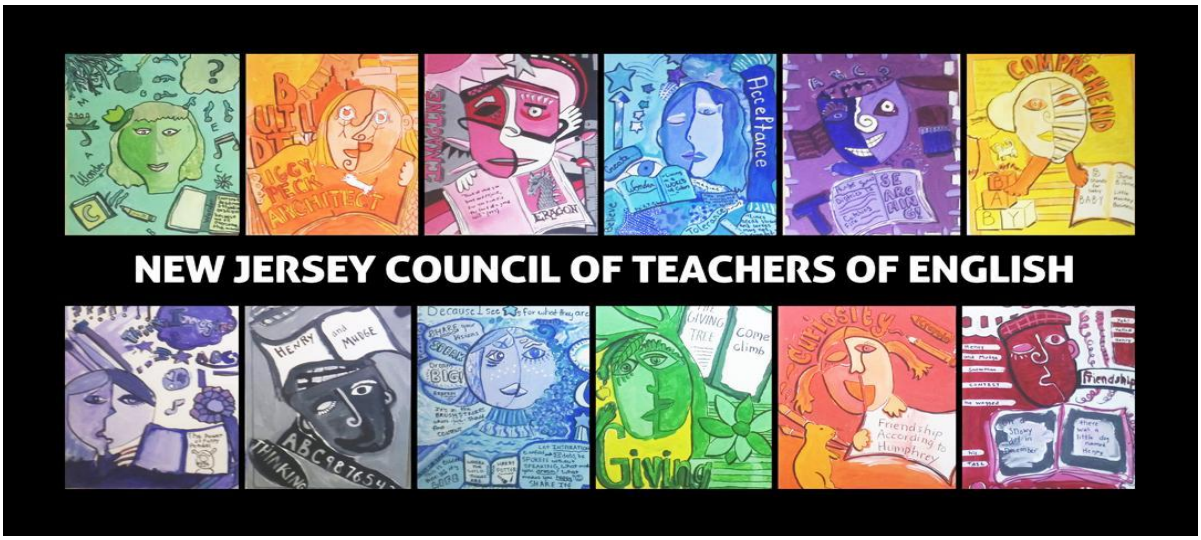

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What sparked the NJCTE logo? A NJCTE board member, Pat Schall, who was a professor at The College of St. Elizabeth, New Jersey, had a graduate student named MaryAnn St. Jacques, who taught private art lessons and is now an art teacher at Madison High School. While she was in Dr. Schall's classes, they got the idea that perhaps the art students could design and make a banner based on literacy. So the art students, ranging from second grade to fifth grade, designed a self-portrait based on their own literacy--reading, writing, speaking, and listening, focusing on what was important to them in literacy. St. Jacques had been teaching them about Picasso and the Cubists, and their self-portraits reflect that era in art but also sparked their own interpretations of that era and their reflections on their own literacy.

New Jersey English Journal
2017 Issue

New Jersey English Journal is a peer-reviewed publication of New Jersey Council of Teachers of English (NJCTE). This journal is intended to serve our members through the sharing and showcasing of research, best practices and ideas related to K-12 and college English Language Arts education.

CALL FOR MANUSCRIPTS

2018 Issue of *New Jersey English Journal*:

New Jersey English Journal, a peer-reviewed publication of New Jersey Council of Teachers of English, invites you to share submissions on **"**Transformative Teaching in the 21st Century: Teachers as Catalysts.**"** We seek researched articles as well as 500-word personal essays and other creative responses that shed light on the many possibilities, topics, issues, problems and solutions related to transformative teaching in the 21st century at all grade levels from kindergarten to college. Articles should relate directly to English Language Arts teaching and learning. We value responses from both veteran and new teachers. Co-written articles are also welcome. Writers are urged to read past editions available online at www.njcte.com to review successful submissions. The editors expect thoughtful and carefully edited submissions.

We invite you to respond to the theme of "Transformative Teaching in the 21st Century: Teachers as Catalysts" by considering such questions as:

***** Teaching Language Arts in a Technological Age

* Encouraging Critical Thinking & Creativity in an Assessment-Driven Environment

* Creating Community & Encouraging Empathy in Language Arts Classrooms

* Building Knowledge, Skills, and Dispositions for Global Citizenship

* Dispelling Myths about Education Today

* Social Justice Pedagogy and Tackling Controversial Topics

* Methods for Teaching beyond The Canon: Suggestions for 21st Century Texts and Strategies

In addition to submissions that respond to the theme, we also welcome poetry on the topic of teaching. Submissions will be accepted between April 1 and **December 15, 2017**. Submissions should not have been published in any other journal. Submissions must use MLA formatting and Garamond Font in Size 12. All submissions will be reviewed by multiple members of our editorial board. Submitters will receive a response by February 1, 2018; the journal will be released by April 1, 2018. Send queries and submissions to 2018 journal editor Liz deBeer at ldebeerwardell@gmail.com.

From the Editor

The theme of "Professional Growth: What's Inspiring?" reminds me of a workshop I attended years ago at The Conference on College Composition and Communication (CCCC) entitled "If Teaching is Meant to Feel So Good, Why Do I Feel So Bad?" English teachers spend countless hours grading papers, writing lesson plans, responding to parents and administrators' angst, and preparing for various tests. We are exhausted and often unfulfilled, yearning for validation and inspiration. And then we hear some public officials insult our profession, such as when New Jersey Governor Chris Christie called some New Jersey schools "Failure Factories."

We teachers love learning and helping others learn. That's why we joined the profession, after all, to share our commitment to education with others.

Sometimes, though, that huge pile of ungraded papers taunts us, and we wonder how we can find our passion again. Thankfully, the contributors to this issue offer myriad ways to feel better, to be inspired, to remember the words of Nelson Mandela: "Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world."

Some contributors like Edwin Romond and Rachelle M. Parker pay tribute to teachers who inspired them. Others like Christina N. Berchini and Eric Paragallo find inspiration in students who desperately need help. New technology inspires some writers like Lauren Heimlich Foley, who describe exploring twitter and digital portfolios. LeVar Harris and Jonathan Dimaio share how teaching in another country can be inspiring. Caroline Wilkinson, Audrey Fisch, Susan Chenelle, Roberta L. Tipton and Patricia Bender are all motivated by collaborating with peers.

As I have worked on this journal, I myself am inspired to hear these stories, to bear witness to others' testimony. Nothing is a greater spark than feeling the heat from someone else's passion in teaching.

The opposite is true too. Like Debbie Downer from *Saturday Night Live*, it is draining to listen to teachers (or anyone) regularly spew dismissive comments about the profession, each other and even students, especially when the words are without hope. No one wants to be judged on a comma splice. We need to help each other, not just in the big ways, but in the everyday moments, being more mindful of our comments and listening more openly.

I remember when one of my children had a teacher who would read aloud the worst paper submitted for each assignment. Years later, those students still remember both that teacher for humiliating them, as well as dreading English class. Conversely, if the teacher had read aloud the successful essays, the students would feel pride and perhaps be inspired to try new techniques.

I hope, like me, you find reading the poems, vignettes and articles in this issue inspiring. Teaching can often be a struggle, but it's a noble one and it has, if we look closely, a community where we can find and give encouragement and strive to be the teacher to whom others pay tribute, like the one pictured by Rachelle M. Parker in her lovely poem "Mrs. Lang."

A special thanks to all the editorial board, but especially the assistant editor Patricia Bender, whose input is invaluable to both the journal and my sanity. Also, much gratitude to Donna Jorgensen and Joe Pizzo for spreading word about this journal at the NCTE conferences. Thank you also to NJCTE President Susan Reese who meets the challenge of guiding us all. Finally, thank you to all the contributors and the readers, whose words, art, and reactions create this journal.

Sincerely,

Liz deBeer
Editor

Artwork by Graciela St. Onge

The New Jersey Council of Teachers of English Congratulates the 2016 Winners

AWARDS

NCTE Affiliate Excellence Award:
The New Jersey Council of Teachers of English was one of eight affiliates which has qualified for the NCTE Affiliate Excellence Award. *The New Jersey English Journal* was acknowledged in the tribute, which read in part: "your journal is an exceptionally strong means of communication in keeping members informed and aware." Further, NJCTE Conferences were praised, and the website was described as "a strong mechanism for reaching out to your membership." The value of Project Spark and NJCTE presence at NCTE conferences were also commended. This award is a reflection of both the leadership and membership at NJCTE; thank you and congratulations!

NJCTE Educator of the Year Award:
Heather D. Rocco, Graduate of Hofstra University.
K -12 English Language Arts Supervisor for the School District of the Chathams

Weiss Award Winner for Early-Career Teachers
Ellen Papazian, College of Saint Elizabeth.

Holtzman Award Winners for Preservice Teachers
Darcy Lucia, Rowan University
Delight Penaverde-McKitrick, College of Saint Elizabeth

NJCTE 2016 High School Writing Contest Winners

GENRE WINNERS

Short Story

Gold Medalist	**Richard Brown, Gr.12**	**"Blow Smoke"**	**Tenafly High School**
Silver Medalist	Jamie Greer Gr. 12	"Clock Strikes Twelve"	Bergen County Academies
Silver Medalist	Zoë Rivera Gr 9	"Inferno"	West Orange High School
Bronze Medalist	Tom Yuz Gr. 12	"Pro Patria Mori"	Bergen County Academies
Bronze Medalist	Jessica Zhu Gr. 12	"And the Stars Threw Down Their Spears"	Bergen County Academies
Certificate of Merit	Sophia Hu Gr. 11	"Trust Me"	East Brunswick High School
Certificate of Merit	Sophie Marsden Gr. 9	"Strangers"	Glen Ridge High School

Poetry

Gold Medalist	**Maressa Park Gr 10**	**"Butterfly Cage"**	**Mary Help of Christians**
Silver Medalist	Alexa Dersovitz Gr. 10	"You Know"	Livingston High School
Bronze Medalist	Eva Lebovitz Gr. 12	"Interstate"	Newark Academy
Bronze Medalist	Valery Tarco Gr 12	"Mothers Become Their Daughters Become Their Mothers"	Newark Academy
Bronze Medalist	Melody Xiao, Gr. 10	"Everything That's Wrong With Me"	Newark Academy
Honorable Mention	Melissa Phillips Gr. 12	"By the Horns"	Somerville High School
Certificate of Merit	Shadayah Tucker Gr. 11	"I am the Gold Platter"	Cicely L. Tyson School
Certificate of Merit	Diya Goyal Gr. 11	"stained glass memory"	Eastern Regional High School
Certificate of Merit	Shannon Lally Gr. 11	"postcard to heaven"	Haddonfield Memorial HS
Certificate of Merit	Brittany Rose Gr. 11	"I AM POEM"	Ridgefield Park Jr/Sr High School
Certificate of Merit	Brian Benedict Gr. 11	"Blinded by What They See"	St. Benedict's Prep. School

Essay

Gold Medalist	**Grace Springer, Gr. 12**	**"Finding Them"**	**Northern Highlands Reg'l HS**
Silver Medalist	Alexandra Franchino, Gr. 11	"Confessions of a Social Phobic"	Livingston High School
Bronze Medalist	Caitlin Chan, Gr. 11	"Meeting Vincent"	Bergen County Academies
Bronze Medalist	Katelyn McCreedy, Gr. 11	"Am I Alone?"	Morristown High School
Bronze Medalist	Rebecca Zaritsky, Gr. 12	"Dichotomy"	Bergen County Academies
Certificate of Merit	Suji Balfe Gr. 12	"The Second 38th Parallel"	Madison High School
Certificate of Merit	Andrew Bonan Gr. 11	"Arriving at Building 27"	Ramsey High School

Thank you to all of the sponsoring teachers who encouraged their students to draft, edit and submit their work to our writing contest.

NOTE: Students in bold also received the Governor's Award in Arts Education.

The New Jersey English Journal
2017 Issue

Professional Growth: What's Inspiring?

Artwork

Izzy Boyce-Blanchard is a senior at Rumson Fair Haven Regional High School. After graduation he plans to study cartooning at the School of Visual Arts in NYC.
Pages 35, 49, 100

Sarah Cesario is a 2016 graduate from Red Bank Regional High School.
Page 17

Sarah Curtis is in her junior year at Red Bank Regional High School.
Page 42

CeCe McCarthy is currently a junior at Red Bank Regional High School and is in the process of deciding what college she would like to attend. She plans on majoring in international studies while keeping up with her love of photography throughout college.
Page 66

Juliet Slattery is in her senior year at Red Bank Regional High School.
Page 95

Graciela St. Onge is currently attending Monmouth University where she hopes to major in art, specifically illustration. While art is her passion, other fields of study she hopes to pursue are art history, anthropology, and biology.
Pages 5 and 53

Cover Design:

Editors Liz deBeer and Patricia Bender

Project SPARK: The Story of Inspiration in Today's Classroom

By Liz deBeer and the NJCTE Executive Board

Most people believe that inspiration is a key component of teaching. For example, Albert Einstein said, "It is the supreme art of the teacher to awaken joy in creative expression and knowledge." This quote, and many like it, implies that the teacher should inspire students, but there is no suggestion regarding how teachers should inspire themselves. As with many giving professions, teachers, new and veteran, often feel drained, searching for ways to reinvigorate themselves, so they can continue to teach and inspire others.

The New Jersey Council of Teachers of English (NJCTE) executive board is concerned about this too. As a Washington Post reporter reflected, "It's no secret that most teachers today feel demoralized — poll after survey tells us so, and it's no wonder, given that they feel school reformers have put targets on their backs with teacher evaluation systems they feel are unfair and support for programs that they believe belittle their profession" (Strauss).

NJCTE executive board has responded by creating SPARK: Sharing Passion And Re-Kindling Knowledge, which involves a year-long focus on inspiration. The board will offer small cluster groups around the state and focus its annual journal on SPARK. The conferences and clusters will involve NJCTE board members and other experts sharing passion and re-kindling knowledge.

One way they are hoping to SPARK New Jersey English educators is based on the ideas of Larry Smith, editor of *Smith Magazine*, who invited readers to write "six-word stories." Smith noted in his TEDx Talk, "Everyone has a story; we know this. But we have to remember to ask." He invited his readers to send in "six-word memoirs," and credits Ernest Hemingway with the genesis of this project. Smith's success has brought the "six-word memoir" to congregations, correctional centers, and many other places – as well as the classroom. He noted "the constraint fueled creativity" and helped "start the conversation."

NJCTE is hoping to "start the conversation" with Language Arts Teachers, by asking them to take minimalism and focus to a new intensity, by submitting six-word "sparks" that illuminate their professional lives. These six-word sparks of teacher inspiration will be used in up-coming workshops.

Members of NJCTE executive board offered some six-word sparks of their own. Here are some generated from the summer board meeting:

"Students suddenly unafraid to be honest."

"That moment when students get it."

"Working with colleagues toward shared goals."

"Imagination becomes opportunity and sparks accomplishment."

"Sharing, caring, daring: make a difference."

"Every story a possibility for voice."

"When a student asks a question."

"Watching students discover love of reading."

"Students and teachers united in learning."

"Boys and girls: people responding passionately."

"Smoldering ideas heat generated before ignition!"

"Exploration, Respect, Humor, Discovery: AHA Moments."

"Encountering and sharing new familiar world."

"Seeing the dedication on NJCTE board!"

Six words: we want yours too! What inspires you to teach? To learn? To care? To keep going? What was a most influential moment in your teaching career? Or what book or character most inspires your teaching? In Smith's TEDx, he concludes with the six-words of George Takei, of Star Trek and Twitter fame: "Share your story, change the world." Please submit your six-word entry to njctefocus@gmail and include your full name. Take the challenge and share your six-word story with NJCTE and other teachers. Together, members of the New Jersey Council of Teachers of English can help each other remain inspired.

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Liz deBeer is the editor of this journal. She is retired from teaching English at Point Pleasant Beach High School in New Jersey and as an adjunct from Rutgers University. She currently teaches classes at Brookdale Community College's Lifelong Learning and tutors at Covenant House New Jersey.

Again September

for Kevin Horn

by Edwin Romond

Again September arrives shedding
stubborn heat of a summer already
in our museum of memory. Again

we note darkness sneaking in earlier
and earlier, maybe we're caught
by surprise as we were last year

and will be again next year. Strange
how each September seems a beginning
even as leaves die in shrouds of color,

the earth turning orange and red
after months of solitary green. Good
teachers consider the coming fall

a mystery to unfold with students
starting as strangers on a class list
but blooming into learners after weeks

turn to months in the enriching,
fulfilling, sometimes exasperating,
one of a kind story of a school year

that begins again in September.

Edwin Romond is the author of eight collections of poetry and has been awarded writing fellowships from the National Endowment for the Arts, the National Endowment for the Humanities, and from both the New Jersey and Pennsylvania State Councils on the Arts. In 2013 he received the New Jersey Poetry Prize for his poem, "Champion." Garrison Keillor has twice featured Romond's poetry on National Public Radio and his memoir, "The Ticket," appears in Tim Russert's *New York Times* bestseller, *Wisdom of Our Fathers.*

Now retired, Romond taught English at Metuchen High School and Warren Hills Regional High School, Washington, New Jersey. A native of Woodbridge, New Jersey, he now lives in Wind Gap, Pennsylvania, with his wife and son.

Reaching Students Effectively

by Kiersten Zinnikas

At times, teaching feels a bit like performing. Depending on the size of the class, there may be 25 faces (or more) staring at you, thinking all manner of things, and waiting to see what you will do next. When I began my student teaching internship, it was a bit intimidating to know that I was the one person they were (supposed to be) looking at and paying attention to. Throughout the months I spent at the school, the intimidation faded and I eagerly began to look forward to each group of students. A key difference was that I went in the first day hoping desperately to be liked and came out at the end hoping to be respected by the students and effective as an educator. By the end of the semester, it also became apparent that a teacher must be able to, as a comedian would, read the room and tailor the instruction to match the audience.

As a student teacher, I had the opportunity to observe different teachers in action both inside and outside of the classroom to see how they taught and connected with students. There truly is no one-size-fits-all approach to reaching students and helping them achieve success. The teachers I saw ranged in years of experience, but they all shared a trait: they would shift their content, delivery, or manner to best match what the students – or even one specific student – needed. One teacher spent almost everyday after school with a group of students guiding them through their readings and other assignments because this was helpful for them and also the sort of additional attention they needed. Another established firm expectations and more of a no-nonsense attitude with certain students and saw a positive response. A third teacher permitted a student to spend time with her for an extra period until he "cooled off" because she knew that this student did not have a good relationship with any administrators and sending him to one of them would only result in more trouble.

Before I began my student teaching experience, I had only my own experiences with school to reflect upon and the experiences of my siblings. My brother and I needed different things in school. My brother will readily attribute his success in particular classes to a teacher who made a huge difference in his level of achievement. He needed a teacher who was willing to be more personal in class and demonstrate interest in each student. I was a compliant student who grasped content quickly, but who needed support that had nothing whatsoever to do with academics. In the future, I hope to be a teacher who can connect with students like the two of us as well as the teachers I observed while student teaching. While it may be easy to walk into a classroom and see a group of students, it takes an effective teacher to see a room full of individuals.

Kiersten Zinnikas will be graduating in May 2017 from Rutgers Graduate School of Education with her Ed.M in English Education K-12. She hopes to one day inspire her students to love reading as much as she does!

Queering the English Canon

by Swati Dontamsetti

Indian author Arundhati Roy wrote, "There's really no such thing as the 'voiceless.' There are only the deliberately silenced, or the preferably unheard." Most media articles today report on the whitewashing in Hollywood, the Twitter hashtag campaigns to queer characters, the call to stop killing LGBTQ* characters and characters-of-color. We are reminded daily of all the not white, cisgender, straight, male stories that are never given voice to. We are reminded of the stories and people that are preferably unheard. Popular media is showing our students constantly the voices we'd rather not hear as a society. So as educators, we need to queer the English canon and bring varied characters to our students' attention.

A majority of the curriculum we present to our students is centered on stories of dead white men. Through this we tell our students implicitly what stories are worth hearing. By focusing on the traditional canon, so many of our students' voices are left preferably unheard. Instead, we should start pairing all the literature we present our students with modern and inclusive stories that either retell the same story or share the same general theme. In her article "Why Queer Retellings of Classic Stories Are So Necessary," Lindsay King-Miller described a new Young Adult (YA)-novel *As I Descended* by author Robin Talley "an all-too-familiar story of potential outmatched by destructive ambition. It's recognizable as *Macbeth*, but the anti-hero this time is a bisexual teenager named Maria, nudged along the path toward success and then disaster by her closeted girlfriend Lily" (Vice.com). In this story, we have the same general premise and themes of Macbeth, but the struggle revolves around the characters-of-color and the fear of coming out as not straight. If the goal is to inspire students through reading and storytelling, then we need to meet them where they are. We need to meet them as they are. We need to show our students that we hear and respect all their voices and experiences.

The importance of bringing racially, sexually, and gender queer stories into the classroom lies in the fact that we use stories to perceive our world. Paulo Freire, a Brazilian educator, wrote "Language and reality are dynamically intertwined. The understanding attained by critical reading of a text implies perceiving the relationship between text and context" (5). The stories we read play every part in the way we see the world, and in seeing the world, we read our stories through different lenses. And when what we read and what we understand about the world are so intrinsically connected to each other, it's imperative that we bring as many perspectives as possible into our students' lives. Bringing diverse stories that queer the English canon into our classrooms shows students that there are numerous ways a story can be universal. It shows students that we have space for their stories in our classroom. And when students are seen, when their experiences are validated and normalized, they can feel safe enough to engage with the literature in inspiring ways.

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Swati Dontamsetti is a student at Rutgers Graduate School of Education who wants her future students to recognize that everyone contains multitudes.

Photo by Sarah Cesario

Digitally Motivated: Inspire Adolescents with the 21st Century Portfolio

by Lauren Heimlich Foley

My students beam with enthusiasm as glowing laptop screens paint their faces with final revisions and portfolio designs. The gentle click . . . click . . . clicking of keys complements the quiet, purposeful murmur of student voices in the conferencing areas. Navigating between desks, I can feel a palpable buzz of excitement pulsing through the air. When I arrive at Corey's desk, I ask if his myth, a piece first written in September, is revised and ready for publication. Last week he worked relentlessly, improving his character development in class and at lunch to better reflect his present writing ability. He responds, "I'm done! I really like how it turned out. Now I am focusing on my reflection and the final presentation of my portfolio." Although the last day of school is next week, Corey is focused on perfecting his writing and finishing his project. He is one, among a sea of 7th graders, who eagerly refines his writing, reflects on his process, and shows off his ability by using the enhancements 21st century technology offers. My students' dedication inspires me to implement the Electronic Portfolio Project each year.

The idea originated from my undergraduate courses at The College of New Jersey. In my Writing Methods class, we employed the concepts outlined by Jim Mahoney in *Power and Portfolio* to construct our own writing portfolio and mimic the process our future students would explore. A year later during student teaching, I created an electronic portfolio that examined my journey from student to teacher. Appreciating the writing and technology skills learned from each assignment, I longed to develop a project that would offer my students a similar experience – one that would tap into their intrinsic motivation. The electronic portfolio is designed to integrate authentic student writing, revising, and meta-cognition with technology. In addition to online publication and communication, this assignment hooks digital natives because of their innate interests in forming an online identity, having creator choice, and exploring presentation options.

Teacher researchers and educators are finding that Internet communication appeals to teenagers because it allows students to become part of the meaning-making process as they comment on other electronic portfolios and become involved in computerized discussions surrounding their writing. Students view this portfolio as a natural extension of the ways they communicate online through texting, instant messaging, social networking, and blogging. Troy Hicks in *The Digital Writing Workshop* suggests, "When students are responsible for posting their own writing and commenting on the writing of others, they are likely to feel more engaged in the writing process" (82). Writing becomes a means of expressing who they are and connecting to the world around them; students are validated when they receive feedback from their peers. They transcend the role of online consumer to online composer and responder through the communication aspect of the electronic portfolio.

Furthermore, students are intrigued by the ability to become published authors. Teenagers, who create Web pages, are able to share their work with peers, friends, family, and the world-wide Web. When students understand that their work is going to be viewed by a larger audience, they become more invested in the writing process. Gretchen Lee saw a change in her students when publishing on the Web became an integral part of her classroom. In "Getting in Line to Publish Online," Lee shares her students' responses and thoughts about online publishing. One student, Alisha, explains, "When I see my writing on the Internet, it's kind of amazing to know that people all over the world have access to your work. . . You also want to make sure that people understand what you're implying. . . Overall, getting published is pretty cool!" (24). When electronic portfolios are implemented in Language Arts classes, all writing pieces and classroom activities have the option of

being published on the Internet. Students value their work in a different way and begin to understand that everything they do has the potential to be accessed by someone other than their teacher. The publishing component keeps students focused on their learning because the work is for more than a grade.

Although current research primarily focuses on publication and communication, the electronic portfolio engages students from its inception (Hicks 80-102) . This is possible because the assignment enables Generation Z to employ their technology literacy skills in the classroom and prepare for their futures. *Adolescent Literacy: an NCTE Policy Research Brief* claims that "using technology is one way to provide learner-centered, relevant activities. For example, many students who use computers to write show more engagement and motivation and produce longer and better papers" (Kajder xiii). The electronic portfolio increases student participation because it excites them with novel technological components far beyond the hackneyed programs of Word and PowerPoint. Additionally, Kerry Weinbaum, a New York City public education teacher, explains, "Portfolios work when classrooms and students work, when the value of what is being done comes from, and is seen by, the students themselves" (Belanoff and Dickson 214). Portfolios are still a relevant tool in education 25 years after Weinbaum was published; however, the 21st century student values technology. My informal action research demonstrates how computers inherently increase students' desires to want to write and want to write well.

