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Making Curriculum POP

Developing Literacies
in All Content Areas

Pam Goble, Ed.D.
Ryan R. Goble, M.A.

NCTE National Council of
Teachers of English

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PRAISE FOR MAKING CURRICULUM POP

“*Making Curriculum Pop* is fizzing with exciting ideas and creative plans for classroom teachers, but it also has a clearly articulated rationale. The LEOs (Learning Experience Organizers) provide a systematic and engaging way to explore the diversity and complexity of media texts with students in a wide range of curriculum areas.”

—**David Buckingham**, professor at Loughborough University, UK, and author of *Media Education: Literacy, Learning and Contemporary Culture*

“‘Fun’ and ‘standards’ are not words often heard together, but this book makes the case for both and shows us how it can be done. A smart and practical guide to teaching in today’s world of multiple literacies.”

—**Jeff Kupperman, Ph.D.**, associate professor of education, University of Michigan–Flint

“*Finally*, a book that acknowledges the relevance of teaching nonprint texts in a 21st century world. The advice and resources alone in this text make this a must-have for every school’s professional book collection.”

—**Frank W. Baker**, creator of Media Literacy Clearinghouse and author of *Media Literacy in the K–12 Classroom*

“A must read for anyone invested in preparing students for productive and responsible lives in today’s media and information-rich global society. It offers educators and their students a practical and fun way to develop important skills—reading, speaking, writing, listening, viewing, representing, culling, and collaborating.”

—**Carolyn Harris**, education program specialist, NASA Goddard Institute for Space Studies, Columbia University Earth Institute

“Opening *Making Curriculum Pop* is like turning on a firehose of ideas. Do you want your students to be immersed in learning? Do you want your students to discover the world is an interconnected and meaningful place? Be careful: you will need a whole career to use everything in this book.”

—**Scott Eggerding**, director of curriculum and instruction, Lyons Township High School District #204, La Grange, Illinois

“An important and practical guide. This is a necessary resource for classroom teachers and education leaders committed to envisioning new pedagogies that synthesize pop culture, student interests, and digital media as relevant to disciplinary inquiry and academic achievement.”

—**Remi Holden**, assistant professor of information and learning technologies, University of Colorado Denver

“As a teacher, I am always looking for materials that support high quality teaching. Using the Language Experience Organizers provides both students and teachers with flexible tools that stimulate deep thinking about print and nonprint text. Throughout the book, each of the strategies supports critical thinking and deep analysis with clear activities that appeal to students at all levels.”

—**Nancy Bartosz**, English teacher, Westmont Junior High School, Westmont, Illinois

“This book is a treasure trove of inventive and specific ideas to thoughtfully connect popular culture with teaching across the disciplines. Get ready . . . you’ll be using this book A LOT!”

—**Jeffrey Stanzler**, new media and new literacies faculty, University of Michigan School of Education

“A fantastic approach to getting students to analyze text (in all of its forms) in very interesting ways. Students will be far more engaged than they are in settings where ‘traditional’ texts are the only ones used. Teachers have been looking for a way to systematically use popular culture in their classrooms: the authors have provided a very effective approach.”

—**Stephen Armstrong**, social studies consultant for the Connecticut Department of Education and past president of the National Council for the Social Studies

“With profound pedagogical grace, this important and very practical book moves literacy light-years into the future. This vital book is not only an asset; it will prove a teacher’s friend. Based in good science and sound logic, this book will help close the growing chasm separating teachers and students, and students and their optimal literacy achievement.”

—**David E. Kirkland**, director of NYU Metropolitan Center for Research on Equity and the Transformation of Schools, and professor of English and urban education at New York University

“This book walks its talk. For the teacher open and curious about introducing and integrating works of popular culture into their classrooms, this comprehensive, inventive, and ultimately practical book is an invaluable resource to help implement engaging curricula and reimagine classroom experience.”

—**Nick Sousanis**, author of *Unflattening* and postdoctoral fellow at the University of Calgary

“*Making Curriculum Pop* is a tour de force of 21st century learning. The LEOs frame and reframe approaches to content so that there can be deep, differentiated, and collaborative interactions that integrate multiple literacies and create engaged learning. This book will become a classic approach.”

—**Renee Cherow-O’Leary, Ph.D.**, president of Education for the 21st Century, New York, and former professor of English education at Teachers College, Columbia University

“*Making Curriculum Pop* energetically hums in the sweet spot between curriculum standards and everyday student media usage. By designing ingenious prompts to activate student participation, the authors have devised a smart and snappy learning framework that teachers in any discipline can apply. It’s hard to imagine a more updated resource for educators trying to incorporate holistic and creative approaches to using media in their lesson plans.”

—**Antonio Lopez, Ph.D.**, assistant professor of communications and media studies at John Cabot University and author of *Greening Media Education*

“Reading *Making Curriculum Pop* feels as if the most clever, talented teachers I know have opened those secret passages into how their minds work and invited me in to take everything I need and want from their files. It distinguishes the best practices of the artful educator and presents cutting-edge, practical research about ways to inspire our 21st century learners. It is my go-to text for elevating my craft.”

—**Jane Wisdom, NBCT**, English teacher, Maine West High School, Des Plaines, Illinois

“Truly inspiring . . . the LEOs made me think outside the box in terms of assigning student roles, especially in a mathematics classroom. They allow students to take a deeper dive into the content, increase student engagement, and provide collaborative learning experiences. This book is a powerful resource for teachers!”

—**Stefanie Geeve, M.A., NBCT**, mathematics teacher and instructional coach, Glenbard West High School/Glenbard Township High School District 87, Glen Ellyn, Illinois

“The LEOs engage students deeply and provide naturally differentiated pathways for diverse learners. Rigorous, vigorous learning doesn’t have to be boring. I highly recommend this book.”

—**Kristin Fontichiaro**, clinical assistant professor, University of Michigan School of Information

“The Gobles provide an innovative and profusely illustrated way to design learning experiences on the basis of a differentiated, interdisciplinary notion of everyday cultural literacy. It will maximize student interest, engagement, and socialization while enriching teachers’ professional development.”

—**John M. Broughton, Ph.D.**, Arts and Humanities, Teachers College, Columbia University

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**Developing Literacies
in All Content Areas**

Pam Goble, Ed.D.
Ryan R. Goble, M.A.

