



How School Principals Can Foster Effective Literacy Instruction: A Ten-Step Plan

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ABSTRACT

School principals can foster effective literacy instruction by orchestrating community collaboration in an ongoing cycle of literacy program development, implementation, evaluation, and revision outlined in this ten-step plan. The steps address forming a community advisory board, appointing a building literacy leader, forming a literacy team, conducting a literacy audit and purchasing materials, fostering professional development, and preparing a literacy plan for assessment-based literacy instruction suitable to developing all students' print and digital literacy.

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Imagine yourself at a summer vacation breakfast gathering of several old friends. You report that you've just finished reading Sarah Vowell's book, *Assassination Vacation*, which you portray as a humorous account of the author's vacation touring U. S. Presidential assassination sites. Your friends respond to your report in various ways:

"I read a review of it and could not imagine how it could be funny."

Another contributes: "I listened to the author read the Audiobook version and loved it."

Still another queries, "I suppose the book represents some kind of larger political statement?"

"I read it on my Kindle," a fourth friend confesses. "Great detail, and her humor makes the reading fly."

You respond, "It did seem well researched, with especially good use of eye witness reports. She's also got a nice sense of the ironic, especially descriptions of Robert Todd Lincoln, Teddy Roosevelt, and Lincoln-Kennedy connections."

Experienced principals understand that the literacy implied by the preceding discussion also might not serve young people trying to pass state reading tests. Yet the discussion reminds us that there are more dimensions to literacy than can be reliably tested, and that, when we organize literacy instruction to address only a single assessment, young people lose the chance to see school as the place to learn the print and



digital literacies needed for life success. Young people who lack the means to develop such connections outside of school are, sadly, out of luck.

School principals can foster effective literacy instruction, first, by remembering that they, or that any teacher acting alone, cannot sufficiently model the multiple facets of literacy for young people in a school. Instead, the entire school community is needed to mount a successful effort. Thus, school principals can foster effective literacy instruction by orchestrating community collaboration in an ongoing cycle of literacy program development, implementation, evaluation, and revision.

Anders (Hinchman & Anders, 2009) suggests that such grounding—in community interests, expertise, issues, and plans—is the best way to send the message that school is the best place to develop needed literacy and, in turn, that young people’s literacy is of paramount importance to the community. Such grounding makes instructional expectations explicit and improves literacy-related problem-solving capacity, increasing the chance of eliminating the achievement gap for students of color or in poverty, or for new speakers of English or other students with special needs. Fullan (2001, p. 3) explained:

Leadership... is not mobilizing others to solve problems we already know how to solve, but to help them to confront problems that have never yet been successfully addressed.

I’ve worked with dozens of elementary, secondary, and district-level urban, suburban, and rural school leaders since I left my position as public school reading specialist almost 30 years ago. My collaborations with these remarkable individuals, typically in school for at least 12 hours each day, are the inspiration for this ten-step plan, suitable for supporting literacy instruction school-wide at the elementary or secondary school level.

1. Form a community advisory board.

The first step a principal should take in developing a community-based literacy program is to develop a community literacy advisory board. Such a board can brainstorm regarding the vision for such a program. It can then meet at least quarterly to review, advise, advertise, and bring community resources to the school literacy plan—purchasing books and digital resources, offering classroom volunteers, internships, and extracurricular support, and representing community literacy during student inquiries. Board members are also expected to review literacy program reports and participate in exhibitions of student work (Fullan, 2001).

The community literacy advisory board should not be the same as an elected school board, although the community literacy advisory board must, of course, report to this board; a school board will not have time to keep literacy in the spotlight amidst its other concerns. The community advisory board may include one or two school board members. In addition, an effective community literacy advisory board should include parent and high school student representatives. It should also include such community representatives as bank managers, business owners, not-for-profit directors, media representatives, and higher education faculty.



Local literacy professors may be interested in negotiating a quid pro quo advisory board relationship when schools with a literacy focus become sites for teacher education fieldwork, a move that can breathe considerable energy into school programs. Also helpful may be literacy experts from outside the community. Depending on school resources, such individuals can become frequent or occasional visitors, and as outsiders, they may be able see strengths and needs that are not visible to locals. Beware of outsiders' expertise, though, since they cannot be in your building each day. Unless one is purchasing an entire professional development program, such as Literacy Collaborative (Fountas & Pinnell, 2007) or Reading Apprenticeship (et al., 1999) at the elementary or secondary level respectively, it is typically better to invite more than one outside expert for synergy and ideological balance.

