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May 5, 2003

CTSE 4150

Manipulating Status in a Complex Instruction Classroom

Introduction

In January of 2003, I began a four-month journey in teaching the expressive English language arts. Two of my peers (Courtney and Jessica) and I were presented with the task of planning, designing, and implementing a unit to teach to a seventh grade Honors English class at Opelika Middle School (OMS) based on a set of principles called Complex Instruction (C.I.). Learning about C.I. and the principles it is based upon showed me an effective way to increase interaction among students, giving all students access to learning. Experiencing teaching a C.I. unit at OMS, observing my cooperating teacher, Ms. Cathy Buckhalt, and studying C.I. taught me how to effectively evaluate and manipulate status in order to create better learning environments for my students.

The Profession of Teaching

I am not exactly sure what or whom I expected to find at OMS my first day observing Ms. Cathy Buckhalt's classes. What I found was a tiny woman, barely five feet tall, greeting six of my peers and me with a smile and handshake, "Hi, I'm Ms. Buckhalt, but my students call me Ms. B." Ms. B's a seventh- grade teacher at Opelika Middle School with an insatiable hunger in her eyes for teaching. She is a gentle, soft-spoken woman that commands respect from her students in class because she gives them that same respect.

One thing that I learned in the first few minutes I had known Ms. B was that she was always prepared. Once we made our introductions and shook hands, she got down to business. She placed in each of our hands a two-page handout, one page listing students' names and the other a list of

reminders for the student teachers. The list of reminders appears in the Appendix. Among the reminders were that writing workshop was not quiet and that we were encouraged to walk around and interact with the students. After she gave us the handout, Ms. B told us up front that the students were her first priority; she was going to get done what she needed to get done. When we entered the classroom, she introduced all of us as “new friends” before showing us exactly what she meant when she said that writing workshop was not quiet.

I had never witnessed a writing workshop quite like the one I saw that day and would soon be seeing frequently. I had never seen students so willing and eager to share their work with their peers before. One particular day, writing workshop began with Ms. B behind the projector, sharing her own writing. The students were learning about persuasive writing. She reminded students that it would be wise to choose a topic that they felt very strongly about for that particular assignment, just like she did. She showed students how she had begun her essay with a question to introduce the essay and told them a question was a great way to start a persuasive essay. Using her essay, she then showed them how to support their argument by numbering her three supportive sentences in the body of the essay. She even told students where she would be taking her discussion of the topic past the first few paragraphs.

Once Ms. B had modeled her own writing, she gave students their instructions: students that wanted help could raise their hands and those that did not could begin working on their essays. I heard students say things like: “I am having trouble with a transition from my second paragraph to my third paragraph,” “I need a new introduction,” and “I am stuck here and don’t know where to go next.” Once students let their peers and Ms. B know exactly what help they needed, students read aloud their writing. Other students began making suggestions about how to improve that student’s paper. For the most part, Ms. B let students help each other; sometimes she made suggestions, but

other times she did not. She made sure that a student received the help he or she needed in order to work on the essay before moving onto the next person's paper.

Once everyone that desired help from the entire class received it, Ms. B allowed the students to get to work. Ms. B helped students in small groups as well as one-on-one. The only way I can describe the setting is organized chaos. Everyone was working on and talking about writing. I was amazed at the nurturing atmosphere Ms. B had created in her classroom. The atmosphere was full of writing and poetry. Ms. B always encouraged *every* student. No students were given preferential treatment because she expected the best from everyone.

Another thing I noticed about Ms. B was that there was never a moment when she was not teaching. She took every opportunity to nudge her students as well as us toward learning moments. I frequently saw her work mini-grammar lessons into lectures and whole-class discussions. At the beginning of each class, Ms. B gave students what was called a planner message. Each student in the class had a personal planner. Ms. B read aloud what each student was supposed to write down in his or her planner in order to prepare for classes and homework for the next day or week. All planner messages were in complete sentences. When Ms. B read them aloud, she talked about the punctuation in the sentences such as commas, semicolons, and periods. An example planner message was: "I need to study my outlines for persuasive (comma), descriptive (comma), and expository writing (semicolon); the Writing Assessment is next week." Following each punctuation mark, she asked why that particular punctuation was appropriate for that sentence. Student volunteers were called upon to answer. Ms. B had incorporated a mini-grammar lesson into a routine each day that takes only five minutes. She also told us that she does the same using textbooks and students' own writing. After one hour teaching students, I was exhausted. I cannot imagine what it must be like for Ms. B to teach nonstop for eight hours each day!

Ms. B always encouraged us to ask her questions and discuss with her anything pertaining to the students. During our first visit to OMS, students were working on a writing assignment. Just like Ms. B had encouraged, the other student teachers and I walked around and interacted with the students. Another team member (Courtney) and I got stuck attempting to help a student with his paper; we had no idea how to help him. After class, we told Ms. B about the incident. She told us that when we get stuck in the future, to ask the student to see his assignment instructions and go from there. That particular time, as well as any other time I had a question, I did not feel as if I were a nuisance to Ms. B. I could tell that she genuinely loved talking to us about her students and teaching because she had such a passion and love for them both.

Ms. B's form of discipline and classroom management was subtle. It was difficult to keep the chaos organized, but she did so flawlessly. Occasionally a student talked without raising his or her hand or became disruptive. All Ms. B had to do was to give that student what I call "The Look." When Ms. B gave students her Look, she had a look of disappointment on her face. Students knew right away that she was disappointed in their behavior. All it took was Ms. B's "You know better than to do that" Look and students corrected their behavior. Ms. B's other means of subtle discipline was in regards to getting the students' attention. In the environment that she had facilitated, student interaction was always going on. Lots of energetic talk can get loud in a classroom of seventh graders! So loud, in fact, that Ms. B's small voice often got lost among it. When the noise was too loud for her voice to be heard, Ms. B would simply raise her hand above her head. The students knew that this was the signal that they needed to be quiet and pay attention. She would just wait patiently with her arm raised for the students to be quiet.

There were extreme cases where even the arm and hand raise above the head would not work. In other cases, Ms. B was running short of time and could not wait for students to notice her

and be quiet on their own. In both those cases, she would walk quietly over to the light switch and flip one or more switches off in the room. This was a way for her to communicate in a nonverbal way (quickly) that she needed them to be quiet and pay attention. During our unit, I found myself (as well as the other members of my team) using some of Ms. B's behavior management tactics in the classroom. I learned that trying to yell over the noise would tire my voice out quickly. It was more effective to raise my hand or flip the light switch off.

Ms. B said almost everyone in her family was a teacher. Two of her grandmothers were teachers. One of her uncles taught at Auburn University before teaching at Georgia Southwestern. Ms. B's father also taught at Auburn University for 36 years. Despite a lineage in education, Ms. B did not initially want to be a teacher; she wanted to be a flight attendant. Fortunately for her students, Ms. B was too short according to airline regulations. Now she travels in her spare time. (Buckhalt¹)

Ms. B always knew that she would not have children of her own. Nevertheless, she said, "For some reason kids and I get along well together." As a student at Auburn High School, Ms. B got involved with her future teachers organization and began tutoring. When she began college at Auburn University, she decided to double major because she loved history but could not escape her love of writing. While still at Auburn, Ms. B got a job at Auburn Junior High School as a tutor where she both spent her internship and got her first job. (Buckhalt)

Ms. B's love of travel led her to Nashville, Tennessee, where she taught high school for three years. Upon leaving Tennessee, Ms. B moved back to her home state of California, where she taught students that had attempted suicide or had been living with severe drug problems at an alternative school at the University of California in Los Angeles for two years. Ms. B describes the job at UCLA as the best job she ever had, "a real eye opener." In 1976, she moved back to Alabama

¹ Buckhalt, Cathy. Personal interview. 29 Jan. 2003. A transcript appears in the Appendix.

to begin graduate school at Auburn University and teach at Opelika Middle School, where she has taught ever since. (Buckhalt)

These days, Ms. B's day starts quite early. She arrives at school early each morning, usually around 7 a.m., so her students have a place to go in the mornings to eat breakfast, participate in study groups, socialize, and share writing. Ms. B wants to make sure that her students "have a place to study and get help." The middle school format and the small teaching team Ms. B is on allow her classroom to be part of a tight-knit community, no small feat in a large school of about 1100 students like OMS. Ms. B likes to think of it as a family. She says, "We do know as a school that the smaller the community, the better for the students." Ms. B's "family" even eats lunch together in the cafeteria. She says, "It's like family time, and the most rewarding [thing] is talking with them, reading with them, writing with them before the day actually starts." (Buckhalt)

During her planning period, Ms. B keeps busy. She has many meetings she must attend that contribute to the impact she has on her students' lives. Ms. B attends meetings with the other seventh grade teachers to plan field trips and the like. She is also required to plan with her teaching team at least twice a month to integrate curriculum among all subjects. Ms. B must attend double the departmental meetings because she teaches both history and English language arts. She also meets with the principal and guidance counselor to attend to students with special needs. Aside from meetings, Ms. B must keep detailed records in her lesson plans that identify Alabama State Standards and S.A.T. objectives met by each activity. The detailed record keeping is Ms. B's least favorite part of teaching, and she says that will be the reason she decides to retire when she does so. Ms. B says, "It's become just a concrete effort other than an imaginative, fun effort to create a lesson. That hampers us." (Buckhalt)

Education is constantly changing. Increasing demands on teachers by means of the State Standards, the S.A.T., the Graduation Exit Exam, and the Alabama Writing Assessment requirements force teachers to constantly modify their curriculum. Yet with all of the demands on teachers today, Ms. B has managed to create a learning environment that fosters growth. I have never been in a classroom environment where students were so willing to share their writing, without hesitation, and to help each other grow as writers—especially in my own experience as a seventh grade English language arts student. Ms. B believes students leave her classroom unafraid of writing, unlike her own experience. She says, “I have feedback from some of the students that they feel much more confident because of the work they did here.” After spending four months observing her as a teacher, I do not doubt for a second Ms. B’s impact on her students. I asked a student once, “Do you like being in Ms. B’s class?” Without hesitation, she replied, “We do a lot of work, but it doesn’t feel like it.” (Buckhalt)

Classroom Structures

In order to identify status, we gave students in Ms. Buckhalt’s seventh grade Honors English language arts class a questionnaire. Determining the status order in a classroom is extremely helpful when planning a unit in which students will perform group tasks. We needed to know the status of each student in the classroom in order to understand which students his or her peers perceived as more or less competent. We needed to know status order in order to plan how to manipulate it so low status students would be given optimal learning experiences along with higher status students. For one question, students were provided with a list of each student in the class and were asked to identify the best writers. The results from that question show academic status in the classroom. Students were also asked to identify their fellow classmates that they would like to sit with on a field

trip. The results from that question show social status in the classroom. The results combined from the questions show students' overall status in the classroom.

Twenty-eight students were surveyed. One of the students surveyed (Anthony) was transferred out of Ms. B's class before we began teaching our unit [All the middle school students' names are pseudonyms]. Also, two African-American females, Evelyn and Antionette, were transferred into the class following the questionnaire but before we began teaching our unit. We had no status information about these two students but had to place them in groups for the unit anyway. Students were placed into quintiles based on number of times they were named in each category. We tried to divide up quintiles evenly. However, many students received the same number of votes in some categories, therefore some quintiles are unevenly distributed. The following tables show the results from the questionnaire with students divided into quintiles for each particular type of status and number of times each student was named in parentheses ():

Table 1: Academic Status

1st Quintile	2nd Quintile	3rd Quintile	4th Quintile	5th Quintile
Lucy (18) Star (15) Lacrecia (14) Anika (12)	Tom (10) Jack (10) Stephen (8) Tracy (5) Hillary (4)	Jeff (3) Sanford (3) Elizabeth (3) Jasmine (3) Jane (3) Stefan (3)	Lucas (1) Judy (1) Kim (1) Bill (1) Yvonne (1) Anthony (1)	Lauren (0) Charles (0) Richard (0) Christy (0) Lindsay (0) Susan (0) Daniel (0)

Table 2: Social Status

1 st Quintile	2 nd Quintile	3 rd Quintile	4 th Quintile	5 th Quintile
Star (9) Lacrecia (7) Anika (6) Richard (6) Stefan (6) Susan (6) Tracy (6) Tom (6) Jack (6)	Lucas (5) Yvonne (5) Lindsay (5) Daniel (5)	Judy (4) Kim (4) Elizabeth (4) Lucy (4) Jane (4)	Hillary (3) Jeff (3) Sanford (3) Bill (3) Stephen (2) Christy (2)	Lauren (1) Charles (1) Anthony (1) Jasmine (0)

Table 3: Overall Status

1 st Quintile	2 nd Quintile	3 rd Quintile	4 th Quintile	5 th Quintile
Star (24) Lucy (22) Lacrecia (21) Anika (18) Tom (16) Jack (16)	Tracy (11) Stephen (10) Stefan (9) Hillary (7) Elizabeth (7) Jane (7)	Lucas (6) Jeff (6) Sanford (6) Richard (6) Yvonne (6) Susan (6)	Judy (5) Kim (5) Lindsay (5) Daniel (5) Bill (4)	Jasmine (3) Christy (2) Anthony (2) Lauren (1) Charles (1)

Anika and Star appear in the top quintile in all three status measurements. Many students that had high academic status had lower social status, and vice versa. For example, Lucy appeared in the top quintile in academic status but only the third quintile in social status; however, her extremely high academic status score placed her in the first quintile overall in the classroom. What is interesting about Lucy is that she received the highest academic status placement among her peers, but Ms. Buckhalt describes her as having “poor skill development” (Buckhalt). By contrast, Anika’s appearance in the top quintile of academic status is congruent with Ms. B’s description of her being one of the best writers in the class. Students recognized Anika’s abilities despite her quietness but mistook Lucy’s outgoing personality as competence.

Ms. B talked at length about Anika, calling her “magic” (Buckhalt). I learned that Anika is a well-rounded student; she does extremely well in all academic classes, participates in choir, tutors her peers, is a gifted dancer, and is a skilled player on the girls’ volleyball team. The fact that Anika is such a well-rounded student could be an indicator of why she appeared in the top quintile in each

category. Likewise, I learned that Star is a member of the OMS Pep Squad; that could account for her high social status together with high academic status.

Jack was another interesting case. He appears in the second quintile for academic status. However, my own experiences with Jack as well as Ms. B's observations about him contrast with his peers' observations about his academic status. Jack is an extremely intelligent student. Where Ms. B called Anika "magic," she said Jack is "double magic" (Buckhalt). They listen to National Public Radio together, discuss political cartoons, and argue about current events of the world. Above that, Jack is an excellent writer and student. I know that students also know he is a competent writer. Once, a girl said to me, pointing at Jack, "You see that guy over there? Jack? He's so smart. He knows every word in the dictionary." However, Jack also has a great sense of humor and was always extremely vocal during class, which could account for his appearance in the top quintile in social status. His high social status could have actually worked against him in the academic status category.

Discipline

After the first few visits to Ms. B's class at OMS, I began to notice how discipline works in her classroom, especially with regard to misbehavior as a means to gain status. We typically observed on Friday afternoons during the last class period of the day. So, naturally, the students were more rambunctious than usual. They had finished the work that needed to be done for the day and the week and wanted to start their weekends early. Furthermore, seventh graders are by nature energetic even if it is not on a Friday afternoon. I know from my experience as a seventh grader!

Most of the Fridays we were there, the students would be working on their writing. During writing workshop, it was not uncommon to find students talking with each other and moving around the room. Students who needed help asked for it from Ms. B and their peers. Ms. B made sure we knew before experiencing a workshop that the students wrote when they felt like they were ready to

write, even if it was in the middle of a workshop. Ms. B fully understands that a more traditional or strict form of classroom management may not necessarily be the best option for her classroom; students can learn in organized chaos. The organized chaos bothered me at first because I was accustomed to a classroom situation in which the teacher stands and talks while the students listen.

As I began to get to know the students, I paid close attention to their peers' perceptions of them in relation to how they interacted with each other in class. I paid particular attention to Star, a popular African-American female on the school's pep squad. In the interview with Ms. B, Star was never mentioned. However, Star scored in the top quintile in both academic and social status, making her our highest ranked student overall. I became interested to learn exactly what made the other students in the class perceive her as being so competent. Watching her interact with the other student teachers as well as with other students, I noticed what I call a "too cool" attitude. She constantly rolled her eyes at the student teachers, their directions and attempts at classroom management. During the C.I. rotations, she often took a leadership role. When other students were talking, she would often interrupt them and make them feel inferior. In one of our planning meetings, a student teacher remarked, "I am beginning to see why Star has such a high ranking because she seems 'too cool' for everything and everyone." I agreed. Adolescents think defiance of authority is "cool." Any student that acts out against authority of any kind will have a higher status in the classroom according to his or her peers.

Another student I was interested in watching was Stefan, a popular, athletic African-American male on the baseball team. He was a concern to both of the teaching teams in Ms. B's

classroom because he appeared to be consistently disengaged from the rest of the class. We had no clue how he would work in a group task setting. However, Stefan appeared in the second quintile overall, after appearing in the third academic quintile and first social quintile. I was, to say the least, intrigued. After watching him react in the group, he appeared disengaged, just as I had feared. The other student teachers and I thought we had an untreated status problem on our hands but had no idea what to do about it. We tried to get Stefan involved, but none of our efforts seemed to work. During the first rotation, I noticed Stefan had his head down on his desk and seemed disengaged from the other members of his group working on a skit. I inquired about their skit and asked what each member would be doing for the presentation to the class. I made sure to try to disguise what I was doing. I have always known that kids are smarter than adults give them credit for; I knew they would catch onto what I was doing if I appeared to be spying on Stefan. From their answers and my own observations, I was convinced Stefan was participating in the group only as much as he wanted to and was not being shut out of the task by the other members of his group.

Still concerned and a bit confused, I asked Ms. B about Stefan's behavior the next day before the class came into the room. She shook her head and told me, "Don't fall into Stefan's trap." She assured me that he is smart and participates only as much as he wants. No one can make him do anything he has no desire to do. Still unsure about what she was telling me, I asked her if there was anything that my group members or I could do to get Stefan to participate more in his group. The only advice she gave us was that he would have probably preferred not to be in a group with all girls. Stefan was in the only group that had only one boy. This fact had not even occurred to me. Since it was too late to change the groups around, we decided there was nothing more we could do for Stefan. In the end, I trusted Ms. B's insight about Stefan but later found out for myself Stefan is just quiet. He loves to socialize with his friends and is a wonderful poet. In fact, for his pretest, I

was pleased to see that he had created a poem from his revision of the vague sentences. Stefan does not like to make his efforts public. I assume it is part of his tough, athletic basketball player persona. He wants to appear “cool” to his peers. Stefan participates in his own way. During the presentations that his group did on each day of the rotation, he always took active parts, acting as the sound engineer in one and a mountain in the other.

A few other students used joking around in class as a means to get attention and (I assume) to gain status in the class. Two of the students that exhibited this type of behavior were Bill and Jack. Bill was a African-American male with a smile that lights up the room. When reading aloud during class, Bill had a soft voice and often mumbled. When answering questions, I often had to ask him to repeat himself so I could hear and clearly understand him. Despite his soft voice, Bill was always the first to raise his hand to be a volunteer or to answer questions. Bill was always looking for attention. During the other teaching team’s rotations, I noticed Bill walking around with not just his own role badge on, but all of the other role badges for his team as well. When I asked him why he had all of the role badges around his neck, he just smiled knowingly and said, “Because they [the other teachers] said that if anybody wanted an extra role to take one.” Bill knew what the other student teachers had meant and was just trying to show off in his group.

In seventh grade, it is not exactly the “coolest” thing to be known as the nerd or smart kid. To avoid social suicide, Jack goofed off in class. He was always quick with smart comments during class, often cracking the class up. I believe this is a reason why he did not rank highest in academic status. Instead of using misbehavior as a way to gain academic status, Jack used his outgoing personality to hide his intelligence from his peers and perhaps elevated his social status in the process.

Complex Instruction

Getting Started & Content

Once students' perceptions of their peers' academic and social status were calculated and evaluated, my teaching team was ready to begin crafting our Complex Instruction unit. Ms. B had expressed an interest in us creating a unit on revision of student writing. We had also noticed during our interactions with students that they had trouble with descriptive language in their writing, particularly with words. For example, one student had to call me over to her desk because she did not know what the word *devours* meant. Based on our own observations as well as Ms. B's insight of her students' needs, we decided to make revision of words the Big Idea for our unit, specifically revision of words in the context of "Show, not Tell."

Dr. Whyte and Ms. B pointed us to a great resource for the development of our unit, Georgia Heard's *The Revision Toolbox: Teaching Techniques that Work*. Courtney and I were already familiar with Heard's concept of teaching poetry with a toolbox metaphor and loved it, so we decided to each take a look at what Heard had to say about revision. Instead of teaching students terms about poetry or revision, Heard suggests teaching them as skills, or tools, to put in their own "toolboxes" to use with their writing. The idea that we decided we liked the best about revision of words was about cracking them open, much like a geode is cracked open to reveal a crystal (Heard 11). Words can be "cracked open" much like the geode to reveal more interesting and vivid words.

When we had decided upon our big idea, the next step was to begin creating the six group tasks needed for our unit. The first principle of Complex Instruction is to create "differentiated

and non-routine tasks,” which include those that incorporate multiple groups and materials; are open-ended and involve discovery; give students varied opportunities to understand the central concept; and elicit multiple abilities (Whyte, 12 Feb. 2003). According to class discussion and lecture, the four criteria for a good group task are multiple intellectual abilities, uncertainty, group responsibility and individual accountability, and conceptual redundancy. Our group knew that we wanted to make our group tasks seem fun and interesting to the students. We knew we wanted to create group tasks that would use multiple abilities such as dramatic and artistic abilities. We also knew that each group task would revolve around vague sentences that the students would be required to revise and then present to the class in a presentation, each presentation taking on a different form such as graphic or skit. The following is a chart showing directions and descriptions of the six group activities for our unit:

Table 4: Group Tasks

Activity	Description	Group Task Instructions
1	The Wonderdogs' Dating Game	As a group, create a dating game drama to “sell” a member or members of your group (or be creative by choosing a celebrity or inventing a character) as a presentation for the entire class. Remember to use descriptive words that show the qualities of the person, not just tell them.
2	Building Description	<i>The structure is big.</i> The sentence above tells a boring fact. Discuss as a group the many different possibilities for what the writer may be trying to say. As a group, revise the sentence into at least one paragraph describing the structure. Then, create a model that reflects your revised description. Be sure to show what you tell, and be prepared to read your writing with your presentation.
3	Show with Song	<i>The rain makes me think of sad times.</i> As a group, discuss and decide upon possibilities for answers to the above questions and revision to the sentence. The sentence, <i>The rain makes me think of sad times</i> , needs vivid words to help the reader know what the writer is trying to say. As a group, discuss potential plans for revision as well as the tone or mood you want to create with your revision. Write a new song that shows instead of <i>tells</i> . Present your revision in the form of a song or read it to the class using music. Remember to think about the

To accompany the activities, students needed resources. For four of the group tasks, (1, 2, 3, and 6), we created resource cards. The following shows the information that was on the resource cards and the resources placed in each group's activity box:

		different types of music, such as jazz, rap, country, rock 'n' roll, pop, classical, rhythm & blues, punk, metal, and hip-hop, and the tones, or mood, that each type of music conveys.
4	Drawing Words	<i>The house is near the mountains.</i> The sentence tells a boring fact. Discuss the possibilities for what the writer could mean. As a group, revise the sentence to show the reader what you mean using descriptive language. Then, prepare a graphic representation of your revision and present it to the class. Make sure your reporter is prepared to read your revision to the class along with the presentation of your graphic.
5	Acting Out	<i>The food is good.</i> As a group, create a drama that shows the boring fact instead of telling it. You are at a restaurant attempting to make your customers want the food. "Sell" the food to your customers as well as your audience, the entire class. Set the scene for us. Your reporter should be prepared to tell us how you arrived at your interpretation.
6	A Revision Map	<i>I got up. I got ready. I went to school.</i> Revise the series of sentences above. You are late for school and must make up an excuse at the front office. Be convincing. Make sure you show someone getting ready for school with your words. Pay attention to every step of your revision process. Then, create a diagram/map/graphic that shows the steps of that process. You will present this to the entire class along with your revision of the sentences.

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Table 5: Resources

Activity	Description	Resources
1	The Wonderdogs' Dating Game	Description of Kate Hudson from March 2003 issue of <i>Cosmopolitan</i> , Chart showing difference between <i>showing</i> and <i>telling</i> , Description of Scarlett O'Hara from <i>Gone with the Wind</i>
2	Building Description	Descriptions of buildings from <i>Gathering Blue</i> and <i>The Hound of the Baskervilles</i>
3	Show with Song	Blues song written by a high school senior
4	Drawing Words	Drawings and picture books
5	Acting Out	Menus from different local restaurants
6	A Revision Map	Description of a process: getting out of winter outerwear

To foster individual accountability, Individual Reports (IRs) were developed. Students would be required to complete an IR for every rotation of the unit. The IRs were to reflect what the student had learned from each rotation. The following shows the instructions from each IR for the unit:

Table 6: Individual Reports

Activity	Description	IR Instructions
1	The Wonderdogs' Dating Game	<p>Write a thorough description of a person. This person may be someone who you admire, a teacher, mentor, coach, peer, or anyone else who has made a personal impact on your life; someone who you do not particularly care for, an enemy, a bully, etc.; or someone who you now realize that you have not paid much attention. Truly think about the person you have chosen and use words that show the reader this person rather than simply tell about this person. Discuss not only his/her physical characteristics but also his/her personality characteristics. Make sure that you proofread your work through the eyes of the reader to ensure that, as the reader, you can truly "see" the person through your description. Avoid words such as "big," "tall," "pretty," or "blonde" because these words do not truly create an image for the reader. Use metaphors, similes, and strong synonyms that portray a strong image.</p>
2	Building Description	<p><i>The plant has big leaves and lots of large roots.</i></p> <p>The above sentence uses many words that do not convey strong images. Can you identify these words? Think critically about these words and write a paragraph explaining why these words do not create strong images. Think about possible synonyms for these words and identify these in your paragraph. Explain why these words might be a better choice for this sentence in order to create a stronger image.</p>
3	Show with Song	<p>Think about your favorite kind of music and your favorite song. Think about this song and the various tones that it expresses. Does it use metaphor? Write a short paragraph explaining why you think that these tones are presented in this song. Include particular words or phrases that convey strong images for you, the listener.</p>
4	Drawing Words	<p><i>The flowers are pretty</i></p> <p>Revise the sentence above so that the reader can actually "see" the flowers. Make sure that you use vivid words and phrases (Example: metaphors and similes) that thoroughly describe the flowers so that the reader feels as if he/she is actually looking at it. Using imagery, then draw a picture of a bouquet that reflects your description.</p>

		Draw the bouquet either on the back of this sheet of paper or use a separate sheet of paper and attach it to the back of this sheet.
5	Acting Out	<p><i>The food is good.</i></p> <p>The above sentence is the same sentence that is presented in the activity. Think about this sentence. Do any strong and vivid memories form in your mind? Briefly describe a time in your life when you ate or drank something that you really enjoyed. Thoroughly describe the food or drink so that the reader feels as if he/she is experiencing the food or drink just as you once experienced it. Make sure that you use words and phrases that express exactly what you are thinking. Remember, it may be necessary to write and revise several drafts of your description in order to create an image that appeals to the reader.</p>
6	A Revision Map	<p><i>I had a lot of fun.</i></p> <p>The above sentence is in desperate need of revision! Think about this sentence and the image that comes to mind when you read it. Thoughtfully revise the sentence so that it conveys a strong image to the reader and describes exactly the image that formed in your mind. Make your own revision that shows the process that you went through to revise this sentence. Include your final revision at the end of your revision map.</p>

The entire “Cracking Open Words” unit appears in the Appendix.

Pre-test

On the first day of our unit, we gave the students a pre-test in order to compare with our post-test results taken after the unit. Evaluating students’ growth from pre- to post-assessment is a tool used to help evaluate the effectiveness of the unit. Students were given sentences that were bland, boring and vague and asked to pick two and revise them. Some students had no trouble whatsoever. Others just sat and looked at us with blank stares. Ms. B says that the students were probably just confused. She told us that students have trouble adjusting to a new teacher’s methods when they are used to another’s ways. The following is a reproduction of the instructions from the pre-test:

It was a hot day.
The night was kind of dark.
I bought some stuff at the mail.
She is nice.

It smells good.
The big animal is in the forest.
The concert was fun.

The sentences above tell boring, vague facts and do not stir emotions in the reader. They do not convey a specific image, or **show** the reader what is meant. Pick two of the sentences to revise. Add specific details to make the sentence **show** your meaning. Feel free to make any changes and write at least 4 sentences in your revision of each sentence.

I believe the students needed some scaffolding prior to the pre-test. Ms. B suggested doing a mini-orientation to the concept prior to the pre-test. She said, “I know that because it’s a pretest, you don’t want to do any scaffolding in order to get a true measure of how much they know about the concept. However, sometimes they need a little help to know what you are looking for.”

An explanation of our grading of both forms of assessment as well as a chart showing growth made appears in the section about the post-test. A copy of the pre-test appears in the C.I. unit in the Appendix.

Norms, Roles, & Skill Builders

The second principle of Complex Instruction is delegation of authority to individuals and groups through the establishment of cooperative norms and roles, practiced in skill builders (Whyte, 12 Feb. 2003). Norms and roles are the means by which teachers delegate authority to students. Since my team was the second to teach in Ms. B’s class, students were already familiar with the norms and roles of Complex Instruction and working in group settings.

When the first teaching team began their weeklong unit in Ms. B’s class, they took the students to the library for orientation to the unit, roles, norms, and skill builder. The library was not an area conducive to orientation because I could not hear the other student teachers well. I am sure the students could not either. There were also no visual aids for students to look at regarding norms. Having no visual aids for norms made it difficult to refer to them and for students to remember. They did, however, give each student a handout with descriptions of the roles. They spent a great

deal of time going over each role with the students. Extensive introductions to the roles saved my team time because the students were oriented to the roles and knew them extremely well by the time our unit began.

The other team chose Broken Squares as their skill builder. The rules for Broken Squares (such as no talking and no taking others' pieces) were not enforced during the skill builder. I was worried about the effectiveness of the skill builder because students were not completing the activity the way it was meant to be completed. However, I changed my mind when I heard one of the students during a rotation from the first team's unit remind one of his group members about one of the norms: No one's done until everyone's done.

Before we began our unit, colorful signs were placed around the room displaying the norms and roles from C.I. During our review of the norms and roles, we pointed and referred to the signs on the wall in order to reinforce those norms and roles.

According to the Complex Instruction Implementation Manual, a norm is "a written or unwritten rule for how one ought to behave" (12) and must be internalized, that is, must become part of one's instinctive behavior. A norm is different than a rule. A norm is a behavior that must become part of one's nature, part of one's value system. People follow norms because they believe that is the way one should act. The following were the rules we displayed and referred to consistently:

- You must complete your activity and Individual Report.
- Play your role in the group.
- You have the right to ask anyone in your group for help.

- You have the duty to assist anyone who asks for help.
- Help other group members without doing their work for them.
- Everybody helps.
- Everybody cleans up.

The only rule students seemed to have problems with was the first one: completing the activity and Individual Report (IR). No matter how much time we gave them to complete the activity and IR, no one would be finished with both at the end of the allotted time. I believe the seventh graders needed more structure and time management. Perhaps a timekeeper role in the group would have helped with this rule.

A way that authority is delegated in C.I. is through public assignment of roles. Students were required to wear role badges while in groups. Also, a chart of each class member's assigned role was clearly visible to each student during rotations. Students had no trouble remembering the roles or the ways they functioned during group discussion. Since there were a maximum of five students per group, we used the following five roles:

- The facilitator makes sure everyone understands instructions, makes sure all members participate, calls the teacher when no one understands, and makes sure all are getting the help they need.
- The recorder makes sure group has notes or diagrams from discussion and makes sure everyone completes an IR.
- The materials manager collects whatever materials are needed to complete the activity.
- The reporter organizes the group's report for the class, discusses with the group what will be reported, and briefly summarizes the activity to introduce the report to the class.

- The harmonizer makes sure communication lines are open, makes sure there are no “put downs,” and encourages positive responses (Implementation Manual, 19-20).

Once students finished the pre-test, we reviewed the norms and roles. At first, we asked students to name all of the norms and roles that they could remember. Even though it had been a month since they had last participated in Complex Instruction, the students remembered the norms and roles. This meant we would not have to spend time re-teaching them as well as reinforcing them.

In order to reinforce the norms (and particularly the roles) we chose to use the role-playing skits as our skill builder. Students were given the role-playing skits found in the C.I. Implementation Manual (Appendix A). Students were instructed to break into their assigned groups, divide up parts for the skit, and practice to present the skit to the class. In each skit, a group was to perform a group activity. However, something would go wrong in each skit that could be solved by group members playing their roles correctly and abiding by rules and norms. We noticed that the students love to perform skits for the class. Doing the role skits as a skill builder would also orient students to revision, our Big Idea for the unit. We asked students if they remembered the skill builder from the previous teaching team’s unit. They did, and we asked them to name the norms, or new behaviors, they learned from Broken Squares. We then reviewed the new behaviors (norms) learned from that activity:

- No one is done until everyone is done.
- Pay attention to what other group members need.

Students were given time to prepare before performing their skits. Then, one group at a time performed for the entire class. After each group’s performance, we facilitated a discussion about what went wrong in each group, who in the group could have stepped in and helped based on roles, and what they could have done to help. Students were then given time to revise each skit as a group.

Their instructions were to revise it and have a conflict solved in the skit by using roles. Students then performed the revised skits for the class. Again, there was a whole class discussion of what happened in each skit in relation to norms and roles and to enforce them.

Status Treatments

“Curriculum for Complex Instruction assumes that intelligence is multidimensional” (Complex Instruction, 5). The third principle of Complex Instruction is access to materials and learning for all students (Whyte, 12 Feb. 2003). In most classrooms where students perform group tasks, students’ expectations of how well others as well as themselves will perform in a group task can predict what learning gains they will make. Students who have high status (whether it is academic or social) will take over the group and learn more in the process. Students who are perceived to be less competent and have low status will not be given access to the materials in the group and will consequently learn less. Therefore, status treatments must be implemented in a classroom that will engage in group tasks in order to better assure access to all students.

Two status treatments were implemented in this classroom, a multiple abilities treatment and assigning competence. Each treatment is necessary in a heterogeneous classroom. For a multiple abilities treatment, we made colorful posters of every ability we could think of that would be required for the activities that we designed for the unit. The following is a list of abilities we listed on the wall:

- Dramatic Abilities
- Using gestures, facial expressions and body language to convey a particular idea or action
- Critical analysis of words

- Developing synonyms and antonyms
- Elaboration upon and creation of strong images and atmosphere
- Illustrative abilities
- Articulation of thoughts and ideas
- Recognizing and creating tone
- Seeing creative uses for ordinary objects
- Designing and crafting three-dimensional objects
- Organizing ideas
- Analyzing and reflecting on the revision process

Students must acknowledge these abilities to be intellectual in order for the multiple abilities treatment to work because they must perceive their peers that have these abilities as competent, not just the students with reading and writing abilities. During our orientation before the first rotation, all of the abilities were pointed out and elaborated upon in a whole class setting. Also, the following skills were displayed, discussed, and elaborated upon:

- No one is good at all of the abilities.
- Everyone is good at some of the abilities.
- No one of us is as smart as all of us together.

From students' pre-tests, we chose some of the best examples to read aloud to the class. This served many purposes, first and foremost to assign competence to students. One student in particular whose revisions that were read aloud in class (Lucas), Ms. B told us, had never had anyone assign competence to him. Lucas had come up with great synonyms for one of the sentences he revised, *The big animal is in the forest*, such as *canopy*, *creature*, and *carnivore*. I read Lucas' revisions out

loud to the class and saw his shy smile. With that simple act, I manipulated status for Lucas's group because I identified him as a possible resource with intellectual abilities.

Other students had chosen to revise their sentences using different genres. For example, Stefan chose to revise his into a poem while Tom elected to create dialogue. We also used this as a way to show students the different revision tools that could be used, such as simile, metaphor, active verbs, elaboration, and so on. The part I had trouble with was assigning competence during the rotations and during wrap-ups. It was difficult for me to find that happy medium between hovering and not being close enough to hear what was going on in the groups.

Rotations

On Day Two of my teaching team's weeklong C.I. experiment, the first rotation in groups began. Once the multiple abilities treatment was completed, the materials managers for each group were instructed to gather materials for their groups. Then, the groups began working happily (and noisily). For about ten minutes or so, students studied the task cards together, trying to figure out exactly what their task was. Soon, people were digging into their material boxes and constructing costumes, props, and visual aids for their presentations. Ms. B saw all of the talking and working that was going on in the classroom and asked us to give students extra time for the rotation.

Consequently, there was not enough time for presentations that day.

On Day Three, we gave students about fifteen minutes to make final preparations for presentations. When it was time for the presentations to begin, we led the students to an open area called the vestibule so the groups would have room to present since Ms. B's classroom is tiny. Even Jessica and I got to be part of the skits that day! We held up the curtain for the group doing Activity 1: The Wonderdogs' Dating Game. All the groups attempted to make the funniest skit. Even groups that were not required to create a skit for their task created them as their method of presentation to

the class. The group that did Activity 3: Show with Song decided to create a rap song in which all members of the group participated. Instead of getting in front of their peers and singing the song, they pretended they were at the Grammy Awards, complete with a host, Tom.

Following each presentation, my teaching team and I would talk about the group and tied everything back to our “Show, Not Tell” theme of the unit. If a group had used one of the methods for revision that we had talked about, we would point that out. We would ask students what they saw in the skit relating to “Show, Not Tell.” For example, the group that completed Activity 1: The Wonderdogs’ Dating Game compared a girl’s hair to spun gold, using a simile. We discussed how effective the image that the simile created for us was for us in imagining the person they were talking about.

Following the confusion from the pre-test instructions, I was worried that students would get confused during the rotations and not learn anything about revision or “Show, Not Tell.” However, I was pleased with what I saw in the presentations. Every group used at least one of the devices we discussed in their revision, such as elaboration, simile, metaphor, active verbs, and descriptive adjectives. We tried to spark discussion as much as we could about “Show, Not Tell” relating to each presentation following each presentation. However, the wrap-ups proved to be much harder than Courtney, Jessica, and I realized they would be. Most of the time, the three of us were the only ones discussing. One problem could be that the previous teaching team had not done wrap-ups relating their Big Idea to the presentations. Students were accustomed to watching the presentations one right after the other without interruption or discussion.

After the presentations from the first rotation, students were eager to begin another one. However, only one group had completed IRs from the first rotation. Once we got back into the room from the vestibule, students grumbled about completing the IRs. They were reminded of the norm

“No one’s done until everyone’s done.” Once IRs were completed and turned in, the second rotation began, even though there was only about fifteen minutes left in the class period. The second rotation was a challenge because students wanted to jump directly into working on the presentation without even reading the task cards. We had to walk around and remind them to read the cards.

On Day Four, students were given most of the class period to prepare for their presentations, about 30 minutes. As the time for presentations drew closer, we reminded groups to do the IRs. Nearly every group paid no attention. We realized that we would have to designate a specific time for IRs to be completed after presentations. The second set of presentations was just as wonderful as the first! During this rotation, many of the groups brought props from home. The group that was doing Activity 1: The Wonderdogs’ Dating Game brought a Barbie to participate in the dating game (She won!). The group that did Activity 5: Acting Out brought chefs’ aprons for their restaurant skit. I was interested to see what the group that was doing Activity 3: Show with Song would come up with after seeing the last rotation’s group do a rap song along with the Grammy skit. I was not disappointed. The group depicted an *American Idol* scene, complete with judges. Lucas sang a country song that went well with the sentence they were to revise: “The rain makes me think of sad times.” The country genre naturally lends itself to sad storytelling (think dead dogs and heartache). I had that song in my head all afternoon! I even heard other students singing or humming it days later.

Again, my teaching team led group discussion about each presentation, bringing in revision and “Show, Not Tell.” For example, the group that had completed Activity 1: The Wonderdogs’ Dating Game had said that Barbie’s eyes were as blue as the ocean, using a simile. We again discussed that group’s effective use of a simile. Again, our attempts at sparking discussion about “Show, Not Tell” between presentations was not successful. We found out that students only wanted to watch presentations, not discuss the unit. The presentations were all wonderful and showed that

the students were learning “Show, Not Tell.” Where the presentations from the first rotation had incorporated at least one of the revision methods we discussed as a group at the beginning of the unit, the presentations from the second rotation incorporated at least two to three of them. We knew the students were ready to attempt the post-test. After the presentations, students had to complete their final set of IRs. Once the IRs were finished, students cleaned up and put the classroom back in order, just in time for the period to end.

Post-test

For an assessment following the unit, it was necessary to give students a post-test. A post-test was necessary to compare with the pre-test in order to evaluate the effectiveness of the unit. Several possible scenarios were discussed. The most desirable to our team as well as Ms. B was a form of authentic revision. We wanted students to choose a piece from their writer’s folder to revise. However, that plan presented several problems. We would need to have the original versions of the students’ papers as well as the revised versions in order to compare and evaluate the students’ revision of the paper. Authentic revision would also take much longer for the students to complete than a designed post-test that resembled the pre-test and IRs. We had run out of time in our unit, using most of our time during rotations and presentations. Ms. B believed the authentic revision would be too much of an inconvenience.

Therefore, Ms. suggested a post-test similar to the way the pre-test was designed, taking into account the students’ confusion as to what to do on the pre-test. In accordance to what the students learned in the unit as well as in regular writing class with Ms. B, students were asked to revise a paragraph describing a room. Much like the pre-test, the sentences were vague, boring, and bland. However, this time they all fit together and related to one another in the paragraph. Also, clearer

directions accompanied the test. The following shows the directions given to students for the post-test:

Directions: Revise the description of a room in a house in *italics* below the directions. Remember everything you learned from writing description for your quarter writing portfolio, as well as everything you learned from this unit about descriptive language, such as:

- Metaphors
- Similes
- Active verbs
- Descriptive adjectives
- Synonyms
- Imagery
- Elaborating and specifying
- Using the five senses

My favorite room in my house is pretty. There is lots of stuff in it. The furniture is pretty. There are also a lot of things on the walls. The floor feels good under my feet. The ceiling is very high. There is just enough light in the room. I can see lots of stuff from the window. The sight is beautiful.

Both the pre- and post-tests were graded by the entire teaching team. A five-point scale was decided upon to be the best for this particular assessment. Each student's test was read aloud and then discussed by all of us. We would reach a consensus about grades for each of the papers, based on a five-point grading scale.

Out of 29 students, we had 14 complete sets of data, that is both a graded pre-test and post-test for the student. The following chart shows the results from those forms of assessment:

Table 7: Results from Assessment

Student (Academic Quintile)	Pre-test	Post-test	Growth
Star (1)	2/5	3/5	1
Anika (1)	2/5	5/5	3
Tom (2)	3/5	4/5	1
Jack (2)	3/5	5/5	2
Stephen (2)	4/5	5/5	1
Hillary(2)	2/5	3/5	1
Sanford (3)	1/5	3/5	2
Jasmine (3)	2/3	3/3	1
Jane (3)	4/5	5/5	1
Charles (5)	3/5	3/5	0
Lindsay (5)	1/5	3/5	2
Susan (5)	3/5	3/5	0
Antionette (?)	3/5	3/5	0
Evelyn (?)	1/5	5/5	4
Overall Average*	2.43	3.79	1.36

*Rounded to the nearest hundredth

Perhaps the most interesting bit of data from the assessment table is the case of Evelyn. Evelyn was transferred into the class following our questionnaire to determine status. Therefore, we did not know which group to place her in or how the unit would affect her. So, we placed her in a group with no students that would overpower her. We wanted to give her room to grow. When we graded her pre-test, we were glad we had placed her in a group that would allow her to take a leadership role and gain access to materials. Evelyn was eager to complete and be involved in each task presented to her group. She made the highest leap of any student in the class, four points.

Anika was the high status student to make the largest leap. From her pre-test to post-test, she gained three points. Even though Anika is a quiet and shy student, I saw her participating in everything her group did. Even though she was the high status student in her group, she also listened to others' suggestions and ideas about the skit and graphic the group completed. She used her fellow students as resources, making great gains in the process.

The low status student that made the highest leap in achievement was Lindsay. From her pre-test to post-test, Lindsay gained two points. Lindsay was in a group with students that always valued her opinions. She was naturally a loud student, seldom shy. Her courage to voice her opinions and ideas about the group task probably gave her greater access to learning in that group, resulting in her assessment gains.

Synthesis

Looking back on my experiences with Complex Instruction and in Ms. B's classroom at Opelika Middle School, I realize that I must manipulate both social and academic status in my classroom so every student can be given a nurturing learning environment. The most important thing for me to do with my students is to design learning experiences in which students will be given the opportunity to talk and work together. Status problems must be overcome in order for students to effectively talk and work together in a group setting. The principles of Complex Instruction work together to manipulate pre-existing status barriers into situations in which students rely on each other as resources for learning.

According to the first principle of Complex Instruction, the teacher creates tasks with outcomes that the students perceive as uncertain. This forces students to rely on each other as resources in order to successfully complete the task. When students perceive a task as uncertain, talk can lead to higher achievement. I am confident that I can design tasks with "good" levels of perceived uncertainty for use in my future classrooms. Uncertainty in a group task will force students to rely on each other as resources. Low status students are given many more opportunities to contribute to the group. Low status students can then be seen as assets to their groups, improving academic achievement and status.

According to the second principle of Complex Instruction, delegation of authority is fostered when norms and roles are implemented in the group work. When norms and roles are implemented successfully, students rely on each other instead of the teacher for supervision. The norms and roles will keep students on task, talking and working together, and ultimately learning more. Groups and roles must be designed carefully. I know that I must pay attention to which students will work well in groups together and which ones will not. Putting best friends in a group can be a danger; they can create wedges and take over the group, excluding others, or get off-topic and become a distraction to the group. Either way, learning is not taking place. I also know that putting a student with high status in the facilitator role to begin with can be potentially harmful to group interaction. Since these people have a natural tendency to want to control the group, another student in the group should be assigned the facilitator role. Roles hold each group member accountable for group success. Accountability forces each member to participate in the group activity, manipulating status in the process. When authority is delegated to the students through implementation of norms and roles, they rely on each other for learning instead of the teacher.

According to the last principle of Complex Instruction, all students must be given equal access to materials and learning in the group. The teacher can introduce and reinforce the concept of equal access through the implementation of status treatments in the classroom. The multiple abilities treatment has to be successful for students to be in a learning environment. Students must truly believe that their peers are resources for their learning and success in the group instead of only the teacher and high status students. I am extremely confident that I can reinforce the idea of equal access into my classroom by performing a multiple abilities treatment.

A way to reinforce the multiple abilities treatment is assigning competence to individual students. If a low status student is still perceived by himself and the group as having no contributions to make to the group, intellectual competence that is publicly assigned to that student can manipulate status in that group. The manipulated status in the group can, in turn, affect that students' learning gains during the unit because of the greater access he will be given. His learning is not at the expense of the high status students in the class; the learning gap between high and low status achievement is just narrowed. Through my experiences at OMS, I am not as confident assigning competence as I am a multiple abilities treatment. However, I am confident that the more practice I have will only give me more confidence.

I can successfully administer a status survey to my students, regarding both academic and social status. Instead of using only two questions to determine status like in this unit, I would use more questions because I believe it would be less obvious to students. To determine academic status, I would ask students questions about literature, grammar, and other assignments besides writing because I know that students that are seen as competent in reading are seen as competent in all group tasks. To determine social status, I would probably use different questions, depending on the classroom and group of students I would be giving the survey to. For example, I would ask younger students who they would like to sit with on the bus for a field trip but would ask older students would they would like to hang out with outside of class. A question that I believe would work well for all ages is, "Who do you work well in a group with?" I feel confident that I can use the information that a status survey would provide me, even outside the realm of Complex Instruction. The status survey will let me know how to structure groups in my class. I am confident that I can place students in heterogeneous groups that can successfully work together to achieve learning goals.

I also learned about my own behavior and classroom management strategies as a result of my experiences at OMS. I have a tendency to want to control everything and everyone in a situation, right down to the last detail. I have learned that my instinct to control a classroom can often work to my disadvantage. I always thought that a disorganized and lively classroom would drive me crazy (which it did at first!). However, I've seen what a positive learning environment Ms. B has created and know that students respond well to it. I am confident that I can still hold a comfortable level of control over my classroom without becoming authoritarian. I can trust my students to rely on each other instead of just me as an authority. And I can trust myself not to interfere with learning that is happening in my classroom when I am not the center of it. Watching Ms. B's writer's workshop showed me that students can be resources for each other and not always have to depend on me for their learning.

Perhaps the most profound thing I learned through the experience of teaching revision to a group of wonderful seventh graders is that my life as a teacher will always need revision. I can look back on a lesson or unit that I have taught a class and evaluate it. I can trust the insight of mentors like Ms. B and my colleagues to improve my teaching methods. I know that each class and each student is different; my approach to teaching these students should be adapted accordingly. The most important aspect of teaching is that the students learn. I know that must be my focus at all times. I cannot be afraid to reflect upon myself and my methods in the best interest of my students.

Visual Argument

For my visual argument, I wanted to create something that would reflect this paper and what I have learned over the course of this semester. The following is a picture of what I came up with:



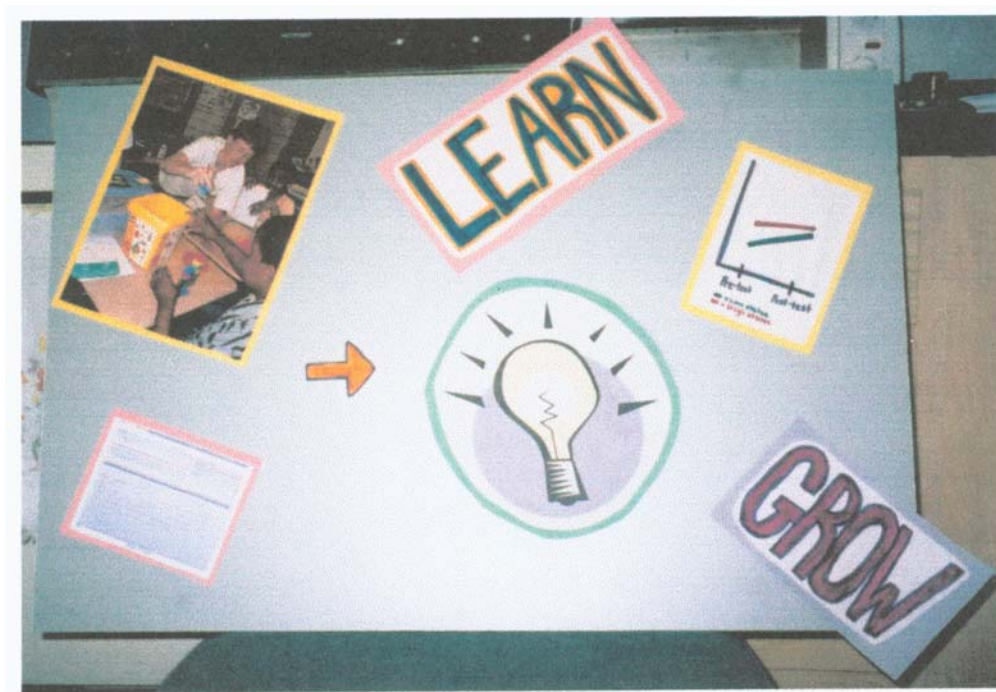
I took the three principles of complex instruction discussed throughout my paper and created a mathematical/chemical equation from it, showing that task uncertainty, delegation of authority, and access will lead students to talk and work together, ultimately yielding learning and growth. In order to discuss the individual parts of my visual argument, I took pictures of the visual argument in three different pieces. The following is a picture of the first part of the argument:



To represent uncertainty, I chose to use clip art of children with question marks on their papers, the word *uncertainty*, and a picture of the materials students were given for their tasks in our unit. I thought the students with question marks on their papers were a great way to represent task uncertainty because there are so many different ways to complete each task. When students are first looking at a task card, it's as *if* they are staring at a blank sheet of paper with all kinds of questions surrounding them. I wanted to include the picture of our materials boxes because those materials can contribute to task uncertainty; students will try to find uses for all materials in the boxes because being creative with props is fun.

To represent delegation of authority to students, I chose to use a picture of our role chart, a digital photo of a student pointing to norms on the wall, and the words *authority* and *accountability*. I chose to use the picture of the role chart because roles are a means by which a teacher can delegate authority to students. I chose to use the picture of the student pointing to the norms on the wall because it shows that the implementation of norms was successful in that classroom. I chose to include the word *accountability* along with *authority* because group and individual accountability is how a teacher delegates authority to students.

work. I thought my visual argument would have a much greater impact if there were pictures of actual students in it instead of drawings.



For the last part of representing students talking and working together I chose to use another digital photo of students talking and working together and a note that Dr. Whyte gave our teaching team on the last day of rotations for our unit. I thought the picture used here was a great picture showing students working together and being excited about the project they were working on. The note from Dr. Whyte talks about the talking and working going on in the classroom. I thought someone else's words would have more of an impact than my own in this instance.

For the final part of the mathematical/chemical equation, I showed that talking and working yields growth and learning. Along with the words *grow* and *learn*, I chose to use a clip art of a light bulb and a sample growth chart showing progress from pre-tests to post-tests. The light bulb is a universal symbol of learning that I thought showed wonderfully what I wanted to show. The growth

chart shows how the achievement gap is narrowed between low and high status students when those principles are put into place.

I also elected to use bright colors. When I teach, I want bright colors to fill my room. Also, my mother has always told me that bright colors will stimulate thinking. I am not sure if that is an old wives' tale or not, but it cannot hurt to try.

References

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Heinemann, 2002.

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Appendices

Handout from Cathy Buckhalt for Student Teachers

Interview Transcript with Cathy Buckhalt, 29 Jan. 2003.

C.I. Unit: Cracking Words Open

Handout from Cathy Buckhalt for Student Teachers

Welcome to room 60, on the Wonderdogs team! Things to keep in mind:

- My students call me Ms. B. Help them learn your names.
- Writing workshop is not quiet.
- Walk around to see what the students are doing during writing time. Ask questions.
- You may be interested in coming to a history class.
- Please use the email : buckhaltc @ oms.osc.k12.al.us
- Phone = 745 9726, 8:05 – 9 or 3- 3:30
- Dress like a professional.
- Don't chew gum.
- Try to find time to tour the school.
- Keep a list of questions you would like me to answer.
- Let's try to form discussion groups rather than one person coming at a time.

Interview with Cathy Buckhalt on 29 Jan. 2003

Buckhalt: Our format is that Jennie and I think that kids should come in as early as they get here to school. So we're here by 7 o'clock every morning and we open our classrooms so the kids can either come here directly or come bring their breakfast if they'd like to from downstairs and then spend the time socializing or studying. We have study groups for kids who want them or need them. I have a creative writing group that comes in in the morning starting at seven. So we have practically our whole team trained to come in early like that rather than going to the gym or the auditorium to sit. And we have a good number of kids from other teams, seventh and eighth grade, and I have two sixth graders, who come in and just stay here in the mornings so they have a place to study and get help. And then our morning time starts with the homeroom time about 7:45. So the kids are with us basically 45 minutes before the day starts. And then we have our homeroom where we can ask the kids to do certain tasks like lay out their homework and be ready for third period, get pencils sharpened and that kind of thing. And then when they leave they go off to either P.E., band or other exploratory classes. And we have until -- from 8:05 until 9:45 for planning time, but we're required to have team meetings and we're required twice a month to meet with other seventh grade teachers in our area and since Jennie and I both teach two subjects we have double meetings. So we meet with all of our departments and then once a month we meet with the — all the other seventh grade teachers to plan like field trips, incentive trips, and things like that -- discuss our discipline policy and then twice a month we meet with Mr. Ross who you just met and Mrs. Cappsplamer, the guidance counselor you met, so we can look at special needs of kids. So I'm saying all that to let you know that even though what we have — what seems to be a long expansive time every morning, half of it at least is taken up with meetings. If Jennie were here this morning we would be meeting about how to spend our day. We just finished doing bar graphs together for a double grade. I'm studying immigration and heritage in the civics and she could use the bar graph for math and I use the grade for civics. So we work a lot on projects like that — that give us double grades and let the kids see how the subjects are linked. (Interruption).

Interviewer: So you have two teachers?

Buckhalt: On our team we have two teachers. We feel like that's the best way to be. We feel it so strongly that I guess four years ago Jennie and I went to then our principal was Mark Neighbors and we presented to concept of being a two person team because we're both — Jennie's actually elementary certified. So she can teach all the subjects and I have a double major. And we've known that small is better and family is better. We already had one two person team in the school and we were lobbying to take over that team because those teachers were leaving and it was so successful that we now have an eighth grade two-person team and we have one two-person team in sixth grade and all the rest of the sixth grade teams are threefours — makes it very hard for

the sixth grade teachers. They teach — everybody teaches history in the sixth grade and then they have their subject areas too and reading. So it's busy as a sixth grade teacher. But we do know as a school that smaller the community the better for the kids. We just don't have the money to have all two-person teams. And we also know that most students — most of you are not certified to teach double subjects — we wish you were. We're looking for that all the time in middle schools.

Interviewer: Is there a way you can become certified? Is there a test or something you can take?

Buckhalt: You would be taking more course work all along. And of course you can go back like a fifth year students and get certification, but it certainly helps if you're at all interested in teaching middle school.

Interviewer: We wanted to know how you decided to become a teacher and where you went to school?

Buckhalt: I looked at those questions. I — everyone in my teacher — in my family is a teacher. I just — my grandmothers were teachers, my father was at Auburn University for 36 years, my uncle was at Auburn and then in Georgia at Georgia Southwestern. We just teach. And really I wanted to be an airline stewardess, but I wasn't — I am a traveler that's how I spend my extra time — I travel, but I was told — and we use this for talking about discrimination, and of course it's changed now, but I wasn't tall enough to be a stewardess — flight attendant now. So you know I rethought, but I've always known that I wasn't going to have any children of my own and — but I — for some reason kids and I get along well together. So I looked at teaching and started doing tutoring work in the Auburn schools really as a student at Auburn High School. I worked with my Future Teachers Organization tutoring younger students. And then as soon as I entered Auburn University I knew I loved history, but I couldn't get away from my love of writing so I began as a double major and got a job at Auburn Junior High School as an after-school tutor and I've just been working with education all my life.

Interviewer: So you went to Auburn?

Buckhalt: I did. I got both of my degrees at Auburn. Left after my bachelors. I got a job even before I graduated because I had been tutoring at Auburn Junior High School I was fortunate enough to get an internship there too, which was quite interesting. It was the first year Auburn experimented with what was called a team room situation. We had 150 kids. Have any of you been to Auburn Junior High School? You will. We had an auditorium when I went to school there. It was completely gutted and turned into an enormous classroom with the stage being a resource room and the rest of the auditorium being a partitioned four-subject area space and I interned there. The only time the kids left the room would be to go to an exploratory class or lunch. The rest of the time we were encouraged to work with all four subjects. What a test because I am not a math student, but seventh grade math most people can do at that time, so I have that training of working with other teachers and lots of subject areas and that was good

for me. And went right into my first job at that school. So I — I have a long history with Auburn schools. Left went to Nashville. Taught three years at a high school in Nashville. Loved — of course every English teachers dream is teaching junior and senior English because of the literature. So that was a great deal of fun. Left there moved to Los Angeles. Taught at an alternative school at UCLA for students who had severe drug problems or who had tried to commit suicide. Best job I ever had in my life — A real eye opener. And then moved back to Auburn and started graduate school and admittedly found this job. I've been at this school since 1976. Started here —

Interviewer: How long were you in Los Angeles?

Buckhalt: At that time just for two years. I've lived there off and on. California is my home state.

Interviewer: What's the most rewarding thing about teaching and the most difficult?

(12 minutes)

Buckhalt: The most rewarding thing is getting to know the kids so personally and I know it's because Jennie and I have as much of a family atmosphere here as we can make it. The middle school really gives you that format anyway, but then it's up to the teacher to make it work. We eat with our kids at lunch, which most people would think is horrendous, but there again it's like a family time and the most rewarding is talking with them, reading with them, writing with them before the day actually starts. And we know them so well. If you saw the paper yesterday there was an announcement of a young man's death -- a very sudden heart attack. His brother is on our team, so we know Jeff and his situation very well. We'll be able to take of him when he gets back to the team. Carlos who came in late had a sister who died earlier this year and was in hospice for a long time before she died and it's like a group effort getting the kids through these trouble spots because this if you remember — and I think this is why I chose middle school ultimately because this was a horrendous time. I would not be a 12 or 13-year-old again for an unlimited amount of money. I hated that time and they're conflicted too. So that is the reward — being with them in other ways than just being a teacher. I love the fact that they feel to come eat breakfast up here and play their band instruments, share their poetry. That's good. What's hard is -- we recently got a new student — first of all what's hard if you counted we must have had 35 people in the room last Friday with you guys and remember I told you that two people had checked out so we were very lucky. We're huge. We have a huge seventh grade class and isn't just our team it's the whole grade. That makes it very difficult. Plus what Jennie and I like to do is as soon as we see the grade level students, which is the class in which you are sitting, we try to identify especially minorities who can move up into the honors class, who can handle a boost, who want to work harder. So what we've none on purpose is make our honors class bigger. The one you're working with and we know that and we have a couple of kids that are really struggling, but we think ultimately it's better for them to have that challenge. So into the size we got a new student two weeks ago who is severely conflicted. He actually

has one of those labels, but he's from another state. We don't have all his records and he has been very disruptive on the team and part of his problem is that the other team members won't have anything to do with him and that's been very hard. They don't want to get in any trouble. They know our family so they are like shunning him and it's sad to see in a way. It's pleasant to see that they know how to act, but we're having to deal with a new person coming into the family. So size is difficult. Working with 12 and 13-year-olds is difficult enough without anything else. Other than that there isn't anything that a middle school teacher can't handle. I think we have probably the most to deal with of any age group. Maybe not first grade teachers.

Interviewer: So the class that we saw Friday you have that class and how many other kids do you actually —

Buckhalt: That is my class for history and for English and the class in which you're sitting is history and English.

Interviewer: They both are honors or just —

Buckhalt: We have one grade level and one honors class and as soon as they see our names on the front door in August — and they see Wonderdogs. For many them the impression is, "oh no we're on that little two person team," and there's still a little bit of that stigma because they're separated not just physically, but they are accustomed to being with a huge group in sixth grade. Now the sixth grade has gone to smaller teams. We won't really have that problem from next year on, but that has been a sore spot. But I — practically every child this year — those two — the desk that you two are sitting in — those two girls had a horrible sixth grade year and they have both said, "we are so glad we got on the smaller team with a smaller group of people," because they have a hard time dealing with large groups. Anger. Competition. All that is easier with a small group of people.

Interviewer: So how do they meet with the other class? How do they interact with the —

Buckhalt: Our two classes? We have incentive time specifically built in to take care of that where the whole team does something together. We have projects where the whole team works together. In the morning — that's another reason we have the morning time. They are not separated and they really mingle and they go back and forth between the two classes — the two rooms. Just — there isn't — they know they can move up. They can move down in class rank, but they eat lunch together. The only times they're separate is when they get down to academic business and they're all mixed up when they go to exploratory P.E., for the team the morning time is on of our reasons for getting everybody together and project time, incentive time. Other than that they are ranked.

Interviewer: I guess the next question is pretty much answered.

Interviewer: Is this something you see yourself doing for the rest of your life?

(Laughter)

Buckhalt: No! No! Not for the rest of my life.

Interviewer: No plans for retirement?

Buckhalt: Yes.

Interviewer: Focus on standards and achievement tests — how is that tampered or increased your teaching likes and dislikes?

Buckhalt: When I retire the new standards for record keeping will be one of the major reasons I leave and I'll write the state department and Dr. Drakeson explaining that because I've noticed that my lesson plans are much shorter than they used to be. I would make three and four page lesson plans for each subject just for the fun of it. Writing in complete detail. Now we're required to state everything. Put out beside every plan we have to list the Alabama Graduation Exit Exam requirement that we're teaching, the SAT requirement that we're teaching. It's become just a concrete effort other than an imaginative, fun effort to create a lesson. That hampers us. We're required to keep lesson plans, but not in the format — now as first year teachers you will keep regular lesson plans that you're being trained to write and you'll turn those in and we can look at lesson planning if you like to this semester — the format that our school uses, but also you'll be required to keep a lesson plan book with a little block in it that's about 4x4 and everything has to be written in there and you can see why that would you would say, "Do I want to fill out this whole sheet of lesson plans and then come do this little block of lesson plans too as a summary?" It's doing double work and many of us have been teaching a long time do not like that. Mostly because it has stymied our creativity and length of time we want to put into our work

(Interruption)

Buckhalt: So in Alabama the fifth and the seventh grade and now tenth grade teachers — if you're interested in any of those subjects — grades — will give the Alabama writing assessment and that's a test I guess we've been giving about eight years. But it has always been given at the end of the year and then suddenly two years ago the state department decided it would be given in February instead of at the end of the year. So now we do have state wide a new focus in writing and that's great and all teachers of all content area and grades are supposed to be focusing on writing — keeping journals, different types of writing developmentally appropriate to the age, but those three grades will have tests administered. So even though our fifth and sixth grade teachers get our seventh graders prepared that they are going to be writing, that's still an extra focus, an extra burden to make sure that you have focused on —
(Interruption)

Buckhalt: We have to have focused on all four modes of writing by January — the end of January really because the month of February needs to be spent on teaching the kind

of test that they'll take and the structure of that test and reviewing those four modes. So that's an extra and it seems that every year the SAT changes and every time the graduation test changes, the exit exam changes, the lower grades have to adapt to those changes too. People think it's just the high school, but no it isn't because that changes the standards on which we focus in the sixth, seventh, and eighth grade and then every time the state changes — for example history requirements. In the last three years the state has changed the sequence twice of what history will be taught in each grade and every time a focus like that changes then you have to adapt to that. So there is quite a bit and an effort to hold teachers accountable and an effort to hold the state accountable to getting kids ready to graduate. It's enormously more difficult working toward those mandated test than when I started teaching.

Interviewer: So do you sometimes feel like you have to skim over some things and if you do how do you compensate to make sure the kids get the most out of it?

Buckhalt: I feel sorriest for the high school teachers on block because I know they really have to skim. They've had to cut back in their curriculum areas so drastically and I heard through some state grapevines that to save money we might get rid of a lot of scheduling in high schools, but here we tell ourselves in all of our meeting, try not to cut back, try not to leave out. Maybe not spend as much time looking at a short story unit -- maybe spread out looking at short stories throughout the year, but try not to leave things out. We don't feel the pressure that the high school teachers feel. What we feel is a pressure every time there is a change — adapting the programs.

Interviewer: How's your classes, class time, and focus distributed between writing, literature, grammar and all of the other English Language Arts?

(Laughter)

Buckhalt: We do it all everyday. I mean really, that's the message. If you want to be an English teacher don't divide things up into little segments. The kids, I just believe the kids don't learn as well in a segmented approach. Um, If we're going to look at grammar, um, why not look at it inside the personal reading book or inside a class novel or inside the civics book. We're studying capitalization right now and we're using our newspaper, and we're using our civics text and if you are departmentalized and teach just English there is still no reason you can't take an approach of using the science because those teachers will make the information available, so Jannie and I are completely integrated. The kids write poems for science, they write poems for math. We read stories for science. We read stories for math. We write research papers for all four subjects. We completely integrate. And it does take longer.

Interviewer (Joel) interrupts: Do ya'll teach math?

Buckhalt: Jannie teaches science and math.

Interviewer (Joel): Oh, o.k. I understand the

Buckhalt: But see I have my own math and science book. And earlier this year, we began the year writing a children's book teaching safety rules for the lab, that's how we begin our year. I can introduce dialogue and characterization; she can introduce the safety rules. And then the kids are set for writing books the rest of the year. We, um, start our research skills with a scientist from the past, who has had his or her, but mostly his obviously, influence felt. So I can begin bibliography work, but nothing, you asked earlier do I have to leave something out, maybe I don't spend as long with dwelling over simile, metaphor, personification as when you and I were together, but instead of spending a couple of weeks looking at that focus we look at it all the time. If we're reading and we see a good example we'll stop and talk about it. I know that grammar and mechanics, see that's the thing, mechanics, cannot be taught in isolation. And the writing that's going to use that grammar and that mechanics cannot be taught in isolation.

Interviewer (Cara): I definitely wasn't taught that way and so I'm wondering what is the outcome. It will have to be much better.

Buckhalt: Well I'll tell you one thing, my students who are in the tenth grade right now writing, and of course they, tenth graders, will now take the Alabama Writing Assessment this year for the first time two modes, I believe descriptive and narrative, I'm not sure why they chose those two and I could be wrong. But, um, they're not scared, what I see is that when kids leave the seventh grade today they're not fearful of writing, like probably I was, huh, you know, writing a poem, my own poem, writing a short story, writing a research paper, they may not have down perfectly the bibliography form, which changes, but, um, they're not scared of that kind of writing and that's what I see as a result. Plus, Jannie does literature circles in science. I don't use my literature circles really in English anymore I use them in history. They're perfect; they get everybody involved so I see more kids discussing, not being afraid to speak up and all of those are good. Now the downside is if the eighth grade teachers are not following through with those concepts, is it lost? Yes it's lost. But the good point for our school is, and you know, I don't know, who's married? Any of you? Joel. (Laughter) I didn't know that. You don't get often to choose where you're going to live if you have two people to consider. But it's nice if you can really instead of being desperate to have a school choose you, to look at schools, because here we have two writing project teachers in the sixth grade one is math, one is English science. We used to have, we used to have five writing project teachers in the seventh grade now we're down to three. We have, um, one current writing project teacher in the eighth grade. Now why is this important? Because you know in those classrooms everybody is teaching the same way. And even in the eighth grade on the 2-person team the English History teacher is not a Writing Project teacher but she is a writer and she knows how to integrate those skills of writing into the different classes, so I count her as a writing teacher so you know then that what you're teaching in the sixth seventh, and eighth grade will be on a continuum, then it's up to the kids because truthfully when they get to the ninth grade, the focus is textbook and skills. So will they continue the study strategies that they learned at the middle school and the writing skills? I don't know. I

just have feedback from some of the students that they feel much more confident because of the work they did here.

Interviewer (Joel): We're studying Complex Instruction units. Do you use that?

Buckhalt: Do I? What do you think?

Interviewer (Joel): I hope so! (Laughter)

Buckhalt: I think so. (Laughter)

Interviewer (Joel): Is it like standardized or is it incorporated kinda in your teaching, the ideas of Complex Instruction?

Buckhalt: It's incorporated Joel because if you travel the school, which you really need to do. That's on your sheet, what do I advise you to do, travel the school. Um, You're going to see the same type of instruction next door, your going to see it in Mr. Barkley's room, in Mrs. Worth's room. But you're not going to see it in every room. Some teams work really well integrating everything. Julie Worth's team where some of your friends are is one of those teams. They have huge projects that incorporate every content area plus some of the exploratory areas. We do that. I wish it were all over the school, but it isn't. (Interruption) A very quiet young lady in the middle section that I hope one of you can draw out, her name is Anika.

Interviewer (Joel) interrupts: I love that name.

Buckhalt: She is magic. The thing about Anika. She's on the volleyball team She's a seventh grader, but she plays most of the time on the girl's volleyball team. Now that's rare for a seventh grader. She's here every morning at seven. She helps other students; she's one of our tutors. She is an excellent student in all four areas and in choir, but she doesn't have confidence and she will not speak out. But what she needs is for you to take one of those stools over there, which is what I've used before, and to travel and to seek her out. Because she loves to talk about her writing, but not to a group. And on that note, you will not see me working in groups of four or groups of five very often; we are more likely going to be in partnerships or in threesomes and most of that will occur in history because we do "pair share" learning quite a bit, where we make predictions as a class and then buddy-up in partnerships or threesomes to read a passage, look back at our predictions, then come back to the class, see who was right on and make sure we have a focused answer if it's a subject matter and, um, but with English, most often partnerships work is with writing. Lit circles probably fourth quarter with English and more of a full class approach in history, especially the grade level class. Anika definitely, Jack, double magic, he's my cohort listening to NPR everyday, we talk political cartoons, we know, he knows exactly what is happening in the world and has an opinion about it. His parents and I were children of the '60s, we're pretty vocal about our opinions, and he has learned that from his parents but he does his opinion voicing in a very good way and he knows how to write. He needs no

instruction, he may need a comma, big deal, but what he needs is someone to read and just enjoy his work, it's just unbelievable how that child can write as a 12-year-old. Lucy, whose desk you are sitting in Joel,

Interviewer (Joel): We noticed her, vocal. (laughs)

Buckhalt: is an actor, oh, but so focused. And she restrains herself everyday. She is a young lady who in the sixth grade, even though she has always been an honors student, had the reputation of, you know, wanting to get up out of her desk, want to talk across the room, she'll really, if you watch her, she'll turn pretty much this way to work. Because her best friends will be very obvious to her if she were to sit like this. But she has taught herself to focus on me and to focus on her work. And it has been an effort. She has poor skill development. But she has taken me at my word, get the draft out first we can always clean it up, and that's Lucy, I mean abbreviations, spelling, but she's getting the word out and it's usually a very long, lengthy piece. (Interruption) So you will enjoy her work. That's a student in each section, really, but you'll find more. Susan who sits next to Anika in the middle section, is one of our children who came here from—. The other student is Jane. They're both restrained. We have tried using that early morning time to open them up. With Jane we have been really successful. With Susan it has taken longer, um, but now she smiles more and answers out more and has managed to even laugh at some of Jack's jokes. A time or two I've even had to caution her to settle, which is good, because before we just thought these children have just been in straightjackets. So um her writing is perfect, if anything with Susan she needs to work on voice because grammatically she's perfect, structurally she's perfect but she, it's just like her personality, she's learning how to put herself in everything and it's not quite there in her writing. Huum, Yvonne, Anika, Lacrechia, and Stephen. The girls are all on the volleyball team together, which is a good thing, but Yvonne is one of our kids that we moved up from the grade level class with every good intention of Lacrechia and Anika bringing up Yvonne and there has been just the slightest of Yvonne bringing the two of them down. We're really watching this; they don't need to be together, um, even in partnerships, don't put Yvonne and Anika together. It hasn't been a healthy—

Interviewer (Joel): Don't they sit right next to each other?

Buckhalt: Not any more.

Interviewer (Joel): They were Friday.

Buckhalt: And by the way. I understand that you've got to learn them, but my way of learning is to get out there with a stool and travel from place to place because I move kids around. You know, sometimes it is from day to day. So I can't promise that they're all going to be in the same little seat. (Laughter) They like to move around. Routinely if someone is absent, Jeff, who's so wonderful, will ask to sit closer to the front or um if it's in a place that's more by himself. Others not together. Jack and Tom probably need to be separated because they are both such top students they need to give their

voice to other groups. And that's the only reason. More people need to benefit. They like to partner, get a paper back that the two of them have corrected you don't have to pick up your pen, but they need to share that wealth with other kids. Tom is the artist of the classroom, as is Anika. And routinely in a literature circle for history the two of them will ask to be artist, the illustrators (interruption).

Interviewer (Courtney): Is there anything that you think that you'd like for us to teach in our unit, anything that you haven't got a chance to go over yet or spend a lot of time on that you'd like to spend more time on?

Buckhalt: I want the kids to keep working with revision. And I know that's a hard task for you guys to take on, but, um, definitely working with revision, continue working with transitions, um, they always need work with commas, sorry but that's true. Um, those are pretty strict. I want to work with the short story. We haven't yet. I mean we've worked with what is a short story, but I would like for them to write a short story. I don't know if a couple of you would want to take that on together, or if you're allowed to take on something together, um, I want to work with poems with two voices or three voices which is always something fun that I do, um, but skill work, mechanics, any mechanical skill plus revision.

Interviewer (Joel): Is there anything, any work of literature, that there's a concept, like, that you'd like for us to focus on out of that particular reading?

Buckhalt: Jack asks specifically about working with tone. He's concerned as a writer that his stories have a tone. A seventh grader asking! I asked them midyear, after their second portfolio, "what haven't we worked on this year that you feel you would like to work on in your writing?" Where I did not ask the grade-level that question. They could tell, well, they're not really ready to give me an answer that I could work from in lesson planning. But that's an example that came from that class, that Jack said that he knew he would be writing longer stories and he wanted to work on tone. He already has voice. But as building a spooky atmosphere, um, descriptive writing is, um, people think of just in terms of mode of writing, but when you break it down there are so many skills in descriptive writing, like using specific nouns, not so many adjectives perhaps but specific nouns. And then there's the skill work of using commas between adjectives, um, and building in all of the senses. Opelika has typically not scored as high on the descriptive mode as on the other modes, so work in that area would be another writing. But as far as literature I do want them to develop their own short stories and I think characterization is one of those skills that you talk about with writing, but characterization is difficult, but a fun unit could be developed around characterization. And then work in, um, up to leading toward a story.

Interviewer (Cara): Well could we incorporate possibly characterization and short stories—, I don't know **if** you would want to do this, characterization to a short story and then from that revision.

Buckhalt: Yes, Yes. You know that is an angle. If you came up with something that would be beneficial to the classroom and something you were interested in it would probably be enough to incorporate several of you in a like a focused rotating unit of lessons—

Interviewer (Joel): Yea but I figured maybe some, some Poe and—

Buckhalt: Mmm, they would love it

Interviewer (Joel): —and they could see how he uses tone to create a spooky atmosphere.

Buckhalt: That's immediately, as soon as when Jack asked that question— (Tape Ends)