

THIEVES!

“Stealing” Information from Nonfiction Texts

Lesson Plan and Reflection on Practical Experience

by

Bill Cron

SI 641 – Fall Term 2006

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction	3
Background: the Hoben Elementary School Media Center	3
Project Initiation: Contact and Observation	4
Planning and Implementing the Lesson	7
Full Lesson Plan	9
Reflection	11
Annotated Bibliography	13

I. Introduction

To fulfill the instructional planning and implementation requirements for SI 641, the project I chose to undertake was to design and teach a lesson for two groups of 4th grade students at Hoben Elementary in Canton, Michigan. The media specialist requested that the content of my lesson address the effective reading of nonfiction texts. Over the course of two months, I visited Hoben, interviewed the cooperating media specialist, observed classes, and worked with the SMS to develop the lesson plan that I would ultimately teach. The project culminated with my assumption of teaching duties for two full classes, during which I instructed students in the THIEVES! strategy for previewing nonfiction texts.

II. Background: the Hoben Elementary School Media Center

Hoben Elementary School is located in a residential area of Canton, Michigan. The school is relatively small, and its diversity reflects that of the community in which it is situated. Canton is a majority working-class community that is home to people from a range of racial and ethnic backgrounds. In the classes I was to teach, about half of the students were white, the other half being comprised of African-American, Hispanic, Asian-American, and Arab-American students. None of the students I encountered were ESL learners.

The media center for the school was centrally situated, surrounded by a ring of classrooms with doors opening directly into the library. A computer lab, loosely associated with the media center, was located in another part of the building. The media center at Hoben employs one full-time SMS as well as two part-time aides, who do not

work simultaneously. There are also several parent volunteers who work regularly in the library. The majority of the space in the media center is occupied by books; there is a small station with four computers where teachers can check their email and students can browse the online catalog. A section of the media center is populated with tables and chairs where students can read and work on assignments. The “storytime” area is an open space where students sit on the floor facing a white board and rocking chair. A pair of office rooms extends behind the checkout desk and are used for storage, book repair projects, breaks, and cataloging activities.

To put it mildly, technology resources are not a strong suit of the Hoben media center. The library has a shoestring budget, and as I mentioned, only houses four student-use computers, all older and running antiquated software platforms. Students receive no instruction in the use of computers in the media center until they reach 5th grade. Just how low-tech the library is can be evidenced by the fact that their most elaborate piece of equipment is their overhead projector – and when a bulb breaks, it actually makes a dent in the budget. A part of this assignment was that the lesson should include some use of technology; this was not particularly an option at Hoben.

III. Project Initiation: Contact and Observation

The media specialist at Hoben Elementary is Jolie Valentine, a recent (3 years removed) graduate of the U-M school media program. I had met her through a friend the previous year, and in fact had applied for one of the aide positions in her media center. She is energetic and excited about her school media program, so I thought she might be an excellent person to work with in carrying out this assignment. I approached her with

the class assignment and she was cautiously optimistic: she liked the idea, but required two things prior to giving me the go-ahead. First, that I spend time in her media center observing “normal” class procedures, and second, that she obtain clearance from her school’s principal. The clearance was granted without delay. The second requirement, observing her media center in action, was an interesting pre-teaching experience that merits discussion herein.

Spending observation time in the Hoben media center grounded some of the things we’ve been learning about in 641 in reality, particularly in three areas: classroom management, curriculum development, and professional collaboration. Looking at my upcoming career as an SMS, classroom management is something that causes me a great deal of concern: I don’t see it as one of my strengths. In light of this, I was interested to observe some of the techniques Jolie employed at Hoben. What stood out most was her division of the standard class period into specified activity times. Each 45-minute session was divided into the “four L’s”: listening, learning, liberty, and lending. The first part of the class was dedicated to a readaloud, the second part to a learning activity related in some way to the readaloud, the third part was a “free” time for students to browse the shelves, ask questions, etc., and the final part was dedicated to students checking out books. The students reacted very well to the structure – knowing what to expect seemed to shape their behavior within the context of each segment. Another element of Jolie’s classroom management that I noticed was her use of non-verbal techniques to quiet the students, similar to techniques we learned about from the Kagan structures cards. For example, she might clap rhythmically – a signal to the students to stop using their voices and respond to her with an “echo” of her clap. Finally, Jolie augmented her class

management with a system of rewards and punishments. Students were rewarded with good behavior by “stars” (later exchanged for prizes) or by getting to check out their books first. Disruptive behavior was punished in some cases with removal of library privileges.

