

W I N T E R 2 0 1 4

# Mailbox

Literacy Collaborative at Lesley University

## Happy New Year!

Welcome back...and we hope you all had a pleasant school break. We know that our friends in Wisconsin, Minnesota, and other areas of the Midwest were entrenched in extreme cold after the New Year, and we are glad that they all made it through to the other side. Even Virginia, Georgia, and other parts of the South had to batten down the hatches. Hopefully they, and the rest of us will not have to endure such severe weather again this year.

We are looking forward to hosting administrators from Literacy Collaborative schools for the first time at ongoing professional development this year. This is an exciting opportunity for us to gather with coaches and administrators in one room in order to share discussions and new learning. We know that in order for school improvement plans to succeed, principal and administrative support and involvement are a must.

In other news, our center is involved in two major grants this year. The first involves schools and coaches in grades K-2 who have Reading Recovery, LLI, and Literacy Collaborative implementations. The five-year study will look at the impact of a comprehensive literacy approach on student achievement (See the Fall 2103 Mailbox for details).

The second grant is providing funding for Boston Public Schools' participation in the "Lesley University Professional Development for Elementary School Leaders and First Grade Teachers for Early Literacy Impact," and is supported by the Massachusetts Higher Education Improving Teacher Quality Grant.

Three of our faculty, Diane Powell, Cindy Downend, and Jessica Sherman are representing the Lesley Graduate School of Education as they provide professional development in literacy content and pedagogy for principals, literacy district coaches, first grade teachers, and one district administrator. The goal is to improve achievement for up to 900 first grade students in the Boston Public Schools. It also provides access for other Massachusetts public and private schools to participate. Wendy Vaulton will be conducting research as the project progresses.

We hope that the New Year has begun on a positive note for you and that it continues to provide opportunities for teaching and learning for us all. As always we are excited to hear your stories...so if you have something you would like to share with others via The Mailbox, please contact your liaison.

## Formulating a Coaching Roadmap to Achieve Shifts in Teacher Insights

*Irene Fountas*

When you are in the position of coach, you are in an ideal context for learning about the effects of teaching on learning and about how your collegial coaching interactions foster reflection and change in teacher decision-making. How exciting that you can learn more by observing teaching and engaging in the act of coaching day by day.

You know well the importance of maintaining the stance of a learner, not positioning yourself as the literacy guru. Your experiences and knowledge about literacy teaching and working with adult learners serve you well, but your colleague's knowledge and experiences and close work with students brings essential riches to the conversation.

Your skillful decision-making in the act of coaching requires the art of inquiry, knowing how to lead your colleague down the pathway of reflection to make conclusions that are meaningful and long lasting. Your colleague learns how to travel the same pathway to reflect on teaching day by day.

As a coach, I found it very helpful prior to our post observation conference to formulate a tentative, written map of key points that were worthy of discussing with my colleague and was prepared for my colleague to add the points that he wanted to discuss. Imagine a simple graphic organizer to organize your thinking. The roadmap began with my first words to open the discussion and a sequence of topics that lead to one another, and then the final destination or big ideas I wanted to leave my colleague thinking more about. The important part was maintaining tentativeness, listening well, and being able to make detours or travel down some different roads without losing sight of the destination. Responsive coaching requires the ability to handle surprises or information you didn't have along the way. You may even on occasion have to change the final destination.

After your lesson observation, try sifting through your lesson notes and creating a very brief, written roadmap to engage your colleague in reflecting on a series of important ideas that lead to explicit new insights about teaching and learning. Without clarity on some tentative routes to the destination, you might meander for a long time along the road and leave your colleague lost, without reaching any worthwhile destination. Effective coaching requires that we are planful so our colleague's valuable time leads to the reward of new thinking that will result in more expert decision-making in the act of teaching.



### Literacy for All Conference November 2-4, 2014

#### **Deadline Extended: Coaches and Principals encouraged to submit proposals for sessions at the 2014 LFA Conference**

We would welcome proposals in all conference strands: administrators/school leaders; literacy coaching; technology and literacy; middle school/adolescent literacy; Grades PreK–K; Early Literacy, Grades K–2; and Intermediate Literacy, Grades 3–6. You can find the proposal on our website: [www.lesley.edu/literacy-for-all-conference](http://www.lesley.edu/literacy-for-all-conference). Please submit your proposal by January 31, 2014. If your proposal is accepted and scheduled, one lead presenter may attend the two-day conference (Monday and Tuesday) for free — a \$295 value!

We hope you will attend this year's conference with several of your teaching colleagues in order to share in the learning.

*Finding the Heart of NONFICTION: Teaching 7 Essential Craft Tools with MENTOR TEXT,*  
by Georgia Heard

Book Review by Jill Eurich

Over the winter break I read Georgia Heard's latest book for teachers of writing. It has the grace and heart you would expect from Georgia as well as a great deal of practical, purposeful information set out in a clear accessible way. Here is how she writes about the text:

My hope is that in reading *Finding the Heart of Nonfiction* you and your students will be inspired by the words and craft lessons from the mentor texts I've chosen but also inspired to seek out your own mentor texts, to find your writing voices and to continue to explore the world through nonfiction (p. 3).

