INTERNATIONAL READING ASSOCIATION
SECONDARY READING INTEREST GROUP

THE EXCHANGE

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Message from the President . . .

by Lori DiGisi, SRIG President

Dear Secondary Reading Community,

I have been a member of the SRIG since 1993, and the strong commitment to adolescent literacy represented by the individuals in this group has sustained me through many changes in my career. After participating in a whirlwind of activities at the IRA conference in Orlando last year, and bringing home many ideas about how incorporate new literacies into work in my middle school, I was offered a position with the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education to lead the development of model curriculum units that integrate the Common Core State Standards in ELA, Math, Social Studies and Science.

The decision to leave the classroom is not one that I undertook lightly, and the change from a ten minute to an over an hour commute was something I strongly considered as well. Yet, the opportunity to build disciplinary literacy into the foundation of model curriculum units and to work with teachers from each discipline as they begin to think about what the new standards would look like in action in classrooms, was a challenge too exciting to pass up. So, on August 1, 2011, I left the classroom view of the world to see what teaching and learning looked like through a statewide lens.

Fortunately, I continued to follow my #book-a-day group on Twitter (see the article by Donalyn Miller, author of *The Book Whisperer*). This group kept me current on great reads for adolescents and was a constant reminder of how delightful it is to be in the company of readers. Similarly, I continued to expand my own knowledge of how technology can be used to provide students with innovative ways to communicate, and found Troy Hicks's book, the *Digital Writing Workshop* and tweets to be encouraging and informative. From Central Michigan University, he even introduced me to a teacher in my own state who is doing innovative work with writing, and you can read about that in his article.

However, as I began my new job, I found that my team of lead curriculum developers in math, social studies, and science were not clear on how disciplinary literacy was different than content area reading and wondered how we could integrate the literacy standards and still maintain the integrity of each discipline. Fortunately, I had the opportunity to compare summer reading lists with our SRIG Secretary Kathy Galvin, who referred me to Doug Buehl's new book, *Developing Readers in the Academic Disciplines*. I used this book to help define disciplinary literacy and to begin some important conversations with my colleagues. Doug, who was the first editor of the *Exchange*, graciously agreed to share some of his insights for this edition, in spite of his busy schedule providing professional development in disciplinary literacy around Wisconsin and beyond. I am both humbled and grateful to him for his contribution to this issue.

And, as I struggled to explain to my content colleagues the difference between the work that teachers would do in their disciplines to support students' development of the literacy skills they need to be college and career ready and the how that is different from the work that teachers do in English Language Arts classes, I was fortunate enough read Carol Jago's book, *With Rigor for All,* which articulates the difference beautifully. She shares her thinking with you here, with a kind nod toward one of the authors of my state Constitution, John Adams.

And finally, my ongoing conversations with our President-elect and session chair for this year's conference session, Kelly Gallagher, have pushed me to influence policy makers to think about role of state assessments and the real lives of adolescents whose literacy habits remain in our hands. You'll read more about that in our next issue of the *Exchange*, but for now, I hope you enjoy a guided tour of the people and ideas I met through reading on my summer vacation. I know their thoughts will inspire your work as they have mine.

Enjoy!

Lori DiGisi

P.S. You can follow me on Twitter @MrsWhosit. My tweets are not that interesting, but the people I follow are. You may also want to check out #Engchat and #Edchat.

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57th Annual IRA Convention: Celebrating Teaching

The Secondary Reading Interest Group will sponsor the following session:

Wednesday, May 2, 2012 9:00 AM - 11:45 AM

Beyond the Common Core Reading Standards: Pathways to Lifelong Literacy

In *To Read or Not to Read*, the most comprehensive survey of American reading ever completed, researchers found a "calamitous, universal falling off of reading" that usually occurs around age 13 and that often carries forward through the rest of our students' lives < www.nea.gov/research/toread.pdf>. Unfortunately, this drop in reading comes at a time when the reading demands for college and career readiness are intensifying. These new reading demands are noted in the Common Core Standards, which state that students should be taught to "read and comprehend complex literary and informational texts independently and proficiently" < http://www.corestandards.org/the-standards/english-language-arts-standards/introduction/students-who-are-college-and-career-ready-in-reading-writing-speaking-listening-and-language/>. In short, students are reading less—and less well—at a time when the demands of reading are deepening. With this in mind, this session will focus on how to move students into deeper, authentic academic and recreational reading in an age where reading has fallen out of favor with many students.

Carol Booth Olson will focus on a nationally-recognized reading/writing intervention designed to help English Learners in a large, urban school district develop interpretive reading and analytical writing abilities by exposing them to the cognitive strategies that research indicates experienced readers access when they construct meaning from and with texts. Carol will focus on helping students deepen their interpretative reading and analytical writing skills as called for in the Common Core Standards.

Cris Tovani will share how she uses a workshop model to support and scaffold her most struggling readers. Cris will model how she is able to give students "real time" feedback so they can re-enter the learning process. Using formative assessment data that she collects during the work time, Cris will share how she uses students' thinking to plan her next day's mini-lesson. Participants will see examples of student work and see how to begin managing the demands of differentiation.

Kelly Gallagher will discuss what the research says about developing lifelong recreational readers. The Common Core Standards clearly delineate the academic and functional reading expectations at each grade level; however, the new standards virtually ignore recreational reading —the kind of reading we want all of our students to be doing years after graduation. Kelly will discuss strategies proven to help foster recreational reading habits in the age of the Common Core Standards.

Lori DiGisi, president of the Secondary Reading Interest Group, will facilitate the session.