Foreword by William Kist

free spirit
PUBLISHING®



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help4kids@freespirit.com

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This book is dedicated to
Ruth and John,
who loved sharing stories



Chicago, Illinois, 1942
Photograph courtesy of Ruth Bocian

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Foreword

William Kist, Kent State University, Ohio

I'll start by saying that I think that "Making Curriculum Pop" is one of the smartest, most clever titles and concepts that I've heard for describing a paradigm or template for learning. (It's right up there with "Mindblue"—another Goble creation!) "Making Curriculum Pop" as a concept is brilliant not only because it promotes the use of pop culture in K–12 classrooms, but because it promotes a culture of teaching and learning that emphasizes engagement, that emphasizes the pop! The title itself pops and is fun. And, to paraphrase Auntie Mame, "We need a little fun. Right this very minute!"

It is so refreshing to read an education text that speaks not only about the Common Core but also mentions documents that we rarely hear about—the National Arts Education Association's standards, for example, and the Capacities for Imaginative Thinking. The Capacities list starts by asking kids to "notice deeply." As the father of young children, I see that little kids notice deeply rather effortlessly. But before too long, the party's over for them and it's time only to care about "what do I have to do to get an A?"

But even before I had my own children, I knew about the transcendent power that the arts and popular culture have to engage kids and to cross the boundaries that we so artificially set up in schools. As I've written elsewhere, showing the film *The Kid* to my ninth-grade students at Hyre Junior High in Akron, Ohio, was a truly profound "teachable moment"—both for my students and for me. I remember standing in the dark watching as my students stared open-mouthed at the screen. I think some of them got a little teary when little Jackie Coogan was taken away from Charlie Chaplin. They asked for more, and my interest in the so-called "new" literacies came from this moment related to a silent film, more than from anything I've ever learned from a "tech tip." Serendipitously, while I was showing my students old movies and asking them to make their own grainy videos, the Internet crept into our lives, and before we knew it the act of reading and writing became about all kinds of forms of representation—not just words. The Gobles are in my camp—they come at a broad-based conception of text not so much via a digital pathway, but through the ancient gateway of the arts as a way of knowing. To continue my Angela Lansbury theme: "Tale as old as time . . ."

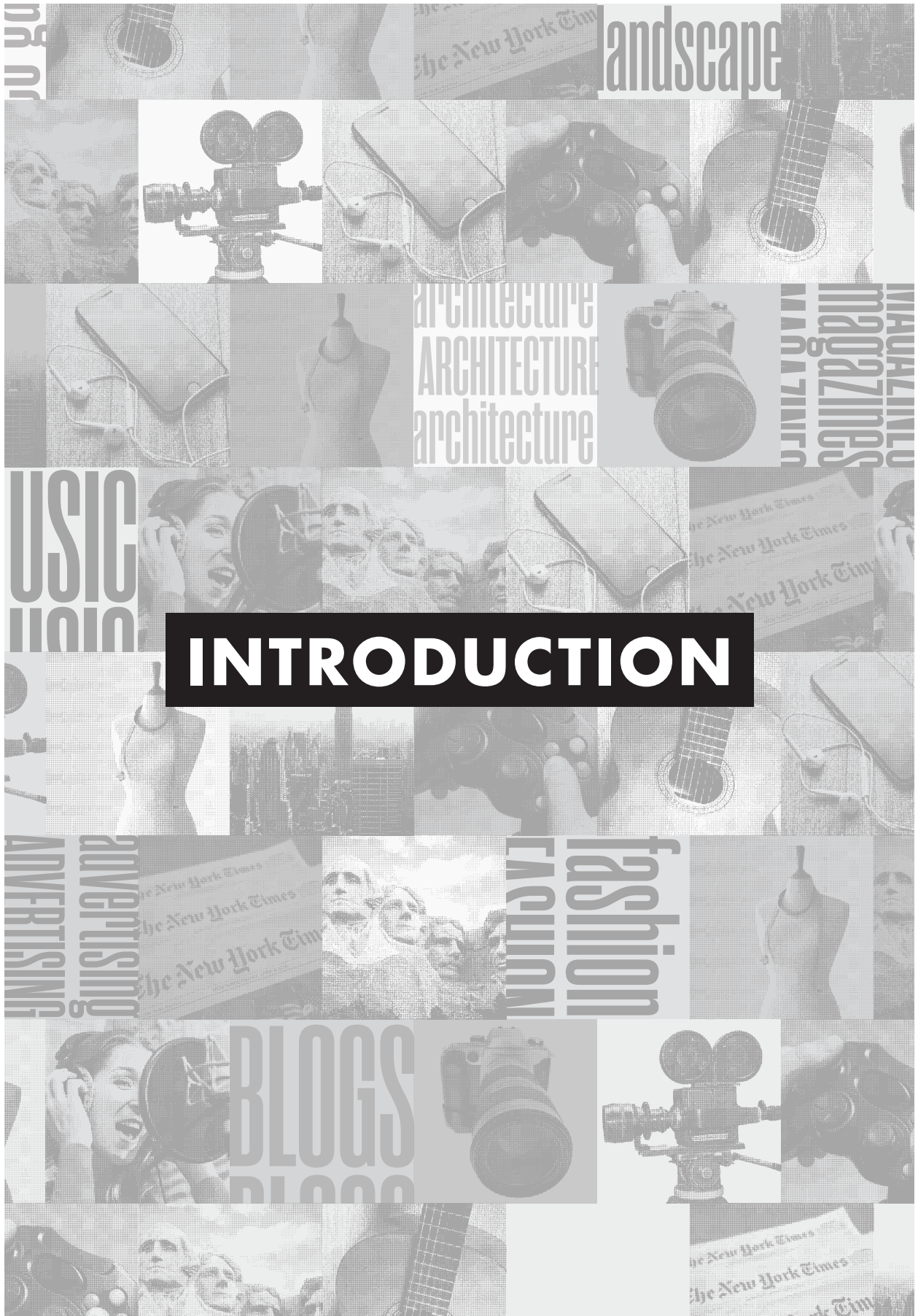
But to be clear, this book is not only retro, it's also extremely relevant and grounded in the Gobles' real-world knowledge of the way schools work. They understand that we educators must exist in the real world of standards and standardized testing, and nothing in this book is out of step

with current realities. It's just that, in addition to a world in which a PLC exists on every corner, this book proposes that we also have an artist-in-residence on every corner. And maybe an architect and a casting director and a cartographer, to name just a few other people standing on the corner. The Gobles effectively debunk the silo structure that has been so prevalent in institutionalized education yet demonstrate a system for operationalizing interdisciplinary studies within our subject-bound schools. They do this based not only on their real-world experiences but also on their wide knowledge of scholarship and great thinking about human learning that has gone before them, work that has not always really been operationalized or even acknowledged in our current K–12 structures. As you'll see, Pam and Ryan have drawn widely from Maxine Greene to Harvey Daniels and Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, and from Daniel Pink to Jimi Hendrix to Linda Darling-Hammond. This truly is a book of greatest hits!