In the first part of the book Heard lays a foundation by defining different types of nonfiction and discussing the important role mentor texts play in student inquiry and teacher instruction. In the second part Georgia devotes a chapter to each of seven aspects of writer's craft that she believes are essential tools in the writing of nonfiction.

1. Focus: the hearth of nonfiction writing
2. Turning facts into scenes: writing with imagery
3. Leads: the doorway into writing
4. Point of view and voice: who are we when we write?
5. Precise language: details, details and more details
6. Text structure: writing bird by bird
7. Endings: letting words linger

The book has intriguing information that Georgia connects to her beliefs including the origin of the words mentor and focus.

The word mentor comes for the Ancient Greek poem, *The Odyssey*, by Homer. Mentor was Odysseus' confidante, faithful friend and reliable steward with whom he entrusted his home and his family while he was away on his journeys. And now of course the word mentor has come to mean someone who imparts wisdom to and shares knowledge with a less experienced colleague. In a writing community a mentor text is literature that is used by writers to study craft and genre and to inspire writing as well as vision (p. 3).

The first craft lesson is about the importance of focus. Georgia explains that the word focus comes from "the Latin word, hearth, a place in the home where family and

friends come together to warm and comfort themselves. If we think of focus in writing in the same way-- the hearth of a piece of writing around which all the details and words gather -- it is a helpful metaphor. But finding the focus in any genre, nonfiction included, is one of the biggest challenges writers have" (p. 41).

The majority of the book, consists of the craft lessons accompanied by an explanation of the important role each has in the crafting on nonfiction writing. Each broad craft suggestion is divided into specific strategies that include questions we can ask ourselves to engage in the strategies and suggestions for both teachers and students in the form of minilessons or sections entitled, "Try This", with explicit suggestions for getting inside the strategy and then applying it to our own writing. Best of all, in many ways, are the mentor text examples from students and other nonfiction authors that guide each of the lessons or suggestions. These different craft lessons are linked to the Common Core State Standards at the end of the chapter.

Since this book's focus is writing, it is a powerful companion to *Genre Study: Teaching with Fiction and Nonfiction Books*. While this is a book about the writing of nonfiction, many of its lessons can be applied to any genre: finding a focus for your writing, the strength of powerful, relevant details, leads that do more than hook the reader, endings that linger after the piece has been concluded. *Finding the Heart of NONFICTION* will be instructive to us as coaches and teachers of writing. The mentor text examples and the lessons will engage our students, and strengthen their reading and crafting of nonfiction writing.

