FEATURE

Elevating Instruction

Enhancing Literacy Practices for Advanced Readers in Primary Grades

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Abstract: The tool, *Elevating Instruction: A Planning Tool*, was designed to aid teachers in improving literacy instruction to best meet the academic needs of all students, including advanced readers in the primary classroom. It is crucial for teachers to elevate reading practices for advanced readers during the time when young learners are developing skills to be lifelong readers. Teachers can do this by promoting authentic choice, encouraging student agency and ownership, supporting meaningful peer interactions, and collecting and using formative data. To this end, the authors address these four instructional components within the scope of a literacy block in an elementary classroom using an easy-to-access and easy-to-implement planning tool, which teachers can use to enhance instruction for all students. The use of this tool is depicted by a classroom teacher working with a gifted resource teacher (GRT), demonstrating how the tool can be used to support teachers as they work to improve and elevate literacy instruction.

Keywords: assessment, best practices, curriculum, reading, differentiation, writing, instructional strategies, talent development, advanced readers, literacy instruction, young gifted

The tool, *Elevating Instruction: A Planning Tool* (Appendix), shared within this article was intentionally designed to capitalize on principles of learning well-established in the fields of gifted education and education in general. Specifically, the four components include promoting authentic choice, encouraging student agency and ownership, supporting meaningful peer interactions, and collecting and using formative data. These components are essential aspects related to daily classroom instruction and are intended to be used as a way for teachers to identify specific areas of instruction to improve. This tool is not intended for a teacher to use all parts at all times, but instead should be viewed as a guide which aids teachers in their unique classroom needs as they plan and implement rigorous literacy practices to elevate instruction for advanced readers in the primary grades.

> "The tool is specifically designed in a way that allows teachers to identify area(s) of interest they want to improve and elevate within their literacy practices."

Framework

The four components highlighted within this tool were selected because each can be influential in supporting advanced primary-aged readers. For instance, the need for students to have opportunities for authentic choice as part of high-quality instruction has been identified in past work regarding best educational practices. Kaplan (2017) identified personal rigor as a student's "stated interest in an area or skill" and explained that this "requires the utilization of instructional strategies of individualization or personalization of curriculum and potentially instruction" (p. 219). Thus, considering ways to infuse authentic choice into daily literacy instruction increases academic rigor for students, including advanced readers.

Furthermore, Flowerday and Schraw (2000) conducted a study on teacher perceptions of choice in the classroom. Based on their work, the researchers identified six types of choice

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offered by teachers of varying grade levels and content areas, "including: (a) topics of study; (b) reading materials; (c) methods of assessment; (d) activities; (e) social arrangements; and (f) procedural choices" (Flowerday & Schraw, 2000, p. 637). Interestingly, they noted that younger students often had choice regarding content or "what to do" (p. 637) as compared with older students who often had choice regarding process. Notably, many of the participants in this study indicated their belief that older students needed more opportunities for choice as compared to younger students; however, a small subset of teacher participants disagreed, expressing the belief "that it is never too early to start teaching decision-making and self-regulation skills that spontaneously emerge from choice making" (Flowerday & Schraw, 2000, p. 638). Another related finding was that many of the teachers believed that offering choice supported student learning, including processing and decision-making skills, even though the researchers note that this was not supported by existing literature (Flowerday & Schraw, 2000). Research has also been conducted on choice as it relates to student learning. For instance, Patell, Cooper, and Wynn (2010) researched the role of choice with homework assignments for secondary students and concluded that "results suggested that providing students with choices among homework tasks effectively enhanced motivational and performance outcomes and that choice is an important component to creating a classroom environment supportive of autonomy and intrinsic motivation" (p. 910). Although this study was conducted with older students, the findings still suggest positive benefits associated with choice and may relate to all learners.

Student agency and ownership is another area in which educators can work to elevate instruction within the classroom because of its relationship with motivation. Providing students agency and ownership can help them to build background knowledge and skills, supporting them as they "create meaningful and purposeful lives for themselves" (Williams, 2017, p. 11). In fact, Stefanou, Perencevich, DiCintio, and Turner (2004) claim that "the goal for educators is to create and foster classrooms that support students in becoming truly autonomous or self-determined as learners" (p. 99). Based on prior research and their own classroom observations, the researchers described different classrooms in which teachers offered varying amounts of support for students' organizational, procedural, and cognitive autonomy (Stefanou et al., 2004). In particular, they noted benefits regarding student participation in the classroom where there was considerable support for cognitive autonomy, or instances in which students had "a great deal of control over how to think about their academic tasks" (Stefanou et al., 2004, p. 104). Brookhart, Moss, and Long (2009) also considered the role of student ownership over their learning, examining this in regard to teachers' use of formative assessments. According to preliminary research findings, teachers reported that when "sharing ownership of questioning with students" this resulted in "higher level questions and discussion" and that "students liked asking questions" (Brookhart et al., 2009, p. 59). Although the researchers concluded that the results of quantitative assessment measures were "not definitive" (p. 60), they did indicate teachers saw an increase in student motivation when students had opportunities to take ownership of their learning (Brookhart et al., 2009).

