

Reading in the Middle

A newsletter for the Middle School Reading Special Interest Group of
the International Reading Association

Volume 6, Issue 1

Spring 2014

Inside this issue:

Middle Level Teacher
Candidates as Readers 3

New Kid on the Block 9

Yes, Content Area
Teachers, There's an App
for that 11

New Middle Grade Titles
of Note 13

Using Trade Books to
support Disciplinary
Literacy 16

MSRSIG at IRA in New
Orleans 18

Editor: Nance S. Wilson, Lourdes University

Officers: **Chair:** Nance S. Wilson; **Chair Elect:** Carla Meyer; **Past Chair:** Eileen Diamond; **Secretary:** Jennifer Fong; **Treasurer:** Billie Jo Dunaway

Review Board Members: Sherron Roberts, University of Central Florida; Jeffrey Kaplan, University of Central Florida; Vicky Zygouris-Coe, University of Central Florida; Melanie Koss, Northern Illinois University; Lisa Laurier, Whitworth University; Jennifer Fong, Toledo School for the Arts; Jackie Koch, Lourdes University; Carla Meyer, Appalachian State University; Emily Pendergrass, Vanderbilt University

Building Readers

The focus of this issue of *Reading in the Middle* is on building readers.

In our feature article, *Middle Level Teacher Candidates as Readers*, Robin Dever and Joanne Previts present ideas for developing pre-service teachers' personal identity as readers. In helping pre-service teachers become avid readers they will encourage students to be avid readers.

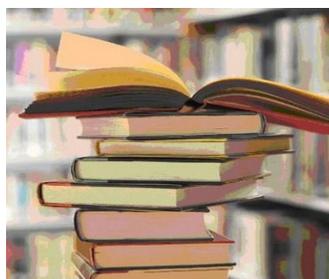
Our columnists have provided us with insightful and important information on building readers in both the language arts classrooms and across the disciplines.

Paloma Ferreira shares how a literacy

coach builds relationships with teachers through building avid readers with literature circles.

Lourdes Smith shares cross platform apps that support those needed critical thinking and literacy skills. These apps offer the background experiences often needed to support those deeper understandings we want our students to have in and outside of the classroom. The apps will help to build student engagement and encouragement for reading.

Melanie Koss' booklist helps teachers create lifelong readers by providing a list of new and notable books that will engage and encourage students to be



avid readers.

Vicky Cardullo talks about trade books to support disciplinary teaching and learning. She provides some excellent examples and some tips for choosing e-trade books.

We close this issue with a preview of the MSRSIG session at the IRA on May 11, 2014.

We hope that you enjoy this issue of *Reading in the Middle*.

The purpose of this group is to provide a network for middle level teachers to share information, ideas, activities, strategies, and techniques. To disseminate pertinent information and research on middle school reading, serve as a forum for expressing varying viewpoints on middle school reading, and promote an interest in further research in the field of middle level reading



How Does the Middle School Reading SIG Serve Its Members?

- This SIG provides its members with information regarding the teaching of literacy in grades 5-9. This group provides a forum for teachers, students, and researchers to share teaching ideas, book lists, and research applications.
- The SIG publishes a peer-reviewed newsletter twice a year with teaching ideas, book lists, and research applications.
- Membership provides you with access to past and present issues of *Reading in the Middle* through our organization's website.
- The SIG presents an interactive professional development session as part of the Annual Convention of the International Reading Association.



Middle Level Teacher Candidates as Readers

Robin Dever, Kent State University-Geauga

Joanne L. Previts, Georgia College and State University

Teacher candidates enrolled in middle level education programs are a fascinating, diverse group of individuals. They are committed to working with a unique and diverse population of learners whose habits, attitudes, and beliefs about reading are strongly influenced by their words and actions (Stairs, & Stairs Burgos, 2010). Among the many cognitive, social, emotional, and physical changes middle school students undergo, their quest to form a personal identity is of particular concern for this population. Therefore, it is imperative that teachers of young adolescents possess a disposition that appreciates and values reading in order to positively influence middle school students' attitudes about reading. One component of middle level teacher education programs should be devoted to exploring and addressing this affective domain. This is an opportune time for teacher candidates to critically reflect upon and think about their identities and actions as readers. Once these candidates see themselves as readers then they may be more likely to use this enthusiasm and passion for reading to help young adolescents develop their own personal identity as readers and motivation to engage in a variety of reading practices.

Teacher Candidates as Non-readers

While many teacher candidates recognize the importance of personal reading, they fail to participate in this practice (Nathanson, Pruslow, & Levitt, 2008). Many teacher candidates identify that they have no use for reading other than for academic purposes (Applegate & Applegate, 2004). Therefore, in addition to dispositional factors, teacher candidates' actions need to reflect their beliefs—they need to be readers and engage in the practice of personal reading. Teacher educators have opportunity to provide experiences that encourage and compel teacher candidates to: examine their beliefs about reading and their reading practices; become knowledgeable about the discipline of reading; as well as identify and develop the skills needed to generate, develop, and sustain a culture of reading for both academic and nonacademic purposes.

Teachers have an impact on their students' reading. This includes going beyond teaching the basics of reading but also includes developing their students' intrinsic motivation to read and their passion to be a reader themselves. The influence a teacher has on passing these traits onto students has been explored as far back as the 1970s (Mour, S.I., 1977; Mueller, 1973). Many seem to agree that the

influence teachers can have on students to become avid readers can be dependent on their own enthusiasm as a reader and their engagement in reading for multiple purposes (Applegate & Applegate, 2004; Brooks, 2007; Cremin, Mottram, Collins, Powell & Safford, 2009). Teachers who are enthusiastic and engaged in reading are more likely to pass these traits onto their students (Applegate & Applegate, 2004). These types of teachers often express their enthusiasm for reading to their students and in turn, their students also become motivated to be readers. In addition, teachers who are enthusiastic about reading themselves are more likely to use instructional methods such as literature circles and discussions (Brooks, 2007; Dreher, 2003) that engage their students in the texts they are reading at a deeper level than just reading for low level understandings.

