

Planting Seeds across Curricula

RACHELE CHAMBERS AND NANCY TERRELL



“Connecting with people of different backgrounds, content, and experience is beneficial to students and educators.”

It all starts with an idea, and when it starts to blossom and grow, new experiences will nurture inquiry and make learning bloom.

The focus starts with preparing students to read and write but also to inquire, explore, research, synthesize, and repeat. Learning through hands-on, relative tasks is the way to foster independent, successful students who can become productive individuals in society, not afraid of tackling problems they encounter and able to discover answers.

COLLABORATION

As a 5-year veteran educator, Rachele Chambers has faced challenges related to teaching inquiry to seventh graders. The teacher librarian, Nancy Terrell, invited her to collaborate and blend their expertise to create an amazing language arts / social studies project. In her 26 years as a teacher librarian, Nancy has had the awesome opportunity to reach every child and collaborate with a wealth of classroom teachers. She is excited to see the potential in classroom teachers, get them engaged in hands-on learning activities, and encourage them to enter and use the library resources. Therefore, Nancy reached out to



Positive messages by seventh-grade English language arts classes

Rachele as a willing partner to plan this project.

WHY COLLABORATE?

First and foremost, individually teachers and librarians do not have all the answers. Connecting with people of different backgrounds, content, and experience is beneficial to students and educators. Learning from and sharing one another's strengths builds new skills in each individual. The act of incorporating different content areas, educators, and stakeholders shows students interdependence, collaboration, and connection. In this way, students make necessary connections between historic events and the future while applying learned skills for finding and using information.

For students, “Learning is a social process. When learners work together in group- and team-based situations, they are able to solve problems together that they would not be able to solve independently” (AASL, 2018, p. 86). Therefore, Rachele and Nancy decided that by creating learning stations that focus on social issues, conflicts, and violent and nonviolent pro-

tests, they could allow students to gain knowledge of the past and the skill set to peacefully resolve conflicts and foster their own citizenship. Furthermore, in a society where young people spend so much time communicating through electronic devices, working on a collaborative project provides them the opportunity to think, create, share, and grow—in order to work toward common goals in face-to-face learning experiences based on AASL Shared Foundation III, Collaborate (2018). Collaborative projects allow students to be “confronted with diverse viewpoints and alternative interpretations of a situation or problem” to “improve critical-thinking and problem-solving strategies,” fostering lifelong skills that will benefit students in- and outside of the classroom (AASL, 2018, p. 86).

WHY THIS PROJECT?

Nancy attended a session at the Virginia Association of School Librarians (VAASL) annual conference and met Nancy Noyes Silcox, author of *Samuel Wilbert Tucker: The Story of a Civil Rights Trailblazer and the 1939 Alexandria Library Sit-In* (2014). This biography, which takes place in a public library in Alexandria, Virginia, highlights a nonviolent protest against discrimination and is packed with primary source documents. Nancy thought this nonfiction text would be great for the seventh-grade language arts classes, so she bought a copy to share with Rachele, who read the book and immediately thought of ways to incorporate various language arts skills, including text features. Nancy also knew the civil rights focus would tie in with the social studies curriculum and thought a research activity focusing on violent

and nonviolent protests would successfully engage students in learning about history.

To begin, she developed a Hampton Education Foundation grant proposal to provide a hands-on learning research activity. Upon receipt of the grant, she was able to purchase three classroom sets of the Tucker biography. That’s when the fun began.

PLANNING FOR OUR BUDDING RESEARCHERS

The first part of this project involved the planning stage for the students to explore primary and secondary sources as they made connections with text features through their study of violent and nonviolent protests. Students accessed resources in Edmodo and Google Classroom to participate in online discussions about the text with the author and their peers. Nancy organized learning stations with text, images, video clips, and websites about various protests throughout the world.

PUTTING DOWN ROOTS

Nancy and Rachele planned this learning sequence to ensure that the students were developing strong research roots. They considered Virginia Standards of Learning (Virginia Department of Education, 2018a) requirements by their State Department of Education, making connections with language arts and history. Pairing the two content areas was a perfect fit with incorporating research into student learning. The teacher librarian collaborated with one of the seventh-grade history teachers, Corinne D’Amato, to establish the timeline for the project and ensure connections in both subject



Student deals with conflicts by asking for help.

areas were made at the same time. By doing so, the three colleagues increased the learners’ active participation and “create[d] a learning environment that supports and stimulates discussion from all members of the school community” (AASL, 2018, pp. 88–89). Nancy developed a graphic organizer to track their research while in the library, providing a method to make notes on key issues with the conflicts as they discovered them.

The main history standard of learning targeted was VA History SOL USII.1a, which reads, “The student will demonstrate skills for historical and geographical analysis and responsible citizenship, the ability to analyze and interpret primary/secondary source documents to increase understanding of events and life in United States history, and making connections between the past and present” (Virginia Department of Education, 2018b). Nancy and Rachele were also able to make connections with many of Virginia’s English Standards of Learning (Virginia Department of Education, 2018a). As an English language arts teacher, Rachele was tasked with

enhancing student reading, writing, and communication skills.

It is often difficult to encourage students to read, let alone read nonfiction, or in their eyes, “the boring stuff.” Rachele utilized the text, *Samuel Wilbert Tucker: The Story of a Civil Rights Trailblazer and the 1939 Alexandria Library Sit-In*. With this reading, Rachele wanted to ensure that the students could answer essential questions that demonstrated their understanding of main ideas, summarizing, inferring/drawing conclusions, and word analysis. Rachele included those essential skills to address Bloom’s Taxonomy Levels (Anderson & Krathwohl, 2001)—as required by the district—of “remember, understand, analysis, and application” on daily handouts and/or graphic organizers. Rachele focused heavily on analysis and application, since students struggle with these higher order thinking levels. Essential questions that Rachele and Nancy wanted the students to focus on were:

- What effects do protests have on the community and world?
- Why is it important to learn about protests in our past?
- How does the past impact the present?

In addition, Rachele developed some higher order thinking questions for students to expand their thinking and provide opportunities to express their views and respond to their peers through online and classroom discussions:

- Why did the protesters choose the methods they used to share their views?
- Was the protestor’s method effective



Student “speaks” up when faced with a problem.

in making change? Why or why not?

Rachele also developed a nonfiction text feature preview and text features crossword that were used in the classroom. Additionally, she prepared some “paired texts” to compare and contrast the events of the Alexandria Library sit-in and other nonviolent protests in history. One of those texts was “Integration of - Central High School” (2010). The excerpt was included with the students’ reading comprehension and analysis questions. In the language arts class, students compared and contrasted to find commonalities between the events in Tucker’s life to those of the Little Rock Nine. The students were intrigued by the events and began to gain a better understanding of their history. The fictional novel *Out of My Mind*, by Sharon Draper, was used to prompt discussion about how individual uniqueness helped people overcome adversity. The main character, Melody, had to develop strength and a plan to combat the obstacles, similar to Tucker and the Little Rock Nine. Incorporating a variety of texts allows students to access and connect with experiences of



Student learns from conflicts and “moves on.”

others and empathize with the struggles they are unfamiliar with. This exposure will make a positive impact on relationships in their daily lives, which meets the competency Include Shared Foundation of the national standards (AASL, 2018). Developing an understanding for those who are different from ourselves is a challenge in our society; therefore, student exposure to this as early as possible is essential.

SMALL GROUPS HELP STUDENTS GROW

Through the use of learning stations, students worked in small groups as they explored texts and websites. The experience gave the students a sense of belonging and the opportunity to work with the strengths of others in completing their graphic organizers. The students were also provided an opportunity to express their views and experiences and gain insights from those in their group, supporting the Collaboration Shared Foundation (AASL, 2018, p. 91). Small groups provided accountability, as each member shared in the responsibility of the research, record-



Chambers, Silcox, and Terrell

ing, and final decision for their media message. Furthermore, this allowed for small-group instruction to assist students who needed more assistance, scaffold the tasks, and provide remediation on skills not mastered in direct instruction within the classroom. It was helpful to have an instructional assistant to add support; however, if this is not possible, the teacher or librarian can do so.

FINAL PROJECTS LET STUDENTS BLOOM

The final part of the learning adventure for students was to create an audience-specific visual representation on ways to deal with conflict in a nonviolent way. Nancy and Rachele decided to use a 15-foot LEGO wall in the library to display their final product. Based on

the students' analysis of the text and inferences made using content and pictures, students gained understanding of what was taking place in the text and described the type of individual Tucker was in the face of conflict. Students then developed solutions to combat the problem of discrimination and related it to present-day conflicts. Each group had to come up with several ways to deal with conflict in a nonviolent way. The group worked together to choose one word they would create on the LEGO wall that no one else had chosen. When the group decided on a word, they would record their group word on the laptop connected to the promethean board to prevent repeated words. Then they proceeded to the LEGO wall to either spell out the word or create an image using LEGOs.

THE BIG STEM SUPPORTS LIFELONG SKILLS

Students demonstrated their knowledge of text structures to predict and categorize information from both print and digital texts to summarize supporting details on their graphic organizer. Students demonstrated their knowledge of technology as a tool to research using appropriate reference materials, organize their information on their graphic organizer, and evaluate and communicate information to create their media message of a nonviolent way to deal with conflict using our LEGO wall. Students also demonstrated organization and persistence when completing their group assignment. Students self-assessed by completing an exit ticket, determining their comfort level with reference

materials and technology tools, as well as summarize an event they researched and how the events affect present-day society. Teacher and librarian used a rubric to assess students' overall understanding of accessing and summarizing details about an event, using reference materials and technology to collect information and work with others to determine mastery of predicting, summarizing, and inferring/drawing conclusions.

EXTEND LEARNING WITH AN AUTHOR VISIT: WELCOME NANCY NOYES SILCOX

It is very exciting for an author to see how her nonfiction text impacts the life of young people! Nancy reached out to Silcox during the first year of using her text and in turn created an Edmodo site to communicate with the author. They used it to ask questions and provide reflection as students read the book, giving them direct contact with the author. Students enjoyed reading the book and conducting research using the learning stations and QR codes. One student commented, "We really liked the fact that you came [to] our school and talked to us about your book and the upcoming preview of the picture book. . . . I have to think that you have a great way of words that can give out amazing information. Please keep writing!"

THE SEEDS OF COLLABORATION

Nancy and Rachele's collaboration didn't end with this project. They went on to share this learning experience with educators around the state as they prepared and presented at the Longwood Summer Literacy Institute, the VAASL Annual Conference,

and Hampton City Schools Title One "Rejuvenate" Session. Nancy also collaborated with Silcox to plan a school visit, funded through the Hampton Education Foundation grant. Having the author meet the students in person and share that "sometimes life provides opportunities that you never thought you could do" provided them with a unique experience. You never know where seeds will land and the impact that they can have on others. May you pick up one tiny seed (idea) from this article and plant it to see where it will grow for you.

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Rachele Chambers is a native of Hampton, Virginia. She loves to read in her spare time and became a teacher to spark that interest in young people. She has been employed as a seventh-grade language arts teacher at Davis Middle School with Hampton City Schools for 5 years. She has served as instructional leader for 1 year as well as a mentor for one of the district's new teachers and cooperating teacher for a Hampton University teacher candidate. She is excited to embark on her new journey as a teacher librarian next year.

Nancy Terrell has served as a teacher librarian with Hampton City Schools for the past 26 years. She is currently working at Davis Middle School (which will change its name to Tarrant Middle School in the fall). She is a National Board Certified Teacher and mentors candidates in her district. She has published articles in *Knowledge Quest* and *Library Media Connection*.