Project Smart 2012-2013 Team Action Report Form

Using Common Core Learning Standards & Data to Improve Student Achievement

Teacher(s)/School: Sheridan Prep. Albany, NY

SUNY Oswego faculty member: Beyerbach, Blunt White, Walsh (literacy support)

Project or Team Name: Developing Text Resources to Support the Literacy CCLS K-5

Please answer the following questions:

**Action:** Describe your CCLS project. Which CCLS standards will you target?

Our Team read Calkins et al *Pathways to the Common Core*, as well as information from *Engage NY* and other sources and reflected on each of the 6 literacy shifts. We are self-assessing our own practice and identifying goals for aligning instruction to the Reading and Writing CCLS. We are examining each of the anchor standards and then how they play out across the grade levels. We are sharing text resources we are each using in our classrooms to teach to the CCLS, focusing in on one or two standards each session, sharing resources across grade levels, as well as lesson ideas. We are developing a resource for the school so that all teachers know what books/text resources are available at various grade levels and how they are being used to support the CCLS.

**Rationale:** Fully state your rationale for the project. Why is this work important?

As Calkins et al suggest, shifts need to occur from where teachers are in their practice, building on strengths and targeting areas for development. Having an opportunity to discuss the standards in depth as a faculty, meet in small groups to examine and share how we are or could be addressing the standards in our practice, and then implementing new ideas in the classroom, is essential to identifying shared goals for growth and improving as a school.

**Responsibilities/Timeline:** Identify a series of action steps you will take to complete your project. Next to each step, identify person(s) responsible for carrying out that task. For each step also identify your timeline (during what month(s) you plan to complete each step).

1. The group is meeting monthly during a teacher professional development session to discuss implementation of the CCLS in our classrooms, and to discuss a chapter of the Calkins book each session. These dialogue forums are open to the entire school, and over 25 teachers have attended, most on a regular basis. Of these teachers, 13 committed to completing the Project SMART Graduate Course.

2. The teachers in the Project SMART Graduate Course examined and shared resources for the school focused on identifying exemplary texts (fiction, non-fiction, all genres, and all grade levels) that are or could be used to teach to the CCLS, as well as sharing lesson ideas for how they are using these, and collecting data on how students are responding and performing.

3. In the monthly dialogues, teachers identify themes for areas they wish to address (e.g. how to move students towards more analytic thinking, how to strengthen writing instruction linking it to reading, how to incorporate science and social studies informational texts into literacy instruction aimed at the CCLS, how to manage the observational data on student performance that one needs to track success and support continuous improvement). Teachers engage in a recursive process where they
examine a standard in depth, make sense of what it means across the grade levels, share what they are or could be doing, collect resources that can be used to address the standard, identify goals for future instruction, and make connections across standards.

4. Outside of the monthly meetings, the teachers in the SMART course (and many others) read the Calkins book, explore websites and resources that are shared at the meetings, have grade level and cross grade level dialogues, implement new strategies in their classroom they then report back on in group meetings, and select resources to bring to the next meeting to share.

5. The group proceeded through the standards and book so that all were discussed by the May 30 end of the year meeting. They submitted final reflections and assessed the year 1 professional development efforts. Next year, teachers will focus on the mathematics CCLS, while continuing to deepen implementation of the literacy CCLS.

6. Teachers have also participated in professional development on the CCLS provided by SMART Literacy Coach Dr. Chris Walsh. Teachers had the opportunity to observe demo lessons in reading and writing, to participate in small group conversations, and to explore resources shared by Dr. Walsh. This will be an ongoing support for the team.

**Evaluation:** What data will you collect that shows the impact of your project on student achievement of CCLS? How will you document student learning? Teacher learning?

Documentation of teacher learning has been ongoing. Teachers have completed self assessments on the 6 shifts and standards, and shared reflections in writing and group discussions. Minutes are recorded at each monthly session and shared with the whole group, and this becomes data on the conversations that occur and the decisions that are made.

Data on student learning includes samples of student work, observational notes during ELA instruction, pre/post assessments used by district, examples of students reflecting on their own literacy development, etc. As teachers implement the lessons they develop around the texts they are sharing, they collect relevant data on the impact on student learning and engagement, and share these with peers in small and large group discussions, identifying strengths and sharing strategies for improvement. Formative assessment is an ongoing process.

**Resources:** What resources will you need for this project? What costs, if any, will be incurred? What are possible sources of funding for needed resources? Books have been purchased.