A problem arises when teachers who are not enthusiastic expect their students to be engaged and motivated about reading. If a teacher does not possess a certain characteristic, then how is it expected that students will be able to gain it? These teachers take on an attitude of "Do as I say, not as I do." Applegate and Applegate (2004) found that 52% of teacher candidates classified themselves as unenthusiastic readers. Candidates attributed their lack of reading to the instruction they received in their early school years, and often viewed the books they were re-

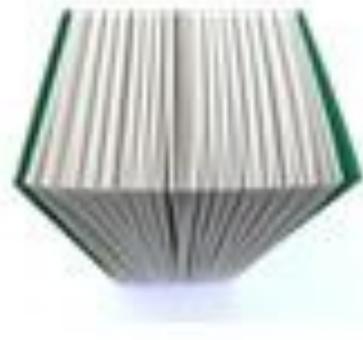
quired to read in school as boring and dull (Applegate & Applegate, 2004). Cremin, et al. (2009) provides additional support for these findings by stating that 62% of classroom teachers could only name one or two children's fiction authors and 58% could identify less than two children's poets. Nearly 25% of teachers could not identify any children's authors. These results support that teachers are not readers themselves and are not keeping themselves abreast with children's/young adolescent literature. If this issue is viewed as a cycle, where teachers who are unenthusiastic/uninformed about reading are responsible for teaching young adolescents, then teachers are likely to continue the cycle of producing unenthusiastic /uninformed readers. The question then becomes: How do we stop this cycle?

The issue of identifying oneself as a reader is of particular importance to teachers of young adolescents. These students “undergo more rapid and profound personal changes between the ages of 10 and 15 than at any other time in their lives” (National Middle School Association, 2010, p. 5). Erikson (1963) contends that during these years, adolescents make choices that determine their sense of personal identity. Young adolescents make decisions about their beliefs, habits, and social connections—who and what they choose to value is likely to impact their academic lives. Of the plethora of areas in which teachers may influence middle graders, the ways in which middle grades students view themselves as learners and, more specifically, as readers should be a top priority to educators.

Transforming Teacher Candidates to Readers

Teacher educators generally are committed to assisting middle grades teacher candidates' development and, in particular, their dispositions toward reading and their reading practices. The following sections discuss the role of teacher educators in helping teacher candidates develop their identities as readers in order to positively influence young adolescents during this period of identity deliberation. There exist numerous learning strategies and experiences in which teacher candidates may have opportunity to participate as a way to develop the knowledge, skills, and dispositions that help form their identity as readers.

In order for teacher candidates to form their identities as readers, and ultimately translate these



identities to their students, teacher educators need to work with their students in helping them to see themselves as readers. These teacher candidates will inspire their students to be the same (Applegate & Applegate, 2004; Dreher, 2003). This task is not an easy one nor is it one that can be done within a short amount of time. It is a lengthy task that is multi-faceted. Changing how adults perceive themselves can be a challenging undertaking but is certainly possible.

Several activities can be used to help teacher candidates reflect on their lives as readers. The first of these is the use of a reading autobiography in which a teacher candidate critically examines his/her journey as a reader. How did it begin? Who helped them along the way? What challenges did they face? How did they overcome these challenges? Samples of actual students' reflections include: “Most of what I have had to read or write in college has been boring,” “Both of my parents worked full time jobs, so I do not believe they read to me very often,” and “This teacher was the total package. She allowed us to read books that were of interest to us, followed by very comprehensive instruction on how to write effectively. We read short stories, plays, novels, fiction, and non-fiction. She made reading plays fun!” Once these key aspects of their lives are identified, then the candidate can reflect on how each one influenced them, either positively or negatively, as a reader. Typically while completing this activity, teacher candidates identify the role of a teacher in their journey. This teacher usually either helped them become a reader or deterred them from continuing to read. Reflecting further on the teacher's actions and/or dispositions can help teacher candidates see what their future role will be in working with young adolescents and the impact they can have in their students' reading attitude and aptitudes.

Once teacher candidates can identify their per-

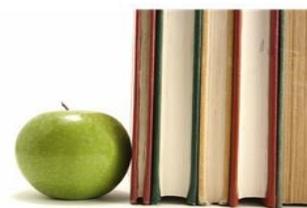
sonal past and how it affected them as a reader (or a non-reader) then they can work on strengthening their role as a reader or simply identifying themselves as a reader in the first place. There are many ways to help teacher candidates experience success in their identification of themselves as readers and the continued development of their enthusiasm for reading. The first way, and possibly the simplest, is to expose them to a wide variety of young adolescent literature. These pieces of literature should cross a span of many genres, cultures, reading levels, and formats. Typically, non-readers associate 'in-school reading' with reading classics or texts that do not relate to their interests. By exposing students to a wide range of literature, they can see that young adolescent literature is not limited to these types of text. One method that can be used to accomplish this is through the use of a book pass whereby a diverse collection of texts is made available to students as a way to browse through and explore texts. As part of a book pass, a teacher candidate gathers information about a piece of text by examining its cover, reading the book summary and maybe a selected passage or two. After this information is retrieved, one can jot down initial reactions, thoughts regarding what one specifically noticed about the book, and whether or not he/she would like to read it and why this decision was made. The aim of this exposure is for teacher candidates to identify pieces of literature that they enjoy or at least identify with in some way.

Once candidates are exposed to these various forms of text, allowing them to choose what they will read is important in allowing them to have a voice in selecting texts. If this occurs, then they may be more likely to read that piece and others like it. After teacher candidates experience the process of having a choice in selecting texts, they can reflect on how important that part of the process was in their enjoyment of and understanding of the text. After reading any literature, reflection on not just *what* was read, but also how they *felt* when they read is important. Many of us have specific emotions/feelings that are strongly tied to particular actions; noticing how one feels during a literate experience may offer further insight into one's identity as a reader. As well, becoming aware of the emotional connection between self and reading is relevant because it helps candidates remember what it is like to be a young adolescent reading different texts and how they feel when they are asked to read something in

class. These emotions could either be positive or negative dependent upon many factors including the presence of student choice and voice regarding what they read, the variety of choices offered to them, and the enthusiasm level of their teacher to reading.

