

# Reading in the Middle

Fall 2015

Volume 7 Issue 2



*This group provides 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.*

## Building Relationships

As we publish the Fall 2015 issue of *Reading in the Middle*, we look forward to the International Literacy Association Conference in Boston, MA July 9-11, 2016. We are searching for teachers and researchers who are interested in sharing their work with teachers across the world. Please see the Call for Conference Proposals at the end of this issue.

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

In our feature article, *Supporting Middle School Literacy Coaches: Relationships Matter*, Lenora Forsythe discusses the

complexity of providing ongoing professional learning that supports instructional practices and promotes teacher change. This paper highlights the power of relationships in enhancing the role of the literacy coach and proposes practical ways that these relationships support the literacy coaches themselves, the teachers they work with, and overall school success. Some of these recommendations include:

- Collaborating with expert teachers
- Networking with other literacy coaches
- Exploring new ways to collaborate with other local literacy coaches.

Lourdes Smith provides guidance for *Helping Middle School Students Navigate the Digital Literacy Landscape*. Her article highlights the role that digital literacy across the curriculum to guide teachers in building students who are college and career ready.

Melanie Koss shares novels for engaging middle school readers and empowering teachers to help connect students to the right book.

Enjoy this issue of *Reading in the Middle* and we look forward to your proposal for presenting at ILA 2016.

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## Supporting Middle School Literacy Coaches: Relationships Matter

**Lenora Forsythe, University of Central Florida**

### Introduction

In my eight years of coaching at the elementary level, I loved the challenge of each day, the learning opportunities, and the breadth of experiences that the position naturally offers. To expand upon those experiences, I recently spent some time shadowing instructional coaches at the middle school level. During one particular visit, I was asked to join a coach during her “rounds” in math and science classrooms. I politely agreed to do so, but was not anticipating that it would be a very beneficial use of my time. It was in those brief visits to content area classrooms that I realized the relevance of literacy coaching in all content areas. I easily identified literacy coaching points from things such as print directionality and vocabulary, to more general points such as increasing student engagement and classroom management. I was taken aback by the relevance of this experience, because as an elementary school literacy coach I did, in fact, have something to offer to the middle school coach and the content area teachers. Not only did collaborative conversations between the coach and me stimulate coaching points, but it was also evident that the coach and teachers had

established trusting relationships.

Current trends in education draw attention to the role of the teacher in raising student achievement. According to the United States Department of Education (USDOE) (2015), the quality of the classroom teacher is proven by research to be the single, most important, school based factor for a child’s academic success (Cornett & Knight, 2009). Teacher shortages are a common phenomenon across the country, and often teacher preparation programs are unable to produce enough teachers to fill vacancies (Alliance for Excellent Education [AEE], 2015). In addition, roughly half a million teachers leave the field each year, which exhausts education funding in the United States, and makes receiving a quality education more challenging in high-poverty locations where it is needed most (AEE, 2015). The middle school coach mentioned in the introduction reports that approximately 20% of the teaching faculty at her school is brand new to the field each year, which is believed to impact the school culture, morale, and sustainable, collaborative relationships. This issue, among others, raises questions about how teachers can be better supported for success in their profession.

Literacy coaching, identified as a “should be hot”

topic on Cassidy, Grote-Garcia, and Ortlieb's (2015) summation of current priority literacy topics, demands further research to offer a means for preparing, supporting, and retaining teachers (Blamey, Meyer, & Walpole, 2008; International Reading Association [IRA], 2010). Literacy coaches have the opportunity to create and foster an environment that leads to teacher growth and collaboration (Aguilar, 2013; Blamey, Meyer, & Walpole, 2008; IRA, 2010). According to AEE, demands of the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) will not be met unless teacher preparation and development are transformed (National Governors Association Center for Best Practices & Council of Chief State School Officers, 2010). In fact, specific to middle school content area teachers, the standards require the inclusion of specific literacy standards. Terms, such as text complexity, and strategies, such as determining central ideas, analyzing text structure, and author's purpose are no longer tasks limited to the English Language Arts classrooms, as they appear in the Science and History standards as well. Professional learning that is engaging, collaborative, and addresses needs determined by teachers themselves can be supported by a literacy coach and should be used to assist content area teachers in the transformation of their teaching to meet these new demands (AEE, 2015).