I spent some time becoming acquainted with the school media curriculum and its development, maintenance, and implementation at Hoben. The district (Plymouth-Canton Community Schools) opted to base their curriculum on the information literacy standards set forth in Information Power. Prior to each school year, Jolie maps out her intended teaching activities and keys them to the curriculum standards. In this way she is working to make sure that the skills she wishes to impart to her students are actually being taught.

Collaboration is evident in Jolie’s work at Hoben, both within the school and across the district. She meets regularly with the other school media specialists in the district to discuss curriculum implementation, share concerns and resources, and socialize generally. She also works with other teachers in her building to integrate what she is teaching in her media center with the learning activities students are working on in their classrooms. For the purposes of the lesson that I taught about previewing nonfiction texts, for example, we utilized an Earth Science textbook that was actually being used in the 4th grade classes.

Jolie wanted me to be familiar with the “routine” of her media center before I attempted to teach there, so I observed two half-days of classes at Hoben. The first half-day I sat in on a pair of kindergarten classes. She was reading that day from “Elbert’s Bad Word” as part of a lesson on banned books. Following the readaloud she had the

students draw pictures of “something they remembered from the book.” I thought it was a curious choice of activity, but suppose that the nature of it had more to do with her wanting to keep them quiet and occupied for ten minutes than anything else.

The next half-day I spent observing the 4th grade classes that I would eventually be teaching. Their readaloud was from Judy Blume’s “Blubber” and the activity which followed also dealt with banned books. Rather than doing a written activity, Jolie led an informal discussion with the students about the reasons why books are sometimes banned. I was surprised to see this format work, especially given the fact that the students in the 4th grade classes had been fairly rambunctious during the readaloud. Nevertheless, several different students gave input and Jolie made an effort to keep the students interested, involved, and on-task: this would soon be my missive as well.

IV. Planning and Implementing the Lesson

After several visits, including the observations, Jolie felt comfortable enough with me to authorize the design and teaching of a lesson in her media center. The parameters of the lesson were set as follows:

- I was to run the entire class period, covering the “four L’s” components
- Class Period: 45 minutes
- Readaloud text should relate to the subsequent lesson
- Lesson should be no longer than 20 minutes
- Would be delivered to two 4th grade classes
- Content: Reading strategies for nonfiction texts

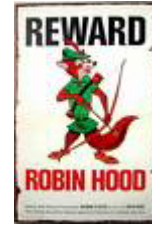
She gave me a great deal of freedom to draft a lesson plan, but requested that I communicate regularly with her regarding my progress and for approval of the finished product.

I visited some resources on the Web that I've used in the past to find ideas for lesson plans. One of the nice things about the teaching profession is that people seem extremely willing to share instructional materials that they've developed. Collaboration in this electronic form is an important support tool for educators. I found a lesson I liked entitled "Using THIEVES to Preview Nonfiction Texts." As written, the lesson was intended to be carried out over a period of three days and delivered to a middle school audience. However, I thought the concept could be adapted well for the lower grades and applied particularly well to the stated need of the SMS for whom I'd be working.

The basic concept behind THIEVES (detailed lesson plan and is found in the pages following this section) is that a nonfiction book can be divided into identifiable parts, each of which can be beneficial for helping the reader anticipate material to be encountered in the text. The letters in THIEVES stand for: title, headings, introduction, every first sentence in a paragraph, vocabulary and visuals, end-of-chapter questions, and summary. In the lesson, students would utilize a text they were already using in their classroom to understand the benefits of previewing texts. I reviewed the concept with Jolie and asked her to coordinate the lesson with the 4th grade teachers. She did so, approved the idea, and we selected a date on which I would come in to teach. Following is the lesson plan that resulted from our exchange.



THIEVES!



“Stealing” Information from Nonfiction Texts

Concept/Topic to Teach:

Introduce students to effective methods for previewing nonfiction texts.

