



Turning Points

TRANSFORMING MIDDLE SCHOOLS

Teaching Literacy in the
Turning Points School





Teaching Literacy in the
Turning Points School

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Teaching Literacy in the Turning Points School

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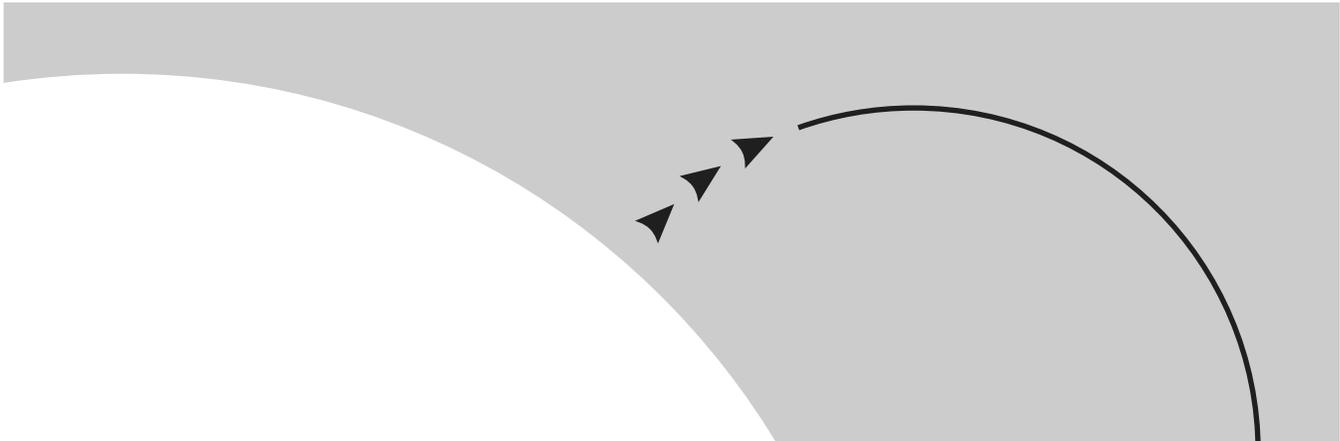


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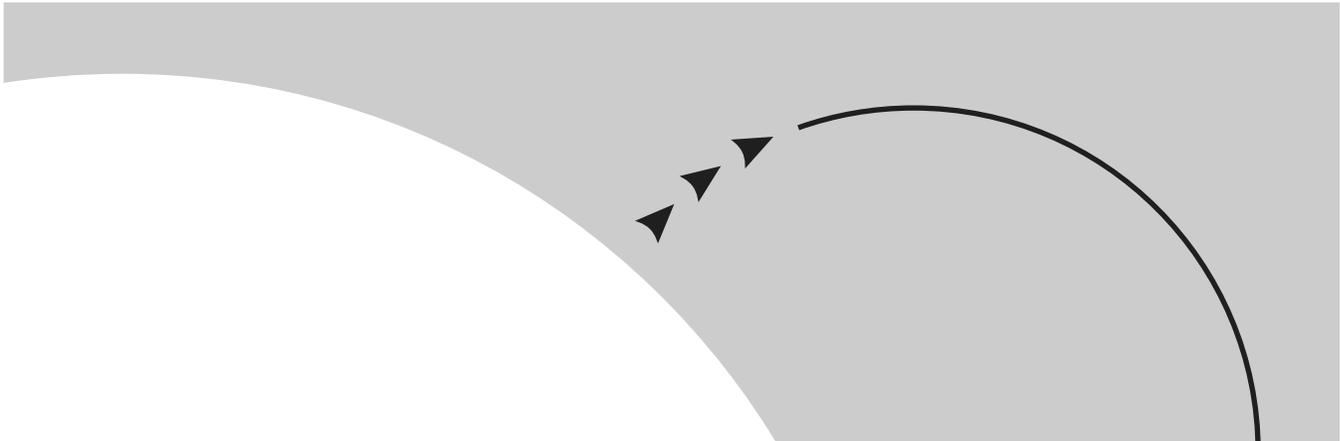
The Center for Collaborative Education wishes to thank all the Turning Points middle schools and regional centers that have contributed to the development of this guide.

In addition, we would like to thank the following people who gave us ideas and feedback:

Susan Griffith, Lesley University

Ellin Keene, University of Pennsylvania

Jay Simmons, University of Massachusetts, Lowell



Preface

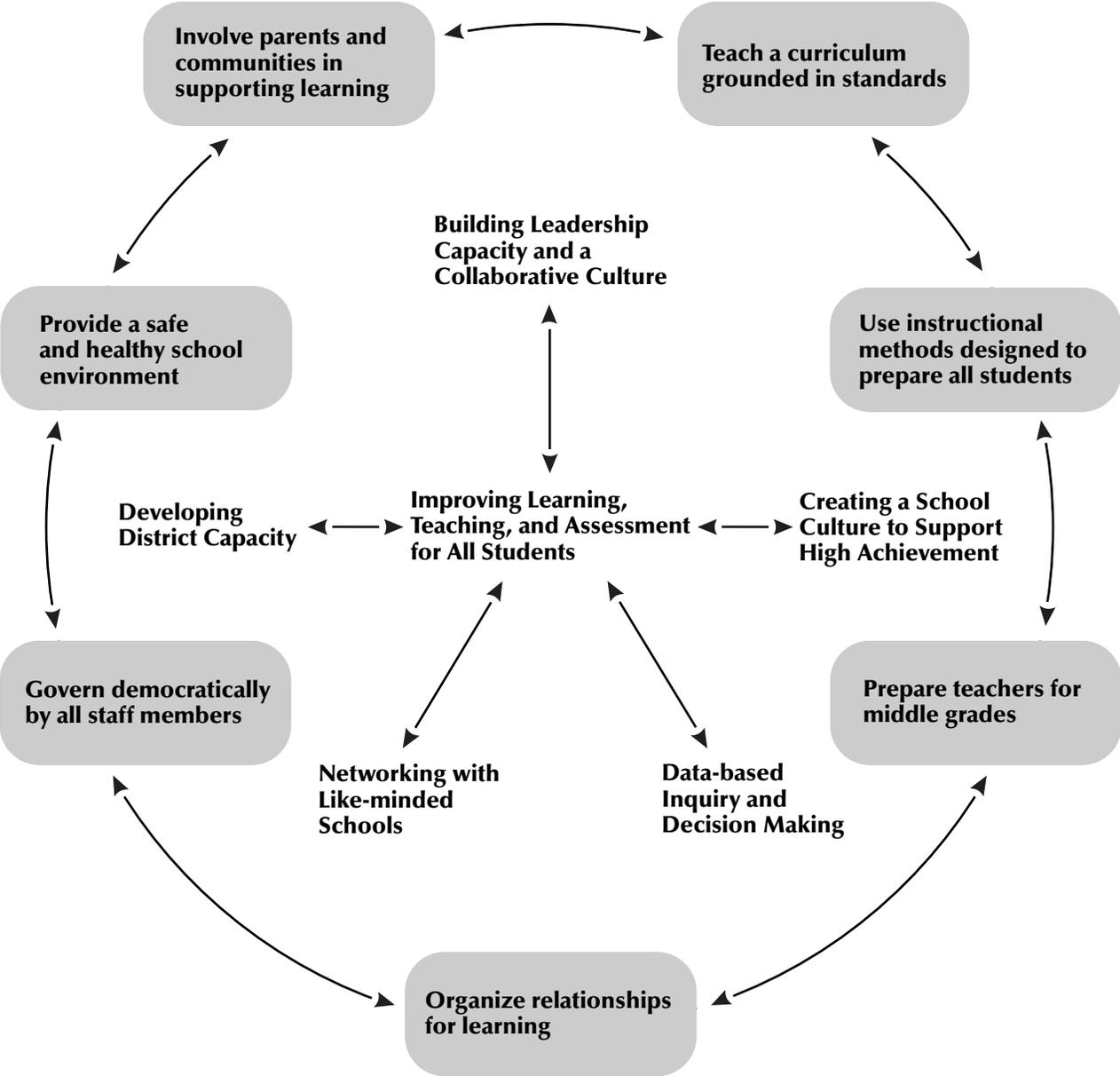
Turning Points is a national design for middle school change, coordinated by the Center for Collaborative Education in Boston, Massachusetts, which serves as the National Turning Points Center. The design focuses on restructuring middle schools to improve learning, teaching, and assessment for all students. It is based on the seminal *Turning Points* report issued by the Carnegie Corporation in 1989, which concentrated on the considerable risks that young adolescents face as they reach the “turning point” between childhood and adulthood.

The purpose of this guide is to provide a middle school literacy model, to describe practices and strategies of literacy education, and to assist school communities as they implement a balanced Turning Points literacy program that is responsive to the particular needs of middle school students.

This guide includes:

- the rationale for a Turning Points model for literacy education
- an explanation of the literacy model
- literacy practices that demonstrate how a balanced literacy program for both school and classroom can be created in Turning Points schools
- specific tools that can be used by members of the school community engaged in Turning Points literacy education.

Turning Points Design Principles and Practices



Turning Points Principles*

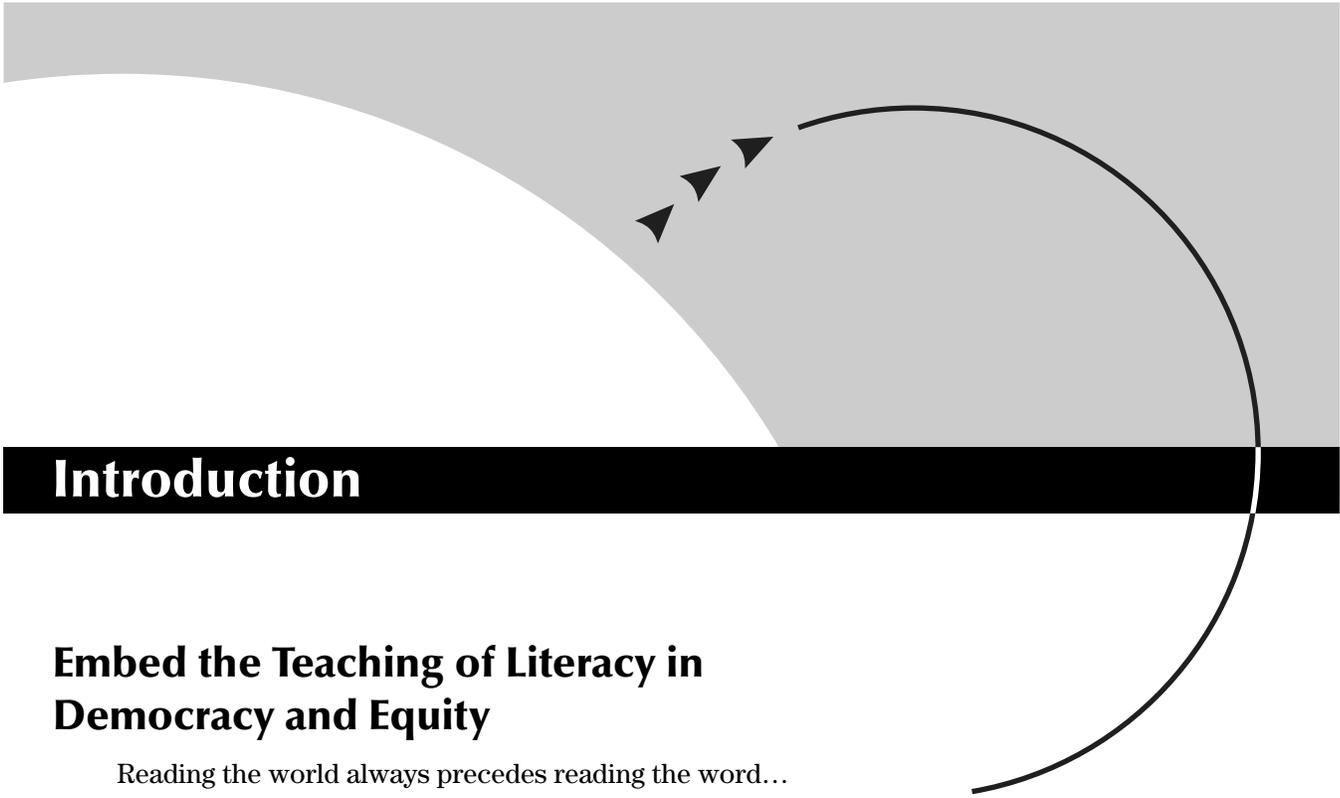
- Teach a curriculum grounded in rigorous, public academic standards, relevant to the concerns of adolescents and based on how students learn best
- Use instructional methods designed to prepare all students to achieve high standards and become lifelong learners
- Staff middle grade schools with teachers who are expert at teaching young adolescents, and engage teachers in ongoing professional development
- Organize relationships for learning to create a climate of intellectual development and a caring community of shared educational purpose
- Govern democratically through direct or representative participation by all school staff members, the adults who know students best
- Provide a safe and healthy school environment as part of improving academic performance and developing caring and ethical citizens
- Involve parents and communities in supporting student learning and healthy development

Six practices translate these principles into action in each school and throughout a network of Turning Points schools in a district. Within each area of practice, teacher teams, a school leadership team, and faculty committees, engage in collaborative work.

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The Six Turning Points Practices

- **Improving Learning, Teaching, and Assessment for All Students:** working collaboratively to set high standards, close the achievement gap among students, develop curriculum that promotes habits of mind and intellectual inquiry, utilize a wide range of instructional strategies and approaches, emphasize the teaching of literacy and numeracy
- **Building Leadership Capacity and a Professional Collaborative Culture:** creating a democratic school community, fostering skills and practices of strong leadership, establishing regular common planning time, embedding professional development in the daily life of the school
- **Data-based Inquiry and Decision Making:** setting a vision based on the Turning Points principles, collecting and analyzing multiple sources of data to help improve areas that most impact learning, teaching, and assessment, setting annual measurable goals
- **Creating a School Culture to Support High Achievement and Personal Development:** creating structures that promote a culture of high-quality learning and teaching, establishing small learning communities, eliminating tracking, lowering student-teacher ratios, building parent and community partnerships
- **Networking with Like-minded Schools:** participating in network meetings, summer institutes, and forums; visiting other Turning Points schools
- **Developing District Capacity to Support School Change:** building district capacity through collaboration



Introduction

Embed the Teaching of Literacy in Democracy and Equity

Reading the world always precedes reading the word...

—Paulo Freire

Democracy begins in conversation.

—John Dewey

Mr. Horning's seventh grade history class is studying the U.S. Constitution and the Bill of Rights. The class decides to debate issues pertaining to the Second Amendment. Students are asked if gun manufacturers should be held liable for human loss and suffering due to gun violence.

The topic strikes a raw nerve for many students. One student's young cousin was a victim of a drive-by shooting, and another student's father was paralyzed by an armed intruder. Many students know someone close to them whose life was in some way transformed by gun violence. The opinions in the classroom reflect the diversity of opinion in the society-at-large.

In small groups the students build a case for their respective positions using the argumentative strategies Mr. Horning has been teaching them throughout the year. The students collect and read news articles relating to gun control, looking for evidence to bolster their claims. Each group labors over the composition of its opening argument. Is the writing clear? Are the examples effective? Does the opening connect with the audience? The group also discusses the order of speakers and explores issues of oral presentation.

When a visitor to the class asks Mr. Horning what the students are studying, the teacher answers, simply, "Literacy."

Literacy is a social act. It is a process of thinking, questioning, problem posing, and problem solving.

WHAT IS LITERACY?

All too often literacy is defined as a set of testable skills that are acquired in a linear fashion. The Turning Points design, with its emphasis on engaging the student, connecting with families and the community, and building a collaborative culture for learning, views literacy more broadly. Literacy is a social act. It is a process of thinking, questioning, problem posing, and problem solving. Literacy helps people take control of their lives. It is about respecting the knowledge already acquired by middle school students. Literacy is a conversation: student to student, teacher to student, and student to teacher. It is about listening to students as they articulate what is meaningful to them and work to negotiate their relationship to their world. To teach literacy, schools must recognize that all students have the capacity to make meaning and must ensure that they are held to high expectations and given equal opportunities to develop their literacy capacity.

INSPIRING STUDENTS TO JOIN THE CONVERSATION

Children cannot acquire language in isolation. Human culture, marked by voices engaged in conversation, draws out the child's capacity to speak, to join the voices and be heard, and, being heard, to discover what she has to say. Parents can recall times when their child struggled to put her feelings into words and how the frustration involved in the effort was almost too much for the child to bear. Parents glimpse how desperately a child wants to be a part of the conversation, to be a part of the world of language. Given this great desire, it is not surprising that young children are capable of the tremendous achievement of learning to speak. A similar desire must drive the learning of text-based language (Cambourne, 1995).