Ultimately, I wonder how we, as literacy coaches, stay current on best practices, when the literacy needs of teachers and students change on a daily basis. It is both intimidating, and difficult, as we are expected to be the "experts," yet we have no classroom of our own in which to experiment. This is especially a concern for literacy coaches that do not have classroom teaching experience since the onset of the

CCSS, as they are coaching instruction that they have not yet taught on their own. In middle schools there is additional pressure to have mastery of best literacy practices across the content areas and the organizational and cultural structures of middle schools make it challenging for coaches to serve the needs of all teachers and students. So, how do we keep ourselves current? How do we teach ourselves and learn from others, while simultaneously teaching others? The purpose of this paper is to provide recommendations to middle school literacy coaches for fostering positive relationships that support secondary teachers, as well as using relationships to foster growth in their own unique position.

### Summary of Research

#### The Role of the Literacy Coach

Broadly defined, a literacy coach is one who supports teachers with the goal of improving literacy instruction and student achievement (Cornett & Knight, 2009; IRA, 2010). While underdeveloped, supportive research on coaching does identify the role as having a positive impact on teacher attitudes, changes in teacher practice and efficacy, and student achievement (Cornett & Knight, 2009). At the middle school level, literacy coaches have the unique responsibility of working with content area teachers that may or may not believe literacy instruction is part of their work load, nor do they feel sufficiently prepared to teach literacy strategies (Blamey, Meyer, & Walpole, 2008; McCombs & Marsh, 2009). Effective literacy coaches spend time providing professional learning in various settings to improve teacher knowledge, they assist in making data-driven decisions, modeling lessons, observing instruction and providing meaningful feedback to teachers,

and more. The coaching model is meant to support research based best practices for professional learning (McCombs & Marsh, 2009). According to Darling-Hammond and Richardson (2009), effective professional learning is ongoing, collaborative, and embedded in the teacher's work day. A literacy coach can offer each of these elements at the school level, but he/she also requires ongoing professional learning opportunities and support systems that can support his/her roles and responsibilities.

#### Learning Experiences for Literacy Coaches

According to Cornett and Knight (2009), effective coaches require learning opportunities that foster andragogy (Knowles, 1978) which is an understanding of adult learning, in addition to a well-rounded set of teaching practices, effective communication and leadership skills, and the ability to facilitate professional learning. In 2010, the IRA issued revised, specific standards to help define the role of the secondary literacy coach. These standards state that middle school literacy coaches are collaborators, job-embedded coaches, evaluators of literacy needs, and instructional strategists in literacy and all other content areas (IRA, 2010). In a national survey that examined the actual and potential roles of middle school literacy coaches, it was reported that of the professional learning received, the most helpful activities were completing graduate level coursework and professional reading (Blamey, Meyer, & Walpole, 2008). A common theme that emerged from the coaches' responses was their desire for collaborative, ongoing, professional learning opportunities that allow for networking with other coaches

and provide a means to stay current on research and techniques (Blamey, Meyer, & Walpole, 2008).

### **Research Implications for Practice: Relationships Matter**

#### **Relationships with Teachers**

In the opening vignette of this paper in which I described visiting middle school classrooms alongside an instructional coach, there is an underlying and fundamental literacy component that went unstated. Our visits that day were completely unannounced, as was any idea of the coach dropping by with an additional observer. The surprising part is that it really did not seem to matter to the teachers we visited. In every room, teachers welcomed us and warmly greeted us. This cannot go unnoticed. Minimal research that does exist on literacy coaching highlights and recognizes the need for the coach to build rapport, trust, and camaraderie among teachers. When asked, the coach stated that a “strong rapport keeps the doorway open for me to enter their rooms at any time, as well as for them to come to me. I am grateful that they welcome me, and seek advice and feedback.” The role of the literacy coach stretches beyond knowing how teachers teach and students learn literacy skills (Rainville & Jones, 2008). Trusting, collaborative relationships build success among coaches and teachers.

