**More Than Words**

**Looking at Teaching and Learning through the Lens of Academic Literacy**

*Kannapolis Middle School March/April 2010*

Spring is here, and I’m sure most of us are looking forward to warmer weather, Spring Break, and marshmallow peeps. And whether or not you like it, you are probably at least looking ahead to the EOG’s. You have worked hard to prepare the students, and one way to view the state assessments is to think of it as an opportunity for your students to show what they’ve learned. We must acknowledge, however, that there are many factors that affect student performance on EOG’s. How have you (and are you) addressing these factors in your classroom? Which factors do you think have the most impact on student success on the EOG’s? Fill out the short Google Form survey in the box to the right and I’ll share the results.

***How would you rank   
these factors in   
EOG success?***

*instructional strategies*

*reading strategies*

*vocabulary*

*classroom management*

*questioning (language/levels)*

*EOG prep unit*

*use of technology*

*time to practice (reading, math)*

**Submit your rankings or add additional factors** [**HERE**](https://spreadsheets.google.com/viewform?formkey=dC11elYyN3JQRTRaWWNIRjhzOXdQSHc6MA)**!**

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***Consider This:***

*How often do you read the instructions or questions off the board/handout out loud to students? What are your students doing while you read?  (Watch them closely next time.)*

***What If:***

You had them read it quietly and then checked for understanding:

*"What does the first direction ask you to do?"*

*"Any questions about the second bullet?"*

*"Can you summarize for us what #3 is telling you to do?"*

Students need repeated practice in reading and comprehending questions and instructions independently. Remember, no one can read it to them on the EOG.

**5 Things You Should Do in 4th Period**

**EVERY WEEK**

1. Tell students, “While you read today, I’d like you to…(make note of any questions you think of; pick the most descriptive section to share with the class; notice something the author did).

2. Make sure students are truly reading. If not, take *positive* action. (Suggest a different text, move seats, give them a task while reading, [book Mrs. Smith](http://sites.google.com/site/kannapolismiddleschool/academic-coaches-resources/book-an-academic-coach))

3. Plan time and a strategy to allow students to share/talk about what they are reading.

4. Read something *to* them that you find interesting or enjoyable.

5. Read something *with* them so they can practice a strategy and discuss the same text.

**5 Things You Can Do In 4th Period   
TOMORROW!**

1. Let students visit the reading [wiki](http://kmsreading.pbworks.com/General+Text-Resources) and select a website to browse. Ask them to share something interesting they read at the end of class.

2. Snowball Fight! After reading, students write a response/question on paper, ball it up, throw into the center of the circle on the count of 3, and then pick up a new snowball to read. They respond on the paper, then ball it up and throw it back out. Repeat as desired.

3. Grab a [PPT](http://kmsreading.pbworks.com/Comprehension-Strategies) for a reading strategy from the Reading wiki and guide students through it.

4. Find an interesting short article on [tweentribune.com](http://tweentribune.com/) to read aloud and have students record questions. Then sort questions into categories (answered in the text, can be answered with research, or can’t be answered).

5. Cut up enough [reading response questions](http://pmms.msdpt.k12.in.us/imc/preddy/writing%20prompts.pdf) for each student to have one and set up [Inside/Outside Circles](http://teachingtoday.glencoe.com/tip/inside-outside-discussion-circles) to spark discussion with different partners.

**Have You Ever Heard a Student Say…**

“Back in school, my teacher assigned that chapter in the textbook, and I read it, and from that point on I knew!”

**What If…**

instead of focusing on how to get students to remember what they read, we simply provide texts that are more memorable?

*Texts That Matter*, Educational Leadership, March 2010

***Focused Visits***

***Teacher Testimonies***

*Tiffany Fulton, 7th Language Arts*

***Focus: Maximizing Student Discussion in Lit Circles***

*Having Cara observe my classroom was great.  The kids didn't pay much attention to the extra person in the room and continued with business as usual.  The best part was sitting down with Cara afterwards and going over her notes from my lesson.  As a result of this reflection I incorporated several small "tweaks" to what I already had in place.  The "tweaks" were just what was needed to help the students accomplish my goals for the activity.*

*Anna Watson, Life Skills*

***Focus: Teaching with Foldables – feedback***

*I really enjoyed Cara coming in.  I was doing "foldables" with my classes for the first time and just asked her to come in and see what we were up to.  She ended up coming in during my largest class, which was an unexpected bonus!  It was nice to not only have an extra pair of hands but also to get her input. Cara took notes throughout the lesson and gave me some great feedback-tips on little "extras" to add in during my lesson to better engage the kids, and I was able to add those in the next day (since the next day was a B day).*

*Joey Chapman, Cross Categorical EC*

***Focus: Levels and Appropriateness of Questioning***

*I had been having trouble recently with getting a group of my students to engage in discussion during class and I wondered if it was a result of the questions I was trying to lead them with. I called on Cara to come and help...she wrote down the questions I asked, as well as the type of questions and came to discuss them with me. While the students did discuss, she showed me ways to enhance discussion by asking different types of questions and helped me look at new ways to question my students. Even though she only came to one class it helped in my questioning in all my classes!*

***Some Other Possible Focus Areas for a Visit:***

*Trying a New Strategy*

*Sharing an Effective Strategy*

*Collect Data on Student Engagement*

*Collect Data on Student Participation*

*Collect Data on Teacher Behaviors*

*Identify Opportunities for Literacy Integration*

*Classroom Management*

[*Book Me*](http://sites.google.com/site/kannapolismiddleschool/academic-coaches-resources/book-an-academic-coach)

So, who wants to…

VISIT OTHER CLASSROOMS?

I’ve been talking to some teachers and to administration, and we all agree that we’d like to provide opportunities for you to visit other classrooms to get new ideas and see certain teaching techniques in action. There are several ways we can do this, and we can try one or all of them:

* Schedule “Class Visit Days” when everyone is encouraged to take time during their planning period to walk through other classrooms.
* Require each teacher to visit a certain number of classrooms every so often.
* Schedule visits individually based on the purpose/focus of the visits.
* Walk through classrooms in small groups during planning days or planning periods.
* Visit for short periods (walk-throughs) or visit for an entire class period.

I would like to facilitate these visits and help you make the most of them. [E-mail me](mailto:wolfordc@kannapolis.k12.nc.us?subject=Classroom%20Visits!) if you are interested in helping me pilot this before the year is out or if you have some ideas on how to make these class visits happen. We’d like to have a good plan before next year!

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**Challenging Your Students**

When I had my own classroom, I often found it more difficult to differentiate for my advanced and AIG students than for my struggling ones. John Bugaiski from KIS and our own Michele Pitts shared some ideas at the last GCRA meeting, and I have begun a list of ways to add rigor to assignments. The list won’t make much sense without examples, but I hope we can all have some conversations and maybe even some professional development from John or Michele to show us some examples and help us adapt our current lessons. John gave me a TON of math files/lessons with different levels of rigor if any of you math teachers are interested in them.

In the meantime, I can at least share what I think rigor is NOT. Rigor is NOT:

-giving more work

-setting high expectations and removing support/scaffolding

-just for gifted students

-not any single task or activity

And my “new” vocabulary word I created after their session –

*rigormortis – when student boredom sets in due to classroom tasks that lack rigor!*

***Other Ways to Work With Me***

Co-Planning, Todd Devlieger, 8th Science

*I met with Cara this week to pick her brain about ideas that she has or things she has seen other teachers doing in their classrooms involving technology. It was great as we were able to immediately come up with some ways to introduce the next unit in science. Just sitting down for a few minutes and talking with Cara about things that are going on helped me to get out of a bit of a technological rut.*

Co-Planning, Co-Teaching, Betsy Buchanan, 7th Math

*As part of a unit on integers, my students designed comic strips using the website* [*http://www.toondoo.com*](http://www.toondoo.com)*. The best decision that I made in preparing for this activity was to “book” the coaches. The assistance that I received from the coaches was an integral part of the activity’s success.*

*During the comic strip activity, the hands-on assistance from Cara and Debby made this experience successful for my students and much less stressful for me. They assisted groups of students, and offered great tips and suggestions for improving and enhancing the activity, and handled technical difficulties. Their advice and guidance allowed me to “tweak” the lesson daily so that it became a better learning experience for my students as well as for me. So what are you waiting for … book a coach!*

Co-Planning, Melissa Wright, Language Arts

*I had been brewing an idea for a while, but I was having trouble figuring out the logistics of what I wanted to do. Cara has helped me figure out the best way to teach a concept several times.  She brings a fresh perspective to the material.  I have always found it beneficial to bounce ideas off of another before implementing them in the classroom.  Cara has been a great help in this capacity.*

Co-planning, Paula Breen, 8th Math

*Cara and I worked to develop a more meaningful and relevant lesson on slope and slope-intercept form.  After discussing our ideas, Cara was able to provide me with pictures and videos of slope in real life.  When we discussed this in class, students were more engaged and I was able to confidently connect this important math topic to the real world.*