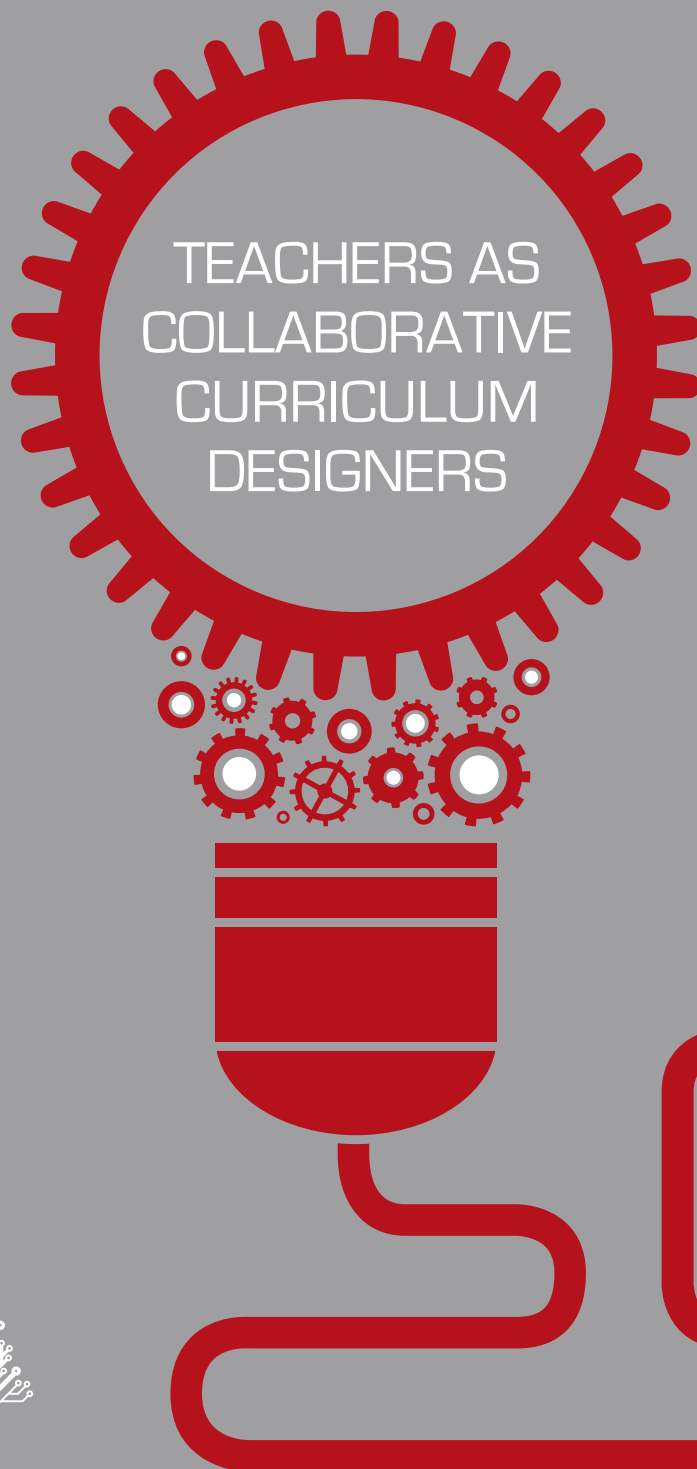


GETTING SMART ON



TEACHERS AS
COLLABORATIVE
CURRICULUM
DESIGNERS

IN PARTNERSHIP WITH:



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Introduction

Catherine Wedgwood,
Communication Manager, Getting Smart

“The most valuable resource that all teachers have is each other. Without collaboration, our growth is limited to our own perspectives.”

~ Robert John Meehan



Teaching in the 21st century presents new challenges, but also affords new opportunities. Traditionally, the work of educators has been confined to individual classrooms. While they have deeply impacted their own students, their impact beyond their classrooms has been somewhat limited.

Technology opens new doors for collaboration and extends the work of excellent teachers. Teachers can now share their passions, struggles, research and lessons. They can work together to create more powerful experiences for student around the globe. The creation of such learning experiences requires dedication and innovation. It requires a teacher’s ability to not only deeply understand content, but also know individual students’ strengths and needs.