The electronic portfolio is important to students because it builds upon their already existing skills and enables them to work in a medium that they feel comfortable and confident in. To help confirm this significance, I asked my seventh graders to reflect on the value of their Microsoft OneNote portfolios, an electronic notebook that provides digital enhancements and can be shared via the Internet with multiple users. Common sentiments included: "It [is] exciting. You can customize anything, and you get a chance to be creative," "The project is very handy. It is online where all my typed documents are, and it is easy to format to make it look perfect," "It [is] a good way to share our writing, and I [think] it was really cool how it was all done electronically," and "I think the electronic portfolio project was fun because I've never done something like that before." Students have "fun" and are "creative" as they build their portfolios, complete the writing process, and think critically about their products. All the while they are practicing relevant technological skills that they will need in the professional world.

My previous eighth grade students, who worked with Wix.com, a free Web page builder, enjoyed the process and discovered the value in designing their online selves for future educational and career opportunities. Students expressed: "I can show it to my future teachers," "When I apply to college I can show my Wix," and "Wix could be something to use in the future for things such as my music career." Namely, students decided to use Wix to design their Social Studies final projects and believed they would be able to apply their abilities for high school and college assignments. Regardless of whether students first learn to produce a portfolio on Wix, Google, OneNote, or Wikiblogs, teens' interest increases and their writing naturally becomes stronger because they are happy and find future value in their work and learning.

Even more compelling than students' inclination toward technology is their need for personal development. During adolescent years, teens search for their identities as they are influenced by the world around them. Today's middle school students investigate who they are by writing on social networking sites, blogs, wikis, and other online forums. Technology is an ever present force in their lives. With the electronic portfolio, students draw upon these social writing tendencies to create their portfolio personalities. In "The Digital Imperative: Making the Case for a 21st Century Pedagogy," Elizabeth Clark explains that electronic portfolios at the university level "offer a platform for considering questions of digital identity and audience as students explore the public/private nature of writing…Students tailor their digital identities for multiple audiences, learning how to introduce

themselves to a virtual world" (29). Students begin to learn how they can use technology to create an academic persona as well as their social one; they are able to develop who they are within the school setting as well as with friends and family. The success found in collages also benefits students in the middle grades because computerized portfolios inspire students to enhance their writing as a way to better reflect who they are.

For instance, Riley, one of my seventh graders, commented, "I think my portfolio captured my personality very well. I feel as though the pictures represent me." CJ, another student, explained his overarching theme, "I have optimistic pictures and quotes in my welcome. My reflection is optimistic. Even my story has a touch of optimism." This self-exploration and creation process in turn drives students to revise and edit their writing pieces and produce a final electronic portfolio. They pay careful attention to the topic, genre, and presentation of their writing. Riley went on to describe her revisions, "I am proud of how I revised my original piece…I really developed the issue of the town and why the queen was a horrible queen. I also developed the conversation between the queen and the old man." Likewise, CJ communicated how he spent extra time crafting his piece; "I altered the paragraphs where the son is imprisoned…I added a prologue instead of my original epilogue. I also changed the message the dad sent through his son's dreams." This close reading, rereading, writing, and rewriting becomes possible as students discover their digital selves. Creating and writing become synonymous because teenagers wish to represent an accurate, unique, online persona. They are eager to have a space to create who they are and who they want to become.

Students are simultaneously drawn to the electronic portfolio because they design how their writing is perceived by others. They are the storytellers. Hicks explains that "by structuring the portfolio with a table of contents that allows for easy navigation as well as other features such as links to reflective statements or previous drafts, digital writers can take advantage of the media to present a more robust portrait of their work as writers" (84). Equally important to the higher level thinking and comprehensive organizational skills that Hicks refers to is how teens are fascinated by the ability to craft personalized final products. Students choose how their audiences will view their work. They have the option to create a table of contents that their readers must return to in order to proceed further. Other students can design a linear model for half of their portfolio that eventually leads to a table of contents. Additionally, they decide whether they want their writing pieces and reflections on the same page. The development is up to the individual, which supports their originality and creativity. My students' feedback validated the importance of these features; they stated, "I like how we can organize our work." "I thought the enhancements (table of contents) really made [my portfolio] better because it feels more complete." Just like professional Web page makers, students are in charge of the navigation in their electronic portfolios. Print portfolios do not offer this type of choice, which does not promote the same type of ownership in student writers.

Moreover, multimedia presentation options intrigue students and invite them to think critically about how to best represent their work. Students have more choice in the design than just drawing pictures or printing and cutting out images to complement their writing. Kathleen Yancy in "Postmodern, Palimpsest, and Portfolios: Theoretical Issues in the Representation of Student Work" emphasizes the "Web sensible" portfolio in her college classroom because "through text boxes, hyperlinking, visuals, audio texts, and design elements [it] not only inhabits the digital space and is distributed electronically but also exploits the medium" (745-6). By including these various technological components, students develop new literacy skills and have more responsibility over how their work will be comprehended.

The electronic portfolio requires students in all grade levels to decide how they will enhance their writing through digital options. Now, middle school students have more power in how they frame their texts. For example, students writing a memoir about a music concert can include a video clip of their final performance or multiple clips of practices leading up to the performance. Sean, one of my

current seventh grade students, recorded a video through OneNote because he wanted a unique way to show his writing process; the final product documented various pages in his Writer's Notebook so his readers would understand the steps he took to write his piece. Similarly, students can be creative with how they include pictures. Jon expressed that the picture collage he created "showed the meaning of [his] literary essay and how *The Cay* and 'The Summer of the Beautiful White Horse'" compare. Lyndsey explained, "I really [like] having the pictures from my Writer's Notebooks in there. Those pages really show a lot of revisions and some pages are even completely changed." Students are eager to spend extra time enhancing their portfolios by including these technological improvements.

Besides uploading their own pictures and videos, students are able to interact with their classmates' work. Two students, JoJo and Chloe, referenced each other's story in their portfolio pieces and shared how this came to be by explaining the writing process in their reflections. Instead of having this novel concept go unnoticed, the girls were able to highlight the intertextuality of their pieces by linking their portfolio pages – a component they had never dreamed possible but was made possible by the technology. Their readers are now able to view both pieces without having to fumble for a different project, and the girls' final products are even more an illustration of who they are as writers.

In addition, teens are able to join the academic conversation by including videos and articles relating to their narratives or argumentative essays. In particular, students writing about Martin Luther King Jr.'s birthday "can link to another essay on the Internet that talks about the same event or they can import a video clip that contains King's 'I Have a Dream' Speech" (Kahtani 263). Specifically, Jackie, one of last year's 7th graders, added online magazine and news videos that she had watched about body image before writing her essay; she wanted to allow peers and other readers a glimpse of what inspired her writing as well as raise awareness on body image issues that plague women in today's society. Furthermore, she transformed her Works Cited page into an interactive tool, prompting her viewers to explore all of the online research she had conducted. By inserting hyperlinks, readers are able to visit supplemental information with just a click of the mouse. Providing middle schoolers with control over what is shared, and how their audience comes to understand the topics they write about, increases their investment and encourages them to practice necessary writing and technology skills. Not only are students determining the pieces to include in their portfolios, but also they must decide the best way to portray their work, which is an exciting journey for them to take.

To summarize, students operate in a technology rich environment outside of school. Bridging traditional literacies with digital literacies within the classroom becomes essential to nurture adolescents' natural motivational tendencies. The electronic portfolio places students' reading, writing, and reflecting abilities at the core of its purpose while the meaning-making process is extended through technological enhancements. By incorporating the electronic portfolio in their classrooms, teachers will engage students, foster strong writing, and prepare Generation Z for real world 21st century opportunities.

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When Yellowstone Writing Project Teachers and Western Literature Association Scholars Meet: A Found Poem

by Allison Wynhoff Olsen

Authenticity, privilege, personal
Self-advocacy, forward thinking, reaction
Relationships
Sovereignty
Affirmations of voices

How do we build curriculum without resources?
What truths lie beneath?
    Slaughter and loss, cruelty and betrayal, creation and destruction
    Historical trauma. Erasure.

"We need to heal to grieve."
The damaged world—exploitation of the land
Our human responsibility is to love one another.

Lens on an exotic culture
Consider how we may become conditioned
"I'm sorry for what happened to you. We have to move forward."

Getting the language at home
    Words are emotions, language is sensitive, ambiguity is solved in context
Smudging, learning with an open mind

Writing systems are crippled
We burn out by working alone
We need to embrace confusion and partner
"The best teachers are healers."
Students are teachers
"I either innovate or I die."

We are all vibrations. Energy. Life. Humans.
"People that live and breathe what we love."

Offer digesting time
Balance the wild and civilized
Interview, tour, learn, explore, listen, story

The work does something
Be nourished.

Commentary: The Yellowstone Writing Project (YWP which is funded by Humanities Montana) gave 20 classroom teachers an opportunity to participate in and attend the 2016 Western Literature Association (WLA) Annual Conference. Given Montana's Indian Education for All Act (IEFA), the teacher strand of the conference program highlighted sessions and events related to Native American literatures and carved out time to talk with literature scholars and engage in dialogue as peers interested in reshaping classroom experiences. Having the focused time at WLA to meet, dialogue, and reconnect with artists and literature at a deep level helped the teachers slow down and dig deeply into texts, question the authors, and reshape/write curriculum that speaks to and with IEFA in engaged ways. This found poem illustrates the confluence of voices that resonated with me during our shared time at the conference.

Allison Wynhoff Olsen, PhD, is an assistant professor of English education at Montana State University and director of the Yellowstone Writing Project. Her research interests include examinations of students writing—particularly the social and relational practices enacted in writing communities and tracings of talk and texts within written arguments—and experiences of rural English teachers.

Twitter and Pre-Service Teachers: Overcoming Obstacles to become "Real Teachers"

by Kendal Brooks, Ciera Cornelison, Mike P. Cook, and Brandon Sams

Authorial Note: As a group, we want to endorse the process of students and faculty writing together. We found that thinking through problems of expression, organization, and argument made our thinking visible to one another, a move that makes possible collaborative thinking, timely feedback, and meaningful revision -- an invaluable process for teachers of writing at any level. Collaborative work also troubled old and persistent divisions between novice student and expert teacher. When writing with students, faculty have opportunities to intentionally model teacher thinking and critical reflection, but also to learn from and respond to student feedback. Students, likewise, contribute meaningfully to professional dialogue, and, through this process, begin seeing themselves as learning professionals in a community. In short, faculty learn and students teach. Our work below describes how we, as faculty and students, use Twitter in our English teacher education program. While our focus is on Twitter, we want to note at the outset that Twitter is merely one social media and composing tool, among many others, that helps teachers build knowledge and participate meaningfully in a professional community. Readers interested in learning more about how teachers develop identity and acquire expertise will also find this work of interest.

Introduction

In "Cultivating Novice Teachers as Teacher-Leaders," (a resource we learned about from one of Ciera's tweets) Emily Meixner notes that teacher education programs must help pre-service teachers (PSTs) develop an expansive and practical toolkit, including unit plans and classroom activities, to address a variety of pedagogical situations. Equally important,

she argues, is that TEPs help pre-service teachers develop *habits of mind* and orientations to practice, including ongoing self-reflection and a desire to improve and grow by contributing to and learning from professional communities. Meixner, like many others in the field of English Education (see, for instance, Sheridan Blau and Anne Elrod Whitney), asks that pre-service teachers and teacher educators refuse discourses of certainty and mastery that frame our profession. What does this refusal demand of pre-service teachers and teacher educators? It demands that we frame, talk about, and practice teaching as a journey instead of an arrival. One cannot "finally know" how to teach. Instead, one teaches and engages with nuance and imagination the practices of reflection, self-criticism, and ongoing professional development. Teaching is less a collection of skills or units that one *possesses* than a continued practice, something one *does*, and, in the doing, thinks through, responds to, and reflects on problems of (teaching) practice in a community. Twitter is one social media tool that can help educators reflect, ask questions, and seek guidance from other teaching professionals.

It has been widely reported that Twitter can be used to help students make connections between their world and their learning (see for example, Steven Anderson; Wayne Journell, Cheryl A. Ayers, and Melissa Walker Beeson; Christine Redman and Fiona Trapani; and Noeline Wright). Moreover, teacher educators have often suggested that it is important to use tools, such as Twitter, to introduce pre-service teachers to a range of pedagogical activities and discussions (Victoria Marn and Gemma Turn; Michael Mills; Chris Shaltry, Danah Henriksen, Min Lun Wu, and W. Patrick Dickson, among others discuss this). That said, others have also shared a variety of limitations and obstacles that accompany the incorporation of Twitter in the classroom: for example, finding time to use the tool, managing unprofessional discussions, students feeling disconnected with course content, and so forth (e.g., Jeffrey Carpenter; Wayne Journell, Cheryl A. Ayers, Melissa Walker Beeson). Similarly, a number of scholars, such as Victoria Marn and Gemma Tur have called for further discussion of PSTs and their use of Twitter as a learning tool.

We (Mike and Brandon, two English teacher educators) have worked to integrate Twitter into English education coursework and the experiences pre-service teachers have in the program. This begins by implementing Twitter as valued and required components of our courses. A sample prompt we provide students reads:

> Throughout the semester, we would like you to utilize a non-traditional space for academic discussion to engage in meaningful discourse around the powerful topics that emerge from your reading. Your goal is to extend our in-class conversations and, by connection, your learning. To do this, you will maintain a professional Twitter presence throughout the course (aim for 2-3 original tweets per week), using our course hashtag, to (1) pose questions to extend or anticipate a class discussion, (2) retweet or like resources that extend or challenge course readings, (3) find and share ways of approaching assignments, topics, and so forth. Remember, this is not a comprehensive list. It is simply meant to provide you some beginning parameters. We encourage you to use this tool and space in your own personal ways, ways that foster learning and professional growth beyond the confines of the classroom.

Yet, we have experienced a variety of barriers. One such struggle has been understanding our students' lack of engagement. It wasn't until we made it a point to sit down and talk with the students who have used Twitter to make the most of their experiences that it began to make sense. This valuing of the perspectives and voices of pre-service teachers is vital to better understanding how to implement Twitter and how to scaffold students' experiences. The goal of this article is to do just that.

Ciera and Kendal, pre-service teachers in the English education program, have benefitted from contributing to the Twitter community but their experience has not been the norm. Many English education students have struggled or refused to engage Twitter. We wanted to understand Ciera and Kendal's perspective on the benefits of using Twitter and how they could improve its integration in coursework. Ciera and Kendal used this writing opportunity to think intentionally about their evolving teacher identity and how social media would play a role in their future classrooms. During our collective conversations about this manuscript, we began to notice four major criticisms of and obstacles to using Twitter voiced by many of the English education students. Ciera and Kendal have responded to those criticisms in the following sections. Their voice and perspective also concludes the work. We continue to use their responses to revise and rethink the use of Twitter in the English education program.

Using Twitter in Teacher Education:
Two Pre-Service Teachers Respond to Obstacles and Their Peers

Obstacle 1: "I'm Not a Real Teacher"

Twitter has helped us ask and begin to answer a number of questions. What does it mean to be a pre-service teacher? What does it mean to be an actual teacher? What, if anything, separates the two terms from existing as a single entity in the minds of future teachers? The term "pre-service teacher" has been an indirect reminder during our undergraduate journey that we are not yet real teachers. There seems to be somewhat of an invisible barrier between the process of becoming a teacher and actually being one. As pre-service teachers, we tend to believe the idea that only once we obtain our undergraduate degrees in the field of education will we be responsible for truly transitioning into the role of an actual educator. Because of this, pre-service teachers might not fully engage in educational practices that have the potential to heighten their professional careers.

Transitioning into the role as an actual teacher from the role of a pre-service teacher is complex and at times uncomfortable and unfamiliar. In most circumstances, this development does not begin until after graduation, but in reality it should begin much sooner than this. Twitter has helped us transition from only thinking of ourselves as pre-service teachers to thinking of ourselves as teachers. Also, this process, we have come to realize, is never ending.

This process involves gaining a deeper understanding of our roles within the field of education on a much larger scale than just our future classrooms. We frequently limit ourselves unintentionally due to our misunderstanding of our role as pre-service teachers. We also overlook that we do not have to have our own classrooms to refer to ourselves as actual educators or to participate in teaching practices. Exposing pre-service teachers to the ways in which they can become involved within the professional teaching world can help them enhance their teaching methods, artifacts, and relationships. Throughout this semester, we have used Twitter to enhance these items and in turn have broken the barrier we place between actual educators and ourselves.

Obstacle 2: "I Have Nothing to Contribute"

When we were first given the task of creating a professional Twitter account, we had doubts about how it could impact our professional career as future teachers. Our presence on Twitter was nonexistent prior to our English education courses; however, we knew Twitter was a form of social media that was used by an enormous amount of users worldwide. As we created our Twitter accounts, we followed our teachers' lead by following major educational organizations as well as various prevalent voices in the field of education. Many of our classmates expressed concern with not wanting to participate on Twitter because they felt as if their voices did not matter on such a

large platform. They also felt as if they were not as important as other members of the English education community because they were only pre-service teachers. A large part of this goes back to the imaginary line drawn between being a pre-service teacher and being an actual teacher.

The professional topics of conversation that were present within the educational community on Twitter made us feel a little hesitant to begin participating in conversations. We shared the same concern of our colleagues of not being as qualified to actively participate in discussions with professional educators. We still thought of ourselves as unjustified in assuming the role of an actual educator while we were still pre-service teachers. However, using the Twitter platform allowed us to explore our roles as actual educators at our own pace.

We began to "like" certain tweets and began to re-tweet articles posted by various users. We eventually became confident in stating our thoughts on re-tweeted material. Our professors were integral to our growing confidence on Twitter. They not only "liked" our tweets, but also posed questions and thoughtful responses that pushed us to think of ourselves as teachers. By participating in dialogue between professional organizations and individuals, we were able to use Twitter as a tool to help us become more comfortable with our roles as educators. The articles and responses presented by teachers on Twitter exposed us to the relevant topics of conversation amongst actual educators and helped us to further our accountability among the academic community, dissolving the mindset of having no valuable input as a pre-service teacher.

Obstacle 3: "I'm Never Gonna Use This"

What started as a way to only get class participation credit is now one of the ways we are building our future classrooms. Because of Twitter we have lists of books to read, methods for leading class discussions, ways to arrange and organize a classroom, and ideas for writing assignments. We are able to see what teachers are currently doing in their classrooms and learn from their conversations on Twitter. Twitter also proved to be a valuable tool in our practicum experience. Not only were we able to implement some of the methods we learned through Twitter, but we were also able to use Twitter as a way to share our experiences with our classmates and professors. We could share what worked in the classroom, and we could reflect on what didn't work so well and get immediate feedback.

Twitter has also drastically changed the relationship between student and professor. At first, communicating with our professors outside of the classroom was a little awkward. We were accustomed to collaborating with them inside the classroom by having discussions. We were not accustomed to having these collaborations move past the classroom and put into practice. The conversations we were having on Twitter did not stay outside of the classroom; instead our professors would comment on various tweets during class. We were shown that our voices on Twitter did impact our educational journey because of this. Having our instructors by our side, acknowledging our participation, helped boost our confidence within the classroom as well as within the education community.

Twitter has also allowed us to begin participating in other collaborations while still pre-service teachers. We were exposed to terms, organizations, and events that helped socialize us within our profession, which we consider a jump-start within our personal career. Now, there would not be room for collaboration if nobody replied to our tweets. However, the members of the ELA education family on Twitter once again reinforced our aspiration to become English teachers through their generous comments and conversations. Dialogues between professors, teachers from across the United States, and recent English education graduates became a regular form of exchange. Instead of just re-tweeting or liking a tweet, we became part of the collaboration we were amazed with from the start.

Obstacle 4: "This isn't real writing"

As pre-service teachers, we are constantly discussing how to incorporate out-of-school literacy practices into our methods of teaching. Incorporating social media is one way to leverage out-of-school and in-school writing. Yet, in classrooms, because social media is not classed as "academic discourse," it is often not taken seriously as a learning tool. Similarly, using Twitter as an educational tool within college courses did not appear practical or professional for several of our classmates, many of whom refused to participate in the assignment out of hand. While we did commit to participate, it was not as easy or straightforward as we first imagined; but, through our participation, we learned that unsanctioned writing practices can be fruitful for learning as well.

At first, we took time to consider what was acceptable discourse while tweeting. We often were unsure if we could express our thoughts within 140 characters without using abbreviations and other informal features of writing. This particular conflict began our own personal journeys of understanding our beliefs on traditional writing practices and how Twitter could be used to bridge these practices with what students are already composing outside of the classroom. Maybe the reason why pre-service teachers do not fully understand how Twitter, or social media in general, can function positively in their classrooms is because they have never tried to do it themselves. If we are constantly talking about, but never participating in, using these methods in our future classrooms, then we do not have the right to ask our students to.

Furthering this thought, we began to feel a false sense of pride for believing our teaching philosophies included being an advocate of not restricting what "good" writing was within our classrooms. We began to question every lesson plan we made that involved a new, exciting method with "fun" activities, which we had never completed from a student's perspective. We thought about how a student must feel when we try and "speak their language", only to tell them to change the way they compose it in the process. Though the task of creating a professional Twitter account was not something regularly asked of pre-service teachers, we quickly realized why our professors had asked us to.

Conclusion/Summary

With Twitter being more of a non-traditional assignment in our college classroom, there was plenty of doubt on how much our professors would actually be paying attention to our activity on Twitter. However, we found that our professors were actively involved in our Twitter presence. This made our personal involvement with Twitter seem more appreciated by our professors. It also showed us that they were actually reading our tweets and taking the time to respond to them.

As pre-service teachers, we believe we need guidance from our professors when participating in an activity, such as Twitter, that may be a little challenging at first. Also, our professors took the time to learn this new platform of communication with us. They made it clear that they too were learning how to use Twitter to the best of their ability. If we are shown that there really is no correct way to try new educational approaches to teaching, then we will be more inclined to participate. As pre-service teachers, we often have trouble jumping into new learning strategies on our own. Having our

professors to share challenges with made using Twitter ten times as meaningful.

The vulnerability expressed by teachers longing for knowledge in their content relaxed us and enticed us to reply, comment, or express our gratitude for their articles and resources. To our surprise, the educators posting these articles responded to us and encouraged us to research the subject further. The conversations we experienced on Twitter exposed us to collaboration before internship. We feel that pre-service teachers need more intentional and guided experience collaborating with educators prior to internship. Being part of the Twitter community helped us create a library of resources to reference for future teaching. Just as important, it helped us make the transition into members of the English teaching community.

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What is Motivating? A Personal Reflection From the Lens of a New Teacher

by Erika Richardson

A Stark Realization

I've always considered myself a good student: engaged, confident, and most of all, eager to learn. It wasn't until my junior year of college that I was confronted with the fact that the image I had painted of myself was not entirely true. We were assigned the task of writing a 40-page research paper with only two guidelines. First, it had to be on an evolutionary event. Second, it had come from scientific research that was published in the year we were born. The lack of teacher involvement, and the unprecedented amount of freedom associated with this hefty assignment, motivated and inspired me. However, as I would quickly realize, the aforementioned would lead to confusion, tension, and an overall lack of interest and motivation.

I was excited to delve into the assignment, but also strangely worried. It was the first time a professor had given us so much freedom and responsibility; this paper would ultimately decide my fate in the class. As I began, I was bombarded with hundreds of journals and research that had been published in 1992. Unsure of how to proceed, I began to procrastinate for the first time. This process had me questioning my ability to "make it" in the real world, which was just around the corner. It shattered any confidence I had in myself.

Looking for Guidance

What I had hoped would lead to a moment of clarity turned out only to lead to more confusion. I scrounged up the courage and met with my professor, who was vague at best. He restated that the purpose of the assignment was to allow us to stretch our wings, and get a real feel for navigating an assignment of this magnitude. The only bit of tangible advice he gave me was to pick a topic specific enough that the brevity of it would limit and tailor my research.

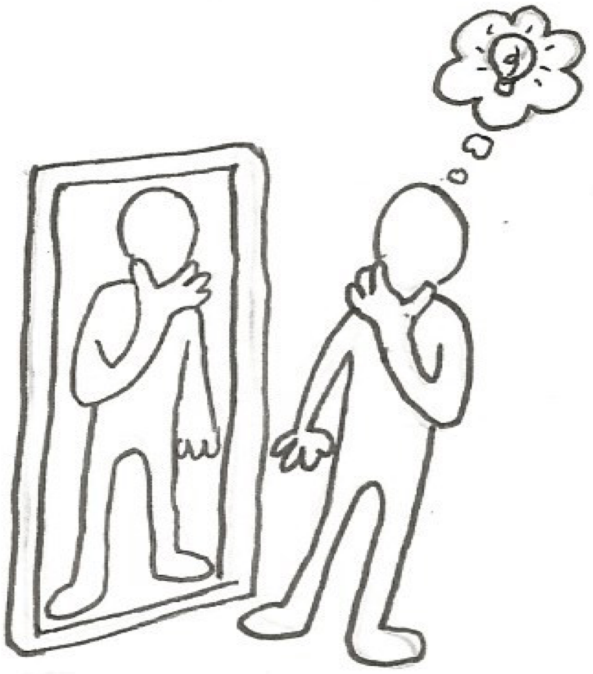
A Moment of Reflection

As I continue on my journey of becoming a teacher, I find myself reflecting on this moment of tension more and more. The significance behind that moment of frustration is not only illustrated by what it taught me about myself as a learner, but more importantly, the insight it gave me into the minds of my future students. As a learner, I need a basic level of understanding and comprehension with an assignment, structure within the assignment itself, and a general level of interest in order to remain inspired. At first, it was motivating to tackle an assignment of this magnitude on my own. The freedom to write about whatever topic I wished and the lack of teacher involvement was at first inspiring, but this lack of teacher involvement and instruction impeded on my ability to fully demonstrate my strengths as a writer.

