

SCOPE

NEWSLETTER
OF THE
NAGC
CURRICULUM
STUDIES
NETWORK

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NATIONAL ASSOCIATION FOR
Gifted Children

From the Editor

The Spring/Summer edition of SCOPE is about how to stay inspired as a teacher, with a special emphasis on how to do so in the extremely challenging environment of an urban school. The articles in this edition will inform and inspire you, whether you are at the beginning of your career or a seasoned professional, whether you are at an urban public school or at a crossroads in your career. This edition, our article contributors come to us from Teach for America in St. Louis, Missouri and New York City. Amy Kordus reminds us not to be an island—no matter how long or short of a time we've been teachers, we can always learn from our fellow teachers and become inspired once again.

When I write curriculum, I want to connect with students, connect students to the larger world, to each other, and to their teachers. Felicia Nicole Trautman's article reminds us that teaching is truly about the amazing feeling of seeing students make connections between ideas, and that at its most rewarding, teaching is about students and teachers connecting.

Summer is a great time to widen your horizons when learning about new curriculum models, brushing up on old skills, writing new curriculum, or professional development. "Summer Reading" recommends books for you to read this summer. You can use your time wisely to enhance your curriculum repertoire.

Spring is a time of new growth; summer is a time for reflection and relaxation. Now is a wonderful opportunity for you to look back at what you've done so well over the past few years in building exemplary curriculum. I encourage you to consider submitting your "star" unit to the NAGC next year's Annual Curriculum Studies Awards. Visit Curriculum Night in the fall for ideas on how to excel in this way and use your time this summer to polish a unit you could submit next year.

-Leighann Pennington, Editor

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NAGC Curriculum Network
2009
Network Leadership

Network Chair: Carol Ann Williams
Convention Program Chairs: Christine
Briggs and Carol Ann Williams
Newsletter Editor: Leighann Pennington
Layout Editor: Brianna Pennington

From the Network Chair

As I look back on my teaching career, I realize that my best efforts at meeting the needs of my students really came back to my own reflective teaching practices. The more time I spent in pre and post planning, the better my subsequent lessons became. This summer offers an excellent time to reflect back on the year just ended and catch up on some required reading to stay current in our field. As you try to avoid the heat, humidity and rain this summer season, the books suggested in our newsletter will help you reflect on your own teaching practices and open some doors for you on how to enrich your unit and lesson planning while meeting the needs of all your learners. (Also, giving you an excuse to stay cool indoors or at the beach!)

~Carol Ann Williams, Network Chair

You are welcome to email me at carol.williams@stockton.edu if you have questions or want to become more involved. *FOR MORE FROM OUR CHAIR, SEE PAGE 6: INFORMATION ABOUT THIS YEAR'S CONFERENCE.*

Riding Shotgun: Staying Inspired as a First-Year Teacher

by Amy Kordus

The life of a first-year teacher is by no means easy: in fact, the so-called learning curve that I experience feels more like I'm accelerating past 80 miles an hour down a freeway. As I careen through this tumultuous period, I get quick glimpses of veteran teachers on cruise, executing new strategies and managing classrooms with seeming ease. Oh, how I wish I could fast forward 15 years and finally have experience to back me up. I can barely keep my metaphoric "teacher-mobile" in the center of the lane most days! I'm swerving around mountains of paperwork and finding myself battling traffic jams of obstinate students and fatigue. Why is it that everyone else (i.e. veteran teachers, even my fellow first year teachers) seems to have it all together? How can anyone feasibly stay in the classroom for 40 years when I can hardly survive a Monday? When I strap myself in at the start of every week, I grudgingly brace myself for the unexpected. It is difficult for me to stay motivated when everything in my classroom seems to be on the brink of spontaneous combustion!

When I slow to reflect on exactly what has inspired me to keep coming back to the classroom for almost 150 days (and counting), it is by far the incredible support of my fellow teachers. I am fortunate in that I started my first year of teaching with a cohort of other inexperienced young people as a part of Teach for America. This program is a national teaching corps that recruits recent college graduates to commit two years of teaching in urban and rural school districts.

