

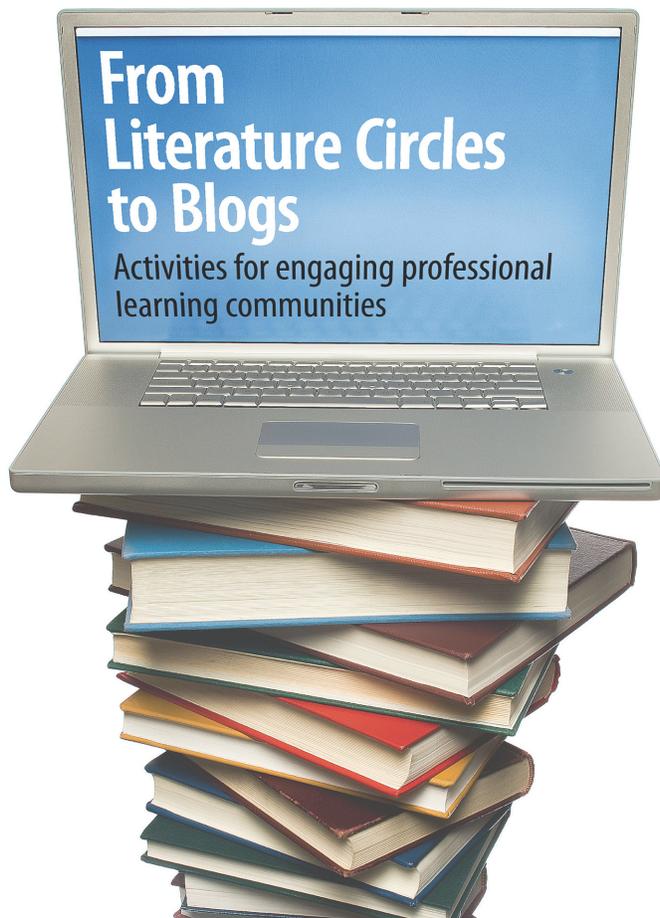
Professional Reading

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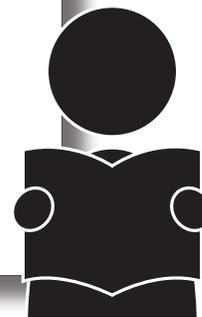
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From Literature Circles to Blogs

Activities for engaging professional
learning communities



Reading



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Activities for Connecting With Texts

1. Literature Circles

Every year we [the authors] engage pre-service and graduate teacher education students in literature circle discussions as an integral part of their course work. Without fail, the students tell us that it is their favorite activity.

Many teachers are familiar with literature circles as part of their classroom work with students. Daniels defines these groups as follows:

Literature circles are small, peer-led discussion groups whose members have chosen to read the same story, poem, article, or book. While reading each group-assigned portion of the text (either in or outside of class), members make notes to help them contribute to the upcoming discussion, and everyone comes to the group with ideas to share. Each group follows a reading and meeting schedule, holding periodic discussions on the way through the book. When they finish a book, the circle members may share highlights of their reading with the wider community; then they trade members with other finishing groups, select more reading, and move into a new cycle. (Daniels, 2002, p. 2)

Like a book club, a literature circle may suit the purposes of a professional learning community by providing a framework for reading and discussion. Within a large professional learning community, several small literature circles can read different texts, thus providing opportunities for members to address areas of specific interest.

At the outset, groups may wish to use the roles that Daniels developed to help readers explore the text actively and to stay focused on their discussion. Daniels identifies four basic roles: connector, questioner, literary luminary/passage master, and illustrator. (Descriptions of these roles are included as a blackline master at the back of this book; see “Literature Circle Roles for Teacher Discussion Groups.”) The role descriptions can be copied and distributed to individuals or printed and posted for reference throughout the session(s).

Daniels offers a note of caution regarding the roles. These roles can certainly facilitate readers’ participation in a group activity; however, if participants focus too much on the roles rather than on their engagement with the text, discussions can become stilted or mechanical.

2. QQC (Quote, Question, Comment/Connection)

In this activity, participants read the same text on their own time, respond individually on their own time, and prepare for group discussion.

- Each participant receives the text to be read and one large index card. The card limits the amount of writing that is expected. Participants read the text before the next session and use the card to record a quote from the text (this can be a quote the reader agrees or disagrees with or does not fully understand), one or two questions that arose during reading, and a personal connection, opinion, or comment about the reading. Participants bring the cards with them to the next session.
- Groups of colleagues (no more than three or four) form a group to share and discuss their quotes, their questions, and the personal connections they made to the reading.

- Several of these small groups share their responses. After all participants have discussed their reactions, each small group can share their thoughts with the larger group, outlining the issues, ideas, and questions that arose from their reading. The small group reports can be discussed further, they can lead into another activity, or they can be recorded for future reflection.

Into the Classroom

Teachers can use the QQC strategy in their classrooms, adapting it to different situations as described below.

- At the very early grade levels, young children in pairs or small groups can read aloud their favorite (or least favorite) quote from a story and then talk about their choice. Alternatively, they can read a passage and talk about how it reminds them of an experience or experiences of their own.
- Older students can record their own quotes, questions, and comments/connections in response to the reading or use the technique with informational material to record
 - something new or surprising,
 - a new question they now have about this topic, and/or
 - a personal reaction to the topic.
- Students can use this strategy when dealing with controversial materials—issues in content areas, for example—to focus discussion and to allow all students a chance to participate.