2. Appoint a building literacy leader.

Principals have long been promoted as instructional leaders who can infuse members of school communities with mission and energy. Yet there are many brush fires in a day in the life of the building principal: concerned parents, swine flu, staff illness, and myriad deadlines are just a few of the emergencies that can make it difficult to retain focus on a literacy program. I have worked in several schools whose administrators marked my arrival with, "We're so glad you're here to remind us of what's important." Reminders that arrive with the outside consultant may not be frequent enough to keep a school sufficiently focused on literacy.

To avoid letting such distraction interfere with a building's focus on literacy instruction, step two of the plan involves the principal in appointing a building literacy leader. This individual's job is to keep the constituents focused on literacy instruction. It is important that she or he be knowledgeable about literacy development, with at least an M. S. in reading or literacy education and evidence that she or he knows about assessment, instruction, coaching, and program development at the appropriate grade levels. This literacy leader should also be an enthusiastic, upbeat person who recognizes and understands print and digital literacies beyond what's tested, as well as the expertise and perspectives of everyone on the staff. She or he should know how to monitor students' literacy development and collaborate with others on interventions, enhancements, and exhibitions of students' work (Allen, 2006).

Such an appointment does not mean that the principal turns all authority for literacy instruction over to the appointed literacy leader; the principal remains the literacy program's chief advisor, cheerleader, and participant, as well as the one individual who is in a position to evaluate teachers' literacy instruction. This suggests that the principal should be careful of her or his relationship with the appointed literacy leader. It is critical that the literacy leader gains the confidence of the literacy program's constituents, especially the instructional staff, and this will not happen if the staff sees the literacy leader as the principal's confidante. When the building literacy leader can speak with other staff members confidentially, she or he can orchestrate collaborations among widely different kinds of people for a community advisory board, literacy team, study groups, progress monitoring, and coaching. She or he will be able to mediate



compromises as well as help those who might not want it known that they do not know how to address certain student needs.

3. Form a building literacy team.

Once a building literacy leader has been appointed, the successful principal will then help this individual to form a literacy team. This representative group is important so that neither the principal nor the appointed building literacy leader is left alone to promote a literacy plan that staff will undermine because they do not understand it. Also, involving more people means the development of a realistic, context-specific plan that represents the wide array of community print and digital literacy practices (Anders et al., 2000).

This collaborative group completes the rest of the plan steps, facilitated by the building literacy leader and the principal. It should include representatives from all constituents, including library media specialists, school psychologists, parents, and students, depending on grade level, as well as the principal. So that the plan includes attention to literacy-related interventions for young people who struggle with literacy, as well as instructional ideas for all students, the team should include representatives of regular and special education classrooms, all grade levels, and all subject-areas.

I have seen successful literacy teams that were either appointed or selected by those they represent. It is more important that members of the team be willing to work with the building literacy leader on tasks distributed equally among members. It is also important to select well-respected individuals so that they can discuss new instructional ideas with enthusiasm and confidence. Please note that literacy team members are not turnkey trainers; each constituency also needs professional development specific to their needs from the building literacy leader, other coaches, or outside consultants.

4. Conduct a literacy audit.

The literacy team should orchestrate a building literacy audit, facilitated by the literacy leader and the principal. The purpose of this audit is to assess constituents' ideas about literacy program needs and possible solutions, and to uncover the human and capital resources that are available within the building and community. It will likely find useful texts, technology, and human resources to help with the literacy program.

Anders and Guzzetti (2005) suggest that the literacy audit should begin with a summary of available formal and informal testing data. The group should also survey all constituents for confidential suggestions and observe in classrooms to capture the range of current literacy practices—again confidentially. A number of observational checklists are available to help with such observations; two popular checklists—by Taylor and her colleagues (Taylor et al., 2000) at the elementary level and by Irvin and her colleagues (Irvin et al., 2007) at the secondary level—may be adapted to suit specific school purposes.

