester, 2009), as well as those not restricted to specific rural or urban populations (Pitcher et al., 2007; Taylor, 2011), have revealed that voluntary reading selections are often influenced by teens’ social interactions and relationships and that they generally prefer magazines and Web content over novels and other types of printed materials. Other research that takes reading format into account suggests, however, that as a whole, teens actually prefer print items over electronic ones when choosing leisure reading (Lenhart, Arafeh, Smith, & MacGill, 2008; McKenna, Conradi, Lawrence, Jang, & Meyer, 2012; Springen, 2012; Tveit & Mangan, 2014; Vruno, 2013). As to the question of where teens access their reading material, reports also vary. Howard’s (2011) study, conducted in a Canadian regional municipality, suggests that teens acquire it from home or chain bookstores, whereas Hughes-Hassell and Rodge, using data gathered from an urban population, reported that teens procure items from the school library, public library, and classroom.

Research suggests that teens use literature to aid in identity formation and exploration in multiple, complex ways. According to Bodart (2006), it is imperative to provide realistic literature for teens to facilitate emotional

connections to characters and stories that can help teens understand and navigate their own experiences. Studies by Kirkland (2011) and Morris et al. (2006), of African American and urban youths, respectively, reinforce this idea and suggest that literature deemed by teens to be relevant to their lives can help them explore issues related to their environment, their evolving identities, and their relationships. Howard (2011) explained that by aiding teens in exploring multiple aspects of their identities, literature can help them successfully transition to adulthood. However, she noted that teens also seek out characters and stories very different from their own as a way of escaping from problems or pressures.

An extensive case study done by Nylund (2007) illustrated that teens are also capable of reading subversively, discovering hidden messages, for example, in popular fare such as the Harry Potter series to speak to questions of sexual identity. Richardson and Eccles (2007), drawing conclusions from a combination of longitudinal surveys and interviews conducted in an urban setting, argued persuasively that literature speaks not only to teens’ current identity but also to “who they want to be” and “who they fear being” (p. 354); in this way, literature serves as an

arena in which adolescents can safely try on and contemplate future selves in the world of work, romantic relationships, adventure, risks, success and failure, come to terms with discrimination, find strategies for navigating personal and social relations, and settle on personal values and beliefs. (p. 344)

Rural Teen Literacy

Several recent studies tried to pin down what it means to be a rural teen (Leyshon, 2008; Matthews, Taylor, Sherwood, Tucker, & Limb, 2000; Smith et al., 2002). They emphasized the evolving, dynamic nature of identity and concluded that although there may be some nebulous patterns to be discerned, such as teens recognizing both the value and the challenge of rural life, rural teens’ identities are not stable entities but vary depending on context, mood, social interaction, and more, as is true for all teens. The research into rural teens’ reading behaviors and choices, although scarce, offers a glimpse into the world of rural teen readers.

For example, Howard (2004) surveyed 159 Nova Scotia teens to better understand their reading habits and library usage patterns. Her analysis of the data suggested that compared with urban teens, rural young adults were more likely to describe themselves

as nonreaders. However, Boltz (2010) demonstrated that rural teens regularly engage in reading items other than novels. Through her analysis of the testing data, reflection journals, and individual interviews of 30 rural high school boys, Boltz found that access to digital content, confidence in ability, and male role models served as positive factors influencing reading behavior in her subjects.

In a particularly informative and related study, Rothbauer (2009) reported that the 27 rural teens she individually interviewed were regular readers who found enjoyment in the practice. Having analyzed the data for common themes, she found that these teens, having no place to go to select books, were forced to choose their reading material from what was available at home or what they could find on the Internet. Further, the teens reported having no community of readers, no one with whom to share their thoughts about books or even exchange recommendations. This prompted Rothbauer to introduce the notion of “the placelessness of reading” (p. 481) and to lament the fact that these teens keep their reading identities private, afraid to share them in communities that hold literacy and education in low esteem.

Based on the findings of these studies, these three questions were developed to guide our research:

1. How do rural teens choose and access the materials that they read?
2. What kind of social interactions involving reading do rural teens experience?

3. If rural teens engage with current, popular young adult literature, how might it help them to explore questions of identity?

Research Design

This study was designed to learn what, how, and why rural teens read by receiving direct input from the teens themselves. The two-phased study began with a reading inventory survey sent to approximately 100 tenth-grade students in rural North Carolina schools. Tenth-grade students were targeted to allow for a more manageable collection of data. We used the results of the survey (see Moeller & Becnel, 2015) to aid us in developing a set of questions to employ in a series of focus groups.

Volunteers were recruited through the statewide listserv for school media specialists, and we identified three sites for focus groups. To preserve the anonymity of participants, the sites will be referred to as Mountain High School, Coastal High School, and Piedmont High School. Media specialists at each site recruited students from grades 9–12 to participate and collected the required permissions. They solicited student participation by working with teachers who would offer extra credit or by asking students if they would participate. We conducted and audio- and videotaped the focus group interviews with a predetermined set of questions (see Figure 1).

Focus groups included any high school students who wished to participate at each site, and the

FIGURE 1 Focus Group Interview Discussion Guide

1. What's your favorite book? Why?
2. How do you choose what you voluntarily read?
3. What format do you read when you read?
4. What counts as reading?
5. Who/what influences your reading choices? Or does anyone or anything give you ideas about what to read? Any recommendations?
6. Where do you get your reading materials?
7. Do you have discussions with peers/family/teachers about reading?
8. How do you think your community feels about reading?
9. What about a book makes you want/not want to read it? What about other formats?
10. If you were the main character in a story, what would that story be about?
11. Who is the most memorable character you've read about? Why?
12. Would you describe yourself as “country”? What does that mean? Or do you know anyone who would describe themselves as “country”? What do you think that means?
13. Do you know of/read anything about people who live in a rural area like you do?

interviews lasted no longer than one hour. At Coastal High School, eight students (two males and six females) participated in the discussion. At Piedmont High School, there were nine students (five males and four females), and at Mountain High, 11 students (three males and eight females) participated. In total, there were six African American students and 22 white students. The entire population comprised 1 ninth grader, 16 tenth graders, 1 eleventh grader, and 10 twelfth graders.

As researchers, we took an inductive approach to analyzing the data that allowed themes to emerge from them as opposed to using a priori categories. Initially, we conducted individual analyses of the transcribed audio interviews along with the videotaped interviews from each site, identifying emergent themes. We then came together to discuss our individual findings, resolve any differences in the findings, and then recode the data based on agreed-upon themes. The major themes that emerged were access and choice, reading and relationships, and popular teen reading and identity.

Results

Access and Choice

Asked where they obtain their reading materials, the students in each group mentioned borrowing from friends and neighbors and buying from retail outlets such as Barnes & Noble, Amazon, and Target. Shopping at one of these stores requires a considerable effort because, with the exception of Walmart, they are all at least an hour's drive from the students' rural homes. Despite the distance, the students all agreed that they did not get reading material in print from libraries, whether school or public. Some suggested that many teens use computers and other devices to read digital content because they do not have time to visit the library. There were also several complaints about the poor offerings of school media centers, as in this comment from a Piedmont High student: "They don't have the books that I would want to read anyway." These patterns of access support Howard's (2011) conclusion that teens find reading material at home or through retail outlets and is contrary to Hughes-Hassell

"Students all agreed that they did not get reading material in print from libraries."

and Rodge's (2007) finding that teens get their materials from libraries and classrooms.

When asked about how they choose reading material, the teens responded that recommendations were gathered from reviews, friends, noticing what other people are reading, Tumblr, YouTube, movies, teachers, authors they like, and bookstore staff. Some mentioned reading the first page, the first few chapters, the back cover, or the inside flap of a book to evaluate it. Students who used this method were often looking for dramatic content or hooks to draw them into the story. Participants also indicated that they check the Internet, specifically YouTube, to see if they can find titles that their favorite authors are recommending and promoting. These recommendations seemed to have a strong significance; when students were later asked to identify what makes them inclined to read a book, they returned to the authors' endorsements, noting that they check the back of books to see whether a favorite author has penned a blurb. Students also cited the attractiveness of a book's cover, the overall design, the font, and even the smell as elements capable of helping them decide whether to engage with a particular title. Other factors included a likable/relatable narrator and language preferences (e.g., some indicated a preference for slang, whereas others despised it).

Other themes arising from this discussion included a general distaste for e-reading and a preference for freely chosen material. Although the participants acknowledged that they and their peers often read digital content, they expressed a strong preference for print. Although in conflict with research on urban/suburban populations that demonstrated a teen preference for digital materials (Hughes-Hassell & Rodge, 2007; Knoester, 2009), this finding is in line with several other studies that concluded that teens generally prefer print for their recreational reading activities (Lenhart et al., 2008; McKenna et al., 2012; Springen, 2012; Tveit & Mangen, 2014; Vruno, 2013).

As justification for their preference for print, students mentioned experiencing difficulty reading on a Kindle, iPad, or computer. They indicated that it is difficult to read on these devices while lying in bed and that they disliked the artificial light from the devices. Further, several students remarked that they were too distracted when online content was available, a sentiment echoed by others in each group. A student from Coastal High School explained, "Sometimes I click on online ads. I get ads for c.l.f.

and Etsy and Forever 21, and it's like, huh, let me wait for this [the online reading content] and check this out really quick." Another added, "If I'm online and a hot girl would pop up, it could be an ad. It would stop me [from reading]."

All three groups expressed their displeasure for assigned reading in their courses. For the most part, they considered what they were assigned uninteresting and/or irrelevant and preferred items they chose themselves. This preference for self-selected over assigned materials is consistent with previous study findings concerning rural teens and the teen population in general (Boltz, 2010; Hughes-Hassell & Rodge, 2007; Knoester, 2009; Pitcher et al., 2007). The teens were particularly resistant to discussing assigned reading, as revealed by a Mountain High School student: "I hate for teachers to have to assign books, like you have to read this and this is your deadline. So, like, I'm not going to talk to you about it." Another Mountain High student echoed this sentiment, adding her perception that these discussions are designed to coerce students into interpreting a text in a particular way: "I hate when teachers assign. Like, they tell you to read something in class and then tell you this is how you have to think about it. I like to think what I want to think about the book."

Reading and Relationships

When the teens were asked about whether they engaged in conversations about books and reading, there was a wide range of responses. Some offered an enthusiastic affirmative, and others indicated that they did not really talk about books to anyone. Of those who reported having conversations about books, they indicated that they talked to their parents (most often their mother), siblings, and teachers. Across the three groups, more students indicated talking to their families about books or other reading material than to their instructors or peers. Most of the focus group participants indicated that their parents read and that they were aware of what their parents were reading—everything from romance novels, wedding magazines, and Westerns to cookbooks and general nonfiction—indicating that they regularly saw reading modeled in the home.

Some teens disparaged the reading preferences of their parents, saying they were boring or implying that they were not substantial enough (e.g., wedding magazines, cookbooks). For example, one male student from Coastal High School remarked, "Like, my mom, like, reads feminine books, like lady books

with, like, some shirtless dude. And, like, I'm reading some type of horror book, and she's, like, 'Oh, so, what're you reading?' And I'm reading this, and I tell her about it, and then I don't dare to ask what she's reading." Others spoke highly of their parents' choices and accepted their recommendations, such as a young man from Coastal High who explained, "My mom, she reads fantasy books, but my dad reads books based on true events. And he's like, you should read this, and I'm like OK, look at it, pretty good. 'Cause they're, like, about WWII, Desert Storm, Vietnam, stuff like that. Pretty good." Finally, some students reported reading with their parents or siblings. One young man seemed to greatly enjoy reading a fantasy series with his mother, and another student revealed that she and her sister share recommendations and "sometimes talk about same book after both have read it."

It is interesting that when students spoke about talking to teachers about books, the group was always speaking about one particular teacher or librarian who was particularly well read in teen literature, such as the "lovely English teacher" at Coastal High who has "read over 80 books this year and...told us about, like, half of them," as well as "most of the YA books on the North Carolina booklist." The implication was that these teachers were exceptions and that the teens did not choose to speak with most of their teachers about their reading material. Here, the students reiterated their distaste for assigned reading and the conversations that follow those assignments: "Assigned readings don't allow you [to] say what you want about the book." In addition, talking with friends was mentioned only by a couple of students. Most seemed to agree with the sentiment expressed by a Piedmont High School participant: "My friend gave me the book. We don't have conversations about it. None of my friends talk about books." With only a few exceptions, the students seemed to agree that teens typically do not talk to one another about books and reading.

Although the students made it clear that their teachers, peers, and families were, at least to some degree, all part of a shared culture of reading, even if they were not always choosing the same materials or engaging in lengthy reading-centered conversations. However, the students' responses were quite different when asked about how their community at large seemed to feel about reading. The groups agreed that there are few readers in the community and described the general attitude toward reading in their communities as negative

or apathetic at best, which supports Rothbauer's (2009) notion of the placelessness of reading.

The Coastal High School group seemed very disdainful of this general apathetic culture and sought to position themselves as outside of it. As such, they spoke at length about the negative public reaction to a new public library. One student remarked, "Once the new library was built, I came to school to hear so much backlash on it, like we don't need a new library, why don't we have a McDonald's or something?" Several students in that same group also complained about students not completing reading assignments for class, with one lamenting, "SparkNotes is killing us....You're not allowed to have opinions if you read SparkNotes."

Participants in the Piedmont and Mountain high school groups also described communities without vibrant and rich literary opportunities, but rather than define themselves against this culture, they viewed themselves as part of it and seemed to take on some of the responsibility for the lack of enthusiasm for literary endeavors. Although the Mountain High group was able to come up with some literary events sponsored by the community, such as poetry readings and several school-based programs, they indicated that they did not participate in any of them but felt that they should be more supportive. The Piedmont High students also described their community as apathetic toward reading and literature. Notably, they remarked that one might see people reading at a college campus or a Starbucks, both of which require driving quite a distance to the nearest urban center, and were unable to come up with any local places or community events with a literary connection.