After teacher candidates begin to select and read texts based on their personal preferences they need to also analyze how choice influences their reading dispositions and practices. Because young adolescents will have varying interests, reading levels, and prior literary experiences, teacher candidates will need to have knowledge about a wide-range of texts. This may be accomplished by challenging teacher candidates to select and read texts outside of their preferred genres to help them develop their practice as reading teachers. Teacher candidates can be directed to popular book lists such as The Young Adults' Choices Reading List sponsored by International Reading Association, The Best Books for Young Adults, the Michael L. Printz award sponsored by the Young Adult Library Services Association, and <http://www.adlit.org>. Middle grades teachers should be adept in engaging in conversations about a wide-variety of literature, including varying genres, cultures, reading levels, and types of texts. These forms of texts should reflect the interests and backgrounds of the unique and diverse students they teach.

Another important realm of showing teacher candidates how they can help young adolescents become engaged and enthusiastic readers is to help them understand how to establish a literacy rich environment that supports their students as readers and conveys a message of comfort and safety as readers. This environment also gives students the encouragement to interact with texts rather than just read them superficially. On the surface, this environment is set up physically in a fashion that promotes dialogue and interaction. This includes having desks arranged so that stu-



Call for Manuscripts

The International Reading Association's Middle School Reading Special Interest Group seeks manuscripts for *Reading in the Middle* an independent peer-reviewed publication. The journal publishes two issues a year sharing original contributions on all facets of language arts learning, teaching, and research focusing on young adolescents. *Reading in the Middle* offers middle level educators a practical guide to best practices in middle schools.

Reading in the Middle disseminates pertinent information and research on middle school literacy, serves as a forum for expressing varying viewpoints, and promotes an interest in further research in the field of middle level literacy. Manuscripts focus on quality programs, promising classroom practice, middle level author viewpoints, book lists for the middle level student, and teaching resources.

Presenters at the annual conference as well as other recent professional development events are invited to submit articles based on their work.

The deadline for articles is November 15, 2014, with Spring publication scheduled for May/June.

***Reading in the Middle* follows specific submission guidelines. Articles should:**

- be approximately 3,500 words and, when appropriate, include photocopied (originals will be requested upon acceptance) samples of students' work, photographs of students working, charts, diagram ms, or other visuals (work submitted by students may be of any length up to 3,500 words);
- offer specific classroom practices that are grounded in research;
- be double-spaced with 1-inch margins in 12-point font;
- include 100-word abstract and bulleted list of key points;
- follow the current edition of the publication manual of the *American Psychological Association*—please do not include an abstract, footnotes, endnotes, or author identification within the body of the text.
- identify any excerpts from previously published sources; should their use require a reprint fee, the fee payment is the responsibility of the author.

To submit a manuscript:

- submit a copy of your manuscript for blind review as a Microsoft Word file to MSRSIG@gmail.com attach a separate cover letter that includes your name, affiliation, home and work addresses and telephone numbers, fax number, email address, and issue for which you are submitting. Your name should not appear anywhere in the text.

dents can see each other and the teacher in order to have conversations between students and between the students and teacher. This dialogue allows students to become engaged with others about a piece of text rather than simply answering questions from the teacher. Unfortunately, the latter is the style of reading that most teacher candidates are familiar with and may be tempted to replicate in their classrooms unless and until they experience and critically examine alternatives. Another essential element of this literacy rich environment is having a classroom library filled with a variety of texts so as to provide students with easy access to an exceptional and diverse supply of reading materials.

On a physiological level, teacher candidates need to be aware of how to arrange and maintain a classroom environment in which young adolescents feel safe to converse about a piece of text and develop the capacity and confidence to respond to it on a personal level. This allows students to, “take intellectual risks, to be bold with their expectations, and to explore new challenges” (NMSA, 2010, p. 34). A secure, comprehensive reading environment needs to be experienced by teacher candidates as part of their teacher preparation curriculum in order for them to be able to identify, analyze, and establish key attributes of this type of environment. When requiring teacher candidates to read different forms of literature and then reflect on their perceptions of choosing a book and reading it, they must also feel safe and confident in expressing their personal views of the text and feel comfortable in engaging in critical discussions about the text. Here again, this may be a departure from what they have been exposed to in the past. If their past includes reading a text and responding only to low-level questions then they may not be familiar with how to engage students in higher-order thinking nor incorporating personal expression regarding the text.

In conclusion, teacher educators need to acknowledge how teacher candidates’ identity as readers as well as their attitudes towards literacy influences their practice as well as young adolescents. Teacher educators need to carefully craft learning experiences that help teacher candidates increase their awareness of how they define themselves as readers as well as continually examine and develop these identities and skills and as teachers. This needs to be recognized not just by teacher educators but also by the candidates themselves. Teacher candidates’ dispositions about reading may be positively influenced through the use of reflection on who they are as readers, exposure to and engagement with a wide range of young adolescent literature, and being part of a literacy rich environment. This in turn may be translated to their students in the classroom and the cycle of unenthusiastic, unmotivated readers can come to an end. More importantly, as young adolescents are forming their general identities within society, they may more be likely to choose to make being a reader part of their identity.

References

- Applegate, A. & Applegate, M. (2004). The Peter effect: Reading habits and attitudes of preservice teachers. *The Reading Teacher*, 57(6), 554-563.
- Brooks, G. (2007). Teachers as readers and writers and as teachers of reading and writing. *The Journal of Educational Research*, 100(3), 177-191.
- Cremin, T., Mottram, M., Collins, F., Powell, S., & Safford, K. (2009). Teachers as readers: Building communities of readers. *Literacy*, 43(1), 11-19.
- Dreher, M. (2002). Motivating teachers to read. *The Reading Teacher*, 56(4), 338-344.
- Erikson, E. H. (1963). *Childhood and society* (2nd ed.). New York, NY: Norton.
- Mour, S.I. (1977). Do teachers read? *The Reading Teacher*, 30, 397-401.
- National Middle School Association. (2010). *This we believe*. Westerville, OH: NMSA
- Nathanson, S., Pruslow, J., & Levitt, R. (2008). The reading habits and literacy attitude of inservice and prospective teachers: Results of a questionnaire survey. *Journal of Teacher Education*, 59(4), 313-321.
- Stairs, A.J., & Stairs Burgos, S. (2010). The power of independent, self-selected reading in the middle grades. *Middle School Journal*, 41(3), 41-48.

