

SECONDARY CONNECTION

MIDDLE SCHOOL / HIGH SCHOOL CURRICULUM NEWSLETTER

JANUARY 2019 | ISSUE 10

**Cooperative
Learning**
In the Classroom

Veterans Day
2018

The **"Secrets"** To
Designing Effective
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INSTRUCTIONAL TECHNOLOGY

LEADERSHIP & TEACHING IN A TECHNOLOGY-DRIVEN WORLD

BY BRIAN GADDIE

Instructional Technology: What is it? Who is it? Why do we need it? What does an instructional technology specialist do? These are questions that are asked on a regular basis. Teachers, administrators, and other stakeholders in school districts across our state understand that technology is a large part of our society and most of them understand the importance of technology's role in the future of our students. To understand instructional technology, one must first understand instruction, which is the what the entire instructional technology world is based around. Teaching and leading are necessary concepts and skills that are held by teachers and administrators throughout Rankin County School District and across the state and nation. They are also skills that are, inherently, separate from technology. Effective instructional technology leadership cannot happen until instruction and the skills needed for proper instruction are understood and implemented at the school and district level, something that is done very well here in the RCSD.

WHAT IS INSTRUCTIONAL TECHNOLOGY?

Let's start off by identifying what instructional technology is not. It is not making sure that teachers are using the latest and greatest technology program or app in their classroom. It is not making sure that teachers are using technology in every aspect of their lesson every single day. It is not making sure that Macbook that all of our students have is open all the time. It is an educational theory and practice that is not so much a straight forward, bulleted list of specifics but rather a more obscure theory that focuses on current technology trends, developing new technology for education, assessing educational value of technology, and most importantly, ensuring that available technology is used in an effective manner and in a way that promotes true learning and authentic experiences for students. To clarify the definition, instructional technology is not the use of technology in the classroom, it is the theory and understanding of different technologies' usefulness in the classroom and beyond.

WHO IS IT? WHY DO WE NEED IT? WHAT DOES AN IT SPECIALIST DO?

Instructional Technology Specialists are those who work to implement effective instructional technology strategies in their respective school districts. Here in RCSD, we have two instructional technology specialists; Stephanie Cotnam (Elementary) and me, Brian Gaddie (Middle/High School). The job of an instructional technology specialist is to work closely with principals and teachers to gain an understanding of where a school is as far as technology implementation in the classroom and what areas need to be addressed or what interests there are within the school about technology in the classroom. Also, researching, testing, and presenting new technology is an important aspect of the job. Discovering new technology and gauging its usefulness and effectiveness in the classroom setting is vital to ensuring that technology is going to enhance and add-to the learning process and not detract from that process.

Today's society is surrounded by and engulfed in technology from every angle. That is not going away and is only going to grow more over the years. There is a belief that the use of technology in the classroom is simply to spice up a lesson or add some new and engaging aspects to a lesson. While those things do happen and are not a bad thing, that is not the only reason for instructional technology. Teachers do much more for students than just helping them pass a test or get a good grade in a class. Teachers are preparing our students for life outside of school; careers, college, social situations, and many other aspects of the "real-world." The fact of the matter is, the "real-world" is technology driven. From the counter of a fast food restaurant to the top floor of a fortune 500 company, technology is in use and an understanding of how to properly use that technology is necessary for success. Without exposure to technology and its appropriate use, students would enter college and/or the workforce lacking skills that are required by almost every industry in our nation. We need instructional technology, not just to make our lessons look "neat" and do interactive and collaborative new activities, but also to prepare our students for a world that is technology driven and equip them with the knowledge to properly use that technology for success both in school and out of school. ■

TECHNOLOGY REMINDERS

Restart your computers on a weekly basis. It's a new year and a great new year's resolution would be to restart your MacBook on a regular basis. Pick a day and make that your "restart" day every week.

Backup your computer. Make sure that you are saving your important files to somewhere besides your desktop. It's okay to save things there but be sure to have them backed up to Google Drive, an external hard drive, or any other external storage device.

Keep your passwords safe and secure. A lot of damage can and has been done by someone getting the password of a teacher. Writing down your password and leaving on a sticky note on your computer, your desk, or anywhere in your room is never a good idea.

Remember to continue putting in work-orders for your technology issues. This is the fastest and most organized way to ensure that we get everyone fixed up as fast as possible.



CLASSROOM SPOTLIGHT BHS TEACHER ACADEMY

by Rebecca Russell

Brandon High School Teacher Academy has been gifted with a great opportunity to explore cultural diversity through a program called “Global Connections.” Marie Adkinson, Peace Corps Volunteer, from our very own Rankin County, began her peace relations abroad in March of 2018.

Marie visited and spoke with Mrs. Russell’s Teacher Academy students about cultural diversity and commonalities and differences between Mississippi and Kapan, Armenia. Students posed interesting questions like, “What’s the food like there?,” “What are the schools like there?,” and “What is the biggest difference in Armenia and Brandon?” Marie was able to show them a video of a typical day in her school, speak to them in Armenian, and even had them write their name using the Armenian alphabet.

After visiting with Marie, students were still curious; therefore, we decided to partner with and become pen pals with the school in Kapan through the Peace Corps program, “Global Connections.” Students sent them a video saying “hello.” We told them our names and they did the same. We wrote letters to the Armenian students and told them a little about ourselves including our families. This is a very unique experience that the students are really excited about! The Peace Corps’ mission was founded on peace relations and friendships abroad, which is exactly what we are creating.

