

OFFICE OF INSTRUCTION NEWSLETTER

Dennis-Yarmouth Regional School District
March 2022

WHAT'S INSIDE

Important Dates
Page 1

Structuring Academic Talk in
Primary Classrooms
Page 2

The Equity Dimension with
Traditional Grading Practices
Page 3-5

Ideas for Indoor Recess in
Elementary Schools
Page 6-7

Making Social Studies Content
Accessible to Struggling Readers
Page 8-9

Podcasting as a Way to Liven Up
the High-School Essay
Page 10-12

Discovery Education
Read Across America Day Virtual
Read-Aloud
Page 13



Important Dates

March 2	Ash Wednesday
March 8	K-5 Parent Conferences
March 8	6-12 Cultural Proficiency PD 12:00-2:00
March 10	K-7 Parent Conferences
March 13	Daylight Saving Time begins
March 17	St. Patrick's Day
March 20	Spring begins at 11:33am
March 30	K-7 Report Cards

March (23 days)						
S	M	T	W	T	F	S
		1	2	3	4	5
6	7	8	9	10	11	12
13	14	15	16	17	18	19
20	21	22	23	24	25	26
27	28	29	30	31		

Structuring Academic Talk in Primary Classrooms

["3 Ways to Guide Early Elementary Students to Talk About Their Learning"](#) by Cheryl Abila in Edutopia, January 7, 2022



In this Edutopia article, consultant Cheryl Abila says the more students talk about what they're learning, the better they will understand and the more they'll retain. The problem is that kids often talk about off-topic stuff, it's noisy and can feel out of control, and teachers worry about wasting time. Those are legitimate concerns, says Abila, but with the right structures and some practice, paired and small-group conversations can increase academic talk and boost learning. She suggests three strategies that have the added benefit of getting students out of their seats in a controlled fashion:

- Red line, blue line – Students stand up, form two parallel rows (red and blue), and pair up. The teacher poses a question on the content being studied – What are the four stages of a butterfly's life? or What would happen to the larval stage of the butterfly if its habitat didn't receive the normal amount of rain that season? – and students on the red side share their thinking with their blue partners. Then the blue side shifts one person to the right (the student on the end goes to the other end), and blue-side students share their thinking.

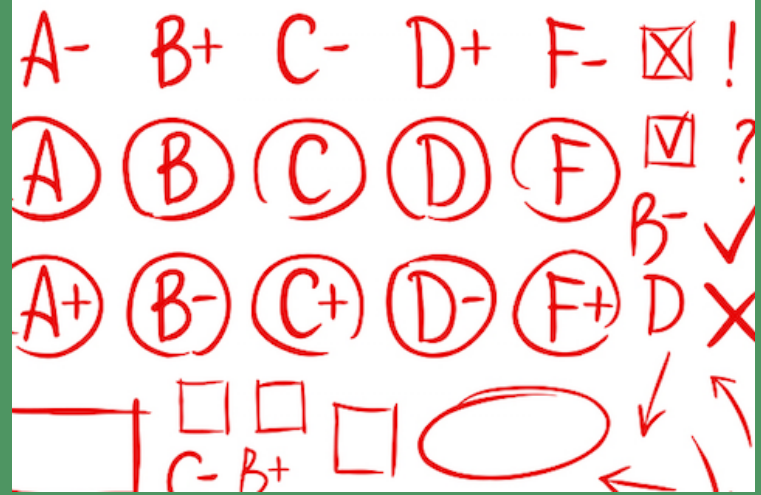
"The purpose is to have students, listen, talk, think, and possibly debate their thinking," says Abila. "After two or three conversations, they'll have a good understanding of the four stages of a butterfly, and, depending on the level of questions, they'll have moved to a higher level of thinking."

- Numbered heads together – Students form groups of four and each student gets a number 1-2-3-4 (if there's a group of three, #3 also answers for #4). Groups are asked a comprehension question or given a problem to solve, and students individually write down their answer and then discuss as a group. The teacher then calls out a number – two, for example – and that number student in each group gives the answer. This continues with other questions or problems. Competition can be introduced by awarding points for correct answers and extra points for especially thoughtful answers or solutions.

- Dance-freeze-share – Students stand up, the teacher poses a question, and starts music playing. Students mill around and when the music stops, they freeze and pair up with the person nearest them and share their answers. The music starts and stops two more times, with students pairing up and sharing with a different classmate each time.

