



Volume II, Issue 4

June 2007

## Boys' Literacy Teacher Inquiry

### Work Plan Support Booklet – June 2007

#### Introduction/Overview

*"We know that no single category includes all boys or all girls. We don't need to add to the stereotype of classifying all boys' behaviour, tastes, and attitudes into one single frame, nor do we want to reinforce the generalizations that are often applied to boys. But as we look at studies and reports that examine boys and girls and their learning styles and special interests, their growth patterns, and their stages of intellectual development, we do notice differences. These differences are not in all boys or all girls; but in enough of them to cause us to reflect about the demands on their young lives."*

David Booth, *Reading Doesn't Matter Anymore*, 2007

#### Greetings!

Another school year draws to a close! We pause to celebrate our achievements over the last months - successes with drawing more boys and girls to literacy competencies; successes in collaborative efforts of understanding more deeply the students we teach and how to reach them; and successes in examining our inquiry. June is a time of such rituals and ceremonies as graduations, awards, and good-byes to departing students and staff alike. Often, we take little or no time to think about the year that is passing by. As educators, so deeply immersed in action and activity each day in our classrooms and our schools, time for reflection on action is precious, helpful, and essential. It is now time to acknowledge our own work and depart in June, satisfied with the work that has been done, and comfortable with having set the stage for next year's continuation of the Boys' Literacy Teacher Inquiry Project!

In this Support Booklet are some tools to support your reflection, recommendations for professional readings, and some thoughts for further action planning for 2007-8. The template for the 2007 Progress Report is also enclosed.

#### Your 2007 Progress Report for the Boys' Literacy Teacher Inquiry: Due on June 30.

Enclosed with this Support Booklet, you will find the Template for the 2007 Progress Report with five sections focusing on key components of your project. After recording some general information, you are asked to comment on your teacher inquiry work to date, your data collection, your preliminary data results, notable successes and areas for continued focus and future plans.

In the 2007 Progress Report, we ask you to elaborate upon your data gathering strategies and comment on some early findings. Using the Tracking Template provided in the last Support Booklet, coupled with your extended discussions sparked by your sessions in January and February, you will describe and convey your progress.

People's lives get so busy in June that it will be important for you to schedule your time carefully. First, to complete the report with your team, and then, to circulate the completed report to the principal, superintendent, and director for their individual approval and signatures in good time to meet the submission date.

This report allows you the opportunity to review and reflect on your project and can be a useful culminating activity to your present work and a springboard for your plans for the next year.

Barbara Bodkin, Rose Dotten, and Micki Clemens, OISE

[teacherinquiry@oise.utoronto.ca](mailto:teacherinquiry@oise.utoronto.ca)

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## Instructional Strategies: Using Graphic Novels in the Classroom

A number of schools have explored the use of graphic text as part of their Boys' Literacy Teacher Inquiry because boys, in particular, have gravitated to this text form with a great deal of enthusiasm. Graphic text can include print and visual media, comic strips, diagrams, maps, visuals and other forms of depicting information. The graphic novel is distinguished

because it is a longer text, incorporating more complex plots, characters, and dialogue. Some graphic novels deal with serious themes and issues and yet their concise narrative and "cool" graphics engage many readers.

Among many struggling as well as proficient readers, graphic novels have generated a growing interest in reading for pleasure and information. This interest has increased significantly due to the growing popularity of video games, revival of superhero movies, and manga-style television programs.

Reading graphic texts requires new skills for understanding and making meaning. Helping students to connect new content and new ideas to their prior knowledge helps them to transfer this knowledge to their understanding of the graphic text form.

### Graphic texts also promote:

- communication through print and visual media;
- creative and critical reading of text;
- informal and formal writing and speaking;
- accountable talk in collaborative groups – literature circles/informational circles;
- integration of text forms due to a variety of levels;
- inference making both in print and visuals; and
- connections text-to-text, text-to-popular culture.

Graphic novels can be classified into different types within the genre and their visual content is organized differently in each type. These different types target specific purposes and audiences. The types include:

**Manga**, which is simply the Japanese word for comics. It is important to keep in mind that "comics" are not strictly for youngsters and that language, themes, images and subject matter must be examined with regard to appropriateness for the audience.

**Anime**, a style of animation invented in Japan. Some well-known Anime series include "Sailor Moon", Pokemon, and Dragonball Z.

