



Curriculum Connections

Promote a challenging environment creating an extraordinary community of learners

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June 2004

From the Director . . .

How quickly the 2003-2004 school year has passed! The weather has been kind to us this past month. We did not have too many terribly warm days to distract our students as everyone worked their way through final projects and exams. It was good to get out into the schools and see the many wonderful things that you all do every day to give Plainville students the best instruction possible.

A number of curriculum projects are under way this summer. Grade 6-12 science teachers will continue to work on aligning the curriculum with the new frameworks. Grade K-5 teachers are completing at least one new science unit for piloting in the 2004-2005 school year. A group of high school language arts teachers will write a new 9th grade curriculum, and middle school teachers are working on integrated reading/language arts units around core literature. Fourth and Fifth grade teachers will work on a reading assessment plan for our most at risk readers. High school social studies teachers continue their work on the U.S. History curriculum and may begin to work on elective courses. Physical education teachers will spend a few days refining the Life Skills curriculum for PHS, and middle school unified arts teachers will work on family and consumer sciences and technology education curricula. Many thanks to all of you for your willingness to spend a bit of your vacation time on curriculum development.



My wishes for a restful,
relaxing and recharging
summer vacation.

~~~Linda~~~

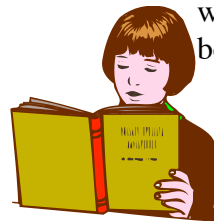
## CMT News

After significant delays, the state has released the 2003 CMT scores. Our fourth and sixth grade students outperformed their ERG G peers in all three subject areas and performed well in comparison to the state-wide performance in mathematics and writing. The principals and I will be analyzing our scores so that we may work together to improve student achievement in all grades. In September, we will administer Generation 3 of the CMT for the last time. In the 2005-2006 school year, testing moves to the spring, and we will administer CMTs to all students in grades 3 through 8.

Student reports will be sent home to parents during the summer, and a full report to the Board will be made in the fall.

## CRISS Strategy of the Month Authentic Questions

Whenever I read – whether it is fiction or non-fiction, I find myself asking questions as I go along. Sometimes the questions are about what will happen next, or why a character or person in history behaved in the way that he or she did. Sometimes the questions are about vocabulary or a phrase that piques my curiosity. The questions are genuine, or what Project CRISS calls “authentic” because they spring from my own reading of the text. As we work with students to enhance their reading skills, it is important that we help them to develop their own authentic questioning skills. “We want our students to know that all good readers have questions when they read. Having questions is not a sign of comprehension failure, but a sign of a successful



## CRISS Strategy of the Month (continued)

reader who monitors his or her own comprehension.” (CRISS manual, p. 37)

The best way to help students develop this skill is through modeling. Read aloud and talk about your own questions as you go along. Model questions that deal with difficult vocabulary or syntax, why a character behaved a certain way, why a character did something, how a situation evolved, what will happen next, etc.

Next, ask students to develop their own questions as they read an assigned passage. You might read along with them and do additional modeling by writing your questions on the board, or you might choose to circulate, encouraging those students who have difficulty. It is important that you accept every response.

Write questions on the board and lead a class discussion of possible answers. Remember that not every question will have a definitive answer.

Authentic Questioning is not just for fiction. Once students learn how to pose authentic questions about their reading, they may use the strategy for content-based reading. It is far more powerful for students to pose their own questions about the content they are reading, rather than answering questions at the end of a segment. In the latter type of assignment, students often use the skim method of reading, rather than reading the entire selection carefully.



Next time:

**Question Answer Relationships (QARs)**

## Fifteen Strategies for Motivating Students

Motivating reluctant learners is a challenge that each of us faces every day. Much has been written on the topic, but too often those articles are research reviews on why it is important to motivate and engage students. J. Michael Palardy's article entitled "Some Strategies for Motivating Students" (February, 1999 NASSP Bulletin) gives fifteen research-based strategies to increase student engagement. The first seven are presented here:

1. Involve students in setting objectives. Engage students in setting the goals and then establishing the criteria and methods of ensuring that the goals were met. Given a choice of product, students will be more invested in the learning.
2. Individualize objectives. Not every student is alike; not all students have the same learning styles, rates or background knowledge. Differentiate the product, process and/or pace to meet the needs of each one of your students.
3. Set priorities in content. What is the *critical content* of the lesson, unit or course? What can you let go of in order to ensure that you can spend enough time reviewing and reinforcing the key information? It really is true that "less is more"!
4. Show students the relevance of what they are learning. Far too often our students fail to engage in learning because they do not see the connection between what they are asked to learn and their world.
5. Help students learn to learn. It is "increasingly clear that many students . . . do not learn so effectively and efficiently as hoped, not because of their lack of ability, but because they lack productive methods of studying." Teach previewing, note taking, semantic webbing, skimming, reviewing, outlining and other effective study skills.
6. Make first experiences positive. The first time that students encounter something new, they will form a lasting impression. Make sure that the impression is a positive one.
7. Introduce the unfamiliar through the familiar. Help students tap into and use their prior knowledge to make connections.

*See the July issue for the rest of the story!*