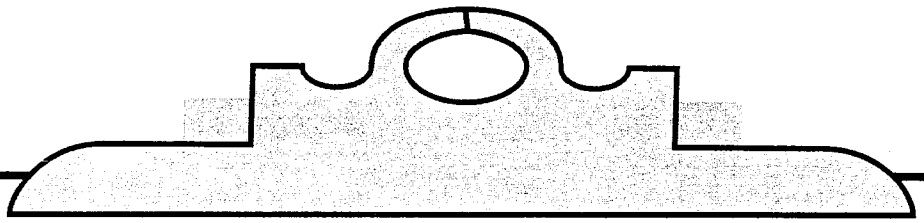
Writing about Action Research

Writing is an integral part of the action reseach process. It is a vehicle to record thoughts, actions, and reactions as the process unfolds. It is a tool to support systematic reflection resulting in data that may be collected and analyzed. Finally, it summarizes each teacher's journey so that others may learn. Some teachers find written expression a natural extension of the reflective process they are experiencing. Others benefit greatly from the ideas collected here to build writing into the action research experience and record the experience into a final written report.



THE WRITING PROCESS

Writing consistently, over time, helps build the reflection skills of participants. Plan a time at each meeting for participants to write in their journals. Prompts can be given to assist people in focusing on their work.

Build this activity into the agenda to communicate the importance of teachers writing about their work. Don't just save it to do if there is time.

Plan strategies to share the writing (pairs, small groups, the whole group).

If many opportunities are created for teachers to write, the experience will inevitably build their confidence as writers and give them a rich collection of work to reflect on over time.

Comments from Facilitators

The importance of writing throughout the action research process cannot be under-estimated. Writing scares many teachers because they haven't written thoughtful, professional papers since college days. So, write, write, write! At every meeting carve out time for writing. Writing used to be at the end of the meeting, if there was time. Now it is put close to the beginning. Provide a prompt for those who want to use it. Have people read what they've written aloud—first with a partner, then to the whole group. Really try to help teachers feel comfortable with who they are as writers.

Barriers to Writing and Strategies Facilitators Can Use to Overcome Them

TIME	> Give teachers time to write during meetings. > Provide additional time away from the classroom to do their action research writing.
COMPLEXITY OF THE WORK	> Encourage teachers to keep a journal; look for themes. > Have them ask for help from their colleagues in the group. > Narrow the topic; break it down into smaller chunks. They don't have to write about everything.
FEAR	> Build trust within the group. Create the environment which allows people to talk about their fears. > Practice writing and reading aloud throughout the year. Collaborate on some work. Build confidence over time.
GENERALIZABILITY	> Write a case study. > Focus on the individual's context and the impact on the individual teacher. Try to draw connections to the larger context when appropriate.

Reprinted with permission. Adapted from Barth, R. (1982). *Writing about practice.* In T. Amabile and M. Stubbs (eds), *Psychological research in the classroom,* (pp. 186-200), Pergman Press.

Writing Tips for Struggling Writers

• Establish a Writing Routine—A Little Every Day

Consistency in routine enables teachers to complete their writing projects. Writing and thinking a little bit each day about the research is the teacher's way of taking control of the research project and whipping it into shape. You can never feel truly in control of all the information and possible findings. Daily writing will at least make you feel as though you are managing the task.

• To Jump Start, Temporarily Lower Your Standards

Researchers need to follow William Stafford's advice to "lower their standards." Unrealistic standards breed procrastination. You are not alone; almost everyone procrastinates. Many researchers aren't lazy—they are just unrealistic. What is in your head will always be more eloquent than what lands on the page. The frustration of producing words on the page that is not up to the quality of the words in our heads makes many researchers avoid producing work. It also fosters last-minute work. The concept of lowering standards to write is a paradox. If you don't lower your standards, nothing will land on the page. If you do not write, you will not improve. By lowering your standards, you do get a draft, however ill-formed, on the page. You then have something to revise, and revise again. The process of improving writing cannot begin until something lands on the page.

• Set Deadlines

The critical element in establishing a routine is to build deadlines into your work. Some of these deadlines may turn out to be imposed for you— a date when a conference proposal is due, the day when you must present your research to colleagues, or the month when your group begins peer editing. You will have more success meeting these big deadlines if you impose and meet smaller deadlines in you work. Set a date to send a research memo to a friend, or to present a rough sketch of findings to colleagues over lunch...and stick to it.

• Overcome Writer's Block

Every teacher researcher has both psychological and pragmatic constraints in getting the work done. The psychological constraints include the "devils on your shoulder" who try to convince you that you have little to say and that you will not be able to say it well anyway. Ignore them. Some people believe that the benefits of teacher research and the knowledge gained from it are primarily for the teacher completing the research. We disagree. Teacher research can enrich your professional life immeasurably, but learning for yourself isn't enough. If you have discovered something that can help other teachers work with their students, you have an obligation as a professional to share it. Teachers are eager for this knowledge. If you start with the understanding that there are teachers who want to know what you have learned, it will be easier to face the blank page.

• Make Time for Writing

Pragmatic constraints in getting the work done include the clothes that have to be washed, the kids that have to be carpooled, the garden that needs tending. There are times particularly at the end of a research project when closure is needed. This requires a shift in priorities and occasionally ignoring practical routines so that the writing can get done.

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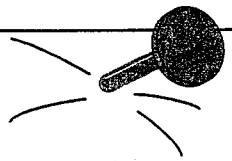
The art of classroom inquiry: A handbook for teacher-researchers. Heinemann, 1993.



Beginning of the year writing...

Writing about what is most familiar is a good beginning for participants. The following questions are starting points.

- What does my classroom/school look like?
- What does my team look like? (skills, interests, expertise)
- What is the nature of my school community?
- What needs do I see in my classroom and school?
- What data do I currently have about my students?
- What feedback do I have from parents and others which will influence my thinking?
- Where are the gaps?
- What do I want to make sure I record so that I won't forget it later?

Writing Prompts for Classroom Action Researchers

by Robin Marion

September: Begin by visualizing what an observer might sense as they shadow you as you go about your work: the physical environment (sights, sounds, smells, arrangement of furniture, what hangs on the walls, from the ceilings); the interactions among individuals in the setting (students, teachers, administrators, support staff, and parents); and the activities (what are people doing.) Write about this now, and then revisit the vision of your work environment later in the year.

October: Write a story about an event or circumstance that illustrates the issue(s) you are interested in studying.

November: What question(s) would you have to answer to understand your issue better?

December: How do you get at the "real" issue that interests you, how do you peel back the layers to reveal the root causes of the condition/circumstance/situation you would like to change or understand better?

January: Think about the kinds of "evidence" that convince you that something is working...then answer: What data do I currently have about my students? What feedback do I have from parents, administrators, and others which will influence my thinking? Where are the gaps? What do I do with the data?

February: How can I use the data I've collected to better understand my question? My issue? What do I do with the data?

March: What have I learned from the data I collected after reading through it, rereading it, looking for patterns, themes, curiosities?

April: How can I tell my story, what I have learned, to others? What parts do I leave in? What do I leave out? What form should it take? Who are the others who might/should/could see what I have written?

May: Revisiting September's writing...what would an observer sense as they shadow you going about your work...the physical environment, the interactions among individuals and the activities. Compare this with your September entry. How has the vision changed? How is it the same?

Other: What is the action in your action research?

Reflective Journals as a Source of Data

Teachers who have experienced action research often cite their journals as the most valuable sources of insight from the action research experience. Even some of those who struggle to find a time, a place, or a means for recording important information reflect that they wish they'd done more of it, particularly early in the school year. In light of teacher comments about the value of regular journal entries, we offer the following tips for using a journal effectively.

Consider using your journal as:

Field Notes: A place to note details from careful observations of students, interactions, events or dialogue, and the reflections and reactions of the observer to those observations.

A Scrapbook: A place to collect artifacts, photographs, handouts, notes on post-its, copies of grade sheets or attendance records. By placing captions below such items, the researcher can be reminded of the significance of the artifacts.

A Portfolio: A collection of student work showing progress, of student drawings or poetry, of examples of students' "best" work, or of descriptions of projects completed. The researcher can use cover sheets to describe what the work represents and why it was selected to put in the portfolio.

Kathleen Adams, in her book **Journal to the Self**, *suggests using a journal in the following ways (adapted for classroom settings):*

Visual of the Classroom: Describe the physical surroundings as well as the activities taking place, and record the feel of walking into the room or peering through a window. Include any sights, smells, sounds, or the feel of being there. Note what people are wearing, the arrangement of the furniture, what hangs on the walls, etc. Do this over the course of the school year, at least quarterly, or more often if you'd like. Compare the visual reports as part of your data analysis.

100 Issues: Number a page in your journal from 1 to 100 and list quickly issues, events, or ideas that provoke sensation, whether pride, frustration, tenderness, anger, joy, or sadness. Write as quickly as you can; it is okay to repeat entries. Afterwards, identify categories, patterns, problems, or themes that emerge. This helps get below the surface, past the obvious, and helps focus on the underlying issues that are creating the sensations.

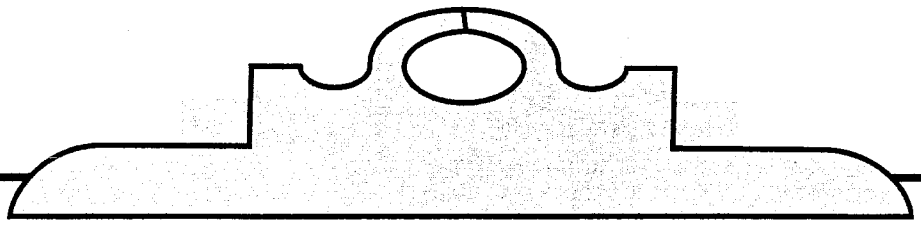
Stepping Stones: These are significant points of movement along the road of your teaching life—markers or places where you pause. They may be your response to the statement, "My teaching will never be the same since_____." First list 10 or 15 events and then choose one to expand upon. Recapture the events and moments that shaped the experience. You may want to contemplate a metaphor for the experience or an emotion that rises out of it and develop it into a story or a drawing and title it.

Time Capsule: These are periodic logs written daily, weekly, monthly, quarterly, or annually. They are valuable for pinpointing cycles, patterns, and rhythms. The journal entries will tell a story over time. The series of entries intertwine into an intricate tapestry. Approach this by revisiting the same subject or asking the same question at regular intervals. For example, each month you might address where you are in relation to an issue that you identified early in the school year.

Topic du Jour: Related to the time capsule, this strategy revisits a number of topics regularly. First, choose a list of daily or weekly topics and assign them to days of the week or weeks of the month. Each of the topics will be revisited at the assigned interval, allowing you to track multiple issues simultaneously. By reading across the entries over time, you begin to see patterns emerge that help you understand more clearly what is happening.

However you choose to use or organize your journal, try to write in it regularly because it may become an important source of data for your final report.

Robin Marion is a professor at National Louis University. Used with permission.



WRITING YOUR PAPER

Before individuals pull together all of their data, journal entries, and meeting notes, have the group talk about the final report. Ask the group to generate a list of possible areas to address in the paper. Some teachers prefer to use this list as a framework to organize their work.

While some facilitators are comfortable with the group constructing this list, others prefer to present a framework for participants to use. Examples of both are included.

Try to encourage creativity and originality so that the papers do not all look alike.

What's So Important About Writing Up Our Research?

(7 compelling reasons to pull it all together)

1. **Synthesis**
   Writing up our findings allows us to pull it all together: to clarify our thinking, to decide what it really is that we want to communicate about our research and how we want to say it, and to make it tangible by getting it down on paper.

2. **Reflection and action**
   Writing can lead us toward new discoveries about what we know and what we believe. In this sense, writing about our work is intellectually stimulating and professionally rejuvenating. Articulating our theories and insights helps us forge new connections, rethink our assumptions, and refine our work as educators.

3. **Building community through communication**
   How often do we get the chance to talk seriously with other educators about the work we do in our classrooms? Teachers pay attention when other teachers talk. When we share our classroom action research with colleagues, our voices resonate for each other in powerful ways.

4. **Empowerment and visibility**
   When teachers study and write about their work, their knowledge becomes more visible to themselves and others. Here is a chance to contribute what we understand about education and to help bridge theory with practice. Here is a chance for teachers to speak and to be heard in ways that uniquely impact what is known about teaching and learning.

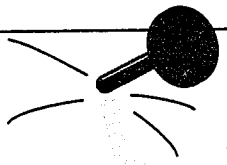
5. **Perspective**
   We often hear from the "experts" about what's right and what's wrong with education, but rarely do those voices speak from inside the classroom experience. We, on the other hand, have a distinctive "insider" perspective to share regarding what's really going on in schools today.

6. **Making a difference**
   Not everyone has the opportunity to systematically conduct meaningful research in their classrooms in ways that directly impact teaching. Our work makes a difference not only for us and for our students, but for parents, colleagues, administrators, and policy makers in our own schools and beyond.

7. **Regeneration**
   While writing up findings may bring a logical conclusion to a specific research project, more often than not it will also open up new questions, new concerns, and new areas for inquiry and research. New life is breathed into our teaching.

Comments from Facilitators

Writing the final paper is scary for some teachers. As they get closer to the end of the year, their frustration level rises. Some teachers don't see a strong purpose for doing it. They will tell you that they discovered what they needed to know and don't feel the need to do the writing. Give them strategies to keep them moving along while supporting and encouraging them. Teachers say that writing about their work forced them to analyze and think more deeply. They say that it required a different kind of thinking and enriched the experience. In the end, after all the blood, sweat, and tears, they see the rewards.



Writing about My Action Research

Getting ready to write...Before participants pull together their final paper, we ask them to reflect on their thoughts and feelings. This is very helpful feedback for facililtators.

When I think of writing up what I have learned in my action research project, I...

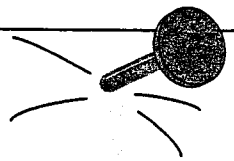
As a writer, I think I am...

One thing I am hoping will come out of doing my write-up is...

One thing that would help me with writing is...

One thing I am hoping will come out of my action research project is...

NAME (optional)



Ideas for your final write-up

_____ Your name/what you do (district position)

_____ Background information (setting, population, school, class)

_____ Question (expectations, assumptions, evolution, if applicable)

_____ Why chose the question; (rationale). What drew you to the question?

_____ Why important to you. Educational philosophy, if applicable to question

_____ Instruments used to collect data (surveys, questionnaires, etc.)

_____ Actual data (students' samples, quotes, voices; adult quotes; observations)

_____ Literature review/references (if used)

_____ Organization of data/analyzing data by themes, chronologically, by questions, by source

_____ Struggles (to arrive at question, to collect data, findings, etc.)

_____ Reflections on action research process, separate from the topic

_____ Changes you've gone through in the process; insights; inconsistencies

_____ Conclusions/findings; what I learned; interpretation

_____ Feelings, intuitions not encountered in the study

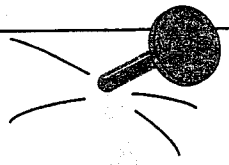
_____ Future directions; Where do I go from here?; impact; new questions; ideas for implementation changes in practice/perspective; recommendations

_____ Pictures

Other thoughts:

- All write-ups should not/will not look alike. They will reflect not only the teacher and his/her particular style, but also the nature and context of the question.
- Remember you are telling your story. You can organize this chronologically, by themes, by data source (i.e. students, parents, staff), or some other way. It's up to you!

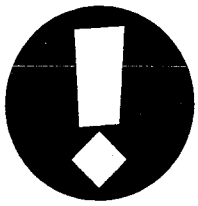
Generated by a Madison Metropolitan School District Action Research Group.



Suggested Components of the Action Research Report

The following components should be included somewhere in the report, but not necessarily in this or any other prescribed order.

- Abstract of the study
- Statement of the question (focus, problem, issue) and rationale for addressing it
- Summary of actions that the researcher took to address the question
- Description of the context, setting, or background of the study
- Explanation of the research methods and types of data collection
- Descriptive account or narrative of what happened in the study
- Interpretation or analysis of the data collected (the findings)
- Conclusions, recommendations or suggestions for future actions for self and others
- Connections to the educational research literature (optional)



Confidentiality

Suggestions for dealing with issues of confidentiality in action research work and writing are listed below.

1. ALWAYS change the names of the students who were part of your study in your written report. If you want to use the name of a teacher or the principal, check with them before you include their names.

2. Make sure you honor any requests from parents which were included in the Informed Consent process. (See pages 241-243.)

3. Write a vignette so that it describes several experiences which happened to more than one person. The reality is that you are disguising how all of these incidents happened to one person. Describe the behaviors accurately, but attribute them to different people.

4. Keep the focus on yourself as much as possible.

5. Create a character at the beginning of your study.

6. Don't put anything in print which you don't want printed.

7. Take care with *what* you say and *how* you say it.

Crafting and Assessing Your Writing

according to the 6-TRAIT ANALYTIC MODEL FOR WRITING ASSESSMENT

1. IDEAS and CONTENT

   The ideas are the main theme together with details that enrich and develop the theme.

   - Paper has clear sense of purpose and a focused theme.
   - Topic is narrow enough to be manageable.
   - Reader's attention is held.
   - Anecdotes and details are relevant and enrich central themes.

   ?Can you sum up the main ideas in a few clear sentences?
   ?Does it have those "you had to be there" kind of details that make it unique?

2. ORGANIZATION

   Organization is the internal structure of a piece of writing, the logical pattern of the ideas.

   - Introduction is inviting, sets the stage, and pulls the reader into the topic.
   - Sequence is logical and effective.
   - Transitions are strong and link ideas.
   - Conclusion brings a sense of resolution.
   - Overall effect is smooth and balanced

   ?Do the beginning and ending work harmoniously—like bookends?
   ?Does the internal structure enhance the main idea?

3. VOICE

   Voice is the heart, the wit, along with the feeling and conviction of the individual writer.

   - Writing is individual, expressive, and engaging.
   - Writer seems to speak to audience. Reader feels a connection with writer.
   - Narrative is honest, appealing, and conversational.
   - Expository is engaging, shows strong commitment, and anticipates questions.

   ?Would you take this home and read it aloud to someone?
   ?Would you keep reading if it were longer? Much longer?

4. WORD CHOICE

Word choice is the use of rich, colorful, precise language that moves and enlightens readers.

- Words are precise and accurate.
- Lively verbs give writing energy.
- Word choice is well-suited to audience and topic.
- Redundancy is avoided.
- Jargon, cliches and slang, except for effect, are not used.

?Are there words or phrases that linger in your mind after you read them?

5. SENTENCE FLUENCY

Sentence fluency is the cadence of the language, the way in which the writing plays to the ear.

- Sentences move with easy rhythm and flow.
- Sentences are well-built and vary in length as well as structure.
- Fragments, if used, add style; dialogue, if used, sounds natural.
- It is easy to read aloud.

?Does this piece invite expressive oral reading?

6. CONVENTIONS

Conventions are the mechanical correctness of the piece—spelling, grammar and usage, paragraphing, use of capitals, and punctuation.

- Spelling and punctuation are accurate.
- Skillful use of grammar/usage adds to clarity and style.
- Paragraphing reinforces the organization.

?How much editing will you have to do to get this piece ready to publish?

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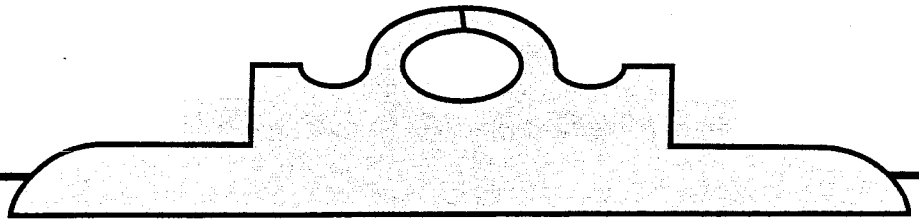
Northwest Regional Lab, Culham, R.B. & Spandel, V. 1994, 1996.



EDITING WITH YOUR PEERS

Once group members begin to pull together their written work, provide opportunities for them to share this work with their peers.

Ask individuals to find a partner and read a section of their paper. Provide time for partners to offer helpful feedback.

At a later meeting, ask each participant to read aloud a portion of the paper to the whole group. Have group members offer feedback.

Give group members the opportunity to edit each other's papers. In small action research groups, all members read everyone's paper. In larger groups, participants read 2-3 papers and provide feedback to their colleagues.

Questions to Ask when Editing a Colleague's Paper

CONTENT

1. What question was explored?
2. What data were collected to answer the question?
3. Were the data appropriate for answering the question? Why or why not?
4. What were the author's findings?
5. What action does the author plan to take based on the findings?

MECHANICS

1. Is the writing grammatically correct?
2. Are there spelling errors?
3. Are there typographical errors?
4. Is the paper clearly organized?
5. Does the author use organizational devices to lead you through the paper? (headings, sub-headings, spacing, underlines, etc.)

STYLE

1. Is the paper easy to read?
2. Does the author take too long to get to the thesis or question posed in the paper?
3. Is the text engaging? Why or why not?

Working Draft of "Qualities of an Effective Action Research Report"

> ***The research question is significant, manageable, and clearly stated.***

A **significant** question is one that focuses on teaching and learning practices that could have an impact on students' behavior or achievement.

A **manageable** question is one that is do-able within the time constraints of the researcher. It is neither so broad as to be impossible to answer nor so narrow that it cannot offer much insight.

A **clearly stated** question is one that accurately conveys the focus and scope of the research.

> ***The research methods are sufficient, appropriate, and exhibit triangulation.***

Research methods are **sufficient** when they generate enough data to provide some answers or insights.

Research methods are **appropriate** when they generate the type of data that could address or answer the question.

Research methods that collect data from three different sources **exhibit triangulation**. (e.g. teacher observations, student interviews, videotapes)

> ***The descriptive account or narrative (story) of the study is sufficient, appropriate, and vividly expressed through specific examples and detailed vignettes.***

The descriptive account is **sufficient** if it gives the reader a clear picture of what actions the researcher used and of how the subjects of the study responded to these actions.

The descriptive account is **appropriate** if it provides the necessary information to understand the basis for the researcher's insights or conclusions.

The descriptive account is **vivid** if the reader can picture what occurred as a result of numerous details, quotes, samples of student work, or episodes.

> *The interpretation or analysis is reflective, insightful, and clearly supported by the data.*

The interpretation is **reflective** if it shows evidence that the researcher has given considerable thought to the actions of oneself and the other subjects of the study.

The interpretation is **insightful** if it leads the researcher to some new ways of looking at or understanding the activities under study.

The interpretation is **clearly supported by the data** when the researcher can reveal in a convincing way how the data leads to and justifies the interpretation.

> *Conclusions contain a logical plan for follow-up action steps.*

The conclusions **contain a logical plan for follow-up** when the researcher specifies what actions he/she will take next as a result of what was learned and what he/she might recommend for others interested in the same question.

> *Identities have been protected.*

The people in the study have been **protected** when they cannot be identified or, when necessary, have given written permission to be part of the study.

> *The tone of the report is professionally respectful to colleagues in the program or school.*

The tone is **professionally respectful** to colleagues if it does not make its point by criticizing or negatively presenting one's colleagues. The focus of the report is a study of the actions of the researcher, not the actions of one's colleagues.

> *The report reflects genuine interest on the part of the researcher and addresses issues that would be of genuine interest to others.*

A report that **reflects genuine interest on the part of the researcher** is one that appears to have meaning and importance to the researcher. It is not merely a response to an assignment from an administrator or a professor.

A report that **focuses on issues that would be of genuine interest to others** is one that is broad enough to be applicable, generalizable, or useful to others.

> *The report is well-written.*

A **well-written** report is one characterized by a logical flow of ideas, proper grammatical usage, correct spelling, and clear and effective sentence structure.

Example of an Action Research Paper

THE INTERACTIVE READING GUIDE: AN INVESTIGATION OF A STRATEGY TO SUPPORT STRUGGLING READERS IN LEARNING HISTORY

Doug Buehl
Madison East High School

"How can we teach history to students who cannot read the textbook?"

The bell rings, the classroom door opens, and twenty-five ninth-graders file in to another day of studying history. Prominently positioned on most desks is a thick, glossy paged textbook, and as the class unfolds, students flip open their texts, to refer back to sections read the previous evening, or to launch into the next assignment, perhaps on the American West, the Industrial Period, the Progressive Era, or the Great Depression. Textbooks, and reading, are a daily fact of life in learning history.

Indeed, the ability to read is essential for success in all academic subjects at the high school level. For many of our students, however, reading is a roadblock to rather than a vehicle for learning. In particular, struggling readers are continuously frustrated by the reading demands placed upon them in content classrooms. As the introductory quote denotes, teachers are frequently at a loss when trying to work with students who cannot independently read the required course materials.

Beginning with the graduating class of 2003, effective reading skills will take on an even greater significance, due to the upcoming Wisconsin state high school graduation test. The graduation test will assess literacy in the areas of science, social studies, language arts, and mathematics. All students will be asked to demonstrate their learning through both reading and writing. Struggling readers will be especially at risk for not receiving a diploma due to their performance on the state test.

In addition, today's students are facing lifestyles and workplaces that will mandate a much more sophisticated level of literacy than our previous students. As the International Reading Association Statement on Adolescent Literacy (1999) asserts:

> Adolescents entering the adult world will do more reading and writing tasks than at any other time in human history. They will

need reading and writing to cope with the flood of information they will find about the world as it exists. They will also need to use literacy to feed their imaginations so that they can create the world of the future. In a complex, diverse, and sometimes even dangerous world, their ability to read is crucial, and therefore it is essential not only to help them survive, but also to help them thrive.

Background of Study: The Struggling Reader in the High School

As a high school reading specialist, I am involved for much of my school day in exploring strategies that can help students become more effective and efficient learners in their content subjects. My work may be with individual students, with students who are receiving tutoring assistance, with students who elect a reading class, or in collaboration with teachers who are seeking ways to help these students be more successful with reading tasks in their courses. Although identifying effective practices for serving struggling readers has been an ongoing part of my job at East High School, the impending high-stakes graduation test creates an atmosphere of immediacy for designing programs and investigating strategies that can succeed for these students.

During the 1998-1999 school year I have participated in devising a pilot project at East High School in ninth grade U.S. History. This project targets improving the academic and reading abilities of struggling readers within the context of a social studies classroom. My involvement with the development of this project has been in conjunction with a social studies teacher and a reading teacher. The social studies teacher, who is also certified to teach reading, formerly worked with at-risk students at East. This was her first year teaching history at the school. The reading teacher works extensively with struggling readers in the Learning Shop, our school tutoring program. Many of the students who would be impacted by the pilot project would also receive tutorial support under her guidance. Both are veteran teachers with years of experience teaching struggling readers.

Reading test data culled from Wisconsin Student Assessment System (WSAS) underscores the extent of reading underachievement at East High School. Struggling readers perform at the minimal and basic levels on the WSAS tests, and are typically at risk for failing their academic subjects. The

results of the 1997-98 WSAS tests for Madison tenth graders indicate that 7% performed at minimal range, 14% at the basic range, and 16% were not tested. WSAS scores for 1997-98 East High tenth graders, however, reveal a larger contingent of struggling readers who may fare poorly on the state graduation test; 12% of East tenth graders scored at the minimal range, 20% at the basic range, and 17% were not tested. Students who did not take the WSAS—special education students, limited English proficiency learners, and truants—are students whose low skills exempted them from the test or who as a group traditionally perform poorly on reading achievement measures. These WSAS results indicate that, as students move through high school, many low achieving students may either drop out, or are not tested.

East High WSAS results by ethnic background are even more sobering. For example, 26% of African-American tenth graders scored at the minimal level, 20% at the basic, and 26% were not tested. Likewise, Hispanic students had a difficult time with the WSAS reading test: 9% performed at the minimal level, 45% at the basic, and 27% were not tested.

The profile of a struggling high school reader reveals characteristics that go far beyond a simplistic statement that "they can't read." Although a few high school struggling readers do founder with the rudiments of reading, most can read to some extent, and some can read certain materials fairly effectively. What this group of students cannot do, however, is handle the reading demands of high school academic classes independently and successfully.

A common misconception about struggling high school readers is that their sole, or perhaps primary, need is further instruction in phonics. Teachers tend to notice these students' lack of fluency when they read out loud and when they labor to figure out unfamiliar words. As a result, many teachers feel helpless in assisting the learning of these students. Yet a more comprehensive profile of a struggling high school reader suggests a number of possible interventions by teachers that can help these students become more successful learners and readers in their content classrooms (Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction Curriculum Guides in Reading, 1986, and Strategic Learning in the Content Areas, 1989).

For example, struggling readers often possess limited background knowledge related to what will be learned in class. In addition, they may need help accessing what they do know and deciding how to use this knowledge when they read. These students tend to approach reading tasks reluctantly,

they read with no clear purpose or goal, and they read with little consideration of possible strategies they could use to insure that a passage makes sense. In essence, they jump in without looking, against their will, with no plan for how to proceed, and with little expectation that they will gain much from their efforts.

During reading these students display a limited attention span, often finding it hard to focus on their reading for a concerted period of time. They tend to skim over hard words rather than apply word identification strategies that they may know but have never become practiced enough to use automatically. They may have a limited vocabulary in the topic area they are studying, and they may have an insufficient general vocabulary as well. Most importantly, they tend not to monitor their comprehension as they go along, preferring instead to read merely to "get done." They may glean only isolated pieces of information, but miss the point of a passage. They may read passively and not ask themselves questions about the material or conduct an internal monologue on what they are encountering. And they tend to give up easily, especially when the material is challenging or uninteresting.

Finally, after reading, these students are able to offer only a few facts, perhaps disconnected, about the passage. They may misinterpret information, and prefer to "look for the answer" and write down verbatim responses. They are heavily reliant on the teacher for constructing meaning, and they tend to avoid reading whenever possible. Their lack of reading practice, both in and out of school, impacts their reading fluency, and some students find themselves mired in laborious word-by-word efforts whenever they must confront a reading task. Many of these students consciously choose not to complete reading assignments outside of class and independent of the teacher's guidance.

Content teachers cannot be expected to teach rudimentary reading skills within the context of their curriculum, but they can integrate strategies into the classroom routine that address many of the characteristics detailed in the above profile. For example, strategies that both elicit and build relevant background knowledge will give struggling readers a more enhanced knowledge base as they begin reading. Strategies that help readers sort through information and establish major ideas are especially beneficial to struggling readers, who tend to see all information as of equal value and, as a result, too overwhelming to attempt to learn. In addition, strategies that

involve peers working together during reading provides a network of learning that can assist struggling readers who do not fare well with independent reading expectations.

Therefore, the goal of our pilot project was to investigate classroom strategies with a group of ninth grade history students who fit this profile of the struggling reader. Our pilot proposal is explained below:

Rationale: Historically there has been a population of ninth grade students who have not attained academic success in history. This lack of success can generally be ascribed to inadequate reading skills, disinterest in the content, and insufficient background knowledge in the topics being studied. These students attend school regularly and do not have overt behavioral problems that interfere with learning. Teachers might observe behaviors such as daydreaming, withdrawal, lethargy, and task avoidance, and these students may expend great effort to hide their academic deficiencies. As a result, they fail to meet classroom learning and performance expectations.

Objectives: This pilot proposal endeavors to address the needs of these struggling learners by meeting the following objectives:

1. accelerate learning of students who are struggling readers through teacher-led instructional activities, including use of technology and self-paced educational software;
2. assure students will successfully complete one year of the required social studies credit for graduation;
3. provide students with integrated reading/writing/social studies skill development;
4. provide alternative learning strategies, materials, and skill development for content area material;
5. explore strategies that will help students meet state standards, benchmarks, and assessment criteria as delineated in the upcoming state graduation exam;
6. continue to meet the school's overall student achievement goals with specific attention to minority student goals.

Description of Pilot Program: This program will be instituted in October, 1998. Two special sections of ninth grade U.S. History will be created, periods 1 and 7. Each class would have a limit of 15 students. Students struggling in history will be referred to this pilot program by their ninth grade U.S. History teacher,

principals, counselors and the East reading consultant. Students and their parents may be interviewed by the history teacher, reading consultant, principal and/or counselor to insure students meet program criteria. Those individuals who wish to participate in this option will be rescheduled from their current history class into the pilot program.

This pilot history class will differ from current social studies classes in the following ways: (1) smaller class sizes can more directly address individual needs of the students; (2) emphasis will be on reading and writing in a content area; (3) use of a broader range of materials will help stimulate interest in the content; (4) organization around themes rather than chronological study can help students see connections between the past and their lives; and (5) skills emphasized in this program will be transferable to other content reading and study situations.

The pilot history classes were approved by the East Principal, and we selected students according to the program guidelines described above. The classes began to meet in October during the first quarter of instruction.

The Study: Investigating Strategies Effective with Struggling Readers

How can teachers of social studies, science, math, or other academic courses support the learning of struggling readers in their classrooms? My role in the pilot project was to identify classroom strategies that could help these students more effectively learn in their academic classes as well as provide them with sufficient scaffolding for handling challenging reading assignments. Successful strategies could then be shared with other teachers who teach similar students at East.

My action research question, then, evolved into: **What strategies are effective in supporting the learning and reading development of struggling ninth grade readers in a U.S. History course?** The strategies we decided to investigate were predicated on a number of assumptions. We assumed that our students would either not do the required reading out of class, or would have difficulty completing it successfully. We assumed that students would need structure integrated into a reading assignment that guided them toward successful reading and completion of the task. We assumed that students

would need assistance, either from their peers or from the teacher, while reading the class materials. We assumed that students would need ongoing practice in engaged reading, and that they needed this practice to develop fluency and become more automatic in their basic reading skills. We assumed that the students would find much of the class materials frustrating to read, and that they might be reluctant to read some materials.

We decided to experiment with a number of classroom strategies during the pilot project, including graphic organizers, jigsawing of materials, reading from different perspectives, and others. For the purposes of this action research study, I specifically investigated employing Interactive Reading Guides (Wood, 1988) with these history students.

The Interactive Reading Guide is a variation of the study guide and involves students working with partners or in small groups to figure out the essential ideas in their reading. In some respects, Interactive Reading Guides are analogous to those treasure hunts we participated in as children. You were given a series of instructions that led you to several locations. At times you had to pause and think about the clue you had received, and it helped to collaborate with others. If you followed all the directions carefully, you discovered the spot that contained the "treasure"—the whole point of the exercise.

Getting the point of a reading assignment, however, is an especially difficult undertaking for struggling readers. They are confounded by the amount of information they encounter in a textbook, and they are unable to differentiate key ideas from supporting detail. As a result, they could benefit from a few clues that direct their excursion through the text.

Teachers implement the Interactive Reading Guide strategy in the following manner. First, they carefully preview a reading assignment to determine the major information to be learned and to locate possible pitfalls for understanding. This initial "scouting" excursion should pay special attention to any difficulties struggling students might have with the material. Is there an occasional "mismatch" between students and the text. Does the author assume knowledge that some students might lack? Does the author introduce ideas and vocabulary without providing sufficient explanation or examples? Does the author use language or a sentence style that will be tough reading for some students? As part of this preview, the teacher identifies

salient features of the text that students might overlook, like pictures or charts and graphs.

Next, the teacher constructs an interactive reading guide which is designed to be completed with partners or in cooperative groups. Items on the guide should help students decide where to focus their attention during reading and support their learning when the material might prove challenging. The teacher segments the passage to be read so that portions are orally read by individuals to their group, portions are read silently by each student, and portions that are less important are skimmed. In some circumstances the guide can also be used to provide additional background information, or to encourage students to brainstorm what they already know about the topic.

The completed interactive reading guides then serve as organized notes on the material for classroom discussions and follow-up activities. They also make excellent study guides for examinations. A main advantage of the interactive reading guide is that it makes it possible for students to learn from text materials that may be too difficult for independent reading. In addition, students are conditioned to read materials at differential rates, for varying purposes, as they are directed to read some sections carefully and to skim others. Students are also able to draw upon each other as resources when they tackle a challenging reading assignment, and they discuss the material as they read rather than afterwards (Buehl, 1998).

Research Methods and Data Collection

We experimented with the Interactive Reading Guide strategy two times during our pilot project. The first guide was created for a lengthy and challenging article on immigration and the second guide for an extended article on Great Plains farmers in the late nineteenth century. I created the first guide, in consultation with the history teacher, and she created the second one, using my example as a model.

We presented the first Interactive Reading Guide in November, about six weeks after the pilot classes were created. Therefore, the history teacher had an opportunity to observe the students for a few weeks before we implemented this strategy. Both groups of students were small—the first hour class consisted of ten students, the seventh hour class of twelve

students. Because the students were recommended for the class by their previous ninth grade history teachers, and they had to assent to participate, we were working with students who at least had expressed an interest in improving their skills.

The students represented a diverse cross section of the student body, and included individuals of white, African-American, and Hispanic ethnic backgrounds. Two of the students were in the learning disabilities program. All students fit the profile of the struggling reader described above—they were resistant readers who were having difficulty achieving success in their previous history class. However, they were also wary about the pilot program, some worrying that the class would have the stigma of being "dummied down," which these students did not desire nor felt they needed. The history teacher found it necessary to assure them that this class was indeed a "regular" history course that used the same textbook as their previous class and followed the same content expectations. In addition, we told them, they would receive extensive reading attention and skill development. It soon became evident that these students did need a great deal of support during reading, and that they needed to develop overall academic and learning behaviors as well as upgrade their reading abilities.

The passage on immigration during the nineteenth century was selected by the history teacher to provide additional background to the textbook material. This reading was quite sophisticated and presumed a fair degree of background knowledge, but it was also a lively passage with vivid descriptions of what life was like for immigrants traveling to America. I segmented the article into three sections (A, B, and C) and created an Interactive Reading Guide for each section (copies of the Interactive Guides are included in the Appendix). To condition the students for their role as listeners and to set the context for the reading, the history teacher read Section A of the article aloud to the students, and they were encouraged to refer back to the article after the read-aloud to complete Section A of the guide. Then students worked in pairs to complete Section B, and finally Section C of the guide. Students were allowed to select their own partner for Sections B and C of the phase.

Although the reading was only five pages long, it was dense and formatted in three column magazine style, with a small font size. It took most students four to five days to complete all three sections of the activity.

Data Collection assumed the following forms. First, observation data was collected by the history teacher, who had experiences with the students before using the Interactive Reading Guides, and was able to contrast their behaviors on this strategy compared with other reading activities. Secondly, I also observed the classrooms and collected observational data. I interviewed the history teacher, keeping her comments in a journal, and I also recorded my own observations in the journal. Next, we had performance data from the students, who completed the reading guides. We were able to judge the effectiveness of the strategy based on their abilities to demonstrate their understandings of difficult text on their guides, which were handed in and counted as a class assignment. In addition, student comments were tracked as they worked on the activity, which I also recorded in the journal.

The second Interactive Reading Guide was administered in February, and again focused on a challenging selection, an article with the same visual format as the immigration passage described above. This second article centered on the tough lifestyles and harsh adjustments Great Plains farmers had to make in the late nineteenth century. This Interactive Reading Guide took students nearly a week to complete, with all students doing the first part, and then the class jigsawing the rest of the packet. The jigsaw strategy involves dividing a reading into parts and assigning responsibility for each part to a different group of students. The students who read a particular part then take turns "teaching" the pertinent information to their classmates who had not been assigned that segment (Aronson, et. al., 1978).

In the spring, after both Interactive Reading Guides, as well as other strategies, had been explored with the students, they were given a short survey which asked them to reflect on the effectiveness of our pilot program. The data from that survey is also included in this discussion.

Discussion of Findings

The Interactive Reading Guide strategy was fairly effective in supporting the students in the pilot program in a number of respects. First, they were quite engaged in reading the material. Typically, the history teacher found these students to be capable of sustaining silent reading in class only a short period of time, perhaps ten to fifteen minutes, before losing concentration

and perhaps feeling over-exertion from the efforts they needed to expend. However, these students were able to work the entire period on the Interactive Reading Guide activity, and were willing to continue on the task for several days. This is especially significant because the material was clearly at a higher difficulty level than their textbook and they had to work hard to complete the guide. They could not get by with superficial skimming for answers, because questions on the guide often asked for more thoughtful responses that required integrating material and making connections rather than just listing of factual information.

Second, student work on the guides demonstrated that they were gaining a fair degree of accurate information from the material. We were concerned that they might just fill in answers to get the assignment done, rather than truly attempt to do a conscientious job. At times the history teacher had to battle with their disposition to do work just to hand it in, but with this particular activity there seemed to be more effort on their part to satisfy the intent of the assignment.

A large part of this result can probably be credited to the cues that the guide provided for reading and prioritizing the information. But the interactive elements also seemed quite significant. Students were allowed to complete a reading assignment with a partner rather than alone, and this social element may have lowered the frustration index because they were allowed to collaborate with a fellow problem-solver when things were not immediately evident from the text. The history teacher also commented that her classes were generally better behaved during the activity than was sometimes true in the class. This effect may be due to some extent to the presence of a second and sometimes third adult (the reading teacher and myself) in the room during the activity. Yet it also appeared significant that students had a partner to assist their learning during the days of the activity.

Third, working with a partner was generally appreciated by most students, but not all. The first time we used the guides, a couple of students resisted working with others and wanted to work alone. To some extent this was a personal work preference, and to some extent it reflected a class dynamic where some students wished to operate in isolation from the other students. Obviously, some elements of the guide would not be effective with a student working alone because we intended that discussion during reading be a key ingredient of the process. The history teacher allowed students to choose their

own partners as long as they could be productive, and she matched up students who were reluctant to locate someone with which to work.

Not surprisingly, we noticed during the first time we explored the Interactive Reading Guide strategy that interpersonal and general academic behaviors were just as significant factors as reading ability in this learning activity, as well as others we tried. To help us analyze these behaviors and to provide a more defined work environment for the second time we used an Interactive Reading Guide, I constructed a series of three rubrics to be used with the students (see Appendix). One rubric outlined worker traits, a second learner traits, and the third cooperative traits. Each rubric listed characteristics on a five point scale, from A to F, in an attempt to help students recognize traits that could facilitate their learning as well as impact their reading development. Worker traits included such items as giving top effort, persevering when the work is challenging, and an inclination to try to do the job right. Learner traits included an open-mindedness and willingness to try new things, as well as handling feedback, taking risks, and keeping focus. Cooperative traits included how one contributes to the overall classroom environment, how one supports the learning of others, and how one interacts with classmates during learning.

I used this rubric to guide my observations during the second time we explored the Interactive Reading Guide strategy, with the passage on farmers in the Great Plains. I observed that students were perhaps somewhat more willing this time to engage in the activity, and that students showed again a fair degree of perseverance in engaging with difficult text. We were more aggressive in arranging partners this time, and all students knew from the start that we expected them to work with a classmate. We also emphasized several of the cooperative traits as we got them started on the activity. I observed again that most students seemed genuinely interested in coming up with reasonable answers for the guide, and that they were willing to problem-solve with each other before calling for help from a teacher. As teachers, we would direct their attention to a part of the text that could help them, or suggest ways to problem-solve where they were stuck, and most students appeared comfortable with that assistance, rather than expecting us to supply them the answer.

In both trials with this strategy, I have to admit that I found myself amazed that the students were willing to work as hard as they did on

uncovering meaning in their reading. In my judgment, both texts—immigration and prairie farmers—which were written for adult audiences, represented a upward adjustment from the textbook, which the students did not find easy. I was not at all sure that either selection would be really accessible to the students. Yet the Interactive Reading Guides seemed to provide enough structure, and with the added element of peer support, the students were able to learn from them.

Indeed, the rigorous nature of these two selections provided other unintended benefits. Both passages reinforced to students that the curriculum of the pilot program was intended to enhance their skills with legitimate material, and the students seemed to appreciate that we regarded them as capable of handling difficult, adult-style text. As mentioned earlier, several individuals were very sensitive to being singled out as needing easier expectations. Therefore the unmistakable rigor of the tasks may have been seen as an endorsement of their abilities and potential. In a sense they "rose to the occasion" and worked to prove that they could read this material.

Observations and Conclusions

Classroom strategies such as the Interactive Reading Guide do seem to hold promise for boosting the achievement of struggling readers as they learn in their content classes. However, an overriding concern continues to be with the three traits represented in my rubric—that of workers, learners, and cooperators. Interactive strategies which are less teacher-directed and allow students the freedom to work with each other also run the risk of time off task and other behaviors that may interfere with learning. Often teachers conclude that struggling readers are too immature to handle the responsibility inherent in these strategies, and choose instead strategies which keep students quiet and task oriented. The reverse option, I feel, is to continue to explore interactive strategies, but to use tools such as the rubric to teach these responsibilities and expectations as an integral part of a lesson.

Students generally responded favorably to our strategy experimentations on a short survey administered in May, 1999 (see Appendix). Not unexpectedly, all but one student either agreed or strongly agreed with the first statement: "It is more helpful to do the reading required for history

during class than at home on my own." The second statement, "The activities we do during reading in this history class help me better learn to read," received a somewhat more mixed response. While most agreed or strongly agreed, three students were not sure, one disagreed, and one strongly disagreed. These results may be understandable because all of our strategies were imbedded in the learning of the course content and were not necessarily transparent as initiatives to improve reading skills.

The third statement, "It helps to have classmates or the teacher available to help me while doing reading assignments in class" received a similarly favorable response. Two students were not sure and two disagreed or strongly disagreed. This is not surprising, as a couple of students preferred working alone in class, and some students were willing to work with partners as long as these partners were not certain other individuals in the class. The students admitted in their responses to the fourth item that they were "more likely to do the reading in this class" than in their previous history class, and the results were a bit more scattered for the fifth statement, "I am more likely to do the reading in this class than in other classes when the reading is assigned as homework." Apparently they were doing some independent reading for their other classes, or at least they claimed they were.

The final statement, "The reading I have to do in this history class is too difficult," received a decided negative response. Only two students agreed or strongly agreed, and two were not sure. The rest concluded that they could indeed handle the materials we asked them to read. This seems to be a significant response, because struggling readers often complain about the difficulty level of what they are asked to read in class, arguing that they did not complete work because it was too hard for them.

The results of our pilot project this year confirmed our intention to offer a history class with a reading emphasis as a regular course option for the 1999-2000 school year. A major addition to the program will be a block structure; students will be scheduled into the program for two consecutive 50 minute class periods. Students will be enrolled in the two classes for the entire 9th grade year and will receive one required social studies credit for History and one elective credit for reading. The class blocks will be scheduled for Periods 1-2 and 3-4, with each class having a limit of 22 students. Students would be referred to this program by their middle school counselors and teachers, based on the criteria listed below. US History teachers, principals, and counselors

and the reading consultant may also refer students for possible inclusion.

Students who fit the following profile will be recommended for the History/Reading block:

- Students at risk of not succeeding on the State Graduation test.
- Students in the regular curriculum who struggle with independent reading.
- Students who may be extremely slow readers or who lack reading fluency.
- Students who need to develop academic learning and study skills.
- Students who need support in their learning within the regular curriculum.

Students who are truant or who exhibit other behaviors not necessarily related to reading difficulties will not be accepted into the History/Reading block for next year.

In conclusion, we will continue next year to experiment in the History/Reading block with interactive strategies that will help struggling readers build reading fluency and general reading ability, make connections to learning in social studies, and use reading to enhance their background knowledge in the subject. As the history teacher recently commented: "I got them to read for 45 minutes today! It took a little coaching, but they read for 45 minutes!" This may seem like a modest achievement, but compared with October, 45 minutes of engaged reading is a real milestone.

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Reading Guide—"Hope, Tears, and Remembrance"

Section A: Introduction to Ellis Island pages 1-2

1. Entire Class: Listen and follow along in the article as I read this passage to you. Then based on what you remember respond to the questions below. If you need to, you can locate information from the article:

   • Ellis Island is located in what city?

   • What famous national landmark can be seen from Ellis Island?

   • What do they use Ellis Island for now?

   • How many immigrants came to the United States through Ellis Island?

   • List 4 nationalities of immigrants that were mentioned:

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   • List 4 reasons why immigrants came to the United States that were mentioned:

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Section B: Early Immigration to the United States pages 2-3

1. Both Partners: Read paragraph 1 silently to yourself. Then decide on the answer to this question:

   • Who were the first immigrants to America?

2. Partner X: read paragraph 2 out loud. Partner Y: as you listen, decide how to answer:

   • Were the early immigrants to America regarded as a good thing?

   • Why or why not?

3. Partner Y: read paragraph 3 out loud. Partner X: as you listen, decide how to answer:

   • Did the government keep very close track of immigrants in the early days?

   • What clues in the article helped you figure this out?

4. Both Partners: read paragraphs 4, 5, & 6 silently to yourself. Then list 4 things that attracted people to America:

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5. Partner X: read paragraphs 7 & 8 out loud. Partner Y: as you listen, decide how to answer:

   • What are some of the nationalities of the new immigrants?

   • What was the attitude of many Americans to these new immigrants?

6. Partner Y: read paragraph 9 out loud. Partner X: as you listen, list 2 reasons why officials became concerned about immigrants:

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7. Both Partners: silently read paragraphs 10 & 11. Then decide:

• What was happening to some of the immigrants?

• What were 2 things the immigration act of 1890-91 provided?

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8. Both Partners: silently skim paragraphs 12, 13, & 14. Look for:

• What do these 3 paragraphs describe?

Both Partners: silently skim paragraph 15 to find out about the first immigrants to come through the new building at Ellis Island.

9. Partner X: read paragraph 16 out loud. Partner Y: as you listen, decide how to answer:

• Locate evidence that shows that most immigrants to the U.S. came through Ellis Island:

Partner Y: read paragraph 17 out loud. Partner X: as you listen, decide how to answer:

• What was the highest number of immigrants coming through Ellis Island in a single year?

10. Both Partners: silently read paragraphs 18 & 19. Then decide:

• If you were an immigrant, what were the chances that you would be allowed to stay in the United States?

Section C: Conditions Coming to America pages 3-5

1. Both Partners: skim paragraph 1 silently to yourself. Locate one name of a famous immigrant that you have heard of before or that you find interesting and write it below:

2. Both Partners: read paragraphs 2 & 3 silently to yourself. Then decide:

   • Why were so many "common people" motivated to come to the United States?

3. Partner X: read paragraph 4 out loud. Partner Y: as you listen, decide how to answer:

   • How did the companies who owned ships try to attrack people to sail to America?

   • If you were a poor person, what could you expect to pay to sail to America?

4. Partner Y: read paragraph 5 out loud. Partner X: as you listen, decide how to answer:

   • List 2 ways poor people found the money for sailing to America?

   -

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5. Both Partners: read paragraphs 6 & 7 silently to yourself. Then decide how to answer:

   • List 2 rules that ship companies had to follow for immigrants to America?

   -

   -

   • Several European cities were ports for immigrants. Pick one city mentioned and find it on a map in the classroom. Write the city and its country below:

6. Partner X: read paragraphs 8 & 9 out loud. Partner Y: as you listen, decide which item would be the most difficult to take on a ship:

7. Both Partners: silently skim paragraphs 10 & 11. Look for evidence that these immigrants were very poor:

8. Both Partners: silently read paragraphs 12 & 13. Look for 3 bad conditions for immigrants on the ships:

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9. Partner Y: read paragraph 14 out loud. Partner X: as you listen, look for 2 more bad conditions for immigrants on the ships:

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10. Both Partners: silently read paragraphs 15, 16, & 17. Then decide on 3 more bad conditions for immigrants on the ships:

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11. Both Partners: silently skim paragraphs 18, 19, & 20. Then write one sentence below which summarizes the tough times immigrants had on the ships:

12. Both Partners: silently read paragraph 21. Then decide how to answer:

    • If you were an immigrant on a ship to America, what were the chances that you would actually get to the United States?

History Survey

Circle one response for each statement:

1. It is more helpful to do the reading required for history during class than at home on my own.

strongly agree	agree	not sure	disagree	strongly disagree
(10)	(6)			(1)

2. The activities we do during reading in this history class help me better learn to read.

strongly agree	agree	not sure	disagree	strongly disagree
(5)	(7)	(3)	(1)	(1)

3. It helps to have classmates or the teacher available to help me while doing reading assignments in class.

strongly agree	agree	not sure	disagree	strongly disagree
(8)	(4)	(3)	(1)	(1)

4. I am more likely to do the reading in this class than in my old history class.

strongly agree	agree	not sure	disagree	strongly disagree
(7)	(7)	(2)		(1)

5. I am more likely to do the reading in this class than in other classes when the reading is assigned as homework.

strongly agree	agree	not sure	disagree	strongly disagree
(5)	(6)	(3)	(1)	(2)

6. The reading I have to do in this history class is too difficult.

strongly agree	agree	not sure	disagree	strongly disagree
(1)	(1)	(2)	(8)	(5)

Worker Traits

A

____ Attends class every day (no unexcused absences)
____ Arrives to class on time every day
____ Gives top effort the entire class period
____ Settles down quickly & gets into the work
____ Tries hard even when work is challenging
____ Willing to push self even if work's difficult at first
____ Tries to do things right & wants to do things right
____ Is able to work independently
____ Can tell whether has done a good job or not

B

____ Attends class every day (no unexcused absences)
____ Arrives to class on time every day
____ Gives top effort nearly all of the class period
____ Settles down & gets into the work
____ Usually tries hard even when work is challenging
____ Can push self even if it difficult at first
____ Usually tries to do things right
____ Is able to work independently most of the time
____ Can usually tell when has done a good job or not

C

____ Attends class nearly every day; rarely absent
____ Arrives to class on time nearly every day
____ Gives top effort most of the class period
____ Settles down & gets into the work most days
____ Often tries hard even when work is challenging
____ Can push self most days even if work is hard
____ Tries to complete assignments
____ Is able to work independently much of the time
____ Can usually tell when has done a good job or not

D

____ Attends class nearly every day (3-4 absences)
____ Arrives to class on time nearly every day
____ Gives top effort some of the class period
____ Takes time to settle down & get into the work
____ Sometimes tries even when work is challenging
____ Can push self some days even if work is hard
____ Completes assignments just to get them done
____ Is able to work independently some of the time
____ Is not always trying to do a good job

F

____ Does not attend class every day (5+ absences)
____ Is tardy several times
____ Does not work unless required to by teacher
____ Needs teacher reminder to settle down
____ Gives up quickly when work is hard
____ Does not complete all assignments
____ Needs teacher help almost daily for work
____ Does not care whether has done a good job or not

Learner Traits

A

____ Is open-minded & willing to learn new things
____ Feels learning in class is worth doing & valuable
____ Thinks before acting & avoids being impulsive
____ Makes sure knows what to do & how to do it
____ Can handle constructive feedback from teacher & classmates
____ Keeps attention focused on class activities
____ Tries out strategies & new ways of doing things
____ Is willing to take a risk when learning is hard

B

____ Is open-minded & usually willing to learn
____ Feels learning in class is worth doing
____ Usually thinks before acting & is rarely impulsive
____ Makes sure knows what to do & how to do it
____ Can usually handle constructive feedback from teacher & classmates
____ Attention is usually focused on class activities
____ Tries out strategies & new ways of doing things
____ Usually will take a risk when learning is hard

C

____ Is sometimes open-minded & willing to learn
____ Feels learning in class is sometimes worth doing
____ Sometimes thinks before acting; at times impulsive
____ May start not knowing what to do & how to do it
____ Sometimes has difficulty handling constructive feedback from teacher & classmates
____ Attention is sometimes not focused on class
____ May be reluctant to try new ways of doing things
____ Sometimes will take a risk when learning is hard

D

____ Resists learning new things
____ Feels learning in class is often not important
____ Often does not think before acting; often impulsive
____ May start not knowing what to do & how to do it
____ Has difficulty handling constructive feedback from teacher & classmates
____ Attention is frequently not focused on class
____ Often reluctant to try new ways of doing things
____ Often will not take a risk when learning is hard

F

____ Is not very willing to learn
____ Feels learning in class is not important
____ Rarely thinks before acting; very impulsive
____ Starts not knowing what to do & how to do it
____ Can not handle constructive feedback from teacher & classmates
____ Attention is usually not focused on class
____ Is reluctant to try new ways of doing things
____ Will not take a risk when learning is hard