The Equity Dimension with Traditional Grading Practices

[“Letter Perfect?”](#) by Joe Feldman in Independent School, Winter 2022 (Vol. 81, #2, pp. 72-77)



“Of all teachers’ responsibilities,” says veteran educator Joe Feldman in this article in Independent School, “perhaps none is more consequential, with more implications, than assigning grades.” Here’s why:

- A student’s grades affect course placement, athletic eligibility, college admission, scholarships, and job opportunities.
- Grades affect what students think they’re good at, their level of stress, and whether school seems like a place where they can excel.
- Grades affect how parents evaluate their children’s schools.
- Grades give educators important data on students’ errors and misconceptions, what worked and didn’t work instructionally, PD and staffing needs, and achievement gaps.

The shocking thing, says Feldman, is that in many schools, grading practices are inaccurate and widen economic and racial opportunity gaps. In all too many schools, “teachers choose their own individual way to grade, guided by their best sense but uninformed by either research or best practices,” and administrators hesitate to encroach on teachers’ “professional autonomy.”

Feldman lists six grading beliefs and practices that have a negative effect on teaching and learning – most acutely on fairness and equity:

- The belief that students are primarily motivated by extrinsic rewards like grades and points; research shows that learning and creativity are undermined by extrinsic rewards;
- Counting errors in homework and classwork against students’ grades; these two areas work best when they are low-stakes opportunities to practice and learn from mistakes;
- Averaging grades across a semester, which penalizes students who steadily improve from a low baseline and reach mastery after weeks of effective effort and feedback;

Using a 0-to-100 percentage scale where a zero can have a devastating effect on a student’s summative grade; using a 0-to-4 scale, a poor grade has a proportionate impact;

The Equity Dimension with Traditional Grading Practices (Cont.)

- Including effort, participation, homework completion, and behavior in academic grades, which can be highly subjective and tends to work against disadvantaged students; keeping these areas separate from academic achievement levels the playing field;
- A pressure-cooker environment in which everything is graded “sows distrust, shame, and deceit,” says Feldman; studies have shown that a less-pressured classroom fosters psychological safety, relationships, and trust and encourages participation, risk-taking, and hard work.

On top of these is the unfairness and inequity that result when teachers are free to decide their grading practices. “What confidence or uncertainty do you have,” asks Feldman, “that two teachers in your school who teach the same course would assign the same grade to a student?”



Over the last six years, Feldman has worked with a number of schools on improving grading policies. In one independent school in Washington, D.C., the principal saw the need for change but knew that top-down reforms would spark resentment and resistance. She shared a few articles with the faculty and issued an open invitation to dig deeper into the instructional and equity dimensions of grading. To her surprise, almost half of the faculty expressed interest, and she and Feldman led a series of workshops exploring the impact of different grading practices. Feldman suggested three criteria:

- Accuracy – grades are a valid reflection of a student’s academic performance;
- Bias-resistance – the design reduces subjectivity and implicit bias;
- Motivation – grades encourage students to strive for academic success, accept struggles and setbacks, persevere (including retaking tests), and gain critical life skills.

The Equity Dimension with Traditional Grading Practices (Cont.)

Members of the committee tried out new practices for a year and were so impressed by the results that they insisted on implementing them for the whole school.

In the schools he's worked in, Feldman has found that improved grading policies have seven positive effects:

- Students are less stressed, student-teacher relationships are stronger, and classrooms are more relaxed and productive.
- Grade inflation decreases because teachers aren't padding grades with homework completion, behavior, and students "doing school."
- Grades provide teachers, students, and families with more-accurate data on actual learning.
- The percent of students receiving As goes down, most dramatically among economically advantaged students.
- The percent of students getting Ds and Fs decreases, most dramatically among students of color and those from low-income families.
- There's a stronger correlation between teachers' grades and their students' standardized test scores, especially among less-advantaged students.
- Finally, says Feldman, "Teachers find that learning and implementing these grading practices improves their work as educators and has led to improved student learning."



Ideas for Indoor Recess in Elementary Schools



[“Fresh Ideas for Indoor Recess”](#) by Marcee Harris
in Learners Edge, January 11, 2022

In this Learners Edge article, Marcee Harris suggests ten ways to engage students when the weather nixes outdoor recess:

- Finger knitting – Inexpensive yarn and their fingers are all students need to create a bracelet, scarf, or belt (see a YouTube video with directions at the link below).
- Directed drawing – The link below has an Art for Kids Hub video for drawing an ice cream tower.