Upcoming topics for writing our pen pals and videos include favorite cultural activity or holiday, favorite food, animals/pets, extra curricular interests, technology in the classroom, travels and trips, and money. Not only is this global connection beneficial to my students but also to the students in Armenia. We, in Teacher Academy are learning about cultural diversity, classroom challenges, and societal trends. The Armenian students are learning English vocabulary, American customs, and how to communicate globally. Thus far, we have learned just how different, yet similar, we are all the way across the globe.

Educators Rising and the BHS SADD-SAVE club is even “getting in on the action.” Here at Brandon High School we are promoting positive social change, and the Armenian students are partnering with us. In January, BHS will be promoting positive self image. We will have 1700 students with nametags on such as “Hello, I’m beautiful,” “Hello, I am intelligent,” “Hello, I am strong.” Students in Armenia will do the same activity, and we will get to discuss it with them. This partnership has already had an extremely positive effect on my students, school, and myself.

1 Rebecca Russell, teacher academy instructor, Dr. Bryan Marshall, principal of Brandon High School, and Marie Adkinson, Peace Corps Volunteer

2 Mrs. Russell’s Teacher Academy One students (L-R) Taylor Barnes, Marie Bryant, Marie Adkinson, Markayla Johnson, Olivia Vowell, Taylor Davis, Anna Claire Dickerson, Cici Williams, Viniyah Ducksworth, and Beth McGaughy.

3 Marie explaining the Armenian Dram to BHS Teacher Academy students.

4 (L-R) Sian McGregor, Colby Burleson, Cici Williams, Marie Bryant, Bryona Williams, Marie Adkinson, Mary Kate McCreary, Katie Kelly, Carolyn Beard, Vinyah Ducksworth, Beth McGaughy, and Tanaka Ridge



VETERANS DAY

by Catherine Beasley

As many of you know Veterans Day started as a day to honor and reflect those who served and died during World War I. Starting in 1919 on the first anniversary of the end of World War I, the “war to end all wars.” This day was originally called “Armistice Day” and it fell on November 11, the date the Armistice was signed ending World War I. President Wilson commemorated this day by stating, “To us in America, the reflections of Armistice Day will be filled with solemn pride in the heroism of those who died in the country’s service with gratitude for the victory, both because of the thing from which it has feed us and because of the opportunity it has given America to show her sympathy with peace and justice in the councils of the nations ...” His words still hold true today as we continue to be grateful and thankful for the amazing men and women, along with their families, who pledge to keep America safe.

This year is particularly special, as we finalized the commemoration of the 100th anniversary of the end of World War I, a war that seemingly shaped lives, and America, forever.

Check out information on WWI Centennial Celebration - <https://www.worldwar1centennial.org/>

Some other GREAT WWI resources for your classes here - <http://www.nea.org/tools/lessons/60045.htm#LP>

This special day was changed to Veterans Day in 1954 by President Eisenhower in an effort to honor American veterans of all wars. As we march forward we continue “to honor America’s veterans for their patriotism, love of country, and willingness to serve and sacrifice for the common good” on Veterans Day each year.

As always, the schools in Rankin County School District showed up and showed out to honor local veterans. This district was filled with pride for its country all throughout the month of November. Many students were able to participate in special experiences in which students met, talked with, and honored our local veterans.

Brandon Middle School Student Council created cards that were given to the veterans at the VA in Jackson, MS. The school had three 6th grader students who were recognized at the City of Brandon’s Veterans Day breakfast for winning the mayor’s Veterans Day essay contest.

Brandon High School turned the building into a parade ground to honor and celebrate local veterans.

BHS Veterans Day Video

Florence Middle School ROCKED Veterans Day! The History department sold fabulous “FMS Loves our Veterans” t-shirts that students will wear when they host over 100 veterans. Veterans and their student sponsor were able to enjoy a nice reception while listening to a performance by the band and choir.

Florence High School hosted a Veterans recognition and tailgate at the home football game on October 26, 2018. Veterans were invited to a tailgate party before the game where they were treated to food and drinks. The FHS choir sang the National Anthem as the JROTC Drill team unfurled a Garrison flag and the JROTC Color Guard presented the Colors. During half-time, the veterans marched out on the field where they received special recognition for their service. There were 62 veterans present for the event.

McLaurin High School Beta Club and ROTC hosted its 5th annual Veterans Day program. The Beta Club prepared and served breakfast for local veterans and the ROTC presented a program for honored veterans and all students. This year over 30 veterans attended and participated in the event.

Northwest Middle School Choral Department hosted more than 400 people at the 3rd Annual Veterans Day concert. They were joined by Northshore Elementary Honor Choir and Northwest Elementary Honor Choir. All branches of the military were honored. Veterans attending were asked to sign their name under their branch of service and were given American Flag lapel pins as a thank you. Over five-hundred dollars was raised for the Wounded Warriors of Mississippi Organization.

Northwest High School recognized military and first responders at their home game. Pre-game recognitions included a special video created by the school, playing of America the Beautiful by the NWRHS Band and the National Anthem by the NWRHS Choir. There was a large flag on the field and fireworks! A special coin toss with 12 Honorary Captains from the Military and First Responders.

