

The Exchange

Spring 2015



A Newsletter of
the Secondary
Reading Interest
Group of the
International
Literacy
Association

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Message from the President

by Julie Meltzer, SRIG President

Inside this issue:

- ◆ **Message from the President...1**
 - ◆ **Getting It By Heart...2**
 - ◆ **Tracking Argumentation in Complex Disciplinary Texts...3**
 - ◆ **Finding Focus...4**
 - ◆ **Making Research Matter to Teachers...6**
 - ◆ **Coaching from the Coached...9**
- and information about SRIG membership, the SRIG session in St. Louis, an invitation to the Canadian Reception and more...

Dear Colleagues,

This issue of *The Exchange* brings you a whirlwind of thoughts and ideas from two of our Adolescent Literacy award winners, Carol Jago and Doug Buehl, and from President-elect Debra Franciosi. These brief snapshots take us “behind the scenes” into what they are currently working on and thinking about related to Adolescent Literacy. Carol revisits the benefits of learning poetry by heart, Doug looks at what is entailed with tracking arguments in complex text and Debra describes how teachers with whom she works through Project CRISS are keeping a steady course despite the turbulent waters of the Common Core.

Thanks to all of you for sharing.

Our third award winner, Jeffrey Wilhelm, traces his research and thinking throughout his career. Jeff bares the bones of how, in his experience, deep thinking and real inquiry has resulted in...deep thinking and more inquiry! In this detailed piece, Jeff gives us a real inside view of the academic journey he is traveling still – all focused on how and what and why and under what conditions adolescents read. Enjoy!

Many of you know that I am the curriculum director for a small rural district near Bar Harbor, Maine. It is a beautiful place with a short exquisite summer, a very long winter and many far flung, isolated small

SRIG Membership

The SRIG has close to 200 members. **Every member counts** when it comes to our ability to getting a large enough room for our annual SRIG session. Please let anyone who might be interested know that they are welcome and encouraged to join! At \$10 per year, it is a bargain! Please let Rita Noon know that you want to be a part of us: ritanoon@gmail.com. You can also renew when you come to the SRIG Session at the ILA Conference.

schools. Over the past few years we have implemented an intermittent coaching model to support implementation of the writing workshop approach. In my article I share a little of what this looked like and how it was experienced by our middle school teachers.

The ILA Conference is less than one month away! In the sidebar, you will find a description of our two-hour SRIG session on Saturday and an invitation to the Canadian Reception that we cosponsor every year. In addition to having the opportunity to meet our Adolescent Literacy Thought Leader awardees, session attendees will be able to nominate next year's award recipients.

You will notice that the Newsletter is not only late, but is rather plain without the high level of graphics and design that members have come to expect. Our wonderful newsletter designer, Jody Mueller, was in a serious accident and is working on recovering from multiple injuries. She hopes to be back on the job for the Fall Newsletter. Please send her good wishes and lots of healing energy.

I hope you find many things to think about in this issue of *The Exchange*. And I hope to see many of you in St. Louis!

Sincerely,
Julie

Getting It by Heart by Carol Jago

Now that even family members' telephone numbers have moved from the hard drive between our ears to our smartphones, you may think that having students memorize poetry is a practice that should have been discarded along with chalk and rubber tipped pointers. Not so. Memorizing poetry is a powerful way to learn about the moves poets make. It is also a contemplative task that can help to counterbalance students' multi-tasked and much-distracted lives. As William Wordsworth noted in 1808, "The world is too much with us."

In order to learn a poem by heart, you must surrender yourself to it, proceeding often with incomplete comprehension but trusting in the words. Memorization helps students to understand the text they are working with because it forces them to follow the mind of the poet and to recreate the experience and feelings that went into the poem's composition.

Kids can do this. Most teenagers carry around hundreds of song lyrics in their heads. They instinctively know how rhythm, rhyme, and repetition contribute to the ease with which a lyric "sticks" in one's head.

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Invite your students to choose a poem and commit it to memory. The *Poetry Out Loud* website

<http://www.poetryoutloud.org/poems-and-performance/find-poems>

offers a wonderful collection of poems ideally suited to the task.