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MsZsUBYU0qU>



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vzaUdSnUWS4>

- Virtual field trips – Students can visit a rain forest, the ocean floor, a museum in Paris, and more.
- A magic bin – Invite students to use odds-and-ends materials to create their own invention, inspired by the book, Miss Makey and the Magic Bin.



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EvhxshXeLRc>



https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RdATcstB1_g

Ideas for Indoor Recess in Elementary Schools (Cont.)

- Code.org – This website introduces students to the basics of coding – creating poetry, an app, or a video game.
- GoNoodle – Release pent-up energy with dance-along, sing-along, workout music videos.



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZRN RVu4DFcs>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xjtPMiumixA>

- Chopstick challenge – This team-building activity needs only chopsticks – see the video below.
- Human tic-tac-toe – Student teams race each other to make three in a row using their bodies or other classroom items.



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IFmrJgHV42A>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-hwDNL0pQ8o&t=1s>

- Several classic games, including Heads Up 7 Up and Silent Ball.



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UY2sYFh6lWM>

Making Social Studies Content Accessible to Struggling Readers

[“Unlocking Social Studies Text”](#) by Jeanne Wanzek in *American Educator*, Spring 2021 (Vol. 45, #1, pp. 10-15); Wanzek can be reached at jeanne.wanzek@vanderbilt.edu.



“High-school students with reading difficulties face incredible challenges navigating content learning,” says Jeanne Wanzek (Vanderbilt University) in this article in *American Educator*. “These students face significant barriers in preparing for college, for careers with livable wages, and for civic engagement.” Secondary social studies teachers have a wide range of reading proficiency in their classes, with many students struggling to comprehend grade-level texts due to gaps in background knowledge, vocabulary, and strategies for monitoring comprehension.

“How can a teacher address the needs of students who are not proficient readers,” asks Wanzek, “at the same time they are trying to teach a mountain of content?” She suggests five research-based strategies for helping all students successfully engage with on-level texts:

- Start with a “comprehension canopy.” To kick off a unit, the teacher spends 5-7 fast-paced minutes hooking students’ interest and scaffolding comprehension by: (a) showing a brief, engaging video and leading a discussion on it; (b) giving a mini-lesson on essential background knowledge; and (c) posing an overarching question that lends itself to research, is a problem to solve, and will be answered by the end of the unit – for example, During the Gilded Age, how did the economic, political, and social landscape change for American workers?
- Teach essential content-specific vocabulary and concepts. The teacher introduces 4-5 words and concepts that are central to the unit, accompanied by student-friendly definitions, a visual representation, examples and non-examples, and a quick discussion so students get practice applying the words (three examples: revenue, urbanization, immigration). These ideas are revisited throughout the unit in warm-up activities, readings, and applications to real-life situations.
- Provide support for critical content readings. The teacher scaffolds students’ comprehension of reading passages by (a) pre-teaching a few essential words; (b) reading key passages with the whole class, in small groups, in pairs, or individually; (c) stopping at strategic points to discuss and get students taking notes; and (d) throughout the unit, making connections to the overarching question, key terms, and previously learned content.

Making Social Studies Content Accessible to Struggling Readers (Cont.)

- Use student teams to monitor content understanding. The teacher forms heterogeneous groups of 3-5 students that work together throughout the year discussing and applying content. At several points in each unit, all students individually take a short multiple-choice quiz on the content and vocabulary covered so far (a sample question: Which of the following is not a cause of rapid urbanization during the Gilded Age?). The teacher collects the quizzes and checks to see how individual students are doing. Then teams are given the same questions and work together to answer the questions correctly. They can use what each student remembers, their notes, and the texts they've been reading. "Because the questions have been carefully crafted to draw on multiple aspects of the content," says Wanzek, "they are likely to elicit discussion of the content during the team work. In addition, because each student has already taken the quiz, each is prepared to contribute to the discussion." Teams might use scratch-off cards or another method for getting immediate feedback on whether their answers are correct. The teacher circulates, listening to groups' discussions and noting misconceptions and questions that caused the most difficulty, and uses insights gained to plan individual, small-group, or whole-class follow-ups and address knowledge gaps.

