

Engaging the Disengaged: Using Learning Clubs to Motivate Struggling Adolescent Readers and Writers

Learning clubs organized around student interests and needs offer a sustained, supportive atmosphere to engage struggling adolescents.

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As Sharon's 19 seventh-grade students filter into class, a warm May breeze permeates room 212, which has housed books and students for nearly a hundred years (all teacher, student, and school names used are pseudonyms). The stubborn window in the corner, held up by a ruler and a stack of old textbooks, slams shut as the students open their books. "Alright," Sharon announces, "Let's begin." With that, the students reposition and reshuffle themselves until rows of desks have become five circles of learning, and the conversations around texts begin.

Frank Smith (1988) extends an invitation to the literacy club. Nancie Atwell (1998) invites students to the dining room table. Harvey Daniels (2002) organizes this as book clubs. All are interested in engaging students in active reading and writing events, recognizing that collaborative learning offers opportunities to work within students' abilities, engage learning, and provide access to literacy materials and events. In Sharon's class, 6 of the 19 students are eligible for basic skills literacy support. Often, it is during this group instruction time that these students would be pulled out for explicit instruction. According to Sharon, this is the time when these students need to be present the most. Sharon reflects on how her teaching has grown to place learning clubs as central.

I had a kid who said to me finally, "I can't read." And I said, "But you waited this long to admit it to yourself?" And so I said, "Well, let's see what we can do." We started Readers' Workshop after school where they could come and bring books that they wanted to share. And we started out with sharing. And I've been a collector of children's books for years, so I have a lot of Steven Kellogg and Mercer Mayer, and I'd bring them, and they'd say, "Those are your favorite books?" I'd say, "Absolutely, look at the story." We'd talk about that, and they would come. We had it two or three times a week. They would come after school for an hour, and we'd sit and read, and they'd share what they had read. Bring your favorite book to share and tell us why, and this kind of stuff and for the first time I saw kids who couldn't or didn't read, reading. Next year, it was a main part of our class.

With this conversation, Sharon and I begin our work together. Sharon has been teaching language arts for 34 years in an inner-city school and is increasingly frustrated by her middle school students' lack of interest in literacy events. Sharon confirms what research suggests: Untangling the struggling adolescent learners' frustrations with reading and writing is a complex process of understanding ability, considering engagement, and providing access to appropriate materials (Biancarosa & Snow, 2004; Blum, Lipsett, & Yocom, 2002; Casey, 2007; Long & Gove, 2003/2004).

Conceptual Framework

The time I spend with teachers, my reading of research, and my reflections of my own work are situated within a sociocultural framework. The appropriation of sociocultural theory to studies of classroom systems suggests that context is inclusive of the agents' shared communication, the physical tools and artifacts that mediate these exchanges, as well as the collective groups that form within these larger systems (Engeström, Miettinen, & Punamäki-Gital; 1999; Leont'ev, 1978; Vygotsky, 1978, 1934/1986). Activity is defined as the purposeful transformation of individuals, groups, and "social realities" based on the interactive relationship among all three (Davydov, 1999, p. 39). In this paradigm, teachers and students are positioned within multiple intellectual, cultural, economic, and spatial systems that situate these agents' construction of knowledge (Engeström et al., 1999; Leont'ev, 1978).

Learning clubs employ this paradigm because they evolve in response to the unique systems and agents (teachers and students) that are specific to the classroom and the larger school and community in which these agents learn and live. Sociocultural views of learning suggest adolescents' literacy development is related to the unique social communities that they inhabit. According to sociocultural theory, mapping adolescents' literacy development involves understanding the larger community in which the school is situated, recognizing the multiple social systems that exist within the classroom, and understanding the unique needs and interests of the individual students. Learning clubs, as described in this article, cannot be "plugged in" to curriculum but instead evolve in

response to the literacy needs and interests of the individual adolescents and the unique social relationships that exist within the classroom community.

