



# Dennis-Yarmouth RSD

## Instruction Office Newsletter

### Getting Students Reading and Responding at Four Levels of Rigor

(Originally titled "Pursuing the Depths of Knowledge")

"Good teachers resist the idea of 'teaching to the test,'" says Nancy Boyles (Southern Connecticut State University) in this article in *Educational Leadership*. "But aligning literacy instruction with assessment isn't teaching to the test if that assessment is a valid measure of our students' performance. If the test is rigorous – if it demands deep levels of knowledge – then alignment means asking ourselves, 'How can we plan for this rigor in our instruction?'"

Teachers' challenge is preparing students for the kind of rigor in Common Core-era assessments. Looking at the six levels of Bloom's Taxonomy – *remember, understand, apply, analyze, evaluate, and create* – is unhelpful, says Boyles. That approach has even resulted in creative but decidedly non-rigorous projects like "Draw a map of your ideal bedroom." A better approach, says Boyles, is using Webb's depth-of-knowledge levels, all four of which are important to rigorous comprehension:

- **Level 1: Recall and reproduction** – Recalling facts and locating information in the text to answer questions about *who, what, when, where, why, and how*. Answers at this level are either right or wrong. Some sample PARCC and Smarter Balanced test items:

## December 2016

## Volume 4, Issue 4

### IMPORTANT DATES

December 13

Full Moon

December 21

Winter Solstice begins @ 5:44am

December 23  
– January 2

Holiday Vacation

January 3, 2017

Teacher Professional Development Day

### IMPORTANT NOTICE:

Central office is a **fragrance-free zone** so please be respectful and plan accordingly when you visit.

Due to one of our members at the CO being highly sensitive to any type of fragrance, we ask that staff visiting/meeting at the Administration building refrain from using any scented products. Fragrances from personal care products, air fresheners, laundry and other cleaning products have been associated with adversely affecting a person's health. We ask that we all work together to make the environment a safe and healthy workplace for everyone. Thank you very much for your cooperation!





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- What is the meaning of *trudged* as it is used in paragraph 10 of this folk tale?
- Which sentence from the folk tale helps the reader understand the meaning of *trudged*?

What most commonly goes wrong at this level is students not going back to the text and finding the exact information. Rigor at this level, says Boyles, is “in maintaining high expectations for all learners and in providing honest, specific, and immediate feedback.”

• **Level 2: Skills and concepts** – Students need to make some decisions about how to approach the problem or activity, for example:

- What is the meaning of the quote, “One small step for man, one giant leap for mankind”?
- Which words *best* describe the character \_\_\_\_\_?

The rigor here is teachers explaining, modeling, and practicing. For students, the rigor is achieving independence, which involves the teacher gradually releasing responsibility.

• **Level 3: Strategic thinking and reasoning** – This involves using logic and evidence to think more abstractly about a text. Sample questions:



- What is the theme (or main idea) of the passage? Use details from the text to support your answer.
- What effect does the author create by using the phrase \_\_\_\_\_?
- What is the most likely reason the author included a map of \_\_\_\_\_?

- Which details from the text are irrelevant to the author’s claim?

Many students need practice at inferring – zeroing in on the main idea as they start reading, thinking about the author’s intent, understanding the external and internal structure of texts, and thinking critically about what they’re reading.

• **Level 4: Extended thinking** – Integrating information from multiple sources. Some sample items:



- A central idea of these articles is \_\_\_\_\_. Provide two pieces of evidence from different sources that support this idea and explain how each example supports it.
- Which source most likely has the most useful information about \_\_\_\_\_? Explain why this source is likely to be more helpful.
- Compare and contrast the way the author develops the central idea of \_\_\_\_\_ in the two texts we read. Use details from both sources to support your explanation.

To prepare students for questions like these, teachers need to plan lessons that ask students to make connections between two or more sources – including video, audio recordings, illustrations, and more. “But just including text-to-text lessons is not enough,” says Boyles. “A good text connection lesson will ask students to tap into a key similarity or difference between the sources, raising a question that brings students to a deeper knowledge of both texts through that connection point.”

“Pursuing the Depths of Knowledge” by Nancy Boyles in *Educational Leadership*, October 2016 (Vol. 74, #2,





p. 46-50), available for purchase at <http://bit.ly/2dVtRsl>; Boyles can be reached at [nancyboyles@comcast.net](mailto:nancyboyles@comcast.net).

## Rethinking How Writing Is Taught in High-School English Classes

In this *English Journal* article, Lindy Johnson (The College of William and Mary) and Nicole Sieben (SUNY College at Old Westbury) describe asking their college students, “What do you wish your English teachers would have taught you in high school?” Many students said they wanted:

- More emphasis on generating and refining their own research questions;
- Dealing with flexible assignment structures (versus assignments like five-paragraph essays that place rigid constraints on composing);
- Treating the writing process as creative problem solving;
- Connecting writing to their interests and the real world.



With this in mind, Johnson and Sieben had their students read the *Framework for Success in Postsecondary Writing* side-by-side with “How to Get a Job at Google” by Laszlo Bock, the company’s senior vice president of HR. “Doing so helps students to understand that writing a paper in English is not simply about getting a good grade or passing a writing test,” they say. “Rather, developing writing skills and strategies can help students expand habits of mind that connect to the skills and abilities that leading twenty-first-century employers look for in new hires.” The five attributes Google is looking for map nicely with the eight habits of mind in the *Framework*:



curiosity, openness, engagement, creativity, persistence, responsibility, flexibility, and metacognition.



Here’s an example: A high-school English teacher has his students study *Night*, *Persepolis*, and *Things Fall Apart*, books that focus on problems affecting real and fictional communities, and then asks them to research a topic of concern within their community. Students engage in authentic inquiry using primary and secondary sources, asking themselves, “What are the concerns in my community? Who is already addressing these concerns? How can I help with the issue?” Students contact local organizations involved with this issue, plan and conduct an event or service to benefit the organization, and reflect on the experience and what they learned from their work. Finally, students present their projects at a school family night. Having a large turnout at this event “reinforced the point that what students had to say about issues in their community mattered to an audience beyond the school,” say Johnson and Sieben. “Ultimately, students were able to make the connection that learning to write in English class could do real work in solving problems in their community.”

The authors conclude by calling for “a systematic reorientation of secondary students’ writing processes around creative problem-solving... students should increasingly see high-school English as more closely connected to the demands and opportunities awaiting them in college and in their careers.”





“Minding the Gap: Reframing Writing As Creative Problem-Solving” by Lindy Johnson and Nicole Sieben in *English Journal*, September 2016 (Vol. 106, #1, p. 80-83), no free e-link available; the authors can be reached at [lljohnson@wm.edu](mailto:lljohnson@wm.edu) and [Siebenn@oldwestbury.edu](mailto:Siebenn@oldwestbury.edu).

## Getting Students Writing in Math Class


In this article in *Mathematics Teaching in the Middle School*, Oklahoma educator Melissa Gunter describes how she coaxed her math students into writing short pieces using the four dimensions of the RAFT acronym: Role of the writer; Audience; Format; and Topic. Here are some sample prompts:



- A ratio writing a pen-pal letter to a proportion on their differences and similarities;
- Ratio and proportion writing an owner's manual to math students;
- Proportion writing an online dating profile to similar figures on how we go together;
- Inequality symbols writing a comic strip to math students on larger, smaller, equal to;
- Exponents writing a defense argument to a jury on the laws of exponents;
- Substitution, elimination, and graphing writing a sitcom script to a TV audience on solving systems of equations;
- Parallel lines writing a love letter to transversal on how we are meant to be together;
- Data writing a news report to math students on data displays.


Gunter read a few samples aloud to her class, then had pairs of students choose one of three possible scenarios on ratio and proportion (a topic they'd

recently studied): an owner's manual, a pen-pal letter, and a dating profile. She gave the class about 20 minutes to come up with a first draft, circulated to help with prompts and suggestions, and then had students read their products before plunging into revisions. Gunter was happy with the results. Two samples:

- An online dating profile for the Pythagorean Theorem: Likes right angles, three-sided figures, my men twice as tall, long walks on the graph; Dislikes isosceles triangles, scalene triangles, any other shapes; Age 25, height 16 inches, weight 9 pounds. Looking for a right-angled triangle with a similar figure to mine. Someone to spend the rest of my life with, and have 3 beautiful baby triangles with. I even have their names already picked out: Sea (the oldest, hopefully), Thin bee, and Aye. I want someone whose height, aye, and weight is the same ratio as mine.
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- A cartoon illustration of a man and a woman looking at a large right-angled triangle. The man, on the left, has dark skin and curly hair, wearing an orange shirt. The woman, on the right, has light skin and curly hair, wearing a green shirt. They are both looking at a large right-angled triangle that is white with a black outline. The triangle is positioned such that its hypotenuse is the longest side, and the right angle is at the bottom-left vertex. The man is pointing at the triangle with his right hand.



- A *pen-pal*



*letter from Rachel (ratio)*

*to Portia (proportion):* Hey Portia, I'm so glad we have been pen pals for a while. We each can talk about how our group of friends relate to us. You just are able to compare to all of them rather than just a select group like me. I have yet to ask you about how many pets you have. I have three cats and it is 1:2 ratio of them being male. He is neutered of course. How many male pets do you have? I wish I could have birds, but my cats would eat them. Talk to you in the next letter!

Rachel

"Riding the RAFT" by Melissa Gunter in *Mathematics Teaching in the Middle School*, October 2016 (Vol. 22,







#3, p. 172-175), <http://bit.ly/2eEpi42>; Gunter is at [melissag@norman.k12.ok.us](mailto:melissag@norman.k12.ok.us).

## No More Random Acts of Intervention



A teacher stops a colleague in the hallway and asks for help.

**Teacher:** "Sam has refused to do any work this morning and sat alone at recess!"

**Special Education Teacher:** "I had his brother. Give him a snack. That *always* helped."

Another teacher bumps into the principal at the copy machine:

**Teacher:** "Mary wouldn't do any math this afternoon, what should I do?"

**Principal** (after a moment's thought): "Maybe give her a partner to work with in English class."

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While the suggestions they get may prove helpful at times, this kind of off-the-cuff consultation, based on instinct and a desire to help, doesn't result in a systematic behavior analysis that can effect real change. A teacher may spend the entire year unsuccessfully trying these random acts of intervention, suggested by everyone from the occupational therapist who comes in to work with a small group to the reading specialist pulling a student out for a lesson to the math coach passing in the hallway. The ten questions below will generate interventions that actually make a difference.



## Why Do We Need to Change Our Approach?



Our student body has changed significantly in the past decade. Students come to school from increasingly complex backgrounds and/or social and emotional needs. Schools and teachers are facing new challenges they may not be prepared for. Teacher preparation coursework requires almost no education in behavior management or mental health, leaving educators seeking help to meet the needs of students who exhibit challenging behavior. When struggling, they may turn to colleagues and administrators for advice. This is so frequent that principals, vice principals, school psychologists, and counselors report spending 60-80% of their week focused on the top five struggling students in their building. This adds up to an exorbitant amount of time dedicated to the challenging behavior of relatively few students. What's worse, despite this investment of time, often students' behaviors improve only marginally, if at all. Principals and vice principals don't necessarily have any more training in mitigating challenging behavior in students than the teacher does. School psychologists are burdened with heavy testing schedules and often not easily available during the school day.



We all know that best practice is to have all the people consulting to the teacher in the same room at the same time to prevent the teacher getting differing or competing suggestions and to allow the time to analyze and respond purposefully. However, even when such a meeting is scheduled, it's difficult to get all team members for more than twenty minutes to address the problem. We need an easy-to-follow, solution-focused system that's quick enough to be used in a short meeting.

