

# FIELDWORK

NOTES FROM EXPEDITIONARY LEARNING CLASSROOMS

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## Active Pedagogy ... Our New Core Practice

By SCOTT DOLQUIST

### IN THIS ISSUE:

#### Active Pedagogy

##### Guiding Question:

What does active pedagogy look like in Expeditionary Learning schools?

Talking About Math 3

By Gretchen Morgan  
with Steve Jenkins

Tapping a Professional's  
Expertise Over Time 6

By Laura Kretschmar

Recording to Preserve a  
Ritual 8

By Carrie Haymond-  
Hesketh

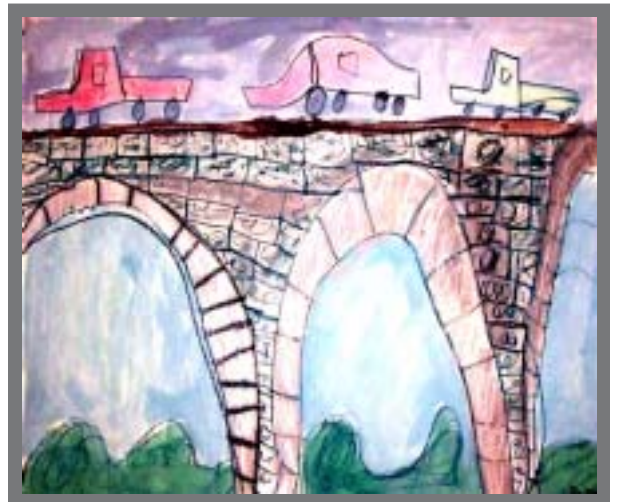
Making Writing Meaning-  
ful through Theater 10

By Thabiti Akil Brown

For more teacher tools related to this issue, visit our website at [www.elob.org/publications/webarchive/v12n1tt.html](http://www.elob.org/publications/webarchive/v12n1tt.html).

*Editor's Note: After more than a year in development, school designers are introducing the newly-revised Core Practice Benchmarks to teachers throughout our schools. This issue will focus on the largest area of revision, our new core practice, active pedagogy.*

In the former core practice document *Are We There Yet?*, the title alone reminded us that thinking and learning about school reform is never a done deal. For the past 11 years, Expeditionary Learning teachers, principals, and school designers have partnered to create learning expeditions, to cultivate school culture and character, and to teach in an "E.L. way". Through constant revision and rethinking, our network raised the standards for the rigor of learning expeditions and the understanding of school culture and character tremendously. However, teaching in an "E.L. way" has been more elusive. The new core practice, active pedagogy, articulates what teaching and learning look like on a daily basis and over time in an Expeditionary Learning classroom. Expeditions shape "what" students will be learning while active pedagogy clarifies "how" they will be learning.



Emma Holloway, then a second grader at the Genesee Community Charter School in Rochester, New York, drew this Erie Canal aqueduct for an expedition on the canal last year. The school's compact disc features songs from expeditions.

### MANY LEVELS, FOR ALL STUDENTS

The active pedagogy benchmarks describe teaching and learning on several different levels. The first benchmark, *Using Effective Instructional Practices Schoolwide*, illustrates the day-to-day design of lessons in all subject

*continued on next page*

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### *Active Pedagogy, continued from page 1*

areas. At this level, active pedagogy is the intentional plan the teacher has choreographed, using and adapting techniques from the various categories of the instructional practices.

The description of Steve Jenkins' high school math class in this issue of *Fieldwork*, sheds light on the daily lesson level of active pedagogy. Jenkins' classroom often incorporates the same workshop format used in reading and writing classrooms. There is a flow from whole class presentation, modeling, or problem set up to small group application, and back to full group debriefing. The format pushes students to be metacognitive, to socially construct meaning, and to be accountable for sharing their work. His lessons are nearly always driven over an extended period of time by the "need to know" arising from his design of long-term investigations, complex problems, and learning expeditions.

In the benchmarks, we characterize this second level of active pedagogy as a sequence of instructional moves over a period of weeks or months connected to specific content areas. In this issue of *Fieldwork*, Thabiti Akil Brown, from Codman Academy Charter School in Dorchester, Massachusetts, writes about a series of instructional plans over a period of months that shows how students actively engaged with professional theater to improve their writing. Brown's work demonstrates the relationship between the overall plan to motivate student writing and daily instructional practices, such as the writers' workshop, de-

signed to hone specific writing skills.