In a study of middle school literacy coach perspectives, Smith (2012) highlighted establishing and nurturing relationships with teachers as an essential component of effective coaching. Relationships need to be a priority for coaches, as they provide the foundation for all other work. In middle schools especially, where the coach works with many teachers of diverse content backgrounds, it is imperative that

the coach takes the time to get to know each teacher, identifies his or her literacy strengths and needs, and develop a trusting relationship. According to Rainville and Jones (2008), literacy coaching “involves enacting varied identities to build personal relationships as well as scaffold teachers’ on-going learning in literacy education” (p. 441). I challenge all coaches to discover and develop each teacher’s strengths, and use those strengths to build capacity within the classroom, department, and school. The middle school coach shared that when one teacher is observed masterfully teaching a single element, she seeks permission to send other teachers to observe and bring that element back to their own classrooms. The coach shared that this “alleviates my need to be the only “expert” or the sole person available to model lessons, which then frees up more of my time to coach others.”

Once strong relationships are established with teachers, literacy coaches should consider how they can build their own practice by learning from their colleagues. “Optimism, communication skills, and commitment to learning are necessary for coaching success,” yet these skills are not enough (Blamey, Meyer, & Walpole, 2008, p. 320). Literacy teaching and learning changes constantly. Coaches must be willing to learn from expert teachers (and other literacy coaches) that are eager to share their expertise in instructional techniques and strategies. This is especially important in the middle school setting, in which literacy coaches are responsible for coaching all content areas, regardless of their familiarity or comfort with the content. I recommend that coaches take the time to tap into these experts, and allow the mentor to become the mentee as was shared by this middle school coach:

My key to survival in coaching science teachers is that I first refresh on the content and how it is presented to the students by attending the science department chair’s classroom. It’s as if I have to first be the student. Once I see it in action, I am more equipped to coach the other science teachers.

By taking advantage of the literacy capacity of expert teachers (especially those teaching in content areas that literacy coaches feel less familiar and efficacious with), coaches can keep abreast of the latest literacy research and strategies through various coaching methods, such as side-by-side coaching, co-teaching, model lessons, observations, or lesson study. Allowing for this vulnerability to be transparent to others also helps build trusting relationships.

From the middle school teacher perspective, I simply recommend that you utilize your literacy coach. Sometimes seeking assistance from others is perceived as a weakness that needs to be dismissed from the realm of teaching and coaching. Ultimately, we are in our profession for the good of the students. Keeping that in mind, we must consider the impact having a reflective conversation with a knowledgeable other, such as a coach, can do in expanding our own thinking and therefore, teaching. Gone are the days in which teaching happens behind closed doors. Consider the benefit of inviting the coach in to observe, model, or co-teach a lesson prior to having an administrative evaluation completed. I challenge teachers to embrace the culture of coaching by reaching out to the

coach for advice, support, or to serve as an avenue for the coach to expand his/her own knowledge.

### Fostering Relationships with Other Coaches

It is important to recognize that coaches need coaching, too. Returning to the opening scenario, I unintentionally captured the benefit of collaboration to build coaching capacity. Currently, there is no established structure that supports coach to coach learning within and across schools (Aguilar, 2013; Cornett & Knight, 2009). I encourage middle school literacy coaches to develop their own avenues for ongoing professional learning. To do this, I suggest literacy coaches seek relationships with other coaches at nearby or similar school sites. This may mean using a pre-established platform, such as a Professional Learning Community (PLC), where several coaches can gather to learn about new research and discuss practices that are happening at their schools. It may be a simple phone conversation or email to check in, or dynamic visits to both schools to meet with teachers, co-teach professional learning sessions, or co-lead a book study. Joining another literacy coach for classroom “rounds” once a month is another suggestion that is manageable and provides collaborative outlets for building knowledge. The initial session should include the development of norms and a “to-do” list, so that over time the sessions remain focused and productive. An important aspect of coach to coach interactions is that the agenda for these sessions should be set based on needs and relevance determined by the coaches themselves. Furthermore, documentation of these events is critical to prove their value over time to stakeholders, such as school and district administrators. My final tip

for making the most of these coach to coach interactions is to be intentional about prioritizing time, space, and topics of discussion in order to prevent the chaotic demands of the job from hindering focus.