## The 10 Questions



These ten questions are that system. They allow the team to efficiently assess the student's behavior and come up with data-based interventions that are likely to help. (This shouldn't replace a functional behavior assessment, which is best practice





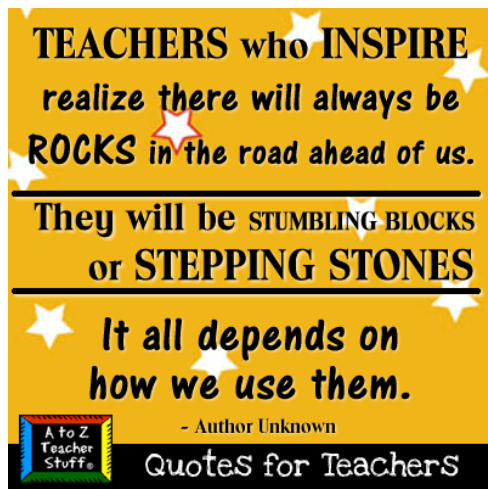
to find a solution when concerned about the student's behavior). Its best practice to have a meeting specifically for this type of consult, with all the team members present so they might advise the teacher.

**1. In three sentences or less, what is the behavior or concern?**

Even if others exist, prioritizing one problematic behavior allows the meeting to focus on the most relevant information. We need to be disciplined so the conversation doesn't veer off-course because of the teacher's huge download of information. A short meeting doesn't allow time to discuss home factors, psychiatric diagnosis, and medication issues *and* analyze the school factors contributing to the student's behavior. A different meeting should be scheduled to discuss these important factors.

**2. What is the frequency and/or duration of the behavior?**

Whether a behavior is disruptive or otherwise causing concern, it can feel like it's occurring *all the time* and lasts *forever*. Looking at the data will help us be accurate with the severity of the problem.



**3. When/where is this behavior/concern most likely to occur?**



This information is crucial. Framing the problem and narrowing down when and where in the school day can be problematic.

**4. When/where is this behavior/concern least likely to occur?**

Particularly when analyzing a behavior that seems pervasive in nature, answering this question identifies which variables contribute to the moments of success, allowing us to replicate them. For example, a student who "never does work" may actually do some work when interacting with a peer. We can set up more situations in which she works with someone else.



**5. Which underdeveloped skills do you think are underlying the behavior/concern? (If helpful, review the IEP and recent test results.)** A student would behave if he could. If the student isn't behaving well it a result of an underdeveloped skill. If we want to reduce a challenging behavior we must teach the opposite skill. For example, to reduce work avoidance we often must teach the skills initiation, persistence and help seeking. Here are common social and emotional skills that are underdeveloped in many students: Self-regulation, social skills, positive thinking, flexible thinking, executive functioning, initiation, persistence, and help-seeking. Click [here](#) for more information on social/emotional skill identification and teaching.

**6. Which helpful interventions are currently in place to address the underdeveloped skills?**

Answering this helps us realize we often forget to teach the appropriate opposite skill. Asking which interventions are currently in place highlights this possible oversight. It may help a teacher who thinks she has tried everything realize there is hope.

**7. Which interventions have been tried and weren't helpful after consistent implementation?**





This is a good place to reflect on interventions that were tried and did *not* work. Looking at the variables of unhelpful strategies will be fodder for successful ideas.

### 8. What are the antecedents of the behavior / concern? (Review the teacher's ABC notes.)

Taking notes on the student's behavior before the meeting is important to targeting a helpful strategy. It's important to take notes on any behavior incident in three parts – [ABC](#) refers to Antecedent (what happens before the behavior occurs), Behavior (description of the behavior incident), and Consequence (what happens after the behavior incident – both teacher and peer responses). Arguably, knowing the antecedent is most useful. Intervening at the antecedent will prevent the behavior from ever occurring.

