



JOURNAL OF LITERACY INNOVATION

RETHINKING LITERACY INSTRUCTION



VOLUME TWO, ISSUE ONE

SPRING 2017

SEAN RUDAY, EDITOR

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EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION

SEAN RUDAY, *JLI* FOUNDER AND EDITOR

LONGWOOD UNIVERSITY

The Broadway musical *Hamilton* has so many powerful songs, but there is one that especially resonates with me: in the song “Hurricane,” Alexander Hamilton’s character refers to the transformative power of writing by asserting “I wrote my way out.” This statement conveys Hamilton’s belief that he used his writing talents to help him overcome the difficulties he faced in his life. Lines such as “I wrote my way to revolution/ I was louder than the crack in the bell” and “I wrote about the Constitution and defended it well” illustrate the impact of writing on Hamilton’s life and his ability to achieve his goals.

Here at *JLI*, we have a similar belief about the transformative power of language—just as Hamilton used writing to accomplish his ambitious objectives, literacy teachers and teacher-educators can present reading and writing as ways for our students to re-see and re-create the world around them.

This issue of the *Journal of Literacy Innovation* describes a number of ways that literacy can be used to re-imagine the world. In the first article listed in the issue, *Documenting Literacy Histories, Values, and Practices: The HUMN Project*, author Jason Chew Kit Tham describes a “multimodal community literacy narrative project—The HUMN Project—designed to let student writers document narratives from the University of Minnesota (Twin Cities) community.” The innovative practices and ideas this manuscript shares are exciting and empowering.

Next, you’ll encounter Russell Greinke’s excellent piece, “*Who Am I to Try and Teach English?: Preparing Preservice Teachers from All Disciplines to Understand, Anticipate, and Address Resistance to Writing Across the Curriculum.*” In this well-researched and thoughtfully-written piece, the author reviews key articles about the importance of writing across the curriculum (WAC), identifies refutes potential arguments offered in opposition to WAC, and provides recommendations for advocating for WAC in one’s one academic environment.

The third piece in this issue, Tiffany Flowers’ “Exploring Diverse Literature in Grades 6-8” is an outstanding resource on the significant topic of incorporating texts written by culturally diverse authors into the classroom. This article discusses the importance of teaching diverse literature to students, provides specific text suggestions, and describes strategies for teachers to use when helping their students explore texts written by diverse authors.

After that, you’ll find Sabrina Jones’ excellent work, “Language is Power: Personal, Cultural, and Political Empowerment in the College Composition Classroom.” This thoughtful manuscript addresses insightful questions such as “How can composition be empowering?” and “Why is student empowerment necessary?” In the article, Jones describes the assignments she uses in her freshman composition course to address these questions and “to help empower students through a series of authentic experiences: the personal, the cultural, and the political.”

This issue of *JLI* concludes with an outstanding merging of theory and practice in “Implementing a Reader’s Workshop in a First-Grade Classroom” by Susan Fialko and Cynthia Dawn Martelli. This piece allows us to “follow one teacher as she implements a Reader’s Workshop in her first-grade classroom,” combining relevant research-based ideas, classroom experiences, and thoughtful reflections to give readers strong understandings of the benefits, possibilities, and challenges associated with implementing a reader’s workshop program. The visuals included in this manuscript are excellent resources for those looking to incorporate a reader’s workshop in the own classrooms.

These five manuscripts describe distinct ideas about literacy instruction, but all of them provide empowering literacy practices that can make reading and writing meaningful and effective as possible. I hope you’ll consider sharing your ideas by submitting your work for consideration for publication in future issues of the *Journal of Literacy Innovation*. For more information on the journal, please visit www.journalofliteracyinnovation.weebly.com.

See you in October 2017 for *JLI*’s next issue!

Sean

Sean Ruday, Ph.D.

Editor, *Journal of Literacy Innovation*

Associate Professor of English Education, Longwood University

DOCUMENTING LITERACY HISTORIES, VALUES, AND PRACTICES: THE HUMN PROJECT JASON CHEW KIT THAM UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA, TWIN CITIES

Abstract

Literacy narratives are personal accounts of learning to read and write. They offer insights to individual literacy histories, values, and practices. For this reason, they are valuable in the composition classroom as they allow students to grapple with culturally diverse ideas and literate practices of others. This essay showcases a multimodal community literacy narrative project—The HUMN Project—that’s designed to let student writers document narratives from the University of Minnesota (Twin Cities) community. I begin with narrative theory as seen through literacy perspectives, and provide the details of The HUMN Project including its process, learning objectives, reading materials, and project tools, followed by student reflections on their experience with the project. The essay closes with my personal reflection on this endeavor and a call for literacy educators to innovate learning activities such as The HUMN Project to engage students across K-12 and college settings.

Documenting Literacy Histories, Values, and Practices: The HUMN Project

Literacy narratives are powerful rhetorical linguistic accounts through which people fashion their lives and make sense of their world, indeed, how they construct the realities in which they live.

– The DALN (Digital Archive of Literacy Narratives) Consortium

It’s about taking an atmosphere of fear, strangeness, and uncomfortableness, and turning that into an atmosphere of intimacy where people feel comfortable sharing.

– Brandon Stanton, photographer of the Humans of New York project

Introduction

Students today bring with them complex and diverse social, educational, economical, and cultural backgrounds. Many of them—roughly 30% of entering freshmen in the United States—are first-generation college students, according a *USA Today* report (Ramsey & Peale, 2010). Appropriately, the college campus becomes a unique place where students meet and engage with people from different walks of life and circumstances. As a core requirement common in many schools and colleges around the country, the composition course, by the nature of its existence,

provides these incoming students with not just semester-long writing instruction but also a contact zone (Pratt, 1991) to experience and understand various civic discourses. Such environment offers both the teacher and students the opportunity to discern and participate in important public conversations, such as racism, structural oppression, and critical literacy practices in the public.

One way to take advantage of the diversity in such contact zones is to engage with those who occupy these spaces—students, faculty, staff, and administrators—through dialogues about one’s personal literacy experience. In “Documenting Community Literacies: Using Digital Narratives,” an iTunes University course created by Cynthia Selfe and Lewis Ulman (2013), Selfe demonstrates that narratives about one’s literacy background are a great and rather friendly way of entering someone’s literate life and finding turning points where their literate practices have helped shape their personal values and beliefs. Listening to and collecting others’ literacy narratives are thus purposeful ways to gain insights on how literacy transforms lives. It also provides students an opportunity to encounter culturally situated and epistemologically significant events in others’ lives that may help them consider the values of their own literacy practices through a process of reflection (Sharma, 2015). Such exercise, then, is valuable for students across K-12 and college levels as they meet with those who are culturally different from them and grapple with values and ideas that might seem divergent from theirs.

In this essay, I describe a multimodal literacy narrative project I designed for a first-year composition class at a research university, where students in my class had participated in collecting and exhibiting literacy narratives of members of the university community through an oral history methodology. My goal is to showcase the pedagogical benefits of this literacy narrative project—fondly called The HUMN Project—for students of composition in both K-12 and college settings. In the following sections, I provide a brief introduction to the rationale of the project, the theoretical framework underpinning its design, followed by the logistics and student reflections after completing the project. It is my hope that readers find this project inspiring and applicable to their own pedagogy.

What is The HUMN Project?

The inspiration for The HUMN Project came from both the Humans of New York project and the Digital Archive of Literacy Narratives (DALN) hosted at The Ohio State University. I have named our project “HUMN” not just because it looks like a clever wordplay by a colleague of mine, but truly to pay tribute to Humans of New York as well as to hint at the campus community—UMN (short for the University of Minnesota)—from which our literacy narratives are curated. The logotype (Figure 1) of The HUMN Project is made up of its name and a bar across the letter “H” to emphasize the human factor in this project. The maroon and gold colors in the logotype serve as key institutional identifiers.

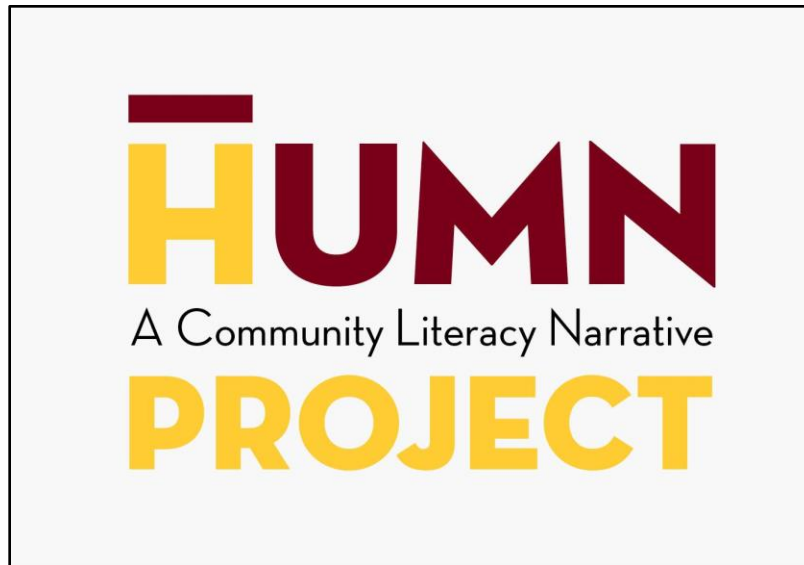


Figure 1. Logotype for The HUMN Project.

Thriving on the culture of an open campus and the available means for storytelling, The HUMN Project provides an opportunity for students to think about their literacy practices and those of others, as well as to consider issues surrounding literacy acquisition. The HUMN Project allows students to work in teams and meet with people on the University of Minnesota campus to collect accounts of how individuals remember learning to read and write; the conditions under which they continue reading and composing; and the influences, people, and values that shape their literate practices. Coupled with readings on critical literacy, power, and identity, as well as collaborative in-class activities, students will be given the chance to reflect on their personal literacy histories and to explore patterns of local literacies.

Narrative Theory and Functions of Literacy Narratives

Literacy narratives have a traditionally important place in the composition classroom. A literacy narrative is a first-hand account about an individual's reading or composing (or the teaching of reading or composing) in any form and context. Literacy narratives often focus on impactful memories about events, people, things, or places—times when one experiences success, failures, or any emotions associated with reading or composing. Through language in various forms, personal literacy narratives can serve as ways of constituting one's identity. Blake Scott (1997) observes that literacy narratives allow students the time to reflect on “everyday language acts they might normally overlook or dismiss as trivial” (p. 112), thus “throw[ing] into relief the knowledge and literacy they already have” (p. 113) and that such stories provide students the chance to “critique their literacies in light of the discourse communities to which they belong” (p. 112). Literacy narratives have become increasingly popular among teachers like Scott for their potential to introduce critical issues of race, class, and gender into the writing classroom. Such accounts allow for students to study the cultural influences that shape students' identities as learners, as well as to examine the literate lives of those who are not students.

Indeed, a meaningful college experience should allow students to learn and grapple with literacy values and practices that are different from their own. Scholars of literacy and composition have

noted that we can understand reading and composing as a set of practices and values when they are properly situated within the context of a particular historical period, a specific cultural environment, a cluster of actual material conditions, and the complex lives and experiences of individuals and their families (Selfe et al., 2013).

By using the term *literacy narrative* at its most granular level, I am referring to personal stories and accounts. These accounts are structured by “learned” and “internalized” understandings about literacy that are culturally constituted (Selfe et al., 2013). Such narratives are rich in meaning; they are simultaneously “practices and artifacts” (Brodkey, 1986, p. 26). And because our cultural understandings of literacy are “the tropic material of which literacy narratives are woven” (Selfe et al., 2013), an initiative like The HUMN Project may help to illuminate the constructedness of a student’s cultural values and social identities. Michael Bamberg (2005) connects this notion of storytelling to an action-oriented study of “language in communities of practice” (p. 215), which focuses on the discursive nature of narrative:

Rather than seeing narratives as intrinsically oriented toward coherence and authenticity, and inconsistencies as an analytic nuisance, the latter are exactly what is most interesting. They offer a way into examining how storytellers are bringing off and managing their social identities in context. (Bamberg, 2005, p. 222)

This further complicates both the teaching and learning of writing, and thusly makes The HUMN Project as a whole even more complex and valuable.