Popular Teen Reading and Identity

When asked about their favorite book, the teens' responses featured well-known, popular young adult titles and series, including John Green's *The Fault in Our Stars*, Suzanne Collins's *The Hunger Games* series, J.K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* series, Cassandra Clare's *Mortal Instruments* series, and Rainbow Rowell's *Eleanor & Park*. The participants also offered a few classic titles written for adults and young adults, such as *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy*

"The teens described the powerful emotional and psychological connections they felt to the literature."

by Douglas Adams, *The Great Gatsby* by F. Scott Fitzgerald, and *The Lord of the Rings* by J.R.R. Tolkien.

A few titles were cited as favorites because of the appeal of a suspenseful and well-crafted story; however, the majority of students tended to describe personal connections to their favorite titles. One young woman from Coastal High School, for example, talked about how much she loved reading *The Fault in Our Stars* even though it was very difficult for her: "I read it while I was helping take care of my grandma who had cancer, and I had to stop reading it for a while because after she passed, I couldn't bring myself to read it anymore." A student from Mountain High School discussed Chaim Potok's *My Name Is Asher Lev*:

He wants to be an artist, so he spends his whole life hiding it. I read it when I was really young, and I guess I was going through that "who am I?" phase. I read it at the right time in my life.

In these cases, the teens described the powerful emotional and psychological connections they felt to the literature that they had read, suggesting that it helped them navigate their difficult emotions or understand their experiences (Bodart, 2006; Kirkland, 2011; Morris et al., 2006).

When the group was asked about the most memorable character they had encountered in their reading, the responses were again mainly drawn from popular, mainstream young adult titles: Percy Jackson, Harry Potter, Alaska Young in *Looking for Alaska* by John Green, Augustus Waters in *The Fault in Our Stars*, Eleanor in *Eleanor & Park*, Katniss in *The Hunger Games* series, and Alec in the *Mortal Instruments* series. As justifications for their answers, many of the teens described what they perceived to be evidence of good character or admirable traits. For example, multiple students agreed that Augustus Waters was commendable for graciously accepting people's flaws and that "fierce" Eleanor should be lauded for her ability to handle difficult situations. Several teens described selecting Eleanor and Katniss for their strength and ability to assert themselves. Finally, according to a Coastal High School student, *Mortal Instruments'* Alec is to be admired because he learns to be honest with himself about his sexuality even when his parents reject him:

He is trying to find himself....And even though his parents don't really accept it, they learn to,

and I think that's a wonderful thing. He's absolutely terrified of saying something, then he's, like, forget it, I'm in love. And I thought that was perfect.

These responses suggest that tolerance, perseverance, strength, honesty, and courage are important qualities to these readers.

Although the students did not explicitly state that they themselves would like to possess the specific qualities they admired, other students made this desire explicit. For example, a Mountain High School student chose as her most memorable character Alaska Young for her ability to be true to herself while ignoring others' opinions and judgments. The student explained, "I would love to just not care about anything at all sometimes, and that grabbed my attention when she has that about her." As Richardson and Eccles (2007) suggested, the literature that teens read seems to help them explore not only who they are but also "who they want to be," and provided a safe space to think about their beliefs, their priorities, and the ways in which they interact with others.

Limitations and Further Study

As there was no way to ensure a random sample of students for this study, we interviewed those students who volunteered to participate. Therefore, self-selection bias may affect the results. It is possible that students with a special interest in reading were more likely to volunteer than nonreaders, and thus there may be some voices missing from the overall picture that these data create. Reading levels for the students who volunteered for this study were not collected. Also, although the results across the three discrete focus groups were consistent, due to the small number of participants, they cannot be deemed representative of all rural teens in North Carolina.

The choice of reading materials that the students discussed may have been limited to the availability of materials in their communities. Several students mentioned that their local school and public libraries did not own the titles they most wanted to read. It is worth investigating the accuracy of this perception. Do rural schools and rural public libraries collect current, popular young adult materials? How do their collections stack up to those in urban and suburban areas? If this perception is not correct, what is causing students to discount their local libraries as possible sources for their reading material? What do students think their libraries lack?

Finally, when asked specifically if they were aware of or had read any titles featuring characters who live in a rural setting similar to their own, only the Mountain High School group could come up with a list of examples of young adult titles, including *To Kill a Mockingbird* by Harper Lee, *The Hobbit* by Tolkien, *Vampire Academy* by Richelle Mead, *The Hunger Games*, *Bridge to Terabithia* by Katherine Paterson, and *Twilight* by Stephenie Meyer. In light of the recent #weneeddiversebooks movement, researchers should examine how rurality is currently represented in young adult literature and whether these titles reflect the lives and concerns of rural youths.

Conclusions

Although this study's population size was small, it illustrates the reading identity of a group of teens who belong to a geographic and cultural group that has largely been ignored in the field of research on young adults and reading. The results of this research suggest that the rural teen reader has much in common with the urban/suburban teen reader, although there are some distinctions. Like all teens, rural teens tend to avoid the library, obtaining their reading material from home and retail outlets instead, and they greatly prefer materials of their own choosing over those assigned to them by teachers or librarians. Like their urban counterparts, rural teens read widely in the realm of current, popular young adult materials and use this literature as fodder for exploring identity, forging strong emotional connections to the characters in their favorite books, and using them to help process situations they are encountering and as models for the character traits they most want to embody.

Although scholars are split over teens' preference for digital content, studies of urban populations suggest that magazine and digital content are the preferred format for reading (Hughes-Hassell & Rodge, 2007; Knocster, 2009; Pitcher et al., 2007; Taylor, 2011). Conversely, the rural teens in this study expressed a preference for print material over digital, admitting to feeling distracted when trying to read content on computers, phones, or other e-reading devices. Finally, in a finding that echoes Rothbauer's (2009) study of rural young adults, this group of rural teens perceives a regrettable lack of opportunity for stimulating interaction on literary-related topics in their schools and communities.

Take Action

STEPS FOR IMMEDIATE IMPLEMENTATION

1. Start a book club for students who want to meet before or after school or during lunch. Allow students to choose what the group will read.
2. Use current, popular young adult fiction to complement history or English lessons.
3. Work with your school librarian to develop ways in which he or she can promote new materials to let students know what current young adult titles the library owns. The school librarian can give book talks, select book trailers for students to watch, or collaborate with teachers to engage students further in developing their own media projects based on what they have read.
4. Provide read-alike lists for current best sellers so students enamored of a particular author or title can easily find similar items.
5. Encourage reading in multiple formats. Students can read the same title in two different formats and discuss how their readings differed.
6. Create literature circles in which each circle would focus on a different type of reading, such as nonfiction, fiction, graphic novel, or audio-book. Have students move from circle to circle.
7. Talk to your students about what you are reading for fun; successful reading is often a social experience, and your students want to talk to you as a person, not as an instructor.
8. For a major project, consider having teens design and implement a school or community event centered around literature or reading.
9. Involve your public librarians. Often willing to visit your school, public librarians can sign students up for library cards, thus giving them ready access to materials online if they cannot get to the library's physical location.

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More to Explore

CONNECTED CONTENT-BASED RESOURCES

- ✓ American Library Association. (n.d.a). *Starting a book club*. Retrieved from www.ilovelibraries.org/booklovers/bookclub
- ✓ American Library Association. (n.d.b). *Teens' top ten*. Retrieved from www.ala.org/yalsa/reads4teens
- ✓ Epic Reads: <https://www.youtube.com/user/EpicReads?spfreload=10>
- ✓ Kunzel, B., & Hardesty, C. (2006). *The teen-centered book club: Readers into leaders*. Westport, CT: Libraries Unlimited.
- ✓ National Public Radio. (n.d.). *NPR's 100 best-ever teen novels*. Retrieved from www.listchallenges.com/npr-100-best-ever-teen-novels

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CHILD ILLUSTRATORS

Making Meaning Through Visual Art in Picture Books

Alicia Villarreal ■ Sylvia Minton ■ Miriam Martinez

"I wanted to make the book more interesting...something you could look for when reading the book. To keep you wanting to turn the page..." —Anna

Fourth grader Anna (all names are pseudonyms), herself the author/illustrator of picture books, understands that those who create picture books make deliberate decisions as they craft stories—decisions made with an eye toward pulling readers into and through the story world. Anna was part of a fourth-grade class that wrote and illustrated their own picture books both before and after an in-depth study of ways in which published illustrators craft their work. In this article, we share insights these fourth graders gained through their investigation of picture books and the ways in which those insights influenced their own creations.

Picture Books as Mentor Texts

Writers write well when they have a clear vision of what they are trying to create. Ray (2004) observed that when it was time to write in her classroom, students used the books they had read as mentor texts. For young children, picture books are ideal mentor texts. After all, in the early years of schooling, picture books are central to children's literacy experiences and drawing is an integral part of their writing process. In effect, young writers are naturally multimodal: they use talking, writing, and drawing to compose what is meaningful to them (Dyson, 2002). This symbolic flexibility is a key feature of the authoring process of young children; it should not come as a surprise that much of their writing is produced in the picture book format. As a logical extension, picture books, with both verbal and visual texts, can serve as particularly helpful mentor texts for children, especially if they have the opportunity to engage in a close study of those books under the guidance of a knowledgeable teacher.

According to Kristeva (1980), "any text is the absorption and transformation of another" (p. 66), and a literary work "is not simply the product of a single author, but of its relationship to other texts" (Keep, McLaughlin, & Parmar, n.d., para. 1). So children are

best positioned to make decisions as illustrators by first having opportunities to explore the crafting of the visual text in mentor texts (Pantaleo, 2009).

Becoming immersed in picture books is one way in which children come to understand the workings of this format. However, to gain their deepest insights into the crafting of illustrations, children need to do more than just read picture books. We believe they also need opportunities to participate in picture book studies under the guidance of knowledgeable teachers. Ray (2010) argues that when children have the opportunity to study the decisions made by illustrators, it "expands their potential for decisive, purposeful action when they do their own composing" (p. 43). Commenting on the power of the picture book format, Hindley (1996) too discusses the need to look carefully at the illustrator's techniques along with the writer's style. So, an important instructional step in helping children learn to create picture books is to guide them in looking closely at the decisions illustrators make so they, in turn, can use published picture books as mentor texts in crafting their own illustrations (Ray & Cleaveland, 2004).

One way of helping children develop proficiency in composing visual text is by helping them become more explicitly aware of how visual text conveys meaning. In her investigation in a second-grade classroom, Pantaleo (2006) found that aesthetic reading of picture books supported students' understanding of literary elements, artistic codes, and conventions of picture books. Her participants developed an appreciation for and an understanding of the abilities required to comprehend, interpret, and create various sign systems. The picture books these children read, wrote about, and discussed influenced the texts that they created.

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The Nature of the Picture Book

In this section, we discuss features of picture books (with a particular focus on visual text and picture book design) that set them apart from other books. We believe that understanding the distinctive features of picture books provides teachers with the knowledge needed to make sound instructional decisions as they guide children's explorations of the format.

The picture book is a complex format that tells stories through a combination of pictures and words. While illustrations are sometimes found in other types of stories, the illustrations in these books likely do not play a central role in conveying story elements. By contrast, picture book stories are created through the *interplay* of the visual and verbal sign systems (Sipe, 1998a), with both components playing an integral part in telling the story (Guijarro, 2014). While pictures and words may convey similar or complementary information, oftentimes the relationship is more complex, with illustrations and words sometimes contradicting one another or even telling different stories (Nikolajeva & Scott, 2000).

Picture books are also set apart from other formats because of attention to

Pause and Ponder

- Am I modeling appreciation and knowledge of illustrations during picture book read-alouds?
- How can I help my students to become aware of how picture book illustrations convey meaning?
- Am I allowing my students time to explore the role of illustrations in their own creation of text?

Table 1 Definitions of Key Picture Book Terms

| Term | Definition |
|--------------------|---|
| double-page spread | An illustration that extends across two facing pages. |
| endpapers | The first and last pages that are seen when opening a book. |
| full bleed | An illustration that extends to the edge of the page. |
| montage | A succession of images in a picture book to illustrate an association of ideas. |
| motif | An element that appears repeatedly in illustrations (or text). Motif can help to develop and inform the text's major themes. |
| peritext | Everything in a book other than the printed text. Peritextual features can include front and back covers, endpapers, title page, dedication page, and copyright information. |
| positionality | Refers to the placement of characters and objects in an illustration. Analyzing this placement provides the reader the opportunity to interpret and construct meaning about character status. |
| visual elements | Tools of the illustrator that include color, line, shape, and texture. Illustrators manipulate these elements to convey meaning visually. |

the peritext that often serves to deepen the complexity of stories (Serafini, 2012). The peritext is "anything in a book other than the printed text" (Sipe, 1998b, p. 71) and includes front and back covers, front and back endpapers, the title page, the dedication page, and notes. (Table 1 contains definitions of key picture book terminology.)

Another distinguishing feature of quality picture books is the use of illustrations that tell part of the story (and sometimes a very significant part of the story). Illustrators use a variety of tools to craft illustrations that include visual elements (i.e., color, line, texture, shape, space) as well as pictorial tools such as montage, positionality, frames, and perspective. Illustrators and book designers also contribute to storytelling through careful attention to elements of design, such as text fonts, text layouts, book orientation, and borders (Serafini, 2012).

Our Inquiry Project

This inquiry project explored how instruction on the crafting of visual text influenced children's picture book creations. The project was conducted in Alicia's (first author) fourth-grade classroom (see Appendix A). The children

composed their first picture books prior to instruction on visual text. Their initial books were crafted as part of a holiday writing project in which the students created picture books as gifts for their families. For this book, Alicia's instruction focused on the writing process and the crafting of verbal text. Alicia read aloud a chapter-length mentor text and used it to conduct minilessons on writing devices such as metaphors and similes. She also used holiday picture books to conduct minilessons on literary elements. The students were encouraged to use these books as mentor texts as they wrote their own stories. The project took three weeks as the students drafted, revised, and edited their stories. In the fourth week, they copied their stories into Bare Books (commercially bound books with 14 blank pages) and created illustrations. The children used pencil and rubber crayons to illustrate the books. For this picture book, there was no instruction on the crafting of illustrations.