Now looking at this situation from the lens of a future teacher, I understand the importance of freedom and student choice within an assignment, but that freedom needs to be associated with structure, informal and formal checkpoints, examples, and above all, support. Teachers must emphasize and encourage their students. We need to instill in our students the idea that they have the ability to succeed and that no task is too difficult if they put their minds to it. It is our responsibility to provide our students with a positive learning environment embedded with assignments and activities that generate a passion for learning while promoting self-growth and self-esteem.

As educators and motivators, we need to have positive and long-lasting impacts on our students. We need to challenge our students academically, but these challenges must be attainable and embedded with support. It is essential for us as we stand in front of today's students to remember that collectively it is the experiences we had as students that should shape our teaching practices and philosophies in order to help build the educators of tomorrow.

Erika Richardson graduated from the University of Delaware in May 2015 and is currently pursuing her Master's Degree from Fordham University in Adolescent Biology. She strongly believes there is much promise in teaching science through creative writing and literacy and plans to implement this type of curriculum into her own classroom next year.



Artwork by Izzy Boyce-Blanchard

Co-Teaching in the Dual-Credit Classroom: Collaboration for High School and College Teachers

Caroline Wilkinson

On the first day of class at University Academy Charter High School, I was worried to share teaching responsibilities with another educator. I had not experienced co-teaching before. In fact, when other educators were in my college classroom in the past, they were senior faculty who observed my teaching and asked students about the course. For those days, my class was planned for every minute and I performed with confidence and aptitude. Therefore, I connected another educator in the room with assessment and surveillance. Co-teaching is an entirely different experience because it involves a whole academic year working together, through the great classes and the not so great ones. After collaborating with my co-teacher, Ms. Sue Suarez, in teaching a dual-credit composition course, I recognized how energizing it is to work with another educator in such a collaborative way. I also recognize, however, how seldom collaboration between high school and college educators occurs. Institutional support for collaboration such as ours varies greatly, and in place of the daily dialogue Ms. Suarez and I designed, there are other techniques educators can use to effectively collaborate across levels of education.

Dual-credit courses are classes that high school students take and earn both high school and college credit upon completion. They offer high school students an opportunity to take a college course in fields of study such as composition, math, music appreciation, and psychology. The positive outcomes to dual credit are many. The National Center for Education Statistics states that dual-credit programs "enhance retention once students are in college" ("Dual Enrollment" 2005). In "Fuel for Success: Academic Momentum as a Mediator between Dual Enrollment and Educational Outcomes of Two Year Technical College Students," Xueli Wang and co-authors found that participation in these programs related to students' college completion or retention and better academic performance (165). Students and parents, as well as instructors and administrators, are interested in dual-credit courses because of the academic challenge and option for students to receive college credit before stepping on campus. However, as these courses increase throughout the United States, high schools and colleges struggle with how to best approach student learning, retention, collaboration, and preparation for "college-level writing."

The limitations of acceleration in dual credit are complex. Although students who take dual-credit courses seem to be more likely to move on from high school to college and then to graduate from college, there have not been enough studies about student learning in dual-credit writing programs (Tinberg & Nadeau 2011). Other research demonstrates the tension between colleges and high schools as each stakeholder possessed differing purposes and contexts (Farris 2010). Unlike Advanced Placement (AP) courses, dual-credit courses are not directed by a national organization. Each university and high school in partnership decide on how the curriculum will be structured, who will teach the course, and whether the course will be located at a high school or on a college campus. After these essential decisions about dual-credit courses are made, many participating colleges and high schools do not tend to engage in dialogue with each other. This is troubling, not only for the students who would benefit from the input of multiple parties, but also for the teachers who could be collaborating.

In composition studies, research on collaboration tends to examine professors working together in

writing studies (Miller, Licastro, & Belli 2016; Alexander & Williams 2015) or between professors working together across academic disciplines (Henry & Baker 2015; Dinitz and Harrington 2014). In "Seeking New Worlds: The Study of Writing beyond Our Classrooms," Bronwyn Williams criticizes the gap between college-level rhetoric and composition studies and other disciplines such as K-12 literacy studies. Williams demonstrates that even when scholars from different fields examine similar topics, they all too often cite only other publications in their discipline. In doing research in this manner, scholarly citations become exclusionary to other disciplines, even if they are promoting a similar kind of knowledge. This silo-effective exists also in part because there is not enough discussion of pedagogy and curriculum between high schools and colleges. The need for more dialogue and more collaboration is visible when partnering in dual-credit courses.

The Option of Co-Teaching

In the 2015-2016 academic year, New Jersey City University (NJCU) and University Academy Charter High School (UACHS) in Jersey City, N.J., created a partnership through a dual-credit course so selected UACHS seniors could take an English Composition I course and earn credit for the class at both the high school and college levels. One of the specific local advantages we recognized was that when many of these first-generation college students began college the next year, they had experienced and received credit for one college class. Most dual-credit courses across the United States are taught either by a high school instructor who has earned a Master's degree in the field of study or a certain number of graduate credit hours in the field, or by a college faculty member who comes in to the high school or teaches the course on campus. We decided to create the partnership between NJCU and UACHS differently. We chose to co-teach the class together—me, an Assistant Professor in English and Ms. Suarez, a high school teacher who taught Senior English. We were reaching for an effective way to provide students a chance to experience learning under a college professor, while also fulfilling the high school curriculum requirements for Senior English so students could additionally take the AP exam in Language and Composition. To match my schedule with my university teaching load, I would come in for three days of the week to co-teach the class with the high school educator. On the other two days, Ms. Suarez taught the class by herself.

To my surprise and delight, our collaboration over the dual-credit course not only proved effective for our students, but was also energizing and inspiring. Ms. Suarez and I began collaborating over the curriculum as a whole for this English Composition I class starting in the summer of 2015. We planned the four major assignments that students would complete throughout the year to fulfill college-level writing requirements and also to help them prepare for the AP exam. We created the syllabus and schedule for the course together. Ms. Suarez and I shared an overarching idea of how the class would be approached. This understanding was helpful because—as we realized once we were in the classroom—we were coming from two different cultures on writing.

Since this was my first time co-teaching, I had many worries, including that I would talk too much. Ms. Suarez and I decided from the beginning of the year that we would teach together every day. This collaboration meant we would not "take turns" teaching in segmented time blocks. Instead, she focused more on certain lessons, such as providing context on a specific author, and I focused more on certain other lessons, such as constructing an effective thesis statement. For each lesson, Ms. Suarez and I would each give our own perspectives on the subject at hand. We began our class in Fall 2015 with 20 students and quickly learned our pedagogical styles in relationship to one another.

Once we had taught together for a couple of months, we developed a rhythm. We knew when to talk more about a subject and when to listen to the other teacher. Rather than my worries coming true, I found that it was an inspiration to observe and participate with another educator in the classroom.

Fuller Understandings of Learning Strategies, College-Level Writing, and Partnerships

After collaborating through the academic year teaching the course, I found much to learn about

pedagogical strategies from Ms. Suarez. Like most professors with a doctorate in Rhetoric and Composition, my pedagogy background was limited. I took one graduate course on teaching college composition and then was put in the classroom to teach composition courses. Many composition graduate students and professors, including me, end up learning pedagogy strategies in workshops or in rushed anecdotal conversations with colleagues in the hallways. Ms. Suarez holds a Bachelor's degree in English Education, and thus, she employs learning strategies that I had not encountered in composition training. I learned a great deal about composition pedagogy from Ms. Suarez.

Student Learning Strategies

As a professor, I use a combination of a lecture, PowerPoint, group work, and class discussion. However, class discussion was a weakness in my classes. It was difficult for me to resist controlling the conversation or to avoid asserting authority. When co-teaching with Ms. Suarez, I found myself leading class discussion with greater ease. This shift occurred because Ms. Suarez and I were in dialogue already, therefore, students felt comfortable to participate in a discussion we were both engaged in already. Students offered insights on James Bamford's "The Most Wanted Man in the World" and about the life of Edward Snowden after he leaked classified information from the NSA. I came to see these discussions as authentic spaces where Ms. Suarez and I and our students interpreted texts and shared ideas with each other instead of spaces I needed command lest my students miss something important.

This change even transferred to the college classroom when I was a solo instructor. I became much more comfortable listening to my students during class discussion. I did not feel as though I had to control the room as I did previously and more students participated in discussion because the classroom became designed for that. This change occurred because my teaching style evolved in part because of what I learned about learning strategies from co-teaching.

Additionally, Ms. Suarez helped me to realize that I privileged visual learning in my lessons. There was not a lot of space for auditory or kinesthetic learning. Visual is privileged in college composition scholarship and therefore, my models had not taught me to recognize there were other kinds of learning. I had never learned about students' learning strategies or Howard Gardner's multiple intelligences until I co-taught with Ms. Suarez. I adjusted to include auditory learning more in my college composition classrooms and I even adapted my heavily lecture-based Grammar and Usage undergraduate English major course. I also experimented with kinesthetic learning by asking students to move during class into different kinds of groups, to walk to the front of the class and to write their thesis statements on the podium computer that was projected to the class. As a class, we revised thesis statements and students revised them on the computer simultaneously. This was a teaching strategy to combine the visual, auditory, and kinesthetic strategies.

Discussions of "College-level" Writing

By planning and teaching this course together, Ms. Suarez and I had many discussions on what "college-level" writing means. We assessed students' major assignments together. Grading together took us to texts by Patrick Sullivan and Howard Tinberg in *What Is "College-Level" Writing*? as well as Janet Alsup and Michael Bernard-Donals' "The Fantasy of the 'Seamless' Transition." I realized that, in many ways, we held similar conceptualizations of what college-level writing looked like. We both privileged thesis-driven arguments, understood that evidence needed to be employed to support an argument, and worked for clear organization and style in our students' writing. From these discussions, I found that college composition and secondary English education instructors are frequently coming to literacy from different places but arriving at similar places.

Ms. Suarez learned more about the usual genres in a composition classroom. These were helpful to her as a high school educator because most of her courses focused on literature. In our class, we

combined some literary texts, such as George Orwell's *1984*, Jonathan Swift's "A Modest Proposal," and Junot Diaz's *Drowned*, with assignments that focused on argument about societal structures, such as relations of power and gender and surveillance in modern society. As she prepares her high school students for college-level writing, she better understands what kinds of genres composition instructors often use.

Creating a Partnership

Co-teaching with another educator is full of possibilities. I had trepidation about collaboration in this arena, but I found that Ms. Suarez and I possessed similar teaching personas. I had worried when we began this collaboration there would be a "good cop"/ "bad cop" situation. We did not slip into that stereotype because we deliberately approached the students as a team. When students submitted their written assignments to us through Google Docs, they were asked to email both of us. When a student struggled, we both stayed after class to meet with them. We discussed the assignments, what students were doing well with the work and who needed more help, and we talked about our schedule for each week in weekly Thursday meetings after class during Ms. Suarez's planning period. Sometimes I had to miss a class because I had required meetings on the university campus. Ms. Suarez was always generous and understood. Since we approached the class as co-teachers, there was a real sense of trust between us.

Collaboration between High School and College Educators

This teaching experience models a successful partnership between a university and high school for dual-credit courses. In "The Need for Teacher Communities," Lorna Collier and Linda Darling-Hammond assert, "when teachers can collaborate with other teachers, they can better serve their students" (12). My experience co-teaching this course this past year demonstrates that this claim is not only true for college educators collaborating with other university professors and high school instructors collaborating with other high school teachers, but it is also true for college educators and high school teachers working together. Not every university and high school will provide the kind of institutional support for dual-credit co-teaching that Ms. Suarez and I enjoyed in the 2015-2016 academic year. When such support is lacking, there are other ways for college and high school educators to collaborate in English Education.

Teacher Symposium

A teaching symposium sponsored by a university and high school would be valuable—even if it only ran a single day. Fostering dialogue between teachers and professors about the kinds of work they are doing in the classroom would be key. A symposium would allow for 15 minute presentations similar to a conference setting and could offer spaces to learn from a variety of perspectives on literacy, composition, literature, and pedagogical strategies. Educators could have a chance to learn about others also studying the same kind of research. Collaborations, co-teaching, and action-oriented co-authorship could all begin from this symposium.

Reading Groups

Adding a requirement like a reading group or book club runs the risk of backfiring because teachers and professors are already overworked. A monthly reading group on relevant and brief pedagogical texts in English Education could make it so that university and high school instructors can interact with one another and begin to have sorely needed conversations on what "college-level" writing means and how to prepare students for college, careers, and life experiences.

National Writing Project

The National Writing Project is an essential resource for many English educators. The Summer Institute involves many secondary educators every year, but more college professors who teach composition, literature, and linguistics should participate. The National Writing Project is an established, respected setting where generative active discussions about teaching are already

occurring, so it is a natural setting for conversations about partnerships between high school and college educators.

Inspired

Through co-teaching with Ms. Suarez, I learned more about my own pedagogical strategies which inspired me to become a more effective educator. I wasn't just inspired to teach more effectively to the high school students in the dual-credit course, I was inspired to reach the university students in my composition and undergraduate English major classes. Models who inspire us are rarely a discussion topic among college professors. Perhaps if dialogue and collaboration were supported more often, fewer high school teachers and fewer college professors would burn out.

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The Art of Inspired Teaching

by Eileen Dormer

Thorough and Efficient. No Child Left Behind. Portfolio Assessment. Problem-Based Learning. Understanding by Design. Statewide Standards. Core Content Curriculum Alignment. Differentiation. Summative evaluation. The education machine continues to spit out buzz words at an increasingly rapid clip. Whatever the latest education initiative, there is always the difficulty of forcing square pegs into round holes, since these administrative edicts come down from above, often removed from the teachers themselves. But buried beneath this torrent of trends lies the bedrock of an inescapable truth: inspired teaching is an art, not a science.

As a teacher for four decades, I have observed countless colleagues who demonstrated a broad range of pedagogical artistry, running the gamut from deadly seriousness to flat-out insanity. Current administrative observers, while looking down at their laptops and checking boxes on "domains," would never select any of these educators as exemplars of their theories. Yet, these teachers inspired their students- and me- because they were all remarkably effective in their classrooms. There was the teacher who was completely incapable of communicating with any other adults but who literally "came alive" as if on stage in front of a group of students, using his own method of sardonic discourse to encourage critical thinking about literature. His pupils worshiped him.

Another educator was completely "old school," insisting on strict grammar and reading just the classics, so utterly out of touch with current vogues yet assured of her own direction that she seemed original and cool to the students. One memorable guy was crazy and compulsive, leaping around the room, full of rituals from which he would not allow his students to deviate: pencils placed on the upper right corner of the desk, no curled corners on papers, and daily memorization of critical facts about our world and its cultures. Students watched this teacher in the same way they might watch an exotic animal in a zoo, with rapt attention and fascination. I would venture to say that the thousands of students who spent a year in his class can still recall and apply everything they committed to memory and could be great ***Jeopardy*** candidates (or more knowledgeable political candidates than some we have seen lately).

These teachers have left their classrooms now, along with many more quirky, creative performance artists like them. Their square pegs splintered in the smooth round holes of new, required methods forced upon them. Seated in their well-worn chairs are those for whom teaching is a science, earnest professionals who are competent and comfortable in checking off core content standards, teaching to tests, and using newest technology in their disciplines. They are accountable, ~~t~~their successes are quantifiable, and their methods are validated by research.

But that certain spark, that ineffable quality that marks teaching *artistry,* seems harder to find. In the myriad forms of evaluation developed by the education gurus, where have they included the box that can be checked off noting that the teacher skipped lunch for a week, talking to a student who couldn't talk to anyone else? Is there a number that correlates to the inspiring teacher who made her students museum cognoscenti, even paying for their trips? What rating would have been assigned to that teacher who still insisted on teaching pristine grammar when her supervisor required her to eliminate it in favor of problem-based group learning projects?

The science of teaching leads us down the straight highway of endless measurement and computation. But the art of teaching finds many winding roads that lead to personal journeys. I prefer those pebbled paths less taken, and I am inspired when the byways lead to an open sunlit meadow for my students to explore. We are off the grid for a just a little while, with no scientific instruments to calibrate the pleasure of our discoveries.

I know that it is much harder and possibly even professionally unsafe in this time of scrupulous evaluation for teachers to let their freak flags fly. But I am sure we can seek gentle breezes here and there, let those flags flutter in a freshening wind, and be inspired once again.

Eileen Dormer, MA, is an adjunct professor of introductory college writing at Union County College, New Jersey. She has also taught at Bergen and Brookdale Community Colleges and at Montclair State University. Dormer is retired from the West Essex School District, where for 36 years she indulged her passions by teaching reading, writing, studio art and AP art history.

Photo by Sarah Curtis.

Two Views of a Writers' Group: Reflections on writing with and for others

by Roberta Tipton and Patricia Bender

The reflections here are from two members of the Dana Writers Group, formed to help mentor Rutgers University-Newark colleagues through the writing and publication part of their tenure work. The lunchtime series offered as informal professional development was organized and directed by Roberta Tipton, Faculty Librarian. Patricia Bender served as a writing coach and co-lead. Both created a number of writing prompts and recommended readings very specifically responding to the needs of the group. All members of the group shared best practices as well as writing in this supportive context and efforts are underway to build capacity for a long-running series that would support faculty and graduate students in a variety of disciplines based on the success of this first launch.

The Dana Writers Group: Creativity and Scholarship
By Roberta Tipton, The John Cotton Dana Library

The Dana Writers Group grew out of an urgent need. The John Cotton Dana Library at Rutgers University-Newark had a brand-new crop of library faculty in the tenure stream with the clock ticking. Writer and writing teacher Patricia Bender and I had been speaking for years about starting some kind of reading group or writing group on our campus. If there was anything that could be done to help mentor my colleagues through the writing and publication part of their tenure work, we had to do it now.

My immediate inspiration was *Demystifying Dissertation Writing* by Peg Boyle Single. Single's book is not just about dissertations; it lays out methods of writing from research which are well-organized and highly effective for any academic work or long form nonfiction. Single's work then led us to Robert Boice, Single's mentor. Among Boice's many insightful books on writing process and overcoming procrastination is *Professors as Writers: A Self-Help Guide to Productive Writing*. Boice and Single both offer suggestions for writing exercises that work well in academic writing groups; both of their books are affordable paperbacks currently in print. We also drew inspiration from many other writers on writing, including Peter Elbow, Betty Friedan, Ann Lamott, and Natalie Goldberg.

We began in the fall of 2014, at first meeting weekly as the Dana Writing Group (with exceptions for scheduling conflicts) during the fall semester and then continuing about once per month in the spring of 2015. We had three to five regular attendees. The meetings were arranged as brown bag lunches that included either a round-robin discussion of our current projects, an exercise from Patricia or me, or a guest speaker. Our guest speakers included writing instructors from the campus and people we knew who were very productive scholars in librarianship. The exercises and discussion topics ranged from strictly academic to creative writing, reinforcing Patricia's refrain that "writing is writing." At one point we even teleconferenced with library faculty at another Rutgers libraries unit with good results. After about 10 months the group was suspended because of personnel and scheduling changes, but it was later reinstated locally as an occasional lunch-discussion-writing event. We could not get together at all last summer, so we sent inspirational messages and "DIY" writing exercises via email to have our group members continue to write and to think about writing.

Some of our significant "wins" included: encouraging one of our number to turn a rejected book chapter into a published, peer-reviewed journal article; having another member plan a successful conference presentation during one of our exercises; and discovering the "Pomodoro Technique" of

structuring work time and writing time through one of our group. Whatever one's writing or research issue, someone else in the group had an idea for solving it. The value of having a writing coach and an academic librarian working together on a project like this cannot be overemphasized. Our different perspectives gave solid support to the process of writing this very specialized kind of nonfiction.

Inspired by Writing Alone and with Others
by Patricia Bender

I have been a writing teacher for more than 25 years, and fortunate to work with writers from 5 to 85 years old in a variety of settings that included high school classrooms (as tutor and mentor), college classrooms (as teacher, tutor and mentor) and workshops around the world with teachers and community writers. My work through the Rutgers - Newark Writing Center and the Faculty Alliance for Education, where I worked as a team member in interdisciplinary efforts, took me around the city of Newark and state of New Jersey and, eventually, to South Africa.

I am a writer. One of my many mentors, Pat Schneider, titled one of her books *Writing Alone and with Others*, and her philosophy and practice displayed in that book make absolute sense to me, including an emphasis on listening. So when my longtime friend and writing partner Roberta Tipton, Rutgers University faculty librarian, asked me to join her in the Dana Writers Group, I was glad for the invitation and looked forward to the meetings, and listening and learning.

I am not a librarian. I was invited to join the Dana Writers Group because Roberta sees me as a coach who is able to help hesitant writers and confident writers alike. Professional development opportunities present themselves in many ways and in many moments. We learn from peers and near-peers alike (sometimes even what we do not want to know), from books, from formal workshops and classes. The Dana Writers Group series was a rich resource of advice, encouragement and hands-on writing. Yes, we wrote regularly in the workshops and shared our very raw work. This is a gift: to write with others who know the vulnerability of early drafts and how to respond with kindly but rigorous advice.

One of the sessions I designed included writing letters to the academic journal editors (real and imagined) who we imagined sending an article to or who might have rejected an article of ours in a harsh way. The goal of the exercise was to address the strengths of the articles as we had written them or to outline the strength of articles we would indeed write. And to share the realities of rejection including our responses to it. The prompts are included at the end of this reflection in case you want to try them yourself. We can report that one of our writers looked again at a rejected book chapter and after noting in her fictional letter to the editor all the great things he had missed, revised the chapter (slightly). That chapter is now a published article in a peer reviewed journal in the writer's field.

As we strive to grow as teachers and writers there is wisdom in turning off the harsh editor in our head and resisting completely some of the many obstacles that keep us from writing. Rather than struggling alone, let's continue to trust, and support each other and to develop professionally together.

Dana Writers: Where We Are Now

At this writing, Roberta and Patricia have applied for a small grant that would bring capacity building resources to the Writers Group. Whatever the grant proposal response, both co-leaders will continue to work with writers interested in enriching their writing practice and enlarging their publication portfolio. While it is often a challenge to find time to devote to developing our writing and offering it

to others to consider, including sending it out for publication, our efforts, especially when communal and collegial, and let's include too, compassionate, result in support for our professional lives and more, as the Dana Writers can attest.

DEAR EDITOR PROMPTS:

LETTER #1	**LETTER #2**
Dear most critical (and not in good way) editor: **Before you thoughtlessly criticize and then casually and callously reject my new article about _____, please know that you will be missing an opportunity to bring your readers' attention to a most worthwhile and unique perspective which can only be provided by me based on my expertise and experience. Here is a list of what you will have missed:** **1.** **2. . . .**	**Dear esteemed editor:** **Attached please find a prospectus for an article I would very much like to publish in your esteemed journal. The focus on _____ includes my unique perspective as a _____ ___. The finished article will address _____ in the following ways:** **. . .**

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Roberta Tipton, MLS, MBA, has worked in academic, corporate, medical, and government libraries. She has written or presented on information literacy, collaboration, reference process, online library guides, and information about business. She is currently Business Librarian, Information Literacy Coordinator, and Librarian, School of Public Affairs and Administration at the John Cotton Dana Library at Rutgers University - Newark, New Jersey.

Patricia Bender, MALS, Research Grant/Contract Specialist Rutgers University-Newark, has taught writing, and offered community writing workshop for more than 20 years. A National Writing Project consultant, she founded and directed the Rutgers, Newark Writing Center (1998-2008), earned workshop leadership certification through Amherst Writers & Artists and serves as Assistant Editor of the NJCTE Journal.

The Kid Sleeping in the Back

by Eric Paragallo

In the back of your class there is that kid. You know the one I'm talking about: any moment of silence is an invitation for this student to talk. No homework assignment is simple or short enough for this student to complete. And no classwork is ever engaging enough to call this student from slumber. This student is a distraction, a crack in your hold of your classroom, and a reminder, a reminder—buried deep in your subconscious, under mountains of denial—that your teaching strategies are *not* working for everyone.

So what do you do? What is the solution? You have already tried every form of punishment in the book: lunch detention, after-school detention, a call home, a private talk, a conversation with the principal. Instinctually, I think the gut reaction is to punish any problem into submission. But this student will not submit. And as a result of this student's defiance, you are once again reminded that your strategies are *not* working for everyone.

