

# ENGAGING AND INSPIRING STUDENTS IN THE ELEMENTARY CLASSROOM

Literacy Research  
and Best Practices



BY TODAY'S LEADING EDUCATIONAL EXPERTS

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# Create Your Story



When you envision an elementary classroom, what do you see? If you're like most, you imagine a room full of students who love learning. Some students are engrossed in conversation about the books in their laps. Others are excitedly working together to solve a problem or eagerly writing ideas in their journals. There may be a few who are struggling, but they're also demonstrating how resilient young learners can be.

In this eBook, you will discover how authentic engagement can amplify learning in literacy classrooms through insights and research from today's leading educational experts, including best practices for effective implementation.



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## L I T E R A C Y



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# New Directions in Literacy Teaching: Engaging Readers and Writers in 21st Century K-12 Classrooms



**BY ERNEST MORRELL, PH.D.**  
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Literacy educators and advocates have similar goals for students. We want to engage them. We want to connect them to the world of ideas. We want ideas to inspire them to engage more powerfully with the world that they inhabit as literate and competent beings. I'll address factors that prevent this engagement with reading and writing, I will share some research convergences in literacy studies, and I will highlight a few promising practices from K-12 contexts.

We often ask ourselves how to move the needle on literacy achievement but a different question is more important to diagnosing the problem and moving toward a solution. That question is, how do we bring real joy to the readerly and writerly lives of our students? We need to think about disengagement, not lack of ability as the crisis we face in our literacy classrooms. We know that because we can see tremendous turn around in a very short amount of time with students, with classrooms, with whole schools or a school system. The students are not necessarily getting a new ability, they're certainly not getting a new socioeconomic status. But what they are doing, when they are succeeding, is becoming more engaged.

We must also be aware that disengagement is often both logical and self-destructive. We must then challenge ourselves to become experts on the logic of student disengagement. Our challenge, as literacy educators, literacy leaders, and administrators at the school or district level, is to figure out how to change that logic. This white paper draws its examples from ELA classrooms that are effectively employing high leverage literacy practices to engage all learners.

I will focus on three core practices. The first practice concerns how to nurture powerful readers, how to get students to read more, how to get them to read more critically, and how to ask more engaging questions of the texts that they read as a higher level of questions provokes an advanced level of thinking. The second practice addresses how to teach media, how to help students to become better readers of the media but also smarter and more informed producers and distributors of media. The third practice explores the development of powerful writers and the fourth practice involves generating powerful student voice in the polyvocal classroom.



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## Ten Minutes of Reading a Day Will Change a Child's Life

If we can get a student to read 10 minutes a day, it will change their literate life (Adams, 2006; Anderson, Wilson & Fielding, 1988; Beers & Probst, 2017). Students who identify themselves as struggling with reading or not liking reading will read as little as two minutes a day on their own. Those who enjoy it will read upwards of 20 minutes, which is the gold standard. However, 10 minutes is the magic number. **Just ten minutes will change a child's fluency, comprehension, and academic vocabulary.** How do we get students to read more at school and at home? How do we move from 2 minutes to 10 minutes a night? Essentially, if a child or adolescent is reading an additional 10-15 minutes a day, that amounts to approximately a million words a year. We typically have students for thirteen years, from K - 12, and if the student is reading 10 to 15 minutes daily inside of class, that's an additional 12 to 13 million words. If they add ten minutes outside of class, that's an additional 25 million words. Two children may begin school with the same ability, but all of a sudden one's literacy ceiling raises significantly as they increase their reading by 12 million to 25 million words over the duration of their schooling. What keeps children and adolescents from reading that additional ten minutes and how can we open the door to literacy so that they acquire the additional 25 million words while they're in our elementary and secondary school systems?

## How Do We Inspire Literate Lives? Three Big Questions

How do we inspire literate lives? I worked with students for several years over a 12-year period in a central city school system where we had 100% graduation rate and 100% college-going rate by implementing some of the strategies that are to follow. One key aspect of this paper is that I am committed to keeping this inspirational. The Latin root of the word, *inspire*, literally means to *breathe life into*. The question is: How do we as educators breathe that literate life into our students daily in our classrooms? We want to think about literacy as powerful student voice. What do our students want to say? What do they have to say? What do they need to say? That's the conversations they have with the texts that they're reading. It's also the conversation they have through writing and through speaking.



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There are three big questions that undergird my work. The first one is: how do we get children and adolescents excited about reading? For all the reasons I mentioned, students who are excited about reading, read more. Those who read more simply perform better across all literacy practices. They're better speakers. They're better writers. They're more critical in terms of their engagement with text. I think about this as the tiger crouch (Lave & Wenger, 1991) which is the position of a tiger about to pounce. The tiger is leaned in. That position is really important for learning. It's important for adults. We might get in the tiger crouch when we're bingeing on our seventh season of *Game of Thrones* or watching our favorite team in a football game. We get in the tiger crouch in the moments that really matter to us. What is happening is that our brain is activated at a different level when we're in that tiger crouch. The question is: How do we get students to lean in to what they're reading?

**Just ten minutes will change  
a child's fluency, comprehension,  
and academic vocabulary.**

The second question is: How do we develop students' literate identities? Their academic identity is really the cornerstone of engagement (Baker, Dreher & Guthrie, 2000; Guthrie & Alvermann, 1999; Wigfield & Eccles, 2000). If they do not see themselves as being able to do what we ask, they can not be engaged (Rumberger, 2012). But if they can see themselves as being successful in the activity, and it's valuable to them and they can see success, they are much more likely to be engaged. This identity question is key to developing students' literate identities.

The third question is: How do we make literacy learning socially, culturally, and digitally relevant? Currently, in the K-12 system we do not have any students that are remnants of the twentieth century. Even the graduating seniors in the class of 2019 were born in the year 2001. We know that middle school and high school kids are going to live to see the twenty-second century. What do they need from us now? How can we share the essential characteristics of our disciplines that we learned and loved as pre-service and early career teachers and at the same time acknowledge that the world is changing, our kids are changing, their needs are changing, the demographics are changing but much more importantly, what it means to be a literate person is changing?

### **Why Do The Students Who Want to Succeed and Can Succeed Still Fail?**

I draw on two research based assumptions to complicate simplistic explanations for student disengagement. The first one comes from the aspirational literature, which tells us that all kids want to succeed. Regardless of any identity marker, if success is possible, students will choose it. The overwhelming majority of them want to be successful in school and they know that being successful in school is important for their quality of life socially, intellectually, and materially.

**Regardless of any identity marker, if success is possible, students will choose it.**

The second assumption comes from the literacy achievement research, which tells us that the majority of schoolchildren are capable of advanced literacy learning. Scholars such as David Pearson and Barbara Taylor (2002) and Nell Duke have long questioned literacy instruction in schools serving children from lower socioeconomic backgrounds and found that improving instruction and resources leads to academic success. The most important variable in students' potential for growth and achievement is not their parent's income. Duke has consistently found that the difference in children's achievement is not their ability to learn and succeed; rather it is the ways in which they are taught and the resources available to them (Halverson, Duke, Brugar, Block, Strachan,

Berka & Brown, 2012). She has also argued for having access to a broad range of genres in classroom libraries and as environmental text (Duke, 2002). In other words, variables such as a child's socioeconomic background is not the strongest predictor of academic success. So we can assume that all kids want to succeed and all kids are capable of a level of success that they have yet to achieve. Hence, when we talk about failure, the real question should be why do kids who want to succeed and can succeed still fail. The two most common explanations outside of our profession for lack of success is kids don't want to succeed and they can't succeed. We have to completely eliminate those explanations from our conversations inside the profession. We know kids want to and we know that they can. But at the same time we know that kids still fail. When we ask the question, why do kids who want to succeed and can succeed still fail, we begin to arrive at more profound and productive explanations.

**The majority of schoolchildren are capable of advanced literacy learning.**

One explanation for why students who want to succeed and can succeed still fail is that they lose confidence, which affects their academic identity. If a student is laughed at when they offer an idea or see themselves as incapable of keeping up with the reading or not being able to jump in to a conversation, they begin to lose confidence. As soon as they begin to lose confidence they begin to engage in self-defeating, self-destructive behaviors that reinforces their underachievement. We need to offer critical feedback to students to push them forward on their learning trajectory, but in a way that maintains their confidence.

A second explanation for why students fail is a lack of perceived relevance. Drawing on 60 years of educational psychology, we have learned that a basic equation for motivation is confidence plus relevance (Wigfield & Eccles, 2000). For example, according to Wigfield and Eccles' Expectancy-value theory of achievement motivation, motivation is a function of confidence, or an expectation of success, and relevance which is a value proposition. When either confidence or relevance is lacking, kids are going to lean back from their learning.

A third explanation is that students lack engagement with high quality, relevant literature. Reading engaging texts dealing with issues that are of importance to the children and adolescents in our classrooms raises their interest. The quality of what they read matters. We have to maintain a high bar for the books and other texts that we put in front of them.

**We have to make sure that the work is relevant, that it matters and that we're asking students about their passions and concerns and trying to connect our curriculum to those concerns and passions.**

A fourth explanation for student failure is that they lack sustained engagement with a community of learners. We know that when students are working together on a project, they're much more likely to show up to school, complete that project, and say that they enjoy doing it. This is the same with adults. We're social creatures and we learn while together so figuring out ways to have children and adolescents learn together can help them to succeed. Unfortunately, if a student begins to struggle early in their K-12 trajectory, they're much more likely to be isolated, which just exacerbates the problem. Our students on the periphery are the ones that need to be welcomed in and embraced with both arms by the classroom community as they often crave a sense of belonging (Allyn & Morrell, 2016).

A fifth explanation for academic failure is a lack of engagement with the social world. How are our practices and curricula in the classroom today in 2019 relevant to 2019? It's important to read *King Lear*. It's important to understand what happened in the Civil War. But these classic texts are important to the degree that they help us to think more provocatively about our world today and for the students, the world tomorrow and all the tomorrows that will be a part of their lives.

If we take these reasons for failure and flip them, they become a recipe for success. We have to increase student confidence. We have to let students know that they can

and will succeed if they put in the work. We have to make sure that the work is relevant, that it matters and that we're asking students about their passions and concerns and trying to connect our curriculum to those concerns and passions. We need to make sure students are reading thought-provoking literature as a class as well as literature that they choose or that interests them. We have to provide opportunities for collaboration and connect what's happening in the classroom to the larger social world.