Schools can create a literate culture that will draw a student into another world of language, one formed by writing: books, short text, student-created texts, and teacher writings. To engage students in becoming literate requires school and classroom structures and instructional strategies that actively engage students in things they care about, explicitly teach skills, and take into account the different backgrounds and experiences students bring with them. Books that help inform the Turning Points' literacy model, such as Ellin Keene

and Susan Zimmermann's *Mosaic of Thought*, Nancie Atwell's *In the Middle*, Linda Christensen's *Reading, Writing, and Rising Up*, and Janet Allen and Kyle Gonzalez's *There's Room for Me Here*, show us communities of readers and writers sharing works, asking questions, talking about texts. These books offer strategies on how to engage and draw students out of passivity or indifference towards the literate world. Students learn that others are waiting for them to express themselves, waiting on their words, whether it is in the form of the students' study of an essay or in the form of their own essay writing. When students learn there is a conversation going on and that others are expecting them to take their turn and join in, more often than not, they speak.

LITERACY AND DEMOCRACY

In the Turning Points literacy model, there is a strong link between literacy and democracy. A strong civil society depends on the fair exchange of ideas among members of the democracy. Preparing students as readers and writers is preparing them to be participants in public discourse, negotiations, debate, consensus-building, coalition-forming, haggling, and other forms of public talk. As students learn to be active readers, writers, listeners, and speakers, we prepare them to be entrepreneurial, in the broadest sense of the word—creative, independent thinkers—a quality that is much desired in this new century.

If schools are to be places where students become highly literate, they must also be places where students are encouraged to be strong citizens, and that means participating in healthy debate. Turning Points schools should be laboratories for democracy where issues, important to students' lives, are actively debated, different viewpoints are articulated and considered, and every voice is encouraged. Through structures such as town meetings, student government, student publications, and community service projects, a culture of democracy can be created within a classroom or a school. It is within this culture of democracy that literacy flourishes as students work to hone their skills and become better readers and writers, speakers and listeners.

Many times schools avoid controversial discussions or underplay issues of difference among the student body. In the interest of protecting students or shielding them from uncomfortable questions, many teachers rarely raise such issues as welfare reform, hate crime,

Turning Points schools should be laboratories for democracy where issues, important to students' lives, are actively debated, different viewpoints are articulated and considered, and every voice is encouraged.

economic justice, or gay rights. Some feel that schools should be neutral places where conflict is kept to a minimum. Schools ask students to be articulate writers or speakers, yet rarely ask them to express themselves about matters that affect them deeply and about which they have the strongest opinions. In particular, by ignoring issues that relate to social justice, schools help foster inequity. A culture of democracy, where every person is encouraged to participate, will help make Turning Points schools models of equity.

PUBLIC DISCOURSE AND MIDDLE LEVEL STUDENTS

John Trimbur, in his essay “Literacy and the Discourse of Crisis,” argues that often schools work towards “the privatization of literacy—the representation of reading and writing not as means of enlarging the sphere of public discourse and political participation but as personal credentials, forms of cultural capital, and articulations of a wider ideology of possessive individualism” (Trimbur, 1991, p. 294). In other words, people are taught to use literacy to advance themselves but not necessarily to contribute to a common good, to a larger and shared sphere of ideas and purposes. Creating a public space for students to use their words, as literate individuals, must be the conscious objective of a school’s literacy program.

During the middle school years, students’ attentions begin to extend past family and peer groups, and they begin to notice a larger society. Students begin to see themselves as members not only of family and peer groups but of society as well. Schools need to take advantage of this growing awareness and give students the opportunity to participate in the democratic culture the school establishes. Imagine how powerfully students will learn about the tension between freedom and responsibility in media if they are writing for a real newspaper about an issue sensitive to the school community.

ENGAGING DIVERSE VOICES

Many students resist literacy. Outside of school they do not see the important conversations taking place within the literacy context defined by schools. Inside the school, as literacy researchers such as Victoria Purcell-Gates (1997), Gloria Ladson-Billings (1994), and Shirley Brice Heath (1983) have pointed out, many students feel removed from the literate conversations in their classrooms. Educators face major challenges when they work to overcome this resistance and engage these students in literate conversation. Educators need a keen

appreciation for the impact cultural differences, class tensions, and linguistic polyphony (the idea that a “language” must be understood as a product of many “voices” reflecting diverse social registers) have on literacy education. While there is controversy among educators regarding the nature of a “literacy crisis,” there can be no disputing the fact that a reading “achievement gap” reflects cultural, linguistic, and class differences in our society. Educators need to acknowledge the impact these differences play on the teaching of literacy and have conversations among themselves on how to address issues involving culture, language, and class (Ogbu 1999, Heath 1983). Such discussions will need to address the selection of materials, texts, and topics of study, as well as the methods of teaching. Educators need to constantly assess the literate conversations they are facilitating in the classroom and ask if these conversations invite participation from all students, especially reluctant students.

There can be no disputing the fact that a reading “achievement gap” reflects cultural, linguistic, and class differences in our society.

LITERACY FOR DEMOCRACY AND EQUITY: KEY POINTS

1

What is Literacy? Literacy is a social act. It is a process of thinking, questioning, problem posing, and problem solving. Literacy helps people take control of their lives.

2

Inspiring Students to Join the Conversation Schools must create conditions that spark the desire to learn and the kinds of conversations that students will want to join.

3

Literacy and Democracy Turning Points schools should be laboratories for democracy where issues important to students’ lives are actively debated, different viewpoints are articulated and considered, and every voice is encouraged.

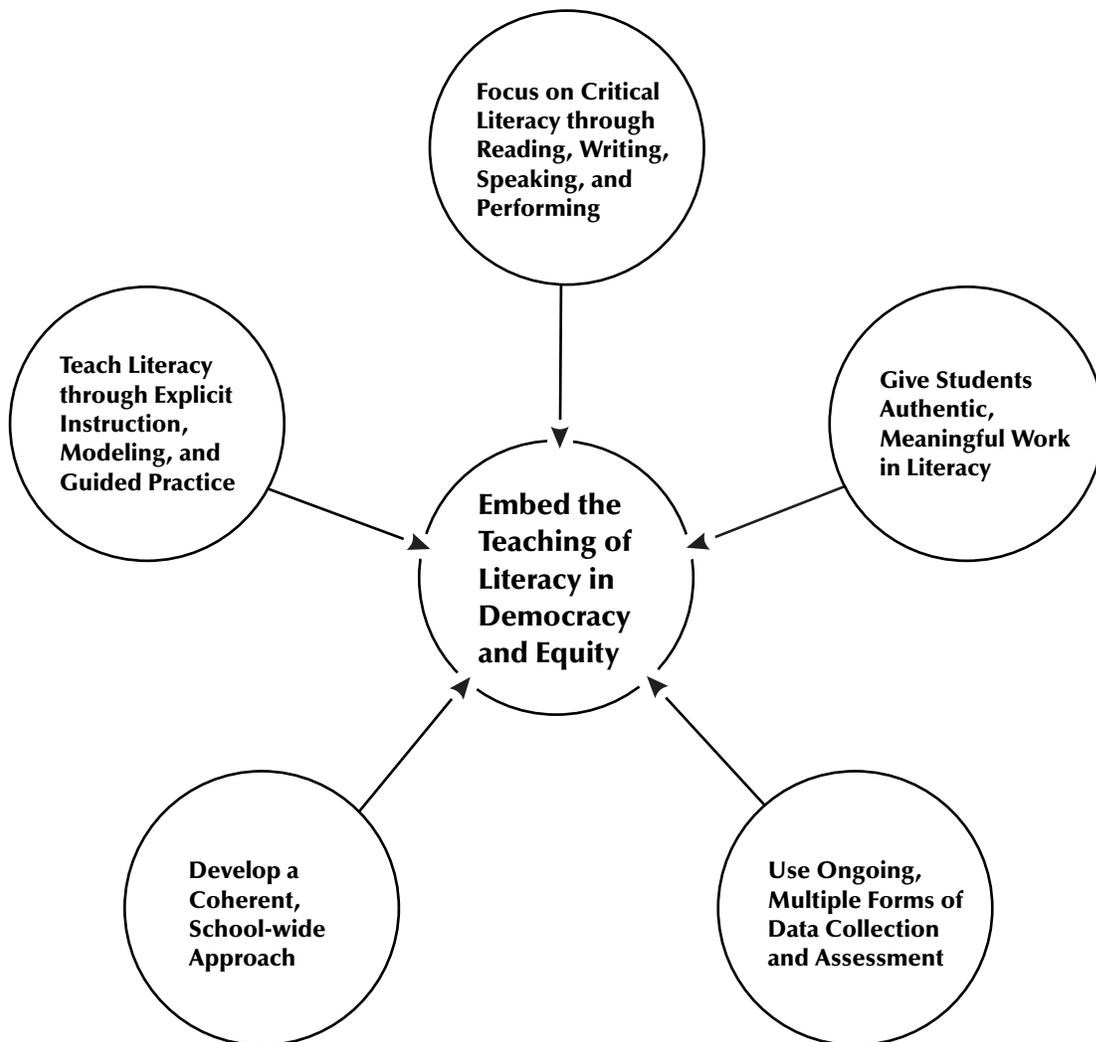
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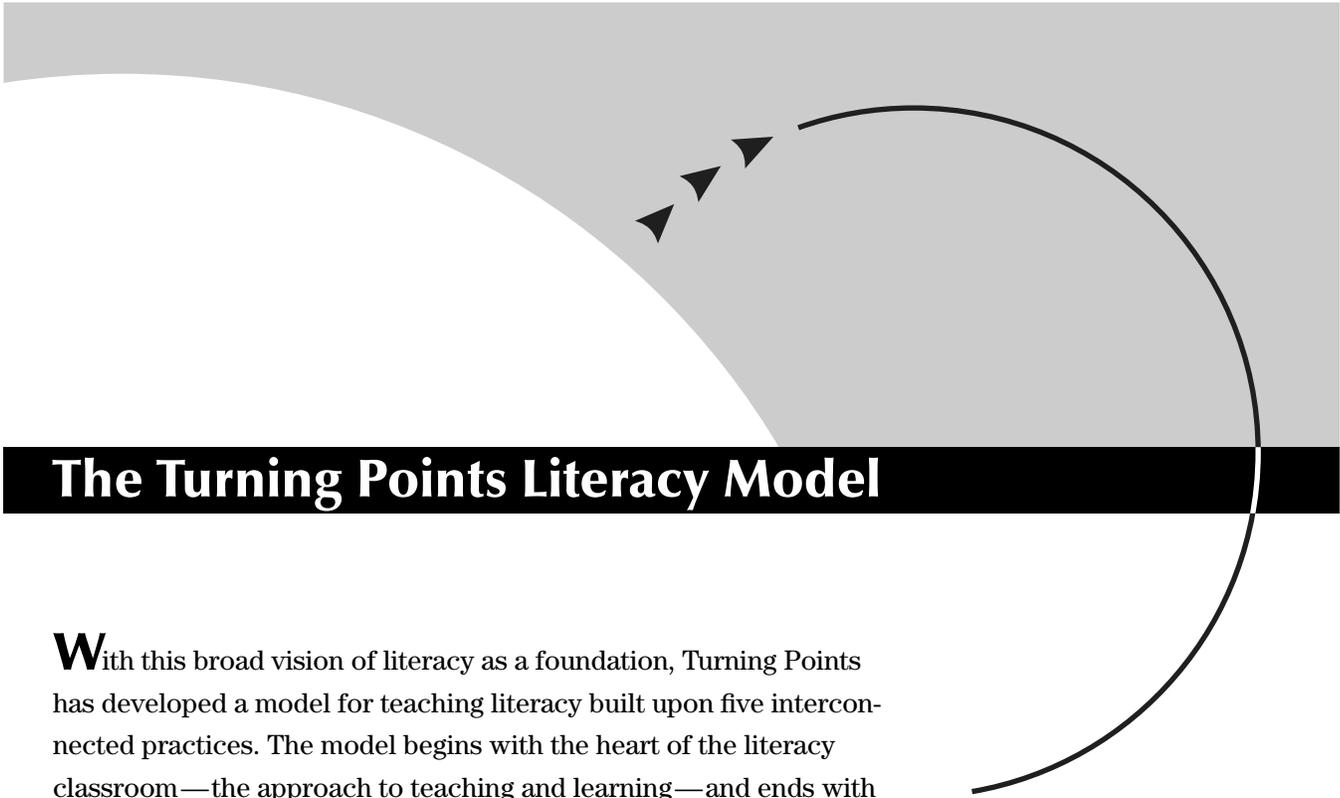
Public Discourse During the middle school years, when students’ attentions begin to extend beyond family and peer groups, schools need to give students the opportunity to participate in a democratic, public space.

5

Engaging Diverse Voices Educators need to cultivate a deep awareness of the impact that cultural differences, class tensions, and diverse linguistic voices have on literacy.

The Turning Points Literacy Model





The Turning Points Literacy Model

With this broad vision of literacy as a foundation, Turning Points has developed a model for teaching literacy built upon five interconnected practices. The model begins with the heart of the literacy classroom—the approach to teaching and learning—and ends with the school-wide structures that will support such an approach in every classroom. Practices 2–4 outline the specific content of a strong literacy curriculum, the means to connect such a curriculum to the world in meaningful ways, and an approach to assessment that will continually inform the teaching and learning of literacy. Together, these practices give shape to a model of literacy education that is embedded in democracy and equity. The purpose of this guide is to describe each practice and outline a set of concrete tools and strategies educators may use in their schools and classrooms.

The polarization of particular approaches in the intense debates about how best to teach literacy leads us to miss an essential point: there are multiple and varying routes to literacy and no single approach will meet the needs of every child in a classroom. The Turning Points school-wide approach provides a literacy framework or set of beliefs to inform decisions to be made daily by teachers in their classrooms and in collaboration with each other. To teach and learn within this literacy framework, teachers and students will need to become skilled in a wide range of materials and methods.

There are multiple and varying routes to literacy and no single approach will meet the needs of every child in a classroom.

PRACTICES OF THE TURNING POINTS LITERACY MODEL

1

Focus On Critical Literacy through Reading, Writing, Speaking, and Performing

2

Teach Literacy through Explicit Instruction, Modeling, and Guided Practice

3

Give Students Authentic, Meaningful Work In Literacy

4

Use Ongoing, Multiple Forms Of Data Collection And Assessment

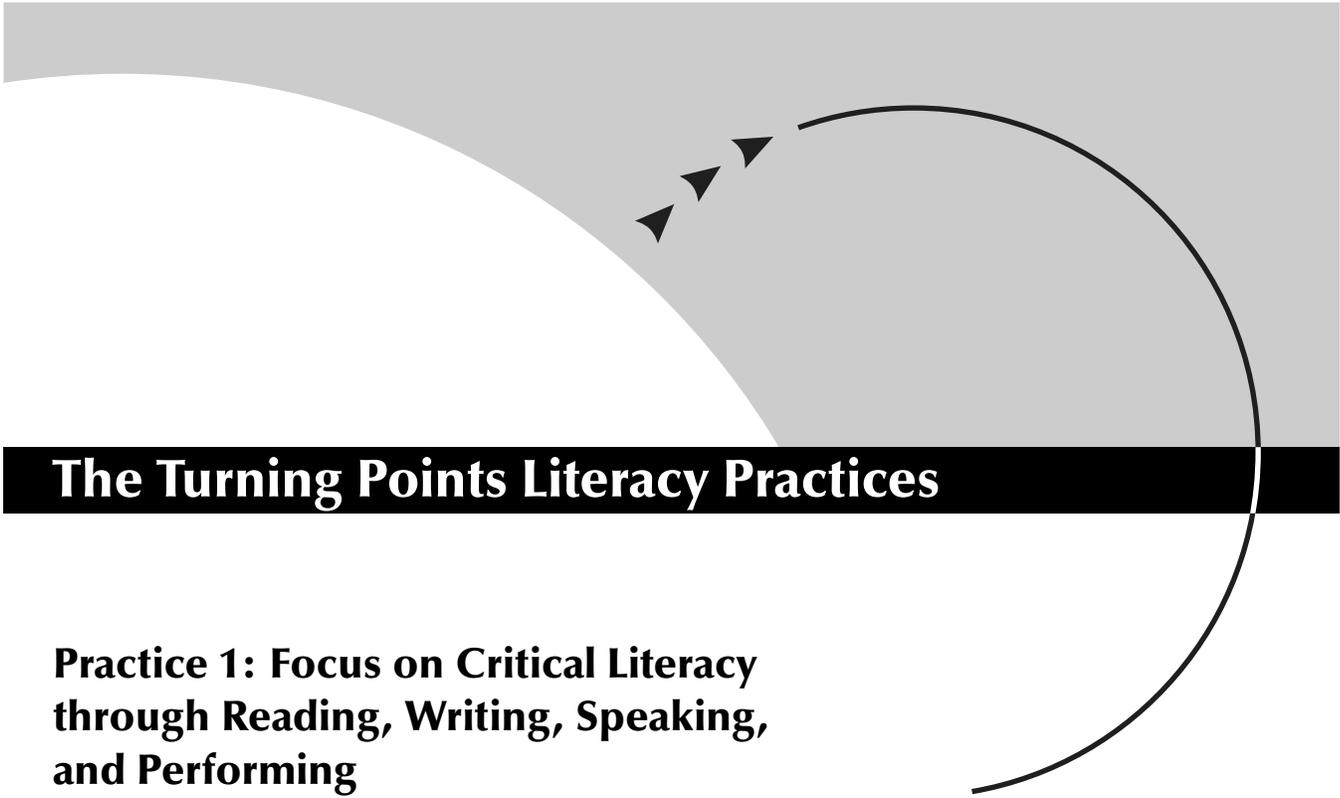
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Develop A Coherent School-Wide Approach To Literacy Education

There is such a dizzying array of literacy resources and research available to schools that it is often difficult to know where to turn first. This guide is intended to help Turning Points schools set a course through this challenging terrain. Offering guidance and direction, it will help individual teachers, leadership teams, study groups, and faculties choose priorities in developing a comprehensive approach to teaching literacy at the middle level. We hope it will begin an important conversation at each school about how to open up the world of language to students, avoiding a narrow and limited view and linking literacy to the most powerful concerns of public and private life.