The third area highlighted within the planning tool is to support meaningful peer interactions. Kelly, Ogden, and Moses (2019) noted that meaningful interactions between young children are valuable; however, children also need structures and "support to learn how to interact appropriately during conversations . . . not led by the teacher" (p. 30). Furthermore, Wilson, Pianta, and Stuhlman (2007) explained that classrooms are one place for these peer interactions to occur. As such, it is important to provide scaffolded supports for teachers so they can work with students to engage in meaningful peer interactions. Based on work examining social aspects of elementary classrooms, Gest and colleagues (2014) determined that although "teachers, on average, report that they frequently use strategies to manage classroom social dynamics, teachers who report more use of these strategies have students who display more positive patterns of social, academic, and behavioral adjustment across the school year" (Gest, Madill, Zadzora, Miller, & Rodkin, 2014, p. 115).

This suggests that when teachers make a concerted effort to support positive and meaningful peer interactions, this can aid students in a number of ways, including academically.

Finally, the use of formative data to inform instruction is an essential part of instruction, and Tomlinson and Moon (2013) explain that "[t]he power of assessment is magnified when teachers use it not only to inform their own teaching, but also to inform each student's learning" (p. 25). To better understand aspects of assessment, Brookhart and colleagues (2009) conducted a study in which teachers participated in online professional development (PD) modules focused on various aspects of formative assessment. As a result of their study, the researchers identified changes in teacher practice and beliefs and noted "when teachers are given the chance to explore formative assessment in their classrooms over time, teachers are able to use the formative assessment process to focus their self-improvement efforts in intentional and belief altering ways" (p. 66). MacDonald (2007) also detailed the importance of formative assessment and described the importance of "pedagogical documentation" (p. 233), a method for collecting student data, as part of the Reggio Emilia educational approach. After primary-grade teachers used this approach to assess and communicate student learning, the researcher reported that the teachers agreed the approach to formative assessment helped to inform their future literacy instruction (MacDonald, 2007). While she detailed challenges teachers experienced with this process, including a lack of time or additional supports to collect data, MacDonald (2007) demonstrated the value in collecting formative data as a way of informing instruction and communicating student learning to parents. Ultimately, formative assessment informs both the learning and teaching occurring in the classroom and should be an embedded part of the classroom experience.

Given the extensive research in these different areas (i.e., promoting authentic choice, encouraging student agency and ownership, supporting meaningful peer interactions, and collecting and using formative data), the tool detailed within this article was designed to align to best instructional practices and provide teachers with a resource they could utilize when modifying and improving instruction within their own classroom.

Method

This article provides approaches for elevating literacy instruction in primary-aged classrooms that is supportive of all primary readers, including advanced readers. The work reported in this manuscript is part of a larger Javits-funded research study focused on identifying and supporting primary-age students identified as gifted and students with gifted potential from underrepresented populations. As members of the larger research team conducted classroom observations from K-1 literacy blocks, patterns of common practices, examples of best practices, and missed instructional opportunities became evident. As a result of our analyses, we wanted to create a practical tool to help teachers in elevating instruction within their elementary literacy blocks.

After identifying four areas that were aligned to best practices in instruction, we delineated ways in which teachers could reflect upon their current instruction to elevate future instruction. Practically speaking, the left-hand column of the tool includes questions for teachers to consider when planning for and implementing literacy instruction. Based on teacher responses to said questions, they can then enact recommendations provided in the right-hand column of the tool to elevate this area of instruction. In this way, teachers have the flexibility to identify areas of their practice that they would like to improve and incorporate related suggestions that are provided. The design of the tool was created so that teachers can select one or several areas to work toward improving and are able to revisit as they continue to refine and elevate their instruction for advanced primary-aged readers.

Elevating Instruction Tool and Implementation

To facilitate a classroom environment where all students are inspired to stretch, wonder, and engage, teachers can develop content that helps students, including advanced readers, utilize choice, ownership, and engage in meaningful peer interactions. Furthermore, these strategies are amplified when teachers simultaneously collect and use formative data to inform their literacy instruction. Research points to the urgency of providing all students with opportunities to grow and learn (Reagle, 2006) and approaching literacy instruction in the ways detailed within this article can help teachers to achieve this goal.

To punctuate this, consider the following (typical) scenario:

> *Ms. Snow, a kindergarten teacher, is working on her weekly lesson plans for her literacy block. She is focused on helping her advanced readers, but wants to do so in a way that will elevate the literacy of all of her students. Normally, she begins her literacy block with a class read aloud, where she uses a book that she thinks her students will find interesting and is topically appropriate. She asks students to raise their hands to share responses to the text. After the read aloud, she breaks students into their assigned small groups where they engage in various literacy-based centers. There are typically four centers the students rotate through while Ms. Snow works with a small group on guided reading instruction; the teacher assistant monitors the other centers. To conclude the literacy block, the students work on writing where they respond to a prompt or sentence stem, which is connected to the earlier, read aloud.*

On the surface, Ms. Snow performs as expected: she engages students using the read aloud, places students with peers, utilizes centers, and facilitates guided reading groups. Taking a closer look, however, one can see ways in which Ms. Snow can elevate her reading instruction to support the literacy of all students, including that of advanced readers, by addressing four key components: (a) promoting authentic choice, (b) encouraging student agency and ownership, (c) supporting meaningful peer interactions, and (d) collecting and using data to inform literacy instruction.

After working with students during Ms. Snow's literacy block, Ms. Rivers, the gifted resource teacher (GRT), met with Ms. Snow to discuss ways to increase opportunities for the advanced readers in her class. In particular, she suggested that Ms. Snow review the resource, *Elevating Instruction: A Planning Tool* (Hobson & Kreamer, 2017), to guide her journey.