Middle School Reading
SPECIAL INTEREST GROUP

THE INTERNATIONAL READING ASSOCIATION
OFFICIAL MEMBERSHIP FORM



MSR is a "Special Interest Group" of the International Reading Association (as revised May 2, 1973), and shall serve the same geographic area that the International Reading Association encompasses.

The purpose of MSR shall be:

To provide a network for middle level teachers to share information, ideas, activities, strategies, and techniques.

To disseminate pertinent information and research on middle school reading, serve as a forum for expressing varying viewpoints on middle school reading, and promote an interest in further research in the field of middle level reading.

3. To act as a resource body to aid middle school teachers in implementing or improving reading and study programs for their students.

4. To sponsor conferences, meetings, and publications planned to further the purposes of MSR and International Reading Association.

___ YES, I wish to continue my membership or join MSR: **non-paying member (receive access to on-line resources)**

___ YES, I wish to continue my membership or join MSR, support the MSR-SIG, and contribute funds to support printing of the newsletter for IRA, further the mission, support graduate students, and support maintenance of the SIG: **enclosed is my check for MSRSIG for \$10.00.**

Send this form with your check to:

Billie Jo Dunaway

4640 Secret River Trail

Port Orange, FL 32129

E-mail Dr. Nance S. Wilson if you have any questions: nwilson@lourdes.edu

NAME _____

SCHOOL _____ POSITION _____

ADDRESS _____

CITY _____ STATE _____ ZIP _____

PHONE _____ FAX _____

E-MAIL _____

HOME ADDRESS _____

CITY _____ STATE _____ ZIP _____

HOME PHONE _____ VOICE MAIL _____

New kid on the block: How one literacy coach fostered a trusting relationship with a teacher through students

By: Paloma Ferreira, Ed.D.
Jackson Middle School

Literacy coaching has become an essential component of the efforts toward reading improvement in secondary schools. Essentially, literacy coaching has been described as “integral to larger instructional plan that targets and aligns professional development towards the district’s goals” (Neufeld & Roper, 2003). Joyce and Showers (1996) argued that teachers need the opportunity to learn new techniques and strategies, to observe and receive feedback, in their own classroom setting.

As persuasive as these definitions of literacy coaching might be, there is very little discussion about the relationship between teachers and literacy coaches. The relationship between literacy coaches and teachers can be individual to each teacher, and it can be impacted by the different roles coaches perform. The roles assigned to literacy coaches are defined by school culture; thus, some literacy coaches might be expected to perform administrative duties and others might be expected to write grants and conduct

professional development. These different “hats” might negatively impact the relationship between teachers and literacy coaches.

For example, as a new literacy coach, one of the biggest challenges I faced was building relationships with teachers. A trusting relationship between teachers and coaches is the essential foundation for continual job embedded professional development. Due to the multifaceted roles that I play as literacy coach, such as participating in administrators’ meetings, and helping with student supervision, many teachers might see me more as an administrator rather than a coach. This might cause apprehension in and among teachers. Thus, many may be skeptical about sharing questions and/or opening their classrooms. For instance, when I conducted classroom visits, it was clear that teachers had overly prepared and almost “put on a show.” Although these visits can be helpful in creating trust with teachers, they are not a good reflection of actual classroom instruction. Further, after the classroom visits there was very little time for coach-and-teacher conversa-

tions, and to make plans for future actions.

To alleviate this situation, I began to invest my time into building relationships with students rather than with teachers. This process began during morning school, one of the roles I inherited as a literacy coach. At our school, we offer a daily voluntary 30-minute academic program. In this program, students are required to read or work on homework at the library; at the end of the thirty minutes, students gain access to the gym for recreation. As a supervisor of the program, I started helping some Language Arts students with their worksheets for literacy circles.

During our conversations, always initiated by me, I asked students about their roles in the literacy circle. Their teacher, hereafter referred to as Teacher T, uses a traditional format, where she selects the books from the Common Core State Standards Text Exemplars and Sample Performance Tasks (CCSS, 2012). In each group, students have to complete a sheet and participate in the literacy discussion as a *connector*, a *word wizard*, a *passage master*, and *discussion director*. The *connector* is responsible for

making connections between their reading assignment and other books they have discussed. The *word wizard* is required to select a few words that might be new, or essential to the understanding of the passage, and explain them to the group. The *passage master* is responsible for recording passages that students in the group considered memorable, or an “aha” moment. The *discussion master* is required to create questions about the passage for discussion. Teacher T decided that one question can be low level, and two other questions have to be higher order thinking (HOT) questions. The decision to include HOT questions was based on this year’s School Improvement Plan. Teacher T also has a policy for students who do not complete their sheet, which includes removal from the literacy circles. According to her, this policy avoids off-task conversations because students did not prepare. It also teaches accountability when working in collaborative settings.

Some of the students I worked with were a group of eighth graders who were reading and working on *Freedom Walkers* by Russell Freedman and *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* by Mark Twain. While reading their work, I noticed that they were struggling with designing HOT questions. In the small amount of time, I helped them go beyond “right there questions” and formulate questions that require thinking outside the book, and/or making connections to other books or texts.

After working with this class for a couple of weeks, I gained some basic knowledge, such as student names, preferences and behaviors. I also gained some knowledge of their academic aptitudes, such as vocabulary knowledge, interest in the book and how much effort they put in the class. With this information in hand, I “accidentally” met with Teacher T at the media center. This meeting turned into an hour-long coach-to-teacher conversation.

Once I approached the conversation with specific information about students, Teacher T was more open to discuss her curriculum choices. During the conversation, my questions were specifically about her literacy circle, how she runs it in her classroom and whether she has used it with struggling and successful students. Teacher T was completely trusting, shared information and invited me to see how she implements literacy circles. The conversation, face-to-face at first, migrated to emails and more visits to her classroom.

Currently, I have plans to implement literacy circles in the reading classes at my school. There is very little independent reading happening in these classes, and literacy circles can impact student engagement, vocabulary, and appreciation for reading. Further, the practices required in literacy circles can help teachers meet the Common Core State Standards (CCSS). In particular, through the use of literacy circles, students will be exposed to *key ideas and details*, *integration of knowledge and ideas*, and *range of reading and levels of text complexities*. Teacher T has offered to help me establish literacy circles in other reading classes, by conducting peer observations, and sharing resources. Our professional relationship continues to grow.



