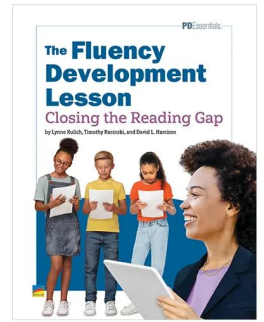


The Power of Fluency Development Lessons at Ana Grace Middle School

Bo Ryan, Principal, Author
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A combination of teacher resignations, lack of newly certified teachers entering the workforce, and uniformed public policies to staff America's schools, which lower the requirement to enter the teacher profession, serve as big threats to the improvement and longevity of the public school system. The teacher shortage is real and serves as an immediate threat to school quality.

Dr. Anthony Muhammad, *The Way Forward*, p 53

Ana Grace Academy of the Arts Middle School, formerly Arts Middle School, is located in Bloomfield, Connecticut. In 2012, the school was established in the city of Hartford, CT, in a factory building called the Colt Building. Hartford is one of the poorest cities in the United States (World Population Review, 2024). Our school is a magnet school with most of the students attending coming from Hartford and the rest of students coming from area towns and cities. We had to move our school out of the Colt Building in April 2019 to a building down the street because of flooding and in January 2021 we moved our entire school to Bloomfield, CT, just outside of Hartford. Our student make-up is 85% Black and Hispanic students with over 70% economically disadvantaged. Our school is also 65% female and 35% male.

Our school was faced with some real challenges in Spring 2020 when Covid hit the United States. In 2021/2022, we had half of our students in school and half at home attending virtually. The following school year, we could not find qualified staff to fill core teaching positions. We averaged 0-1 candidates for each open position in our school. The problem was compounded when we moved our school to a new building 20 miles from the previous location. We had to find a way to help our students, especially those most at-need. I have always been a huge believer in the power of literacy and the impact it makes on lives. During my career, I have been a continuous learner in the area of literacy. Thank you to a few amazing authors: Richard Allington, Kylene Beers, Regie Routman, Kelly Gallagher, Jen Serravallo, Mike Schmoker, Julia Simms, Robert Marzano, Marzano Resources, and Solution Tree books and resources. They have all made a great impact on my career with their books and webinars. And of course, Timothy Rasinski, who has become a mentor to me without even knowing it. In the summer of 2024, I ran across the following 2 articles:

- Rasinski, T. (2017). *Readers Who Struggle: Why Many Struggle and a Modest Proposal for Improving Their Reading*. The Reading Teacher. Vol 70 (5). p 519-524
- Rasinski, T. and Padak, N. (2011). *Who Wants to be a Reading Millionaire? The Reading Teacher*, 64(7) p 553-555

Both of these articles gave me an idea for making an impact on our school. I was inspired! The Fluency Development Lessons and finding the 20-25 extra minutes a day

for reading, both mentioned in the articles, were what we needed to employ at our school. With our newly created plan, all students will have access to the grade level text. Students would be involved in repeated reading of the text, vocabulary review, word study, and comprehension work. Mr. Rasinski said that educators are encouraged to vary the protocol to meet the needs of the teachers and students. The plan must be systematic and easy for all educators to follow. My literacy coach, Sarah Henry and I, created a program for all literacy teachers to use during the college prep block at our school that fits our system, students, and needs.

College Prep

College Prep is a 45-50 minute time block during the day, beyond core classroom instruction, that was created to give students more time and support, including foundational support, enrichment, extension, behavioral support, and time for Special Education and other Services. Students who need IEP pull-out support should not be pulled from core instruction. Students who do not have access to core, grade-level instruction will never reach grade level standards. The focus of the College Prep time is extra support to help students master the grade level priority standards discussed and selected by teams. All students, in an equitable environment, must have access to classroom instruction focused on the priority standards. We had to find ways to help them access the grade-level priority standards without removing them from core instruction. We also had to find ways to enrich and extend the learning for students who mastered the grade-level priority standards. College Prep was created in order to give students access to more time and support during the school day that is targeted, directive, systematic, timely, directive, and research-based. College Prep has 2 blocks:

the 1st 23 minutes focus on foundational work/literacy and the second 23 focus on enrichment. Our teachers work together in teams, placing students into different classes for college prep based on their results from the common formative assessments (measuring student learning of the grade level priority standards), state testing, formative assessments, and other classroom data. This year, we added a literacy portion of College Prep to help all students improve their word work, fluency, and comprehension.