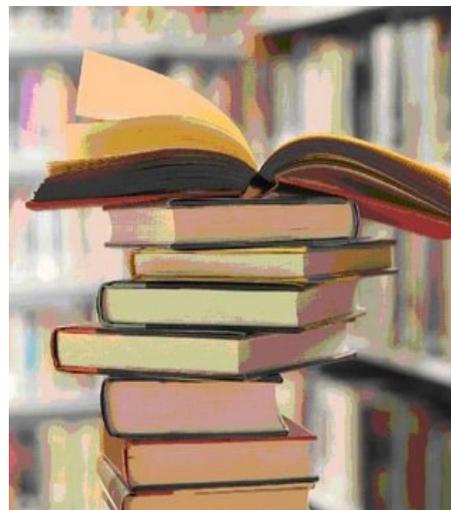
### Challenges

Regardless of a coach’s ability to establish and nurture relationships, there will always be pockets of challenge and resistance. Varying levels of administrative support may alleviate or provoke these difficult relationships. Coaches need to be secure in the reality that not all relationships will be easy, and to focus their efforts on teachers that are responsive, accepting, and collaborative. Results from effective relationships and experiences will speak volumes to those that are reluctant, and will hopefully spark teacher interest in coaching.

Common challenges are evident for including collaborative professional development for coaches, such as time restraints and having the flexibility from schools and the district. Coaches provide an outlet for creating teacher change; however, it is important to realize that such limitations exist and impact their work (Smith, 2012). Last, coaching should be considered one method for transforming teaching that should work alongside other components of an effective learning system (Cornett & Knight, 2009).

### Conclusion

As literacy coaches, how do we keep ourselves current? How do we teach ourselves, while simultaneously teaching others? We take risks. We remain humble. We seek help from other coaches and teachers through collaborative relationships that help build school capacity. We are reflective about our own learning



needs, and have the determination to find ways to meet them. We are coaches, after all, and we must find strength in walking that fine line between colleague and expert to make a difference for our school, our teachers, and our students.

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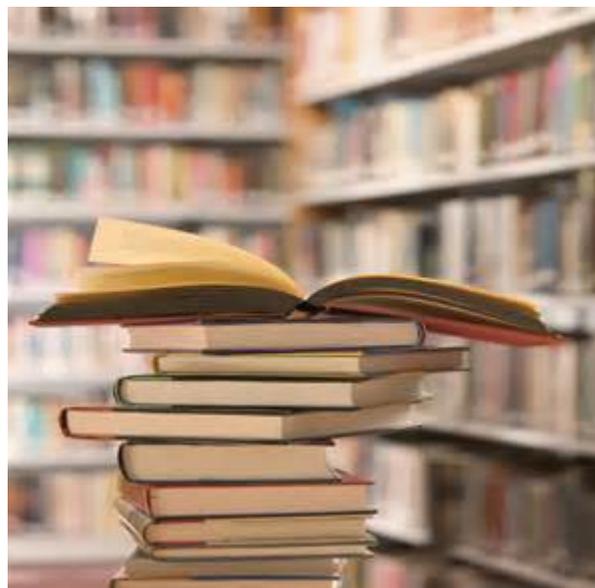
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MSR is a "Special Interest Group" of the International Reading Association (as revised May 2, 1973), and shall serve the same geographic area that the International Reading Association encompasses.

The purpose of MSR shall be:

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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 website.

The SIG presents an interactive professional development session as part of the Annual Convention of the International Reading Association.



## Helping Middle School Students Navigate the Digital Literacy Landscape

Lourdes Smith, University of Central Florida

“...it's important to remember that technology alone isn't going to improve student achievement. The best combination is great teachers working with technology to personalize the learning experience and engage students in the pursuit of the learning they need.” - U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan, 2010

### Introduction

As coined by Mark Prensky (2001), digital natives are defined as those students that have been immersed in technology since they were born with digital immigrants being those that have experiences with the same types of technologies later in life. Digital natives are viewed as being able to use Information and Communications Technologies (ICTs) quickly, easily, and actively; digital immigrants are generally older and may have a learner curve when using new

technologies. While these terms are not new, the concepts have been heavily debated. The specific abilities and needs of the digital natives and digital immigrants, in terms of the literacy skills required in authentic learning experiences go beyond just basic technology and social media use. In order to support all learners, we must focus on critical thinking instruction and learning and on finding out what really works for digital learners in the everyday classroom (Bennett & Maton, 2010; Bennett, Maton, Kervin, 2008; Brown & Czerniewicz, 2010; Wang, Hsu, Campbell, Coster, and Longhurst, 2014).