Poetry Out Loud also offers the following suggestions for memorization:

- Rewrite your poem by hand several times. Each time, try to write more and more of it from memory.
- Read your poem aloud before going to sleep at night, and repeat it when you wake up.
- Carry around a copy of your poem. You'll find several moments throughout the day to reread or recite it.
- Practice your poem by saying it to family and friends.

To memorize a poem is to own it. Like nuts squirreled away for winter, the poems you have by heart nourish you in times of trouble and provide company in moments of solitude. According to the great actor Paul Robeson, "If we do not learn by heart, the heart does not feel the rhythms of poetry as echoes or variations of its own insistent beat."

I still remember the lines from *The Merchant of Venice* that I was made to memorize in 9th grade, "The quality of mercy is not strained ..." You may argue why bother with memorization when you can Google the speech in a heartbeat. Wouldn't be the same, though, would it?

Tracking Argumentation in Complex Disciplinary Texts by Doug Buehl

An article summarizing what we have now learned about the Ebola virus after this last major outbreak. An analysis explaining health hazards for workers in New York City's nail salons. Brief travel vignettes detailing scenic destinations "not to miss" while driving along the California coast. A column that outlines possible moves needed to be made by the Milwaukee Brewers after their dreadful start to the baseball season. A movie review of Joss Whedon's latest *Avengers* extravaganza. Another weekend's lineup of reading; consider for a moment—what do each of these texts have in common?

They all represent exposition, you might say; each is an example of what the Common Core refers to as informative text. But this array of texts serves a deeper purpose that extends beyond merely "telling." Each can also be understood as forms of argumentation.

Argumentation—the reasoned presentation of explanations, generalizations, conclusions, interpretations, propositions, or even theories—is a key facet of complex texts across disciplines. Argumentation is pervasive in informational texts and the analysis of

Don't Miss the Secondary Reading Interest Group Session!

Insights from Thought Leaders in the Field of Adolescent Literacy

Time: 3:00 PM - 5:00 PM on

Saturday, July 18

**Location: America's Center St.
Louis, 105**

This two hour session, sponsored by the Secondary Reading Interest Group, features this year's inaugural recipients of the new Thought Leader in Adolescent Literacy Award: Doug Buehl, Carol Jago, and Jeffrey Wilhelm. Each will present briefly on his/her current work, current thinking, and beliefs about what is important for us all to be thinking about in the field. Following the three 25 minute presentations, there would be a 30 minute panel discussion to provide participants opportunity to further interact with panelists.

argumentation rightfully assumes a prominent place in the Common Core literacy standards, most particularly Reading Standard 8, Writing Standard 1, and Speaking/Listening Standard 4.

We often think of argumentation in the classic sense, texts that are constructed around propositions, intended by authors to influence point of view, to propose certain ideas, to articulate a position, to advocate some action or change. However, most argumentation we encounter seeks to establish a convincing rationale for a particular way of understanding our life and our world.

Argumentation is intricately intertwined with another Common Core mantra: "text-based evidence." Details, facts, examples, citations, specifics—all can be seen as corroborating information, not offered necessarily as ends in themselves, as "things to know," but rather employed to develop, support, substantiate, or defend a particular explanation, conclusion, generalization, interpretation, or theory.

Informative texts need to be perceived as more than just packed compendiums of "stuff." Exploring the nature of argumentation, and in particular how arguments are central to assembling, examining, questioning, and organizing disciplinary knowledge, is an essential component in studying a subject. Literacy practices that prompt and guide the analysis of argumentation can be especially valuable scaffolds for mentoring students in tracking and evaluating argumentation as they engage with comprehending informational texts. As students become increasingly astute in recognizing variations of argumentation in their study of disciplinary texts, they will in turn be increasingly prepared to use their learning to explain, interpret, conclude, generalize, theorize, and critique with well-reasoned justifications as speakers and writers.

***Finding Focus* by Debra Franciosi**

At Project CRISS, I work within a professional family of teacher-leaders with a common goal: help teachers facilitate the growth and development of lifelong learners. In recent months, I've had to retrace some steps to help the educators I work with maintain a clear path amidst the chaos that swirls around public education.