Teachers have expressed interest in developing text sets of informational and narrative texts on themes—We purchased some children’s fiction and non-fiction texts and we may need to purchase more children’s literature to develop and pilot these text sets.

**Analysis of Data on Teacher and Student Learning:** (give examples/evidence for each claim.). Below are the reflections of the teachers in the SMART course in which they describe changes in their teaching as well as changes in student learning, supported by evidence. Themes across the group included:

1. Increased knowledge of the CCLS and the basic shifts required of teachers. Teachers reported that this was the only or most in depth professional development they had on the CCLS.

2. Increased attention to creating a balanced literacy program with more resources to support this.

3. Increased focus on non-fiction reading and writing across the curriculum, with specific attention to integrating literacy into all content areas.
4. Focus on higher level questioning and analytical thinking, specifically with focus on helping students support their claims with evidence from the text.

5. Within and cross grade level dialogues that led to a clearer understanding of how the curriculum aligns and deepens up the grade levels.

6. Increased focus on writing instruction and specifically on all three types of writing.

7. Increased focus on text complexity and preparing readers to engage in close reading with more complex texts.

These led to:

1. Students who were avid readers of informational texts as well as fiction.

2. Students who were much more explicit in supporting their claims about a text, both in discussions and in their own writing.

3. Growth in confidence in students writing abilities, as well as their ability to raise and respond to higher level questions. Students have risen to the expectation that they be more accountable to produce work and think deeper.

4. Increased use of domain specific vocabulary due to the increased focus on content area reading and writing.

**Individual Teacher Reflections**

**Project SMART-Oswego University**

**Charlotte Miecznikowski - Grade Kindergarten**

Being a veteran teacher (over 30 years) I have been a part of the many twists and turns of what, how and why to teach children. Project Smart has been one of the best professional development opportunities that I have had the opportunity to attend and that has impacted my teaching.

Due to the shifts in the Common Core, this year I took more time and thoughtfully choose more complex texts not only for ELA, but across the curriculum. I always had the standards in mind. The texts chosen also were often used over a period of several days. I focused on how to help the students become higher level thinkers. In kindergarten, the children referred to a chart showing “thin” or “thick” sandwiches and in discussing the text they were excited to show that they could ask and answer a “thick” question about the text.

This year my lessons were less teacher directed. In doing so every child knew they had to participate and in doing so one could witness them becoming more confident learners. They were given more time during “turn and talk” shared reading and interactive read aloud that allowed them to share their thoughts and make connections. They came up to the poems on the chart or in the big books and pointed to the text to show evidence for their answer. I also used “I Can” statements. This promoted the students to analyze and infer information within a given text.

Due to the shifts in the Common Core, we also spent more time writing nonfiction pieces. Within our theme about farm animals, after much brainstorming and using NUA maps not just as a class but individually, the students wrote and illustrated their “own” book in addition to the classes’ big book, “We
Love the Farm.” Compared to previous years, I felt having the students gather their information on their maps helped the students create stronger writing pieces.

In summary, although I sometimes feel overwhelmed by all the changes, I like the shifts in the Common Core and due to Project Smart I have a better understanding of them. I have seen the impact it has had on my teaching instruction and therefore my students learning. I am excited about how the Common Core will continue to change my teaching craft and help my students become lifelong learners.

Patrice Loomis - Grade 1

This year when I began to attend the Project SMART classes I really did not know what I was signing up for. It seemed like a good way to learn more about Common Core and the new standards in a supportive environment. Besides they offered a free book so I thought I would see what it was all about.

I am teaching first grade for only my second year this year and last year we had Harcourt Storytown as our reading program. This led us by the hand through all the skills our students would need to learn how to read. But this year along comes Common Core Learning Standards or CCLS as we have come to know it. Our curriculum now became a binder with a menu of choices, suggestions and resources which we then needed to navigate to create balanced literacy instruction in our classrooms. Each of the six units was created to address the CCLS and give teachers the freedom to teach what they wanted to teach as long as we were “teaching to the standards”.

As you can imagine this was very confusing, to say the least, but being a person who wanted to keep my job, I decided to give it a try. In the past we had taught Literacy using the Irene Fountas model of Literacy Collaborative and much of our training became useful once again.

It is difficult on a daily basis to write and execute plans that address the standards adequately but attending Project SMART, reading Pathways to the Common Core by Lucy Calkins and sharing resources with my colleagues has gone a long way towards improving the process.