This tool, designed after analyzing primary-grade literacy blocks for opportunities for talent development as part of a Jacob K. Javits' grant, is formatted to help teachers target the specific areas within literacy instruction that they are trying to improve. For example, if a teacher is working on collecting and using formative data, she could go to that area of the tool and use it to guide her instruction. The following sections will address each specific area included in the Planning Tool and how teachers can elevate common literacy practices in various ways to better meet the needs of advanced readers.

In the following sections, the *Elevating Instruction: A Planning Tool* (Hobson & Kreamer, 2017) has been deconstructed to align with a narrative of a kindergarten teacher and GRT working together to address specific classroom goals for enhancing literacy instruction through the

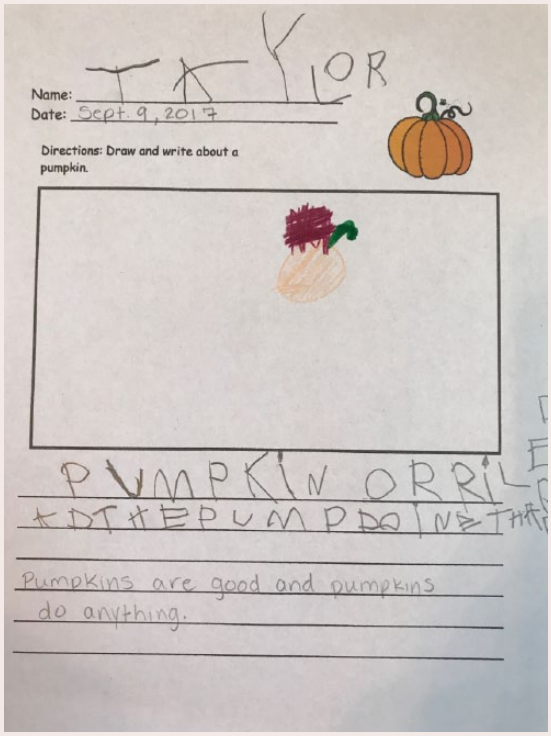

Figure 1. Student prompt with limited choice.

use of the Planning Tool (the complete tool is available in the Appendix). First, we describe typical classroom practices, followed by ways to improve, and then to further elevate instruction to support advanced primary-aged readers. This allows for a gradual approach to instructional change, instead of expecting teachers to move from what they are currently doing to a more foreign approach to instruction without scaffolded opportunities along the way. The bolded portions in each section of the Planning Tool are referenced within the narrative.

Promote Authentic Choice

Ms. Snow's Typical Classroom Practice

To infuse more opportunities for authentic choice within Ms. Snow's classroom, Ms. Rivers suggested that the writing portion of Ms. Snow's literacy block might be a great opportunity for promoting authentic choice while also encouraging students' creativity. To do this, Ms. Snow considered the *Elevating Instruction: A Planning Tool* to help her accomplish this goal. Her typical writing instruction included giving students specific writing prompts, which she acknowledged do not give students choice regarding the prompt or process. For example, after reading a book about pumpkins to her students, her initial approach was to provide them with a handout that included the following directions: "Draw and write about a pumpkin" (see Figure 1). This handout included a box for students to draw a picture and then a fixed number of lines for students to write a corresponding story.

Ms. Snow's Improved Classroom Practice

When looking at the excerpt from the Planning Tool in Table 1, Ms. Snow reviewed the various questions listed and identified the third reflection question as an area of literacy instruction that she could implement into her instruction to improve her classroom practice: "In planning for my literacy block do I provide multiple avenues for my students to approach an assignment?" Once she determined the specific area she wanted to work on, she considered the various ways in which she could address it. She reviewed the recommendations provided in Table 1 under "To promote choice I can . . ." and identified the third suggestion which is to "move beyond choice in content (e.g., different books, open-ended writing prompts) towards choices in process (e.g., read to a stuffed animal, draw pictures before writing, dictate ideas into a tablet)."

Ms. Snow realized that although the prompt encourages moving *beyond* choice in content, this is a good starting point for her to embed more choice into the writing portion of her literacy block. Specifically, she thought to herself: *one simple way to infuse choice into student writing is to give students more choice regarding the content they write about by providing open-ended writing prompts.* As a result, she redesigned her writing prompt to include the title "October Me" and invited students to write about a topic related to themselves and October. Students had the opportunity to make connections to the classroom read aloud, as well as the choice to make connections to their own experiences and knowledge. Figure 2 depicts what one student elected to draw and write about, which is his love for skeletons. By allowing for choice in writing topic (i.e., content), students are able to write about something meaningful to them. Instead of being limited to writing about the same topic, students might choose to write about annual hayrides, celebrating dia de los Muertos, or Trick-or-Treating. This can also be a great opportunity for Ms. Snow to collect informal data related to her students' interests and writing skills so that she can further support them throughout the literacy block and embed these interests into instruction when possible.

