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ABSTRACT
                A high-school department chair and English teacher
switched jobs with a university-based teacher educator. In this
paper, they define their shared vision of student-centered learning,
describe how to create a student-centered environment, explain how to
implement student-centered activities, provide an example involving
the colonial period in American literature, and provide a 23-item
practitioner's reading bibliography to begin exploring the range of
fields that helped shaped their ideas. The final unit plan developed
by students for the colonial period research project is attached.
(Author/RS)

STUDENT - CENTERED LITERACY INSTRUCTION IN HIGH SCHOOL: I WANT TO, BUT HOW?

Patti McWhorter   **Sally Hudson-Ross**

NRRC

National Reading Research Center

Student-Centered Literacy Instruction in High School: I Want to, But How?

Patti McWhorter

Cedar Shoals High School, Athens, Georgia

Sally Hudson-Ross

University of Georgia

INSTRUCTIONAL RESOURCE NO. 29

Summer 1996

NRRC National Reading Research Center

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The National Reading Research Center (NRRC) is funded by the Office of Educational Research and Improvement of the U.S. Department of Education to conduct research on reading and reading instruction. The NRRC is operated by a consortium of the University of Georgia and the University of Maryland College Park in collaboration with researchers at several institutions nationwide.

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Donna E. Alvermann, Co-Director
National Reading Research Center
318 Aderhold Hall
University of Georgia
Athens, GA 30602-7125
(706) 542-3674

John T. Guthrie, Co-Director
National Reading Research Center
3216 J. M. Patterson Building
University of Maryland
College Park, MD 20742
(301) 405-8035

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About the Authors

Patti McWhorter teaches high school English at Cedar Shoals High School in Athens, Georgia, where she serves as chair of the English Department. Her 22 years in classroom teaching have included grades six through college. In addition, she has conducted numerous staff development courses throughout the state and presented at professional conferences throughout the state and nation.

Sally Hudson-Ross works primarily with secondary preservice teachers and their mentor teachers in local high schools through the Language Education department at the University of Georgia. In 1993-1994, Sally exchanged jobs with Patti McWhorter, a local English teacher and department chair in another NRRC project entitled The SYNERGY Project. Insights they gained from doing one another's jobs as teacher educator and high school teacher for a year directly influenced the Collaborative Inquiry Project reported here. Details of the SYNERGY Project are reported in other NRRC reports.

Student-Centered Literacy Instruction in High School: I Want to, But How?

Patti McWhorter
Cedar Shoals High School
Athens, Georgia

Sally Hudson-Ross
University of Georgia

Abstract. *Patti McWhorter and Sally Hudson-Ross exchanged jobs during the 1993–1994 school year. Patti, Department Chair and English teacher at Cedar Shoals High School in Athens, Georgia, went to the University of Georgia to work in teacher education while Sally assumed Patti's teaching role of five classes. In this article, they define their shared vision of student-centered learning, describe how to create a student-centered environment, explain how to implement student-centered activities, and provide a practitioner's reading bibliography to begin exploring the range of fields that helped shaped their ideas.*

Die-hard Andy Griffith fans remember the episode when Aunt Bea, feeling her age, buys the Colonel's magic elixir for its promise of vigor and vitality. The image of Aunt Bea pounding her piano keys in a thundering rendition of "Toot, Toot, Tootsie" was unnatural. Her demure, proper demeanor was the antithesis of the woman at the piano, whose singing could be heard for blocks away. The magic elixir truly had no medicinal value and no lasting effects.

A little like Aunt Bea, classroom teachers constantly search for the "magic elixir" of teaching. The perfect activity. The perfect strategy. The perfect approach. Something to reach every student. A motivational miracle. We flock to workshops and conferences with the hope that we can find that magic. Often, we return to our classrooms to find that our new ideas and approaches, without careful nurturing, become empty and ineffective. Like Aunt Bea, we might even feel hung over and disappointed after something does not work out as we planned. Students balk. Confrontations ensue. We feel cheated by the promise of miracle cures.