So you wallow in pity for a while, and as you do, an even worse thought occurs to you: *how do I remove this mark of shame from my room*. You push this thought aside quickly, though, because you know good teachers do not entertain such thoughts.

But—still—you have no idea what to do next.

I am a student teacher. The teacher I described above may be you, but he is also me. My corresponding teacher has released one of her three classes to me. In this grade level class, there is just such a student—one whom I cannot seem to reach. I will call him Pedro[1]. He is a good kid. Every time I get observed by my university supervisor, this kid turns into a model student. On those days, Pedro's head rises from the surface of his desk, his back straightens and he engages, answering the questions I pose to the class with genuine insight. I realized after my fourth observation that Pedro wanted to make me look good in front of my supervisor. As I said, he is a good kid; he cares. But I just can't seem to get him to care about learning outside of those special occasions.

The urgency in reaching Pedro becomes all the more real when you consider his present circumstances. Every day he enters class wearing the same tattered red Nike sweatshirt and the same black sweatpants. Every morning, from my classroom window, I see him walking the cracked sidewalks of Paterson, past a notorious corner where drug deals are frequently conducted, toward the front gates of school. Like 95% of the students who attend the school I student teach in, Pedro is eligible for free breakfast and free lunch. Pedro lives in poverty. I believe that his resistance to learning stems, in part, from the unfair and harsh circumstances that surround him. I also believe that it will be exponentially more difficult for Pedro to overcome those circumstances, if he does not soon gain the skills I am charged with teaching him.

What's my next step, though? Where does a teacher go after punitive measures fail?

As previously noted, I am a student teacher—as such I have the privilege of speaking to a number of intelligent and insightful professors and supervisors. I also have the benefit of searching for answers in the books those professors and supervisors recommend.

In one such book, *Star Teachers of Children in Poverty* (1995), the author Martin Haberman provides the transcripts of two interviews he conducted with two teachers. In the interviews, Haberman seeks to

[1] Pseudonym

find out how each teacher would deal with a student who will not do his homework. Just what I was looking for. The first interview is with a teacher he labels as a "non-star teacher" and the second is with a teacher he labels as a "star teacher."

The "non-star" sought solutions for the problem outside of the classroom—he or she sought the principal, the guidance counselor, and the school therapist for help. The "non-star" believed that there must be something mentally wrong with the child and that only a trained specialist could cure the issue. The "star" believed that there was nothing wrong with the child, but rather that the student simply had a different type of intelligence and that intelligence required a different type of education.

There was my answer. I was going about the problem all wrong. Pedro wasn't a problem, but my approach in engaging him was. All Pedro needed was a different type of education, one that was more aligned with his interests. As Haberman taught me, it was my job to find that solution.

Pedro pointed me to one possible solution during an after school detention I held. He was sitting in a desk across from mine and, somewhat randomly, he asked, "Do you watch *Impractical Jokers*?" *Impractical Jokers* is a show about four adult best friends who compete to embarrass each other by playing practical jokes on each other. I told Pedro I did watch the show and that I actually met one of the stars of the show, bumping into him by chance at a New Jersey Devil game the previous year. This seemed to excite Pedro. A flurry of questions leapt out: "Was he cool?" "Was he filming an episode?" "Did you ask him how he came up with his jokes?" Finally, *finally,* I had Pedro engaged. An idea ballooned in my head.

After Pedro left, I designed a project—a project that would play to Pedro's interests and require him to utilize writing and critical analysis skills:

- First: Pedro will write two to three sketches for an *Impractical Jokers* episode.
- Second: He will write an explanation for how the sketches he wrote will be funny and successful.
- Third: He will create whatever he would like to, to enhance his sketch ideas: videos, illustrations, etc. This is where Pedro really gets to take control of the project, if he so chooses.
- Fourth: He will write a letter and query the *Impractical Jokers* with his episode plans.

I do not have an answer as to whether this project will work out or not. I am waiting until the current semester ends before putting it into effect. But I'm excited. I'm excited because the project has a chance of working. It has a chance of showing Pedro that the skills my corresponding teacher and I are teaching him in class everyday are worthwhile life skills and, that with those skills, he can achieve his some of his desires.

Once Pedro glimpses success in putting together his *Impractical Jokers* project, he will hopefully crave that feeling. He will remain engaged in future classes, knowing that to do so will bring him that much closer to his dreams and desires.

As teachers, we must try our best to avoid punishing disenfranchised students and instead seek to understand them—their behaviors, their lives, their interests, their goals—for in understanding those students, we will find the keys to open the doorways that those students sleeping in the back once assumed locked.

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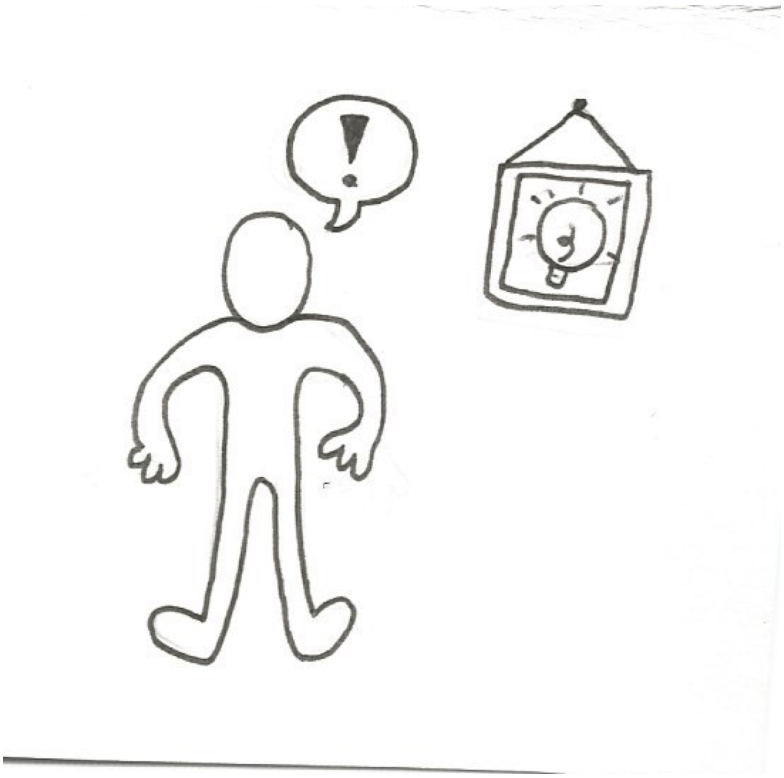
Eric Paragallo is a currently a student teacher at New Roberto Clemente middle school, pursuing a Masters of Arts in Teaching degree at William Paterson University (WPU), Wayne, New Jersey. In 2012, he received an undergraduate degree in English with a concentration in writing from WPU. He has contributed articles to The Alternative Press.



Artwork by Izzy Boyce-Blanchard

Mrs. Lang

by Rachelle M. Parker

I had a teacher once. I
don't know which was bigger
her heart or her eyes.

She saw through
my tears, raggedy coat
and crooked parts.

She saw all the way down
in me. Her palms on brick
looking in a well.

Rachelle M. Parker is a Callaloo Creative Writing Fellow. Her poetry has appeared in *Tupelo Quarterly, Creations Magazine, The Path Magazine*, *Elohi Gadugi* and the anthology *Poeming Pigeons: Poems About Food*. She was the winner of The Fourth Annual Pat Schneider Poetry Contest. Rachelle is currently the poetry editor for *Peregrine*.

From New Jersey to Hong Kong: Adventures in Teaching

by LeVar Harris

From English to Cantonese. From pizza and American pie to dim sum and fishballs. From the Hudson River to Victoria Harbor waterfronts. After eight years of teaching high school English in New Jersey, I made a professional leap to explore teaching on an international level and landed in Hong Kong, a bustling city of 8 million inhabitants, tall skyscrapers, and a fusion of British-Chinese culture. I have learned much having taught in both the United States and Hong Kong; these experiences inspire me as an educator.

My Background

A native of New Jersey, I grew up in the central suburban city of Rahway. After completing my undergraduate and graduate studies at Rutgers University, my professional path led me to teach high school English in a few school districts ranging from wealthy and high achieving to working class with low-motivated students. I cherish these diverse realities as they have shaped me as a professional, equipping me with the skills to assist and teach various types of students. In addition, I also taught reading and writing part-time on the community college level. One of my primary goals in my college classrooms was to see what skills were required of students on the college level, so that I could better prepare my high school students to bridge the gap between their secondary and tertiary education. Eight years into my professional career, I enrolled into a certification program for students with disabilities to further expand my professional knowledge. After completing the program, I took a trip to Hong Kong to visit a friend, also a New Jerseyan, who had been teaching abroad, and discovered another professional path that I wanted to explore – teaching on an international level.

Hong Kong Education Environment

To graduate secondary school, students in Hong Kong have to take a high stakes exam with an English component that assesses students' ability to read, write, speak, and listen to English. Students must also sit through a Chinese component with similar parts as well as math and liberal studies assessments. As a result, education in Hong Kong has become a simmering cauldron of competitiveness. Add to this mix the fact that the city has eight universities with enough slots for about 20% of all its graduating students, and the result is a highly competitive environment. Taking advantage of this situation, multiple tutorial centers proliferate in every district of Hong Kong, whether affluent or impoverished, trying to appease the demand to prepare for the test and score well enough to enter university. From this environment, I have concluded Hong Kong is a city that values education, and that such high stakes testing has created an environment in most local schools where teachers feel forced to "teach to the test," even adding the previous years' exams to the curriculum. While this has some similarities to the United States, the difference seems to be that every lesson in Hong Kong is geared toward test performance rather than skill development. Students are encouraged to complete at least three past exams of reading, writing, listening, and speaking components in an academic year in addition to their current workload.

Classroom Teaching

Picture this scene: Students enter your classroom, stand up at their desks, and after I say, "Good morning class," they reply in unison, "Good morning, Mr. Harris," before sitting down. This same practice is followed at the end of class ("Goodbye, and thank you Mr. Harris"). What a nice way to start the day and class! Classrooms in the United States tend to be more informal at the start, perhaps

with greeting students at the door, asking them to settle into their seats, or beginning with some type of "Do Now" or journal prompt. Both methods are indicative of the cultural norms of each society.

In terms of teaching, while most local English teachers in Hong Kong engage in more standardized teaching (dictation, worksheets, PowerPoints) to prepare students for the reading and writing components of the exam, my role is more focused on preparing and helping students improve their English-speaking skills for the group discussion exam component. Gone are my days of teaching the classic novel, poems and short stories, but this new role enables me to be quite creative in teaching English language learners, addressing vocabulary and speaking skills through classroom discussions, pictures, games, online videos, music, etc.

To further assist students, I organize activities during lunch time where students can informally come to the canteen and practice English. These range from practical skills (posting a large-scale map of the local transit system and having students give directions in English from one location to another along with trips to interview foreigners) to fun games (music sing-alongs, iPad app games, 'Hoop-that-Verb' grammar and basketball activities) to English debate competition preparations. My experience in the United States with further assisting students to develop a love of English has been mainly been through poetry and book clubs. Since English is native to the United States, the challenge is to encourage students to develop a lifelong love of reading and writing rather than engaging its use outside of classroom. While curriculum in Hong Kong is somewhat rigid and exam-oriented, I try to vary my approach and create different opportunities for students to use English. This keeps it interesting for myself and the students.

Staying Inspired

I remember once returning to my hometown high school in New Jersey and talking to a teacher who inspired me. He told me that a large part of teaching is teaching based on our personality. This means that each teacher has a "personality" that is formed from our beliefs, interests, family, character, etc., so no two teachers are alike, and what works for one may not work for another. I have noticed this in my professional career both in the United States and Hong Kong. In the classroom, the variables we work with are our students, the curriculum, and our personality. I believe that understanding one's personality is key to being effective and staying motivated. Since the curriculum in most public schools in Hong Kong is often fixed and exam-driven, I constantly feed my personality. One way I do this by attending workshops, many of which are offered through the Hong Kong Education Bureau. In addition, there are a few international conferences that I attend in nearby Macau, South Korea and Singapore which allows me to see what others do and what I can adapt based on my personality and curriculum.

Recently I attended a Google Apps event in South Korea to become a Google certified educator and improve my knowledge of using technology in the classroom. (Apple offers a similar workshop but without certification.) I also use teacher support groups through online teaching forums; there is one here in Hong Kong that I joined (www.nesta.hk), which provides not only advice, but professional development and social events such as "The Amazing Race HK," tram rides, beach cleanups, and more. I also visit bookstores and toy stores; in essence, any place that can spark an idea that I can use in my teaching and lessons based on my personality and style. This makes my teaching more effective, which in turn, keeps me motivated each year and continues to add to this adventure of teaching and learning.

LeVar Harris, M.Ed., is a former high school English teacher in New Jersey. He also taught English part-time on the community college. Currently, he is teaching high school in Hong Kong to English language learners. He has also assisted other English teachers in Hong Kong through professional development programs and workshops through the Native English Speaking Teachers' Association and the Hong Kong Education Bureau.

Art by Graciela St. Onge

Language Arts, from the United States to the Dominican Republic

by Jonathan DiMaio

In 2007, when I traveled as part of a Yale undergraduate "alternative" spring break trip to Batey Libertad—a community in the Dominican Republic whose residents are vulnerable to human rights violations because many are Dominicans of Haitian descent—English Language Arts was far from my mind. We were there to explore, to learn, to practice Spanish, to have fun. But that short trip started something: we became friends with people in the community, we learned about their atrocious treatment at the hands of Dominican authorities, we saw the deficits in public education, and we became inspired to do something. I didn't realize until much later that Language Arts would be the key.

Ten years on, and the group of students I traveled with is still at work building Yspaniola, an education non-profit that is building a vertical education model from pre-school through university in Batey Libertad so our programs' graduates can find work beyond non-contracted manual labor, support themselves and their families, and advocate for their communities. We run a Learning Center, where we provide literacy instruction to over 135 children ages four to seventeen, all of whom receive a meal before class. Data from our evaluations suggest that our intervention is having a noticeable effect on children's reading levels in the community. We also have a University Scholarship Program, which has two current scholars and three recent graduates who all have full-time employment. Dozens of college and high-school students visit us each year to volunteer in the Learning Center. After the inevitable challenges of starting a non-profit—limited funding, missteps with our focus and program design—we have become a small, sleek start-up, building programs as well as institutional practices that will ensure our long-term success.

Our funding base has grown these past few years, which has allowed us to hire professional educators. What I see when I return to Batey Libertad is that what we have asked our educators to create—the Learning Center—is simply our attempt to recreate the learning environment for reading, writing, and analyzing stories that I and my co-founders and co-board members enjoyed during our educations. Obviously, there are some differences, notably our limited resources and Spanish language instruction. But the key elements are the same: a safe, fun space—with high expectations for achievement and behavior—for learning fundamentals to read and write, and then using those fundamentals to think, to be creative, and to keep learning. I knew we were onto something in early 2014, when a 10-year-old Tatiana confronted me outside the Learning Center after class. She had just finished a lesson in which the students were reading *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*, and as she left the classroom she peered up at me, paused, considered my beard, and then exclaimed, "YOU are the Faun!" As Tatiana cackled and scampered away, I marveled: only a year earlier, she could barely read, and now she was pulling fictional characters from a book and creatively imagining them outside the classroom, with humor thrown in at my expense.

Commitment to Language Arts is the foundation. The challenges Batey Libertad and its residents face are immense, but not insurmountable. Yspaniola has joined with the community to provide the building blocks: we currently have trained five Batey Libertad residents to be teachers, and a few months ago, we hired one of our university scholar graduates, Mayra Rodriguez, to teach literacy in our Learning Center. English Language Arts education in the United States gave Yspaniola's founders the skills necessary to build the organization, and now, Yspaniola has given Mayra and others from Batey Libertad the ability to share and teach Spanish Language Arts in their own community. We have confidence that by continuing to provide these opportunities in Batey

Libertad, community members can achieve inside the classroom and learn skills to help them overcome hardships outside the classroom.

Jonathan DiMaio is a founding member and President of the Board of Yspaniola and graduate of Yale University. For more information including service-learning trips, go to http://yspaniola.org.

Sicily

for Julius Gottilla **by Edwin Romond**

Surrounded by three seas,
beautiful the way
a woman who's lived
long years of joys and
scars is lovely with
lines around eyes
that have seen a full life.

An island with history
of wars and songs, crisp
mountains, the charm
of late-night Marsala streets
and the pulse of Palermo
beating beneath
the smokey face of Etna.

People speak of summer
heat baking terracotta walls
and its ancient cuisine
of *cannolo* and couscous.
I think of my friend walking
among these splendors
sensing the embrace

of ancestors and at night
gazing up at sky feeling
them bless him in heaven
for the teaching life he's led
an ocean away from this island,
their family love living
in Sicilian lemon air.

Edwin Romond is the author of eight collections of poetry and has been awarded writing fellowships from the National Endowment for the Arts, the National Endowment for the Humanities, and from both the New Jersey and Pennsylvania State Councils on the Arts. In 2013 he received the New Jersey Poetry Prize for his poem, "Champion." Garrison Keillor has twice featured Romond's poetry on National Public Radio and his memoir, "The Ticket," appears in Tim Russert's *New York Times* bestseller, *Wisdom of Our Fathers.*

Inspired to Grow through Cross-Disciplinary Teaching and Learning

Audrey A. Fisch and Susan Chenelle

The four ninth graders at the table closest to the door hadn't exactly chosen to work together. Each had selected the same topic related to gentrification: the chromium contamination in the lot being redeveloped down the block from their school. Among the five groups working on their service learning projects, this group probably spoke to each other the least.

However, they were hunched over their iPads looking for articles relevant to the subtopics they had identified: the chemical properties of chromium and its uses, its positive and negative effects on human health and the environment, and the history of chromium at the nearby site and its clean-up. They copied and pasted the URLs from the sources into a shared GoogleSheet, where they also summarized the articles' key points and evaluated their credibility.

In completing this last step, the students discovered how important it was to read and think about their sources carefully. Through our discussions on gentrification in general, the students had come to recognize the variety of stakeholders with different agendas and concerns, including politicians, developers, and passionately engaged community residents.

The student who was looking into the remediation efforts at the contaminated site nearby found what he initially thought was a blog created by a concerned individual. The simply designed site thoroughly detailed the effects of chromium, the history of how it had ended up in the area, and the efforts to remediate the land. It seemed objective in tone, citing government studies as sources in answers to key questions about chromium. He was initially pleased to find a website that seemed to have everything he needed for the project, but then he scrolled down to the bottom of the page.

"Hold up," he said. Susan walked over to see what he had found. He scrolled back up to show her the name of the website and the information it featured, and then back to the bottom, where it said, "Copyright © 2005-2016 Honeywell International Inc." The site had been created by the company responsible for both the contamination and its clean-up. The straightforward-seeming information on the site no longer appeared so objective.

He showed what he had found to the other members of his group.

"So, what does this mean?" Susan asked.

"We need to compare what all of our sources say," one of the students responded.

It was the moment when they realized the importance of their own critical thinking in relation to their research on the topic. They were no longer simply seeking out the quick and easy source that would allow them to expeditiously finish the assignment. They were engaged and reflective learners, attempting to determine the truth about a complex topic relevant to their own lives, so that they could in turn inform others. They went on to create and deliver a presentation of their findings about the chromium contamination next door to a chemistry class consisting of juniors and seniors.

Shared responsibility for learning and action

The Common Core makes clear, in a way that wasn't entirely explicit before, that literacy is an important, shared responsibility: "Instruction in reading, writing, speaking, listening, and language are

to be a shared responsibility within the school" (CCSS). All teachers, regardless of discipline, have literacy expertise; we all read and write in our fields and are familiar with the genres and formats of our disciplines. The Common Core demands that we all participate in the project of growing our students' literacy competence.

Though many states, including New Jersey, are modifying the Common Core, the recognition of the importance of disciplinary literacy and of student experience with what the Common Core calls informational text will surely persist. New Jersey, for instance, in the proposed New Jersey Learning Standards, eschews the language of informational text and returns to nonfiction, but the revised standards retain the Common Core's focus on the wide-ranging, cross-disciplinary literacy that is vital to empowering our students to be informed, engaged 21st-century citizens: "Part of the motivation behind the interdisciplinary approach to literacy promulgated by the Standards is extensive research establishing the need for college and career ready students to be proficient in reading complex informational text independently in a variety of content areas" (CCSS).

Susan, as then-English department lead for her school, and Audrey, as a literacy consultant from New Jersey City University (NJCU), have been working to foster collaboration around literacy at University Academy Charter High School (UACHS) in Jersey City, NJ, by offering professional development workshops and initiating time and structural supports for teachers to undertake cross-disciplinary collaboration. In particular, we were, like Kathy Thayer, trying to share the "instructional lift" around informational text through collaborative teaching.

Our focus in promoting disciplinary literacy has been two-fold: 1) supporting teachers in using relevant, engaging informational texts in their own classes and 2) encouraging collaboration across disciplines. Content-area teachers often shy away from bringing in supplementary complex texts because their students already struggle with reading the textbook. However, we know students need to be reading a wide range of texts in all classes (NCTE; IRA). We also know that students will surpass our expectations when we create meaningful education experiences that allow them to connect what they are learning in school to their lives in the outside world (Lent). Building on that critical recognition of relevance, we can use careful scaffolding to help our students succeed in reading challenging texts.

This recognition of the importance of connection between school and students' communities is a fundamental part of the service-learning focus embedded in UACHS. The arrival of gentrification and the remediation of chromium in the Jersey City neighborhood where UACHS and NJCU are located presented students with immediate concerns that mandated both study and action during the 2015-2016 school year.

New building projects driven by gentrification have displaced students from their homes and unearthed some of the history of the impoverished area, including the chromium contamination left to languish for decades after the closure of factories from Jersey City's past.

When many UACHS freshmen chose to focus on the chromium remediation for their self-designed service-learning projects, we were excited that they would have an opportunity to connect their projects to their lives, but we also knew that to be successful in these ambitious projects, the students would have to grapple with science-rich, complex texts that would be generally challenging.

An opportunity to offer guided reading practice presented itself in connection with the development of the aforementioned lot that students walk past every day. The previous site of an industrial chemical processing facility, this land was contaminated with chromium (VI), exposure to which can cause cancer, skin lesions, and other detrimental effects. This contaminated land was donated to NJCU for remediation and development. In 2015, the university began work on the first building at

the site: a dormitory.

The freshmen, most of whom shared the same physical science teacher, had studied the periodic table and the properties of chemical compounds. Mr. Dorman, their shared teacher, was amenable to our proposed collaboration in which the students would have the opportunity to apply their pre-existing content-area knowledge in science to two challenging, science-rich texts in order to reflect on the development of the contaminated site at NJCU.

Preparing the text

In addition to physical science, most of the freshmen were enrolled in a study skills class, designed to foster academic success and acclimate them to high school, which was taught by Susan, two other English teachers, and a math teacher, all of whom were amenable to the project. As our goals were skill-oriented and cross-disciplinary in nature, we thought this class would be an ideal additional site for this collaboration.

Susan identified two informational texts: an excerpt from an article on the different types of chromium published by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry and a local news report about a lawsuit attempting to stop NJCU from building on the remediated land.

Susan prepared the government piece according to the approach she and Audrey have developed for supporting students' success with informational text (see *Connecting Across Disciplines*). To keep the students focused on the information relevant to our instructional goals and the text pedagogically wieldy, we cut out any sections from the chromium article that were unnecessary in helping students achieve our purposes. The result was a manageable 780-word excerpt that students could successfully grapple with in their physical science class before reading the short news article in their study skills class.

We drafted discussion questions in a sidebar alongside the text of the chromium article to assist us and our teaching collaborators in directing students' attention to key ideas and details in the text (see Fisch and Chenelle). (Our template for preparing informational texts for classroom use is available here: http://bit.ly/2fzFi6y. Password: collab2016.)

We shared the draft of the excerpted government article on chromium, along with the discussion questions, so that Mr. Dorman could make sure our edited version and questions fully reinforced and addressed the content-area concepts relevant to his science class. His additions foregrounded the students' scientific knowledge in ways that Susan could not have anticipated: questions about what the Roman numeral indicated about the type of chromium under consideration, the relative properties of different kinds of chromium, the number of oxygens in chromium trioxide, and the kind of compound -- ionic, covalent, or metallically bonded.

The collaboration over the preparation of the text and questions for the article allowed Mr. Dorman to emphasize discipline-specific and complex scientific issues so that the use of the chromium text would be useful both as practice in scientific literacy and as reinforcement of science content.

Collaborative teaching

Collaboration isn't just about sharing materials; we also wanted to think about collaborative teaching and to work together with the science teacher to model different approaches to literacy instruction. We were fortunate that Audrey was able to come and join in the instruction of the government article on chromium with Mr. Dorman in three science classes. They read through the text together with the students, modeling and scaffolding close reading. Progressing through the article, Audrey and Mr. Dorman used the sidebar questions to draw students' attention to key ideas in the article and

issues about its credibility. The physical science teacher jumped in to reinforce a scientific concept or help draw out students' content-area knowledge to help them make meaningful connections between the reading and what they had already learned.

After the first-period class, Audrey and the physical science teacher agreed that students needed an engaging visual to activate their existing knowledge and hook their interest in chromium (Daniels and Zemelman). Quickly, they found images of common objects covered in chrome, like motorcycles. They also showed images of people working with chromium in protective gear along with images of warning labels about chromium, all of which primed students to read the dense and dry informational text with a greater sense of purpose and urgency. Students readily responded to the images and the next two team-taught periods progressed even more smoothly, with the students more successfully primed for the reading.