At first glance of the ELA College and Career Readiness Standards of the Common Core, I was thrilled to see core elements of what my organization has been teaching for decades. However, it didn't take long for curriculum publisher contortions, a multitude of misinterpretations, a dearth of common sense, and amnesia regarding decades of research in the face of the national directives to surface and take hold. It came as no surprise with the rushed implementation of assessments to see the backlash: the anger aimed at the tests, but also the release of burgeoning frustration coming from teachers in settings



YOU ARE INVITED!

You are cordially invited to the Seventeenth Annual Canadian Reception at the 60th Annual Conference of the International Literacy Association

Sunday, July 19, 2015

6:00 – 9:00 p.m.

**Majestic Room A – Second Floor
Renaissance St. Louis Grand
Hotel 800 Washington Avenue
St. Louis MO 63101
Light Refreshments & Cash Bar**

Join us for a special reading by Margriet Ruurs CNIRAC & C SIG-L Poet Laureate. There will be books for sale/signing. As has been the case for the past several years, this event is co-sponsored by the Canadian Network of IRA Councils (CNIRAC), the Canadian Special Interest Group (CSIG), and the Secondary Reading Interest Group.

FYI - The Canadian SIG Session is called "Adolescent Literacy in Action: The Province of Ontario's Approach" Monday, July 20, 2015 11:00 am - 1:00 pm, Room 150 America's Convention Center Complex.

where "rigor", "data", "skills", and "close reading" are now dirty words.

The successful schools and districts with which I work to improve student literacy do so with clear purpose. The struggling schools often don't begin with a clear goal, or the leadership has one in mind, but teachers aren't informed. Engaging the key stakeholders is vital to improving student literacy (and it's all about literacy!). With staff engagement at a tipping point, we use frameworks to provide pieces of the puzzle: consistent language, key processes, and tools for teachers' and students' toolboxes. There are lots of effective tools or strategies for close reading, questioning, and deep analysis. There are processes to facilitate student performance on assessments. Effectively implementing any of these depends on teachers and other educators understanding what we know about how humans learn, and what it takes to facilitate that happening. We're developing tools and working with administrators, instructional coaches, and other teacher-leaders to find balance and focus as professionals, colleagues, leaders, and learners as we walk the path of lifelong learning.



Thinking About a Name Change...

Even before the International Reading Association changed its name to the International Literacy Association, those of us on the Secondary Reading Interest Group (SRIG) board were discussing the need to change our name to the Adolescent Literacy Interest Group (ALIG). When looking over past issues of *The Exchange* and the SRIG sessions offered over the past five years, we realized that we have had a broader literacy discussion than just about reading. For examples, sessions have been as likely to focus on writing, engagement, teacher practice, schoolwide adolescent literacy initiatives, as well as reading fiction, nonfiction, reading instruction, and reading research. Now, given the shift in the name of our parent organization, we think the time has come. But maybe we are overlooking something? What do YOU think? After all, you joined the Secondary Reading Interest Group. Would you find it as exciting and fulfilling to be a member of the Adolescent Literacy Interest Group? We will vote on this at the SRIG Session on Saturday, July 18. Please come and add your voice!

Making Research Matter to Teachers: Where I've Been and Where I'm Going by Jeffrey D. Wilhelm

Throughout my career as a researcher I've made the effort to engage in basic primary research. And, because I regard myself first and foremost as a teacher, to then make that research matter by applying the findings in the context of real world classroom instruction.

You Gotta BE the Book!

In *You Gotta BE the Book* (1996; 3rd edition to appear in early 2016), I explored the stances and strategic moves of highly engaged and competent middle school readers. I found that whenever these readers successfully engaged, they operated on all of the following interdependent dimensions of response, which tended to be hierarchical in that previous dimensions were prerequisite to responses on later ones, e.g. a reader could not reflect on an experience that they had not fully and consciously enjoyed. These dimensions of response constitute mental activities that these readers regularly practiced in reading:

- EVOCATIVE DIMENSIONS: Entering the story world, showing interest in the story, relating to characters, and visualizing and participating in the story world
- ELABORATIVE DIMENSIONS: Elaborating on the story world and connecting literature to life
- REFLECTIVE DIMENSIONS: Considering significance, recognizing literary conventions and structural moves, recognizing reading as a transaction, and evaluating an author and the self as reader (46-47).

We wanted this research to matter to the classroom teachers who are supporting student readers. This led to a series of intervention studies about the use of different techniques (frontloading, think alouds, drama, action strategies, visualization strategies, technology, inquiry contexts, etc.) to support less engaged readers to take on the same stances and use the same strategies of the more engaged readers (see, for example, Wilhelm & Edmiston, 1998; Wilhelm, et al 2001, Wilhelm, 2007, 2012a, 2012b, 2012c, Smith & Wilhelm, 2009).

Reading Don't Fix No Chevys!

In *Reading Don't Fix No Chevys* (Smith & Wilhelm, 2002), Michael Smith and I took a fine-grained look at the literate lives of a range of adolescent boys of different capacities and backgrounds, both inside and outside of school. We found that whenever young men were highly engaged with activities involving literacy (or any other activity, for that matter) that particular conditions of situated motivation were always present. Conversely, we found that the lack of these conditions explained every case of non-engagement and lack of motivation in the study – both inside and outside of school. In other words, these conditions (or the lack of them) explained every single case of engagement and motivation, or its absence, throughout a multi-year study.

Following Csikszentmihalyi (1990), we called these the conditions of flow experience:

- A clear Purpose, Goals, and Immediate Feedback foregrounding visible signs of growth and accomplishment
- A Challenge that requires an appropriate level of skill and Assistance to meet the challenge (as needed to be successful)
- A sense of Control and Developing Competence
- A focus on Immediate Experience

- Involvement of the Social (this included a social contract to care with teachers: get to know me, care about me, address my interests, assist me and don't give up, be passionate)

To show the practical applications of this research, In *Going with the Flow* (2006), we explored how teaching contexts at the unit and lesson level like “inquiry and design” necessarily meet all the conditions of flow and the social contract to care. In *Fresh Takes on Teaching Literary Elements* (2009), we further explored how teaching fairly traditional tropes like literary conventions can be taught in inquiry contexts that meet these human developmental needs for motivation and social support.

The Power of Pleasure Reading

Most recently, Michael and I researched the experiences of highly engaged readers of texts typically marginalized by school and the wider culture (romance, dystopia, vampire, horror, fantasy, etc.). In *Reading Unbound* (Wilhelm & Smith, 2014) we report on the five pleasures these readers always experienced whenever they pursued free choice reading:

- Immersive Pleasure of Play: lived through experience of the story world and action
- Work Pleasure: getting something done; functional application to real world
- Inner Work Pleasure: rehearsing who you want to be; dealing with existential issues
- Intellectual Pleasure: figuring out how texts work for meaning and effect
- Social Pleasure: identifying the self; affiliating with groups; relating to authors, characters, and other readers

Each of these pleasures provided very specific benefits to the student as a reader, learner, and person.

What followed as part of the same study, to explore teaching applications and make this research matter to teachers, was an exploration of ways to endorse and foster these pleasures with all texts, both inside and outside of school. We particularly emphasized promoting the immersive pleasure of play, since we found this to be prerequisite to the other pleasures.

What Now? Researching “Rules of Notice” in Nonfiction Texts

As I reflect on my research over the past twenty-something years, I see several “throughlines”: a focus on understanding engagement and expertise as readers, writers, and learners, and a corresponding emphasis on exploring techniques for promoting engagement and expertise with reluctant and struggling readers, writers and learners. I also see a “throughline” regarding motivation, joy and pleasure, and a rich collaboration with my colleague Michael W. Smith.

