

LDC LETTER

A MONTHLY UPDATE ABOUT ALL THINGS LDC

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WIDER AND WIDER, DEEPER AND DEEPER.

That's the story of the Literacy Design Collaborative as it takes on implementation and refining phases in several states and a large number of districts and networks. It is a crucial time for this new approach to teaching literacy in secondary schools and to basing literacy instruction on the Common Core State Standards.



LDC: ON THE MOVE

LDC, like its counterpart in the formative math assessments also supported by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, had “humble beginnings,” according to Carina Wong, deputy director of its College Ready Work program. But it took off very fast.

A small design team came together in 2009 to focus on what teachers and students should be doing to meet the core standards. The team developed prototypes and piloted them, while also reaching out to partners and becoming a true collaborative. By the 2011-12 school year, the LDC tools – templates, rubrics, modules – were ready for refining and scaling up, guided by data collected through every phase.

Teachers, trainers, coordinators and researchers in several states and

large districts are taking part in this phase of LDC. Additionally, many partners with curriculum development, networking, technology or teacher professional development expertise have become part of the collaborative.

Wong and Vicki Phillips, the foundation's director of education (College Ready, United States Program), strongly underscore the teacher “voice” in the LDC initiative. As they pointed out in an article in *Phi Delta Kappan* (April 2012), “teachers co-created the materials, tested tools in their classrooms, and offered real-time feedback to designers about what worked and what didn't.”

We will report on research as it becomes available, and LDC is collecting anecdotes to make the research come alive. At a recent summit sponsored by Gates on effective teaching, for example,

teams from Fayette County and Kenton County (KY) presented their work on informational tasks, their tools and the work students produced. Listening to the panel, Dan Brown of the Center for Teaching Quality and a nationally known writer on teaching, was “blown away” by the “empowering” aspect of LDC. He found the confidence of the teachers to be “eye-opening.”

This first generation of LDC, says Wong, has been somewhat informal, providing play and work spaces for teachers and their training. Future generations promise to be even more exciting and pioneering, using technology to create new tools and teacher supports. She says the focus is clear: “We are creating systems that support good teachers, that help average teachers get better and new teachers learn the profession so they can be good.”

LINKS TO LDC STUFF

Go to My Group Genius for Teachers (<http://www.mygroupgenius.org/literacy/>) to find:

- >> The 1.0 Guidebook to LDC
- >> Template Task Collection

- >> Anatomy of a Module
- >> Sample modules and module templates

SARA BALLUTE AND LDC: FROM 'HO-HUM' TO REAL EXCITEMENT

Sara Ballute, in her seventh year of teaching social studies at the High School for Service & Learning in Brooklyn, NY, was looking to get out from under the “shadow” of the 10th-grade New York State Regents’ exam. She wanted a way to address the curriculum covered on the exam but also put life into it and “grab my kids’ attention.”

As a researcher and observer of the first LDC module development by teachers at her school, she had a sort of “ho-hum” attitude about the process. But in tackling module development herself last summer on a unit for the coming year, especially creating mini-tasks, she realized what an exciting experience this was going to be for her students and her teaching. “The best way to learn this link to common core standards is to dive into it and do it,” Ballute says. Another social studies teacher and now part-time curriculum writer and coach, Timothy Lent, worked with her on the curriculum.

The result was a “massive” unit on the Industrial Revolution (his word) that Ballute taught over several weeks. How she guided her 100 very diverse students through answering “Were the achievements and growth of the Industrial Revolution worth the cost to society?” is documented in Literacy Matters, a video resource prepared by Media Lockers for LDC (see box). The students used 23 sources for their discussions, annotating, outlining and writing. Lent searched for potential readings, Ballute selected and adapted them for her four classes (two regular classes, one for ELL students and another for special education students). Lent also focused on the writing process, providing students with a step-by-step writing packet that helped them slowly build their thinking into argumentation essays. Peer-editing sections in the packet were especially helpful, he says.

Ballute (pictured at right) planned very specific structures for each day, and her students used the Cornell Notes strategy to line up themes with text references. By the end of the unit she believed her students were much better prepared to deal with generic questions about the Industrial Revolution such as the impact of technology on living conditions, themes they would need to know for the Regents’ test. She saw their analytic skills improve, as did their ability to make a claim and maintain it through their

writing. Because Ballute has the same students for three years, she could quickly adjust the assignments to student needs. For some students reading at pre-primary levels, for example, she narrowed the reading selections and helped them use pictures and other visuals to supplement their final essays. At the end, 94 students submitted final essays.

In addition to Lent, other New Visions for Public Schools expert staff observed Ballute’s teaching and gave advice. “I was frustrated that I didn’t see the details in their opening paragraphs that I expected,” she says, “but I realized from talking with observers that they didn’t get the idea. I



BALLUTE AND LDC IN ACTION

Watching Literacy Matters is like being a fly on the wall in Sara Ballute’s classroom, or at least, looking on from the back of the room. Video filmmakers Media Lockers captured the presentation of the Industrial Revolution unit in detail and its impact on students. There are two versions narrated by Gary McCormick of the Kenton County (KY) school district. The 9-minute version is a good introduction to LCD and is available at www.collegereadyedu-sharedmedia.posterous.com. A 13-minute version and raw footage from each day the module was taught provide greater detail for LDC trainers.

had to teach that skill directly.” She first was “terrified” about teaching writing; now both she and her students enjoy it. “My own expectations changed,” she notes. “It is almost as though I saw them transform into more rigorous students.”