Ms. Snow's Elevated Classroom Practice

After improving practice by expanding students' access to authentic choices, Ms. Snow and Ms. Rivers were pleased by the novel directions students pursued when writing, but the educators both believed she could still provide even more opportunities for students to explore content aligned with their own passions within her literacy block. Once Ms. Snow restructured her approach to the writing task by removing limitations on choice in content, Ms. Rivers suggested she design instruction so that students would be empowered to determine the processes they use in addition to choice in content. To this end, Ms. Snow decided she would encourage

Table 1. Promote Authentic Choice

In planning for my literacy block do I . . .	To promote choice, I can . . .
– provide opportunities for students' choices within centers? – create structures in which students can select how they work and with whom they work? – **provide multiple avenues for my students to approach an assignment?** – allow my students to show what they know in multiple ways?	– implement a mixture of required and self-selected centers – allow students to decide the order in which they will complete work – **move beyond choice in content (e.g., different books, open-ended writing prompts) toward choices in process (e.g., read to a stuffed animal, draw pictures before writing, dictate ideas into a tablet)** – provide choices in products (e.g., students can write letters, conduct interviews, draw and label scientific drawings, write speech or thought bubbles, create maps or graphs, write a sequel to a favorite book, caption photos)

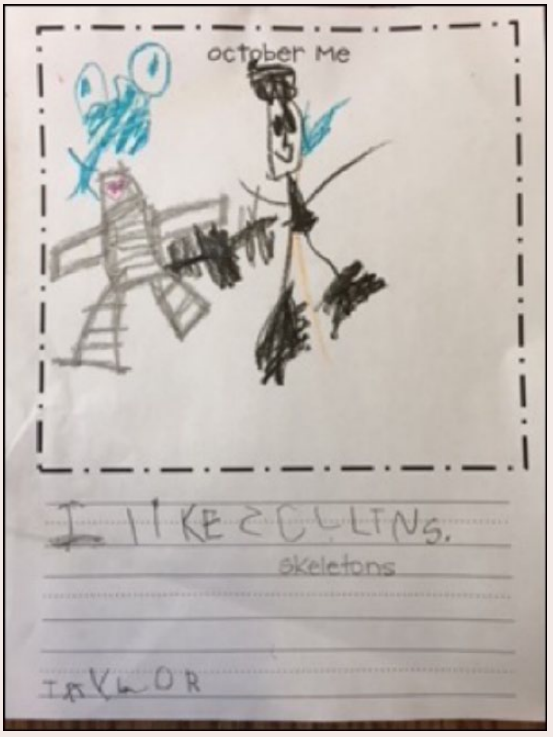

Figure 2. Student prompt incorporating choice bounded by content.

students to move "towards choices in process" (see Table 1) by engaging in their own approaches to the writing process. She did this by encouraging students to write with a partner, plan their writing using a storyboard, or use a tablet to auditorily or visually record their stories. The teachers found that students selected a topic they are invested in and engaged with a process that helped motivate their writing through the promotion of authentic choice, elevating literacy instruction for all students, including advanced readers.

Before using the *Elevating Instruction: A Planning Tool*, students in Ms. Snow's class were provided structured, topical writing prompts connected to a read aloud. However, this type of writing instruction was limiting to students. By using the tool and altering her writing instruction, Ms. Snow elevated her literacy instruction by allowing students to exercise choice regarding content and process, while promoting voice in the writing process and still making connections between students' reading and writing.

Encourage Student Agency and Ownership

Ms. Snow's Typical Classroom Practice

Another major component of the literacy block in Ms. Snow's class is center time. With the guidance of Ms. Rivers, Ms. Snow used the *Elevating Instruction: A Planning Tool* to reflect on her typical approach to implementing centers. Usually, she spent time explaining the four centers to the whole class as her teaching assistant prepared the different areas around the classroom. After she explained the different literacy activities, students would move to their first assigned center with their group members. As students in Ms. Snow's class are grouped by reading level, during center time, Ms. Snow worked with one group at a time using different leveled books for guided reading, including more complex texts for the advanced readers in her class. While Ms. Snow led the guided reading center, her teaching assistant rotated between the other three centers. After 15 minutes working at one center, a timer set by Ms. Snow would go off, and students knew that they were expected to rotate to the next center with their group. Figure 3 depicts the center time routine to which students were accustomed. Although the different centers students engaged in were aligned to literacy foundations, Ms. Rivers suggested that Ms. Snow consider some ways to infuse more agency and ownership into this portion of the literacy block, while still ensuring students work on foundational literacy skills.

Ms. Snow's Improved Classroom Practice

As an approach to increasing student ownership during her literacy block, Ms. Snow considered the prompts and recommendations on the Planning Tool under the section

