

Gifted Education Communicator

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A New Teacher's Perceptions of the First Month of Teaching

Deven Lyon

On the Friday of my third week of teaching, I found myself standing in front of thirty-four 4th graders who had just taken part in a food fight. This wasn't a little food fight, mind you; this was the stuff of childhood legend -- the sort of thing you fantasized about doing as a child but would actually never have the guts to do. But there I was, fresh in my first-year and at a complete loss for how to deal with the reality at hand.

Again and again in this first month of teaching, I've been struck by the reality of how education and school cultures exist separately. Each school I've ever stepped into has a distinct feel of its own, and this makes sense to me only now.

It's the sort of thing they don't teach you in grad school. I feel a continual pressure to conform to the norms of the school, whether that be in pedagogy, classroom management, or attitudes toward students. Maintaining and applying what I have learned in a teacher preparation program and utilizing this knowledge of theoretical best practice as I have been taught it requires an incredible amount of stick-to-itiveness. The structures, ideas, and knowledge that new educators bring to the table are important, but every day we, as new teachers, are confronted directly and indirectly with the ways in which our practice should adjust to the norms of the current system. Learning from our veteran colleagues is, of course, an essential part of the educative process, and they have much to teach us, but holding on to the theoretical underpinnings that have driven our schematic constructs to this point is also a necessary piece of the puzzle.

Until I was truly entrenched in the day-in and day-out of the school system, it was difficult to understand the sort of constructs that would exist as a teacher and the pressure that would exist to be a part of the predominant atmosphere of that school. For me as an educator, it is important to maintain a classroom that is inquiry-driven and student-centered. Maintaining this habit takes an exceptional amount of intention and drive, when more teacher-centered models of instruction predominate and the pressure to implement this practice is continual and persistent. This pressure is sometimes explicit from the administration in the required daily classroom instruction. Sometimes, it is simply a result of my desire to collaboratively plan with peer teachers, who have been teaching direct instruction models for years. Sticking to what I believe of student learning theories is a difficult balancing act, and being the brand-new teacher doing something completely different from other teachers is frightening -- particularly when I know that I, like other first year teachers, am on a temporary contract waiting rehire for next year.

Increasingly, I have come to understand that the path best for kids will often not be the path easiest for me. This may seem obvious, but I didn't really understand it until I lived it. A mentor of mine once said that people who are authoritarian toward children only treat them that way that way because they don't fully see them as people, and that has always stuck with me. Some moments it is so much easier to dictate to kids than to really work with them. When students are learning how to work in a classroom that is representative of a larger democratic society, it is hard. It takes balance and work and patience on the part of the educator, and in no situation do these communities flourish in a day or even a week. They take time and a concerted amount of energy, and it's definitely something our class is still working on. Throughout my studies, when I envisioned the kind of teacher I wanted to be, it was always in a classroom where student voices dominated and their ideas drove the classroom. I know already that this isn't always the classroom I have created each day. Not defaulting to the easy route has to be a continual, intentional, and conscious choice that we make as new teachers in order to maintain our identities.

What I am coming to understand is that our veteran teacher colleagues have an immense amount to teach us, and I have learned so much already from some great educators; it is just as true, however, that we must weigh this information against our recently learned knowledge of new best practices. New teachers are in the odd position where we must be tentative about sharing our knowledge with the community around us, since we are novices in practice. In the same breath, we have the most up-to-date theoretical information at the forefront of our minds. We hear colleagues say that old phrase again and again that practice and theory do not align, and in our moments of self-doubt (which come frequently early in teaching) it feels true. It is so easy to lose your voice and your identity as an educator in the beginning. It's essential for us to remember that what we've learned is critical and important, and that we do have something to contribute as new educators.

My teacher preparation program in particular was focused on the necessity of being self-reflective. It fixated on the need to reflect on ourselves in the classroom as we were teaching, but I think it's just as important to look at our interactions outside of the classroom. In what ways are we reflecting on our interactions with colleagues? How are we being purposeful about establishing best practice in our classrooms? How are we incorporating colleagues' ideas into our classrooms in a way that complements, rather than overshadows, our own practice?

Standing in front of that group of thirty-four nine-year-olds after their food fight encompassed pure, raw, new teacher fear, and it truly was my first fork in the road moment. I knew I could stand there and yell at them for this completely ridiculous choice they had made. I would make my point, they'd understand that I was mad, and that they did something wrong. That certainly felt like the easier thing to do. Instead, I just waited, with my usually giggly students completely

silent, wide-eyed, and waiting. I thought for probably a full minute about everything I had really learned and about the teacher I wanted to be, of all the little things people I respect have said to me about moments like this. So, we talked. We talked about safety, respect, responsibility, and empathy. We talked about being ambassadors for the 4th grade, and how a choice by the few makes the whole 4th grade look bad. We talked about what an apology really means – not just the words that parents and teachers make kids say all of the time, but the concept of remorse behind the words. My group of normally rambunctious little 4th graders was totally serious as they decided they wanted to write a letter of apology. So that's what we did together, as a community. We walked down and faced the people they'd wronged and handed them that letter signed by every solemn nine-year-old.