In theorizing the contributions of literacy narratives and defining the work they can accomplish, Selfe et al. (2013) have identified five areas of interest for teachers of composition:

- Literacy narratives and the information they convey about identity and identity formation
- Literacy narratives and the information they convey about historical and cultural context
- Literacy narratives and the role they play in representation and agency
- Literacy narratives as social/political action
- Literacy narratives and what they can tell us about teaching and learning

These areas serve as the foundation (or themes) of The HUMN Project. In my first-year composition course where this project is deployed, learning units were structured around these themes with readings that complement the surrounding topics. In other words, the course and the project complete each other. Briefly, I began with students’ personal narratives as way to enter the conversation on literacy and rhetoric of writing. Then, focusing on narratives as self-representations and a form of personal agency, I invited students to consider what constitutes the self and how language underlies meanings. By scrutinizing the rhetoric of power and social and political oppressions, I challenged students to consider the infrastructure of organized communities and how writing plays a role in creating knowledge and cultivating change. Finally, we focused on some 21st century teaching and learning issues—such as access, knowledge divide, and media literacy—through the discussions of popular, digital, and visual cultures, as well as multimodality. I will also teach students how to employ ethnography as a way for research and self-advancement. The last unit of the course aimed to redirect students to thinking about what they have learnt while doing The HUMN Project and how they can transfer those

knowledge into a research project, paired with their respective scholarly and professional interests (e.g., workplace narratives, health or medical humanities, digital storytelling, etc.).

Pedagogical Objectives

As a writing instructor, I place value on how language shapes the structures of our daily interaction and community development. While teaching, I strive to illuminate systems of struggles and oppression to unknowing students and focus on creating opportunities for conversations where inclusion, access, and students' relationship to writing are central concerns. It is my objective that students get an opportunity to explore critically and reflect rhetorically their thinking and writing skills through purpose-driven activities, helping them to adopt a disciplinary identity as writers who bring particular ways of seeing and ways of acting in and on the world around them.

Through The HUMN Project, I strived to guide students into thinking critically about their roles as emerging scholars and professionals in the society and how their literacy practices have served their personal and professional development. Following the footsteps of the Humans of New York project, I aimed to expand the landscape of literacy narratives to reach the wider campus community. I hoped, through the hands-on project, to help students experience a robust data gathering and reporting process via a quasi-ethnographic research methodology. Students would collectively design the research questions as relevant to the course theme, plan and execute the narratives documentation activities. To add value to this exercise, students were required to record and produce their corpus of literacy narratives in multiple formats, such as print, video, and audio. This allowed them to trace the digital literacy practices and cultural values of UMN citizens.

Learning from the Past: A Personal Anecdote

I am always fond of a popular Chinese saying that goes, the past is one's best teacher. There are valuable lessons to be learnt from one's past experience and those who ask the right questions are prepared to actualize greater potential in their future. My first encounter with writing literacy narratives was when I was assigned a digital literacy narrative assignment in my own first-year writing class. I remember writing about how I got my first cellphone and how short-text messaging had changed my relationship with writing in English. Then, in one of my master's level courses, I produced a narrative of teaching and learning with digital technologies. In both instances, writing a literacy narrative has helped me to reflect on my personal educational practices situated in lived experiences. Having benefited from such discursive reflection, I have in turn assigned literacy narrative in one of my first-year writing sections. Students did well in that assignment, even though nothing stuck out as exceptional from their work. In retrospect, I had not prepared the students well enough to consider the complexity of narratives and how they relate to identity and identity formation, historical and cultural contexts, representation and human agency, and narratives as social and political actions. In The HUMN Project, I rectified these shortcomings by focusing on reading and working with scholarships that theorize literacy narratives as a systematic way of understanding class, race, culture, and identity.

Learning Opportunities through The HUMN Project

In “Narrative Theory and Stories that Speak to Us,” Selfe et al. (2013) contend that by writing self-reflectively, students may identify their roles and responsibilities as writers—a sense of ethos, develop understand of literacy and agency as writers, and develop awareness of their writing—how their writing can effect change in their community. By externalizing such literacy practice, The HUMN Project encourages students assume the role of critical agents who amplify the voices of the community. Specifically, the project aims to help students:

- See with a lens through which they may examine their literacy practice as critical acts of inquiry.
- Study the cultural influences that shape individuals’ identities as learners.
- Examine the literate lives of those who are not students.
- Develop a sense of narrative agency by producing multimodal literacy narratives.

As a multifaceted initiative, The HUMN Project also allows the instructor to engage with literacy narratives in different ways. Particularly, the project encourages the instructor:

- To explore patterns of local literacies and literacy histories.
- To reflect on the influences, people, and values that shape literate practices.
- To learn how to instruct and execute narrative documentation activities.

The HUMN Project Process

The HUMN Project is designed to be a semester-long project that is integrated with the primary purposes of first-year writing at the University of Minnesota, i.e. critical reading and thinking, rhetorical analysis, constructing arguments, and drafting, revising, and editing in various academic genres. This could certainly be localized for other university writing programs in two- or four-year institutions, as well as adapted for middle and high school writing courses.

The following outlines the steps involved in pursuing the project: (For full description and timeline of the project, please refer to the attached handout [Appendix 1] written for students as well as a sample timeline of the project as integrated in my course calendar [Appendix 2].)

1. **Prepare:** Introduce students to the idea of literacy narrative by reviewing the DALN (The Ohio State University’s Digital Archive for Literacy Narrative; <http://daln.osu.edu>) and Center for Digital Storytelling (<http://storycenter.org>). Facilitate in-class discussions and instruct students to produce their personal literacy/digital literacy narratives. Conduct peer reviews on narratives. Hold large-group discussions to reflect on the features of narratives.
2. **Plan & Practice:** Introduce the rationale and goals of The HUMN Project. Facilitate a workshop to collectively generate interview questions, set up ground rules and boundaries, and evaluative criteria for outcomes in this project. Generate an interviewee consent form. Organize in-class simulations of street interviews, and then review and discuss what are some best practices and things to pay attention to when conducting interviews. Assign student working groups (pairs or groups of three).

3. **Produce:** Conduct Round One of actual interview. Allocate time for weekly check-in moments to discuss challenges and breakthroughs experienced by the students. Create a common drop-box for students to upload and share interview data from Round One interviews. Repeat this step for Round Two interviews.
4. **Publish:** Design or set up The HUMN Project web portal (via Tumblr). Facilitate workshops to coach students in reproducing textual narratives from their interviews. Hold proper sessions (including tutorials) to edit and render videos and audios from the interviews. Conduct large-group peer reviews on the final drafts before publishing them onto the web.
5. **Present:** Soft-launch The HUMN Project website in class. Hold presentation sessions for students to reflect on the lessons learned from interviewing people and working in groups, and discuss the data/findings from this project. Collectively create a document of recommendations for future studies or projects of a similar kind.

Readings for Students

To help students achieve the learning objectives of The HUMN Project, the following texts were assigned throughout the course as conceptual grounding for the project.

Foundational readings on rhetoric, arguments, discourse communities, and writing:

- Covino, W., & Jolliffe, D. (1995). What is rhetoric? In William Covino and David Jolliffe (Eds.), *Rhetoric: Concepts, definitions, boundaries* (pp. 3-26). Boston, MA: Allyn and Bacon.
- Grant-Davie, K. (1997). Rhetorical situations and their constituents. *Rhetoric Review*, 15(2), 264-279.
- Greene, S. (2001). Argument as conversation: The role of inquiry in writing a researched argument. In Wendy Bishop and Pavel Zemliansky (Eds.), *The subject is research* (pp. 145-164). Portsmouth, NH: Boynton/Cook.
- Swales, J. (1990). The concept of discourse community. In John Swale, *Genre analysis: English in academic and research settings* (pp. 21-32). Boston, MA: Cambridge University Press.
- Sommers, N. (1980). Revision strategies of student writers and experienced adult writers. *College Composition and Communication*, 31(4), 378-388.

On narratives, literacy, and identity formation:

- Brandt, D. (1998). Sponsors of literacy. *College Composition and Communication*, 49(2), 165-185.
- X, Malcolm. (1965). Learning to read. In Alex Haley (Ed.), *The autobiography of Malcolm X*. New York, NY: Ballantine.
- Alexie, S. (1997). The joy of reading and writing: Superman and me. In Michael Dorris and Emilie Buchwald (Eds.), *The most wonderful books: Writers on discovering the pleasures of reading* (pp. 3-6). Minneapolis, MN: Milkweed.
- Strasser, E. (2007). Writing what matters: A student's struggle to bridge the academic/personal divide. *Young Scholars in Writing*, 5, 146-150.

On narratives, representation, power, and agency:

- Magee, S-K. (2009). College admission essays: A genre of masculinity. *Young Scholars in Writing*, 7, 116-121.
- Daya L. & Lau, S. (2007). Power and narrative. *Narrative Inquiry*, 17(1), 1-11.
- Ahearn, L. (2001). Language and agency. *Annual Review of Anthropology*, 30(1), 109-137.

On ethnography and multimodal composing:

- Ellis, C., Adams, T.E., & Bochner, A.P. (2011). Authoethnography: An overview. *Forum: Qualitative Social Research*, 12(1). Retrieved from <http://www.qualitative-research.net/index.php/fqs/article/view/1589/3095>
- Grabill et al. (2013). Revisualizing composition: Mapping the writing lives of first-year college students. *WIDE Research Center*. East Lansing, MI: Michigan State University.
- Takayoshi, P. & Selfe, C. (2007). Thinking about multimodality. In Pamela Takayoshi and Cynthia Selfe (Eds.), *Multimodal composition: Resources for teachers* (pp. 1-12). Cresskill, NJ: Hampton Press.
- Palczewski, C., Ice, R. & Fritch, J. (2012). Visual rhetoric. In Catherine Palczewski, Richard Ice, and John Fritch (Eds.), *Rhetoric in civic life*. State College, PA: Strata Publishing.

Project Tools

As a multimodal project, The HUMN Project aims to give students an opportunity to play the role of producer and create a multimedia exhibition of the literacy narratives they collect during the project. The following are lists of production instruments students need for The HUMN Project.

For in-class simulations and actual interviews:

- Cameras with video-recording function (may be provided by students using their smartphones or rented from university libraries)
- Tripods and microphones (optional)

For post-interview productions:

- File sharing: Dropbox, Moodle, or Google Drive
- Video editing: Apple iMovie, Windows Movie Maker, or other software
- Audio editing: GarageBand, Audacity, Adobe Audition or other software
- Other premium production software and tutorials available through university libraries or media services
- Hosting site for The HUMN Project: Tumblr.com

Discussion Prompts

In my experience of teaching with literacy narratives, I have learned that not many students have a solid grasp of what literacy narratives entail. To prepare the class for meaningful discussions, well thought-out prompts are necessary. The following is a list of suggestions for in-class dialogues or writing prompts to get students started on thinking about their personal literacy histories and building the interview questions for The HUMN Project:

- Have you ever written or received a goodbye letter? A love letter? A poem? A note from someone you care about? What makes those writings significant to you? What are your experiences with reading and writing that help with understanding these writings?
- Did you learn to read by studying the back of a cereal box? A TV guide? An Ikea user manual? Who/What taught you to read?
- Have you ever felt illiterate? Can you tell a story about a time when you were punished or rewarded for reading or not reading?
- Elaborate on a time when you were rewarded for writing insightfully.
- Did your parents read you bedtime stories? What are the affective factors involved in learning to read and write?
- What does it mean to be a literate person? Why should we be literate citizens?
- What happens when someone is illiterate? Why are some people illiterate?
- What is the importance of literacy in the 21st century? In school? In the workplace?
- Can you describe a story about how others have helped you write and read?
- Can you recreate your first experience with using a computer? The first email you composed? Your first Facebook status? The first video you made and/or uploaded to YouTube?

The HUMN Project Assessment

The success of this project is primarily measured by the how well the final project turns out and how much the students have learned from its process. To encourage students to work collaboratively as well as independently during different phases of this project, two grades were assigned to a student upon completion of the project. A class grade was given judging at the overall quality of the final digital collection of literacy narratives. An individual grade was given by the instructor to a student based on the student's engagement with the project. Ideally, students should be able to articulate the following criteria, either through their final iteration of the project or verbal feedback:

- Clear, directly stated research intentions
- A description of what they found in their interviews and what conclusions that leads them to
- An explanation of "so what?" at the end of this project
- An insightful reflection of the learning that happens during the course of this project and recommendations for future researchers

Outcome

The final face of The HUMN Project was a website (Figure 2) that showcases interview videos and transcripts that students have curated over the course of the semester. Students have collectively decided on the layout of the website and how the videos would appear on the site. They have also chosen to feature quotes from their interviewees as bylines for the videos, and added emphasis (bold texts) to values of literacy they identified as key constructs in the interviews.

