



Dennis-Yarmouth RSD

Instruction Office Newsletter

RETELL FYI:

The DESE plans to offer a limited number of SEI endorsement courses during the 2016-2017 school year for educators who were required to earn the endorsement but, through no fault of their own, were unable to do so. Educators who will be eligible for no-cost, state-offered courses in 2016-2017 are those who were required to earn the endorsement during their districts' cohort windows and who:

- 1. enrolled in a course that was subsequently cancelled by the DESE,*
- 2. placed themselves on a waitlist, but were not offered an open seat in a course, or*
- 3. applied for and were granted a hardship extension.*

Enrollment in these courses will be restricted to only those educators who are eligible. The DESE is compiling a list of these educators and will notify them individually of their eligibility and course registration procedures in the late spring.

Close Reading 101

This Education Week white paper sponsored by the Great Books Foundation suggests eleven ways to build the skills of close reading – “Getting students to slow down, engage with the text in different ways, and reflect as they read...”

- **Be a close reader yourself.** This means reading texts carefully beforehand and modeling close reading with students (“How do we know that Macbeth feels guilty?”).

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IMPORTANT DATES

May 2 - 6	Teacher Appreciation Week
May 3 -	Dennis town meeting
May 7 -	Yarmouth town meeting
May 26 -	All Stage 1 Curriculum maps, new and revised, and all Stage 2 common formative assessments should be saved to the labeled folder on your school's common server (more information to follow)
May 23 -	Mentor meetings
May 30 -	Memorial Day observed

IMPORTANT NOTICE:

Central office is a **fragrance-free zone** so please be respectful and plan accordingly when you visit.

Due to one of our members at the CO being highly sensitive to any type of fragrance, we ask that staff visiting/meeting at the Administration building refrain from using any scented products. Fragrances from personal care products, air fresheners, laundry and other cleaning products have been associated with adversely affecting a person's health. We ask that we all work together to make the environment a safe and healthy workplace for everyone. Thank you very much for your cooperation!



- **Model it first.** When students are novices with close reading, use a document camera to show them step by step how to analyze specific portions of a text and annotate, thinking aloud as you do so.
- **Teach students to look for the evidence.** This is a key Common Core skill.
- **Teach “stretch texts.”** Students should be challenged to read increasingly complex texts over time – passages that raise authentic questions and could be interpreted in different ways depending on students’ background knowledge or prior reading.
- **Always set a purpose for reading.** Have students read a passage once and then pose a specific challenge for their second reading.
- **Differentiate.** If a text is above some students’ reading level, they can still think about it in different ways and read “between the lines” by hearing it read aloud or working with a classmate.
- **Focus on making connections.** Go beyond simple comprehension questions, asking students to dig deeper for big ideas, how the reading relates to other texts students have read, and how they might learn more about the topic.
- **Use student queries to drive discussion.** Have students come up with questions about a



- **Let them make mistakes.** Students will misinterpret, and it’s important to use those



errors positively to model the process of using evidence and arguing a point.

- **Listen to your students.** “Along with close reading the text, you need to close read your students,” says the paper. “When you begin to let students’ questions and ideas about the text take the lead, you’ll find your class will be much more invested in the reading.”
- **Close-read across the curriculum.** For example, close reading can be used with charts and graphs in science, discussing a math concept, or working to understand various interpretations of a speech by a historical figure.

“11 Quick Tips: Turn Your Students Into Close Readers” in *Education Week*, March 1, 2016, <http://www.edweek.org/ew/marketplace/whitepapers/white-papers.html>



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Teaching Students Mathematical Argumentation

In this article in *Teaching Children Mathematics*, Chepina Rumsey (Kansas State University) and Cynthia Langrall (Illinois State University/Normal) provide pointers for teaching elementary students mathematical argumentation, a key component in Common Core and Standards for Mathematical Practice. The authors recommend incorporating five specific components:



• **Provide language supports.** The discourse of mathematical argumentation is unfamiliar to many students, and it's helpful to teach and model language frames, including:

- I agree with _____ because _____.
- I noticed _____ when _____.
- I wonder why _____.
- I have a question about _____.
- I disagree because _____.
- Based on _____, I think _____.

Students might then be presented with a claim and given three possible frames for responding to it.

• **Discuss rich, familiar content.** With odd and even numbers, students could be asked to provide justification for various claims – for example, *An even number plus an odd number gives an odd sum*, or *If you add two even numbers, you'll get an even number for the sum*. These discussions can also be a bridge to understanding arithmetic properties.

• **Specify conditions.** A mathematical proof has a claim and the conditions under which the claim is true. When students are presented with a claim – for example, *The sum of three numbers will be even* – they realize the need to specify conditions. This also teaches students the importance of precision in mathematics.

