

## 21<sup>st</sup> Century Literacy Leaders

By Anitra Butler

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The purpose of this newsletter is to provide specialized information to Maryland's literacy leaders. As our state's schools build teacher capacity in preparation for the Common Core State Standards, it is essential that Maryland's literacy leaders understand the demands of these standards and keep abreast of the best approach, methods, and/or practices that will get our students career and college ready.

According to ACT:

- Reading demands in the workforce, college, and life have held steady or increased over the last half century, yet K-12 texts have declined in sophistication (CCSSI, 2010, Appendix A, p. 2)
- This gap between the end of high school text

readability demands and university text is increasing (Williamson, 2008, p. 618; ACT 2011)

Hence, this newsletter will provide bi-monthly updates on literacy issues and serve as an optimal source of information to state leaders, district leaders, curriculum writers, school-based leaders, teachers, and support service personnel because it takes a village to educate a child.

### Special points of interest:

- Digital literacy is the ability to effectively and critically navigate, evaluate and create information using a range of digital technologies.
- Literacy of the 21st Century today depends on understanding the multiple media that make up our high-tech reality and developing the skills to use them effectively.

## Digital Learning Day – Wednesday, February 6, 2013

The Alliance for Excellent Education is the proud host of Digital Learning Day - a national campaign that celebrates educators and the potential of technology in education.

The national event is taking place on Wednesday, February 6, 2013 and local events are popping up all over the country with more than 17,000 teachers already signed up to participate representing more than 3.3 million students. We urge you to make plans to host local activities and

sign-up TODAY to join tens of thousands of educators in a wave of innovation sweeping across our nation's schools.

Participation is free and open to all interested parties. This is a great opportunity to highlight teachers doing great things and your efforts to promote the effective use of technology in education. Take a look at <http://www.digitallearningday.org/participate/> for ideas on ways you can participate.



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## What is Close Reading?

By Dr. Sheron Brown



Image courtesy of Microsoft  
Word clip art

*"The fellows at the Critical Thinking Foundation defined close reading for us years before the Common Core even existed."*

If you have been keeping up with the Common Core, in particular ELA, you have heard the term close reading a few times and may have asked "what is close reading?" In the last year I've participated in several sessions where attendees have asked this same question. The presenters attempted to define close reading, but none of them provided the clarity needed to help a teacher really understand what to do in the classroom. I heard one presenter say to have the students read the text slowly. I've heard another say have them re-read the text multiple times. My favorite was when a presenter said "have them hold the text close to their eyes." That was hilarious! But unfortunately, neither of those descriptions could help teachers support students as they grapple with complex text, and so the question is beckoned: what is close reading?

A clear definition of close reading exists for us all. The fellows at the Critical Thinking Foundation defined close reading for us years before the Common Core even existed. According to their clear definition, close reading has five levels and each level supports students with determining the meaning behind complex texts — yes, even struggling learners too. The first level involves students paraphrasing the text

sentence by sentence. This means that students engage with a very meaty piece of text and the text is short. It also means that teachers have to decide on the most important portion of text as it relates to the content they want the students to engage in for the day. At this point of the definition, teachers and leaders tend to respond, "Yes BUT, what about my struggling readers? They don't know the words in the text." After I ask, "have they been taught the necessary vocabulary, "their answer is a gaze toward the heavens. A lack of understanding of the academic language is one major reason struggling learners struggle. So if your question is how can I get struggling learners to grapple with complex text, one major response is teach them the vocabulary they need for the day.

The second level of close reading involves summarizing a piece of text, paragraph by paragraph. The foundation suggests the following format for summarizing: state your understanding of the text; elaborate on your understanding; provide an example of the meaning of the text; and illustrate the meaning of the text with an analogy or metaphor (SEEI). This process sounds rather easy, but actually doing it is a challenge—even for the adults I've observed. Nevertheless, it is still a great exercise because it deepens comprehension, improves mental capacity and supports the understanding of concepts

that can transfer for later use. The third level of close reading asks the reader to analyze the text. This analysis follows a structured format. The format is referred to as the eight elements of thought (purpose, questions, information, inferences, concepts, assumptions, implications and point of view.) Every lesson may not necessarily require students to engage in all elements, but students should be familiar with how to interact with all eight elements of thoughts and should be asked to use them regularly.