SUMMARY OF TURNING POINTS LITERACY PRACTICES AND KEY STRATEGIES

<i>Focus On Critical Literacy through Reading, Writing, Speaking, and Performing</i>	<i>Teach Literacy through Explicit Instruction, Modeling, and Guided Practice</i>	<i>Give Students Authentic, Meaningful Work In Literacy</i>	<i>Use Ongoing, Multiple Forms Of Data Collection And Assessment</i>	<i>Develop A Coherent School-Wide Approach To Literacy Education</i>
<p>READING Decoding Reading Comprehension Multiple Genres and Social Contexts Critical Literacy Through Reading</p> <p>WRITING Different Roles of the Writer Modes of Discourse and Genres Critical Awareness of Contexts for and Purposes of Writing</p> <p>SPEAKING AND PERFORMING Storytelling Theatre Arts Debate Socratic Seminar</p>	<p>Gradual Release of Responsibility Model of Instruction Reader's Workshop Writer's Workshop</p>	<p>Creating Connections Across the Curriculum Literacy-based Projects and Performances Opportunities to Teach and Serve the Community Getting to Know Your Students</p>	<p>ONGOING CLASSROOM-BASED STRATEGIES: Literacy Profiles Individual Conferences Student Reflective Writing</p> <p>SCHOOL-WIDE STRATEGIES: Holistically Scored Writing Prompts School-wide Reading Assessment Performance Tasks and Exhibitions Standardized Test Scores Literacy Portfolios</p>	<p>Literacy Study Group Community Forums Community Literacy Program Publications and Performances Literacy Calendar</p>



The Turning Points Literacy Practices

Practice 1: Focus on Critical Literacy through Reading, Writing, Speaking, and Performing

KEY STRATEGIES:

- **Reading:** decoding, reading comprehension, multiple genres and social contexts, critical literacy through reading
- **Writing:** different roles of the writer, modes of discourse and genres, and critical awareness of contexts and purposes of writing
- **Speaking and Performing:** storytelling, theatre arts, debate, Socratic Seminar

OVERVIEW OF THE PRACTICE

Joey resists writing every step along the way. In class he is extremely vocal and full of opinions, but when he is asked to express his ideas on paper he often becomes a behavior problem. His reluctance to write is attributed by his teacher, Ms. Bishop, to a general lack of confidence in his literacy skills. Avoiding work is his primary strategy for dealing with his limitations.

Midway through the semester, Joey asks if he can write a play-by-play commentary of a football game he saw on Sunday. Ms. Bishop hadn't planned any work like that. But this is the first time Joey has expressed any interest in writing, so she agrees. To her

surprise, after about thirty minutes, Joey has produced three pages of writing, full of grammatical, punctuation, and spelling errors, but also full of energy and strong imagery.

Ms. Bishop seizes this opportunity and helps Joey edit the piece. She also plans a sequence of assignments that will exploit Joey's "knack" for writing play-by-play commentary. These assignments include an interview with the star player after the game, a newspaper story to appear in Monday's paper describing the game, and an interior monologue written for the star player at a key point in the game. Ms. Bishop plans to have Joey "rehearse" his texts using a mini-tape recorder. As a final project, during the monthly showcase of literacy texts, Joey agrees to "perform" his play-by-play commentary in a simulated broadcasting booth for the benefit of his classmates.

Ms. Bishop realizes that it won't always be easy to keep Joey on task. But she knows that her best chance to build Joey's capacity as a reader and writer and to solve a major behavioral headache is to follow up on this opportunity and keep Joey practicing his literacy skills.

The Turning Points approach asks teachers to link specific literacy skills and strategies to the power and purpose of language.

In creating a literacy curriculum focused on reading, writing, speaking and performing, the Turning Points approach asks teachers to link specific literacy skills and strategies to the power and purpose of language. For example, when the late Brazilian educator Paulo Freire was a young teacher, he traveled to a distant rural village to teach literacy. For the first few days he taught his class of adults and children with the materials that he had been given. To teach the meaning of the word "water" he used the sentence, "The water is in the well." But after a few days Freire was worried that he wasn't making connections with his students. Hoping to make his lesson more interesting, Freire changed his material by using the sentences, "Is the water in the village dirty or clean?" and if the water is dirty, asking, "Why is the water dirty? Who is responsible?" Almost immediately, Freire observed in the class a greater sense of purpose. Freire realized that his students were learning not only the meaning of words, but also the power of those words.

Readers and writers do not come to their tasks as neutral, unformed participants. They possess already formed points of view and schematic knowledge. These points of view are shaped by readers' cultural, linguistic, social/class, and gendered identities. Readers and

writers (even the very young or inexperienced) bring prior knowledge and school-based experiences (both positive and negative) to the task. Teachers need to know their students and make sure they do not inadvertently create barriers by failing to work with students' varied identities. They need to explicitly show students how they can call upon their changing and developing identities to make a text meaningful for themselves. In other words, how can teachers help students take ownership of what they read and write?

This practice emphasizes the development of a "critical literacy" as well as the development of specific skills. Critical literacy means understanding the full context of a text and using that understanding to address important issues. As students become better readers, writers, and speakers they become increasingly aware of the values, principles, and views shaping any text—including their own. They become aware of how to use this knowledge to solve personal and public problems. Although reading, writing, and speaking are addressed separately in the discussion that follows, they should be constantly integrated in the literacy classroom and throughout the student's day. In particular, speaking and performing provide powerful context and motivation for students to develop skill as readers and writers.

A PROBLEM-POSING APPROACH TO READING

Key to any reading theory is the idea of the **active reader**. Active readers do more than just decode words when they read, turning the tiny markings of print text into sense. Active readers take the words on the page and interact with them. They listen to a piece of writing and speak back to it through imaginative interaction with its author. When they begin a book they wonder quickly about the source for the words. Active readers make assumptions as they collect evidence. They read with feeling and ideas, with intentionality of their own. Active readers are aware of their identity. They approach a text with their own wants, tastes, opinions, objectives, and purposes.

Students acquire reading skills in order to become better active readers, ready for conversation, ready to interact and prepared to be "spoken with," not to be "spoken to." The goal of teachers must be to show students how to have purpose when they read and how to generate a strong response to texts; this means joining the conversation the text is part of and adding their own voice. Teachers in effective middle schools expect students to be active readers in all classes, not just in the reader's workshop.

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When people read and write, when they talk and listen, when they view and present, they make meaning. Meaning is made as a result of multiple factors: the texts, audience, individual experience, language, social context, and the moment in time are just some of the factors. A strong literacy model helps middle school students understand the meaning-making process in many different forms. It provides them with strategies they can use to understand texts in multiple ways as **text decoders**, as **text participants**, as **text users**, and as **text analysts** (Freebody and Luke, 1990).

1

Text Decoders

STRATEGIES FOR TEACHING AND LEARNING DECODING

It is important for a literacy program to maintain skill building strategies—sentence mechanics, sentence combining, increased sentence sophistication, phonetics, vocabulary building—but not to forget why: to make students active readers and writers. There are three “surface structure” systems in which students need to be adept in order to be fluent readers:



Graphophonics, or phonemic decoding system: letter/sound knowledge



Lexical, or word bank system: word knowledge



Syntactic, or logical and grammatical system: language structure

Small-group instruction should provide students with strategies to build phonemic word attack skills, strategies to use context clues at the sentence level to decode words, and strategies to show students how to make associations with their known vocabulary in order to add new words. Students can maintain an ongoing vocabulary list generated from their reading. Periodic brief reading assessments should be built into the instruction.

SAFETY NET INTERVENTIONS FOR STRUGGLING READERS

A strong literacy curriculum ensures that an initial diagnostic process is in place to identify those middle school students who are not fluent readers and are in need of some safety net intervention. An effective safety net strategy ensures that the lowest-achieving students receive small-group reading instruction using high-interest material written at

the reading level appropriate for their skill level. This instruction needs to be maintained over the course of the school week and the school year. Students with decoding problems should not be tracked into permanent remedial classes, but grouped flexibly within the heterogeneous class. The instructional support should not be at the expense of students' involvement in other activities that take place in the literacy curriculum. Finding this balance between engaging students in the general literacy curriculum and providing students with small-group instruction is no easy task. Schools have used a variety of approaches in scheduling, including trading electives for extra time in literacy support, doubling up on reading periods, and tutoring before and after school.

Students with decoding problems should not be tracked into permanent remedial classes, but grouped flexibly within the heterogeneous class.

SAFETY NET ASSESSMENT PRACTICES

When teachers work with struggling readers, it is important that they align assessment practices with instructional practices. Assessment practices such as retellings, miscue analyses, anecdotal records, and student self-reflections, can alert teachers to problems specific to the individual reader and can help the teacher match students with appropriate reading material. Of course, these strategies are beneficial to all readers, not only to those who are struggling.

Retellings

In retellings, teachers ask students to retell what they have read without looking at the text. These retellings can take the form of oral, written, or visual representation. It is important that the teacher chooses a text that is effective for a retelling and is appropriate and non-threatening to the student. The teacher must make it clear to students that they are not being asked to interpret the story or to have memorized it, only to retell the story as best they can.

Miscue Analyses

Running record or miscue analysis is a valuable strategy to identify whether or not a text is within a student's reach. As a student reads a short passage, the teacher notes the errors the student makes by using a quick and specific system of notation. As teachers select texts for guided reading and independent reading, it is wise to make sure that the text is within a student's comfort level. For read aloud and shared reading activities, a text might be more challenging.

2

Text Participants

STRATEGIES FOR TEACHING AND LEARNING READING COMPREHENSION

Often, middle school teachers observe that most of their students are able to read words, but many are unable to comprehend what they read.

Often, middle school teachers observe that most of their students are able to read words, but many are unable to comprehend what they read. They do not seem able to engage texts or are resistant to engaging them. They are able to read words with some fluency, but do not understand the power of words. For middle school teachers, the biggest challenge is preparing students to become active readers who are capable of engaging diverse texts.

In reading comprehension, there are three “deep structure” systems in which students need to be adept in order to become proficient readers:

- Semantic, or word development
- Schema, or connection to prior knowledge
- Pragmatic, or social construction of meaning, related to audience, purpose, and social interaction.

By middle school, most students are familiar with “surface structure” systems, but many are not familiar with “deep structure” systems. They can read but cannot “engage” texts. They recognize a text, but are not yet adept at making a text “one’s own.” They can decode a sentence, but are not proficient at “hearing” the different emphasis given to words, or at making connections between what they read and their own lives, or at reading this text in a larger social context of negotiation and meaning making. This limitation prevents students from developing the fluency that will enable them to read and comprehend at the level of enjoyment they will need to become proficient. Without familiarity with these “deep structure” systems, reading involves too much hard work and offers too few rewards.

Students need explicit instruction in specific strategies that will allow them to understand the role of these “deep structure” systems in reading. Ellin Keene and Susan Zimmermann, building on the work of cognitive psychologists such as P. David Pearson, have identified seven strategies that allow students to build familiarity with these systems (see Appendix 1 for detailed description and guidelines for

using the seven strategies). The goal is to help students to identify and use these strategies in order to connect with diverse texts across the curriculum.

EFFECTIVE READING COMPREHENSION STRATEGIES

1

Activating relevant, prior knowledge before, during, and after reading text.

Good readers are able to relate unfamiliar text to their prior world knowledge and/or personal experience (schema or long-term memory banks). These connections generally take three forms: Text to Text, Text to Self, and Text to World.

2

Determining the most important ideas. Good readers can pick out the most important ideas and themes, and use these conclusions to focus their reading, while not paying as much attention to unimportant ideas.

3

Asking questions of themselves, the authors, and the text they are reading. Good readers use questions to clarify and focus what they are reading. They ask questions of themselves, of others, and of the authors to help them better understand the text.

4

Creating visual and other sensory images during and after reading. Good readers are able to create visual, auditory, and other sensory connections to what they are reading, and then use these images to deepen their understanding of the text.

5

Drawing inferences. Good readers use prior knowledge and information from the text to draw conclusions, make judgments and predictions, and form interpretations.

6

Retelling or synthesizing what they have read. Good readers can order, recall, retell, and recreate into a coherent whole the information that they read. They can sift through a myriad of details and focus on those pieces that are most important to know. They can organize different pieces of information to make meaning.

7

Using a variety of fix-up strategies for better comprehension when they are having problems understanding the text. Good readers use fix-up strategies when they are having problems understanding what they are reading, including skipping ahead, rereading, using the context to better understand a particular passage, and sounding it out.

(Adapted from Mosaic of Thought, Keene and Zimmermann, 1997)

One of the most effective ways to integrate curriculum is through the use and application of common reading comprehension strategies, essentially asking students to apply the same cognitive processes and strategies from one class to the next.

Each of the seven reading comprehension strategies has different applications and effects when applied to different content areas and texts. One of the most effective ways to integrate curriculum is through the use and application of common reading comprehension strategies, essentially asking students to apply the same cognitive processes and strategies from one class to the next. The way to do this is through explicit and transparent instruction using the “gradual release of responsibility” method outlined in Practice 2.

APPLYING READING COMPREHENSION STRATEGIES TO DIVERSE TEXTS

While teachers have to explicitly teach students the internal systems (reading comprehension strategies), they also have to help them deal with the external, or text structures. Students often have difficulty applying reading comprehension strategies across different texts. Textbooks are particularly challenging. Students often expect narrative structures, and what they get instead is chronological structure, cause-and-effect structures, etc. In addition, anaphoric words, which refer to another text or earlier text, are tough for students. Besides different text structures, textbooks also present students with hurdles of new vocabulary and concepts that cut across their path at a rapid rate. Students need to learn techniques that help them to comprehend textbooks and other difficult or “inconsiderate” texts.

A balanced literacy program teaches students strategies for dealing with textbooks. For example, it teaches students about anaphoric words and has them search texts, find the words, and identify their meaning. A balanced literacy program has students do comparative readings on the same topics in different forms. Usually, in fact, it is best to create scaffolding by starting with a narrative text that covers the same concept as the textbook and then moving to the expository text. Teachers should also model by thinking through a piece of text aloud: What does the text mean? How do readers connect with prior knowledge? How do readers connect text to the self, and the world? How do readers grapple with anaphoric words?

3

Text Users

STRATEGIES FOR TEACHING MULTIPLE GENRES AND SOCIAL CONTEXTS

Students need to be apprenticed in the different ways literacy looks and works outside the classroom. School literacy, with a focus on

expository prose and expressive literature, represents a narrow band of the literacy spectrum. Not only do students receive a limited picture of the range of literacy practices, they miss seeing the “tie-ins” between literacy practices, genres, social situations, and what composition theorists call discourse communities, for example, the discourse used by medical professionals.

One way to expand the range of literacy activities with which students are familiar is to be sure that a wide variety of materials from everyday living be used. Menus from ethnic restaurants can be used for learning about ethnic foods as well as the social interchanges involved in ordering meals. Health care discourse can be introduced by the use of brochures from hospitals and clinics. Students can be introduced to specialized discourse communities, such as business and social service organizations, by using materials specific to these social institutions: automobile brochures, sales information, or government documents.

It is important to ask middle school students to read and to write reports, records, summaries, descriptions, advertisements, briefs, explanations, analyses, parodies, theories, imitations, agreements, disagreements, discoveries, confusions, confessions, surprises. When they read and write, middle school students need to keep in mind a variety of audiences: self, friend, classmate, co-worker, potential customer, teacher, and an anonymous public.

4

Text Analysts

STRATEGIES FOR TEACHING CRITICAL LITERACY THROUGH READING

Explicit instruction in critical literacy will train students to be shrewd appraisers of the full context of a text, and to learn to apply their analysis of the context in solving real problems. To give an example, if some middle school students who had been taught critical awareness were presented with a magazine advertisement, they would begin to be able to identify:



Audiences for the text



Types of appeal the advertisers are using



Assumptions the advertisers are making about the audience

It is important to ask middle school students to read and to write reports, records, summaries, descriptions, advertisements, briefs, explanations, analyses, parodies, theories, imitations, agreements, disagreements, discoveries, confusions, confessions, surprises.