• **Introduce false claims.** One of the goals of teaching argumentation is to encourage students to become producers of math understanding and knowledge, say the authors. So teachers need to give students opportunities to develop their own ideas and have the confidence to validate or challenge the ideas of others. A teacher might show students a series of multiplication problems and then ask them to respond

X2 to a generalization: *Every time you multiply two numbers, you are always going to get an even number as the product.*

• **Manipulate familiar content to be unfamiliar.** Building on their knowledge of the associated property of addition, students might be asked if these statements are true or false:

$$(a + b) + c = a + (b + c)$$

$$(a - b) + c = a - (b + c)$$

The key skill with problems like this is students' ability to ask **What if...?** and develop a playful posture trying out different combinations of numbers.

"Teaching with an emphasis on mathematical argumentation is a powerful tool that can be embedded into many mathematical content areas as well as other subject areas," conclude Rumsey and Langrall.

"Promoting Mathematical Argumentation" by Chepina Rumsey and Cynthia Langrall in *Teaching Children Mathematics*, March 2016 (Vol. 22, #7, p. 412-419), <http://bit.ly/1RfrLN4>; the authors can be reached at chepina@ksu.edu and langrall@ilstu.edu.

Feedback That Makes a Difference to Students

(Originally titled **"The Secret of Effective Feedback"**)

In this article in *Educational Leadership*, assessment expert Dylan Wiliam reports the startling research finding that students often learn nothing from the comments and grades their teachers write on their papers – in fact, many students learn less when teachers provide feedback than when they write nothing at all. "The apparently simple process of looking at student work and then giving useful feedback turns out to be much more difficult than most people imagine," says Wiliam. "The only important thing about feedback is what students do with it... If our feedback doesn't change the student in some way, it has probably been a waste of time."

Feedback Opportunities



Two examples: An English teacher tells a student that her composition will be better if she reverses the sequence of the third and fourth paragraphs. The composition will improve, but the teacher did the intellectual heavy lifting and the student probably learned very little. Similarly, if a teacher corrects arithmetic errors, there's nothing left for the student to do except calculate the score. "The real issue is purpose," says Wiliam. "We need to use the information we obtain from looking at the student's work – even though that information may be less than perfect – and give feedback that will move the student's learning forward." Here are his suggestions for teachers:

- **Design tasks and ask questions that make students' thinking visible.** This means more prep work for the teacher, especially in math classes, but frontloading well-framed tasks makes it much more likely that feedback will be useful. We won't always get it right, says Wiliam, but he reassures us with a reminder that batting .300 in the major leagues is considered very good.



- **Make feedback into detective work.** A math teacher might return a 20-question test to a student with the comment, "Five of these are incorrect. Find them and fix them." This approach ensures that students receiving feedback do as much work as the teacher who provides it. It also makes students look at their work with a more analytical eye.

- **Build students' capacity for self-assessment.** The ultimate goal of feedback should be to get students to the point where they can self-correct without the teacher looking over their shoulder. Instrumental music teachers understand this

intuitively, and focus the 30-40 minutes they spend with their students each week on developing the skill of being able to notice mistakes and improve technique in the hours of solo practice. "Contrast this approach with most content-area teaching in schools," says Wiliam, "where teachers seem to believe that students make most of their progress when the teacher is present, with homework as a kind of optional add-on."

Human nature being what it is, many students find it emotionally challenging to be critical of their own work. A good scaffolding strategy is having a class look at an anonymous piece of work and describe the feedback this person should receive, then have students critique the work of a classmate, and finally self-correct. After a task like this, it's helpful to ask students what they found easy, what they found difficult, and what was interesting. Alternatively, students might be asked what they would do differently if they did the task again. Once students can do this, feedback from others becomes less and less necessary.



"In the end," says Wiliam, "it all comes down to the relationship between the teacher and the student. To give effective feedback, the teacher needs to know the student – to understand what feedback the student needs right now. And to receive feedback in a meaningful way, the student needs to trust the teacher – to believe that the teacher knows what he or she is talking about and has the student's best interests at heart. Without this trust, the student is unlikely to invest the time and effort needed to absorb and use the feedback."

"The Secret of Effective Feedback" by Dylan Wiliam in *Educational Leadership*, April 2016 (Vol. 73, #7, p. 10-15), <http://bit.ly/1MMHUx1>; Wiliam is at dylanwiliam@mac.com.