Mr. Dorman led the final two classes, closely following Audrey's model. At the end of the day, the science teacher reflected on the collaboration, remarking on not only how the lesson involved a lot more reading and student-centered discussion than he usually incorporated into his instruction but also how the lesson produced a lot more student engagement. At the same time, Audrey was impressed with how much scientific knowledge the students were able to bring to reading and thinking about the article.

Cross-disciplinary extension

After reading the chromium article in their physical science class, most students moved into their study skills class (or did so at some point over the next few days) where they independently read a news article discussing the efforts of two community groups to have a judge halt NJCU's construction on the contaminated site. This reading, in contrast to the chromium article, was less scientifically dense. Primed by the slow, scaffolded reading experience with the chromium article, students were able to read the local news article independently. Their final task, completed in their study skills class, was to explore in writing the issue of chromium contamination and NJCU's West Campus, using evidence from both readings.

Challenges to collaboration

Not all students had both the science and the study skills class, so a handful didn't have the benefit of both pieces of the cross-disciplinary lesson. Given the vast difference in students' high school schedules, this challenge is the norm, but it shouldn't prohibit the endeavor. Teachers were easily able to accommodate and assist those students who didn't benefit from the dual lesson, and the vast majority of students was able to benefit from the collaboration.

In addition, the science teacher was understandably anxious about undertaking a new lesson style. The co-teaching approach, however, easily put his mind at ease, and he quickly caught on and adapted to the new style, adding it to his personal pedagogical toolkit in a way that can only enhance his own future teaching.

Mr. Dorman was unequivocal about the pay-offs: "Tying prior scientific content knowledge to this active learning discussion strategy motivated students in a refreshing, invigorating way. Students were eager to participate; they appeared empowered now, drawing from experiences of more than one content area."

Teacher feedback

As reflected in the brief survey we conducted to assess our collaboration, all teachers involved in the linked lessons said that the collaboration enhanced their teaching. The study skills teachers liked that students came into their classes with some background knowledge about the topic of chromium contamination and development of the NJCU site. Two-thirds of these teachers reported higher

levels of student engagement and a higher quality in the student work. Many also indicated that the collaborative lesson provided background knowledge and confidence in the students that facilitated improved student discussion and participation.
Most teachers also felt that approaching the topic from two angles helped enrich students' understanding and that the quality of student work was somewhat higher, while all teachers observed that students connected the material to the real world.

One teacher noted: "collaboration aids in securing learning because [students] get further practice and it activated prior knowledge." Another said, "When done right, the interdisciplinary approach to teaching compels students to make connections."

Most importantly, all teachers said they would recommend more collaborative lessons.

Student outcomes
In their written responses, students articulated generally coherent arguments against building on the chromium-contaminated lot, though their attempts to use evidence from the readings was not always successful. Many students accurately listed the possible health effects of exposure to chromium, but overlooked the more nuanced point that only those working directly in contaminated areas are at significant risk, according to the readings. Students also struggled to use evidence from both articles, relying more heavily on the government article they had read together in their science class than on the news story about local contamination.

For example, one student was able to work successfully with the idea, from the government article, that "chromium in soil does not dissolve easily in water and can attach strongly." She was also able to describe accurately the health dangers chromium can pose, including lung cancer and skin ulcers, and its heightened risk for children.

However, when the student turned to the news article about the local remediation, her reasoning became more confused, and she reasoned, inaccurately, about the comparative danger of chromium contamination of soil versus water, and worried, without enough use of scientific evidence and reasoning, that "the chromium would spread. That would affect us who live around here in a big way."

This student's work and the teachers' general observations suggest a number of important conclusions. First, the careful scaffolding and teacher-led instruction of the science article seems to have improved students' comprehension and scientific literacy generally. However, the independent reading of the news article proved a more challenging task than we had anticipated, and students, like the one above, struggled to assimilate the more abstract scientific discussion to the specific conditions of the NJCU remediation effort. Clearly, more teacher-led instruction and more scaffolding was necessary for the complex task of applying general scientific knowledge about chromium to the specific situation of chromium remediation in Jersey City.

Student feedback
We also surveyed the students, and an impressive 74% indicated that the readings and discussion about chromium and the NJCU development of the contaminated site helped them connect the content from their science class to the real world.

One student observed that they had previously "learned about elements but never seen [them] in a real-world setting." Another said, "the lesson was interesting" and wanted "to know more about what is happening in my community."

In the end, this cross-disciplinary lesson demonstrated the potential, the challenges, and the need for

consistent practice in tasks that ask students to think and write across texts and disciplines and to apply their school-based learning to the world outside.

Conclusions

Creating meaningful cross-disciplinary literary experiences for students takes time and effort, and the rewards are not always immediate or unqualified success. Indeed, the most immediate outcomes for both students and teachers involved in our chromium collaboration were growing pains and a bit of struggle outside their respective comfort zones.

This relevant, authentic learning experience, however, allowed us to support our students' reading, writing, and thinking skills while also obtaining valuable information about areas in which the students needed further support. The project also enabled all the involved teachers to grow professionally, as we collaborated to make meaningful cross-disciplinary learning happen in our classrooms. And while we may have been moved to do this work by the demands of the CCSS, the project drew from our core passions: for teaching to move student learning into the realm of meaningful connections with their communities.

One student noted the value of the lesson in preparing them for his service-learning project on gentrification: "I believe that giving additional information on the issue [of chromium remediation] helped the students understand gentrification much better and helped them with their projects [and] gives us a chance to speak up about gentrification."

Because the project allowed both students and teachers the opportunity to reflect on this cross-disciplinary literacy collaboration, everyone also experienced a high level of ownership in the project and, particularly for the students, a level of metacognition about the cross-disciplinary literacy skills they were developing and how they could use them to speak to and shape their own community. This kind of ownership and engagement is, indeed, what's inspiring in education today.

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Returning to Our Roots as Students

by Sanyogita Padhye

I taught Indian classical dance as an undergraduate. Because I taught beginners' level students, I was required to retrain in the basics, polishing compositions and concepts that I had learned at the beginning of my dance journey. It was during these review sessions that I fell in love with dance again. The teaching mindset, combined with my dual identity as a student, allowed me to register the nuances of every movement. Beauty could be found in the perfect swirl of a wrist movement, in the light, sharp toss of the head at a composition's finale. Returning to my roots as a student let me find inspiration in the knowledge I had gained and to communicate that awe as a teacher.

Now, as an aspiring teacher pursuing a master's degree in English Education, I find myself, again, in the unique position of occupying both a teacher's and a student's mindsets. As a student teacher in high school classrooms, many of my lessons focused on literary analysis: a process in which we return to a text's foundations, examine the elements of its language, and emerge with a deeper understanding of its *implications*, whether an overarching theme, or profound connections to human souls. To teach these classes meaningfully, I was compelled to apply these principles to my practice: to study each detail of my knowledge of both literature and the educational theory. I approached (and still return to) this material in the student mindset, as I had while teaching dance. Studying and deconstructing this material—filling the margins with notes, quizzing myself on plot—while straightforward, familiar, are slow processes; as, arguably, they must be. They require refinement of our grasp of our subject, questioning of our understanding; after all, we are recreating our foundations as readers and writers.

However, they push us to be both students and teachers: to solidify our command of our subject, while consciously admiring what we teach, the beauty that first pulled us to this material. This dual mindset inspires us, as we push ourselves to consider and discuss a writer's use of rich sensory details and imagery, or the manipulation of sounds that turn brief lines into poetry. To be a teacher is to be a student. We reconnect with our ability to wonder at our subject, to achieve mindfulness and insight through reading, and share this with our students.

In *Letters to a Young Poet,* Rainer Maria Rilke wrote, "Live for a while in these books, learn from them what you feel is worth learning, but most of all love them…it will, I am sure, go through the whole fabric of your becoming." The knowledge we have, and questions we seek to answer, allow us to renew and breathe life into our teaching. It is when we choose to be both teachers and students that we find our love and appreciation for English. It rests in the nuances of communication, the perfect turn of phrase, and the astonishing poetry of a detail.

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Sanyogita Padhye is a graduate student in the five-year teacher education program at the Rutgers Graduate School of Education. She is currently finishing her master's degree in English Education (K-12). She graduated summa cum laude from Rutgers University in May of 2016, with a bachelor's degree in English

Dreams Change

by Annie Burnside

What has been brought to light again and again within me over the past year and a half of substitute teaching is to be unafraid to do something "small" with my life. I have learned that it's okay to move in a direction that may seem small to yourself, others, society. We don't have to buy into the external or internal messages that tell us we need to be bigger, better and more in everything we do.

I used to write articles and blogs, appear as a guest on radio shows, make presentations, lead workshops, and wrote two books, one award-winning, about the soul-to-soul perspective, all presented in a "bigger" way.

But things change. Dreams change. We change. Sometimes we realize that being "big" was never really the true desire of our soul, but perhaps just the dream of an outer layer of ourselves. I realized that this was no longer what my soul really desired at all. Maybe it never was. Now instead of writing and speaking with a focus on growing a larger audience, I actually yearn to live by crossing paths with others who have nothing to do with being part of an audience.

Now I work as a substitute teacher for grades pre-k through eighth grade in the Evanston Public Schools and the Chicago Public Schools in Illinois. I thoroughly enjoy the spontaneity of heading to different schools and being with different-aged students. I appreciate the experience even beyond the connection with children and teachers and custodians from all backgrounds. Pulling up to old schools tucked away in city neighborhoods on tree-lined streets is pleasurable to me. Many of these old schools have huge windows, hardwood floors and sunlight pouring in. While substitute teaching is challenging at times due to behavior management issues that sometimes occur, overall I have been surprised at how much I am learning both about myself and others. Throughout the day, I discover opportunities for soul-to-soul connections with other people who would not ordinarily cross my path.

My new work as a substitute teacher may seem less important or prestigious to some people than what I previously did, but it satisfies me. I originally went into it thinking that I would move back into full-time teaching, which is where I began my career many years ago in the fourth grade classroom before having my own children. However, the simplicity and daily choice of the substitute position is freeing for me on many levels.

We are unique in our desires, financial needs, stages of growth. Now I find that it is more than okay, more than enough, to enjoy a perceived small arena. The big arena that so many of us think we want may be overrated. I now understand that the concept of a small arena is a relative one. And perhaps the small arena can prove to be quite big in the most important ways. Finally, I see that fear of the big arena in that we may "hide our light under a bushel" for interior reasons is quite different from choosing a small arena because we truly desire a simpler existence.

It is empowering for substitute teachers, custodians, children, parents – all of us – to know that doing big or doing small, each of us is worthy. Remembering this keeps me grounded and helps me find the inspiration each day to place more focus on *being* big rather than doing big by offering big warmth, presence and love in my own "Annie" way to all whom I encounter. And when a Kindergartener calls me “Mrs. Sideburn” instead of Mrs. Burnside, it makes me smile.

Annie Burnside, M.Ed., is a former fourth grade teacher who became a stay-at-home mom for several years before creating her own career as a soul nurturer, writer, speaker and workshop leader. She is the author of two books, *Soul to Soul Parenting* and *From Role to Soul.* She is currently a substitute teacher and runs a monthly Soul Circle for women in the Chicago-area.

Photo by Cece McCarthy.

Creating Art in the English Classroom

by Annie Yon

I sat at Starbucks one afternoon glaring at the remaining stack of 70 essays on *To Kill a Mockingbird* I needed to grade. For their final assessment, students were asked to write a literary analysis essay that asked them to compare and contrast the narrative style, message, and tone in *To Kill a Mockingbird* and Maya Angelou's poem "Caged Bird." After reading five essays, I was already yawning, frustrated by the number of sterile, formulaic essays I received; most lacked originality, voice, and for the most part, each student's thesis argued the same claim we discussed in class. Looking at all the red C's I had stamped on my students' paper, I began to think about the relevance of this essay as a final assessment of my students' understanding of the text. It was evident that my students absolutely detested the writing prompt, a genre I felt compelled to teach in order to prepare my students for the newly-adopted PARCC exam. I wanted to give my students an opportunity to empathize with the characters and further invest themselves in the story. So the next day, students were asked to create a spoken word, skit, or a performance that thematically connected to the text. Ultimately, while the essay was a failure due to a paucity of original ideas, their creative assignment was a beautifully crafted success that reflected the reader's individual, aesthetic experience of the text.

When introducing his project, my 11th-grade student, Edward, expressed his outrage at the racist, all-white jury and judge for condemning the fictional Tom Robinson, an African American, and the Scottsboro Boys to prison for crimes they did not commit. Edward stood in front of his 15 classmates and performed his spoken word poem on a theme from *To Kill a Mockingbird*. He introduced the title of the poem, "The Beautiful Moth," and began:

If you were born a moth, would you want to be a butterfly?

See, a moth and a butterfly are very similar creatures
They crawl, they walk, and have almost the same features
But why does the butterfly make fun of the moth's color?
The moth has never been so hurt; he thought the butterfly was his brother
He is constantly harassed but holds his head up high
He has a constant urge to hide and a constant urge to cry
A constant urge to believe, but a constant urge to die
See, the moth is not ugly
His beauty is his ability to stand strong
And his good and gracious heart
His willingness to help others and eagerness to take part
And the butterfly is not really that beautiful
He is ugly because of his evil thoughts
His malice against his brothers, his malice against the moths
So who is really a moth?
And who is really a butterfly?
A butterfly is not just the person with a beautiful smile
But a moth is the one that wants to help others and go the extra mile
The moth really wants to know why he is discriminated against
So he asks, why?
And the butterfly tells him that, that's just the nature
Why do you do me that way?
Why am I betrayed by my fellow fly?
And I ask you again
If you were born a moth, would you want to be a butterfly?

First, Edward's animated hand gestures, intonation, and decision to perform it to the class reveal his interest and dedication to the assignment. Next, Edward's choice to use the metaphor of a moth and a butterfly to discuss the wrongs of discrimination shows that he was, in fact, influenced by Angelou's "Caged Bird." In addition, the rhetorical questions through the repetition of "why" further emphasize his perspective that racism is unjustifiable and develop the theme of brotherhood. In this poem, he makes the argument that the moth is not ugly, stands strong, and is willing to help those around it; it is hopeful with "a constant urge to believe," but also affected by prejudice that it has a "constant urge to die." On the other hand, the butterfly is not beautiful because of his "evil thoughts" and "malice." He concludes his poem with a rhetorical question making his audience reconsider the definition of beauty. Furthermore, Edward empathizes with the one being discriminated against, which is shown when he slips the word "me" in the line "Why do you do *me* that way?" Edward begins writing in the second-person point of view to lure his readers in, shifts to third-person to discuss the symbolism of the moth and butterfly, then ends in a first-person point of view. When Edward substitutes the "moth" with "me," he becomes part of the narrative and experiences the hurt and anger of the victim. Ultimately, Edward's creation of his poem reflects his thinking and interest in the text in an original way—much better than a literary paper can assess.

Is a Literary Essay the Best Assessment for Reading?

Forced with demands to prepare students for standardized tests such as the SATs and PARCC, English teachers seem to be straying from creative assessments to multiple choice exams and analytical essays. In a Ted Talk on "Do Schools Kill Creativity?" Ken Robinson argues, "If you were to visit education, as an alien, and say, 'What's it for, public education?' I think you'd have to conclude, if you look at the output, who really succeeds by this, who gets all the brownie points, who are the winners—You'd have to conclude the whole purpose of public education is to produce university professors." Robinson posits that individuality is no longer valued in schools, especially since these state tests, teacher-assigned exams and essays strip away students' creativity. Similarly, Peter Elbow articulates, "The development of writing as a technology seems to have led to the development of careful and logical thinking—to a greater concern with 'trying to get it *really right*'" (284). In other words, Robinson and Elbow suggest that the "winners" are students who follow all directions ("to get it really right") and complete assigned work, even if they do not pleasure in any of the activities. Hence, in an English class, writing becomes a means to impress the teacher and score high on the rubric. Consequently, when writing a literary analysis essay on a core text in the curriculum, the student regurgitates trite responses from class discussion to ensure that their interpretation is "correct," and inundates their paper with transitional phrases and embellished vocabulary terms to be seen as an "academic." Educational practices that restrict student freedom and imagination seemingly prevent teachers from creating avid readers and writers. Of course, no English teacher intentionally tries to elicit tepid papers in response to literature from students.

However, I now recognize how an English teacher's seemingly innocuous instruction—asking students to read independently and write analytic responses on the text develops theme, assigning argumentative essays ("and don't forget the thesis!"), mandating outlines with topic and concluding sentences, and grading student writing by marking up all grammatical blunders—can destroy a student's incentive to read and write. If our purpose as English teachers is to help students aesthetically experience the text and produce life-long writers and readers as opposed "university professors," we should limit the number of assigned analytic essays, which generally asks them to prove the author's message or story's theme, and offer abundant opportunities that allow for students to become imaginative, reflective, and inventive again.

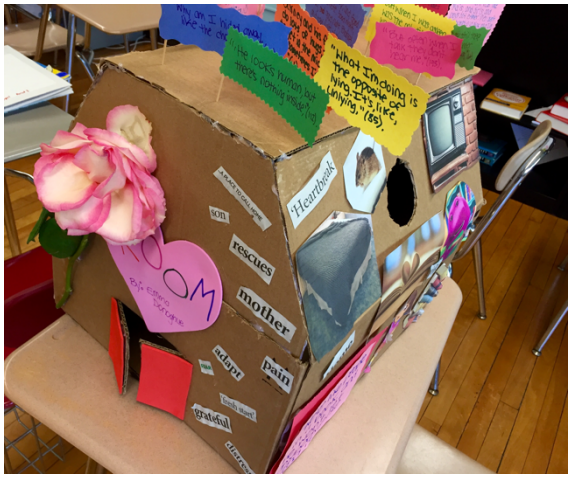
Creative Projects in our Independent Reading Unit

By the time that my 10th and 11th grade students began our independent reading unit, I was inspired mainly by Elbow's teaching philosophy. I was most struck by his wish that "the culture of literature

learn more inherent attention and concern for students—their lives and what's on their minds. [If it did,] teachers of literature would give more attention to helping students read with involvement and write more imaginative pieces" (540). Instead of assigning the traditional book report that asks for students to analyze the setting, plot, and theme, my students created imaginative, artistic projects for their final assessment. First, students had to create a four-stanza poem that follows a rhyme scheme and is thematically related to the literature they read. Second, students had to create a visual representation of their book through the means of a scrapbook, a game board, a poster, or any other creative project that appealed to them.

With students reading books of different genres (e.g. Mystery, Fantasy, Romance, and Nonfiction), the projects and poems presented in class were original and eclectic. Prior to their presentation, students read daily in and out of class for three weeks. They had the freedom to select their own books (on their reading level and with some professional guidance) in order for them to have a personalized and meaningful experience with the text. Although they silently read for most of the class period, students consistently participated in group discussions on their book, completed double-entry journals by reacting to passages that resonated with them, and wrote diary entries from the perspective of a character (expressive writing). Expressive writing prompts that allow for students to *become* the character in the story and projects that ask them to visually represent their book augmented their engagement with the text as well as the quality of the class discussion.

Projects and Poems: The Three-Dimensional Collage



My 11th-grade student, Angie Johnson, read Emma Donoghue's *Room*, a story told from the perspective of five-year-old Jack, who is born and lives in an 11-by-11-foot room after a man named "Old Nick" kidnaps and rapes Ma, Jack's mother. For her project on *Room*, Angie created a three-dimensional replication of the story's setting and covered the exterior of "the room" with a collage of quotes from the story she analyzed, words she cut out from newspapers that describe the mother's state of mind ("adapt," "pain," "heartbreak," "distress," "grateful"), and symbols (television, mouse, book, rug) that she found significant. While presenting her project, Angie explained, "One of the quotes that stood out to me was when Ma tells Dr. Clay that Jack has 'never been out of my sight and nothing happened to him, nothing like what you're insinuating' (167). Dr. Clay wants to examine Jack to check for any abuse, but Ma refuses because she knows that Jack has never left her sight. This reveals how no one quite understands what Ma and Jack went through while being locked up. She is offended that the doctor would even imply that Ma abused her child." In her response, Angie first cites a line from the text, then provides context to help her peers understand the relevance of the line; she concludes by inferring why Ma is agitated by the doctor's insinuation.

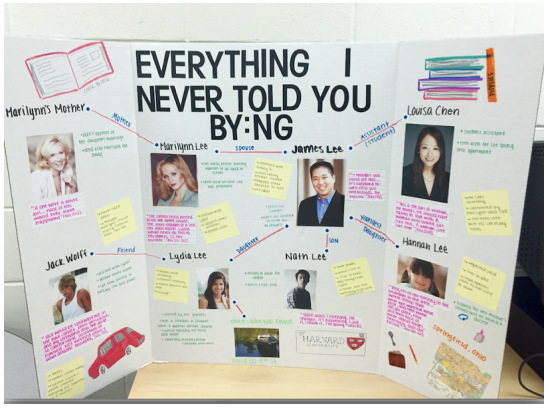
What I admired about assigning these projects was that students analyzed quotes from the story that they individually related to and offered their own original analysis without regurgitating ideas shared in class discussions. The project was also successful in getting students to ask questions and think about what they were curious or confused about, an important skill in the reading process. Angie continued, "For those of you who read or watched the movie, I have a question. What do you think is going to happen to Jack if he is so behind in development? Are the newspapers correct in saying that he has a form of mental retardation?" Her questions invited students to become invested in Angie's presentation and her reading experience; students, who watched the movie or read the book, shared their opinions, but even students, who were unfamiliar with the story, contributed by thinking

about real cases of abducted children that are rescued and expected to live normally again.

When asked if Angie gained any new insights from creating her project, she remarked, "It made me think about how similar this case is with that of a child named Genie[2], who was trapped in a room for the first thirteen years of her life with no way out. When Genie was found, she was extremely behind, which hindered her entrance into society. One parallel I see between Jack and Genie is their inadequate language capabilities and assumptions of mental retardation." The connection she makes between Jack and Ma's case and that of the feral child Genie reveals her understanding that a fictional story is also a reflection of situations that occur in our society. Instead of merely reciting facts from the novel, Angie makes intertextual connections between stories, categorizes quotes and symbols to show how they develop the theme, and analyzes character motive as well. Most importantly, her engagement with the text is evident.

Family Board and Perspective Writing

My student Taylor Gram, a sophomore, read Celeste Ng's *Everything I Never Told You*, a story about a Chinese American family living in 1970s small-town Ohio who is horrified by the death of their missing daughter, Lydia Lee. Taylor made her own version of a crime board; however, instead of an evidence board of suspects that a detective might keep, she structured the board to resemble a family tree to show how each character connects to one another. She explained that the family secrets, pressures, and lies are what compel Lydia to run away from her family. First, Taylor's project is extremely detailed; similar to the content seen in Angie's project, Taylor also includes quotes and symbols (e.g. Harvard bumper sticker, items that Hannah steals, the car that symbolizes Lydia's alternative life) from the story as well as descriptions and an analysis of each character's relevance to Lydia's death. Taylor expressed her frustration toward James Lee, the father, who has an affair with his graduate assistant, Louisa Chen, and is obsessed with trying to fit in as a Chinese American; her annoyance at Marilynn Lee, the overbearing mother, who neglects the other children but is consumed by the idea of prepping Lydia to apply to Harvard University; and empathy toward Lydia, who rebels against her oppressing mother and father.



Taylor explained that she sympathizes with Lydia, but she found herself caring more about the minor character, Hannah Lee, Lydia's younger sister. In her presentation, Taylor remarked, "The parents are so obsessed with Lydia's academic performance that they hover over her and neglect Hannah. The narrator says, 'They set up Hannah's nursery in the bedroom in the attic, where things were not wanted were kept, and even when she got older, now and then each of them would forget, fleetingly, that she existed' (160-161). Ugh! It got me so mad, but this makes me wonder if Hannah will also follow Lydia's footsteps later on and rebel against her parents. Maybe she'll also lead a double-life and party like Lydia did behind her parents' back. But would the parents even care if Lydia ran away?" First, I was fascinated by the way Taylor fervidly revealed her antipathy toward the parents who "emotionally abandoned" Hannah in the attic, but more so by the stream of consciousness in her presentation. In talking out her thoughts, Taylor seemed to make predictions and generate more

[2] "Genie," the pseudonym for a feral child born in 1957, was abused and locked in one of the family's bedrooms for nearly 11 years by her sadistic father. This solitary confinement and social isolation caused a delay in her speech and communication skills, which was widely analyzed and recorded in the works of psychologists and linguists.

ideas about what could've happened if there was a sequel to the book. Her interest in the book is further emphasized in the narrative she wrote to pair with her project. From the perspective of Hannah Lee, Taylor expressed:

> My name is Hannah and I am seven years old. My sister was found in the pond by the lake two weeks ago. I don't think my family is normal, but I wouldn't know since I don't have many friends, and I don't have playdates. My mommy and daddy wouldn't even know if I was gone. I'm not really sure what to feel about the fact that Lydia is gone. In the summer, she would never go into the water since she couldn't swim, and if I asked her she would just yell at me and tell me to go away. I never understood why she hated me so much, and I don't think I miss her although I was shocked that they found her bloated body floating face-down in the river. She never once talked to me except when she wanted something or when I was touching her stuff. I sometimes take things that my family won't notice because they will at least acknowledge me even though they'd yell. Like ever since I can remember, my mother only makes tea for herself, so I took the tiniest spoon in her tea set. I stole my father's old wallet, which is as thin as paper now. I took Nath's pencil with his teeth markings on it. These things make me feel happy and like I'm part of the family. The only time I have felt the slightest comfort was when my parents fought in the vacant room, which used to be Lydia's. My brother Nath would hold me and I rested my head in his shoulders and smelled his cologne. He was my first hug (Jordan).