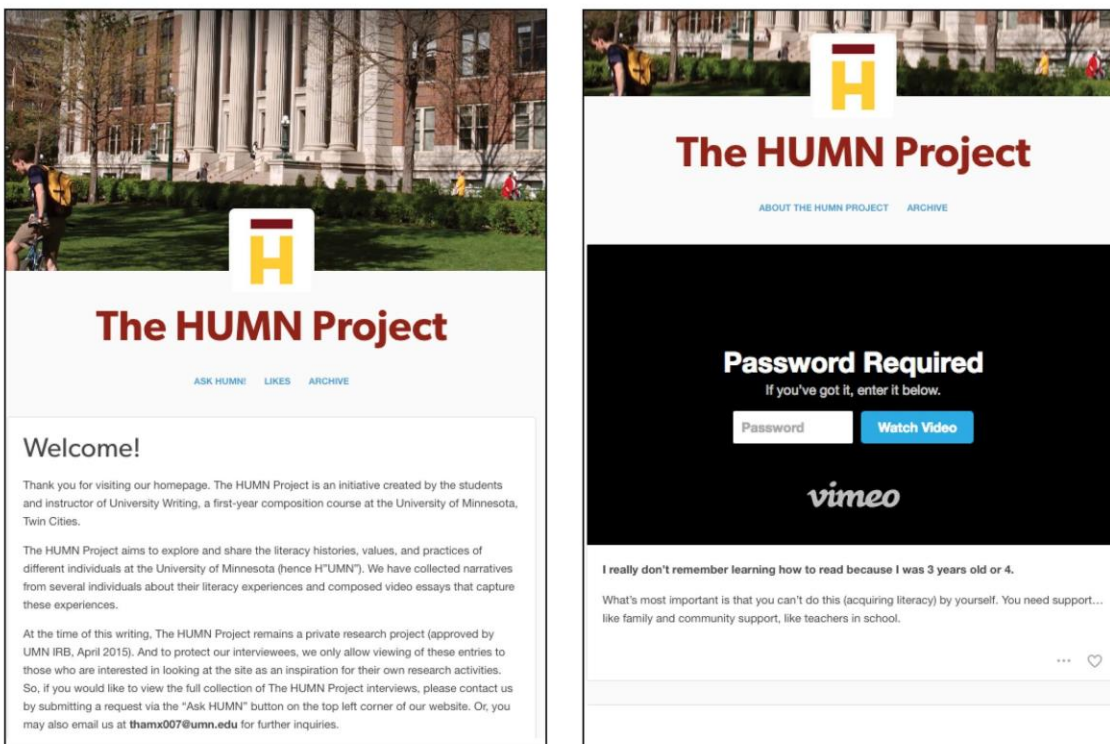


Figure 2. A screenshot of the homepage and videos page of The HUMN Project.

All of the interviewees have signed a release for their video recordings to be made public; however, our Institutional Review Board (IRB) has required this project to do its best in preserving the privacy of its subjects. For this reason, the entire website is password-protected, including the individual videos. Viewers of the site would need to acquire a special password from the site administrator (students and myself) to access the site and the videos. I will continue the discussion on logistical concerns with IRB at the conclusion section of this essay.

Student Reflections on The HUMN Project

At the end of the semester, my students participated in a public presentation of their work in this project. At the annual First-Year Writing Symposium organized by the writing program at our institution, students shared their experience in learning how about literacy sponsors, and collecting literacy narratives from their interviewees. They discussed how this project has made them more aware of the diversity within the campus community, and how it has changed their

perspectives on the importance of one's literacy education on their social and professional outlook.

Taking advantage of the student ratings of teaching (course assessment) before the closing of the semester, I have collected individual student feedback on this project. Upon compiling all responses, three themes emerged:

- Learning about interviewing
- Applying literacy concepts
- Considering different values and practices

Students were excited that they got to conduct a project outside of the confines of the classroom. Specifically, they reported that being able to speak with people around the campus was an added value to their experience in the course. Students said that after completing The HUMN Project, they felt more confident approaching people and asking them for short interviews. Although this does not have a direct relation to the course objectives, it has certainly allowed students to practice a skill that is transferrable across disciplines and work contexts.

The second theme found in the student reflections was about the application of concepts learned in the course onto the production of The HUMN Project. Students reported that they liked being able to put the lessons into practice. They did so by using the vocabulary around literacy and literacy sponsors in their interview questions, which involved clarifying the terms for interviewees (sometimes by providing examples) when necessary. This way, students felt that they had mastery over the concepts of literacy beyond just reading about them in their coursework.

Finally, students also reported that they have learned to consider diverse literacy values and practices around the campus community. Although surrounded by largely similar academic and domestic cultures, students said that they saw differences in individual literacy histories, which informed their respective beliefs and attitudes toward certain literacy practices. This realization has helped students to be more aware about the people around them in terms of individual cultures—what it means to read and write, and using those skills, in those cultures.

Closing Thoughts

Working on The HUMN Project with my students has been a rewarding experience for myself as an instructor as it had taught me how to be agile and responsive to students' needs during the semester. Certainly, the benefits of engaging students through a class-wide, semester-long activity outweigh the technical efforts required to pull different pieces of a puzzle together. Getting IRB approval in conducting The HUMN Project is among the most challenging of those efforts. As this project involved human subjects but without any immediate risks, it was required of the project principal investigator (i.e., the teacher) to acquire an exempt from IRB review. For me, it wasn't successful at first try; the IRB review committee returned the application after my initial submission asking for more information on how interview video clips would be stored or displayed. It was obligatory for me to ensure that all subjects' identity were protected through proper authentication requirement. Since it was the project's intention to showcase the curated

literacy narratives, I had to make a case to the IRB about the educational purposes of this display and how the identity of the subjects interviewed might still be protected. In fact, Selfe et al. (2013) have also described their own struggles in developing the DALN and gaining their IRB approval for publishing submitted narratives. The best approach to a project of this nature, from my experience along with Selfe et al.'s, is to enroll volunteers for interviews rather than approaching them. For as long as the interview subjects offer their own narratives and provide written consent for release, the IRB would permit this sort of project.

I invite literacy educators and researchers to envision future iterations of The HUMN Project for their own classes. As demonstrated throughout this essay, literacy narratives are more than mere stories about people; literacy narratives often reveal societal issues including structural oppression, racism, institutional powers, among others—all of which have direct impact on how an individual learns to read and write. By engaging first-hand with everyday members of a given community, students may encounter personal accounts that show them what really happens outside the brick-and-mortar classrooms. These accounts would affect them deeply, especially when they connect and apply concepts that are taught in the classroom. As Paulo Freire contends in his landmark book, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970),

For apart from inquiry, apart from the praxis, individuals cannot be truly human. Knowledge emerges only through invention and re-invention, through the restless, impatient, continuing, hopeful inquiry human beings pursue in the world, with the world, and with each other. (Freire, 1970, p. 21)

With an eye toward cultivating critical literacy, it was my hope that this community literacy narrative project would create an exciting rhythm in a composition course and give student a multimodal composing experience they may not have had otherwise. On a broader perspective, I also hoped this project will inspire those who might be touched by it, in one way or another, to think more critically about literacy and to develop a sense of narrative agency by creating and sharing literacy narratives with others. And as educators, I think we are in a favorable position to promote such experience.

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Appendix 1: The HUMN Project Description/Handout

The HUMN Project is a class initiative that aims to feature individual literacy narratives collected on the University of Minnesota campus. It is a cultural project that highlights individual literacy histories, practices, and stories. The outcome of this project is a digital collection of multimodal literacy narratives (text, image, video, audio) that provides a historical record of literacy practices and cultural values of the individuals interviewed.

What is a Literacy Narrative?

The following is an excerpt taken from the OSU Digital Archive of Literacy Narratives (DALN), which explains what a literacy narrative encompasses:

A literacy narrative is simply a collection of items that describe how you learned to read, write, and compose. This collection might include a story about learning to read cereal boxes and a story about learning to write plays. Some people will want to record their memories about the bedtime stories their parents read to them, the comics they looked at in the newspaper, or their first library card. Others will want to tell a story about writing a memorable letter, learning how to write on a computer or taking a photograph; reading the Bible, publishing a 'zine', or sending an e-mail message.

Your Role as Producers of The HUMN Project

As students of WRIT 1301 University Writing, Sec. 055, you have the privilege to be the producers of this project. You are given the opportunity to design the interview procedure, conduct the interviews, and publish collected data to a web portal. Through this project, you will learn to:

- see with a lens through which you may examine your literacy practice as critical acts of inquiry,
- study the cultural influences that shape individuals' identities as learners,
- examine the literate lives of those who are not students, and
- develop a sense of narrative agency by producing multimodal literacy narratives

Assuming the role of critical agents who amplify the voices in our campus community, you will develop an awareness of your own writing and how writing can be used to negotiate power and change in our society.

How the Project Will Unfold

Phase 1: Plan and Practice

We will first review some examples on DALN to identify features of a literacy narrative and produce our personal narrative as the initial process in this project. We will couple this exercise with readings on personal knowledge, power, and identity formation in political contexts. Then,

we will collectively generate interview questions, learning questions, interview “best practices,” and conduct a mock interview in class as practice.

Phase 2: Produce

There will be two actual rounds of interviewing in this project. You will be paired up with another classmate to conduct these interviews on campus following the reflections and discussions from our mock interviews. Between Round One and Round Two of campus interviews, we will check in regularly to identify challenges and breakthroughs experienced by everyone in the class. We will continue to read articles on representation, agency, and multimodal composing.

Phase 3: Publish

After collecting, rendering, and uploading all interview data onto Scalar, our hosting server for The HUMN Project, we will review, edit, and soft-launch the digital collection in class at the end of the semester. We will write a collect document to recommend directions for future studies or projects.

Evaluation

Your final iteration of The HUMN Project should result in a meaningful communication that motivates a relevant audience to take actions on the issues you have explored in this project. You will receive a group score on how effectively you and your class have communicated about these issues through the digital collection (i.e. quality of written and visual works, rhetorical strategies employed, overall persuasive value). You will also receive an individual score on based on your engagement with the project. This individual score will be a summation of your peers’ evaluation of your involvement in the working groups and my own evaluation.

Appendix 2: The HUMN Project Timeline and Course Calendar

The following calendar and activities may be altered any time during the semester if the need arises. Students are responsible for all announcements given during class, whether they are present or not.

Week	Tuesday	Thursday	The HUMN Project
1 1/20 1/22	Jumping In		
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Course and syllabus overview Goals and expectations What is First-Year Writing? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Personal Learning Network (PLN) The learning ecosystem Rhetoric and writing studies as scholarly disciplines 	
2 1/27 1/29	Understanding Rhetoric & Writing		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Introduction Working groups
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Read: Covino & Jolliffe (325-346) Introduction to Rhetoric The composing process 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Read: Grant-Davie (347-364) Rhetorical situations Introduction to The HUMN Project Assign working groups 	
3 2/3 2/5	Rhetoric and Literacy		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Generate personal literacies
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Read: Brandt (43-64) Read: X, Malcom (119-127) Literacy narratives Intro to MA 1: Literacy Narrative 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Read: Swales (215-229) Rhetorical appeals Conventions of writing Discourse communities 	
4 2/10 2/12	Rhetoric of Representation		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Generate interview questions Generate expectations, or “ground rules”
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Read: Magee (460-468) Issues of representation Annotating a text Rhetorical & strategic reading 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Peer review for MA 1 Collective generation of interview questions and expectations for The HUMN Project 	
5 2/17 2/19	Power, Identity, and Agency		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> In class simulations
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Read: Alexie (128-132) MA 1 due Intro to MA 2: Critical Analysis Writing a synthesis Academic documentations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Read: Daya & Lau (Moodle) Writing identities In-class mock interviews 	
6 2/24 2/26	Ethnography and the Writer-Scholar		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Round 1 Interviews
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Read: Ellis, Adams & Bochner (Moodle) Designing and writing ethnographies Documenting narratives 	1-on-1 Conference with Instructor	
7 3/3 3/5	Check-in Week, or <i>How are you doin'?</i>		
	1-on-1 Conference with Instructor	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Share and review PLN v.1 Peer Review for MA 2 	
	Rhetoric and Popular & Digital & Visual Cultures		

8 3/10 3/12	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Read: Palczewski et al. (Moodle) MA 2 due Popular and digital cultures Visual rhetoric I 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Read: Grabill (724-739) Visual rhetoric 2 Media literacy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Round 2 Interviews
9	SPRING BREAK – NO CLASSES ON 3/17 & 3/19		
10 3/24 3/26	Putting in Your Oar <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Read: Greene (27-39) Writing a research paper Writing arguments Intro to MA 3: Research Paper 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Writing proposals Upload all interview data to shared folder 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Clean up data Upload to shared folder
11 3/31 4/2	Multimedia Composing <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Library Research Orientation Meet at _____ 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Read: Takayoshi & Selfe (Moodle) Considering multimodality Review all narrative data; discuss editing and rendering strategies 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Edit and render narratives
12 4/7 4/9	Hindsight 20-20 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Proposal due Read: Sommers (576-589) Refining your research questions Share and review PLN v.2 	1-on-1 Conference with Instructor	
13 4/14 4/16	21st Century Presentations 1-on-1 Conference with Instructor	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Annotated bibliography due Review finalized collection of narratives for The HUMN Project Designing a Pecha-Kucha presentation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Review finalized drafts of narratives
14 4/21 4/23	Getting Ready for the Finale <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Peer Review for MA 3 Discussions of findings from The HUMN Project 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Peer review for MA 3 Presentation Drawing conclusions from The HUMN Project 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Discussion of project findings Drawing conclusions
15 4/28 4/30	Pecha-Kucha Time! <ul style="list-style-type: none"> MA 3 Presentations Soft launch of The HUMN Project digital portal 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> MA 3 Presentations Produce recommendations for future HUMN projects 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Soft-launch The HUMN Project portal Produce recommendations for the future
16 5/5 5/7	That's a Wrap! <ul style="list-style-type: none"> MA 3 Presentations MA 3 due Share and review PLN v.3 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Optional revisions for MA 1 & 2 due Peer evaluations and reflections Course recap and evaluations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Peer evaluations Reflections

WHO AM I TO TRY AND TEACH ENGLISH?:
PREPARING PRESERVICE TEACHERS FROM ALL DISCIPLINES
TO UNDERSTAND, ANTICIPATE, AND ADDRESS RESISTANCE
TO WRITING ACROSS THE CURRICULUM
RUSSELL GREINKE
UNIVERSITY OF CENTRAL MISSOURI

Abstract

The best way for students to become more effective readers and writers is to be immersed in reading and writing, but, as an English teacher, I know the sinking feeling that when it comes to reading and writing, some colleagues from other departments consider it exclusively the English department's job to ensure students are adequately prepared to read and write at grade level. In order to advance the vital cause of promoting the value of writing-across-the-curriculum (WAC) both below college and in dual-credit college courses, this paper presents the counterarguments typically encountered from other departments and offers future teachers advice on how to address the skeptics. I start with a literature review of key articles, then proceed to identify and refute the most commonly heard arguments in opposition to WAC so that new teachers entering the profession will not be caught off guard by arguments they had not previously considered. Some unique approaches to handling the resistance to WAC will be offered in the "findings" section.