Learning clubs in this article are a grouping system teachers use to organize active learning events based on student-selected areas of interest. Literacy in a learning club is the tool for learning and shifts according to the area of study. Similar to literature circles and book clubs, teachers guide the process by deciding areas of inquiry available for students to select from, how groups will be structured, the nature of student involvement, and the formats available for response. The key difference is that the shared literacy event is not always tied to a piece of literature, thus broadening conceptions of text and offering possibilities for working across content areas. Central to the students' investigations are multiple texts that may include magazines, fiction, the Internet, videos, photographs, and conversations with "experts" (often teachers, parents, and members of the local community), among others, to guide their learning.

Observing the interactions that occur across these common learning episodes offers a portrait of how these clubs support middle school students' literacy development. Positioning the struggling adolescent learner within this paradigm offers an alternative lens that traditional remediation structures, either "pull-out" or "push-in," resist.

Accepting the Invitation: Joining the Literacy Club

Situating the Struggling Middle School Student

Adolescents who struggle with literacy typically bring a history of frustration and failure to their transactions with text (Alvermann, 2001; Ivey, 1999). According to popular resources for working with adolescents, in middle school this frustration is compounded by the expectation that children are no longer learning to read, but instead reading to learn (e.g., Beers, 2003; Biancarosa & Snow, 2004; Tovani, 2000). These students, often dismissed as lost, frequently are asked to engage in reading and writing activities across content areas that are frustrating. It is not uncommon for students to respond to this frustration with inappropriate

outbursts or passive disengagement (Long, MacBlain, & MacBlain, 2007). Whether students are actively seeking ways out of the classroom or shutting down within, the achievement gap continues to widen (Fisher & Frey, 2007; Long et al., 2007).

Research in this area offers competing paradigms. There is support that suggests struggling middle school students meet with greater success when offered a range of motivating activities that encourage reading and writing (Boyd, 2002; Ivey, 1999). Curricular content and teacher instruction is designed to be responsive to individual students' needs and interests (Lewis, 2001). There is another body of research, however, that suggests middle school students who struggle with reading and writing need more explicit skill instruction. According to this work, students are motivated by the success that targeted instruction provides (Dole, Brown, & Trathen, 1996; Jacobsen et al., 2002).

Learning Clubs: Broadening Conceptions of Book Clubs and Literature Circles

Small-group reading experiences are commonly named "literature circles" in the K–12 classroom, situating reading as a socially discursive practice that is rooted in particular cultural contexts (Allen, Möller, & Stroup, 2003; Daniels, 2002). The terms *literature circles* and *book clubs* are often used interchangeably and share similar grouping procedures, though literature circles traditionally include more prescriptive roles than book clubs. In practice, both offer spaces for students to participate in facilitated conversations about common texts, which are generally, but not always, fiction. While effective teachers use this grouping system in multiple ways to suit the needs of the students, Daniels (2002) offers a framework that many, including Sharon, turn to when developing these clubs. Among the key pieces Daniels describes are student selection of text, temporary grouping systems, and regular, predictable meetings that are dialogue intensive. In a book club, the teacher becomes a facilitator of student communication and comprehension as the focus is the *process* of constructing and deconstructing text.

Classrooms are unique spaces because students and teachers form temporary communities based on

their individual experiences outside of school as well as the shared learning events they participate in together during the school day (Engeström & Miettinen, 1999; Street, 2005; Wells & Claxton, 2002). Literature circles, or book clubs, are examples of smaller communities of learning that form within this larger classroom context. As students decode, describe, and react to a shared reading event, their individual identities and experiences shape conversations and the texts being considered while the conversations and texts shape the individual identities and experiences of the participants. As Claxton (2002) stated, "As we learn, we are also changing as learners" (p. 21). The activity—here the literature circle and within this article the learning club—unfolds as the participants do, as each experience is specific to the temporary community formed around the shared learning event.

