

Highland Oaks Middle Reading Newsletter

Fall 2008



Print Rich Environment

Establishing a print-rich environment can be as easy as turning on a computer, whether or not there is a workstation dedicated for student use in the classroom. Where computer access is limited to instructor's use, it may be necessary to plan on occasion to utilize a projector for the computer's screen to be viewed by all the students together.

For example, to create a simple "word list" of newly discovered words that can be "posted" conspicuously for student reference and recall, set those words as the computer's screen saver. This list can be set as a scrolling marquee or as an image on the desktop. The screen saver setting can be changed easily on a PC by clicking the right mouse button on the screen, selecting *properties*, and then selecting the *screen saver* tab. Of course, many students are aware of how simple this process can be, so having students change or update the computer word list becomes an affirmation of their skill.

A print-rich environment is more than word walls, though. A print-rich environment provides students with continuous access to the written word. The most effective ways to create a print-rich environment is through the display of student work and the use of posters. In the classroom, these efforts can sometimes be thwarted by fire code and safety restrictions beyond teachers' control. Student work can be displayed on the computer. Student documents can be used as background settings on the computers. Each computer could highlight a different student's work. In addition,

teachers can post examples of student work on a class website so that students can show their progress to those who never visited the classroom. Creating a print-rich environment using the World Wide Web helps students to perceive the work they do in a wider context, and literacy begins to mean more than a grade or test score.

The most crucial aspect of a print-rich environment is student access to texts at multiple levels. The most exciting way that the computer works in the classroom is to provide this essential access at very low, if any, cost. On a regular basis teachers can download eBooks for their classes to read. Just connect a computer to a projector and read the book together on the wall. It gives new meaning to the concept of "word walls" and provides an excellent opportunity to scaffold the reading comprehension of a difficult text. For example, one teacher downloaded a short story that was in a recent issue of the New Yorker. The teacher projected the story on the wall for a group of struggling high school readers who have very limited access to reading materials. Everyone read the story together, and the teacher observed the more practiced readers reading ahead and caught the most challenged reader really digging into the story for multiple meanings. The students themselves began to build essential background knowledge for each other to better understand the story. The entire story was on the computer, yet several readers wanted copies so that they could read it again. The teacher simply printed it for those who wanted their own copies.

The teacher explained that since that excursion into e-reading, she has downloaded several eBooks that were made for computer viewing. There is a wealth of digital non-fiction articles that teachers can use to provide multiple access points to traditional print texts. SUNLINK < <http://www.sunlink.ucf.edu/>> and EBSCO < <http://www.ebsco.com/>> are excellent sources for these articles, and the articles are already leveled!

Project Gutenberg <<http://www.gutenberg.org/>> provides free digitized classics and many primary source documents. One interesting class of high school students decided that they wanted to read *The Spoon River Anthology* as part of a class project. Thirty copies of the book were definitely OUT of the school budget, so all the teacher had to do is download the classic through the Project Gutenberg site. As the students shared the reading together, they naturally returned to the Internet to find critical interpretations of the text and they discovered entire communities studying it. Students were able join into these online conversations as part of their own discovery of the text and its connections to the community. Building a print-rich classroom for students can be as close as the computer.

Web logs or journals (blogs) are the hottest thing for adolescents today. It is a short leap from the classroom journal to the blog—and much more relevant to 21st century literacies. A school intranet is an ideal place to host a community chat, discussion forum, or academic blogs. Students have the opportunity to construct knowledge in this sort of during-reading activity that enhances the experience for everyone, even the teacher. For students to envision themselves as critical contributors to vast conversations of humanity is synonymous

with the roles they will play in the society for which we are preparing them, and it will improve their desire to learn the essential skills of that participation. One of the best examples of this critical conversation is Wikipedia—a huge compilation of information built by inquisitive minds and active readers.

When considering a print-rich environment in the classroom, please do not neglect all that a computer can contribute to it.

Explore these sources for digitized books that can help you begin to build a print-rich environment on your desktop: *Sites Linking or Containing Digital Books* at Digital Text International <<http://www.ditext.com/etexts.html>> and *The Online Books Page* at the University of Pennsylvania <<http://onlinebooks.library.upenn.edu/>>.

Source: Charla Bauer

Works Consulted

- Gee, H. P. (2004). *What video games have to teach us about learning and literacy*. Hampshire, UK: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Kress, G. (2004). *Literacy in the new media age*. NY: Routledge.
- Lankshear, C., & Knobel, M. (2003). *New literacies: Changing knowledge and classroom learning*. Philadelphia: Open University Press.
- Richardson, W. (2005). The educator's guide to the read/write web. *Educational Leadership*, 63(4), 24-27.
- Serafini, F., & Giorgis, C. (2003). *Reading aloud and beyond: Fostering the intellectual life of older readers*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

Contact your reading coaches, Laura Goulding and Lisa Cox, if you want to learn more about reading strategies that can help your students.