

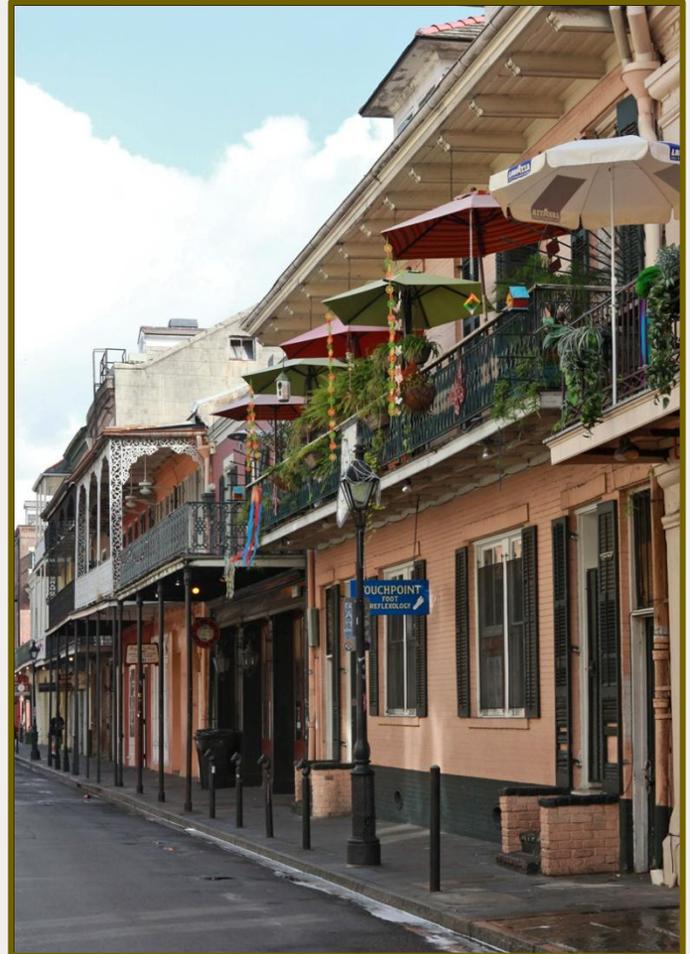


## College Ready Work Arrives in the Big Easy

Welcome to New Orleans, a city most beloved for its history, grandeur, and resilience, and the site of the College-Ready Work convening – *Unleashing Group Genius: Sharing Strategies and Building a Network* for the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. This is a historic gathering of teachers and other experts, who are leading efforts to transform secondary literacy and math standards into profound learning for all students. The past year of piloting ideas and refining those ideas has invigorated classrooms in dozens of schools and districts. That energy and expertise now comes to New Orleans for the next step.

The convening opens today with a pre-meeting devoted to sharing teachers' experiences with the Literacy Design Collaborative's template tasks, and with the Shell Centre's Formative Assessment Lessons. Teachers will be joined over the next two days by representatives of states/districts and networks to explore issues about going to scale with the work of the two initiatives. The future is very much with the convening. It is all about allowing collective creativity to flourish, mixing people's experiences and ideas with information about foundation investments that anticipate incredible uses of technology to support student learning.

There are four themes at the convening: integration, capacity building, scale, and sustainability. This issue of *The Daily* mostly tells teachers' stories, but every forthcoming issue will build on these four themes. And at the end of the convening, we hope to have unleashed our group genius!



*We have come such a long way. Two years ago, the Common Core State Standards were just being developed, and teachers' supports to implement those standards were just being developed. Our initial meetings were small and full of questions. Our math pioneers met in Chicago and San Francisco; our literacy teams launched their work at lively meetings in Santa Monica and Baltimore. People all over the country have been working very hard since then, trying out and refining tools for teachers, and now we – teachers, districts, states and networks – have come together to learn from each other and think about exciting possibilities for the tools we are developing. This is a time to celebrate and to let our imaginations go free.*

**Carina Wong, Deputy Director, College Ready Work, Education**



## Students Just Ran With It: The Literacy Design Collaborative in a Chemistry Classroom

Michelle Buroker was bored with the state curriculum on physical science. As a chemistry teacher at Scott High School in Kenton County, Kentucky, she knew that she could make the work more interesting for herself and for her students. And Michelle had previously improvised last-minute assignments for the students, but their responses were predictably last-minute, as well. She was out of ideas.

But this time, Michelle decided to do something different. She came across the argumentative module from the Literacy Design Collaborative (LDC) strategy for reading and writing and inserted the module into her unit on electromagnetism. Though she was unsure about the LDC module at first, she was quickly surprised by how well it worked. To her amazement, her students, as she recalls, “just ran with it, debating about – believe it or not, *cell phones*.” Her students determined their arguments based on their findings from original research about the potential harm of cell phones. And it was clear her students were receptive to the module because Michelle applied in class learning to a real work problem – what they might read in the newspaper, or what they might hear on the nightly news.

The immediate success of introducing the LDC module to her students was not apparent at first. Michelle admits to her initial reservations, noting: “I was incredibly skeptical about how the modules would fit into my instruction.

I wanted something authentic, not another ‘afterthought.’” But in witnessing how her students’ enthusiasm persisted even months after her first introduction of the module into her regular instruction, she later became convinced of their efficacy: “I found out that these modules are rigorous, but not in a ridiculously hard way. Rather, in a way that asks students to apply what they have learned.”