Who Am I to Try and Teach English?:
Preparing Preservice Teachers from All Disciplines to Understand, Anticipate, and
Address Resistance to Writing Across the Curriculum

Literature Review

I have identified the following works as exemplars in addressing faculty resistance to WAC. Citation information is followed by summaries.

The first two entries suggest ways to expand the boundaries of what is possible in WAC. The first demonstrates that large lecture classes can effectively incorporate writing, and the second posits that even genres such as creative writing can work across disciplines.

*Beall, H, & Trimbur, J. (1993). Writing in chemistry: Keys to student underlife. *College Teaching* 41(2), 50-54.

Can writing across the curriculum work in large lecture classes? According to the authors, "this way of posing the problem neglects the fact that students spend most of their time in large lectures writing—taking notes on the instructor's lecture. It is not the presence or absence of writing that is the issue in lecture

classes, rather it is the kind of writing students do and the uses to which that writing is put” (p. 52). As a follow-up, the authors explained that, “this essay describes changes that took place when the instructor of a general chemistry class of over three hundred students at an engineering college added brief (five minute) writing assignments to the curriculum. These writing assignments, requiring students to explain chemical concepts in their own words, were written during class time, read by the instructor, and then three to five of the best were shared with the class” (p. 50). The researchers found that the in-class writings helped the teachers to gauge what the students were learning from the lectures and assigned reading.

*Young, A. (2003). Writing across and against the curriculum. *College Composition and Communication* 54, 472-85.

Young leads off this article with his own Abstract: “After reviewing my career as a teacher of composition and literature and as a writing program administrator of writing across the curriculum, I discuss the potential of poetry across the curriculum as an important tool for writing ‘against’ the curriculum of academic discourse. When they write poetry, students often express meaningful thoughts and emotions not readily available to them in disciplinary languages and contexts” (p. 472).

To persuade fellow faculty to engage with writing requires one to understand and acknowledge the beliefs of those who are in opposition. The next entry points to the value of approaching reluctant faculty as one would a resistant student. That is followed by an article arguing that those who train teachers must buy into the notion of WAC before bringing others on board.

*Boice, R. (1990). Faculty resistance to writing-intensive courses. *Teaching of Psychology* 17(1), 13-17.

This Abstract appears at the beginning of the article: “This article examines professors’ resistance to implementing writing as learning and contends that strategies developed for inhibited writers can also help inhibited teachers. These strategies were combined with surveys and observations of professors implementing writing-intensive courses to produce a sequence of steps for overcoming resistance: (a) raising consciousness about resistance, (b) helping students generate momentum, (c) establishing regimens of brief writing sessions, and (d) making writing more socially skilled.”

*Chowenhill, D. C. (1996). *Faculty resistance to writing across the curriculum training: A study of two two-year colleges*. (Doctoral dissertation). U of California, Berkeley, CA. (DAI 57: 3333A)

Abstract (from DAI): “The argument of this study is that trainers responsible for teaching two-year college instructors the principles and methods of writing-to-learn activities must take into account the ideas and beliefs that participating

instructors hold, at the outset, regarding teaching and learning. Failure to identify these ideas and beliefs, and to have the participating instructors examine them, will yield uneven results, with many of the trained instructors not adopting the lessons they have learned. For this study, sixteen community college instructors, of two two-year colleges, were interviewed regarding their ideas and beliefs about teaching and learning, about their attitudes about writing across the curriculum training they had received, and about how the training has affected their teaching practices. Interviews were also conducted of these instructors' writing across the curriculum trainers, regarding their own beliefs about teaching and learning, and their goals as trainers. The data gathered from these interviews is analyzed with the Swanson-Owens locus of attention framework, by which an instructor's primary instructional concerns can be located on a grid controlled by four factors that shape classroom instruction--teacher, student, knowledge, and materials/activities. After identifying each instructor's and trainer's locus of attention, this study focuses on the correlations between the six loci of attention and the extent to which the instructors adopted the lessons of their training. This study concludes with recommendations for writing across the curriculum trainers.”

One problem, as might be expected, is the feeling of territoriality that can arise in academic departments. WAC must build bridges and earn the trust of other disciplines. The three entries that follow delve into the particulars of a campus-wide undertaking.

*Fulwiler, T., & Young, A. (Eds.). (1990). *Programs that work: Models and methods for writing across the curriculum*. Portsmouth, NH: Boynton-Cook.

Of particular interest is the “Afterword” of this book, *The Enemies of Writing across the Curriculum*, authored by Young and Fulwiler. They organize the resistance to WAC into six categories. **Uncertain Leadership:** WAC is often relegated to adjunct faculty, whose jobs are less stable than those in tenured positions. This is because WAC “is not considered an academic discipline” (p. 288). **English Department Orthodoxy:** Even when WAC is housed in the English department, opposition may appear in that literary studies are considered more the mission of English than writing, which is often cast off on teaching assistants. **Compartmentalized Academic Administration:** Higher education is organized into disciplines, so a program that cuts across disciplinary boundaries is not a good fit in such a structure. As such, “writing programs remain isolated and vulnerable” (p. 290). **Traditional Reward System:** Research is rewarded more than teaching, which devalues time-consuming efforts by faculty to make undergraduate classes more student-oriented. **Testing and Quantification:** Objective test scores, not subjective writing assignments, are the evaluation instruments of choice. If one is teaching to the test, writing becomes a luxury rather than a necessity. **Entrenched Attitudes:** There are administrators who won’t make the long-term commitment, in terms of budget and resources, that a successful WAC program requires. There are faculty who are territorial about

their traditional teaching methods. There are students who resent any additional assignments.

*Mahala, D., & Swilky, J. (1994). "Resistance and reform: The functions of expertise in writing across the curriculum." *Language and Learning Across the Disciplines* 1(2), 35-62.

This article is divided into three sections. **I. Change at the Margins and Center: WAC Reform in Its "Second Stage."** Where does WAC fit into the university structure? An interdisciplinary program like WAC does not fit easily into a division of disciplines built around expertise. The authors believe that WAC should strive for "mainstream legitimacy" (p. 37) and not settle for change "at the margins." **II. Dominant, Residual, and Emergent Cultures: Expertise as an Obstacle to and Impetus for Reform.** The various academic disciplines tend to focus more on "their differences rather than their similarities" (p. 37). When faculty see themselves as experts in just one area, they may view writing as something to be left to the "writing experts." Writing specialists may be seen as service providers, as are technology support staff. Some faculty may resist the student-centered educational theory that seems to be packaged with WAC. Cultural studies, women's studies, and honors colleges offer models (and allies?) of how WAC might cut across disciplines. **III. Disciplinary Rhetoric, Power, and Permanence in WAC Research and Reform.** WAC needs a research component that is interdisciplinary and makes ties to teaching practices. The authors quote from another article, which argues that "permanent success in the WAC movement will be established only when writing faculty and those from other disciplines meet halfway" (p. 50).

*Patton, M. D., Krawitz, A., Libbus, K., Ryan, M., and Martha A. Townsend, M. A. (1998). Dealing with resistance to WAC in the natural and applied sciences. *Language and Learning Across the Disciplines* 3(1), 64-76.

These five authors include members of the University of Missouri/Columbia's Campus Writing Board, defined as "the policy-making body that peer reviews WI course proposals" (p. 75). Each author writes a separate section. Patton's **Introduction** notes that despite MU's WAC program having grown to include "seven full-time employees" who oversee "about two hundred WI courses annually" (p. 64), there are still "skeptics" and "curmudgeons" (p. 64). Krawitz's **Faculty Resistance: An Engineer's Perspective** identifies resistance to WAC in engineering as rooted in the belief that engineering should stress vocational training, not critical thinking. Also, there is a tendency to resist change, and most engineering faculty were "trained to be professionals in their fields, not teachers" (p. 65). Faculty may not respect learning theory and may put their energy into research, which promotion and tenure favors. There may also be "a fundamental lack of understanding about writing to learn" (p. 66). Krawitz countered this resistance by arguing that the real world presents open-ended problems, not just formulaic quizzes. WAC presentations could be made to "industrial advisory boards" and WAC workshop could be held "specifically for engineers" (p. 67).

Libbus's **Multiple Sites of Resistance: A Nursing Perspective** points out that nursing is a creative activity that can be enhanced by WAC. Nursing majors, who must pass rigorous licensing exams, may feel writing is an intrusion on their time. Libbus believes that WAC will help nurses become more independent in the rigid hierarchy of the medical field. Ryan's **Resistance as a Symptom of a Larger Malady** argues that teaching should be considered scholarship since its goal is to "transform and extend knowledge" (p. 72). Pressure can be brought to bear both inside and outside the academy for "institutional recognition for Teaching Scholarship" (p. 74). Townsend's **Future Considerations** offers a variety of reasons for WAC's success at MU. It has "high-level administrative support" and control "has always rested in the hands of faculty." It is significant "that WAC and WI courses are integrally tied to four of MU's central missions." Additional reasons include workshops, letters of support, nominations for teaching awards, "and a campuswide publication." (p. 75)

The following entries argue that WAC must be absorbed into the culture of the institution in order to receive adequate support.

*White, E. M. (1991). Shallow roots or taproots for writing across the curriculum? *ADE Bulletin* 98, 29-33.

White argues that for WAC to succeed on campus, it must sink deep "taproots" into the university structure. Otherwise, "the program is peripheral to the academic departments and hence vulnerable to budget cuts and to administrators' shifting interests" (p. 29). White's institution, California State University, San Bernardino (CSUSB), may offer an example of a successful implementation of WAC: 1. Writing courses are required for graduation. 2. Writing courses are "located in schools," not departments, addressing the drawbacks of overspecialization. 3. "School and university coordinators are assigned time to monitor and support the courses" (p. 31). 4. "Enrollment caps are set at 20" (p. 31). 5. "Faculty development is ongoing" (p. 31). 6. A common final essay test brings together all the WAC faculty once a term to talk about writing. White warns to be on the lookout for the following threats to WAC: 1. Financial constraints. 2. Faculty who get territorial about their classes. 3. Turning writing courses over to TAs from the English department can seem like an easy out. 4. If the WAC coordinator is untenured, he or she may be vulnerable to campus politics.

*Swilky, J. (1991). *Cross-curricular writing instruction: Can writing instructors resist institutional resistance?* (Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Conference on College Composition and Communication, March 21-23, 1991.)

The database ERIC includes the following Abstract: "A case study of the responses of two faculty members to a seminar designed to help them use writing-across-the-curriculum in their classrooms was undertaken. The purpose of the seminar was to examine the positive and negative views of the concept of

“resistance” to illuminate reasons for, and forms of, faculty resistance to change. The seminar participants used in the case study were both senior members of the faculty: one was a rhetorician and the other was a language philosopher. The rhetorician demonstrated assumptions on learning and teaching which were at odds with the objectives of the seminar. Yet while he initially resisted ideas about writing-to-learn, he has continued to scrutinize and revise his teaching to incorporate writing-to-learn into his teaching style in the semester after the seminar. The language philosopher, however, based his objections to using writing-to-learn on a perceived unbearable increase in his workload. The language philosopher discussed his teaching with the seminar leader only sporadically in the semester after the seminar and confessed at the end of the semester that he has not incorporated elements of the seminar into his teaching because of a perceived increase in workload. Findings suggest that seminar leaders need to collaborate with instructors as they revise their courses so as to be able to understand the sources and nature of resistance and to assist teachers who are serious about changing their philosophy.”