But as anybody who's taken Jazz 101 knows, there can't be freedom without structure. The famous ninth note in a jazz chord sounds "blue" simply because it tweaks the do-re-mi structure that we Westerners are used to. So Pam and Ryan don't leave us without our scales. The Learning Experience Organizer (LEO) structure gives any teacher a nice scaffold (to mix my metaphors) into this so-called new way of teaching. And what blew my mind was the beautifully curated list of resources you'll see in Chapter 4, resources spanning text types and subjects, and organized in a way I've never seen before. That chapter alone is worth the price of admission.

Ultimately, what I think you'll also pick up from reading this book is exactly what those of us who already know Pam and Ryan already know—they are good people and master teachers. We're fortunate that they have taken the time to write down their ideas for us to use. Now, I'm off to the movies. And the art museum. And the concert hall. And to the library. And to my social network. It will be fun.

William Kist



INTRODUCTION

You may notice that throughout this book we talk about developing a teaching practice that is meaningful, engaging, and fun. That is why we decided to name the book *Making Curriculum Pop*. The title has a double meaning: we embrace pop culture as an essential part of classroom study, and we also get excited about teaching when experiencing fun, joy, and the unexpected.

When your curriculum “pops,” it becomes more efficient, effective, fun, and engaging. It’s like a cool tie, a great pop song you didn’t expect to hear on the radio, or a giant bubble being popped by a preschooler. Obviously, our classes don’t feel like this every moment, on every day, but the goal of

our work has been to discover content and develop practices that make this kind of learning more the norm than the exception.

The title also links to the Making Curriculum Pop (MC POP) social network (mcpopmb.ning.com). Ryan coined the phrase and launched the website when he was working as a teacher-coach and curriculum coordinator at a high school in the South Bronx in 2009. MC POP is a place where teachers from all over the world collaborate by sharing articles, ideas, and resources to make curriculum more connected and intriguing for students across the disciplines.

Around the same time the MC POP social network came into being, we began thinking about how to create universal and interdisciplinary tools that teachers not formally trained in media education could use comfortably with a variety of curricula. With this nonprint and interdisciplinary focus in mind, we began building on Harvey Daniels’s literature circles practices.

In classes and conferences our early experiments were well received by our K–12 students and graduate students. As the work evolved we found ourselves developing the wide range of Learning Experience Organizers (LEOs) collected in Chapter 5 that made our classrooms pop in unexpected ways.

Like its social network namesake, we hope this book allows us to continue learning from and conversing with our teacher friends, students, and readers. We hope that the collaborative learning strategies built around LEOs illustrated in this book make *your* curriculum pop the same way they have for ours. We also hope you will reach out to us to share the experiences and modifications you make on our ideas to experience the same enjoyment in learning that we do.

But before we start popping, we want to briefly explore the term *text*, glance at the way diverse standards explore the broader concepts of text

While we usually associate *text* with print, it is a term designed to expand our definition of “things that can be read.” The more texts students can critically and creatively examine and create, the more well equipped they will be to mindfully navigate our complex and textually rich world.

and literacies, and also clarify the concepts of cooperative and collaborative learning as they apply to the learning experiences this book is designed to support.

Text as a Term

We struggled with what term to use to describe our tool. We started with the idea of media circles, but we felt that this term might be too exclusive. We then played with the idea of pop circles or text circles, and we felt that those terms also lacked clarity. While all these terms were acceptable, we felt we could focus on the widest range of subject matter and texts by conceptualizing all of our “role sheets” as Learning Experience Organizers. These LEOs are a vehicle for teachers and students to collaborate to make curriculum pop.

While we usually associate *text* with print, it is a term designed to expand our definition of “things that can be read.” Broadening our understanding of the term allows us to talk about texts such as sculptures, baseball cards, landscapes, body art, webpages, movies, comics, songs, buildings, photos, and ads.

Text evolved into its present meaning after the advent of mass media—starting with newspapers, followed by radio, television, and film—when academics and teachers theorized that we could “read” a radio show or a film using many of the same skills we use to read a book. Simultaneously, schools of education and K–12 schools shifted from talking about “reading and writing” to the broader concepts of “literacy,” “new literacies,” “multimodal literacies,” and “multiliteracies.” At the moment and in this book, we capture this idea using the broad term *literacies*.

With the advent of digital technologies, our concepts of literacy expanded further. According to a national survey by the Kaiser Family Foundation (2010), eight- to eighteen-year-olds use entertainment media seven-and-a-half hours a day—more than fifty-three hours a week. The number goes up to ten hours a day if one accounts for media multitasking. New communication modalities are being developed seemingly on a daily basis, and they require as many, if not more, literacies than we afford to the written word alone.

This is one of many data points that urge us toward literacies that allow us to “read” a world where one creates, communicates, and collaborates through a seemingly infinite range of texts. The ubiquity of nonprint text requires students and adults to comprehend, critique, and compose across a wide range of symbol systems. The more texts students can critically and

creatively examine and create, the more well equipped they will be to mindfully navigate our complex and textually rich world.

The powerful idea of supporting literacies in our classrooms is built around teaching “modes of representation much broader than language alone . . . [that] differ according to culture and context, and have specific cognitive, cultural and social effects.”¹ This theory points to a world of texts worthy of study. For those who continue to focus on more traditionally assessed texts like reading and writing, research on media texts (the most familiar nonprint texts) is valuable to note. Many researchers have found that, over time, students are able to transfer concepts from media texts like viewing, listening/looking for details, decoding symbols, using context clues, and identifying themes, arguments, and organizational structures into their understanding of traditional print texts.

Again, focusing on media and digital texts, the 2011 New Media Consortium Horizon Report is instructive. The report—a collaboration between the New Media Consortium, the Consortium for School Networking, and the International Society for Technology in Education—states that “digital media literacy continues its rise in importance as a key skill in every discipline and profession,” especially teaching, but goes on to remark that “training in digital literacy skills and techniques is rare in teacher education . . .”² This type of training and broadened understandings of texts are crucial to allow for an expanded scope of teaching and learning.