Parameters:

Time permitted for lesson: 20 minutes

Lesson should be integrated with story time (10-15 minutes)

Class size: 20 students

Technology available: Overhead projector, white board, rocking chair

Standards Addressed:

PCCS library curriculum objectives for Upper Elementary, 4th grade:

- “Finding Information – Reading Nonfiction”

PCCS curriculum standards are based on Information Power, this lesson meets:

- Standard 1: “The student who is information literate accesses information efficiently and effectively”

It addresses the following defined objective:

- 1.LE.7 “Recognize specific elements of nonfiction texts, including: table of contents, glossary, index, heading, captions, bold print”

Additionally, the lesson fits within the district’s English Language curriculum:

- PCCS ELA Curriculum Core Genres/Forms: “Informational: non-fiction book”

Objectives:

Students will learn the various “parts” of a nonfiction text. They will learn how to use these elements to predict what they will be reading about and to more efficiently locate information.

Required Materials:

“Elements of Thieves” handout/worksheet

Whiteboard

Nonfiction textbook, preferably one being used currently by the classroom teacher

Plan of Activity:

1. Open session with readaloud from fictional text (*Note to 641 students: this is ancillary to lesson plan and is included as required by the supervising SMS for this assignment)
2. Ask students to brainstorm what they know about the difference between nonfiction and fiction texts
3. Tell them that they are about to become THIEVES! of information
4. Write the word “THIEVES” on board
5. Work with students verbally to identify the important elements of a nonfiction text – use whiteboard to display results. Sequentially work through the letters of “thieves,” demonstrating the concepts using textbook as appropriate. Students should each have a textbook and should be able to follow along with this segment of the lesson in their own book.
6. As mentioned above, utilize textbook from their regular classroom (requires pre-collaboration with classroom teacher)
7. Have students complete “Elements of Thieves” handout individually using their non-fiction text. Work individually with students as necessary to facilitate completion of worksheet.

Assessment:

Both formal and informal assessment will be possible for this lesson. Observational assessment information will be generated through teacher-student interaction during the identifying elements portion of the lesson. Additionally, the instructor will collect and review the “Elements of Thieves” worksheet and will use this as their primary tool for providing written feedback to individual students. The SMS may wish to retain the worksheet for placement in an ongoing student portfolio, or direct students to do the same if this procedure has been previously established.

Adapted from:

Manz, S.L. (2002). A strategy for previewing textbooks: Teaching readers to become THIEVES. *The Reading Teacher* 55(5):434–435.

V. Reflection

If there is one maxim I can take away from the experience of designing and implementing this lesson, it is this: Plan, plan, plan....and be ready to change your plans on a moment's notice. I felt well-prepared the day I went in to teach at Hoben. The text I had selected for the readaloud, an excerpt from "Robin Hood," seemed to correspond well with the lesson and I had cleared it with Jolie ahead of time. When I arrived, however, she didn't approve of the copy of Robin Hood I'd selected. "Not enough pictures," was her immediate reaction, and she gave me a copy of Robin Hood from her media center shelves. When I went to read the text to the students, however, we both realized that the version she'd chosen was written in flowy, difficult language – not long into the readaloud, the attention of many of the students waned. I realized that I would need to do something to keep them engaged or it would be a LONG 15 minutes. So, I transformed readaloud time into an interactive historical vocabulary exercise with the students where we explored various words from the text. When we got to words like "serf" or "fiefdom," for example, I called these words to the attention of the students and had them guess at their meaning, eventually leading them to the actual definition. This served well enough to prevent student interest from getting too far away from the task at hand.....crisis averted. I was pleased later to receive compliments from Jolie about this improvisation of the activity.

We then moved on to the THIEVES lesson. Students were more willing than I'd anticipated to volunteer ideas when requested to do so. They were excited to be using their own books, and seemed to actually enjoy the activity. It was decidedly low-tech: the Hoben media center lacks adequate computer resources to do much in the way of

technology-based instruction (see section VI, below). Yet even without many bells and whistles, the relevance of the lesson for the students (coupled with the novelty of a visitor teaching it) seemed to be enough to keep the students engaged. One thing that was unfortunate about the lesson as I'd planned it was that there simply wasn't enough time within a 45-minute class to carry out the worksheet portion. Jolie warned me about this ahead of time, saying that we could include the worksheet as a part of the lesson if there was time, but that "there wouldn't be time." This left as the only assessment tool the informal observational assessment described in the lesson plan; I wasn't entirely satisfied with that element of the experience.