The literacy audit should also take inventory of available texts, including books that might be suitable for literacy instruction or content-area study, as well as media, technology, and materials buried in individuals' closets and other storage areas. Finally, it



should endeavor to locate staff members with graduate degrees in literacy and other human resources, such as good rapport with a particular group of students or organizational abilities that will facilitate program implementation.

5. Foster professional development.

Before developing a literacy plan, the principal and rest of the literacy team should study how young people develop reading, writing, and digital skills in and out of school. *Preventing Reading Difficulties in Young Children* (1998), by Catherine Snow, M. Susan Burns, and Peg Griffin, offers a nuanced explanation of the psychology of language acquisition and development, and the New London Group's (1996) "Multiliteracies: A Pedagogy of Social Futures" offers explanation of what's needed for effective instruction of print and digital literacies. The literacy team will also want to have a detailed understanding of state reading, writing, speaking, listening, viewing, and technology standards.

The literacy team should also read about and visit successful programs from within and outside their state, acknowledging differences in state standards and assessments. In consultation with the community advisory board, members of the team should talk with colleagues in nearby school districts, attend state and national conferences, comb the Internet for ideas, and consult with literacy experts from around the country to identify suitable program components. The United States Department of Education, International Reading Association, and National Council of Teachers of English websites are excellent sources of study group materials, journals, and program reviews that can be helpful to literacy teams involved in program planning. Figure 1 (see appendix) presents a list of my favorite resources for such a task. Please note: my list represents an array of program philosophies; a knowledgeable literacy leader can help the literacy team weigh these philosophies given the schools' interests and needs.

The literacy team's initial study should be a model for later professional development by all program constituents, with team members making their professional learning visible to colleagues through ongoing discussion. The literacy team will want to plan for various kinds of professional development to suit the varied needs of all instructional staff and other program constituents. Depending on their out-of-school lives, some teachers may appreciate the support of the learning community (Wenger, 1998) offered by early morning or after school professional book clubs or study groups, and others may respond better to the online camaraderie of webinars or other networking sites. Teachers can also be encouraged to conduct action research or inquiry, systematically studying their influence on students' schoolwork.

Staff members' self-selected professional development can richly inform initial and ongoing building literacy plans. Well-regarded one-time speakers from outside the district can also motivate teachers. However, those who hire such speakers should be wary about speakers who don't know a school's knowledge base: a social studies teacher with a literacy education masters degree can only be expected to hear the same instructional recommendations once or twice before losing enthusiasm for professional development initiatives.



As a vision for the school literacy program concretizes, the building literacy team will want to encourage more systematic opportunities for staff to read about and study identified core literacy program components (Taylor et al., 2000; Sturtevant, 2004). The team will need to plan for classroom coaching by the building literacy leader, other coaches, or outside consultants as well as study key constructs and instructional ideas. Systematic study typically involves as many as 60 to 100 hours across school years, and should begin with volunteers who offer insights to, in turn, strengthen professional development opportunities for later participants. Special plans should be made for teachers new to the building so that they can learn and be coached in the specific expectations of the school literacy program. The principal will want to participate as a learner in as many of the varied professional development forums as possible, fostering a climate that encourages an individual's willingness to take part without critiquing those who are wary about going first.

The principal should typically tread with caution regarding staff members' professional development. The principal can orchestrate informal and formal observations to advise areas identified by staff members. I have also seen principals focus on one student through a class period or drop in to ask students what they're working on, and share observations with teachers in an invitation to problem-solving with words like, "I wonder why..." and "What do you think about..." recognizing that collegial conversations can result in more extensive problem-solving than accusations and ultimatums. In some cases, a principal will need to become involved in more direct intervention with a staff member. In such cases, reference to observations made with published observation tools, such as those cited in the description of the literacy audit, above, or to understandings demonstrated in student work samples can be helpful grounding for discussions focused on accountability--to the literacy plan and student performance--and not personality (e.g., How can I help you organize x? What resources do you need so that you can help students to do y?).

6. Develop a long-term plan.

The principal, literacy leader, literacy team, and community advisory board should articulate a vision for the literacy program, addressing such questions as, what will people see when they walk into the building?, and with what literacy will students leave the building? Following this, they should develop a long-term literacy plan in consultation with the community literacy advisory board and colleagues from throughout the school. The literacy plan contains goals and objectives for all program constituents, mapping from state standards and district goals for all teachers and students at each grade level. The plan should involve parents and community in various aspects of delivery. Professional development, building culture, student assessment, program evaluation, and annual plan revision should also be addressed in this blueprint (Irvin et al., 2007).