Building a Reading Community with the Book-a-Day Challenge

by Donalyn Miller, Trinity Meadows Intermediate School in Keller, TX (thebookwhisperer@gmail.com)

It was spring of 2009 and I was racing toward the end of another school year. My house was a wreck, in large part due to the towering stacks of unread books and journals that had accumulated during the year. Looking at the piles, I considered taking a sabbatical, putting caution tape over my classroom door, and reading for a year. A nice dream, but it wasn't going to happen. I knew that I would grow as a teacher if I could read those books and articles; I knew I would discover marvelous stories and new authors, and I knew that I would enjoy reading all summer long. So, I made a public challenge to read a book for every day of my summer vacation. I proclaimed it on my blog for *Education Week*, *The Book Whisperer*, started a Twitter hashtag, #bookaday, and invited teachers, librarians, and other readers to join me in the crazy attempt to read a mountain of books over three months.

For me, the Book-a-Day challenge was akin to setting a weight loss goal and telling everyone about it. Publicizing my reading plans held me accountable for the reading. If I threw down such an ambitious goal to other readers, I had to do it myself. That summer, I read 61 books. I didn't make my Book-a-Day goal of 71 books, but it didn't matter. I walked into my classroom that fall with four overflowing book bags to share with my new students and grew in my understanding of Twitter as a powerful professional development source.

This summer marked our third Book-a-Day challenge and the community has grown beyond my expectations. Hundreds of teachers, librarians, and readers from all over the globe regularly share their book recommendations and build connections between colleagues that offer professional support. From new teachers like Colby Sharp to veteran literacy experts like Teri Lesesne, Book-a-Day participants gather as equals, united in their shared love for books and children.

The Book-a-Day challenge guidelines respect the needs of its primary participants—K-12 teachers and librarians—and attempt to honor a variety of reading personalities and individual goals:

- Read one book per day for each day of summer vacation. This is an average, so if you read three books one day and none the next two, it counts.
- Set a start date and end date. Teachers typically choose the first and last days of summer vacation.
- Any book qualifies including picture books, nonfiction, professional books, poetry anthologies, or fiction–youth and adult titles.
- Participants keep a list of the books read and share them via social networking sites like goodreads or Shelfari, a blog, Facebook page, or Twitter feed. They do not have to post reviews, but they can if they wish. Titles will do.

Although I still announce the kickoff for Book-a-Day at the beginning of summer break, we hold Book-a-Day mini-challenges during winter break and readers post titles and links year round. This summer, several publishers and children's authors spontaneously joined Book-a-Day—offering book giveaways and inside information about authors and titles. Book-a-Day members post everything from extensive book reviews to simple title mentions.

Readers love to talk about the books they read almost as much as they love the act of reading itself, and the Book-a-Day challenge offers participants the opportunity to share and comment about the books they read. Asking participants why they choose to join the challenge, they mention these benefits:

- Provides a reading community: Book-a-Day participants connect with other readers who support and challenge them.
- Empowers participants to dedicate time for reading: If you set out to read a book every day, you must carve out daily reading time.
- Challenges them to branch out and try new books and genres: Do you avoid science fiction? Has it been a year since you read a poetry book? Book-a-day offers readers extensive recommendations to expand your reading horizons—from adult fiction to professional books to children's graphic novels.
- Raises their personal expectations for reading: If the other members of your reading community can commit to reading more, so can you.
- Suggests titles for additional reading and classroom use: Are you looking for a new read aloud title to start the school year or books to use as mentor texts? Book-a-Day participants offer ideas for using books with your students.
- Encourages mindfulness about what they are reading and sharing. Book-a-Day helps readers determine what they will read next and what books appear worthy based on the recommendations of others.
- Fosters collaborative relationships between colleagues. Beyond sharing our reading lives, Book-a-Day allows educators to develop relationships with like-minded colleagues who can provide resources and support throughout the school year.

In many ways, Book-A-Day provides teachers with a model for building a successful reading community in their classrooms by providing a model of what an organic, inclusive reading community looks like. Ultimately, it doesn't matter what we read, or how much, or when. What matters is that we celebrate reading, share our book love with other readers, discover new titles, and enjoy ourselves.

Donalyn Miller is a sixth grade language arts teacher at Trinity Meadows Intermediate School in Keller, Texas. In her popular book, *The Book Whisperer: Awakening the Inner Reader in Every Child*, Donalyn reflects on her journey to become a reading teacher and shares how she inspires and motivates her students to read 40 or more books a year. Donalyn currently writes a blog, "The Book Whisperer," for *Education Week Teacher* and a monthly column for Scholastic Book Fairs' *Principal to Principal* e-newsletter.

Leveraging Digital Writing with the Common Core State Standards

by Troy Hicks, Ph.D., Central Michigan University (hickstro@gmail.com)

In their science class, my children are currently learning about simple machines. Wheels, inclined planes, levers and more have been a part of our conversations at home for the past few weeks, and the idea of leveraging force to do work has become more and more evident to them as we talk about tools, and toys, that use the principles of a fulcrum. Along with seeing them come to new realizations about how such items as a see-saw or wheelbarrow works, I have also been thinking more and more about the idea of leverage as it relates to teaching writing with technology.

While I am not a physicist, and I don't want to overextend the analogy, I think that we have a point in the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) that offers us a fulcrum point, and we need to use it. As we read the CCSS, we obviously see the "big three" text types: argumentative, informational, and narrative. Yet, to make a stronger argument for integrating digital writing into our instruction and assessment, we can move to the "Production and Distribution of Writing" section and find that students should "use technology, including the Internet, to produce and publish writing and present the relationships between information and ideas clearly and efficiently."

This standard, tucked away below the larger headlines of text types, is our fulcrum. More than simply taking the types of writing we would do anyway and putting it online, we can invite students to "produce and publish" writing in many ways. This pivot point invites students to move beyond producing traditional academic texts -- most notably an essay (usually five paragraphs long) -- and opens up the process and possibilities of digital writing. Digital writing provides students with the chance to explore combinations of new genres, media, and audiences with argumentative and informational writing.