## 21st Century Learning

It is important to understand that learning is different in the 21st century than it was in the 20th century. For many of us educated in the 20th century our learning modalities are closer to Gutenberg than Zuckerberg! Learning changes as technologies change. We're moving from what would have been a receptive learning ecology to an interactive and productive one. The 21st century is about producing knowledge. It's a century where students need to develop unique and powerful voices plurally and consider the following questions: How do I speak to different audiences? How do I understand the rhetorical situation? How do I know what my audience needs to hear from me? How do I meet them where they are? There's not just one generic academic voice; there are multiple voices. It's also about learning to consider and engage diverse perspectives.

**Our classrooms need to be a space of collaboration, presentation, and invention.**

The U.S. holds 4.4% of the world's population, which means nearly 96% of the people that we could interact with in our lifetime are not even in the United States, let alone our town or state. The world is big and filled with people who have many different viewpoints. We need to understand how to engage those perspectives and allow ourselves to be informed by them. Our classrooms need to be a space of collaboration, presentation, and invention. We need to consider all of these factors and variables as we ponder what an engaging literacy curriculum might entail.

## Powerful ELA Practices in K-12 Classrooms

There are several powerful practices in the classroom that have risen to the top in the field of literacy research. Often people say there's a lot of noise in the research and question what to listen to. I encourage educators to look for the convergences in research because we have ten practices that continue to be the cream of the crop. These ten practices include:

1. Interactive read alouds
2. Critical engagement with texts
3. Independent reading
4. Classroom libraries
5. Writing for purpose
6. Inquiry and research
7. Digital and media literacy
8. Student voice (polyvocality)
9. Culturally responsive teaching
10. Social and emotional learning

Powerful literacy classrooms are spaces where teachers are reading aloud to students and helping students to critically engage texts. They are spaces where students have a chance to read on their own texts of their own choosing. Where students write for purpose and joy to share with authentic audiences; where students write as a part of genuine inquiry and research. Where students have opportunities to connect to digital technologies and raise their voices in a polyvocal classroom. Powerful literacy classrooms are places where teaching is culturally responsive and honors all the ways that young people bring culture into the classroom. Culture is not only ethnicity and race, language, religion, and age. Children and teens belong to youth cultures and local geographical neighborhoods and communities. Culturally responsive teaching means seeing every child as multicultural. Finally, powerful literacy classrooms are places where teachers consider the social and emotional aspects of student learning.



***7 Strengths to Open a World of Possible,***  
**by Pam Allyn and Ernest Morrell.**  
**Published by Scholastic, 2015.**

### Practice 1: Developing Powerful Readers

The first practice I'll discuss is developing powerful readers. For this image of the Lit Wheel (Allyn & Morrell, 2016), we think of each of these triangular pieces as a section of the wheel. The first section is joy and engagement. We cannot have a solid foundation for literacy curriculum without joy and engagement. Basically, when kids like what they're reading, we see improvement with all of the other spokes. The second section is focus and stamina, which to me is the most important part of this wheel because focus and stamina are really the barriers to any high level literacy achievement. Focus and stamina are normally metaphors connected to activities like running or sports. A child can have the ability to run or an ability to play the piano but if they don't practice they're not going to maximize that ability. It's the same with reading. Often what we consider an ability is much more of an experience issue. It just is the case that the more we enjoy what we're doing, the more focus and stamina we will have. When my college students are dozing off two minutes into my lecture, I ask them, when is the last time you fell asleep at your favorite hip-hop concert? Whether we are watching our favorite musical stars, favorite TV show or favorite athletic team, we just lose

track of time when we're doing something we enjoy. No one ever says in the fourth quarter of a hard-fought football game, boy, I'm really bored with this. I can't wait for them to finish this game. No! We have a focus and stamina for it because we enjoy it. Students may be two pages into a novel or two pages into a history textbook and they're ready to toss it away. What we really need to do is focus on the joy and engagement. The focus and stamina will come. The more focused students are and the more stamina they have to embrace words, literally to embrace them, the better chance they have to attain fluency and expression.

**The more focused students are and the more stamina they have to embrace words, literally to embrace them, the better chance they have to attain fluency and expression.**

During my career, one of the big a-ha moments occurred when I began to understand that fluency is a function of experience and not ability. We talk about kids as being fluent or not fluent as though it's innate. It really is a function of how much experience they have, which is similar to learning to speak a foreign language. If you went to Germany or Russia and you weren't familiar with German or Russian, it doesn't mean you don't have the ability to speak that language. It means you lack the experience. But say you went on a Fulbright Fellowship and you spent a year or two in Germany or Russia. All of a sudden you would begin to dream in that language. You would be able to order beers for the whole bar in that language. You would begin to tell jokes in that language and all it would mean is that you gained experience. You didn't get a new brain. You just became more fluent because you had more experience. Our real barrier is that the students lack experience because they're not necessarily having the relationship with text that fosters that joint engagement. We now know that fluency is the gateway to comprehension and all high stakes examinations across our disciplines at the elementary and secondary levels are about comprehension - even math and science exams. If students do not understand what they read, they can not demonstrate what they know. We often think about fluency and comprehension but we don't as often think about how joy and engagement, focus and stamina are really what undergird that.

## Interactive Read Alouds

One of the high level practices that I'm most passionate about is teachers reading aloud to students and interactively discussing what they read. Are we reading aloud on a regular basis to students? It could be just a few minutes. It could be the first couple paragraphs of a chapter in a book, a primary source, or a play. Reading aloud remains the single biggest game changer in K-12 literacy. The amount of time teachers read to students and engage students about what they're reading orally is the most research proven literacy practice to increase achievement (International Literacy Association, 2018). There are a few reasons and we can look at the definition of a read aloud, which goes back to the 1980's, because the answer is in the definition (Anderson, Hiebert, Scott & Wilkinson, 1985). A read aloud is, "a strategy in which a teacher sets aside time to read orally to students on a consistent basis from texts above their independent reading level but at their listening level."

There are four aspects of this definition that are important for read alouds. First, the teacher is sponsoring this activity and sets aside a time to read orally. Well into high school and maybe beyond, the students' listening level is above their reading level so they can listen at a level that they can not yet read. Hearing the text read orally is important because it's a chance for students to ingest texts that they couldn't otherwise on their own. It's also a chance for them to expand their academic vocabulary in a discipline specific way on a consistent basis. Over time, they are developing focus and stamina. The text is above their independent reading level but at their listening level, which means that students wouldn't necessarily be able to access it in the same critical ways without a teacher.

**Our classrooms need to be a space of collaboration, presentation, and invention.**

When teachers read aloud, students begin to associate reading with pleasure. It provides them with a reading role model and develops their academic vocabulary and background knowledge in how texts work, which is very important. Students learn more than just a substantive background knowledge of what the teacher is reading. They gain a knowledge of how texts are constructed rhetorically that will translate to any text that they read on their own.

Powerful read aloud strategies for ELA classrooms in grades K-12 include the following:

- Extension activities to engage prior knowledge
- Develop academic vocabulary and ask students to derive meaning from context
- Have students role play different characters
- Ask “What do you think” questions
- Have questions to promote deep understanding and share your questions with students prior to the reading
- Encourage students to brainstorm their own questions while listening
- Encourage peer-to-peer interaction to promote engagement
- Have students mark the text to identify passages they would like to discuss
- Encourage controversy, debate, and multiple viewpoints
- Have an extension activity on the back end that motivates the students to be active listeners and that allows them to continue to form their ideas about the text

**The volume of reading students do on their own is the single biggest determinant of their literacy achievement.**

Through interactive read alouds, students develop academic vocabulary. We can ask students to derive a meaning from a context by reading a sentence or passage and then ask them, what do you think this word means based on the context of the sentence. Students can role play various characters. We can ask “what do you think” questions and have questions that promote a deep understanding. Prior to reading, we can share questions with students so as we are reading, the students can think about these questions that they’re going to discuss. Students can brainstorm their own questions and teachers can have them write down a question or two that they might have so that they can offer a question in the overall discussion and engage peer-to-peer. Encouraging controversy, debate, multiple viewpoints, playing the devil’s advocate, getting students to argue different viewpoints - even ones that they may not necessarily believe in - are all powerful ways to have a vibrant polyvocal community around a text and to encourage close and critical engagement with that text.

## Student Choice and Independent Reading

In a meta-analysis of dozens of research studies, Stephen Krashen (2004) found that students’ reading achievement correlates with success in school and the amount of independent reading they do. The volume of reading students do on their own is the single biggest determinant of their literacy achievement. As previously mentioned, the magic number is 10 minutes a night. Ten to fifteen minutes a night will yield about a million words a year for students.

We need to encourage independent reading and have important conversations with students about how to connect their interests and their current reading ability level to text. We need to allow students to read and reread during class time. The books that we’re asking them to read on their own, without any real discussion in class, are ones they should be able to comfortably read with about 95% accuracy. We can ask current and former students for recommendations, have multiple forms of accountability, and have a protocol for students to set aside a book that they’re just not enjoying. We can encourage students to talk about the books they’re reading to their peers, whether it’s for a research report, English, social studies, a novel, a play, or a graphic novel. The more they’re able to talk about and be an expert on a text, the more that’s going to cohere their positive identity. We should encourage parents and guardians to ask children about what they’re reading and give them questions. Parents should be an audience of their child’s ideas for ten minutes a day. Sometimes teachers can send questions home or explain what students are learning in class. For example, teachers can share with parents that their child is participating in an important debate about a particular era of history or we’re reading a particular text in ELA, so please ask some provocative questions to your child about the topic.

## Critical Engagement With Texts

How we read is just as important as what we read. How do we engage text critically? The level of questions that we ask of texts sets the bar for the kind of thinking and discussion we’ll have around that text. If we want a high bar, we have to offer students critically and challenging questions to inspire a different level of thinking. I have been an educator for twenty-six years, and taught some books a dozen times, perhaps up to fifteen times over a period of two decades or more. What I focus on is the questions. What are the

questions that I want the students to be thinking about as they read this text and what do I want to talk about with them?

**Text doesn't just speak to students. Students have a conversation back with that text, especially when they're reading powerfully.**

My approach includes reading behind the text, within the text, and in front of the text. It can also be thought about in terms of a rhetorical triangle where there is author centered, text centered, and reader centered approaches. The first approach is reading behind the text, which is an author centered approach. We want to know who the author is. When did he or she write the text, what was happening at the time they wrote the text that would have influenced the construction of the text? These are important questions with primary sources such as texts from the 20th century or earlier centuries. What was the immediate audience and what were their beliefs or values? How did they see the world? What purpose did the text serve? We want to have 10 or 15 total questions for the students across the behind, within, and in front approaches. We choose three or four from each approach and take all of them up or down depending on the student, their age, and the discipline.