### Effective Literacy Coach

*Spring 2014*

March 11-14, 2014

April 23-25, 2014

June 5-6, 2014

*Summer 2014*

August 18-21, 2014

September 30-October 2, 2014

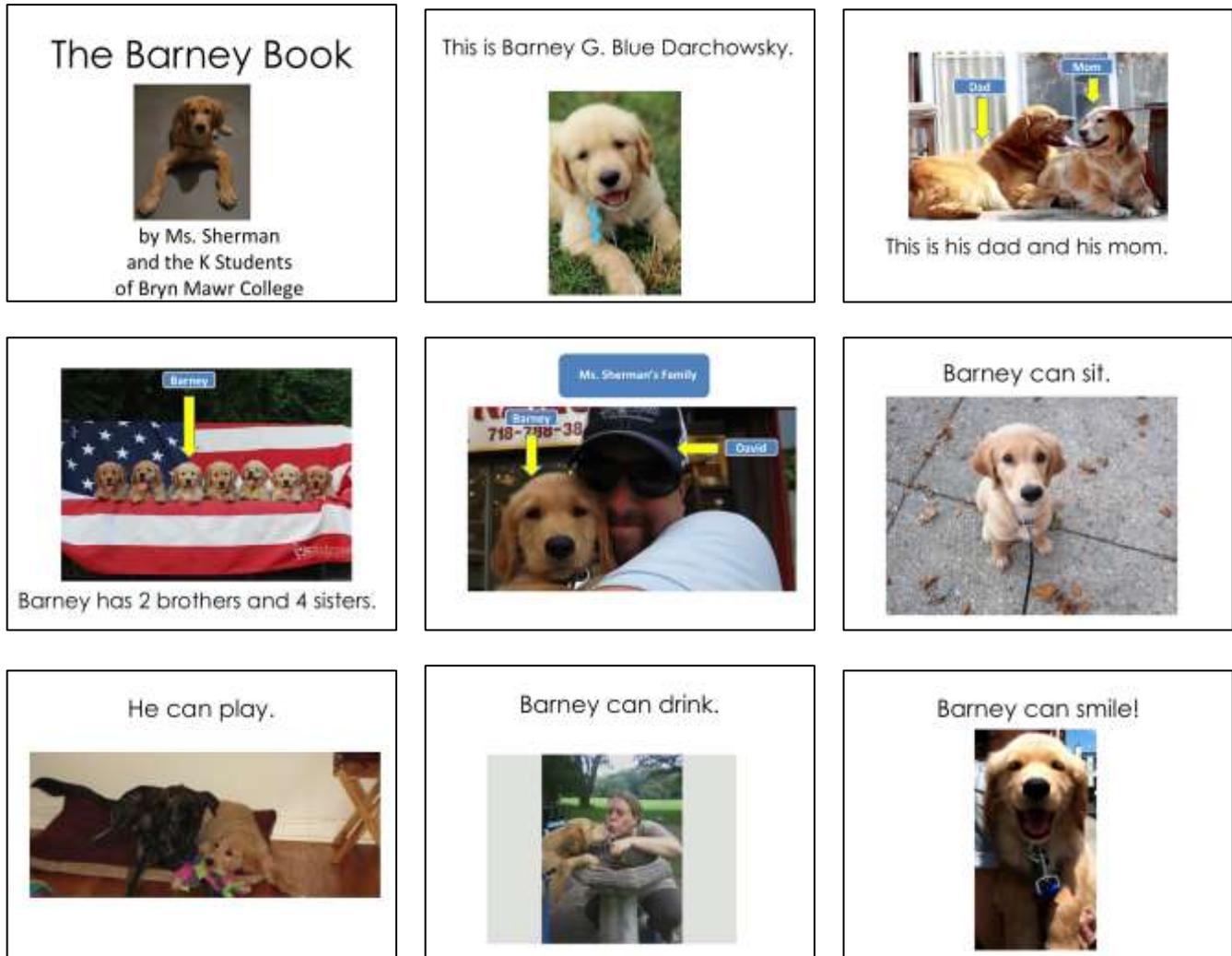
December 11-12, 2014

## Creating Meaningful Texts for Repeated Readings

*Jessica Sherman*

When it comes to creating exciting texts for shared reading, a little bit of technology goes a long way. With the help of an LCD projector, programs like PowerPoint, SMART Board technology, and apps for iPads like Scribble Press can become tools for easily creating meaningful, personal shared reading texts to use in your classroom and to send home with students.

Here is an excerpt from a book I created with a group of Kindergarteners who had joined me in my obsession over my new dog, Barney.



This book evolved pretty organically. I had recently led a couple of professional development sessions on Interactive/Shared Writing and on Shared Reading. One of the teachers in my class was brand new to teaching and had asked me to model some Shared Reading with her class. Her room was next door to my office, and over the first few months of school we had bonded over our mutual love of dogs. I had just gotten Barney a few months before, and often demanded that she look at the unending stream of pictures I was constantly taking of him. If her students were standing nearby, they would ask to see the photos too. By October, Barney was already a kindergarten celebrity. So as we discussed how I might model Shared Writing and Reading, a book about Barney became a clear choice.

I started by talking to the students about creating a class book about Barney. We looked at some "All About Texts" that they were familiar with and talked about how we might create a similar book. I started by putting some easily captioned photos

of Barney into a PowerPoint presentation. We discussed and negotiated the text that I typed on each page. We talked about the purpose of captions and headings. We talked about the implications of calling Barney by name or by pronoun. When the text was all written we had a discussion about the page order. It was a student's idea to put the "Barney can smile!" page last, because he thought that Barney would be happy after doing all of the activities in the book. Another student suggested that we use the exclamation point at the end.

After viewing our book as a slide show and reading it together several times, I chose the "6 Slide Handout" option from the PowerPoint printing menu and sent a copy home with all of the students. They were thrilled. I also color printed each slide and bound the book for their classroom library. This became the first in a series of books I created about Barney – some on my own and some with the help of the students. At our annual holiday arts celebration, many Kindergarten parents stopped me to ask me about my dog. They let me know that had learned more than they ever wanted to know about Barney.

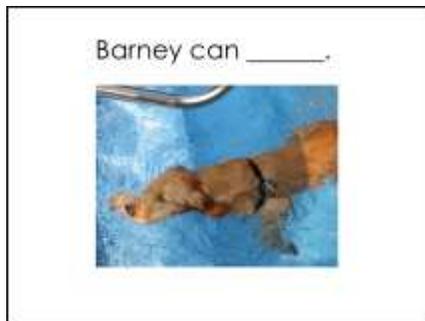
When creating/co-creating texts for shared reading, The Shared and Performance Reading section of *The Continuum of Literacy Learning* guided all of my decisions. I found it helpful to ask the following questions:

- Is the subject matter engaging? (The subject matter was often dictated by which events/subjects I could capture on my smart phone. Keep in mind that focusing these texts on experiences that are shared by the community assures that the text is meaningful to all students.)
- Can the language structures in the text be made accessible to students? Are they repetitive and/or predictable?
- Is the print large enough for all students to notice even the finest details?
- Are there some known high frequency words and names that will "anchor" students in the print?
- Are there familiar word patterns that the students might recognize and use?
- Are the design features appropriate for the readers?

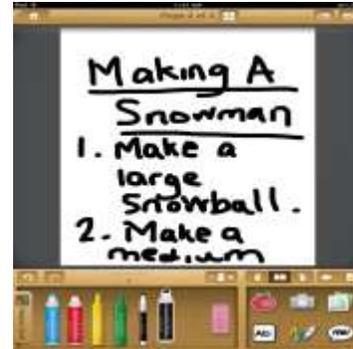
By carefully manipulating the book and print features, students were supported as they processed print in continuous text. PowerPoint, Keynote, and other similar programs allow you to use what you know about your students to create books that meet their specific needs. Brenda Parkes reminds us in *Read It Again: Revisiting Shared Reading* that "when children are encouraged by the appropriateness of the book and the support and expectation of the teacher and the group, they will become active problem solvers" (p. 14-15).