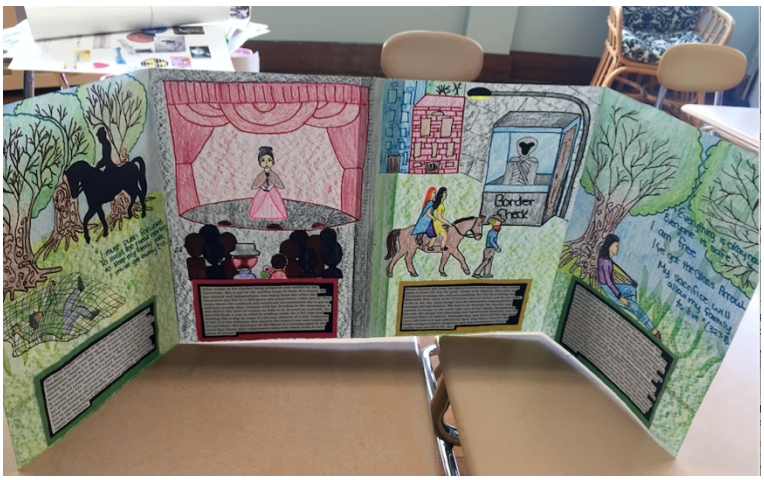
In this excerpt of her narrative, Taylor immerses herself into Hannah's character and sympathizes with her. She cites textual evidence to support her argument that Hannah feels neglected but apathetic toward Lydia's death. For example, Hannah is affected by the mom who makes tea only for herself and questions why her family members "hate her so much." In addition, Taylor suggests that even though Hannah sees Lydia's dead body floating in the river, she does not miss her. Taylor further mentions that Lydia steals her family member's items to feel closer to them and infers that the parents aren't the most loving or caring, possibly the reason for Lydia's suicide. After her reflection of the book, Taylor concluded her presentation by asking her classmates, "This book made me question: How does parental pressure affect children? How do secrets tear a family apart? Similar to the parents who took Lydia for granted, what do we take for granted in this world?" She led a fruitful, engaging discussion with students asking questions about her book and sharing stories of familial secrets and pressures they feel as teenagers and sons/daughters.

As previously mentioned, giving students the freedom to create projects and write narratives is equally or even more valuable than assigning a specific literary essay. While a book report might ask students to take a cursory look at a story to write a summary or a subjective review of the book, projects ask students to think deeply about their reading experience and share ideas and insights that are individualized to the reader. In addition, while a literary essay asks students to prove an argument, the narrative that Taylor wrote from the perspective of Hannah and her presentation of her family board revealed her understanding and higher-level thinking about the book. In fact, the common-core standards were also addressed through this assignment; Taylor used narrative techniques, such as description, reflection, and multiple plot lines, to develop experiences of the character (ELA. W.9-10.3); she propelled conversations by posing questions that relate to broader themes or larger ideas of her book (ELA. SL. 9-10.1); she cited strong and thorough textual evidence to support her analysis (ELA. RL. 9-10.1); and finally, she analyzed how complex characters develop over the course of a text, interact with other characters, and advance the plot or develop the theme (ELA. RL. 9-10.3). To sum up, the creative project allowed for Taylor to imaginatively create a work of art that she was invested in and not just because it was a mandatory assignment.

Panorama and Poem

The last student to present her project, Charlotte Greff held up her poster, a panorama of scenes

from Kristen Simmon's *The Glass* Arrow, and introduced, "The story begins with Aya running through the forest to escape a group of trackers, whose aim is to capture any women they find to sell them to the government. Women are thought to be evil in this dystopian society because men are afraid of their own weakness of succumbing to temptations. The caught women are essentially auctioned off to the highest bidder." Charlotte led a discussion on gender inequality and expectations. She connected the *The Glass Arrow* to Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* claiming that both stories take place in a society where women are owned by men, stripped of their rights, and expected to procreate.



I was impressed by the way Charlotte synthesized the readings; instead of compartmentalizing each story into different categories, she actively sought similarities and differences that helped her understand the consequences of a constricting, patriarchal society on women. In her presentation of her project, she discussed how the themes of individuality, sacrifice, freedom, and trust develop in the story and mentioned a quote that she found most memorable: "I remember how Mother told me that this was just the way of things. That to have life there must be death, To have joy, there must be sadness. And that I must not be angry even though I'm angry. I'm *still* angry" (Simmons 95). She explained that Aya needed to make sacrifices as well as understand her mother's advice that to be safe meant to sacrifice one's freedom, because freedom also means that one is in danger. Inspired by Aya, an anomaly in the patriarchal society, Charlotte wrote a poem titled "She Wanted Freedom" and recited it to the class:

Life ran with equality on the rise
As men and women were treated the same.
But they warped society with lies
Of witchcraft, saying women were to blame.

Women became collectables for sale.
Men became their owners and superiors.
Women bear sons because her roles so entail,
Men naught but treat her as inferior.

She did not want to be controlled forever.
She did not want a meaningless life story.
She did not want that life now or ever.
She did not want life in purgatory.

She wanted that freedom for her and them,
So she was relentless and persistent.
Thus she fought to avoid being condemned.
Til death, she refused to be ignorant.

The poem is done well and reflects Charlotte's comprehension of the text. The first stanza sets up the context of the story and introduces how women were seen as inferior; she explained that the line

"They warped society with lies of witchcraft, saying women were were to blame" was inspired by Miller's *The Crucible*. Similar to the townspeople in Salem, Massachusetts, who accuse women of being witches through the preposterous claim that they bonded with the devil and were more susceptible to sin, the men in *The Glass Arrow* also make women scapegoats. The second stanza addresses gender roles; the metaphor of women as "collectibles for sale" reveals Charlotte's understanding that women were objectified with the sole purpose of bearing "sons because her roles entail." Through the use of anaphora in the third stanza, Charlotte discusses Aya's state of mind; Aya does not want to live a "meaningless life" or feel trapped in "purgatory." She is not like the other women in the story who blindly adhere to societal traditions. Finally, the last stanza reveals Aya's obstinacy and ambition to fight for her freedom and escape the Trackers. Higher order thinking was evident in Charlotte's panorama project and poem. She recalled plot events and basic concepts from her story to summarize the *The Glass Arrow* for her peers; she demonstrated understanding of themes and ideas by depicting and organizing importance scenes from the story; she made intertextual connections among *The Glass Arrow*, *The Crucible*, and *The Handmaid's Tale*; and she analyzed quotes and Aya's motives to teach the class about the dangers of conformity. The project and poem assessment as well as the presentation helped students like Charlotte reflect on their reading process in an imaginative and effective manner.

My New Teaching Philosophy

Inspired by Elbow's argument that no activity works better than inviting students to write stories or poems that are structurally or thematically related to the literature and Maxine Greene's discussion of the importance of aesthetic encounters, I created lessons designed around imaginative thinking. My instructional activities allowed for students to notice deeply, pose questions, make connections, embody and empathize, create meaning, and reflect on their work. This year, my students created their own art works (poems, narratives, drawings), learned reading strategies that help "promote metacognitive awareness and heightens students' emotional and cognitive engagement" (Appleman 33), and wrote papers that required the synthesizing of readings through intertextual connections. Out of all the activities that students participated in, I recognized that opportunities for students to release their imagination, experience empathy, and meaningfully collaborate with their peers were most successful in getting students engaged in their reading.

Unfortunately, many teachers do not see the value in assigning creative projects or narrative prompts (expressive writing) because these activities supposedly do not prepare students "to critically think," "write analytically," and "for college." My argument is not to discredit teachers who assign mandatory essay topics (to prepare students for standardized tests) or those who only use short answers and multiple choice exams to assess students after each unit, because I do agree that part of an English teacher's responsibility is to prepare students to write literary analysis papers and to offer them some practice in taking multiple choice tests. However, I believe that both students and teachers can benefit from *limiting* the number of assigned topics for essays for more creative assessments in which students can showcase their individual experiences with the text. Our job as teachers is to help students construct their own meaning from stories and not become "miners of existing meanings" (Hogue Smith). Essays that ask for students to prove a theme or the author's intent perpetuate the problem of students continuously look for the "correct" interpretation of a text.

As Peter Smagorinsky articulates in *Teaching English by Design,* "Argumentation and analysis are skills that I would expect someone to learn in school; they are not the only forms of expression students should acquire in English class" (13). In addition to analytic essays, I found that double-entry journals in which students have the choice to react to individual passages; narrative prompts that allow them to embody the character; poems that rhetorically or thematically relate to the story; and creative projects that ask for students to animate the text work best in my classroom; these activities influence students to see reading and education as meaningful and pleasurable. Moreover, these

creative assignments have motivated me to spend less time begrudgingly reading C essays in the Starbucks and more time being like the moth Edward described, who motivated others to "go the extra mile."

Appendix
Additional Student Projects

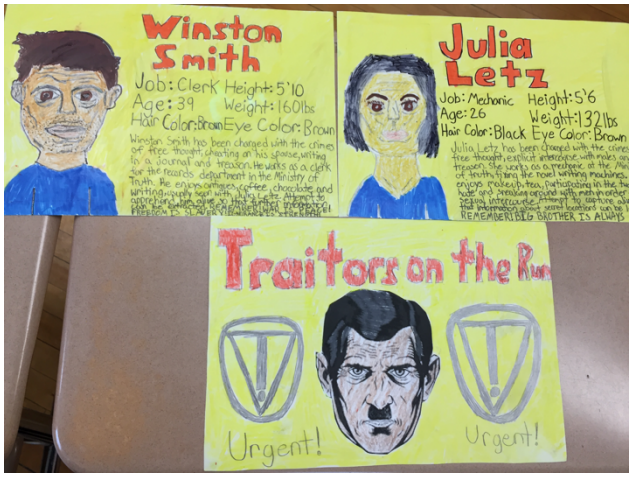


Figure 1 Thomas* created a Wanted Poster for Winston and Julia, characters that rebel against Big Brother, in Orwell's *1984*.

Figure 2 Sam* created a game board on her book *City of Lost Souls*. She includes "Rune cards" and "Demon cards" that explain what each player needs to do. The game instructions and cards describe an event from her book.

Figure 3 Ella* created her take on a collage after reading *Intern: A Doctor's Initiation*. She typed up a report from the perspective of a psychoanalyst who diagnoses the main character in the book.

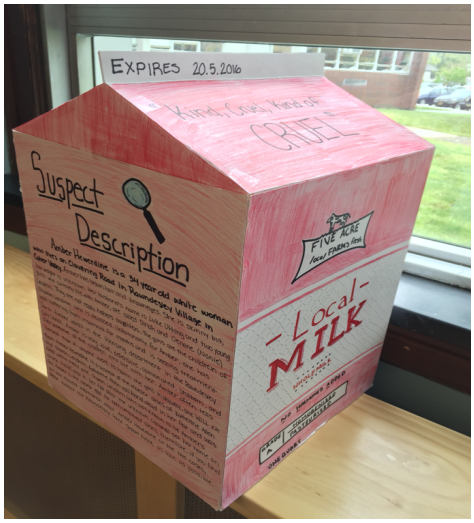


Figure 4 Jenn* created a three-dimensional milk box with a picture of a suspect and an analysis of the character's motives and traits after reading Sophia Hannah's *A Kind of Cruel*.

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Standardized Testing – A Mean-spirited Regression

by Joseph S. Pizzo

Prodigious preparation
Preponderance of preview plied with presumption
Consternation-influencing cadence
Copious inspection inspiring conscripted examination
Deep meaning and structure
    sought from mundane surreptitiousness
Patented prescription purveyed
    plied by presumptive pundits
Pedagogy parlayed for profit
Insidiousness and consternation
Invalidation
Insinuation
Imitation
Intimidation
Ambiguity
Fortuitousness
Fractiousness
Viciousness
Virulence
Vituperation replacing virtue
Intimidation replacing inspiration
Insipidness replacing instinct
Connectivity and catharsis promised
Conflagration and consternation delivered

Joseph S. Pizzo has taught integrated language arts at the Black River Middle School in Chester, New Jersey, for 42 years. An adjunct professor at Union County College and Centenary University, Pizzo is the NJAMLE Educator of the Year for 2016. An executive board member of NJCTE and a former co-director and Educator of the Year, he also serves on the boards of NJAMLE and NJ Schools to Watch. A member of Fordham University's Digital Literacy Collaborative, Pizzo has written blogs about his digi-poem unit for the US Office of Veterans Affairs, the NEA Foundation, NCTE, and Digital IS. The host of podcasts for NJAMLE, NCTE, and NJCTE, Pizzo is a member of the NJDOE's Council for Teaching and Learning and the author of Barron's *New Jersey ELA/Literacy Test.*

The Benefits of Mentoring Teacher Candidates: Professional Reflection and Growth

by Maureen Connolly

Overview

When teachers serve as mentors, they inspire future educators, and they have an opportunity to engage in their own professional growth. The College of New Jersey (TCNJ) is extremely grateful to all mentors who choose to work with our teacher candidates. In an effort to support the mutually beneficial effects of the mentoring process, during the 2016-17 school year, we invited cooperating teachers working with secondary education teacher candidates in the humanities to engage in a mentoring workshop program. This program was developed, in part, based on the success of the support provided via the Woodrow Wilson Program to Science, Technology, Engineering, Mathematics (STEM) cooperating teachers. According to a 2014 Woodrow Wilson mentoring report, "Currently, there are few examples of excellence in mentoring; too few mentors have demonstrated ability to assess and meet the needs of an adult who is learning to teach, and too few can explicitly explain the reasons for their decisions" (Fraser and Watson 10).

Typically TCNJ provides an overview of expectations of the cooperating teacher via a written overview of expectations, discussions with teacher candidates, discussions with field supervisors. Through these means, cooperating teachers are informed regarding expectations of their teacher candidates such as how long they should observe before teaching and the number of times teacher candidates will be observed. My colleagues sought to enhance the guidance for cooperating teachers because research shows that "mentoring is effective when it is consistent and based on an explicit vision of good teaching as well as an understanding of teacher learning" (Martin para. 7). Our mentoring workshop program was designed to help cooperating teachers develop a shared vision of a high quality internship experience for teacher candidates and to develop the skills to make that vision a reality.

The importance of this kind of guidance for cooperating teachers has recently been emphasized by the Garden State Alliance for Strengthening Education (GSASE). In their report summary, the GSASE calls for increased attention given to training and professional development of the school-based cooperating teachers and mentors to ensure that they have the proper skills to adequately guide and mentor a new teacher candidate or a new teacher (13). By offering a mentorship program for cooperating teachers, TCNJ is likely preparing for an element of teacher preparation that may soon be mandatory.

The Program

In Fall 2015 and Spring 2016, TCNJ invited cooperating teachers who were working with teacher candidates in the humanities to engage in three 2 ½ hour workshops. The 14 cooperating teachers who engaged in this program were compensated for their time, and light refreshments were served were served at each workshop session. It seems important to note this because in this profession, too often, people can feel that they have been "voluntold" to do something. The stipend and the food were ways to show the cooperating teachers that we valued their time and commitment.

The objectives for these sessions were as follows:

Objective 1: To establish a clear understanding of the college's expectations for teacher candidates and cooperating teachers.

Objective 2: To discuss and develop effective mentoring approaches for planning, co-teaching, and engaging in productive dialogue.

Objective 3: To discuss and develop instructional approaches and feedback strategies.
The intent of the program was to help cooperating teachers hone their mentoring skills by learning from "experts" in the field and from one another. I taught the first two sessions, and two fantastic cooperating teachers from Grover Middle School in West Windsor, Laura Bond and Rachel Skupp, taught the final session. That said, some of the best teaching/guidance came from the collegial conversation that took place in each of these sessions.

Objective 1: To establish a clear understanding of the college's expectations for teacher candidates and cooperating teachers.

In our first session, I focused on establishing a clear understanding of the college's expectations for teacher candidates and cooperating teachers. I began the session with an overview of the coursework that teacher candidates take in addition to their fieldwork. I emphasized that teacher candidates are learning many new strategies that they want to try out in the classroom. I then took time to discuss the proposed timeline for observing and teaching. Teacher candidates at TCNJ are expected to work within a "gradual release" construct. They observe classes, getting to know their cooperating teacher's style and approach and their prospective students' needs. Then they begin teaching mini lessons or one course section, gradually taking on more responsibility as the semester progresses. Cooperating teachers discussed how this could look in connection with their pedagogical approaches, their students' needs, and their curriculum. This discussion validated TCNJ's decision not to set an absolute timeline, but rather to set guidelines for gradual release.

Following the overview of coursework and expectations of teacher candidates, we focused the discussion more directly on the cooperating teachers' role as mentors. By reading "On Considering the Preparation of New English Teachers: What the Experts Say," we considered common struggles of new teachers such as content knowledge, planning, classroom management, differentiation, and communication (43). Then we brainstormed ways that mentors might provide support in relation to these struggles. We utilized post it notes for this activity, and I introduced the cooperating teachers to the Post-it App, a tool for categorizing ideas and concepts. The cooperating teachers expressed excitement about this app and were glad to know that their teacher candidates might be using it with their shared students.

We read two additional articles related to mentoring, "Find Your Marigold: The One Essential Rule for New Teachers" and "Mentoring Novice Teachers to Become Teacher-Leaders". To reflect on lessons learned and application to self, we engaged in a "Build-a Mentor" activity. For this activity, cooperating teachers created a drawing of a mentor and labeled each element of that mentor with its purpose (e.g.-ear to listen; backbone to say what needs to be said). With both the fall and spring cohorts, the cooperating teachers were so engaged in this activity that we agreed to dedicate more time at the start of Session II to recall our focus and bridge into our next discussion.

Objective 2: To discuss and develop effective mentoring approaches for planning, co-teaching, and engaging in productive dialogue.

In our second session, we focused on effective mentoring approaches for planning, co-teaching, and observing. As mentioned above, the cooperating teachers returned to their "Build-A-Mentor" activity, thus focusing on who they wanted to be as mentors. From there, we moved into a discussion of planning by reviewing the rubric that supervisors would use when they observed the teacher candidates. The cooperating teachers engaged in a carousel activity during which they

reflected on the criterion for each category such as lesson opening, responsiveness to students, questioning, differentiation, and assessment. What was particularly interesting about this is that the teacher candidates had engaged in the same activity during their methods class. When responses were compared, the cooperating teachers quickly noted that their responses were more theoretical whereas the teacher candidates' responses were more practical. For instance, teacher candidates listed various approaches they might take to differentiate lessons like varied levels of texts or choice assignments whereas cooperating teachers made reference to Vygotsky, zone of proximal development, and scaffolding. When we discussed this difference, the cooperating teachers and I agreed that it had to do with stages of professional development. Teacher candidates are very focused on the practical when they are first entering the field. Cooperating teachers who have had some professional experience are more inclined toward professional reflection and making the connections between the theoretical, the practical, and the personal. This discussion made overt another benefit of the mentoring workshops—the opportunity to engage in professional reflection.

Another support for professional reflection was our discussion of a list of conversation starters from *The Co-Teaching Book of Lists* by Katherine Perez. I included this resource to provide support for those who were planning to co-teach with their teacher candidates, however, it was meaningful for all, regardless of whether or not they were planning to utilize co-teaching. Some of the questions posed on the lists included, "Why are we doing this?"; "How will we communicate with each other?"; "What are my values and beliefs as a co-teacher?" (63). Each of these major questions had sub-questions listed to help push the professional reflection and planning further. Whether or not the cooperating teachers were planning to utilize co-teaching as part of their gradual release method, this information was generally appreciated because it supportive reflective conversations.

Our next step was to consider four dilemmas encountered by beginning teachers

1. Choosing between personal beliefs about teaching and the recommendations of others.
2. Selecting and using teaching strategies that focus on developing learners' understanding versus developing their performance.
3. Taking risks by trying different teaching strategies versus playing safe and maintaining the status quo.
4. Concentrating on the less able students instead of accommodating the diverse range of students in a class.

(Zimmerman et al. 26)

We all agreed with the concept that a mentor should be an "option provider" rather than a "solution provider" thus facilitating the mentee's ability to solve problems independently.

To facilitate that kind of approach, we took part in a role-play activity that involved the four kinds of Language of Support that can be utilized in a mentoring dialogue--paraphrasing, clarifying, mediating, and imagining (Virginia Department of Education Mentor Training). Partners applied one or more types of dialogue to one of the dilemmas listed above. We all agreed that the low-stakes of role-play provided a safe way to practice having potentially difficult conversations.

To end this session, I shared letters from former teacher candidates in our program describing the positive qualities of their cooperating teachers. While the more researched elements of this workshop were helpful, I think that this method of closing was particularly effective because it reminded the cooperating teachers of the impact that they can have on their teacher candidate.

Objective 3: To discuss and develop instructional approaches and feedback strategies.

In our final session, we continued to focus on planning, and we discussed effective approaches for providing feedback. Laura Bond, a cooperating teacher West Windsor-Plainsboro, began by asking other cooperating teachers to prioritize elements that influence their course planning such as content/skills standards, teacher evaluation, marking period timing, assessments, universal concepts, and course goals. This activity led to lively discussion related to how to model for teacher candidates the opportunities that teachers have to work according to their own priorities while still meeting building, district, and state expectations.

Laura also challenged cooperating teachers to consider how to intentionally model best practices for student-centered learning. She discussed growth mindset, Wiggins and Understanding by Design, differentiated instruction, and integrated curriculum. She also led an activity related to developing strong learning objectives. As we saw in Session II, cooperating teachers were equipped to make strong connections between theory and practice. This conversation facilitated to help them focus on bridging planning decisions and research on best practices helped them feel better prepared for engaging in similar types of conversations with their teacher candidates.

Another conversation for which cooperating teachers wanted further support was the teaching feedback conversation. Rachel Scupp, also a cooperating teacher from West Windsor-Plainsboro, presented on how cooperating teachers can set teacher candidates up for success and how best to provide effective feedback. Rachel first had cooperating teachers reflect on their own classroom routines, structures, and systems in order to streamline classroom turnover to the teacher candidate. For instance, Rachel shared that the teacher candidate working with her students was struggling with getting students to transition smoothly to a new activity after directions were given. Rachel realized that the teacher candidate was not using her pre-established routine of saying "1, 2, 3, go" after giving directions. Once the teacher candidate started saying this, the class transitioned more fluidly. Simple realizations like this can make a huge difference for teacher candidates as they take over a classroom.

Rachel also discussed the concept of classroom presence. While it may be effective for a teacher candidate to embrace some of the cooperating teacher's routines, it is important for that candidate to develop their own professional presence. She asked cooperating teachers to consider what defines a strong teacher presence. All agreed that it does not have to mean being loud and commanding at all times. When teacher candidates are more shy or reserved, Rachel advised them to think of attributes of their own favorite teachers or leaders and to try to take on some of these attributes. She also recommends practicing in front of a mirror and/or videotaping to help with self-evaluation.

Lastly, Rachel focused directly on mentor feedback regarding teaching. She shared a feedback loop that included discovering issues, analyzing causes and consequences, creating options and solutions, committing to action, and evaluating performance improvement. Rachel's presentation focused on guiding teacher candidates to think through each step, thus connecting back to the concept of being an option provider rather than a solution provider. That said, the cooperating teachers stated that they liked the idea of applying the structure to themselves when they reflected on their own teaching.

Results/Outcomes

Cooperating teachers' eagerness to apply what they learned to their own professional reflection and development in addition to their guidance of their teacher candidates speaks to how working with a teacher candidate can be mutually beneficial. It is also important to restate that in several instances, I utilized teaching and reflection strategies that were being taught to the teacher candidates. This helped the cooperating teachers better understand some of the approaches that their teacher candidates were trying and, in some cases, gave the cooperating teachers new ideas to try themselves.

Cooperating teachers completed pre and post surveys for each training session. In addition, I gathered anecdotal evidence from conversations during and after the sessions and information from items produced by the participants during training sessions. Below, are results that coincide with each objective:

Objective 1: To establish a clear understanding of the college's expectations for teacher candidates and cooperating teachers.

After the training sessions, mentor teachers reported a better understanding of what it means to be a high quality mentor, the specific expectations of TCNJ, and how best to guide teacher candidates as they work toward meeting their TCNJ expectations for fieldwork.