The second reading, within a text, is the most common. Even more important than telling students to read a text closely is giving them questions such as: What happens? What takes place? Who speaks? Who is silenced? If it's a non-fictional text, we can ask what evidence can we find in the text or about the political life of the time. How is it intended to communicate? How is it structured? What's its style? Is it evidentiary? Does it make an evidence based argument? Is it just opinionated? The real question that we have been focusing on in my classrooms and in the work that I'm doing in schools is who speaks and who is silenced? Who's absent from the text? If it's a news story or a short story, who should we be hearing that we do not? Students can read a text for its absences as much as for what's present.

The third area, reading in front of the text, is the real payoff. Students get engaged when they realize they can speak back to the text and that the text is actually the beginning

of a conversation. It's not a monologue. Text doesn't just speak to students. Students have a conversation back with that text, especially when they're reading powerfully. They can ask questions of the text such as: What are the biases? How is the text representative of the mainstream ideas of its time? How is it critical? How does it push the envelope? What are the silences? Who's missing? Who is spoken for? What contradictions or debates has the text generated or is likely to generate? What alternative readings or interpretations are there? How do we have to consider context? How might the text provoke or inspire new thinking and new action? Across the three approaches, there are approximately 20 questions. We can use them all. Teachers can put them on one 8.5 x 11 paper and tell students that these are the core questions. As they are reading, they should think about these questions and know that they will be discussed in class. The questions become a constant which give more precision to how students are reading and talking back to the text. They bring that to their writing and class conversations.

### Practice 2: Critical Media Literacy

In the early 1990s I became inspired to think about adding media to my teaching repertoire when I began reading research from the American Medical Association and the American Academy of Pediatricians. Both organizations talk about the negative health outcomes that are associated with overexposure and uncritical consumption of mainstream media. Some of those include sleep problems, depression, anxiety, and eating disorders. Both of these organizations have asked adults, mostly teachers and parents, to step up and have critical conversations with children and teens about how they consume and produce media—everything from reading, film, video games, mobile applications, to responsible citizenship and social media participation and cyber bullying. That's our responsibility. The ability to read the media is a 21st century skill that impacts employability and the ability to live as a citizen but it's also a key factor in how children and adolescents construct a social identity. This includes whether a person sees themselves as worthwhile, beautiful or powerful or smart or important or what they think a girl or a boy is supposed to be like. These are really important questions that don't just end with the classroom. They affect every aspect of our students' lives.



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## Digital Media Consumption

There are four dimensions of reading the media that I consider as being a part of our classrooms of the present and future (Mirra, Morrell & Filipiak, 2018). The first one is digital media consumption, or how we read the media text with which we are confronted. Young people spend more time engaged with the media than they do asleep, in school or with their families. They're reading the media on average seven or eight hours a day which is upwards of 50 hours a week or 2,500 hours a year. We definitely need to think about how to help young people consume media more powerfully and more thoughtfully.

Below are some questions that I give to students (Morrell, Dueñas, García & López, 2013):

- What values or ideas are promoted?
  - What does it mean to be normal (or cool)?
  - What does it mean to have power?
  - What does it mean to be desired?
  - Who is marginalized or “Othered”?
- How is the audience/recipient constructed?
  - Who is targeted?
  - What assumptions are made about the audience?
  - How does the ad/image/artifact intend to make the recipient feel about him or herself?
  - What is an audience member compelled to do/believe?

When we talk about what ideas or values are promoted, we discuss how every artifact of the media has a value proposition. And so the question is, what is the value proposition of that media artifact whether we're talking

about a song in their iTunes library, a movie in their Netflix library, a mobile application, social media, their Twitter feed, Instagram, or Snapchat. Each media artifact has a value proposition. Students should question what values are being promoted. What does it mean to have power? What does it mean to be on the outside?

**Each media artifact has a value proposition. Students should question what values are being promoted.**

The second set of questions is about how consumers are targeted as an audience and what they are being compelled to think or believe. Asking versions of these two questions helps students to think differently about the media they consume. For one of my projects, I have students complete a one month auto-ethnography of their media consumption. In other words, they become researchers of their own practices for a month and they document everything - every artifact they consume and its value proposition. It's eye-opening for them because at the end of the month we say, are these values your values? They almost always say no but I say they are going to be. In nutrition and health there is a belief that you are what you consume. The same concept applies to the media. We are what we consume. If we are consuming media with these value propositions, they will become ours.

When teaching students to be critical consumers, we have students ask the key questions above and start with old media images, from the 1950s, up to the early 2010s. The images are not necessarily a part of their life now because they have a blind spot when it comes to looking at their own media images. Therefore, it's easy to use the clay pigeon of 1950s advertising. We can look at these and say that's sexist or racist. But we want to think about how these images work and why they were so rhetorically powerful at the time. Students will begin to understand that it's not that people were ignorant in the 1950s and 1960s. They had the same intellectual capacity as we do but there were issues they were blind to in their media consumption in the same way we are blind to a lot of these same issues as they present themselves in the media we consume today. We talk about how to read the image, how to read the words, how to understand who's in power and who's not in power, what is the hierarchy, who's speaking, and who's spoken for.



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*Lincoln... Nothing could be finer.*

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We look at images for their attitudes toward consumerism. One of my favorite images of all time, in terms of media in the beginning of the “Mad Men” post World War II generation is one similar to the above image. The idea is that to be happy, you have to consume. There are three types of cars. Who wants the lower priced car? Everyone wants the custom-built one with all the bells and whistles. It doesn’t matter if you have to go in debt to get it. This is the beginning of advertising as trying to create anxiety. This certainly isn’t a picture of the low-priced model car. If you want your family to be happy, go in debt and buy a custom built machine, is a common motif in the media today. Media industries continue to encourage people to consume products that they don’t need and that they don’t have the money to buy without going into debt.

We then move closer to contemporary issues. Think of popular magazines targeting teenage girls (fashion, makeup, etc.) or teenage boys (video games, music, sports, etc.). Students might say they don’t listen to a certain rapper like 50 Cent but they know who he is or a celebrity

like Hayden Panettiere whose face might grace a glossy magazine cover. Again, these represent people and images close to contemporary time but not today. An interesting thing to note is that when looking at magazines geared towards teenage girls such as *Seventeen*, we usually see two words appear on every cover: one is *pretty* and one is *sexy*. We also see a reoccurring message about being an object of a guy’s desire, “get the guys.” Targeted toward 12 to 14-year-old girls, these types of magazines use words like *pretty* and *sexy* to sell products but also end up influencing and shaping how girls think of themselves – what it means to be *pretty*, what size you have to be, what you have to wear, and what you should care about if you want to be *pretty* and *sexy*. Unfortunately, in most of these types of magazines, there’s not much about being smart, courageous, or standing up for what you believe in. It’s all about how you look. Your joy in life, your value in life as a 17-year-old girl goes back to how you look. The products in magazines such as these are all about physical beauty or what someone else has deemed “beautiful.” They’re not selling Texas Instrument calculators! It’s makeup, mascara, earrings, and material things or the physical appearance and this is a real problem when we are talking about identity formation of young girls. That’s why the reading of the media is so critical, not just for academic attainment, but for well-being, health, and wellness.

**We can talk to students about being digital curators. If there’s a story that they think is important, they should understand how to distribute it, how to share it, and how to get the word out.**

The image on the cover of a magazine targeted towards teenage boys might not be any better. For example, imagine a cover on video games or even movies that show tough looking men holding weapons, and wearing certain clothing or having a certain style that denotes toughness. What these images convey is that if you want to survive, you have to look and be tough. In fact, you might even have to be willing to do harm to others. It’s saying that you have to be tough in order to survive and that it’s ok to be violent. How many of our young boys are destroying themselves over these images? These types of images are deadly whether we’re talking about bulimia and anorexia, anxiety

or sleeplessness, or if we're talking about fights on campus, bullying, or violence to others or to oneself. We have to help young people to be able to critically consume this kind of media that is everywhere from billboards on street corners to ads online, in magazines, on tv, favorite shows, album covers, etc.

We also want kids to know that there are good ads out there - that there's positivity in the media as well. What are some examples of the good ads? One activity that I like to do around Super Bowl time is have students look at the ads, rate them on different criteria, and decide which ones are promoting or defying these stereotypes. Then they can understand that the media is also a place that pushes back on norms.



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## Digital Media Production

The second component of critical literacy media is digital media production, which is how we write or produce media, because the technology exists for kids to be producers not just consumers. We know that many of our students are addicted to video games. In the past, I would have had students just critique a video game, like Resident Evil 5 and talk about its propensity for glorifying violence or miscegenation. This particular game also has some racist undertones for going into Africa and killing zombies. Students can talk about how these problems exist but may wonder what they are supposed to do. With a program like Scratch ([scratch.mit.edu](http://scratch.mit.edu)), students can make their own video games. It's the most ingenious resource available for helping kids learn how to code to make their own games. I've seen children and teens in classrooms, my own students,

and my own children become addicted to the idea of being able to produce and distribute their own video games that share their own values and interests. Plus, if they make it, they are much more interested in playing it. They're learning a lot about their productive capabilities and developing a skill set that's going to be really important for them moving forward.

## Digital Media Distribution

The third component of media literacy is distribution which is how we share media artifacts, both those that we create and those that we come across. We can talk to students about being digital curators. If there's a story that they think is important, they should understand how to distribute it, how to share it, and how to get the word out. A lot of media artifacts go viral because they're curated and distributed. Students can be more savvy about that. They can think about what they want to suppress as well as ideas that people need to hear more about. They can learn the art of being a curator and a distributor of digital technology.

**Students are readers of the past and present so they can become authors of the future.**

## Digital Media Invention

The fourth is becoming digital inventors which is just understanding that the new threshold for media literacy is what the students can build and what they can create. We can ask what we are doing in our school to help kids learn and develop the skill set they need to be able to invent media.

One way to bring consumption, production, distribution and invention together is through multimodal theme-based units. This can include picture books, chapter books, novels, plays, or primary sources and combining these anchor texts with films and TV shows, poetry, music, magazines, and informational texts. We can have students create traditional and multimodal products. Perhaps they can produce a documentary or public service announcement based on something that they studied or researched. Furthermore, they may take some social action around their project.