Unlike Aunt Bea's conniving Colonel, Sally and I found our own kind of miracle over a period of years. It was not the kind of bright flashy classroom miracle that only happens in someone's classroom in another state or even another country. (Not a note of "Toot, Toot, Tootsie" could be heard.) It was more like a gradual transformation, a slow metamorphosis of our classrooms from places where teachers rule, to places where students and teachers come to understand and appreciate each other more fully; classrooms where teachers learn from and with students, and students take responsibility for learning.

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What we offer here is an overview of our experiences and the definitions and principles we have come to live by in our teaching. If you asked us to write this again next year, we would have more to say about what we have learned—that's the exciting thing about the mindset we have adopted. We do not have all the answers. We accept the uncertainties of teaching, but we also delight in its possibilities and its promises.

Defining Student-Centered Learning

Student-centered classrooms, in our understanding, are places which are responsive to the needs of a particular group of learners. These classrooms respect adolescence as a developmental stage, capitalize on student interests and energy, and minimize student apathy. In these classrooms, decisions are made collaboratively and thoughtfully by both the teacher and the students. Learning activities are not gimmicky or cute; they are engaging, challenging, and respectful of the learners present. Heterogeneity among student abilities, interests, and cultures offers opportunities, rather than limitations or excuses for poor performance or minimal learning.

Teachers in student-centered classrooms know and understand the varied styles of learners, have understanding of how the human brain processes information and learns, and apply this information in their planning. As a result, content delivery is contextualized into more personally meaningful learning experiences for the students. Students are challenged to learn more—not less.

Our vision of student-centered language arts classrooms evolved over years of professional reading and experiences and continues to evolve. From Nancie Atwell, we learned the power of choice and individualization for students; from Eliot Wigginton of Foxfire, we made the connection to the world outside the classroom. From a variety of other movements in education—cooperative learning, performance assessment, multiple intelligences, constructivism—we discovered that a focus on individual student learning, not the transmission of content, connects them all. Each theory positions students in the center of learning and celebrates their unique abilities, while challenging us as teachers to orchestrate a classroom that maintains high standards in all learning.

Changing a personal approach to teaching takes time if a teacher does more than add new activities to an already existing framework. However, adding new activities and trying new ideas can be a beginning point, a safe place to start. But these ideas look different when they are selected to meet student needs rather than because a teacher likes them. The best advice we have for teachers who are thinking deeply about student learning and their classrooms is to start slowly. Most importantly, do not expect any one approach to "cure" the problems in your classroom. Make thoughtful, careful changes, rather than wholesale ones. Do not give up if something you try does not work the first time. Write down what went wrong and keep considering how you could try again. Think about your students in positive

ways—focus on what they can or might do instead of on their shortcomings.

None of us has time. But if you give yourself the 15 minutes a day you deserve—before school, after school, before bed—you can begin in three ways. (1) Read widely in the professional journals. The bibliography we include is guaranteed to inspire and spark new ideas. (2) Begin a personal/ professional journal and record what went well today, what questions emerge, how things are going, and new goals. (3) Find ways to share and build your own community—attend workshops, ask lots of questions of teachers who are trying to move toward student-centered classrooms, seek the company of teachers like yourself who desire a change in their teaching, and get on the Internet and explore NCTE, teacher research, and other discussion groups. Remember that you are in control of yourself and your professional growth. This is a powerful belief—one that can transform you and your classroom if you allow it to do so. By reading, writing, and building community, you share with your students exactly the activities you are asking them to engage in and make it far more likely that you will both understand and have the enthusiasm for these activities.

Creating a Student-Centered Environment

Get to Know Your Students

Every classroom situation, every new group of students presents a new challenge for the classroom teacher. Experienced teachers know that the same lesson plan can look distinctly different with each group of students. So many factors can come into play—the size of the class, which students are present or absent on a given day, the abilities and interests of the students, the time of class period, the events taking place in the school—all can affect the success or failure of a carefully planned lesson. The better a teacher knows and understands his/her students (and the better students know and understand each other), however, the greater the odds are that s/he can predict possible obstacles in the learning and adjust the lesson accordingly.

This understanding has most dramatically affected my approach to evaluation with my students. After an extended period of studying performance assessment and the many forms this approach to assessment can assume, I began to *evaluate* students less at the beginning of the year, approximately through the first two grading periods, and instead *assess* their individual strengths and weaknesses. I plan a wide variety of reading, writing, and speaking activities and provide students with points for completing these activities. I evaluate very few activities according to an "A, B, C" scale. Those that are, are done so only after students know and understand the evaluation criteria. Simultaneously, I begin to form a picture of each of my students and their respective classes.