Powerful learning also requires thoughtful development and planning. As teachers look for efficient ways to do this they find businesses touting curricula-in-a-box as the magical cure. However, there are several reasons why this is not the answer:

- We know all students are not at the same learning level or able to learn in the same way.
- No two classrooms are alike in the same school, much less in different states.
- “Cookie cutter” curricula diminish teachers’ creativity and credibility, ultimately lessening the value of the teacher/student relationship.

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This is why a teacher-developed curriculum is so important. On the front lines of education every day, they are most familiar with which student needs are not being met and preventing them from being successful. Let's face it, those closest to the work, know what works! However, busy teachers are pressed for time.

When the [College and Career Readiness \(CCR\)](#) standards were announced, a group of teachers and education experts decided to collaborate on the development of a set of tools and resources to help teachers implement the new standards in their classrooms. The goal was to create a flexible design structure for teachers that would support the rigor of the standards yet allow teachers the freedom to design instruction that reflects their discipline and their students' specific needs. Thus, [Literacy Design Collaborative \(LDC\)](#) was born.

LDC's professional learning model features a library of standards-driven, teacher-developed tasks as well as a powerful collaborative lesson authoring environment. So how does one begin on the LDC path? It's as simple as visiting the website, opening an account and digging into the rich content already available. Once equipped with the knowledge, experience and contributions of teachers across the nation, you'll be ready to create strong and impactful curricula for your classroom.

Literacy Design Collaborative Boosts Student & Teacher Learning

Tom Vander Ark, Founder and CEO, Getting Smart

When Arturo Garcia decided to teach while earning money to attend veterinary school, little did he know that nine years later he would still be teaching and on his way to becoming one of the three literacy leaders at [Cigarroa High School](#), his alma mater. On the Mexican border three hours south of San Antonio, Cigarroa High serves about 1300 mostly Hispanic students in south Laredo.

By the time students reach high school, the assumption is that they can read and write. However, as Garcia assigned science reading and writing to his students he found they often performed poorly at one or both.

Seeking better literacy results, principal Laura Flores introduced the the CHS staff to the [Literacy Design Collaborative](#) (LDC) two years ago with implementation support from SREB. LDC is an open library of literacy lessons, each one teacher-created, standards-based and peer-reviewed. Core Tools is LDC's collaborative lesson authoring environment.

Garcia's first LDC training resulted in questions — the design-based work was different than most professional development he had experienced. He struggled through module design and didn't have enough time in the school year to implement it.

The first time he taught an LDC module he skipped key steps on the instructional ladder, again, due to limited time and it showed in the student work product. Garcia learned that reading and writing must not only be assigned, but taught following a process for learning and the emphasis on content must be shared with an equal — if not greater — emphasis on thinking through reading and writing.

As Garcia began to implement LDC in his classroom, he found that LDC had a positive effect on his students; "By improving their literacy skills, the students will be able to comprehend the content much better. This in turn will be of great benefit for performance in state assessment as well as for college readiness."

Garcia also observed that learning is multi-faceted and directly impacted by student engagement and motivation.

With LDC, Garcia also made discoveries about his own teaching. It turns out that designing engaging, standards-based learning experiences is a powerful professional learning experience. Garcia has become a facilitator of learning with LDC, extending his leadership skills to his peers.

With LDC tools and SREB's approach to professional development, Garcia will continue to co-lead school-wide literacy efforts at CHS.

Collaborative Lesson Authoring Builds Teacher Capacity Student Literacy in Grand Prairie

Tom Vander Ark, Founder and CEO, Getting Smart

“Our focus is on developing future male leaders who are college ready and college bound.” That’s the mission of the [Young Men’s Leadership Academy at Kennedy Middle School](#) in Grand Prairie ISD, a high challenge district between Dallas and Ft. Worth serving about 28,000 students in 40 schools.

To encourage close reading and better writing across the curriculum, Grand Prairie worked with SREB to introduce the [Literacy Design Collaborative \(LDC\)](#), a nonprofit offering a collection of open writing prompts and a collaborative lesson-authoring environment.