In the spring semester, Alicia and Sylvia (second author), who were enrolled in a doctoral program, signed up for a graduate course on picture books. As they participated in closely inspecting illustrations in picture

CHILD ILLUSTRATORS: MAKING MEANING THROUGH VISUAL ART IN PICTURE BOOKS

books and the ways in which illustrations worked with verbal text, Alicia and Sylvia soon realized their thinking about picture books was being transformed, and they wondered if similar experiences might transform their own students' thinking. This inspired them to implement an inquiry project in Alicia's classroom in the spring semester that would involve the children studying the picture book format followed by creating new picture books. Alicia took the lead in day-to-day instruction; Sylvia, an elementary reading specialist from another school district, visited Alicia's classroom a number of times. Other facets of the project were done collaboratively with both Alicia and Sylvia analyzing the children's picture books and conducting interviews with the children about their picture books.

During the spring, read-alouds became a space for sharing and closely inspecting carefully selected picture books. Initially, Alicia chose all the books for her read-alouds and used these selections to strategically introduce students to various facets of illustrator craft, including visual elements, peritextual features, page turns, and elements of design. As the children became increasingly interested in illustrator craft, they began to bring in books and asked Alicia to read aloud their selections as well. During read-alouds, Alicia not only guided students' explorations of targeted pictorial tools, but she also invited the students to closely inspect the picture books and share their insights with one another. Table 2 contains a list of books Alicia read aloud and the instructional foci associated with each. In addition, picture books lined the bookshelves in the classroom and were readily accessible for students to explore independently.

Table 2 Visual Tools Targeted for Instruction in Picture Books

| Title | Author/Illustrator | Instructional Focus |
|--|---|---|
| <i>Lilly's Purple Plastic Purse</i> | Kevin Henkes | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Peritext ■ Montage ■ Line ■ Character size ■ Typography ■ Breaking frame |
| <i>Voices in the Park</i> | Anthony Browne | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Interplay of pictures/text ■ Perspective ■ Typography ■ Color |
| <i>When Sophie Gets Angry—Really, Really Angry</i> | Molly Bang | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Endpapers ■ Color ■ Line |
| <i>Leonardo the Terrible Monster</i> | Mo Willems | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Positionality ■ Character size ■ Typography |
| <i>The Mystery of Eatum Hall</i> | John Kelly (author) Cathy Tincknell (illustrator) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Interplay of pictures/text ■ Peritext ■ Color ■ Double-page spreads/full bleeds ■ Establishing shot |
| <i>The Relatives Came</i> | Cynthia Rylant (author) Stephen Gammell (illustrator) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Interplay of pictures/text ■ Double-page spreads/full bleeds |
| <i>The Sweetest Fig</i> | Chris Van Allsburg | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Interplay of pictures/text ■ Color ■ Double-page spreads/full bleeds |
| <i>Rosie's Walk</i> | Pat Hutchins | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Interplay of pictures/text ■ Page turns |
| <i>Henry's Freedom Box</i> | Ellen Levine (author) Kadir Nelson (illustrator) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Double-page spreads/full bleeds ■ Perspective ■ Color ■ Line |
| <i>A Beastly Story</i> | Bill Martin, Jr. (author) Steven Kellogg (illustrator) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Endpapers ■ Interplay of pictures/text ■ Color ■ Double-page spreads/full bleeds ■ Page turns |
| <i>Dear Mrs. LaRue</i> | Mark Teague | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Endpapers |
| <i>I Ain't Gonna Paint No More!</i> | Karen Beaumont (author) David Catrow (illustrator) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Color |
| <i>Two Bad Ants</i> | Chris Van Allsburg | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Interplay of pictures/text ■ Line |
| <i>Kitten's First Full Moon</i> | Kevin Henkes | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Perspective ■ Motif |
| <i>The Napping House</i> | Audrey Wood (author) Don Wood (illustrator) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Color |
| <i>Amadillo Rodeo</i> | Jan Brett | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Framing ■ Interplay of pictures/text |

continued

CHILD ILLUSTRATORS: MAKING MEANING THROUGH VISUAL ART IN PICTURE BOOKS

Table 2 (continued)

| Title | Author/Illustrator | Instructional Focus |
|---|--|--|
| <i>Art and Max</i> | David Wiesner | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Color ■ Perspective ■ Line ■ Double-page spreads/full bleeds ■ Positionality |
| <i>The Three Pigs</i> | David Wiesner | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Typography ■ Page turns ■ Color ■ Double-page spreads ■ Interplay of pictures/text ■ Breaking frame |
| <i>Flotsam</i> | David Wiesner | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Interplay of pictures/text ■ Double-page spreads ■ Perspective ■ Framing ■ Endpapers |
| <i>Tuesday</i> | David Wiesner | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Color ■ Double-page spreads/full bleeds ■ Breaking frame ■ Page turns |
| <i>Minty: A Story of Young Harriet Tubman</i> | Alan Schroeder (author) Jerry Pinkney (illustrator) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Double-page spreads/full bleeds ■ Text boxes ■ Perspective ■ Endpapers |
| <i>The Hallelujah Flight</i> | Phil Bildner (author) John Holyfield (illustrator) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Double-page spreads/full bleeds ■ Text boxes ■ Perspective ■ Endpapers ■ Color |
| <i>Goal!</i> | Mina Javaherbin (author) A.G. Ford (illustrator) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Double-page spreads/full bleeds ■ Motif ■ Perspective ■ Establishing shot |

The project culminated in the creation of a second picture book that we compared with the children's holiday books. For these books, children again published their books in Bare Books and used the same art materials for illustrating.

As part of our analysis, we also wanted to interview the children about their two picture books; so, in the spring, students were asked to bring their holiday books back to school so we could copy them and conduct

interviews about these books (see Appendix A). The interview questions were designed to explore children's insights into the crafting of their illustrations.

The last month of the school year, following their spring explorations of the picture book, students began work on their second books. They had four weeks to draft, revise, and edit a story. As part of the project, Alicia also provided students with a quick review of literary elements and conducted other

writing lessons required by the district. The students made all their own decisions regarding the crafting of book illustrations. In an effort to foster student autonomy as authors, students were given instruction in how to engage in peer-to-peer editing and how to support peer-to-peer conferences focused on illustrations.

Following the completion of the picture books, we interviewed the children a second time. For this interview, the children had both books available for reference. We posed the same questions asked in the earlier interview and invited the children to respond to two additional questions, which asked the children to compare their two books and elaborate on which of their books they liked best (see Appendix A). Alicia also maintained a journal as the children drafted their second books; she made observational notes about the children's informal conversations with her and with each other as they crafted their text and illustrations.

What We Found

As we began to examine the children's picture books and interviews, we anticipated that the children would focus more on illustrations in their second book because of the instructional intervention. This was confirmed when we discovered interesting differences

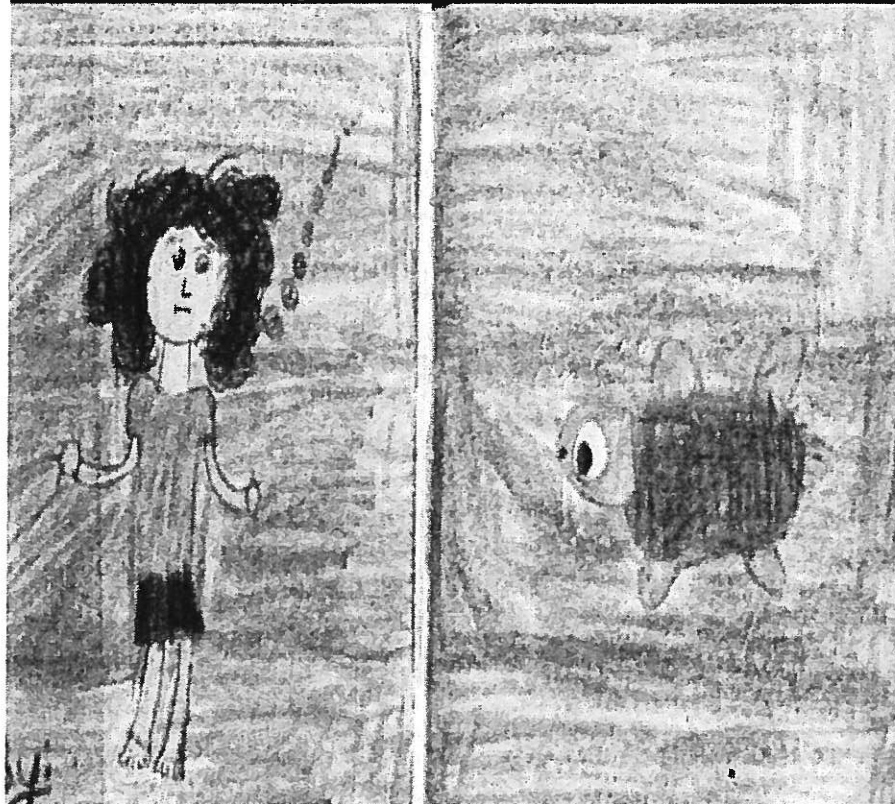
"Interview questions were designed to explore children's insights into the crafting of their illustrations."

between their first and second books. First, the children included a richer array of peritextual features in their second picture books. Second, the composition of these books (and individual illustrations) was more complex. Finally, the children used visual and textual elements in more purposeful ways.

Peritextual Features

In the first set of books, the children incorporated a variety of peritextual features, including front covers, title pages, dedication pages, “about the author” sections, and blurbs on back covers informing readers of story content, and these features were often well designed. For example, front cover illustrations appeared to be designed to entice readers into the books, and the children wrote heartfelt dedications to loved ones. However, in their second books, the children began to employ new peritextual features such as cover illustrations that wrapped around from the front to the back cover and “Other Books Written by the Author” sections. Of particular note was the inclusion of endpapers. In their first books, none of the children included this component, but in their second books, all children included endpapers. For example, Dyanne’s vibrant, full-bleed underwater scenes on the endpapers of her second book, *Going to the Beach*, instantly inform the reader of the setting of her imaginative picture book (see Figure 1). In *Friends Before Fists*, a story about overcoming bullying, Judy filled the front endpapers of her book with wavy lines against a dark background, while the back endpapers were filled with curving lines against a lighter background. In talking about this shift, Judy explained that the lines on the front endpapers signified the tension her main character was feeling. She used

Figure 1 Full Bleed in *Going to the Beach*



curving lines at the end of the book to show the harmony of the girls’ relationship once they became friends.

In their second books, some of the children included a section at the end entitled “Other Books Written by the Author.” The inclusion of this element was noteworthy because it signaled that the children had come to view themselves as authors. Henry also expressed his identity as a picture book creator in his final interview: “I now know what to do and how to do it.... If I was the real author, then it would be published and people would like it. I could trust this book.”

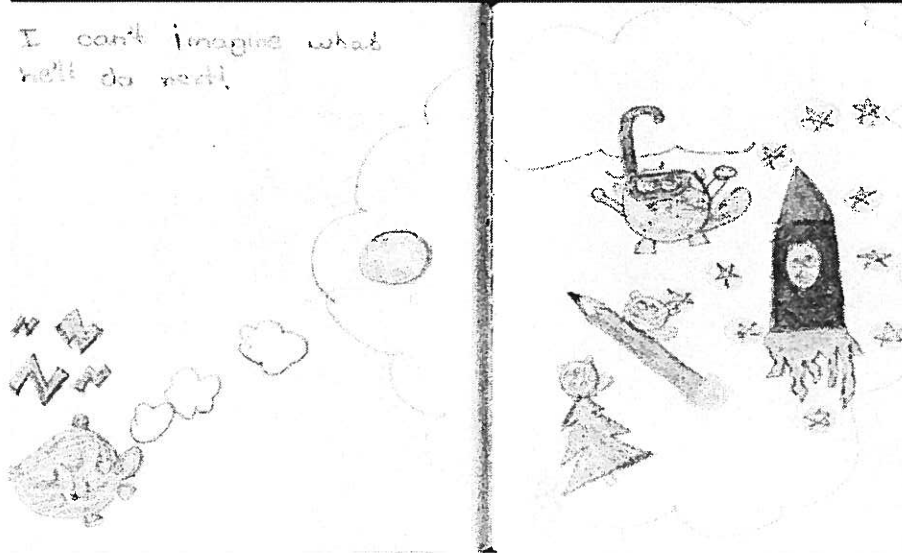
Composition of Illustrations and Books

In inspecting the composition of illustrations and books, we looked at the

nature of picture–text relationships, the inclusion of double-page spreads, the use of full bleeds and montage, the purposeful placement of characters in illustrations (i.e., positionality), and shifts in perspective.

Picture–Text Relationships. In their first books, the children’s illustrations typically reflected what they talked about in the accompanying verbal text. Henry addressed the picture–text relationships in his first book when he noted, “I had to read the page to know what to draw because if I do something that didn’t go along [with the words], the reader wouldn’t know what the picture was about.” Sandy echoed this concern: “I wanted the picture to look like what was happening in the story.” In analyzing their holiday books, we did not see any evidence that the children were

Figure 2 Interplay of Picture and Text in *Nutty the Hamster*



Hamster: "I have learned that you don't always have to match the pictures and the words they are saying. You can make your pictures different and you don't have to exactly follow the words."

Double-Page Spreads and Full Bleeds. Double-page spreads function to pull readers into a story, allowing them to feel as if they are "in the book." The full bleed is a pictorial tool that serves to extend illustrations to the edges of a page. Illustrators sometimes use full bleeds to emphasize a special event or character.

In their first books, the children relied largely on unframed single-page illustrations, which are characteristic of beginning artists. They are a budding illustrator's first attempt at creating a connection between text and illustrations. However, in their second books, almost all of the children used double-page full bleeds extensively. In *The Mysterious Path*, a story about getting lost in the woods, Tammy used a full-page bleed to pull her reader into the woods and convey her character's feelings of confusion as she is engulfed by her surroundings. As her character grows increasingly lost, the trees become taller and taller on subsequent pages until, finally, they extend to the edge of the page, their tops no longer visible (see Figure 3).