Kevin Hodgson, a sixth grade teacher at William E. Norris Elementary School in Southampton, Massachusetts, and prolific edublogger (http://dogtrax.edublogs.org) offers us one glimpse of how we can leverage digital writing tools to support the text types outlined in the CCSS.

Integrating the CCSS: One Teacher's Path

In his efforts to map changes from the CCSS and Massachusetts state curriculum over the past year, Hodgson recognized the need to shift from mostly narrative writing in his sixth grade classroom to also include argumentative and informational texts. Shifting the focus from a personal essay to one built on persuasion, he describes his experience this way:

> My experiment last year was to take our traditional essay unit and revamp it with the Common Core in mind. The theme was the environment, and students had a choice of topics, but then had to document the research they did. All essays also had a multimedia component, and I appreciate that the Common Core gives references to technology and media production.

Over the course of the unit, students were able to participate in traditional aspects of the writing workshop, including research, writing, and peer response. Also, Hodgson invited them to participate in a youth social network, Voices on the Gulf (http://voicesonthegulf.com/), which gave them opportunities to read and respond to digital writing created by other students, as well as share their own work. Students created a variety of products, including: Glogster multi-media posters, PowerPoint presentations, digital stories, webcomics, podcasts, and, of course, posters made from more tactile media such as paper and markers. Student work is available to view online: http://environorris.yolasite.com

In reflecting on the project, Hodgson focuses as much on his writers as he does on the writing that they produced:

> While the project touches on the Common Core and our new Massachusetts Curriculum in multiple ways, what I saw most were very engaged writers and composers, using their passion for the environment to argue for change in the world in a meaningful way. And I have never had a more powerful set of essays to read, either. For all the talk of shifts in curriculum, those points are the ones that allow me to feel that I found a good path forward that I can build upon this year.

Hodgson's students made decisions, created digital writing, and shared their work with the world. Ultimately, when we ask students to write, we ask them to share a part of themselves. If we can leverage the power of digital writing to help them make that sharing process more meaningful, like Hodgson has done with this project, then they are more likely to meet the secondary, academic goals that we have set for them, too.

Additional Applications for Digital Writing

As we all know, technologies continue to evolve and proliferate, so trying to pin down any one set of tools for creating digital writing is difficult. That said, the "Cool Tools for Schools" wiki has an ever-expanding list of web-based tools for producing audio, video, text, slideshows, and other media (http://cooltoolsforschools.wikispaces.com). Still, the digital writing process is about the writing, and the writer, and we need to think about ways to invite them in to that process, not just focus on the tools.

Leveraging Digital Writing with the Common Core State Standards

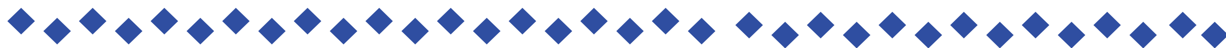
by Troy Hicks, Ph.D., Central Michigan University (hickstro@gmail.com) *continued from page 4*

So, how might we invite students into the process of digital writing? To begin, we would use the same process as we would for any type of writing; help them formulate questions and begin looking for answers. Then, the process can take on many shapes, a few of which are outlined below.

Narrative	**Informational/Argumentative**
• Writing responses to literature that embed hyperlinks and media to information about the author, the time period, or other elements of the text • Reading, critiquing, and creating fan fiction that explore alternate endings or characters' back stories • Exploring the creation of hypertext stories/poetry, digital storytelling, web comics, and transmedia (integrating multiple forms of media to tell a common story, often with TV/film, print texts, and online components) • Using a blog as a space to compose their own narrative serials • Modeling character sketches as social network profile pages • Engaging in virtual worlds to fully immerse one's self in character • Creating podcasts that include multiple actors, sound effects, and music	• Blogging, tweeting, and social network participation to discuss their own informed opinions • Creating alerts in Google and using RSS to discover more about current event topics • Building concept maps that compare and contrast topics, inviting collaborators to contribute • Identifying competing points of view, and then creating a text that, Wikipedia-like, emulates a "neutral point of view" • Collecting multiple sources of information through social bookmarking or a citation manager such as Zotero • Capturing, critiquing, and creating multimedia with movie-making or screencasting software

Even this list of ideas isn't exhaustive, and another excellent resource that is full of ideas from teachers like Hodgson is the National Writing Project's collection, "Digital Is." Available online (http://digitalis.nwp.org), there are over one hundred of examples of how teachers invite their students to compose digital writing. No matter what tools your students use to express themselves, your role as teacher remains the same: to help them improve as writers. Help them focus on the craft of composing a text first, then on the tools to help them do it.

As you integrate the CCSS, my hope is that the lessons my children are learning about simple machines may apply to you, too. Use this "Production and Distribution" standard to leverage technology in your writing instruction and, like Hodgson, you may find that your students are more engaged in their writing than they have ever been before.



Troy Hicks is an associate professor of English at Central Michigan University and focuses his work on the teaching of writing, literacy and technology, and teacher education and professional development. A former middle school teacher, he collaborates with K–12 colleagues and explores how they implement newer literacies in their classrooms. Hicks is director of CMU's Chippewa River Writing Project, a site of the National Writing Project, and he frequently conducts professional development workshops related to writing and technology. Also, Hicks is author of the The Digital Writing Workshop (Heinemann, 2009) and a co-author of Because Digital Writing Matters (Jossey-Bass, 2010). In March 2011, Hicks was honored with CMU's Provost's Award for junior faculty who have demonstrated outstanding achievement in research and creative activity. Most importantly, he is the father of six digital natives and is always learning something new about writing and technology from them.