Chadd Johnson, Principal at YML last year, said, “LDC has opened that portal for teachers to question their instruction, methodology, and its effectiveness in student academic success.” Johnson captured the following teacher feedback after implementation:



Paul Blackwell is excited about including literacy instruction in Physical Education. LDC helped him develop a picture of quality work and when he doesn’t see it he encourages students to revise their work.



Ginger Matthews implemented two LDC modules and found they showed students skills they needed to master state standards. After the LDC training she said, “I am doing more modeling of what is expected for my outcome.” Ginger was also pleased to note, “Students actually give better work when using laptops.”



Ethan Hoeft and Amber Wiederhold are 8th grade English Language Arts teachers. LDC modules are an everyday event in their classrooms and they have devoted time to LDC lesson development. Amber has submitted modules for national LDC Jurying.



Canesha Roblow developed and implemented one LDC module after her SREB training. “During class, I emphasize the importance of writing and reading. I hold students accountable for their writing.” She added, “My students are writing more [and] able to recognize good writing.”

Johnson said, "LDC is not easy and the teachers, students, or administrators cannot learn it in a short time. Leadership is imperative to the success of any LDC initiative, and leaders must understand the depth and complexity of this work."

Focal points of literacy work this year have been the writing process, academic writing, inferencing, vocabulary, text complexity and assessment.

Johnson appreciates that, "The Literacy Design Collaborative is an instructional process where professional learning and student learning go hand in hand."

SREB Literacy Consultant Dixie Lee said Grand Prairie leaders were urging teachers to move away from teaching the test and toward facilitating learning by giving students the tools they need to be successful through meaningful assignments and instructional planning.

10 Benefits of Teacher Developed Curriculum

Catherine Wedgwood, Communication Manager, Getting Smart

When it comes to developing curricula, who knows students' needs better than their teachers? After all, it's the ones working directly with them on a daily basis who can best provide those outside the classroom with much needed insight into which materials, activities and specific skills to include.

The Literacy Design Collaborative (LDC) is a library of standards-driven, teacher-developed open tasks. It's also a powerful collaborative lesson-authoring environment. By contributing to the planning, creation, implementation and reflection process necessary to create strong curricula, thousands of LDC teachers have promoted their own learning as well as student learning.

Following are ten teacher observations about the benefit of curricula development using LDC and other options:

1



Promoting Complex Discussions

Cody Miller: 9th grade ELA instructor, P.K. Yonge Developmental Research School

"[My] students read, write and discuss complex ideas using a wide variety of 'texts.' And by using LDC, I'm assured that the tasks and writing align with rigorous state standards."

2

Creating Lifelong Critical Thinkers

Liam Bayer: former teacher and administrator, Baltimore City Public Schools

"We no longer live in an industrial society, but a post-industrial one that is based on information, knowledge and the selling of services. Critical thinking and creativity are going to help our students tell their story and be ready."

3

Creating Curriculum with Meaning and Purpose

Courtney Hanes: staff development specialist for grades 7-12, Riverside Virtual School

"By starting with the end, the unit project, and focusing on big picture questions while incorporating foundations, my students and I are able to make connections and see relevancy."

4



Creating an Environment of Deep Thinkers

Kara Copher: 8th grade English teacher, Greenwood Junior High School

"LDC was the means that I was looking for to measure student growth and create an environment of deep thinkers. LDC became my ticket to becoming the teacher that I want to be."

Introducing Students to Blogging While Improving Their Writing Quality

Susan Lucille Davis: 7th & 8th grade English teacher, Iolani School

5

"I have blended my previous experience with teaching writing as blogging with our [school's] more traditional writing curriculum. My hope is that this draft curriculum can serve as a transition to more vibrant and engaging writing program for today's students."



Empowering Teachers Across All Content Areas to Teach Literacy

Abbie Mahaffey: Reading/Language Arts Supervisor, Palmyra Area School District

6

"LDC has united teachers in our district through a common goal...all teachers have become teachers of literacy."