This entry presents a case study of WAC implementation and the assessment of its effectiveness.

*Young, A., & Fulwiler, T. (Eds.) (1986). *Writing Across the Disciplines: Research into Practice*. Upper Montclair, NJ: Boynton-Cook.

In the Bibliography in the back of Fulwiler and Young’s *Programs That Work*, C. W. Griffin offered the following Abstract of this anthology of essays: “The eighteen essays collected in this book describe the development of the WAC program at Michigan Technological University and attempt to measure its effects on both faculty and students. Essays in the first section describe the theoretical basis for the program, the sense of community it fostered, and the research model that was developed in order to evaluate the program. Those in the second section measure the impact of the program on faculty attitudes toward writing, on pedagogical practices, and on students. Essays in the third section, which describe writing in psychology, biology, engineering, and mathematics, attempt to demonstrate in specific ways that assigning certain kinds of writing does help students learn better, while essays in the final section describe the setbacks and surprises encountered during the development of the program” (p. 319).

We also get reminders that WAC implementation may require navigating the treacherous waters of academic politics:

*Russell, D. R. (1987). Writing across the curriculum and the communications movement: Some lessons from the past. *College Composition and Communication* 38, 184-194.

In the Bibliography in the back of Fulwiler and Young’s *Programs That Work*, C. W. Griffin offers the following Abstract of this article: “Using the examples of early WAC programs at Colgate and Berkeley, both of which flourished in the 1950s but fell victim in the 1960s to the ‘compartmentalized structure of

academia and the entrenched attitudes in the university both toward writing and toward interdepartmental programs,' this author argues that 'WAC programs must be woven so tightly into the fabric of the institution as to resist the unraveling effects of academic politics.'" (p. 315)

*Swanson-Owens, D. Identifying natural sources of resistance: A case study of implementing writing across the curriculum. *Research in the Teaching of English* 20.1, 69-97.

This article begins with the following Abstract: "To develop an insider's perspective as to what strategies teachers employ in their efforts to translate instructional theory into occasions for learning, this study represents teachers' perspectives in a way that (1) identifies some of the legitimate and unexpected resistance to implementing new curriculum, and (2) suggests an analytic model of theoretical and practical value to those interested in curriculum implementation. Two high school teachers collaborated with the researcher to develop writing tasks that would encourage careful thought and learning on the part of the students. Both teachers were observed before and during the time they developed and implemented these writing tasks. On the basis of the field notes and interview transcripts, an analytic model was developed and used to: 1. characterize a single meaning system here defined as a "curricular system of meaning"; and 2. identify several natural sources of resistance to innovation. The discussion focuses specifically on two components of this meaning system: (a) "locus of attention" here defined as a critical point of balance in the system which enables the teacher to negotiate a number of delicately balanced and sometimes conflicting concerns, and (b) "conditions of instruction," defined as the underlying conditions that influence instructional practice. These conditions include the teacher's conceptions about the source of knowledge, the development of knowledge, and the goals of instruction. Evidence cited suggests that these two concerns are crucial to the effective and efficient working of a system, and that both are thus natural sources of resistance" (p. 69).

Faculty may not feel up to the task of teaching writing effectively:

*Winterowd, W. R., & Gillespie, V., (Eds.) (1994). *Composition in context: Essays in honor of Donald C. Stewart*. Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP.

Of particular interest in this anthology are two essays--*Enlarging the Context: From Teaching Just Writing, to Teaching Academic Subjects with Writing*, by Richard L. Larson, and *Impediments to Change in Writing-across-the Curriculum Programs*, by Richard E. Young. Larson sees growth in academic incorporation of writing. He identifies multiple reasons for resistance: "Many faculty will not ask for writing, they say, for numerous reasons: they do not themselves write and they lack confidence in *themselves* as writers; they lack the time to read the students' writing; the writing is so poor that they cannot read or understand it; there is no support for their spending the time needed to read the writing; they are not comfortable talking about writing; they do not know how to assign writing;

they have too much material to cover to permit them to talk about writing; and so on” (p. 121). The solution? Faculty should realize that despite their lack of background in teaching writing, they are the best resources for writing in their disciplines; experienced teachers in other academic fields are farther ahead on the learning curve regarding writing than the teaching assistants who often teach composition; writing is the ideal way to introduce majors to their chosen fields; WAC will increase student interest in writing across the board; and students need to write past the first year of college if any gains are to be retained.

Young argued that the resistance is rooted in “a clash of cultures, of shared beliefs, attitudes, and social patterns that shape our lives” (p. 127). This is a critical point for WAC administrators because “The difference in the beliefs and practices of the outsider and of the insider can function like an invisible wall between the participants that precludes cooperation” (p. 127). Any approach to WAC that does not address the underlying assumptions behind faculty objections is not likely to succeed.

One final entry encourages us to approach resistance as having a positive connotation, to view it as something other than an obstacle:

*Swilky, J. (1992). Reconsidering faculty resistance to writing reform. *WPA: Writing Program Administration* 16(1-2), 50-60.

This essay posits that the word resistance can have both positive and negative meanings. For example, if a teacher says she is teaching her students resistance to the “dominant ideology,” that would carry positive connotations for most academics. Therefore, Swilky suggests, try thinking of faculty resistance to WAC as “something other or more than ‘negative’ behavior” (p. 51). To do otherwise, Swilky believes, “limits our ability to distinguish unproductive opposition to arguments for reform from productive responses that question the agendas that reformers impose on others” (p. 51). By approaching WAC via conversations and collaboration with faculty, WAC practitioners can “attain fuller understanding of their ideology and resistance, and with this knowledge we can work more effectively to encourage different levels of transformation” (p. 58-59).

Methodology

One boundary I decided early on in researching this paper was that I would not look at *student* resistance to WAC. I assumed that anything that required more from students would meet initial resistance, but the best chance to win students over would be if writing permeates education. One suggestion I have, in fact, is that faculty talk to their students about the value of writing. It was *faculty* resistance that would be my focus. If the faculty are not won over, then the students never will be. The sources of resistance I address include faculty from both secondary and higher education since dual credit college classes are increasingly common in high school.

Another boundary was that I did not tackle the pros and cons of any one specific teaching method, e.g., cooperative learning. My findings suggested this would be addressing the surface “symptoms” of faculty resistance, symptoms that are merely a manifestation of an underlying philosophical resistance that must be appealed to if real transformation is to take place. Also, even faculty who carry an undying allegiance to lecture-style teaching can incorporate writing, e.g., have students turn in a brief summary of what they consider the key points of the day’s lecture to be.

This could, in large part, be described as a historical paper. Although I informally questioned faculty about reservations they may have about WAC, I never turned up an objection that could not be found from a published source. My research question was to condense the various works that deal with resistance into one place, and find promising avenues of response that might allay fears resistant faculty might have to WAC implementation.

I first used the CompPile database and found that using “resistance” as a key word search, which turned up hundreds of hits, was the most useful. I winnowed out the ones that were most relevant. I only utilized works that would address objections that might reasonably be expected to come up in a faculty workshop or meeting. For example, I did not use an article that addressed writing in court settings, but I did reference one that speaks to resistance from faculty who teach chemistry classes.

Although outside the purview of this paper, a general Internet search can identify specific assignments for the WAC-friendly classroom. Having classroom-ready writing assignments available to teachers is one way to counter resistance.

Findings

My goal was to identify, understand, and offer ways to address, faculty resistance to WAC so that teachers coming into the profession will be ready for that discussion. The following is a list of the kinds of objections that have been raised, followed by suggestions regarding appropriate (and hopefully persuasive) responses.

***I teach large lecture classes. This doesn’t apply to me.**

Small, writing-intensive classes certainly are an important goal for a student-centered classroom. Still, large lecture classes offer some doable options. For example, consider the following advice for “one-minute papers” quoted from the book *Classroom Assessment Techniques: A Handbook For Faculty*, by K. P. Cross and T. A. Angelo:

Description: One-Minute papers, a technique also known as the Half-Sheet Response, provide a quick and extremely simple way to collect written feedback on student reactions. The teacher stops class a few minutes early and poses one or two questions to which students are asked to react. The students write their responses on half-sheets of paper (hence the second name), or index cards, the teacher has handed out.

Purpose: One-Minute papers elicit timely and limited student feedback on one or two specific questions about the course in general or a specific class session. That feedback will help teachers decide if midcourse corrections or changes are needed and, if so, what kinds to make.

Suggestions for Use: One-Minute papers are probably most useful in large lecture or lecture/discussion courses, although the technique can easily be adapted to other settings. The questions that teachers pose may concern class procedures, content, materials, activities, and assignments, or any other specific element that the teacher wants to examine. One-Minute Papers work best at the end--or the beginning--of a class session. It is a productive warm-up or wrap-up activity.

Example: After the first three weeks of the semester, a chemistry teacher has the feeling that the students in her undergraduate chemistry class--a lecture and lab class with 150 students--may not be getting all that they should out of her lectures. Ten minutes before the end of class, she quickly passes out 3x5 index cards to the class.

She then asks them to write a very brief answer on the cards to the following two questions:

1. What was the most important thing you learned in today's class?
2. What question or questions that you have from today's class remain unanswered? (1988, p. 148)

Keep in mind that "Studies with academic writers show that brief, daily regimens produce more and better writing than does the popular practice of binging" (Boice, 1990, p. 16).

***I don't know anything about composition theory, and I have no training in teaching writing.**

Not being bogged down in theory can be a plus. There is a difference between *learning to write* and *writing to learn*. The latter, which is the goal of WAC, requires only that you give meaningful writing assignments to your students. The most important insight I ever had as a writing teacher is that talking about writing is no substitute for actually engaging in the act. Carefully crafted lectures about Greek models of classical rhetoric are not nearly as effective in developing fluency as having students write. Also, writing is not like learning to ride a bicycle, where once you "get it," you never forget. Skill in writing is an ongoing process that requires regular practice, regardless of the student's major. Students are not "done" with writing when they finish their English classes. And who better than discipline-specific faculty to teach students the way language is used in that particular discipline? Using writing to facilitate student learning is everyone's responsibility.

***Is my own grammar good enough to teach writing?**

Besides the fact that writing is so much more than grammar, think of the way a foreign language is best learned. Is it through memorizing rules, or is it through immersion in the language? That serves as a metaphor for grammar acquisition. Students need to read and write, constantly exposing themselves to grammatical situations. With those elements in place, grammar will inevitably improve. Consider also that paying too much attention to grammar early on in the writing process can take the student's attention off the substance of the writing. Editing can come later. Think of what motivates students to write. Is it because they want to test their grammar?

***I can grade a test, but I'm not sure I know the correct way to grade/comment on student papers.**

First off, not everything needs to be graded. Students need to be writing, regardless of whether or not they receive credit every time they put words on paper. Students often find rubrics helpful. Also, asking questions about their writing is effective. Offer an honest reaction. Let students know that writing is a process. Rather than "fix" their papers, try pointing them in a direction that would allow them to decide on their own what their papers may need. Don't forget that positive feedback, when warranted, can be a great motivator. As a follow-up to the previous objection concerning grammar, overemphasizing surface features in grading can lead to the mistaken notion that successful writing means correct grammar.

Grading falls under the bigger umbrella of assessment and evaluation. Consider that there are other ways to measure what students are "getting" out of your class. For example, are you stimulating their interest in the subject matter? That element is harder to quantify, yet it is a vitally important consideration in assessing whether or not your class is impacting the students' lives. WAC may help achieve that goal.

***I don't have time to read all that writing.**

Making writing a habit is more important than the length of the assignments. The long-range goal of WAC is to have reduced class sizes to remove this obstacle, but until then, short writing assignments can also enhance student learning. See, for example, "One-Minute papers," described earlier. Rather than comments or a grade on student writings, you can utilize a plus/check/minus system that goes quickly. If you don't have a philosophical aversion to a technological component to assessing and/or responding to student writing, there are software programs that can provide machine-generated feedback.

***I won't advance on the career ladder if I spend my time doing this.**

Innovative teaching methods that incorporate writing should be more highly valued. As Ryan noted, "Bringing the scholarship of teaching to light is an essential first step in reducing resistance to new pedagogies, especially WAC" (Patton et al., 1998, p. 73). While faculty push for the kind of systemic change in the institutional culture that would remove this objection (are you pressing the case at your own school?), what do we do in the meantime? This objection goes back to fundamental questions, such as: What responsibilities do faculty have to their students? What is the goal of the courses you teach? What professional code of ethics do you live by? Does

your own concept of professionalism allow you to shortchange your students? How will students best learn in your class?

If you're still looking for a personal pay-off, consider that you may well find teaching more personally satisfying when students are more active, more involved, and more highly motivated--factors that WAC may well accomplish in your classes.