CONSTRUCTING TOWERS OF LITERACY

by Doug Buehl (drbuehl@sbcglobal.net)

"I guess this is all part of my training to be a scientist."

During a recent phone conversation with my son, who is immersed in a doctoral program in cell and molecular biology at Michigan State University, Christopher talked about his ongoing frustrations in his lab work. Nothing ever seems to unfold the way he's conceptualized, and he is increasingly appreciating the dynamics of "learning through incremental failure."

As he chatted about proteins, peptides, and restriction enzymes, Christopher remarked on his growing realization as to how he should be thinking about his endeavors in his laboratory and as an advanced student in science. Thinking like a scientist means that he needs to transcend his disappointments with daily results and instead seek to piece together "what story his months of data *is* telling him." And he is constantly challenged to identify the points of intersection between his work in the lab and the scholarly literature that underlies his investigations.

During a visit to his lab this summer, I caught a glimpse of what "reading like a scientist" looks like. A thick stack of scientific treatises occupied a prominent spot next to Christopher's laptop & bulging lab notebook, sporting such enticing titles as: *Histone H3 Exerts a Key Function in Mitotic Checkpoint Control.* He reads regularly from a burgeoning cache of research articles and technical reports to inform his work and to provide direction for possible next steps. He tracks procedural insights from biotech manuals and websites. He mines detailed explanations from biochemistry texts and online resources. He doesn't read merely to "know more," he reads to access pertinent information, insights, and ideas so that he can add to that communally shared base of knowledge. And he is periodically called upon to communicate his work and his thinking, in written proposals and syntheses, in seminar presentations, and in frequent oral interchanges. He operates within a hub of scientific activity, and his behavior as a reader, writer, and researcher within that environment is conditioned by thinking through a scientific lens.

Of course, there are times when I too think through a scientific lens, for example when I am perusing the array of articles in the weekly Tuesday morning *Science Times* section of *The New York Times.* Obviously, I am not pretending that I am a scientist when I engage with an author who writes:

> "Plants 'forage' for resources like light and soil nutrients and 'anticipate' rough spots and opportunities. By analyzing the ratio of red light and far red light falling on their leaves, for example, they can sense the presence of other chlorophyllated competitors nearby and try to grow the other way. Their roots ride the underground 'rhizosphere' and engage in cross-cultural and microbial trade." (Angier, 2009)

But I do subtly shift my approach to my reading to accommodate a more scientific mode of processing when I am reading "sciencey" stuff. Some of my accommodations, without question, must acknowledge language that falls within the domain of the biological sciences. What do I recall from Botany 130 back from my college days, for example, that can help me navigate the sophisticated vocabulary load facing me in this article? Thinking scientifically mandates meaningful interactions receiving and using the language—the discourse—of a branch of science.

But my scientific lens encompasses more than maneuvering through a thicket of science terms; thinking scientifically is predicated on a coherent approach to prioritizing, organizing, and synthesizing as a reader. I am expecting some cause/effect relationships and I'm not disappointed: plants apparently engage in a number of proactive behaviors to protect and sustain themselves, and the dynamics of "being a plant" reflect their responses to their environment. I am also aware that thinking scientifically means that I must invariably track a scientific "claim of how things are"—an explanation, a theory, a conclusion—and evaluate the support provided by the author to buttress this claim. And my understanding needs to be qualified: in science we are constantly reworking what we feel we know, in order to factor in new findings that deepen, redirect, or even contradict what we have previously understood. In science, I recognize that any understanding I arrive at during any point of time is merely "a work in progress." At these moments in literacy, my thinking parallels in a number of respects how my son, the scientist, reads the texts of his field.

Disciplinary Lenses

This approach to thinking about texts, exhibited by my son and at times by me, can be described as reading through a disciplinary lens. The phrase "disciplinary literacy" is increasingly being used to characterize this "growth phase" of literacy development, a use of reading and writing in the service of learning disciplinary knowledge, insights, and applications. It is helpful to typify literacy development as assuming three critical growth phases (Shanahan & Shanahan, 2008). The foundational phase, basic literacy, emphasizes becoming comfortable with how written language works and concerns mastery of those "enabling skills" that allow a reader to do what readers do: receive and comprehend written communica-

Constructing Towers of Literacy

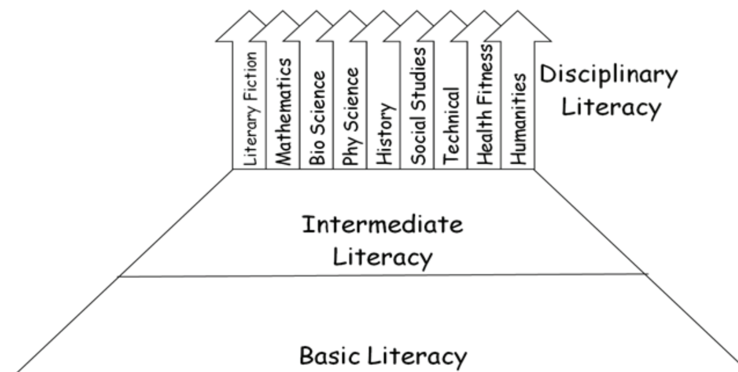
by Doug Buehl (drbuehl@sbcglobal.net) *continued from page 6*

tions. Although there remains considerable contention as to what exactly instruction should look like during the basic phase, all politics aside, everyone agrees that concerted attention and extensive instruction be directed to building a solid foundation literacy base.

The second growth phase, intermediate literacy, is predominately a streamlining and multitasking time, when readers become practiced in smoothly orchestrating their repertoire of strategies, extend their personal comprehension toolkits, build vocabularies that now heavily target "tier two" words, and sample a broader range of text genres. It is the need for continued work on this phase that characterizes most of our struggling readers at the middle and high school levels, and our school-wide conversations about differentiation and interventions focus on students still growing this phase of literacy development.

