



Dennis-Yarmouth RSD

Instruction Office Newsletter

HITTING RE-SET

January is when most folks set out to quit smoking, lose weight, save money and recommit to any number of worthwhile goals.

But for teachers, January is smack-dab in the middle of the same old (school) year. If you're a member of the teacher tribe, chances are you think of August, not January, as the time for a fresh start. The thought of getting 30 youngsters to turn over a new leaf now—after nearly 20 habit-forming weeks—gives whole new meaning to the word *resolution*.

But what if you *could* start the school year over again? What would you change about your classroom? What's stopping you from making those changes now?

During this time of year many teachers, especially early-career teachers, feel as if negative behaviors and patterns have settled in and become "the way it is" in their classes. These challenges interfere with student learning and undermine your ability to create a nurturing and inclusive classroom environment. Whether it's constant and disruptive talking, low participation, lateness, meanness, bullying, cheating or inappropriate use of technology (you fill in the blank), these problems can make even the most creative and hardworking teacher feel exhausted, inept and ashamed.

You don't need to feel that way. More importantly, your students are capable of more. Consider these steps, and resolve to a two-week turnaround of a negative pattern you see in your classroom:

- 1. COMMIT TO CHANGE.** Sure, first impressions matter, but that doesn't mean there's no chance for reinvention—even if it's the middle of the year. What is the price of not changing? Ignoring the big problems simply means you'll continue to

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IMPORTANT DATES

January 16- Martin Luther King, Jr. Day- No School



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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revisit the same issues daily. Believe in your students, and be strategic about changing your practice so that they can accomplish more in the second half of the school year.

2. **NAME THE PROBLEM.**

Identify the biggest behavior problem you are facing in your classes. Analyze the factors that are causing the problem, and reflect on your role.



- ❖ What is the behavior I would like my students to stop? Why do I consider this behavior a problem?
- ❖ When does this behavior happen? Who is involved? What is the student perspective?
- ❖ Do students know my expectations? Did I give clear directions? What kind of feedback have I given students who were not following directions?
- ❖ What are my own beliefs and assumptions about this problem? Have they changed?
- ❖ Do I model the behavior I want to see? What are my expectations for myself, and have I been consistent in following through on them?
- ❖ Do I trend toward positive reinforcement or negative reprimand? Do I highlight good behavior?
- ❖ Have I invested as much as I could in building strong relationships with my students?

3. **SEEK SUPPORT.** Analyzing the problem and coming up with solutions is hard. It's important to ask for help and seek the support you need from those around you. What are the resources available to you? Who are the people in your school who handle these challenges well? Have you taken advantage of them? If not, why not?

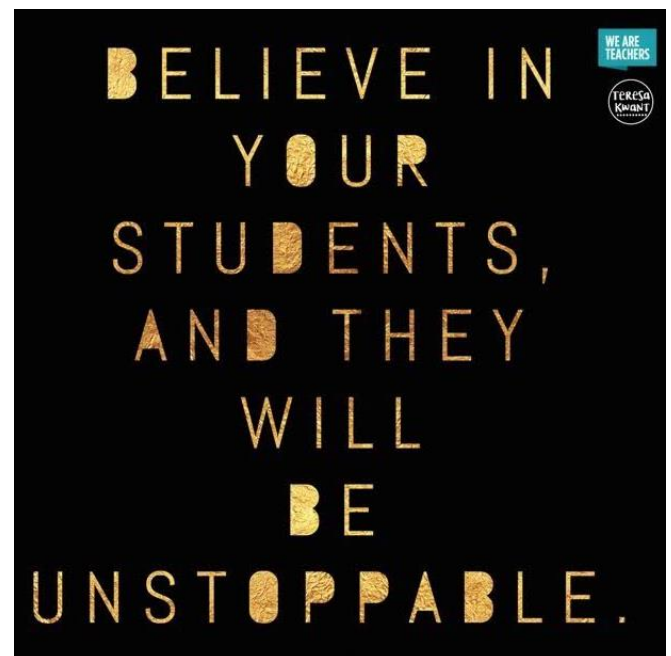
4. **TEACH EXPECTATIONS.** While it may seem obvious, it's important that classroom management and curriculum and instruction not be thought of as separate domains. You can teach, and reteach, behavior in the same focused and engaging way you have learned to teach multiplication. And you can involve students in that learning in the same culturally responsive