The National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) was clearly able to see this need for an expanded definition of literacy over eighty years ago when they created a Committee on Photoplay Appreciation in 1932 that published study guides for teachers around the use of film. Since that time, calls for wider understandings of different kinds of texts have only increased. At the turn of the century, the 21st Century Skills movement began articulating ideas around communicating and composing in multiple modalities. NCTE released position statements, including the 2003 Resolution on Composing with Nonprint Media and summary statements on multimodal literacy, and the National Council for the Social Studies issued a strong position statement in 2009 on the importance of media literacy.

Expanding Standards

Following these earlier statements, the national Common Core State Standards movement began to address some of the same concerns. The

1. Cope & Kalantzis, 2000, p. 5.
2. New Media Consortium, 2011.

Common Core State Standards (CCSS) for English Language Arts have begun to articulate a more wide-angle view of literacy as the ability to read, write, listen, and speak across media through anchor strands like the following:

In reading . . .

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.R.7

Integrate and evaluate content presented in diverse media and formats, including visually and quantitatively, as well as in words.

In writing . . .

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.W.6

Use technology, including the Internet, to produce and publish writing and to interact and collaborate with others.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.W.8

Gather relevant information from multiple print and digital sources, assess the credibility and accuracy of each source, and integrate the information while avoiding plagiarism.

In speaking and listening . . .

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.SL.2

Integrate and evaluate information presented in diverse media and formats, including visually, quantitatively, and orally.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.SL.5

Make strategic use of digital media and visual displays of data to express information and enhance understanding of presentations.

The National Council for the Social Studies' College, Career, and Civic Life (C3) Framework for Social Studies State Standards echoes the concerns of the national English language arts standards.

In the science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) disciplines, the CCSS's Eight Mathematical Practices focus on goals such as "creating mathematical models" (graphs, equations, or infographics), "constructing arguments and critiques," and "reasoning abstractly." The Next Generation Science Standards' (NGSS) Science and Engineering Practices call for students to create representations through models, analyze and interpret data, engage in argument, construct explanations, and evaluate and communicate information. All these skills require students to analyze, critique, and ultimately engage with a wide range of texts.

In our eyes, the National Arts Education Association's standards are the most elegant of the bunch, asking students to connect, respond, perform/present/produce, and create. This leads to one of the better boutique standards, developed by Lincoln Center Education in New York City.

Their Capacities for Imaginative Thinking are clearly inspired by the work of their past philosopher-in-residence (and heir of John Dewey’s intellectual legacy), Maxine Greene. These capacities are the closest reflection of the intent of this book, as they are profoundly interdisciplinary and they ask students to collaborate to:

- notice deeply
- embody
- pose questions
- identify patterns
- make connections
- empathize
- live with ambiguity
- create meaning
- take action
- reflect/assess

Outside of these pedagogical and policy documents, we know on a practical level that humanities teachers use primary sources, including photos, art, and maps, and STEM teachers use graphs, simulations, infographics, and images. These texts, however, generally remain secondary to the kinds of reading, writing, and memorizing of formulas and key terms required of students on most standardized tests.

All the standards we have mentioned incorporate these wider ideas about texts and literacy, but nontraditional texts often remain neglected in favor of the traditional literacies of reading and writing. We like to approach standards and standardization with both care and caution, as they are often used more for control than creativity, collaboration, and creation.

We recognize that many valuable educational goals are often articulated by standards and that they remain “currency of the realm.” We get most excited when standards are used by students and teachers to expand curriculum to create richer and more engaging learning environments. But we rarely *start* our work with standards; instead, we ask, “what would make a rich learning experience?” This question leads us to create learning experiences that easily align with standards after the fact. To help you do the same, we have aligned all the LEOs in Chapter 5 to a wide range of standards in the Appendix available in the digital content (see page viii for how to access this content). We hope this allows you to focus on making your curriculum pop first, and aligning your learning experience with school, state, district, and national initiatives second.

Fortuitously, every major set of national standards speaks to our need to read, write, speak, listen, view, and represent in a variety of modalities. This book is an effort to put these articulations into practice, by helping educators creatively integrate broad literacies into dynamic and engaging teaching practices.

Collaborative and Cooperative Learning

We have also noticed a second challenge around developing meaningful, purpose-driven collaborative learning in classrooms. Many teachers practice group work in the most informal sense by asking students to “get in a group of four” and work on a task. While this can be effective in many situations, group work can often be more powerful if it crosses into the realm of practices labeled collaborative and/or cooperative learning.

The literature on cooperative and collaborative learning presents varied ways to look at both concepts. Many sources stress collaborative learning as a philosophy and an umbrella term for more student-centered and student-directed group learning. Cooperative learning is often characterized as more teacher driven, focused on equitable contributions while utilizing specific structures and roles.

Depending on how you use the LEOs, students’ learning experiences may be more structured and cooperative or organic and collaborative. We hope you take advantage of this continuum of practices to suit your classroom needs at any given time. If you assign students’ texts and LEOs with a specific standard or goal in mind, you would be using LEOs in a more structured, cooperative way, but if students select their own LEOs and/or select their own texts for more open-ended inquiry, you would be using the LEOs in a more collaborative structure.

While your work may be both collaborative and cooperative, we ultimately used the thinking articulated by Roger and David Johnson’s research on the traits of successful cooperative learning and constructive collaboration as the framework for making curriculum pop with LEOs. Their research focused on developing structures that promote:

- face-to-face interaction
- positive interdependence
- individual accountability
- social skills
- group processing abilities³

3. Johnson & Johnson, 1999.

Similarly, Kagan and Kagan also suggest that cooperative learning is successful because of four constructs:

- positive interdependence
- individual accountability
- equal participation
- simultaneous interaction⁴

All of these articulations speak to the type of collaborative and cooperative learning the LEOs are designed to support. The LEOs are not designed to be competitive or reward driven, but they are designed to address the complex and often competing needs of a diverse student population. Because the LEOs allow myriad ways in to learning, they can assist in developing student expertise and create equitable contributions from group members over time.

The ideas in this book are flexible enough to support a wide range of collaborative learning while also functioning as a more goal-focused, cooperative learning structure. This continuum is something for you to explore with your team over time.

About This Book

In the following chapters we articulate a flexible, differentiated, and collaborative approach to help secondary teachers and students purposefully engage with any text they might encounter in their world, from traditional print texts to nonprint texts like film and paintings, as well as the many hybrid texts found on the Internet, or environmental texts like rooms, houses, landscapes, or cities.

Chapter 1 articulates how you can use Learning Experience Organizers (LEOs) to make your curriculum pop. It introduces a ten-step process, describes the educational paradigm shifts involved, and discusses, in brief, the theory and research behind LEOs.

