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Stacey Joy, Elementary Teacher, Baldwin Hills Magnet Elementary

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Date: 2012

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“Just leap, jump, do it!”

Sometimes one impactful workshop can make a significant difference in a veteran teacher’s development. When Stacey Joy, an experienced upper grade elementary teacher at Baldwin Hills Magnet Elementary School, participated in a novel study workshop at a gifted education conference, she found something that would impact her classroom instruction for many years to come.

Novel study is an in-depth study of an author’s work through guided reading and independent activities. The workshop provided materials, models and student work samples that inspired Stacey to create novel studies for her students. She started with “The Land” by Mildred D. Taylor, an author frequently used in her class. Stacey devoted the summer to deconstructing the novel, restructuring her instruction, and developing activities for the novel study. The creation of Stacey’s first novel study took a considerable amount of time and she found she needed to engage in the text herself in order to create the many chapter activities. Her novel study needed to not only increase student comprehension of the text, but also excite her students about reading and making choices about how to engage in the text. Therefore, she focused her chapter activities on character analysis, setting and plot development, vocabulary builders, interdisciplinary connections, and real world connections. When Stacey implemented her novel study unit, she knew all of her hard work had paid off when she heard her students say in disappointment, “Awww!” after she announced the end of reading time. “That’s the most exciting sound I think I hear,” she exclaimed.

Once she had fully developed her novel study skills, Stacey embarked on a journey to lead others in creating novel studies. Stacey believes one of the most powerful aspects of novel study is student choice; allowing students to pick which activities to complete in order to engage in the text. However, developing all the different “choice activities” and managing different student choices took time for her to effectively implement. Therefore, it was important for Stacey to take time to collect the needed resources, work out the different choice-making activities, and reflect on what worked and what didn’t work so she might share her experiences and resources in a way that didn’t overwhelm teachers beginning the process. Stacey developed templates and scaffolds to support her colleagues in starting the novel study process, allowing them to create the novel study in manageable chunks. By starting small,

Stacey supported other teachers in her school to ease their way into novel study while also reinforcing that novel study is an on-going process that constantly changes and grows.

Here are some of Stacey's suggestions for first steps in creating a novel study:

- Choose a novel that captivates you as a reader and that you enjoy teaching and reading with your students.
- Find time to adequately plan the novel study unit. If you select a novel that will take more than 2 months to read, plan the first half of the novel and assess your activities and the success of your planning before moving on to the second half.
- Find as many resources that will allow you to NOT create too much from scratch.
- Always keep your novel study in a 3-ring binder, preferably with sheet protectors, and lots of sticky notes inside your novel to keep track of activities or discussion starters.
- Remember that it takes time and you have to be patient with yourself throughout the process of completing your first novel study.

Stacey learned that being flexible and forgiving in starting slowly is needed in creating an effective novel study unit. Not all the resources and activities are going to be in place in the beginning and growing the novel study process is part of learning and reflecting on what works and doesn't work, while also providing her students with an opportunity to really engage in and love reading. Through her role-modeling and risk-taking of effective and engaging classroom instruction, Stacey Joy has led her students and her colleagues to higher levels of achievement.

Stacey Joy is an elementary school teacher at Baldwin Hills Magnet Elementary with 28 years of experience. She is a UCLA Writing Project Fellow, a UCLA Teacher Education Program (TEP) Guiding Teacher and Site Coordinator/Faculty Advisor, and instructor for the UCLA Lead Teacher Certification Program.