way you do in other lessons. While they can be useful, relying merely on reactive interventions—talks and lectures, rewards and prizes, detention and loss of privileges—is often not enough. Plan and practice how you will authentically teach your expectations.

5. **GIVE YOUR PLAN TIME TO STICK.** Learning and unlearning behaviors take time. Once you adopt a new system, rule or practice, you and your students will need time to adjust and get the hang of things. Because they may have seen it happen in other classrooms, some students may expect you to give up on your efforts to make change, especially if they resist. Don't make that mistake. Allow opportunities to explain, model and practice new systems. Give it at least two weeks.

Responsive and reflective teaching means that you are relentless in your efforts to make school welcoming and productive for all students. If behavior management or classroom culture issues are getting in the way of that, then addressing those issues must be a priority.

So, what will *you* do to turn around your classroom this new year?





Perversions of “Data-Driven Instruction” – and How to Do It Right

(Originally titled “Code Red: The Danger of Data-Driven Instruction”)

In this *Educational Leadership* article, Susan Neuman (New York University) reports what her team of researchers saw in 4th- and 7th-grade literacy classrooms in nine New York City public schools:

- Low-level worksheets focused on decontextualized basic skills for low-achieving students, higher-level content for successful students;
- Instruction focused on skills, not comprehension or content;
- Excessive testing, rubric-scoring, clipboard note-taking, data-displaying, and rank-ordering with insufficient meaningful instruction for all students and follow-up with struggling students;
- Students engaged in lengthy periods of independent reading, some of whom weren’t really reading, the rationale being to build stamina for state tests that were regarded by teachers with fear and loathing;
- Display of students’ test scores, with students who were chronically failing publicly branded as such;
- Slouching, disengaged students staring into space or sleeping; they’ve given up;
- Extremely low achievement on state tests year after year.

Neuman reports the researchers’ conclusion: these schools’ interpretation of data-driven instruction was “failing our most vulnerable children and sucking the life out of meaningful, content-rich education for young learners.” Too many students, she says, “are receiving the unintended message that reading has no real meaning, no delight, and no purpose other than answering one or two questions that are duly recorded on a clipboard.”

But this doesn’t have to be, Neuman believes:

“Arguably, the theory underlying data-driven instruction makes sense” – using important

information to continuously improve teaching and learning. Here are her suggestions for implementing data-driven instruction in a more humane and effective manner:

• **Don’t try to “motivate” students with data.**

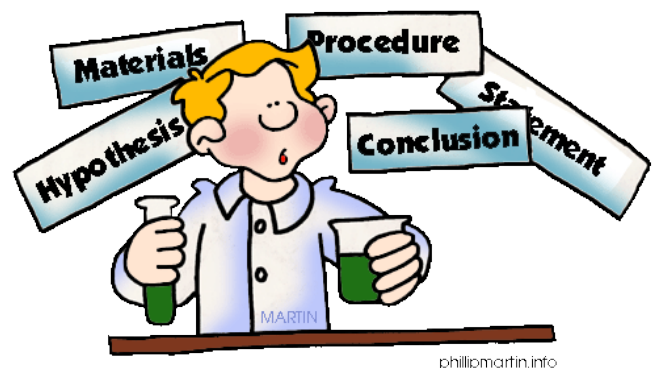
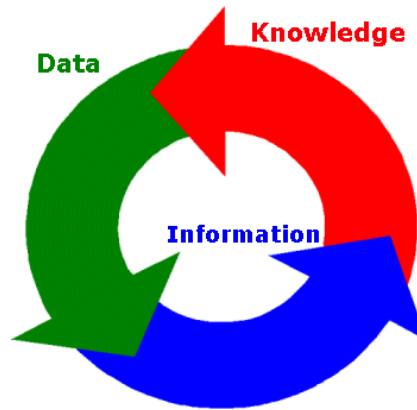
Standardized assessment results can be helpful for teachers diagnosing needs and planning instruction, but they’re not particularly helpful for students, says Neuman. “Struggling readers know they’re struggling readers. They do not need to see this confirmed every day.”