Yes, Content Area Teachers, There's an App for That!

Lourdes Smith, University of
Central Florida

Content area literacy in the middle school classroom touches on a variety of topics, concepts, and subjects. We can think about content area literacy “as the ability to use reading and writing for the acquisition of new content in a given discipline” (McKenna & Robinson, 1990). McKenna and Robinson (1990) specifically consider general literacy skills, prior knowledge of content, and content-specific literacy skills as three cognitive components of content area literacy. It is thought that in order to assist students with becoming literate in each content area they must be provided tools that will allow them to think and learn about the subject and content (Vacca & Vacca, 2002).

There are many strategies and tools available to assist our middle school students with learning the vast array of content that is covered. It is important to remember that not every strategy or tool will work for every area disciplinary subject; what may work in science may not work as well, or at all, in math or English language arts. We must consider what tools and strategies best fit the material we are covering while also meeting students' needs and appropriate standards. As we move forward we must continue to assist our students with using texts, and other applica-

tions, so that they understand the content at more meaningful levels. Deeper readings combined with scaffolding of appropriate reading strategies can assist students to think and talk like a scientist, historian, or mathematician, which lends itself to a more thoughtful comprehension of the material and the content area itself.

Many content specific concepts and topics can be learned and practiced by integrating apps into instruction. Apps specific to content areas, along with literacy apps that support those needed critical thinking and literacy skills, can be found across platforms and devices. These apps offer the background experiences often needed to support those deeper understandings we want our students to have in and outside of the classroom.

The following applications were specifically chosen for middle school students and middle school content areas.

English Language Arts

Idioms (cost: free for lite version)

iPad

This idioms app provides an opportunity for students to improve their reading ability by successfully utilizing native level expressions. The app includes over 600 common idioms with explanations, examples, and illustrations.

Brush of Truth (cost: \$1.99)

iPad

Looking for something to engage your reluctant readers? Then Brush of Truth may be a great app choice for you. Brush of Truth is a book where the reader makes choices of where to go in the story. With 65 decision points and 20 possible endings, the reader has many options on which path they want to follow. It includes challenges, riddles, and mysteries for the readers to work through as they read the text.

Literacy Skills

Subtext (cost: free/premium features are available for \$2.99 per user)

iPad

Subtext is an iPad app (Android version coming soon) that allows teachers to use the tools they need to enhance the learning experience for each student. Digital books or documents can be downloaded onto an iPad device and, via Subtext, teachers can create groups, send students notes and ideas within the group that will show up on their device, and track students as they progress. Subtext is great for analysis and critical thinking as teachers can send questions for specific pages of the digital text and students can write their own thoughts and ideas to send back to the teacher. Teachers can also create assignments or modify and incorporate the premade ones created by Subtext. This application can be used across content area subjects.

Math

Minds of Math (cost: free)

iPad

This free app and website (<http://mindsofmath.com/index2.html>) developed by IBM provides a multi-media and interactive journey about the story of mathematics and its role in our progress as humans. Included are specifics on how math influences everything from science to music, art, everyday life, and culture. Highlights include a 3D chronological view timeline and online, educational films.

DragonBox Algebra (cost: \$9.99)

Android, iPad

If you're looking for an app that is fun, educational, and about algebra then this may be the app for you! Containing over 350 puzzles, this educational game focuses ages 12 to 17 that want to learn or practice their algebra skills. The game includes practice and play on areas such as positive and negative signs, addition of fractions, factorization, and substitution.

Buzzmath (cost: free/does cost per student)

iPad

Did you hear the latest buzz? Buzzmath, an app available for iPad, boasts a collection of 3,000+ mathematical problems that are aligned with the common Core State Standards. Buzzmath is specifically designed for middle school math practice and focuses topics such as number sense, fractions, decimals, algebraic equations, geometry, measurement and other mathematical areas.

Science

Monster Physics (cost: \$0.99)

iPad

Monster Physics is a building app that allows you to play and learn with physics. This app allows for free and mission based play involving specific challenges for you to solve. Also included are tutorials and a learn section that introduces basic physics concepts.



NASA's Earth Now (cost: free)

Android

NASA's Earth Now is an application that provides recent global climate data from Earth satellites, including surface air temperature, carbon dioxide, carbon monoxide, ozone, and water vapor as well as gravity and sea level variations.

Bobo Explores Light (cost: \$4.99)

iPad

This app offers interactive and exciting content focusing on 21 light-related topics. Topics include lasers, reflection, refraction, photosynthesis, bioluminescence, aurora borealis and the human eye. Also used are interactive 3D holograms, hands-on experiments, and supplementary materials like videos, articles, animations and trivia.

Social Studies/History

Civil War: America's Epic Struggle App (cost: \$4.99)

iPad

This app features high-resolution photos, multimedia presentations, authentic maps, and dozens of first-hand accounts on topics surrounding the Civil War. Included are articles and chapters about the major battles, biographies of the historical figures, timelines detailing each year of war.

Pocket Law Firm (cost: free)

iPad

This free app focuses on the US Constitution and uses a game simulation to allow players to learn about each amendment to the Constitution and apply their understandings to real-life situations.

References

McKenna, M. C. & Robinson, R. D. (1990). Content literacy: A definition and implications. *Journal of Reading* 34(3), 184-186.

Vacca, R. T., & Vacca, J. L. (2002). *Content area reading: Literacy and learning across the curriculum (7th ed.)*. Boston: Allyn & Bacon.

New Middle Grade Titles of Note

Melanie D. Koss, Ph. D.
Northern Illinois University

Two of the best ways to encourage students to read are to 1) to be excited about reading yourself and 2) to share new titles of note. The following are some of my favorites from the new crop of titles published so far in 2014. Help spread the buzz!

Federle, T. (2014). *Five, Six, Seven, Nate!* New York, NY: Simon & Schuster.