■
Specific argumentative strategies being used

■
Whether or not counter opinions are acknowledged in the advertisement

But beyond the analysis of advertisements, as a result of explicit instruction in text analysis middle school students will be able to conceptualize the full context for any text: essays on the newspaper's editorial page, novels read in literature class, songs heard on the radio, chapters from a textbook, direct mail solicitations, business memos, letters from insurance companies, television talk shows, Internet websites. In general, they would become practiced at looking at texts through a critical lens and at asking questions about a text. Students would be able to critique and understand how the message of this specific text is a product of:

■
The interaction among a particular audience, a particular writer or speaker, and a particular subject

■
A particular historical moment

■
The material conditions of the interaction (i.e., the cost of the magazine, the production values of the advertisement, the subscription base of the magazine, etc.)

■
The place where this message is received

Teaching students to be critically aware provides them with a richer, deeper awareness of how texts are constructed and how they work. Students also learn how to think about and talk about their roles as text users and text analysts. When students develop their capacity to analyze texts, they are developing not only the capacity to change the world, but also the capacity to maneuver in the one that exists.

Active writers bring intentions, experiences, and emotions to their writing, and they understand that writing is a vehicle to deeper understanding as well as a tool to solve problems and address dilemmas.

A PROBLEM-POSING APPROACH TO WRITING

As with reading, the goal of the literacy curriculum is to create **active writers**. Active writers do more than follow the steps in a prescribed format or structure. They understand and have internalized the writing process—generating ideas, drafting and revision, polishing and editing. Active writers are good readers and apply their understanding of

SOME WAYS TEACHERS CAN BEGIN TO SHOW STUDENTS HOW TO GENERATE A STRONG RESPONSE TO TEXT

- Reconstruct the text's origin by asking:
Who is the author?
What audience is the author targeting?
What occasion prompted this writing?
What is the author's purpose?
- Have the students join the text's conversation by exploring students' views on the issues before reading.
- Have students read 'with the grain' by teaching them how to summarize.
- Have students read 'against the grain' by having them talk back to the author and question assumptions.

the different levels of written language to their own texts. They let their reading fuel their writing, borrowing ideas, vocabulary, and style. Active writers bring intentions, experiences, and emotions to their writing, and they understand that writing is a vehicle to deeper understanding as well as a tool to solve problems and address dilemmas.

The goal of the writing teacher is to show students how to have purpose when they write and how to apply strong writing skills in the service of this purpose. Providing opportunities for publication for real audiences is a key feature of purpose—classroom magazines, newspapers, and plays as well as writing for outside publication through letters to the editor, articles, etc. Making students' work public can be a powerful way to create active writers. Modeling and guided practice are the primary instructional strategies for teaching writing.

1

Learn the Different Roles of the Writer: Generate Ideas and Multiple Drafts, Revise, Edit

Just as in reading, there are many different behaviors and strategies required for the production of a written text. While each student

The goal of the writing teacher is to show students how to have purpose when they write and how to apply strong writing skills in the service of this purpose.

THE FOUR ROLES OF A LITERATE PERSON

Students need to be proficient in four interrelated dimensions of language use. Freebody and Luke identify the roles literate people take on as code breaker, text participant, text user, and text analyst.

Coding practices: Developing resources as a code breaker

How do I crack this text? How does it work? What are its patterns and conventions? How do the sounds and marks relate, singly and in combinations?

Text-meaning practices: Developing resources as a text participant

How do the ideas represented in the text string together? What cultural resources can be brought to bear on the text? What are the cultural meanings and possible readings that can be constructed from this text?

Pragmatic practices: Developing resources as text user

How do the uses of this text shape its composition? What do I do with this text, here and now? What will others do with it? What are my options and alternatives?

Critical practices: Developing resources as text analyst and critic

What is this text trying to do to me? In whose interest? Which positions, voices, and interests are at play? Which are silent and absent?

will have his or her individual style and approach to writing, the proficient writer needs to practice some form of invention, generating ideas, and sorting them out. In order to create the text, the writer needs to integrate many strategies including:



Understanding the concept of an absent reader who will need more information than the writer needs to understand the writer's meaning



Recognizing the conventions of the specific genre in which the writer is creating text



Knowing print specific rules for spelling and punctuation

During the writing, and afterwards, experienced writers constantly revisit the text in order to develop ideas, sharpen language, and revise meaning. They need to pay attention to the text at the macro and the micro levels, dealing with structure and form and with

sentence-level mechanics. As well, writers will eventually want to pay attention to finer points of style, for example, strong, effective vocabulary and clever figures of speech. Students need to be reminded that writing is communication—are they getting their ideas across?

Often, inexperienced or novice writers are under the impression that a published piece of writing sprung fully formed from the writer’s keyboard. They are unaware of the hundreds of drafts, dead-ends, edits, and corrections a professional writer experiences in the process of creating a published text. Students need to be shown such efforts of adult and professional writers to help them understand and try on the different roles a writer must play.

Although they are not linear and often occur simultaneously, the roles or phases of the writing process can be summarized as follows:



Generate ideas and text — use your own values, thoughts, experiences, reading, and research in order to find a focus for your writing. Gather evidence, brainstorm, use graphic organizers, and finally draft your piece—organizing ideas into structure.



Revise— look critically at your work, question your purpose and clarity, discover new angles. Revise means “look again.” Does your piece communicate what you really want to say? Share your work with others for feedback and make decisions about which feedback to incorporate in the next draft. (It’s useful to get both teacher and peer feedback, and students need training in becoming good peer reviewers.)



Edit — apply your knowledge (and your editors’ knowledge) of the rules of mechanics and grammar to polish and present your piece for publication.

2

Gain Experience with Different Modes of Discourse and Genres

Writing is a complex and difficult endeavor that encompasses many different skills and behaviors. Learning to write is made even more difficult than necessary through the types of writing assigned in school. Middle school students may first come to school comfortable

and familiar with certain forms of writing—letters, notes, stories. Rather than building on those comfortable forms and gradually introducing more complex writing, assignments in school often immediately require that students create “autonomous texts” that can be understood without any context—for example, a persuasive essay about censorship and television that is written in the third person to an anonymous reader.

There are ways to help students contend with the barriers inherent in school writing. One is to make explicit the criteria and expectations of a specific assignment, helping students to break it down and understand both the purpose and the skills required. Another is to offer students many more experiences with writing than expository and narrative compositions.

One good system around which to structure a balanced writing curriculum can be found in the work of James Kinneavy, who identified different “modes of discourse” found in literacy texts (Kinneavy, 1980). Using these modes as a starting point allows teachers to open up the range of texts introduced in the classroom. An effective literacy program will encourage students to play with and experiment with many modes as they try on the roles of different discourse communities.

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MODES OF DISCOURSE

- **Expressive writing:** poetry, descriptive writing, and journals
- **Persuasive writing:** advertising, editorials, “In My Opinion” essays, legal oratory, political speeches, religious sermons, and polemics
- **Narrative (literary) writing:** short stories, drama, biography, and folk tales
- **Expository (referential) writing:** news articles, summaries, reports, scientific proofs

There are many examples of informal writing that can help students develop skill and fluency. Having students create theatre pieces that grow out of role plays is a good way to scaffold (or create stepping stones to more complex tasks) as students begin to develop the ability to write more autonomous texts. Creating classroom-based “chat rooms” in which students create written conversations that resemble oral face-to-face exchanges allows students to experiment with writing.

As students practice different literary voices, they gain confidence and fluency in literacy and will, in time, be able to “try on” the voice of the “writer” as defined by the more formal, “autonomous” text. The student will be able to produce a text that is self-contained and independent. But first, students need to practice and to play with writing. They need to have many different kinds of literacy practices modeled for them and then try these practices themselves.

3

Develop Critical Awareness of the Contexts and Purposes of Writing

Critical literacy leads the learner to an understanding of literacy as public discourse, that is, the making of meaning to solve public and personal problems. The production of texts is always a dynamic negotiation involving the purposes and motives of both readers and writers. Just as all texts are social, so all texts are also rhetorical—dependent on and driven by the context in which they are created.

When teachers work with students to develop their critical awareness, students begin to ask themselves the following questions before and during composition of texts:



What do I know about my reader?



What does my reader feel?



What does my reader need to know?



What do I not know about my reader?



What do I have to know about the reader in order to get the reader to share my perspective?

Just as all texts are social, so all texts are also rhetorical—dependent on and driven by the context in which they are created.

■
How much am I willing to accommodate the reader's point of view in order to have the reader share my point of view?

■
Have I provided enough information for my reader?

Students who have developed a rhetorical awareness recognize that writers choose from different styles to appeal to audience emotion and intellect, from different argumentative strategies, and from different types of evidence. The work of teachers is to provide students with opportunities where they can develop this awareness. As literacy expert Linda Flower writes:

The educational challenge is to go beyond teaching conventions to teaching literate actions. How do you help students to not merely control important literate practices, such as essay writing, but to embed those practices in literate action—in a playful, social, and cognitive process of using writing to do something?
(Flower, 1996, p. 27)

For example, suppose a group of students were hoping to convince their city council that a skateboarders' park with ramps would be a good way to solve some of the city's skateboarder-related summer-time problems. To be effective, the students would have to carefully analyze the rhetorical situation. If this group had arranged meetings with different constituencies—say, a gathering of their peers, a group of parents, the local chamber of commerce, a city council subcommittee—they would have to use their literacy skills to respond to the very different opportunities and challenges each meeting presents.

While the above example has a clear social setting, any literacy task—whether it is writing a love letter or an essay exam, reading a history book or viewing a commercial—presents a particular context. Developing rhetorical awareness goes to the heart of proficiently performing these tasks.

A PROBLEM-POSING APPROACH TO ORAL LANGUAGE

The Turning Points literacy program places new emphasis on the oral-based language arts of public speaking, performing, and listening. Just as in reading and writing instruction, the goal is to help students become **active speakers or performers**. Oral performances challenge students to recognize the way an audience impacts a speaker's

Any literacy task—whether it is writing a love letter or an essay exam, reading a history book or viewing a commercial—presents a particular context.

performance, how the speaker can influence an audience, and how the topic can shape the behavior of an audience and speaker. Middle school students respond well to opportunities for public speaking and performing. Such activities tie the development of social skills to the development of literacy skills. The public nature of these activities also tends to drive the curriculum towards ethical and moral dilemmas, a direction middle school students appreciate since they are often beginning to personalize value systems.

Because oral performances often create a compelling purpose for the creation and use of written texts, this approach also helps students to become more proficient readers and writers. It is here that reading, writing, speaking, and performing are most powerfully integrated.

Middle school students respond well to opportunities for public speaking and performing. Such activities tie the development of social skills to the development of literacy skills.

Structures for Speaking and Performing

1

STORYTELLING

The ancient art of storytelling teaches students skills that are vital to literacy development. Students learn the concept of genre and those literary elements that characterize genres: themes, narrative conventions, stylistic conventions, and stock characters. Working with storytelling formulas allows students to work in a comfort zone, while at the same time providing them with the opportunity to put an original spin on the composition. Storytelling teaches students the need to elaborate within a given structure in response to an audience's needs. Teaching students how to respond to a live audience helps prepare students for the far more challenging task of writing to an absent audience, which they must do when they write. Having students reflect on what was learned and on technical aspects of the practice is one way to tie this practice into a literacy context. Occasionally, storytelling can provide students with a spoken text they can then translate into a written text.

2

THEATRE ARTS

A strong use of the theatre arts contributes to building a culture of discourse. Different theatre-related practices, such as role play, oration, oral performance of literary texts, staged readings or full performances of plays, and improvisational exercises, build students' oral skills and strengthen their appreciation of literacy as performance. The collaboration and the improvisation that are typical of theatre performance help

students build their literacy skills. Reading and writing take on a different tone when they are viewed as acts of collaboration and improvisation. Theatre arts are also a way to engage reluctant students who resist reading and writing when they are presented as solitary activities.

3

DEBATE

One of the most important things students should learn in school is how to persuade. Everywhere we turn we find this skill in demand. Advertisers seek to persuade consumers, lawyers strive to persuade jurors, teachers attempt to persuade students, voters work to persuade lawmakers and policy makers, prospective employees want to persuade hiring officers. Even in private life, people use their words to persuade other people to love them, to obey them, to agree with them, to believe them.

Debate provides students with an opportunity to practice the art of persuasion in a structured context where they can receive immediate feedback. Schools usually ask students to master the far more difficult task of writing a persuasive essay where the students must imagine reactions to their ideas rather than providing students with practice at developing arguments in situations where they can immediately test their arguments and adapt them accordingly.

To be good at debate means more than just being able to deliver a good line. Debaters need to know how to read an audience, to anticipate an audience's point of view. The most successful debater is able to imagine what an issue looks like from the perspective of someone else. The debater also needs to know how to sort through evidence to find support and how to choose among a wealth of argumentative strategies in response to a given rhetorical situation.

4

SOCRATIC SEMINAR

The Socratic Seminar is a structured format for discussion and dialogue in which students ask authentic questions, gain understanding of a complex text, and gain awareness of reading comprehension strategies and group dynamics (Metzger, 1998). A Socratic Seminar looks like two concentric circles, each with 4–12 participants

Reading and writing take on a different tone when they are viewed as acts of collaboration and improvisation. Theatre arts are also a way to engage reluctant students who resist reading and writing when they are presented as solitary activities.

engaged in talking, listening, facilitating, and observing. Everyone comes to the seminar having read a common text, and the assumption is that knowledge and understanding of the text will be constructed by the participants themselves, not by the teacher. As Brookline, Massachusetts, teacher Margaret Metzger describes it, “To give the students a chance to help one another through muddled understandings, I needed to stay out of the way of their misunderstandings. If I had been in the inner circle, directing every question, students might not have been so willing to reveal their confusions.” (Metzger, 1998, p. 242) Through focused observation and feedback, students gain awareness of effective reading strategies and communication styles. (See Appendix 2 for a full outline of the Socratic Seminar Format adapted by Metzger.)

Practice 2: Teach Literacy Through Explicit Instruction, Modeling, and Guided Practice

KEY STRATEGIES:

- Gradual Release of Responsibility
- Reader's Workshop
- Writer's Workshop

OVERVIEW OF THE PRACTICE

As March approached and the American Civil War loomed on the seventh grade curriculum horizon, history teacher Arthur Williams felt he was in danger of losing the interest of his students. Somehow he needed to jump start this new unit. He had to find a way to get the students connected.

One day Mr. Williams began class by sitting on the edge of his desk, holding a copy of Liam Flaherty's short story "The Sniper." He said to the class: "Before we start to study about the American Civil War, I want to read to you this story about a civil war that took place earlier this century in Ireland. As I read this story I want you to close your eyes and play a mental movie in your mind of what you see. Occasionally I am going to ask you what you see in this movie. Because, you see, an author just needs to give you a few details and you will supply the rest. When I read I always imagine I'm playing this mental movie in my mind. Now listen carefully and transport yourself to this different place."

Mr. Williams began to read and his students followed the story, which takes place in the twilight on the pitched roof tops of Dublin. At certain points in the story, Mr. Williams stopped reading and asked the students what they saw, asked them to describe the feeling of fear, asked them to imagine the smell of cordite.

When Mr. Williams reached the end of the story where the sniper turned over the dead body of his adversary and discovered his brother, the class was deadly silent.

"Now open your eyes and let's start talking about what it is like for a country to have a civil war."

Proficient, active readers know when they understand what they read and when they do not. They can identify when and why the meaning of a text is unclear to them and can use a variety of strategies to solve comprehension problems or to deepen their understanding of a text. This Turning Points guide to teaching literacy recommends providing explicit instruction to demystify the literacy process and lead to a richer appreciation of language. Just as an apprentice learns a trade through practical experience with a skilled mentor, so students become proficient with new, unfamiliar forms of literacy that the teacher has had greater experience with, for example, science lab reports, mathematical proofs, historical analysis. At the same time, it is important for teachers to remember that students are already proficient in many different forms of literacy—from storytelling and singing, to writing letters and reading magazines—and to build on those forms in their teaching. The literacy classroom should be a safe, supportive place where students “try on” new forms of literacy after the teacher has modeled these practices. After students have gained confidence with these forms of literacy, they will be able to expand the number of places where they can practice their abilities.

What makes literacy education an especially challenging project is that most people, including teachers, do not think about the specific strategies they use when they read, write, and engage others by using language. Recognizing that these literacy activities are a complex set of strategies and providing explicit instruction for each strategy is a vital element of a balanced literacy program.

The apprentice approach to instruction should take place in the context of a “gradual release of responsibility” model that represents a gradual transition from teacher’s modeling to student responsibility for demonstrating and articulating his or her use of a particular strategy. This gradual release of responsibility is recursive—the process is repeated as new strategies are introduced or as new, more sophisticated uses are given to familiar strategies.

Proficient, active readers know when they understand what they read and when they do not. They can identify when and why the meaning of a text is unclear to them and can use a variety of strategies to solve comprehension problems or to deepen their understanding of a text.