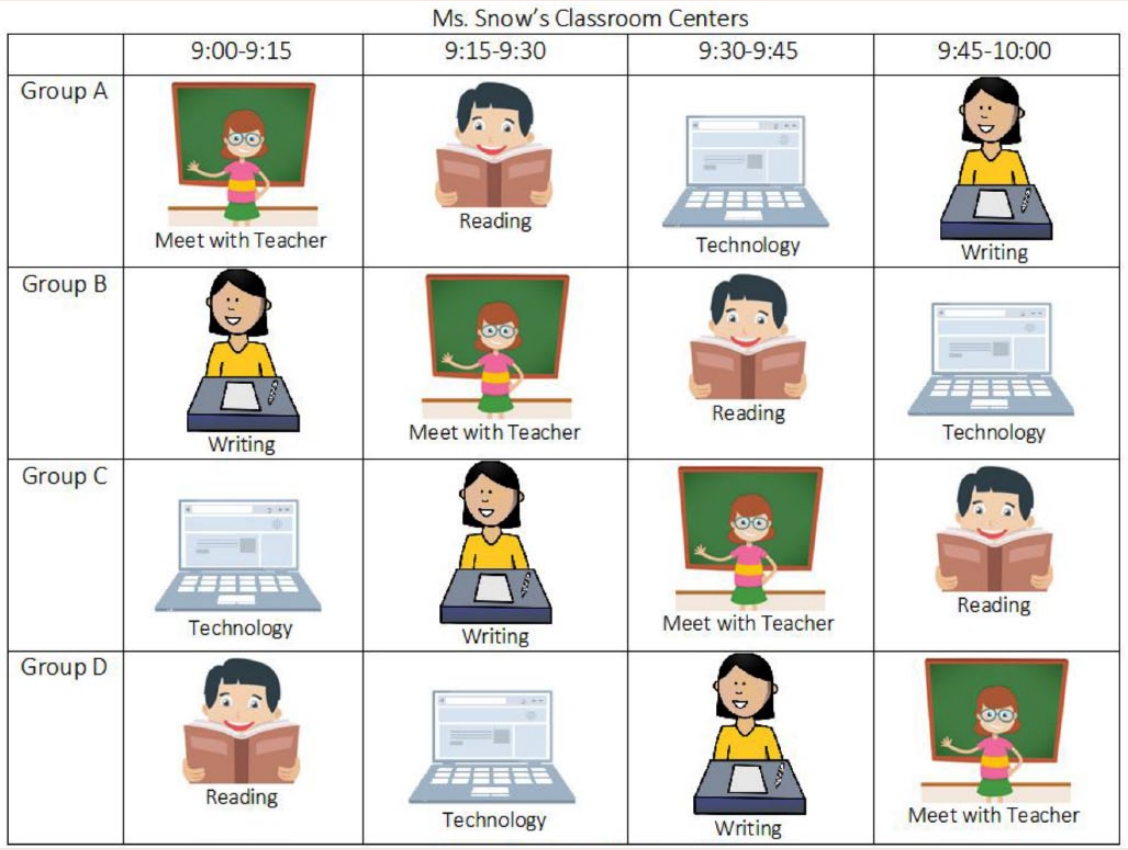

Figure 3. Limitations for student agency and ownership within centers.

Table 2. Encourage Student Agency and Ownership

In planning for and during my literacy block do I . . .	To encourage student agency, I can . . .
– allow my students to voice what they are curious about and cultivate personal interests? – provide time for students to explore their ideas in more depth? – **hold students accountable while still allowing for them to be in charge of their learning?** – provide tools that help students assess whether they are producing high-quality work?	– **allow students to determine how long they want to work on a given task or the order in which they complete work** – create more flexible protocols for centers (e.g., do not mandate switching at a designated time, allow students to provide input into the development of centers and the resources within them) – provide students with accountability tools such as choice boards, learning contracts, and learning menus – **provide students with self-assessment tools such as rubrics, checklists, and anchor charts**

"Encourage Student Agency and Ownership" listed in Table 2 and decided that center time provides an opportunity to infuse these ideas. In particular, the following caught her attention, "In planning for and during my literacy block do I hold students accountable while still allowing for them to be in charge of their learning?" When looking at suggestions from the tool, she identified the prompt "To encourage student agency I can allow students to determine how long they want to work on a given task or the order in which they complete work" as something she could incorporate into her existing center time. While still ensuring students spent a certain amount of time at each of the centers, Ms. Snow encouraged student agency during centers by allowing students to choose the order in which they engaged in the various centers. This was something that the students were

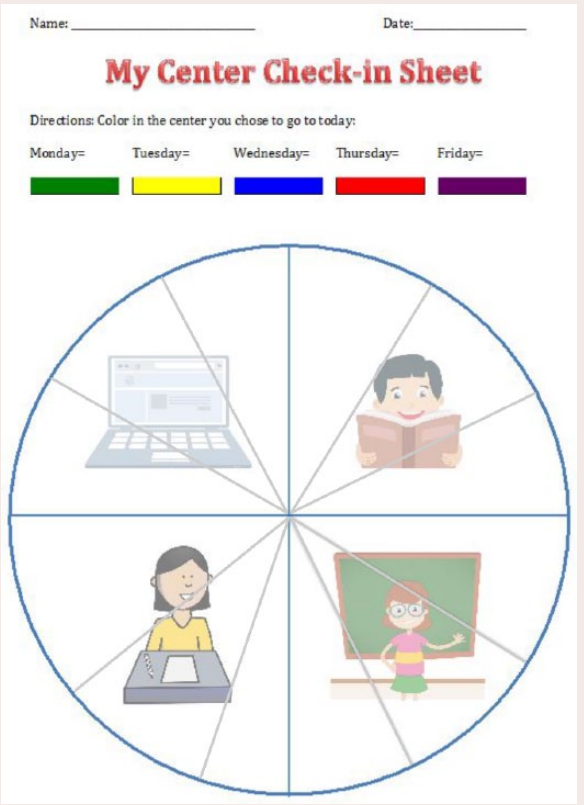

Figure 4. Increased student agency and ownership within centers.

given ownership over by allowing them to complete the *My Center Check-in Sheet* themselves (see Figure 4). Although this opportunity for choice may be seen as minor, in making this instructional change to how she approached literacy centers, Ms. Snow took one step toward providing students with greater agency and ownership of their learning. Once Ms. Snow and her students become accustomed to this modified and improved approach to centers, she can then consider next steps for further increasing student agency and ownership during centers (e.g., creating more flexible protocols for centers such as not mandating switching at a designated time and allowing students to provide input in the development of centers and center resources) and differentiating centers. Differentiating literacy instruction will be explored further in the final section of the tool, Collect and Use Formative Data. However, for this section, the idea is that students are taking ownership of their learning.