### 9. Which interventions are in place to mitigate these antecedents?

Prevention is key! Looking at each antecedent helps us realize we may not be preventative enough. This question highlights which antecedents or triggering variables haven't been addressed or prevented. Usually these antecedents include: unstructured times, transitions, writing tasks, social demands, novelty or unexpected change, and independent work time. For strategies to assist these antecedents click [here](#).



### 10. What is the typical response to/result of the behavior/concern?

Reflect on how response is handled and whether or not that may be reinforcing the behavior. Review the consequence column. For example, if the student rips up a math paper and the teacher sends him out of the room, she's accidentally reinforced his escape of the assignment, increasing the likelihood of him ripping another paper in the future.



## What's Next?

After these questions have been answered, write out the agreed-upon recommendations for strategies and teaching the underdeveloped skills. Share this list of interventions with all relevant team members.

Finally, review and agree on the next steps to be taken. The team may need resources for finding suggestions on how to accommodate and teach these skills until they become more fluid with this type of brainstorming.



No more guessing! No more random Acts of Intervention! Whether at the water fountain, in the teacher's room or a planned consult meeting, team members can get in the habit of not letting a suggestion pass their lips without asking these ten questions. Taking this extra step results in solution-based suggestions that won't only save time and prevent reactive decisions, but also lead to improvement in student behavior throughout the year.

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*Jessica Minahan, MEd, BCBA, is a licensed and board certified behavior analyst, special educator and a consultant to school's internationally ([www.jessicaminahan.com](http://www.jessicaminahan.com)). She is the author of [The Behavior Code: A Practical Guide to Understanding and Teaching the Most Challenging Students](#), with Nancy Rappaport (Harvard Education Press, 2012) and author of [The Behavior Code Companion: Strategies, Tools, and Interventions for Supporting Students with Anxiety-Related or Oppositional Behaviors](#) (Harvard Education Press, 2014).*

### Classroom Management During the Holidays

Muriel K. Rand December 12, 2011

Feeling stressed? It would not be surprising! During





December, it's hard to avoid the intensity of the holiday season – whether you celebrate or not. Psychologists tell us that anxiety can exist within systems of people, not just individuals, so that even if you are not particularly stressed out yourself, you can absorb the stress that's in the environment. And so can children, of course, which makes a difficult situation in our classrooms.



The most important strategy to combat the holiday pressure is to recognize the extra stress and try not to let it take over the classroom. Children will have a lower tolerance for frustration, they will be triggered more easily, and you will likely have less patience. Here are some practical suggestions for having a peaceful, and hopefully productive holiday season in your classroom:

1. **Slow down.** Leave extra time, especially for transitions which are likely to trigger conflict.
2. **Have group relaxation moments.** Quiet the class down and lead the children through your favorite **breathing exercises**. Have them relax their shoulders and legs, and visualize a peaceful place. You don't need more than a couple of minutes and this is especially effective first thing in the morning,



right after lunch or recess, and before packing up at the end of the day.

3. **Observe your children for signs of agitation** – nail biting, tapping, rocking, facial changes, etc. When you see this, try to redirect them for a minute or two by getting a drink of water, stretching, or just a pat on the back. Remember the **acting out cycle** and don't let the agitation build with intensity and move to acceleration phase.
4. **Keep the daily schedule consistent**, even though you may have to interrupt it with more assemblies, parties, visitors, etc.
5. **Monitor your own tone of voice.** Smile frequently, even if you don't feel like it, and keep an eye on the **tension in your own body**. Take more frequent breaks if you can. If you are working with another teacher, make an effort to give each other quick breaks throughout the day.
6. **Take the children outside.** In northern climates, children get less time outside as we move through December. Their need to move, breathe fresh air, and feel the freedom of outdoor play is decreased just when the stress increases. Even though it might be getting cold, be sure to give the children time outside.
7. **Have some fun with your children!** Plan some movement games, special story readings, creative art projects, or songs to build community and remind the children that school can also be joyful.