Chapter 2 walks you through a ten-step process to using LEOs in the classroom, while pointing out basic modifications. A model learning experience is outlined in each step, based on the film *Kit Kittredge*, along with example assessment rubrics.

Chapter 3 offers ideas for how to make LEOs a part of your unique classroom culture. It covers additional possibilities for designing learning experiences, shows detailed modifications—including ones for elementary

4. Kagan & Kagan, 2009.

classrooms and for students struggling with academic literacies, and presents some model LEOs.

Chapter 4 offers a wealth of resources, many of them involving less traditional text types than books and film. It guides you in locating information about the resources, helps you choose accompanying LEOs, and provides you with suggestions for using Twitter and other social networks to keep current on each text type.

Chapter 5 contains the fifty-five Learning Experience Organizers (LEOs), which are designed to help students make their thinking visible. Five student example LEOs are included at the beginning of the chapter to give you an idea of the variety of ways students might represent their thinking. All of the LEOs exist in digital form as customizable PDFs for you to share with your students. See page viii for the website link to download these forms.

The **Appendix**, available in the digital content, includes an extensive chart indicating the standards reflected in each LEO, including Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts and Math, as well as national science, social studies, and art standards.

You'll also find key terms defined and a list of resources by chapter to help ensure your understanding and guide you to further reading.

How to Use This Book

We hope our book is a catalyst for educators to bridge the divide between traditional and nontraditional texts and literacies to develop students' abilities to learn and think in teams. We also hope *Making Curriculum Pop* is an educative experience that allows teachers and students to develop literacies while exploring a wide range of texts.

Of course, this book was developed with feedback from our students, as well as preservice teachers and graduate students in our college classes. Its evolution is an ongoing process that we invite you to participate in. Please continue the conversation by sharing your experiences, thoughts, and ideas with us in our "MC POP—Developing Literacies in All Content Areas" group at the Making Curriculum Pop social network (mcpopmb.ning.com/group/mcpopdlaca).

If you are short on time, you can focus on Chapter 2 (the how-to chapter) and Chapter 5 (the LEO collection). Chapter 1 gives you the "why" of our LEOs. This chapter is excellent to get you into the mindset to make your curriculum pop while providing the research foundation supporting the practice. Chapter 4 is a dynamic place to spend time if you are looking to learn more about fresh, nontraditional texts for your classroom. This

chapter might also be the most fun to dive into during a long weekend with a computer at your side.

In summary, we hope that the ideas and practices articulated in this book represent a small but meaningful contribution to make our schools and world a bit more engaging and humane while developing the type of cooperative practices that can inform a sustainable future for our planet. We hope the pedagogy outlined here helps all of us be more critical in our thinking, mindful in our metacognition, and kind to our students and colleagues as we learn and address challenges through inquiry and collaboration.

We'd love to hear how this book has helped you make your curriculum pop! If you have stories or questions for us, you can reach us through our publisher at help4kids@freespirit.com or through our social network at mcpopmb.ning.com.

Pam Goble and Ryan Goble

The **Making Curriculum Pop Ning** (also known as MC POP—mcpopmb.ning.com) is an online community for educators interested in better practices and more emotionally engaged classrooms through the exploration of popular and common cultures. MC POP is a free social network, but it is password protected; this allows educational materials to be shared under fair use practices. You can sign in using a Yahoo, Google, or Facebook ID. Once you join you can share and receive ideas from thousands of interesting educators from all over the world. We are also collecting your LEO ideas in the “MC POP—Developing Literacies in All Content Areas” group at the site with the idea that we will be able to share the best LEOs online.



CHAPTER 1

**HOW CAN
LEARNING EXPERIENCE
ORGANIZERS (LEOs)
MAKE YOUR
CURRICULUM POP?**

Using Learning Experience Organizers, or LEOs, creates a highly differentiated instructional practice designed to engage students with any print or nonprint text, including objects and spaces. Instead of using a traditional study guide to search for a text’s “right answers,” students can use LEOs to individually and then collaboratively interact with the text using a variety of specific and open-ended foci.

No idea comes out of thin air, and this book is no exception. Both of us have enhanced our language arts teaching using literature circles, a term and practice developed by Harvey Daniels in his watershed 1993 book *Literature Circles*. Daniels’s unique practice popularized the idea that there can be individualized roles for exploration of differentiated literature. As we thought about his practice, we built on that work in three specific ways. We want to focus on:

1. incorporating print *and* nonprint texts
2. working across all content areas
3. utilizing roles that allow for whole-class, small-group, or individualized explorations of texts

What Daniels developed as literature circles and the role sheets that evolved, for us morphed into Learning Experience Organizers (LEOs) for students, as they read a wide range of texts independently and in different-sized groups across the curriculum.

Here, we think it is worth giving you a preview of a framework you can use to make your curriculum pop using the LEOs collected in Chapter 5. Chapter 2 takes you through a step-by-step progression for how students may explore texts, content, or themes using a selection of our fifty-five LEOs. No matter what texts you select or what LEOs you use, you will likely follow some permutation of the steps in Figure 1.1.

The concept of using LEOs for higher-level critical and creative thinking about any text evolved naturally through our work and research with a wide range of texts as we were working across the disciplines. We had developed specific LEOs for music, images, and film, but as the challenges teachers faced with nonprint texts became clearer, we set out to develop LEOs that went beyond media to include more nonprint texts like objects and spaces.



Figure 1.1 Ten Steps to Make Your Curriculum Pop

STEP 1. Choose Appropriate High-Interest Texts and Conceptualize Your Instructional Purpose

STEP 2. Choose Text-Appropriate LEOs That Support Your Questions, Objectives, and Standards

STEP 3. Estimate the Length of Your Learning Experience

STEP 4. Prepare and Assemble Materials

STEP 5. Introduce the Text(s)

STEP 6. Assign, Distribute, and Model LEOs

STEP 7. Revisit Texts and Create Time for Individual LEO Exploration

STEP 8. Group Students and Facilitate Discussion

STEP 9. Pause or End the Day's LEO-Based Learning Experience

STEP 10. Assess the LEO-Based Learning Experiences

Each of the fifty-five LEOs provided in Chapter 5 allow students to articulate unique insights and to work with other students to uncover (and as such, socially construct) the meaning and ideas presented in a text. The criteria, questions, and prompts central to our LEOs direct students to view any text more critically and creatively than they would using a standard worksheet. As a rule, most of the lower-level information (the basic information common to the bottom rungs of Bloom's Taxonomy—remembering, applying, and understanding) is easily uncovered while students—in groups and individually—craft unique, higher-level (analyzing, evaluating, and creating) connections, questions, and interpretations about the text using the LEOs.