Getting Students Rolling on Needed Coding Skills

Dave Guymon: public online middle school teacher

7

"Regardless of whether you use the SPRK curriculum with fidelity or customize it to fit your students' needs, one thing is assured. Your students will learn the basic concepts of programming, robotics and math."



Making Locally-Based Lesson Writing Fun

Angela Schoon: 4th grade teacher, R.L. Stevenson Elementary School of the Arts

8

"We started working on writing our own fourth-grade LDC Module to accompany our study of entrepreneurs and inventors in Florida's history. And we liked it! We finally saw how exciting it was to get to choose the activities based on the skills and standards."

Improving Student Achievement

Ian Faley: former English teacher, Mystic Valley Regional Charter School

9

"Through the formal articulation of thought, we collaborate ideas, defend viewpoints and refine our understanding. This is the impetus behind many attempts to 'write across the curriculum.'"



Supporting Teacher Planning Sessions For Faster Results

Christina Kostaras: middle school ELL teacher, Lilla G. Frederick Pilot Middle School

10

"Whether it's getting feedback on curriculum, analyzing student work or digging deeper into a dilemma a teacher is facing, there are protocols designed to structure these important conversations. From this, I learned that authentic teacher-driven professional learning communities are a means for us to really improve adult learning and thus directly improve student learning."

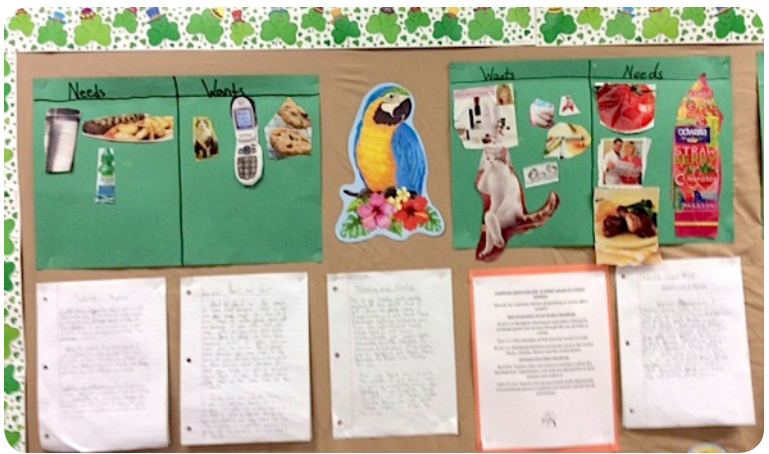
Thinking Outside the Box: Leaving “Boxed Instruction” Behind

Tracey Hertzog, 5th grade teacher, R.L. Stevenson Elementary School of the Arts

A few years ago, my principal at R.L. Stevenson Elementary School of the Arts came to me with a big idea. He was excited about a new way to design and implement standards-driven instruction and explained that we were going to be on the front lines of Literacy Design Collaborative (LDC).

This sounded intriguing, but at the same time foreign and daunting. However, I felt if there was something cutting edge out there that could help teachers and students, I needed to explore it. I had no idea what I had gotten myself into.

Shortly thereafter my principal, assistant principal and I headed to P. K. Yonge Research Lab in Gainesville, Florida, to learn more about LDC’s curriculum design system. During our three days of training, we packed information into our brains until they literally hurt. Yet there was an excited energy among our group as we grappled with our task template, debated about how to build our instructional ladder and impatiently moved through the training like the Type A personalities we are.



A “Saving and Spending” module example created by Stevenson Elementary educators

To develop a curriculum, you need the right entry point of introduction. LDC’s use of focus standards supports alignment between standards, instruction and results beginning with the development of an engaging task. It’s not about using a “scripted curriculum” either. I am in control of the text, writing products, scaffold and development of the “mini tasks.” LDC’s online design system allows me to organize what I want to teach in a sequential way, helping to build the thinking process from simple to complex by bridging reading to writing.

After the three day workshop and some additional training, I was 100% ready to implement LDC at my school. I experienced firsthand how LDC could support me in doing the work I want to do: design powerful lessons to engage my students in complex thinking and authentic work. It also meant it was time for me to train a very leery group of high-performing teachers on how to build LDC modules.

Needless to say they were excited, confused, and at times overwhelmed during our sessions. But my fellow educators want to help students grow and develop thoughts of their own based on real facts that are relevant to their lives so they continued working hard. Eventually everyone was on board and ready to implement LDC schoolwide.

A Growth Mindset

For me, professional development is about having a growth mindset where I can attempt things I have not done before while working within the structure of a curriculum design system like LDC. This has helped me develop a better roadmap for instruction, increase my students' literacy and improve their overall writing.

The Stevenson administration fosters just that environment. They encourage teachers to take risks and work outside of our comfort zones — trying things, failing at times, but always learning. This truly made all the difference for our professional development growth as we continued trying out the LDC platform.

Creating a LDC module also requires collaboration. Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) have been an integral part of our everyday work, but now we have an even more common purpose with a strict focus on instruction. We discuss, develop, create, mull over and then go back to the drawing board to perfect our instructional ladder so that greater meaning comes from how we teach and students learn at a deeper, more complex level.



Tracey directs 5th graders in a Skype video debate on solar energy vs. hydro-power

Through the hard work of our teachers on individual learning and group collaboration, as well as our administration's continued support, here we are today—an LDC Demonstration School.

The Difference For Students

Today, I walk the halls and hear words coming from our elementary students such as: DEFEND, PROVE, CITE, THINK CRITICALLY and RESEARCH. Why are students using such terms? Because LDC saturates students with many types of text, both informational and narrative on the topics it informs so they are able to defend their ideas and show others their way of thinking.

They are empowered to write passionately to support their thoughts and make their arguments persuasive. I have found that I no longer give "cookie cutter instruction." On the contrary, everything is thought out with standards in alignment to the task, mini-tasks and end product.

LDC has not only heightened my professional learning, but opened my eyes to the idea that learning should be rich, meaningful and shared with others. Last year we opened our doors to other educators to witness our students' level of engagement and interaction with each other as they wrestled with complex ideas.

As a fifth grade teacher, I was blown away by the level of enthusiasm and eagerness students had while sharing their experiences with our guests. I vividly recall their excitement describing a streaming video debate we held with another school on which energy source would best serve humankind in the future. I was impressed by how well they could articulate and explain their reasoning with detailed, persuasive knowledge. Now that is learning!

My aim moving forward is to take my team's modules through LDC's peer review process so they can be used by many schools across the country. I have come to realize how this remarkable journey has enriched my teaching by focusing on how "backward design planning" improves learning for my students.



Stevenson Elementary students volunteer to share their learning during LDC Demonstration Day

Teaching the Teacher: Lesson Planning and Powerful PD in One

Suzanne Simons, Chief of Instruction & Design, Literacy Design Collaborative

Have you ever watched a child learn to tie shoes? It's no coincidence that most children learn it (after much trying and failing) just at the point when they seek independence from adults. It begins when they realize they need their shoes for important, independent things like running and playing games on their own and their fingers finally have the motor control to wrap and pull those laces tight.

Vygotsky called this moment the Zone of Proximal Development (ZDP), and teachers spend their days seeking each students' ZDP in order to provide them with the right scaffolding to acquire new knowledge and expertise. These learning moments are often magical for both teachers and students in the way they combine apparent ease of learning with just the right amount of productive struggle.

Literacy Design Collaborative (LDC) tools work a lot like the shoe-tying analogy. They were developed to provide teachers with a way to intentionally create more of those extraordinary moments with their students by providing just the right amount of scaffolding for teacher planning. The reward is two-fold: Students acquire necessary literacy skills as they learn the content and have fun in the process. Additionally, teachers learn new things about their own instructional craft and have fun collaborating with their peers.

Saturn Elementary School and LDC

Della and Tiffany are teachers at [Saturn Elementary School](#) in Los Angeles Unified School District. They began using LDC to teach close reading to their Kindergarten and fifth-grade students and then moved on to writing longer reading-to-text assignments, building enduring skills from one lesson to the next.

By meeting weekly in their professional learning community, these teachers discovered something far beyond lesson planning: The weekly collaboration around their LDC planning work was helping them get "unstuck" as teachers.