In this engaging sequel to *Better Nate Than Ever*, Nate's dreams of being on Broadway are starting to come true. Recently cast in *E.T.: The Broadway Musical*, Nate is experiencing what the theater is really like. Can Nate survive in a world of talent-hungry understudies, self-absorbed directors, and most importantly, New York City?

Fitzgerald, L. M. (2014). *Under the Egg*. New York, NY: Dial.

After accidentally spilling rubbing alcohol on an old painting of her late grandfather, Theo uncovers a hidden secret underneath the top layer of paint. This clever tale follows Theodora Tenpenny as she races to solve the mystery of a mysterious and

possibly stolen painting. Renaissance masterpiece! But as Theo uncovers more clues, she finds secrets involving her grandfather and must put aside her need for independence and find new friends to help her in her search.

Green, S. (2014). *Half Bad*. New York, NY: Penguin.

Set in modern-day England, witches live among humans. White witches are the good witches, Black witches are the evil witches, and Nathan was born the illegitimate child of a beloved White witch and the most evil and feared Black witch living today. His mother is dead, his father is being hunted, and Nathan is caught in the middle, not knowing if he is ultimately Black or White. Neither side wants him alive. But are things ever all black or all white? Or can one exist somewhere in between?

Lloyd, N. (2014). *A Snicker of Magic*. New York, NY: Scholastic.

Once upon a time the town of Midnight Gulch was full of magic, until a curse sent all of the magic away. After twelve-year-old Felicity moves to town, she must find a way to break the spell to bring the magic back and help save her mother's broken

heart. Felicity's love and collecting of words helps her find a way to save the town she loves best of all.

Lord, C. (2014). *Half a Chance*. New York, NY: Scholastic.

Lucy's father is a famous photographer, and Lucy is following in her father's footsteps. She loves being behind the camera lens and is always trying to practice her craft. After moving to a new town with new opportunities, Lucy decides to enter a photo contest to see if she has the talent she wants. As she takes pictures of her new town and its inhabitants, Lucy uncovers secrets, including those hidden by the boy next door, and in the process she learns the power of pictures.

Philbrick, R. (2014). *Zane and the Hurricane: A Story of Katrina*. New York, NY: Scholastic.

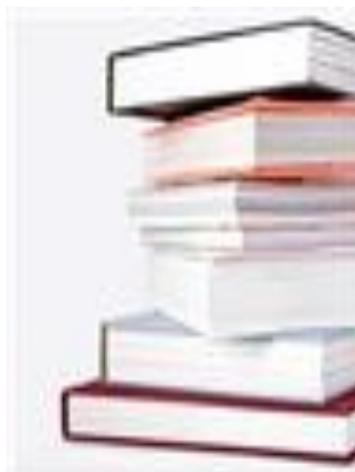
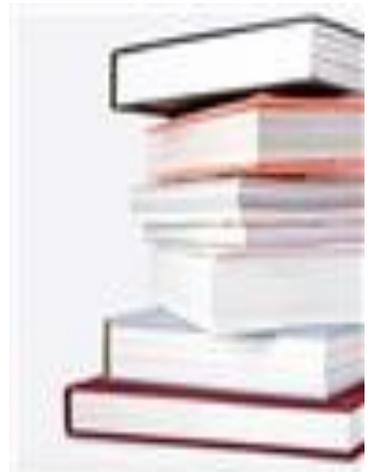
Providing a close up and personal look at Hurricane Katrina and its devastation, *Zane and the Hurricane* tells the heart-wrenching story of twelve-year-old Zane and his dog, a pair on their own trying to stay alive through the storm. After being separated from his family and picked up by another unlikely pair, the group sticks together and works to survive the swirl of water, lack of food and shelter, and loss of government control.

Starmer, A. (2014). *The Riverman*. New York, NY: Farrar, Straus and Giroux.

Riverman is a book that challenges the reader to separate reality from fantasy. It all starts when Fiona Loomis knocks on Allistair Cleary's door and asks him to write her biography. He agrees, and Fiona begins to share her story. She tells of a mysterious portal in her basement that transports her to a dangerous and magical world. Allistair has to determine if Fiona's story is true or the creation of an unstable mind.

Turnage, S. (2014). *The Ghosts of Tupelo Landing*. New York: NY: Kathy Dawson Books.

The Ghosts of Tupelo Landing brings us back to the town of Tupelo Landing that first captured our hearts in Newbery winner *Three Times Lucky*. In this sequel, Desperado detectives Mo and Dale are back to solve another mystery, the mystery of the ghost living in the old inn Miss Lana acquires. Along the way, Mo and Dale learn that there are in fact many ghosts living in the town waiting for them to discover their secrets.



Using Trade Books for Disciplinary Literacy

Guest Columnist: Victoria Cardullo, Auburn University

Understanding how to read and write like a scientist, historian or literary critic while navigating dense concepts can be difficult. Many content area textbooks are often unappealing, difficult to read and challenging to navigate. “Trade books serendipitous to a curricular topic can make the difference between a passive reader who quits when the bell rings and an active, lifelong, self-motivated reader/learner” (Sebesta, 1989, p. 114). Over forty years ago, Daniel Fader (1968) found that trade books helped struggling readers improve their reading ability. Students often read more and were more motivated to read when they had access to trade books.

Quality literature helps to expand awareness of topic, for example using a trade book such as *Sir Conference and the First Round Table* (Neuschwander, 1997) a whimsical book about King Arthur and Camelot helps to explain concepts in geometry. Quality literature provides an enjoyable read that does not overtly teach or moralize a concept, it tells the truth, has integrity and is original (Olness, 2007). For example, a quality trade book for older students, such as *Yankee Girl* (Rodman, 2004) could be used to explore racism and civil rights in the south. This trade book is viewed through the eyes of a 12-year-old girl in Mississippi during 1964 struggling with real world issues.

Technology has created opportunities for digital trade books. The ease of browsing and shopping with just a click of the button is an appealing opportunity for many. A great-paired text could be the print version of *The Diary of Anne Frank* or a digital version of *Anne Frank and the Children of the Holocaust* (Lee, 2006) paired with an electronic informational text such as *The Shoal: 100 Keys to Understanding the Holocaust* (Hurd, 2012). The electronic features such as hyperlinks, photos, video, dictionary, and pronunciation guide embedded within *The Shoal: 101 Keys to Understanding the Holocaust* (Hurd, 2012) scaffold and support student understanding of informational text. Using trade books in the classroom for



disciplinary literacy is not a new concept, although the look and feel of the text may have changed in some classrooms trade book offer support and scaffolding for the navigation of dense concepts.