3. Save the Last Word for Me

Adapted from Harste, Short, and Burke (1988), this reading response activity encourages each reader to connect actively to the text and to receive and share feedback with their colleagues. The activity can be done in two ways. The text can be read on-site together or participants can read it off-site and prepare notes to bring to the next session. This activity stresses the different experiences and knowledge that each teacher brings to the text and provides opportunities for all participants to voice their impressions and questions based on the text. Since this activity can be frustrating for those participants who tend to dominate discussions (especially discussions revolving around controversial topics), it is important that the facilitator clarifies the activity procedures in advance and ensures that everyone follow the rules as outlined below.

Protocol and Procedures for On-Site Reading

- Each participant is supplied with a copy of the text (article, chapter of a book, and so on) and reads silently. The text should be reasonably brief so that it can be read in one session.
- The group or the facilitator marks in advance specific places in the text where all the readers will stop. At each of these prearranged spots, participants stop reading and go back to highlight (or jot down) a phrase, sentence, or brief passage that caught their attention. After everyone has had a chance to read the section and highlight the part they wish to share, one person reads their chosen phrase, sentence, or passage aloud. At this point the reader says nothing more. The other participants then have an

opportunity to speak about what has just been read aloud. This part of the discussion can be round-robin style, with each person speaking once, or it can feature a more open give-and-take format.

- When all participants have had a chance to discuss what was read, the person who read the quote then makes a final comment about it. At that point, he or she can summarize everything that was said or add something new—but that person has the “last word.”
- The next person in the group now reads their quote from that section, the group discusses it, and the reader has the final word. The process repeats itself until all participants have had an opportunity to share their quote.
- The whole group then reads the next section and repeats the process, which continues until the group has completed reading and discussing the entire text.

Protocol and Procedures for Off-Site Reading

- Participants are given a text to read on their own time and they are asked to jot down several phrases, sentences, or passages on the front of a small index card (jotting one quote per card).
- On the back of the card, they jot down notes about why they chose that quote.
- When the group gets together, each person takes a turn reading one of their quotes (indicating the page/paragraph in the text so that others can find it), listening to the responses of their colleagues within the group, and then stating their own “last word” on the quote, using both what they have written themselves and what they have heard during the discussion.
- In this procedure, it is not necessary to chunk the reading; participants can select quotes from anywhere in the text, and quotes do not need to follow the sequence in which they appear in the text.

Into the Classroom

“Save the Last Word for Me” requires student readers to interact with and make a connection to some aspect of a text. Each student brings their own experiences to the text and therefore finds different selections meaningful or relevant to their lives. Even when two or more students choose the same quote, responses and interpretations can be highly variable, demonstrating how all readers construct meaning individually. Less confident readers may choose a passage that they do not fully understand. The feedback they receive from others can support them as readers as they consider different perspectives on the text. Their understanding is further enhanced as they offer their own comments about their chosen quote following the group discussion. Students can also do a variation of this activity in writing. (See “Into the Classroom” on page 31.)

4. Say Something

Also adapted from Harste, Short, and Burke (1988), this on-site reading response activity for pairs or small groups allows participants to share and deepen their understanding of a text together. It highlights the social nature of language and the importance of opportunities to interact and learn along with others.

...purposeful student-to-student talk is probably the most underrepresented teaching and learning practice that we can think of.

Harvey and Goudvis, 2007, p. 53

With input from the group, the facilitator introduces a question pertaining to the topic, outcome, or goal that the group is exploring together. Prior to the session, the facilitator has found and made copies of a text that addresses some aspect of the issue or question under discussion.

- Participants choose one or two reading partners (or partners are assigned by the facilitator). Each participant in the pair/group works with a copy of the text. Participants choose whether they wish to read aloud or silently. Before reading, participants (or the facilitator) choose(s) to mark several places in the text where they will stop reading and “say something.”
- All participants start reading up to the first designated spot. When each person has finished reading the section, one person starts by “saying something” about what they have just read. They can summarize the section, make a personal connection to the text, or point out something with which they agreed or disagreed. A second person now has an opportunity to “say something” about what they have just read or about the comments made by the previous participant. This part of the activity can proceed on a “one person, one chance to comment” basis, or it can follow a more informal give-and-take format. After each participant has had a chance to “say something,” the group reads along to the next designated spot and each participant is once again asked to “say something” about what they have just read.
- This process is repeated until the pair/group has finished reading the entire text. When all the pairs/groups have finished reading, the facilitator can focus a whole group discussion on how the text addressed the issue/topic/question that the group is exploring, asking participants to support their comments with specific quotes from the text.

Into the Classroom

“Say Something” is an activity that can help students experience and benefit from the social nature of language. It encourages students to engage actively with a text and to see how their own and others’ interactions with text help readers create meaning. Students can participate in “Say Something” in a general way (as described in the section for teachers) or the teacher can direct the “Say Something” focus, by having students read a story together and then offering specific comments at each designated stopping point. For example, younger students can be asked to “predict what will happen next” (and then go back to read sections in the text that support their prediction). Older students can be asked, for instance, to “describe a real or potential conflict or problem” or to “find something in the text that you agreed with (and explain why) or disagreed with (and explain why).”