The plan should describe core instructional components that involve all staff and community volunteers, and it should explain how these components are to be modified for differentiated instruction across grade levels. Team members can consider what young people should be expected to know and do at the end of each school year, and then



determine the kinds of instructional actions needed during different parts of the school year to help students reach these performance goals. The team can then develop essential questions to provide instructional focus and a concrete vision for student outcomes that teachers can use in their more detailed yearlong backward and day-to-day planning and decision-making. Horizontal, or within grade level, and vertical, or across grade level, collaborations will bring coherence to such plans (Wiggins & McTighe, 2005).

The team should also plan for gradual implementation of the literacy plan. This will mean choosing instructional components and/or classrooms within which to begin, as well as a developing a timeline for full implementation. Drafts of the plan should also be shared with all program constituents and the community literacy advisory board for periodic feedback during development and implementation. Feedback from these groups should also be taken into account when the five-year plan is updated annually.

7. Create a literate building culture.

Imagine yourself in a perfect primary grade school. One walks in any door and the building screams the message that the business of the building is about literacy. There are book displays throughout the school, names of books read printed on cards throughout the hallways in the shape of a railroad track, reading and writing going on in every classroom. Student work is everywhere, representing various manifestations of students' stories and reports, including essays, books, visual representations, and multimedia presentations. The building fairly shouts literacy from every crevice, sending daily messages leaving no doubt about the literacy focus in the school.

Any school at any grade level that wants to have an effective literacy program can plan activities and displays to create a similar effect. A monthly calendar of class work exhibitions, poetry slams, plays, digital storytelling festivals, author visits, student-led morning announcements and book talks, all-school reads, all school inquiries, and book trades, with different staff members in charge of coordinating each event, will go a long way toward creating such a culture. Regular building walkthroughs that notice classrooms engaged in extended, meaningful reading and writing, along with monthly changes in hallway and classroom displays of student work, can also help to create such a climate.

Frequent interactions with students around current reading and writing are most important in establishing such a culture. Calkins Teachers College Reading and Writing Project (Calkins, 2003) has long recommended that all teachers across grade levels have regular conferences with each student in any classroom. Discussion of current reading, particular aspects of students' writing, that which is most appreciated about a young person's class participation, and student interests are all pertinent subjects for such conferences. Such daily meetings should primarily address students' strengths and interests, with teachers picking single aspects of reading or writing processes to talk about or model in ways that will help the young person learn something he or she feels she will benefit from learning.



8. Foster instructional approaches that help young people to engage in multiple facets of literacy in increasingly sophisticated ways.

The literacy plan will contain a vision for the development of literacy instruction, building culture, and professional development. The principal's job is to work with the literacy leader and team and the community advisory board, to develop this plan and to ensure that everyone has the support needed to move forward with it. Such planning often produces collisions of individuals' quite varying visions for the same recommendations. Thus, the principal's multiple roles of cheerleader and study group, literacy team, and community advisory board member are critical—not so that the principal dominates discussion, but, instead, so that she or he can help the literacy leader develop shared ideas about the plan implementation. Such participation is also important so that the principal can talk with teachers about their own goals for implementation of the literacy plan with knowledgeable insights regarding differences of opinion among staff members.

To better understand the subtexts of colleagues' recommendations and visions for the literacy plan, the principal will want to have an understanding of the recent history and politics associated with United States literacy instruction. For most of the 1990s, schools implemented programs derived from research and theories of literacy development in what came to be called a balanced literacy approach. At the elementary level, such evidence-based programs combined decoding, vocabulary, comprehension, and composition instruction with the reading of children's literature and the writing of stories or responses to reading (Pressley, 2005). At the secondary level, programs combined pre-reading, reading, and post-reading support activities across the curriculum with writing-to-think (journals, quick writes) and subject-specific genre instruction (lab report, literary analysis). Many schools took a long-term approach to study and implementation of such popular instructional frameworks as guided reading, word work, writing workshop, or literature circles from such programs as Four Blocks (Cunningham et al., 2000), Literacy Collaborative (Fountas & Pinnell, 2007), Public Education Business Coalition (PEBC, 2009), or Reading and Writing Workshop (Calkins, 2003) at the elementary level. In the upper grades, schools were more likely to turn to Project CRISS (Santa et al., 2004), Reading Apprenticeship (Schoenbach et al., 1999), or the Best Practice Cluster Schools (Daniels & Zemelman, 2004) approaches.