An article by Laura Kretschmar, from Lighthouse Community Charter School in Oakland, California, zooms in on active pedagogy in science by highlighting the use of fieldwork and experts in her Lake Merritt expedition. At this level of active pedagogy, Kretschmar shares her beautifully-designed plan over weeks and months to make fieldwork purposeful and to use an expert in a powerful way.

During the course of the expedition, the in-depth investigation of Lake Merritt, and the associated fieldwork and experts drove daily instruction in her classroom. Kretschmar used readers' workshops in her science class, including think-alouds to model comprehension and to contextualize reading in deep science content. She also incorporated a unique twist on the use of models by using her own college level lab report as an exemplar. Students analyzed the lab report, generated criteria for a high quality lab report, and produced their own reports using word processing and Excel data tables.

### ACTIVE PEDAGOGY THROUGHOUT A SCHOOL

Many schools and school designers are developing strategies to support the use of active pedagogy throughout a school:

~ At C.S. Porter Middle School in Missoula, Montana and Ronan High School in Ronan, Montana, teams of grade level teachers selected a specific reading comprehension strategy and

*continued on page 12*

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## MODELING ACTIVE PEDAGOGY FOR OUR TEACHERS

University of Washington science education professors Mark Windschitl and Helen Buttemer designed an afternoon of science inquiry for Expeditionary Learning middle and high school teachers in the Northwest recently. They began with the guiding questions, "What makes a pond healthy?" and "Can we make an unhealthy pond healthy again?"

They immediately engaged participants in designing a closed ecological system using small bottles, elodea, aquarium snails, and aquarium water. Buttemer artfully directed observations and questions into a sequenced proto-

col resulting in the set up of a quality experiment mostly designed by the "students." She modeled effective minute-to-minute instructional practices by using the Five E's (engage, explore, experiment, explain, elaborate) protocol, and by structuring small groups with all individuals accountable for participation. By placing the experience at the front of the lesson so that students immediately needed to know complex science, she motivated the teacher-learners to actively investigate and to learn necessary information and skills. In a classroom situation, this would lead to a series of interconnected, student-generated labs or investigations.

—Scott Dolquist

# Talking About Math:

## UNCOVERING STUDENTS' THINKING IN HIGH SCHOOL ALGEBRA

BY GRETCHEN MORGAN WITH STEVE JENKINS

**O**bserving teachers who have mastered the most eloquent and elusive practices of our craft is one of the most inspiring things any teacher can do. I have had the pleasure of visiting Steve Jenkins' high school math classroom at the Rocky Mountain School of Expeditionary Learning in Denver, Colorado, several times. His teaching practices, as well as the classroom culture and mathematics work that it inspires, illuminate many of the ideas in the active pedagogy benchmark, *Teaching Inquiry-Based Math*, in the newly-revised Core Practice Benchmarks.

I interviewed Jenkins in the late fall after one such observation of a junior level math class (see sidebar on page 4). I asked Jenkins what structures he uses to support mathematical thinking.

The biggest one is the idea of the discourse—we discuss math. Many of the other structures support that. I use the first two weeks to focus on characteristics of learning. We begin by thinking about why we work in groups. The students come up with things like: groups allow you to solve something more difficult than you could do yourself; they can help you get started; they give you a way to give help or to get help. We go on to describe how to work in groups and what roles people like to take. As the year goes on, I may videotape groups and then have them analyze how they work together. I also have a physical separation between the space where groups work (tables and chairs) and the space where they present and defend ideas (benches around a carpet area). In addition, all assessment must match the goal of instruction. Students are responsible for providing a convincing argument for their thinking that justifies their answer. This is also the case when they work in a group or present to the whole class. If you insist on dia-

logue and collaboration during the work and then give an assessment that only requires a solution, you have devalued understanding. That one assessment says more about what you value than all the work leading up to it.

*Instructionally, I also saw you moving from group to group, asking questions and keeping the discourse going (see sidebar on page 4). Tell me about what you did with the group that wanted to use the calculator.*

When students are confused, it is important to take things back to their prior knowledge. Whole numbers is a great place to go; they make sense. I made a whole number equation similar to the one they were working on, and then asked them to do the same thing to the whole number equation as they wanted to do to the algebraic equation. When they did, it was clear that their method wasn't going to work.

