



The Partnership Community

News from and about the teachers, facilitators, and coaches working in CELA's Partnership for Literacy to improve students' achievement across the grades and subjects.

Webinar about the New Common Core State Standards

Inside this issue:

Webinar on Academic Literacy and the New Core Standards 1

Engaging Reluctant Learners by Supporting Their Envisionments 2

Envisionment Building Helps Build Historical Consciousness in Swedish Adolescents 3

Langer Publishes Envisioning Knowledge 4

On May 26, Johanna, Karen, and Janet will be featured in a webinar discussing instructional strategies that prepare students to meet the new Common Core State Standards. Hosted by the Capital Area School Development Association (CASDA) and facilitated by CASDA Executive Director Jim Butterworth, the panel discussion focuses on "Supporting Academic Literacy & Learning" and how "CELA strategies" develop the kinds of knowledge and skills called for in the new standards, which go into effect in September.

To sign up to view the webinar: surveymonkey.com/s/DLB2H5L. Cost is \$25 per person or \$200 for unlimited viewing.

During the 50-minute discussion, panelists define academic literacy, explain how academic literacy relates to the new standards, and offer many examples from your classrooms to demonstrate the connections. **Thank you!**

In addition to the webinar, Johanna and Karen, with Randy Roeser and Monica Judd (Iroquois Middle School, Niskayuna), on July 26 and 28 will offer a summer institute for intermediate and middle school teachers of science, mathematics, social studies, and English language arts. Teachers will learn more about the standards and then work in content-alike groups with real classroom materials to learn effective strategies that will

help students meet the new standards.

On the second day of the institute, Nancy Andress of CASDA will work with supervisors and administrators to examine the effect of such strategies on student achievement. It is expected that supervisors and administrators will also join the content-area groups.

The Summer Institute, "Teaching to the Core: Classroom Techniques That Work," will be held July 26 & 28 on the East Campus of the University. For more information about the institute, contact nandress@uamail.albany.edu. For questions about the webinar, contact bmorgan@uamail.albany.edu.

About this issue

As New York and 33 other states prepare to adopt the new Common Core State Standards, teachers and administrators will need to rethink curriculum and instruction. The vision that drove the development of the standards is of students who can demonstrate independence, build strong content knowledge, adapt their communication to audience and situation, critique as well as comprehend, value evidence, use technology strategically,

and understand other perspectives.

We at CELA and our partner teachers have long advocated for and used instructional strategies and an approach to curriculum that develop in our students the kinds of abilities envisioned by the new standards. With that in mind we are partnering with CASDA (see article above) to offer a webinar and summer institute for teachers and administrators that share some

of these approaches.

Many are built on the work of CELA director Judith Langer and her ideas about how humans come to know (see p. 4). Articles on pages 2 and 3 come from a teacher and a university scholar who share how they have used Langer's research in a middle school classroom (pp. 2-3) and to shape an exploration of the effect of using historical fiction to develop adolescents' historical consciousness (p. 3). JLA

Summer Institute

**Teaching to the Core:
Classroom Techniques
That Work**

July 26 & 28, 2011

UAlbany East Campus

**For teachers of core content areas,
supervisors, and
administrators**

For more information:

nandress@uamail.albany.edu

Engaging Reluctant Learners by Supporting

May 26, 2011

Webinar

**Supporting Academic
Literacy :
Meeting the New Core
Standards**

Sign up at

www.surveymonkey.com/s/BLB2H5L

\$25pp, \$200 unlimited

*Juaneika Agyeman
Knickerbacker MS, Lansingburgh*

I have always lived by the motto that my father instilled in me years ago, “You’ve gotta think!” Granted every time he’d say this, I was usually getting scolded for doing something I shouldn’t have been. However, these words stuck with me and have been guiding me in my personal life as well as my career as an educator.

I find myself years later passing along the same words of wisdom to my students in my reading class at Knickerbacker Middle School in Lansingburgh: “You have to think ...you have to look at the world critically. There are layers of understanding, and it’s YOUR job as a literary scientist to peel back the layers of understanding ...you can’t always take things at face value.”

Taking the Plunge

My students stare at me blankly as I say, “Take for instance this article we’ve just read (holding up a copy of ‘Child Soldiers of Sparta.’ (Brown, 2009). This article tells us that male children were taken from their mothers and brought to a school where they had to fight one another, go naked and hungry, all for the purposes of making them into soldiers.” I pause. “Is this way of thinking of living an ‘honorable life’ as a soldier of Sparta similar to anything you’ve experienced in your lives?”

I brace myself. Who knows what will come out of their mouths? After all I’ve just started using this envisionment-building guide that literacy coach Johanna Shogan has recommended that we use. I

wonder to myself if it will really work.