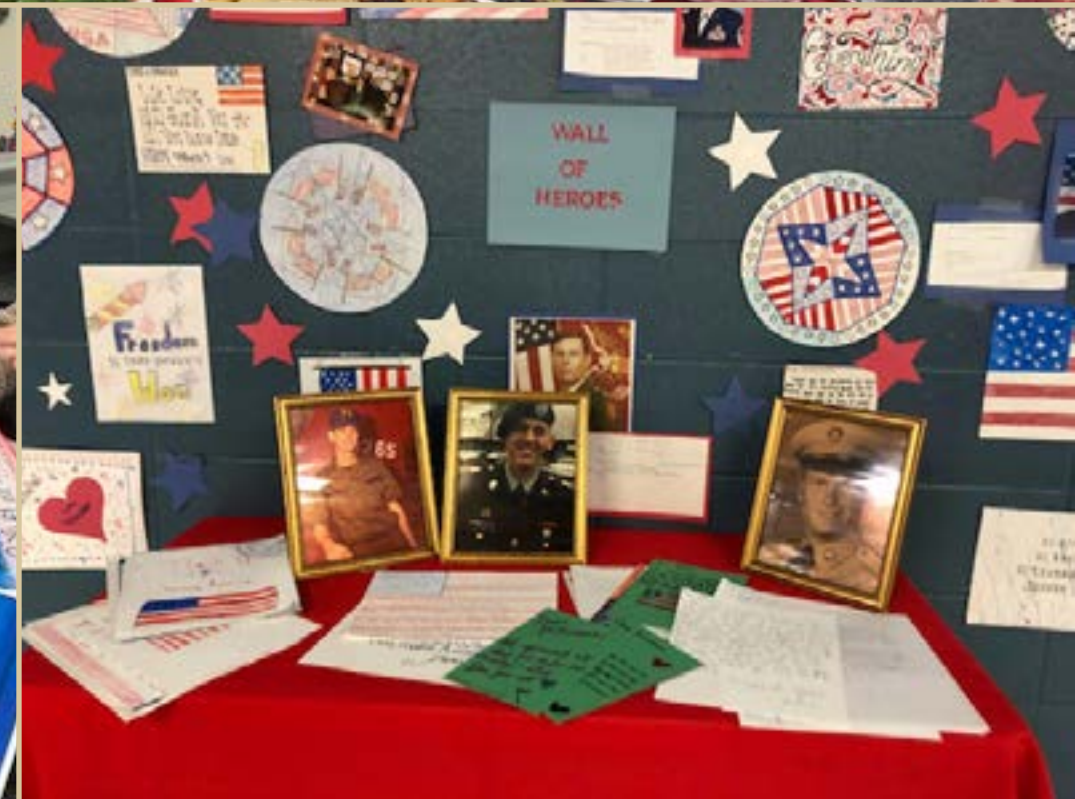
Honorary Captains for the night included -

3 Star General Harold Cross | Special Forces Chris White | Battalion Chief Ellis Barner | Operations Manager for Pafford EMS Curtis Weldon | Army Sgt. Jim Seymour | US Air Force/ Fireman Josh Swales | Flowood Chief of Police Ricky McMillian | Flowood Police Officer Wealton Beverly | Rankin County Sheriff Bryan Bailey | Rankin County Undersheriff Raymond Duke | Reservoir Fire Chief Scott Berry | Rankin County Supervisor/Fireman Daniel Cross

Both teams participated in a player run out holding American flags under the fireworks!

NWRHS Veterans Day Video ■

*See Veterans Day in Photos
on the following
Pages*



Cooperative Learning in the Classroom

by Jana Comer

As my mind meanders down memory lane (insert magical flashback sequence melody), I very vividly remember the first time I laid eyes on my brand new, flashy, hot pink and metallic robin's egg blue Pound Puppy bicycle...sans training wheels might I mention. Besides the fact I had absolutely no clue how to ride this thing, I thought I was the baddest chick on the block. Sure, my mother relentlessly attempted to show me and instruct me on the "how to's" of the bicycle riding process; however, that just didn't resonate. It wasn't until many attempts of trial and error on my own that I became an expert of cruising my neighborhood streets on my "big girl" bike.

A few years later, highschool arrived, and it was expected of me to not only play basketball but to excel. I was fairly talented thanks to genetics, but more importantly, I was an extremely hard worker. There were things that I knew I needed to improve on, but I also knew that I couldn't get there by myself. After watching and working with my teammates that dominated in the areas of my shortcomings, my game drastically improved.

Fast forward a few more years down the road to when my mother and grandmothers so generously introduced me to the world of culinary arts- and I use the term "arts" very loosely. I was shown recipes and instructed on how to prepare the perfect "this and that"; however, these lessons of domestication weren't exactly meeting the designated outcomes my "teachers" had hoped for. As more practice and conversation with friends ensued, my cooking game eventually grew stronger.

As an adult reflecting on past events, even though the aforementioned examples may not be exactly life altering, I do feel that it is safe to say that without the opportunities to make meaning for myself and work out issues with others, I would not have been very successful at any of them. The same can be said for students in our classrooms. As educators, we can "teach" students all day long, but the truth is, we cannot learn or understand anything for them. It is imperative that we are giving students ample opportunities to create meaning for themselves through cooperative learning with their peers.