As research predicts, students are engaged because they have the opportunity to make choices about their reading and their participation while sharing responsibility for learning with their peers and their teachers (Casey, 2007; Guthrie, 2004; McKool, 2007). Research described engaged readers as those who (a) are motivated by the material, (b) use multiple strategies to ensure comprehension, (c) are able to construct new knowledge as a result of the interaction with the text, and (d) draw on social interactions to mediate these literate processes (Guthrie, McGough, Bennett, & Rice, 1996). In Sharon's class, this is observed multiple times when the exchanges documented among small groups of students focus exclusively on the shared learning event and students are observed actively listening and responding to one another, often continuing the conversations as they move on to their next class.

I have named these temporary learning communities learning clubs in Sharon's classroom because she frequently invites students to form small groups based on a shared interest that invites students to use literacy to learn. The discursive dynamic that encourages active reading of literature and books can be used as a lens for actively engaging in learning that is not limited to sharing conversations around the bound word. Daniels (2002) described organizing groups around themes or shared areas of inquiry. As students begin working within these groups, the social dynamic that

erupts across these collaborative experiences becomes the catalyst for learning (Johnston, 2004; King, 2001; Lewis, 2001).

Learning clubs have the potential to offer a paradigm for working with struggling middle school literacy learners that weaves together principles of motivation, engagement, and literacy development (Lewis, 2001). Small-group reading experiences have a long history of drawing on the social nature of learners to engage readers in text and deepen comprehension (Allen et al., 2003; Daniels, 2002; Guthrie, 2004). There are multiple opportunities to include struggling students within these systems while broadening what counts as text. The efficacy of these learning clubs in supporting struggling students' literacy development is explored in Sharon's classroom.

Room 212: Ms. Sharon Ailine

Situating Sharon

Mr. G., principal of Williams School, identifies Sharon as effective based on criteria rooted in research on effective teaching. This includes teachers' relationships with students, faculty, and parents; students' success on formal and informal assessment measures; and knowledge of pedagogy and content (e.g., Allington & Johnston, 2002; Morrow & Casey, 2003).

She knows her subject very well. She's prepared when she walks in the classroom. She doesn't wing it. She doesn't shoot from the hip. I've been in that class numerous times. She doesn't raise her voice. The kids are always working. She does her traditional total class activities, then she has the kids in different groups. She's more of a facilitator.

In an era of increasing accountability, Mr. G. is impressed by Sharon's ability to navigate mounting external assessment pressures while continuing to motivate students.

Sharon has taught a variety of grades and subjects during her 34-year career. While Sharon maintains that her undergraduate work as an English major makes language arts a favorite subject to teach, her primary motivation for entering the field is the opportunity to positively impact students' lives.

Gathering Information

Data collected includes six 80-minute observations, two semi-structured interviews, a variety of informal conversations, and multiple documents, including lesson plans and photographs (Seidman, 1998). All observations and interviews were digitally recorded. The class I observed for six weeks was selected because, of the 19 students, 6 are identified as struggling with reading and writing. In this research, struggling students are defined as students eligible for basic skills literacy support. These are students who do not qualify for special education services but, because of low state test scores, grades, and teacher recommendation, are identified as in need of improvement. Old Gate School District does not have a formal basic skills program in the upper grades. Sharon identifies these 6 students based on poor performance on class reading and writing activities as well as their sixth-grade district test scores, which fall below 50% in reading and writing. Currently at Williams School the type and level of support for seventh-grade students who have reading and writing challenges, exempting those designated as special education, is largely determined by the classroom teacher.

This description of Sharon's work is part of a larger study of seventh-grade teachers identified as effective in supporting struggling middle school readers and writers. My work with Sharon revealed learning clubs to be a significant forum for supporting these students. This portion of the study is guided by the following three questions:

1. What structures does Sharon incorporate to frame small-group literacy events?
2. How does Sharon position struggling students within these groups?
3. How do these small-group literacy experiences inform the struggling middle school students' literacy development?

Why Are the Kids in Room 212 Learning to Read and Write?

