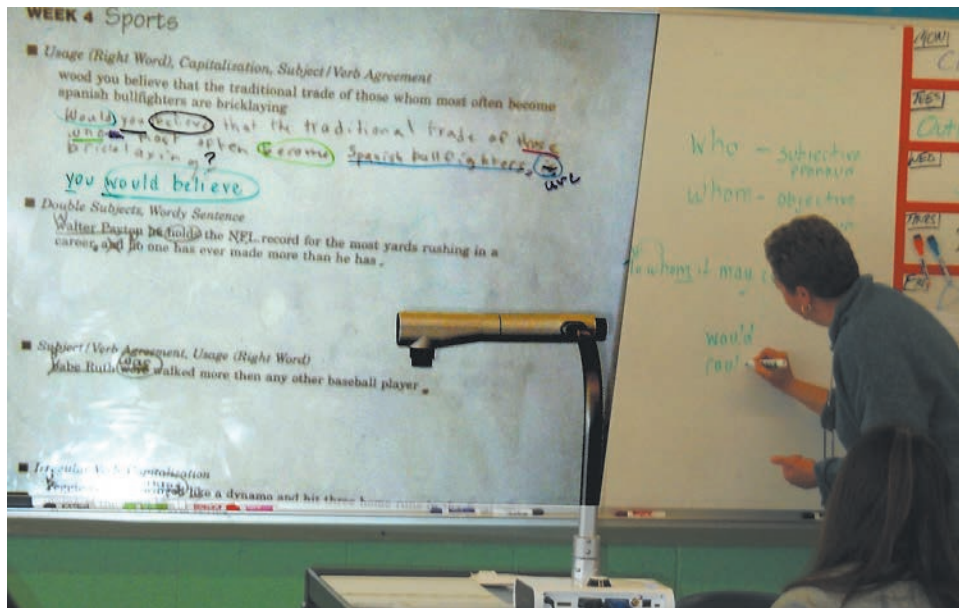


English Language Arts in the Lexington Public Schools



Eighth grade English teacher Rebecca Gruber teaching sentence structure with student work projected by the ELMO document camera. Photo by Paula Antonevich



Collaborative work on the SMART table in Ms. Baranofsky's first grade classroom at Bridge. Photo by Ann Boese

Reading, writing, and arithmetic are the traditional core of education; in our media-rich, technology-powered world, the language arts – reading, writing, and critical thinking – have a central role in the curriculum. This year, LEF has funded grants that open the world of books and thought to our children.

This summer, teachers from Bowman Elementary School attended the Donald Durrell Reading and Writing Clinic at Boston University, a highly regarded program that 2nd grade teacher Rosanne Barbacano describes as having “a rich history of addressing the needs of struggling readers.” She adds, “Our experience there has carried over into our own practices.”

Christina Shin, an 8th grade language arts teacher at Clarke attended an intensive course on Shakespearean drama at Cambridge University. “Having studied his plays more carefully ... I have a greater sense of how they are produced, all of which help as I direct my students in A Midsummer

Night's Dream.

Innovative technology has an increasing role in teaching language arts. LEF is funding a fun, highly regarded tool for kindergarten classrooms. With the interactive ‘touch technology’ surface of child-sized classroom ‘SMART’ tables, groups of children work on collaborative projects ranging from word sorts to multiple-choice questions. Bridge School kindergarten teacher, Kristen Baranofsky says, “The greatest benefit of using technology in the classroom is that we are

preparing students for a technology-driven world ... starting this foundation early helps students’ success in later grades.”

Diamond 8th grade teacher Rebecca Gruber is using document cameras – real-time image-capture devices that can be used to immediately and easily project a student’s paragraph, the pages of a book, or even a relevant three-dimensional object to the entire class – to teach “making sense of text.” The greatest benefit of the document camera is that she can share her thinking process in the moment. With the text up on the board, she can write notes, zoom in on a passage, and highlight text – the process of critical thinking made tangible in real-time.

For today’s students, ‘text’ comes from many sources, not just English anthologies or textbooks. Students have greater access to primary sources, web documents, and a wide range of audio-visual media. How to actively engage with information, whatever its form, is essential in language arts. The curriculum needs to keep pace with change.

Reading specialist Meghan Giannetto and literacy teacher Mathew Saraca are developing a ‘content literacy’ curriculum for 7th and 8th grade students at Diamond. Their goal – to create a program that teaches students to transfer the skills they learn in language arts classes into other coursework. Students learn how to navigate textbooks and ask questions that draw on the text and their prior knowledge. Their approach is lively and engaging. For example, the class examines commercials – a ubiquitous form of ‘language’ in contemporary life –for underlying messages, along the way learning about inference and context. They apply their new skills to a textbook. Whether the course is biology or geography, the skill set is the same.

Along with great teachers, with tools and curriculum in place, there is one element always needed in language arts

education: books. Students need to read and enjoy others reading to them. Elementary teachers and librarians (and parents) read to children. Now the librarians in the Lexington school system have another option: audio books.

Through an LEF grant, the Lexington Public School libraries have begun developing a collection of ‘playaways’, audio books preloaded onto ‘MP3’-style players – easy for even the youngest students to use. Like any books, children and teachers check them out from the library. Books range from childhood classics to the latest children’s fiction.

Why have children listen to rather than read a book? Hearing text that is above their reading level stretches their skills. Listening to a book improves comprehension, expands vocabulary, and increases the fluency with which they can read.

The goal of language arts education is to create discerning readers and communicators. LEF is proud to be the conduit of community support that makes these innovative, creative



Compact and portable, the MP3-style audio book, a Playaway, of Roald Dahl's Charlie and the Chocolate Factory. Photo by Ann Boese

opportunities possible for Lexington’s teachers.

LEF is supported by contributions from individuals, families and area businesses. For over two decades, LEF has served as a conduit for community support, providing more than \$3.3 million in private funding to Lexington’s nine public schools.

Save the Date A Celebration for Education to be held April 2, 2011

Please support LEF by attending A Celebration for Education, Saturday, April 2, 2011, at the Westin Waltham, 70 Third Avenue, Waltham. Proceeds from the annual fundraiser help to bring innovative instruction and new technology into the classroom to improve student learning. For more information about the event, please contact LEF at 781-372-3288 or www.lexedfoundation.org.