The fourth level of close reading asks students to evaluate. Evaluation requires critiquing and/or judging. When one judges they need standards, and in this case the standards are the foundation's intellectual standards. They include clarity, precision, accuracy, logic, breadth, relevance, significance, and fair-mindedness. I've heard teachers ask, "but how do I teach these standards everyday?" I would suggest that you don't. Instead, look at your unit plan or lesson and determine what intellectual standards are most appropriate in relation to the text you are using and your learning goals. Developing proficiency in this professional exercise takes time, but it's time well spent.

## What is Close Reading? Continued...

The more you develop as a practitioner in using these tools, the better you'll become and the better your students will become. The last level of close reading involves placing yourself in the position of the author. This level requires students to engage in empathy and to consider another's perspective by thinking the way the author might think. In order to do this, the

reader must have already deeply considered the concepts and perspective of the author. The previous levels of close reading provides the opportunity for the deep consideration. Each level is built on the previous level, and so, this model of close reading provides the cognitive scaffolds that students need for success.

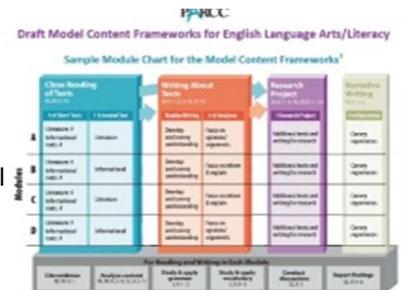
So there you have it—a practical definition of close reading. Now you can go

forth, and close read.

Figure 1. Draft ELA Framework that recommends close reading for every grade level.

Click on the figure for a full explanation of the framework.

Figure 1. PARCC Model Content Framework courtesy of PARCC



This article is courtesy of [www.sheronbrownphd.com](http://www.sheronbrownphd.com) ©2012. She can be reached at [sheron.brown@edsolutionsbydesign.com](mailto:sheron.brown@edsolutionsbydesign.com)

## Town Hall for Digital Learning

You can join Gov. Bob Wise and the Alliance for Excellent Education for The Digital Town Hall on February 6, 2013 from 1:00 p.m. to 2:30 p.m. (ET). The Digital Town Hall will focus on how great teaching, combined with effective technology, makes a positive impact on improving America's schools, particularly those that serve high-risk and high-poverty populations. It will profile teachers,

students, schools, and districts that are implementing digital learning in innovative and successful ways, including

Dysart Unified School District (Surprise, AZ and El Mirage, AZ); Quakertown Community School District (Quakertown, PA); and Cajon Valley Union School District (El Cajon, CA).

Last year, more than 40,000 people watched

this digital event live and more than 3,500 educators participated in the live chat to share resources and best practices.

Sign up now to watch the live simulcast of the Digital Town Hall at <http://digitallearningday.entbrite.com/>

*"The Digital Town Hall will focus on how great teaching, combined with effective technology, makes a positive impact on improving America's schools, particularly those that serve high-risk and high-poverty populations."*

## Linguistics Anyone?

By Anitra Butler

"[A]ll educators need knowledge and tools to understand their students' language differences and variations, address the language-related challenges they may face, and support their educational development and academic progress" (p. 1). In other words, in-

service teachers need to be sensitive to the linguistic differences of their learners in order to support the developmental needs of students as they acquire standardized American English for academic purposes. Knowledge of

standardized American English, vernacular variances, and sociolinguistics will support the pedagogy of educators by allowing them to scaffold their students' linguistic competence and academic language acquisition.

Hence, instructors must make room in their coursework that "incorporates learning exercises that help students examine how talk shapes social life" and academic achievement (Mallinson, 2009, p. 302).

# The Authentic Literacy Model

By Dr. Sheron Brown and Anitra Butler

When reading instruction for struggling readers focuses on remediation and simplification of text, it can create a vicious cycle of students disengaging from texts they find irrelevant and teachers answering with further simplification and remediation. This paper presentation will highlight the Authentic Literacy Model (ALM) which is an approach to literacy instruction that uses rich powerful texts to provide students with the opportunity to grapple with complex, ambiguous, and relevant ideas. Through the authentic literacy model, reading is repurposed as an experience students partake in to study words, discuss texts, close read texts, and substantive written expression.