However, at the turn of the century the National Assessment of Educational Progress (National Center for Education Statistics, 2009) continued to indicate an achievement gap for young people of color and from poverty, as well as for speakers of English as a second language. In response, legislators created the No Child Left Behind Act (U.S.P.L. 107-110). The Reading First component of this act required that primary teachers in high needs schools engage in intensive study and implementation of scientifically-based reading research in alphabets, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension that had been reviewed by the National Reading Panel Report (2000). NCLB also required annual state-level reading (and mathematics) testing in grades 3 through 8 with results disaggregated by gender, race, class, and special education status. Recognizing the lack of NCLB support for adolescent literacy, Striving Readers was added to NCLB initiatives in 2005, inviting a handful of high needs secondary schools to



implement scientifically-based school-wide literacy instruction and interventions. The Federal Institutes for Education Sciences and the private Carnegie Corporation (2008) are among the agencies that have sponsored additional studies to augment research evidence related to adolescent literacy.

As I write this, predictions abound regarding upcoming directions for Federal and private literacy funding, the driving force behind many recent literacy initiatives. With widespread gratitude for added resources, accompanied by equivocal reading comprehension gains and corrupt program administration, the Reading First initiative has been abandoned (Manzo, 2009). Instead, monies available through the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 are being used for programs that drive results for students, increase educators' capacity, accelerate reform, improve productivity, and foster continuous improvement (United States Department of Education, 2009). Current rumors also suggest possible increases in funding for Striving Readers and other school improvement activities that reference what is now called scientifically-valid reading research, as well as monies to be redirected to a new literacy initiative and/or to linking teacher evaluation with student outcomes (Manzo, 2009; Pearson, 2009; Wells, 2009). In addition, United States Secretary of Education Arne Duncan recently announced that 46 states and the District of Columbia agreed to develop common K-12 education standards for reading and mathematics. This will begin with the release of readiness standards for high school graduates in July 2009. However, "There will be no prescription for how teachers get there" (Glod, 2009, ¶15).

Without such prescription, school literacy teams will want to develop literacy instructional components with an eye toward what has been learned from earlier initiatives and adding attention to the multiliteracies represented by today's evolving technology, sometimes referred to as New Literacies by researchers (Leu, 2000). Especially important will be invitations for young people to bridge out-of-school and in-school literacies with community collaborations for problem-based learning that also involve attention to vocabulary development and cross-curricular connections (Darling-Hammond, 2008; Moje, 2008).

At a recent International Reading Association conference, Pearson (2009) reviewed what we have learned from research that should inform our coming work in literacy education. Citing several important reviews of the last 20 years, he noted that research supports early attention to young children's decoding within a balanced approach that includes vocabulary and comprehension instruction, reading, and writing. He also explained that comprehension benefits from explicit teaching of strategies, rich discussion of ideas and genre, and attention to motivation and identity. However, he also identified several areas of needed further study, including "the other side of the knowledge-comprehension nexus," the "right mix of explicitness in strategy instruction," and why "reading begets reading" (Pearson, 2009, slides 63-64).

Instruction will benefit when the literacy plan includes standing frequent opportunities for review of assessment results by grade-level teams and the literacy leader, and, somewhat less frequently, the literacy team and community advisory board. Such collaboration should focus on how to modify instruction to address all students'



literacy strengths and needs. Research suggests that such instruction is most efficiently and effectively provided in small group, responsive strategy instruction (Pressley, 2002), with planned gradual release of teacher responsibility as students demonstrate independence (Pearson & Gallagher, 1983). Such instruction should begin with texts that young people can and want to read with reasonable fluency, adding more complex print and digital texts with instruction in new genres and texts with added complexity.