Annotated Bibliography for SI 641 Final Paper – Bill Cron
Bibliography Themes: Reading Non-Fiction, Multiliteracies, Assessment

Eisner, Elliott. (1994). Forms of Representation. In *Cognition & Curriculum Reconsidered*, 2nd ed. New York: Teachers College Press.

Eisner looks at the different ways in which people choose to outwardly represent their personal understandings of the world. His concepts have implications for education, as forms of expression and representation are intimately connected to the demonstration of understanding necessary for assessment. A student uses not only words to represent their understanding: evidence can be found in pictures, music, mathematics, dance, etc. Given this evidence, teachers need to afford their students the opportunity to express themselves to afford their students the opportunity to express themselves using different forms of representation.

Gambrell, Linda B. (Mar. 2005). Reading Literature, Reading Texts, Reading the Internet: the Times they are A'Changin.' *Reading Teacher* 58(6):588-591.

Gambrell, concerned about the decline in pleasure reading by adults, took a critical look at literacy instruction among elementary students. The author believes that the increasing availability of informational texts and their effective utilization in the classroom, coupled with a broader definition of literate behaviors, has important implications for levels of reading across the educational spectrum.

Gal, I. (1999). Links Between Literacy and Numeracy. In D. Wagner (ed.), *Literacy: An International Handbook*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press.

Gal explores the connections between traditional conceptions of literacy (language-based) and *numeracy*, which is the ability for students to express themselves mathematically. Gal conceptualizes mathematics as a language; in Eisner's terms, it would be a "form of representation." His analysis fits within the larger context of considering multiliteracies in an increasingly diverse population.

Harris, J., and G. Storr. (Mar. 2005). Before-, During-, and After-Reading Strategies. *Science Scope* 28(6): 52-53.

Harris and Storr highlight the necessary skills for young readers to be able to engage nonfiction texts successfully. According to the authors, readers must be able to navigate multiple starting and stopping points, decipher charts and other graphics, and be able to scan and skip about through texts. The authors write specifically about reading science texts, but their findings are applicable broadly.

New London Group. (1996). A Pedagogy of Multiliteracies: Designing Social Futures. *Harvard Educational Review*, 6:1(60-92).

This seminal article by the New London Group defines the concept of multiliteracies. The authors argue that our increasing national diversity (in terms of culture and language) demands a broader view of literacy than that of traditional language-based definitions. Educators need to provide new channels for evaluating student literacy that recognize the fact that different cultures have different values and express their understanding of material in a variety of ways. The authors believe that taking a “multiliteracies approach” will help students gain access to the “evolving language of work, power, and community.”

Palmer, R.G., and R. A. Stewart. (Feb. 2005). Models for Using Nonfiction in the Primary Grades. *Reading Teacher* 58(5):426-434.

Age-appropriate nonfiction texts are becoming increasingly available to classroom teachers. Palmer and Stewart identify the skills necessary for a young reader to effectively utilize non-fiction texts, and propose 3 models for scaffolding instruction in these skills. The end goal of each model is the independent student use of informational texts.

Soalt, Jennifer. (Apr. 2005). Bringing Together Fictional and Informational Texts to Improve Comprehension. *Reading Teacher* 58(7):680-683.

Soalt argues for the inclusion of both fiction and nonfiction texts within the same unit to strengthen background knowledge, vocabulary, and motivation. Using multiple types of texts about the same topic presents different viewpoints, cross-context vocabulary, and can be used to create scaffolds across reading levels.

Winger, T. (2005). Grading to Communicate. *Educational Leadership* 63(3): 61-65.

Winger focuses on the various ways that grades can interfere or augment learning. Her take on this component of assessment is that grades can be a powerful tool to encourage student cooperation. However, many teachers fail to recognize that grades become the sole focus of the student and that the skills they develop are targeted more towards grade acquisition rather than genuine learning. Teachers must learn to effectively connect grades to learning by establishing the evidence of learning upon which grades will be based.