

Collecting Threads, Weaving Community/Colgando hebras, tejiendo comunidad

Weaving the threads of the Common Core into the fabric of our community/Enhebrando los hilos del Básico Común en la tela de nuestra comunidad

a proposal for collaboration from Fred Mindlin, Associate Director for Technology Integration, Central California Writing Project (UCSC)
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There is great promise in the prospect of our coming Common Core implementation, and I'd like to see the Central California Writing Project coordinate a large-scale effort across our tri-county service area to take the fullest advantage possible of the richness and diversity of our local community as we plan and develop the curricula to support the new standards.

The Writing Project's motto, "Teachers teaching teachers," serves as a wonderfully empowering image for the collaborative and cooperative process which we envision for this endeavor. It's also emblematic of how all the work of Writing Projects around the nation embodies one of the current buzzwords of business development and change: [Frugal Innovation](#). Basing professional development programs in schools on the talents of the teachers already on staff at a site, or reaching no further than the teachers at other schools in one's local community, makes so much more sense than spending orders of magnitude more dollars on "experts" from outside the region: as well as costing so much more, the outsiders do not know the environment, the population, the families of the students you need to serve, not to mention the other teachers and administrators in the group being served. This is not to say that there is never a reason to bring in someone from outside the community, or even from the other side of the globe, when it's appropriate to do so – if we need and can afford Sir Ken Robinson, John Holt, or Lucy Calkins, let's bring 'em on – my point is that we should first look to each other and see how far we can go.

First ideas: echoing some of the collaborative effort that went into [2009's Assemblage + Collage + Construction](#) series of exhibits, we are proposing a tri-county series of themed exhibits at art galleries and museums, public spaces and government offices, tied to the notion of thread, fabric, and connection. Our Central Coast communities abound with artists and craft workers who use thread, string, cloth, and fabric of all kinds in their art. The MAH's "Radical Craft" night in the fall of 2011 highlighted weavers, spinners, knitters, and string gamers plying their wares. SCAL holds an annual fiber arts exhibit, Cabrillo features costume design, and mobile sculptors depend on "hanging by threads" to capture movement and delight the eye.

What does this have to do with implementing the Common Core curriculum in schools? The Central California Writing Project is offering a series of seminars and workshops on strategies and design processes to enable a collaborative approach to this task. While textbook publishers, curriculum designers, and testing companies are offering many "pre-packaged solutions" to the challenges of Common Core deployment, it is our conviction that empowering teachers in each school to collaborate on the design and delivery of instruction based on their granular knowledge of their local communities and of the needs of each student in their classrooms, is the most effective framework for addressing Common Core implementation – as well as a less costly approach to use.

At the same time, this local empowerment need not lead to multiple iterations of duplicative lesson plans. We envision a region-wide network of project-based activities, tied to the exhibits grouped around the threaded themes of cordage and cloth, developed by teachers and students in collaboration with the many vibrant cultural institutions which enliven our community. Collaborative online communities of teachers through their “personal learning networks,” as well as through existing national and local networks can support rich collaborations (NWP Connect, Youth Voices, and the iAnthology Ning, are examples nationally, and CABC’s local mailing list and this CCWP Group network are local examples).

Threading is a powerful metaphor for the connecting nodes of the elements of a story, and the essence of communication is creating coherent and compelling narratives -- whether in words, images, actions, or objects. These are all, at base, writing processes, even when non-verbal: even a silent movie has a script and a storyboard. And threading is also one of the key concepts in computer programming, again a field crucial to our education work and full of rich analogy: nodes, knots, strings, and processes come to mind immediately.

The working title for this “grand scheme” -- Collecting Threads, Weaving Community/Colgando hebras, tejiendo comunidad

-- is meant to evoke a vision for a cultural event that transcends and transforms the boundaries of schools, homes, businesses, farms, factories, and public spaces, and even includes the wild spaces still left in our beautiful region in such abundance. To thread the awareness of connections, the string that ties one suspended piece of the fabric to another, weaving, knotting, knitting, playing with the endless possibilities of connection and communion: this is what education in the age of the Common Core can be about.