## What is Authentic Literacy Model?

ALM is a constructivist literacy approach that requires students to actively build their knowledge of a discipline. The model involves four components: explicit vocabulary instruction (or word study), close reading, inquiry text talks (ITT), and substantive writing. Essentially, the components of ALM have all individually demonstrated the ability to increase student learning through providing the supports that struggling learners require when grappling with complex texts.

**Word study** - Word study is the back bone to the model. Word study builds students' oral language and supports their acquisition of text by first understanding the language.

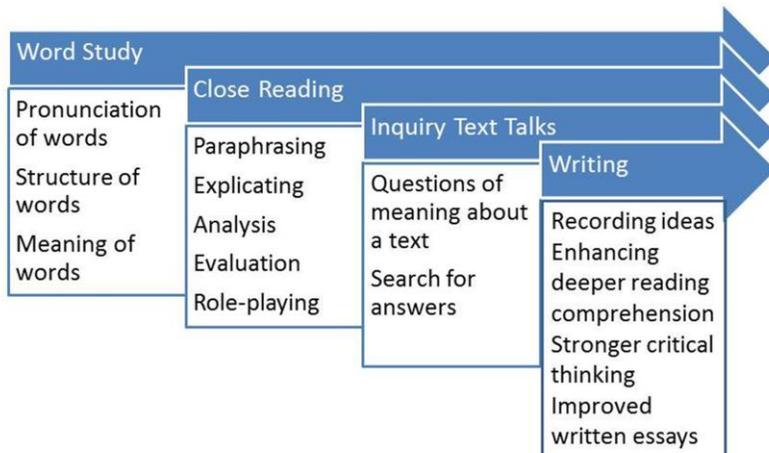
**Close Reading** - Close reading is a technique that deliberately requires conscious reading on the part of the reader. In particular, the Elder-Paul (2008) version of close reading demands a deep analysis of text during reading and has 5 levels with specific behaviors for each.

**Inquiry Text Talks (ITT)** - The function of the Inquiry Text Talk is to create a community of learners who are free to share ideas about the text and their questions related to the text while developing oral language.

**Substantive Writing** - Because reading and writing are reciprocal processes, ALM has students doing close reading and substantive writing concurrently. This enhances deeper reading comprehension and improved written compositions.

*This article is courtesy of Dr. Sheron Brown and Ms. Anitra Butler © 2012*

## Authentic Literacy Model



Closing the Achievement Gap



Image courtesy of Microsoft Word clip art

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Candidate

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## Save the Date – February 9, 2013

[Maryland ASCD](#) invites you to join us for a Super Saturday Professional development opportunity to **Lead, Learn, and Teach** with the **Common Core**.

***Maryland's Education: Setting a New Course for Success for the School Leader, Teacher, and Student***

### **Keynote Speaker:**

**Dr. Lillian Lowery, MSDE State Superintendent**

**When:** Feb. 9 (snow date- Feb.23)

**Cost:** \$25 for members and \$30 for nonmembers

**Time:** 8:30-3:30

**Place:** Anne Arundel Community College



Image courtesy of MSDE

### **Continental Breakfast and Box Lunch included!**

Earn 1 CEU and/or 1 CPD credit

**For further information call:** Chris Sparr at 440-465-4134 or  
e-mail: [mascdinfo@gmail.com](mailto:mascdinfo@gmail.com)

## Resources links:

<http://www.mysay.org/>

Newsletter for middle schoolers, published by local Author Jennifer Keats Curtis, powered by SoMIRAC

<http://www.corestandards.org/>

Common Core State Standards

<http://www.all4ed.org/>

Alliance for Excellent Education website

<http://www.edsolutionsbydesign.com/>

Local educational online resource

[www.lilaac.com](http://www.lilaac.com)

A blog site dedicated to literacy, language, and culture

<http://sheronbrownphd.com/>

A blog site where Dr. Brown shares, reflects, and inspires

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SHALL COMMUNICATE WITH  
ADMINISTRATORS,  
SUPERVISORS,  
COORDINATORS, AND  
DIRECTORS IN MARYLAND  
TO INFORM THEM OF THE  
PURPOSE OF SOMIRAC,  
MAKE THEM AWARE OF NEW  
TRENDS IN THE AREA OF  
READING AND LANGUAGE  
ARTS AND UPDATE THEM ON  
NEW FEDERAL AND STATE  
LEGISLATION AND ITS  
IMPACT ON SCHOOLS.**

*See us at:*

<http://www.somirac.org/>

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