Some of my learning is based on understanding the shift from using primarily fiction in my reading instruction to a 50/50 split between fiction and non-fiction. This has enabled me to address many Social Studies and Science topics and give students opportunities to read and write about these topics. I found that if I wanted to do my literacy instruction well and teach the standards I needed to spend most of my instruction time doing it. This leaves little time for other subjects to be taught in isolation. Therefore, when I was teaching about chicks, I used the topic in my poetry and shared reading choices and in my interactive read alouds as well.

In teaching writing I made sure to give students opportunities to write their opinions and try their hand at persuasive writing. I found that using rubrics and allowing students to evaluate the quality of their own writing was a useful tool in improving my ability to teach to the standards.

Another important learning I have been trying to incorporate into many of my lessons is the shift to have students spend time improving their comprehension through text based questioning. I make it a standard practice now to follow up my initial questions with “Where in the text did you learn that?” The students are using more examples from the text in their writing as a result.

Lastly I cannot forget to mention the time we spent working on knowing the standards across the grade levels. When we see the expectations of the next grade and even up through high school it gives us the context for why we are teaching the particular standard. One thing I have been trying to do is ask the second grade teachers if a certain thing I am teaching is going to support the work the students will be expected to do the following year. For example we have been working on writing paragraphs so that the
Through support from the Project Smart program I have become more focused on basing my instruction on the new CCLS. I have studied the Standards using the text, Pathways to the Common Core, discussion, and the standards themselves as resources to help better understand the focus of the standards and how the expectations within the standards are related and build upon one another.

A primary shift in my instruction began with a shift toward nonfiction. I began using nonfiction in all areas of my instruction- as a shared reading, as an interactive reading, and during guided reading. I had more non-fiction available in the classroom for browsing, for take home reading, and for book buddy reading. This resulted in students having a greater understanding of the features of a nonfiction text. Students know how to glean information from photographs, diagrams, and other visuals. They know how a heading can guide your focus. They are learning to create questions for themselves on each main area to discover the main idea. The effect of this immersion of nonfiction has made my students more comfortable with nonfiction texts. Students now will often select nonfiction when given the option of selecting their own books. Students can comfortably refer to different areas in a nonfiction book. Students are beginning to be able to extract main topics and key details from texts as well.

Another area of change in my instruction is how I teach students in areas of reading to explain their understanding using examples in the text. We refer more often to the text as we read and demonstrate where we find the information to guide their understanding. Students are gaining comfort with finding the exact spot in a text where they learned something or noticed a detail. Students will often use sticky notes to mark areas in the text that they may want to refer back to when we discuss a book or story. Using the document camera has helped to model finding the specific information in a text for the students.

We have worked more on speaking and listening skills as a result of increasing familiarity with the CCLS. We have spent time working on having discussions and conversations between groups of students about topics or books. Some students are becoming adept at contributing and keeping a conversation flowing. They are also working on asking their peers to explain things more. This requires the student to be more reflective and then elaborate on their statements.

A final area where I have made a lot of changes to my classroom instruction due to greater understanding of the CCLS is in writing. We have done a unit for the first time on opinion and persuasive writing. This was formerly not a unit done in 1st grade, but we added it to our curriculum as we were reading about it in the Pathways book. This unit has been very different but enjoyed by all as the students really like to express their opinions about a variety of different topics as well as books they have read. The students are able to state an opinion and support it with at least 3 examples but are having more trouble with creating a sense of closure to their writing pieces.

Overall, Project SMART has been instrumental in helping me grasp the ideas behind the common core learning standards, understand the progression, as well as implement them into my lessons.
I would say the primary impact of Project Smart this year has been having a deeper understanding of the Core Curriculum Learning Standards and how these standards have to purposefully be integrated into the curriculum that we are using to teach our students.

Since the majority of my day is teaching reading using the Wilson Reading program and Leveled Literacy Instruction, most of the curriculum I use is scripted. It has been my charge to examine the questions that have been created and modify them as needed. For example, in Wilson, one of the question types that we teach the students is that a “Level 2” question asks them about their experience with the topic. Since personal connections are not stressed in the CCLS, I have changed those questions to summarizing the major events in the story using textual evidence.

The effects of these changes in my questioning and expectations can be seen in the answers that my students are giving me. In the beginning of the year, students often just regurgitated the last event in the story as the retelling. Now, with the visual aid of a story mountain, students can retell a story from the beginning, through the middle and onto the end citing evidence from the story. My students have been successfully transferring this skill back into their classrooms as they are moving levels in the Fountas & Pinnell assessments.