- Have teams apply content knowledge in a summative activity. At the end of the unit, students work in their teams to tackle a problem-solving or perspective-taking challenge – for example, Imagine

you serve on an advisory committee to a U.S. president during the Gilded Age. As a team, make a recommendation on whether the United States should limit immigration. Provide at least two economic, two political, and two social reasons in support of your recommendation. Students can use notes, readings, and other class resources to discuss and formulate their responses; the teacher might provide a graphic organizer and step-by-step directions. In a whole-class discussion, teams report on their claims, conclusions, and rationale. The teacher highlights high-quality use of text to support ideas, pushes teams to supply evidence where it's missing, and facilitates questions and discussions. The teacher wraps up by making connections to the overarching questions of the unit, and has teams self-assess on how well they used text-based information, listened to each other, engaged in critical thinking, and worked together.

Using the Five-Step Routine to Teach *Urbanization*

Definition

The movement of people from rural to urban areas and the resulting physical growth of cities.

Visualization



Related Words

Urban expansion, urban sprawl, development, migration

Example of Word Use

The United Nations forecasts that the pace of global *urbanization* will continue to quicken, and that 60 percent of the world's population will live in cities by the year 2030. (That's amazing, considering that only 13 percent of the world's population lived in cities in 1900.)

Example

New York City

Nonexample

Harvard, Illinois (a small town in the Midwest)

Turn and Talk

Select one of the following topics to address: economic opportunity or climate change. For the selected topic, tell your partner two benefits and two challenges of urbanization.

- Example: Urbanization creates more economic opportunities for individuals because there are more businesses and more job training opportunities. However, individuals moving to big cities to pursue economic opportunities face high rents and many other newcomers also searching for jobs.

Podcasting as a Way to Liven Up the High-School Essay

[“Back to ‘I’: Recasting Students and Teachers as Problem-Explorers Through Podcasting”](#) by Kathryn Hackett-Hill in English Journal, January 2022 (Vol. 111, #3, pp. 27-33); Hackett-Hill can be reached at kmh007@uark.edu.



In this article in English Journal, Kathryn Hackett-Hill (University of Arkansas) remembers how her fifth-grade teacher told students they were going to learn how to write “real” essays. “What you learned before,” said the teacher, “well, that was just for fun. You aren’t in fourth grade anymore.” As they tackled the five-paragraph academic essay, students were forbidden to use contractions or the pronoun I. Students highlighted each paragraph in a different color and practiced outlines and thesis statements. Hackett-Hill complied, churning out teacher-pleasing essays in “stiff, dusty language and academic voice.”

In subsequent grades, college courses, and training to be an English teacher, she had better experiences. “The ideas in my writer’s notebooks grew wings,” she says. “I was moved to transcend the comfort of five paragraphs.” In her first year with her own ELA classroom, full of naïve energy and idealism, she was determined to not be like her fifth-grade teacher.

But students, jaded by years of formulaic writing instruction, “stared back at me with wooden, incredulous eyes,” and colleagues said raising standardized test scores was the name of the game. “Slowly,” says Hackett-Hill, “I retreated to the fill-in-the-blank thesis statements and five-part outlines... Standardized, dispassionate writing begot standardized, dispassionate teaching.” Every day she supplied a new prompt and students practiced writing on-demand essays “of the cardboard variety: flimsy, identical, and boring to read. I used to have to bribe myself with vanilla lattes to grade a stack of them.”

Then Hackett-Hill had an epiphany. In a summer PD course, she composed and recorded a podcast on how poetry benefits teachers. Although it was a challenging exercise, she realized that having students create podcasts might “capture and amplify the voices, passions, and curiosities of my student-writers, while also strengthening their fundamental essay-writing skills.” An upcoming unit on informational writing seemed like a good time to try the idea. Students groaned at first, having been subjected to all too many dreary experiences with the genre. Here’s how the unit came alive in a series of “laps” over several days:

- Responding as readers – First, Hackett-Hill asked students to read a variety of short, lively informational texts (news articles, infographics, podcast scripts), think about the intended audience, write brief summaries, determine the importance of

Podcasting as a Way to Liven Up the High-School Essay (Cont.)

the ideas, and notice the authors' "craft moves." In this segment, she says, students were "beginning to rediscover the 'I' in their expository writing, reanimating as more curious, questioning, and observant critical thinkers about information and how information is presented."