"We were so used to doing things the way we always had and I think I was really stuck," said Tiffany. "Working with my teaching partners has helped me become inspired again, because I'm learning so much while I'm doing my lesson planning."

Student Instruction and Professional Development Tool

What LDC offers Della, Tiffany and teachers like them across the country is a system of tools that not only helps them provide more critical moments of instruction for their students' learning, but for their own as well.

Using the LDC tools to plan for student learning builds teachers' own skills, fosters their developing competencies and helps them have the same magical moments of struggle and learning they are creating for their students. For these teachers, LDC serves a double purpose: nurturing learning in themselves while nurturing learning in their students.

LDC assignment templates are fill-in-the-blank prompts that teachers use to write sturdy, standards-driven assignment tasks for their students. Because the templates contain the cognitive demands highlighted and privileged in academic standards, teachers can be assured their students will be thinking critically and deeply when working on an LDC assignment. And because the structure of the prompts requires that interesting content be combined with engaging questions, students thrill at the chance to learn new content with the right amount of support.

Teaching is also how a teacher learns, and to continue doing their work well they must improve and refine their skills. They are needed in the classroom though, which makes going outside the school for professional learning a challenge. With LDC they can plan, teach, tie their shoes, guide students in tying their own and move together from one extraordinary moment to another. LDC is helping teachers learn while doing the regular work of teaching. What could be better?

Conclusion

Catherine Wedgwood, Communication Manager, Getting Smart

Excite. Enrich. Empower. This is how teachers engage students in powerful learning experiences. But no matter the subject, the ability to learn involves basic literacy skills and the educators developing curricula must take into account that:

- 34% of children entering kindergarten lack the basic language skills needed to read, especially minorities and those living in poverty.
- 65% of fourth graders read at or below the basic level. As the curriculum advances, these children will fall behind.
- A lack of academic success contributes to the reasons why more than 8,000 high school students drop out of school every day.

Source: Reading Is Fundamental



Creating a curriculum that builds students' literacy skills in tandem with their understanding of science, social studies and other important academic content is obviously not an easy task, which is why LDC was created by teachers for teachers. By helping educators better prepare students to meet the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) across curricula it helps them succeed beyond high school in college and careers.

The following video shows a real-life example of how a teacher and LDC instructional coach co-authored an Industrial Revolution module, as well as student interviews on how well it worked for them in the classroom:

How It Works

The basic LDC building block is a module—one to four weeks of instruction comprised of a student performance task, and other instructional elements described below. Using LDC's instructional design system, teachers develop a literacy-rich performance task and instruction to help students create written products in response to reading.

LDC puts educators in the lead by providing a common design system upon which teachers can individually or collaboratively build literacy-saturated curricula within their content area and for their focus topics. Teachers work collaboratively, with instructional coaches at their school and through LDC's network of partner organizations to develop their skills and the skills of their students.

1. **Teaching Task:** The student performance task teachers design using LDC templates aligns with the CCRS.
2. **Skills List:** Engages teachers in backward mapping to identify the reading, writing and thinking skills students will need to complete that task.
3. **Instructional Plan:** Teachers create or select predesigned student activities or “mini-tasks” with instructional strategies that develop students’ literacy skills and guide them toward completion of the teaching task.
4. **Results:** Shows sample student responses to the task and how those pieces scored on an LDC rubric, as well as an option for teachers to design a summative assessment of the teaching task.

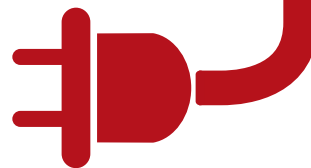
For each step, LDC’s professional learning model offers tools, supports and examples and then invites teachers to make the professional choices that create effective designs for rich student learning. Emerging research from the past few years has confirmed preliminary findings: LDC leads to instructional shifts and improved student outcomes. In addition, the collaboration between teachers across the nation provides deeper, more meaningful professional development and ultimately, sustainable school transformation.

The current generation of students is the first to have such advanced technology at their fingertips. It is important that teachers also benefit from this advantage, for their own growth in the classroom to better support their students.

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