***Students are better off because of this? Prove it.**

In anticipation of what might inspire this objection, note that WAC does not detract from content; WAC aids the learning of content. And as Bean pointed out, "Writing assignments can be used profitably in any course" (2001, p. 10).

Of the two kinds of educational research—quantitative and qualitative, attempts to quantify the impact of WAC are not conclusive. The impossibility of isolating all other variables and reducing growth attributed to writing to a measurable number may be an impossible task. It is in qualitative studies, which focus on student beliefs and attitudes, where the value of WAC is demonstrated. Students find positive effects in such critical areas as writing, thinking, motivation, and readiness for future classes. For details, consult the 2001 report, *Making the Most of College: Students Speak their Minds*. The best "proof," of course, will be to observe the impact WAC has on your own students.

***I'm not very creative in designing writing assignments.**

Developing writing assignments is a learned art, and there is help. There are helpful websites. Talk to the members of your department who have a reputation for incorporating writing in their classes. Use a mixture of assignments in order to appeal to a variety of student personalities and learning styles. Vary personal/exploratory and expository/thesis-based writing. For longer assignments, consider setting them up as a significant problem that students can struggle with in order to engage their critical thinking abilities. Consult Bean's book, *Engaging Ideas: The Professor's Guide to Integrating Writing, Critical Thinking, and Active Learning in the Classroom*, the best single resource for classroom applications of WAC. Build revision into your assignments. Show your students the multiple drafts you went through in composing a paper.

Discussion

In this section I offer suggestions on how to present WAC that might cause resistant faculty to give writing a chance. First of all, try thinking of resistance this way: It's not a person who is objecting, but a practice. Faculty resisters object to WAC because it represents a culture and not just one class. If you don't identify and understand the underlying reasons for the opposition you're hearing, the attitude will never change. A way to facilitate this at a faculty meeting might be to ask the "deep structure" questions (see Young's *Impediments* for good examples) such as: Where does new knowledge come from? How do you understand the learning process? How do you go about arriving at your instructional goals? What is the relation between language and thought? What is the relationship between language and your subject area's content? What is the ultimate goal of having students write? That way, "we attain fuller understanding of their

ideology and resistance, and with this knowledge, we can work more effectively to encourage different levels of transformation” (Swilky, 1991, p. 10). Challenge faculty to give WAC a try—Let the evidence decide if writing is a worthwhile addition rather than being guided strictly by ideology.

By the same token, don’t entirely neglect the person. People need to feel their thoughts and ideas are being recognized as worthwhile. As Ryan said, “Never underestimate the ego of an academic!” (Patton et al., 1998, p. 74). When a local university hosted a WAC workshop for faculty, they labeled it an “idea exchange” so that everyone would feel valued. Patton suggested having faculty talk about themselves first and their own experiences with writing.

Try approaching faculty resistance as something positive. Burke once famously wrote, “He who wrestles with us, strengthens our nerves, and sharpens our skill. Our antagonist is our helper.” The drawback to viewing resistance in strictly negative terms “is that it restricts our ability to understand the reasons for and nature of resistance, because it fails to perceive the possibility of productive opposition to reformers’ attempts to influence others. While resistance can be a conscious or unconscious attempt to preserve the status quo, it also can represent a critical interrogation of the purposes of reform” (Swilky, 1991, p. 1). If the opposite of love is not hate, but indifference, then resistance signals an interest in the topic of WAC. As such, a resistor’s “questions may represent an attempt to initiate a dialogue” (Swilky, 1991, p. 6).

Offer follow-up during the school year to a WAC faculty workshop, so that any initial enthusiasm (I might call this the “honeymoon effect”) does not recede with the time pressures of the school year. As Swilky (1991) warned, “We need to collaborate with instructors as they revise their courses. The short workshop and extended seminar have serious limitations as means of effecting change” (p. 10). This also closes any gap between the theory of WAC and its actual implementation. As Patton noted, what faculty say they value in their classrooms, and what their actual classroom practices reveal as to what they most value, are not always a perfect match.

Be willing to meet in the middle. WAC must be flexible and adapt. According to Swilky (1991), “these conversations [between resistant faculty and WAC trainers] require compromise” (p. 11). Williams (2000) pointed out that flexibility is a fundamental lesson of rhetoric: “Conceding some territory to your opponent is always a good idea. No position is 100 percent right or 100 percent wrong. . . . Absolute positions that refuse to yield an inch create absolute oppositions that are equally stubborn” (p. 89). Small victories are still victories, and calibrating your expectations to achieve less than total compliance may be more realistic. As Larson (1994) wrote, “probably no faculty will participate 100 percent, or 75 percent, or maybe even 66 percent in efforts to make writing an all-college requirement” (p. 121).

Consider Burke’s concept of identification. Rather than approaching WAC implementation as winning an argument, think of it as finding common ground between different parties. For example, we all want our students to learn, don’t we? (Burke labeled this common ground “consubstantiality.”) Cooperation, rather than competition, can be highly persuasive, and an effective means of breaking through what Burke called “terministic screens,” or blocks to reason. Young (1994) recalled having success promoting WAC when he and another WAC trainer on his

campus tried “abandoning our missionary attitude and assuming the role of the anthropologist” (*Impediments* p. 133).

For systemic change, White noted the advantages of assigning responsibility for WAC courses to schools, not departments, to negate the over-specialization that hampers efforts to promote cross-curricular writing instruction. Mahala and Swilky (1994) offered “women’s studies, cultural studies and honors” programs as educational models that embrace interdisciplinary goals (p. 44).

Here are some final suggestions on ways to handle WAC that would help counter resistance:

*Show faculty who are unconvinced of the merits of WAC examples of exemplary student writing that were the result of WAC-style writing assignments. Also, show examples of student writing that let the teacher know the students *weren’t* understanding the material. That demonstrates the value of WAC also.

*Point out that faculty tend to get isolated in their own departments and lack opportunities to build community with faculty in other disciplines. WAC workshops are an antidote to this segregation-by-discipline.

Conclusion

When I consider the audience for this paper, I think of faculty in three categories. There are WAC professionals, who are not the intended audience and for whom this paper will reveal little that is new. Then there are English faculty outside of WAC. They have a greater familiarity with opposition to writing, but English faculty themselves are often resistant to WAC, and they might benefit from reading this study. The third category is faculty outside the English department, who stand to gain the most from the treatment that resistance receives in this paper. As Boice (1990) pointed out, “Although analyses of our resistance have found their way into the literature on the teaching of writing . . . they are not well known to teachers outside English departments” (p. 13).

Understanding the resistance to WAC, and having a response for it, is one necessary step in achieving the goal of “assist[ing] faculty across the campus in becoming more comfortable asking students to write in a variety of forms appropriate to their fields” (Larson, 1994, p. 122). The findings in this paper may assist WAC supporters to achieve what Williams (2000) called for: “Do not . . . be afraid to burn with enthusiasm. However, be sure you have a strong argument constructed to contain the fire” (p. 99).

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EXPLORING DIVERSE LITERATURE IN GRADES 6-8

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Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to explore diverse literature in grades 6-8. A variety of texts are presented in this work along with strategies for implementing these books into the curriculum. Implications for literacy educators are discussed and delineated.

Exploring Diverse Literature in Grades 6-8

“We need to tell young people that America was built by men and women of all colors and that the future of this country is dependent on the participation of all of our citizens.”

—Author Walter Dean Myers

Introduction

Diverse literature is a representation of the varied experiences of all people within the United States and abroad (Hade, 1997). Exploring and implementing diverse literature in the classroom is about moving from discussing the importance of diversity to implementing these books within real classroom spaces (Anelli, 1978; Harris, 1997). Although, there are many benefits to implementing diverse books within the classroom, there are also issues with implementation as well. Those issues include a lack of knowledge of these texts, book banning, self-censorship, lack of representation, and lack of training in regards to implementing these texts (Harris, 1996; Hart, Rowley, 1996; Larrick, 1965; Micklos, 1996; Wollman-Bonilla, 1998). As educators, it is important to not only have an awareness of diverse texts, but to implement those texts in the classroom.

Why Diverse Books?

In the early nineties, there was a renaissance of authors and publishers committed to increasing the number of diverse titles depicting diverse characters (Harris, 1997). Two decades later, the number of diverse books has increased (Joshua, 2002). However, there is a great deal of work left to complete (Myers, 2014). The existing research on diverse representation of books is clear. Diverse books make up less than 6-7% of the all books published (Horning, 2014). Broken down further, less than 3% of all published books are written and illustrated by African American authors and illustrators (Myers, 2014). If you look at the Cooperative Children’s Book Center¹ in Wisconsin, you will notice the number of books recently published in 2015 show the increasing problem. The number of books published include n = 3,400. However, the numbers and percentages of books about various and racial ethnic groups are extremely disheartening. Books pertaining to African American characters n=269 or 7%, American Indian First Nations People

¹ <http://ccbc.education.wisc.edu/books/pcstats.asp>

n=42 or 1%, Asian Pacifics/Asian American Pacific n=113 or 3%, and Latino (a)/Chicano (a) n=82 or 2% experiences are extremely low.

Reforming the Canon

In order to reform the current canon, we must begin to implement diverse books throughout the curriculum (Harris, 1990; Rogers & Soter, 1997). This includes ensuring a great deal of texts represent students backgrounds as well as a wide selection of their interests and ideas. Reforming the canon presents many challenges such controversial book debates, who gets read, and making choices between privileging one book over another (Willis & Harris, 2005). However, it is imperative as professionals that this practice happens in order to help students select from a wide range of texts.

Controversial Topics

Many of the stories within these texts focus on experiences such as immigration, civil rights, police brutality, socio-economic status, gender identity, sexual abuse, mental illness, slavery, bullying, and violence. Many of the controversies have been noted as a reason why teachers are often cautious of using these texts within the classroom (Harris, 1996). However, I contend controversies should not be seen as a learning opportunity instead of an issue to avoid. Trying to sanitize book selections leads to more problems with having high quality texts to read within the classroom.

Where to Find Diverse Books?

For practical purposes, the overall concern many teachers have is where to actually find diverse books, whether they are reviewed, and how to implement the texts. First, finding diverse books should be seamless. There are a few sites which have great books which have been vetted such as the *Boys Read Blog*, *We Need Diverse Books*, *Brown Babies Read*, *the Brown Bookshelf*, and *American Indians in Children's Literature* to name a few sources. Second, reviews can be difficult to ascertain for diverse books. Therefore, reading books as a grade level team or across the district can provide teachers with varying perspectives on the diverse texts they plan to use. Third, developing a district-wide plan for implementing diverse texts allows open dialogue and best practices towards implementation of texts to begin.

Evaluating Diverse Books

According to Morrison (1992), people should evaluate African American books or diverse books based on the following questions:

1. Is the book written by a diverse author?
2. Is the diverse character in the book the protagonist or antagonist?
3. Is the diverse character subservient in the book? (Maid, Sidekick, Dependent on whites)
4. Is the diverse character lacking intelligence? (Are they depicted as having less intelligence or being led by White people for survival or interpretation?)
5. Is the diverse character presented as a savage with no redeeming qualities?
6. Is the diverse character hypersexualized? Stereotypical?
7. Is the diverse character viewed as having humanity?

This is a great way to look at diverse books in order to justify our use of these texts in the classroom. These questions are particular useful for teachers who are just beginning to implement diverse texts within the classroom.

Implementing Diverse Books through Curriculum Changes

After selecting diverse books, the next step includes implementing the books into the existing curriculum. In Georgia grades 6-8, there is an English Language Arts standard for diversity. The Comprehension, Listening, Speaking, and Collaboration (Focus on Diverse Perspectives Grades 5-8) focuses on the various ways in which diverse books can be implemented. This standard is broadly defined and includes language which allows teachers to read aloud diverse texts and to respond to critical questions in pairs or groups. Another example can include, collaborating on a diverse book project as peers, and presenting findings. Students can also respond to essays or short stories through writing or visual representations to name a few strategies. Monthly Historical Celebrations can also be a great way to implement diverse books during monthly cultural celebrations such as Latino Cultural Month in October, Native American Cultural Month in November, Black History Month in February, and Asian American Cultural Month in April. Additionally, teachers can implement diverse books using thematic study units such as the Civil Rights Movement, Immigration, the Women's Movement, United States Wars, and Friendship/Bullying. The list below includes a sample listing of twenty texts which can be implemented within the classroom:

Table 1. Diverse Texts Sample List

Contemporary Realistic Fiction Sample List

Hush by Jacqueline Woodson

Monster by Walter Dean Myers

Almost Grown by Tony Lindsay

Miracle's Boys by Jacqueline Woodson

Twists and Turns by Janet McDonald

Who am I without him? by Sharon M. Draper

The House on Mango Street by Sandra Cisneros

Tell us We're Home by Marina Budhos

The Hot Freshman 15 Series by Destiny Gates

Biographies/Memoirs Sample List

We Beat the Street by Sampson Davis, George Jenkins, and Rameck Hunt

Malcolm X By Any Means Necessary by Walter Dean Myers

Enrique's Journey by Sonia Nazario

Savion My Life in Tap by Savion Glover and Bruce Weber

Shirley Chisholm: A Catalyst for Change by Barbara Winslow

Romance Sample List

Belle by Beverly Jenkins

Josephine by Beverly Jenkins

Motivational Sample List

Do You!: 12 Laws to Access the Power in You to Achieve Happiness and Success by Russell Simmons

A is for Attitude An Alphabet for Living by Patricia Russell-McCloud, JD

Graphic Novel List

The Skeleton Man by Joseph Bruchac

Teaching Strategies for Implementing Diverse Books

There are many teaching strategies for implementing these texts such as read aloud, drop everything and read (D.E.A.R. time), author study, and text pairing. During author study, students can develop critical questions to ask an author via web conferencing. Additionally, students can write an author a letter, interview an author, read all of the authors' books, create an artistic collage of the authors' books, and write reviews of all of the authors' books. Author study is a great way to engage students in reading multiple diverse titles of a single author.