• **Don’t teach to test items.**

Particular words in standardized tests are there to spread students out on a distributional curve and establish norms. Schools may item-analyze tests and try to

teach particular words, but students are likely to be blindsided by completely different words the next time around. In order to teach effectively, says Neuman, schools “need to focus on a much more comprehensive set of understandings, including developing background knowledge, applying it to text, and predicting what might come next. Students don’t develop deep comprehension skills through quick hit-and-runs. They learn these skills through carefully crafted, systematic instruction.”

• **Be data-informed, not data-driven.** Grade-level teacher teams should regularly look at students’ work to inform instruction, asking themselves, “What are our key teaching points for the coming week?” and then the next week asking, “Were we successful?” and



if so, “How do we build on students’ learning?” These meetings are all about fine-tuning instruction to make all students successful. Neuman and her colleagues saw some of this kind of collaboration in the New York



City schools – but not enough.

• **Broaden the definition of data.** Defining it as “recorded information on student learning” is too narrow, Neuman came to believe. Teachers should be looking for “the looks on students’ faces, the tenor of a rich discussion, or the smiles and signs of joy when students are learning something new,” she says. “For the highly capable teacher, these observations *are* data. In fact, these observations may be the most valuable data for helping us understand what students – especially struggling readers – are telling us.”

“Code Red: The Danger of Data-Driven Instruction” by Susan Neuman in *Educational Leadership*, November 2016 (Vol. 74, #3, p. 24-29), <http://bit.ly/2e0jmn0>; Neuman can be reached at sbneuman@nyu.edu.

Ten Ideas for Improving Results for Students with Special Needs

“No one seems satisfied with the state of serving students with special needs, and for good reason,” say Nathan Levenson and Christopher Cleveland in this *District Management Journal* article. “In nearly every school district across the country, the conversation is the same. Parents are concerned that their children aren’t well enough prepared to succeed in life, college, and career. Students themselves often feel excluded or frustrated by ever-higher standards that they can’t seem to meet. Classroom teachers feel underprepared to address ever-mounting student needs, and special-education teachers feel stretched thin. Despite the hard work of

so many caring people and the mounting resources dedicated year after year, disappointment and frustration persist.”

But Levenson and Cleveland believe there are steps that can be taken to produce better results. Based on what their organization, District Management Council, has learned from the research and working with special educators across the country, here are their suggestions:

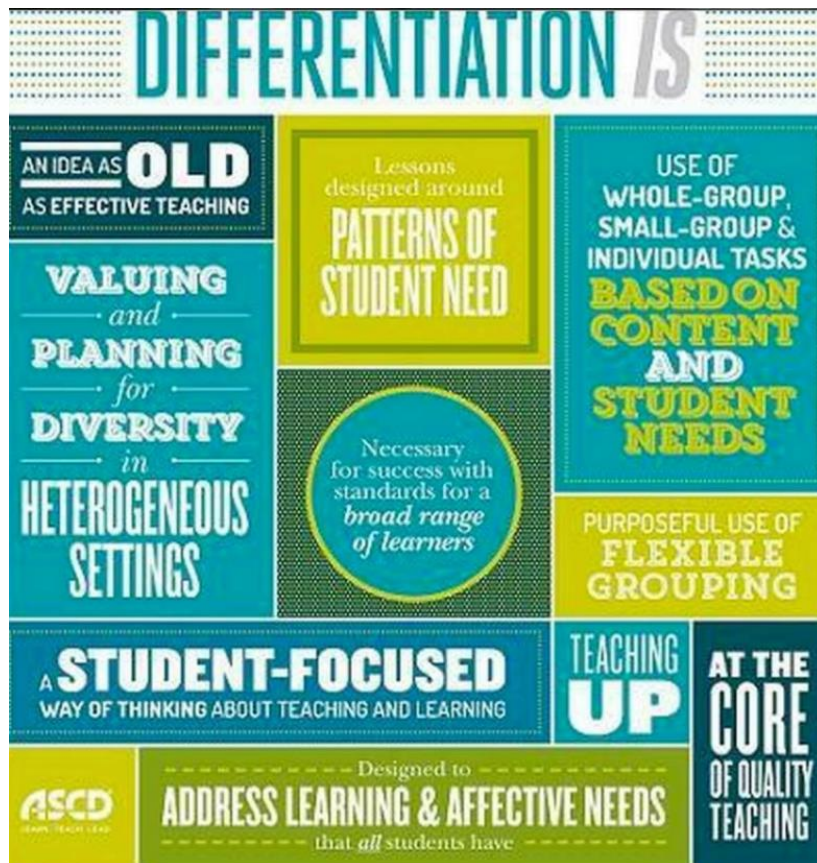
1. **Focus on student outcomes, not inputs.**

When results are disappointing, all too many districts pour money into more staff, more paraprofessionals, more co-teaching, and more hours of service. “History shows that continuing to add resources and layer in solutions does not yield results,” say Levenson and Cleveland. “If the current approach isn’t achieving great outcomes, current practice must be reviewed and modified.”

2. **Focus on effective general education.** According to NAEP data, when

general education teachers are effective with Tier I instruction and take responsibility for all students, those with special needs do better. “If we want students to master the general education curriculum,” say Levenson and Cleveland, “general education teachers have to be a big part of the solution.”

3. **Ensure that all students can read.** Low reading skills are at the root of many special education referrals – hence the spike in third and sixth grade when reading deficits make it especially difficult for students to learn math, science, and social studies. “An overwhelming majority of students who have not





mastered reading by the end of third grade will continue to struggle throughout high school and beyond,” say Levenson and Cleveland – and that includes behavioral problems. Fortunately, there are specific steps districts can take to increase reading proficiency in the primary grades:

- ✚ Setting clear and rigorous grade-level expectations;
- ✚ Identifying struggling readers starting in kindergarten;
- ✚ Frequently measuring achievement and using the data to improve instruction;
- ✚ Giving students at least 90 minutes a day of balanced core instruction;
- ✚ Explicitly teaching phonics and comprehension;
- ✚ Providing at least 30 minutes a day of additional time for all struggling readers;
- ✚ Tightly connecting remediation to core instruction;
- ✚ Fielding highly skilled and effective teachers of reading;
- ✚ Putting one person in charge of reading curriculum and instruction;
- ✚ Making effective use of instructional coaching and professional development.

4. **Provide extra instructional time for struggling students every day.**

“In many schools, struggling students are provided extra adults, but not extra time,” say Levenson and Cleveland – teaching assistants, paraprofessionals, co-teachers. “Extra ‘help time’ should not be confused with extra instructional time.” To catch up on missing foundational skills, correct misunderstandings, and master current material, these students need at least 30 minutes of *additional* reading instruction every day at the elementary level, an extra period at the secondary level. In a sample schedule, the authors suggest that students with special needs in math are part of a regular-education classroom for the



initial presentation of content, learning from effective instruction and peer questions, and then have an extra period of math support taking the place of Spanish.