In preliminary findings on the efficacy of the LDC work, Michelle’s story emerges as not the exception to the rule, but the rule itself. Her ability to expand on the core content of the physical sciences brought forth an effective and engaging way to teach literacy skills in non-English Language Arts settings. The argumentative module assisted Michelle in teaching students about using citations and clarity in writing in chemistry through the examination of challenging texts, and the labor towards a final product, such as an essay, report, or opinion piece. Her students’ work resembles the reading and writing required in college, or found in the modern workplace; it is college-ready.

The LDC modules are designed to deliver Common Core State Standards as a foundation for teaching. Just as Michelle did for her students, teachers are able to build their content onto it. This was a deliberate effort of the small group of experts and practitioners that developed the learning theories and structures for teaching literacy in English Language Arts, social studies, and science classes. Twenty-nine prototype template tasks, resembling a “fill-in-the-blank” template provides the framework for different writing skills, like argumentative, informational, or narrative writing.

Refining and calibrating the LDC strategy improves as teachers like Michelle continue to use it in practice. And, in collaboration with other teachers, the potential for template tasks and modules increases rapidly. As she reflected on the success of bringing the LDC strategy into her classroom, Michelle shares the new ways she challenges herself to improve her teaching: “I have changed my thinking on assessment and what rigor is all about.”

*In almost everything we do, our focus is on teachers : what investments the Gates Foundation can make to help them move the Common Core State Standards into their practice, what tools can we provide, what futures can we help them envision for their students’ learning. This convening in New Orleans is all about that. Even more exciting, however, is the contribution that teachers have made to our learning as the Literacy Design Collaborative and Formative Assessment Lessons work has progressed over the past two years. We celebrate the efforts of our many partners and are grateful to every one of you.*

**Vicki Phillips, Director, College**

## A Monkey Off Your Back: Formative Assessment Lessons in a Math Classroom

For several years, Michael Stevens worked at the High School for Law and Public Service in New York City on developing new ideas for teaching math. This became his passion as he observed that traditional methods were ineffective and not in the service of his students. Even though he had worked with his assistant principal and mentor, something didn't quite click. Until, he was introduced to Formative Assessment Lessons (FALs).

After attending training sessions with Ann Shannon, Michael quickly found what he had been looking for. He explains, "FALs are richer tasks that involve a greater depth of content, and help students build meaningful conceptual understanding of the math." FALs involve both problem solving and content learning, producing an enriching learning process for students. The emphasis on a plenary among students, where they exchange their work with one another, illuminates problem solving by simply offering a new perspective.

Michael continues, "Traditionally, many teachers have followed a model called, 'I do, we do, you do.' The FALs follows a reverse model, where students are challenged to work on a problem by themselves first. This allows for varied entry points and multiple solution paths. Then, their progress and questions are made public and discussed. Finally, after the students have shown and explained their solutions, the teacher offers further explanation and a summary." "This process," he notes, "is very powerful. It gets the curriculum monkey off my back and gives me the courage and confidence to take the time for students to explore deeper mathematical concepts."

Developed in partnership between the Shell Centre, at the University of Nottingham, England, and the University of California, at Berkeley, FALs unpack the Common Core State Standard for teachers and students. They challenge students to put concepts into practice. The central design of the FALs, as described by Michael earlier, allows teachers to embed it into their regular curriculum. Michael, for example, spends one to three days on each FAL, and in an entire spring semester, used five of them in addition to his instruction during the year.

Michael also notices how FALs switch around the usual classroom hierarchy. He finds that students who figure out an answer first find themselves as "not the only ones with the right answers." As a result, he finds, "everyone is engaged and challenged, even if each student's final destination is not identical." Students enjoy breaking out of the repetitiveness of formal lessons, and appear to value "the chance to approach a math problem without the front loading of ideas and skills." With FALs, Michael explains, "It stops being 'math,' and instead becomes an interesting question."



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## Thinking Back and Looking Ahead: Some Thoughts on Our Work in Literacy and Math



**Marilyn Crawford** currently leads the Literacy by Design project, with particular focus on creating policies and strategies that allow districts and schools to align with common core standards and distribute responsibility across content areas.

**Q:** *What was the most important accomplishment of LDC this year?*

**MC:** I have to say launching a strategy for teaching literacy that is being built out with teachers in the lead. For the first time we have a viable alternative to reading and writing across the curriculum, and it's being developed by practice.

**Q:** *What is the highest priority for next year?*

**MC:** There are a number of LDC support systems being developed that will make it easier for teachers to develop and share modules and to put them into practice in the context of larger course design choice points. Once teachers have access to these supports, I think they will take LDC to the next level and show us a clear pathway to scale.

**Ann Shannon** is a professional development trainer for Formative Assessment Lessons. She has spent the past year working directly with teachers in district pilot sites in Kentucky, New York, Tennessee, North Carolina, to name a few.

**Q:** *What was the most important accomplishment in the Formative Assessment Lessons work?*

**AS:** I think that the most important accomplishment was letting teachers see the impact that the FALs can have on their students' learning.

**Q:** *What is the highest priority for next year?*

**AS:** The priority for next year is the development of courses in Algebra and Geometry. The FALs are going to be embedded in those courses.



Find Marilyn and Ann online, at

**[groupgenius.crowdvine.com](https://groupgenius.crowdvine.com)**

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