THE GRADUAL RELEASE OF RESPONSIBILITY MODEL

1

Teacher Explanation

What is the strategy?
How does it enhance literacy?

2

Teacher Modeling/Student Participation

Teacher models
Large group participation and practice
Small group practice
Pair practice

3

Student Implementation

Independent reading
Sharing
Large groups
Small groups

(Adapted from Mosaic of Thought, Keene and Zimmermann, 1997)

Teachers need to take care not to undermine the process by either failing to provide students with enough support through modeling and social interaction or by failing to provide students with enough choices that will allow students to become engaged in the work and take responsibility for the work.

STRATEGIES FOR APPLYING THE APPRENTICE APPROACH: READERS AND WRITERS WORKSHOPS

The gradual release of responsibility model for teaching can be applied to instruction in reading, writing, and speaking across the curriculum. The classroom becomes a workshop in which literacy strategies are shared, practiced, and experimented with. Reader's and Writer's Workshops allow for intensive and focused instruction and for practice in interpreting, creating, and using written texts.

1

Reader's Workshops

Children learn to read by reading. Reader's workshops allot large

Reader's and Writer's Workshops allow for intensive and focused instruction and for practice in interpreting, creating, and using written texts.

blocks of time for the many different kinds of activities that build reading fluency and generate interest in books. The schedule can be flexible as students participate in **read aloud or modeled reading** activities (e.g., “think alouds”), **shared reading** activities, **guided reading** activities, and **independent reading** activities.

These activities should be incorporated into students’ schedules regardless of their reading levels. It is important, however, that great care be taken in choosing reading materials. A well designed reader’s workshop will stock reading material that includes high-interest texts, reading level appropriate texts, and texts that will challenge students with increasing levels of difficulty. It is also important that students see reading workshop time as flexible, but predictable.

The value of a reader’s workshop is that it allows teachers to focus on the different activities that allow a reader to make meaning from a text. It is important that students be introduced to these activities by the use of specific instructional activities presented during focused mini-lessons. The “magic” of reading needs to be de-mystified for students without presenting a mechanistic, instrumental idea of reading. The ultimate goal of a reader’s workshop is to show students how they can make meaning from texts.



Read Aloud or Modeled Reading Students need to gain familiarity with the different cadences and rhythms of written language as distinct from oral language. Read aloud activities can also help students learn about and locate models of particular genres or forms of writing. Teachers can model reading strategies by reading with spirit and emphasis. At times the teacher should pause while reading and share some of the strategies she uses to make the text meaningful. By choosing books that reflect students’ interests and taste, while at the same time being mindful of their audience, teachers demonstrate how adult readers choose and are engaged by texts. As they develop as readers, students should also participate in modeling for others, allowing the workshop to become more collaborative and less teacher-directed.



Shared Reading Students and teacher read a text together so the teacher can model and the students can practice comprehension strategies involving prediction, close reading, questioning, making connections, drawing conclusions, and reflection.

A well designed reader’s workshop will stock reading material that includes high-interest texts, reading level appropriate texts, and texts that will challenge students with increasing levels of difficulty.

Keene and Zimmermann offer specific strategies based on asking students to make connections from text to text, text to self, and text to the world (see Practice 1).

■ **Guided Reading** In flexible reading groups, students read texts that are reading-level appropriate and practice specific strategies for reading comprehension and interpretation. Activities are structured to give students practice working with other students to make meaning from the text. Groups work somewhat independently from the teacher. The teacher intervenes to help students use strategies based on prediction, questioning, visualizing, and connecting.

■ **Independent Reading** Students choose texts independently and are given time to read on their own. While the activities can be less structured than other workshop activities, students must still process what they read in some social way. Journal writing, letters to characters or authors, double-entry journals, and expressive forms such as poetry, drama, and visual arts are just some ways instructors ask students to make meaning. Most reading workshop formats ask students to keep a reading log.

2

Writer's Workshops

Children learn to write by writing. The ability to communicate and develop writing skills develops primarily through practice in communication. We need to ensure that students have plentiful experience using the medium of writing for multiple purposes. Students need to be shown all kinds of thinking, decision making, and awareness that producing a purposeful piece of writing requires. They need to see this process modeled for them as they are asked to “try on” specific writing practices. They also need to experience how several revisions to a piece of writing can greatly improve it.

As in the reader's workshop, students, as apprentice writers, need to be provided with various degrees of support, responsibility, and independence. For purposes of instruction, students will need to participate in **modeled writing activities, guided writing activities, and independent writing activities.**

■ **Modeled Writing** To provide students with a window into the composing process, the teacher thinks aloud as she begins

Children learn to write by writing. The ability to communicate and develop writing skills develops primarily through practice in communication.

tackling a specific writing task. As the teacher models her thinking process, she writes on a board or on an overhead.



Guided Writing To provide writers with the opportunity to practice a specific area of a writer’s craft, the teacher organizes small-group writing activities using appropriate materials to foster effective interaction among student writers. The teacher provides full support for the mechanics of writing while students engage in the complete process of writing. Structures such as “Daily Edits,” in which a common error seen in students’ writings is explained and corrected on the board, connect mechanics and grammar with the process of writing.



Independent Writing To give students ownership of their writing, the teacher provides time, choice, and opportunity for students to practice and independently solve problems encountered in writing for authentic purposes.

Mary Ellen Giacobbe has identified three characteristics of a well-designed writer’s workshop: **time, ownership, and response** (Atwell, 1998, p. 252).



Time — Students need time to work on their writing. The writing process of invention, composition, critique, and revision is time-consuming, but necessary if students are to produce meaningful work. Students must be reminded not to be fooled by the illusion of a finished text. Published writers rarely expose the false starts, the ruthless editing, the blind alleys, the messy writing that underlie the polished, confident piece of published writing. Students need time to reflect upon the changes in a piece from the first draft to the final manuscript. They must learn to value the entire process, and this means valuing the commitment of time.



Ownership — A writer’s workshop emphasizes writing as problem solving, as investigation, as the literate act of the thinking process. This emphasis is possible only if both students and teachers recognize the student’s “author”-ity over the text. The writing teacher must play many roles, each of which facilitates the development of the student as writer: coach, editor, sympathetic reader, evaluator, modeler, interviewer, and reviewer. The

writing teacher should not expect the same essay from all students. The goal of the writer’s workshop is to guide students as thinkers, problem solvers, and opinion makers.

■ **Response** — All writing is a variation of the traditional “call and response” form of communication. We write in order to work out our ideas. Our success as writers depends on how well we listen to feedback and use this information to adjust our ideas. Language use is our way of knowing the world and building common knowledge shared by others so that we can help each other solve problems and interpret experience. Students need thoughtful and genuine response if they are to grow as writers. Students will not take their writing seriously if others are not taking their work seriously. On the other hand, resistant students will more likely respond positively if they feel that what they write matters. For feedback, brief individual conferences are often more effective than lengthy written comments (see pp. 45–46). Written feedback that is clear and specific is also useful. Rather than commenting on every strength and every flaw or error, identify key places to ask questions or make open-ended suggestions for the student to address while revising the piece. Focus the most substantive feedback on earlier drafts to allow the writer to address it through revision.

For feedback, brief individual conferences are often more effective than lengthy written comments. Written feedback that is clear and specific is also useful.

SAMPLE READING/WRITING WORKSHOP SCHEDULE

- **Silent reading/writing (10–20 minutes):** Often, the teacher spends part of this time reading/writing as well.
- **Mini lesson (5–15 minutes):** The teacher introduces, models, reinforces, and demonstrates a reading/writing comprehension strategy, skill, or procedure.
- **Workshop (30–50 minutes):** This is used for individual independent reading/writing, student-teacher conferences for guided practice, meeting with small, needs-based groups, book club meetings, and other strategies.
- **Sharing (10–20 minutes):** Students share insights from their reading/writing, pose questions, share responses, debrief experiences.

Practice 3: Give Students Authentic, Meaningful Work In Literacy

KEY STRATEGIES:



Creating Connections Across the Curriculum



Literacy-based Projects and Performances



Opportunities to Teach and Serve the Community



Getting to Know Your Students

OVERVIEW OF THE PRACTICE

Yolanda hated to read, plain and simple. Whenever she tried to read, it took forever and was really boring. She was a busy girl with lots of friends and lots of business to take care of. Given this attitude, it was not surprising that for Yolanda, the idea of her reading a short story on a tape for an elderly member of the Ida B. Wells Senior Center was a pretty unpleasant idea.

Ms. Prentice made her students read their stories silently to themselves before practicing aloud on a small tape recorder. She asked the students to make notes in the margins of the story to indicate where they should provide a particular emphasis.

Yolanda's story by Langston Hughes was about a country-talking character named Jessie B. Simple. It was difficult to read because Yolanda thought people weren't supposed to talk that way in school. When she began practicing her story aloud, Yolanda became quickly frustrated because she kept making so many mistakes. No one would want to hear a tape where a girl made mistakes and couldn't read. But Ms. Prentice told Yolanda that the biggest difference between good readers and beginning readers is that good readers practice more. She told Yolanda that this could become her story and that if she kept practicing, she would soon tell the story like a pro.

So that is what Yolanda did. At home she practiced reading in front of a mirror, in the bath, to her baby sister, and while her big brother was watching TV. Soon the words seemed to flow from her mouth and she found herself changing her voice and making the

reading sound interesting and funny. When it came time for Yolanda to tape her story, she read it without a hitch. When Yolanda presented the ladies at the senior center with her tape, she thought, "I fooled them. They think I'm a good reader."

But for the first time in her life, Yolanda half believed it might be true: she just might be a good reader.

Literacy education must provide abundant opportunities for all students to use language and develop critical literacy capability in real-life situations.

Literacy education must provide abundant opportunities for all students to use language and develop critical literacy capability in real-life situations. Literacy has everything to do with meaning making, with reading the world, and with negotiating one's place in the world. Making connections with the student's world is essential if a literacy program is to be embedded in democracy and equity.

Literacy researcher Deborah Brandt writes:

Becoming literate is not learning how to handle language divorced from action but coming to understand the action that written language relates to, coming to realize that written discourse is about what people do with it and that what appears before you on a page has everything in the world to do with what you're supposed to be doing (Brandt, 1990, p. 192).

A balanced literacy program recognizes that the awareness of "context" is as important for students' growth as literate individuals as awareness of "texts." To teach students about context in the literacy process, teachers need to be sure that the work students are doing has connections to the real world and to their lives, and that it has depth.

STRATEGIES FOR CREATING AUTHENTIC, MEANINGFUL WORK IN LITERACY

1

Teach literacy across the curriculum.

One effective way to ensure that students' learning is not fragmented and disconnected from experience is to create strong links among the disciplines. Interdisciplinary units focusing on a common unifying theme and defining common learning goals that include habits of mind are powerful ways to establish such connections. If all teachers address reading, writing, speaking, and performing across the curriculum, not only are the skills reinforced, but students are also given the clear message that literacy is an essential and universal tool of thinking and learning.

2

Develop Rigorous Projects and Performances that Require Students to Use Literacy in Real Ways

Whether part of an interdisciplinary unit, or as major or final assignments within subject-area classes, good projects create context and purpose for learning. When literacy is made central to a project, students have opportunities to discover why being literate is so important. (For more ideas about designing projects, see the *Turning Points Guide to Curriculum Development*.)

ELEMENTS OF STRONG PROJECTS OR PERFORMANCES:



Purpose/Focus: They are based on clear learning goals and give students the opportunity to demonstrate what they have learned about complex concepts (not just factual information).



Audience: They require that students share their work with an audience that extends beyond the classroom (e.g., other students and faculty, parents, community members).



Authentic work and opportunities for fieldwork: They are connected to real life, often calling upon students to conduct research and investigations outside the school or to bring in and utilize resources from outside.



Academic core: They are challenging and require that students develop and use understandings of core content.



Connections across disciplines or fields of study: They are frequently interdisciplinary in nature, even when taught by a single teacher in a specific content area.



Extended time (depth): They require commitment and time to do them well.

EXAMPLES OF LITERACY-BASED PROJECTS/PERFORMANCES



Student-written and performed plays



Scientific studies of a community problem (e.g., surveying the incidence of radon or asbestos)

- Illustrated children’s books

- Architectural drawings/models and presentations

3 ***Create Opportunities For Students to Use Literacy to Teach or Serve Others***

Even when there is no time for a full-fledged project, simple opportunities for students to use literacy in the community can be very effective vehicles for learning. Some of the examples listed below could be year-long consistent structures to reinforce literacy learning. Some might take place before or after school, or as part of electives or extra-curricular activities.

- Tutoring or reading aloud to younger children, including stories students have written themselves

- Reading aloud to people who are elderly, sick, or disabled

- Creating public service announcements, posters, and pamphlets on important social issues

- Press releases or news articles about important school and student issues

4 ***Get to Know Your Students***

Although this strategy may seem obvious at first glance, none is more important for creating a meaningful context for literacy. By getting to know your students and listening closely to their interests, stories, needs, and dreams, you can make stronger connections between the skills of literacy and the things that are most important to students. If literacy is a conversation (both written and spoken), it’s vital that it not become one-sided.

- Don’t leave your concerns, passions, and stories at home. Students respond to genuine face-to-face interaction and personal connection.

- Design assignments with a menu of options from which students can choose.

By getting to know your students and listening closely to their interests, stories, needs, and dreams, you can make stronger connections between the skills of literacy and the things that are most important to students.



Think of assignments that “prime the pump” (to use Peter Elbow’s term), such as brainstorming, questioning, drawing, and wondering. They will allow you and the students to discover something new about yourselves and the topic of study (Elbow, 1989).



Be flexible. Allow students’ interests and concerns to become part of the curriculum.



Remember: teaching literacy is a conversation.

A good conversationalist is not rushed, self-focused, distracted, or bored.

A good conversationalist asks follow-up questions that show she is listening.

A good conversationalist shares the agenda.



If you want to know what students think, ask them. (Not once, but many times and in many ways.)



Ask students “real” questions (that matter and to which you don’t already have an answer) and take time to hear their responses.

Practice 4: Use Ongoing, Multiple Forms of Data Collection and Assessment

KEY STRATEGIES:

- Literacy Profiles
- Individual Conferences
- Student Reflective Writing
- Holistically Scored Writing Prompts
- Reading Assessment
- Performance Tasks and Exhibitions
- Standardized Tests
- Literacy Portfolios

OVERVIEW OF THE PRACTICE

Four times a year, the teachers at the Tobin School ask their entire student body to write an impromptu essay on a topic. Using a rubric, the teachers holistically score the essays and then talk over what they see when they consider the essays as a whole. They look for what students were generally able to accomplish and they discuss the limits they noticed in the students' performances. For example, when the students wrote a persuasive essay, very few were able to acknowledge the other side of the issue.

Using the information derived from studying the essays, the faculty identify specific issues to address with students.

Besides talking about the essays as a whole, teachers bring to the table specific essays that they find especially problematic or that reveal new information about the student or that are good examples of an issue the teacher was struggling with in the classroom.

After one particularly fruitful session of analyzing essays, a teacher remarked, "Now, I would like to see a computer do what we just did!"

The first questions educators need to ask when they think about assessment are: “What is the purpose for this assessment? How will the information it provides us inform our instructional practices?” Some of the purposes for assessment include the following:

- To inform teaching practice
- To create benchmarks that will motivate students
- To allow students to understand their own learning
- To give teachers a picture of what students know and a window into their learning process
- To make public the work being done throughout the school
- To provide debriefing and closure to school projects
- To measure what works and what doesn't work in the classroom

A school must develop a variety of assessments that reflect the richness and complexity of literacy. Educators want to introduce students to a world of language that encompasses writers as diverse as C.S. Lewis, Toni Morrison, Elie Wiesel, Chinua Achebe, Louise Erdrich, and Sandra Cisneros, to use twentieth century English as an example. In short, assessments must recognize and reflect the intellectually and socially complex nature of reading and writing and the important roles of school, home, and society in literacy development.

Researchers cannot design a standardized test that will reflect the many ways of language represented by the authors listed above. More to the point, researchers cannot design a test that reflects the different speech communities whose particular use of words inspired and informed these authors' works. While tests may be used to support teacher observations, they should not be used to define progress in absolute terms.

In the Turning Points approach, assessment is classroom and learning oriented, an active process of making judgments that involve learners, parents, and teachers, and that are an integral part of the curricular process. This approach involves multiple assessments that are both process and product oriented, and both formative and

Assessments must recognize and reflect the intellectually and socially complex nature of reading and writing and the important roles of school, home, and society in literacy development.

Both ongoing assessment practices at the classroom level and regular school-wide assessment practices are necessary for taking stock of individual student learning and the progress of a school as a whole.

summative. At times, a single assessment, such as a writing sample or an individual conference, can be used to assess reading and writing. Speaking and performing tasks are often assessments of reading and writing, as well.