Cooperative learning is a student-centered instructional approach closely aligned with the constructivist theory, which lends itself to the ideology that students learn best when they construct their own knowledge by linking together previous experiences with new concepts through means of collaboration with peers (Brame & Biel, 2015). It is evident that the cooperative learning teaching method has been a prevalent instructional method in the field of education since the 1980's and continuously proves to be beneficial to both students and educators alike. In the study, "The Effects of Cooperative Learning on the Academic Achievement and Knowledge Retention," conducted by Van Dat Tran, he experimented with the effects of different methods of instruction, specifically cooperative and direct, on student learning outcomes.

Over the course of an eight-week period, the research proved "... students who were instructed using cooperative learning achieved significantly higher scores on the achievement and knowledge retention post-test than did students who were instructed using lecture-based teaching." (Tran, 2014).



Effective Implementation of Cooperative Learning

Although peer collaboration is the key component of cooperative learning, it is critical that all group members reach a level of successful understanding; otherwise, there is no authentic learning taking place that meets the individual needs of each student within the groups. According to research conducted by co-directors of the Cooperative Learning Institute, David and Roger Johnson, to ensure that the individual needs of students are met within their cooperative learning groups, there are five elements that must be fundamental pieces: (1) positive interdependence, (2) accountability (group and individual), (3) promotive interaction, (4) appropriate use of social skills, and (5) group processing (Johnson & Johnson).

Initially, it is the teacher's responsibility to create and foster positive interdependence by designing a lesson and environment where students feel as though they have to work as a team to accomplish a common goal. Within this task, students realize that every member's efforts are holistically advantageous opposed to merely individual gains. If this component of collaborative learning is not present, the lack of cooperation will make efforts counter productive.

Secondly, the aspect of accountability, both individual and group, must be present. This is similar to that of an athletic team in the respect that a team is only as strong as the weakest link. Each athlete has to perform a certain role to accomplish the team's goal. If every athlete is not fully cognizant of what the goal is and his or her part in accomplishing that goal, the result will eventually be failure for both the individual and the team. The same with accountability in cooperative learning, if every student

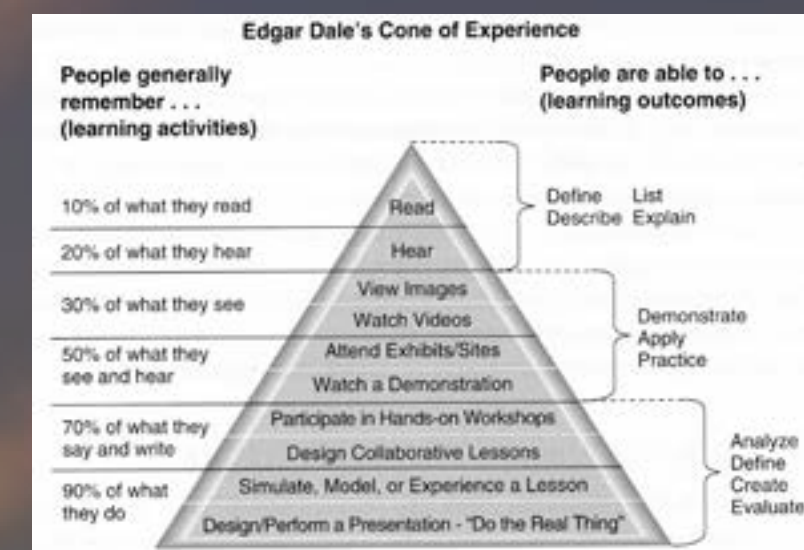
is not clearly aware of the learning outcome/goal and his or her contribution to meeting that goal, the group as a whole is setting themselves up for failure. Students are able to promote accountability by assisting one another, giving positive feedback, and offering assistance in areas of growth.

The third element of cooperative learning is that of promotive interaction. During promotive interaction, students are learning from each other face-to-face through verbal explanations, experiments, and various other methods of peer instruction. Each student is promoting learning for his or her peers.

Furthermore, students are expected to collaborate effectively through means of using appropriate social skills, assimilating task work and teamwork. In the article "An Overview of Cooperative Learning," the Johnsons state "group members must know how to provide effective leadership, decision-making, trust-building, communication, and conflict-management..." (Johnson & Johnson).

Finally, there should be a firm existence of group processing, in which students are able to self assess productivity within the group based on success, working relationships, improvement in areas where growth is needed, etc.

For cooperative learning to be an effective means of student learning, all five of the components must be present each time students are placed in learning groups. It is proven that students who participate in cooperative learning groups show more growth on assessments especially in areas of critical thinking and reasoning skills. A major reason for this is because students participating in cooperative learning are actively engaged in his or her own learning and the learning process itself. So regardless if we are learning to ride a bike, play a sport, cook a meal, or understand and apply content specific skills, we owe it to ourselves and each other to instill the value of lifelong learning within the hearts and minds of our most valuable asset- our students-our future. ■



THE "SECRETS" TO DESIGNING EFFECTIVE LESSONS

BY LORIE YATES

"Every student deserves a great teacher, not by chance, but by design." (Fisher, Frey & Hattie, 2016)

Here's the "secret" - the very best teachers share something in common: they design lessons that allow students to interact and ask questions, they design lessons that take students from surface-level learning to applying knowledge and skills at deeper levels, they focus on learning goals for their students, they plan for opportunities to check for understanding every day, and they evaluate their lessons every day to make changes necessary for improving student learning.

A lot of approaches toward planning out lessons really focus on the content - what we are going to teach. It's how we're going to teach it that makes all the difference in whether students actually learn.

Here are some "secrets" to designing effective lessons:

SECRET #1: HAVE A GREAT PLAN!