*How do you feel about students using graphing calculators in your classroom?*

As technology becomes a better part of the classroom, that becomes necessary. Actually, I see that those students who understand algebraic concepts are the only ones who can use the graphing calculators effectively. This group could only enter the equation if they could convert it to Y equals form.

*How do you deal with the tension between covering content and being a constructivist?*

Really, that's what makes the problems or investigations you choose important. You don't have time to do as many deep investigations as there are concepts or skills. So, each investigation needs to be rich enough to provide students with opportunities to learn and use a variety of mathematics. It also has a lot to do with your own understanding of mathematical

*continued on page 5*

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## A WINDOW INTO A HIGH SCHOOL MATH CLASS

On my recent visit to Steve Jenkins' classroom, at the Rocky Mountain School of Expeditionary Learning in Denver, Colorado, his students were investigating the range of numbers for which the following equation is true:  $.6X - Y < 120$ . At first glance this may seem like any advanced Algebra or Algebra II class. Jenkins' role as a teacher and the way the students approach the work, however, look very different.

When I entered the room, students were sitting in groups of four around rectangular tables. Students were paying close attention to graphs they had created or were creating on chart paper sized graph paper. They were also using calculators, writing equations, manipulating equations, asking questions, and sharing solutions.

One group of students asked Jenkins if they could use their graphing calculator.

Jenkins said, "You can graph the equation on the calculator, but it has to be in *Y equals* form." The students' wrinkled faces showed Jenkins that they were not sure how to do that. So he followed up by asking, "What's in your way of making this into *Y equals* form?"

One student replied, "The *Y* has to be on its own side."

"OK, so you need *Y* on one side." Jenkins replied, reinforcing their correct assertion.

"What's one thing you could do with this equation to get *Y* on its own side?"

"We need to get rid of  $.6$ "

"How do you manipulate it to do that? Which operation would drop it off of this side?"

"Divide by  $.6$ ." then they wrote on their paper that they were going to divide  $.6X$  by  $.6$  and also divide  $120$  by  $.6$ .

"Why? How is this (pointing at the  $.6$ ) connected to the *Y*?" Then Jenkins showed them an example of what their strategy would look like in a whole number sentence.  $16 + 8 = 24$ . "So what you're saying is if I divide  $16$  by  $.6$  and  $24$  by  $.6$  then the equation will still be the same, it will still be balanced and true?"

The students tried their method and found that it yields a false statement. "Oh...", they said. The students realized they needed to try another method.

At another table the students were randomly plugging numbers into the equation to find out whether they work or not. They had plotted several of those numbers on the graph. A student from another table came to join them and check in on their work. He looked at their graph, which had all of the numbers that work written in red, and immediately announced, "This whole side works; you can color this whole side red because it all works. You could put more dots in there, but the whole thing works." The students at the table asked him to explain, as they continued to check additional numbers.

Three groups of students used three different, effective methods to find the solution: guess and check, interpreting patterns in the graph, and trying to manipulate the algebra so they could use the graphing calculator and then interpret patterns from the graph. That kind of situation is typical in Jenkins' room because he believes it is essential for teaching all students in a mixed ability class.

—Gretchen Morgan

*Talking About Math, continued from page 3*

concepts. You need to be able to go into challenging mathematics, but you also need the ability to support students with fewer skills in using their approaches to solve the problem. You can push a class to cover a lot, but then you are going back to the mold where only those few that can learn by seeing something and then reconstructing it themselves get to learn any math.

*What tools do you use to assess student understanding?*

A huge part is the day-to-day dialogue with students. I collect anecdotal records by listening to conversations when students are working in their groups.

*Can you get individual assessments by doing that?*

I am working on a system based on the reading comprehension strategies. I have a clipboard where I have students' names and comment codes. I would put a Q next to their name if I saw them using questioning to help them solve a problem or CQ if I saw them asking a clarifying question. I am trying to use that language to assess and have conversations about their thinking.

They also write in assessment journals once a week. This is a formal, timed assessment. That has been great for me in terms of having a really good idea about where the students are. My assessment of their journals influences my instruction.

At the end of each investigation they also produce math write-ups explaining their thinking and justifying the accuracy of their solution. They do these for both small investigations and bigger investigations.