My approach includes a variety of anecdotal data, questionnaires, surveys, writing samples, and practice activities which have replaced an early emphasis on testing and evaluation. As the picture of each group of learners takes shape, I can begin to see how each class will respond to different types of activities. Some

classes and individual students, for example, may handle group activities better than others. My planning can be done accordingly.

Be Supportive in the Lives of Individual Students

Effective high school teachers, we believe, understand and appreciate the complexities of adolescence. They view teenagers as fascinating, humorous, capable people. These teachers accept their students, every blemish, every fault. This acceptance, however, does not constitute a miracle cure for every challenge or problem in the classroom. Rather, it provides a positive mindset for these kinds of teachers. They remain optimistic that all students can learn in spite of personal, family, and societal problems.

For me, the individual lives of students and their personal problems are issues I had to come to terms with early in my classroom teaching career. The sheer numbers of students in each classroom and across a teacher's schedule make it impossible to deal very effectively with each student's personal situation. The lives of students can consume and overwhelm a dedicated teacher who takes these problems home each evening. To survive, many teachers come to a place in their thinking that allows them to continue to strive to help students with personal issues, while balancing the demands of teaching and learning.

These kinds of teachers use every available resource in a school setting to help these students—counseling, social services, student support teams. They accept their limitations as individual teachers, celebrating small victories

sometimes, in lieu of larger ones. They have what we like to call the "ant moving the rubber tree plant" mentality. Rather than bemoaning the sad state of society, the lack of parental support, and resources, they work on these issues in a variety of ways. More often than is realized, their efforts are meaningful and transforming to individual students in quiet and powerful ways.

Build a Community of Learners

A student-centered classroom is a carefully constructed ecology of cooperation and collaboration. Individual competition is deliberately minimized. Students are encouraged to work together to achieve instructional goals. Creating this kind of atmosphere takes careful planning and attention on a teacher's part. Consulting the numerous professional resources available on building classroom communities is a helpful step toward understanding how this might work with a specific group of students.

I begin the process of building a community at a very basic level—students in my classroom have to successfully identify each of their classmates with a first and last name, spelled correctly. They take a "Name Quiz" periodically over the first weeks of school until each student has made 100%. In my racially and academically diverse classroom, knowing each other as individuals is essential. As a class, we can circumvent much conflict if we know each other as people, rather than that "girl in the red sweater" or that "boy with the hat."

The merits of group work are well established in the professional literature. Students benefit from working with others. Students in

Sally's classes nominated Team Leaders who then selected the small groups with which they would work, ensuring diversity in race, gender, and ability. Students took their responsibilities as Team Leaders seriously and assisted all members of their team in assigned activities. Teachers who are inexperienced at organizing and monitoring group work can begin in small ways to experiment with this teaching strategy.

Taking the time to build a classroom community is an issue for some teachers who feel assaulted by content and curriculum, graduation tests, standardized tests, district and school restrictions. The more recent emphasis in public education on the school-to-work transition, however, offers strong support for the inclusion of team-building skills in any classroom setting. Students moving into the world of jobs and careers will be called upon to work cooperatively with diverse groups of people and find solutions to problems in the workplace. Both require that they leave high school with an understanding of the problem-solving and decision-making strategies needed to succeed as workers.

What we discovered and what we strongly believe is that without a feeling of community and common purposes for being in a classroom, students can become passive or resistant, apathetic learners—a condition we are collectively determined to reduce, if not completely eradicate in our teaching. What is required by outside forces is not often enough to motivate students—we discovered that we could engage more of our students when we chose the teamwork approach. Our actions confirmed for

them that we were in this thing called "their education" together as partners, even when problems seemed insurmountable.

Implementing Student-Centered Activities

Project-based instruction, we have found, provides us with the most opportunities to realize our vision of student-centered classrooms. Projects can offer multiple opportunities to address required curricular objectives, and students can learn a variety of skills and content in a more meaningful context. Projects, teamed with a reading/writing workshop approach, offer a balance between teacher-directed and student-centered activities.