The hardest thing about using this strategy is not facilitating or trying to get students to think for themselves. The hardest part for me is being able to let go of the reins and ALLOW the students to think for themselves, **no matter what their thoughts are.** I believe that many teachers have felt the same way I have. You question if you are really teaching. If you do not follow the lesson plan and ideas that YOU have produced, you begin to wonder, “Am I really reaching these students if I allow them to forge their own path to understanding?” Everyone knows that students can’t think for themselves; they need guidance from teachers, professionals, adults, right?

It Works!

I wait silently, praying that this will work. A student raises his hand, “Mrs. Agyeman, I think that people that are in gangs feel the same way. You gotta be hard, you gotta be tough so that no one will walk all over you.”

At this point I think to myself, “YES! That’s just it!” I jump on this idea like it’s a sale at Macy’s. It is exactly like the ideas that I heard at our CELA institutes in the fall. Students need opportunities to make sense of what they are reading (whether it is fiction or non-fiction). Students need to be engaged fully and be open to many possibilities of understanding.

It became clear to me at that very moment that through my father’s words, my mother’s words of wisdom, and those of Mrs. Meenan, my high school English teacher

who spoke of seeing the world through a “critical lens,” I was given the opportunity to think for myself without hindrances, using their words and examples as a template. I was able to create my own understanding, and years later, I can recall the road to construction.

The envisionment-building guide enabled our class to open up precious opportunities to discuss ideas (that students generated themselves) about violence and cultural expectations of boys (particularly African-American and Hispanic boys). From there a vision was birthed and now I take a step back.

My Students

I work with students in special education. I’ve been told that the hardest thing for “those students” to do is think for themselves, but we began to explore ideas and possibilities. We went from the status quo to students raising their hands and sharing information.

The students that I serve have a wide range of needs and abilities. This particular group has social and emotional needs and rarely does more than what is asked (and for this class what I used to ask was, “Please just try to keep your head off your desk and keep your hands, feet, and everything else to yourself.”) You could barely get them to read or write for long periods of time without some expression of displeasure.

These students began to open up and share their lives’ experiences and the connections that they made with this particular reading. According to Langer and Close, “When

(cont. p. 3)

Their Envisionments

cont from p. 2)

readers are primarily concerned with gaining information, they work to develop a sense of the topic by maintaining a point of reference (2001, 6).” Their understanding began to take root.

“Envisionments are shaped by their questions and explorations that bring them closer to the information they seek and that better help them understand a topic” (ibid.). This was evident from my students’ willingness to take risks and take a stance within the reading.

Extending Envisionments

To extend their envisionments, I posed a question that was “birthed,” if you will, from our book club, which had read Langer’s *Envisioning Literature* (1995). I stated, “I believe that child soldiers are like modern day gangs.” This created a flurry of activity. I put up many images of young boys and girls from different countries in different “settings” and positions. Some were willing gang members, some were child soldiers, and every one had a story attached.

The students had to then take a stand on whether they agreed or disagreed with the initial claim. Some of the students strongly agreed; some strongly disagreed; but everyone thought about the statements, and that is more than I thought I could have asked for. I’m sure my mom, dad, and my literacy coaches would be so proud. I know I am.

Works Cited

Brown, B. (2009). “Child Soldiers of Sparta.” *Junior Scholastic*.

Langer, J.A. (1995). *Envisioning Literature: Literary Understanding and Literature Instruction*. New York: Teachers College Press.

Langer, J.A. & E. Close (2001). “Improving Literary Understanding through Classroom Conversation.” Albany: Center on English Learning & Achievement.

NOTE: Juaneika stepped into the “zone of proximal development” (Vygotsky) for herself and allowed her students to engage with full minds and hearts in the world before them. It is a delight to read her reflection and see how her growth deeply impacted that of her students. JS

Envisionment Building Helps Develop Historical Consciousness in Swedish Adolescents

Editor’s note: Last fall a scholar from Sweden who had been influenced by Langer’s envisionment-building work spent a few weeks at CELA and shared with us findings from her doctoral thesis. We are pleased to provide a brief summary.

“It could just as well have happened today.” Maj Bylock’s *Drakskeppstrilogi* (Dragon Ship Trilogy) and Historical Consciousness in Ten-to-Twelve-Year-Olds

Mary Ingemansson

The aim of this thesis, about the Historical Novel and Historical Consciousness in Ten-to-Twelve-Year-Olds: Maj Bylocks *Drakskeppstrilogi* in Theory and Practice, is to illustrate the possibilities for pupils of the ages between ten and twelve to develop their historical consciousness by participating in classroom work making use of fiction as a central source of knowledge.