The Big Picture: Snapshots of Sharon at Work

The clamor of construction outside Sharon's open windows competes with the clamor of seventh graders

entering for the last period of the day. Sharon, a spirited woman with a memorable laugh, positions herself at the doorway, greeting entering students and pushing exiting students along to their next class. Frantic eighth graders looking for advice about fund raising and other extracurricular activities frequently interrupt casual conversations between Sharon and her students.

As Sharon moves to the podium in the front of the room, students know class is about to begin, and conversations quiet. Sharon invites student engagement by sparking curiosity about the day's lesson either through an interesting visual or questions such as, "I wonder how we might figure out this word?" Sharon's students are engaged because she privileges the learning processes over the products. These whole-class investigations then move to learning clubs, with Sharon moving from group to group, spending a significant amount of time guiding the struggling students. Each class generally concludes with another whole-class meeting, where together, Sharon and students reconstruct what they learned during the class period and look ahead to future work. This paradigm remained relatively consistent during our work together, and, according to Sharon, it is this consistency that the struggling students need.

Focusing In: What's Happening During Learning Club Meetings

Sharon's students use learning clubs for multiple learning events. It is not uncommon to find students grouped in homogeneous groups with specific roles to negotiate new vocabulary. In the following exchange, Luke and Wally—two of the struggling students—are working in their group to learn strategies for learning words. Sharon is helping students create a mental image of new vocabulary in an effort to increase comprehension.

Sharon: OK. So another way to remember this is a horizontal line creates right angles with a vertical line. Let's see if there's another way to say this, because this almost looks like you're making a blessing over the water or something. Dishka?

Dishka: Parallel. Parallel is two lines that don't meet.

Sharon: Two lines that don't meet. So then this line and this line....

Wally: No, no.

Luke: Gotta go this way. [holds hands parallel]

Sharon: Ah, Luke, what did you say?

Luke: They run together, like, like railroad tracks.

Sharon frequently uses this small-group forum to explicitly introduce and review reading and writing skills and strategies.

Sharon also employs this configuration when she uses heterogeneous groups when the students are reading *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry* (Taylor, 1976), a curricular requirement. The groups are organized according to learning interest, and the students are encouraged to choose from multiple processes to support comprehension. In the following exchange, Rakesh and Bill—two struggling students—are engaged with their group in sharing responses to the text.

Rakesh: I did a Venn diagram between me and Stacey and Cassie and Lily. I did Stacey and me so I would get to know him better because I got Stacey mixed up with a girl and a boy, so you know, um. The Venn diagram—Cassie and Lily have a lot in common. I did a Venn diagram about personal traits about them. Like Cassie I said she's a girl that is very confident. I wouldn't say that Lily has a lot of confidence. And for the other Venn diagram he has a whole lot of land and my parents only have a little bit of land.

Bill: Hey. I did mine. Originally I was going to do a poster and, to tell you the truth, I kind of ran out of time and I didn't have the pictures, I did do the paragraph, though, but. So instead I did a nice long chapter and I mean, I don't have to read it, if you guys want me to. [group murmurs yes] Alright, the next chapter in *Roll of Thunder*. [reading aloud from his response] "Come October we started talking about TJ. Little Man out of everyone was the most clueless about TJ. Was TJ going to be alright? And when was TJ going to—Not right now. School started out great. This new teacher, Mr. Crane, he's

alright, he's a little mean though. I don't let it get to me. Jeremy still walks with a limp."

Desai: How did they save his leg?

Bill: You will have to read the next chapter.

