



Into the Center of the Curriculum

Papers of the Treasure Mountain Research Retreat #14

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Reflection on the Teaching and Adoption of Think Models as a Method of Banning Bird Units From the Library

Carol Koeschlin
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David V. Loertscher

We have had the opportunity to present the think models in *Ban Those Bird Units* and now its companion volume, *Beyond Bird Units* in many areas of the United States. These presentations have been with librarians of course, but in a surprising number of places, we have had many teachers and to our satisfaction, a number of administrators who *have stayed all day*.

Bird units, those low-level cut and paste activities are so rampant across the U.S. and Canada that it became apparent to us that libraries, unwittingly, were contributing to and facilitating mediocre assignments. Teachers in our audiences realize instantly that this is the case when they have a chance to think and reflect about their practices in a non-threatening environment. Their response is as expected: What could we do to transform what we have done so many times in the past?

We teach the all the models have a pattern. The first half of any library assignment is business as usual. We try to get students to build a question and extract information from our print and digital collections and try to become a mini-expert about something. Nothing new there. What is new, is the concept that filling in a worksheet, writing a report, or doing a PowerPoint presentation is not the end. When students know something about their bird, their issue, their state, their person, it is the beginning, not the end. This seems to be a unique idea to most. At the very moment when students have done research and tried to learn the basic knowledge about a topic they finally know enough to really learn something in depth – not just about what they researched, but about what the entire group learned. What a novel idea this is as we present – the idea that every student takes their piece of knowledge – their puzzle piece – and fits it into the class puzzle. What appears? The Ah Ha! The Big Idea. The So What. Something akin to the general concepts of understanding usually present in state standard requirements.

In any of our workshops, as soon as participants get the big idea that library research always end up in a big think, they immediately begin to transform mundane assignments into exciting ones. At first, we encourage them to follow the models as outlined by the authors. Invariably, however, they start to creatively adapt the models to various topics, grade, levels and types of students in their own schools. This has made us more than pleased. As authors, we have tried to stimulate the notion that the best instructional ideas that already work generally only need a bit of tweaking to turn them into exemplary teaching and learning – active learning, engaging learning, and in an environment where plagiarism is really not an issue.

So, our basic tenet has been and continues to be: If the library is to be relevant in the 21st century, then the teaching and learning that goes on there have to be the most exciting, absolutely superior to, and, more engaging than anything that a single teacher could possibly do in the classroom alone.

The following page is a big think for anyone acquainted with the think models Perhaps some reflection will stimulate the best in library teaching and learning.

* The Big Think *

What has been the impact of the THINK models on teaching and learning in the library?

The School Library is a knowledge building environment. Librarians cannot claim a contribution to teaching and learning unless literacy and understanding are being built day in and day out. David Loertscher, 2005

So What?

What do we need to consider, to ensure success:

- What skills and literacies will students need in the 21st century?
- How can we enhance reading, writing and thinking in content curriculum?
- How can we design for building big ideas and deeper understanding?
- How can we work toward success for all students?
- How can we move beyond those bird units?

We have discovered that The THINK Models:

- apply **critical and creative thinking**.
- build **cross-curricular literacy** skills and new literacies.
- are **engaging and effective**.
- empower students to build **deeper understanding**.
- are **knowledge building** learning experiences.
- are a framework for designing **successful assignments**.
- effectively utilize information and **technology-rich learning environments**.
- provide opportunity for **differentiated instruction**.

What are bird units?

- all about projects
- fill-in-the-blanks worksheets
- regurgitate answers to teacher questions
- textbook 'research'
- term 'report'
- cut, paste and plagiarize
- assess product only
- value only bells and whistles

Classroom teachers can work to the benefit of many more students by implementing **patterns of instruction** likely to serve multiple needs. *Integrating Differentiated Instruction: Understanding by Design* Tomlinson and McTighe

What we have found that works with the models!

- Design for understanding
- Differentiate Instruction
- Implement Evidence Based Practice
- Use the Think Models Creatively

What is understanding?

"You understand it only if you can teach it, use it, prove it, explain it, defend it, or read between the lines."
Understanding by Design Wiggins and McTighe

What Next?

- Follow the design down process.
- Select a model that fits the information problem or issue.
- Provide students with an information-rich environment.
- Teach information literacy skills when needed.
- Infuse appropriate ICT in program design.
- Gather evidence of success.
- Consider designing your WebQuest using a THINK model at the Processing Stage.
- Use the Web 2 environment to design collaborative workspaces for students based on the THINK models.
- Experiment and tweak the models to fit your need –**transform your old units!**
- Design your own THINK Models

*** The Big Think ***
activity elevates library projects.
The product isn't the end, it is
the beginning!

**Bottom Line... Use the Think Models to demonstrate that
Collaboration in the Library Is the Best Teaching and Learning in the School!**