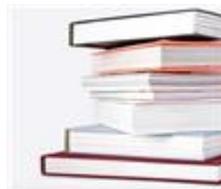
As I close this column, I would like to provide you with some cautionary advise. Often trade books are published for various audiences; it is difficult to flip through a digital text to preview the content, without first purchasing the digital text. Having depth of content and how it fits within the curriculum is important, fully reading the digital version, and “trying” the digital trade book is critical before using with students. By “trying,” I mean does it have support features such as video, interactive charts, graphs and maps, as well as a dictionary, and hyperlinks to search for additional information to support student understanding. Is the digital version of the book supportive of the cognitive load or is it simply a static text of the print version? Can students exploit features in the digital text to scaffold and support their understanding of often-dense concepts?

References:

- Fader, D.N. (1968). *Hooked on books: Program & proof*. New York: Putnam
- Frank, A. (1991). *The diary of a young girl: Anne Frank*. NY: Anchor Books
- Hurd, B. (2012). *The Shoah: 101 keys to understanding the holocaust*. Little Falls, MN: Zoomable Media.
- Lee, C. A. (2006) . *Anne Frank and the children of the holocaust*. New York, NY: Puffin Books.
- Neuschwander, B. (1997). *Sir cumference and the first round table: A math adventure*. Wa-

tertown, MA: Charlesbridge.

- Olness, R. (2007). *Using literature to enhance content area instruction: A guide for K-5 teachers*. Newark, DE: International Reading Association.
- Rodman, M.A. (2004). *Yankee girl*. Harrisonburg, VA: R.R. Donnelley & Sons Company.
- Sebesta, S.L. (1989). *Literature across the curriculum*. In J.W. Stewig & S.L. Sebesta (Eds.), *Using literature in the elementary classroom*, (pp.110-128). Urbana, IL: National Council of Teachers of English.



Authors, Teachers, and Teacher Educators: Sharing Teachable Moments for Reading and Writing in the Middle Grades

Date: Sunday, May 11, 2014

Time: [11:00 AM - 12:00 PM](#)

Location: New Orleans Ernest N. Morial Convention Center, 257

Chair: Nance S. Wilson, Lourdes University

10 min. Welcome and overview of presentations

Choose one 20 minute Round Table

Table 1: Middle Grades Teacher Candidates' Identities as Readers, Robin Dever, Kent State University and Joanne Previts, Georgia College

Middle school teachers are central in influencing their students to be readers. This session will explore data from a study of middle level teacher candidates. These data include how candidates view themselves as readers, strategies used by teacher educators to help these candidates develop identities as readers, and how the formation of an identity as a reader can impact one's performance in a middle school classroom. The formation of a reader's identity helps to motivate students to be readers and be enthusiastic about developing their literate lives.

Table 2: Writing Instruction in the Middle Grades, Stephanie Roman, Rhonda Sutton, and Shawn Watkins, East Stroudsburg University

During this round table presentation, we will share an exemplary lesson using quality literature that frontloads students for writing their own personal narratives. We will present a few explicit activities to engage students in writing to learn information in the

content areas. Finally, we will offer revision strategies to be applied during the recursive writing process that foster competent and confident adolescent writers.

Table 3: Practicing Critical Literacy With Historical Fiction, F. Blake, Tenore and Blair DeForge Hartwick College

Historical fiction offers students and teachers opportunities to develop critical literacy skills that may be unique to this text type. The purpose of our roundtable presentation is to share our critical literacy framework with examples for reading historical fiction. Participants will see how our framework maps critical literacy tenets onto historical fiction texts; experience concrete examples of how to use historical fiction to anchor middle school students' critical literacy learning; and discuss how this framework meets and extends expectations of the Common Core State Standards for English/language arts.

Table 4: The Splendors and Glooms in Middle School Reading: Using Interactive Read-Alouds with Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Students, Tracy Butler, Pamela Dunston, and Mikel Cole, Clemson University

The purpose of this roundtable is to extend findings from the literature and examine the potential benefits of using interactive read-alouds in middle school English language arts classrooms. We will discuss participants' interactive read-aloud experiences and explore strategies for selecting and using current popular press books in the classroom. Following a brief interactive read-aloud demonstration, participants will examine instructional elements that have the potential to enhance the literacy of culturally and linguistically diverse students.

Table 5: **Inside My New Interactive Notebook: Linking CCSS and Digital Literacy**, April Blakely, Eastern Kentucky University

Replace drab, uninspired student notebooks with technology-blended interactive notebooks. Engage students in manipulating information about content literacy standards using several types of writing and innovative graphic techniques. Ready-to-use resources provided.

Table 6: **Examining Social Justice Issues in Common Core Anchor Texts**, Mary Ellen Oslick and Tammy Benson, University of Central Arkansas

Participants in this presentation will discover multiple critical literacy strategies to be used with social justice texts. Participants will see authentic student responses to these texts and learn about how these fifth grade students responded to texts and the social justice issues within them.

Table 7: **The Craft of Mystery Writing and Engaging the Middle School Reader**, Michael Beil, Random House

Everyone has heard the old saw: *Write what you know*. There's some truth in it, but far more important is to write what you *like*. When I set out to write my first middle grade novel, I knew it had to be a mystery. As a reader, I loved (and still love) the way they make me use every part of my brain. (I like to think that I was a close reader before close reading was cool.) As a teacher, I'm thrilled when I see a high octane mystery pull readers into a story, challenging them to remember, to deduce, to solve, and to imagine. Best of all for teachers, middle grade mysteries offer a wide variety of topics and levels of sophistication, offering something for every reader, from the most reluctant to the most enthusiastic.

Table 8: **The Use of SCRAP: A Comprehension Strategy to Improve Reading Comprehension and Response to Literature for Struggling Urban Adolescent Readers**, Rona Olukolu, Florida International University

During this roundtable presentation, participants will become familiar with an instructional technique for engaging urban, adolescent Black and Hispanic students entitled SCRAP. The use of culturally relevant text can potentially enhance reading comprehension and response to literature of urban adolescent readers. Attendees will learn about students' responses to culturally relevant text using multiple reading strategies.