It is my personal belief that digital literacies should be integrated and developed in all content area instruction. While students of all ages, especially those in the secondary grades, often have a great deal of experience with technology they may not have the academic abilities that come with using them in

academic or educational environment. The purpose of this article is to provide information on the specific types of digital literacies, their connection to the Common Core State Standards (CCSS), and some practical applications that can be used in the middle school classroom.

Digital literacies incorporate literacies associated with the use of digital technologies including desktops, mobile devices, interactive whiteboards, digital recording devices, Web 2.0 and Web 3.0 technologies, and Internet applications such as blogs, wikis, concept-mapping tools (Ng, 2012). Specific types of literacies found in digital literacies include photo-visual literacy, reproduction literacy, branching literacy, information literacy, and socio-emotional literacy (Eshet-Alkalai, 2004). Middle school is a useful population to address for increasing integration of digital literacy into the curriculum as middle school students often are required to read independently in order to find relevant information on specific-subject areas (Colwell, Hunt-Barron, & Reinking, 2013). Internet searching, evaluation of resources, understanding of non-fiction text structures, and development of metacognitive practices and comprehension skills are fundamental to middle school students' abilities across subject areas.

Although teachers are becoming more aware of the need to integrate technology and digital literacies into their instruction in meaningful and authentic ways, there is a need to better understand how this can and should be done. It is often easy to become both excited and overwhelmed by the new ICTs and applications that are virtually developed on a daily basis. In a recent survey conducted by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation and Research Now (2015) found that of the middle school teachers surveyed, 62% felt that digital tools supported student collaboration and provided interactive experiences at an effective or very effective level. Also, 55% of those middle schools teachers surveyed noted that digital devices could effectively or very effectively be tailored to the learning experience to meet individual student needs. Still, only 30% of those middle school teachers surveyed noted that using digital resources to support students in meeting college and career ready standards was a factor to their use. The results of this survey support that many teachers are already considering ways digital learning can support students while others may need more support in their own technology use and instruction.

Whether you believe the middle school student to be a digital native or not, there is not enough evidence, yet, to determine if their digital literacies, and the skills that accompany them, transfer easily to their academic and college/career goals. The K-12 English Language Arts (ELA), College and Career Readiness Anchor Standards, taken from the Common Core State Standards (National Governors Association Center for Best Practices, Council of Chief State School Officers, 2010a), address many digital literacy strategies including the following:

- Use of technology to produce and publish writing and to interact and collaborate with others.
- Gather relevant information digital sources, assess the credibility and accuracy of each source, and integrate the information.
- Make strategic use of digital media to express information and enhance understanding of presentations.
- Integrate and evaluate information presented in diverse media and formats, including visually, quantitatively, and orally.

Table 1 represents specific CCSS for school students that address the digital literacies (National Governors Association Center for Best Practices, Council of Chief State School Officers, 2010b).

Teachers working to integrate digital literacies in their classroom instruction should be aware of not only of related instruction technological tools/applications, but they should also focus on the underlying processes that need to take place in order to support students' content and technological knowledge. The Technological Pedagogical Content Knowledge (TPACK) framework (see Image1) identifies the knowledge teachers need to teach effectively with technology Koehler & Mishra, 2009). By integrating each of the three elements, knowledge of technology, pedagogy and content, teachers can flexibly steer the lesson so that content, pedagogy, and technology interact in a specific context arranged by the teacher.

For students to become marketable in the current and future global economy, they need to be able to access and evaluate useful and reliable information and also effectively communicate that discovered



from school-based professional development and target conversations that will provide them with a framework, modeling, tools, and support for developing their students' digital literacies in content-specific and authentic ways.