Basic Tenets

1. Student input into the daily workings of the classroom is solicited and encouraged by the teacher. The time spent involving and inviting students into the decision-making process creates a more productive working environment. Classroom decisions should be negotiated by teacher and students within acceptable parameters so that all can learn.

Both Sally and I have found that students can solve the day-to-day logistical problems of the classroom much easier than we can in isolation from them. Although our solution to a problem or our decisions might be the same as those of our students, we have found that by simply asking their opinions about procedures, ways to organize instruction, and instructional options, we become partners in the classroom.

Adolescents have opinions, sometimes strong ones, and we have found it useful to use that developmental tendency purposefully. The added benefit of this strategy is that we are given an opportunity to teach problem-solving, compromise, and consensus—skills students desperately need in the real world.

A teacher who wants to move toward more student-centered practice can begin in small ways with the decision-making process in the classroom. I began this transformation in my own classroom by negotiating timelines for projects and activities with my students. As I began each teaching unit, I worked with the students in a whole class setting to determine the most sensible time frame and deadline for activities, presentations, written products, and tests. Student response to this practice was so overwhelmingly positive, I continued and expanded this practice of inviting student input into almost every area of my teaching.

Both of us discovered that classroom decision-making is an excellent context in which to teach problem-solving with students. I address problems in my classroom by putting the problem before the class, facilitating a brainstorming session on possible solutions, and working with the class to reach consensus on the solution to be adopted by the class. For example, I discovered with my students that Fridays were not the best day to have large projects and assignments due. Students confessed that they were often tempted to hand in a project late if it was due on a Friday. Since my practice is to enforce a penalty rule for work handed in late, this often resulted in lower grades for the

students. I took the problem to the students. Their decision was that large projects or assignments should be due on Mondays, allowing one last weekend of opportunity for them to succeed.

This practice sends students the clear message that problems can be solved if people are willing to explore issues, offer viable alternatives, and compromise. Although *I* could have made the decision to alter the day large assignments were due, the few minutes of class time it took to discuss the situation with my students turned the problem over to *them*. They became the responsible party. Students who still procrastinated about completing the work could no longer complain that the due date was the fault of the teacher. They owned the problem as well as the solution. The percentage of students handing in the larger assignments on time increased.

Inviting students into the decision-making process does not mean that we have abdicated our responsibilities as teachers. Rather, we carefully examine our own agendas as the teacher to discern if there are places in our decision-making process for the voices of our students. We give them choices. We take the time to hear what they are telling us about their needs as learners.

2. Students should be provided with a range of choices—in activities, in reading material and subject matter—in all aspects of their learning.

I can no longer plan an instructional unit without first considering how students will be given choices. So many options exist for in-

cluding the element of choice. The choice may be in the topic about which the student is to read or write. The choice may be in the day of the week for sustained reading or the form used for keeping a record of independent reading. In longer units, I include as many options as possible for students. One variation is to require that students complete an established number of activities alike and then choose from a list of optional activities in addition to those required. The opportunity for students to make choices in the classroom exist in abundance; the teacher, however, must learn to see the possibilities.

If you are comfortable with your basal literature book, it is easy to begin with simple student choice there. Ask students which story they would prefer to read together to illustrate plot or symbolism or in which order they would like to read them. Invite students to set deadlines for outside reading, to submit questions to help you shape the discussion, to decide whether to read aloud or silently in class, or to suggest ways to convince you that they have read (journals, quizzes, projects, etc.). If your text includes a thematic table of contents, invite students to select poems to be read in conjunction with similar stories, to decide which theme to engage in for a short unit, or to decide how they will go beyond the text materials to explore a shared theme.

3. Student learning should have connections to the world outside school or be integrated into a meaningful context. A "need to know the information" must be established by the teacher or the teacher working in concert with the students in order to motivate them to achieve.

From Foxfire methodology, we learned the value of connecting classroom learning to the outside world. Our students have created a televised talk show, public service announcements, and informational brochures. Through these activities, students learn the value of correctness and preciseness in writing, the need to read critically, the value of research.