### Practice 3: Developing Powerful Writers

Students are readers of the past and present so they can become authors of the future. All students have a story they want to share—something they want to say. Writing is not so much about showing that they have a command of grammar and usage. While those are important skills, they're a means to the end. The end is being able to say something you want to say. Students should understand that *writer* is an identity, not a technical act. Writing is a way of transmitting culture in storytelling. We want students to think about writing for purpose and joy and we want them to write in 21st century genres. I'm a huge fan of assigning five to seven paragraph essays, so I'm not saying we should throw them out entirely. I'm merely suggesting that there are many other powerful genres that students can and should be writing in addition to the five to seven paragraph essay. This includes everything from blog posts to research reports to memoirs, funding proposals, and crossing the divide into fiction, drama, and poetry across the disciplines. There's a project at Columbia University where science students are writing hip-hop songs to share their findings and so they're using art and poetry to share science (Emdin, Adjapong & Levy, 2016). It certainly can transcend the humanities disciplines in terms of having students write poems, short stories, plays, documentaries, or cartoons. Each of these other genres outside of the five paragraph essay is naturally about sharing with a real audience, so the more we have students writing in these other genres, the more they're going to be writing for an audience. The more they're writing for an authentic audience, the more they will embrace the idea that it's important to revise, to be thoughtful, and to communicate as succinctly and engagingly as they can. Having these other genres available automatically moves us in the direction of writing for purpose. Writing for purpose normally is writing for joy because there's a joy in being able to share ideas and viewpoints with others.

One of my favorite examples of how this works is having students write essays and digital stories about a day in their life. They write about a typical morning and what happens in school, what they do during school, and after school. Being able to share through essays or digital stories, being able to connect a day in their life to social science research, being able to share in a memoir or essay format or even

out of the box genres like spoken word poetry or theatre of the oppressed helps students to develop their writer identity. They can also think about how a story of their life can lead to some larger social movement or social change.

I encourage students and educators to watch Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's TED talk, "The Danger of a Single Story" (2009). She talks about how writers can make more nuanced and complex arguments and bring more humility and counter evidence to their own argument thereby pushing past simple arguments. We want students to be writers. We want them to be more nuanced, more reflective, and more humble in the voice that they bring when they're sharing with others.

**Eighty percent of our waking hours are spent in some form of communication and most of that communication is speaking and listening.**

### Writing and Student Research

A second aspect of writing that I'm really excited about and have been involved in since the late 1990s is student research and social action projects. We started with these two big questions: "If you could change the world, what's one thing you would change?" and "If you could change your community, what's one thing you would change?" We take students through a process from identifying a problem to developing a question, to collecting and analyzing data all the way to creating products. The final products may be traditional or multimodal. Finally, students disseminate those products and take some form of action.

One example of this type of project is the Youth Historians in Harlem. We worked with a group of young people who were historians of their Harlem neighborhood. They collected oral histories, digitized artifacts, shared these with a local library, and made them accessible to the public. They became storytellers and digital curators of the history of Harlem while at the same time facilitating their academic achievement. After four years, the first cohort had a 100% graduation rate and 100% college going rate in a school that was ranked D on an A - F scale in the city of New York. These students were able to achieve. We then expanded the Youth Historians in Harlem program across elementary, middle, and high schools where students were becoming

primary collectors of historical artifacts, not just readers of secondary historical literature.

In another example, one that crosses ELA and social studies, students were reading the novel *Bless Me Ultima* (Anaya, 1972) and using that novel as a launch into collecting oral histories from elders in their community and learning more of their stories about migration and immigration.

**Students need to learn how to be in front of their classmates, whether it's a short research report or reciting a poem that they wrote or giving a book talk.**

In a third example of having students do research that transcends humanities, was reading a novel like *Native Son* (Wright, 1940), but using that novel to ask larger questions about race and justice in our criminal justice system. In one classroom research project I developed a mock trial unit where we put the main character of *Native Son*, Bigger Thomas, on trial (Morrell, 2008). The students in that classroom learned about the legal system and at the same time they became involved in a very critical reading of a complex text for high school students.

The last example is using a poem, like Langston Hughes' (1951), "Dream Deferred" as a launching pad to social science research. Students took that poem and used it to look at issues of engagement and inequality in their school system. They conducted interviews, visited local community organizations, made claims, and supported those claims with evidence. Finally, they created an action plan for teachers and community leaders.

#### **Practice 4: Improving Classroom Talk in the Polyvocal Classroom**

Eighty percent of our waking hours are spent in some form of communication and most of that communication is speaking and listening (Wilt, 1950 as cited in Hyslop & Bruce, 1989). It develops community, improves oral language, helps us to be better writers, and improves our confidence. But speaking is often the least taught of the literacy skills. I want us to think about how that becomes

more central to the work of literacy classrooms. That's why I call a polyvocal classroom a place where many different people are able to share their voices powerfully.

### **Improving Whole Class and Small Group Discussions**

The whole class discussion is a space where teachers model thinking out loud, similar to read alouds. The teachers model reading in conversations to model thinking out loud. Teachers model academic humility; they provide scripts for how to clarify, how to synthesize, and how to disagree without being rude. With the help of their teachers, students develop critical listening skills. Ninety-five percent of the time they spend listening in the whole class discussion. When we talk about whole class discussions, what we're really doing is helping kids to become active listeners, better questioners, and more thoughtful participants who understand how to take appropriate turns, and how to jump into and out of a conversation. A whole class discussion is a teacher led, student centered space, which often leads very well into a small group discussion, which is a student led, student centered space.

In a small group discussion students need to understand how to get in the formation for a discussion, such as a huddle or knee-to-knee, how to co-facilitate, how to be responsible for each other, how to pull someone into the conversation if they're on the outskirts, how to politely push someone back if they're dominating, how to bring synthesis or how to agree to disagree. These are all important in terms of their mutual learning, but they're also important life skills to learn how to dialogue meaningfully with others.

### **Improving Multimodal Presentations**

The final communication genre, in terms of talking in class, is how to make multimodal presentations. Students need to learn how to be in front of their classmates whether it's a short research report or reciting a poem that they wrote or giving a book talk. How do students understand the rhetorical situation? How do they understand the audience? How do they effectively incorporate technology? How do they learn how to use their voice, how to speak from the diaphragm, and how to have positive body language? We need to teach students these skills to be successful in sharing their ideas through multimodal presentations.

## Concluding Thoughts

Toni Morrison says if there's a book that you want to read but it hasn't been written yet, then you must write it. If we told people in 1870, the dawn of public schools, that within one hundred years we were going to place former slaves, immigrants from Eastern Europe, Latin America, and Asia, and women into the same classrooms and teach them all to read, they would have looked at us as if we were saying humans would live on Jupiter or grow wings. But we did it as a profession. Within a hundred years of the beginning of public schools, we have taught every American citizen how to read. Our illiteracy rate is essentially zero and it has been since 1970. So the question for us is, what are the books that we want to write with our generation of literacy educators? My mom and dad recently retired after 50 years each of teaching. My mom taught kindergarten and my dad taught high school social studies and coached football. I think about what they accomplished. For those of us that are in the middle of our career or at the end of our career, or those who are in year one, we should ask ourselves what we want to be able to say that we've done. For me, the number one goal for us is equitable distribution of literate excellence. That means all students, regardless of their zip code, regardless of where their parents come from or the language that is spoken in the home, can live a powerful literate life. We are so close to being able to say that, but the question is, how do we engage those students that are on the periphery of our classrooms? How do we enable them to be more powerful participants in classroom life?

## Teaching Makes You Eternal

My mom and dad were both teachers and collectively taught for nearly a century in very high needs schools. In 1993, when I told my dad that I was going to be a teacher, he just uttered a five word sentence to me. He said, "Son, teaching makes you eternal." My dad was a legend as a teacher in our neighborhood. He coached a rival high school in basketball, football, and track and field that I played against. He directed the International Baccalaureate program. He was department chair. He was an award-winning teacher. A few years ago my dad became really sick and that was the reason he retired. On his Facebook page, his students would say, "Mr. Morrell we love you. Mr. Morrell, I tell my grandchildren things that you taught me." Unfortunately in fall 2018, my dad passed away. I went on his Facebook page and it said, "If Mr. Morrell has made a difference in your life, go ahead and post." There were

more than 500 posts within 24 hours and literally 300 of his former students, colleagues and coaches came to his funeral and talked for an hour and a half about the impact he made on their lives. I really began to see that teaching does make a teacher eternal. Our impact lives on after we do. I often ask the teachers and educational leaders that I work with if they can remember the name of their kindergarten teacher and the overwhelming majority of them do (mine was Mrs. Cox). There is very little that we can remember from when we were five or six, but our teacher is one of them because of the role that she or he played in our lives.

**Children and teens spend 1,000 hours a year with their teachers. It is a privilege to love people's children through literacy. And that is what teachers get to do.**

My mom and I taught in the same district in Northern California and she would always say at the end of summer, "I can't wait for the babies to come!" She taught kindergarteners, and she taught me that it's a privilege to teach people's children and to love them through literacy. I have three children that I send to school daily and I expect my children's teachers to love them. Not as I love them, but as I want them to be loved by their teachers. I call my children's teachers their co-parents. Children and teens spend 1,000 hours a year with their teachers. It is a privilege to love people's children through literacy. And that is what teachers get to do. It's one of the amazing human spectacles that every fall parents bring their 5 -17 year olds to the doorstep of strangers and they walk away trusting teachers with their children's lives. There's literally a circle at Notre Dame where we see license plates from Iowa, Nebraska, and New York and the parents take turns. They drop their kids off in the circle and they head off on a freeway or back to the airport and they trust us to do something good for their children in the four years that they're with us. It is a privilege to live and operate in the public trust and that's what teachers do.

Asa Hilliard says, "I've never encountered any children in any generation that are not geniuses. There's no mystery on how to teach them. The first thing you do is treat them like human beings and the second thing you do is love them." Educators have the privilege of loving people's children through literacy.

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# Building Young Readers' Comprehension and Engagement Through Inquiry and Research

BY JULIE COIRO, PH.D.

Ask teachers to describe what they see among students who are engaged and motivated while reading, and you'll hear stories about children who are curious, interested, goal-directed, and eager to talk with others and show them what they've learned. Not surprisingly, these observations are also supported by research that characterizes engaged readers as those who ask questions, actively explore personally relevant ideas, and share their learning with authentic audiences in ways that make them feel successful and important.