Disciplinary literacy, the third growth phase, represents a significant transition from more generalized reading practices to highly contextualized reading demands—reading, writing, and thinking through different disciplinary lenses. Students are called upon, certainly in the later elementary grades and most definitely during middle and high school years, to delve into increasingly complex texts that reflect the knowledge, processes, and wisdom—the discourses—of a host of academic disciplines.

Disciplinary literacy, however, is not one compact set of highly skilled behaviors and routines but many. It might be helpful to portray disciplinary literacy as "towers of literacy" (see diagram). Students are expected to grow their capacities to access communications through texts as disparate as literary fiction, mathematics, the sciences, the social sciences, technical fields, health and fitness, and the humanities (art and music). Growth in one of these towers (for example, the ability to effectively read fictional texts) does not necessarily translate into growth in the other towers, such as mathematics or the sciences. Disciplinary literacy is undertaken to facilitate disciplinary learning, and disciplinary literacy instruction must be embedded into disciplinary practices if students are to grow their capacities to successfully read disciplinary texts and communicate their understandings through speaking, writing, and creating in ways that conform to disciplinary expectations. As I have illustrated with my son, readers of science, for example, must learn to think scientifically as they interact with authors of complex texts in the sciences.



Buehl, D. (2011). *Developing Readers in the Academic Disciplines*. Newark, DE: International Reading Association.

But who mentors students to build the capacity to read through different disciplinary lenses? As anyone who has worked in adolescent literacy over the past several decades can readily attest, disciplinary literacy has been the neglected growth phase for our students. Generally, the approach in our schools might be encapsulated as: "You should be able to do this by now." As in, "shouldn't we able to expect six graders (or ninth graders, or twelfth graders) to be able to read the texts central to learning in our disciplines?" Students may receive reading assignments during the flow of disciplinary course work, but they rarely receive reading instruction. Essentially, at that time when texts become increasingly diverse and complex, we tend to yank instruction and leave students to devise on their own effective practices for making sense of disciplinary texts. Students are expected to comprehend texts dealing with sophisticated concepts—and that are more abstract, ambiguous, and subtle—by engaging in advanced literacy practices that as Shanahan and Shanahan concluded, "are rarely taught." (2008, 45)

Constructing Towers of Literacy

by Doug Buehl (drbuehl@sbcglobal.net) *continued from page 7*

Reading as Access

Of course, the disciplinary literacy growth phase also presumes that students are actually spending time comprehending complex texts as a regular component of their learning in different academic subjects. However, students are not mentored to read complex disciplinary texts when one of these three very prevalent but flawed classroom conditions exists:

1. Students are expected to comprehend such texts without instruction and scaffolding;
2. Students are assigned to read such texts but do not need to depend on reaching satisfactory comprehension as they can count on being told or shown what they need to know;
3. Students are not even assigned to read such texts, and operate instead in a "print-free" environment where virtually all they need to know will be delivered through telling, showing, and interactive or "hands-on" activities.

Obviously, the first condition is a "sink or swim" scenario, and it is probably fair to say that many teachers of academic disciplines recognize that a significant number of their students could find complex disciplinary texts overwhelming and would fail to learn as independent readers from these texts. Teachers may feel that their students *should* be able to comprehend such texts without instruction and scaffolding, and they may be frustrated that this is not so. Although this first condition is highly descriptive of my personal reality back in my days as a learner in middle school and high school (and certainly college)—and descriptive of some content classrooms today—the second and third conditions may be more widespread in disciplinary contexts.

The second flawed condition—assigning reading and then subsequently telling students what they need to know—might be summed up as a "hedging your bets" scenario. When teachers do not trust that many of their students will satisfactorily comprehend assigned texts, they follow up with presentations that focus more on telling rather than discussing to ensure that students "get" the desired content. And of course students—not just struggling readers but all students—pick up on this default routine very quickly. It has become a truism that students realize (and expect) that being a good listener will be the ticket to success in disciplinary classrooms. As a result, students may "read" assigned texts but rely on their teachers to deliver the payoff of what they will be accountable for knowing. Reading assignments may permit students to bypass comprehension and instead encourage a superficial "pseudo-read" that concentrates on locating information to record on a worksheet or as answers to questions. In essence, this second flawed condition represents teacher awareness that "sink or swim" expectations are unrealistic. But in lieu of providing needed instruction and scaffolding, teachers resort to telling. (A variation of this condition is resorting to reading texts aloud to students, not as modeling and think-alouds, but to deliver content, another exercise in listening.) Students become highly dependent on an intermediary—the teacher—to tell them what they should be developing the capacity to get themselves from their reading.

The third flawed condition—not assigning reading—reflects a perception that disciplinary texts are a barrier to learning rather than significant sources for obtaining knowledge within an academic subject. This third condition might be rather bluntly identified as "throwing in the towel," with teachers conceding that because students struggle with comprehending complex texts, reading as a means to access disciplinary knowledge and practices will be completely sidestepped as a course expectation. Teachers may proclaim, sometimes quite proudly, that reading is not an issue in their classes because their students are not asked to do it.

It is important to recognize that there are many points of access to disciplinary knowledge and insights, and that reading is only one of these access points. Certainly, given the wealth of technological resources today, a 21st century classroom should aggressively integrate viewing, creating, and interacting through technology into the flow of learning, interspersed with telling, classroom demonstrations, discussions, hands-on experiences, inquiry projects, and yes, reading. But avoiding developing reading as an access point to learning about a discipline guarantees that many students will not build disciplinary knowledge without access to an intermediary—a well-informed and experienced expert—to tell them and show them what they need to know. They will have not developed the capacity to *inform themselves* as learners.