Additional research-based interventions should be referenced in the school literacy plan to address the wide-ranging needs of students who struggle with literacy, and in a way that invites them to be seen as viable contributors to ongoing classroom problem-solving, whether they are receiving instruction from the classroom teacher or from a literacy specialist (Greenleaf & Hinchman, in press). Current government emphasis on student performance suggests that a problem-solving model of response to intervention that allows for individually tailored interventions will be far more useful than current models that use off-the-shelf programs without modification (Lipson & Wixson, 2009). Taken together, the preceding components align well with the prescriptions overt instruction, situated practice, critical framing, and transformed practice suggested as important at all levels of literacy development by the multiliteracies theorists (New London Group, 1996).

9. Implement an assessment system.

Effective principals know that monitoring student progress is central to providing effective literacy instruction (Marzano et al., 1993), and our movement toward national standards and linking teacher evaluation with student outcomes suggests that data-driven decision-making should be a day-to-day component of a school literacy plan. Principals will want to participate in discussions of how to orchestrate this work, and to be involved in sharing all levels of assessment results with the community advisory and school boards.

To be effective, progress monitoring that informs instructional decision-making and evaluation should occur at multiple levels with multiple constituents--including students as they age and begin to understand their literacy performance. The principal and literacy team will, of course, need to monitor annual performance on mandated state assessments as a primary piece of program evaluation data. Such data are also reported to the community literacy advisory board, the school community, and the state and federal government. School districts that are especially concerned with improving test scores may be inclined to purchase expensive assessment systems to monitor students' progress with added frequency, but the current state of the art is such that group-administered assessments provide little useful added information while reducing important instructional time (Afflerbach, 2004).

At another level, the principal will want to ensure that the literacy leader and literacy team monitor individual student performance on a regular basis, especially for those young people who seem to be struggling with literacy. The scores produced by group-administered tests typically mask variability in youth's reading and writing performance. Item analysis yields limited useful data when an individual struggles with



reading in significant enough ways to guess at answers. Individually administered fluency assessments are similarly limited at most grade levels (Pressley et al., 2006). Needed insights are better gleaned with less formal observation and interest inventories whose reliability is derived from multiple administrations and collaborative interpretation (Buly & Valencia, 2002). Thus, the literacy plan should ensure that teachers discuss classroom literacy data for all students at regular grade-level meetings and to report results of these discussions to the building literacy leader and team in an ongoing cycle of feedback and support.

Informal reading inventories (IRIs) can be used to learn more specifically about individuals' reading strengths and needs. IRIs require that a student reads aloud passages from a variety of text passages while a teacher notes and, later, analyzes the student's oral reading miscues to determine needed areas for instruction (Johnson & Kress, 1965). IRIs can be completed with any available text or with published IRIs whose passages are organized according to text readability, structure, or content (e.g., Leslie & Caldwell, 2005), although their relatively short passages may also not align well with a youth's day-to-day or future literacy needs (Paris & Carpenter, 2003).

Teachers and instructional leaders should monitor students' word-level, comprehension, and composition strategies in multiple ways on a day-to-day basis—during orchestration of each component of the literacy program. Such monitoring allows the testing of developing hypotheses about students' literacy understandings and monitoring of students' response to intervention as required by evolving special education identification mandates (Lipson & Wixson, 2009). Teachers can ask students to think aloud about their problem solving during reading and writing (Van Someren et al., 1994), invite young people to listen to recordings of their reading and then collaborate with a teacher or other youth to discern and address miscue patterns (Goodman & Marek, 1996; Wilson, 2005), and learn about word knowledge, during oral reading of graded word lists, such as the San Diego Quick Assessment (Ekwall & Shanker, 1999), or with the developmental spelling assessment described by Donald Bear and his colleagues (2003). Some schools also use writing rubrics combined with think alouds to measure changes in students' composition insights (Culham, 2003), as well as study videotape of students' classroom discussion about texts to note changes in vocabulary use and comprehension (Lipson & Wixson, 2009).

10. Choose commercial materials carefully.

Publishers' sales representatives have long lured customers with talk about the research-base of their programs. Reading First invited teachers to study results of experimental research on various aspects of reading instruction, but often within the context of published programs whose selection was so riddled with conflict of interest that discussion about the lack of empirical support for the actual programs was silenced. What counted as the research base for such programs were often over-generalized replications of research; the programs themselves had not been researched with peer-reviewed experimental studies or even compelling case studies. Salespeople produced white papers sponsored by their employers and depended on buzz between school



personnel and state education department liaisons who also monitored grant performance. Principals should be wary during “hot topic” discussions of commercial materials to stick to their school’s vision for its literacy program in considering whether and what to bring back to their buildings for review.