PARTNER PROFILE:

NEW VISIONS ADAPTS, REVISES AND KEEPS ROLLING OUT LDC

New Visions for Public Schools thrives on innovation, but what is unique about this organization of small schools within the vast New York City public school system is its emphasis on teacher leadership and support. The New Visions staff tailors its help to the specific needs of the 75 schools in its Partnership Support Organization.

Last year, teachers from 11 schools volunteered to participate in piloting LDC modules, guided by weekly sessions with curriculum experts. Every participating teacher or teacher team completed one or two modules, and for the 2011-12 school year, “we didn’t lose a single school,” says Janet Price, director of instruction/charter for New Visions. Eventually, New Visions plans to have LDC modules developed in every school, but its strategy varies from an emphasis on mini-tasks to prepare students for the work to full-blown adoption of LDC in each core subject in the two charter schools that now are part of the organization.

Because of the broader inclusion, New Visions cannot place literacy experts on a weekly basis in each school, but the school system has provided support for literacy coach positions to serve the network. Monthly professional development sessions with literacy teams from all of the schools allow teachers using LDC modules to present their strategies and student work. After Sara Ballute and Tim Lent described the Industrial Revolution module (see p. 2), the literacy teams came away “very impressed” with the module’s links to the common core standards and the state’s Regents’ Exams. Lent, as a part-time curriculum writer, has been giving help to other teachers on the module and other topics for social studies modules.

For schools not yet ready for the full modules, the focus has been on using the mini-task element to teach reading strategies in each discipline. “This means the teacher must scaffold the task, get students more accustomed to reading non-fiction, and use the same

strategies over and over,” says Price. “By the time the students are ready for full modules, they will have the quiver in their belts.”

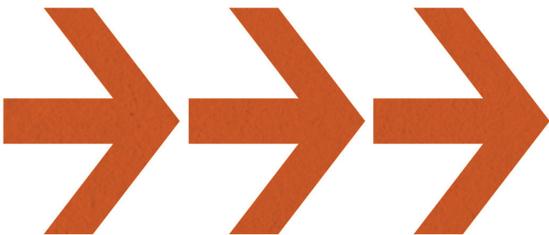
At the two charter high schools, now ending their first year of operation, LDC modules rule. Each core subject, including math, schedules an LDC module every trimester. By the time students finish 10th grade, they will have completed 24 modules and met the 10th-grade common core standards. Using the same rubric, the teachers score student work of other teachers, looking for progress over time. According



Tim Lent, PSO curriculum specialist.

to Price, the math teachers bought into the LDC module because it puts the reading assignments within the curriculum and not as outside reading. New Visions also has one ultimate example – an English/language arts teacher at one of its high schools who created a full course using only LDC modules.

Working with another LDC partner, the National Paideia Center, New Visions is developing humanities courses for middle and high school students. The students will use LDC modules with Paideia content and receive a year of credit. Because New Visions is adapting LDC gradually, depending on the needs of teachers and schools, it is fostering teacher leadership. “I have never collaborated with so many other teachers as I have since the LDC work first started,” says Lent, who taught in a PSO school for five years. “The collaborative nature of these projects has really brought our schools together and put some very sharp minds to solving common problems.”



QUESTION AND ANSWER:

GATES FOUNDATION VIEW OF LDC'S FUTURE

Amy Hodges Slamp brings years of experience to her post as the point person for LDC as part of her responsibilities as a senior program officer in the College Ready Work program of the Gates Foundation. From a vice principal in Kenya, Africa, to a high school principal and state-level director of teaching and learning in Pennsylvania, she built a reputation for teacher-centered support and leadership development. She came to Gates from the superintendency of the Elizabethtown (PA) schools, a pilot site for LDC.



Q: What motivated the foundation to get into math and literacy supports?

AS: When it became clear there would be common core state standards, we knew we had to do something to help implement them in the field. The assessment “space” already was filled, so it was decided to go straight to the classroom. We bet on practice, using teachers as co-designers and believing that if teachers design high-quality tasks and support students on the skills they need, students will produce good work.

Q. LDC has gone through piloting, refining, implementation and some scaling up. Three states are being called “integration states.” What is that about?

AS: Colorado, Louisiana and Kentucky have launched a statewide scaling up strategy that combines three areas of foundation investments – LDC, the formative math assessments and research-based knowledge of teacher effectiveness through observation and evaluation.

Q. What else can the field expect in the coming months?

AS: We are working on developing digital supports so that people can do this on their own. What are the tools they need? What is needed to create strong, virtual professional development groups? We know that scaling up cannot be dependent on face-to-face teacher support, but it has to be teacher-to-teacher, in some way. The demand for supports is unbelievable. We had planned to roll out the

software Module Creator program from MetaMetrics next December, but every time we show it to people, they want it right now. We’ve moved up the delivery to this summer. We also are in the process right now of getting protocols of good work on line.

Q. Is there anything bothering people in the field about LDC?

AS: People are anxious about what the state assessment consortia are going to produce. We know that the LDC work aligns to the Common Core State Standards, and we have strong indications that it will be aligned to the new assessments, but people won’t be sure until the new assessment data comes in. Meanwhile, we have assessment experts who are using current testing programs to find out how well students do if they have been taught with LDC strategies.

Q. Any surprises so far?

AS: The most consistent surprise has been by teachers and students themselves. Teachers have been surprised at the quality of work students can do if they are challenged, and teachers, even our most veteran ones, are surprised at how excited they get about what students can do.