Another component of my teaching that has changed is the time I spend creating thoughtful questions that just don’t ask for basic comprehension. I spend more time asking questions that support higher order thinking, for example, synthesis and evaluation. I have found it difficult to create these types of questions when working with leveled readers below a G. Not impossible to do, just more difficult.

This change is very obvious in the discussions that take place following an independent reading assignment. In the beginning of the year, I had to do a lot of modeling and push their thinking with evaluative type statements i.e. “Why is it better that….” Or “Why did the character choose to do ___ instead of ___?” Now, I hear students using language like I was modeling and expressing their ideas and opinions about character motivations. My students did not know how to have a discussion about a book. It was one question then one answer. I wanted more of a discussion so I made prompt cards to engage students in conversations. Students must agree or disagree following an answer citing textual evidence. Students barely utilize the cards now since they have internalized the language and expectations.

A final push within my teaching and the students’ learning is the exposure to more nonfiction material. In the previous years, I would have pulled more fictional stories to ask comprehension questions. Now I pull more nonfiction and we discuss the text structure and the possible reasoning for the way the material is presented. This is going to be something that I work on right from the beginning of the next school year.
In the past, I read the story and asked questions while reading the text. This year I found it more beneficial to plan out the questions ahead of time and align the questions with the standard being taught. I found focusing on one standard during a read aloud more beneficial, than focusing on more than one standard. The texts chosen were not read within one day, but sometimes across several days. For example; when I taught the standard **RL.K.2** (With prompting and support, retell familiar stories, including key details.) I used “How a Seed Grows” by Helene Jordan. This book prompts children to notice sequencing and prompts them to remember information within the text. When using read alouds in the classroom, I also used “I can statements”. This promotes students to analyze the information they are reading within the text. This also promotes confidence within student learning. The students are able to identify what they are able to do and become more confident readers.

This year I spent more time having the students “talk and turn” during shared reading and interactive read alouds. This gave children the opportunity to share their meaning of the text and make connections with each other. During the read alouds, I would have students point out where they found the answer within the text versus just saying the answer. Doing shared reading, I would have the students explain what they noticed and what they can infer. For example, when I used “Miss Mary Mack, I had the students infer why Miss Mary Mack was wearing a dress and who Miss Mary Mack was in the text. “Their response was “a teacher”. Instead of just writing Miss Mary Mack was a teacher on the T Chart, I had the student come up and point to the sentence that showed why they thought Miss Mary Mack was a teacher.

Due to the shifts in the common core, I also spent more time having the students write informational pieces. We composed “How to Books”, along with “Pattern Books” based on a non-fiction topic. In this piece, I had students use a combination of writing and drawing to compose their pieces. Before writing the informative pieces, I had students gather information on the topic and draw ideas pertaining to the informational topic they were writing about. For example; before students completed their pattern books, I had them brain storm “what are some animals you have knowledge about”. They drew out animals on their papers. Then I had them brain storm, what they know about this animal. They had to draw pictures of all the things they know about the animal. After having the students complete their brainstorming and sorting information activity, they had to compose a piece of writing based on sorting the information. I found the writing pieces composed this year, were much more productive, than in previous years. I feel brain storming and sorting information really helped students analyze the information they were writing about.

I found the shifts in the Common Core to be very complex, but yet productive in my teaching. I found my students have a better understanding of higher level thinking and are able to analyze and synthesize information through reading and writing.Even though the shifts in the Common Core were hard to get used to, I found them to be extremely helpful in my ability to teach students. I feel my students have a better understanding of informational and non-fiction texts and writing. I also feel they have a better understanding of how to analyze and synthesize information. My students are now able to find answers within the text and explain why they came up with that answer. I am excited to see how the Common Core will change my students next year, now that I have a better understanding of the shifts and how to implement them in my teaching instruction.

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Elizabeth Palmer - Grade 3

As I reflect on this year I am so grateful for the opportunity to participate in this offering. Project SMART has helped me to learn the ELA Common Core Standards, in a way that was easy to implement in my classroom. In fact if it weren’t for this program, I’m not sure what I would have done. Our district has not been very forthcoming with Common Core professional developments this year.
As I look back, I have been able to learn and implement the Common Core in reading and writing that I don’t know if I would have been able to without this guidance. My students are able to answer higher order thinking questions and enjoy the challenge. I have switched my brain to “think like the CCLS” and carry that on to my class.

The demonstration lesson was absolutely one of the most useful things. Like many of my students, I am visual, and being able to see someone teach a lesson was not only helpful, but I and another colleague actually implemented it in our own classrooms.