Book and Print Feature	Consider...
Font, font size color	Which font will be clearest to your students? <i>I preferred Century Gothic because its ts gs as were familiar to my students. The bigger the print the better!</i>
Spacing	What do your students understand about word boundaries? <i>Sometimes exaggerated spacing goes a long way when trying to establish a voice to print match!</i>
Text layout	Will text be in a consistent, predictable place on the page? <i>It is important to consider what students understand about directional movement.</i>
Number of lines	Can students use a return sweep? How many lines of text can they control? <i>Think about how the number of lines will ultimately affect the size of the font you choose.</i>
Parsing	How do line breaks impact the way students will read the text?

Sometimes I used the animation capabilities of PowerPoint to demonstrate new reading behaviors and to practice strategic actions that students were just beginning to bring under control. In the slides below, I was demonstrating how to cross-check the meaning gathered from the photo with the initial sound in the word "swim." To the delight of the children, the line, the letter "S" and the word "swim" floated into the frame as we discussed and confirmed their thinking.



If you have access to a touch screen device like an iPad, Scribble Press might be an interesting tool for Interactive Writing. Teachers can use their finger or a stylus to write words directly into a book template and invite students to contribute. When the Interactive Writing is completed it can be projected as a Shared Reading piece. Teachers can create and share books they have made on the Scribble Press website or on an iPad with a specified, private group. These books can be viewed on other devices in the classroom or at home. SMART boards offer similar opportunities to export and share.



Variety is the spice of life. As Fountas and Pinnell explain in *Teaching for Comprehending and Fluency* “No one format is best for shared reading: using a variety of formats will develop flexibility in young readers.” (p. 311). If you exclusively use “new” technology in Shared/Interactive Writing and Shared Reading, so much can be lost. When reading, using traditional texts, like Big Books, provides students with a chance to explore some print concepts that PowerPoint presentations cannot (such as discerning between front and back cover and how to turn pages) and to meet some important literary characters. We would never want to deprive our students of some quality time with Mrs. Wishy-Washy! When writing, it’s important to note the difference between pulling and pushing a marker on chart paper and sliding a chubby finger across a slippery iPad screen. Effectively using both traditional texts and these technologies can be a wonderful way to help readers strengthen their literacy understandings, while also strengthening the classroom and school community.

Parkes, B. (2000). *Read it again! Revisiting shared reading*. York, ME: Stenhouse.

Fountas, I.C. & Pinnell, G.S. (2006). *Teaching for comprehending and fluency: Thinking, talking, and writing about reading, K-8*. Portsmouth, NH; Heinemann.

### Summer Literacy Institute

July 14-17, 2014

#### *Intentional Instruction in a Readers' Workshop: Understanding Readers, Texts, and Teaching, Grades K-8*

During this four-day institute, you will study the structures and rationales for Readers' Workshop and examine how the use of whole-group minilessons, small-group instruction, independent reading, and the language of conferring support the growth of all readers while meeting the demands of the Common Core State Standards.

Learn how to establish routines for managing the classroom, engage students in writing about reading that maximizes the impact of Reader's Notebooks, and select texts for a variety of purposes.

This institute will conclude with a meaningful whole-group share.

### **i3 Research Study Shows Large Impact of Reading Recovery Intervention**

*Wendy Vaulton*

The Consortium for Policy Research in Education (CPRE) recently released the first of three evaluation reports from the i3 scale-up of Reading Recovery. If you haven't had a chance to read it yet, the headline finding is that Reading Recovery produces "large positive effects on student literacy performance overall, and these positive effects were also large for ELL students and students in rural schools." In fact, children in Reading Recovery scored twice as high on the Iowa Test of Basic Skills as their similar peers. The gains in achievement made by Reading Recovery students translate to an additional 1 to 2 months of learning during a 3 to 5 month intervention, or an increase of 120-166% over the typical rate of learning for first graders.

This report, released in August 2013, is part of a rigorous and comprehensive external evaluation of the i3 scale up. The findings are based on data from 866 students at 147 schools across the country. The research team also collected extensive information about implementation and interviewed teachers, administrators and other stakeholders. Regarding implementation, the research team found that "school level implementation of Reading Recovery was, in most respects faithful to the Reading Recovery Standards and Guidelines."

The CPRE research team also notes that the impact of Reading Recovery goes well beyond what is represented by large gains in test scores. The investigators note that impact on teachers is profound, and "many Reading Recovery teachers reported that and their Reading Recovery teaching was transformative in terms of their own instruction and understanding about literacy."

Regarding impacts at a system level, the CPRE research team suggests that "while it is still too early to say whether Reading Recovery is inspiring systemic organizational changes, two things are clear. First, Reading Recovery is positively affecting student literacy outcomes, and second, RR teachers are sharing their new knowledge, strategies, and information with other teachers in their schools."

The Center for Reading Recovery and Literacy Collaborative at Lesley University is one of 19 universities involved in this nationwide effort to help schools implement Reading Recovery and train teachers to work with lowest-performing first graders. The initiative is part of a 5-year, \$45.6 million grant awarded to The Ohio State University by the U.S. Department of Education's Investing in Innovation (i3) Fund. An additional \$9.1

million private sector match was also raised to support the scale-up across the United States. The report released in August will be followed up by subsequent reports scheduled to be released in 2014 and 2015.