Sharon maintains that students who struggle need to connect their conversation to a physical product. Sharon understands that students are motivated by choice and more engaged when directing their learning so she typically offers a "menu" for students to consider that allows the struggling students to link their learning to a forum that is accessible and interesting. Prior to each session, these students prepare a visual or written response to the reading. This is expected of all students, but according to Sharon it grew from her observations of the struggling students needing additional scaffolding to open up conversation. These products do not always fit the research definition of book clubs, but it does fit what Mr. G., the principal, calls "gut smarts" when describing Sharon. Sharon draws on strategies that will support the struggling students' movement toward a larger literacy objective. In reflecting on this particular group's work, Sharon comments,

The reason why that group read *Roll of Thunder* is they had read an excerpt of this book in their basal text, and they made a good connection with it, and so I said, "Would you like to know more about this problem?" and so we started to read it. And it was funny because Bill said something about, "Well I want to know about what happens next," and I said, "Well, that's called *Road to Memphis*" [Taylor, 1992].

"There's another book?"

And I said, "Oh, and there's a third one."

"You have 'em?"

I said, "Yeah we have 'em here somewhere." I said, "We'll find 'em."

"Yeah, I want to read it, I want to read it."

I said, "OK." I said, "We'll find it for you."

Sharon's careful reflection about how students respond to their work plays a significant role in her daily planning.

When students are working with shorter text, the reading and responding happens within the class session and the struggling students are more engaged. This is observed as this same group described above

responds to the short poem "Feelings About Words" by Mary O'Neill (1994).

Bill: It talks about lots of different words.

Dishka: 'Cause there are so many words and there are different ways to use them and stuff.

Josh: Like how words look. Like the alphabet. It says some words are big, and, like, you say, umm, bulb, like a light bulb—

Bill: Where does it say some words are big? I missed that.

[pause]

Desai: It says a few are small. It says some are thick.

Dishka: And some are thick. But does it say some are big?

Rebekah: Some words are slow.

Dishka: Which words are thick?

Josh: Glue, paste, and brick.

Dishka: It's like a metaphor.

In this group exchange, the students are engaged in a conversation that invites critical thinking instead of a presentation focused on decoding and describing. This remains consistent for the struggling students.

Understanding the Risk: Creating a Safe Space to Learn

Initially the struggling students resist participating in the learning clubs because they are dialogue intensive and require students to be active constructors of meaning as opposed to passive recipients of information. Sharon finds that many of her struggling students do not view themselves as readers and writers so they resist structures where reading and writing are primary. Sharon reflects on this after facilitating a book club meeting.

These two groups interestingly enough didn't want to do any kind of literature circles. Feel much more comfortable doing chapter by chapter.... I don't know that it's necessarily because they feel it's easier. I think it's just the fact that it's more structured.

To alleviate this discomfort, Sharon devotes a large portion of class time, particularly in the beginning of the year, to constructing a safe learning environment.

In order to have a conversation, you have to feel safe, and so that's the one thing that I try to create in the classroom is that everybody has an opinion and that every opinion is valid and that, even if you don't agree with that opinion, that your job then is to explain your opinion better and convince somebody not to put somebody down.... And so eventually what happens is more and more kids want to share because, no matter what is said, I never say they are wrong. And so then the dialogue starts so that, "Oh yeah, I wrote something, and it wasn't wrong, but maybe I didn't carry it far enough."

Once students are comfortable with these open exchanges, Sharon introduces literature circles. Initially, this is done through a class text to ensure understanding of how the roles work and gradually moves to students assuming more ownership of the structure and materials. The nature of these literature circles quickly shifts, however, as the roles offered by Daniels's (2002) work evolve and eventually dissolve in response to the students' interactions and reactions to text. Sharon then broadens this structure further to motivate learning events that require students to draw on their developing literacy to navigate learning that is sometimes, but not always, connected to written text.

Responsible Grouping Practices

A basic tenet of using book clubs in the classroom is that students will be able to comprehend the texts selected (Daniels, 2002). For struggling students who are often reading one or more grade levels below peers, this can become problematic if there are not appropriate resources. Even with appropriate resources, there is the additional problem of grouping by ability, which positions struggling readers with other struggling readers, and the cycle of frustration continues.