To have a great lesson, you must plan a great lesson. In **EMBEDDED FORMATIVE ASSESSMENT**, Dylan Wiliam writes, "...most of us behave as if lecturing works, but deep down, we know it's ineffective. But leaving the students to disc over everything for themselves is equally inappropriate. For this reason, I describe teaching as the engineering of effective learning environments."

Here are a few ideas on how to engineer effective learning environments:

- Have a **CLEAR LEARNING INTENTION** for the lesson. A learning intention is specifically what the student should be able to know and do as a result of teaching during the lesson. The learning intention should be the driving force behind the lesson and referenced at each transition point throughout the lesson.
- Have **CLEAR SUCCESS CRITERIA**. The teacher - and students - know when and what the students will be held accountable for from the lesson/activity and what success on that looks like.
- Plan for **STUDENT ENGAGEMENT**. Start your lesson with a "hook" that grabs attention, foster a growth mindset, allow for collaborative and cooperative learning, provide op-

portunities for students to engage in argument using evidence, incorporate peer and self evaluations so students take ownership over their own learning.

- Plan a **SEQUENCE OF MEANINGFUL LEARNING ACTIVITIES** that support the learning of content and skills - always with the learning intention in mind. Use a variety of instructional approaches (not just lecture alone).
- Provide **GUIDED PRACTICE**. After the content and/or skill has been introduced, allow students to demonstrate his or her grasp of the new learning, or to practice a skill by working through an activity or an exercise while the teacher is monitoring constantly for understanding and providing feedback.

SECRET #2: MANAGE YOUR INSTRUCTIONAL TIME

Plan out every minute of your block. Decide on the activities for your lesson then decide how much time each will take. Use the 60/40 rule as a general guideline - students should be discussing content, practicing skills, completing learning activities, etc. 60% of the class and the teacher explaining, modeling, demonstrating, etc. 40% of the time. Whoever is doing the "doing" is doing the learning" (Breaux and Whitaker, 2006) so use this as a guideline for helping plan out each activity of your lesson. By doing this, you will ensure that the activities are varied, that the transitions are smooth, that you don't stay on any one thing for too long, and that students know the connection between the activities and the learning intention.

SECRET #3: MAKE YOUR LEARNING INTENTIONS AND SUCCESS CRITERIA CLEAR!

Learning intentions are more than a standard. Learning intentions take the standard and break it down into "learning bites" for students (Fisher, Frey, & Hattie). The learning intentions drive our instruction on a daily basis. By focusing on the learning intentions for the lesson, it ensures we plan a sequence of purposeful activities that help students successfully meet the goal for the day. Students knowing how they will be expected to demonstrate their learning, based on the learning intention, will help them take ownership of their learning on a class by class basis. Clarity! That's the secret! What is it that students should be learning, and how will they know if they learned it? That's the "secret" to learning intentions and success criteria.

SECRET #4: ALIGN TEACHING AND TESTING

One of the best kept secrets of highly effective teachers is that they assess what they teach. To do this, they start with the end in mind and plan backwards. Oftentimes, teachers plan instruction forward, one day or week at a time, and then write a summative test or summative assignment after the teaching, and right before the students complete the summative. However, when teachers plan multi week units, working backwards from state standards, "big ideas," and then construct unit assessments, the result is the design of more-thoughtful instruction that is scaffolded for deeper understanding of content and the development of skills.

SECRET #5: ENGAGE ALL STUDENTS EQUITABLY IN CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES

Often times, teachers have designed this wonderful lesson where they think all students will be willfully engaged and motivated to participate. However, in actuality, there may only be a few students who are engaged in the lesson. The secret is to plan for using specific strategies that help promote student engagement and foster equity in the classroom. Here are few ideas:

- CALL ON STUDENTS RANDOMLY**. Strategically include all students, not just those with raised hands.
- UTILIZE "THINK-PAIR-SHARE."** Give students a specific amount of time to "think" through a question, then "pair" up to discuss, then "share" their thoughts with the whole class. This gives all students a chance to develop the skills of speaking and listening around the content. Then, you could randomly call on students to share out the key take-aways from their discussions.
- REMEMBER "WAIT TIME."** Don't be too quick to answer your own questions! Especially when asking higher level questions, give students 10 seconds or so to formulate an answer. Have students write their answer on a sheet of notebook paper (or small whiteboard) and hold it up once they have an answer...or ask for a thumbs up when they have come up with an answer. This guarantees everyone has a chance to process the question, and the expectation is everyone answers. It's also a way to formatively check for what they know at that point in the lesson.
- ASK "FOLLOW-UPS."** Ask: Why? Do you agree? Can you elaborate? Tell me more. Can you give an example? What is the evidence that supports your claim? Plan for the kinds of questions you will ask so that you don't get stuck just asking surface level questions. Plan for what to do instructionally if students are not on track.
- ASK FOR A SUMMARY (TO PROMOTE ACTIVE LISTENING)**. Randomly call on students to summarize what another student stated.
- USE SILENT CONVERSATIONS**. Pose a question, provide a text for reading, or use a visual and have students silently respond on chart paper. This is a great way to "hear" from all students - even those that are usually too shy to speak up in class.
- USE THE "WHIP" AS A LESSON CLOSURE**. Have students list 3 - 5 things they learned from the lesson or key take-

aways from the lesson. Then, have the class form a circle and share out one thing they learned or one key take-away from the lesson. Encourage them not to repeat the same thing someone else has already shared. Giving them time to list some things before going into the "whip" will support varied responses. It's also a great formative assessment!

SECRET #6: LEARN WITH AND THROUGH ONE ANOTHER!

Plan together, share ideas, observe others teaching, ask for feedback on your own lessons, and regularly analyze and discuss student work with other teachers in order to adjust instruction as needed. Constantly learning with and through one another is a secret to improving our practice as teachers, and a secret to improving student learning in our classrooms. Dylan Wiliam writes, "We now know that the teacher is the most powerful influence on how much a student learns and that teachers can continue to make significant improvements in their practice throughout their entire careers. If all teachers accept the need to improve practice, not because they aren't good enough, but because they can be even better, and focus on the things that make the biggest difference in students, according to the research, we will be able to prepare our students to thrive in the impossibly complex, unpredictable world of the 21st Century."

Embrace the New Year as a chance to revisit and revise your lesson planning. Do what research shows has the most impact on student learning. In **VISIBLE LEARNING FOR LITERACY**, Fisher, Frey and Hattie present this challenge:

"Teachers, we have choices. We can elect to use instructional routines and procedures that don't work, or that don't work for the intended purpose. Or we can embrace the evidence, update our classrooms, and impact student learning in wildly positive ways. We can design amazing lessons that mobilize the evidence and provide opportunities for students to learn. And we can decide to evaluate our impact, if we are brave enough."

Use these "secrets" to help you accept the challenge to continue to grow in your own practice and to be engineers of learning environments for our students. Remember, the ultimate secret, effective teaching and student learning comes,

not by chance, but by design. ■

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GET YOUR STUDENTS OUT THERE!

by Paula McClain

In the world of academia, we (and our students) often get caught up in “our world.” We focus on state testing, curricula, technology in the classroom, and the like. Those things are important, no doubt! However, it is good to also take a moment to allow ourselves and our students to give back to the community that supports us so much in an ongoing basis. Allowing our students to get involved, give of their time and efforts, and show our Rankin County communities how much we appreciate them is a vital part of their education as well.

Our Rankin County businesses, churches, and private sponsors do so much for our schools and students throughout the school year with things like providing meals for clubs/special events, donating supplies for classrooms, giving gift cards for student awards, giving prizes for Grad Night, and the list goes on and on.

When we take time out to allow our students show appreciation by giving back to them, it is good for those we are partnering with, it is good for the students, and it helps to build the bridge between the campus and the community.

IT IS A WIN-WIN-WIN SITUATION!

The Fine Arts Department, as a whole, across Rankin County, has really done an amazing job at this! The Puckett Choir sang for the residents at Peachtree Village, Florence High School National Art Honor Society students donated their time and talents at The Mustard Seed, the Brandon High School Band collected coats for those in need during the winter time, the Pisgah Select Choir sang for the residents at Castlewoods Place Retirement Center, and the Art students at Northwest Rankin painted a canvass for the Rankin County Sheriff's Department...just to name a few! Almost every campus' Fine Arts Department has a project where students can give back!

According to Scholarships.com, when students volunteer it does several things for them as well:

- It makes the student stand out!
- It helps the student to make connections.
- It can help the student earn college credits or even scholarships.

First of all, it can impress those all important College Admissions Professionals. It allows them to see that the student can manage his/her time outside the school day (on their own). It allows those in Admissions to see that the student cares about his/her community and are willing to get involved. This can make them stand out in the college application process.

Secondly, it aids students in being able to make relationships and connections with others they might not have otherwise: from various walks of life or seasons of life. This is key for students to learn how to communicate and work with others.

Third, volunteering can actually aid students in getting to college. Volunteering can translate, for some degrees, into college credits; that means students save money. Likewise, scholarships for volunteering are some of the most common students can apply for.

You see, volunteering in and for our community is beneficial for all involved!

I would like to challenge classroom teachers to do one of two things:

Get behind and support a project that already exists at your campus; encourage your students to get out there and get involved! Talk with your students and see if there is a need in the community they may know about, where they could get involved and volunteer their time and talents; then, find a way to organize it!

After all, if it's a win-win-win situation...isn't that worth doing? ■



Florence High School National Art Honor Society at The Mustard Seed. They go every year to lead the residents in crafting projects.



Northwest Rankin Middle School's Theatre II students working with First Responders from UMC's Advanced Disaster Life Support (ADLS). They have participated in this for eight years straight, helping to prepare our local First Responders for any disaster!

Math “Rock Stars” Build Student Excitement for Algebra I

by Rhonda Kilgo and LaVonda White

On November 27, 2018, Rankin County was fortunate to have math “rock stars” visit two of our schools. Algebra I and Foundations of Algebra students got to meet their favorite study experts from the Algebra Nation videos they had been watching in class and outside of class to prepare for lessons or review previous lessons. Amy, Zach, Kiana, and Darnell are well-known names in several of the Algebra I and Foundations of Algebra classrooms across the district. These “rock stars” made surprise visits to Richland High School and McLaurin High School, and the students and teachers were given the opportunity to ask questions as well as get autographs and selfies. Questions ranged from, “What is your favorite thing to teach?” to “Do you play video games?” Most found it interesting that not all of the study experts majored in any form of mathematics in college. During the visits, the study experts were accompanied by Shauna Hedgepeth, Algebra Nation Assistant Director for Mississippi, Dr. Marla Davis, MDE Bureau Director and Mathematics Content Specialist, and at Richland High School, Senator Chris Caughman, and Representatives Mark Baker and Tom Weathersby.