Figure 3 Full Page Bleed in *The Mysterious Path*

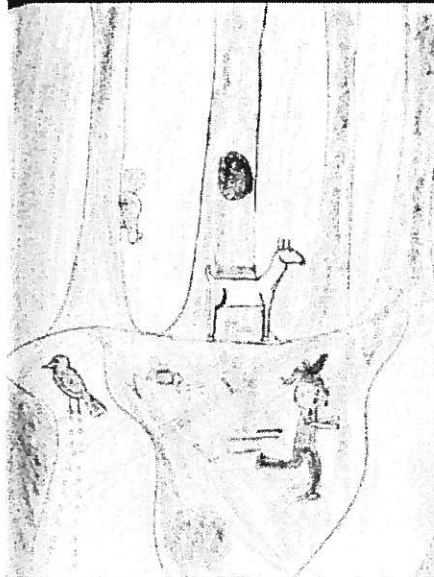
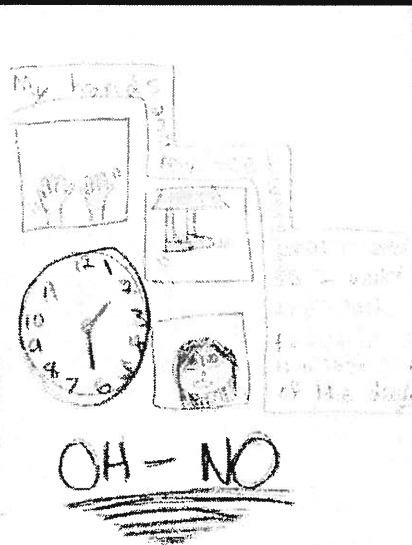


Figure 4 Manipulation of Typography and Montage Depicting Passage of Time in *Friends Before Fists*



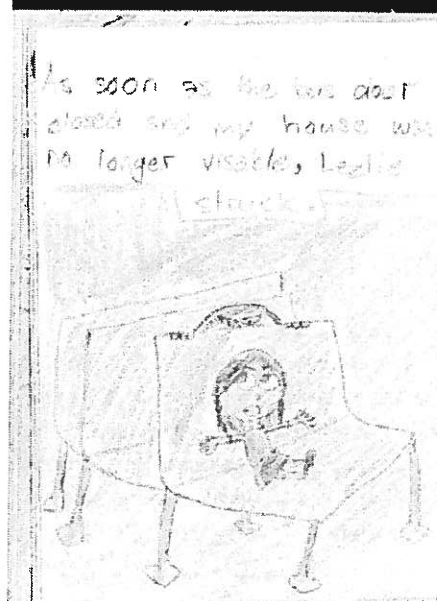
Montage. Illustrators use montage for different purposes. One purpose is to show changes that happen over a period of time. We found no instances of montage in the first set of picture books; however, in the second set, children used montage in purposeful ways. For example, in her story about bullying, *Friends Before Fists*, Judy used montage to depict the passage of time; the main character's shaky hands and feet and wide-eyed shock convey a growing sense of urgency as time winds down to the scheduled "fight" with the bully (see Figure 4).

cognizant of the potential for the creative interplay between pictures and text.

By contrast, in the second set of books, it appeared that the children realized that illustrations do not always have to coincide with the text. For example, the only text on the final page of *Nutty the Hamster* reads, "I can't imagine

what he'll [Nutty] do next." However, the accompanying illustration shows the possibilities for Nutty (see Figure 2). We see scenes of the mischievous hamster snorkeling, rocketing to the moon, and sitting atop a Christmas tree. Anna explained what she was attempting to do in crafting the illustrations in *Nutty the*

Figure 5 Positionality in *Friends Before Fists*



Additionally, after peer conferencing with Anna, David used two different montages in his second book, *Stick Wars*, a story depicting good versus evil. One montage shows the passage of time as an army of skeletons battles for a magic sword that will save the kingdom. In talking about his montages, David explained, “One tells what happened before and the other what happened after.”

Positionality. The positioning of characters can convey information about character status and power. In the first set of picture books, we did not identify any instances of purposeful placement of characters. By contrast, in the second set of books, children appeared to have placed their characters to achieve particular effects. For example, in *Friends Before Fists*, Judy illustrated the main character’s first encounter with the bully by showing her cowering in her seat with the bully hovering above her—a placement that appears to signal strength overpowering weakness

Figure 6 Positionality in *Friends Before Fists*



(see Figure 5). Later in the book, when the bully confronts the main character on a hill, the bully is again placed on a higher plane (see Figure 6). Only when the main character regains her feelings of self-worth do the two characters appear at the same level in the illustrations.

Perspective. Shifts in perspective have the power to create dynamic storytelling effects, and in the second set of picture books, many of the children experimented with perspective. In their first picture books, the children—almost without exception—approached their illustrations by using a frontal, two-dimensional perspective (see Figure 7). By contrast, in the second set of picture books, we identified many examples in which children manipulated perspective, and the children indicated they had intentionally used these shifts to enhance meaning. For example, in his book, *Fox*, Henry used perspective to depict the evil villains’ attempt to trap the main character. He used a bird’s-eye

view to give readers a sense of looking down on the conversations occurring between the villains (i.e., black clouds). The perspective conveys a feeling of eavesdropping, which works well in understanding the villains’ motivation. Another example of a shift in perspective appears in *The Time Machine*, in which the main character achieves the ability to travel through different time periods. In her illustrations, Laurie’s main character, the time traveler, is depicted as small in stature at the beginning of the story. As she receives the power to travel through time, her size increases, a shift that signals the main character is becoming stronger.

In *Friends Before Fists*, Judy also used perspective effectively. In one of her illustrations, a close-up of the bully’s face dominates the page. In talking about this illustration, Judy explained that she had modeled her close-up after one that appears in *Leonardo the Terrible Monster* (Willems, 2005).

Recurring Motif. A recurring motif is a repeated element in the illustrations or text of a picture book. When

Figure 7 Example of Frontal Two-Dimensional Perspective



used as a visual device, it can call attention to important story information. Field notes revealed the collaborative choices and ideas Anna and Sandy shared. Both children used a recurring motif in their second books. In *Nutty the Hamster*, Anna used a blue ball with a yellow star as a motif to signal the chaos wrought upon the household as the characters struggle to locate and recapture their missing rodent (see Figure 8). In *Hamster Run!* Sandy's recurring motif is the hamster itself. As the characters scramble to find their missing pet, they are oblivious to the fact that the hamster is right under their noses the entire time, as it is depicted on each page. In her final interview, Anna demonstrated a clear understanding of the value of her motif: "I wanted to show something that would be in every page and the cover and the endpapers...something you could look for when reading the book. To keep you hooked on wanting to turn the page so you could find it in the next page."

Figure 8 Recurring Motif in *Nutty the Hamster*



Visual Elements

Illustrators of published books have a variety of visual elements in their toolboxes—color, line, shape, texture, and space. In crafting their second picture books, the children in Alicia's class began experimenting with two of these elements in particular: color and line.

Color. Illustrators use color in a variety of ways that include conveying character traits and emotions, establishing mood, providing setting information, and drawing attention to objects or characters.

In the first set of books, the children used color to enhance meaning for the reader. For example, in *The Christmas Thief*, a story about a mouse who steals Christmas lights, Nancy made use of a black background to demonstrate the power outage that occurs when the mouse chews through a power cord. Later, when the main character decides to forgive the mouse for his mistake, Nancy uses oranges and yellows to signal the optimistic note on which her story ends.

While the children often manipulated color effectively in their first picture books, in their interviews there were few mentions of color choice. For example, in her first book, *A Very Rusty Christmas*, Ruth used vibrant colors. Her title page was a full-bleed, double-page spread that appeared to use color to represent the dynamics of this action-filled story; however, in talking about this page, Ruth paid more attention to the realistic qualities of her illustration: "This one [title page] is my favorite because that is the one that I drew the neatest. It [illustration of a car] looks more like a car." By contrast, in her second interview, Ruth talked about her decision to use different colors for the characters in *The Space Creatures and*

Mark the Marshmallow: "[I used different colors] so you can tell them apart and they are more unique."

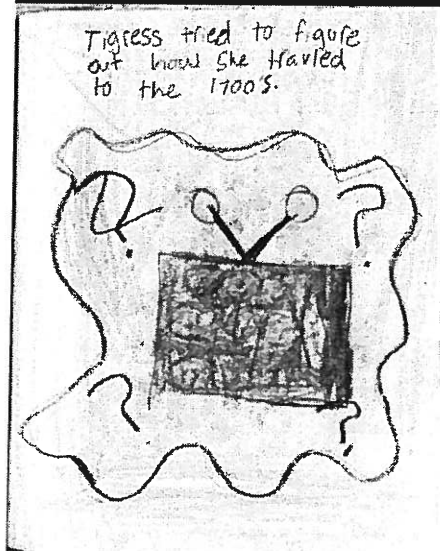
In talking about their second books, the children had much to say about their color choices. For example, Tammy focused on the color shift from her front endpapers to the back ones. Her front endpapers showed brown paths against a blue background. These paths were symbolic of her story about getting lost on a path in the woods. For the back endpapers, she again showed paths, but this time she used a yellow background. In her interview, Tammy explained this shift in background color: "On the last one [back endpapers], I put the different paths and a yellow background for happiness because at the end she is happy that she finds her way home."

Lee also used color purposefully in his second book, *Talking Human Turtle*, a story in which the main character, a turtle, desires to be changed into a human. The turning point in the story occurs when the turtle discovers the formula that will transform him. In the verbal text, there is no mention of the turtle's discovery; nonetheless, Lee's use of color in his illustration clearly conveys that the magic formula has been found. This turning-point illustration, in contrast to the other illustrations in his book, is done in black and white with one exception: the bottle containing the formula is colored a bright green and dominates the illustration.

Line. Line is an important visual element that can be used to organize an image or guide the eye of the viewer. Illustrators also use line to create emphasis, define an area, convey movement, or heighten tension.

In the first set of picture books, we identified many instances in which the children used line to communicate different meanings. In particular,

Figure 9 Use of Line to Depict Time Travel in *The Time Machine*



the majority of the children used line in these first picture books to depict movement and convey facial expressions as well as to establish physical properties, such as steam emerging from a cup of hot chocolate. In their second books, the children continued to use line to demonstrate movement, emotion, and confusion. For example, Judy used lines surrounding a character's hands and feet to signal her anxiety. However, in addition to the use of line to convey movement and emotion, children demonstrated even more complex understandings of this visual element in their second books. For example, Lily used swirls to demonstrate instances of time travel in her book *The Time Machine* (see Figure 9), and Judy used this same technique to signal a flashback in *Friends Before Fists*.

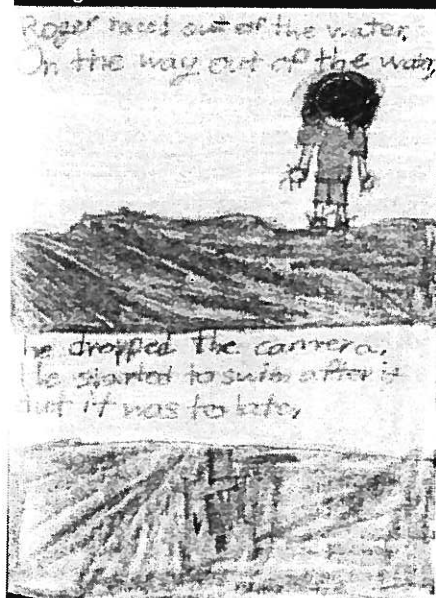
Textual Elements

Picture book illustrators and designers often use typography and text placement in creative ways. For example, the manipulation of text size is one means of expressing emotional intensity.

Emphasis can also be conveyed through choices of typeface or the use of italics.

In their first set of books, the children made extensive use of text boxes and dialogue and thought bubbles. In the spring, they continued to use these tools, but they also began to experiment with new textual elements such as the creative use of typography and placement of text. In particular, we found that in the second set of books, children manipulated typography to emphasize important points, identify characters, or depict various feelings. For example, in his second book, *Talking Human Turtle*, Lee wrote the word "HUMAN!" in all capital letters to emphasize the character's desire to become something more than just a turtle. In *Friends Before Fists*, Judy wrote "OH NO!" in capital letters to emphasize her feelings of anxiety in confronting the bully (see Figure 4). In her second book, Lily used a change in font to depict feelings of excitement and to suggest the different time periods to which her main character travels in *The Time Machine*.

Figure 10 Creative Placement of Text in *Going to the Beach*



In their first set of books, the children placed text in conventional ways, putting the text either above or below illustrations or, in some instances, on the page facing their illustrations. However, we discovered more creative text placement in the second set of books. In *Going to the Beach*, Dyanne's placement of text underwater appropriately coincides with the loss of her video camera as the main character watches it descend into the ocean's murky depths (see Figure 10). In Anna's book, *Nutty the Hamster*, text is placed at random on each page, reflecting the movement of a hamster on the loose. In *The Mysterious Path*, Tammy used text placement to convey the confusion her main character feels at being lost. The zigzagged placement of the words signals the character's anguish and frustration as she runs in circles trying to find her way home (see Figure 11). The placement of text became a deliberate artistic choice after a peer conference while Tammy and Judy reread *Lilly's Purple Plastic Purse* (Henke, 2006).

Figure 11 Creative Placement of Text in *The Mysterious Path*

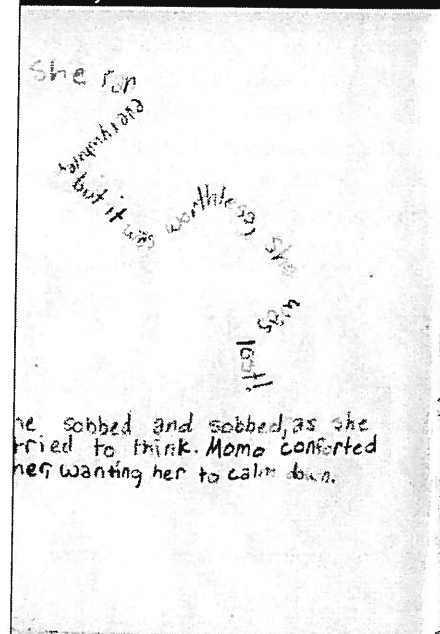


Table 3 Professional Resources for Learning About Illustrator Craft*Picture This: How Pictures Work* by Molly Bang*Teaching Art With Books Kids Love: Art Elements, Appreciation, and Design With Award-Winning Books* by Darcie Clark Frohardt*Literature and the Child* (8th Edition) by Lee Galda, Lawrence R. Sipe, Lauren A. Liang, and Bernice E. Cullinan

"Learning the Language of Picturebooks" by Lawrence R. Sipe

"Taking Full Advantage of Children's Literature" by Frank Serafini

What We Learned

As we inspected and analyzed the children's books, we concluded that teaching elementary children about pictorial tools used by illustrators was well worth the time and effort. While their first books were basic and straightforward, their second set of books contained far more complex tools that required more critical thinking in visually composing the story content.