In room 212, Sharon guides her students' choices. Sharon mediates her knowledge about students' abilities, interests, and personalities with texts and concepts the students are interested in pursuing. Sharon is often frustrated by the current climate that limits this level of responsive teaching.

We're not looking at individual kids any more. And I, as a classroom teacher, I teach individual kids. I don't teach a class: I teach a seventh grade that's made up of 19 kids and each kid has their own specific needs and

yet they have to take a test where it's across the board because they're in seventh grade.

In this particular class, Sharon uses the group framework with a whole-class text initially and then moves to shorter selections that can be read in class. This allows Sharon to directly monitor student reading and scaffold the group process.

I observe this as the students engage in their final day of discussion around a short story read in the text. Jerry and Andrew—two struggling students—are disengaged until a concrete task is provided. Students are expected to discuss the character development in their group novels. Jerry and Andrew initially feign reading by flipping through pages and "busing" themselves with their notebooks. As Sharon comes around and hands each group a large piece of paper and a marker to create a character story board, however, they quickly become engaged in the reading and actively contribute to the task assigned. This careful scaffolding of the response to narrative text is characteristic of Sharon's work with the struggling students.

Responsive Management Structures

It is a lot of work to encourage struggling students to assume ownership of literacy events. Sharon strives to incorporate management systems that place the students in control of their work. This move toward independence involves careful scaffolding of written materials and instructional exchanges between Sharon and her students and the purposeful construction of groups. Sharon provides the groups with resource packets to support their reading. These packets include activities for completion as well as a variety of assessment products to select from. In addition, Sharon carefully selects the groups so the targeted students are working with strong readers who act as the "lead" and do a lot of the administrative tasks, collecting work, organizing assignments, and so on that teachers typically do.

We talked about what the literature circle meant and what the responsibility was and how this would count. As a group you will get a grade, but then as individuals you will also get a grade, and you're working towards a final project so your discussions are really important

so that you understand the story. And what I do is move from group to group.

Sharon recognizes that motivating the struggling readers and writers toward independence is more challenging. When given a lot of choice over their reading and writing events, these students frequently ask Sharon for further assistance.

Larry: How many things do I need to compare in the Venn diagram?

Sharon: Well, you're comparing yourself to Essie? How many did you come up with?

Larry: Ten.

Sharon: Well, ten is a good number then.

Sharon uses these small-group and individual exchanges to build independence by asking students focused questions designed to make them think about their reading and writing instead of simply telling them what to do.

Assessment

In Sharon's classroom, assessment is woven into instruction and is a catalyst for building students' independence. Students are invited to make decisions about the content of their work as well as the processes used to assess understanding. For example, students select different roles to assume during the meetings and choose from a menu of activities to demonstrate understanding and motivate conversation within groups. When the groups are meeting to discuss a series of informational articles, the students rotate the roles of discussion leader, vocabulary explainer, and researcher. These choices, however, are carefully mediated by Sharon as she maintains that students must cycle through each role at least once and produce a written description of how they enacted their roles.

Sharon also offers a menu of activities for students to choose from as a final response to their reading. These include the following:

- Create a final chapter.
- Develop a Venn diagram comparing yourself to another character.
- Develop a game around the plot of the novel.

- Create a multiple-choice test to administer to others.

Coupled with these final assessments is the opportunity for students to offer their own feedback on their learning and the learning of others. Sharon makes use of student checklists where the students describe how their group interacted, what they gained from the experience, and how negotiated challenges might inform future collaborative learning events. Sharon believes that making the struggling students part of the process motivates them to consider what is being learned and how they construct that learning. This is powerfully motivating for adolescents who feel marginalized by the larger literacy community.

Informing Practice

What Can We Learn?

Adolescents who struggle with literacy are often dismissed as lazy or lost—both descriptors doing little to empower these students to independently navigate text (Biancarosa & Snow, 2004; Ivey, 1999; Long et al., 2007). Sharon's work offers a different picture. These struggling students are engaged because their ideas about literature and literacy matter to Sharon, and in turn, to their peers around them. This engagement motivates these students to actively pursue literacy events because they want to become readers and writers. Sharon's comprehensive construction of learning clubs facilitates the struggling students' successes.