After attending a six-week intensive teacher training program in Texas this summer, my fellow corps members and I quickly bonded over the struggles of becoming an effective teacher. We spent many late nights together lesson planning, grading, and analyzing student data. When school started in the fall, we all experienced the ups and downs that come with figuring out the ropes of a new school district. I cannot begin to count the number of conversations I had at the start of the year that did not involve some form of frustration or panic. As exhausted as we were, we knew we had each other. Whenever we had a tough day, we knew that literally a hundred-plus other teachers were going through the same thing.

"By sharing the ups and downs of teaching, we are helping each other to keep things in perspective. We are here for the kids. We are here to affect lives. No matter how tough things get for me as a teacher, my students come first."

Throughout this school year, we regularly swap stories and laugh, pat each other on the back and add a few words of encouragement.

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We share in that dreaded “Sunday pit” in our stomachs, brought on by the anticipation of the coming week. Together we celebrate successes we’ve had with our students and puzzle over what brought about recent changes in behavior. We inspire each other! For example, a friend of mine teaches 5th grade and was very excited when her students grew 1.5 years in their reading levels.

Amy Kordus recommends the following books:

***Ordinary Resurrections*
by Jonathan Kozol**

***Savage Inequalities*
by Jonathan Kozol**

Amy says: They are both heavily researched-based, but Kozol is a former teacher who has become a strong voice in favor of education reform.

***The Freedom Writer's Diary*
by Erin Gruwell: talks about a combination of working in an urban school and motivating students to become better writers.**

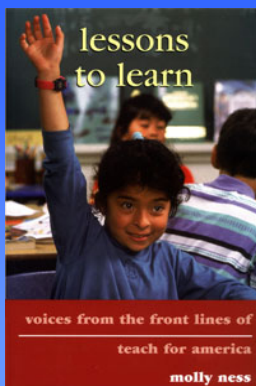
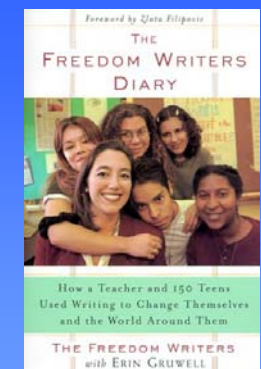
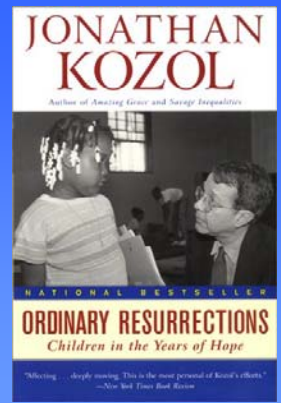
dent that as long as I am teaching there will be teachers who will inspire me, just as they inspired me when I was a student. Inspiration, it seems to me, comes from the camaraderie that we can establish together as professionals in a field that is unlike any other. We create change in the lives of our students, so we can just as easily change each other’s perceptions on any particularly gloomy or grueling day.

In the words of my earlier analogy: no matter how fast things might be coming at us along that endless highway of teacher experience, we can rest assured that another sympathetic soul is riding shotgun.

Even though my kids may have had a rough day, I recognized in my friend’s story that children’s moods change and problems at home amplify; but, as a teacher, I can remain a constant force in my student’s life. I can remain committed to my career in teaching in order to benefit my students. By sharing the ups and downs of teaching, we are helping each other to keep things in perspective. We are here for the kids. We are here to affect lives. No matter how tough things get for me as a teacher, my students come first.

We joined Teach for America to fight against educational inequality; we teach to improve our students’ opportunities in life. Now that it is April, we have all zoomed along the first year teacher’s learning curve. Some of us have started seeing pay-off for all the long hours; others, including myself, wish we could start over knowing what we know now. What keeps me motivated, in spite of all these obvious shortfalls, is that I see and hear success stories from my fellow teachers. I might not have this teaching thing figured out yet, but another teacher knows more than I do.

When Sunday morning comes around and the deep pit in my stomach returns at the thought of another week, I need only to seek out my colleagues, my partners in the challenge of educating our future. I am confi-



Books about Teach for America:

***Lessons to Learn: Voices from the Front Lines of Teach for America* by Molly Ness**

***Relentless Pursuit: A Year in the Trenches for Teach for America* by Donna Foote**



Making a Difference: One Student, One Class at a Time

by Felicia Trautman

When I first learned about Teach For America, my recruitment director shared with me his “Why I Teach For America” story. For the next two years, I continued to listen, inspired and motivated, to other corps members’ stories – tales of beating the odds, facing what seemed to be insurmountable challenges, and making students believe that if they worked harder, they really would get smarter. These stories were what led me into education. So when I finally walked into my own classroom, I couldn’t wait for the day I would find my Teach For America story – what would I share with others to inspire success in America’s toughest schools?