It is also worth noting that Ron Ritchhart, Mark Church, and Karin Morrison stated in their book *Making Thinking Visible* that Bloom's Taxonomy remains a theory. They cite the work of Martha Stone Wiske at Harvard's Project Zero, whose team concluded that understanding is not a springboard to the higher levels of Bloom's Taxonomy but instead is a result of a mixture of application, analysis, evaluating, and creating. Ritchhart and his coauthors also remind us that "looking carefully to notice and fully describe what one sees can be an extremely complex and engaging task. Such close observation is at the heart of both science and art."⁵

Making Thinking Visible properly problematizes Bloom's Taxonomy while considering its usefulness. The collaborative and cooperative learning that

5. Ritchhart, et al., 2011, p. 6.

our LEOs are designed for enables students to explore Bloom’s Taxonomy as if each type of learning is a way of doing/being instead of a taxonomy one must climb. Each LEO is a single element in a larger flexible learning environment. Just as rivers, trees, birds, flowers, and insects play roles in an ecosystem, here every student—through his or her LEO—has a role to play. The LEOs are diverse and allow for every level of Bloom’s Taxonomy to interact with each other toward deeper understandings. Students are given spaces to notice and deeply develop a wide range of understandings over time. The English Language Arts CCSS label these age-old practices as close and critical reading of complex texts.

Teachers have enjoyed the wide and varied range of foci we provide, and the way the LEOs direct their students’ thinking. Our goal in using LEOs is to guide and structure students’ critical thinking toward states of “flow”⁶ in which the experience becomes natural and fun. While flow can be a scarce emotional state in schools built on the factory model of forty-five-minute classes, we regularly see LEOs create deep engagement around curriculum that pops for students and adults.

Engagement does not happen without frameworks. We offer LEOs as guidelines, structures, and models to help students and teachers interact more deeply with texts. We have purposely created LEOs individually and as a whole as flexible structures for students and teachers to customize as needed. It is also important to remember that LEOs are designed to guide students and teachers away from learning focused on the “right answer” and toward a collaborative classroom culture focused on “better answers.” This design creates space for the unique voice of every student to be heard. To further that point, you’ll see that we include a Wild Card LEO that allows a student to create a personalized lens to view a text.

LEOs can be seen as training wheels that can be removed over time or as something you continually mix up and explore. If the LEOs are used mindfully, they can be productive scaffolding for deeper learning. Differentiating the student LEOs, groupings, procedures, and texts, and encouraging collaborative discussions with the LEOs keeps them fresh and exciting over time.

We created LEOs to make learning more fun, but we also work in classroom and administrative roles and recognize how LEOs can hold students accountable. That said, we prefer to conceptualize LEOs as essential artifacts and powerful qualitative data that show footprints of student learning. In this role they can alleviate the fears of supervisors and parents who may question teachers using nonprint, “fluffy” texts in the classroom. Teachers can use the LEOs to share student work with colleagues, parents, and administrators and to showcase the fact that robust classroom practices are applied to nontraditional texts.

6. Csikszentmihalyi, 1997.

LEOs and Shifting Educational Paradigms

As stated in our introduction, we are interested in the double meanings of making curriculum pop. Obviously, our classes don't pop at every moment, or even on every day, but the goal of our work has been to approach every learning experience with an enthusiastic and collaborative spirit. We all know that challenging content like stoichiometry or Shakespeare can be taught in a flat, joyless way, or it can be an animated learning experience in which students collaborate around texts to make meaning, ponder, and perform in a vibrant learning community.

When we approach our classes, we are the lead learner. We don't think about this role as a performance, but we do think more like a member of a band or the producer of a Broadway show—we are trying to design a collaborative production for all kinds of people to share. We realize that every detail—from text selection to the choice of LEOs to the tone of our voice—can transform a class into an experience.

To shift away from the teaching mindset toward a learning experience mindset, we find it helpful to think about the legendary guitarist Jimi Hendrix. Hendrix could have named his group the Jimi Hendrix Band, Jimi Hendrix and the Little Wings, or simply used his name like many solo artists do. He chose to call the group the Jimi Hendrix *Experience* because that emphasized a major goal of his music.

Anyone who has seen the now-iconic film footage of Hendrix playing his guitar with his teeth, or behind his back, or burning and smashing his guitar at the climax of a song knows that this young artist was keenly aware of music's possibility to thrill an audience beyond the notes being played: it was not just music, but a tone, a stance, a way of dressing and being—in short, an experience.

Just as Hendrix's performance shifted the mindset and expectations of his audience, we hope you use the practices outlined in this book to shift your mindset and your students' expectations.

As Hendrix illustrated, the process of changing mindsets—and ultimately actions—can begin with words. As such, all five of our paradigm shifts begin with us renaming, redefining, and/or clarifying words, phrases, and mental models of teaching and learning.



Shift #1—From Reading Words of Text to Reading Worlds of Text

The introduction addressed our first semantic shift—*text* as an all-inclusive term. This definition has been present in theoretical literature for over half a century. As a result, teachers now view text in a far more comprehensive light to include more than just textbooks or novels.

When we are “reading” Jimi Hendrix’s performance—the music, the outfit, his stance toward the audience, the lyrics, and his dramatic burning of the guitar—we are reading the word *and* the world.

Paulo Freire and Donaldo Macedo, in *Literacy: Reading the Word and the World*, explain why the world and the word begin to blur:

Reading the world always precedes reading the word, and reading the word implies continually reading the world. As suggested earlier, this movement from the word to the world is always present; even the spoken word flows from our reading of the world. In a way, however, we can go further and say that reading the word is not preceded merely by reading the world, but by a certain form of *writing* it or *rewriting* it, that is, of transforming it by means of a conscious, practical work. For me, this dynamic movement is central to the literacy process.⁷

For this reason, the dynamic movement from word to world opens up a world of texts. However, because the field of literacy is still very much in flux, the idea of text has also been problematized. John Broughton, reflecting on the role of popular and visual culture in education, takes issue with the concept of text, for “the supremacy of literature over media, of textual over visual, appears absolute, the gap between high and low [culture, becomes] simply unbridgeable. . . . The appeal to text, then, and the aversion to image, to film or to visual culture in general, tend to link arms with parallel forms of social domination.”⁸

We share Broughton’s concerns while also recognizing that the word *text* is now a common term in K–12 teaching and policy documents and is central to the Common Core State Standards across the disciplines (although the expanded definition may not always be implied). For that reason we use the word *text* in the book so teachers enter into a world of body art, baseball cards, comics, cathedrals, pie charts, and power ballads. We hope educators conceptualize the word *text* as including all print and nonprint carriers of information as it relates to all the senses.