**For more information and to download the report**

**Executive Summary:**

[http://www.cpre.org/sites/default/files/other/1489\\_rrexecsummary.pdf](http://www.cpre.org/sites/default/files/other/1489_rrexecsummary.pdf)

**Full Report:**

[http://www.cpre.org/sites/default/files/researchreport/1488\\_readingrecoveryreport.pdf](http://www.cpre.org/sites/default/files/researchreport/1488_readingrecoveryreport.pdf)

### **Primary Ongoing Professional Development**

February 3-7, 2014

### **Teacher Talk**

*Helen Sisk*

As observers of teaching, we look for evidence that students are learning, and that they have high quality instruction to develop as readers and writers. The heart of that growth is effective teaching. As coaches, we need to ensure that it is happening every day for every student.

Teaching demands that we meet each student at his or her level of competency. We need to be keen observers and flexible in our approach in order to teach them to become active and independent learners. In the article, "[Are you Scaffolding or Rescuing?](#)" written by Terry Thompson (2010); he states, "...scaffolding our instruction is anything but simple, requiring skillful teaching moves based on thoughtful interpretations of all the various information we can gather on our students."

So how do we help teachers understand the Goldilocks syndrome? You know, the practice of finding the "just-right" level of support - not too much assistance, which keeps students dependent upon us; nor too little scaffolding, which overwhelms students so they begin guessing or lose motivation to learn.

It begins by listening. Listen to what the student says. Words are a window into the thinking process. Interpret what is said to determine what the student knows and where confusions set in.

It also begins by noticing the student's agency. What's his approach learning? What does he do effectively and what next steps need support? Then piece these two aspects

together to formulate a response – perhaps a prompt or comments that teach or reinforce. “The language we choose in our interactions with children influences the way they...develop a sense of agency” (Johnston, 2004, p. 34).

This decision-making happens quickly throughout every interaction we have with students. We make teaching choices constantly. It is the quality of our assessment of the situation and our knowledge of the student as a learner that drives our intentional scaffolding.

In your own teaching and as you coach teachers, focus on the talk and behaviors between students and teachers.

**Step 1: Evaluate the talk:**

- Are students doing most of the talking?
- Does the talk allow students to be engaged or passive?
- Is the teacher talk about process with gradual release? “Let me show you.” “Let’s try it together.” “Now you try.”
- Do questions, like the following direct the thinking? “How did you figure that out?” “What else could it be?” “I wonder...”
- Is the talk around meaning?
- Is the talk clear to students?
- Is there wait time so students can process a question or idea and articulate a response?

**Step 2: Notice the behaviors of students and teachers.**

- Is the student involved with constructing meaning?
- Are there opportunities for students to have-a-go, make mistakes, and figure out how to fix them without teacher intervention?
- Does the teacher move in with a level of support that allows the student to adjust, and then, problem solve independently?
- Is there a clear focus to the teaching/talk?
- Are students working as hard as the teacher?
- Does the teacher take useful anecdotal notes on the student?

Terry Thompson states, “No learner can afford to be dependent on the teacher for everything that needs to be noticed, so teachers have to teach children to look for possibilities.” Our teaching and coaching observations must reflect this focus.

**School Leaders Seminar**

July 21-24, 2014

**Phonics, Spelling, and Vocabulary in the Reading/Writing Classroom (Grades K-3)**

*Spring 2014*

March 7-9, 2014

April 4-6, 2014

*Summer 2014*

August 11-15, 2014

**Building Rationales into Minilessons**

*Elizabeth DeHaven*

In this day and age it can feel like standards trump what we know is best for students. There is immense pressure to cover a multitude of standards, which often results in instruction that appears to be a mile wide and an inch deep. In addition to addressing curriculum goals, teachers must consider what students need, the rationale behind why readers do what they do, make it clear to students, and provide them with a process for learning and integrating those reading behaviors into their reading process. It’s a tricky dance; one that requires teachers to be careful observers of students and analytical and critical readers of state standards.

By using a process that encourages us to think about how the standards translate into authentic reading behaviors, we counter the trend of teaching for coverage and move toward teaching for understanding. We rely on our curriculum, *The Continuum of Literacy Learning* (COLL), to help us determine what behaviors and understandings to notice, teach, and support. As we look over the behaviors and understandings listed at each grade level, we think about what they mean for our students as readers in authentic contexts. Connecting a reading behavior to what is relevant to students assists in integrating it into a student’s reading process.

While teaching students to be stronger readers happens in multiple instructional contexts throughout the day, the minilesson provides our students an opportunity to work and think together as a whole class about the reading process through shared texts and conversation. The rationale is a crucial component of the teaching that takes place in a minilesson, and one that can be overlooked when standards become the primary language of the classroom.

### A Process for Determining Minilessons and Rationales

There are several factors to consider when looking over curriculum goals and standards and planning instruction: what do my students know, what do they need to know, how does the curriculum fit with my students' needs, and how do I translate the curriculum into authentic teaching.

#### Student Observation

This is an important first step. Thinking about what the students in your class can do as readers ensures that student needs are the driving force behind instruction. A few questions to consider are:

- What are my students doing as readers?
- What do my students need to learn next?
- What types of books do they choose for independent reading?
- What are the demands of the texts the students are reading during independent and small group guided reading?