As Dewey (1997/1938) proposed almost a century ago, when curriculum is built around learner instincts to talk, investigate, construct meaning, and express new discoveries with others, meaningful and transformative learning happens quite naturally. More recently, a growing body of research suggests that students learn more deeply when they have opportunities to solve real-world problems through asking questions, collaboration, research, and the development of creative products (see Barron & Darling-Hammond, 2008; Fullan, McEachen, & Quinn, 2016; Larmer, Mergendoller, & Boss, 2015). While much of this research has been conducted with older learners, elementary-age children can also benefit from intentional opportunities to wonder, explore, think deeply, and share new ideas about things that matter to them (Casey & Bruce, 2011; Hertzog, 2007).

According to the Galileo Educational Network (1999–2017), "inquiry is a dynamic process of being open to wonder and puzzlements and coming to know and understand the world." The goal of inquiry is to promote in-depth understanding and disciplinary knowledge rather than superficial awareness of topical ideas (Wilhelm, 2007). Through inquiry and shared activity, students formulate questions and investigate widely to build new understandings and the knowledge to develop a solution or support a position. In the context of reading comprehension, inquiry is defined as "a *personal* search for meaning set in motion by interest in a problem" (Cornett, 2010, p. 8). There are at least four benefits to teaching reading as an inquiry-based process of personal meaning making.

## **Inquiry helps establish a meaningful purpose for reading.**

Reading comprehension has been defined as an active process of extracting and constructing meaning from a range of texts using a small set of powerful strategies (Pressley & Afflerbach, 1995; Duke & Pearson, 2002). Importantly, more than just *taking* meaning from a text, making meaning requires a willingness and



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ability to actively engage with information from a variety of sources (Eisner, 2002). Thus, reading to actively construct meaning requires effort, persistence, and concentration—all factors that are fueled by a reader's perceived interest and value in the task (Eccles, 2005).

**Students learn more deeply when they have opportunities to solve real-world problems through asking questions, collaboration, research, and the development of creative products.**

Inquiry and research provide clear and personally driven purposes for reading beyond getting a good grade or pleasing a teacher. For example, the inquiry process includes opportunities for children to read in order to answer their own questions, share new insights with a real audience, and act on that knowledge with creative products (Galileo Educational Network, 2017). In turn, these authentic reading purposes promote young children's interest, perceived value, and desire to engage with challenging text (Collins, Brown, & Newman, 1989; Edelsky, 1991).

The inquiry process also helps to move readers beyond identifying main ideas within a single text and toward building a deeper understanding of the big ideas across multiple texts. Big ideas are those that lead readers to better understand basic truths about people and the world, which again helps establish a purpose for reading (Cornett, 2010). Turning a big idea into an essential question gives focus to the inquiry process and guides children toward research that helps them make connections to the real world (McTighe & Wiggins, 2004). Children explore the given resources, generate personally relevant questions about these big ideas, and use the inquiry process to discover and discuss how their new knowledge helps answer the essential questions. As a result, inquiry and research establish authentic and meaningful purposes for wanting to read, talk, and learn more.

### **Inquiry and research cultivate the active use of higher-level reading comprehension strategies.**

Reading activities framed in the context of sustained inquiry require students to actively coordinate higher-level cognitive strategies that are essential to comprehension and critical thinking (Swan, 2003). We know, for example, that skilled readers actively set clear goals, that they read selectively to make decisions about their reading, and that they construct, revise, and question the meanings they make as they read (Duke & Pearson, 2002). We also know that engaged readers are those who work collaboratively with interesting texts as they ask questions, gain and share new information, and transfer their knowledge to new contexts (Guthrie, Wigfield, & Perencevich, 2004).

In the context of inquiry, higher-level comprehension strategies such as purpose setting, questioning, inferring, connecting, analyzing, and synthesizing are framed as real-world problem-solving strategies (Cornett, 2010). Because sustained inquiry involves asking questions, setting goals, building evidence, and developing solutions (Buck Institute for Education, 2015), the inquiry process creates authentic opportunities for young readers to practice and apply these comprehension strategies as they grapple with challenging text around a common idea.

**The inquiry process creates authentic opportunities for young readers to practice and apply these comprehension strategies as they grapple with challenging text around a common idea.**

Supporting children as they flexibly integrate strategies to solve comprehension problems linked to big ideas also helps to cultivate children's deeper understanding of the world around them. The ability to ask questions, in particular, is essential to learning, reasoning, and understanding (Ram, 1991). Inquiry approaches that emphasize deep understanding are also associated with higher scores on standardized reading assessments (Weglin, 2004) and overall achievement growth in elementary school (Clarke, Gil, Sim, Patry, & Ginsler, 2014).

**Ideally, inquiry aims to move learners beyond building knowledge to express, reflect on, and apply their knowledge in creative ways.**

### **Inquiry and research promote active engagement and intrinsic motivation for reading.**

A large body of research focuses on how children's intrinsic motivation to read and their level of reading engagement relate to reading comprehension (Wigfield, Gladstone & Turci, 2017). Unfortunately, many students in elementary, middle, and high schools are astonishingly low in their motivation, interest, and attitudes toward reading for enjoyment inside or outside of school (Mullis, Martin, Gonzalez, & Kennedy, 2003). Yet, research has shown that when individuals have regular opportunities to actively pursue their interests while working with others to deeply understand challenging information, they become intrinsically motivated to want to learn more (Deci, Vallerand, Pelletier, & Ryan, 1991; Swan, 2003). In addition, supported opportunities for children to make choices, receive feedback, and develop their own voice as part of the learning process build competence and foster respect and a sense of belonging. Both researchers and practitioners have documented that inquiry-based literacy instruction aligned with these principles fosters positive changes in motivations for reading and attitudes toward learning (Guthrie, 2008; Guthrie, McRae, & Klauda, 2007; Harvey & Daniels, 2009).

### **Inquiry encourages opportunities for self-directed learning and personal agency.**

Ideally, inquiry aims to move learners beyond building knowledge to express, reflect on, and apply their knowledge in creative ways (Hobbs, 2017). In the context of inquiry-based literacy instruction, learners are guided toward deciding how they will act on their knowledge in and beyond the classroom (Coiro, Dobler, & Pelekis, forthcoming). For example, young children might use their knowledge and creative products to start conversations, raise awareness, or change minds in ways that help others, including friends, family members, or people in their community. These actions, described by Edna Sackson (2017) as the "so what of learning," can foster students'

beliefs that their learning is relevant and meaningful in ways that can help make a difference in the world.

Inquiry also provides opportunities for learners to develop self-regulatory skills needed for academic and life success (Coiro & Putman, 2014). These skills include goal setting, self-monitoring, time management, and self-evaluation (Zimmerman & Cleary, 2006). Early in the inquiry process, children engage in goal setting and strategic planning; during inquiry, children focus their attention and monitor their use of effective meaning-making strategies; and after inquiry, they reflect on their abilities and progress in accomplishing their goals. Thus, engaging in the inquiry process before, during, and after reading provides a natural and supported opportunity for young learners to engage in all three phases of self-regulation, including forethought, performance, and self-reflection (Zimmerman & Campillo, 2003). Offering repeated models and feedback about how inquiry can be applied to solve information problems builds students' confidence in how to apply these strategies to solve their own challenges. Over time, repeated success in these inquiry-based reading practices enhances one's sense of self-efficacy, which, in turn, promotes an increased sense of personal agency. In the context of inquiry, having personal agency means that young children feel capable in their ability to generate questions and guide their learning toward a deeper understanding that helps answer their essential question.

### **Understanding Technology Use as Part of Inquiry**

Researchers have begun to outline the important role that technology can play in fostering engagement, deeper learning, and digital literacy skills as part of inquiry. Some have introduced instructional frameworks for implementing Internet research and comprehension in the context of purposeful inquiry projects. One study found compelling evidence across ten fifth-grade classrooms that instruction in Internet inquiry significantly increased students' ability to comprehend, synthesize, and evaluate online resources compared to nine fifth-grade classrooms that had more traditional reading instruction (see Kingsley, 2011). Explicitly weaving supports for online reading skills into inquiry-based instruction can foster young students' ability to generate high-quality inquiry topics, effectively search for and determine the credibility of online sources, and connect ideas across texts to synthesize what they learned about their focus of inquiry (Kingsley & Tancock, 2013).

Teachers who collaborate with librarians to implement inquiry-based approaches to learning can positively impact children's reading and information literacy skills.

Elsewhere, teachers are integrating elements of guided reading, reciprocal teaching, and online reading comprehension to support first graders as they transition to reading on the Internet (Salyer, 2015), and they are discovering how inquiry and online reading instruction can positively transform teaching and learning with elementary school children from low-income homes (Dwyer, 2013) or those learning English as a second language (Castek, 2008). Finally, research has shown that teachers who collaborate with librarians to implement guided inquiry-based approaches to learning can positively impact children's reading and information literacy skills (Chu, Tse, & Chow, 2011; Kulthau, Maniotes, & Caspari, 2007).

In the past few years, I have been working with Beth Dobler, another university literacy professor, and Karen Pelekis, a first-grade teacher, to consolidate the ways that technology can be used to support and extend literacy and learning in elementary classroom settings (Coiro, Dobler, & Pelekis, forthcoming). One framework that has emerged from this work is a continuum that lays out five purposes for integrating technology with learning outcomes that are naturally woven into the inquiry process (see Figure 1). This framework is grounded in important knowledge goals outlined in Bloom's Digital Taxonomy

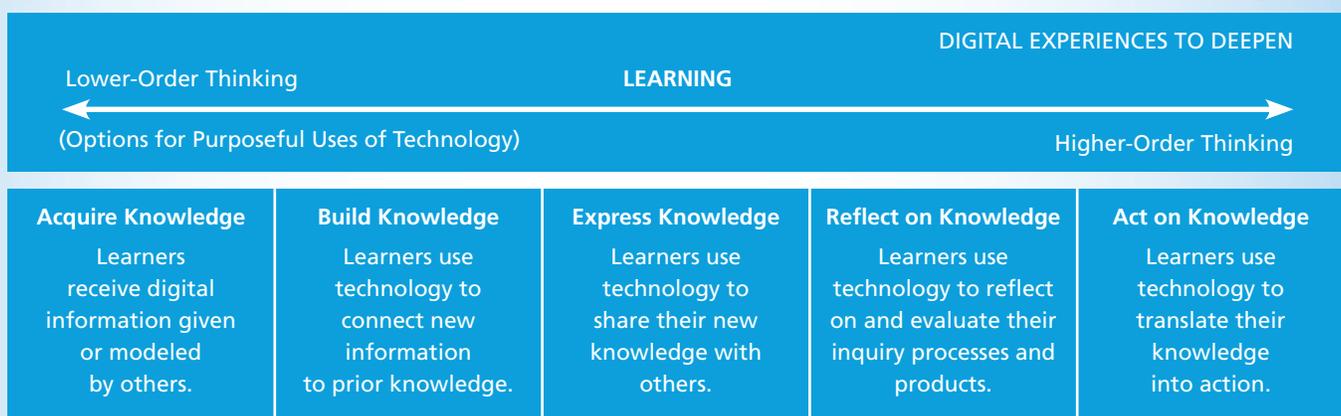
developed by Andrew Churches (2009) and the Depth of Knowledge Levels outlined by Norman Webb (2002). Our framework also integrates ideas about how technology can support children's desire to use digital tools to create, reflect, and act on knowledge gained through inquiry (Hobbs & Moore, 2013).