Whether we like it or not, state testing requirements for high school graduation and other testing by those outside the classroom, such as the College Board's SAT, Achievement Tests and Advanced Placement testing programs, provide the "need to know" context for some students. For others it is the desire for a job, for college entrance, or for personal reward and satisfaction. Once students are helped to acknowledge their willingness to learn for these tests or any outside goal, the motivation is established. As long as we can help students see these connections to our activities, we are freed to use methods we know are more productive for our students. They are willing and creative participants in their own education.

Once students see a need for learning, they will learn. Until that need is established, learning does not happen. In our experiences, the most successful moments in teaching have been those in which students asked us to provide them with information—information to be used in the completion of a project or unit which connected in some real and meaningful way to their lives or their future. When Sally's second period decided to produce a video for a local cable channel about school violence, their decisions to hold a panel discussion for the

school demanded that they learn how to send oral and written invitations, develop schedules, plan group movements, speak in public with a microphone, manage sound equipment and lights, plan questions and be prepared to respond to answers, videotape for close-ups and large group pans, and a myriad of other skills. Sally could not help in many of these areas, so peers and other adults became teachers that students sought out because of the "need to know."

Equally important is returning to established objectives and discussing with students their progress relative to those objectives. Within instructional units, this discussion and interaction helps us and students understand their learning behaviors more fully. We can adjust tried and true activities and requirements to increase student awareness and learning as we assess. Sally adapted an old language arts activity—the resume—to help her second period make sense of their video work. They brainstormed all the activities they were involved in, listed the concordant skills they had learned, and to emphasize their new talents, they presented themselves in resume and cover letter format to employers.

4. Students are encouraged to examine their own work, critique its strengths and weaknesses, and set goals for continued improvement.

Teachers want to teach students who can think for themselves. Yet our methods often rob students of this ability. As long as we make all of the instructional decisions, the learning remains ours—not our students. When

we slow down long enough to allow students to take a look at themselves as learners, the effects can be dramatic.

My first teaching adventure with portfolios taught me this lesson. Given the opportunity to consider a semester's work in reading, writing, and general learning behaviors, both ninth- and twelfth-graders gained insight into their own personal motivations and took a more intense interest in improving as readers and writers. Rather than viewing their work in piecemeal fashion as it was returned, the portfolio presents a comprehensive view of a student's academic ability, skills, and growth.

Sally's experiences reflected my own. Her sophomore students shared their portfolios with a parent or "significant other" to widen the audience for their work. Like my students, Sally's students evinced similar behaviors—a strong sense of ownership for the body of work they had created and a clarity of insight into their own personal behavior as learners. As a side benefit, many parents were brought into a new awareness of their high school student's work.

To assist students in monitoring their growth as readers and writers, we both established the practice of goal-setting activities with students, teaching them to set small, attainable, short-range learning goals and develop strategies to attain those goals. Students who were formerly passively resistant to learning, we found, began to show sparks of interest in learning when we pursued these approaches.

Given the time to slow down and take a hard look at themselves as learners made a differ-

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ence for our students. Classroom activities took on a new quality, a different context for them. Assignments became an opportunity to try again, to improve their skills in reading and writing, to demonstrate what they had learned. **5. Depth of learning should not be sacrificed for content coverage. Language arts learning activities should serve multiple purposes and/or objectives in order to maximize instructional time.**

The pressure to cover material in a language arts course can actually be detrimental to real learning. Under this pressure in past years, I often found myself in a monotonous teaching routine: study background material on authors, assign stories, assign questions, organize a class discussion, administer a test over the material. My teaching, it seemed, turned into a desperate race with myself to cover more material each year, sacrificing any examination of a topic in-depth. My classroom was organized; my students were obedient. By many standards, an outside observer would find my teaching more than satisfactory.

Graduate work and exposure to many of the influences we listed earlier, however, forced me to reconsider my methods over a period of years. Although at times I felt unsettled about my decision to examine and perhaps change my teaching methodology, I believe the gradual nature of these changes allowed me to examine and think deeply about my role as a teacher, often in hindsight. I did not take any one method and buy into it wholesale; I experimented in small ways with questioning techniques, writing and reading workshops,

Foxfire-type projects, and performance assessment. As students responded positively, I felt empowered to continue to retool my teaching.