Algebra I has long been a struggle across the U.S. While this class is often called the gateway to upper level mathematics, and success in the class implies to many that students are truly college and career ready, teachers have struggled to teach students in a way which they retain the material, and students have struggled to apply, understand, and truly comprehend the material. Enter Algebra Nation - a program which began in 2013 in Florida thanks to the collaboration of The University of Florida and Study Edge to address Florida’s concerns over the extremely low pass rates of their students on the state algebra assessment.

As Florida students began to make extreme improvements on the Algebra I test, other states began to take notice and began asking for similar programs in their states. Algebra Nation is a program which is intended to supplement the current curriculum yet is tailored to the standards of the individual states. In conjunction with the Research and Curriculum Unit at Mississippi State University, the Algebra Nation team aligned the program to the Mississippi College and Career Readiness Standards.

Students participate in problems and activities which ask them to complete problems such as compare the cost to travel from Oxford to Starkville and define variables associated with Instagram and Facebook posts. At the same time, practice problems and mini assessments which are accessible to teachers are presented in a way deemed thorough and rigorous by the individual states and mirror question types students will see on the state assessments.

The program not only offers teachers supplemental activities and assessments but also provides students with videos which are presented by different study experts. These study experts “teach” each topic using guided notes (which are printed and given to the students or are a part of the workbooks which are issued to Algebra I and Foundations of Algebra stu-

dents). Each study expert presents the material in his or her own way and focuses on areas which he or she deems most needed - much like different teachers do. Students can watch their favorite study experts, or they can watch all of them. This is similar to having 4 other teachers (in addition to their class teacher) teach the content which is being learned.

Two years ago 30 districts in Mississippi began piloting Algebra Nation. Those districts saw a 7.2% increase in the number of students scoring a 4 or 5 on the Algebra I MAAP test (Algebra Nation, <https://www.algebranation.com/ms/about/impact/>). While test scores improved, classes became more student-centered, students were more involved and willing to do the practice that was assigned, and teachers were relieved from some of the pressures to find “good” assignments which truly addressed standards, increased retention, and were not an extra cost to the teacher. Due to the success of these districts and their students, the Mississippi Legislature appropriated \$500,000 to extend Algebra Nation to all school districts (News Mississippi, <https://newsms.fm/mississippi-schools-to-begin-algebra-nation-program/>). Shauna Hedgepeth calls the program “a buffet for teachers.” She says that there are many ways teachers can use the program; it is really tailored to their needs. As the use of the program grows, Algebra Nation hopes to offer the same well-aligned materials for Geometry and Algebra II in the near future (teachers and students already have access to the videos which are associated with the Florida standards). ■



Rankin County School District Leaders Who Always Look Ahead

by Montgomery Hinton

In the first year on the job as the College and Career Prep Specialist, the leadership of Rankin County School District accepted a proposal to push 9th graders into the PSAT testing. When asked why would this be needed, the data was able to convincingly show that our students who had never been exposed to high stakes tests were at a disadvantage compared to students who were “battle-tested” in the realm of high-stakes tests such as the ACT, SAT, and PSAT.

In an effort to provide our students with the greatest positioning for success possible, a molded, systematic approach was formulated. The senior class of 2019 represents the first graduating class who took the PSAT as 9th graders. We have regained a foothold in the number of National Merit Semi-finalists in the last two years as we have averaged a 200 % increase from prior to the advent of this program.

In the ever-transitioning world of education, the class of 2022 all took the PreACT this year. Again, the administration of this district has its eye on the future. In a [recent report](#) on college tuition, the US Bureau of Labor Statistics stated that tuition has climbed 152.4% from the birth of last year’s graduates (2000) until their admission into colleges of their choice this fall. While inflation increased at a pace of 2.1% yearly, tuition ballooned at a rate of 5.2% yearly. So, as you can see, your RCSD administration is taking steps to insure that even as costs of higher education accelerate, a student is given access to the finest education and educational opportunities to prepare for high stakes tests.

To look at it from a different lens, let’s compare a student who received an average full ride scholarship in 2000. According to the above-cited article, that student would receive an average award of \$20,000.00 per year (\$80,000.00 total). In 2018, an RCSD student would receive an average award of \$50,481.83 per year (\$201,927.32). That is an average award swing of \$121,927.32. Should this trend continue, our class of 2022 would see average tuition costs nationally rise above \$62,000.00. So, to allow students to have the best chances for success without massive debts being accumulated, preparation and exposure to high stakes tests are needed as these high stakes test scores are often a, if not THE, determining factor in scholarship awards.

According to a report [WLOX](#) produced on November 8, 2018, the junior class in Mississippi saw a decline in their ACT scores. However, in Rankin County, our scores continue to well outperform the state average. In fact, our class of 2019 is currently 2.1 points above the state average and is closing in on the national average on the ACT.

So this brings us to the PreACT for our 9th graders. As you can see in this [press release](#) from the ACT on March 22, 2016, the PreACT is designed for 10th graders. Again, in efforts to a) provide our students with access to high stakes testing so that we continue the trend of out-performing our state and national colleagues and b) provide them with free access to the ACT’s new tutoring program called ACT Academy, the decision was made to test our ninth graders on the PreACT.