*Do they write those independently?*

Yes, they work collaboratively, but they have to write up the investigation independently. Currently the groups have moved onto a new investigation, but many of the students are still working on their write-up of our last expedition on population growth: Do you think the human race will have a benign or malignant impact on the earth? I also do a pre-assessment at the beginning of the investigation or expedition. They have a hard time understanding that I don't expect them to perform

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## ACTIVE PEDAGOGY IN A MATH CLASSROOM

- ~ Mini Lesson: Short instructional periods where Jenkins introduces students to new problems and concepts.
- ~ Collaborative Work Time: Students work together in mixed ability collaborative groups, allowing for social construction of understanding.
- ~ Public presentation: Groups or individuals regularly present their work to the rest of the class for critique. Presenters must explain their method as a way of defending the accuracy of their answer.
- ~ Math Investigation Write-Ups: Students individually write detailed explanations to support the solutions they found in their group during each math investigation.
- ~ Math Journals: Students write in response to prompts, which may be in the form of a problem or a question about a concept.

—Gretchen Morgan

*For a more detailed explanation of these practices, see [www.elob.org/publications/webarchive/v12n1tt.html](http://www.elob.org/publications/webarchive/v12n1tt.html).*

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too well on a pre-assessment. Then I give performance assessments at the end of every big investigation or expedition. Culminating performance assessments are important because we have given students the impression that if they have seen it, they can do it. To really understand mathematics you need to apply a concept to an unfamiliar problem.

*How do you prepare students for standardized tests?*

I am explicit with them about doing things that require a time limit, and I let them know that is practice for test taking.

My goal is to bring students' understanding of math to what math really is—a way to represent our universe. So many students think it is so abstract that it has no basis in their lives. If you believe you are teaching meaningful mathematics in your classroom then you have to trust your process and just take a look at your results and make sense out of them. If the results are low you need to find out why they are different than what you expect.

*Steve Jenkins teaches high school math at the Rocky Mountain School of Expeditionary Learning in Denver, Colorado. Gretchen Morgan is a school designer in the Northwest region.*

# TAPPING A PROFESSIONAL'S EXPERTISE OVER TIME

## GIVES PURPOSE TO QUALITY WORK

BY LAURA KRETSCHMAR

*Learning about the lake from an expert would serve as a powerful motivator for my students, and building a relationship with an expert would serve as an even more powerful model of a professional, practicing scientific inquiry and stewardship over the environment.*

*“Good evening, my name is Jorge and I’m going to talk to you about the dissolved oxygen levels at Trestle Glen Arm. You see that the graph shows the D.O. levels are below six parts per million? That means it is too low for aquatic life. Life needs between 6-18 parts per million of D.O. There should be a storm drain filter to keep out the trash.”*

Ask any Lighthouse Community Charter School seventh-grade student about Lake Merritt, and you will get an earful—from an expert. Jorge and 14 other student-experts stood before the Board of Directors of the Lake Merritt Institute last May and confidently explained the importance of improving the water quality at the lake through detailed presentations of their dissolved oxygen studies.

In Fall 2002, voters approved a \$198 million bond measure in Oakland, California, dedicated to improving the water quality, aesthetics, and recreational opportunities of the downtown tidal estuary, Lake Merritt. The bond measure provided an authentic question to investigate for a learning expedition. Is Lake Merritt worth \$198 million? To answer this question, students initially collected qualitative data on the lake’s aesthetics and water quality. Then, for 10 weeks, my students collected dissolved oxygen data on the surface of the lake and picked up trash that flowed into the lake via 60 storm drains during the fall and early winter rains. The project culminated with a lab report and presentation of data to the Lake Merritt Institute, a local non-profit organization founded 10 years ago to educate and involve the community in enhancing and managing the health of the lake.

When planning the Lake Merritt expedition, our school designer communicated the importance of finding a community expert or “gem,” who we could call on throughout the expedi-

tion. In the past, I had thought of and used experts in my classroom as one-time visitors who come in for a day to lecture or present artifacts about the topic of study. The notion of experts being an integral part of the pedagogy was new for my curriculum planning and teaching.

I contacted and planned to use several “experts,” throughout my expedition, but one stood out clearly as the gem—Richard Bailey, or Dr. Bailey, as the students affectionately came to call him. I found Dr. Bailey by word of mouth, meeting with community and city personnel, and searching the Internet. An environmental scientist and consultant, he founded the Lake Merritt Institute in 1992 to monitor the lake’s health and to educate the community on how to protect Lake Merritt from the most deleterious effects of urban runoff.