Ms. Snow's Elevated Classroom Practice

Because of the agency students exhibited when she altered centers (e.g., a student choosing the order in which they complete required centers), Ms. Rivers recommended that Ms. Snow elevate her practice even further by enacting another recommended practice from the Planning Tool excerpt in

Figure 5. Question, response, and evaluation between teacher and student.

Table 2: "To encourage student agency I can provide students with accountability tools such as choice boards, learning contracts, and learning menus." By elevating her instruction in this manner, Ms. Snow increased opportunities for student agency and ownership, while simultaneously supporting instruction of advanced readers as they engaged with literacy practices that were challenging and personally meaningful. By supporting student agency in this manner, Ms. Snow was also providing students with a choice to engage in literacy learning in a way that aligned to their learning profile, including cultural and gender differences (Tomlinson, 2005).

Prior to embedding recommended practices from the *Elevating Instruction: A Planning Tool* (Hobson & Kreamer, 2017) into her class's center time, Ms. Snow's students followed a routine in which they had limited opportunity to take ownership of their learning. By altering her approach to centers based on using the Planning Tool, Ms. Snow now provides opportunities for her students to exercise agency and ownership of their learning.

Support Meaningful Peer Interactions

Ms. Snow's Typical Classroom Practice

Another central tenet of Ms. Snow's literacy block is a daily read aloud, in which she included texts representing a variety of cultures, genres, and passions. In this literacy-rich environment, she and her students enjoy engaging in these high-interest texts thematically related to what they are learning. However, Ms. Rivers noticed that much of what Ms. Snow typically did during read alouds followed a similar pattern of question, response, and evaluation: She initiated a discussion with a question, one student responded, and she evaluated the student's response with a follow-up comment or question to the same student (see Figure 5). Ms. Rivers expressed concern that this process limits the text-focused discussion to just one student and resulted in missed opportunities for all of the other students, including

Table 3. Support Meaningful Peer Interactions

In planning for and during my literacy block do I . . .	To support meaningful peer interactions, I can . . .
– **help my students see each other as learning resources?** – encourage peer interactions? – provide tools that support meaningful peer interactions? – take time to teach and model what effective peer interactions look like and sound like?	– **provide students with tools to guide their interactions (e.g., sentence starters, checklists, or questions)** – expect some level of noise during the literacy block so that students can interact with each other (e.g., during a pre-writing activity, while writing, or buddy reading) – teach students how to peer conference and provide feedback on each other's work

Figure 6. Turn and talk activity that supports peer interactions.

advanced readers, to engage with the read aloud and with their peers. As such, she invited Ms. Snow to consider ways for all students to engage in meaningful discussions centered on the daily read aloud that fostered collaborative learning among students.

Ms. Snow's Improved Classroom Practice

To identify ways that Ms. Snow could improve her read alouds, she reviewed the *Elevating Instruction: A Planning Tool* (Hobson & Kreamer, 2017) and identified the section "Support Meaningful Peer Interaction" in Table 3 as an area of the Planning Tool that could help her to increase student participation during read alouds. Specifically, she reflected on the question "In planning for and during my literacy block do I help my students see each other as learning resources?" She realized that during her read alouds she was not encouraging students to view each other as learning resources and ultimately learn from each other. She identified that this was an area that could be improved upon to further support advanced readers in her class. In Table 3, the right side of the tool provides the following prompt: "To support meaningful peer interactions I can expect some level of noise during the literacy block so that students can interact with each other (e.g., during a pre-writing activity, while writing, or buddy reading)." As a result of this, she changed her read aloud to encourage students to see each other as learning resources and to be talkative and lively when discussing the book. To this end, she identified two sections in a read aloud where students could turn and talk to their buddy about the text (see Figure 6). When Ms. Snow did this, she realized that this activity improved her literacy instruction because it allowed all of her students to engage with relevant questions about the text and the activity helped to infuse the classroom community with a desire to work with each other when learning content.

Ms. Snow's Elevated Classroom Practice

To further help students see each other as a resource and improve the read aloud experience, Ms. Rivers suggested that Ms. Snow revisit the *Elevating Instruction: A Planning Tool* (Hobson & Kreamer, 2017) and consider additional ways to further elevate her classroom practice. In doing this, Ms. Snow saw Table 3 included a prompt that stated, "To support meaningful peer interactions I can provide students with tools to guide their interactions (e.g., sentence starters, checklists, or questions)." During her next read aloud, she provided students with a checklist to guide their discussion about the text (see Figure 7). This checklist directed students to engage with their peers regarding the read aloud text in one of three ways: make a connection to yourself, to another book, or to the world. Ms. Snow and Ms. Rivers found that this checklist helped students utilize each other as resources, make meaning of the text during a read aloud, and make connections to the varied texts utilized in Ms. Snow's read alouds.

Ms. Snow's read alouds used to be focused on her asking questions about a text with one or two students providing answers. With help from the Planning Tool, she elevated her literacy instruction to encourage students to view each other as resources when making meaning of a text. She did this by asking students to discuss the book during a turn and talk activity and by creating a checklist focused on text-to-self,

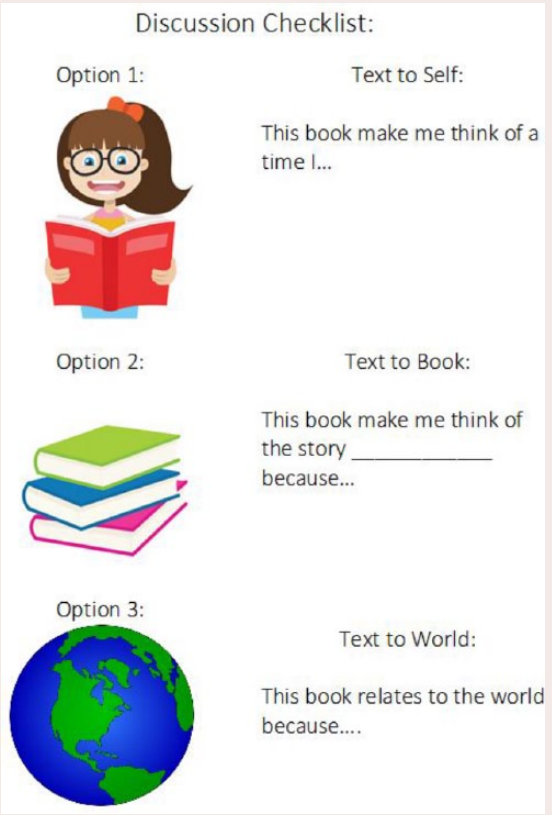

Figure 7. Discussion checklist to foster meaningful peer interactions.

text-to-text, and text-to-world connections that students can refer to when discussing a read aloud text.

Collect and Use Formative Data

Ms. Snow's Typical Classroom Practice

Another component of Ms. Snow's literacy practice included collection of formal student data a few times a year through district-mandated reading assessments. She noticed that when Ms. Rivers conducted push-in gifted enrichment lessons, she frequently collected student data in a variety of forms. As such, Ms. Snow decided she wanted to do more in the way of data collection by routinely collecting different types of information about each of her students. Doing this would help her to better target specific literacy areas on which to instruct her students and to differentiate based on students' academic needs. She knew formative data collection should happen during all aspects of the literacy block (e.g., read aloud, writing, centers), and she considered ways to incorporate this into her classroom practices.

Ms. Snow's Improved Classroom Practice

To increase instances of formative data collection during her literacy block, Ms. Snow referenced the "Collect and Use Formative Data" section of the Planning Tool in Table 4. This section is focused on how teachers who engage in data collection to inform instruction can help improve student outcomes, differentiate instruction, and is a way for students to demonstrate their learning. Ms. Snow knew that her formative data collection system could be improved during all aspects of the literacy block, including during read alouds, centers, and writing, especially in regard to using data to inform future instruction. She scanned the left side of the "Collect and Use Formative Data" section of the Planning Tool and asked herself the following question: "In planning for my literacy block do I use data to meaningfully differentiate literacy activities for students based on interest, readiness, or learning profile?" She was aware that differentiating literacy activities aids all students' learning because it allows for instruction to best address the wide range of students' literacy needs found in a classroom. She then looked at the right side of the section and selected the following idea to incorporate throughout her literacy block: "When planning for my literacy block I can use student interest inventories to inform writing choices, book selection, or to create an interest center." She created a preassessment that allowed her to collect information on student interests. Specifically, her students participated in a read aloud that used a book by the author Mo Willems and were about to begin a writing activity building from the read aloud. Students were given a preassessment that read "We are about to finish our author study of Mo Willems. If you were to write the next Mo Willems book, which characters would you want to write about? Circle one" (see Figure 8). She then grouped students based on similar character interests. Ms. Snow initially designed this interest-based activity to more strongly align with different parts of the literacy block, specifically the read aloud and writing activity. The formative data from the preassessment allowed her to group students by what they were interested in, and students engaged in a collaborative story-based writing experience. She found that this activity was beneficial for her advanced readers because this supported the complex process of integrating reading and writing. In addition, all students were intrinsically motivated by the topic they elected to write about and were invited to use their peers' writing knowledge as they developed their own voices.

Ms. Snow's Elevated Classroom Practice

Pleased with student outcomes, Ms. Snow decided to elevate her centers further by using formative data to inform these literacy activities. To do this, she revisited the *Elevating Instruction: A Planning Tool* (Hobson & Kreamer, 2017) and her attention was drawn to the following recommendation in Table 4: "Use formative data to differentiate resources by readiness (e.g., provide different spelling words or leveled prompts, scaffold tasks and instructions)." Based on student writing outcomes, she elected to design centers based on a continuum of writing readiness where each of the four small groups represent a different writing focus: ideation, fluency,

Table 4. Collect and Use Formative Data

In planning for my literacy block do I . . . use data to inform activities at centers?	When planning for my literacy block, I can . . .
– **use data to meaningfully differentiate literacy activities for students based on interest, readiness, or learning profile?** – include a way to collect evidence of student learning when they are not working with me?	– **use formative data to differentiate resources by readiness (e.g., provide different spelling words or leveled prompts, scaffold tasks and instructions)** – use student interest inventories to inform writing choices, book selections, or to create an interest center – have students fill out a weekly center check-in sheet to report what they have been accomplishing and to inform follow-up teacher conversations/conferences – use technology to capture what students are working on at centers (e.g., have students or the teaching assistant take photos of completed work or work-in-progress) – look at student work that has been purposefully designed