- **Thinking as writers** – Next, students chose a topic they knew something about, or were passionate about, and composed a list of "Six Things You Should Know About..." (modeled after ESPN's The Magazine). "Freed from having to make choices about formatting or genre," says Hackett-Hill, "students could focus on other key skills of informational writing: audience awareness and selection of purposeful evidence and examples... Instead of looking to me for guidance on somewhat banal issues such as word requirements and thesis formatting, students were repositioned as the decision-makers in this lap, challenged by, yet capable of grappling with, the choices that real writers make."

- **Creating a podcast for an authentic audience** – Hackett-Hill then had students brainstorm topics that interested them and were important to the school during Covid-19 – cafeteria food, the school's dress code, profiles of favorite teachers, the school's history, the impact of the pandemic on the mental health of student athletes. As students composed their podcast scripts, she had them keep these questions in mind:

- Who are my intended listeners? What do they already know about the topic?
- What information do I need to include, and what can I leave out?
- Are there misconceptions I should address?
- How should I format and organize the information so it's easy to grasp?
- How can I make the information interesting and relevant to the listener?
- What sounds should I include to reinforce the important ideas?
- What reactions and attitudes do I want my listeners to have?
- Is my tone lighthearted or serious, academic or colloquial?

Each class in this segment began with a mini-lesson on a specific podcasting skill, and students studied sample podcasts from The New York Times student podcast content, This American Life, and The Daily.



Podcasting as a Way to Liven Up the High-School Essay (Cont.)

Over several days, students learned how to conduct an interview, choose an appropriate format, compose an enticing lead and a powerful conclusion, and do a storyboard. The classroom buzzed with energy as students did online research, conducted interviews, collaborated on scripts, planned their podcasts, edited scripts, and recorded their podcasts. In contrast to the dreary way informational writing classes had unfolded before, says Hackett-Hill, “students were set free to follow their curiosities, lean into moments of doubt and risk-taking, and embrace change in the midst of discovery.” The unit covered the state ELA standards and more – and many students successfully applied the skills in standardized tests. And Hackett-Hill says the grading was so much more interesting that she drank fewer vanilla lattes.

While there were some stumbles pioneering podcast units, she believes this approach “gives students permission – no, an expectation – to recast the essay as a tool for exploring problems.” Hackett-Hill aspires to teach writing in a way “that values slowness, mindfulness, earnestness, and openness in a world designed for speed, automation, efficiency, and guaranteed outcomes... in a way that builds connection and dialogue: between ideas, places, and people. Because what if the essay – not the product-over-process kind that I was taught – is a way to overcome the magnetic appeal of absolutes and simplistic answers? What if the essay bestows us with the capacity to experience and even embrace complexity, critical thinking, and the humanity in ourselves and others? What if the essay could be a ‘spot of time’ for all of us, a space for healing, creativity, and nourishment as we think through problems together?”



Kathryn Hackett-Hill taught high school English for seven years and recently started the doctoral program in curriculum and instruction at the University of Arkansas. As a National Writing Project teacher-consultant and ARTeacher Fellow, her research interests include student-centered writing instruction, new literacies, and arts integration in the secondary ELA classroom. A member of NCTE since 2014, Kathryn can be contacted at kmh007@uark.edu.

Read Across America Day Virtual Read-Aloud

March 2, 2022

Celebrate Read Across America Day with a virtual read-aloud featuring internationally renowned writer and activist Alice Walker!

Click [Here](#) to register!



Join DE & Vooks for This Special Event

Brought to you by [Vooks](#) and [Tra Publishing](#), listen to Alice Walker read her powerful new book *Sweet People Everywhere*. This virtual experience includes Alice Walker reading the book and talking about the book-writing process, as well as illustrator Quim Torres discussing the illustration process –in Spanish! Subtitles will be available to help you engage every student with this exciting event.

You can also find a ready-to-use activity and additional resources to build a fun lesson around this annual holiday.



Integrated Computational Thinking



Computer Science for All- The Dennis Yarmouth Regional School District is creating a pathway so that students of all ages get opportunities to experience learning in Digital Literacy and Computer Science.

Click [here](#) for free self paced course options through ISTE.



Explore "Look. Think. Talk." Routines for K-5 at Multiplicity Lab. Perfect for Number Talks!

<https://multiplicitylab.northwestern.edu/look-think-talk/>