A few weeks before school started, I spent an afternoon with Dr. Bailey in his office at the Sailboat House overlooking Lake Merritt. After leaving his office that first time, I remember wondering if he thought it was overly ambitious to ask students to produce professional scientific work. I realized I needed to continue to communicate ideas to him to determine what was possible.

After several follow-up phone calls and e-mails, Dr. Bailey told me he needed help collecting more water quality data on the lake because one of the water quality monitors was broken. Learning about the lake from an expert would serve as a powerful motivator for my students, and building a relationship with an expert would serve as an even more powerful model of a professional practicing scientific inquiry and stewardship over the environment.

My students first met Dr. Bailey at the Lake Merritt Sailboat House where he spoke to them about urban runoff and the role of Lake Merritt

in the Oakland watershed. Having an expert build this background knowledge gave much more authenticity to our topic and work than if I had presented it to students. Dr. Bailey also gave the students a boat tour of the 3.5 mile lake shoreline. For many students this was the first time on Lake Merritt and in a boat. During the boat tour, the students' hands kept popping up and mouths blurting out questions for Dr. Bailey. The exchange of ideas between novice and expert was truly an authentic way to deliver information and set the stage for further inquiry.

Once the students were hooked on monitoring the water quality of Lake Merritt and helping Dr. Bailey clean the lake, students prepared themselves to do the work of professional water scientists as they learned how to test dissolved oxygen from an environmental scientist with the City of Oakland, Kristin Hathaway. In addition to her classroom presentation, Hathaway also met us at the lake to launch our water testing. Experts, such as Hathaway, can be brought into an expedition along the way at critical moments when students have specific needs or interests.

#### MAINTAINING CONTACT


For 10 weeks, students tested dissolved oxygen levels at six chosen sites around the lake. Back in the classroom, I continued to build student understanding of the properties of water, the water cycle, watershed ecology, the human and natural history of Lake Merritt, data analysis skills, and scientific report writing. On our classroom wall, we put up a large scaled map of Lake Merritt that we made from grid paper, with photographs and large data tables covering the location of our testing sites. This visual aid served as a powerful way to keep track of our data over time and to reinforce the geography of the lake.

Students chose their sites based on interest and consultation with Dr. Bailey. Having a real need communicated from an expert gave meaningful purpose to the students' study. On our Thursday fieldwork days, students frequently visited Dr. Bailey in his office at the Sailboat House to hear his report on the latest interesting fact or lake story of the week. Sometimes Dr. Bailey would come to the dock to point out seasonal changes to the life in Lake Merritt: mussel growth, tube worms, algae growth. His love for the lake and his knowledge was contagious.

In addition, the students did read-alouds and shared readings with his series of columns in one

of our local papers as our primary text for ecological content and history of the lake. Knowing the voice of the author provided another natural hook for student engagement.

#### STUDENTS' TURN TO SHINE

To culminate the expedition, students presented their findings by writing formal scientific lab reports. Each student wrote a lab report on the testing site they had monitored for the 10 weeks. The reports included all of the pieces of a professional lab report. Every report mentioned Dr. Bailey. Students presented Dr. Bailey with a copy of their report and an I-movie of them testing dissolved oxygen. Each student had a unique appreciation and way of viewing Dr. Bailey. They also formally presented their findings at the Lake Merritt Institute's monthly forum in May of 2003. This time, Dr. Bailey sat back, and listened to the experts. 

*Laura Kretschmar teaches seventh-grade science at the Lighthouse Community Charter School in Oakland, California.*

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#### INTEGRATING EXPERTS INTO AN EXPEDITION:

- ~ Find and cultivate an expert—Who in the community is the “gem” on this topic? Do I have student work to share that shows what my students are capable of doing?
- ~ Solicit needs and possible areas of study from the expert—What can my students study or collect data on, and what are the tools that will enable them to do so?
- ~ Build background knowledge through the expert—How can the expert provide authenticity to the topic of this expedition?
- ~ Facilitate ongoing communication—Is there a way for students to have ongoing communication or interaction with the expert throughout the expedition?
- ~ Use the expert's writing—Does the expert have any writing or published material on the topic that would be valuable as primary sources or anchor texts?
- ~ Acknowledge and appreciate the expert—Celebrate the contributions of the expert with appreciations, invitations to school exhibitions, written acknowledgment in student work, etc.