In Fall 2015 and Spring 2016, pre and post surveys were used to measure progress toward this objective. Seven cooperating teachers were trained in the fall, and 6 were trained in the spring. The cooperating teachers responded to the question, *How would you rate your understanding of the expectations of cooperating teachers and of the students in the TCNJ Student Teaching/Practicum program?* Responses to this question from both the pre-training survey and the post-training survey are represented in Figures 1-4 below. Expectations of cooperating teachers are represented in red and expectations of TCNJ students are represented in purple

Figure 1. Fall Session I Pre-Training Survey

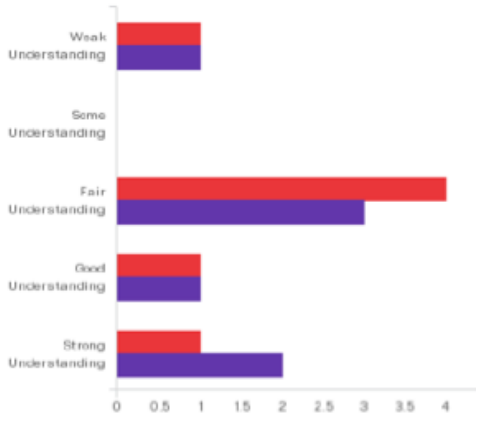


Figure 2. Fall Session I Post-Training

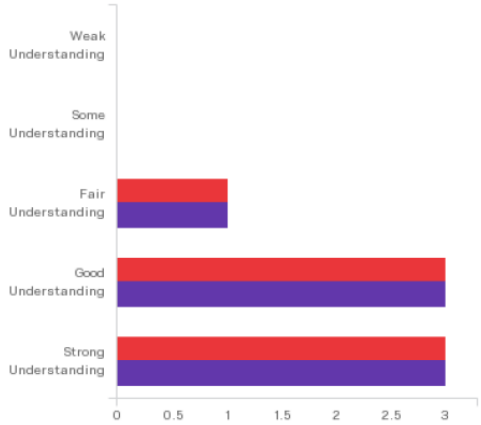


Figure 3. Spring Session I Pre-Training Survey

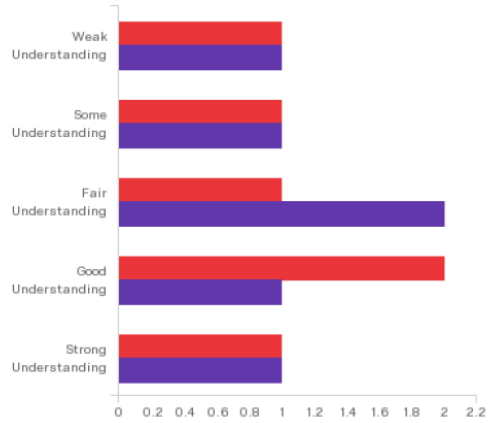
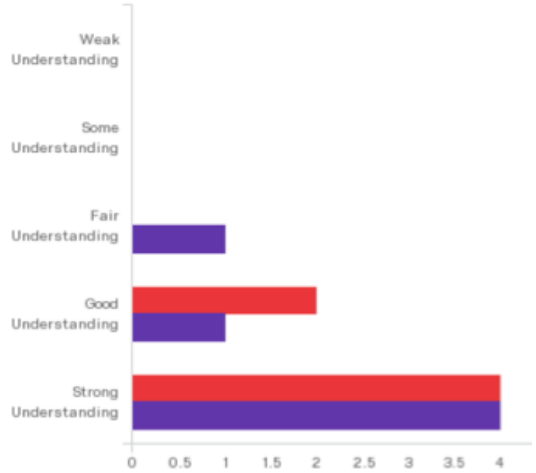


Figure 4. Spring Session I Post-Training Survey



The tables show positive growth regarding understanding of expectations for cooperating teachers and teacher candidates. The cooperating teachers who took part in the mentorship workshop shared that it was especially helpful to have the opportunity to discuss parts of the handbook regarding timeline for observing/student teaching and the Teaching Performance and Professional Dispositions rubrics that they use to evaluate our students teachers.

In addition to the rating scale regarding understanding of expectations, cooperating teachers answered open-ended questions. Common themes that emerged in cooperating teachers' answers to pre-training survey, open-ended questions/concerns regarding program expectations and serving as a mentor were related to unit planning. The practicum requires teacher candidates to develop and teach a two week unit. Cooperating teachers expressed concern regarding how such a unit could fit within their long-range plans, how much support they should give during planning, and how much they should allow their teacher candidates to "struggle."

When asked how they would describe a mentor, before training, common among cooperating teachers' responses were related to open-mindedness and flexibility. Representative words/phrases included "open-minded", "freedom", flexible, "not scared to let their mentee take over and fail", "willingness to learn and let go", "learn from the mistakes of both the co op and the pre-service in the classroom"

After Session I, cooperating teachers were asked, *What lingering questions/concerns do you have about serving as a cooperating teacher?* In the fall, 2 out of 7 teachers stated that they no longer had concerns. One wrote, "I feel so much better having heard/seen the expectations, since the only real information I had on it came from the TCNJ program." In the spring, three out of six teachers stated that they no longer had concerns. Themes regarding lingering concerns for the spring teachers included providing enough opportunity, balancing the role of teacher and observer, and transparency for teacher candidates regarding expectations of cooperating teachers.

After Session I, cooperating teachers were also asked, *What shifted in your thinking today?* The word cloud below represents how much of the conversation and thinking during Session I in the fall revolved around understanding how to balance support and letting the teacher candidate struggle.

In the spring, responses to this question were more varied, however, a common theme of recognizing the need for professional reflection came through. The following words/phrases relate to this theme: "mentoring is more than just the content and actual teaching, but also the teacher as a whole person", "asking the student what they expect of ME", "understanding the give AND take that comes from having a mentee", "Be a marigold!" (the term marigold is a metaphor for a person who facilitates growth. It was used in an article that cooperating teachers read during session I) *Objective 2: To discuss and develop effective mentoring approaches for planning, co-teaching, and engaging in productive dialogue.*

In Fall 2015 and Spring 2016, cooperating teachers learned effective strategies for planning and for guiding mentee planning and teaching. Pre and post surveys were used to measure progress toward this objective. Seven cooperating teachers were trained in the fall, and 6 were trained in the spring. The survey results for the question *How would you rate your knowledge regarding the following [co-planning, co-teaching, assessing teacher dispositions, giving teacher feedback, having a mentoring dialogue]?* are represented below.

Figure 5. Fall Session II Pre-Training Survey

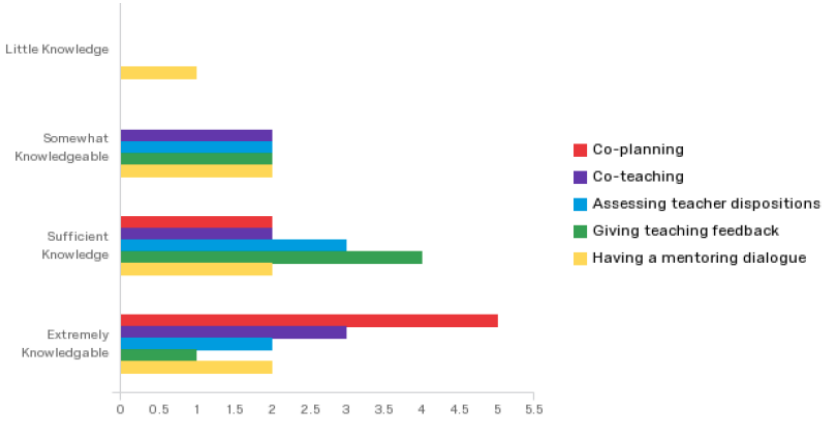


Figure 6. Fall Session II Post-Training Survey

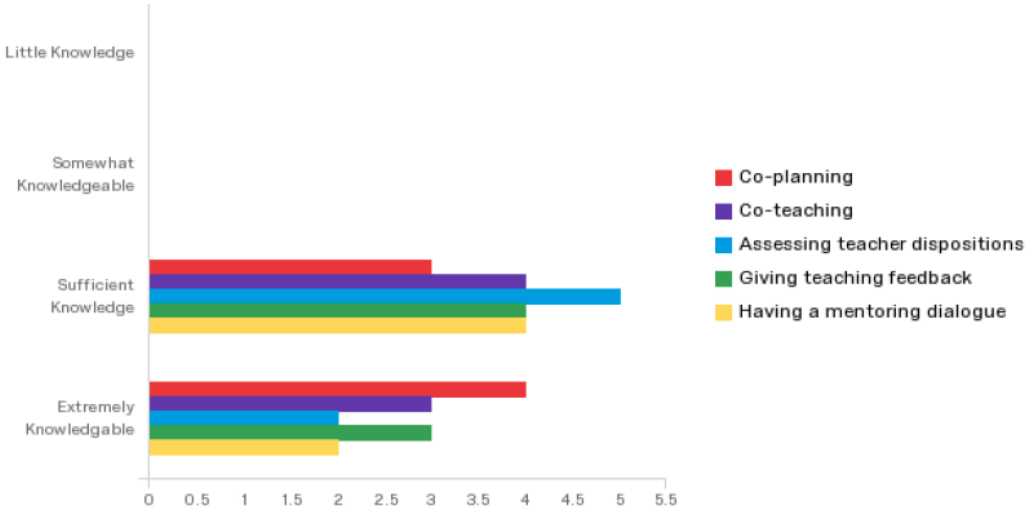


Figure 7. Spring Session II Pre-Training Survey

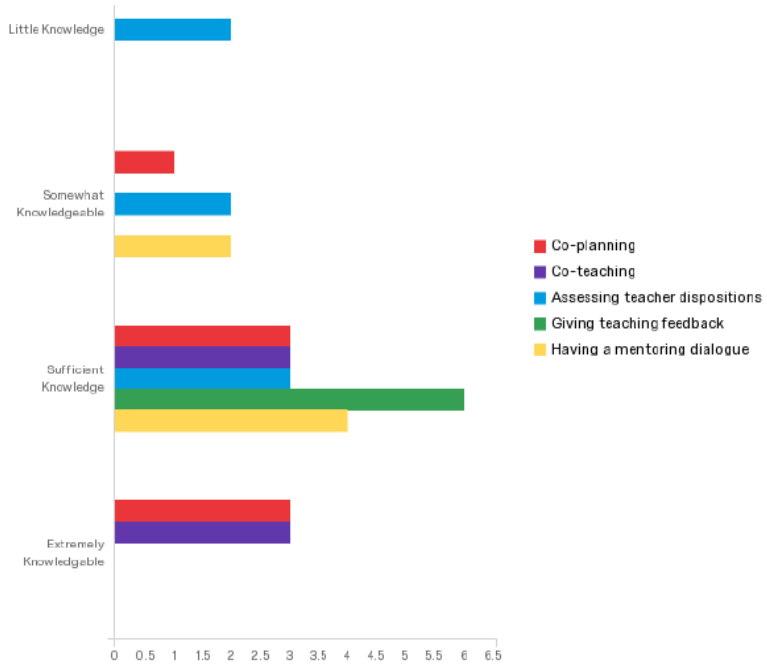
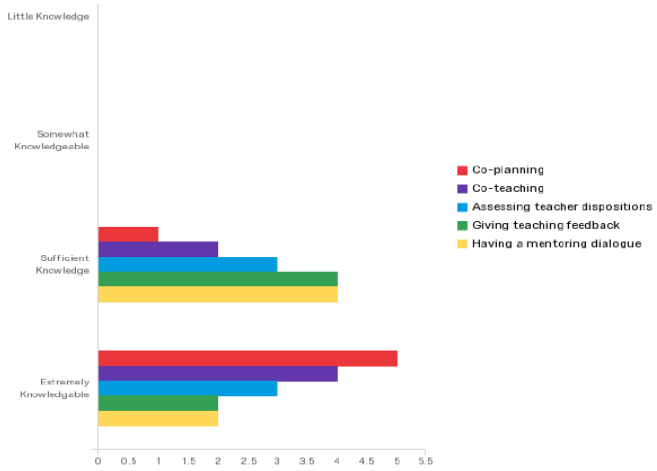


Figure 8. Spring Session II Post-Training Survey



Cooperating teachers showed gains in their perceived knowledge within each category. It is interesting to note that the majority of cooperating teachers in each cohort rated themselves as having sufficient knowledge rather than being extremely knowledgeable in regards to giving teacher feedback and having a mentoring dialogue. They knew that our next session would focus further on this, so I believe that they recognized that there was still more to learn. Also, many times, our discussion led to greater questions, thus it would be difficult to consider oneself extremely knowledgeable.

Objective 3: To discuss and develop instructional approaches and feedback strategies.
Cooperating teachers were asked to rate their knowledge level regarding

- How to approach long-range planning for your course
- Applying UBD and differentiation in unit design
- Writing quality objectives for student-centered learning
- Methods for providing effective feedback
- Awareness of your own feedback practices
- Deliberate classroom presence
- Strategies to foster reflective teaching practices

Figure 9. Fall Session III Pre-Training Survey

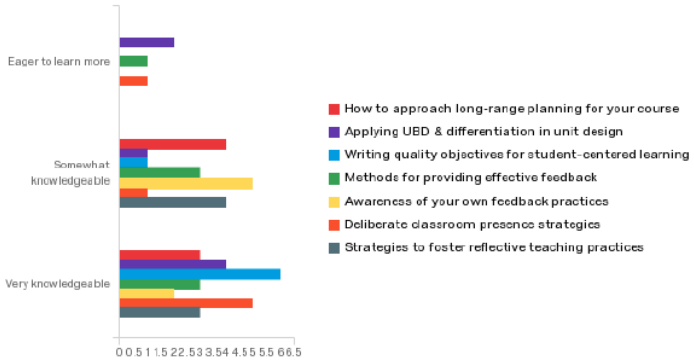


Figure 10. Fall Session III Post-Training Survey

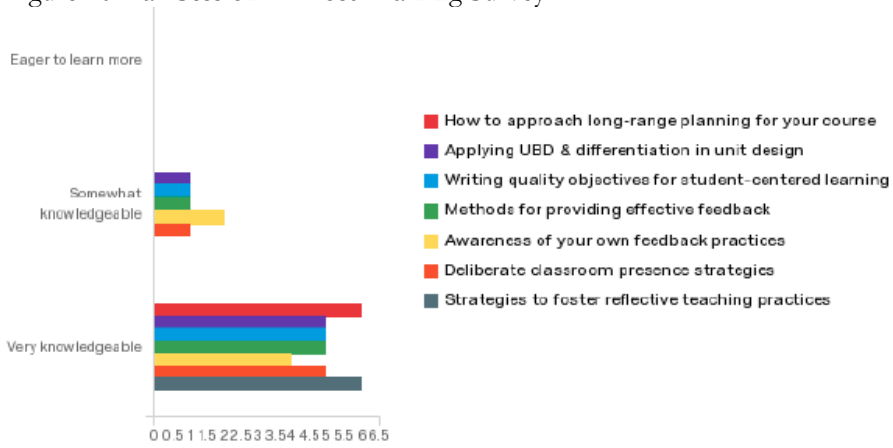


Figure 11. Spring Session III Pre-Training Survey

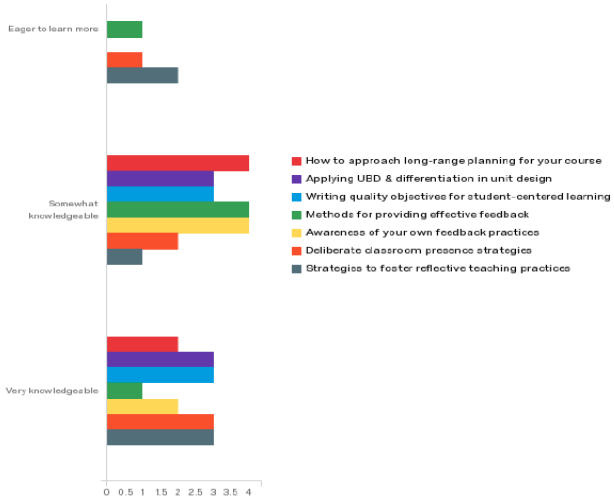
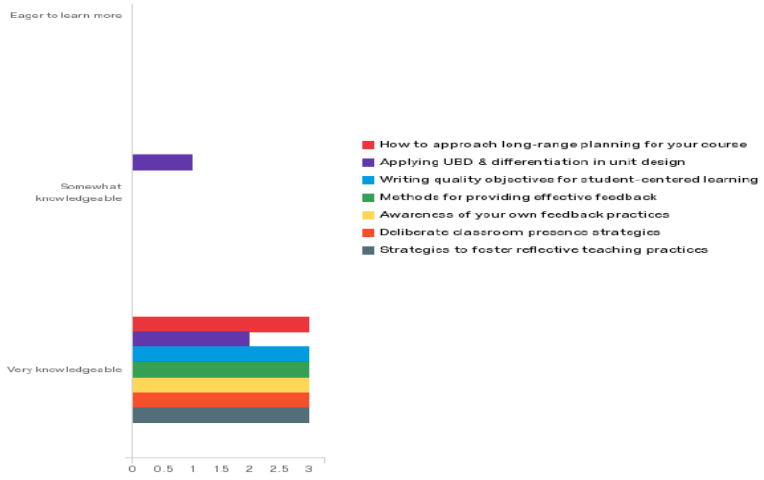


Figure 12. Spring Session III Post-Training Survey



Cooperating teachers shared that they were eager to learn more about how to approach long-term planning, applying UBD and differentiation in unit design, methods for providing effective feedback,

and strategies to foster reflective teaching practices. While they showed growth in all areas, in the both the fall and the spring, 4 out of 6 cooperating teachers who responded expressed appreciation for mentoring dialogue sentence starters that were provided.

Lessons Learned

The outcomes reported via survey and open-ended responses clearly indicate the positive impact of mentorship training for cooperating teachers. The post-session surveys from all six sessions indicate growth in relation to the objectives for the sessions. Participants' open-ended responses were overwhelmingly positive. Some favorite comments are listed below:

- "My expectations and those of my mentee are much clearer." (Fall Post-Session I Survey)
- I found it beneficial to hear the voices of my peers describe their roles as mentors" (Fall Post-Session I Survey)
- "I cannot wait for her to start so I can use some of the things I learned today!" (Spring Post-Session I Survey)
- Some also made mention of apps that were shared during this session. (Spring Post-Session II Survey)
- Love the 'what a mentor looks like', "love the station activity" (Spring Post-Session II Survey)

Significance

In a time of Student Growth Objectives and teacher evaluation being tied to test scores, a program like this is extremely important. Potential cooperating teachers may be hesitant to work with teacher candidates because they may be concerned with "giving up" time with their students, or working with a teacher candidate may feel like too much responsibility. Programs like this can transform participants' views of serving as cooperating teachers by making this role not only an opportunity to mentor but also an opportunity for professional growth.

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Maureen Connolly, Ed.D, is the co-author of the *Achieving Next Generation Literacy: Using the Tests (You Think) You Hate to Help the Students You Love*, the Corwin best-seller, *Getting to the Core of English Language Arts, Grades 6-12: How to Meet the Common Core State Standards with Lessons from the Classroom,* and *Getting to the Core of Literacy for History/Social Studies, Science and Technical Subjects, Grades 6-12.* Maureen currently teaches undergraduate and graduate courses in secondary education for the School of Education at The College of New Jersey and is a consultant for CBK Associates. Before that, she was an English teacher at Mineola High School on Long Island, New York, for 15 years.

If I Knew Then What I Know Now: Finding Inspirations for Literacy Where We Least Expect It

by Christina Berchini

"They think they're all going to be basketball stars."

Mr. Antolini,[3] an eighth-grade English teacher, lamented to me as he shuffled through student papers littered with red, critical ink. I was a guest in his racially and culturally diverse classroom, where he allowed me to collect data for my dissertation. On this day, they had just finished reading a short story from a *Common Core*-aligned textbook; to put it plainly, students weren't having it.

Mr. Antolini was one of my former teacher education students at a large, Midwestern university renowned for its secondary education program. Because I had been his sole instructor for two years' worth of English education coursework, I knew Mr. Antolini well. He was comfortable sharing his frustrations with me. He trusted me to help him as best I could.

Mr. Antolini's comment represents a tale as old as time: That of a teacher struggling to build a solid bridge between traditional, school-based literacies and the realities of a multi-modal world; the bridge between narrow understandings about what it means to be literate, and students with other ideas.

Furthermore, Mr. Antolini's lamentation represents another struggle: That of failing to identify how students' extra-curricular investments represent rich, literate practices. Mr. Antolini's students were deeply invested in sports. I saw firsthand how it was all they talked about; for them, engaging in sports was the best use of their time.

I had such a student, back when I taught English Language Arts at a Title I school in central New Jersey. Mr. Antolini's struggle inspires me to share the story of Jason:

A slight 12-year-old boy, Jason had olive skin and deep dimples, mischievous brown eyes, and a personality that made up for whatever his short stature couldn't accomplish. I enjoyed Jason immensely and noticed immediately that he was one of our school's more popular students. He did not always do his homework, and he did not always pass his exams. In truth, he did not attend school regularly, but when he did, he contributed to our class discussions about novels and current events and other topics in interesting and powerful ways—often diverting the conversation to his first love: Basketball.

I felt—we all felt—Jason's absence when he was not in class.

His basketball skills rendered him something of a celebrity in our small school community. It was almost comical; one might think that his below-average height would have dictated his basketball skills, but his talent on the court immediately silenced his naysayers. He was always the first to be selected as a teammate for games. Jason was good at the sport, and he knew it. His facial expression

[3]All names in this essay are pseudonyms.

exuded two-parts smug, one-part proud after he was selected for a team before all the other kids, time and time again (see Berchini 2016 for a longer narrative about Jason).[4]

Despite Jason's clear love of sports, I did not capitalize on this opportunity to tailor my curriculum to him and students like him. My students and I forged ahead, business as usual, enjoying Jason's occasional sports-related anecdote without considering how to make substantive use of it for the benefit of him and his peers.

I wonder, sometimes, the difference I might have made for Jason and others if I did better to put into practice the subtle ways by which students have pled with me to make use of their extra-curricular investments. Alan Brown describes this practice as a "method for connecting adolescents, sports, and literature" (Brown). Specifically, Brown encourages literacy teachers to consider the ways that "social activities and sports-related young adult literature [give] students…an opportunity to explore the world around them, including academic objectives and social pressures that are part of the transition to high school." Brown has put into practice what he preaches, by way of a weekly book club with only three guiding principles: Talk sports, eat free snacks, and read good books.

In considering my own work, what if I had secured a class set of Kwame Alexander's *The Crossover* – a story about twins revered for their talent on their middle school's basketball court. *The Crossover* is, by far, not the only option for sports lovers. *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian*, authored by Sherman Alexie, is another—highly regarded and award-winning story—about a young boy who struggles in school and falls back on his basketball prowess to make friends. Like any good book, both novels delve into complex and even heart-wrenching issues involving identity, relationships, and life, therefore resolving any misguided questions about "text complexity." More important than "text complexity," books such as these have the potential to reach students uninspired by stagnant literature curricula.

To that end, what if novels such as *The Crossover* and *The Absolutely True Diary* earned a permanent place in middle school English curriculum as easily and unquestioningly as "the classics"? What if one of my (many) negotiations with students involved researching sports-related literature possibilities and then petitioning our principal and school board to secure a class set? This task would hit at several academic requirements in authentic ways: Researching, reading, analyzing, argumentative and persuasive writing, and possibly speech and presentation—and this is just a starting point. Such a project, I argue, is profoundly more effective and memorable than anything reproduced out of a state-testing practice book.

I continue to merge the stories of Jason, Mr. Antolini, and my own pedagogical ineptitude with my preservice English teachers—a group of education majors with fairly narrow understandings about literacy and what it means to teach it and learn it, a narrowness due in no small part to coming up under the Common Core Standards and punitive state expectations for enforcing them. I am explicit about my goal in sharing their stories, and impart to my students what I wish I had known, as a new English teacher struggling to build bridges of literacy and meaning-making. Like Alan Brown, I have one simple principle for our semester-long work together: Find inspirations for literacy where you least expect it.

[4]This piece has been nominated by *Empty Sink Publishing* for a Pushcart Prize.

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The Role of Professional Development in a Lifelong Career: An Interview with Mary G. Bennett

by Patricia Bender

Mary Bennett often encourages her colleagues and her student teachers to "be intentional," and they soon realize they are talking to someone with a substantial and sustaining practice of intentionality. Her expertise in this area can be seen often in her habit and methods of taking notes which started in 1965 when she was instructed by her first high school English teacher, Thomas P. Hunt, to see her writing in a notebook not as copying but rather as making her own map.

She has perfected her own notebook style often drawing arrows and other indicators to place emphasis on key concepts and questions that arise when she is reading for professional or personal reasons or participating in a class or workshop. She returns to certain pages and sections multiple times, uses small spiral notebooks so they fit in her purse when traveling, and always keeps one close by even at home. Seeing herself as a visual learner, she understands that writing things out is the way she processes information.

She describes herself as a close reader and enjoys the physical activity of taking notes. After 51 years and counting, she is convinced that her notebook practice gives her the power of retention among other things and she plans to keep deepening her expertise, one notebook at a time.

Mary G. Bennett, Adjunct Faculty, Secondary and Special Education, at Montclair State University, and Teacher Coach at Seton Hall University, acknowledges that professional development has played a role in her entire 43-year career spent in education. In her work as a high school English Language Arts teacher for 10 years and then for 16 years in various administrative positions, she notes that professional development provided by her district, the Newark Public Schools, was, for the most part, designed to help to carry out district requirements. "Seldom was the professional development the type that inspired me," Bennett says. Most professional development was "the sit and git" variety with someone sharing information or training to encourage compliance with new requirements. Bennett found very often that reading and researching on her own "tended to be more helpful" in her effort to fully comprehend and then carry out the required tasks and duties.

