



Is literacy a focus of your school improvement plans? Should it be?

THE REALITY: Students cannot meet standards in the content areas without strong literacy skills.

THE ISSUE: Content area educators traditionally have not been trained to teach literacy.

THE OPPORTUNITY: The Adolescent Literacy Collaboratory, developed by The Education Alliance at Brown University

THE OUTCOME: The Collaboratory builds literacy leaders at your school.

Literacy is a critical factor that affects the ability of middle school and high school students to grasp concepts in math, science, social studies and English/language arts and to articulate their understanding of those concepts. The Adolescent Literacy Collaboratory is a year-long professional development initiative that helps interdisciplinary teams of teachers to support their students' literacy development while improving their content area learning. Through a combination of online and face-to-face collaborative activities, teachers analyze their students' reading assessment data, explore literacy research and resources, experiment with new teaching strategies, and ultimately create a series of literacy-rich lessons in their content area.

The Collaboratory is not a traditional course. Instead, it is an opportunity for professional learning using a collaborative inquiry process that draws knowledge, experience, and insights from an adolescent literacy expert, online content-area coaches, and Collaboratory participants. It requires adopting what might be a new way of thinking about professional learning—an ongoing commitment among a cohort of colleagues to create knowledge together as they experiment with and reflect on new instructional strategies over a full school year. The structure and content of the Collaboratory draw on established research about effective professional development. The findings of this research show that professional development activities that lead to lasting instructional improvement are long-term, involve teachers in solving problems directly related to their practice, focus on curriculum, provide hands-on opportunities to apply learning, and involve collaboration among teachers.

Year-long, job-embedded PD for middle and high school teachers

Please see <http://www.alliance.brown.edu/Collaboratory> for the most complete and up-to-date information. If you have questions or would like to discuss participating, please contact loom@alliance.brown.edu.

Objectives

Teachers completing the Collaboratory will

- become familiar with recent research on adolescent literacy and with the adolescent literacy resources (teaching strategies, stories, research summaries, and online tools) on The Knowledge Loom web site (<http://knowledgeloom.org/adlit>)
- learn how to identify their students' specific literacy needs using local reading assessment data
- develop content-area lessons that incorporate strategies for addressing student literacy needs and improving student engagement
- become reflective practitioners, evaluating the effectiveness of their literacy-focused instruction and considering alternative approaches when necessary
- act as literacy resources for their team members and for others in their schools, both during and after the Collaboratory year

How it Works

PARTICIPANTS

Each Collaboratory cohort consists of five to seven cross-curricular middle school and/or high school teams. Each **team** contains **five members**: a math, science, social studies, and English/language arts teacher and a team leader. The team leader can be a literacy coach, a professional development coordinator, a curriculum supervisor, an assistant principal for instruction, a library/media specialist, or a department head with a literacy background. A Collaboratory cohort may include teams from different secondary schools across the United States and its territories, multiple schools within a state, various schools within a district, or several teams from one school. Most cohorts have about 30 participants.

ACTIVITIES

Through a blend of online and face-to-face activities, team members collaborate with each other and with a literacy expert and content-area coaches to read about, discuss, and experiment with research-based strategies for literacy-rich instruction in the content areas. The process culminates in the creation of a series of lessons, which are observed by team colleagues and videotaped for online feedback and refinement.

Each year-long Collaboratory includes three components:

- 1) Orientation Institute: 5 days of intensive face-to-face work (July or August)
- 2) Online & Team Interaction: 30 weeks of online coaching and peer discussions integrated with on-site lesson observations and team meetings (September – May)
- 3) Reflection & Sustainability Planning: 1 day of live online activities with literacy expert, coaches, and Collaboratory facilitator and manager (May or June)

Five-person teams developing content-area lessons using research-based literacy strategies

What it Takes

The Collaboratory is an intensive learning experience that requires a serious commitment from participating teachers, team leaders, and administrators. Participating in the full year of activities is the equivalent of a 6-credit graduate course. In teams that participate successfully, **teachers and team leaders** devote about **three hours per week** during the school year to completing Collaboratory activities, and administrators adjust staff responsibilities to compensate for this time. Characteristics of a successful Collaboratory team:

READINESS

- Your five-person team includes a math, science, social studies, and English/language arts teacher and a team leader. Ideal teams teach at least one common class of students for the full school year.
- The team leader has agreed to coordinate and attend all team meetings; support the team's learning as necessary, both face-to-face and online; collaborate online with other team leaders to share challenges and strategies; and serve as liaison between team members and Collaboratory staff.
- Your team is comfortable working and planning together and sharing their learning with non-participating faculty members.
- Your team has common planning time and/or negotiated after-school time for team meetings (3 two-hour meetings required between September and May; more frequent meetings advised).
- Team members have Internet access and are comfortable reading and posting comments online.
- Team members have access to a video recorder (and blank media) and are comfortable having their lessons videotaped and discussed in team meetings.

COMMITMENT

- Your team has identified literacy as a key focus of its school improvement work for one school year.
- During the school year, each teacher team member is willing to spend approximately 3 hours each week thoughtfully completing Collaboratory activities directly related to his/her teaching.
- The team leader is willing to spend approximately 3 hours each week on Collaboratory activities to support his/her own learning and the learning of fellow team members.
- Team members are willing to observe one another's lessons and provide constructive feedback.

ADMINISTRATIVE SUPPORT

- The principal or assistant principal meets with the team before the initial registration form is submitted to review the Collaboratory logistics and team commitment, and share a vision for how their participation will enhance teaching and learning at the school.
- The principal or assistant principal supports the team's Collaboratory work, stays abreast of team progress, and provides extra resources or perks for participants.
- If your school's and/or district's literacy specialist or professional development coordinator is not the designated team leader, he/she still supports the team's Collaboratory work and attends Collaboratory team meetings when possible.
- Team members are relieved of roughly three hours of non-teaching responsibilities per week (e.g. curriculum/school improvement committee work, lunch and study-hall monitoring, other professional development work) to free up sufficient time for Collaboratory participation.
- Collaboratory team members are provided with class coverage for one period during each cycle to observe one another's classes (three total observations per school year) and one full day in May or June to complete sustainability planning.
- The school is willing to fund travel/lodging for the Collaboratory team members to attend the Orientation Institute in Providence, RI. (This does not apply for customized Collaboratories whose orientation will be held at their own school or district site.)

An intensive focus on literacy for a full school year

What's in it for Teachers and Team Leaders

Each Collaboratory team contains five members: a math, science, social studies, and English/language arts teacher and a team leader. The team leader can be a literacy coach, a professional development coordinator, a curriculum supervisor, an assistant principal for instruction, a library/media specialist, or a department head with a literacy background.

Teachers who participate gain

- the chance to join a professional learning community of committed colleagues within and beyond their school
- new teaching skills and tools they can apply in all their classes and share with other faculty members
- the opportunity to see real change in their students' engagement and achievement
- unlimited access during and after Collaboratory participation to online library of literacy-rich lessons in science, math, social studies, and English/language arts from fellow participants
- the option of being trained as a coach for future Collaboratories, which is a paid position
- the option of earning six graduate credits for their participation through Framingham State College in Massachusetts or Plymouth State University in New Hampshire
- a certificate of completion for 120 hours of professional development, which can be used as documentation for district or state professional development or continuing education credit
- a \$1000 stipend

Team leaders who participate gain

- the chance to join a professional learning community of committed colleagues within and beyond their school, including other school- or district-based literacy coordinators or instructional leaders
- new teaching skills and tools they can apply in their work with other faculty members
- the option of being trained as an online coach or literacy expert for future Collaboratories, which is a paid position
- a certificate of completion for 120 hours of professional development, which can be used as documentation for district or state professional development or continuing education credit
- a \$1000 stipend

New skills, graduate credit, stipends, and a professional learning community within and beyond your school

What's in it for Administrators

School and district administrators who are concerned about the No Child Left Behind legislation and its emphasis on standards and research-based practices should consider participating in the Collaboratory.