D.E.A.R. Time

Drop Everything And Read time is a great block of instruction to include audiobooks, digital books students can download on their phones, Paudiobooks, graphic novels/comic books, and easy to read novel and self-help books. This can include books by celebrities, motivational texts, and books that are short in length, and written for young adults. Below is a short list of texts for readers to enjoy independently without feeling stress or embarrassment of reading shorter and easier texts than their peers.

Short list of Books for Reluctant Readers

1. *Almost Grown* by Tony Lindsay

2. *Who am I without him?* by Sharon M. Draper
3. *The Hot Freshman 15 Series* by Destiny Gates
4. *Do You! 12 Laws to Access the Power in You to Achieve Happiness and Success* by Russell Simmons
5. *A is for Attitude An Alphabet for Living* by Patricia Russell-McCloud, JD

Author Study

Author study is a great way to encourage students to read independently as a student focused project. Students can select an author and focus on a research project involving the author. At the end of the project, the student can present about the author.

Sample Assignment Project:

1. Each student will select a diverse author.
2. Students must write a succinct biography of the author using primary research documents.
3. Students must read at least 4-5 books by the author.
4. Students must write a short 50 word review of each text.
5. Students have the option to contact the author by email, letter or skype.
6. Students should interview the diverse author by coming up with their own interview questions.
7. During the final presentation, students can create either a print collage or electronic collage of the author presentation.

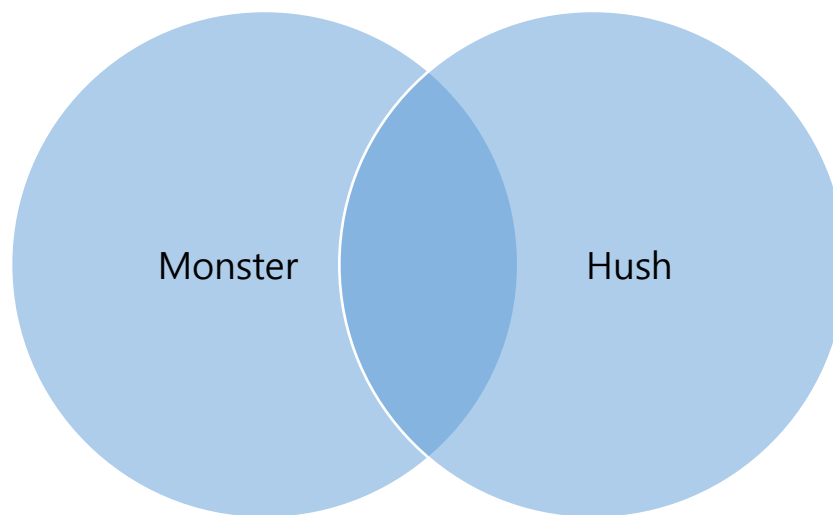
Students can either select their own author or choose from a preselected list of books. Some of the authors can include:

1. Joseph Bruchac
2. Cindy Pon
3. Tracy Chee
4. Zetta Elliott
5. L. Devine

Text Pairing Diverse Books

Text Pairing is also an effective strategy for implementing texts as well. A teacher can implement two titles by minority authors. For example, if teachers implement the texts *Monster* and *Hush* when discussing current issues such as family, disconnected youth, incarceration or criminal justice, they can compare and contrast the themes in these works. (See Figure 1.) Similar themes include teenage males at the center of both stories, family, and dealing with the court system. The texts differ due to the texts being told from different sides of the law. In *Monster*, the teen on trial and being charged for going along with young adults who loop him into a crime and commit murder. In *Hush*, the father of the main character testifies against his former partner for shooting an African American teen while being handcuffed. The characters in both texts are on different sides of the law (citizen and law enforcement). Students can also be divided into various groups while reading these texts for a lively discussing pertaining to justice, ethics, and the law. Teachers can also do a follow up lesson on this topic to determine how the students read the book and based on what stance. Will the students read this text as a lawyer, defendant, parent, student, officer or judge? What are their reactions, reasons, and conclusions to both of these texts?

Figure 1. Comparing and Contrasting Book Themes Example



Also, text pairing a mainstream title such as *The Outsiders* and an African American title such as *Miracle's Boys* about friendship, and disconnected youth. In both of these texts, the boys are all disconnected from society. They are living day to day and making up their own rules for survival. Teachers may want to show both of the adapted films based on the book and have student's journal each day over a four or six day period. Students can take notes and have discussions at various points during the films. They can use the same notetaking technique and questions for both.

Figure 2. Note Taking Example

The Outsiders Day 1 Notes

- List important points from the film or book.

The Outsiders Day 2 Notes

- How does the author progress the story?

The Outsiders Day 3 Notes

- Did you expect the ending of the story

Once the notetaking of both texts is complete, the students can use the notes to formulate an essay discussing the two works or create a collage as a group to discuss and present the points from the book. The assignments can become more hands-on, in-depth or advanced based on the choices of the teacher and the interest level of the students. There are various ways to pair texts. There is no one set formula for using this literacy practice in the classroom. Other activities could include town hall meetings, speeches, letters, blogs, and integrating video production projects.

Implications for Literacy Professionals

As teachers and other literacy professionals begin to implement diverse books, it is imperative to understand the nature of these texts and how to implement them into the classroom. Therefore, forming summer professional learning communities is a great way to read and discuss books as a group. For example, selecting twenty-five diverse texts each summer to read provides both the urgency and practical use of these texts. This professional practice provides an avenue for even the most novice teacher to have the experience of working with veteran colleagues to discuss the academic benefits and strategies for implementation. Further, this practice provides teachers within a school and district with the opportunity to focus on delving deeper into the content of these texts to provide a more grounded experience for students. This is also a great way to ensure that there is a consistent buy-in of diverse texts and full implementation happening within the curriculum. This is key to ensure English Language Arts teachers read and implement these texts during professional development activities prior to full implementation in the classroom.

Additionally, these texts can also be read by literacy professionals such as reading specialists and media specialists in order to fill classroom libraries, place on summer reading lists, and

recommend for students who want to diversify their own reading collections. This can be done in a variety of ways. Professionals may decide to blog about the books they read with other professionals in other districts in order to have discussions online. Audio podcasts may be used by media specialists of great excerpts from the texts to draw readers into reading diverse books. Also, electronic vlogs may be used to review diverse books or interview diverse authors in order to discuss controversial points within the book or the authors' background. This way literacy professionals can ensure diverse books are integrated into the classroom as reading choices, required texts, and a way to enhance the existing curriculum.

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LANGUAGE IS POWER: PERSONAL, CULTURAL, AND POLITICAL EMPOWERMENT IN THE COLLEGE COMPOSITION CLASSROOM

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Abstract

How can composition be empowering? Why is student empowerment necessary? Language is important for communication, learning, and even self-awareness. In the spirit of creating a student-centered classroom, my freshman composition course is divided into four carefully-scaffolded projects to help empower students through a series of authentic experiences: the personal, the cultural, and the political. In this paper, I walk readers through the assignments I use to help students achieve and transfer these experiences to the real world. Brought full circle during the semester through personal writing, discussion, and multiculturalism, yet a fourth form of empowerment emerges – the social. Thus, students leave the classroom with the writing tools and self-empowerment to make a difference in their own lives as well as the lives of others.

Language is Power: Personal, Cultural, and Political Empowerment in the College Composition Classroom

Part I: Opening the Circle—An Introduction

In my beginning composition course, my first day ice breaker involves having students finish the sentence “Writing is...” I let students use these sentences in their introductions to the class and then we discuss some of their reasoning for their selections as a way to examine our personal relationships with the craft as well as some of the expectations of what writing should and/or can be.

Along with students, I also compose a “writing is...” sentence to introduce myself. I keep it short and simple and I share last as a transition into course content. I explain that writing is and can be all the things they listed, but perhaps most importantly, *writing is...power*. Some students stare at me blankly and others give me a philosophical nod of approval. I wait as students make connections and the moment of silence becomes an “a-ha” moment when they start to think about what that brief statement really means. It is *because writing is power* that all of their thoughts on writing *can* be true. Not only is writing powerful, but it is personal, allowing them all to connect differently, and the combination of these qualities can be used to empower students both within and beyond the composition classroom.

Throughout the semester, we revisit this idea of writing as a personal power as *we* (not just I, but the students as well) prove time and again how important language is to communication, learning, and even self-awareness.

But why is it important for students to feel empowered? And how does empowerment through writing lead to empowerment beyond the limitations of my course? To begin exploring and answering these questions, I turn to Patrick McQuillan (2005): “Although U.S. schools commonly accord students little formal power, student empowerment holds considerable promise for improving American education. One can understand a lack of student engagement in learning, for instance, as a reaction to a lack of empowerment. Denied formal power in the classroom and school at large, students frequently disengage from learning and reject what schools offer, often to their detriment” (p. 640-41).

I also agree with James Cummins (1986) that self-empowered students “develop the ability, confidence, and motivation to succeed academically. They participate competently in instruction as a result of having developed...appropriate school-based knowledge and interactional structures” (p. 22). At Marshall University (as well as many other colleges and universities), a major focus is our students’ ability to master the art of critical thinking. In developing critical thinking skills, students gain academic empowerment and self-discipline and are thus able to “assume greater control over setting their own learning goals” (Cummins, 1986, p. 28).

One key to student empowerment is creating an authentic, student-centered classroom, something difficult to achieve in large, lecture-driven survey courses. College composition courses, however, with intimate class sizes ranging from 15-25, set a natural atmosphere for the student-centered classroom. Instructors just need to follow through with student-driven, critical thinking content. David Gooblar (2015) says, “We should look for ways to empower our students. An essential outcome of the student-centered classroom is that students believe in themselves and their own abilities.” He argues that this is particularly important under present social and economic conditions: “The powerlessness we feel in the face of all the forces arrayed against us is felt by our students, too. I know you’ve seen it: Most of our students know how hard it is going to be for them to live the lives they want to live in this era of economic inequality. By making the classroom a space where students can wield power, we offer training in self-confidence, self-respect, and respect for others” (Gooblar, 2015).

To further answer my second question about writing’s role in student empowerment, Dudley-Marling and Paugh (2004) state that, “Language—speaking, listening, reading, and writing—is a means of ful-filling a range of human intentions that could not easily be accomplished by other means. But language is more than an instrument of human agency. Language is a way of being in the world, a way of connecting to others, signaling particular identities and membership in groups” (p. 386). Gutiérrez, Baquedano-Lopez, and Turner (1997) add that: “Language is fundamental to the constitution of self and is at the core of our social, emotional, and cognitive experiences” (p. 369). Thus, I have divided my Beginning Composition course into three scaffolded sections to help empower students through a series of authentic experiences: the personal, the cultural, and the political.

Part II: Personal Empowerment

The activity I use on the first day of class reinforces the idea that writing is personal and every student has his own definition based on his own experiences with it. I like to build from this and carry the idea of writing as a personal experience into the first project. Here, I am doing two

things: I am modeling the pedagogical art of scaffolding as well as the self-empowering use of language to express ourselves.

Scaffolding research links back to the work of Lev Vygotsky. Vygotsky defines the zone of proximal development (ZPD) as "the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance, or in collaboration with more capable peers" (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 86). The ZPD, then, defines a gap between what students can do and what they can *potentially* do under ideal learning conditions. In a student-centered classroom, the potential in this gray area is what instructors can empower students to achieve.

Wood and Middleton (1975) developed an early model of scaffolding after observing how mothers interacted with 4-year-old children who were asked to build a 3D model using blocks and pegs. The type of support the mothers offered included: general encouragement, specific instructions, and direct demonstration. The results showed that there were multiple strategies of assistance that helped the children learn. However, the most effective strategies were the ones geared towards each child's individual progress. The most successful mothers increased the guidance when the children struggled and gave the children more freedom when they were showing progress on their own (McLeod, 2012). Wood and Middleton's study shows that scaffolding is "most effective when the support is matched to the needs of the learner. This puts them in a position to achieve success in an activity that they would previously not have been able to do alone" (McLeod, 2012).