—Laura Kretschmar

# RECORDING TO PRESERVE A RITUAL: MAKING SINGING A FOCUS FOR INSTRUCTION

BY CARRIE HAYMOND-HESKETH

In June 2003 the students of the Genesee Community Charter School recorded their first compact disc, *Back on the Misty Track of Time*. The road to this project truly began the first day that the school opened in 2001 when students from diverse backgrounds began to learn a common language through music. Singing became a part of the ritual of our daily school experience for the purposes of greeting, transitions, and celebrations. There were songs such as “These are Hands that Work for Peace” that united us as a school, and songs specific to the expeditions of individual classes such as “Follow the Drinking Gourd.” As the music teacher I came to realize that these songs and the children’s voices needed to be preserved.

How does one give birth to a quality recording? This question directly affected my teaching practice from March until the end of the school year. First came the protocol that allowed for students to fully participate. I asked every class two questions: “Why should we make a CD?”

and “What songs should be selected?” The students gathered in crews to reflect and write their ideas on chart paper. A gallery walk involving brief group presentations from each crew revealed songs that were well liked by the children. Generally, the crews all agreed that producing and performing on a compact disc would take lots of practice and hard work, and we would need the proper equipment on which to

record. From the long list of songs nominated by students, I chose 19 pieces that would make for a well-balanced compact disc based on musical accompaniments, keys, and tempos.

Next we needed to set criteria for the quality of singing necessary to produce a compact disc. We used exemplars and models of other children’s recordings to help us make a decision. After listening carefully to many recordings, the children came up with their own rubric categories: pitch, breath control, and articulation of text. This document was a key piece to the success of our project, and we referred to it every time we rehearsed. Individual students volunteered to demonstrate good singing by performing a solo in front of the group. “I notice” and “I wonder” statements propelled our model for critiquing the singer. On several occasions I taped each class so we could determine our progress. The students evaluated themselves using the rubric as their guide.

The entire school body became experts on singing, but they discovered other criteria for creating a quality compact disc. After examining many compact discs, the students decided to write a companion booklet. I divided the songs up among classes and asked the students to answer the following questions: Why is this song important to our school? What about this song interests you (the rhythm, text, etc.)? What should someone know about this song if they have never heard it before? Fourth graders compiled the responses from the entire student body, selected the comments that they felt were most compelling, and proceeded to edit the writing of their younger peers. I assembled their work and organized their writing for the booklet with the help of Nancy Valle, the art instructor.

To accompany the writing, Valle collected student artwork that depicted the songs on the

Tatiana Bruzda, then a third-grader at the Genesee Community Charter School, in Rochester, New York, illustrated the song, “These are the Hands that Work for Peace” for the school’s compact disc last year.



compact disc. A crew of student representatives used a democratic process to choose the student cover art. They debated the quality, context, and interpretation of the art that represented student thinking, narrowed their selections down to two, and decided that one would serve as the front cover and the other as the back. We also chose several works to illustrate the companion booklet.

In the midst of these large goals I taught mini-lessons on musical content, expression, and form. Third-grade students learned the meaning of Bel Canto singing through the lyrical phrases of one of their class songs. Second graders composed an accompaniment of a song about a canal using percussion instruments. All students began to realize the importance of a song's text and the tools for how to communicate the meaning through articulation, dynamics, and tempo.

After many months of preparing our voices, memorizing lyrics, rehearsing as a whole school and as individual classes, our recording date finally arrived. On June 5, an entourage of 160 students and teachers marched down the street to a local chapel known for its brilliant acoustics. The sound engineer was ready with his sophisticated equipment to record and produce the best singing out, of Genesee Community Charter School students. We all experienced exhilarating moments when we achieved a unified choral sound, and struggled through frus-

*We all experienced exhilarating moments when we achieved a unified choral sound, and struggled through frustrating emotions during the multitude of revisions it took to get a song just right. Sometimes good was not good enough.*



trating emotions during the multitude of revisions it took to get a song just right. Sometimes good was not good enough. The children found it difficult to sing in four part rounds due to the extreme echoes in the room. At times the children wanted to throw their snacks at me when I came back from the recording booth to inform them that we needed to do it a sixth time. All in all, it took two full days and an intense amount of collaboration and perseverance to achieve the final product. Many students and teachers commented that this felt like a “real” expedition.