If children are to craft their own visually complex picture books, they must understand that authors and illustrators make intentional decisions and that the visual text of picture books is crucial in the development of stories. Daily read-alouds could serve as contexts in which children develop such insights. This is especially likely to happen when a knowledgeable teacher shares insights into craft and invites students to look closely at illustrations and think about why illustrators may have made the choices they did. However, not all teachers have had the opportunity to delve

into the workings of the picture book format and may feel unprepared to serve as "curators" of visual text (Eeds & Peterson, 1991). We encourage teachers to build their own knowledge of picture books by turning to some of the many professional readings available on the topic (see Table 3).

With their emerging insights into the workings of picture books, teachers are well advised to prepare thoughtfully for each read-aloud by reading and even rereading the book, paying particular attention to pictorial tools used by the illustrator. This places the teacher into the role of a curator who can guide children's analysis of illustrator craft. Also, the way in which the teacher reads a picture book aloud is critical. If one goal of the read-aloud is to help children explore illustrator craft, then children must be seated close enough to inspect illustrations in order to join in the analysis of illustrations and even take the lead when given the opportunity.

Once the world of illustrator craft is opened to children, we have found that they are eager to continue to learn on their own. It is also important to surround children with high-quality picture books to peruse. These books can, in turn, become mentor texts as children craft their own picture books.

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TAKE ACTION!

- Preview pictorial tools used in a picture book.
- Select one or two tools to explore with students.
- Sit students close enough to the book to see the illustrations.
- Read the story, allowing time for students to talk.
- Guide students in creating meaning using pictorial tools.

CHILD ILLUSTRATORS: MAKING MEANING THROUGH VISUAL ART IN PICTURE BOOKS

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Appendix A

Research Question

How does instruction on the crafting of visual text influence children's picture book creations?

Methodology

This inquiry project employed qualitative analysis of children's picture books and participant interviews.

Context of the Study

The project was conducted in a fourth-grade classroom in a South Texas public school and was part of ongoing classroom instruction.

Participants

Parents of 12 children out of 22 signed permission slips for the children's data to be used. Of these 12, 8 were girls and 4 were boys. Seven participants were white, four were Hispanic, and one was African American.

Data Collection

We analyzed two picture books per participant, one created during the holiday season and the other in May after instruction on crafting visual text. In addition to these picture books, we conducted two interviews with each participant, one related to their holiday picture books and the other related to their spring books.

Procedures

We began by conducting interviews with students on picture books that they had created as part of a holiday gift project. Interviews were audiotaped and transcribed, and they included the following prompts/questions:

- Tell me about your picture book.
- Tell me why you created your pictures this way.
- Which of the illustrations do you think is the best one, and why?

The next part of the inquiry involved implementing daily read-alouds to strategically introduce students to illustrator craft. Students were both guided and invited to closely inspect picture books for illustrator craft and share their insights with each other. This culminated in creation of a second picture

book that we compared with the original holiday books. Interviews included the following prompts/questions:

- Look at the picture book you created in December. Are the illustrations for your new story different than the ones for your first story?
- (If students responded positively to the previous question, we asked this follow-up.) Why did you do them differently?
- Which picture book do you like best? Why?

Alicia, the primary investigator, maintained a journal as the children drafted their second books.

Data Analysis

Working independently, we closely inspected both sets of student-created picture books looking for evidence that students might have used the pictorial tools Alicia and Sylvia had explored with them over the course of the spring semester. We then came together to compare findings and work toward consensus when differences in analysis became apparent. In order to describe the changes in children's use of pictorial tools, we identified the tools children used in creating their first picture books and the ones used in the books created after instruction. We also read and reread the interviews and reviewed Alicia's observational notes to better understand the types of decisions the children made in crafting their illustrations.

View From the Chalkboard



Stephanie Hager
Third-Grade Teacher, Meadowdale Elementary School,
Carpentersville, Illinois, USA

"Noticing the creative strategies used by authors and illustrators is what hooked my students on writing."

The Untapped Potential of Picture Books

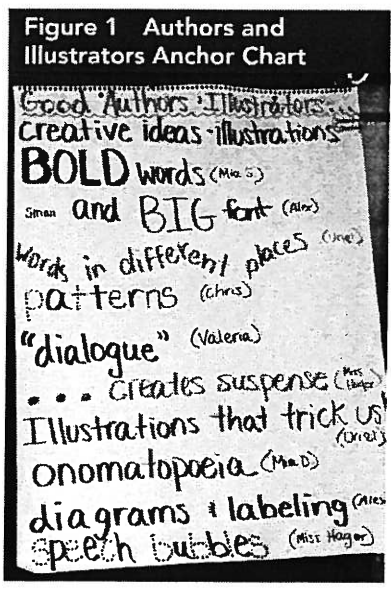
There is no tool in a teacher's toolbox more powerful than picture books. My third-grade students love hearing picture books read aloud to them; however, it wasn't until recently that I realized there was untapped potential in picture books that we had been missing out on. I was already using picture books to teach reading comprehension in my classroom, but why had I not been using picture books to teach students how to write? Reading picture books for the sole purpose of noticing the creative strategies used by different authors and illustrators is exactly what hooked my students on writing.

The first thing I knew I needed to do was to pick fun, captivating picture books to spark students' interest. A great place to find new and interesting books is the public library's new arrivals shelf. I made sure to look for texts that had creative story lines and were full of unique features. Talking with colleagues and librarians is also an excellent way to learn about new titles. Many of my students had been conditioned to write from standard prompts, but with titles such as *Open Very Carefully: A Book With Bite* by Nick Bromley and Aaron Reynolds's *Creepy Carrots*, I knew

students' excitement for writing would grow. My procedure was very simple: Read the book aloud and stop every so often to talk about what the authors/illustrators chose to do as far as craft and structure. I wanted my students to use their "writer's eye" to look at books from an author's point of view. Did the authors use big, bold words? Ellipses? Are different fonts and colors used? What was so great about that illustration? And most important: Why did students believe the author/illustrator chose to do these things? Once you start posing those questions, students will simply start noticing features on their own and will discuss them without prompting. Noticing all of these elements has now become a regular activity during picture book read-alouds—regardless of the subject area we are currently learning about.

Once my class has discussed their noticings, we start an anchor chart (see Figure 1). My students and I continue to add to the chart throughout the year, giving students more ideas as their writing skills progress. Not only did students begin implementing these features into their writing, but they began imitating the books we read as well. They

created their own books that interact with the reader, similar to *Open Very Carefully*, and wrote their own *Creepy Carrot* stories: "Creepy Watermelon," "Creepy Lettuce," and "Creepy Pizza," to name a few. Now that I am having students look at picture books through a writer's eye and have allowed them to mimic popular books, writing has become their favorite time of day. My students have




THE UNTAPPED POTENTIAL OF PICTURE BOOKS


written some of the best work I have ever seen in my teaching career, and they beg me for extra writing time throughout the day. I have broadened my horizons

and used this strategy for other genres of writing as well. My students notice and discuss elements from informational texts, persuasive writing, and

narratives in addition to storybooks. Reading like a writer is something I hope my students take with them throughout their academic career.



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View From the Chalkboard



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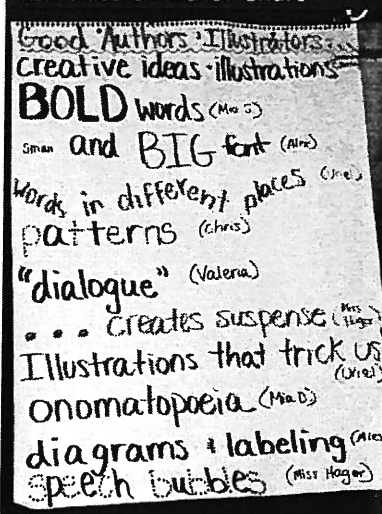
My procedure was very simple: Read the book aloud and stop every so often to talk about what the authors/illustrators chose to do as far as craft and structure. I wanted my students to use their "writer's eye" to look at books from an author's point of view. Did the authors use big, bold words? Ellipses? Are different fonts and colors used? What was so great about that illustration? And most important: Why did students believe the author/illustrator chose to do these things? Once you start posing those questions, students will simply start noticing features on their own and will discuss them without prompting. Noticing all of these elements has now become a regular activity during picture book read-alouds—regardless of the subject area we are currently learning about.

Once my class has discussed their noticings, we start an anchor chart (see Figure 1). My students and I continue to add to the chart throughout the year, giving students more ideas as their writing skills progress. Not only did students begin implementing these features into their writing, but they began imitating the books we read as well. They

created their own books that interact with the reader, similar to *Open Very Carefully*, and wrote their own *Creepy Carrot* stories: "Creepy Watermelon," "Creepy Lettuce," and "Creepy Pizza," to name a few.

Now that I am having students look at picture books through a writer's eye and have allowed them to mimic popular books, writing has become their favorite time of day. My students have

Figure 1 Authors and Illustrators Anchor Chart



THE UNTAPPED POTENTIAL OF PICTURE BOOKS

written some of the best work I have ever seen in my teaching career, and they beg me for extra writing time throughout the day. I have broadened my horizons

and used this strategy for other genres of writing as well. My students notice and discuss elements from informational texts, persuasive writing, and

narratives in addition to storybooks. Reading like a writer is something I hope my students take with them throughout their academic career.



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Leadership Content Knowledge for Literacy: Connecting Literacy Teachers and Their Principals

REBECCA OVERHOLT and SANDRA SZABOCSIK

Abstract: The following vignette relates Becky Overholt's experience during a formal observation by her principal. At the time, Becky had a master's degree in curriculum, was a sixth-grade language arts teacher, and had 20 years of teaching experience.

Keywords: literacy, leadership, teacher supervision, leadership content knowledge, administrators

I finished my reading workshop satisfied that the students were cognitively engaged and interacting with text. During the workshop, I had interviewed several students, taken careful anecdotal notes, and monitored the students' independent reading. The students had made progress and I had assessment data that would guide future instruction. To add to the excitement, our new building principal had observed the session. Two days later I was called into the principal's office and asked, "Just what is it that you are doing during your reading time?" He thought that there was no instruction and that the students were "just reading." My first thought was, "You have got to be kidding." Then I remembered that his previous position was a high school administrator and soccer coach, so he did not understand the purpose or logic behind a reading workshop. During the next few months, I defended my classroom balanced literacy program and fought against the pressure to return to a basal text and whole group instruction.

Although the research in this article was conducted with elementary principals, the findings apply to literacy classrooms across grade levels. Secondary teachers, too, have similar frustrations when principals, who do not have a deep understanding of literacy, observe literacy lessons in their content-area classes. Students'

content-area literacy continues to strengthen throughout their school careers. Principals and teachers at all grade levels must continue the literacy conversations so that students can continue to achieve at high levels.

The Disconnect between Teachers and Principals

In our research, we observed similar experiences as principals entered classrooms for the purpose of evaluating teachers and writing yearly reports. Teachers reported that, depending on what their principals chose to see, their post-observation conferences became an exercise in frustration, a mundane routine, or a valuable time of professional development for the teacher and the principal. We realize that the principal usually knows only his or her particular field of study as well as some generic strategies. University courses leading to principal certification typically include school law, school finance, supervision of instruction, and personnel administration. Course work related to the teaching of specific subjects is rarely offered; teachers, on the other hand, attend professional development specific to their teaching.

Our frustration is that, even though instructional leadership has been the battle cry for principals for several decades, the disconnect between teachers and principals continues. Instructional leadership is defined in generic terms. While observing in classrooms, principals look for questioning strategies, wait time, management skills, and engagement techniques. Little attention is given to the content or the pedagogy that has been recognized by experts in the field as beneficial to students. Consequently, principals' post-observation conferences with teachers are not subject specific. Often,

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teachers feel disappointed that the principal was not more aware of what actually transpired during the literacy lesson. Within our collaborative experiences as elementary classroom teachers and as researchers during our doctoral programs, we experienced and observed this disconnect between teachers and their principals. To address the situation, we developed a professional development intervention for principals.

Observations of teachers are more meaningful when the principal connects to the content of the instruction observed. According to Nelson and Sassi (2005):

If principals are to work with their teachers' instructional practice in ways that make examination of that practice educative for teachers, principals not only need sufficient subject matter knowledge, and knowledge of how it is learned and taught [Stein & Nelson, 2003], but they also need to be able to attend to the particulars of teachers' practice and help teachers cultivate a certain kind of attention to their students' thinking. That is, principals must be able to connect ideas about learning, teaching, and subject matter to particular events in teachers' instructional practice. (58)

For example, a principal stated: "Students made connections with the text; the students read the sentences orally. Children shared their special moments that they planned to write about" (Szabocsik 2008, 63). On the other hand, another principal was more concerned with the teacher's delivery: "Good organization techniques for getting started; good use of visual aids; lesson closure highlighted lesson objectives and encouraged reiteration of desired outcomes" (Szabocsik 2008, 64). The former principal focused on the students' learning, which he discussed with the teacher using the language of literacy. The latter principal attended to the teacher's delivery rather than to specific literacy strategies and the student's engagement.

Principals' Knowledge of Literacy and Literacy Teaching and Learning

In the past decade, researchers have explored what principals know about different subject areas and how that knowledge informs their supervisory and professional development practices, classroom observations, decisions about the purchase and distribution of materials, and other areas (Stein and Nelson 2003). More recent studies illustrate that as principals become more aware of the central ideas being communicated in a class and how the ideas can be developed by teachers and engaged with by students, those principals can become more sensitive observers of classrooms and presumably more effective instructional leaders (Nelson and Sassi 2000). The depth of a principal's understanding of a content area influences how he or she engages with teachers and instructional issues. Moreover, such knowledge appears not to be generic, but specific to a particular domain. Just as teachers need knowledge

to help students learn content, principals need a basic knowledge of content that links instructional leadership to the core task of teaching and learning: leadership content knowledge (LCK).

Due to our frustration with the status quo, the lack of content-specific professional development opportunities for principals, and the perceived gap between principals and teachers, we created a professional development intervention for school leaders titled *Literacy for Leaders* (Overholt 2008; Szabocsik 2008) that would develop LCK. Within the program, we collected data that justified the intervention and clearly pointed out that when principals become more knowledgeable, they can improve literacy teaching and learning in their schools.

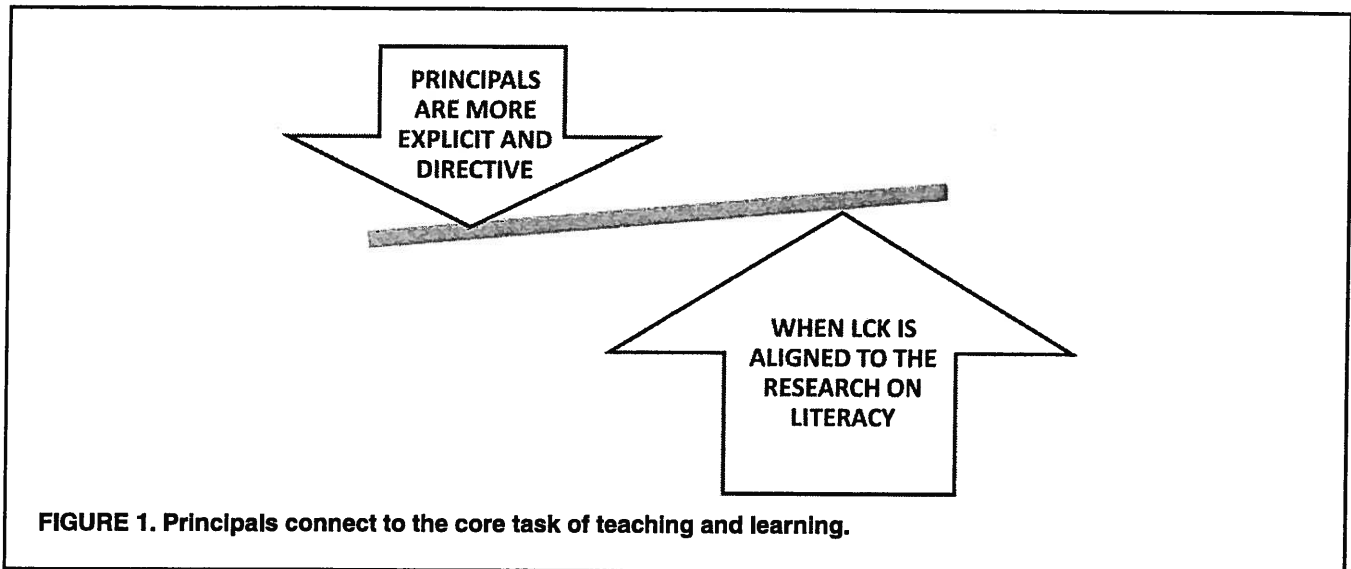
The Qualitative Study on Leadership Content Knowledge for Literacy

Eighteen participants (see the Appendix) in an east coast state were given 12 hours of professional development on balanced literacy practices, the development of comprehension, and engagement in reading. Over the course of the professional development, the participants reflected on balanced literacy instruction and discussed best practices. They reviewed student work that demonstrated strategies and skills used by proficient readers and writers as they make meaning of text. They read classroom scenarios and viewed video clips showing best practices in literacy and the best way to help each child make progress in reading and writing. The participants read excerpts from research on reading comprehension strategies and reflected on teaching practices that promote comprehension. Throughout the intervention, the participants realized that standards-based reading instruction does not center around a program but is focused on the strategic engagement of students and teachers with text (Beers, Beers, and Smith 2010).

The outcomes of the study revealed that, as a result of the professional development, participants did change their thinking to be more aligned to current best practices for literacy (see figure 1). They also reported changes in supervisory practices that included classroom observations, professional development opportunities for their teachers, available resources, and collaborative discussion. Because they developed more expertise in LCK for literacy, they were more explicit and more directive when evaluating classroom practices. They offered specific guidance to teachers about their instructional practices, provided better resources, and engaged in more collaborative discussions with teachers.

Principals' Use of Literacy Knowledge in Their Roles as Instructional Leaders

So what is the LCK for literacy that knowledgeable principals know and implement in practice? To determine LCK for literacy we used a comparative analysis



(Reutzel and Smith 2004) of Flippo's (2001) work on "expert studies" and three reading research reports by Snow (2002), Hiebert, Pearson, Taylor, Richardson, and Paris (1998), and the National Reading Panel (National Institute of Child Health and Development, 1999). Drawing on a synthesis compiled by Reutzel and Smith (2004) and the core understandings of learning to read (Braunger and Lewis 1998), four categories were derived. The four categories were core understandings of reading, effective teaching behaviors, supportive context for reading instruction, and motivating and engaging readers. The four categories included 27 descriptors that were used to analyze the input given by supervisors (see table 1).

Individual participants mentioned a total of 5-20 of the 27 descriptors of good literacy practice on the reflective writing pieces that they completed after each of the professional development sessions. The principals who noticed more descriptors (14 or more) and scored higher on the rubric than their peers were called experts because they were more explicit in their comments on the survey. Their comments were more complete and meaningful, and they used the language and vocabulary of literacy. Additionally, their comments were more directive and they tended to give advice and suggest ways to improve practice.

Principals' Use of Literacy Knowledge and Explicit Communication

Expert principals make more complete and meaningful comments and use the vocabulary of literacy. As a part of their assessment, participants completed a survey in which they were asked to read a kindergarten, first-grade, and fourth-grade scenario from *Organizing and Managing the Language Arts Block: A Professional Development Guide* (Morrow 2003). After reading the scenarios,

they were asked to underline the passages or phrases that they found interesting and to refer to their reasons for underlining specific passages or phrases in the scenarios. The specific scenarios were chosen because they aligned with the descriptors represented in the four categories: core understanding of reading, effective teaching behaviors, supportive contexts for reading, and motivating and engaging readers.

The fourth-grade scenario described the classroom environment, a sustained silent reading time, guided reading groups, literature circles, and a dialogue between students and teachers. A variety of best practices were presented in the scenario. When commenting on effective teaching behaviors, those who were identified as less expert said, "I got the impression that her classroom was a wild array of interactive lesson opportunities for the students." Another said, "Good questioning skills." But those who were identified as more expert used the language of literacy and explicitly referred to choice within flexible groups, the reading and writing connection, the volume of reading, and questioning strategies that promote critical thinking. "The teacher provided vocabulary instruction and a rich environment. Reading and writing were intertwined. The students read a lot and all the activities fostered literacy." Another commented, "There was guided reading that provided differentiation of instruction and met individual needs. There were opportunities for choice within flexible groups."

Principals' Use of Literacy Knowledge and Directive Communication

Expert principals tend to give advice and suggest ways to improve practice. The literature on literacy clearly indicates that students need time to read. Practice and volume of reading is one important component in

TABLE 1. Twenty-Seven Descriptors**Research-Based "Knowledge" about Literacy****Core Understandings**

- Reading is a construction of meaning from text. It is an active, cognitive, and affective process.
- Background knowledge and prior experience are critical to the reading process.
- Social interaction is essential in learning to read. Reading and writing develop together.
- Reading involves complex thinking.
- Children develop phonemic awareness and knowledge of phonics through a variety of literacy opportunities, models, and demonstrations.
- Children learn successful reading strategies in the context of real reading.
- Children need the opportunity to practice extensively or "read, read, read" (Reutzel and Smith 2004).
- Monitoring the development of reading processes is vital to student success.
- Reading and writing develop together.

Effective Teaching Strategies**To help children learn to read, teachers should**

- Model the purposes, behaviors, skills, and dispositions of fluent, strategic, and engaged readers.
- Scaffold instructional processes to make otherwise transparent, tacit reading processes visible and accessible to learners.
- Explicitly teach students a variety of effective reading strategies and when to appropriately apply these strategies.
- Use both silent and oral reading practice at appropriate levels of students' development for appropriate purposes.
- Use dynamic, flexible grouping strategies to meet student needs.
- Read aloud books and other print materials to children.
- Discuss and talk about the texts and stories students read.
- Provide guided oral reading instruction.
- Use playful language activities that focus on the sounds and letters of spoken language, as well as oral and book language, for expanding children's oral language development.
- Employ a variety of strategies to model and demonstrate reading knowledge, strategy, and skills.

Supportive Contexts for Reading Instruction**To promote reading, teachers should**

- Integrate reading instruction with other language arts instruction and with other curricular subjects.
- Create environments rich in literacy experiences, resources, and models that facilitate reading development. Create and sustain "print rich" classroom environments.
- Establish strong home-school partnerships that involve parents in their children's education.
- Provide access to a wide variety of reading materials including varying levels of challenge, genre or types, and topics.

Motivating and Engaging Readers**To promote reading, teachers should**

- Encourage positive attitudes and motivation for learning to read.
- Provide students the opportunity to select independent reading materials from appropriately challenging and interesting choices.
- Motivate students' voluntary reading habits by assessing interests.
- Engage students with text, which is key to reading development.

raising reading levels (Allington 2006). Participants in the study confirmed that they understood this principle. However, a less expert participant said, "I think that it is important to provide as much reading as permissible within the school day." The more expert participant made a more directive comment, "The mini-lesson went on for 25 minutes, followed by students copying a chart from the blackboard. They had only seven minutes to actually read!! After the lesson, I discussed the fact that during this reading lesson, students read for only seven minutes." Another participant who was identified as more expert reported, "During unannounced classroom visits, I have observed teachers using their precious instructional opportunities by having students complete workbook pages related to a previously read story. Students work in isolation and have no opportunity to discuss the story or share ideas. In some cases,

workbook pages are collected and graded by the teacher without any discussion. When I met with these teachers, we discussed effective/efficient use of instructional time. Worksheets, if used at all, should not be completed during the precious time we have to interact with our students. Rich conversation sparks thinking, increases vocabulary, and helps students make connections."

Principals' Use of Literacy Knowledge and Mobilized Resources

Participants who scored high on the emphasis of resources connected the need for resources to reading instruction. One participant commented, "A classroom literacy center should be a varied, vital place with lots of support for the literacy activities; developing higher level thinking skills through the use of various genres should

be a priority. I purchase literacy instructional materials; the classroom library has been set up for multiple uses—ability levels for the students, content areas, and areas of students' interests."

Principals' Use of Literacy Knowledge and Collaborative Instruction with Teachers

Expert principals find ways to support teachers as they continue to learn in the context of their practice. One expert pointed out the value of discussing research articles with her teachers. She related how she and the teachers learned best literacy practices through the reading of research, and they discussed how instruction grounded in the research would look. At post-observation conferences, she talked with the teachers about different ways to structure lessons. Rather than dictating her ideas to the teachers, this principal helped them explore their instructional decisions, reflect on them, and refine them in order to strengthen their students' literacy progress.

Another LCK for literacy expert commented, "I review and discuss effective literacy instruction with the teachers. We assess needs and areas of weakness and work with our literacy coach to address them." Another principal said that, following a classroom observation, she and the teacher "discussed strengths of the lesson, management of literacy centers, and the importance of providing a visual component to the small group instruction. We discussed effective/efficient use of instructional time, rich conversations, and good reader strategies."

Principals Can Develop More Expertise in LCK for Literacy

The finding of the study on LCK for literacy revealed that when principals are presented relevant research-based LCK for literacy and are given time to collaborate with others, their LCK for literacy grows and they begin to think differently about literacy. After the professional development intervention, participants identified 50 percent more of the 27 descriptors than they identified before the intervention. This was a 13.8 percent growth. Interestingly, 64 percent of what leaders noticed in the final survey was different from what they had noticed in the first survey, indicating that supervisors began to think differently about literacy practice. The new thinking was aligned to the professional development and best practices for literacy.

Principals who have a deep understanding of literacy can better recognize and support excellent literacy teaching. With their deeper knowledge, they know what to look for when they observe literacy lessons: in particular, they have concrete expectations for what students who are learning effectively should be doing. They have a better idea about what resources are needed to support effective instruction, and they provide collaborative conversation grounded in the concrete realities of teach-

ing reading that supports the improvement of practice. They connect with teachers and the core work of teaching and learning.

Literacy for Leaders provides an opportunity for principals to explore reading LCK in a relaxed setting, to examine reading LCK in meaningful ways, and to discuss with colleagues the implications of reading LCK for their own leadership roles. We created the professional development opportunity to demonstrate that an effective program to enhance the LCK of principals could be developed and that this understanding would lead to improved literacy practices in schools.

School districts need to provide professional development for principals that is aligned to best practices for literacy. At a minimum, districts should insist that those who are supervising literacy participate in professional development on balanced literacy practices. Additional professional development can come from workshops such as the one conducted by the authors, *Literacy for Leaders*, state reading conferences, study groups, or course work in literacy at the university level. This does not imply that principals need the same depth of knowledge as that required for teachers of literacy; however, they do need a basic understanding of best practices so that they can effectively connect with teachers to discuss instructional practices and improve literacy progress in their schools.

