



## Newsletter Features

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## Important Dates

- ◆ Sept. 26: Partner Connection 4-6; SSB Con. Room C
- ◆ Oct. 11: STEP=UP Module Launch Party 4-5; EPASW Common Area
- ◆ Oct. 13: Induction Seminar 4-6
- ◆ Oct. 24: Field Advisory 4-6 ; SSB Con. Room C
- ◆ Nov. 14: Field Advisory 4-6; SSB Con. Room C
- ◆ Nov. 17/18: Induction Seminar; TBA

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## What is a literacy artifact?

STEP=UP partners' literacy artifacts have surely varied! They included everything from surveys to DVDs to an apple and "outer space ant farm". Given this variation, how do we commonly define "literacy artifact?" The traditional definition of an artifact is a man-made object created for future use. In STEP=UP we conceptualize literacy artifacts as a vehicle with which to engage in discussions about instructing pupils with disabilities. Artifacts are intended to increase awareness and knowledge of teaching strategies, methods, and resources for special education teacher candidates about what to use for developing K-12 students' literacy skills.

Just as there have been many different kinds of artifacts, partners have reported various reasons for selecting their artifact. Primarily though, as we hoped, partners have brought artifacts they found to be excellent resources in their own classrooms. One artifact was selected because it "really helps my students make geometry connections to the real world" and another because it "allows the students to 'load upfront.' It gives all of my students a framework for the story as well as introduces characters." When a partner prepares his/her artifact we intend them to do just that, prepare it in a way the engages UIC

students as well as partner colleagues in thinking and talking about not simply how these items are used, but how they might become a part of their classrooms. Contrary to what you might think, artifacts are seldom tried and true or time-tested. Often they are things that teachers have only just discovered to be assets to their curriculum. For instance, one mentor tells us "My students and I discovered it while reading Time For Kids. My students are obsessed with it and I have used it for several different purposes."

The biggest problem that partners report is a difficulty transitioning from being a teacher in their classrooms to becoming teacher educators in STEP=UP. That is why, in partner professional development meetings, we focus mainly on how to use the artifact in discussions with UIC students. In our first meeting, we talked about emphasizing the *processes* of planning, teaching and assessment from which the particular artifact is an exemplar. In addition to showing the product – the artifact, partners also need to show UIC students your reasoning.

Each literacy artifact generally relates to a specific aspect of teaching such as, for example, classroom management, how to teach writing skills, or student assessment. Foremost among

these general lessons is the idea that education is a process undertaken by both pupils and teachers alike. In fact, one mentor echoes the theme of Frierean pedagogy by stressing, "I want others to learn that there is a process of assessment stratagem [and] assessment. I also want them to learn how different my students are (and) to see how my students are the same." Partners seem to feel that this realization is fundamental to becoming a successful teacher. The philosophical tone of this advice may put off some new special educators who may struggle simply with planning effective lessons. To these students, one partner says, "When someone tells you [that] you don't have to reinvent the wheel this is true," and suggests rather to "use the resources available to find different methods to present specific material students need to know and understand". This kind of advice is recorded often in partner reflections after meetings; and it is our hope that this wisdom will be passed along throughout the 2006-07 academic year. When considering the meaning of STEP=UP, namely, that "Special Teachers and Exceptional Pupils Equals Urban Promise", that in some ways we all are and must be both special teachers and exceptional pupils at the same time.

## Research Corner

*“Teaching is an endeavor that requires simultaneous consideration of six different areas of concern, that strives toward ideals that are inherently contradictory, and that happens in real time where the merits of alternative courses of action must be weighed in the moment. This is the nature of teaching.”* (Kennedy, 2006, p. 26)

Mary M. Kennedy challenges the role of knowledge in teaching by pointing out the variety of issues and concerns teachers must simultaneously address each and every moment of their day issues that are not always predictable and that require different sorts of understanding. She argues that teachers use two strategies to manage such dilemmas: develop integrated habits and rules of thumb for handling situations as they arise, and plan their lessons by envisioning them unfolding like a drama. Such methods enable teachers to respond appropriately to the exigencies of the moment.

What does that mean for us as teacher educators trying to assist teacher candidates? How can we build on the notion that teachers use vision to direct their activities, and not just a particular codified mass of knowledge? Teacher candidates have not yet developed a set of actions and images that allow them to react in the moment. At the university, we are expected to transmit knowledge. Moreover, the vision of *teacher educators* is not fleshed out. We do not have the habits, customs, actions, and tricks of the trade that can help teacher candidates accommodate the range of learners and needed practices they might face in the future. Kennedy suggests that teachers need to imagine particular sets of events that “start with a problem, move through an examination, and ultimately lead to a satisfying conclusion.” (p. 211)

STEP=UP partners, acting as teacher educators, can help UIC students with the envisioning and investigation based on the authentic issues, and your visions, that emerge from your practice. UIC students cannot learn that in courses. The literacy artifact you bring could be the conduit to them seeing the problem/situation you identify, how you examined and managed it, and the outcomes that emerged. Seeing that, our UIC students can be on the road to building visions that will work for their students’ learning as well as their own learning about teaching.

Kennedy, M. M. (2006). Knowledge and Vision in Teaching *American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education*, 57(3), 205-211.

## Suggested Reading

Downing, J. (2005). *Teaching Literacy to Students with Significant Disabilities: Strategies for the K-12 Inclusive Classroom*. Northridge: California State University Press.

Break down literacy barriers to enrich the lives of students with significant disabilities! All educators and family members would agree that depriving any student of the enhanced self-esteem, independence, social skills, and general quality of life afforded by literacy would be wrong. However, because of the particular challenges--perceived or otherwise--of providing literacy instruction to youth with significant impairments, these students are often overlooked in receiving meaningful experiences and equal access to literacy and core curriculum. This book offers tangible support for obliterating the obstacles to effective literacy instruction, including: Effective strategies for tailoring literacy materials to students with disabilities, straightforward chapter summaries, frequently asked questions, websites, and easy-to-implement planning and assessment guidelines. The book seems like a good guide that could empower teachers, family members, and all team members to be realistic while providing goals leading to lifelong benefits.

## Digital Corner

**ZoomText 9.0:** The new ZoomText 9.0 allows those with visual impairments to see and hear everything on the computer screen, now clearer than ever. Their new xFont magnification displays high-definition text that can be recognized effortlessly. With their new NeoSpeech synthesizers, applications and documents are read aloud by friendly, human-sounding voices - right through the computer's speakers. And with ZoomText's productivity tools, finding what you're looking for is quick and easy.

Combining the revolutionary new features of ZoomText Magnifier with a powerful set of reading tools, ZoomText Magnifier/Reader gives you the total computer access solution. See and hear what you're doing in all of your applications, and give your eyes a rest while ZoomText reads your documents, web pages and email - right through your computer's speakers. With ZoomText Magnifier/Reader, your computer is easier to see, hear, and use. You can get more information about this product online at <http://www.aisquared.com/index.cfm>

Transition to Special Education Module  
Launch Date: October 11th  
Watch out for more details!