The Personal Digital Inquiry Knowledge Continuum is designed to illustrate the important role that technology can play in supporting opportunities for children to develop both lower-order thinking skills used to acquire and build knowledge and higher-order thinking skills used to express, reflect, and act on knowledge in a digital world. Our hope is that teachers can use this continuum, and a growing body of examples from real classrooms, to inspire their design of inquiry-based experiences with technology that promote higher-order thinking and active engagement in their classrooms.

### What Is Personal Digital Inquiry?

After several years of exploring purposeful ways of integrating technology and inquiry with educators from around the world at an annual Summer Institute in Digital Literacy at the University of Rhode Island (see Hobbs & Coiro, 2016), we have also come to realize the important role that classroom culture plays in growing engaged readers and self-directed learners at any age. In his book *Creating Cultures of Thinking: The 8 Forces We Must Master to Truly Transform Our Schools*, Ron Ritchhart (2015) explains that schools and teachers, "send important messages about what learning is, how it happens, and what kinds of learning are of value" (p. 20). That is, the beliefs, expectations, values, and routines that we promote as

Figure 1. Personal Digital Inquiry (PDI) Knowledge Continuum (reprinted with permission from Coiro, Dobler, & Pelekis, forthcoming)



part of learning are important indicators of our classroom culture. If we seek to transform our classrooms into spaces that build upon and benefit from a culture of inquiry, it is important to clarify how to create and sustain such a culture with young learners. One important cultural force in inquiry-based classrooms involves opportunities to think deeply, to engage with others, and to create meaning—in short, “opportunities to learn” (p. 143). Importantly, these opportunities focus on the process as well as the products of learning.

Briefly, our vision of Personal Digital Inquiry (PDI) is one that engages teachers and students in opportunities for collaborative discussion and reflection that lead to knowledge building, knowledge expression, and personal action (Coiro, Dobler, & Pelekis, forthcoming). As such, a productive PDI project includes regular opportunities for every learner to engage in four core sets of practices:

- **Wonder & Discover:** All learners have opportunities to engage with content and experiences that prompt their own questions about a topic and have time to explore resources and discover new ideas about the world around them.
- **Collaborate & Discuss:** All learners have opportunities to engage in joint conversations around shared interests, discuss interpretations, make connections, and negotiate differences in their thinking.
- **Create & Take Action:** All learners have opportunities to express their interests and new understandings through creative work designed to start conversations, raise awareness, take action, or change minds in their learning community or beyond.
- **Analyze & Reflect:** All learners have opportunities to analyze content in order to build their understanding of challenging information and reflect on their choices at multiple points (e.g., before, during, and after) in their inquiry process.

These four sets of practices can be woven into what we call the PDI framework (see Figure 2). This flexible framework is designed to help visualize and intentionally plan for these opportunities as part of inquiry in the literacy curriculum. Learners may move through these opportunities in varied sequences with varied levels of support and varied amounts of technology use, but our experiences suggest that successful inquiry-based projects make room for all four sets of practices.

Questions aligned to each of these interconnected PDI practices can serve to guide and support the initial planning of one or more of these inquiry practices without being constrained by the use of technology (see Figure 3). Once the desired learning outcomes have been considered, the question in the center of the figure is designed to prompt discussion and informed choices about which instructional practices and technologies, if any, would be most apt to support meaningful inquiry in the literacy classroom.

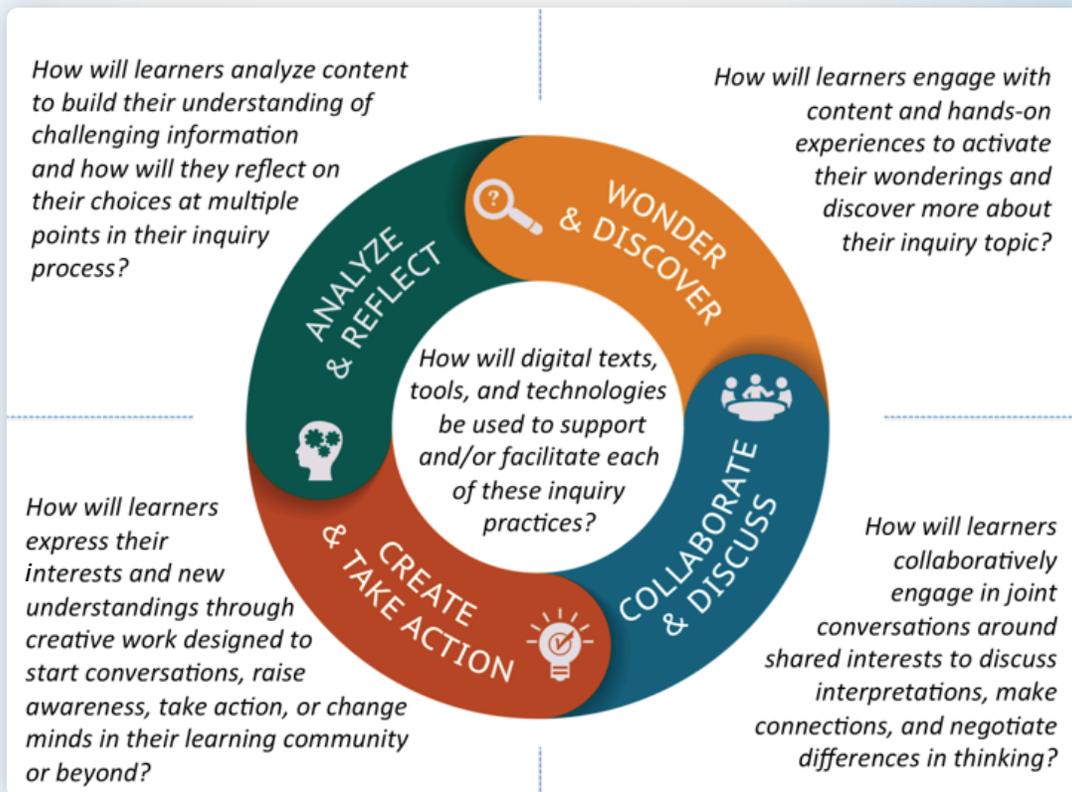
It is our belief that digital inquiry practices designed to engage students’ curiosity and their desire to learn promote intentional opportunities for children to document the process and craft creative products of their learning. In turn, these practices give relevance to what students learn in school and help them make connections to what they see in their worlds outside of school.

Evidence from working to design sustained inquiry experiences suggests that embedding opportunities to wonder and discover, collaborate and discuss, create and take action, and analyze and reflect can most definitely foster engagement and deeper learning among educators (Hobbs & Coiro, 2016; Hobbs, Coiro, Daunic, & Friesem, 2015). The journey ahead looks promising as my colleagues and I turn to documenting exemplars of how teachers and librarians in Grades K–5 are collaboratively using the PDI framework to design personal digital inquiry experiences that promote engagement and deeper learning among students in their classrooms.



Figure 2. The PDI Framework  
(reprinted with permission from  
Coiro, Dobler, & Pelekis, forthcoming)

Figure 3. PDI Questioning Tool (reprinted with permission from Coiro, Dobler, & Pelekis, forthcoming)



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# Texts and Engagement

BY ALFRED W. TATUM, PH.D.

KidsTextMatch, Inc., a new engineering startup, is finalizing its algorithm to match all kids with texts that will engage them based on four conditions that the engineers have weighted across more than a billion data points and preconditions. This was not possible ten years ago, but data science is quickly becoming the new curriculum matchmaker after six years of rigorous research and training examples that use decision trees and categorization based on the most comprehensive synthesis of research focused on children's text choices and preferences. The algorithm uses a sophisticated probability formula that informs major search engines that match consumers with products. The award-winning algorithm is revolutionizing text selection so that teachers can match students in highly diverse classroom environments with books that engage them.

An algorithm to match kids with texts does not exist yet, but teachers and researchers have been trying to identify the best texts to engage students for more than a century. KidsTextMatch, Inc. is a fictional startup. Identifying texts that engage students will always involve some element of guessing and gambling. There will be times when all students in a classroom love the text selection, while other times will be a complete miss for a large number of students.

## Text Selection for Students

Half a century ago, Chall (1967) analyzed text features and the nature of tasks posed by the texts for young readers. Her research stimulated a body of research that examined readability and decodability to support young readers and frameworks for leveled texts (Adams, 1990; Hiebert, 1999). Researchers continue to give attention to matching readers to texts or finding the right texts for beginning and struggling readers (Mesmer, 2008; Hiebert and Sailors, 2009). In their edited volumes, a wide range of topics that include readability formulas, Lexile levels, vocabulary control, leveling systems, and text-analysis tools are discussed. Implications for developmental, instructional, linguistic, and genre considerations are provided. For example, Kim and Snow (2009) offer suggestions for modifying texts for English language learners through simplification and elaboration. Duke and Billman (2009) discuss characteristics that make informational texts more difficult or less difficult for beginning readers. More recently, there is a growing debate focused on leveled texts versus challenging texts and the benefits, limitations, and concerns of both text types (Fisher, Frey, & Lapp, 2012). This research serves as the backdrop of the student-centered perspective I offer to discuss text and engagement.



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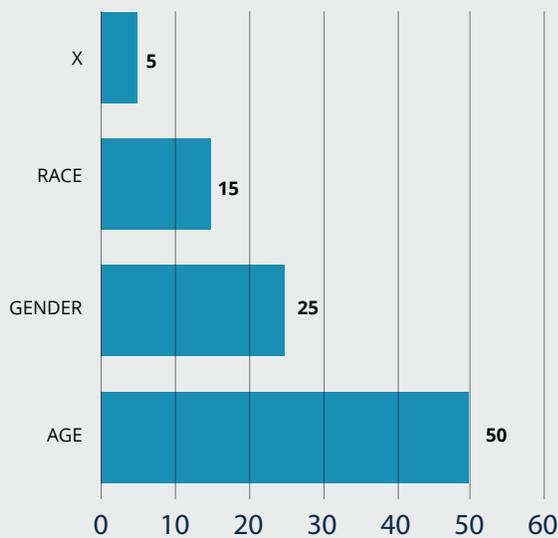
More recently, there is a growing debate focused on leveled texts versus challenging texts and the benefits, limitations, and concerns of both text types.