### Implications for Practice

In the following section I share a couple of sources on how to incorporate authentic activities into middle grade instruction for photo-visual literacy, information literacy, and socio-emotional literacy.

#### Photo-Visual Literacy

Visual literacy has been defined as the "ability to understand, interpret and evaluate visual messages" (Bristor & Drake, 1994, p.74). Students can benefit from viewing photos, diagrams, drawings, artwork, and other types of visuals often found in disciplinary classrooms. By considering elements such as the angle, framing, light, focus, and composition in order to relate to the photographer or creator of the image, students can gain a deeper understanding of the subject, content, and context of the piece of media (Baker, 2012).

#### Resources:

- **Common Core in Action: 10 Visual Literacy Strategies**

<http://www.edutopia.org/blog/ccia-10-visual-literacy-strategies-todd-finley>

Edutopia author Todd Finley offers insights on how to teach Visual Literacy (VL) in the realm of the CCSS along with specific applications and how they can be used to enhance this digital literacy within the content.

- **Inventing Infographics: Visual Literacy Meets Written Content**

<http://www.edutopia.org/blog/infographics-visual-literacy-written-content-brett-vogelsinger>

Creating infographics may look simple to complete, but can actually be quite a rigorous and thoughtful project for middle school students. Check out this link to learn how one teacher taught his students to engage an audience, persuade, complete research, and create an infographic.

#### Information Literacy

Critical thinking is a key component of information literacy skills development.

Students can benefit from not only learning about the best way to conduct quality research, but also from how to evaluate information they find and determine its usefulness, authenticity, and validity. Student awareness in how to discern quality, conclusions, positions, opinions, and models is an important aspect of the skill (Eshet-Alkalai, 2004).

#### Resources:

- **Specific Knowledge Checklist for Information Literacy Skills**

[http://www.broward.k12.fl.us/learnresource/pdfs/info\\_literacy/MiddleAndHigh.pdf](http://www.broward.k12.fl.us/learnresource/pdfs/info_literacy/MiddleAndHigh.pdf)

Looking for a tool to support your students with information literacy skills? Use this checklist to support your students in researching and choosing useful websites and materials from the Internet.

- **Evaluating Internet Resources**

<http://eduscapes.com/tap/topic32.htm>

This site provides detailed information on how to help develop students' information literacy skills. Many resources and activities included with specific emphasis on criteria for evaluating websites.

- **Improving Research Skills with Effective Keywords**

<https://www.teachingchannel.org/videos/teaching-strategies-internet-research>

Watch this video to view how a middle school teacher helps students understand how different keywords produce different search results. Students learn how to select effective keywords to answer a research question, and test those keywords in online searches.

#### Socio-Emotional Literacy

While Internet safety is always an issue for our students, we must also consider how ICTs have allowed us communicate, collaborate, and learn from others at great distances. With this in mind, along with our understanding of the social and emotional needs of our middle school students, we must support our students' emotional and social literacies and understandings. Chat rooms, Facebook, and other types of social media have required students to increase their socio-emotional literacies in order to facilitate the skills of critical, analytical, and mature thinking as it relates to the Internet (Eshet-Alkalai, 2004).

#### Resources:

- **Why Emotional Literacy Is Good For Your School**

[http://www.sagepub.com/upm-data/35374\\_Bruce\\_Sample\\_chapter.pdf](http://www.sagepub.com/upm-data/35374_Bruce_Sample_chapter.pdf)

Although specific to those interested in special education, the authors of book chapter offers insights, guiding questions, and activities to consider the role of emotional literacy in your classroom.

- **Teaching Emotional Literacy**  
<http://www.edutopia.org/blog/teaching-emotional-literacy-maurice-elias>

Maurice Elias, Professor of Psychology and Director of Rutgers Social-Emotional Learning Lab provides information on the role of emotional literacy and its importance in the classroom.