These gradual changes helped me see how I could teach my students more about reading and writing by slowing down the instructional pace. Rather than read all of the short stories in the unit, I began to give choices of stories—allowing students to pursue individual interests. If my instructional objective was to teach characterization, I could still meet that objective without having them read every story. I made time for more activities on characterization and consequently made it possible for my students to really learn about the choices that writers make when they create characters in literature. The level of thinking among my students deepened, evidenced by their writing and their discussion in class.

6. Students should be involved in determining standards and criteria for assessment and evaluation within the framework of the instructional projects and in the larger context of the language arts course.

From the wealth of information on performance assessment, I have come to the practice of involving my students in discussing and determining standards for assessment and evaluation for the work done in class. To introduce them to this practice, I begin by presenting my own checkpoints and guidelines for each assignment. Students know before they begin the work exactly how the work will be assessed. This provides them with the opportunity to set a personal goal on each assignment.

As my students understand my standards and the methods I use for evaluation, they seem to be able to make a logical step toward formulating their own guidelines for assessment. Holistic scales are easy to develop with students. Using letter grades with which they are familiar, we work to articulate the criteria for an assignment to receive an "A," "B," "C," or "F." Students are also able to develop analytical scoring guides for assignments which provide specific scoring criteria for different aspects of the assignment.

Since my practice is to use both holistic and analytic scales to evaluate student work, I feel comfortable working with students to develop these types of evaluation scales. This level of comfort, however, came gradually over a period of years as I experimented with the various scales developed to assess writing. As confidence in my own ability to develop these types of scoring scales increased, I knew that students would benefit from a similar exercise. As we develop standards for evaluation together, there is a natural transfer to the work completed—quality increases.

7. Parameters for projects are established by the teacher, but they are flexible parameters, subject to change if student interest and student learning can increase.

To begin project-based instruction on a gradual basis, teachers might try projects that have been tested by other teachers with similar groups of students. Successful projects have similar qualities in their level of challenge for students, their relevance to students' lives, and their clear sense of organization and expecta-

tion. As confidence with this approach grows, teachers can then turn to students to incorporate their ideas and suggestions into the requirements and choices.

The American Literature Colonial Period project described below outlines one approach a teacher might follow in preparing students for a project. The basic requirements are provided by the teacher, and students are given an opportunity to "flesh out" the details.

An Example: The Colonial Period in American Literature

An American Literature/Composition course is a challenging context in which to examine our beliefs about student learning and our commitment to student-centered instruction. Traditionally, the Colonial Period in American Literature offers little literature of interest to students in the 1990s. Teachers often resort to cute projects to get students through the period or resort to laboring through each writer. Neither approach is entirely successful. The first—cute projects—can actually sidestep the issues of the time period. The second—laboring through each writer—dooms most classrooms to boredom. A more productive approach is to develop projects which incorporate the content and require students to develop and employ a variety of instructional skills.

The Colonial Period project, which I began to develop by specifying broad project guidelines (see below), was created within the context of state-required curricular objectives for the

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course, the state high school graduation test, and my own personal and departmental goals for my students. This project, as it is organized and completed over a two-week period, accomplishes several objectives:

- Provides the historical background needed to understand and appreciate *The Scarlet Letter* without resorting to teacher lecture.
- Reveals students' abilities to function in a group setting.
- Provides insight into students' abilities to conduct and synthesize research.
- Reveals the standards students set for themselves for class presentations without direct intervention from the teacher.

In the initial planning stage, I brainstorm, consult my teaching files and resources and work with colleagues in my department to create a list of possible activities and requirements, as well as possible evaluation criteria. Since my method includes presenting the project to my students for possible modification, I decide if any of the activities are negotiable or optional. (*The cardinal rule is not to offer students a part in the process only to overrule them at every suggestion.*)

In working with students to develop these types of large unit projects, I generally proceed through the following steps:

- Spend a class period allowing students to provide input and ideas using the broad project guidelines, activities, and evaluation criteria. Inform students that they will be given a choice of topic,

and groups will be formed according to students' choices.

- Briefly explain the objectives of the proposed project. (Time spent discussing each potential requirement and inviting student input helps students gain a general understanding of the purposes and objectives of the project.)
- Work through each requirement, evaluation point, and potential problem. Make changes and clarify expectations. (Rather than reacting to a list of things that I want them to do, students become active discussants of each activity, gaining understanding and clarification of the purposes of the unit.)
- Establish deadlines for each step of the project. (Students learn to handle large projects more confidently and successfully if mini-deadlines and checkpoints are established.)