#### Example:

*Through conferences, I notice that many of my students are reading books during independent reading that require them to consider point of view's impact on the story. They are reading books that are told from both first and third person. This also happens to be on my curriculum standards.*

#### Teacher/Team Analysis:

After determining what to teach, thinking through the reading behavior or understanding and curriculum goal is an imperative part of this process. It provides an opportunity to get inside and gain a deeper understanding of how the skill or behavior you want students to take on will help them as readers in authentic ways.

Doing a little groundwork before teaching this minilesson is a worthwhile endeavor. Thinking about the following questions spurs a bevy of thoughts that help to get inside of the reading behavior or understanding and see it from all sides while considering the authentic contexts in which readers encounter and use this skill.

### Literacy Leadership Team Institute

*Primary Teams (K-2)*  
February 11-13, 2014  
April 7-8, 2014

*Intermediate and Middle School Teams (3-8)*  
February 25-27, 2014  
April 9-10, 2014

- What are my personal experiences with this skill/behavior?
- When and why do I do this in my own reading?
- How does this skill/behavior help readers develop a deep understanding of the text or a more proficient reading process?
- What do my students need to know about this behavior or understanding?

*Example: (This brainstorm is a result of being in the reader's stance).*

- *I think about my experiences as a reader of stories told in the first person and how I'm able to be a part of the narrator's inner thoughts, feelings, and decisions he or she wrestles with as the story moves forward.*
- *While being privy to those inner thoughts can often feel like a gift, I also realize I'm limited. My field of vision is only what the narrator sees. I don't always know what the other characters are doing and thinking. When have I recognized this in my reading and how did it impact my understanding of the story? What did I adjust to continue making meaning?*
- *This leads me to examine third person. Reading a story written in third person permits me to experience the story as an outsider. I gain a more global view of the characters and the events as they unfold. However, I'm not privileged to internal dialogue, making it necessary to draw on other sources of information in order to develop a sense of the characters and their experiences.*
- *Another thing I think about is the author's decision to write from one perspective over another.*

#### Minilesson Development

Use what is uncovered from the earlier brainstorm to conceptualize minilessons. What do readers do and why?

#### Example:

- *Readers notice that stories told from the narrator's point of view allow us to hear his or her inner thoughts and help us understand this character.*
- *Readers think about the author's decision to write from the narrator's perspective in order to better understand the theme.*
- *Readers notice stories told from 3<sup>rd</sup> person point of view provide a more global view of characters.*
- *Readers think about the author's decision to write in 1<sup>st</sup> person rather than 3<sup>rd</sup> person in order to understand how the author wants the reader to interact with the story.*

Topics for minilessons and authentic rationales for those minilessons emerge from this process because it causes us to think about it as readers. What is it we want/need to teach our students and why?

#### *Grade Level Support*

This process is compelling when done alone in preparation for teaching, but can be even more powerful when done with a grade level team or a teaching partner. Teaching partners or grade level colleagues can play a supportive role in determining what to teach, why to teach it, and how to structure the minilesson. When this happens, we are not limited by our own understanding and perspective.

Determining the rationales for minilessons is complicated because it requires us to step out of our role as teachers and draw on our own experiences as readers. Curriculum and state standards are invariably going to be a part of our educational fabric; however it is necessary to thoroughly think through them and consider the authentic implications they have on readers, while first and foremost considering students needs.

### **Leveled Literacy Intervention for the Primary Grades K-2**

*Summer 2014*

Days 1-3: August 5-7, 2014

Days 4-6: November 5-7, 2014

### **Leveled Literacy Intervention for the Intermediate Grades 3-5**

*Summer 2014*

Days 1-3: July 8-10, 2014

Days 4-6: November 12-14, 2014

### **The Reading Conference as Teacher Research: A lot can happen in five minutes**

*Toni Czেকanski*

I've been thinking about looking at the bits lately...looking at how the bits can inform the bigger picture. It's easy to get overwhelmed with all there is to do every day between teaching, coaching, and professional development. So what can you do to help your teachers take one small step that will potentially affect their teaching and their students' learning? Let's look at one little bit: the reading conference. Reading conferences generally take less than five minutes per student: a little bit of time. But in those few moments, you can learn a lot, teach a lot, and hopefully lift a student's thinking as a reader.

#### **Why take time to confer?**

Reading conferences are one of the most powerful ways of connecting with students on an individual level, and can be instrumental in helping them grow as readers. Take a minute to list all that can be accomplished in a brief conference. What is on your list? My question to you now is, what *else* can be done to make your list even more powerful? What *more* could you accomplish? What *more* could your student get out of this interaction?

#### **What do you teach?**

This of course brings you to the big question of what students need to learn as readers. Sit down with your colleagues and ask them that question. Then dig even deeper. Be as specific as you can. You want them to be able to recognize and talk about genre. You want them to understand how text structure can help or sometimes get in the way of successful reading. Perhaps you identified effectively thinking within, beyond, and about the text as outcomes. You want them to recognize their strengths and needs as readers. You want them to love reading. What else?

#### **Analyzing conferences: teacher research**

List your outcomes, and take a minute to reflect on how effective you are during conferences at supporting these outcomes. What is working in conferences, and what still needs help? Are conferences honest conversations, inquisitions, or something in between? How can you determine whether or not your conferences are helping your students grow as readers?

One suggestion is to spend one month this year focusing on conferring with your professional development class. More specifically, ask your teachers to do a "mini teacher research" on their conferring practice.