Rankin County School District was the only district in the state of Mississippi who tested their entire 9th grade class on the PSAT. In fact, for three years, RCSD students accounted for over 50% of the state’s population on the PSAT for 9th graders. According to the ACT representative for our state, Rankin County again currently is the only district that has exposed their children to the PreACT.

Rankin County School District wants to aggressively pave the way for your child’s success. Success, if headed into the college world, means achieving College and Career Readiness in all areas as well as finding unique solutions to paying for the ever-skyrocketing costs of college tuition. Should one of our students elect to go into the workforce and is interested in taking the ACT Workkeys, which is a work-readiness evaluation tool, the school district has been active in finding ways to insure that our students also have that opportunity.

So, it is time to plan now. Thankfully, the seeds are being planted by the hard, daily work of your student’s teachers and the careful planning on your administration’s part. So, stay prepared. Take challenging classes and then go forward with the confidence to master these tests! ■

Strategic Strengthening of Student Use of Academic Language in Science and Social Studies

by Sheri Blankenship



How can we as educators help our 21st century students immerse themselves in academic language? We know that avid reading produces stronger vocabularies, but we also know we are fighting a battle with unprecedented amounts of screen and social media time via phone, computer, and television becoming the norm for our students. Additionally, at the secondary level, students begin to need more specialized, disciplinary vocabulary which can tend to only compound the issue. In his chapter entitled “The Challenges of Reading Disciplinary Texts,” Zhihui Fang, Professor and Head of Reading and Literacy Education at The University of Florida, writes, “In the elementary grades, students are exposed primarily to everyday knowledge, and the texts they read typically deal with topics that are near and dear to them and with events that occur at specific times and places.... In secondary schools, students are exposed to more advanced, abstract, and complex knowledge, which they are expected to not only assimilate and reproduce but also question and critique” (Fang 35). Ultimately, we want students to increase their academic vocabulary in ways that demonstrate their conceptual understanding of the content and that allow students the opportunity to truly acquire these words, not simply define them and know they exist. This, then, requires a more strategic approach to ensure that students have these rich opportunities in our classrooms, especially with the already crowded demands of our courses.

Tools and Strategies to be Intentional with Secondary Academic Language Development

On January 7, 2019, Nicole Renner and Megan Jensen from LDC (Literacy Design Collaborative) facilitated a day of deep conversation around how to more strategically embed the specialized vocabulary our secondary students need into our instruction and assignments. This one-day institute was designed in direct response to the student work we have examined together as Social Studies and Science teachers around common writing tasks during first semester. Through this work, we have discovered that our students are able to include some specialized vocabulary in their responses, but they are not showing proficiency in demonstrating a deeper conceptual understanding of the content through application of the content. Through our conversations around the student work

and the instructional needs based on this student work, we have discovered that students often are not getting enough deep exposure to the academic language they need in ways that help them to truly make these words a part of their own vocabulary. In fact, research indicates that students need **4 exposures** to a word to add it to their repertoire, **14 exposures** are often needed if the student does not have a broad vocabulary already, and as many as **40 exposures** could be necessary, especially for English Language Learners! Clearly, simply having students define a set of words and write a sentence with each word will not create the depth and breadth of exposure needed.

With the **4-14-40** yardstick in mind, educators are left with questions such as **which words do I include in my units? When and how and for what purpose do I need to plan for these multiple exposures to the words I have carefully selected? What strategies are shown to be the most effective in developing deeper use of academic language for secondary students?** In the table below, you will find a link to a resource that can be used to address these questions in your own classroom.

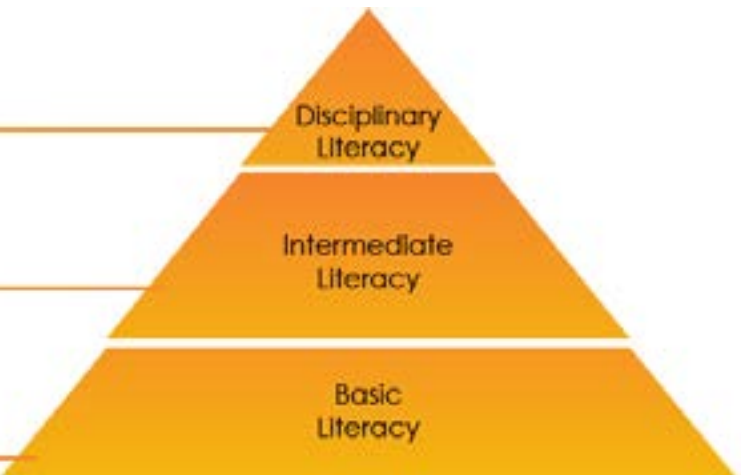
Which words do I include in my unit?	A Decision-Making Model for Selecting Vocabulary for Direct Instruction
When and how and for what purpose do I need to plan for multiple exposures to key vocabulary?	Strategy Evaluation Protocol
What are some effective vocabulary strategies?	Strategy Collection Strategy Reproducibles

The resources linked above were shared and used in our institute day and are readily available for our RCSD teachers to use! Please feel free to reach out to me or to the teachers who attended from your building for additional information or assistance as we all seek to help our students grow their deep, conceptual knowledge using academic language. ■

Disciplinary Literacy:
skills specialized to history, science, mathematics, literature, or other subject matter.

Intermediate Literacy:
skills common to many tasks, including generic comprehension strategies, common word meanings, and basic fluency.

Basic Literacy:
skills such as decoding and knowledge of high-frequency words that underlie virtually all reading tasks.





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