To extend the students' understanding of graphic texts, teachers need to model specific strategies for making meaning of focused aspects of the text.

After examining and reviewing the materials it is important to have students consolidate and extend their understanding of the content by asking them to:

- restate or paraphrase what they have read and observed;
- make connections between prior knowledge and what the text is saying;
- check the accuracy and reliability of the information presented; and
- demonstrate their understanding of the processes used in reading graphical text.

Students may also demonstrate their learning about graphic texts by completing a culminating task such as creating a short graphic text. This could be:

- a short story to be shared with younger students (awareness of audience) or their peers;
- the creation of a how-to-guide for reading graphic novels; and/or
- writing a persuasive letter to the teacher-librarian (or principal) to convince them of the merits of purchasing graphic novels for the collection.

Graphic novels can be controversial and teachers need to consider the cultural norms of their school community and ensure that the selected materials are appropriate for their students. Because of the varied levels of sophistication of the graphics and text, **all texts** should be carefully previewed. Graphic novels offer an additional resource to a balanced literacy program and can be included as one choice among many for self-selected reading in the classroom.

Adapted from *Using Graphic Text to Improve Student Literacy* developed by the Thames Valley DSB, June 2006

### Distinctive Features of Graphic Text Strategies Include:

- Speech bubbles
- Thought bubbles
- Visual cues
- Character expressions
- Gutters
- Lines of meaning and more



## Literacy and Gaming

The topic of gender and computer gaming has generated much research interest in educational communities. Researchers have examined a number of related

issues, including the relative frequency with which girls and boys use computer games, the educational benefits of gaming, and the types of games that appeal to students. Dr. Heather Blair, from the University of Alberta, has been researching early adolescent boys and how they engage with digital literacies. See more of what she has explored at <http://www.education.ualberta.ca/boysandliteracy/>.

### Why Do Boys Engage in Games?

- They see games as fun, exciting, and challenging.
- They see results quickly.
- They can experience success. Because of the multiple levels of the games, boys feel that they can win at some level.
- They play together and games provide a place for social interaction as well as an individual role.

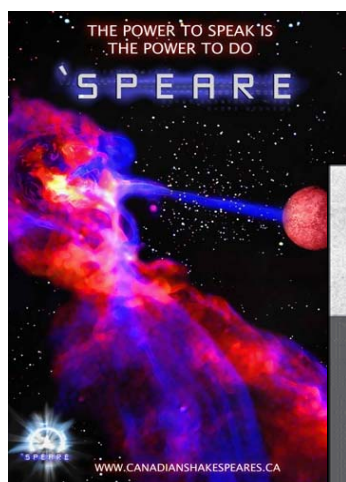
### What Types of Games Appeal to Boys?

Action/Adventure, Sports, Strategy, Role Play Games, First and Third Person Character, and Simulation.

### What are Boys Getting from their Games?

- **Changing Uses of Language:** facility with oral language to be descriptive and engaging, connected, and explanatory, new vocabulary as well as new semiotic systems, such as: instant messaging “emoticons”.
- **Awareness of Categories/Genres:** ability to describe the differences between genres, role-play games, and strategies.
- **Procedural Knowledge:** knowing how to proceed through a game or knowing how to find out how.
- **Willingness to Take Risks:** failure is understood in very different terms from that of classroom failures.
- **Ability to Strategize:** attending to multiple tasks simultaneously.
- **Thinking in Networked Ways:** rather than in linear patterns.
- **Expectations of Engaged, Challenging, Choice-Based Education.**

As literacy teachers and researchers we need to know more about these games and the gaming practices that boys engage in. We also need to begin to understand games from the perspective of the boys. These games represent a significant part of the boys’ literate world and have the potential to connect at many levels to what we do in our classrooms. We will need to think deeply about the impact of gaming practices and ask ourselves this question, “What does it mean to be a reader and writer in the 21<sup>st</sup> century?”



### Gaming Resources



“*SPEARE* fuses fast-paced online arcade game action with the curricular goals of literacy promotion.  
[www.canadianshakespeares.ca/speare.cfm](http://www.canadianshakespeares.ca/speare.cfm) (Ages 10-15)

*Gaming Lives in the Twenty-First Century – Literate Connections*  
 Ed. Cynthia Selfe and Gail Hawisher;  
 Palgrave Macmillan, March 2007



## Working Together: Teacher Inquiry Teams

Reflecting on the year that has passed....