At the end of the day, our classrooms are our own, and we're responsible for our students' development. With all of the pressure and all of the concern, we have to continually keep the most essential end goal in mind. We can take what we learn, the new and the old, and combine it when we decide what's best. In the end, we have to withstand the pressure, because we're the ones who have to believe we're doing everything we can to give our students the tools to become happy, successful adults.

Deceptively Simple and Exceedingly Rich: Using Gifted Pedagogy for Technology Integration

Angela Housand

Generation Z, also known as Centennials, are considered “mobile-natives” and are even more technologically savvy than their Millennial predecessors. Nearly three-quarters of teens have or have access to a smartphone and a whopping 92% of Centennials (ages 13-17 in this case) report going online daily (Lenhart, Duggan, Perrin, Stepler et al., 2015). Yet Centennials share a common problem with the former generation of students: They know how to use technology for socializing, but they do not necessarily know how to leverage technology for learning and productivity. It comes as no surprise then, that in a recent research study the United States ranked 12th out of 31 countries in using digital technology for learning activities like finding websites using hyperlinks and buttons, using charts and graphs to display data, or making calculations with digital calculators (OECD, 2015). As a result of these research findings, the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) calls on schools to find more effective ways to integrate technology into the classroom and suggests that the schools use the kind of pedagogies that require higher-order thinking and build deep, conceptual understanding while making the most of technology (2015). Gifted pedagogy has been working to have pedagogy that focuses on higher order thinking and deep conceptual learning implemented into classroom instruction since Gen X, a whole two generations ago (Kaplan, 1986; Renzulli, 1976; Renzulli & Reis, 1985; VanTassel-Baska et al., 1988).

Building on gifted pedagogy, specifically Renzulli’s Enrichment Triad Model (1976), FutureCasting (Housand, 2013; 2014) takes interest-driven, skills-based learning and integrates technology skill development. FutureCasting, a pedagogical roadmap, helps students connect their interests and passions to academic content while developing technology skills that will enable them to move from novice community participant to expert global participant.

The process is deceptively simple. It starts with having students introduce themselves by creating a webpage. Students are invited to share their interests and talents and required to use text, images, and graphic design that reflects who they are as a person. By simply inviting students to introduce themselves, we quickly get a sense of who they are and what engages them, with the goal of moving them toward deep engagement in curricular content by connecting their interests to a variety of content areas.

Now look at Student B’s webpage. Once again, you quickly grasp that she too likes music, but in what ways is she different? What do you think her “music industry focus” might be? How might her personality be different from Student A?



Figure 2. Student B Webpage

The first student, Student A, was quiet and reserved. She played piano and loved classical music. It was easy to connect her love of classical music to mathematics (e.g. counting, fractions, ratios, & patterns). History was also a clear link to her interests. By focusing on composers, (e.g. J. S. Bach, Beethoven, Mozart, Brahms, Wagner, Debussy, & Gershwin) a period spanning from 1685 to 1937 was easily addressed. In contrast to our classical pianist, Student B was very outgoing and loved to socialize. As she developed her website, it quickly

became apparent that she was not seeking to be a musician as much as to produce music and help others create music, hence the title of her website: “The Unsigned and Upcoming.” Two students with similar interests, but completely different frames of reference for the interest area of “music” and a simple exercise that requires utilizing technology skills reveals an enormous amount about each.

You may have noticed in this illustration that the focus was not on the technology, but rather on the students. When we are talking about integrating technology into curriculum and instruction, it is important to remember that the pedagogy should drive the learning, not the technology. Also when designing curriculum and instruction we need to pay careful attention to what motivates students to engage in the learning process. According to experts, to motivate students to engage academically, the curriculum should connect with students’ lives, seem real and useful in contexts beyond the classroom, allow for meaningful collaboration, and be sensitive to global concerns. Moreover the curriculum needs to be authentic—focused on real problems and processes, using the conventions of the appropriate discipline, and guided by habits of mind (Hockett, 2009; Kaplan, 1986; Renzulli, Leppien, & Hays, 2000; Renzulli & Reis, 2014; Tomlinson et al., 2009; VanTassel-Baska, 2011). By simply asking students to introduce themselves with a webpage that includes text, images, and a graphic design that reflects who they are, much is communicated and we have set the stage for connecting our curriculum to students’ interests, values, and identities.

Note the suggestion of connecting our curriculum to the students’ interests rather than trying to get the students interested in some predetermined or prescribed content. That is the power of having a skills based curriculum like that of the Common Core: Now we get to connect to the students to support meaning making and engagement. Take for example the webpage developed by a boy who ascribed to the “Ball is Life” movement, a term used by young people who believe they will go to college and play NCAA sports or become a famous athlete. When you look at his webpage (Figure 3), do you see the influence of sports?

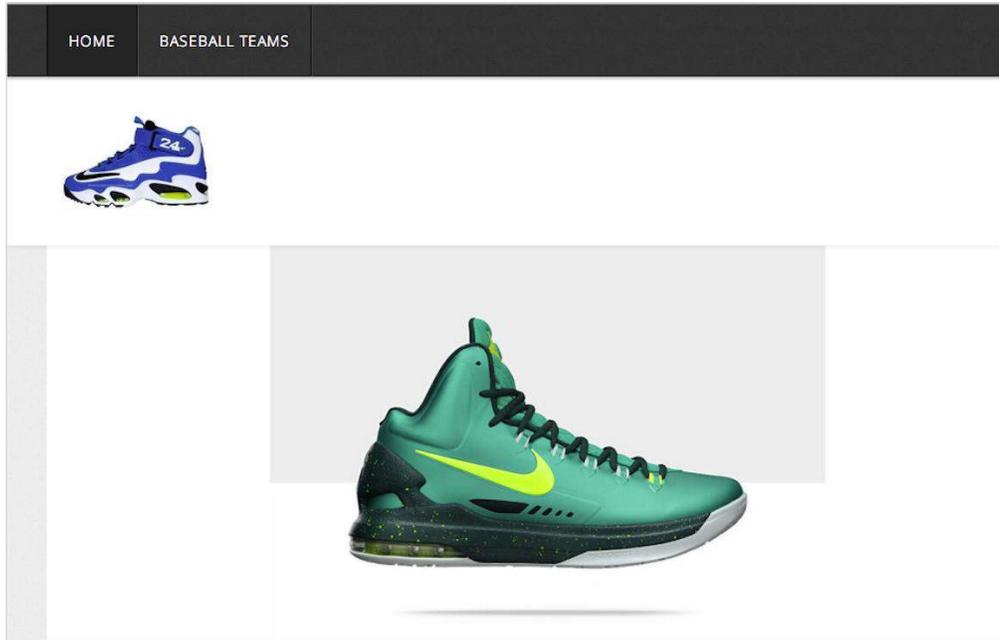


Figure 3. "Ball is Life" Webpage

This student did not include text (despite urging, coaxing, insisting, and requiring), but he did reveal something. Before I share, look at an activity in the FutureCasting process that asks students to take a text meme and insert pictures in each of the boxes (see Figure 4). The "Ball is Life" student provided six images as asked, but there is one image in particular that gave me pause. Can you guess which one (see Figure 5)?

Meme

Your Name Here



What my friends think I do.



What my mom thinks I do.



What society thinks I do.



What my teachers think I do.



What I think I do.



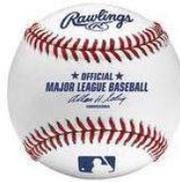
What I actually do.

Figure 4. Meme Template

about me



what my friends think I do.



What my mom think I do.



What society thinks I do.



What my teachers think I do.



What I think I do.



What I

actually do.

Figure 5. "Ball is Life" Meme Student Product

I asked the student why the last picture, "What I Actually Do," was so different from the other sports pictures: "Why football?" His reply was simply, "It's not about football; it is about the shoes." He said that back in the old days, athletes could not jump as high or turn as sharply, but the advances in the shoe technology has made athletes better and faster. As I reflected on his webpage, I was immediately struck with the idea that I should have known... He loves the shoes! With that, I had my entry point for a variety of curricular requirements both in skills and content. Design processes, hypothesis testing, physics, ergonomics, chemistry (materials development), and more; all providing entry points into rigorous curriculum.

At this point, you might be wondering: How does all of this relate to integrating technology into the classroom and teaching technology skills? Well, first of all, students are using the technology to develop the website. There are any number of website design tools available online. I like Weebly because it allows you to create a class account that does not require student emails and it is free. The technology skills developed in creating a website include, but are not limited to typing or keyboarding skills, changing font size/color/typography, software use, troubleshooting, copyright and citing sources, click and drag, saving, exiting a program, finding items in a menu, opening or closing windows, remembering passwords, accessing information online, Internet search skills, screen reading skills, spell checking, digital design and graphic layout. Those are just some of the technology skills. The process also requires students to consider their audience, develop design skills, search the Internet, communicate clearly, problem solve, use systems thinking, make judgments and decisions, manage goals and time, and work independently. Again, that is just a few of the skills required.

The meme activity is similar and is created within a word processing document. Students learn to use the word document to cut and paste, create a table, insert text, insert images, resize images and text, find images on the Internet that are not copyrighted and meet their envisioned criteria (i.e. advanced search skills); just to name a few. Beyond that, this particular activity allows students to start thinking about themselves in relation to family, friends, and society. It is amazing what you can learn about students with this simple yet rich activity.

So, when schools are called upon to find more effective ways to integrate technology into the classroom or use the kind of pedagogies that require higher-order thinking and build deep, conceptual understanding, show them that gifted education is at the forefront of making the most of technology in the classroom.

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Early Entrance to College Programs: Accelerating More than Academics!

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Abstract

The author describes two early entrance to college programs at the University of Washington, and the services provided that support students' radical transformations from middle or high schoolers to becoming young scholars in college. Attention is paid in particular to not only the academic skills needed for college success, but also the less tangible habits of mind, views of self, and social and emotional development needed to persist through the challenges they may face in the transition.

Jake is an 8th grader who spends most of his time gaming in his bedroom after school. He never does any homework because he finds it to be busywork, and he passes the tests without doing it. He programs for fun, and has even made an "app" to start his own business. He doesn't see much purpose in going to school for the next four years because he wants to be a computer programmer and start his own business. He is anxious to begin computer science courses at the university.

Lana is a 10th grade student in high school and has completed all of her math courses that she could possibly take in high school. She is tired of the cliques and drama that she sees within her social scene, and craves for more choices of interesting academic classes, particularly in the biological sciences. She has been interested in becoming a doctor since she could remember.

Without trying to generalize, or stereotype, these collective biographies describe some of the characteristics and motivation for students choosing the Robinson Center for Young Scholars' early entrance to college programs. In a recent alumni study (Hertzog & Chung, 2015), the top two reasons why students chose the early entrance programs was that they were looking for a challenge, and they were excited to learn. Over half of the students were disappointed with their previous schooling, and nearly one third reported that being unhappy socially was an important or very important reason for entering the early entrance programs.

The Halbert and Nancy Robinson Center for Young Scholars (<https://robinsoncenter.uw.edu>) at the University of Washington is home to two early entrance programs to college. Now 37 years old and one of the most radical acceleration programs in the country, the Transition School accepts students who have finished 7th or 8th grade, engages them in one year of college preparatory classes, and then assesses their college readiness before they enter the University of Washington as fully matriculated freshman at 14. Throughout the year, Transition School students take a rigorous curriculum of English, history, pre-calculus, a laboratory science (this year biology), philosophy, and service learning. In addition to taking coursework, they have weekly tutorials with their teachers, and reflection assignments designed to make them more self-aware of their own study skills, growth, and areas of challenge. In the spring quarter of their Transition School year, they take one university course integrated with college age students, on campus. A complete description of the Transition School may be found in the article, *University of Washington Transition School: College Preparation and Teaching for Transformation*, (Halvorsen, Hertzog, & Childers, 2013). Students who do well in Transition School and have demonstrated the readiness to enter the university go on to become our Early Entrance Program students (EEPers).

UW Academy

The other early entrance program, UW Academy of Young Scholars, accepts students directly into the University of Washington after 10th grade. Students have an extensive orientation program called Bridge before fall classes start and take a science and writing course together with their cohort in the fall term with older Academy students acting as their teaching assistants. They also may take an optional course in Winter Term that exposes them more to opportunities that are offered at the University of Washington including studying abroad, research with faculty, exploring majors, as well as helping them prepare for the world outside of college –finding jobs, scholarships, internships, and experiences that further their learning.

Robinson Center Support Services

Both of these early entrance programs transition students from being K-12 school oriented, to becoming young adults in college. The Robinson Center supports their growth in all of their domains to address not only their academic needs, but also the social and emotional growth that is needed to function autonomously in college and beyond. We have an academic advisor, and an academic counseling intern, who is a recent graduate of one of our early entrance programs to guide students through this process. The academic advisor has mandatory advising appointments for the first two years to assist students to choose coursework that completes

their college academic distribution requirements that they missed by not attending high school, and to check-in personally with students to assess and discuss any challenges they may be facing. The content of the academic advising sessions covers everything from how students are physically coping and handling time management (sleep, studying, recreation), to issues of identity formation, family relationships, responsibility, communication, and pathways for exploring their futures.

Within the last two years, we have added optional group check-ins with students that allow them to bring questions or issues to the staff's attention for group discussion. These sessions have been facilitated by a counseling intern from the graduate school-counseling program at the university, and more recently by our academic advisor who joined the Robinson Center with mental health counseling expertise. Many of the concerns that students discussed involved developing relationships with parents, seeking more independence, and changing their academic goals based on their newly-found interests brought about by taking college courses. In some instances, students struggled with pressures they felt from their parents. As a result, we added evening program sessions to share some of these concerns with parents. Whether or not students should live in the dormitories was a popular topic of discussion.

Parent Programs

We had three main goals of our parent programs: (1) to create and strengthen a community of parents whose children chose to attend early entrance programs, (2) to facilitate discussion among parents who had similar experiences, questions, or concerns, (3) and to provide resources on adolescent development and gifted education. We also wanted to create a space for parents to share cultural differences in childrearing and expectations they had for their children. Hearing directly from parents provided important information to increase our understanding of the students' experiences they were having in the early entrance programs. We know that family lives and relationships change when our students enter college early, and we feel that parents can be great resources for each other as they experience these changes. Much like our cohort model for students, the parents are also a group brought together by the accelerated experience.

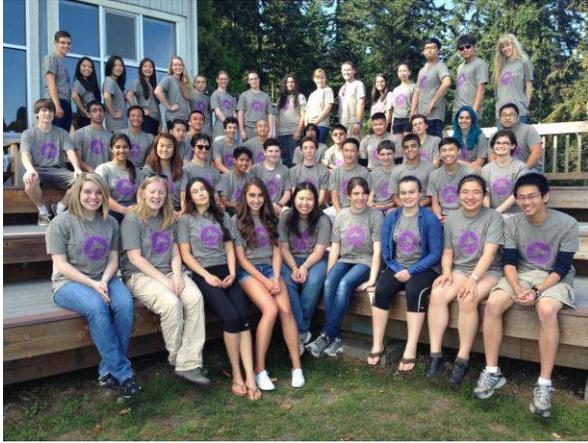
The Cohort Model

Students in our programs, especially the Transition School program, rely on each other to navigate increased demands on their academic lives, and yearnings for independence in their family lives. We have a cohort of 16-18 Transition School students, and another cohort of 35-40

UW Academy students each year. Paying attention to the ways that students in these cohorts develop relationships and friendships is an important part of the early entrance experience. We begin the year with overnight camping trips with each group. Older students from each program serve as camp counselors, teaching assistants, and informal mentors to our new cohorts. We have structured mentor programs that provide training to mentors and give students opportunities to get together with their mentors. Students also have organizations that they coordinate themselves including a Drama Society that puts on a play each year and a literary journal. Throughout the year, we hold social activities such as a spaghetti lunch, a “not a prom” dance, cooking days at the end of every term, and “Pi” day when students use the kitchen to mass produce pies. The Robinson Center itself acts a social hub for many of the early entrance students who are too young to live in college dormitories. They come to prepare their lunches, be with other early entrance students between classes, bake cookies, or play games. Walking into the Center, one immediately feels the energy and hears the often sophisticated conversations of the students. The asynchronous development between their academic skills and their social and emotional development is recognized, nurtured, and celebrated. In the alumni study, having a peer cohort was mentioned over and over again as being an important part of the total experience. One student commented, *“Having a peer group of intelligent and motivated learners helped motivate me to do more academically.” (Early entrance program, alumni).*

Going to college early means more than just taking college courses. Students who choose this path enter the adult world of planning their futures two-four years earlier than most young people. They may be making these decisions before they have had time to truly discover their passions, or they may be good at so many subjects, they want to study them all. Double and triple majors are not unusual among this group of students. Although most of the students confront challenges throughout their college years, when asked if they would make the same choice again, “89.5% of the students strongly agreed or agreed, that ‘If I had to make my educational choice over again, I would choose to attend EEP/ACAD.’ ” (Hertzog & Chung, 2015, pg. 44).

The programs at the Robinson Center continue to evolve and adapt to incoming cohorts. More emphasis is being placed on ways we can enhance the social and emotional growth of our students. We continue to stretch ourselves as faculty and staff to articulate what it takes to nurture the transition from being K-12 students to becoming life long learners and young scholars.



Transition School and Early Entrance Students
at Wallace Falls



UW Academy Students at Camp Indianola

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Student Engagement: Powering the History Classroom with Interactive Boards

Marlys Davidson

If social science is the examination of “human society and social relationships,” then it is incumbent upon educators to incorporate this study across the disciplines in a way that allows students to make critical connections as they come to know the world. Universal concepts applied across the curriculum can aid tremendously in this endeavor. To understand their application, we will focus upon POWER. As a universal concept in eighth grade at McAuliffe Middle School, students find that it encompasses studies not only in history but across the disciplines in science, math, and, most definitely, in physical education. Within the most significant pieces of literature, stories of the struggle for power drive characters and communities, as power fuels the development of deeply significant revelations that are at the heart of the author’s purpose for writing. Common Core calls for critical thinking, discussing, and writing in every classroom so that we develop skills that discourage learning in isolation and encourage more global connections. Building these skills so that making connections becomes common practice requires a concerted effort by educators to constantly provide opportunities to exercise and to encourage this purposeful thinking in our students.

Teachers rely on such signature practices as the creation of essential questions for each unit of study, the use of thinking maps, and Dr. Sandra Kaplan’s strategies for “Thinking with Depth and Complexity.” All of these are woven into modeled instruction, group work, and individual research. Their practical applications can be reflected in the use of interactive bulletin boards throughout the classroom. The teachers frame the structure of the boards. However, the content is constructed through the work of the students, and it is in continuous flux as students advance together through more complex questioning, research, and response.

Interactive Bulletin Boards as Tools for Differentiation

McAuliffe eighth graders begin the school year by being introduced to the universal concept of POWER based upon four tenets:

- POWER is always present in some form.
- POWER can shift or change.
- POWER has the ability to influence.
- POWER can be used effectively or it can be abused.

American history and language arts teachers work collaboratively to further develop this concept and its tenets by adopting the BIG IDEA that “POWER has a voice.” Students begin their exploration of this theme through exposure to carefully selected works of fiction, nonfiction, poetry, and art. History students build three interactive boards. Use of these boards

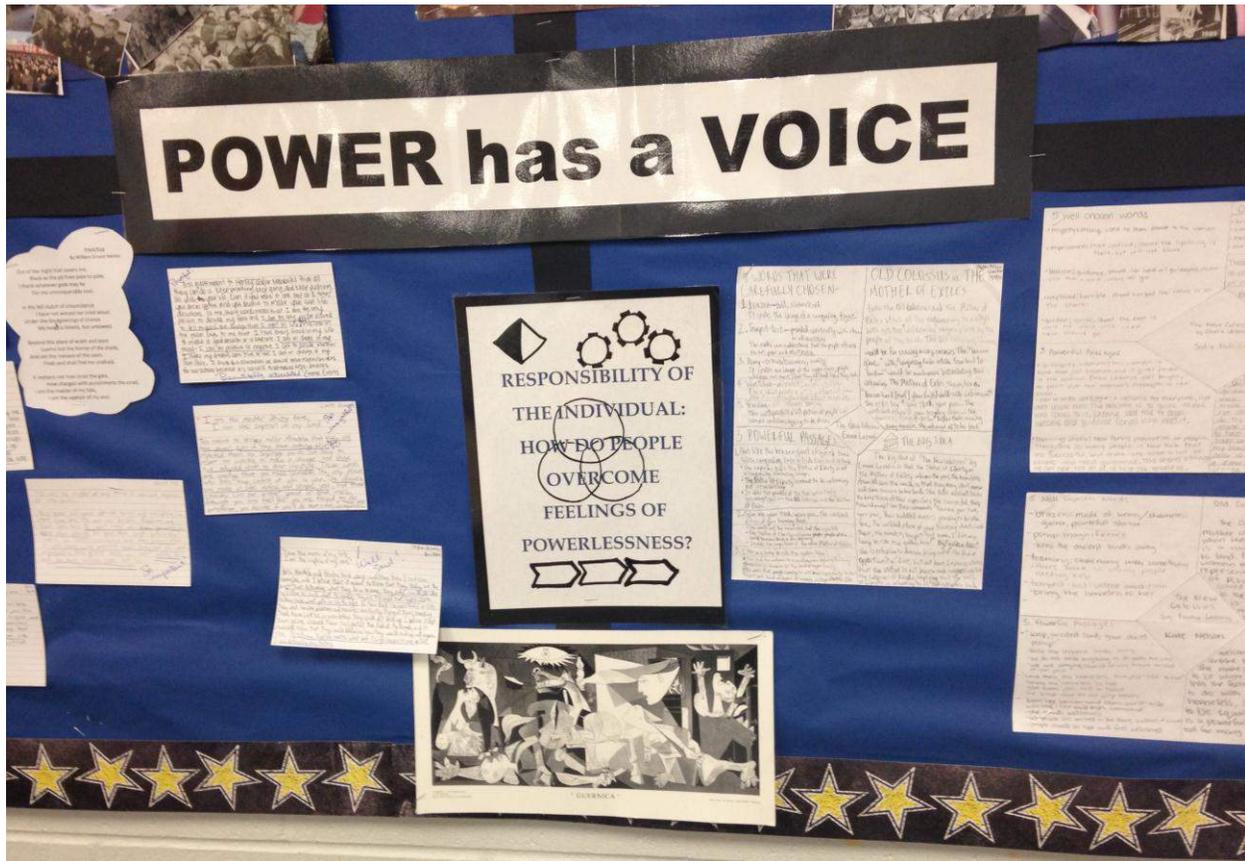
in McAuliffe's classrooms is an outcome of professional development led by Dr. Kaplan and Dr. Jessica Manzone. The first board introduces "POWER has a Voice." The second is titled "The Voice of Power in Government." For the 2015-1016 school year, this interactive board begins by traveling the path to the 2016 Presidential Election. The third is built on Dr. Kaplan's "Think Like a Disciplinarian," titled the "The POWER of Knowledge" with an opening focus on the roles and contributions of the philosopher in society.

Each board:

- encourages students to make connections and find parallels from the past to the present as they reflect upon and discuss works of fiction and nonfiction that relate to the BIG IDEA studied in language arts and history classes
- addresses Common Core Standards
- relies heavily upon the prompts of "Depth and Complexity" as catalysts for higher level thinking, writing, and discussion
- raises "essential questions"
- requires continuous interaction from all students over a structured period of time
- demands research, reflection, questioning, discussion, writing, and collaboration

As we develop units of study, the boards become tools for reflection and for expansion of questioning and research. They are daily reminders that as scholars we never stop probing and diving more deeply into our fields of study.

Board One: POWER has a Voice



To begin the year, this particular board introduces the BIG IDEA or universal theme. It will be used throughout the year as essential questions are raised. Whether studying the path to war in 8th grade history or reading about the struggle for individual freedom in *The Crucible* in language arts, students are continually questioning “Power”, its voice, and the plight of the voiceless through an ever-evolving exchange of ideas represented on the interactive board.

Physical set-up for the first board:

1. Top center title – POWER HAS A VOICE
2. Divide the board into quadrants.
 - a. Top left title – The Voiceless
 - To visually familiarize themselves with the concept, students build a collage of pictures, headlines, and symbols that represent the voiceless in the world
 - Each student provides a visual of the voiceless for the collage that may be of individuals, groups, communities, the environment, or animal life. Students are prepared to discuss the story behind the image with the class or in small groups.
 - b. Top right title – Those with Voice

- Structured like quadrant one, this section focuses on positive and negative images of the voices of power that may include anything or anyone from symbols to political figures to forces of nature.
- c. Bottom left title – Finding Voice
- As students read and discuss works related to essential questions linked to the BIG IDEA, they are invited to use this quadrant to write reflections and pose questions. Close reading, discussing, and writing about such poems as *Invictus* by William Ernest Henley and *The New Colossus* by Emma Lazarus tap into deeper levels of reflection on powers of self-determination and compassion. Pieces of nonfiction are also an effective tools. For example, after reading an interview with Congressman John Lewis about his role as a civil rights activist in the 1960s, students wrote and posted responses to the question, “Is non-violent civil disobedience an effective tool for the voiceless in society?”
- d. Bottom right title - Finding Connections
- This quadrant is reserved for students to find examples of “Voice” in art, poetry, music, and literature. They are encouraged to share creations of their own.
 - The stories behind such powerful works of art as *Guernica* by Pablo Picasso and lyrics as *Blowin’ in the Wind* by Bob Dylan are shared and discussed.

A Culminating Joint Project between Language Arts and History:

Ultimately, after extensive and rigorous research, reading, and discussion, language arts students pursue issues that matter to them. In a formal writing, each demonstrates skills of argumentation by making a claim about his or her issue of choice, researching and providing evidence of the necessity for change, and analyzing what can be done. Common Core standards for an argumentative writing are addressed and required. In American history, students continue the work by writing formal letters to those who have power over the issue, presenting their concerns, briefly highlighting supporting evidence, and closing with a request that their solution be taken into consideration. Letters are mailed. Copies are posted on the board, and as answers are received, they too are posted and discussed. A section is saved for shared input on the next steps that could be taken.

The key for the educator is to not only teach and encourage strong skills of questioning, research, and analysis, but to also encourage students to make meaningful connections and applications of what is learned in the classroom with what can be accomplished in the world.

Board Two: The Road to the Presidency The 2016 Election



The 2016 election has certainly grabbed the interest of citizens at a very early point in the campaign. With so many candidates from uniquely different backgrounds, this could be the election that could capture the attention of middle school students. Since the media alerts us to daily changes in political life, an interactive board becomes an effective tool for student engagement as they study the workings of government.

Physical Set-up: Break your board or boards into sections.

1. Language of the Disciplines - political terms and their definitions
2. The Official Roles of the President - Working in small groups, students research and create a visual presentation of one of the constitutional roles of the president which include: Commander in Chief, Diplomat, Legislative Leader, and Leader of his/her Political Party. This presentation requires a definition of the job, an example of the President exercising this power, and a picture, graph, map, or illustration to reinforce understanding. Projects are displayed on the board and discussed as a class.
3. Qualities of leadership - Students are given a list of character traits. Each student determines the ten most essential to being a great president. For the board, a classroom survey is graphed determining which qualities were most desired. Ultimately, students must be prepared to justify in their choices in a classroom forum.

4. Candidates in the Polls - In an election that has begun with such a rich field of candidates, students do a weekly check on standings for both the Republican and Democratic parties. Each candidate will be represented by a picture of his or her face that can be moved to the proper spot for the week. Students watch news clips and read current news articles that provide evidence for why candidates move in the polls. To encourage research and debate about issues, points are given to table groups that post reasons for a rise or fall in the polls.

Board Three: Knowledge has POWER

Think Like a Disciplinarian

Eagerly waiting their turn to cast their votes for a second time at the interactive board, McAuliffe's student philosophers debate whether John Stuart Mill was correct when he stated, "The greatest good for the greatest number" as his Utilitarian guide for a free society.

Having voted the week before when they first studied *Utilitarianism* and read about how John Stuart Mill applied its tenets, they have since researched unanswered questions and concerns to expand their understanding. Taking into consideration the possible impact on those making up the minority, table groups chose individuals or groups from history or current events that would not be considered part of the "greatest number" to research. They were asked to consider the multiple perspectives from all sides of the issue.

In a Socratic Seminar, students brought informed views to the circle as they questioned whether this belief system protects the rights of the individual. Once the forum ended, students were sent to the board to vote again. A final discussion revolved around why students did or did not change their votes about the fairness of this principle. However, the conversation will continue as students probe the origins of ideas that became the foundation of thinking for *The Declaration of Independence*, *The Constitution of the United States*, and *The Bill of Rights*.

To "think like a disciplinarian" comes from the teachings of Dr. Sandra Kaplan. Creating an interactive board built around this interdisciplinary approach causes students to not only learn about such roles as those of historians, scientists, philosophers, and economists, but to also develop a broader perspective of the inner workings of society. In history classes at McAuliffe Middle School, students often find themselves taking a particular essential question, assuming an assigned role from one of these disciplines, researching the question from the particular perspective of that role, and finally participating on a panel of "disciplinarians" reflecting upon and debating that question.

Powerful Tools

Using interactive boards gives students the opportunity to extend the boundaries of their learning as they expand their quests. Functioning as visual reminders of what they are studying, these boards are tools for curious minds that can expand research, cause reflection, and stimulate discussion and debate. Whether students are determining the role of power in life or literature, thinking like a disciplinarian, or following the path of the 2016 presidential election, interactive boards get them up out of their seats and challenge them to deeply connect what they learn with their world.

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Book Review

Elaine S. Wiener

Top Secret Files: Pirates & Buried Treasure

Stephanie Bearce

Prufrock Press Inc.

Paperback, \$8.95, 116 pp.

ISBN-13: 978-1-61821-421-8

Another *Top Secret Files* and this time it scared me! Who knew that there were so many facts about pirates? Who really cares? I didn't. But you know the author, Stephanie Bearce. She can make you care about anything she writes. This time she takes us back to 1650-1730.

Like all *Top Secret Files*, this book has pictures and little, different shaped boxes with wonderful facts. The *Top Secret Files* books are aimed at 9-12 year olds, but every adult will love them. The information will fascinate all ages.

Listen to the beginnings of *Pirates and Buried Treasure*:

"Pirating sounds like a grand life. Sailing on the warm sunny seas just looking for the next ship that could be filled with treasure. Fighting your enemies and earning piles of gold and jewels. And you don't need a bank because you can just bury your plunder, make a map, and come back for it later after you're tired of salt water and sandy beaches.

The true life of a pirate was actually very short and hard. Most people who became pirates were either killed in battles or were caught and hanged. Some of the pirates, like Blackbeard, had their heads cut off and put on public display to warn other people not to go into the pirate business..."

When you read the details of the lives of pirates, there is no glamor or consistent reward. But Stephanie Bearce explains the causes with so many historical facts that we of modern times really understand the past history.

The book is divided into 1-Pirate Problems, 2-Weapons, Words, and Wardrobe
3-VIPS (Very Important Pirates) and 4-Pirate's Treasures.

Buy this book for your classrooms and your children, but please don't forget to read it yourselves!

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Book Review

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Top Secret Files: The Civil War
Stephanie Bearce
Prufrock Press Inc.
Paperback, \$8.95, 117 pp.
ISBN-13: 978-1-61821-250-4

In Civil War times, there were no air conditioners and no electric fans. The women wore layers of petticoats and corsets. So you can imagine that in the summer, ladies got HOT. Because of this, it was common practice for women to carry hand fans. Some were elaborate fans made from silk, while others were simple fans.

Fans and handkerchiefs made clever ways to carry messages. And maps were considered secret weapons because an accurate map was a treasure.

Stephanie Bearce has a wonderful way with words which will appeal to the young people reading this book, and I repeatedly report that I loved reading this series. It will appeal to all.

Germ warfare is something only found in science fiction movies when evil warlords unleash a deadly disease to wipe out their enemy. That's just the stuff of stories, right? Wrong!

Germ warfare was attempted, but luckily it did not work. It was too early in history to make this feasible.

The Pinkerton National Detective Agency was already famous, and it was its own germ warfare.

All the books in "Top Secret Files" are written to engage kids. The table of contents in "The Civil War" is divided into Secrets and Spies, Special Missions, Secret Missions, and Secret Forces.

Each chapter tells about secrets that were dealt with by children and women as well as the usual male spies. Where and how are secrets that most of us did not know until these books. The pictures and titles and pages that specifically tell children how to "spy" will appeal to young people as much as the stories.

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Book Review

Elaine S. Wiener

Top Secret Files: World War One

Stephanie Bearce

Prufrock Press Inc.

Paperback, \$8.95, 120 pp.

ISBN-13: 978-1-61821-241-2

I am addicted to Gelato ice-cream and Stephanie Bearce's Top Secret Files books. I review every one I can get my hands on, but I must admit that WW1 was hard to review.

WW1 is like all the Prufrock books. It has all the wonderful little boxes and pictures that appear in just the right places. Prufrock even tells our children how to do spy work at home with safe, approved ways. So clever!

All these books are written for the 9-12 set, and I repeatedly say that these books are perfect for adults, too. Most of us do not know the facts that are written by Stephanie Bearce.

But WW1 seems more bloody and primitive even though all wars seem primitive. I would suggest that adults read this book before giving it to their children. That is probably true for all books, but when you are familiar with a set like "Top Secret Files," you can rely upon your previous opinions. In this case, I suggest that you read it and give it only to mature children.

"Can a war really start because of a secret society? WWI did. It all began with a secret society called The Black Hand. In 1911, the country of Serbia was under the rule of Austria, Hungary. Many Serbians did not like this and wanted to govern their own land, so a few members of the Serbian army formed an undercover operation called the Black Hand. This undercover operation was designed to free Serbia from the control of Austria-Hungary."

So starts Top Secret Files: World War One.

1. Secrets,
2. Spies,
3. Special Missions,
4. Secret Weapons, and
5. Secret Forces

make up the table of contents. But the chapter on spies has very familiar names such as the Red Baron, Sidney Reilly, and Mata Hari.

I hate to admit it, but I bet our kids will love all this...even if I am a bit squeamish! Sigh.

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