7. Freire & Macedo, 1987, p. 35.

8. Broughton, 2008, p. 29–30.

Shift #2—From Literacy to Literacies

The expansion of the concept of text runs parallel with expanded conceptions of literacy that began, most notably, with the New London Group's landmark treatise on multiliteracies. This has led to a shift in which educators are urged to conceptualize literacy not only as reading and writing but also to embrace what we like to call the “neglected literacies” of *speaking, listening, viewing, and representing*. To this list, we'd like to add *culling* (information in any form) and *collaborating*, as they have become points of emphasis in the information age and are centerpieces of every 21st century skills list (including the Common Core State Standards) that we have encountered.

Together, reading, writing, speaking, listening, viewing, representing, culling, and collaborating are essential literacies for those looking to critique or create in any medium/text. For that reason classrooms that “read the world” are more likely to engage learners and prepare them for success beyond their formal education.

Shift #3—From Teaching the Whats and Hows to Teaching the Whys

We strongly feel that every teacher has the opportunity to be a great leader. One of the most popular TED Talks is “How Great Leaders Inspire Action” by former ad man Simon Sinek, who turned the speech into a book titled *Start with Why*. In his book Sinek reminds us that, “Average companies [and organizations] give their people something to work on. In contrast, the most innovative organizations give their people something to work toward.”⁹ This idea and the research behind using clear “why” and purpose to animate our lives are clearly summarized in Daniel Pink's book *Drive*. We've all probably taught or participated in classes built on amassing rote skills and knowledge devoid of context, purpose, or “why.” To this point, Pink cuts to the chase:

It is often difficult to do something exceptionally well if we don't know the reason we're doing it in the first place. People at work [and school] are thirsting for context, yearning to know how what they do contributes to a larger whole. And a powerful way to provide that context is to spend a little less time telling how and a little more time showing why.¹⁰

What we're saying here is nothing new. From John Dewey to the standards movement to Wiggins and McTighe's *Understanding by Design*, people

9. Sinek, 2009, p. 96.

10. Pink, 2009, p. 138.

have been urging the articulation of a “why” or at least large points of inquiry to frame the all-too-pervasive “whats” and “hows.” We wrote this book because we believe learning should be enthusiastic, meaningful, challenging, cooperative, and collaborative. That is the “why” behind this work. The Learning Experience Organizers (LEOs) in Chapter 5 are the “how” and the “what” to be determined by you and your students.

You might embrace our simple “why” of making curriculum pop, but LEOs are also waiting for your personalized “why.” For each lesson we urge you to think carefully about why you want students to engage with a text, and we encourage you to make those reasons clear to your students. Great learning experiences should not be about compliance but about curiosity and engagement. Taking a little extra time to think about and articulate why we teach any given text or topic can make a world of difference.

One of the foci for preparing a better learning experience is to use Carol Ann Tomlinson’s design for differentiation. Her articulation includes why students need to know something for real life. Articulating this purpose for or with students can give lessons powerful meaning and focus. It is important to remember that sometimes our “why” is revealed to us gradually over time, and this is an area our present school systems are not designed for. The purpose of any given lesson may end up differing from student to student and change over the course of a month, semester, year, or lifetime. In the Appendix in the digital content, we have aligned LEOs to a wide range of standards to help you align your learning experience after the fact. No matter how you use the LEOs, be sure to create spaces for sharing or uncovering this why/purpose during any given learning experience.



Shift #4—From a Fixed Mindset to a Growth Mindset and Collaboration

Another shift, much talked about in education but not easy to actualize, is based on Carol Dweck’s groundbreaking research in the book *Mindset*. People with fixed mindsets about the ability to learn view every learning moment as a measure of innate worth and value—everything is a test of one’s ability to perform in that moment. Most summative assessments are designed to look at just that.

On the flipside, those with growth mindsets see all learning as a way to expand a repertoire of skills and understanding, not as a simple win-or-lose proposition. This is what formative assessments are usually designed to assess. We have found this formative/growth mindset to be incredibly useful in our daily teaching with LEOs.

Our LEOs are open-ended, sometimes idiosyncratic, and—when selected well—easily accessible to a wide range of learners. Teachers quickly learn there are multiple ways of seeing a text and that purpose-driven

collaboration and/or cooperation is better for learning and understanding. Students learn from each other, and when you split from shared LEO groups to mixed LEO groups, students learn more about their LEO before contributing to a larger group. While the majority of your LEO work making curriculum pop will be formative, there are situations where you might find ways to use LEO-based group learning experiences as summative assessments.

Here, collaboration makes everyone smarter. Obviously, there are many times when individual assessment is necessary and even preferred, but throughout most of our lives we grow and learn together. For this reason, LEOs should never be used in any type of competitive way, but instead should be used to cultivate ecosystems of shared learning.

We also think that teachers should approach this practice with a growth mindset. We hope that every time you experiment and play with LEOs, you will learn something new about your practice, yourself, your students, the texts you have selected, and—in your most sublime teaching moments—the world!



Shift #5—From Lesson to Learning Experience

The last, and perhaps most important, paradigm shift is about the type of instruction you're trying to create using LEOs. We don't want you to think about doing a LEO "lesson." We would rather you visualize the creation of a significant learning experience.

Making the shift from "planning a lesson" to "designing a learning experience" requires another semantic shift. The tools collected in Chapter 5 might typically be called "worksheets," "study guides," "role sheets," or even "graphic organizers," but we suggest the term Learning Experience Organizer—something we hope can become part of the lexicon of teaching and learning to help shift our thinking about the design of our instruction.

Though research supports the use of some type of guidance to understand materials being studied, an effective study guide should engage and elevate learning. Andrea Maxworthy cites two types of study guides: the interlocking and the noninterlocking (see Figure 1.2). The interlocking study guide is straightforward: it follows the text with answers that match exactly what is in the text. In other words, the interlocking study guide looks at what is present in the text.

The noninterlocking study guide looks at the relationship between the student and the text. Choice is a feature of this type of study guide, as is the opportunity to explore connections and feelings, make predictions, and focus on better responses (as opposed to those that are right or wrong). Noninterlocking study guides—such as our LEOs—incorporate higher-level thinking.