Assessment data are gathered over time, so that the results show a profile of achievement. Students evaluate their progress based on personal, ongoing profiles of growth and achievement. As teachers observe, collect information, and reflect on, analyze, interpret, and use assessment information, they also provide demonstrations of literacy growth and development. Both ongoing assessment practices at the classroom level and regular school-wide assessment practices are necessary for taking stock of individual student learning and the progress of a school as a whole.

Having multiple ways of looking at students as literate individuals will allow schools to become more effective at teaching students literacy.

ONGOING CLASSROOM-BASED ASSESSMENT STRATEGIES

The following are ways in which teachers can assess the learning and thinking of individual students on an ongoing basis. These strategies also help students reflect on their development as literate people and take more responsibility for their learning and thinking. The strategies go hand in hand with the practice of looking collaboratively at student work. (See *Turning Points Guide to Looking at Student and Teacher Work*.)

1

Literacy Profiles

An important component of a strong data collection and assessment system is to prepare a literacy profile for each student. This profile might include a sheet of the student's interests, an inventory of recently read material, a reflective self-assessment as reader and writer, the current reading level, and a teacher-generated description of the student as reader and writer. The process of producing this profile prompts both the teacher and the student to focus on who the student is as reader and writer.

SAMPLE STRUCTURED COMMENTS FOR INDIVIDUAL CONFERENCES

First,

Rewind and play back: The teacher summarizes for the student what the piece is about...



"Why don't you show me what you are working on and describe for me what your project looks like..."



"I am going to look over your draft and describe what I understand you are working on..."

then alternate warm comments...



"I really enjoyed the part where you wrote..."



"I especially liked the way you..."

with cool comments...



"I did not understand when you wrote..."



"When you say... I didn't quite understand and I was confused."



"I enjoyed when you wrote... and I would like to hear more about..."

focusing on specific instructional agendas...



"Let me show you the different ways you can report dialogue using both quotation marks and an indirect method."



"Let's work on your conclusion. How can you tie together the important points of your essay?"

2

Individual Conferences

Often, teachers see the results of a student's thinking, but must often guess about the process that led to the work. Misunderstandings can go unnoticed. Individual conferences can be the one chance for the teacher to receive the explanations that will help clarify a student's work. Conferences provide opportunities for talking to students about what they are reading and writing, for teaching specific reading and writing strategies, and for learning more about the student as reader and writer.

In both teacher-led conferences and student writing group interactions, the opportunity for writers to hear their stories played back allows writers to gauge the extent that their goals for writing were met: "Did my reader get it? Does my writing come across the way I want it to come across?"

Often, teacher-led conferences and student writing groups focus on what the reader would like to change about the writing. In particular, the teacher finds the few minutes she has with writers to be a valuable opportunity to intervene and suggest corrections. But research on conferences shows that the less prescriptive conference is a more effective way to contribute to the development of writers. One of the most important questions a teacher can ask students is to hear more about something they have written. Teachers usually get positive responses when they let students know that something they have written is interesting or enjoyable, and when they ask that students develop their points and say more. One of the biggest problems inexperienced writers must deal with is the fact that they are unable to sufficiently develop or explain their ideas for the benefit of readers. Asking to hear more is one way a teacher can encourage students to add details and include more explanation.

3

Student Reflective Writing

Having students reflect on their literacy experiences, practices, challenges, and strengths can be a source for important information about the students and about the curriculum. Giving students a common vocabulary to talk about what they do can help demystify activities that can appear intimidating.

Research on conferences shows that the less prescriptive conference is a more effective way to contribute to the development of writers. One of the most important questions a teacher can ask students is to hear more about something they have written.

As with all kinds of literate activities, students need practice with reflective writing. They need to practice how to look hard at their writing, how to learn the vocabulary, and how to identify appropriate issues to explore.

Below are some examples of student reflective assessments.

EXAMPLES OF REFLECTIVE WRITING

- The student is asked to reflect on her strongest attribute as a writer and to indicate one specific challenge area where she wants to improve.
- The student is asked to describe a piece of writing that gave her the most satisfaction to write. The student is also asked to write about the process she used to compose the piece and to explain the qualities that made the writing satisfying.
- The student indicates something she read, either in school or on her own, that stuck with her. She reflects on why this reading was memorable, on the qualities of the text that she enjoyed, and on what she learned from it.
- The student is asked to reflect on the ways literacy is used at home. What kinds of literacy take place at home, for example, literacy for entertainment, spiritual literacy, occupational literacy, educational literacy, and literacy for practical, household purposes?
- The student is asked to write a literacy autobiography describing first experiences with reading and writing and how subsequent experiences have affected her perception of herself and herself as writer/reader.

SCHOOL-WIDE ASSESSMENT STRATEGIES

The following strategies are most useful for helping an entire faculty or group of teachers take stock of how well their students are progressing in literacy and how well they are doing as a school.

Examining together the data that results from such assessments, faculty can look for trends and patterns in learning, identify strengths and gaps in the curriculum, and shape school-wide instructional goals and strategies.

1

Holistically Scored Writing Prompts

Baseline writing pieces from students several times a year can provide a staff with valuable information. Looking at these essays as a whole and generalizing about their strengths and weaknesses can help teachers identify gaps in the curriculum. Teachers can follow the progress of individual students over many essays, knowing that any one essay cannot completely reveal a writer's strengths and challenges.

These essays are assessed holistically using a rubric carefully developed and agreed upon by the readers. The readers use a sampling of essays to work through any confusion or misunderstanding about how the rubric should be applied, especially in the context of this specific

GUIDELINES TO CREATING WRITING PROMPTS

As writing prompts are developed, consider every writing assignment an invitation to produce more writing, part of a continuing conversation between teachers and students. As well, certain questions are helpful to ask:

- Will this prompt generate a significant amount of writing in a reasonable period of time?
- Can you, the teacher, use the prompt to write a coherent essay in the prescribed period of time? In other words, can you do what you are asking the students to do?
- If this is a cold prompt, does it expect students to know information that they are likely to know?
- Will this prompt elicit an interesting response if students were asked to respond orally?
- Do students have some investment in this prompt? In other words, do they want to know what they think about the issue or theme on which the prompt is based?
- Is the prompt clear enough? Can the students understand the vocabulary used in the prompt? Can the students rephrase the question and still keep its original meaning?

(See Appendix 4 for more detail about administering and scoring the writing assessment.)

writing occasion. This process leads teachers away from placing undue emphasis on any one characteristic and towards the answer to the questions, “Does this essay work? Is the writer successful?”

2

School-wide Reading Assessment

As with the writing prompts, a simple baseline assessment in reading can be conducted at several intervals during the school year. There are many such off-the-shelf assessments available. In the most individualized approach, a selection of short reading passages representing a range of levels of difficulty are chosen. Teachers listen to students reading and note how many words are read in a minute, as well as the number of miscues or errors, determining at what levels of difficulty a student is fluent, challenged, and frustrated. Students are assessed in the beginning, at mid-point, and at the end of the year. Teachers analyze the data from the assessments and use it to inform teaching and learning.

3

Performance Tasks and Exhibitions

In addition to reading and writing assessments, schools may want to consider developing more layered performance tasks that are either focused on a single discipline, or are multi-disciplinary. Tasks such as science experiments and demonstrations, dramatic performances, art exhibits, and videos offer opportunities for students to utilize their literacy skills in demonstrating content knowledge. Public exhibitions of such work give students an audience and a compelling purpose for their learning, and allow a school to create a culture in which student work is highly valued and widely shared.

4

Standardized Test Scores

Standardized test scores inform educators how well students fare in highly structured assessments, and students will have to negotiate these tests throughout their school careers. Comparing composite scores with other scores produced from similar educational settings can also help flag major problem areas or gaps that educators will need to address in curriculum planning.

Standardized tests are perhaps most valuable—and have earned their credibility in the public’s eye—because they ask students to perform identical tasks under comparable circumstances at regular

intervals over a long period of time. This process can help educators to measure students' growth and development and chart students' rate of progress.

But standardized tests must not receive undue emphasis in a school's repertoire of assessment strategies. Standardized tests are, by definition, instruments of reduction that avoid the complexity, the ambiguity, and the contingency of knowledge that defines literacy. Standardized tests are tools that must be used with care and caution.

5

Literacy Portfolios

Portfolios are opportunities for students to create a living record of their learning and progress as readers and writers. As a school-wide assessment structure, students select examples of work from all classes that demonstrate their skill as readers and writers. They are also asked to write periodic reflections on their growth and to set goals for their learning. Portfolios may include a record of all other assessments the student has completed, including standardized test scores. Literacy portfolios can be used for a variety of purposes— as an ongoing learning tool, as a focal point for student-led parent-teacher conferences, as a diagnostic tool for faculty to examine patterns of learning in a school, and as an eighth grade graduation requirement. Before graduating from eighth grade, students may be required to present their literacy portfolios to a panel of adults, including parents and those from outside the school, and to field questions about the portfolio's contents.

Practice 5: Develop A Coherent, School-Wide Approach To Literacy Education

KEY STRATEGIES:

- Literacy Study Group
- Community Forums
- Community Literacy Program
- Publications and Performances
- Literacy Calendar

OVERVIEW OF PRACTICE

Mr. Chance hadn't been enthusiastic about the Tuesday/Thursday read aloud period that was being piloted that fall. He was to spend fifteen minutes of his advisory period every Tuesday and Thursday reading a book to his students. As a math teacher who hated to waste time, Mr. Chance saw the plan as one more way the school babied students.

*Reluctantly, Mr. Chance began reading to his advisory students an old spy novel he had been rereading, *A Coffin for Dimitrios* by Eric Ambler. To his surprise, Chance found himself looking forward to Tuesday and Thursday mornings when he could feed his students more plot to satisfy their curiosity about the suspenseful novel.*

When he brought in other Ambler novels for some interested students, the language arts teacher accused Mr. Chance of trying to steal his job.

"Don't you remember what they said at the meeting?" Chance countered with a sly smile. "Literacy is everybody's job."

The culture of a school teaches lessons about what is important and what matters. When students step into school, they should step into a culture full of literate conversations and visual reminders that discourse matters. Students should come to know their teachers as readers and writers, as thinkers who use literacy to test the power of their ideas. When they walk the school halls there should be lots of invitations for them to join this conversation: displays of student

When students step into school, they should step into a culture full of literate conversations and visual reminders that discourse matters. Students should come to know their teachers as readers and writers, as thinkers who use literacy to test the power of their ideas.

writings, posters celebrating storytellers, and presentations urging viewers to take sides on controversial questions. These print-rich halls and classrooms are just the most obvious signs that in this school, literacy education belongs to everyone. Building students' capacity to be literate needs to be a school-wide effort.

All teachers need to value literacy education in the context of their content area. It is important that a school-wide approach to literacy not give students the impression that these literacy activities are add-ons to their more central work in the fields of science, math, and social studies. In other words, those who don't teach language arts need to view literacy as central to their subject area as well.

There should be a school-wide plan to coordinate the curriculum in a way that creates a culture of literacy. Research indicates that immersing students in a print-rich environment, where they are presented with many opportunities for practicing their literacy skills, is a prerequisite for successfully educating students to be literate. This practice asks schools to look at their school day and at their entire school year to find and develop these opportunities.

STRATEGIES FOR BUILDING A SCHOOL WIDE APPROACH

1

Literacy Study Group

In order to plan, guide, and assess a literacy education focus, Turning Points schools should have an ongoing literacy study group consisting of teachers from across all content areas. The purpose of the study group is to look at how a literacy focus is supported throughout the school. This group regularly reviews data from a variety of sources, such as the Turning Points self-study, collections of student work, standardized tests, and the school's ongoing portfolio. Informed by this data, the literacy study group plans a coordinated, coherent approach to literacy education. Some of the group's work might involve:

- Organizing the use of common reading and composition strategies in all classes
- Contributing to the staff's professional development calendar by planning literacy-related in-service

- Constructing a literacy calendar for the school

2

Community Forums

Turning Points schools should look at their public space in a figurative as well as literal sense. The major debates of the day—the tough questions that claim the attention of the adults and students in the community—should be aired in front of and with the participation of students. When schools organize community forums on serious matters and invite the proponents of different perspectives to present their position, they are showing students that literacy and democracy matter.

When schools organize community forums on serious matters and invite the proponents of different perspectives to present their position, they are showing students that literacy and democracy matter.

3

Community Literacy Program

Introducing students to the power of literacy involves finding ways to show them how literacy creates change in their communities. The following are possible activities that will build the school-to-community connection:

- Sponsoring performances by community poets, authors, and artists
- Inviting activists to speak about how they use literacy to spread their message
- Engaging students in community-based literacy activities such as reading to elders or preschoolers
- Encouraging students to write letters to government officials about issues that matter to them

4

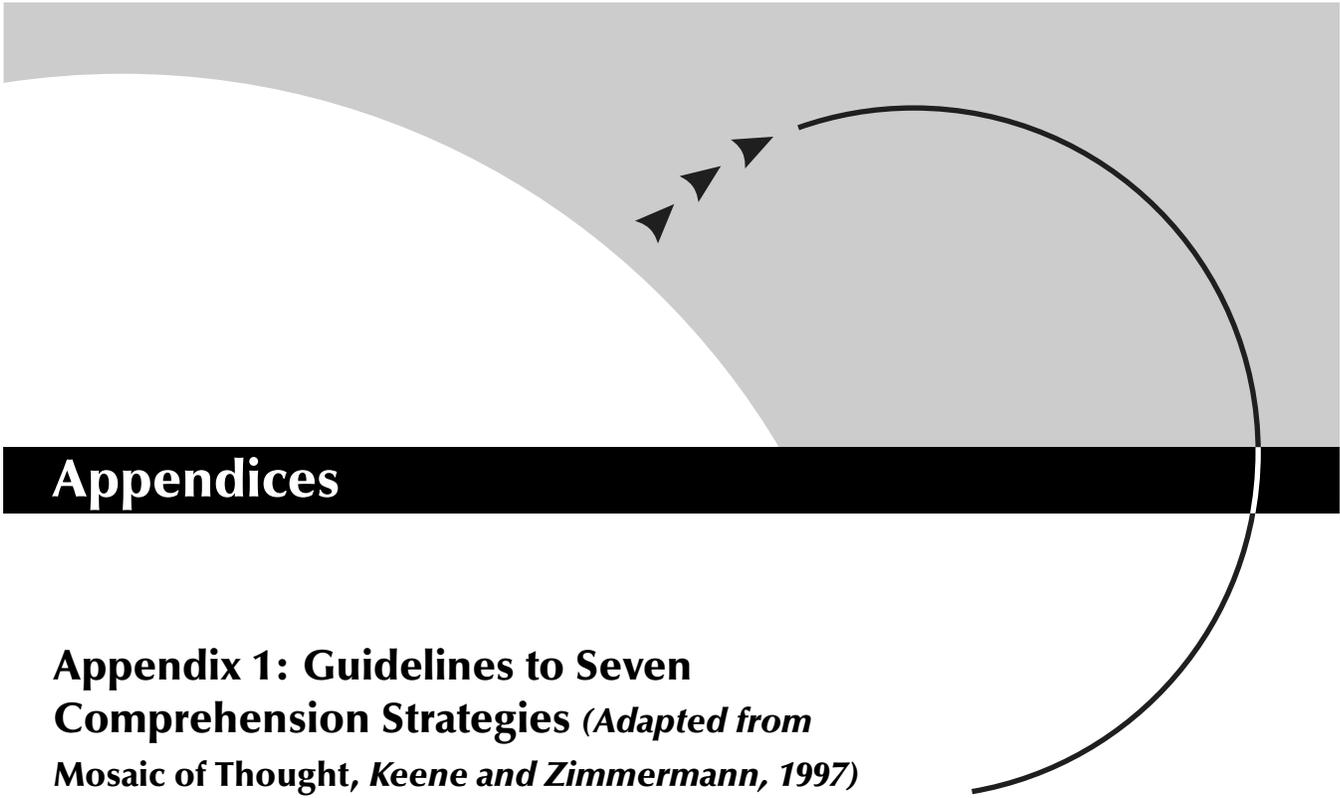
Publications and Performances

Literacy magazines, school newspapers, plays, galleries, etc. are all valuable ways to create a school culture that supports literacy. Publications and performances give students the opportunity to expand and use their literacy skills, and provide a compelling peer and adult audience. In schools where students remain in teams for most of their day, some of these structures also provide opportunities for cross-age and cross-team mixing and collaboration.

5***Literacy Calendar***

At the beginning of each school year, every school should plan a calendar of literacy events that will contribute to making the school a print-rich environment. Research shows that immersing students in a reading and writing environment is one important step in the process of preparing students to be literate. This environment not only needs to involve students in a wide range of reading and writing activities, but it also needs to model literate behavior, a modeling that must involve all teachers, and the school community as a whole. A school-wide literacy calendar can ensure that this immersion takes place.