- Select two students with whom they will document reading conferences once a week for one month by recording them on video.
- The teacher views the videos once a week, alone or with a partner, and documents her language and what the students say.
- She asks questions like these after watching the conference: "How has this conference helped the student reach the goals that we identified as our desired outcomes for students as readers?" "What am I doing to make conferences effective?" "What do the students understand about their role in the conference?" "How do my students know I care about their learning?" "Are the students taking an active part in their learning?" "What is my evidence?"
- Each teacher should identify and record a personal goal to work on for the next week's

conferences. What is one thing they can do to make their conferences be more effective?

- These goals can be shared with you during coaching sessions or shared at your professional development class.
- Repeat the process for at least four weeks.
- At the end of the month, make time to share teachers' reflections on this process during your professional development class. What did you all learn? What shifts occurred?
- Discuss the process, and discuss more global goals that you can set as a group to continue to improve conferences and do the rigorous teaching that is required to meet the standards and curriculum outcomes.

How can you help the teachers in your school teach more effectively during conferences? Think about the how, the what, and the why. First, be sure they understand the purpose and structure of conferences. Next, talk with one another about the content of literacy: what needs to be taught? Be sure teachers are comfortable in their own knowledge of the content of the reading curriculum. Finally, discuss the personal and rigorous nature of conferences: they are brief, purposeful, and collaborative opportunities to engage students in work that can help them meet their instructional goals.

Sometimes by studying the bits, you can learn things that will help you in more general ways. Taking the stance of a person who cares deeply about her students, listens to them every day, waits for them to think and express themselves, asks meaningful questions to extend their thinking, and prompts them to think even deeper is something you can do across the workshop. You just get to practice it intensely five minutes at a time during a conference.

**An Introduction to Guided Reading in an Effective Literacy Program (Grades K-2)**

July 28-August 1, 2014

**An Introduction to Guided Reading in an Effective Literacy Program (Grades 3-8)**

August 11-15, 2014

## Learning Curves

*Heather Morris*

With the last bit of snow here in New England, it was the perfect time to head up to ski in the mountains of New Hampshire. With every trip to the mountain I am in awe of the speed and ease with which skiers make their way down the slopes. I just expect myself to be a seasoned pro swooshing down the black diamonds, which is quite unreasonable for a skier of my skill level! As I slowly made my way down the beginner hill, I began thinking of how it seemed easier now than even last season - some things just began to fall in to place. Muscles that once ached were now well-trained and working in unison with each other.

My memories of learning to ski and what it took to get there, reminded me of the work we do as coaches. As a new trainer with the intermediate and middle school team, I am just getting back in to the role of coach. My recent foray back into coaching has made me think about how we need to pay attention to our needs as learners to guide our coaching practice. Taking time to look at coaching techniques that suit me, and that I am ready to use takes time, just like learning to race down that black diamond slope...it does not happen without work. It's OK to try something new, fall down, and then get back up. The opportunity to try something new, make mistakes, reflect and try again must be at the forefront of long-lasting change. As we take on new learning, these opportunities are important in our ongoing work around coaching, just as it is for teachers and students as they take on new learning.

### Mistakes, or learning opportunities?

As coaches we need to make sure that we provide teachers with the chance to explore, discuss, and contradict the new learning that they are being asked to take on. There will be peaks and valleys as they construct their new learning, and we want them to embrace that dissonance. We must create an environment in coaching sessions, professional development classes, and in a school culture where dissonance is valued and perceived as an opportunity for growth. As teachers plan a reading minilesson, share an interactive read aloud, or teach within a guided writing lesson, they must be given an opportunity to take risks and reflect in order to see the opportunities to refine their understanding that will ensure long-lasting change.

### Tick-Tock

Time is something that we never seem to have enough of and with the pressures of standardized testing, teacher evaluations tied to test scores, and other state and district mandates it can seem as though time is running out. Time

is a critical factor in the change process. Teachers need to feel they have time to rethink and reform their teaching practice. This will allow them to own their new learning. Rationales will then become part of how they see things and therefore will influence every dimension of their teaching. As coaches we must be cognizant that everyone will take on new learning at different rates, and be mindful of the change that is happening over time.

### Variety

Empowering teachers to make choices in the classroom is critical in guaranteeing a shift in practice. Guiding teachers to develop rationales based on the needs of their students and their knowledge of reading and writing processes, will help teachers see how they can make choices that create and nurture independent, lifelong readers and writers who find joy in learning.

As coaches we need to keep in mind that taking on new learning can cause disequilibrium. In *The Challenge of Change: Start School Improvement Now*, we are reminded that, “the concept that captures persistence and flexibility is resilience. Because change is complex, difficult, and frustrating, the change process requires pushing ahead without being rigid, regrouping despite setbacks, and not being discouraged when progress is slow” (Fullan, p 20). It will serve us well to recognize and support that in our work each day.

Fullan, M., Cuttress, C., Kilcher, A. (2009). “8 Forces for Leaders of Change”. *The Challenge of Change*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin.