Literacy Focus During College Prep

Our school has a focus on reading during the first 23 minutes of college prep. All of the lessons were adaptations of the Fluency Development Lesson and consisted of word work, vocabulary, fluency, and comprehension of grade level texts. All staff are provided the tools to administer the lessons. The principal teaches literacy during this block as well utilizing a two-day plan:

College Prep 2-Day Literacy Plan	
<i>Keys: Grade-Level Text or higher, Same Text each day, Teacher must read aloud multiple times, NO Round Robin Reading, Non-fiction writing on Day 2</i>	
Day 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Review Text of the Day: What do you know about _____?● Skim the text with the students (title, headings, repeated words, and pictures) and write unusual or challenging words. Review Words, Read Words Aloud, and Discuss.● Review vocabulary words in the text. Go to (https://chatgpt.com/) and type a kid-friendly definition for _____. You can choose to or not to use the graphic organizers for vocabulary.● Teacher reads text aloud as students follow along with eyes on text. Stop to think aloud.● Teacher reads the text again. Students must have eyes on text.● If time, choral read the text with the group

Day 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Review Text, review vocabulary and words from word bank, re-read text aloud, choral reading, and/or student independently read text ● Choose either theme, main idea, central idea, or claim (define and explain) ● Student reread text independently (give 5-7 minutes) ● Students write main idea/theme/claim first, then if it meets mastery, they write the most important evidence with reasoning ● Give feedback on the Main Idea and Most Important Evidence ● Staff check students work for understanding and expect excellence ● Celebrate the students and thank them for their work
Day 3 or Extensions focus on Prosody	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Review text ● Read Readers Theater or Newscast script multiple times ● Performances or Group Readings

Below is the alignment of the reading focus on the standards in Connecticut.

RI/RL 6.1- 8.1: I can cite textual evidence

RI/RL 6.2 - 8.2: I can determine central/main idea of the text

RI/RL 6.4 - 8.4: I can determine the meaning of words and phrases

RI/RL 6.8 - 8.8: I can evaluate the claim in the text

RI/RL 6.10 - 8.10: I can read and comprehend text

Writing: 6.1 - 8.1: I can write arguments to support the claim

Writing 6.4 - 8.4: I can produce clear and coherent writing

Students read independently on Day 2 of the program, complete a Part A and Part B written response with text evidence focused on Theme, Main Idea, or Claim, and receive feedback on their writing by the teacher. The book, Ethical Test Preparation, is a great resource for the types of questions that are utilized on state tests but also force students to think at a high-level. We also use multiple choice questions or questions to initiate classroom discussions.

Theme	Main Idea	Claim
Moral message conveyed in the story or literary text	Tells what the story is about in 1 sentence	Position or arguable statement about a topic

Part A: The theme, main idea, or claim of the text is...

**Part B: The most important evidence from the text that best supports answer A is...
Explain Your Reasoning...**

My instructional coach, Sarah Henry and I, found grade level text for all of the staff to use during the 23 minutes of college prep literacy block. In October, I received the Fluency Development Lesson Book written by Drs. Lynne Kulich, Timothy Rasinski, and David Harrison. In the book they talk about the performance aspect in literacy/fluency instruction. I loved this idea. We purchased microphones and used AI to turn the texts into News Stories that students read aloud. It was a great way to give students confidence and start to develop a love for reading! Please see a sampling of our resources below:

College Prep Resources		
Article #	Title	Resources
4	Snowboarding becomes a hip, mainstream Olympic event	College Prep Resource/Lesson Plan Vocabulary Prior Reading Background Knowledge Exemplar Main Idea and Most Important Evidence
5	What if animals competed in the Winter Olympics?	College Prep Resource/Lesson Plan Vocabulary Prior Reading Background - Narrative Exemplar Main Idea and Most Important Evidence Extension: NewsCast Extension: Non-fiction to Fiction Fun Story

As principal of the building, I model the importance of reading during college prep by teaching two twenty-three minute classes a day. One of the things I did was take the engagement strategies from the *New Art and Science of Teaching* (Marzano) and incorporate them into my Fluency Development Lessons. I collaborate with our grade 6 team by taking students most at-need and students with IEPs. In September, on the DIBELS assessment, the students read at an average of 90 words correct per minute.

By January, 30 sessions later, the students achieved an average of 140 words per minute with 98% accuracy in word recognition. Most importantly, students learned that they can read challenging texts, have increased confidence, and are proud of their work!

I just want to thank all of the amazing authors and researchers that I mentioned in this blog. A huge thank you to Tim Rasinski for his leadership, knowledge, and resources. All of you are helping to make a positive impact in my school! Thank you!

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Resources Used:

