

Buffalo Hide Academy: JANUARY 2020

Plain Talk About Literacy and Learning: By Jason Krane



I was incredibly fortunate to be able to go to the Plain Talk Literacy conference in New Orleans at the end of January. Several of us from the district participated in the three-day event where leading researchers and practitioners discussed best practices in the field of literacy with sessions ranging from building resilience in social-emotional well-being to coaching the reluctant/resistant teacher to trauma-informed practices for early childhood teachers. Although every breakout session I attended was informative and thought-provoking, there were many more I wish I could have went to! Below is a short description, with bullet points, highlighting key takeaways from a few of my favorite presenters.

Mike Schmoker: Keynote - Teaching and Leading with Focus

- Simplify, simplify, simplify! Focus on “the smallest number of high leverage, easy to understand actions...” meaning reading, writing, and critical thinking through discussion.
- The importance of the following three things:
 1. Guaranteed Curriculum (common topics/skills taught in the same sequence around mostly common texts and writing assignments)
 2. Authentic College Prep Literacy (According to ED Hirsch, “literacy is the most important single goal of schooling in any nation.” Reading, writing, and speaking grounded in evidence from both literary and informational text AND regular practice with complex text and its academic language. Increase the amount and quality of writing.)
 3. Effective Lessons (Clear learning objectives; anticipatory set/purpose of lesson; teach/model in small, manageable chunks; guided practice; checking for understanding; independent practice/assessment)

Joan Sedita: Keys to Critical Thinking

- The two keys are Summary writing and Question Generation.
 1. Summary:
 - a. Identified as one of the most effective comprehension AND writing strategies
 - b. Non-text (experiment, process, video, event, etc.) AND Text (expository and narrative)
 - c. Is a specific type of writing task (different that retell and other types of writing)
 - d. How to write one: distinguish main ideas from details; write in phrase form first; begin with introductory statement; turn main ideas into sentences; combine sentences, incorporate transition words; proofread!
 - e. Annotation is key! Underline the major points, circle keywords or phrases that are confusing or unknown to you, write margin notes restating the author's ideas.
 2. Question Generation:
 - . Identified as an essential comprehension strategy
 - a. Pushes students to engage directly with the source and practice critical thinking skills
 - b. How to teach: start with everyday examples/events; model and use think aloud; teach students a continuum of thinking (Bloom's Taxonomy); provide scaffolds.

Daniel Willingham: Helping Students Think Critically About Fake News, Real News, and the Difference Between Them

- People's beliefs are NOT motivated solely by a desire to represent the world accurately:
 - People are motivated to hold beliefs that accurately represent their world;
 - Beliefs protect values we deem important or even sacred;
 - Beliefs regulate emotions;
 - Beliefs maintain our self-identity;
 - Beliefs maintain social ties.
- 3 key strategies:
 1. Teach students to read laterally (what do others say about the source or about the topic?)
 2. Teach "click restraint" when using Google (don't just look at the top sites)
 3. Use Wikipedia wisely (look at references and at "talk" tab)
- Final (somewhat disheartening!) takeaway - probably not going to impact deeply held existing beliefs... "We nevertheless want to believe that we are only persuaded by facts and logic. The diversity of information (real and not) on the Internet makes it easy to find alternate truths that allow us to keep our motivated beliefs."

Daniel Willingham: Helping Students Learn to Overcome Distraction and Concentrate

- Distraction from within vs distraction from without:
 1. Distraction from within: mind wandering

- **Why** do our thoughts sometimes drift off? It's not well understood, but suggestions are the following: current situation is considered unimportant; mind wandering is the mind's natural state; we have a bias to monitor our internal state AND the world, and when one is done for an extended length of time, we switch to the other.
 - **When** is mind wandering most likely? When doing one task for a while; if task is boring; if task is difficult.
 - **Ideas** to help students: make task lists; a gentle reminder (like a chime) asking if students are still focused; planned breaks after a short period of work (chunking).
2. Distraction from without: **PHONES!**
- **Why** are students so attached to their phones? Most psychologists in the US think it doesn't meet the criteria for addiction...
 - Russ Poldrack: "If we understand there is something to be learned in the environment, we are wired to explore."
 - BJ Casey: "Hyper sociality of teens is adaptive - it's how they learn to understand peers as they grow separate from parents."
 - Time Discounting: good things lose value as we contemplate getting them only in the future.
 - So phones offer new information which is highly valued and highly perishable. A text message loses 25% of its value in 10 minutes. It loses 50% of its value in 5 hours... information depreciation.
3. Phones should **not** be allowed in classrooms, but this needs to be enforced school-wide.

BHA Bear River Massacre Unit: By Nick Rink

Buffalo Hide Academy students completed a unit on the Bear River Massacre in January, culminating in an onsite experience listening to presenters organized by Blackfeet Community College. Students in all classes were given an introduction to the event the days before the 150th memorial of the massacre by reading an article by Roger C. Henderson titled "The Piikuni and the U.S. Army's Piegan Expedition - Competing narratives of the 1870 Massacre on the Marias River." They learned about the misleading narrative of the "battle" as it was originally told by the perpetrators, and then read about the terrible reality of the events leading up to the Massacre and the tragedy of that cold day in January 150 years ago.

With a strong focus on the resilience of the survivors of that day, our students were prepared to brave the cold for the presentations offered by BCC onsite. It was a clear warm day, however, and afterwards the majority of them expressed how impactful it was for them to hear the stories the descendants of the survivors told about that cold day in history while standing on the same ground and looking around at the same ridges General Baker and his men stood on. Our students expressed an overwhelming sense of gratitude and disbelief at the strength of their ancestors who survived such a horrific event.

<https://www.greatfallstribune.com/picture-gallery/news/2020/01/23/baker-massacre-150th-anniversary-memorial-ceremony-shelby-mont/4557743002/>



Student of the Month: By Chris Lewis

This school year, I've had the honor to get to know Jori Gray-Boggs as one of her counselors at the Buffalo Hide Academy. Jori is resilient, intelligent, compassionate, and truly an inspiration to us all. Not only is Jori a committed student, she is also a loving mother to a three-month-old baby. Words can't even begin to describe how proud we are of her as a staff. In her first quarter at BHA, Jori attained a 3.0 GPA and earned two credits. Achieving a 3.0 is definitely not a gimme here at the Buffalo Hide Academy, but to do so with a baby in one arm while working out complex equations is truly incredible. In the face of adversity, this young woman defines what it means to have grit and perseverance. I truly believe Jori is bound to do great things in this life. This is just one of many stories here at BHA that highlight the power of the indomitable spirit.