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Appendix: Participants in Professional Development Sessions (N = 18)¹

| Participant | Gender | Position | Degree | Professional Development in Literacy | DFG ² | Years in Education |
|-------------|--------|------------------------|--------|--------------------------------------|------------------|--------------------|
| Al | M | District administrator | M.Ed. | None | DE | 8 |
| Bob | M | Principal | M.Ed. | Conferences | B | 11 |
| Carol | F | District administrator | M.Ed. | Workshops | B | 35 |
| Dan | M | District administrator | M.Ed. | Workshops | GH | 12 |
| Eva | F | District administrator | M.S. | Workshops | I | 28 |
| Evan | M | Principal | M.Ed. | None | B | 24 |
| Fay | F | District administrator | M.Ed. | NJ EXCEL | GH | 26 |
| Fred | M | Vice principal | M.Ed. | None | DE | 7 |
| Greg | M | Teacher | M.Ed. | None | CD | 33 |
| Joe | M | District administrator | M.Ed. | Workshops | DE | 39 |
| Judy | F | Teacher | M.Ed. | College reading program | GH | 12 |
| Kate | F | District administrator | Ed.S. | None | J | 30 |
| Kim | F | Principal | M.Ed. | Workshops | C | 29 |
| Lynn | F | District administrator | M.Ed. | Workshops | CD | 20 |
| Matt | M | Vice principal | M.Ed. | None | I | 6 |
| Mary | F | Principal | Ed.D. | Workshops | CD | 32 |
| Nancy | F | District administrator | M.Ed. | College courses | DE | 27 |
| Paul | M | Principal | M.S. | College course | DE | 8 |

1. All names are pseudonyms.

2. DFG or District Factor Group is a rating system applied by the State of New Jersey to districts using a variety of economic and demographic indicators. "A" districts are the poorest and "I" districts are the wealthiest.

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FEATURE ARTICLE

Principals Leading Literacy – What Works and Why?

Jo Padgham and Helen Chatto

When ALEA National Council members meet throughout the year at meetings and conferences, our conversations regularly tap in to what is happening in our own schools, networks and regions and we eagerly share research, resources, strategies and stories from our own classrooms and staff rooms. We relish this opportunity to have a window into other schools and over the years have found that what works in one school, region or state finds its way to the classroom of a colleague in another state or territory. One such conversation in 2012 led us to consider sharing with the broader membership some of the great work happening in schools in our networks in the Northern Territory and the ACT through stories from some principal colleagues.

Our ALEA membership is broad and rich, encompassing educators from all areas within school, university, research, publishing and education department environments. This article highlights the vital role principals play in leading literacy in their schools. All the principals who generously wrote vignettes of their literacy leadership and school success are ALEA members. Michael Fullan and Lyn Sharratt (2012) state 'what matters most in accomplishing school success is focus'. Each of the principal's stories that follow demonstrates a school leader with a clear focus on improving the literacy outcomes and opportunities for each and every student in their school through developing the capacity of each and every teacher. Each leader works in a different school context and the strategies and approaches that are applied are tailored to suit that context. Each school leader demonstrates a high level of knowledge and understanding of leading learning and leading literacy. These stories of school success are underpinned by rigorous and ongoing research, wide reading of the literature, collaborative inquiry at both their school level and network level and within the ALEA professional learning community.

Ensuring deep learning through the gradual release of responsibility model – Helen Chatto

Girraween Primary School is a rural school 40 km from Darwin. Most students live on five acre blocks and enjoy an active lifestyle. Girraween won the Northern Territory Excellence in Community Engagement Award at the 2012 Smart Schools Awards. Helen has been principal since 2009 and is the ALEA Northern Territory State Director. Contact: helen.chatto@ntschoools.net

Being a principal gives me a privileged position from which to impact students' learning outcomes. Research confirms that teacher quality is a major factor in improving students' outcomes. As a literacy leader it is my role to build teacher capacity, to lead teachers to develop strong pedagogical frameworks and understandings of what constitutes best practice for the developmental level of the students in their care. At Girraween we cultivate an environment of building common understandings and sowing seeds for change. We do not mandate a single way of doing things as this risks building resentment and resistance rather than building teacher capacity.

We know that learning is most effective for children within the zone of proximal development and that the gradual release of responsibility model is very effective for ensuring deep learning.

I believe this rings true for our teachers as well. It is essential to have whole school beliefs and common understandings on what constitutes effective teaching in each of the literacy modes. However, not all of the teachers in a school will be at the same level of understanding and development and it is my job to understand the teaching philosophies of my staff and to consider what learnings will extend their understanding and knowledge of best literacy practice.

Determining what teachers know and can implement means developing strong professional relationships where trust is a key factor. Conversations about teaching, analysing data together, sharing readings, walk-throughs and formal observations with an intentional focus all contribute to my knowledge of the teachers and their willingness to seek and take on board feedback to improve their practice.

I use the gradual release of responsibility to build teacher capacity; my actions are considered and intentional. I model best practice, for example, I read to the whole school demonstrating reading comprehension strategies. I share picture story books and have a display in my office of recommended books for children and teachers. I belong to professional associations and read (sometimes skim) latest research and reference books. I work with teachers and show them how to analyse spelling or writing, modelling the use of rubrics to establish students' learning needs. I create stories in a box and model the use of graphic organizers to explore the seeds and build vocabulary. I share my reading by using articles with small groups in staff meetings or with individuals based on a need identified by myself or the teacher. We use graphic organisers to re-shape the information we read. I work with my leadership team to build common understandings and direct them to read texts that will help teachers in their teams so they can guide action research. I encourage them to try things in their own classrooms and to then share their learning with their teams.

As I have built the capacity of my instructional leadership team (team leaders), we then guide teacher practice. We ensure that the resources needed are available. We lead action research, for example in 2012 we focused on reading comprehension. The Transition/Year one teachers explored the work of Debbie Miller in 'Reading for Meaning' and explicitly taught reading comprehension strategies, sharing their lessons and the children's responses to further refine their work.

For our year 2-4 team, I purchased multiple copies of 'Reciprocal Teaching' by Lore Okzkus. As teachers

worked through this text and implemented the focus, they commented on the impact on their teaching of reading. Students' results improved. This was also teamed with a focus on the use of real books; I have found that many younger teachers do not yet have a deep knowledge about children's literature. I ensured I had a teacher who loved books in the library, teaching lessons and also recommending texts to teachers. This has built a culture of discussion about children's books and increased knowledge of authors as well as ensuring our students have quality books in their hands that they want to learn to read.

Our upper primary team enjoyed working with Sheena Cameron's 'Reading Comprehension Strategies' book and we explored literature circles. The exciting thing to watch in upper primary was the engagement of students with reading. Imagine my delight to have children 'in trouble' for reading under the desk or taking books to PE!

Within a trusting, collaborative professional climate, it is very heartening to watch teachers apply their new learning, engaging in action research and the quest for continuous improvement for themselves as well as their students. I love teaching literacy and still want to go in and teach a group myself at times when I think I can see the missing key. I have learnt though that I can influence the next generation of teachers by creating an environment of professional trust where talk about our craft is the norm, by keeping abreast with research through professional association membership, talking about the stories behind our data and working with teachers to set learning goals for themselves and their students. I look forward to a great 2013 with my wonderful teaching team.

High expectations for teachers and students and alignment of highly effective teaching practices with resource allocation – Wendy Cave

Macquarie Primary School is a 40 year old medium sized school in Canberra, ACT with a long held reputation as a community school, proudly multicultural and servicing families from around the world. Wendy has been a principal at Macquarie for 3 years.

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One of our school's enduring strategic priorities is to improve literacy performance and since 2010 the education team – our teachers, administrators and support staff – has been guided on a journey to realise a vision of literacy success for all. As Principal, I bring a strong commitment to the ACT Education and Training Directorate's Literacy Strategy. One of my most important responsibilities is to bring and develop leadership capacity 'to promote and enhance a productive school culture that establishes high expectations for teachers and students and aligns highly effective teaching practices with resource allocation'.

This focus area is driven by our Literacy Support Team, comprised of the executive team (Principal, Deputy Principal and two Executive teachers) and the school's Literacy Coordinator. This group meets regularly to engage in rigorous professional dialogue and reflect on student performance data and teaching and learning practices across the school. Our discussions are translated into action plans and together we support the implementation of practices that provide seamless learning for students as they progress through their early years to middle and senior primary phases of schooling.

A significant framework for reflection and teacher inquiry within the Literacy Support team and across the teams we lead is a set of principles that guide our practice. At Macquarie, the education team believes that:

- Hope is not a strategy
- Laughing children learn
- No two people are exactly the same
- Learning doesn't only happen between 9 and 3
- Real contexts lead to real learning
- Curriculum should be inch wide and mile deep
- Learners need to lead.

Importantly, we recognise that these principles apply to adult learners too and therefore teacher learning plans are diverse and personalised. This has allowed us to improve literacy practices from a range of focus areas and entry points to learning. During the past three years, our teachers have engaged in work that included:

- An action learning project, exploring the use of quality literature to develop students' perceptions of themselves as writers
- Action research into the implementation of the Daily Five approach to reading development
- The development of systematic tracking processes for literacy

- The design and implementation of personalised Literacy Support Plans for underperforming and high performing students
- Inquiry into the Australian Curriculum, English and
- Engagement in the development of the General Capability (Literacy).

We have identified, and are fortunate to work alongside, critical friends from beyond the school and system settings to broaden our perspectives and knowledge. Through their engagement in such diverse and personally relevant work and the sharing structures that have become part of our school culture, we have allowed teacher learners to lead.

So ... what are the keys to our success?

- The passion, deep knowledge and sharp focus on literacy within the executive team
- Shared beliefs that guide every action of the education team
- Personalised professional learning
- Systematic checking in, reflection and collaboration between the Literacy Support team and classroom teachers to monitor progress and ensure philosophical alignment of practices within a cohesive whole school context.

A focus on Learning Intentions – every child sees themselves as a learner – Shane Gorman

Bonython Primary School is part of the Lanyon Cluster of Schools in the Tuggeranong Valley in Canberra ACT. The cluster consists of a number of local primary schools and a high school. They work collaboratively and have an additional cluster Deputy Principal who works across all schools focussing on pedagogy and literacy. Shane Gorman has been a principal for 13 years, 5 of those at Bonython Primary School (BPS). Contact: shane.gorman@ed.act.edu.au

Keeping the spotlight on literacy learning for every student at BPS is achieved through cohesive instructional literacy leadership at the executive level. The vision is established, concise, well communicated and drives decision-making at all levels. The alignment of vision is maintained through the long-term strategic plan (four year plan) and the Annual Operational Plan. The executive team meets off site for an executive conference at the beginning of each term to monitor progress against the operational plan (and therefore the Strategic Plan) and establish the coordinated focus for the term ahead. Each of the members of the executive team has the operational plan as their annual professional plan and therefore shares the same focus and priorities.

The executive team coaches and mentors their teams of teachers through the learning and teaching cycle from planning through to delivery and case management including 'putting the faces on the data' (Sharratt & Fullan

2012). Professional Learning is the focus of all meetings. Through self-assessment, all teachers monitor their learning against the school priorities along a continuum beginning at 'need to learn about' to 'ready to coach and mentor'. These strategies have resulted in the development and maintenance of a culture where we all see ourselves as learners, coaches and mentors on the same pathway. This approach has proved both aspirational and affirming for our teachers and hence has been instrumental in building capacity within the school where in the last 3 years 80% of our classroom teachers are early career teachers.

Assessment for Learning is a focus in our classrooms. Each student's learning is monitored and through conferencing with their teacher, a specific 'Learning Intention' is established in reading, writing, maths and learning how to learn. Through this conference, success criteria are also established. This process provides each individual student

with their targeted and achievable next learning step which is celebrated with home when achieved and so the cycle continues. This also provides a focus for parents and carers to support student learning at home through meaningful and targeted strategies. This approach has supported every student in the school to see themselves as learners, which in the past has been a barrier to learning for many students.

This approach has supported teachers to differentiate the planning and delivery of learning and teaching as it acts as a constant reminder of where each student is at in their

learning. Not surprisingly it has also resulted in engaged classrooms where each student knows what their next step in learning is, how to achieve it, when they have achieved it and how to work with their teacher to establish their next 'Learning Intention'. Students not only see themselves as learners but also see that everyone is a learner and we are all at different stages of learning hence there is a culture of acceptance of all students' ability levels. Teachers have commented that it keeps them focused on the important learning and teaching. Every student at Bonython Primary School sees themselves as a learner.

A shared whole school language of literacy practices – Jill Tudor

Bradshaw Primary School is located at the foot of the MacDonnell Ranges in the Northern Territory. There are approximately 405 students at Bradshaw. Fifty per cent of the students are Aboriginal, whilst others come from a variety of multi-cultural backgrounds. Irrkerlantye, a unit offering a wraparound service for identified Indigenous students to access school, has been running very successfully at the school since 2006. Jill Tudor has been a principal for 9 years, 4 of these at Bradshaw Primary School.

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Many years ago a person in charge of health in Northern South Australia spoke at the NT School Leaders' Forum of his approach to achieving outcomes. If the intent is to improve infant health by bathing every baby in a community at least once per day, then mapping every step along the way from the bore pipe connection right down to the plug in the sink, making sure there is no hindrance at any step, is critical. If we look at improving literacy learning, although significantly more complex, the same approach applies.

I consider myself the luckiest Principal in the world with a staff second to none. Each year, however, staff turnover impacts significantly on the capacity to embed literacy practices that we know make a difference to our student cohort. We found that there was considerable difference in practice depending on where new staff came from, and that difference in expectations between and across year levels confused the children. The introduction of good reader, good writer, good speller, good speaker and good listener prompts across Bradshaw School has been a turning point in this regard. It seems such a simple thing to do in retrospect. We now have a shared whole school language of literacy practices.

As a staff, a list of all the things that children needed to know and do to read, write, spell, speak and listen well was developed e.g. good readers make connections between the illustrations and the text, good readers can interpret diagrams and labelled illustrations, good spellers chunk sounds. *First Steps* material was the principle source, a significant investment having been made in previous years to cover

reading, writing and oral language modules. Each strategy was then printed on cards and laminated. As strategies were explicitly taught, a mounting display of prompts became visible in every classroom. The children were taught to refer to them to articulate what they were learning, and the capacity to do this provided evidence of successful practice. Teachers used them to articulate learning intentions.