### Challenges and Questions

While digital literacies are still ever growing and expanding with new technological and digital applications, our instructional goals need to focus on ubiquitous instruction of the digital literacies (Tribuzzi & Fisher, 2014). We need to help all of our students see, practice, and understand how technology, digital learning, and digital literacy permeate, support, and extend their learning. As we move forward into the future we must consider the role of teaching within a fluid and emerging digital context and change not only our instruction, but also how we create a digital learning culture in our schools and develop 21<sup>st</sup> century and the depositions of our students. Teachers can benefit from peer collaborations and reflections on ways to develop students' digital literacies. Here are some guiding questions teachers can use to examine the digital status of their own classroom environment:

- What aspect of instruction and curriculum can you use in your middle school classroom to connect students with digital literacies in the realm of visual, social-emotional, or information literacy?
- What changes will you make to your own current instruction to infuse digital literacies with both new and old curriculum?

Whether or not you agree on the stance that our adolescents are digital natives off school and digital immigrants in school, for academic purposes, it is important for all middle school educators to explore ways to develop students' digital literacies in discipline-specific and authentic ways. By understanding and

integrating activities that are represented by the TPACK model you will be able to have conversations with peers and plan for instruction to support students in the many facets and nuances of digital learning and literacy.

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## New Middle Grade Titles of Note

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One of the best ways to encourage students to read is to be excited about reading yourself and to share new titles of note. The following are some of my favorites from the new crop of titles published in the second half of 2015. Help spread the word!

***All American Boys* by Jason Reynolds and Brendan Kiely. 2015. Simon & Schuster Books for Young Readers. (978-1481463331).**

Rashad went looking for a bag of chips at the corner store, when he is falsely accused of shoplifting. When he tries to proclaim his innocence, he is beaten and mistreated by a cop. An African American teen and a White police officer. Who is right? Who is wrong? There was one witness, Quinn Collins, who is both Rashad's classmate and a boy being raised by the police officer in question. As racial tensions simmer and the town is divided, both boys have to grapple with contemporary reality. Written by two authors, both teens' voices, one Black and one White, are heard.

***Circus Mirandus* by Cassie Beasley. 2015. Penguin Books for Young Readers. (978-0525428435).**

Micah Tuttle lives with his Grandpa Ephraim, who has raised him with kindness and stories of the magical Circus Mirandus, a circus only children who truly believe in magic can see. When Grandpa Ephraim becomes seriously ill, Micah's strict aunt comes to live with them and separates Micah from his grandpa. Micah knows the only way to save him is to find the magical circus and obtain the miracle the wondrous Lightbender had once promised his grandfather. Once Micah finds the circus, he discovers the truth about his family. This novel is magical, and one has to read it to decide whether or not Circus Mirandus is real or imaginary. Do you believe?

***Goodbye Stranger* by Rebecca Stead. 2015. Random House. (978-0385743174).**

Everything is different in seventh grade, at least that's what Bridge Barsamian is finding. She's in the midst of adolescence and everything around

her is changing, especially her best friends. Emily suddenly develops curves, Tabitha discovers human rights, and she becomes closer to Sherm, he a boy friend or is he a boyfriend? And what is going on with the adults in their lives? Bridge explores the nature of love and friendship in this tale of humor, heartache, and mystery.

***Illuminae (The Illuminae Files)* by Amie Kaufman and Jay Kristoff. 2015. Knopf Books for Young Readers. (978-0553499117).**

When Kady Grant's planet Kerenza is attacked, her everyday normal life is thrown out of whack. Fortunately, she manages to escape her battered planet on one of three ships. Just when she thought she was safe, everything goes wrong. The enemies are in pursuit, the ship's computer is on the fritz and attacking them, and a deadly virus is spreading. Told through a dossier of computer messages, blueprints, interviews, and other nonconventional texts that make up the Illuminae Files, Kady's involvement with the complex plot is slowly revealed.

***A Night Divided* by Jennifer A. Nielsen. 2015. Scholastic Press. (978-0545682428).**

August 13, 1961. Over night the Berlin Wall is built. Twelve-year-old Gerta wakes up to find that her father and her brother Dominic are on the other side of the wall and their family is divided. She, her mother, and her brother Fritz are trapped in East Berlin. When she receives smuggled notes from her father, she decides to dig a tunnel to free her family and lead them to the other side. Amidst danger, Greta struggles to succeed. Full of historical detail, this fast-paced novel captures the reader until the very end.