SAMPLE SCHOOL-WIDE LITERACY CALENDAR	
<p>September Diagnostic Writing prompt Pre-test Reading (voc. and comp.) Family Literacy Night</p> <p>October School-wide Ghost Stories Contest Literacy Profiles Completed First Impromptu Writing Prompt Administered</p> <p>November Book Club Month</p> <p>December School Newspaper Issued (Holiday Issue)</p>	<p>January Winter's Night: Readings by Students and Teachers Second Impromptu Writing Prompt Administered</p> <p>February Intramural Debating Challenge</p> <p>April Student Newspaper (April Fool's Issue) Family Literacy Night</p> <p>May Literary Magazine Published</p>



Appendices

Appendix 1: Guidelines to Seven Comprehension Strategies *(Adapted from Mosaic of Thought, Keene and Zimmermann, 1997)*

READING COMPREHENSION STRATEGY #1:

Activating Relevant, Prior Knowledge (Schema) Before, During, and After Reading Text

Good readers use prior knowledge to help understand what they are reading and to store new information with related memories.

Making Connections

Good readers are able to relate unfamiliar text to their prior world knowledge and/or personal experience (schema or long-term memory banks). These connections generally take three forms:



Text-to-self connections (things you have experienced)



Text-to-text connections (things you have read about)



Text-to-world connections (things you have heard about)

This process helps students to better understand what they are reading. It also helps students to do the following:



Use what is known about an author and his or her style to predict and better understand a text

■ Identify potentially difficult or unfamiliar text structures or formats

■ Recognize inadequate background information and learn how to build schema, or the information needed, before reading

Sample Strategies for Making Connections

■ **Define and Use Terms** Be explicit about using reading comprehension terms (e.g., schema, text-to-text, etc.) with students. When introducing the terms, give students examples of each.

■ **Develop a Class Chart** When reading a book as a class, develop a chart of text-to-self, text-to-text, and text-to-world connections.

■ **Modeling** As a teacher, model thinking aloud about each of these connections to the text you are reading, including how your prior knowledge helps you understand the text better and how your prior knowledge is then changed by what you read.

■ **Create a List of Schema** Create a list of schema for particular authors or writing genres, or characteristics of particular authors or genres of writing. Use these schema to help students be better prepared for a new text before reading it.

Questions to Ask Students

GENERAL

■ When you read the story (text), does it remind you of anything you know about? Does it remind you of any experiences or things that have happened? What? Why?

■ Are there things you know about or things in your life that help you to understand this book (text)? How does this knowledge help you to better understand the book (text)?

■ After you think about what the book reminds you of, what do you understand about the book that you didn't understand before?

TEXT TO SELF



What personal experiences do you call on to read this text?



How has this text prompted you to rethink a personal experience?



How are you included in this text? Where are you in this text?



How has this text called on your compassion, reason, and sense of community?

TEXT TO TEXT



Does this text remind you of other texts you have read?



Does this text lead you to think of others texts in different ways?



What texts influence your reading of this text?



What texts does this text speak to?

TEXT TO WORLD



What do you know about the world that has influenced your reading of this text?



How has your reading of this text prompted your understanding of the world?



In what ways has the world influenced this text?



What statements about the world does the text consider significant?

Rubric on Assessing A Student's Ability to Use Schema

- 1 =** Makes no response and does not make schematic connections.
- 2 =** Can talk about what text reminds him or her of, but cannot explain; reference to schema may not be clearly connected to the text.
- 3 =** Relates background knowledge/experience to text.
- 4 =** Expands interpretation of text using schema; may discuss schema related to author or text structure; may pose questions based on apparent discrepancies between the text and background knowledge.
- 5 =** Explains how schema enriches interpretations of text; talks about use of schema to enhance interpretation and comprehension of other texts; extends connections beyond life experience and immediate text.

READING COMPREHENSION STRATEGY #2:

Determining the Most Important Ideas and Themes

Good readers can pick out the most important ideas and themes, and use these conclusions to focus their reading, while not paying as much attention to unimportant ideas.

Determining What Is Most Important in the Text

As they read, good readers make decisions about what is important in the text on each of these levels:



Word Level: Good readers can pick out the words that carry the meaning of the sentence.



Sentence Level: Good readers can pick out the key sentences that carry the weight of meaning for a passage or section. Often, these sentences begin or end a paragraph, or in nonfiction, refer to a table or graph.



Text Level: Good readers can pick out the key ideas, concepts, and themes in the text. A good reader's opinion about which ideas are most important may change as a passage is read. Final conclusions about the most important themes are made after reading the passage completely.

Students make decisions about what is most important based on prior knowledge and beliefs, opinions, and personal experiences. Frequently, it helps to point out what is unimportant to help students distinguish what is most important. Ultimately, interesting discussion comes from debate about what is most important. Students need to work toward defending their positions, while realizing that there is often more than one true set of most important ideas.

Sample Strategies for Determining Importance in Text



Modeling The teacher begins by modeling: thinking aloud about his or her process of determining importance during reading. Modeling should occur frequently using short selections and a variety of texts. The teacher should focus not only on conclusions about importance, but also on how and why he or she arrived at those conclusions. It is

important to think aloud about how the focus on what he or she believes to be important enhances comprehension.



Group Mini-lessons In small- and large-group mini lessons, students are invited to share their thoughts about what is important at the whole-text level, and later at the word and sentence levels. Students should provide evidence or reasoning to support their judgments.



Group and Pair Sharing Students meet in small groups or pairs to compare ideas about what is most important and how they came to that conclusion. Ask them to discuss how focusing on important themes enhances their comprehension.



Book Clubs Book clubs help focus on determining importance in text. Students discuss different conclusions about important ideas if they are all reading the same text, or discuss ways in which members drew conclusions if they are reading different texts.



Conferences Confer with students about the decisions they made about what is most important. Think-alouds can help assess students' use of the strategy.



Book Collections Collections of books with the same characteristic (e.g., author, topic, poetic language) can be used to help students see the important ideas.



Sharing Time Sharing time at the end of independent reading can focus on important ideas.

Questions to Ask Students



Are there some parts of this story or text that are more important than others? Which ones? Why do you think they are the most important?



What does the author think is most important so far in this story (text)? Why do you think so?



We have just talked about important parts of the story. What do you understand now that you didn't understand before?

Rubric on Assessing A Student’s Ability to Determine Importance in Text

- 1 =** Makes no response; uses random guessing; makes inaccurate attempts to identify important elements.
- 2 =** Identifies some elements as more important to text meaning.
- 3 =** Identifies words, characters, and/or events as more important to overall meaning; makes some attempt to explain reasoning.
- 4 =** Identifies at least one key concept, idea, or theme as important in overall text meaning, and clearly explains why.
- 5 =** Identifies multiple ideas or themes (may attribute them to different points of view); discusses author’s stance or purpose and its relation to key themes and ideas in the text.

READING COMPREHENSION STRATEGY #3:

Asking Questions of Themselves, the Authors, and the Text They Are Reading

Good readers use questions to clarify and focus what they are reading. They ask questions of themselves, of others, and of the authors to help them better understand the text.

Asking Questions

■
Good readers ask questions about the text before, during, and after reading to better understand how questions can help focus on and understand text.

■
Good readers ask questions to

- clarify meaning
- wonder about what is to come in the text
- determine an author's intent, style, content, or format

■
Good readers understand that some questions are answered in the text, but others must be interpreted based on the reader's background knowledge.

■
Good readers use questions to focus their attention on the important ideas in a text.

■
Good readers understand how asking questions can deepen their understanding.

■
Good readers listen carefully to others' questions because these questions can help readers understand the text.

Sample Strategies about Asking Questions

■
Modeling Model your questions with short text passages over several days; record questions on chart paper that has categories for the purposes (e.g., clarify meaning, wonder about what is to come, determine an author's intent) and times (before, during, and after reading).



Rationale for Questioning Talk to students about why readers pose questions and how questions can help them understand better.



Invite Student Questions Gradually invite students to share their questions, adding them to the chart.



Book Clubs Have book clubs focus on questions in their conversations.



Focus for Conferences Focus student conferences on the questions students are asking about the text. Invite students to pose types of questions they haven't tried yet. Use think-alouds to assess their use of questions.



Focus for Discussion Focus sharing at the end of independent reading/work on questions posed while reading.



Journals and Charts Have students use structures such as double entry journals and KWL charts (What do you know? What do you want to know? What have you learned?) to keep track of their questions and where the questions lead.



Make Connections Make connections between questioning and other strategies.

Questions to Ask Students



What did you wonder about or question while you were reading this story (text)?



What questions do you have or wonder about this book now?



We have just talked about the questions you asked. What do you understand now that you didn't understand before?

Rubric on Assessing A Student's Ability to Ask Questions

- 1 =** Asks no questions or asks irrelevant questions.
- 2 =** Poses literal questions.
- 3 =** Poses questions to clarify meaning.
- 4 =** Poses questions to enhance meaning of the text (e.g., critical response, big idea); may explain how posing questions deepens understanding.
- 5 =** Uses questions to challenge the author's stance, motive, or point of view.

READING COMPREHENSION STRATEGY #4:

Creating Visual and Other Sensory Images During and After Reading

Good readers are able to create visual, auditory, and other sensory connections to what they are reading, and then use these images to deepen their understanding of the text.

Creating Visual and Sensory Images



Good readers spontaneously and purposefully create mental images during and after reading. The images emerge from all five senses, as well as from the emotions, and are anchored in a reader's prior knowledge.



Good readers use images to immerse themselves in rich detail as they read. The detail gives depth and dimension to the reading, engaging the reader more deeply and making the text more memorable.



Good readers use images to draw conclusions, to create distinct and unique interpretations of the text, to recall details significant to the text, and to recall a text after it has been read. Images from reading frequently become part of the reader's writing. Images from a reader's experiences frequently become part of his or her comprehension.



Good readers adapt their images as they continue to read. Images are revised to incorporate new information revealed through the text and new interpretations as the reader develops them.



Good readers understand how creating images enhances their comprehension.



Good readers adapt their images in response to the shared images of other readers.

Sample Comprehension Strategy for Evoking Images Using the Gradual Release of Responsibility Model



Modeling The teacher begins by modeling. The goal is to help students understand and witness ways in which evoking images

enhances comprehension. The teacher is specific about how reflecting on the images help her to understand the text more deeply.



Short Selections and Mini-lessons The teacher begins with short selections and limits the mini-lessons to thinking aloud and to explanations about how evoking images improves comprehension. She may use overheads to highlight words in a passage or to brainstorm images.



Building Awareness of Images Gradually, the teacher invites students to share and expand the images they created as they read. The emphasis for students is on being aware of their images, elaborating upon them, and developing a sense that reflecting on one's images enhances comprehension. In double entry journals, students record quotes from their reading and, next to the quotes, record images that emerge.



Focus for Conferences In conferences, the teachers focuses on students' images. The teacher helps students distinguish between images that are critical to understanding the text and those details in images that may be interesting, but are not critical to understanding.



Focus for Discussions In sharing sessions, students share images evoked as they read independently and explanations of how those images helped them to comprehend the text.



Extending to Different Genres/Texts The teacher continues to model, demonstrating how reflecting upon images is different in different genres/texts.



Small Group Support The teacher meets with small groups of students who need more instruction and modeling.



Diverse Response Options Students may use different response options (artistic, dramatic, written, spoken) to depict their images.



Assessing Images The teacher collects depicted images and assesses changes, such as images central to understanding key points rather than peripheral details, images that are detailed and descriptive, images that extend and enhance the text, images that come from all senses and emotions, images that are adapted and revised, images from text that find new life in the student's writing.

Questions to Ask Students



When you were reading this story (text), did you make any pictures or images in your mind? Tell me everything you can about that picture or image. How do the pictures that you created help you to better understand the story (text)?



Can you think of a story where you made your own pictures or images in your mind? Tell me everything you can about it. Did those pictures help you to better understand the story you were reading? How?

Rubric on Assessing A Student's Ability to Visualize

- 1 = Makes no response.
- 2 = Describes some visual or other sensory images, which may be tied directly to text or a description of the picture in the text.
- 3 = Describes mental images, usually visual; images are somewhat elaborated from the literal text or existing picture.
- 4 = Creates and describes multisensory images that extend and enrich the text.
- 5 = Elaborates multisensory images to enhance comprehension; can articulate how the process enhances comprehension.

READING COMPREHENSION STRATEGY #5:

Drawing Inferences

Good readers use their prior knowledge and information from the text to draw conclusions, make judgments and predictions, and form interpretations about what they are reading.

Drawing Inferences



Inferring is the process of creating a personal meaning from text. It involves a mental process of combining what is read with relevant prior knowledge (schema). The reader's unique interpretation of text is the product of this blending.



When readers infer, they create a meaning that is not necessarily stated explicitly in the text. The process implies that readers actively search for, or are aware of, implicit meaning.



Inferences are revised based on the inferences and interpretations of other readers.



When they infer, good readers:

Draw conclusions from text

Make reasonable predictions as they read and revise those predictions as they read further

Create dynamic interpretations of text that are adapted as they continue to read and after they read

Make connections between conclusions they draw and other beliefs or knowledge

Make critical or analytical judgments about what they read.



When good readers infer, they are more able to

Remember and reapply what they have read

Create new background knowledge for themselves

Discriminate and critically analyze text and authors

Engage in conversation and/or other analytical or reflective responses to what they read.



A wide variety of interpretations is appropriate for fiction; a narrower range of interpretation is typical for nonfiction. Teachers should allow great latitude for inferences, provided that the reader can defend his or her inferences with a description of relevant, prior knowledge and specific text.

Questions to Ask Students



Can you predict what is about to happen? Why did you make that prediction? Can you point to or identify something in the book that helped you to make that prediction? What do you already know that helped you to make that prediction?



What did the author mean by _____? What in the story (text) helped you to know that? What do you already know that helped you to decide that?



From predicting and inferring, what do you now understand that you didn't understand before?

Rubric on Assessing A Student's Ability to Infer and Predict

- 1 = Makes no response and no inferences.
- 2 = Attempts a prediction or conclusion that is inaccurate or unsubstantiated with text information.
- 3 = Draws a conclusion or makes predictions that are consistent with the text or schema.
- 4 = Draws conclusions and/or makes predictions and can explain the source of the conclusion or prediction.
- 5 = Develops predictions, interpretations, and/or conclusions about the text that include connections between the text and the reader's background knowledge or ideas and beliefs.

READING COMPREHENSION STRATEGY #6:

Retelling or Synthesizing What They Have Read

Good readers can order, recall, retell, and recreate into a coherent whole the information that they read. They can sift through a myriad of details and focus on those pieces that are most important to know. They can organize different pieces of information to make meaning.

Synthesizing

DURING READING:

■
Good readers maintain a cognitive synthesis as they read. They monitor the overall meaning, important concepts, and themes in the text as they read and are aware of ways text elements fit together to create the overall meaning and theme. A proficient reader's synthesis is likely to extend the literal meaning of a text to the inferential level.

■
Good readers are aware of text elements and patterns in fiction and nonfiction and understand that being aware of them helps readers predict and understand the overall meanings or themes.

■
As they read, good readers attend more directly to character, setting, conflict, sequence of events, resolution, and theme in fiction, and to text patterns such as description, chronology, cause and effect, comparison/contrast, and problem/solution in nonfiction. They use their knowledge of these elements to make decisions about the overall meaning of a passage, chapter, or book.

■
Good readers actively revise their cognitive syntheses as they read. New information is assimilated into the reader's evolving ideas about the text, rendering some earlier decisions about the text obsolete.

AFTER READING:

■
Good readers are able to express, through a variety of means, a synthesis of what they have read. The synthesis includes ideas and themes relevant to the overall meaning of the text and is presented cogently.

■
Good readers use synthesis to share, recommend, and critically review books and ideas they have read.



Good readers purposefully use synthesis to better understand what they have read. Syntheses are frequently an amalgam of all comprehension strategies used by proficient readers.

Questions to Ask Students



If you were to tell another person about the story (text) you just read, and you could only use a few sentences, what would you say?



By retelling the story in your own words, what do you understand better that you didn't understand before?

Rubric on Assessing A Student's Ability to Retell or Synthesize

- 1 = Makes random or no response; may give title.
- 2 = Identifies some text events; retelling reveals beginning awareness of event sequence.
- 3 = Synthesizes with some awareness of event sequence: beginning, middle, and end; uses story elements (character, setting, conflict, sequence, resolution) and/or genre structure to organize a relatively accurate retelling.
- 4 = Enhances meaning in text with synthesis; may incorporate own schema; uses story elements to give an accurate retelling or synthesis; may identify key themes; refers to interactions between story elements (how problem affects character, how setting changes problem).
- 5 = Creates succinct synthesis using internalized story/genre structure; uses all story elements/genre structure and inferences to capture key themes; points out interrelationships between elements; talks about how synthesizing promotes deeper connections.

READING COMPREHENSION STRATEGY #7:

Using a Variety of Fix-Up Strategies for Better Comprehension When They Are Having Problems Understanding the Text

Good readers use fix-up strategies when they are having problems understanding what they are reading, including skipping ahead, rereading, using the context to better understand a particular passage, and sounding it out.

Questions to Ask Students



Did you have any problems while you were reading this story (text)?
What could (did) you do to solve the problem?



