



From the Director . . .

Yesterday as I was waiting for my husband to finish blowing the snow off our driveway, I was watching our 5 year old neighbor build a “snowcat” with her father. She chattered away about how much she wanted to have a kitten, and listened patiently while her father gave all the reasons not to have a kitten. After they finished their creation, Morgan looked up at her dad and said, “OK, this has been nice, but don’t you think it’s time to go to school?” Dad replied that school was cancelled for the day because of the snow. Morgan’s face fell, and she said, “But we have to go to school. I haven’t been there for so long! I love school! My teacher will miss me if I don’t go. She says that I am her special friend!”

This simple story of a kindergartener and her dad made me realize yet again what a powerful impact our work has on the children in our classrooms and schools. Clearly Morgan’s teacher has built a strong relationship with the children in her classroom. She has inspired a love of learning and a love of schooling in Morgan at a particularly critical point in her life. During Larry Bell’s keynote speech from several years ago, he spoke of the “power of the teacher” and the importance of making each child feel respected and valued. “Call them what you want them to be,” he urged us, giving examples such as “my scholars” and “my brilliant ones”.

Morgan’s story also reminded me of how much I respect and value the hard work that you all do to help each child reach his or her fullest potential. A smile of encouragement, a well planned and well executed lesson, the willingness to provide extra help before or after school, or volunteering to chaperone a dance or supervise an after-school club or activity are just some of the ways that you share your love of learning and teaching with our students. You are the “wonderful ones” (in the words of Larry Bell) that make a difference for our children every day.

Linda

What Is This Thing Called Rigor?

Rigor has been a major focus of our school “intervisitations” for the past several years. One of the tools we have been using was built based upon the research of Wolf, Crosson and Resnick (2005) as summarized in an article called, “Classroom Talk for Rigorous Reading Comprehension Instruction.” The researchers describe the traditional pattern of instruction as “IRE”, teacher **I**nitiation – student **R**esponse – teacher **E**valuation. According to the researchers, the criticism of this pattern and the resulting implication is that the teacher already knows the answer and is merely quizzing the students. As a result “it constrains the participants in a discussion from collaborating and building meaning together” (p. 28). Instead, we should encourage “accountable talk” in our classrooms where students are actively engaged in rigorous discussion building knowledge and understanding together.

There are three dimensions to accountable talk. They are:

- *Accountability to the Learning Community,*
- *Accountability to Accurate Knowledge, and*
- *Accountability to Rigorous Thinking.*

Accountability to the Learning Community

In this dimension, teachers and students make consistent efforts to ensure that all participants understand the ideas and positions shared during the whole-group discussions. They also try to link contributions to one another so that the discussion builds on the ideas that have been shared within the learning community. This is why the twin skills of attentive listening and paraphrasing are so important. Students should paraphrase the response of their classmates before adding their own ideas. We should hear them saying things like, “Jake said that the colonists took advantage of the Native Americans by pushing them out and taking their land. I think that he’s right, but I’m wondering what other choice the colonists had.” Helping students learn to paraphrase what has been said *before* offering their own opinions reinforces the need to be active listeners.

Accountability to Accurate Knowledge

In this dimension, teachers and students hold themselves and others accountable to using accurate information to support their contributions to the discussion. In short, it is

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a commitment to get the facts right that is the cornerstone of high quality instruction. We can hold one another accountable for accuracy and specificity by getting ourselves in the habit of either citing the page number we found the information on or the context in which we first learned it. Asking, “What evidence do you have? How do you know? Where can I find this information?” helps to hold everyone in the learning community accountable for accurate knowledge.

Accountability to Rigorous Thinking

When we hold members of the learning community accountable for rigorous thinking, we are asking them to use rational strategies to explain their thinking. We ask them to present clear arguments and to draw logical conclusions in ways that are appropriate to the discipline. “Can you take us through your argument step by step?” is one question that clearly holds the learner accountable for careful and rigorous thinking. Asking students to compare and contrast and explain their reasoning is one example of holding them accountable for rigorous thinking.

As we begin to understand more about this “thing” called “rigor”, we need to be examining ways that we can take our students beyond initial understanding into the realm of analysis, synthesis, and creating. Synthesizing information and then creating a new interpretation is exciting – both for the learners and the teacher.

(from, *Reading Psychology*, Volume 26, 2005, pp. 27-53)

Grade Level Expectations for Learning Booklets Now Online

The Grade Level Benchmarks were created from our curriculum documents as a means of communicating to parents and members of the community at large the key concepts, knowledge and skills that are expected at each grade level. They are designed to give you a window into the classroom and an idea of what students are working on in our schools. Grade Level Expectations for Learning booklets for k – 5 are posted on the Plainville Community Schools website and may be accessed at:

<http://www.plainvilleschools.org/curriculum/expectations/>

Curriculum Team News

Mathematics

The Math Leadership Cadre has been hard at work revising curriculum and creating common assessments to be used to assess student progress in key standards. In addition to the assessments and rubric for Data and Statistics, the 4-8 team recently completed a set of assessments and a rubric for Geometry and Measurement. The K-3 team is working on a comprehensive scope and sequence of knowledge and skills and has begun the arduous task of revising the curriculum. And the PHS team is hard at work creating curricula for Plane Geometry, Fundamental of Geometry, and Advanced Math.

Science

Middle and High School curriculum revision is on-going, and the K-5 folks have completed and disseminated their “SMART Cards” which will enable teachers to have on-going review of key concepts throughout the grades so that students will remember those concepts from year to year.

Social Studies

High School Social Studies is nearly complete, and all K-5 curriculum is complete with the exception of grade 1 which is nearly there. Grade 5 spent a day working on the required participatory government unit which will be piloted this year by members of the social studies team (along with any other grade 5 teachers who wish to try it out). The middle school curriculum continues to move forward, and there are several textbook pilots occurring as well.

Language Arts

Under the able leadership of Michelle Steck, the K-5 LAIT has done yeoman’s work in developing the reading and writing curriculum. Mentor texts have been chosen, and a year-long calendar of instruction has been created for each grade. This curriculum was developed online and can be accessed at:

<http://www.plainvilleschools.org/learning/>

Library Information and Technology Literacy

Debbie Mosebach and her department, consisting of the Library Information Teachers as well as the Technology Integration Specialists are hard at work at a vertical articulation of technology and library skills

Congratulations to all for a job well done!