In the first part of the thesis, I analyze the three novels in the trilogy about the Viking age by the Swedish author Maj Bylock, *Drakskeppet* (1997), *Det gyllne svärdet* (1998) and *Borgen i fjärran* (1998). The purpose is to show the conditions given by the novels that could promote children’s own historical consciousness and how the characters are portrayed in order for readers to be able to identify with them.

I studied two functions of the novels: knowledge and analogy. Within the analysis of analogy the concept of empowerment is central to the portrayal of the protagonist. The textual analysis shows that the protagonist’s situation as a migrant above all points to cultural encounters both in the past and in the present time and further highlights the situation of the slaves in the Viking age. The apparent analogy of the present time means that the novels are well suited to discussions about ethics, the value of human beings, and cultural encounters.

In the second part of the thesis I analyze 11-year-old children’s reading of Bylock’s trilogy. During a six-week long thematic project on the Viking age, I document three pupils’ texts, book talks, and interviews and experiences of the novels. Among other concepts, I conduct the analysis with the help of Judith A. Langer’s concept of envisionment building.

The pupils’ historical consciousness development and newfound knowledge can partly be related to the analogy and the themes found in the novels. With the assistance of the novels’ “living characters,” the exciting plot, and an emotional involvement, the pupils have acquired knowledge and at the same time developed their historical consciousness. Book talks are of crucial importance in this.

More Teacher Writing

Heather Calligan & Aubrey Salisbury,
“Encouraging Students to Think While Reading Non-Fiction,” in *In Transition*, the journal of the New York State Middle School Association.

Vol. XXVIII, No. 2, Winter 2011, pp. 14-16.

Partnership for Literacy

The Center on English Learning & Achievement (CELA)
University at Albany School of Education, B9
1400 Washington Avenue
Albany, NY 12222

Phone: 518-442-5026

Fax: 518-442-5201

E-mail: jangelis@uamail.albany.edu

For more information:

www.albany.edu/cela or

www.partnershipforliteracy.org

The Partnership for Literacy (P4L) is a promise and plan for action for continuous teacher learning. It is a collaborative model for schools and districts that want to become (or become stronger) learning organizations with more engaged students demonstrating higher thinking and literacy achievement. Experience shows that such changes happen more effectively when someone from outside the district or school fosters discussion and works toward systematic change. Engaging teachers together in the intellectual work of reflecting on and analyzing current practice, raising questions for themselves and colleagues, and negotiating collective goals is key to bringing about the desired outcomes.

The Partnership is based on the Center on English Learning & Achievement (CELA) and others' long history of research and development into effective teaching, learning, and professional development. For information about CELA, the Partnership, or this newsletter, contact Janet Angelis, CELA Associate Director and newsletter editor: 518-442-5023, or jangelis@uamail.albany.edu.

**Supporting Academic
Literacy :
Meeting the New
Core Standards**

Webinar

May 26, 3:15-4:30

**[http://
surveymonkley.com/
s/DLB2H5L](http://surveymonkley.com/s/DLB2H5L)**

**\$25/pp; \$200
unlimited**

Summer Institute

July 26 & 28

**UAlbany East
Campus**

**[nandress@
uamail.albany.edu](mailto:nandress@uamail.albany.edu)**

About the Authors

Juaneika Agyeman is a special education teacher at Knickerbacker Middle School in Lansingburgh. She wrote this article based on her experience in the 2009-2010 academic year.

Mary Ingemansson, a teacher educator at Kristianstad University in Sweden, was a visiting scholar at the School of Education in Fall 2010. While here she visited many classrooms that are part of the Partnership for Literacy community.

Janet Angelis is associate director of CELA and the Partnership for Literacy.

Langer Publishes Envisioning Knowledge

Many readers of *The Partnership Community* are familiar with Judith Langer's concept of envisionment building, especially as it applies to reading texts, whether literary or informational. Recently Teachers College Press published an updated second edition of *Envisioning Literature* as well as a new book, *Envisioning Knowledge*, in which Langer brings to bear her background in cognitive psychology, her many years of research, and the classrooms of some of our partners in the classrooms of the Capital Region and beyond to show how effective teachers support students to build knowledge in each of the content areas.

In addition to the original four stances readers/viewers take in relation to a text — stepping into an envisionment, moving through an envisionment, rethinking what they

know, and objectifying the experience — Langer adds a fifth stance: leaving an envisionment and going beyond to explore/learn about a new topic.

Perhaps most valuable, however, is the way she relates all of the above to academic literacy and explains how the featured teachers support their students' abilities to focus, narrow, search, consider, judge, question, fine tune, and reject information as they learn and practice the skills that make them independent learners who come to own knowledge rather than just receive information.

For more information, check the CELA website (www.albany.edu/cela/books.html) or visit Teachers College Press (<http://store.tccpress.com>).