In our most recent study, tentatively called *Readers Rules of Notice with Nonfiction* (forthcoming this fall 2015 with Corwin), we've continued to pursue these parallel tracks by trying to understand both how experts read specific kinds of texts and how we might help all students to develop the same strategic facility. Now we're studying the transactional relationship between nonfiction texts and readers (including how different informational/paradigmatic argument and narrative structures are embedded within each other in complex texts and signal readers to make particular moves). Specifically, we've been studying how texts signal and guide readers to notice and unpack certain details and structurings through what we are calling (following Peter Rabinowitz, 1998) rules of notice, rules of rupture, and rules of configuration and coherence, as well as how real readers learn how to notice, connect, and interpret these textual codes and the connections between them.

By using self-studies and studies of adolescent readers, we've discovered an expert process of reading for deep engagement and for a conscious understanding of how texts work for meaning and effect, which has immense benefit to both readers and writers – and helps them to meet all of the Core standards for reading and writing. We've also come up with a classification of rules of notice that we have found very useful as readers and as teachers.

Because, as always, we want our research to matter, we've also embarked on intervention research in how techniques like essential questions, student generated questions, think aloud protocols, concrete modeling of strategy use with visual and multimodal texts, providing extended practice with short texts, activities in writing like a reader/reading like a writer, and finding and analyzing real world examples work to help students to internalize these rules for noticing and how to unpack these to create justifiable interpretations and enriching responses.

We're currently very busy with revisions for our book, which will appear at NCTE this fall. We are hopeful, as always, that our research will matter by helping teachers to assist their students to become not only more highly engaged readers and writers, but more consciously competent ones as well, experiencing the pleasures and joys of engagement and the hard fun of knowing how texts work to create meaning and effect – something that can be put to use through a lifetime of reading as well as writing.

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Coaching from the Coached: How Middle School ELA Teachers Responded to an Intermittent Coaching Model Focused on the Teaching of Writing by Julie Meltzer

Thanks to all of the Mount Desert Island Regional School System Middle School ELA Teachers, our two district writing coaches, and our consultant coach.

Introduction

Instructional coaching has been touted as an extremely effective professional development strategy. Coaching is typically defined as one or more of several activities including, but not limited to, modeling, co-planning, consultation, observation and feedback, and responsive workshop design and facilitation. The literature stresses that to be effective, coaching must be ongoing and consistent and, although not conclusive, there is a general assumption that more is better and will lead to concomitant change.

When a diverse group of middle school teachers are faced with the requirement to implement a new approach to teaching writing, can occasional coaching help them to actually make changes in practice? Which aspects of coaching do middle school teachers see as most valuable? What if the district simply cannot provide intensive on-site coaching and has to rely on intermittent support? Will different types of coaching used in conjunction with one another “make up” for the lack of intensity of coaching?

For the past two years, we have implemented an intermittent coaching model in our small rural district to support implementation of the writing workshop approach supported by the new Writing Units of Study developed by Lucy Calkins and her colleagues at Teachers College. Different kinds of occasional coaching activities occurred within a robust professional development initiative that clearly connected the approach being used to desired instructional outcomes, provided materials, and included time for teachers to work together.

Context

Teaching writing is very personal for middle school ELA teachers. Some of our teachers had limited training in the area of writing instruction while others were passionate about writing and had completed a master’s program focused on writing instruction. However, no one was familiar with the new materials and there were varying levels of enthusiasm about using them. Also, in many rural districts like ours, small schools may have only one or two middle school ELA teachers who provide instruction to all students in grades 6, 7, and 8. Therefore, when K-8 writing scores and feedback from the high school indicate that writing instruction is an area requiring attention at the middle school level, this can be seen as threatening or as an indictment. In addition, people’s varied learning styles and perceptions of their own teaching and of the new materials can also influence teacher buy-in, as can teacher confidence in whether this change to a particular workshop approach is here to stay or just the “flavor of the month.”

Our district cannot afford full time, or even part-time, literacy coaches in each of our schools, so the type of intensive coaching model often described in the literature is not possible for us. We gambled that a few different types of coaching support, even if intermittent, would be more effective than only one type. But would just a few opportunities to experience different types of coaching make any difference? And would this approach work for both new and veteran teachers?