Interestingly, research documenting instructional practices of excellent teachers in both elementary and secondary classrooms discovered elements of balanced literacy instruction have largely been overlooked in recent years. Such work suggests that effective teachers orchestrate reading and writing for authentic purposes, explicit instruction in needed skills and strategies, integrated but explicit attention to test preparation, and collaborative text problem-solving (Langer, 2001; Pearson, 2004; Taylor et al., 2000; Wharton-McDonald et al., 1998). Indeed, listed instructional components echo the pedagogical concerns of multiliteracies theorists described earlier.

No commercial literacy program has research proving that it meets all students’ needs. Moreover, as Goodman pointed out long ago (1988), because such programs are developed to appeal to the widest possible audience, they cannot address any one school’s, classroom’s, or individual’s literacy needs. Indeed, the nature of effective literacy instruction is such that, even the most extensively researched and piloted program could not contain generalizations that speak to all teachers or students in specific contexts. As adopters of well-regarded programs know, teachers learn to organize literature-based, workshop, or content-area literacy programs only with the right combination of study, classroom coaching, and collaboration.

At the same time, I have worked with many new teachers, especially at the elementary level, who “don’t know where to start” in designing classroom literacy instruction that applies what they have learned in classes to a specific context and curriculum. Published literacy programs that are selected to align with a program’s vision with a comprehensive review, pilot, and staff vote can be most helpful as an introduction to teaching for such individuals. Good programs offer thematically related texts representing a variety of genres, along with before-, during-, and after-reading decoding, vocabulary, and comprehension activities, as well as reading and writing strategy instruction that teachers can vary according to students’ needs. Some also offer supplemental intervention materials and multi-leveled trade book text sets to be used for guided or independent reading of more extended texts. Coaches can help teachers focus on managing the use of the materials effectively, including using assessment data to vary use of such materials to address students’ needs.

The principal’s role here is to facilitate the literacy team’s selection of commercial materials, reminding people to look for the materials that will provide the most resources for the investment that will be used by the most people. The principal can remind the team to supplement the inventory of materials discovered during the literacy audit so that teachers have a variety of fiction and nonfiction texts to be used along with the Internet during subject-specific inquiry projects. This can also include supplementing technology hardware and software so that every classroom is equipped with such common equipment as a smart board, LCD projector, computer station for 4 or 5



students, printers, and laptop for the teacher, along with word processing, spreadsheet, presentational, database, and publishing software and Internet access.

The literacy team may also want to invest in a variety of intervention programs and accompanying teacher training so that the school has a repertoire of offerings for young people who struggle with literacy. Principals can help the team to proceed with caution here: many interventions are on the market that promise more results than they can actually deliver, and these may not be cost effective. For instance, if most young people who struggle at the intermediate level in a school can decode but struggle with inferential comprehension, then purchase of an expensive computer-based language development program may not be a good investment. The team would do well to remember that teachers interacting with young people in small groups to model and support students' attempts at reading and writing, coupled with connections to young people's out-of-school literacies and high expectation for progress, will likely make more of a difference in such situations, and in a shorter amount of time.

Conclusion

School principals will do well to remember to draw on all the resources of the community when they want to foster effective literacy instruction in their elementary and secondary schools. Orchestrating community collaboration in ongoing development of research-based literacy plan that includes program development, implementation, evaluation, and revision tells our young people that their development of print and digital literacies is key to all of our futures. Literacy-focused collaboration with a community advisory board, building literacy leader, and literacy team will help to ensure that we enact a literacy instructional plan that eliminates the achievement gap and invites all young people to develop needed schools and strategies for success in an information age. When our young people join our breakfast book discussion—or, better, when they design the next generation of businesses in evolved discussion forms prompted by shared high-powered print and digital literacies—we'll know that our community collaboration has been a success.

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Kathy's Favorite Program Development Resources

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13. U. S. Department of Education: www.ed.gov/index.jhtml
14. U. S. Department of Education Regional Education Laboratories: ies.ed.gov/ncee/edlabs/
15. U. S. Department of Education What Works Clearinghouse: ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc