

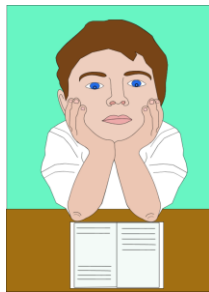
# Dennis-Yarmouth Regional School District

## Instruction Office Newsletter

May 2015  
Volume 2, Issue 9

### Timothy Shanahan on *Real* Test Prep

"The idea of having students practice answering test questions is ubiquitous and ineffective in raising test scores," says Timothy Shanahan (University of Illinois/Chicago) in this article in *The Reading Teacher*. He understands the pressure to raise scores on the new generation of more-challenging ELA tests coming down the pike – PARCC, Smarter Balanced, and others. But the time-honored approach of analyzing sample test items and having students answer questions on main idea, supporting detail, providing evidence, describing a character, identifying a theme, and drawing conclusions doesn't work, he says. "It has never worked. And it won't work any better with the new assessments on the horizon. It's as ineffective as pushing the elevator button multiple times to hurry it along or turning the thermostat to 90° to make a room warm up faster."

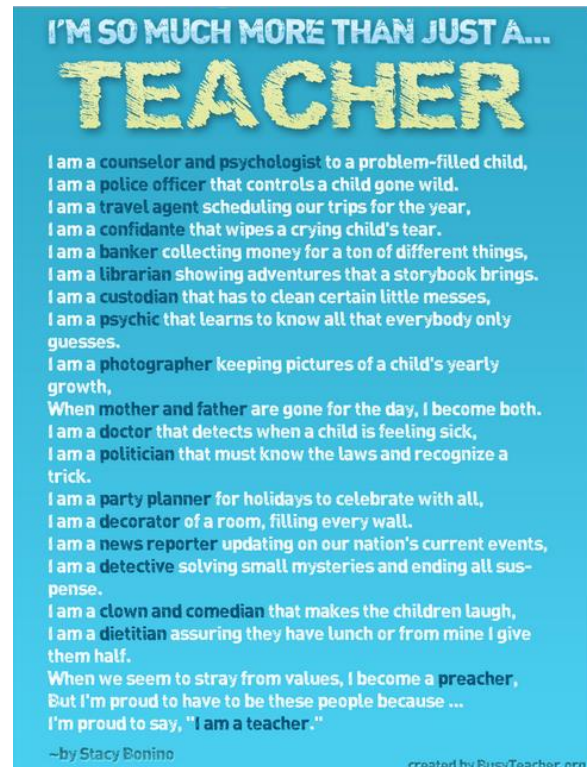


So why are so many principals, superintendents, and teachers wasting valuable instructional time on an ineffective strategy?

Continued on page 2:

### Important Dates

- **May 4-29**- End of Year PARCC testing
- **May 4-8** Teacher Appreciation Week
- **May 27**- District Meeting (DDMs)
- **June 5**- completed Stage One Curriculum Maps submitted electronically to Instruction Office
- **June 16** - PBIS team planning session
- **June 30**- Last day of school



## Timothy Shanahan on *Real Test Prep*

Continued:

“There is a kind of logic to it,” says Shanahan: “The students are practicing something that at least *looks like* it could improve test scores.” But the fundamental problem is that many educators are not sure what *will* improve test scores and make students better readers. It’s not students’ ability to answer questions on specific skills, says Shanahan – “performance on various question types explains none of the variance in student performance on standardized comprehension tests... Analyses of test performance suggest that outcome variance is due not to the questions but to the passages. On reading comprehension tests, it matters how well students read the passages that they will be questioned about. **If you want higher test scores, then teach your students to read the test passages better.**” How do teachers do that? Here are Shanahan’s suggestions:

- **Teach students how to figure out unknown words.** When they take the new tests, students are going to encounter some words they don’t know – there’s no way they will have learned all the possible words. If instruction during the year has focused on learning as many words as possible, students will be up the creek without a paddle. But if instruction has focused on learning words *and* strategies for figuring out unknown words, students will be able to manage. Shanahan believes that during the year, too many teachers are pre-teaching words. That’s okay if the words’ meaning can’t



be figured out from context clues. But if there are context clues, as there usually are, students should be required to do the work of figuring out the word – and explicitly taught how to struggle successfully. Research shows that teaching students how prefixes and suffixes work and how to use context improves students’ abilities to deal with unknown words.

- **Making sense of sentences.** Consider this sentence from a fourth-grade text and how difficult it would be for many students to decipher its dependent clauses:

*The women of Montgomery, both young and older, would come in with their fancy holiday dresses that needed adjustments or their Sunday suits or blouses that needed just a touch – a flower or some velvet trimming or something to make the ladies look festive.*

Students need explicit instruction in how to close-read this sentence, break it down to its basic elements by taking out parenthetical phrases, and make sense of it. The same is true of sentences that use the

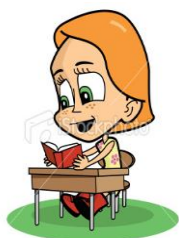


passive voice (*It was determined by Roosevelt that the Chancellor’s message did not require an immediate response from the State Department*). “There is a substantial research base showing the effectiveness of sentence combining and sentence reduction in improving students’ writing and reading comprehension,” says Shanahan. “Such lessons, at one time, were

commonplace in many American classrooms. Perhaps it's time for their rediscovery."

- **Silent reading with real understanding** –

Reading comprehension tests requires students to read lengthy passages without prompting or assistance. How much practice are students



getting at this demanding task? Shanahan wonders. He sees silent reading periods in schools he visits, but he's unclear: "I just can't tell, from what I see, whether the

students are really improving in that essential reading skill or whether they are languishing. In many situations, I doubt whether the teacher knows, either. Sadly, I'm finding that few teachers have any idea how to teach students to engage successfully in this kind of extended silent reading." Shanahan believes many students need to be asked to read one sentence silently and be quizzed on it, then two sentences, then a paragraph, then a page, then a chapter. "This kind of build-up reading with intensive questioning can take place beyond the reading book," he says – in science, social studies, *Weekly Reader*, *Time for Kids*. And students need to be able to do it without picture clues.

If we teach these three things well – figuring out unknown words, breaking down difficult sentences, and sustaining concentration and comprehension when reading long passages silently – Shanahan believes we will see improved test performance, and students will be better readers as well.

"Let's Get Higher Scores on These New Assessments" by Timothy Shanahan in *The Reading Teacher*, March 2015 (Vol. 68, #6, p. 59-463), available for purchase at

<http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1002/trtr.1329/pdf>; Shanahan can be reached at [shanahan@uic.edu](mailto:shanahan@uic.edu).

## A Pennsylvania Teacher Makes Poetry a Daily Routine

In this *Edutopia* article, Pennsylvania teacher Brett Vogelsinger says that one of his most successful routines over the last year has been starting each of his ninth-grade classes with a new poem. Many of his students have previously experienced poetry classes as "dissection labs;" his goal is to make the genre something students love. Here are his suggestions for choosing poems that will make these lesson segments "brisk and bright":

- Choose poems that students can understand on the first reading – and reveal greater depth when re-read.
- Choose poems short enough to understand and analyze in a few minutes.
- Choose poems with humor, nostalgia, sarcasm, despair.
- Choose poems you find engaging and fascinating.

Here are some of the activities Vogelsinger uses in his daily poetry start-up routine:

- **Sketch this poem.**

Students spend three minutes making a sketch of what they see in a



poem and then five minutes discussing the differences in what they saw. His students tried this with “Little Citizen, Little Survivor” by Hayden Carruth, a poem about a rat in a wood pile.

- **Wave this poem.** Students sit in a circle and read the poem one word per student, moving around the circle like a wave, repeating it till the language becomes smooth and fluid.

- **Shout out this poem.** Students find their favorite word or phrase, and when he reads the poem a second time, they join in on their chosen parts. This leads to a good discussion about why certain lines stand out.

- **Build this poem.** He cuts a poem into lines (or, with a short poem, into words), puts the pieces into envelopes, and has students assemble the poem before they’ve read it. When they hear the real poem, they’re ready to discuss its logical coherence and share some different ideas on how to express the ideas.

- **Wordle this poem.** Vogelsinger feeds the poem into Wordle <http://www.wordle.net> to create a word-splash of all its nouns, has students predict what it’s about, and discusses whether the nouns are used literally or figuratively.



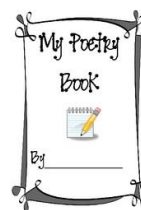
- **Update this poem.** Students rewrite a poem in contemporary language or substitute local place-names and people. Vogelsinger had his

students read “Clay County” by John Hodgen and turn it into “Bucks County.”

- **Overdramatize this poem.** After a first reading in a normal tone of voice, he challenges students to read it in an overzealous, dramatic style and discuss different interpretations.

- **Wreck this poem.** Students suggest altering five words in a poem that will destroy the quality or completely change the subject.

- **Gift this poem.** Students write in their journals for three minutes about a person they’d like to give the poem to and why, and then share their ideas with a partner.



- **Connect this poem.** Students are challenged to make non-obvious connections between a poem and something else they’re studying – for example, Vogelsinger asked students whether there are connections between a haiku about a falcon by An’Ya and *To Kill a Mockingbird*.

- **Hear this poem.** He searches the Internet for clips of poets reading their own work or performing it in a poetry slam.

- **E-mail or tweet this poem.** A class composes a collective interpretation of a poem and sends it to the poet for his or her reactions. Vogelsinger says his classes have had lively exchanges with Jason Tandon, Sean Hewitt, Robert Pinsky, and others.

“Brisk and Bright Approaches for National Poetry Month” by Brett Vogelsinger in *Edutopia*, March 9, 2015, <http://bit.ly/1x7UcZm>

## Using the Newspaper for Daily Literacy Instruction



In this *Elementary School Journal* article, Michelle Jordan (Arizona State University) describes how a veteran teacher used the local newspaper for daily interactive read-alouds with her first graders. This exposed students to sophisticated, ever-changing nonfiction texts, broadened their horizons, and engaged them in frequent, vocabulary- and conceptually rich discussions in line with Common Core expectations. Here are some of the ways the teacher scaffolded learning in these daily sessions:

- **Emphasizing the unfolding nature of the world** – Following stories and waiting for outcomes and modeling ways to talk about things that haven't happened yet. For example, there were allegations that baseball pitcher Roger Clemens was lying about using performance-enhancing drugs and the teacher cautioned a student who called him a "cheater" that it was as yet unproven: "We have to wait to find that out."
- **Acknowledging uncertainty** – This involved positioning themselves as fellow wonderers and following weather reports to see how predictions turned out.
- **Improvising connections and engaging in improvisational storytelling** – "Because newspapers are unpredictable in their daily subject matter, talk was less scripted in this activity than in other instructional events in this

class," says Jordan. "The teacher had to use whatever physical and conceptual materials were at hand in the news each day to develop students' textual engagement." This provided excitement and unexpected learning each day.

- **Positioning students as members of a larger community** – Every day, the teacher kicked off the newspaper activity with this question: "Did anyone hear or see anything they want me to look for in the newspaper?" The fact that newspapers contain real-time information about events that students might have heard about "reduced the unequal footing between the teacher and the students." Jordan's quantitative analysis of classroom interactions in the daily newspaper read-a-louds found that 55 percent of talk turns were made by individual students and students increasingly initiated topics as the year went on. Students highlighted stories about local or upcoming events and called attention to simultaneously occurring events – for example, one student mentioned that she had gone swimming over the weekend and the teacher drew attention to a news story and photo about a triathlon in Florida. "Look at all the folks who did the same thing you did. I bet you didn't go swimming there, did you?"



**"Extra! Extra! Read All About It: Teacher Scaffolds Interactive Read-Alouds of a Dynamic Text"** by Michelle Jordan in *The Elementary School Journal*, March 2015 (Vol. 115, #3, p. 358-383); this article can be purchased at <http://bit.ly/1CohlJ5>; Jordan can be reached at [mejorda2@asu.edu](mailto:mejorda2@asu.edu).



## PLCs at Work – Student Work Protocol

This protocol was taken from Using Data, published by TERC in 2013. Asking teachers to first complete the task being asked of students is a productive way to make sure teachers recognize the content and skills necessary.

- 1- Complete the task with a partner; do the work being asked of your students.
- 2- Review your solutions and approaches with the larger group.
- 3- Identify the knowledge, concepts and skills that are needed to successfully complete the task. Pay careful attention to the depth of knowledge expected.
- 4- Define the evidence you will need to see in order to understand what the student knows and is able to do.
- 5- Predict how students will perform on the task.
- 6- Look at the student work and highlight/underline the evidence.
- 7- Make observations of student responses (ie: compare/contrast solutions, identify patterns, etc.)
- 8- Make inferences, generate additional questions, and identify possible causes.
- 9- Develop a plan of action for next steps.



### Coaches Corner

#### Carol Mahedy, Literacy Instructional Coach 4-8

Our work with curriculum is more dynamic than ever as we unpack standards, pilot and create new units, and implement the Common Core State Standards. However, our well vetted and oft used community books remain intact. The following titles are "reserved" for the grades indicated.

Grade	
level	Title

4	Because of Winn Dixie
4	Boy In The Girl's Bathroom
4	Castle In The Attic
4	Charlotte's Web
4	Dear Mr. Henshaw
4	Friendship/Gold Cadillac
4	Frindle
4	Love That Dog
4	Mississippi Bridge
4	On My Honor
4	Stone Fox
4	Tales of A Fourth Grade Nothing
4	The Not Just Anybody Family
4	War With Grandpa
4	We Are the Ship
5	Bridge To Terabithia
5	From The Mixed Up Files of Mrs. Basil E. Frankweiler
5	Holes
5	In the Year of the Boar and Jackie Robinson
5	Island of the Blue Dolphin
5	Lost On A Mountain in Maine
5	My Brother Sam Is Dead
5	My Side Of the Mountain

5	Shhhh! We're Writing the Constitution
5	The Cay
5	Tuck Everlasting
5	Walk Two Moons
5	Where the Red Fern Grows
5	Lemonade War
5	Lunch Money
5	Millions
5	Tolliver's Secret
5	Wonder
6	Absolutely Normal Chaos
6	Breadwinner, The
6	Bud, Not Buddy
6	Hatchet
6	Maniac Magee
6	Number the Stars
6	Roll Of Thunder Hear My Cry
6	Touching Spirit Bear
6	Tangerine
6	Blizzard!: The storm that changed America
6	Red Kayak
6	A Long Walk to Water

7	Daniel's Story
7	Hope Was Here
7	Shabanu
7	Silent to the Bone
7	So Far From The Bamboo Grove
7	Stargirl
7	The True Confessions of Charlotte Doyle
7	Watsons Go to Birmingham, The, 1963
7	Freedom Walkers
7	When Zachary Beaver Came to Town
7	Revenge of the Whale
7	Can I See Your ID?
7	Boy
8	And Then There Were None
8	Night
8	Outsiders, The
8	The Call of the Wild
8	The Hobbit
8	The Princess Bride
8	Our Town
8	Heroes of the Holocaust
8	Police Lab