### Student-Centered Perspective on Text Selection and Engagement

Imagine that your goal is to identify texts to engage nine-year-old Latino boys. Three identities are prominent. They are nine. They are boys. They are Latino. However, it is not clear which identity or identities are not present. Represent the unknown with "x." The four dimensions can now be used as a starting point to select texts. However, it is not clear how each of the identities are weighted. Will the boys enjoy texts more heavily weighted toward their age, their gender, their cultural identity, or the "x"? The first chart below captures the four dimensions with assigned weights. Charts 2 and 3 have more dimensions with assigned weights that can inform text selection and students' engagement with texts. Each also has the unknown "x."

Chart 1: Four Dimensions for All Latino Boys

Text Selection Weights 9-Year-Old Latino Boy



This first chart suggests selecting boy texts because the boys enjoy texts more aligned to their developmental identity and gender identity. The focus on students' race is smaller. And it is difficult to account for the "x." For example, the "x" could represent the boys' interests in science.

Chart 2: Latino Boy from a Two-Parent Household: Good Reader

Text Selection Weights 9-Year-Old Latino Boy

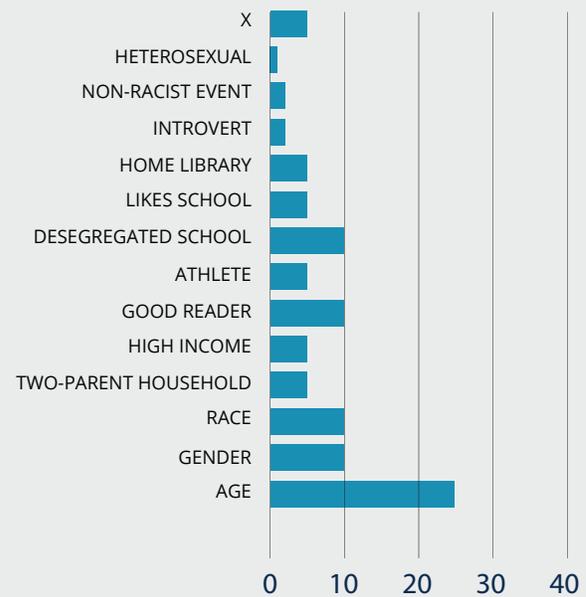


Chart 2 captures more dimensions or identities that were not captured in the four-dimensions chart. While age, race, and gender are heavily weighted, the boy's engagement with texts may also be informed by his identity as a good reader from a two-parent household with a home library. He also enjoys school and has not experienced any overt racist events. He reads cultural literature in his home library, and he loves science. It may be appropriate to provide him with challenging and complex texts appropriate for his grade level without any modifications.

Chart 3: Latino Boy from a Single-Parent Household: Struggling Reader

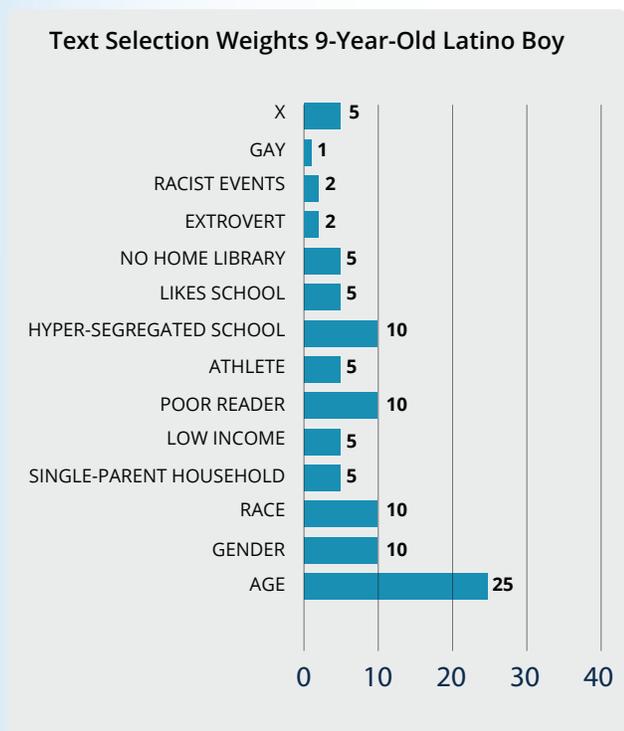


Chart 3 provides different dimensions or identities that were not present in charts 1 and 2. This Latino boy has experienced overt racist events and attends a hyper-segregated school in a low-income community. He is a poor reader and is experiencing the onset of teasing because of his sexual identity. Each of these identities can increase his interests in texts that discuss racial and gender identities. However, his engagement may be limited by his ability to comprehend the text independently because of his struggles with reading.

While there are similarities among all the nine-year-old Latino boys, attempting to select texts based on age, gender, and racial identities may lead to overfitting that does not capture the complex relationships between students and their engagement with texts. This is one of the reasons why it is challenging to recommend the best texts for boys, girls, struggling readers, non-struggling readers, ELLs, or other simple classifications that do not exist in isolation.

**Selecting texts that nurture students' reading, writing, and academic and personal development in a classroom with multiple student identities is one of the most challenging and rewarding aspects of literacy instruction.**

Selecting texts that nurture students' reading, writing, and academic and personal development in a classroom with multiple student identities is one of the most challenging and rewarding aspects of literacy instruction. However, it is a challenge that requires serious attention to increase students' engagement and ensure that students have a meaningful literacy exchange that involves the teacher, other students, and texts (Tatum, 2014).

### Path Toward Effective Text Selection and Engagement

For more than a decade, I have proposed that the following two questions be asked as a starting point for selecting texts: Out of all the texts in the world, why do we want to place this text in front of this student at this time? Will students be well-served by the text? While researchers have answered these questions to account for students' academic identities, developmental identities, reading identities, cultural identities, gender identities, and linguistic identities (Brozo, 2010; Duke, 2000; Tatum, 2005; Tatum, 2011), it has become clear that effective mediation is the key for engaging students across a wide range of texts that allows students to access the texts through one or more of their multiple identities. This is true for fiction and nonfiction texts.

### Identifying Criteria for Selecting Texts

Consideration for students' multiple identities and a clear conceptualization for the roles of literacy development are the starting point for selecting texts. A second consideration is using texts to broker relationships with students. A few summers back, an 11-year-old student wrote the following as part of his application to enroll in a summer literacy institute designed to use texts to nurture students' writing

*All my life I have never been anything more but a trouble making boy. I was always the one that got in the most trouble throughout my family. In my entire life I never had my time to shine. Everyone around me was happy and joyful but not me. I was by myself in a cold world. I always tried my best at everything but my best wasn't good enough.*

*I know no one in the world liked me because every time I walked in a room people looked at me like I was wanted for murder. Most people tell me that I will be locked up with the real bad boys but truly I would love that because most of the bad boys I talked to know how much it hurts to be left out or forgotten.*

**Text selection must be complemented by supporting students' access to the text at the word level, sentence level, or conceptual level.**

Should text be selected to honor his culture identity, developmental identity, gender identity, personal identity, community identity, or economic identity? Is the goal of the text selection to have him move deeper into his current circumstances or move him away from the circumstances? Should I select texts that highlight characters who have experienced similar circumstances so that he finds relevance in the texts? Do I select contemporary texts or will canonical texts engage him? Is it more appropriate to use fiction or nonfiction? Does his reading ability dictate the text selections and accompanying instructional practices? The answer is all of the above. Fortunately, each text selection does not have to meet all criteria. Establishing a litmus test for text selection that honors students' complex identities will increase engagement opportunities by allowing students to experience texts from their identities that carry the most weight during particular reading experiences. Below is a sample litmus test:

- Will students be well-served by “this” text?
- Will students be able to access the text through one or more of their identities?
- What makes this text essential or useful?
- Out of all of the texts in the world, why this one for students in this time and space?
- Will I love to rush in to teach this text?
- Will this text allow me to find out more about me as I find out more about my students?
- How can this text be appropriately paced to engage students?
- What is the appropriate starting point for this text?
- Is “this” a considerate and challenging text?
- Does this text lend itself to academic excellence and identity development?
- Will this text have staying power?
- Will this text restore confidence in literacy instruction?
- Does the text serve as a writing and language coach?

### **Moving Beyond the Text Selection Default**

Two major defaults for text selection are adversely affecting or limiting students' engagement with a wide range of texts across the disciplines. They are: (1) narrowing text selection based on students' culture, and (2) selecting texts based on students' reading levels. Both can be problematic and miss the mark because they fail to account for other factors and identities that stimulate students' engagement with texts. A key to moving beyond the text default is starting with the premise that all text types belong to all students. This requires a clear conceptualization for roles of texts. For example, texts can be selected to nurture social and scientific consciousness in developmentally appropriate ways. Third-grade students may enjoy reading nonfiction texts about boogers and germs as much as they enjoy fiction texts about *a young girl who learns to code to solve mysteries*. Text selection must be complemented by supporting students' access to the text at the word level, sentence level, or conceptual level. While important for struggling readers, this is also true for non-struggling readers who are introduced to new topics.

## In Search of Cumulative Results

Effective and engaging text selections should be assessed by the cumulative results, not individual texts. A reflective teacher discards the texts that do not engage students and builds on those that do. This allows teachers to build a cache or library of engaging texts over time for students to select from. The building of the cache begins with wide reading across the disciplines while thinking about students' identities and the anticipated benefits of the texts. It is also important to observe for the unanticipated benefits that texts yield for the students and teacher. Engaging students with more texts that lead to positive experiences in classrooms increases the likelihood of student engagement. Teaching can be the "x" factor. It is the combination of powerful texts and powerful teaching that engages students. This is the award-winning algorithm that already exists.



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# Book Discussions

BY FRANK SERAFINI, PH.D.

Book clubs (McMahon & Raphael, 1997), grand conversations (Peterson & Eeds, 1990), and literature circles (Daniels, 2001) are just some of the terms used to describe literature discussion groups in elementary and middle grade classrooms. Regardless of what they are called, book clubs involve young readers selecting texts to read and discussing these texts with other readers. Sounds simple? Maybe not. In order to effectively organize, facilitate, and evaluate literature discussions, classroom teachers need help making decisions about who selects the texts to be read, what contributions are expected of each reader during the discussions, when time will be provided for students to talk to one another, and how best to facilitate these unpredictable discussions. Teachers need support to make these literature discussion groups successful and to provide effective ways of helping readers understand and enjoy novels and other contemporary texts (Serafini & Youngs, 2006).