Table 9: **Exploring Young Adult Literature: Laying the Foundation for Critical Stance in Middle School Classrooms**, Lina Soares Georgia Southern University

Reading from a critical stance is an important instructional tool to help middle school students evaluate the ideological stance of a variety of texts. This presentation will provide the foundation for a literature-based instructional model that encourages middle school students to take a critical stance as they read and respond to young adult literature. This presentation will also illustrate how contemporary young adult literature can be used to explore the social, cultural, and political dimensions that influence adolescents' lives (Bean & Harper, 2004; Lewison, Leland, & Harste, 2008) and to engage content area middle school teachers in critical discussion, reading, and writing about those dimensions.

Choose one 20 minute round table

Table 1: **Raised Reading Scores AND Enhanced Attitudes: Positive changes for Success**, Sheila Gloer Baylor University, Brandi Ray, Chavez Middle School, Pat Sharp, Baylor University

During this roundtable presentation, attendees will gain insights concerning a successful adolescent literacy tutorial program, which emphasizes specific vocabulary instruction and assessment. Participants will also learn how both freshmen teacher candidates and middle school students' positive relationships build learning success and increase reading scores.

Table 2: **Critical Literacy and Multi-Genre Writing in the Middle School Classroom**, Carolyn Stufft, College of Education at Stephen F. Austin State University

During this roundtable presentation, participants will learn about critical literacy and how it can be used to promote middle school students' critical thinking and inquiry abilities. Additionally, multi-genre writing will be presented as a way for middle school students to critically respond to literature. This session will provide participants with the opportunity to read examples of middle school students' critical literacy responses to texts. Participants also will be able to view examples of multi-genre writing that present middle school students' critical literacy responses and multimodal representations of text.

Table 3: **Using the laziness of the internet to help strengthen spelling/sentence structure**, Kara Kloss, St. Bonaventure University

As teachers, we have always fought against the laziness of students trying to take shortcuts in writing full sentences, as well as spelling properly. In this age of technology and students use of Facebook, twitter, blogs, threads, and even online learning, etc., students have even more ammunition to be lackadaisical in their writing. This presentation offers teachers ways to help utilize the Internet, and spell check to attempt to enhance students writing capabilities in a fun way. Using games and competitions, the presenter will show strategies to target these issues, and help students' recognition of them. The student becomes the teacher, which is always the best way to learn.

Table 4: **Reengaging the Reading Community: Creating Literacy Pen-Pal Partnerships**, Justin Stygles, Guy E. Rowe Elementary School

Motivating readers in their last year before middle school is challenging as they disengage, before departing to a new school. This presentation explores the implementation and procedures, based on Teale & Gambrell's "Literacy Pen-Pals" (2007) in a rural, economically disadvantaged community, demonstrating how this authentic reading practice became a pivotal teachable moment. The presentation briefly discusses encouraging and inviting community members to participate in the project. The main focus, grounded in student work, demonstrates how the practice re-engaged readers by considering (adult) perspectives and strengthening comprehension over the course of two historical fiction novels.

Table 5: **A Portrait of a Seemingly Engaged Reader: A Case Study of a Seventh Grade Chinese ELL**, Maria Selena Protacio, Western Michigan University

In this round-table presentation, the author will present an overview of her case study research on Jonathan, a seventh-grade Chinese English Language Learner (ELL). Drawing upon two years worth of data, which includes a motivation assessment, comprehension assessments, interviews, classroom obser-

vations, and student artifacts, the author will first discuss how Jonathan’s reading engagement has shifted as he transitioned into middle school. Then, the author will provide data on the four reading engagement components (motivation, strategic knowledge, conceptual knowledge, and social interactions) in order to illustrate Jonathan’s overall reading engagement. Finally, the author proposes an additional component, which may need to be included to provide a more thorough model of ELL reading engagement.

Table 6: **Teaching Middle School Students to be Metacognitive in Their Literacy Learning**, Eric MacDonald and Eleanor Gensemer, Benchmark School

Presenters will share lessons and tools used in working with middle grade struggling readers to help them develop metacognitive skills in literacy learning. A mini-curriculum focused on executive skills that was used in advisory groups will be shared, as well as other tools for helping students reflect on and take control of their learning. Examples of specific reflections, lessons, and tools will be shared.

Table 7: **The Craft of Writing Non-fiction**, Stephen Swinburne, Harper Collins

Award-winning author and ukulele-playing Steve Swinburne will outline his six rules for Making Nonfiction Writing Come Alive: Steve will take you behind-the-scenes of his latest nonfiction mid-grade book, *Sea Turtle Scientist*, and show you how he employs his six rules. His strategies will kickstart a passion for reading nonfiction in your middle schoolers as well as inspire them to practice writing their own engaging nonfiction.

Table 8: **Fostering Improved Reading Instruction through the Middle School Matters Institute Implementation Plan Template**, Jacob Williams, Deputy Director of the Middle School Matters Institute

The Middle School Matters Institute (MSMI) develops and disseminates resources that increase access to research on middle school improvement (grades 6-8) to increase the number of students well prepared to enter high school and earn a meaningful diploma. This roundtable discussion will acquaint participants with the work of the Middle School Matters Institute, provide a brief overview of the reading practices and principles included in the Research Platform, and provide guidance on using the planning template to improve reading instruction at any middle grades school in the nation.

Table 9: **Do the CCSS support developmentally responsive teaching of Young Adolescents?**, Carla Meyer and Laurie Ramirez Appalachian State University, Nance Wilson, Lourdes University

This presentation will share research that analyzed how the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) align with the Association for Middle Level Education’s (AMLE) essential attributes of effective education for successful schools of young adolescents. The CCSS is a curriculum document and for the purpose of this research separate from the standardized testing that will be used to assess students’ achievement of the standards. At this time, the assessments are still under development and the specifics are not fully known. In addition, it is important to consider the standards separate from the assessment.

5 minutes Large Group Wrap-Up and Reflection/Evaluations