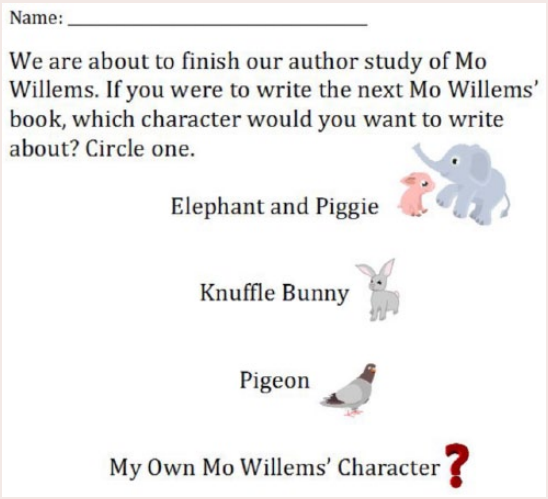

Figure 8. Ms. Snow collects student data based on a character interest survey.

word choice, and editing. Ultimately, these elevated centers helped students to become stronger writers in relation to where they were on the writing continuum, and Ms. Snow will use this information to continue to inform her future instruction.

Previously, Ms. Snow engaged in mandated formal data collection during her literacy block; however, she rarely collected informal data with the explicit intention of using it to inform instruction. After acknowledging that she could elevate her collection and use of data throughout the literacy block, she implemented ideas from "Collection and Use of Formative Data" in Table 4. She improved her instruction by creating interest-based writing groups aligned to a classroom read aloud and further differentiated writing centers based on a continuum of student readiness. These changes in her instruction led to a more natural and iterative process of frequently collecting formative data that she can use when working with students throughout the school year.

Conclusion

The *Elevating Instruction: A Planning Tool* (Hobson & Kreamer, 2017) was designed based on analysis of primary-grade literacy blocks and is intended to help elementary school teachers, like Ms. Snow, identify ways in which they can improve instruction during literacy blocks, including supporting advanced primary-aged readers. The tool is specifically designed in a way that allows teachers to identify area(s) of interest they want to improve and elevate within their literacy practices and is focused on helping teachers: (a) incorporate authentic choice, (b) encourage student agency and ownership, (c) support meaningful peer interactions within their literacy block, and (d) collect and use formative data. Existing literature regarding best practices in instruction aided researchers in identifying and addressing these four components. As teachers identify specific areas of focus, the Planning Tool also includes a variety of suggestions regarding how teachers can improve areas of instruction, allowing teachers to address one or several areas of the tool at a time within their classrooms. By incorporating recommendations from the tool into literacy instruction, teachers can elevate instruction for advanced primary-aged readers in individualized and creative ways.

Appendix

Elevating Instruction: A Planning Tool

Overview: This Planning Tool will help teachers reflect on how well they (a) incorporate authentic choice, (b) collect and use formative data, (c) encourage student agency and ownership, and (d) support meaningful peer interactions within their literacy block. Suggestions for how to incorporate these ideas are also included.

Promote Authentic Choice	
In planning for my literacy block do I . . . • provide opportunities for students' choices within centers? • create structures in which students can select how they work and with whom they work? • provide multiple avenues for my students to approach an assignment? • allow my students to show what they know in multiple ways?	*To promote choice, I can . . .* • implement a mixture of required and self-selected centers • allow students to decide the order in which they will complete work • move beyond choice in content (e.g., different books, open-ended writing prompts) toward choices in process (e.g., read to a stuffed animal, draw pictures before writing, dictate ideas into a tablet) • provide choices in products (e.g., students can write letters, conduct interviews, draw and label scientific drawings, write speech or thought bubbles, create maps or graphs, write a sequel to a favorite book, caption photos)
Encourage Student Agency and Ownership	
In planning for and during my literacy block do I . . . • allow my students to voice what they are curious about and cultivate personal interests? • provide time for students to explore their ideas in more depth? • hold students accountable while still allowing for them to be in charge of their learning? • provide tools that help students assess whether they are producing high-quality work?	*To encourage student agency, I can . . .* • allow students to determine how long they want to work on a given task or the order in which they complete work • create more flexible protocols for centers (e.g., do not mandate switching at a designated time, allow students to provide input into the development of centers and the resources within them) • provide students with accountability tools such as choice boards, learning contracts, and learning menus • provide students with self-assessment tools such as rubrics, checklists, and anchor charts
Support Meaningful Peer Interactions	
In planning for and during my literacy block do I . . . • help my students see each other as learning resources? • encourage peer interactions? • provide tools that support meaningful peer interactions? • take time to teach and model what effective peer interactions look like and sound like?	*To support meaningful peer interactions, I can . . .* • provide students with tools to guide their interactions (e.g., sentence starters, checklists, or questions) • expect some level of noise during the literacy block so that students can interact with each other (e.g., during a pre-writing activity, while writing, or buddy reading) • teach students how to peer conference and provide feedback on each other's work
Collect and Use Formative Data	
In planning for my literacy block do I . . . • use data to inform activities at centers? • use data to meaningfully differentiate literacy activities for students based on interest, readiness, or learning profile? • include a way to collect evidence of student learning when they are not working with me?	*When planning for my literacy block I can . . .* • use formative data to differentiate resources by readiness (e.g., provide different spelling words or leveled prompts, scaffold tasks and instructions) • use student interest inventories to inform writing choices, book selections, or to create an interest center • have students fill out a weekly center check-in sheet to report what they have been accomplishing and to inform follow-up teacher conversations/conferences • use technology to capture what students are working on at centers (e.g., have students or the teaching assistant take photos of completed work or work-in-progress) • look at student work that has been purposefully designed

Further Reading

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