As the Principal, I made it very clear that I wanted to see the laminated cards in daily use and not stapled to the wall, so noticing cards being used by groups of children, noticing prompts used in cross curricular contexts, checking children's understanding of prompts on display whenever in the classroom and supervision of programs to ensure comprehensive coverage of strategies, was important. When new staff came into the school the prompts were included as part of a teacher resource kit and professional learning about their use and the school's expectations of their role were provided as part of the induction process.

In showing prospective enrolments around the school, the prompts highlight the importance the school places on literacy learning. Parents too now have a much better understanding of all the factors that contribute to literacy learning. This was particularly important in early childhood where the view that children were cheating if they looked at the pictures or that sounding out was the only thing children needed to know in order to read was not uncommon.

How do we know it has worked? The prompts and other whole school practices are now euphemistically referred to as the 'Bradshaw Way' by staff. New staff appreciate the well-

structured and supported approach to learning we take across the school. Our most recent student surveys, however, have indicated the need to expand these prompts beyond literacy

to learning and 2013 will see the development of good learner prompts developed for use across the school.

A focus on coherent and cumulative learning and on early intervention – Murray Bruce

Gordon Primary School, like Bonython Primary School, is a member of the Lanyon Cluster of Schools in the Tuggeranong Valley in Canberra ACT. It is a large primary school with a young teaching staff. Murray Bruce has been a principal for 22 years and at Gordon Primary for 7 years. Contact: murray.bruce@ed.act.edu.au

'Children receiving consistent messages about reading and writing leads to success in literacy learning' is a strongly held belief at Gordon Primary School. Hence, we place great importance on achieving maximum coherence in our literacy program from preschool (4-year-olds) through to Year 6 (11-year-olds).

How do we achieve high level coherence from preschool to Year 6?

At Gordon Primary School every teacher undertakes a full twenty-four hour training program using the *First Steps Reading and Writing* resources that were produced in Western Australia. Teachers are required to base their literacy program on *First Steps* and are supported by a standardized planning template that cues them to focus on the *First Steps* major teaching emphases, a range of reading and writing strategies defined in the *First Steps* resource books, and use assessment to guide their planning.

We use the *First Steps Map of Development* to record detailed assessment data on student learning, to provide feedback to students and to plan for subsequent learning. To ensure

that literacy learning is truly transformative, the planning template also cues teachers to include each of the four pedagogical prompts of our 'Learning by Design' integrated curriculum framework. These prompts which we call 'knowledge processes' are experiential learning, conceptual learning, and analytical learning and applied learning. In using this framework, teachers ensure that learning experiences are 'designed' to achieve the planned learning outcomes.

We also recognise that early intervention is vital to prevent misunderstandings and to avoid the compounding negative effect of confusion in the early years of primary school. We address this through our Reading Recovery program which we are very proud of. This well researched one-on-one early intervention program targets below average students in Year 1 and aims to accelerate students' progress to the average level for their grade as quickly as possible so that students may obtain benefit from classroom teaching. A focus on coherent and cumulative learning and on early intervention is crucial to Gordon Primary School's comprehensive approach to literacy.

Creating a culture of building teacher capacity, collaboration and sharing of best practice – Judith Hamilton

Gowrie Primary School is situated in the Tuggeranong Valley Canberra, ACT and was established in 1983. Judy has been a principal for 4 years and in 2012 was Manager of Literacy and Numeracy for the ACT Education and Training Directorate. judith.hamilton@ed.act.edu.au

The revitalisation of literacy leadership at Gowrie Primary School began in 2010 when the Principal embarked on the journey of developing a whole school approach to the teaching and learning of literacy. Working closely with students, staff and the community, the leadership team reviewed current practice, identified the needs of all stakeholders and responded to system and school data. A School Plan was developed that focused on building teacher capacity and improving student outcomes. System, school and team goals were aligned and clearly articulated to all

members of the school community. A new meeting structure based on building teacher capacity, collaboration and sharing of best practice was embedded throughout the school.

The key elements that have enabled a transformation in school culture and a steady improvement in student outcomes include:

1. Instructional Leadership from senior executive members

The principal and deputy have a high level of capability to lead literacy and work collaboratively and alongside

teachers as partners in learning. The leadership team set high expectations for all teachers in providing evidence based practices in literacy to inform teaching and learning to build a system of reflective practice.

2. A coaching and mentoring model

We developed a professional learning model that invests time into teachers. Each teacher had a literacy coach and worked collaboratively with them and other teachers in their team each week. Extra time is allocated each week for teachers to reflect, plan, moderate and discuss students' learning with their coach.

3. Developing teachers as researchers by immersing them in Action Learning Projects

Each professional learning team in the school participated in an action learning project targeted to meet the needs of teachers and students in areas of literacy. The P-2 team developed a project that investigated explicit teaching of reading strategies to improve reading comprehension.

4. Literacy Case Management approach

We advocated for and identified that all students can learn to read and write through a shared responsibility of students' learning. Each teacher is supported with their coach and leadership team to identify students who require further support in areas of literacy. They work collaboratively with the literacy leadership team to identify and assess the student and put together an action plan. This has enabled each teacher to know they have a collaborative and informed team approach in the teaching of literacy.

5. Effective assessment for learning and literacy moderation

As part of the coaching and mentoring model the leadership team recognised the importance of effective and ongoing assessment for learning and moderation in literacy. Each team was led by their coach to develop reading, writing and speaking and listening rubrics to inform planning and teaching practices on a regular basis. This led to building teacher capacity of assessment practices but consistent whole school teaching and learning as well.

Improving the quality of the teaching, introducing an uninterrupted literacy block and being explicit about high expectations – Jennifer Hall

Jennifer Hall was appointed as the principal of Charles Conder Primary School in July 2009. The school is situated at the foothills of the Brindabella Ranges in the southern most region of the Australian Capital Territory. It caters for students from preschool to year 6, incorporating early years preschool programs at both Tharwa, which is a rural setting, and Conder preschools.

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At Charles Conder Primary School we have focused on embedding what Lyn Sharratt and Michael Fullan refer to as the 14 Parameters. These are the important key drivers for a school to adopt so it becomes a place 'where high student achievement is expected and delivered year after year by energised staff teams of true professional educators.' (2012, p. 7). The fourth Parameter is the 'Principal as the Literacy Leader' and in 2009 our school was the lowest performing school in the ACT in terms of Literacy achievement as measured by NAPLAN. Our School Plan (2010 – 2013) priority was to improve student outcomes in literacy and numeracy in line with the system's strategic plan, 'Everyone Matters' and the six core principles of School Improvement.

What did we do?

Professional learning was a fundamental step in improving staff confidence in teaching reading and writing. By having all staff engaged in an action research project we created a whole school vision of improving literacy outcomes for all students. Quality Teaching Interactive Feedback sessions (QTIFs) were introduced based on the Quality

Teaching Model. These sessions provided a forum for weekly classroom observations by classroom teachers, the principal and executive, followed by purposeful and reflective feedback. Staffing resources were allocated to support a coaching and mentoring model whereby the Literacy and Numeracy Field Officer and the other executive were timetabled to work 'shoulder to shoulder' with staff in implementing high quality literacy instruction. Improving the quality of the teaching, introducing an uninterrupted literacy block and being explicit about high expectations for everyone, were three key strategies we adopted to improve outcomes. The imperative of utilising evidenced based data to inform teaching and learning ensured the continued improvement by teachers in their professional work. Previously, teachers conducted running records with individual students each term and entered levels in the database with minimal scrutiny. Using Dr Lyn Sharratt's model, teachers became focused on using appropriate interventions for each and every student. In interrogating the PM Benchmark data, a Venn diagram was used to provide a visual representation of individual student progress and from there the data wall was created.

A further character we grew into our collaborative culture was the intent of 'Core Principle Number 5 – There is strength in collaboration'. As a team we take responsibility for each other's work. This feature became the imperative for all our professional work together.

How has putting 'faces on the data' impacted on student outcomes?

'Putting Faces on the Data' enabled the implementation of a concerted whole school approach to ensuring success in reading for all students. The impact for student improvement is heightened because there is a shared responsibility, derived from a wide range of professional input. Teachers have a greater awareness of each student's reading needs and can differentiate their teaching approaches more effectively. With this approach teachers feel supported

and the responsibility of developing interventions and strategic planning for students is no longer left to each individual teacher. Similarly, students are more aware of their progress and can set personal goals for improvement. Teachers and students are aware of the school goals for improvement and success for all because they are able to actively participate in viewing the data wall and having discussions about the wall with each other. The collaborative scrutiny of students' work has allowed us to easily track identified groups such as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, English as an Additional Language/Dialect students and Learning Support Centre students. Teachers are encouraged to move the data with their class. Transparency is greater as all teachers know where every student is in relation to the agreed benchmarks. Improvement is visible and can be easily celebrated.

Shared beliefs, understandings, responsibility and accountability, instructional leadership and a data-informed approach – Jo Padgham

Turner School is a large inner city 60 year old school in Canberra ACT that caters for mainstream students and students with special education needs. Jo has been a principal for 11 years with just under 1 year as principal at Turner School. Jo is ALEA Vice President and is a trainer for the Principals as Literacy Leaders professional learning program (PALLs) run by the Australian Primary Principals' Association (APPA). Jo has also been Manager of Literacy and Numeracy for the ACT Education and Training Directorate. Contact: jo.padgham@ed.act.edu.au

In 2012, the ACT Education and Training Directorate identified nine essential elements for effective literacy and numeracy:

1. Shared beliefs, understandings, responsibility and accountability
2. Instructional leadership of literacy and numeracy
3. Data-informed approach
4. Instructional practice informed by a balanced literacy and numeracy approach and system endorsed programs
5. Literacy and numeracy coordinators/coaches in every school
6. Capacity and knowledge building of all teachers in literacy and numeracy
7. Effective transitions to support all students' literacy and numeracy development
8. Effective intervention to match student need, and
9. Effective, respectful partnerships with families and communities.

As the newly appointed principal to Turner School in May 2012, I used these nine elements with the executive team to reflect on and evaluate our school literacy practices. As an already successful school, we found that while all nine were in place, some elements had less emphasis and increasing the emphasis we believed would lead to even greater success.

As a team we agreed the areas to strengthen were the first three elements: shared beliefs, understandings, responsibility and accountability; instructional leadership of literacy and numeracy; and a data-informed approach.

The work of Lyn Sharratt in Toronto, Canada, has been an important influence on my learning in recent years and the three elements we identified are at the core of the work she continues to undertake with her colleague Michael Fullan. Their 2012 publication *Putting Faces on the Data- What Great Leaders do!* outlines a range of strategies and case studies that take us deeper into the conversations of what good teaching looks like and how it is achieved.

One of the first strategies our executive team took on was establishing a Staff Learning Room where student data is confidentially displayed on large pin boards that form the basis for conversations about student learning and where further teaching is required. These data walls show individual student achievement and enable every teacher and executive member to see every student's achievement at that point in time. It allowed us to move from the broad use of school data to actually putting individual faces on the data and thereby increasing the urgency to act. In addition the room displays all the information gleaned from staff literacy audits and student and staff writing surveys that were

undertaken to look more deeply into what was happening in writing across our school. The room has a large boardroom table to enable groups to meet for their conversations. Each fortnight the literacy and numeracy coaches, EALD teachers, principal and deputies meet around the table to discuss student learning data, coaching strategies, resource allocation and whole school practices. The four teaching teams schedule time to meet in the room and look closely at their student data individually and collectively and make intentional decisions about their planning, teaching, assessment and feedback.

Writing improvement was a focus for our school in 2012 and at the July Sydney ALEA conference my Deputy Principal and I followed sessions on writing over the course of the 4 days. Mem Fox was, as always, inspirational and we brought back her message of writing in real contexts, for real audiences for real responses. The Windang Primary School team's action learning project on the power of writing feedback and the West Pennant Hills team's work on delving into what was really happening in writing across their school before launching into a specific goal and set of actions became inspirational stories for our large staff that is a mix of highly experienced teachers and new educators of both special education and mainstream. We began whole school read alouds under the trees, displayed our favourite books on Hot Read stands, shared writers' notebooks and authors' chair strategies, wrote in Joy Journals, as inspired by Coolaroo South Primary School teachers, and before long we found we had reignited a passion for writing and reading at our school amongst staff and students alike.

Our substantial number of special education students have benefited enormously from a refocus on *meaning* in their literacy practices underpinned by a digital language experience approach. Our proud teacher librarian announced in the last week of 2012 that we had increased borrowing from our library by 60% in just 1 year! While these shared practices and delight and engagement in literacy practices were occurring, we took time to discuss our beliefs about writing and documented them. Once documented the statements became invaluable words owned by the staff to audit our practices, and allocations of time and resources.

The instructional leadership element is crucial to school improvement. Our executive team works collaboratively to build each other's capacity to lead and guide practice in every classroom. With a very complex school environment of combined special education and mainstream spread over a large campus, it is very easy to slip into the operational side of our role and thus it has been our goal to maintain the focus on our role as instructional leaders first, with a

magnified lens on classroom practice and supporting all teachers. We use *First Steps* resources as the building block for literacy teaching and to support this we have gathered a core set of references and resources in a carry basket for each member of the executive team (including Debbie Miller, Sheena Cameron, David Hornsby, Christine Topfer, Toni Glasson and recent ALEA publications). This supports a shared language across the school executive and the whole staff. 2013 will continue our exciting journey with our talented and dedicated staff.

We, Jo and Helen, thank our ALEA principal colleagues for opening small windows into their schools' approaches to successful literacy improvement. Should you wish to find out more of what is happening in one or more of the schools in this article, the principals would welcome your email and no doubt if you attend the AATE/ALEA joint national conference in Brisbane in July 2013 you may meet them and/or teachers from their school, proudly presenting their practice, research and ongoing learning. For more information about the conference, log onto www.englishliteracyconference.com.au. We trust these principals' stories will inspire each of you to continue your important work as school leaders and literacy leaders despite the challenges of leading schools in what are increasingly contentious times. It has been our privilege to work with these principals.

Please pass this article on to your principal and school leaders and have a conversation about leading literacy in your school. The ALEA website will continue to host stories from principals and school leaders leading literacy improvement in schools. Please contact ALEA with your literacy leadership story – www.alea.edu.au.

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