**"Take time to celebrate your success. Building on your success, determining what actions generated your success and then replicating the appropriate actions to address the next problem are forms of asset-mapping. Successful schools know how they became successful and seek to replicate their success."**

From *Teacher Teams that Get Results*, Gayle Gregory and Lin Kuzmich, 2007.

In the midst of your busy year end activities, build reflection into an Inquiry Team Meeting. While this can seem time-consuming, it will be time well spent as it reminds everyone on the Inquiry Team of your accomplishments to date as well as helps to "sharpen the saw" for the future.

In your team meeting, try the **"Tell Them That You Love Them"** strategy.

**Purpose:** To acknowledge the contributions of every team member present.

**Time:** Multiply the number of the team members times three minutes in order to determine how much time to set aside for this activity.

### Preparation:

1. Write the name of each Inquiry Team member on a slip of paper, folded carefully so as not to reveal the name. This activity works best if the group can be arranged around a circle, or one table. Invite each team member to select a name. Appoint a group leader; the teacher contact would be a logical choice.
2. Once all the names have been distributed, the group leader would begin by commenting about the person whose name he/she drew. Other team members are invited to add their comments as well. The person whose name has been drawn would go next. In this manner, you would proceed around the Inquiry Team until everyone has had a chance to share.
3. Tips:
  - ♦ Comment on the behaviour, not the individual.
  - ♦ Tell a brief story that illustrates the point, the more immediate, the more the perceived value.
  - ♦ Recognize progress as well as accomplishments.
  - ♦ Commemorate events both great and small!

Adapted from "Celebration" in *The Learning Principal* May 2007, National Staff Development Council

**Below is a series of further questions which can spark discussion and celebration as well as future planning. You could create a checklist or use these questions as conversation prompts. This year our inquiry team:**

- ☐ celebrated incremental success as a group;
- ☐ created 'ground rules or norms' to help keep communication positive and focused;
- ☐ referred back to these ground rules from time to time;
- ☐ offered support and advice to each other both informally and formally;
- ☐ reflected on the quality of our dialogue with each other;
- ☐ passed background history and lessons learned to new Inquiry Team members;
- ☐ updated the school administrator.

### Norms of Collaboration

- Pausing
- Paraphrasing
- Probing for specificity
- Putting ideas on the table
- Presuming positive intentions
- Paying attention to self and others
- Pursuing a balance of advocacy and inquiry

Adapted from  
Garmston and Wellman.  
*The Adaptive School:  
A Sourcebook for  
Developing Collaborative Groups.*  
1999.



## Roads to Improving Schools Can be Uneven – Highs, Lows, Peaks, Valleys and Plateaus

### Leading For Inquiry: The Role of the Principal

Richard Elmore is a professor at the Harvard Graduate School of Education. Dr. Elmore has written extensively on school improvement issues, including all facets of the principal role in improving student achievement. He coined the term, 'reciprocal accountability' as follows:



"Accountability must be a reciprocal process. For every increment of performance I demand from you, I have an equal responsibility to provide you with the capacity to meet that expectation. Likewise, for every investment you make in my skill and knowledge, I have a reciprocal responsibility to demonstrate some new increment in performance."

excerpted from ***Bridging the Gap Between Standards and Achievement: The Imperative for Professional Development in Education*** by Richard Elmore.

The entire publication is available at [www.ashankerinst.org](http://www.ashankerinst.org). This idea is helpful as we understand the impact of school level, job-embedded professional development, much like your work in the Boys' Literacy Teacher Inquiry!

As you consider the initiatives and activities within your school this past year, and the opportunities your school teams have undertaken to respond to student data; contemplate changes to your practice and discuss solutions related to students' growth and achievement. It will become apparent that the journey to improvement can be uneven. Elmore indicates that while the 'plateau' can feel like a time when there are no significant outcomes from your work as teams, in fact consolidation is taking place that will render your practice stronger over time.