In certain respects, this third flawed condition almost seems a reversion to preliterate times and reliance on the oral tradition, which emphasized access to a knowledgeable elder who passed on knowledge through telling and showing. One significant advantage of written texts was that learners could now directly access what people know and have thought without proximity to these knowledgeable intermediaries. This is not to deny that intermediaries (teachers for example, or creators of video resources) are not highly valuable and critical pathways for accessing disciplinary knowledge. But critics argue that in order to redress the first flawed condition—expectation of comprehension through reading without instruction and scaffolding—we have tilted too far to the second and third flawed conditions, disciplinary classrooms that do not

CONSTRUCTING TOWERS OF LITERACY

by Doug Buehl (drbuehl@sbcglobal.net) *continued from page 8*

develop independent points of access to knowledge through reading. For example, Pearson, Moje, and Greenleaf (2010) made this telling observation about science classrooms: "reading about science is replaced by listening to some-one talk about science. Avoiding the challenge of engaging students with texts may seem efficient, yet it ultimately undermines student learning. Instead of confronting reading problems head on, it breeds student dependence on the teacher for science knowledge and places the learner in a passive role." (460)

A final comment about reading as a point of access should be acknowledged. An impressive segment of the landmark research on comprehension in the 1980's examined the nature of the material students were asked to read in schools. The term "inconsiderate text" emerged from this body of research, and teachers were introduced to limitations of and issues with texts commonly assigned for disciplinary learning. Teachers who are disheartened by the shortcomings with many traditional texts used in disciplinary instruction—most particularly textbooks—have rightfully veered away from assigning reading from texts that are arguably problematic. Complex disciplinary texts should also represent quality texts, even while recognizing that textbooks can be useful sources of disciplinary information and insights. When teachers lament the dearth of quality texts that can be assigned for disciplinary work, they are voicing a serious concern and one that continues to need to be adequately addressed as we focus on the disciplinary literacy growth phase.

Working Complex Texts

As I related earlier, both my son and I read complex science texts. Christopher, of course, reads such texts regularly and as an integral part of his daily life as a scientist. I read complex science texts that are much less intense and much more infrequently. I primarily sample texts in the popular media that concern science topics, rather than the hard-core material that people like my son, who are farther along the "science pipeline," would tackle. And both of us have to "work" the texts sometimes to reach satisfactory comprehension.

Hence disciplinary literacy instruction in our schools needs to factor in both students like my son, whose science lens is a primary way of interacting with the world, and students like me, who prefer other disciplinary lenses but who are called upon at times as a facet of a literate lifestyle to think scientifically as a reader. It is important to emphasize that the goal of disciplinary literacy instruction is not to create mini- scientists, historians, mathematicians, literary critics or others; it is to mentor students' abilities to explore and understand their world through different disciplinary perspectives.

Throughout our schooling, both my son and I were compelled to "teach ourselves" advanced literacy practices that are central to disciplinary reading and learning. Though we were both successful without instruction and mentoring, the process was not necessarily efficient or always productive for us. As a survivor of the "sink or swim" condition, I gradually figured out how to read the texts of history (my preferred lens and college major) and how I should behave differently as a reader of contrasting disciplinary texts such as in the sciences or mathematics. During our recent conversation, my son reflected on his progression as a reader of science, noting that conditions that prized telling and listening were most often in place in his middle and high school science courses. In high school, like many students, Christopher could rely on his teachers for primary access to science knowledge. Course routines did not tease out the ambiguities of science knowledge and instead projected an air of authority about "what we know." As an undergraduate, Christopher was challenged to access a significant percentage of scientific knowledge independently as a reader, in addition to his access to experts through lectures, and professors frequently referred to "what *we* don't know in science" as a necessary sub-current for thinking scientifically. As a doctoral student, Christopher works with professors who regularly admit "*I* don't know," and who, rather than bestow their knowledge onto him, use their expertise to direct him to the scientific literature that he might access as a reader to inform himself and address his questions.

And Christopher has gradually internalized how to "work" science texts as a reader through a scientific lens. When he reads a research article, he immediately kicks in a highly organized frame of mind for thinking that revolves around a series of transcendent questions: What is the author addressing in the article? Why should we care (why is this important)? What do we currently know? What did the author want to find out? What did the author do to find out? What are the findings? What conclusions did the author draw from the findings? To what extent can the conclusions be justified by the findings? What are the implications of the results? To what extent are the results "generalizable" and to what extent does more research need to be done to solidly establish "what we know" in this area? Not only are these the essential questions for reading his scientific texts, these guiding questions are also a template for his writing, his presentations, and his professional conversations about his own work in the laboratory.

CONSTRUCTING TOWERS OF LITERACY

by Doug Buehl (drbuehl@sbcglobal.net) *continued from page 9*

The Common Core State Standards represent a historic recognition of contextualized literacy practices, articulating for the first time reading standards that are customized to literary fiction, informational, history and other social studies, science, and technical texts. A close examination of the ten reading standards for grades 11-12 in Science and Technical Subjects (2010, 62) reveals a high compatibility with the thinking employed by my son when reading through a scientific lens. For example, three of the standards dovetail exceptionally well with how Christopher talks about himself as a reader through a scientific lens:

> Standard 6: *Analyze the author's purpose in providing an explanation, describing a procedure, or discussing an experiment in a text, identifying important issues that remain unresolved*;
>
> Standard 8: *Evaluate the hypotheses, data, analysis, and conclusions in a science or technical text, verifying the data when possible and corroborating or challenging conclusions with other sources of information*;
>
> Standard 9: *Synthesize information from a range of sources (e.g., texts, experiments, simulations) into a coherent understanding of a process, phenomenon, or concept, resolving conflicting information when possible*.