## The Second To Third Grade Transition: A Gnawing Question

*Cindy Downend*

2014: A brand new year with the same old question coming up while working with a group of principals during the first week. Why do so many educators express concern with children transitioning from second to third grade? Why do so many see such a mismatch between the demands of the 3<sup>rd</sup> grade curriculum and the capabilities of the children? Why do so many teachers and some coaches become perplexed and dumbfounded on how to smoothly transition students from second to third grade? I've been ruminating on this perceived “dilemma” for a while now and have come up with a conclusion of my own... The transition from second to third grade can be as seamless as any other grade progression if we consider stamina, communication, child development, and the demands of the curriculum.

1. **Stamina** – I start here because I believe it is the biggest issue at the heart of this problem. Second grade readers' and writers' workshops need to be structured in ways that begin building stamina in the children from the beginning of the second grade year. We cannot wait until third grade. If a workboard is used in the second grade readers' workshop, students need to be independently reading and writing about reading for the majority of the time. Perhaps one literacy center is included at the beginning of the year and eventually goes away as second graders build their capacity for reading and writing for long periods of time. Responsive Classroom just published an article by Kate Umstatter entitled “Teaching Students to Stay Focused” that is featured on their website, [www.responsiveclassroom.org](http://www.responsiveclassroom.org). Umstatter provides sound thoughts on how to build reading stamina with 3<sup>rd</sup> graders. I would argue that every suggestion she offers can appropriately be used with 2<sup>nd</sup> graders!
2. **Communication** – Consider how often second grade teachers and third grade teachers come together to discuss the vertical alignment of curriculum in your school. Have there been cross-grade opportunities to discuss the transition between these grades? If Literacy Collaborative is implemented in your school across grades K-5, chances are you have a primary level coach and an intermediate level coach. How has professional development been aligned across the 2 levels? As a faculty, do you analyze and share 3<sup>rd</sup> grade summative data with the primary level grades?

Remember those standardized testing outcomes are a product of the students' academic lives from kindergarten to third grade.

3. **Development** – Ruminating on the 2<sup>nd</sup> – 3<sup>rd</sup> grade question sent me back to consider the developmental milestones and changes that eight and nine year olds typically experience. I pulled out *Yardsticks* by Chip Wood to think more about this. In writing about eight year olds, Wood emphasizes how enthusiastic children at this age can be. He states, "The job of the second or third grade teacher is to harness the energy and give it some direction and focus. Teachers need to help children cut work down to bite-size pieces throughout the year...Children at this age need to experience "incremental success" in their school work – success in gradually increasing quantities and levels of complexity – so they will continue to be motivated and excited." (Wood, p. 84). Perhaps this recommendation is especially important for third grade teachers to consider. The academic demands on third graders increases fairly dramatically. Are 3<sup>rd</sup> grade teachers scaffolding the learning in such a way that will support 8 and 9 year old students in achieving "incremental success" across the school year? Or are they squelching motivation and engagement by making tasks too difficult?

4. **Curriculum Demands** – Woods' description of 8 and 9 year olds got me thinking about how the learning goals for 3<sup>rd</sup> graders broaden and expand from those for 2nd graders. Just comparing the goals for *Interactive Read Aloud* from *The Continuum of Literacy Learning* at each grade level is eye-opening. Text complexity is changing significantly. For the first time we see some mature themes included with a few abstract ideas presented. Readers begin to hypothesize the significance of events and setting in influencing characters' decisions and attitudes and must begin to recognize and discuss symbolism. In short, the reader is called upon to use more abstract thinking about the world outside his or her immediate experience. (Fountas & Pinnell, p. 26 – 29).

This list of things to consider is by no means exhaustive. My hope is that it might foster discussion around this question that seems to gnaw at so many educators. Please share your thoughts, reflections, and insights if you too have been grappling with this topic at your school.

**Resources:**

- Fountas, I.C., & Pinnell, G.S. (2011). *The continuum of literacy learning grades prek – 8: A guide to teaching*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.
- Umstatter, K. (2014, Winter). *Teaching students to stay focused*. Retrieved from <http://www.responsiveclassroom.org/article/teaching-students-stay-focused>
- Wood, C. (1997). *Yardsticks: Children in the classroom ages 4 – 14*. Greenfield, MA: Northeast Foundation for Children.

**A final thought on Whole-School Efforts to Deepen the Teaching of Writing [Reading], from *Study Driven: Planning Units of Study in the Writing Workshop* by Katie Wood Ray:**

"How can we grow this work across the years so that students are doing deeper and deeper work in writing [reading] as they grow older in school? As we've worked together to think about this question, one thing we've realized is that depth in writing [reading] work is made possible more by what stays the same year after year than by what is different from grade level to grade level. When students encounter whole new ways of doing things every year, whole new stances to teaching and learning, whole new notions of what writing [reading] means and what writing [reading] is supposed to be when it's good, it takes a long time to get anything very meaningful or deep because there is so much time spent wallowing in the newness of it all.

Whenever I think about this, I can't help but picture scenes from the book and movie *Holes* where you can see the young boys surrounded by all their shallow holes. There is no way for the boys to dig deep, to dig, say, to China, because every day they have to start digging a new hole. I think this is what is happening to a lot of children in schools. Every year they start digging a different hole in a different classroom with a different agenda, so they can only get so far before they have to start all over again. Imagine how different it would be if each year, students could continue digging into the same "hole" they dug into the year before? Imagine the depth they would find in their work as the years of digging deeper went by. The challenge of course, is for whole schools of teachers to agree on what hole should be dug" (Ray, 2006, p. 183).