**Thriving schools can do a lot together in the "plateaus". Four practices :**

- 1. Recognize that there are always learning plateaus. In this period of the implementation process we can uncover progressively more challenging programs.**
- 2. Develop a theory of action about how to improve student performance and stick with it through this period. Develop techniques and procedures to get better. Don't abandon your program strategies. Identify school 'coaches' who can support other staff through this period.**
- 3. Develop finely grained measures to assess student performance. Frequent in-class assessments with opportunities for teacher dialogue, such as data walls and collaborative assessment of student work, provide motivation for teachers.**
- 4. Frequent assessments help schools stop doing what isn't working. Act to change practice. Doing this will help teaching become more precise.**

Elmore and City Harvard Education Letter, May/June 2007

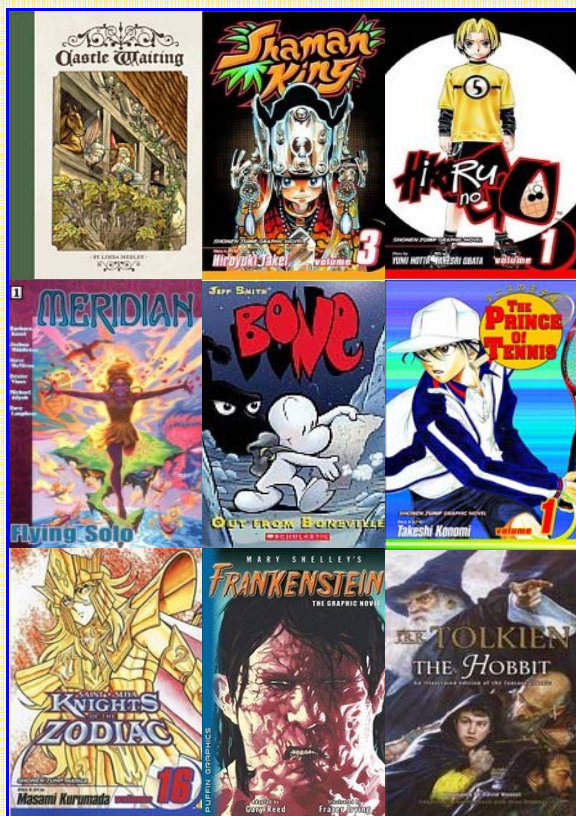
## RESOURCES

### Professional books for inquiry teams:

- Booth, David.** *Reading Doesn't Matter Anymore.* Pembroke Publishing, 2006
- Gee, James Paul.** *What video games have to teach us about learning and literacy.* Palgrave Macmillan, 2003
- Giarrano, Vincent.** *Comics Crash Course.* Impact Books, 2004
- Gregory, Gayle and Lin Kuzmich.** *Teacher Teams that Get Results.* Corwin Press, 2007
- Hart, Christopher.** *Kids Draw Manga Shoujo.* Watson Guptil Publications, 2005
- Hart, Christopher.** *Anime Mania.* Watson Guptil Publications, 2002
- Hart, Christopher.** *Drawing on the Funny Side of the Brain: How to Come up with Jokes for Cartoons and Comic Strips.* Watson Guptil Publications, 1998
- Marchant, Steve.** *The Cartoonist's Workshop.* Collins and Brown, 2004

### Websites:

- International Reading Association Comic Creation Page - <http://www.readwritethink.org/materials/comic/index.html>
- Florida Reading Association - An informative site for teachers - [http://flare.ucf.edu/FLaRE\\_Presentations.htm](http://flare.ucf.edu/FLaRE_Presentations.htm)  
(Search for Larry Bedenbaugh's: "Graphic Novels in my Classroom?")
- National Association of Comics Art Education - <http://www.teachingcomics.org>
- Canadian Adolescent Boys and Literacy - <http://www.education.ualberta.ca/boysandliteracy/>



### Suggested Graphic Novels for Students (With thanks to Larry Swartz)

- Dixon, Charles, and David Wenzel. *The Hobbit: An Illustrated Edition of the Fantasy Classic.* Ballantine Books, 2001
- Hotta, Yumi. *Hikaru No Go (Series).* VIZ Media LLC, 2004
- Kesel, Barbara, McNiven, Steve and Joshua Middleton. *Meridian (Series).* Cross Generation Comics, 2002
- Kurumada, Masami. *Knights of the Zodiac (Series).* VIZ Media LLC, 2006
- Medley, Linda. *Castle Waiting (Series).* Fantagraphics, 2006
- Reed, Gary (adaptor) and Mary Shelley (author). *Frankenstein.* Puffin Graphics, 2005
- Smith, Jeff. *Bone: Out from Boneville (Series).* Graphix, 2005
- Takei, Hiroyuki. *Shaman King (Series).* VIZ Media LLC, 2004
- Takeshi, Konomi. *Prince of Tennis (Series).* VIZ Media LLC, 2004