Participating in Project SMART almost forced me to learn these standards that I may or may not have embraced tackling this on my own. During this year of transition it as definitely nice to have a constant that we could all learn from together!!

Jen Wilson - Grade 3

I am so happy with my decision to participate in Project SMART this school year-2012-2013. The Common Core Learning Standards (CCLS) were introduced last year and were to be implemented this school year. Unfortunately, we were not offered training from our district until after the school year had begun. It was a very scary time for our staff. If it was not for Project SMART, I would have been ineffective trying to implement the CCLS.

Lucy Calkins’ book, The Pathway to the Common Core, was an excellent chose of books to help us begin to understand the CCLS. The way we broke up the reading and reflected out to the group helped me to begin to take ownership of the standards. Before this course I was unable to name the shifts or standards with certainty. After this course I not only can name the shifts and standards but more importantly I understand what they require of my students and me. I understand how they are related and how they build from one year to the next. Project SMART afforded me the opportunity to do this work with knowledgeable leaders and my staff. This environment was safe for me to ask questions and begin to grow.

What I have learned through Project Smart has changed the way I look at stories and how I deliver instruction to my students. With this greater understanding of the standards my teaching is being transformed. The following is a list of how my teaching has changed and what is has meant for my students:

1. This year we read an equal number of fiction and nonfiction stories. I have always favored fiction over informational texts as a reader. However, the standards have pushed me to engage a lot more with nonfiction books. After teaching the students the parts of a nonfiction text and how to navigate this genre, I have watched them absorb informational books. Every two weeks I go to my local library and take out around 30 books for them. They are allowed to request books. In the beginning they would ask for graphic novels and would only read that genre. Now I take out more nonfiction books on all different topics and the students devour them!

2. The standards call for students to look closely at a text and support their answers with evidence directly from the text. At the time we were reading about this shift in Calkins' book, a colleague found a graphic organizer that supported our students in recording their text evidence. After modeling and scaffolding students for many, many weeks, the majority of students were able to complete the organizer independently. By April most students were able to write two paragraphs and support their claims with text evidence without using their organizer. I was very proud of how well many of the students did writing short responses on the state test. It was wonderful to watch their confidence grow!
3. Higher order questioning and thinking are the backbone of the standards. When my students entered in September, their thinking was very literal and detail oriented. They could only answer right there questions. It has taken a lot of modeling and scaffolding to help my students be able to answer think and search questions, author and you, and on your own questions. We are still not where we need to be but we are not where we used to be! Their scores on the weekly reading tests have improved over time. However, it will take more time and diligent teaching to move our students to do this thinking.

Lakesia Chalmers - Fourth Grade

In ELA students are reading more nonfiction informational pieces. I use informational passages daily during our shared read aloud. Students are expected to think deeper and answer specific synthesizing, inferring and envisioning questions. During ELA students have to prove their answers and thinking. It is imperative that they go back into the text and find two examples that support their answers.

In math I have shifted the way I teach as well. I let the students explain in full detail their expectations. I also have the students write and explain in full detail the process by which they got to their final answers. In addition, I make sure that the students are exposed to higher order thinking questions and word problems on a daily basis.

In writing, students are starting to understand that they have to form an opinion, and follow up with supporting evidence about their opinion and thinking. We have done some work with persuasive/argumentative writing; however one of my goals for next year is to focus on this type of writing.

Overall, I’ve learned to use key words like describe, explain and summarize more often in our daily conversations about books. The students are collaborating more, for example, students collaborate during science and social studies. The students have group work assignments, and then they have to present the information to the entire class. Book talks are taking place during reading and guided reading. The students are more accountable to produce work and think deeper.

Caryn Dwyer - 4th Grade

How have I shifted?

I have become more consciences when choosing texts. I tried to alternate between informational text and literary text during full group instruction such as Shared Reading, Interactive Read Aloud, Author Study and Close Reading as well as during small group instruction (Guided Reading). Independent reading was also a time during our day when students were encouraged and given opportunities to self-select a balanced mix of information and literary text.

Balancing information and literary texts has had a positive impact on student learning. Students read a wider variety of genres. Students appear to be more comfortable with informational text. This is evident in their book boxes that are maintained by students, filled with self-selected “Good Fit” books and kept on their desks for independent reading and responding. Since students are also required to keep a daily “Reader’s Notebook”, where they respond to their reading, written responses are also evidence of the balanced mix of literary and informational texts.