Making Good Use of the Final Minutes of a Class

In this **Chronicle of Higher Education** article, James Lang (Assumption College) says he's observed two things in college classrooms over the years: students starting to pack up their things in the last five minutes (intensely annoying to instructors), and instructors hurriedly covering a few more things. "[M]ost faculty members eye the final minutes of class as an opportunity to cram in eight more points before students exit," says Lang, "or to say three more things that just occurred to us about the day's material, or to call out as many reminders as possible about forthcoming deadlines, next week's exam, or tomorrow's homework... We're still trying to teach while students' minds – and sometimes their bodies – are headed out the door." Lang suggests using a mixture of these closing techniques over time:

- **The minute paper** – The teacher wraps up the formal class a few minutes early and asks students to respond in writing to two questions:

- **What was the most important thing you learned today?**
- **What question still remains in your mind?**

The first question gets students thinking about the whole class, making a judgment about something important to them, and articulating it in their own words. The second question asks them to consider what they haven't understood. "Most of us are infected by what learning theorists call 'illusions of fluency,'" says Lang, "which means that we believe we have obtained mastery of something when we have not." To answer the second question, students must

dig for any confusion or weakness that remains in their own comprehension of the day's material. Collecting students' responses (on paper or in electronic messages) gives instructors valuable information on how well the class went and, if things were unclear for a majority of students, a starting point for the next class. Even if the answers aren't collected, Lang believes that students benefit from retrieving information about the class from memory and clarifying points of confusion and uncertainty.

- **Closing connections** – The instructor finishes class five minutes early and tells students they can leave as soon as they have identified five ways the day's material appears in contexts outside the classroom – current events, personal experiences, popular songs, debates in the school or college, and so forth. "You'll be amazed at how quickly they can come up with examples," says Lang. These might be handed in, jotted on the board, or posted on the course website.

- **The metacognitive five** – "We have evidence that students engage in poor study strategies," says Lang. "Likewise, research shows that most people are plagued by illusions of fluency. The solution on both fronts is better metacognition – that is, a clearer understanding of our own learning." Once a semester, Lang has his students jot down how they studied for a test they've just taken. He follows up by comparing test results with study methods: invariably, effective approaches (like self-testing and flashcards) correlate with higher scores, while less-effective methods (like reviewing notes and re-reading material) correlate with lower scores. "Imagine what a difference we could make," says Lang, "if we all took five minutes – even just a few times during the semester – to offer students the opportunity to reflect on their learning habits."



- **Closing the loop** – If the class began with questions, put them back up on the screen at the end and have students use what they just learned to answer them. If the class began with a question about students’ prior knowledge on the topic, end by asking students to explain how the class confirmed, enhanced, or contradicted what they knew before.

“We have such a limited amount of time with students,” Lang concludes, “– sometimes just a few hours a week for 12 or 15 weeks. Within that narrow window, **five minutes well-spent at the end of class can make a difference.**”



“Small Changes in Teaching the Last 5 Minutes of Class” by James Lang in *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, April 1, 2016 (Vol. LXII, #29, p. A36-37), <http://bit.ly/1qoNCLt>; Lang’s book on this subject is *Small Teaching: Everyday Lessons from the Science of Learning* (Jossey-Bass, 2016); Lang can be reached at lang@assumption.edu.

Helping Students Be Critical Media Consumers in an Election Year

“Being informed today requires being more vigilant and critical than ever,” says Stergios Botzakis in this *Journal of Adolescent and Adult Literacy* article. Students need to get outside the cocoon of sympatico views and evaluate what they see and hear in the media. Some helpful questions:

- **Who made – and who sponsored – this message, and what is their purpose?**
- **Who is the target audience and how is the message specifically tailored to that audience?**

- **What are the different techniques used to inform, persuade, entertain, and attract attention?**
- **What messages are communicated (and/or implied) about certain people, places, events, behaviors, lifestyles, and so forth?**
 - **How current, accurate, and credible is the information in this message?**
 - **What is left out of this message that might be important to know?**

Botzakis suggests the following resources to help hone students’ critical skills. These are especially helpful in a raucous election year.

- **The Living Room Candidate**

www.livingroomcandidate.org - This site has TV commercials from every U.S. presidential election since 1952, with background information on each one, a visual display of how each electoral college vote turned out, and suggested lesson plans.

- **FlackCheck.org**

www.flackcheck.org - A compendium of resources on the techniques used in political advertising, including a section on “Patterns of Deception.” There’s also an analysis of the 1844 campaign pitting Abraham Lincoln against George McClellan, posing the question, “Could Lincoln be reelected today?”

- **Settle It!**

www.politifact.com/settleit - Produced by the fact-checking website PolitiFact, this site has a section titled The Argument Ender, a searchable collection of political statements about a variety of issues, with a full analysis of why they are true, mostly true, false, and outrageously false.

“Visual and Digital Texts” by Stergios Botzakis in *Journal of Adolescent and Adult Literacy*, March/April 2016 (Vol. 59, #5, p. 599-601), available for purchase at <http://bit.ly/1SqJPpX>