While the focus of this article is on struggling students, much of what is learned from observing Sharon's work and her reflections is inclusive of all students. Teachers considering adopting learning clubs as a part of their instruction across curricular areas should consider the following as it relates to their community of learners:

- Consider the topics available for students to investigate and how these are connected to their experiences and background and the larger community in which the school is situated.
- Offer a "topic talk" where students gain some insight into the areas open to investigate.
- Determine what types of texts students will use to navigate their learning and be sure multiple

grade-level texts that reflect the multiple needs of students are available.

- Delineate the different roles that students within the small groups will assume to organize learning and facilitate conversation.
- Schedule class time for conversation and collaboration.
- Consider what artifacts you anticipate students will construct to demonstrate understanding.
- Coordinate assessment activities that link with the grouping objectives.
- Offer explicit examples and opportunity for students to see how these areas of inquiry connect to using literacy outside of the classroom space.

The learning clubs in Sharon's classroom are not recipes for success. Within these groups, relationships between peers are fostered, roles are outlined and described, and language becomes the vehicle for navigating conversations around literature, literacy, and learning. These clubs are successful because Sharon mediates the content of instruction with the context of the classroom community and the larger community situating the students' learning. This requires a careful balancing of pedagogy, content knowledge, and management of individual students' needs and identities. This is not something that can be neatly packaged and reproduced across classrooms but instead is organic and emerges within each setting according to the unique characteristics of the participants and the content being considered.

Where Do We Go From Here?

The use of multiple grouping configurations to support different kinds of learners and learning is well researched (Stein & Breed, 2004). Literature circles and book clubs offer successful paradigms for supporting students' engagement with fixed texts. The notion of learning clubs broadens this paradigm because these structures are focused learning events that extend beyond conversations around single texts. In Sharon's classroom, small groups move from discussing a particular poem to investigating patterns in words or events within the school or their community.

The learning club paradigm can move in multiple directions. It is possible that making use of cross-age groups with the struggling student as the director offers the opportunity to work on grade level while positioning these students, who are often marginalized, as powerful literacy participants. This is also a paradigm worthy of investigation across multiple content areas (Stein & Breed, 2004). Forming learning clubs in mathematics and science, for example, around a common concept or problem for investigation may be powerfully motivating and enable students to use literacy to learn (Guthrie, 2004).

Moving Beyond "The Text"

The 21st century finds students engaging in multi-modal literacy events as part of their daily practice. These students move across virtual spaces, rapidly synthesizing multiple modes of fixed and moving text (Rowse & Pahl, 2007). The literature circle/book club configuration has proven to engage students with texts. Moving into learning clubs may facilitate students' digital literacies, further broadening and enriching students' literacy independence. Sharon did not bring in much of students' outside literacy practices to support their work, but this is perhaps another possibility for supporting students' literacy independence. Recent research on digital video production suggests students are motivated by the technology to compose fixed and moving images that cross multiple genres and modes of communication (Ranker, 2008).

Conclusion

Sharon has been a part of students' literacy learning for 34 years. Sharon's ability to continue to help her students meet with success is a direct result of her interest in listening to her students, respecting who they are and what they know, and pairing this understanding with a strong awareness of content, pedagogy, and community. The learning clubs evolve in Sharon's class not because she read a single professional text and then reproduced it in her room, but because she is always reading and listening and learning and refuses to dismiss the adolescent who struggles as lost. This is an important lesson to learn. The learning clubs are effective in this classroom because Sharon recognizes

that their growth is situated within a distinct context. Learning clubs have the potential to motivate disengaged and frustrated adolescent readers and writers because they develop in response to the unique literacy needs and interests that exist in each classroom. Learning clubs have the potential to be a powerful vehicle for motivating engaged and interested learners across content areas to use literacy to build learning.

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