Administrators who support Collaboratory teams gain

- **access to research-based practices and supporting resources for helping students to meet content-area standards through literacy development**

Research has shown that enhancing literacy skills improves learning throughout the content areas, helping students to meet demanding standards. The Collaboratory introduces teachers to the Adolescent Literacy Support Framework, a resource developed by the Northeast and Islands Regional Educational Laboratory that draws from research in cognitive psychology, linguistics, education, English language arts, second language acquisition, and reading. The Framework identifies proven practices for improving adolescent literacy, and the Collaboratory provides teachers with expert online assistance as they learn about and implement these practices.

- **a core team of teacher leaders who can share their new enthusiasm and pedagogical skills with faculty throughout the school or district**

Each participating team consists of an English/ language arts teacher, a social studies teacher, a science teacher, a math teacher, and a school- or district based literacy specialist or instructional leader. Team members participate in online exchanges with teachers from other schools, coaches who have already implemented proven adolescent literacy practices in their own classrooms, and an experienced literacy expert. They also work with each other face-to-face to complete Collaboratory activities. This combination of on-site collaboration and online exchange can help to strengthen the working relationship of school teams while developing their expertise around content-area literacy. When the Collaboratory concludes, teachers from each team can serve as models and mentors for their content-area colleagues throughout the school.

Administrators who choose a multi-year participation plan multiply the impact of the initiative by developing local capacity to sustain and spread the effective teaching of content area literacy school- or district-wide.

An interdisciplinary team of change agents to help all students meet content standards

Results & Feedback

Since its 2003–2004 pilot year, the Collaboratory has demonstrated a capacity to support teachers from urban, rural, and suburban schools around the U.S. and its territories in the use of research-based literacy instruction strategies. Findings from a study of the program's second year point to a high level of engagement and satisfaction among participants, along with a positive impact on teaching practice and student performance. One hundred percent of participants surveyed agreed that their participation had "helped... to address their students' literacy needs," and eighty-five percent "strongly agreed" with this statement. An evaluation of the program's impact on student reading skills, funded by the Carnegie Corporation, is currently underway. The feedback below attests to the enthusiasm of current and past participants for the program.

A **social studies** teacher speaks about the Adolescent Literacy Collaboratory:

"Our school is committed to professional development and expects staff to put . . . an extraordinary amount of time into it. We have had monthly workshops and weekly meetings improving our practice, yet none of the time we have allocated this year has been as useful to my teaching as the Collaboratory has been. Its fully integrated model of a yearlong team approach to literacy has improved the way I teach dramatically. By reading excerpts of the best research on literacy practices, investigating practices in more depth on the Knowledge Loom website, experimenting with strategies in my classroom, and then planning a lesson that I get observed teaching and receive feedback [on] from a multitude of colleagues, I have become a better teacher. The Collaboratory model is one that we should seek to emulate in order for [all of] our professional development time to be worthwhile."

--Liz Newton, Blackstone Academy Charter School, Rhode Island
Collaboratory Participant, 2004-2005

A **math teacher** speaks about the Adolescent Literacy Collaboratory:

"I feel excited and energized by the new process of integrating math concepts with literacy comprehension skills, and also by acting as a facilitator rather than a lecturer. Now my students are not focused on me in front of them teaching, but on them taking ownership of their learning. Being able to read a text and use strategies to comprehend the text means that they've learned something they can use in other content areas and in their future lives. And they're much more engaged and focused on completing their tasks because they feel these tasks have a purpose. I've also noticed that at the end of the day I'm not as tired as I am when I teach in the front of the classroom."

--Janet Harriman, Sacopee Valley High School, Maine
Collaboratory Participant, 2007-2008

An **administrator** speaks about the Adolescent Literacy Collaboratory:

"The interactions with team teachers have really impacted the way I approach/will approach PD. . . . The opportunity to talk with colleagues, share concerns, observe, give feedback has made such a difference in the professional growth of my team. . . . They are more cognizant not only of strategies that will best engage students, but of the classroom climate, their expectations, and the needs of students. Teachers are more willing to give that extra time after school or to adjust assignments to fit the needs or special circumstances of students. I think that they really see the link between their actions and student achievement."

--Barbara Callwood, Charlotte Amalie High School, U.S. Virgin Islands
Assistant Principal and Collaboratory Team Leader, 2005-2006 & 2006-2007

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