When you are reading other stories (texts), what kinds of problems do you have? What are all the ways you solve the problems?



After using these fix-up strategies when you read the story (text), what do you understand now that you didn't understand before?

Rubric on Assessing A Student's Ability to Use Fix-Up Strategies

- 1 =** Has little or no conscious awareness of reading process.
- 2 =** Identifies difficulties in reading (problems are often at the word level); has little or no sense of the need to solve the problem; does not articulate strengths; identifies need to concentrate; sounds out words.
- 3 =** Identifies problems at word, sentence, or schema levels; can articulate and use a strategy to solve problems, usually at the word or sentence level.
- 4 =** Articulates and uses more than one strategy for solving problems; focuses on problems at the schema (more global) level.
- 5 =** Identifies problems at all levels; uses a variety of fix-up strategies flexibly and appropriately, given the context and the problem.

STRATEGY #7 (CONTINUED): FIX-UP STRATEGIES FOR DIFFERENT READING SYSTEMS

READING SYSTEMS	SAMPLE PROBLEMS	FIX-UP STRATEGIES
Graphophonic (decoding, or recognizing that letters have associated sounds and knowing how to pronounce and blend those sounds to decipher unknown words)	Difficulty pronouncing words	<p>Sound the word out by identifying beginning and ending sounds, attempting a word, then check to see if the sounds heard match the letters in the text.</p> <p>Attempt a pronunciation of a word and ask if the letters match the sounds.</p>
Lexical (word banking, or instantaneous word recognition)	<p>Difficulty recognizing a word seen in a text other than the one in which it was originally learned</p> <p>Difficulty recognizing a different form of a word, for example, a contraction, root word with an affix, or a compound word</p>	<p>Demonstrate the various graphic word representations of a single word, showing how a single word may look quite different in various books.</p> <p>Look for familiar words in surrounding text. Do those words give clues about what an unknown word might be?</p> <p>Word analysis: what does the prefix, suffix, root word mean? Is it a compound word? Do you recognize the words that combine to make the longer word?</p>
Syntactic (logical or grammatical system, or understanding the correct structure or architecture of written or spoken language; the ability to recognize when language is not structured correctly)	Substituting a word that disrupts the meaning of the passage, for example, horse for house	<p>Read aloud and ask: Does this make sense?</p> <p>Stop reading when something doesn't sound right, adjust the rate of reading, and reread. Does it make better sense if you read faster or slower?</p> <p>Use language conventions like periods, commas, quotation marks, semicolons as markers of meaning. Exaggerate the pause for a comma or period to support clearer meaning.</p> <p>Study different authors' syntactic styles that achieve different effects. When does an author use short, syncopated sentences versus longer sentences?</p>

STRATEGY #7 (CONTINUED): FIX-UP STRATEGIES FOR DIFFERENT READING SYSTEMS

READING SYSTEMS	SAMPLE PROBLEMS	FIX-UP STRATEGIES
<p>Semantic (word development; the recognition that words and longer pieces of text have associated meanings and concepts, and that those meanings vary slightly from reader to reader; the conceptual meanings can vary from concrete to abstract)</p>	<p>Reading words fluently, but experiencing difficulty defining what is meant by a word, sentence, or text</p>	<p>Stop, consider a word that would make sense in the context, insert the word, and ask, does it make sense?</p> <p>Stop, reread, read ahead, and use the context to confirm the meaning of the passage; stop when it doesn't make sense. Ask questions of the book and the author; synthesize or retell what is happening so far and what the author's main points are</p>
<p>Schematic (connection to prior knowledge used to comprehend text. Schema is built and/or activated from long-term memory stores when relevant in a reading experience. Schema also refers to the way in which information is sorted and retrieved from memory through categories and classification)</p>	<p>Inadequate background knowledge or difficulty in activating background knowledge</p>	<p>Stop and ask what you already know that is like what the author is trying to communicate.</p> <p>Create a visual image and ask, what is happening here? How can I draw conclusions or make judgments to understand the meaning?</p> <p>Imagine the author and consider what he or she had in mind when writing.</p> <p>Ask what you know about the text format that is like other text formats.</p>
<p>Pragmatic (social construction of meaning, related to audience, purpose, and social interaction)</p>	<p>Lack of purpose for reading; perception that text is not interesting or useful</p> <p>A setting that prohibits interaction with other readers to construct meaning collectively</p>	<p>Consider what you need to know to understand the text.</p> <p>Ask what is most important in the text in relation to the purpose for reading.</p> <p>Work with another student to discuss, write about, sketch, or act out pieces of the text in order to better understand it.</p>

Appendix 2:

SOCRATIC SEMINAR FORMAT

The Socratic Seminar is a structured format for discussion and dialogue, originally developed by Mortimer Adler and Dennis Gray, by which students learn to ask questions, gain understanding of a complex text, and gain awareness of reading comprehension strategies and group dynamics.

Role of Facilitator

Try the format more than once with the same group. Groups don't necessarily work efficiently or effectively the first time. Learn to be quiet, even when you perceive participants to be "wrong." The facilitator is responsible for choosing, typing, and distributing the text. The facilitator should also come prepared to sit in both inner circles, at least until a group becomes familiar with the process. Preparing 4–6 authentic and open-ended questions may also be helpful to novice groups. The facilitator should monitor the feedback given by the outer circle. It is also helpful to comment on the quality of the feedback and to reinforce rules of giving and receiving feedback.

GUIDE FOR OBSERVATION – GROUP DYNAMICS

Describe body language. What do you see?

Describe differences between males and females in discussion.

How does the group react to the loudest and the quietest members?

Watch one person and write down what that person does.

What derails or propels the conversation?

GUIDE FOR OBSERVATION – READING STRATEGIES

What major questions are asked?

What derails or propels the conversation?

What kinds of questions are asked about the text, for example, inconsistencies, audience, author's bias and gender, motivations, context/historical context

How is understanding gained? (vocabulary, metaphors, imagery, individual phrases, verb tense, relationship of section to section, relationship of content to form, repetition, etc.)

(Continued on next page)

(Adapted from "Teaching Reading: Beyond the Plot," Margaret Metzger, 1998.)

SOCRATIC SEMINAR FORMAT (CONTINUED)

Process

Prior to Seminar: Type the reading so that there is ample room for participants to “mark up” the page with comments. You may want to double space it and leave 1.5" margins. Preferably, the reading is less than one page.

Hand out the short reading. Participants “mark up” the material with clarifying questions, factual questions, discussion questions, and comments.

STEPS: Set up. Form two concentric circles (an inner and an outer circle.) Everyone should have their marked-up copy of the text. The outer circle should be ready to take notes. As the inner circle reads and discusses, ask half of the outer circle to take notes on reading strategies used to comprehend the text, and ask the other half to observe group dynamics/communication styles. **5 minutes**

Inner circle discussion. A member of the inner circle reads the passage aloud. The inner circle then discusses, based on their mark ups. Outer circle observation. **10 minutes**

Outer circle gives feedback. Inner circle listens. **10 minutes**

Change circles. Outer circle moves in, inner circle moves out. Inner circle discusses. Outer circle observes. **10 minutes**

Outer circle gives feedback. Inner circle listens. **10 minutes**

Sample Open-ended Questions

How does this connect to other things?

From whose point of view? What is the evidence? Is it credible?

What inferences can be drawn from this? What are the implications? What difference does it make? What is its significance? Why do I think so? Who cares?

Is it true? Why do I think so? What else do I need to understand before deciding?

What would a good example of this be?

What are the assumptions underlying what I claim I know? What are the stated and unstated assumptions?

What if _____ happened (or were true) instead of _____?

What would you do or say if you were _____?

What does this text say about _____ issue?

What does the phrase _____ mean?

In what ways are _____ and _____ alike/different?

How do you support your position?

Jane, what did Richard just say? What's your reaction to his idea?

What's missing from this text?

What are the consequences when _____ happens?

What are you left not knowing?

Appendix 3: School-wide Writing Assessment

STEPS TO ORGANIZING THE ASSESSMENT

1

The school administers a writing assessment to all students three times a year (fall, midyear, end of the year).

2

This writing assessment serves as a “snapshot” of a student’s writing performance based on a common rubric. This “snapshot” allows teachers to follow students’ growth as writers throughout the middle school years.

3

All students will respond to a common, school-wide prompt that may involve expository, persuasive, or narrative writing, that is assessed using a school-based rubric, and that aligns with various district rubrics.

4

Through cluster meetings, teachers are involved in the process of choosing the theme and the wording of the writing prompt.

5

Either the language arts teachers administer the writing prompts in two 45-minute periods or all teachers administer them in homerooms during a designated time of day. Students do not sign their names on the writing assessment, but use a student ID number.

6

All teachers are involved in the process of reviewing the student writing:



In cluster meetings, all teachers engage in a “leveling” process where consensus is reached on how to use the rubric for this batch of writing. This “leveling” process involves teachers’ reading a set of “anchor” papers that are used to generate discussion leading to consensus on how to apply the rubric. (See “Leveling Protocol for Scoring Writing Prompts” below.)

■
After everyone has participated in the “leveling” process, individual teachers pair up and exchange one or two folders containing scored essays. Each essay is read two times. If there is disagreement, the teachers talk about the essay to see if they can reach agreement. If necessary, the essay goes to a third reader.

LEVELING PROTOCOL FOR SCORING WRITING PROMPTS

The purpose of this protocol is to establish a common understanding among a group of readers who will score a large group of essays. This process is needed in preparation for holistic scoring of a writing assessment that will provide a “snapshot” of a student’s writing performance. The assessment process is important, but it must not be expected to do too much. It is not a substitute for deeper, more complicated reading of student work that can take place in the context of the writing classroom or in a Looking at Student Work Session involving a group of readers. (See the Turning Points *Guide to Looking at Student and Teacher Work*.)

1

The facilitator passes out copies of the rubric to the group. Allow time for the group to review the rubric and ask any questions they may have about it.

2

Hand out the first packet of “anchor papers” (typically four essays to a packet). Ask each teacher to read the essays and score each one according to her understanding of the rubric.

3

After everyone has finished reading and scoring, ask for a show of hands on what score was given to each essay. Then ask for feedback on why a scorer would give a 2, a 3, or a 4, to this essay (*Could someone give the reasons why this essay would be scored a 3?*)

4

The goal of the discussion is to reach consensus on what a 1, 2, 3, or 4 essay looks like for that particular prompt. Stress to the group that they are seeking common understanding of the appropriate way to level the reading of these essays.

5

After each essay in the first packet has been discussed, hand out a second packet of four essays and repeat the process.

6

After the anchor essays in both packets have been discussed, there should be a sense of consensus among the group. Ask the teachers if everyone is comfortable with how to use the rubric and score the essay.

7

If any teachers are uncomfortable with the use of the rubric, the facilitator can work with them in a small group using the above process to help the teacher become comfortable with the leveling consensus.

8

The group now take the remaining essays and score them.

* “Anchor papers” are pre-selected essays that represent a range of student performance. The anchor papers are selected by a subcommittee in order to generate conversation that will lead to building common understanding. Typically, anchor papers demonstrate clear-cut examples of the rubric as well as more problematic examples.

Appendix 4

ROLES FOR THE LITERACY TEACHER	
Facilitator	Organizes reading and writing assignments, frames the question, sets the protocol, establishes objectives <i>I want to hear more about...</i>
Researcher	Uses every opportunity to learn more about literacy and teaching, gathers information, and reflects on the implications evident in the data <i>Every time a writer tries to argue both sides of the issue she...</i>
Faithful Reader	Indulgent reader who expects pleasure from the reading of a student's work, looks for pleasure in the reading, and wants the writing to be interesting, enjoyable, informative <i>You gave me chills when you described how Nina felt in the attic.</i>
Copy Editor	Applies a standard for correctness to students' drafts; searches for errors <i>This pronoun has to agree in number with its antecedent.</i>
Interviewer	Interviews the student in order to help the student unpack her ideas. Draws out in Socratic fashion the student's point of view <i>When you did...how did it make you feel?</i>
Modeler	Demonstrates to students the writing process, exposing the "apparatus" and revealing the false starts, clumsy attempts, and contortions of words that the "final draft" hides behind its easy eloquence <i>I am getting bogged down here, don't you think? Any ideas..HELP!</i>
Adversary	Challenges students' arguments, tests the student's case, and requires the student to defend her results <i>I don't agree with you when you say...I believe that...</i>
Coach	Offers suggestions, makes a student aware of options, guides a student as she attempts more and more challenging work, and plots strategies <i>If you use your conclusion as a lead instead, it will allow you to...</i>
Evaluator	Applies a rubric to student work, charts student progress to determine where she has improved and where she needs to improve <i>Right now I think this is where you place on the rubric. If you want to place higher, I think we need to work on...</i>

Appendix 5

LITERATURE RESPONSE OPTIONS (from *Mosaic of Thought*, pp. 243–247)

Written or Artistic Response Options



Letters — (hypothetical or real) to or from authors, characters, illustrators, or other readers often help children to understand the stance or point of view an author or a character has taken.



Quick Write — readers pause briefly to write about the gist of the text so far and/or about the strategies the reader is using to make sense of the text.



Double-Entry Journals — used in a variety of ways to help children simultaneously compare two components of their reading.

DOUBLE-ENTRY JOURNAL SAMPLE	
Facts from the text	Reader's responses to the text
Quote from the text	Reader's response—may include examples or reader's use of a specific strategy
Strategy being studied	Reader's thoughts about how use of that strategy enhanced comprehension of the text
One reader's opinion	Another reader's response to that opinion and his or her own opinion



Story Maps or Webs — Children can build visual representations of key themes, questions, important ideas, images, conclusions, story elements etc. Story maps help children organize, connect, categorize, and prioritize key concepts in fiction or non fiction.



Transparency Text — Teachers copy a page or more of text onto a transparency so the teacher or student can visually demonstrate use

of a strategy while other readers watch. The reader marks the transparency using codes or marks the margins with questions and think alouds while reading the projected text. The technique provides a way for children to see as well as hear a proficient reader think aloud.



KWL — Records of what children know, what they want to know, and what they learned are compiled before, during, and after reading a text or before and after a strategy study in which the KWL refers to the use of the strategy itself.



Time Lines — Large time lines in the classroom or small ones in the reading log can record information chronologically about what is being learned in a strategy study or what is understood from a text.



Venn Diagrams — Teachers create blank Venn Diagrams with two, three, or four circles. Children can use these diagrams to show relationships among different strategies, story elements, or changes within a text.



Bar and Line Graphs — Teachers create graphs with horizontal and vertical axes that children can use to represent different strategies, story elements, or changes within a text.



Photographs of the Mind — Students pause during their reading to sketch (or write) an immediate impression, image or question from the text. They can exchange sketches with another reader and add to that reader's images.

Oral Response Options



Book Clubs — Children participate in regularly scheduled meetings of groups (usually with the same group) who meet over time to discuss books they read and strategies they use.



Pair Shares — Two children, usually sitting knee-to-knee, share some application of a comprehension strategy or key concepts from a book.



Think/Pair/Share — Children record their thoughts about a strategy or book and share with a partner. That pair shares with another pair, then with eight children, and eventually with the whole class.



Notice and Share — Groups of children are assigned a stance from which to observe another child or teacher think aloud as he or she reads a text. For example, one group watches a model's use of a comprehension strategy, such as questioning, while another watches for use of determining importance, etc. Students can also assume the stance of a literary critic, a character from a book, a researcher gathering information from the book, or the author, and share their impressions with others.



Strategy Study Groups — Students can form ad hoc study groups to reflect on and improve their use of a comprehension strategy. Occasionally these groups work with the whole class or other small groups to enhance their understanding of the strategy.



Strategy Instruction Groups — Students work in small groups to develop think alouds for other groups, including younger children who are learning to use a particular strategy. Groups may create posters or other visual aids to share their thinking and help other readers learn to use the strategy.

Appendix 6

FORMS OF WRITING

Editorials	Consumer Reports	Advertisements
Riddles	Bumper Stickers	Proverbs
Psalms	Sonnets	Eulogies
Idioms	Greeting Cards	Board Games
Police Reports	Epitaphs	Weather Reports
Homilies	Phone Messages	Chat Rooms
Confessions	Invitations	Recipes
Report Cards	Excuse Notes	Slang Dialogues
Email	Songs	Codes
“How to...”	Instructions	Lab Reports
Horoscopes	Headlines	Maps
Surveys	Diaries	Journals
Interviews	Scripts	Friendly Letters
Notes	Outlines	Narratives
Lists	“To do...”	Logs
Tattoos	Propaganda	Hyperbole
Lies	Cartoons	Parables
Fables	Commercials	Proposals
Legends	Myths	Tall-tales
Testimonies	Depositions	Graffiti
Laws	Parodies	Wills
Haiku	Acrostics	Cinquain
Questions	Jokes	Sketches
Obituaries	Wedding Announcements	Movie Reviews
Ransom Notes	“Do’s and Don’ts”	Persuasive Essays
Book Reviews	Personal Ads	Real Estate Ads
Wanted Posters	Lost and Found	Missing Posters

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