I believe that a final product is only as good as the process that it took to get there. Even though the recording sessions were challenging, the students could not have achieved the quality of sound without the strategies and guided practice that came prior. We are proud of our compact disc, but what makes me even more proud is that the process of producing that compact disc gave the children the skills to keep on singing throughout the rest of their lives. ✍

*Carrie Haymond-Hesketh teaches music at the Genesee Community Charter School in Rochester, New York.*

Tamaira Graham, then a second grader at the Genesee Community Charter School in Rochester, New York, illustrated this aqueduct for an expedition on the Erie Canal last year. The school's compact disc featured songs from expeditions.

# MAKING WRITING MEANINGFUL THROUGH THEATER:

## RAISING THE BAR IN AN URBAN HIGH SCHOOL

BY THABITI AKIL BROWN

**A**t Codman Academy Charter School, the small college prep high school where I work, in Dorchester, Massachusetts, most of our incoming ninth graders arrive reading and writing below grade level. While the long-term goal for students is college, our short-term goal in humanities is to get students up to grade level in the basic skills necessary for success: reading, writing, and thinking about texts. As a humanities department we believe that students will become engaged in a text when given an opportunity to participate in interactive discussions and instructional practices geared toward understanding the text. Our major tool in this endeavor is the literacy through drama curriculum that we have co-developed with the Huntington Theatre Company, a professional theater here in Boston. In its third year, the curriculum production team now includes the ninth, tenth, and eleventh grade humanities teachers and three

theater educators from the Huntington Education Department.

The ninth and tenth graders devote an entire day, twice a month, to the theater curriculum. It all culminates in the student production of a play. Our students become actors, directors, stage managers, light designers, costume designers and production managers. In order to successfully pull off their final production students quickly realize that they will need to do a great deal of reading and writing. Our “in,” then, is to engage the supply side of learning; we increase the passion and care that students put into looking at texts as a means of getting them to want to do the extra hard work that is necessary to get up to grade level and eventually into college.

In an attempt to improve the skills related to reading and writing, we channel the students’ energy and enthusiasm through a variety of instructional practices. Practices aimed at increasing experience with the text include body movement warm-ups, discussions with actors, and reenactments of scenes of the play. In September, for example, three actors from the first production, *Ain’t Misbehavin’*, engaged in a lengthy discussion with our students about their characters, the rehearsal process, and performing. Such experiences lead students to questions about the characters, the flow of the play, and the author’s intentions in creating the piece.

With the wealth of experiential material, students are able to write wonderfully about the texts they encounter. Writing at the Huntington traditionally focuses on journal writing, where students make connections between their reading of the play and their experiences performing, seeing, and interacting with the play. In journals, students converse

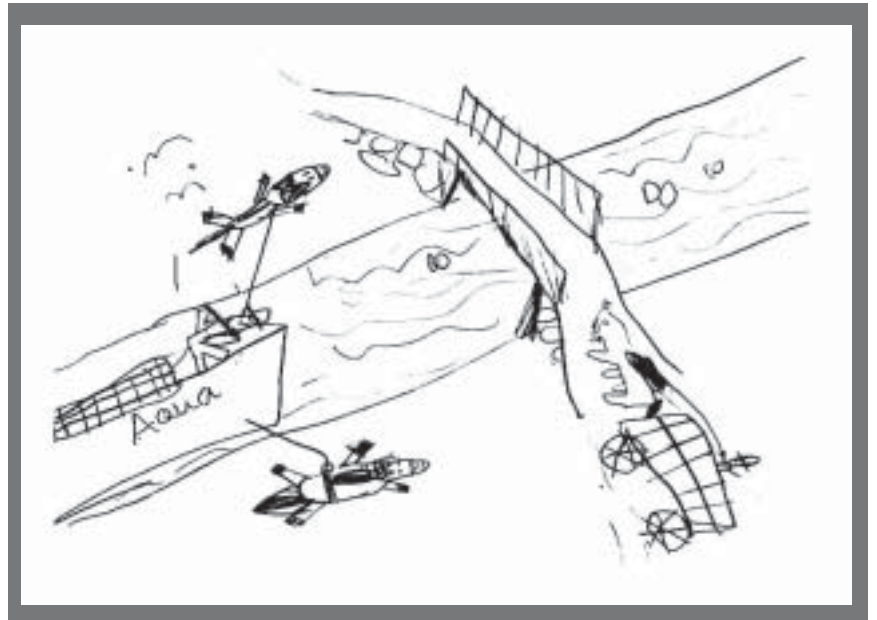
*The class continues with an active reading of a scene from the play. During this reading, and the ensuing discussion, students are expected to record questions, responses, ideas related to the themes, vocabulary words and general observations about the text.*

with teachers about the plays studied through guided reflections. Journal writing at the theater provides an important backdrop: the connections that students make often are incorporated into later formal writing in the classroom.

The time we spend in the humanities classroom differs from the Huntington work because it includes more “traditional” methods of literature studies, vocabulary work, deconstruction of themes/symbolism, character development, journal writing, and preparation for literary analysis essays. I set aside time during every discussion for students to record their observations in writing. A typical day in humanities begins with a written response to a prompt that serves as a focusing point for the day’s discussion and analysis of the text. The class continues with an active reading of a scene from the play. During this reading and the ensuing discussion, students are expected to record questions, responses, ideas related to the themes, vocabulary words, and general observations about the text. All of this writing is part of the pre-writing that students do toward production of the final product.


Although creative writing and art pieces have been part of final projects in the past, we often ask ninth and tenth graders to write a five-paragraph essay for each play that they study. During the two years that this program has been in existence, students have written about diverse questions. While studying *A Raisin in the Sun*, some students wrote about the portrayal of the American dream in the play. For the play *Marty*, one of the many choices was a creative writing prompt: re-write the final scene, updating the language and themes for 2003.

When I teach writing, I emphasize the steps that students must undertake to successfully complete written assignments. Students employ the philosophy of “writing as a process” on all major projects; they revise and refine their work toward an overall improvement in expressing their ideas in writing. The writing process at Codman includes grading with rubrics (both self graded and teacher graded), peer editing, and writing conferences. Humanities students are expected to produce multiple drafts of all essays. Since the writing pro-



cess is truly endless in real life, students in my classroom can revise a piece of writing as many times as they choose prior to the end of the school year.

Students start the process by demonstrating what they know about writing, and we use writers’ workshop to teach students how to be successful in areas where they are having difficulties. Students are often explicitly involved in this process; they keep notes on themselves about their common mistakes, and participate in the brainstorming process that produces the subjects of future mini lessons.

To date, we have seen many signs of success in our students’ comfort level with text and in the writing arena. Students say that they are more comfortable with written texts after engaging in the Huntington humanities curriculum. In our first year taking the English/ Language Arts MCAS (Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System) exam, a state level high stakes test, 85 percent of students chose to write about plays that they studied within the Huntington curriculum, and 100 percent passed the exam. Interactive activities at the theater, coupled with supportive writing structures in the classroom, have proven to be an excellent strategy for teaching writing at Codman. 

*Thabiti Akil Brown teaches eleventh-grade humanities at Codman Academy Charter School in Dorchester, Massachusetts.*

Mark Torres, then a third-grade student at the Genesee Community Charter School, in Rochester, New York, sketched this barge making its way down the Erie Canal last year. The sketch illustrates the song “Low Bridge” in the school’s compact disc.

# FIELDWORK

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### *Active Pedagogy, continued from page 2*


designed a readers' workshop on it. They used protocols during team planning time to critique the plans, to share reflections on success in the classroom, and to analyze student work resulting from the lessons.

~ In Portland, Maine, last summer King Middle School teachers spent part of a day learning new instructional techniques and designing readers' workshops, and the rest of the day using these new techniques with students enrolled in a summer reading program.

~ Teachers at Lighthouse Community Charter School in Oakland California, focus on a specific instructional strategy each month and use professional development time to design lessons incorporating that particular strategy and to provide feedback to one another

~ The staff at Lincoln Middle School in Oakland, Oregon, posts new instructional practices they are implementing on a bulletin board in their staff lounge. Teachers' document their use of the selected practices to create a public, on-going, professional dialog about their work.

~ ANSER Charter School in Boise, Idaho, is producing a compact disc with clips of classroom instruction that demonstrate specific practices for revision and critique, reflection, debriefing, and the use of exemplars and models to understand quality, formats, and group work. The process of producing and critiquing the clips for inclusion on the compact disc and plans for distribution to teachers throughout Idaho, engages the staff in thinking deeply about their own work and using the same effective practices with each other as they use with their students.

Examples like these, as well as the articles in this issue of *Fieldwork*, give evidence that categories and levels of active pedagogy in the Expeditionary Learning benchmarks are applicable across all grade levels and content areas, for diverse student populations, and as a tool for high quality professional development. 

*Scott Dolquist is field director for the Northwest region.*