5. **Ensure that content-strong staff provide interventions and support.**

“Districts that have made the most significant gains among struggling students have done so by providing these students, whether or not they have IEPs, with teachers skilled in content instruction during extra instructional time,” say Levenson and Cleveland. They note that special education teachers know pedagogy and are not always expert in math or ELA. Content-strong support (versus generalist support) looks like this: associating students’ incorrect answers with the underlying concept, inferring misunderstandings from incorrect answers, teaching prior, foundational skills, and teaching correct material using two or three different approaches.



6. **Allow special educators to play to their strengths.**

It’s smart for a school to take advantage of particular areas of expertise among teachers – for example, some may be strong in math content, some in specific pedagogical areas (scaffolding, differentiation, chunking), some in social-emotional support, and some in case management.

7. **Focus paraprofessional support on health, safety, and behavior needs versus academic needs.**

Paraprofessionals can play a vital role with students who have severe disabilities, autism, health needs, and behavior issues. But Levenson and Cleveland don’t favor having paraprofessionals provide academic support. They cite evidence that students with special needs do best when they are fully engaged during Tier I instruction and then get extra time with content-strong teachers, RTI interventionists, and other trained specialists focused on academic and other specific needs. When aides are present during core instructional time, it can decrease the amount of instruction a student receives from the classroom teacher, who may believe the student already has an



adult's attention. In addition, an aide hovering beside a special-needs student "creates a social barrier, stifling peer interaction and thereby defeating one of the primary benefits of inclusion," say Levenson and Cleveland.

8. **Expand the reach and impact of social, emotional, and behavioral supports.** It's hard for teachers to be successful when students can't communicate, connect with others, resolve conflicts, and cope with challenges, say the authors – hence the critical importance of counselors, social workers, psychologists, and behavior specialists. But Levenson and Cleveland have found major differences in how well these professionals are used. In some districts, they spend 75 percent of their time with students while in others they spend only 45 percent; in some districts psychologists spend five days for each initial or three-year evaluation while others complete the same work in 1½ days (staff moving from one district to another quickly adapt to the prevailing standard).

The bottom line: it's possible to expand direct services students simply by streamlining meetings and paperwork. It's also far more effective, say Levenson and Cleveland, to stop relying on paraprofessionals as hand-holders and crisis interveners and beef up the role of behaviorists, who are expert at diagnosing why a student has a disruptive outburst, providing the student with coping mechanisms, and guiding teachers to avoid triggers. Better that paraprofessionals report directly to behavior specialists and provide ad hoc support to multiple classrooms. If there aren't enough psychologists, social workers, counselors, and behaviorists, a district might forge a partnership with a local nonprofit counseling agency.

9. **Provide high-quality in-district programs for students with more severe needs.** If a district has at least three high-need students, it may be more

cost-effective to provide special education services within the district, saving long bus rides for students to out-of-district placements and strengthening connections to their town or neighborhood. Of course the key is hiring staff with the right skills and training and providing dedicated leadership.

10. **Know how staff spend their time, and provide guidance on effective use of time.** Unlike regular-education teachers, most of whom are working as part of teams with clear curriculum and assessment guidelines, special educators "are typically left to themselves to figure out how best to help their students, how best to juggle the many demands on their time, and how best to schedule services," say Levenson and Cleveland. "This serves neither the student, the teacher, nor the budget well." When districts do careful time-and-motion studies, "both staff and administrators are often surprised at how much time is spent in meetings, how much service is provided 1:1 or 2:1 even though IEPs call for small groups, and how much instruction is provided by paraprofessionals." Often the master schedule is a culprit, forcing teachers to pull students from core instruction in reading or math and preventing grouping of students with similar needs. Once these problems are confronted, sometimes with the help of an outside scheduling expert, much more effective use can be made of everyone's time.