As an experienced teacher, I can just as easily determine what I want students to do for each of these requirements, print the handout, explain the project and move on with the work. Choosing to involve students in establishing requirements, however, establishes a relationship of trust between the teacher and the students, raises student self-esteem, and increases student commitment to the learning, in this case establishing an atmosphere for the rest of the year.

Teachers just beginning to utilize this strategy cannot go into the discussion of requirements with students without some notion of what needs to be discussed. Having a list of ques-

tions which need to be answered about each component of the project enables the teacher to provide clear directions for the students and truly involve them in the decision-making process. Questions I used to focus the discussion in each area are provided in parentheses beside each requirement. These questions guide the discussion and ensure that the requirements for the work are clearly established for the students.

- topics for research (*Are there other areas we might add?*)
- oral presentation on the topic (*How long?*)
- equal responsibility for the work (*How will we know that everyone participates?*)
- utilization of research materials (*How many resources? How extensive?*)
- evidence that all group members understand the research process (*How to document?*)
- visuals (*What kind? How many?*)
- handout which includes key points (*Typed? Handwritten? Required format?*)
- individual written product (*What topic? How long? Typed? Handwritten? How evaluated?*)
- group project grade: group participation/on-task behavior; thoroughness of research; group presentation (interesting/organized/meets time requirement/class evaluation); required research components (*Who evaluates these? What will the scoring guidelines look like?*)

- peer evaluation score (*Do we know how to do this? Is this important?*)
- score on the written component (*Who evaluates?*)
- group members who are not present on the research/group work days (*What is our policy?*)
- group members who are not present on the day of the group presentation (*What is our policy?*)

Attachment A is the final unit plan my juniors developed as a result of our negotiations of these questions. It worked for them. Importantly, however, I cannot say the unit is now complete. In true student-centered learning, I must take the same set of questions to next year's class and expect and enjoy the new combination of options they create for their interests and schedules. If I have several classes at one time, it is clear that I may need to keep them together; in that setting, I simply share the input across classes and shape one plan for all to allow me to stay sane. Students understand that parameter, among the many other guidelines they respect, in this type of planning. Planning in student-centered classrooms is never ended and that's what keeps our work interesting.

Attachment A

Colonial Period/Research Project   Name _____

American Literature/Composition

P. McWhorter   Date _____

Objectives: To understand the Colonial American time period.

To learn and improve research skills.

To practice and improve writing skills and oral presentation skills.

To improve and develop skills in working collaboratively in groups.

Topics for Research: (Circle the topic which you are assigned.)
- food/housing
- religion
- clothing
- occupations
- government
- educational system
- medical knowledge/health care
- leisure/recreation/fine arts

Requirements:
1. Each group is responsible for a 10 minute presentation on their topic.
2. All members of the groups must share equal responsibility for the work. Groups will be provided with instructions for documenting the participation of each group member.
3. Groups must use a minimum of three (3) sources for their presentations.
4. Groups must submit evidence that all group members understand the research concepts presented (bibliography cards/bibliographies; outlining; notetaking; paraphrasing). This evidence could be attached to each group member's individual composition.
5. Group presentations should include visuals (for example, posters/transparencies) and a one-page handout which includes key points (typed/word processed; organized; easily understandable).
6. Each group member is required to write and submit a composition about some *aspect* of the research which includes a properly formatted bibliography. (See #4 above.) (Length: Approximately 2 pages handwritten. Typing/word processing is preferable.)

Evaluation:

1. Group members will share the group project grade which includes: group participation/on-task behavior; thoroughness of research; group presentation (interesting/organized/meets time requirement/class evaluation); required research components.
2. Individuals will receive a peer evaluation score and a score on the written component.
3. Group members who are not present on the research/group work days will receive a reduced score unless they arrange for makeup work which meets the requirements/standards of the group.
4. Group members who are not present on the day of the group presentation can only receive 50% of the group *presentation* score unless the group determines otherwise.

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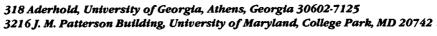Routman, R. (1988) *Transitions: From literature to literacy*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

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