Bennett continues to seek professional development opportunities describing herself as "curious." And she sees professional development extending beyond her school life. "I want to know and I want to grow. I am driven by my desire to feel that I have enough understanding about a given topic that I can use it effectively in my work and perhaps in my everyday life."

Bennett did have some great professional development experiences along the way and she described in some detail the Harvard Principals Leadership Institute which she attended for 10 days in July of 1995. Bennett found each day at the Institute filled with opportunities. She recalls how:

> 120 principals from all over the US, Canada, Mexico and London gathered to read, listen to presentations from people known to be gurus in education, and participate in workshops that gave us time to discuss, reflect, digest and ponder the relevance of the presentations we experienced. Daily, there was time to read, write, share and consider our work back in our schools, our effectiveness and what we might do to make things better for our school communities through our leadership.

This professional development was not offered by Bennett's school district. She found out about a foundation that annually offered a Request for Proposals to educators in her district to apply for grants to do something for self- improvement. Bennett describes herself as "lucky" noting "I submitted a proposal and it was accepted." The $5000 grant covered most of her expense including the registration fee, hotel and meals allowing her to immerse herself in the experience. The structure of the Institute provided a much needed component of development in Bennett's view: time.

In addition to the financial cost of professional development, when grants and district support are not available, Bennett notes lack of time as a hindrance finding, for example in her former school district, whether as a teacher or administrator, it was not easy to get the release time during the school year to attend conferences, seminars or workshops that the district did not sponsor. In addition, the funds were limited. If she could get the release time, most often she had to pay for the professional development activity.

At this stage in her career, Bennett has decided if there is a session or a conference that she wants to attend, she does. "Now, I am not school district employee, and it is up to me to continue to read, research and keep up with the current issues of the time that are impacting schools." Her current work includes being a Teacher Coach, Mentor/Critical Friend and Facilitator and she develops and presents professional development for schools in some of this work. Therefore, Bennett says, "I must stay in the mode of being a lifelong learner. Definitely, my interests and my work spur me on to find opportunities for the professional development that I need and want."

Bennett challenges herself to see if she can take some idea or practice that is seemingly new and tie it back to something that was in the field before, but called by a different name and possibly packaged or presented another way. She remains encouraged about the integration of learning across grades and across subjects that creates incredible opportunities for students, teachers and administrators.

Bennett captures her commitment to lifelong professional development and her dedication to teaching and mentoring saying: "Learning excites me. Helping and supporting others' learning excites me. There is always something to learn."

Patricia Bender, Assistant Editor of *New Jersey English Journal*, interviewed Mary Bennett for this issue of the journal.

Counting the Minutes: Drawing Inspiration from Deficit

by Christian Palomba

The clock in my room does not work. None of the clocks in any of the rooms work. I have been here for three months, and have yet to meet anyone who can remember a time when any of the clocks worked. In the teachers' lounge, people who have been doing this for most of my lifetime sit and ponder aloud how many minutes they have until retirement. In the classroom, we never know what time it is because the clocks do not work.

Before I began my time as a student teacher in a high needs school district, my friends in the profession told me, "You can't let the kids focus on what they don't have." The kids know when they do not have a warm bed or a hot meal waiting for them at home. They know if their neighborhood is plagued by violence and drugs and they have nowhere safe to go. Most imminently, they know that the quality of their education may be far less than that of students in a neighboring community. They know if all these things are true, so we need to try to redirect their focus from what they don't have to what they do have. They have an opportunity. It was good advice. But, no one told me how difficult it would be to shift my own focus from what I did not have to what I did.

From my first day in the building (and more days after that than I care to admit), I find myself flustered by how many of the seniors in my English IV classes cannot construct a sentence, or read more than a page or two at a time. I recognize how out of my depth I am. The teachers in my school are a genuinely fantastic group of people, but the things I repeatedly hear from them are not positive reinforcements of our ability to make a difference.

> *They should have learned these things already.*
>
> *It's just a bad bunch this year.*
>
> *These computers are too old.*
>
> *We don't have any books.*

These are some of the comments I hear almost every day. If I allow this way of thinking to imbue me, it will pervade every aspect of my working life.

As I complete my student teaching residency, I find myself appreciative of the fact that I am afforded a unique opportunity to refresh the inspiration that gets worn away from me. There are no scientific formulas or mathematical equations that will provide you with the opportunity to connect with your students in the same way as simply saying, "Write a paragraph about your day." Without saying a word, a 16-year-old girl tells me about the baby I didn't know she had, and another tells me how scared she is of losing even one of the two jobs she works. The quiet girl, who never talks in class, shows me how nervous she is about having to return to her native country. One student, who constantly impresses me, lays out his vision for how a school day should go. They have so many ideas, emotions, and issues that they are hesitant to talk about. I get to hear them all without making them speak a word, and that inspires me. I know that, even when I am struggling to connect to my students, a simple assignment can open the lines of communication.

There are days where I feel like I am failing. No matter how much time I have spent with my students, I have not taught them all I wanted to. No matter how much time I have left, it will not be enough to teach them all I need to. The clock stands still while I count the minutes I have left to make some sort of difference. I know that when I am done with this placement, I will just be

beginning my career. When I see teachers who have been doing this so well for so long and students who have overcome so much, I am eager to get started.

I know there will still be days when I struggle to find inspiration, when I may hear echoes of these words: *They should have learned this already, so I cannot teach. We do not have any books, so I cannot teach. The clocks do not work, so I cannot teach.* However, I will also recall a group of kids who have shared their stories with me, who knew exactly how little they have, and who showed up every day anyway. So, I will teach.

Christian Palomba is a graduate of Rutgers University and a graduate student at William Paterson University, New Jersey. He hopes to find a full-time position teaching high school English in the fall.

Photo by Juliet Slattery

Challenging Old Fogyism

by Donna W. Jorgensen

At the turn of the 20th century, Professor Arthur O. Norton of Harvard University wrote about the professional growth needs of secondary teachers. He said, "What the teacher needs is continuous growth, prolonged efficiency, a long period of plasticity, and expansion of power…" (136). Further, he said that teachers ". . .fossilize at any age…" and he further states, "Professor James caps the climax by saying that old fogyism sets in in most people at twenty-five." (136). That is a startling statement when applied to the teaching profession because it seemed to suggest that teachers hit their peak in the classroom quite early and then become fossils, old fogies, who should have additional professional training but do not. Well, you say, that was 108 years ago; things have surely changed since then! What if that is not the case? Today's teachers face many challenges, and perhaps it is still quite easy to rely on pedagogical methods that have past their prime as they struggle to prepare learners for a place in our 21st century world. Sadly, school hasn't changed a lot in the past century, and part of that is because teachers fossilize, and the result is that their teaching becomes stale and rote and dated. Teaching lacks any kind of spark because teachers find themselves placing importance on all the wrong things. Their creativity is stifled in the name of test preparation, and their personal style can be buried. It is time to challenge "old fogyism." It is time to embrace the spirit of growth and change. If teachers do not, if they stay on the same path, using the same methods, they should not be surprised by children's disinclination to learn.

The truth is that teachers have it in their power to change the world. They have the power to awaken the joy of learning in even the most disinterested students. They have the power to contribute to a citizenry who are knowledgeable, involved, and caring. They have the power, but they must fight that the tendency to dig out the same old lessons on the same old subject matter year after year, sometimes because they believe students don't actually care about either the content or the way it is taught. Sometimes, teachers are victims, too, of a movement to standardization that seems to stifle opportunities to be creative in the classroom. These are the teachers who have settled in to lives of old fogyism; these are the teachers who need to have their worlds shaken up and reinvented. Orit Schwarz-Franco tells us that we need to heed to advice of Josef Schwab in understanding the work of teachers. Teaching "is constantly dynamic, and it demands creativity..." (994). Teachers do have autonomy and the power to transform teaching and learning, but they must accept the challenge. Teachers may believe that they have few or no choices about what goes on in their classrooms, so they simply keep doing what they have always done. This is counter-productive, and pesky old fogyism has found an entry point.

Paulo Freire suggested that teachers must engage students in learning that empowers students to participate and share in the pedagogy. Learning is much, much more than what old fogyism applauds: the depositing of information (knowledge) into waiting receptacles (students) rather than offering situations in which knowledge evolves as students actively participate in igniting the learning spark (Schwarz-Franco). Schwarz-Franco further states, "…I suggest that autonomous and transformative teaching are both dependent on the idea that knowledge is dynamically produced in class and that teaching is a creative undertaking" (p. 995). This is the heart of what teaching and learning can and ought to be. Today's students need knowledge of the past and past events; there can be no doubt that they need a foundation. At the same time, they need to see that learning is not static any more than the world we live in stands still without change. Change is important; change is scary; change is necessary. Change challenges our set ways, and that can be uncomfortable.

Challenging old fogyism does not mean that every teacher must become the sort of super-hero teachers often portrayed in movies. In some of these movies, teachers are portrayed as invincible,

always available, brave people with limitless energy and enthusiasm, interested in only what is best for their students, always. "This hero may be thought of as a source of inspiration and motivation for young teachers. On an elusive level, however, such films send the teacher a frightening message, saying that if you are not a 'super-man,' you better accept the norms of the school…" (1001). That belief that one cannot be a superhero can result in another entry point for old fogyism. Movie teachers should inspire us to find ways to challenge this in our own classrooms. We know that superheroes are fiction; we also know that teachers do heroic things every day in many ways. Wanting to be inspired and wanting to grow professionally are not enough. Teachers must step up and find their path in a constantly changing and miraculous world of educational opportunity.

Pearls of wisdom are often dropped into conversations, particularly those connected with professional development. Often they are left to take seed and grow. Sometimes, what is masquerading as wisdom appears more like a burr, an irritant, that left unattended would fester. One of these pearls of wisdom is that "opportunity knocks but once…" Hearing it time and again, one might wonder whether it knocks once each day or week or month or year. Does it mean that opportunity knocks only once in each of the areas of one's life? Is it possible that any person would be given only one opportunity to define a lifetime? Every moment of every day, every person whom we meet, every adventure we have is opportunity knocking…once in the moment, but certainly not once only.

Appreciating opportunity is inspirational. In each experience in the classroom and in each student whose path has crossed that of a teacher, there is an opportunity to be inspired and to be inspirational. Through the beauty of language, even for those who struggle to find the "right" words to complete a task, inspiration flows outward and then back. To share, through the words of others, possibility, to see inspiration dawn in the eyes of a student, to nurture discovery—these are inspiration, and in these inspirations we challenge old fogyism. In order to keep the challenge alive, there must be a bit of idealist in each of us. The old fogy would say that it is better to be realistic, to accept that this is the way things are and that we have little chance to change them. Idealists refuse to accept that we cannot change things or that we cannot meet and overcome challenges. Idealists make us believe that anything is possible. Idealists know that they and their students can change the world. In 1943, music teacher Lillian McCune looked at the reality of a world torn by war. She suggested that we look for those moments that make us want to be better than we have been before. McCune wants to make music part of every student's world, believing that finding the song the world needs to hear can make a difference (58). McCune may have been an idealist, but she believed that, in emergencies, inspiration comes from the songs of our lives. In 1943, World War II was the emergency; in 2017, there continue to be real political and global emergencies. Can we find the songs to help us challenge the status quo of educational experiences? Can we create music that will compel us to embrace change? Perhaps it sounds idealistic, but what if we each can find a way to sing songs of change and growth and justice and hope? If we do, there is every reason to believe that our classrooms will become dynamic and innovative. Old fogyism will be banished.

Marlow Ediger suggests that there are bits of wisdom from which we can all draw inspiration. Among them, he cites Dr. Herman Harrel Horne who, in 1931, put forth some things he saw as truths about teachers. He said,

> Blessed are you teachers: For you have found your work.
> Blessed are you teachers: For you are freed from the temptation to put your trust in money.
> Blessed are you teachers: For yours is the kingdom of children.
> Blessed are you teachers: For your associates are among the world's best.
> Blessed are you teachers: For your work is constantly realizing your selfhood.
> Blessed are you teachers: For you may 'allure to bright worlds' of truth and live and learn the way.

> Blessed are you teachers: For you have kinship with the great sharing souls of all mankind. (Ediger 2)

If we accept these blessings, we must recognize that we are challenged to rid ourselves and our classrooms of old fogyism. We have work to do.

Hold the hand of child grasping a pencil to form the letters of his first word on paper; watch the intense concentration on the face of an adolescent struggling to make sense of a passage in a beloved book; cry with the writer who has found exactly the right word to convey an emotion; comfort the student who struggles to master a formula for writing that will help him to reach "proficiency" on an assessment that says nothing about who he is as a person or as a learner. Each is an opportunity to be inspired and to inspire. The smallest successes inspire greatness in a child. The struggles inspire determination. The discovery inspires joy. None of it is easy, but opportunity presents itself time and again to inspire us to continue to do what we do…we teach in order that others may also find inspiration. Inspiration grows from opportunity… In the face of a dynamic, creative, motivated, caring teacher who is committed to professional growth, old fogyism cannot survive.

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Sleep's Got Nothin' To Do With It

by Patricia Stewart

5:30 am starts, cold water alarms.
Late nights beneath a desk lamp
grading papers where the text begins to blur

Budget cuts, shared rooms
Triple the students, third of the books

Standardized tests cutting the creativity
right out of the front of the brain.
Students forget how to imagine --
forget how to be children

We grow tired
Calluses on our fingers
From writing, writing
Comments about how to improve
Writing grades reflecting ourselves

We grow tired
and we sing a lullaby to our students
as they sit crouched over tests
that are none of our own
evaluation that does not reflect knowledge

We sit at our desks
tired and resisting the urge to yawn
pencils tapping a rhythm on our desks
a tune that is unknown.

Imaging days where we could write.
Write a story, a poem, perform a play.
Read, read anything we could get out hands on
But now we sit

We circulate but
We see one student
Drawing an abstract flower on the
Back of his test

And so we
sing another lullaby
sliding novels across desks
discussing the different ways
to describe the cloud drifting past our bare window.

Patricia Stewart is in her last semester of my graduate degree at Rutgers University. She is seeking a high school English teacher position to share her love for reading and writing with the younger generations.

Artwork by Izzy Boyce-Blanchard

Graphic Meets Canon

by Samantha Vargas

"Graphic novel" was considered a dirty word in the public school classroom during my high school years. It was often brushed off as a "comic book" meant for children, with an arrogant upturned nose of academia. When I was in high school, the book list for the English curriculum strictly consisted of canon texts. Once every few weeks, I would be handed an abused secondhand copy of *Romeo and Juliet* or *The Odyssey* or *The Scarlet Letter*. Not only were these books growing mold within their spines, but the corresponding lessons were too. Wondering why we could not breathe some fresh air into the classroom, I would hastily thumb through graphic novels under my desk. Often times, I was scolded for this vigilante style reading beneath my desk top. My parents found this reprimanding comical since ultimately I was learning by reading more during class. However, I propose that graphic novels have a place in the classroom. Simply, "the new and unfamiliar are often also vigorous and enlightening" (Applebee, 231). This idea is vital as the current state of the English book curriculum lacks diversity due to its adherence to Anglo Saxon culture. Unfortunately, a lack of diversity in the literature curriculum is quite detrimental as it favors "the college-bound, primarily white, middle class students," while excluding more diverse students in terms of race, gender, and socio-economic status (Applebee, 232). The blatant reality is that "the students who need the most help get the least attention in curriculum planning and curriculum revision (Applebee, 232). If the educational system continues not to account for the different needs, cultures, and learning styles of all of the students, then this vicious cycle shall perpetuate. The graphic memoir, *Fun Home* by Alison Bechdel, offers a strong example of the merits of using a graphic novel in the curriculum because *Fun Home* offers numerous text features such as allusions, symbols, graphics, multiple perspectives, identity formation, and differentiation.

The most obvious difference between a conventional novel and a graphic novel is its inclusion of illustrations. In fact, the majority of a graphic novel is comprised of "frames" in which the comic illustrations are drawn. The text portion is minimal, and is present in speech bubbles or along the bottom of the comic frames. Simply, a graphic novel lends itself as a visual tool in the classroom. This is extremely relevant because it directly caters to students who are more visual learners. Thus, *Fun Home* would allow for differentiation regarding visual learners and low level readers, who are a much under represented group when it comes to the literary curriculum. In addition, students with learning disabilities such as ADD or ADHD may also be accounted for in terms of differentiation with the addition of a graphic novel in the classroom. This is because each page on a graphic novel offers so many different aspects; each page is chock full of multiple images, symbols, text, etc. There is always something new to observe/read in a graphic novel- some are even interactive in their format and require the reader to physically flip or turn the book upside or sideways. Thus, a visual learner, a low-level reader, or a student with learning disabilities may find *Fun Home* more engaging and easier to read and comprehend due to its visual format.

The graphic elements in *Fun Home* are not just important in terms of differentiation methods, but how well it incorporates text features. For many readers, reading comprehension is not so easily achieved, and similarly, it is not so easy for teachers to teach about the reading comprehension process. Bechdel 's utilization of the comic form externalizes the usual internal reading process; the images in the novel act as a physical representation of otherwise normally abstract literary concepts. This includes imagery, which is apparent in a myriad of traditional literature. The illustrations in *Fun Home* are a concrete example of what imagery does in the reader's mind: it draws or paints a picture. Here, the effect of imagery is obvious, especially to a low level who may not as readily be able to conceptualize and visualize the abstract text feature. Similarly, the graphic novel medium lends itself to teaching about mood in writing; light, shadows, color palettes, style of cartooning, composition of

the frames, size of the frames, etc. all work together to relay the mood of the graphic novel, externalizing the conceptualization of mood in literature. For example, Bechdel utilizes a cool color palette including blues, greys, and black to enhance the dark nature of the twisted tragi-comedy. Ironically, she pairs the somber coloring with a childlike cartoon style in which the juxtaposition of the serious versus imaginative adolescent mind create a two-tiered mood. Once again, the aesthetic text features allow for a more stimulating read in terms of visual engagement, and the reading comprehension process of language characteristics becomes clearer by externalizing it.

In addition, *Fun Home* is also instructive in its physical representation of perspective. The structure of the graphic memoir can be described as a circle maze of sorts that starts from the outside and spirals into the center of the story that goes over the same material, but a slightly altered perspective. This altered perspective is due largely to the addition of allusions, and what they can do to a narrative when it is placed under a specific perspective lens, in this case it being a literary/artistic perspective. Allusions to Greek myths, traditional "canon" literature, and visual arts are scattered throughout the text; the events of Bechdel's family dynamic during her childhood are portrayed through this allusive lens. The allusions are once again physical in their representation whether it be a comic frame including a specific work of art or an excerpt from a dictionary definition or a quote from another piece of literature. The inclusion of allusions allows for class discussions that call for higher level critical thinking in terms of analysis and connecting the modern literature to more conventional curriculum selections in regards to theme, narrative content, motifs, etc. Hence, the structure of the memoir allows for discussion of multiple perspectives: the personal, the child versus the adolescent, the patriarchal figure, society, the homosexual, the maternal figure, the reminiscing adult, and so forth. Additionally, larger overarching perspectives such as such as psychoanalysis, performance/visual arts, social issues, and feminism/gender theories may be applied in the discussion of *Fun Home.* Therefore, the study of the theories and perspectives that the graphic novel encompasses allow for active learning that extends to cross-curricular studies in class discussions.

Simply, "when cultural differences are recognized, legitimized, and bridged, students may participate more actively in school reading activities" (Bloome). Currently, the LGBT community is an emerging body in society, and it is still in need of representation in the academic world. Very few, if any, novels in a traditional English classroom curriculum attend to the conflicts surrounding the LGBT individual. Realistically, there will be students who identify with the LGBT community or are struggling in terms of gender identity. By providing a book that deals with these relevant social topics, the gap between reading and cultural differences like homosexuality can be bridged. Thus, students who identify with this under-represented culture will be able to connect with a piece of literature in terms of its diverse theme representation; subsequently, students will be more apt to participate in reading based activities, and find themselves engaged in this: a text that tells a version of their own personal story in the classroom. Bechdel's memoir provides a critical exploration of applicable themes and issues that arise when one is maturing into an adult from adolescence. This particular novel is an important bildungsroman in terms of the current time; it is more accurate in its depiction of the psychological and moral growth that a student of today's society will encounter from youth to adulthood, based on its more accurate cultural diversity. This is apparent in the relevant themes Bechdel includes: sexual orientation, gender roles, suicide, emotional abuse, dysfunctional familial relationships, and the role of literature in understanding one's identity are raised. All in all, Bechdel's memoir reaches out to a diverse array of individuals with her innovative presentation of the memoir genre through an aesthetically pleasing medium.

This idea "bridging" a gap is critical to ensuring the achievement of all students in the classroom, especially when it comes to the notion of literacy. Unfortunately, literacy is usually viewed through a single academic lens that only considers the types of reading that occurs in the classroom, ignoring what other reading activities and literacy may be achieved outside of the classroom, but in one's home culture. "What gets counted as 'reading' can be both situation specific and ethnocentric"

(Bloome). Basically, this stipulates that "there is a great deal of variety in reading activities" that are contingent upon the different aspects of reading as a social process. "For example, students may do a lot of reading...read notes, share comic books, read directions...read signs and labels- but the only reading that may get counted as *reading* by the teacher and students may be the oral rendition of the basal story during reading group instruction. All of the reading activities that they do may simply not get recognized as reading"(Bloome). As a result, minority students are considered less literate by classroom standards, even though they may be perfectly literate in his or her own home culture or in different reading activities that are just not being recognized as reading. This is problematic because it allows more "power" of literacy to more culturally represented students, usually those who have a similar background the roots of canon literature; this puts some students at an advantage in terms of test scores as well as having a higher social status in the classroom. *Fun Home* deconstructs this ideal in its inclusion of varied types of reading such as visual, comic, artistic, symbolic, abstract, etc.

In summation, the need for a more diverse curriculum in the classroom is incredibly important. "Whether intentional or not, schools have chosen to ignore diversity and assimilate everyone to the 'classical' culture that found its way to ensure that our programs are culturally relevant as well as culturally fair- that no group is privileged while others are marginalized by the selections we choose to teach" (Applebee, 235). The negative implications of this practice are vast: some students will fall behind, struggle, and not perform as well their culturally represented peers. This is due to their inability to connect with a text, low literacy (or what the school deems as 'literacy'), a lack of differentiation, and disinterest in the subject material. How can teachers amend this vicious cycle of establishing a social status hierarchy of readers in the classroom? The answer is fairly simple in theory: "it is an issue of finding the proper balance. . . [for the] complex and changing fabric of American society" (Applebee, 235). Thus, by providing more diverse texts that represent different cultures of students (ie. race, religion, sexual orientation, gender, divergent learning styles, etc.), differentiation is achieved in terms of reading levels as well as one's interest and connection to the literature. As a result, social statuses of reading will diminish, literacy will improve because the idea of literacy becomes more inclusive by accounting for different types of reading. *Fun Home* provides an abundant amount of differentiation to a book list due to its graphic novel format.

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Revelations and Inspirations: The Starting Point in a New Vocation

by Peter Zabor

Right now, I'm coming in from the cold world of business into the warmth and richness of English Literature. The ideas that spring from these pages, these phrases, these words provide ample opportunities for reflection and thought. I can extract and distill, compute and equate, align and select from the varied genius of humanity to bring into my classroom. And from the differing perspectives, the disparate world of thought that can come from history and cultures different from our own, I can find better ways to question my preconceived answers.

When I think about inspiration, I think about the reinvigoration of ideals and goals. Maybe it's because I'm a greenhorn, but I want to feel like this profession is a joyful expression of an artform, not an endeavor that requires a "survive and thrive" mentality. I'm currently a Graduate Student at The College of New Jersey (TCNJ through their Secondary Education MAT program. This semester, I was fortunate to be able to intern and teach lessons and units on *The Crucible*, Emerson, and Jack London. The inspiration I found came not only from these works and great minds, but from the students, the faculty, and my personal learning community that I am beginning to build.

I try something new and different each day. That sort of effort brings a lot of anxiety and fear that I will fail, that my expectations will not be met. However, seeing my students working with me, trying and succeeding, is and always will be my greatest source of inspiration. From them, I can realize my goals of success. Through them, my labors and plans can come to life in a classroom we build. And with them, we grow and learn and see our efforts change us for the better. My students are why I am there, and I need to be a source of inspiration for them as they are for me.

My colleagues are an invaluable source of feedback, inspiration, and camaraderie. They are able to revitalize my spirits, refocus my aims, and clue me into new ways to imagine my classroom. I had the chance to sit in seventh, eighth, and tenth grade classrooms and the ideas that sprung from watching their craft soared my mind into wild possibilities. Supervisors and administrators that exude passion, professionalism, and determination galvanize my desire to be my ideal.

Finally, I have been wholeheartedly jumping into building a personal learning network using social media and professional development. Connecting with other teachers on Twitter through live teacher forums (usually about an hour a week, where teachers and administration can come together to answer questions about educational topics that create positive and constructive discourse) , I can recharge my battery, reaffirm my beliefs and goals, and listen to colleagues across the state and the nation. By seeing such driven and idealistic people in this profession, I am motivated and inspired to rise to their ranks. I need to be continually learning and exposed to new ideas. Continuing to use these sources of inspiration and always looking for new ways to grow, I can develop as an educator and a learner.

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