First, I think of how amazingly selfless my class became that first year. My students heavily focused on the genocide in Darfur as an ongoing leadership project. They collected donations from high-schoolers and contributed their leftover lunch money to charities. They cut out and intelligently discussed articles from the newspapers that then decorated my classroom door. They wrote letters to President Bush, the Red Cross, the janjaweed, and the refugees.

Their efforts were amazing, their questions insightful, and I was surprised to see how invested they became in resolving the crisis.

Then, I think about a 6th grader named Kalejatu who was in that class. I found out Kalejatu was diagnosed with sickle-cell anemia through a standard letter in my school mailbox. Shortly after that, she came to me and asked me if I would help her read the high-school level book the doctor had given her when she was diagnosed. Her need to understand her disease and what was happening to her led her to me and led

us both to begin working intensely on her reading abilities.

Before one of our after-school sessions began, Kalejatu, who had developed a love of country music over the school year, was searching through my iPod for new songs she hadn’t heard yet. She came upon a Martina

McBride song entitled “Concrete Angel.” She played it once, and then played it again. I was surprised when she played it a third time, mostly because it is sad and slow, and Kalejatu usually chose the really upbeat songs. Then I listened to the lyrics:

*She walks to school with the lunch she packed
Nobody knows what she’s holding back
Wearing the same dress she wore yesterday
She hides the bruises with the linen and lace, oh*

*The teacher wonders but she doesn’t ask
It’s hard to see the pain behind the mask
Bearing the burden of a secret storm
Sometimes she wishes she was never born*

*Somebody cries in the middle of the night
The neighbors hear, but they turn out the lights
A fragile soul caught in the hands of fate
When morning comes it will be too late*

Kalejatu yelled, “Ms. Trautman, Ms. Trautman.” I turned and saw a look on her face that seemed to be a combination of shock and urgency, and she said, “We’re the neighbors! The United States are the neighbors, and we are turning out the lights while Darfur is crying for help!”

Across this nation, there are millions of children sitting behind broken desks, staring down at books they can’t read, and they are crying for help. Most of them will be found in our nation’s poorest neighborhoods. As educators, we cannot afford to turn out the lights on this country’s most academically-neglected children.

Teaching isn’t easy, and there are certainly many days when you feel like you aren’t making a difference or that you are fighting an uphill battle you will never win. But those are the days I think of Kalejatu.

Kalejatu, working hard to end a genocide halfway across the world, saw no difference in the lack of US intervention in a large-scale crisis and the apathy of a little girl’s neighbors in preventing her abuse. For her and my class, the size of the problem didn’t matter. If you knew about it, you did something about it. They looked at massive upheaval and ruin and did not say, “We can’t do anything about that” or “What we do here won’t matter.” They simply answered the cries of Darfur the best way they could.

“As teachers in urban schools, it may very well seem like our efforts are futile... Those are the days I encourage you to think of Kalejatu and her innocent belief that we all can make a difference.”



Curriculum Studies Awards

Have you considered submitting your curriculum to the Curriculum Studies Awards?

Advice from a Reviewer:

- Think very carefully about how your curriculum would be read from an outsider's point of view.
- How are you formatting the lesson?
- Did you answer all the questions [such as criteria on the rubric] and are the headings clear?
- Would it be easy for someone else to pick up your curriculum and teach it?
- Think carefully about the student examples---the examples should demonstrate the curriculum's ability to respond to the needs of all their learners.

See below basic information about submitting your curriculum to the awards.

Visit this website: <http://www.nagc.org/index.aspx?id=1204> for more information. There you can also download detailed requirements, rubric and nomination form. I encourage you to take a look at the guidelines this year, so that you can plan to submit your work next year. If you are attending NAGC's Annual Conference, you can visit Curriculum Night to learn about the award-winning units.

NAGC Curriculum Studies Award Competition Guidelines Contact Information

Please contact Christine Briggs of the Curriculum Studies Network at cbriggs@louisiana.edu with any questions on the information below.

Submission Deadline:

All submissions must be postmarked by June 1, 2010.