***Orbiting Jupiter* by Gary D. Schmidt. 2015. Clarion. (978-0544462229).**

Troubled and traumatized, 13-year-old foster child Joseph arrives at Jackson Hurd's family farm and changes Jackson's stable life. Through the patience and kindness of the Hurd family and benevolent teachers, Joseph's story emerges. He was abused by all who were supposed to take care of him, he fathered a child he was never allowed to see, and he lost the girl he loved. Throughout the novel, Jackson becomes attached and protective of Joseph, and as tragedy strikes again, the boys must come to grips with the harsh realities of life.

***Rhythm Ride: A Road Trip Through the Motown Sound* by Andrea Davis Pinkney. 2015. Roaring Brook Press. (978-1596439733).**

This masterful book explores the history of the rise and fall of the Motown Record Corporation, the influential African American music company. Starting from the small beginnings of the founder, Gordy Berry, the book shares the stories of the artists and legends created in the studio amidst the troubling times of the 1960s and 1970s. The writing is spirited and captures the feeling of the era, bringing the reader into the Motown groove.

***Rules for Stealing Stars* by Corey Ann Haydu. 2015. Harper Collins. (978-0062352712).**

Silly's mother is an alcoholic. Her family moves to their summerhouse in New Hampshire to provide a new environment, but instead of helping, her mother's drinking gets worse. To top it all off, her father is distant and her sisters ignore her and exclude her from their secrets, until the day the secret is revealed. The bedroom closet is actually a portal into worlds of the sisters' own creation, worlds where they attain their desires. But not all desires are good. The closet causes strife between the girls. They must learn to deal with harsh realities when one sister gets trapped in the closet. Can they save her while also saving themselves?

***Terrible Typhoid Mary: A True Story of the Deadliest Cook in America* by Susan Campbell Bartoletti. 2015. HMH Books for Young Readers. (978-0544313675).**

In this powerfully written biography, the truth about Mary Mallon, now known as Typhoid Mary, is told. In 1906, Mary was a cook for a wealthy family at the onset of the typhoid outbreak. After investigation, it was discovered that she was the source of the epidemic as she was a healthy carrier, a person with no symptoms who spreads the disease. Mary was arrested, quarantined, and later denigrated when she refused to stop cooking upon her release. Her harsh treatment is explored throughout this biography, told in Bartoletti's engaging narrative prose.

***The Thing About Jellyfish* by Ali Benjamin. 2015. Little, Brown Books for Young Readers. (978-0316380867).**

Suzy can't believe her best friend Franny drowned. Franny was an expert swimmer. So Suzy sets out to discover how her friend really died and determines she was stung by a jellyfish. As Suzy undertakes her journey of discovery, the reader learns the truth between her relationship with Franny; it ended when Franny chose popularity over Suzy's friendship upon entering middle school and Suzy attempted to seek revenge. Suzy's guilt pushes the story forward as truth through grieving take place.

## **CALL FOR PROGRAM PROPOSALS Middle School Reading/SIG International Literacy Association**

2016 ANNUAL CONFERENCE  
Boston, MA  
July 9-11, 2016

Electronically send the following information to [msrsig@gmail.com](mailto:msrsig@gmail.com) by **February 1, 2016**

1. **Title of Presentation:**

2. **Presenter Information:**

First Name Last Name

Institutional Affiliation:

Position/Title:

Mailing Address:

Phone:

Email Address:

*If you are presenting with colleagues, please attach co-presenters' contact information.*

*Each presentation is limited to 20 minutes and will be presented in a round table format.*

3. **Nature of Presentation:**

Program Description

Research Report

Instructional Demonstration

Other

4. **Description of your presentation (200-400 words) that will include:**

—the rationale/objectives of your session,

—the content and method of presentation,

—significance to the field of college reading,

—co presenters' (if applicable) names, mailing addresses, phone numbers, and email addresses.

5. You must be a member of the International Literacy Association to present at the Middle School Reading SIG meeting. **ILA Membership # \_\_\_\_\_**

## 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.

### ***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, diagrams, 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](mailto: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.