Implementing these ten suggestions is not an easy process, conclude Levenson and Cleveland. "Districts that have been able to expand and improve services, increase inclusion, and close the achievement gap have generally devoted three or more years to the effort," they say – including assembling cross-functional teams, involving parents, and wrestling with the budget. There was also a sense of urgency: "While they understood that moving too fast could erode trust and understanding, they also knew that waiting to start would delay helping students in need. Clear goals,



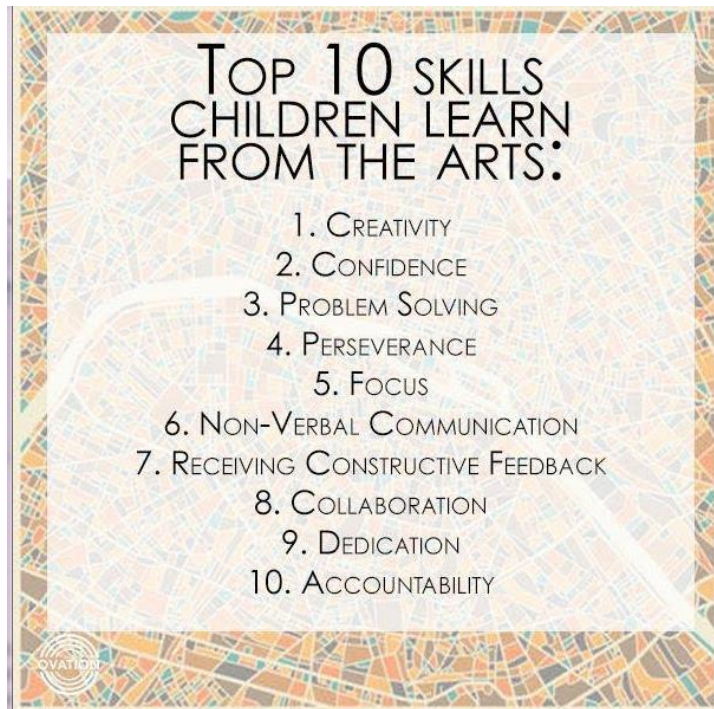
careful planning, and lots of communication helped pave the way.”

“**Improving Special Education**” by Nathan Levenson and Christopher Cleveland in *The District Management Journal*, Fall 2016 (Vol. 20, p. 12-27), can be purchased at <http://bit.ly/2f9t9Fq>

(Promoting Adolescents’ Comprehension of Text), CCDD (Catalyzing Comprehension through Discussion and Debate), and READI (Reading, Evidence, and Argumentation in Disciplinary Instruction). They found that each project pursued distinct instructional approaches and produced positive results with students. The authors were struck by the fact that the core practices recommended by all three were quite similar. To wit:

• **Theme #1: Active, purposeful, engaged reading** – A common problem in U.S. secondary schools is that many students either cannot or do not independently read textbooks. Teachers try to get the content across by reading the text aloud, playing audio or video recordings, or lecturing on key content. “Although these strategies may ensure that the content is covered,” say Goldman, Snow, and Vaughn, “they may deny students opportunities to learn to read content area text, thus failing to support reading development.” PACT, CCDD, and READI attacked this problem not by dumbing down the reading but by using non-textbook material that presented content in shorter chunks, sequencing texts of increasing difficulty, and using texts intentionally designed so students could answer the unit’s essential questions and build arguments from the evidence gathered from their reading. In addition, the programs made a point of:

- Establishing an explicit purpose for reading beyond answering end-of-chapter questions or passing a test – for example, using essential questions or explicit unit goals connected to students’ lives (a PACT U.S. history unit posed these questions: *What was life in America like prior to the industrial revolution?* and *What were Americans’ social and work worlds like?* A CCDD unit on ancient civilizations asked, *Was it better to be an Athenian or a Spartan?*).



Essential Elements in Effective Content-Area Reading

In this *Journal of Adolescent and Adult Literacy* article, Susan Goldman (University of Illinois/Chicago), Catherine Snow (Harvard Graduate School of Education), and Sharon Vaughn (University of Texas/Austin) note that the literacy achievement of U.S. high-school graduates has scarcely budged over the last 35 years – in spite of a lot of hard work teaching reading comprehension skills like summarizing important ideas and using context clues to infer the meaning of unfamiliar words.