Cooperative Traits

A

____ Is sensitive to others & can work with classmates
____ Helps others feel comfortable being in class
____ Actively listens during class presentations and when others talk
____ Participates appropriately in class discussions
____ Remains focused on the assignment during group work
____ Contributes to orderly classroom environment
____ Supports the learning of other students

B

____ Is sensitive to others & can work with most peers
____ Helps others feel comfortable being in class
____ Is usually an active listener during class and when others talk
____ Participates appropriately in class discussions
____ Usually is focused on the assignment during group work & is rarely off task
____ Contributes to orderly classroom environment
____ Supports the learning of other students

C

____ Can work with some students & not with others
____ At times makes others feel uncomfortable in class
____ Sometimes an active listener during class and when others talk; sometimes interrupts
____ May be inappropriate during class discussions
____ Is focused on the assignment during group work only some of the time; may be off task
____ At times makes for loud class environment
____ At times interferes with learning of other students

D

____ Can only work with a few others in the class
____ At times makes others feel uncomfortable in class
____ May be an active listener some days & not other days; sometimes interrupts
____ Often inappropriate during class discussions
____ Needs reminding by teacher during group work to focus on assignment & not be off task
____ At times causes loud class environment
____ At times interferes with learning of other students

F

____ Does not work well with others
____ Often makes others feel uncomfortable in class
____ Rarely listens during class and when others talk; frequently interrupts
____ Is constantly disruptive during class discussions
____ Has to be watched by teacher during group work or will be off task
____ Frequently causes loud class environment
____ Often interferes with learning of other students

To: Action Researchers
From: Cathy Caro-Bruce

Re: Abstracts

As the school year winds down, and you work to complete your final report about your Classroom Action Research and findings, please take a few minutes to write an abstract of your study. This brief synopsis will be published in ***Voices from Madison: Issues and Ideas from Inside Schools***, a compilation of all of the studies completed by Madison Classroom Action Researchers from 1990 to the present.

Please use the following format to ensure consistency among the abstracts. Be concise. The purpose of the abstract is to help readers select which studies might be pertinent to their interests, not as a substitute for reading the study.

Author, School
Title of the Study. (Year completed)
DESCRIPTORS OF FOUR TYPES, in one word or a short phrase:

1. Methods of Data Collection
2. Issue(s) Addressed in the Study
3. Subject
4. Grade

A summary of the study, including the research question, method, focus, data collected, the findings, any unique attributes, description of attachments or appendices.

The average length of abstracts is one-fourth to one-third of a page. The attached examples may help you with ideas for your own.

Copies of the ***Voices*** directory of abstracts will be available from Cathy Caro-Bruce in the Staff Development Office, and on the district's web page (www.madison.k12.wi.us) by clicking on the Staff and Organization Development Home Page.

Thanks for taking the time to make your study more accessible to others! Thanks for all of your efforts with the action research journey!

EXAMPLES OF ACTION RESEARCH ABSTRACTS

Baumgardner, Nancy
Once a Buzzard, Always a Buzzard? (1997) Elvehjem Elementary
AVOIDING THE STIGMA ASSOCIATED WITH TRACKING, ABILITY GROUPING, STANDARDS / BENCHMARKS, GRADE LEVEL CRITERIA, MEETING THE NEEDS OF A WIDE RANGE OF STUDENTS, MATH, GRADE 5
This researcher documents the journey of this fifth grade team as it implements flexible grouping to address the needs of their students in math. The team seeks to align the math program with the NCTM Standards, and to provide instruction to large classes with a wide range of needs from talented and gifted students to fully included students receiving cross-categorical special education services. Their hope is that by pre-testing for each of the topics, they can group the students accordingly and reduce the range of needs in each classroom without the stigma associated with tracking. The researcher compares the journey to a remodeling project where one improvement always leads to another. Included are examples of assessments, a report card rubric, and student self evaluations. STUDENT SELF EVALUATION, REPORT CARD RUBRICS, MATH ASSESSMENT TOOLS

Donovan, Heidi J.
On Schools, Learning and Becoming Ourselves (vol: 1998 Assessment/Health & Wellness) J.C. Wright Middle
INTERVIEW, MOTIVATION AND SELF-DIRECTION, CURRICULUM, GRADE 6-8
Frustrated with students lacking motivation and self-direction, this teacher used surveys and personal interviews of individuals ranging in age from 13 to 70. The interviews focused on the question of when and how learners begin to take ownership of their own learning and become genuinely engaged and self-directed in their learning. The findings are summarized in the following categories; age of initial self-motivation, parental roles and impact, development of personal interests, influence of school environment, impact of teachers, impact of competition and cooperation. Data: SURVEY QUESTIONS, INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Hammatt-Kavaloski, Jane
Learning By Teaching: Enhancing Academic Achievement Through Service-Learning (1997) Shabazz City High
MINORITY STUDENT ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT, SERVICE-LEARNING, LEARNING THROUGH TEACHING, BLACK HISTORY, MULTICULTURAL ISSUES, ALTERNATIVE HIGH SCHOOL
Frustrated by poor academic achievement among alternative high school students on a Malcolm X research assignment, this researchers explored what happens when the staff adds a service-learning component. As part of class expectations, students were now expected to: complete a research project about the life, work and influence of Malcolm X, to develop an educational project which demonstrated their knowledge, and to use their project to teach 6th grade students at Sherman Middle. Jane examines the steps which were taken to implement this project, as well as the results this type of teaching had on student attitude and achievement. Student quotes lead to a genuine sense of the impact of the experience on students who traditionally have poor academic achievement. The number

of students passing the class increased over the same course passing rate for prior semesters. OBSERVATION, STUDENT COMMENTS, STUDENT SURVEYS, STUDENT GRADES

Mueller, Jennifer

The Multi-Age Journey--What Impact Has The Multi-Age Model Had On Students, Parents, and Teachers? (1995) Mendota Elementary

MULTI-AGE GROUPING, GRADES 1 & 2

As a result of careful reading and planning, a pilot of two multi-age grade 1 & 2 classrooms was approved at Mendota. After a first year with expected trials as well as successes, this pilot moved into a second year, which is documented by this study. Multi-age has pushed Jennifer to tailor the curriculum so that ALL children feel challenged and successful, and she has become more flexible in the physical classroom arrangement and planning. Rather than rely on activities dictated by textbooks, she seeks lessons that allow students at different levels to benefit and be challenged. Excerpts from student interviews and parent surveys give voice to those truly affected by the changes in her teaching. A bibliography of resources and a quick compilation of advantages to multi-age practice are attached. Data: LITERATURE REVIEW, STUDENT INTERVIEW, PARENT SURVEY

Starling, Betsy

Students' Reactions to Reading Prize-Winning Literature (1997) Memorial High

PRIZE-WINNING LITERATURE, STUDENT MOTIVATION, INTERNET, COMPUTERS, LIBRARY MEDIA CENTER (LMC), GRADE 11

This library media specialist worked with a junior English class and teacher to see if certain techniques influence reading motivation and selection of novels. The students each read different award-winning American novels and performed numerous assignments, including an Internet survey. Student work from the study is published on the Internet. The students enjoyed the novels and benefited from retrieving author and book review information. Appendices include a bibliography, the survey, student assignments, student reflections, and statistics. Data: PRE- / POST- STUDENT SURVEY

Swift, Ken

Inquiry Projects with Primary Students, Teacher Survival, Parental Involvement (vol: 1998 Literacy) Lapham Elemenary

STUDENT QUESTIONAIRES AND SURVEYS, CONFERENCES, OBSERVATION, STUDENT AND TEACHER JOURNALS, PARENTAL FEEDBACK, CROSS CURRICULUM, FIRST GRADE

Ken was intrigued and anxious about initiating inquiry-based projects with his first grade class. Experience with second graders the previous year had given him a sweet and sour taste. His question, "Can first graders and their teacher tackle inquiry projects and succeed?" set the stage for a ten week odyssey. This study describes the journey his class took investigating questions and topics of their own choosing. Ken discusses the importance and challenge of parental involvement in supporting such an endeavor. Student surveys and questionnaires inform the reader of how the "Great Blue" projects were perceived by the kids themselves. He concludes with ways he will change this adventure next year. Data: STUDENT QUESTIONNAIRE, STUDENT SURVEY