PLAN EARLY FOR NEXT YEAR!

Please send your materials to:

NAGC
Curriculum Studies Award
1707 L Street, NW
Suite 550
Washington, DC 20036



Summer Reading for Teachers

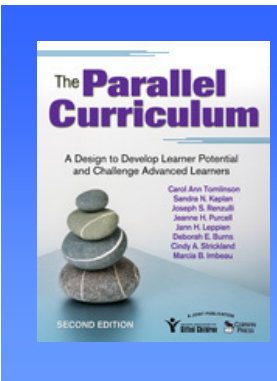


You assigned summer reading to your students—now it's your turn!

Books that Answer the Question:

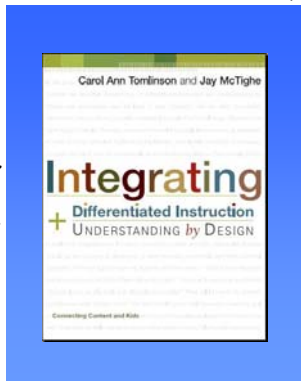
How can I gain a stronger background in Curriculum Development?

The Parallel Curriculum: A Design to Develop Learner Potential and Challenge Advanced Learners,



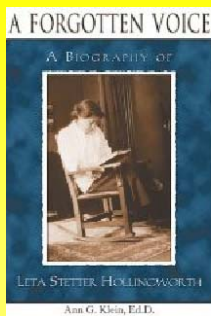
Second Edition: The second edition is updated to be more user-friendly for teachers. Visit CorwinPress.com to find companion editions to help you apply this model at your school or see books with sample units from your discipline.

Integrating Differentiated Instruction and Understanding by Design by Carol Ann Tomlinson and Jay McTighe.: This is a good introduction to these curriculum and instruction models. If you've already learned about each, this book is a useful refresher and also irons out the finer points that could benefit from clarification.



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Have you been reading about First Lady Michelle Obama in the news lately?

Don't forget about the First Lady of Gifted Education, Leta Stetter Hollingworth.

I recently read her excellent biography:

***A Forgotten Voice: A Biography of Leta Stetter Hollingworth* by Anne Klein.**

***These are books I've read lately.
What do you recommend?***

Send in:

article submissions, book recommendations, book reviews, questions for a Curriculum Expert (I will post your question and answer from an expert in the next edition!)



The Fall Edition will include recommended books that answer the question: How can I differentiate curriculum for students with special needs?

**NAGC's Annual Conference Update from Our Chair
See you in St. Louis!**

The planning for our annual conference has been completed and our program offerings will be extensive, such as using RTI for acceleration to understanding concepts, rigor and grouping in meeting the needs of our gifted learners. This year we are partnering with the Middle Grades Network to offer a **full-day Wednesday Academy on Curriculum Writing and Teaching Strategies for the Middle Grades**.

Our scheduled business meeting will be on **Friday** from **11:30 to 12:30 pm**, giving you time for lunch after the meeting and our **Annual Curriculum Night** is scheduled for **Friday** from **7:15 to 8:30 pm**. There are many opportunities at the convention to become involved in our network. Consider joining us in St. Louis, meet your fellow curriculum colleagues and learn about ways you can personally become more active. If unable to attend, please remember that it is very easy to volunteer. We always have openings for curriculum readers, convention proposal reviewers and newsletter contributors. You are welcome to email me at carol.williams@stockton.edu if you have questions or want to become more involved.



Article Contributors



Amy Kordus is currently finishing her first year of teaching at Compton-Drew Investigative Learning Center Middle School in St. Louis, MO, where she teaches Title I Communication Arts, grades 7 and 8. Amy recently graduated from University of Wisconsin-Madison, Madison, WI with a degree in English literature and political science. She is a proud Teach for America corps member, an organization dedicated to closing the achievement gap in our nation's lowest performing schools. To learn more about how Teach for America's mission or how to get involved in the program, please visit www.teachforamerica.org.

Ms. Felicia Nicole Trautman is a graduate of Loyola University in Chicago, IL. She taught for Teach for America in New York City. Felicia currently works at Columbus Collegiate Academy as a Founding Teacher, during the school's first year, where she teaches Writing and Science. Felicia taught for Teach For America in New York City, working in the Bronx during a two-year commitment at Frederick Douglass Academy III.