Likewise, these particular three standards are also appropriate to my reading of popular science articles, like the *New York Times* piece on plant behavior cited earlier in the article. I too tracked an explanation, evaluated conclusions, and synthesized my understanding in terms of previous knowledge as well as anticipating potential compatibility with future texts and learning. Although not a scientist, I too could engage in scientific thinking when texts, and comprehension, called for it.

The Common Core State Standards have great potential in reframing our work in adolescent literacy and for guiding teachers toward conceptualizing instruction that truly mentors students in reading, writing, and thinking through different disciplinary perspectives.

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Doug Buehl worked for 33 years as a social studies teacher, reading teacher, reading specialist and district Adolescent Literacy Support Teacher in the Madison Metropolitan School District, Madison, Wisconsin. He is a Past President of the Secondary Reading Interest Group and the author of *Classroom Strategies for Interactive Learning, 3rd Edition*, 2009, and *Developing Readers in the Academic Disciplines*, 2011, both published by IRA.

Common Sense, Common Ground, Common Core

by Carol Jago (jago@gseis.ucla.edu)

Teachers new to the profession often wish they had worked in the good old days. Alas, if thirty-two years in the classroom has taught me anything it is that there never were any good old days. My students have always been challenging, always been averse to hard work, and always been wonderful. What has changed are the stakes. More than ever before, students need to acquire high levels of literacy in middle and high school in order continue learning in post-secondary settings. This was the impetus for creation of the Common Core State Standards. It also explains the drumbeat for accountability.

The texts students will encounter in college and in job training programs are highly complex. Students need stamina to negotiate pages of information-laden readings and the syntactical confidence to be able to comprehend what they read. They need to bring to these readings a broad range of background knowledge and a robust vocabulary. They need to be independent readers who know what to do when understanding breaks down.

Does this mean that aligning curriculum with Common Core Standards will turn secondary ELA classrooms into test-prep factories? Nothing in the Common Core recommends that approach. The standards place a high priority on a rich and rigorous literature curriculum along with the focus on informational texts. But in order to bring this to fruition, we will need to make literacy instruction the shared responsibility of the entire school community.

"The Standards insist that instruction in reading, writing, speaking, listening, and language be a shared responsibility within the school. The K-5 standards include expectations for reading, writing, speaking, listening, and language applicable to a range of subjects, including but not limited to ELA. The grades 6-12 standards are divided into two sections, one for ELA and the other for history/social studies, science, and technical subjects. This is division reflects the unique, time-honored place of ELA teachers in developing students' literacy skills while at the same time recognizing that teachers in other areas must have a role in this development as well" (4).

It won't be an easy sell. Many content area teachers insist that they have too much material to cover to spend instructional time focusing on literacy. We must find ways to persuade our colleagues that reading and writing about history and science will deepen students' understanding of what they are learning. We also need to be willing to look in the mirror and admit that some of our own practices in English language arts have pushed students away from reading rather than towards it. Instead of creating lessons that invite students to dig in and explore a text, we make them answer questions, our questions, rather than come up with their own.

Too often, teaching literature has been an occasion for teachers who know and love books to showcase what they love and show off what they know. Students come away from such classes—and this is when they are done well—in awe of their teachers but with little confidence in their own ability to read literature. Louise Rosenblatt asserted that, "The problem that a teacher faces first of all, then, is the creation of a situation favorable to a vital experience of literature. Sadly, many of the practices and much of the tone of literature teaching have precisely the opposite effect" (61). I believe that classrooms from preschool through college should be places where that vital experience of literature takes place every day.

I am not so naïve as to think that students will cheer when you hand out copies of a Shakespeare play or a Homeric epic—let alone *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* or *The Grapes of Wrath.* The sheer weight of the volumes is daunting. But this is not a recent development in teenage behavior. Adolescent groans mask a deep hunger for meaning. They also mask students' fear that they won't be able to do this work. Nor will they be able to — without your help. Instead of making the excuse that today's students don't have the vocabulary, background knowledge, or stamina to read complex literature, we need to design lessons that build reading muscles page by page. Lily Wong Fillmore, a scholar and long-time researcher into English language learning, recently made an impassioned plea to teachers not to dumb down texts for English learners. Worried about the "gradual erosion of the complexity of texts" offered to students, Fillmore posits that when teachers offer only simplified materials to their English learners, it is "niceness run amok." While she acknowledges that for the first year or two English learners need altered or alternate texts, ultimately they deserve the challenge of rich literature.

I do not believe that teaching literature should be about dragging students kicking and screaming through works they hate and poems they find opaque. It should be about nurturing the next generation of readers — readers who one day may choose to buy a ticket for a performance of *Macbeth*, who will excitedly order the latest Cormac McCarthy for their Kindles and Nooks, who can find solace in poetry during times of trouble. Much is made of the economic impact of education, but I'm more concerned about preparing students' hearts and minds for whatever the future may hold.

Writers from George Orwell to Kazuo Ishiguro have warned us about just how dystopian the future could become, but unless students read and heed their warnings we may be heading not for the best of all possible worlds but for the worst. Charles Dickens opens his story of the French Revolution with a riff on the best of times and the worst of times. "It was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness, it was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity, it was the season of Light, it was the season of Darkness, it was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair, we had everything before us, we had nothing before us, we were all going direct to Heaven, we were all going direct the other way- in short, the period was so far like the present period, that some of its noisiest authorities insisted on its being received, for good or for evil, in the superlative degree of comparison only." How many of our twittering students can parse this sentence? How many teachers have lost the will to ask their charges do so?