Teacher Response

Teachers responded to specific aspects of the coaching support, in isolation or in combination, raising important questions for effective professional design to meet the needs of veteran and novice teachers all grappling with a new instructional approach. For some, the responsiveness of, and time to plan with, the consultant coach were key. For others, it was the hands-on coaching in each building that seemed to make the most difference. Some teachers loved being able to “see” the consultant coach with their students. Others valued the peer discussion time and responsive workshops more highly.

The response from the teachers may have been quite different if the quality of the coaching had not been so high. Both the two part-time district coaches and the consultant coach received very positive reviews. Partly this resulted from the perceived responsiveness of all three of the coaches. Teachers were comfortable asking for specifics from both the local district coaches and the consultant coach.

It is interesting to note that 1) there was no difference in enthusiasm or trust among new vs veteran teachers, and 2) that the teachers were engaged with the new materials and approach to writing instruction and clearly expected that time with the district coaches, the lab site visits, and the responsive workshop would be useful and valuable. This was despite the fact that the consultant coach facilitated only four responsive workshops during the year, the district coaches saw each teacher only a couple of times, and there were only three lab site visits that included observing the consultant coach model in a teacher’s classroom followed by a debriefing session.

Some sample comments from middle school teachers are shared below so you can “hear” the model in action. Together, the comments here, and many other comments like them, indicate that it may be the combined synergy of the multiple types of coaching experiences that led to changes in classroom practice and quality implementation of a new approach to teaching writing. This raises the question if the intensity of the coaching is the relevant variable. Others may want to consider substituting variety for intensity when designing coaching models to inspire and support changes in classroom practice.

It was important to have the opportunity to watch...and then sit with my colleagues to discuss the decisions made in that lesson...as well as periodic check-ins with our [district] writing coach. These supports encouraged me to explicitly teach the craft of writing. This process has reinvigorated my teaching of writing.

...the PD with [the consultant coach] was very high quality and helpful. I always find that I have at least 2 tips I put into practice right away (this time it was giving students just one goal to focus on at time--this made the kids really happy and focused!).

It has kept me accountable to teaching lessons I was hesitant about. Having someone “check in” while I was working on “buying in” was helpful.

Thanks for arranging these visits. The last one was so helpful, it fed me for weeks (students, too)...I have lost count of the number of times I have referred to [the consultant coach’s] example of the “funnel compliment”, when dealing with kids with big, large, and lofty ideas. This helped me give more compliments and then dive into the heart of the assignments. She will be pleased to know the gentleman she focussed on that day has written a fabulous tale, with a strong message.

Conclusions?

In education we often discuss the importance of differentiated instruction and of engagement in learning. Clearly, the same is important for teachers who gravitated toward and felt support from varying aspects of the coaching process. One size does not fit all! But it is possible to conclude that putting in place different types of interaction with multiple people may be more important to achieving quality implementation of writing instruction than the *intensity* of the support. This may hold true for other professional development initiatives as well and raises the question of the role of differentiated professional development design using coaching as the center of the model. An unexpected side effect was the emergence of a true professional learning community among the teachers *across schools*, fostered by the coaching, getting in one another's classrooms, sharing questions and feedback, and discussing instruction and student work. For districts where resources are less abundant, where teaching is sometimes isolating, and where intensive coaching models are not possible, this may be good news -- or at least something to ponder.

Literacy Night at the Ballpark

Saturday, July 18, 2015 6:15 - 10:00 p.m Busch Stadium, 700 Clark Avenue, St. Louis, MO

Matt Carpenter Bobblehead Night (first 25,000 fans 16 y/o+)

The International Literacy Association and the LEADER-SIG invite you to join us for a fun-filled night out at the ballpark - with awesome seats - for a great cause: literacy! Proceeds from your ticket will help ILA advance literacy at home and around the world through local and international projects. St. Louis Cardinals host the New York Mets! Take your EventBrite receipt and pick up your actual ballpark tickets at the "Will Call" Table located near Registration in the America's Convention Center Complex.

Seats are selling fast! Reserve your tickets now at the SPECIAL CONFERENCE PRICE in First Base or Third Base Level 100 International Literacy Association seats: only \$45.00 + s/c

<https://eventbrite.com/event/16734554503/>