In 2010, the U.S. Department of Education’s Institute for Education Science charged six research teams with finding ways to improve K-12 reading instruction. Goldman, Snow, and Vaughn studied the three projects focused on adolescent literacy – PACT



Happy New Year!



- Introducing abstract or unfamiliar topics with understandable analogs so students could exploit familiarity and connections;
- Introducing new topics with videos, photos, or other accessible sources of background information;
- Introducing topics with discussion designed to activate relevant prior knowledge;
- Launching text-based inquiry to pose questions about controversial topics or present seemingly discrepant or paradoxical situations.



Even after an engaging start, sustaining students' interest in reading complex and demanding material is a challenge. The three programs addressed it by staging debates, getting students involved in pair-share and team reading protocols, and having them constantly ask each other what didn't make sense, what was relevant to the task, and what else they needed to know.

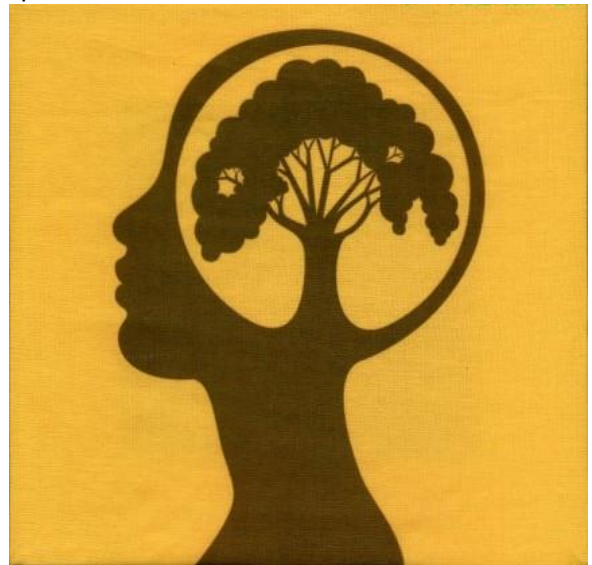
• Theme #2: Social support for reading –

All three programs included tasks that students completed in collaborative groups. "Critical to success of this group work," say Goldman, Snow, and Vaughn, "were purposeful tasks, individual and group accountability, and opportunities to discuss, debate, and write. The group tasks also required that students use text as the main data source for addressing the questions or completing the activity... A focus of whole-class discussions in all three projects was to make public the meaning-making process. Students discussed similarities and differences in their thinking and responses to texts." In these whole-class discussions, teachers had a chance to model academic language and disciplinary conventions like re-voicing, prompting for elaboration ("Say more about that"),

and highlighting or juxtaposing responses that seemed puzzling or contradictory.

• **Theme #3: Knowledge building** – All three programs were designed to link new content to students' prior knowledge and expand their grasp of concepts and vocabulary essential for discipline, topic, and grade level. "These concepts were presented multiple times within units to ensure familiarity, develop fluency, and deepen students' understanding of their centrality to the topic," say Goldman, Snow, and Vaughn. "Students were asked to use the information to make a decision and justify it, solve a problem, or put forth an explanation for some event or natural phenomenon."

"That these commonalities emerged across three different projects with distinct theoretical commitments and goals attests to the importance and robustness of the themes," conclude Goldman, Snow, and Vaughn. "The convergence across the three programs on common themes in instructional practices emboldens us to suggest that they should be incorporated into any effort to promote reading comprehension."



"Common Themes in Teaching Reading for Understanding: Lessons from Three Projects" by Susan Goldman, Catherine Snow, and Sharon Vaughn in *Journal of Adolescent and Adult Literacy*, Nov./Dec. 2016 (Vol. 60, #3, p. 255-264), <http://bit.ly/2gDgXBM>; the authors can be reached at sgoldman@uic.edu, snowcat@gse.harvard.edu, and srvaughn@austin.utexas.edu.