Figure 1.2 Interlocking vs. Noninterlocking Study Guides

Interlocking Traditional Study Guides/ Worksheets	Noninterlocking Learning Experience Organizers (LEOs)
○ Sometimes look for only the right answer	○ Look for a variety of responses
○ Usually are customized for one text	○ Created for multiple texts
○ Usually require an answer key	○ Generate student-centered responses or reflections
○ Designed with specific answers in mind	○ Develop frameworks for thinking and discussion and space for understanding
○ Focus on one modality	○ Value multiple ways of thinking
○ Accommodate one kind of learner	○ Allow for differentiation for many different types of learners
○ Designed to cover content	○ Designed to uncover content and allow for inference
○ Encourage little or no communication or collaboration among students	○ Encourage collaboration and communication

We like to couple these five paradigm shifts with the major research findings of a metastudy captured in the book *Powerful Learning*. There, Barron and Darling-Hammond showed that:

- Students learn more deeply when they can apply classroom-gathered knowledge to real-world problems, and when they take part in projects that require sustained engagement and collaboration.
- Active-learning practices have a more significant impact on student performance than any other variable, including student background and prior achievement.
- Students are most successful when they are taught how to learn as well as what to learn.

These things are generally not happening when you simply deliver a lesson, ask students to take roles, or have students fill out worksheets, study guides, or graphic organizers. The findings of Darling-Hammond and Barron create a clear set of goals around active, student-centered, and collaborative learning with value far beyond studying for a chapter test.

Using LEOs to make your curriculum pop is directly aligned to Darling-Hammond and Barron's research, with one point of divergence: LEOs are not a traditional authentic assessment where we make students go outside

the classroom to solve real-world problems. We do, however, believe that using popular and common texts brings issues that are authentic to the students' world into the classroom. Both these practices (bringing issues in and going beyond the classroom) can create spaces for more culturally responsive classrooms in which texts indigenous to the students' worlds are valued.

David Kirkland begins his brilliant book about the literacy of young black men, *A Search Past Silence*, by reminding readers:

To be conceptually astute, I have not viewed literacy as natural, but as a consequence of those natural human drives that we may rightly call *the basics*—pleasure [flow], play, curiosity, creativity, and so on. Pleasure, play, curiosity, and creativity are prerequisite to one's love of learning (to read and write). As these basics invent themselves within the universe (within individuals and within the larger company of our inherited communities), the interdependent capacities/potentialities of languages and literacies, thought, and imagination are fully realized.¹¹

LEOs are built on the energy of this passage, the pleasure of a great meal with family and friends, the freedom of a Jimi Hendrix solo, the curiosity of a Jane Goodall, and the creativity of you and your students. We (and likely Dr. Kirkland) know these are lofty aspirations. On paper, these paradigm shifts and research findings seem both reasonable and realistic. In practice, none of these shifts are easy. If that were the case, more schools would look radically different than they do today. Huge distances exist between knowing, understanding, and doing. We believe well-designed learning experiences are a powerful way to help teachers take the journey to a way of doing school that is considerably different than the status quo.

Recapping, we can shift our practice by . . .

- **Reading Worlds of Text**—we can view the world as a place filled with texts, and value texts and issues authentic to the students' worlds.
- **Shifting from Literacy to Literacies** by emphasizing a broad definition of the term *literacy* that includes reading, writing, listening, speaking, viewing, representing, culling (information), and collaborating.
- **Teaching with Purpose** by thinking about the purpose or “why” of our lessons.
- **Using a Growth Mindset**, i.e., LEOs are about learning, not performance.
- **Cultivating Learning Experiences** by using collaborative and cooperative learning to create joyful learning ecosystems and significant learning experiences.

11. Kirkland, 2013, p. 8.

All these shifts are made in service of differentiated and flexible structures that shift student participation and idea generation to the forefront of instruction. With this mindset, we can start to visualize making curriculum pop with LEOs as an active, engaging, and meaningful practice that creates dynamic classrooms filled with fun and learning.

Theory and Research Behind Making Curriculum Pop with LEOs

Six interrelated strands of educational research and theory are integrated into the LEOs practice. Here are some brief (and simplified) summaries of the guiding ideas we use to make our curriculum pop.

Constructivism

LEOs are designed to move teachers to the sideline, allowing students to take the field to construct or uncover the meanings and content of a text.

Broadly speaking, constructivism is a theory that posits that knowledge is formed by the learners' own ideas and lived experiences. Constructivist teaching practices usually value collaboration, inquiry, active learning, social constructions of learning, and the unique ideas of each student. More specifically, constructivist teachers want students to generate their own creative ideas, questions, hypotheses, and interpretations. A constructivist teacher designs collaborative social learning experiences for students. Often this process has a clear purpose (a "why") and is problem- or inquiry-based.

Research shows that active learning can lead to better retention, comprehension, and possibilities for transference of knowledge across subjects and domains.¹² Ideas learned in one domain of school, play, work, or home can be fluidly applied in another setting and vice versa. LEOs are a powerful tool for learners to create meaningful relationships that link texts to the wider world.

Collaborative and Cooperative Learning

LEOs are designed to use the continuum of collaborative and cooperative learning that values individual insights and builds on them through a wide mix of collaborative structures and practices.

Even before they became buzzwords, collaborative and cooperative learning were recognized as valuable instructional practices. Those learning experiences are even more important today. In school, at home, and in work settings, it is clear that students need to be able to work creatively with

12. Bizar & Daniels, 1998; Darling-Hammond et al., 2008; Hattie, 2011; Marzano, Pickering, & Pollack, 2001; Perkins & Salomon, 1994.

diverse groups of people. While the myth of the singular genius persists, many creativity researchers are keenly attuned to the role colleagues and collaborators play in every breakthrough, big and small.¹³

Students who have meaningful collaborative learning experiences develop critical and creative thinking skills. Cooperative learning is also one of the nine effective strategies cited in Marzano, Pickering, and Pollack’s landmark book *Classroom Instruction That Works*. Robert Slavin suggests two examples of cooperative learning that work well with the LEOs: (1) jigsaws and (2) four-member groups which are diverse.¹⁴ Both collaborative and cooperative learning encourage peer communication and foster social behaviors in a group setting. These skills are key objectives in the Common Core State Standards.

Figure 1.3



Figure 1.4



13. Csikszentmihalyi, 1997; Gardner, 1994; John-Steiner, 2000.

14. Slavin, 1991.