I frequently embedded Science and Social Studies topics of study into ELA instruction. For example, during our study of Plant and animal life cycles I collected multiple copies of several different titles books
about plant and animal life cycles to use during guided reading groups. This allowed students to read about the topics we were expected to learn about at their own instructional reading level. I was also able to use texts during Shared Reading, Interactive Reading and Close Reading instruction that allowed me to embed the content areas.

Embedding content from the content areas has had a positive impact on student learning. Students have had increased exposure to material being discussed during content area instruction. Students are able to discuss topics using domain specific vocabulary. This is evident during reading group discussions. Students are also able to write about topics and have demonstrated this throughout their Reader’s Notebook, Think Marks/Sticky notes as well as formal writing samples such as reports. Students repeatedly demonstrated their knowledge and understanding of vocabulary related to topics and used a variety of written sources to extend and enhance their writing about specific topics.

I have planned lessons and activities that foster the development of using text and textual evidence in conversation and in writing. Conversation and interactions as well as writing regarding Shared Reading, Interactive Read Alouds, Close Reading and Guided Reading are all text-based. “Thought Prompts” such as “In the story,” and “For example,” hang on our classroom walls and are frequently referred to. I model this language and prompt and remind students to use it well. Their use of text-based answers is observed throughout the day. Listening to conversations during guided reading group has been an excellent way for me to not only observe the engagement with text but also to encourage the use of textual evidence to support verbal responses. Students were required to use the prompts and textual evidence in their literary essays. The daily focus on text-based answers allowed text-based answers to simply become the expectation in our class.

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Carol Villeneuve - Grade 5

Participating in SUNY Oswego’s Project Smart course has enhanced my knowledge of the new English Language Arts Common Core Learning Standards. Prior to taking the class, my understanding of the standards was very limited.

From the very first session, I remember feeling excited about the change when I spoke of some books that accidently became the beginning of a text set on Civil Rights. I was not familiar with the term “text set” before. When Dr. Beyerbach announced that my theme related books were a text set, I felt excited about the possibilities that could arise from this. After that I found my way to The Reading and Writing Project from Columbia University’s Teachers College. I found digital text sets for topics that would engage my fifth grade students. Using technology became part of the norm for many of my reading and writing lesson.

Halfway through the school year I began preparing for my formal observation. I was forced to take a very close look at the informational reading CCLS for fifth grade. However, it wasn’t until just recently that I realized how important it was to look at the standards for fourth and sixth grades as well. This will be some of the work I will be doing during the summer to prepare myself for the coming school year.

Reading “Pathways to the Common Core” and then discussing it during class was especially helpful in understanding the new writing standards. I will be taking a closer look at the specific standards for narrative, informational, and argument writing.

The most obvious effect that my newfound knowledge of the CCLS has had on my students is their ability to go back to the text they are reading, and prove that their answers are accurate using this evidence. Quoting sentences and even full paragraphs to prove a point is common practice now. It has become an
automatic process during all of my guided reading groups. Students are also more in tune to identifying genres using text features for specific genres, noticing authors’ use of figurative language, and discussing an author’s point of view. Lastly, argumentative opinion reading and writing has stimulated the minds of these sometimes blasé 5th grade students.

I look forward to continuing my professional development with SUNY Oswego. I am interested in taking a much closer look at the math CCLS next.

Melissa Maioriello – Grade 2

Over the course of the year, our district has implemented a new balanced Literacy program, which is aligned to the new Common Core Learning Standards. Within the CCLS, we have also been learning about the six shifts and making changes within our own teaching. Unfortunately, our district did not offer a lot of professional development to assist with these changes. Through Project Smart and collaboration amongst colleagues, I feel more confident with the six shifts and have applied some of the changes within my own teaching.

One of the shifts I spent time on within my own classroom is balancing informational and literary text. In the past, I might have spent some time reading informational text to my students while teaching a social studies or science unit. However, this year, I spent quite a bit of time on informational text. I used it during interactive read alouds, shared reading, and in guided reading.

During the month of February, I came up with a Black History month report for my students to work on. They were very excited. I went to my own local library and took out as many books as I could on famous African Americans. Each student had the opportunity to select a Famous African American they wanted to learn about. I created a document in which the students had to take notes regarding their background information and then they had to select a character trait that best described their person. Once they picked their trait, they had to use textual evidence from their book to support their answer. I also created a template and provided an example/model for my students to use as a guide. For some it was difficult but most of them did a really nice job.

With the help of Project Smart, my goal is to continue learning about the Common Core so I can feel comfortable and confident when teaching my children.