## What Are Book Clubs?

Book clubs or literature discussion groups are quite different from the traditional reading groups often convened in elementary classrooms. Traditionally, students were organized into three levels of readers—low, middle, and high—and instruction focused on the acquisition of discrete skills often measured by multiple-choice quizzes (Almasci, McKeown, & Beck, 1996). Instead, book clubs are intended to focus on the construction of meaning in transaction with works of literature (Rosenblatt, 1978). They are also used to support individual readers' responses to literature (Marshall, 2000), the sharing of ideas in small groups (Short, 1997), and a deeper analysis of the author's craft (Gambrell & Almasi, 1996).

Book clubs or literature discussion groups serve particularly valuable purposes by allowing students of all backgrounds and reading abilities to engage with books and by providing a supportive space for rich discussions and opportunities for teachers to value all students' voices (Martinez-Roldan & Lopez-Robertson, 1999). In addition, careful selection of texts to read and extensive time to talk facilitates deep thinking among young readers and provides opportunities for teachers to introduce and support reading strategies, such as inferring, asking questions, and monitoring comprehension (Moses, Ogden, & Kelly, 2015).

Readers respond to stories because stories are a way of understanding one's experiences and the world in which we live. Therefore, discussing literature with fellow students can serve as a window into the lives and experiences of other people and as a *mirror* into one's own life and identity (Cullinan, 1989). Readers, as members of various communities of readers, share their feelings and experiences with texts in the company of other readers, and construct meaning during the social interactions in a particular community of readers. Literature



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study discussions are both cognitive and social events, where readers bring their individual interpretations and responses to a discussion group in order to negotiate meanings and ideas in the company of other readers (Raphael, Pardo, & Highfield, 2002; Serafini, 2009).

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Book clubs are part of a workshop approach to reading instruction where the focus is on the construction of meaning by individual readers participating in small-group discussions (Serafini, 2001). These discussion groups also provide an opportunity for young readers to share their ideas with other readers and develop the skills and strategies for reading more proficiently on their own.

### Responding to Literature

Understanding how young readers respond to written texts has an extensive history in literacy research (Marshall, 2000; Meek, 1988). Rosenblatt (1978) suggested, "a better understanding of how children 'learn to mean' in specific contexts should yield signals for those involved in all aspects of reading, especially research on response to literature and the teaching of literature" (p. 41). Additionally, Sipe (2008) has asserted that young readers respond in a variety of ways, including analytical, intertextual, personal, transparent, and performative responses. It is important for teachers to provide support and opportunities for readers to respond to texts in a variety of authentic ways and contexts.

Children do not become better readers simply by building a diorama of one particular scene from a book or creating a mobile by cutting out pictures from old magazines to resemble the characters from their readings. As schools continue to display banners announcing their commitment to the development of *lifelong readers*, educators and administrators need to ensure they no longer require readers to do things with books in school that lifelong readers would never tolerate outside of school. When lifelong

readers finish a book, they share ideas with other readers, make recommendations to their friends, read another book connected in some way to the one they read, or simply move on to something else.

The "enrichment" activities teachers assign readers after they have read a book in preparation for a book club discussion need to align with the kinds of things readers outside of school might do to prepare for a discussion at the local library or bookstore. When students trust their interpretations and contributions will be heard and valued, when teachers listen to what students have to say, and when teachers minimize the mindless activities surrounding the reading of books, literature discussions will improve in quality and effectiveness (Urzua, 1992).

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### Before the Conversations Turn Grand

Before children are sent off into small groups to discuss literature, primarily chapter books for older readers and picture books for younger readers, children need to be exposed to a wide variety of literature, explore the structures and elements of story, and learn how to successfully interact in small groups as they discuss their ideas about literature (Eeds & Wells, 1989). There are different ways to expose children to literature and provide demonstrations and opportunities for discussion; however, for many teachers the most effective way seems to be reading aloud to children and discussing books on a daily basis (Serafini & Giorgis, 2003).

Reading aloud is the foundation of a successful reading program (Atwell, 2007; Galda & Cullinan, 2006; Laminack & Wadsworth, 2006). It exposes readers to a wide range of genres, topics, formats, stories, and information. Reading aloud serves as an advertisement into the world of books, inviting readers to sample and select for themselves that which is relevant and interesting. It is an important experience for young readers that exposes them to the language of stories and helps them to understand the differences between oral language and "book language" (Cullinan, 1987). Besides the academic benefits of reading

aloud to children, it is an enjoyable way to build community through the shared experience of listening to and talking about stories together. These experiences are vital for the success of book clubs.

In addition to the elements of literature that readers need to support quality literature discussions, they need to know how to talk to one another respectfully. During the first few months of school, teachers need to pay close attention to the ways their students respond to the literature read aloud and discussed to see whether students listen to each other's ideas, respond to other students' comments, and incorporate the literary terms introduced during whole-group discussions. Two parallel developments signal whether students are ready for book clubs: (1) an increasing respect for other readers' ideas and interpretations, and a willingness to listen to these diverse ideas, and (2) an expanding level of knowledge of the elements and structures of literature necessary for progressing discussions beyond personal preferences and anecdotes (Serafini & Youngs, 2006).

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There are numerous signs that indicate these concepts are beginning to develop within one's classroom—for example, when students begin responding to each other in group discussions, not just directing all of their ideas toward the teacher; when students don't interrupt each other as frequently and are listening more deeply; and when they have begun to consider ideas different from their own interpretations. As the content of the discussion grows more complex and the respect for each other's ideas increases, teachers are ready to set up book clubs that have a better chance of being successful.

### **Quality Literature Discussions Defined**

Although there are many ways to evaluate the quality of a book club or literature discussion, there are some fundamental aspects that separate an informal chat from a quality, in-depth literature discussion. In a quality discussion,

readers are deeply engaged with the books they read and are eager to generate, share, and negotiate meanings with the other members of their group. This sense of investment in the reading itself and in the group discussion is an important factor in determining the quality of these literary experiences.

Dillon (1994) described a quality literature discussion as a particular form of group interaction where readers come together in addressing questions of common concern, exchanging and examining different views to inform their opinions, and enhancing their own understandings of the text being discussed. The research by Nystrand (1997), Mercer (2000), Myhill (2006), and others has indicated that creating quality discussions requires a different stance or role on the part of the teacher to enable students' voices to take a more prominent role. It is necessary for teachers to respect what students have to say, provide support for students to learn to interact effectively with one another, and deepen students' understandings of what has been read to enhance their responses and contributions to literature discussions. Student-led discussion formats allow for increased student responsibility and more room for student voices, and they may lead to more complex responses from students, the valuing of multiple viewpoints, and more engaged discussions (Almasci et al., 1996).

Literature discussions usually take place in small groups, usually made up of five to seven students that meet for several days to discuss what they have read and thought. Students read and prepare for discussions knowing they will have to share what they are thinking and experiencing as they are reading. This requires different ways of engaging with text rather than simply reading for enjoyment. Being a member of a book club demands commitment, not only to the book being read, but also to engaging in discussions and negotiating and reconsidering potential interpretations with other group members. These responsibilities are not to be taken lightly. It should be an enjoyable experience, but it is an intensive one as well. Classroom teachers need to support the responses of young readers and help them prepare to discuss literature with fellow readers if our book clubs are to be successful.

Theoretically, the books themselves create the groups. Children select books that they really want to read and sign up to discuss that book. Teachers should provide numerous titles, genres, and formats for students to select from in

order to ensure readers can find something to read that truly interests them. Being able to choose what one reads helps sustain the types of discussions we are working toward. The more choices readers have, the better the chance they will find something that is engaging and something that is worth discussing more deeply.

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Quality literature discussions are filled with a variety of readers' perspectives and opinions about the books being read, and readers in the discussions are interested in the meanings they construct and those meanings offered by other readers. It is the diversity of ideas present in literature discussions, rather than the group's ability to reach consensus and agreement, that is essential for quality literature discussions. The subjugation of group members' interpretations to a single main idea should not be part of these proceedings. Book clubs should support conversations where engaged readers passionately share and negotiate their understandings and interpretations concerning a piece of literature (Serafini, 2001).

### Facilitating Quality Discussions

As facilitators of book clubs, the teachers' role in literature discussions is to help readers notice things they didn't notice for themselves and to help them experience a work of literature in greater depths than they could on their own. To do so, teachers need to offer their ideas later in the discussions and then, quite tentatively. Teachers want their expertise to sneak into these discussions, not come charging in through the front door. It is important that our grand conversations don't turn into *not-so-gentle inquisitions*.

There are a variety of opinions on the use of roles or discussion jobs in book clubs (Daniels, 2001; Eeds & Peterson, 1997). Assigned roles may reduce literature discussions to a set of disconnected pedagogical procedures, where students blindly follow a particular role without thinking about connections to the text, their wonderings, or personal interpretations of a text. It can be suggested

that assigning roles is more of a crutch for teachers, trying to bypass the difficult work of deeply knowing a piece of literature and supporting students' often unpredictable interpretations, than it is a support for students. Usually when literature study groups are not working, it is because of the lack of a solid foundation established during read alouds and whole-group discussions before the book clubs ever meet. Not all conversations will turn grand, but assigning roles won't guarantee it will happen, either. Without an extensive knowledge of the elements and structures of literature, a deeper commitment and level of engagement with texts, and students' willingness to listen and negotiate meanings with other members of a community of readers, the quality of the literature discussions in our classrooms will never improve.

### Concluding Remarks

Teachers need to keep in mind that the primary goal of literature discussions is to invite students into the world of stories, first so they can lose themselves in it, and second so they have the opportunity to examine their responses in the company of other thoughtful readers (Eeds & Peterson, 1997). Because of the limitations in the amount of time available in the school day, teachers are required to make choices about what to teach, how much time to spend teaching reading, and the range of instructional experiences they provide their students. These choices are always value laden. In other words, teachers give time to what they themselves value, what is mandated through district and state standards and curriculum documents, and what their students demonstrate they need to know and learn. To create time and space for discussing children's literature, teachers must begin by finding value in the reading and discussing of literary texts. If teachers don't value children's literature itself and the possible roles that children's literature may play in the reading curriculum, they won't find time for reading and discussing it.

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