I have always believed that the purpose of education was to help children become more humane. In 1780 John Adams wrote into the Massachusetts Constitution, "Wisdom and knowledge, as well as virtue, diffused generally among the body of the people, being necessary for the preservation of their rights and liberties; and as these depend on spreading the opportunities and advantages of edu-

Common Sense, Common Ground, Common Core

by Carol Jago (jago@gseis.ucla.edu) continued from page 11

cation in the various parts of the country, and among the different orders of the people, it shall be the duty of legislatures and magistrates, in all future periods of this commonwealth, to cherish the interests of literature and the sciences, and all seminaries of them."

Rather than wishing for a return to "good old days" that never were, let us embrace this duty.

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Carol Jago has taught middle and high school in Santa Monica, California for 32 years and is past president of the National Council of Teachers of English. Her latest book *With Rigor for All: Helping Students Meet Common Core Standards for Reading Literature* is just out from Heinemann.

Secondary Reading Interest Group

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Regular Meeting of the Secondary Reading Interest Group of the IRA

May 10, 2011
2:00 p.m. – 4:45 p.m.
Orlando, Florida
West Building – W307a

Call to Order: Lori DiGisi, President, convened the regular meeting of the Secondary Special Interest Group of the IRA on May 10, at 2:00 p.m. in Orlando, Florida.

Old Business

Reports: Readings of the Secretary's minutes and Treasurer's report of the April, 2010 meeting were accepted and approved. Reports were made available for those interested.

Introduction of 2010-2011 Officers:

- President – Lori DiGisi
- President Elect – Kelly Gallagher
- Secretary – Kathy Galvin
- Treasurer – Rita Noon
- Past President – MaryAnn Liberati (in absentia)
- Past President – Cynthia Greenleaf (advising)

New Business

Close of Business

SRIG Session

Keynote Address: Emerging Insights and Online Opportunities to Empower 21st Century Adolescents and Their Teachers – Julie Coiro, University of Rhode Island

Dr. Coiro shared emerging data and insights about online literacy practices among adolescents and classroom teachers in school contexts. She shared several sets of emerging realities with promising possibilities about how to empower adolescents with digitally networked resources such as electronic anticipation guides and inquiry based challenges. She also described the process of capturing real-time data to foster teachers' awareness of online literacies and how to use student process data to inform instructional decisions. Participants left with five key steps toward preparing teens to be innovative critical thinkers in a global information society. For more information visit: http://tilesig.wikispaces.com/coiroIRA2011SecSig

Teens as Multimodal Designers: Responding to Young Adult and Classic Literature with Media and Web 2.0 – Bridget Dalton, Vanderbilt University

Dr. Dalton illustrated the possibilities of using multimedia author studies, video book trailers, multimedia retellings and literary analysis, soundscapes, and Web 2.0 tools to build teen's comprehension and love of books while developing important digital literacies. She demonstrated the realities of how class novels can be digitally scaffolded to provide support for a wide range of learners and provided strategies for scaffolding students' multimodal composing. Examples of student work was shared.

Professional Development for the Secondary Reading Special Interest Group: Newsletters or Nings? – Kelly Gallagher, Magnolia High School

Mr. Gallagher facilitated a discussion of how technology can be used to provide professional development, information and real time support for teachers.

Drawing for Prizes

Adjournment: President Lori DiGisi adjourned the meeting at 4:45 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,
Kathy Galvin, Secretary

Membership Matters — With increasing attention to concerns about adolescent literacy achievement, brought about by student performance on high profile tests like the PISA and NAEP and recent broadly disseminated reports on the literacy learning needs of adolescents, we have been given an unprecedented opportunity. The Secondary Reading Interest Group can work within IRA to build a stronger presence for secondary literacy concerns, stronger representation of these concerns and interests on the conference programs, and more attention to older students' needs in general.

As your president, I would like to encourage you to build this effort. You may not be aware that IRA awards time on the national conference based on the size of special interest groups. The more members we have, the longer the time given over to our program, and the greater the size of the meeting room assigned. To be counted, SRIG members must also be current in their IRA membership.

I would like to ask you to please take a moment to check on your IRA membership and renew it if necessary. In addition, please feel welcome to pass this newsletter on to others in your professional circles who may be interested in joining our Secondary Reading Interest Group. A membership form for the SRIG is included on the back page of every newsletter. Help build a stronger presence for secondary literacy and adolescent learners within IRA!

Our $10 yearly dues help to defray costs for newsletter preparation and mailing, for meeting expenses, and for occasional actions taken by the membership.

The Mission of the Secondary Reading Interest Group is to:

- encourage the study of the reading process at the secondary level;
- encourage research and evaluation relating to secondary reading programs;
- act as a clearinghouse on secondary reading;
- provide a network among secondary educators; and

The Philosophy of the Secondary Reading Interest Group is based on the belief that:

- reading is a process;
- literacy has value beyond economic benefits; and
- we have the resources to make significant and lasting changes in reading today.

IRA Secondary Reading Interest Group — Membership Form

Name: ____

Address: ____

City: __________________________State__________________Zip___________

Home Phone: (   )_____________________Fax________________________ E-mail: ___________________________________

School Affiliation: ____

__School Reading Specialist (__middle __high) __College Professor __District Reading Specialist

__Classroom Teacher (__middle __high) __School Administrator __Other ______________________

IRA Membership #________________ Expiration Date ___________ Renewal ___ New Member ___

Paid: Check ____ (made out to SRIG) Cash ____ Mail to : Rita Noon, 2083 Lac Du Mont, Haslett, MI 48840

Receipt

Received from:____ Amount: $10.00

For membership in IRA Secondary Reading Interest Group (SRIG)

From: May 20____ to May 20____ Paid: Check____ Cash____

Rita Noon, Treasurer/Membership Chairperson