Wood, Bruner, and Ross (1976) furthered this research by listing specific processes that aid in effective scaffolding. These processes should sound familiar to any teacher: gaining and maintaining the learner's interest in the task, making the task simple, emphasizing certain aspects that will help with the solution, controlling the child's level of frustration, and demonstrating the task. These are natural steps that should occur in the student-centered learning process and they are steps that occur during each of the projects my students complete, starting with Project 1: The Intellectual Autobiography.

According to Cathy Davidson (2015), "Scaffolding means underscoring for students the skills they are learning--so they can build on those. Scaffolding also means trusting students to learn. If they are interested, invested, believe it will be important to their lives and not just to a grade, they will be motivated. If they are showing their work to their peers and to the world...it is *theirs*, and not just an assignment."

This is the goal of our first project. It provides a foundation from which we can scaffold our other projects as well as offers a means for scaffolding the writing process to move the power of authority from my hands to theirs via their voices and personal experiences. It also helps them engage with what they consider meaningful "learning," even (especially!) if that learning doesn't occur in the traditional sense.

So how does scaffolding work in the Intellectual Autobiography? Most students are familiar with narrative writing. They see it in pop culture all the time via any type of story-telling, whether it be popular books, films, or even social media. They are familiar with stories.

Chances are also high that my college freshmen have written a personal narrative at some point in their lives – even if they don’t remember this fancy name for it. They have written a story about themselves. And they have all encountered a learning experience in their lives worth sharing. So we scaffold. We start with something they’re already familiar with – the genre, the format, and the meaningful personal experience itself.

Before students begin drafting their own intellectual autobiographies, I use Jamaica Kincaid’s “Girl” (1978) and Sylvia Plath’s “America! America!” (1979) to spark discussion on different impacts that learning can have, different avenues it can come from, how it changes from generation to generation, and how different styles make the story unique to each writer even when they encounter similar themes. We talk about what is powerful in each narrative and how both writing and the broader topic of learning has helped empower each of the writers. The goal is to leave students feeling empowered to find their own voices.

Once we have some samples under our reading/writing tool belts, it is time for students to start their own projects. Each student must first figure out which story to tell (and for some, this is the hardest part). I use a graphic organizer called a “life line” to help students visually brainstorm specific events from their own lives. The “life line” is much like it sounds – a time line of events. However, it can be graphically represented in multiple ways and I give students free reign on how to map their life lines. It can be hand-drawn, it can be computer-generated, it can include pictures, it can be a straight line, it can be a never-ending spiral, etc. The endless possibilities make each visual lifeline as unique as the content it includes – just another way to empower students to develop individual voices.

In the first project, not only does each student tell his own story and reflect on how that experience has affected the person he is, but the student is also faced with the challenge of presenting that lesson, through words, for his audience (other students and society at large) to also learn from. He becomes the master teacher in this case and holds the power of enlightening others based on something he has already mastered – the epitome of empowerment.

Once students are empowered personally, we can expand this out to help them make a broader connection to culture – not just their own culture, but other cultures as well. Once they build on this basic academic foundation, Patrick McQuillan (2005) says, “empowered students develop an understanding of the economic, political, and social realities that affect their lives, what Paolo Freire and Donaldo Macedo (1987) characterized as a new way to read the ‘word and the world,’ learning to appreciate the challenges one faces in life as well as the opportunities that exist” (p. 642).

Part III: Cultural Empowerment

Cultural empowerment does not mean ethnocentrism. It does not mean knowing all the lyrics to “The Star-Spangled Banner” or only buying goods made in the USA. Cultural empowerment is *not* synonymous with patriotism.

So what is it? And how do we teach it to students? Cultural empowerment is the knowledge that multiple cultures exist (even within a single dominating label like “American” culture) and can

co-exist harmoniously. Cultural empowerment is awareness and acceptance of both your own culture(s) and those that were once foreign to you. It is recognizing and celebrating diversity – even in a dominant society that thrives on conformity.

My goal for the second project is social empowerment by looking through various lenses at stereotypes, diversity, and cultural ethnocentrism – which is especially important in a university where many of my students come from rural West Virginia with similar backgrounds, race, and cultural ties.

At this juncture in the semester, I ask students to complete a cultural analysis by delving deeply into a piece of writing to break down and evaluate the content and language within the text while also considering the context of time, place, historical events, social issues and cultural impacts surrounding the piece. As Freire (1970) would agree, reading the word always involves reading the world (and vice versa).

As we explore our options for analysis, we revisit the earlier pieces we read from Plath and Kincaid. Not only does this reinforce the impact of these writings on different aspects of our real lives and help us make more synaptic connections with course content, but it also helps us see the pieces in a whole new context – a multi-cultural one. Although Plath and Kincaid both discuss some form of education (whether it be formal through the education system or familial through the passing down of customs), we see varying perspectives and experiences in two different cultures. Ultimately, both writers hint at failed attempts to conform to social expectations within their respective dominant cultures.

James Gee (2001) argues that “words and grammar are not primarily about giving and getting information but are, rather, about giving and getting different perspectives on experience” (p. 716). Dudley-Marling and Paugh (2004) add that “in order to learn how perspectives are expressed in texts, young readers need to have opportunities to read a range of texts (i.e., texts with various points of view) and engage in discussions of these texts with people likely to have points of view different from their own” (p. 393). Reading these selections and engaging in discussion about how our personal experiences with education and conformity compare and contrast helps us develop this kind of scaffolded, student-centered learning.

Our class then branches out from these narratives to look at culture through the other lenses mentioned earlier. One lens we look through is the popular TV series *Family Guy*. As opposed to Plath and Kincaid, most of my students are familiar with the show – but not necessarily its premise or cultural implications. Before I tell them what we are going to watch, I have students freewrite about stereotypes: What are they? How do they develop? How do they impact society? Once we discuss their initial thoughts, we watch the episode titled “To Love and Die in Dixie,” and I have students jot down stereotypes about the South suggested in the piece. The stereotypes are thrown at us at slap-stick, laugh-a-minute pace and we watch and laugh, just as the writers of the show would want us to do.

Afterwards, I have students organize their notes into a short writing discussing how stereotypes are dramatized in the episode and the impact they leave on the audience. Then, we discuss what we watched, why we laughed, how we knew these jokes were stereotypes, whether or not these

stereotypes are accurate, and what impact they can have on an audience that isn't familiar with the culture being portrayed. Because of their West Virginia heritage, many students can relate to the stereotypes presented in this episode and often argue passionately about how false and unfair the generalizations are. Yet, they also admit that they laugh when they hear the jokes and thus re-inforce that it is okay to use stereotypes for entertainment purposes. They start to realize that even though they defined stereotypes as negative, they hypocritically stereotype themselves and others without even realizing it.

Dudley-Marling and Paugh (2004) discuss this type of learning from a constructivist perspective. They say, "Students' ability to infuse their social and cultural identities into the curriculum is fundamental to learning. Constructivism defines learning as the integration of 'new' knowledge with previous or 'old' knowledge; therefore, learning always builds on students' background knowledge, experience, and culture" (p. 387). Here, we see how important cultural awareness and analysis is to the scaffolding process. Dudley-Marling and Paugh suggest that learning is "idiosyncratic" and "there is always a point of view to learning and sense-making in general" and that "an individual's point of view is shaped by social and cultural forces" (p. 387). Our next reading assignment proves just how true this theory can be.

Once students are riled up about stereotypes and vow to not judge others by hearsay, I have them read Horace Miner's "Body Ritual among the Nacirema" (1955) as homework. After reading the article, they must pretend they are visiting with the Nacirema culture and write a letter home detailing their adventures. Most of my students write about how negative the experience is. They are shocked and outraged by the rituals of this culture, calling them barbaric, primitive, unnecessary, and just plain bizarre. A small handful embrace the adventure and try to point out positives about the learning experience. Occasionally, one or two students make the connection that Nacirema is American spelled backwards and the entire piece is written as an outsider's view of their very own culture. Jaws hit the floor when I reveal the twist and students scramble for their copies of the article to re-read it with this insight. Some feel foolish. Some feel manipulated. Some feel defensive. All feel enlightened.

Students are pushed beyond their comfort zones to look at their customs and biases from a different perspective, and, ultimately, begin to question their own cultural norms and ethnocentrism. This new perspective on the world gives them a sense of disequilibrium that they have never encountered before. Nadler (1993) states that this feeling arises when "people do things they might not ordinarily do" like "leave their safe, familiar, comfortable, and predictable world and enter into uncomfortable new territory" (p. 59). McQuillan (2005) says that "if people have sufficient support, disequilibrium can help them see the world differently and thereby become an impetus for changed beliefs" (p. 665). This disequilibrium can lead to empowerment for change, empowerment for diversity, and empowerment for knowledge. I encourage students to use language and writing as a means to explore these powers and cross the boundaries of their own comfort zones in the search for knowledge. Gutiérrez (2001) says that language is "the tool of tools, the most powerful sense-making instrument humans use" (p. 567), and I could not agree more.

Language plays a vital role in our interpretation of Miner's "Body Ritual among the Nacirema." The piece is supposedly written objectively from the perspective of an anthropologist studying

cultural norms. The language, though objective, distances the reader from the culture and makes the common sound unfamiliar. Students automatically attach negative connotations to their daily rituals (such as brushing their teeth or shaving) when they are described as atypical and purposeless. This leads to disequilibrium as students read as well as disequilibrium when they start to finally see their own cultural connections with the Nacirema. The Russian linguist Volosinov (1973) states that “the meaning of a word is determined entirely by its context...There are as many meanings of a word as there are contexts of usage” (p. 79). Dudley-Marling and Paugh (2004), on the other hand, argue that “it is not the context that ‘determines’ the meaning of a word; it is people’s perspective on the context (put differently: words don’t mean, people do)” (p. 387). That is to say, understanding of words, culture, and power itself lies in the perceptions of the beholder. It is thus up to each individual student to seek her own interpretation of the world and use language to make sense of it in a social world. How is that for student empowerment?

Part IV: Political Empowerment

McQuillan (2005) claims that knowledge is “a complex, socially constructed phenomenon” (p. 654). As we can see from the sections above, this is, indeed, true. Meaning is produced individually, but it can’t be effective until it is expressed and interpreted socially via language.

Cathy Davidson’s blog on designing a student-centered classroom provides much inspiration for creating an empowering atmosphere. She discusses how we can make pedagogy egalitarian. One reason for moving towards this type of classroom experience “is deeply political and philosophical: it allows you and your students to model how to participate responsibly in a more just, equitable, democratic, diverse society” (Davidson, 2015).

My third composition project pushes students a step beyond cultural analysis and interpretation to get them socially and politically involved in a public forum. For their persuasive research project, they are asked to use a variety of real-world genres (written, oral, and visual) to present multiple issues and perspectives to their peers. Project #3 is set up as a mock Presidential election. Each student must select a candidate (dead, alive, real, fictional, human, non-human) to nominate for the presidency. Then, she must put together a written campaign packet (including a personal email, business letter, character sketch, and campus newspaper editorial) for the candidate. Each student is then paired up with a classmate to work on both written revisions and the presentation portion of the project. Once she has polished the writing part, each student will then take on the role of her candidate and persuasively present her platform to the class – against her partner/opponent. The partners serve two roles in this project – to help strengthen written arguments by throwing a naysayers into the mix and by turning the project into a competition that results in entertainment, empowerment, and bonus points. After each pair presents, the class blindly votes for a winner. Once every pair has presented, a second blind votes produces one winner and representative for the class. This project challenges students to get socially and politically involved by researching issues that are important to the self, other college students, and society as a whole. A democratic society is created within the project where the students themselves hold all the control over the election.

This type of public forum could be just the empowerment that some students need to succeed. Cathy Davidson (2015) claims, “Especially for students who do not come from superior K-12 backgrounds, the inspiration to excellence in the public representation of themselves is huge.” Dudley-Marling and Paugh (2004) add that, “creating space for children’s voices in our classrooms affirms students’ social, cultural, and individual identities while enabling students and teachers to use their language and experience—and draw on the language and experience of other voices in the classroom—in support of school learning. But the implications of student voice extend beyond the needs of individuals” (p. 388). They continue on to argue that, “The creation of an inclusive democracy...depends upon constructing social discourses in which the voices of all our fellow citizens, whoever they may be and wherever they may live, are present” (p. 388).

This holds particularly true in my story of how this project led to empowerment for Sandy. Sandy was a new international student anxious to take my freshman composition course. He was still learning the English language and had a hard time following American pop culture, so he worked harder than anyone else to make sure his writing was acceptable. He revised and revised until his papers were well-polished. When I introduced the persuasive research project, Sandy was a nervous wreck. Not only did it involve an oral presentation where his heavy accent would stick out like a sore thumb, but it also involved learning about American culture and using language to persuade his classmates to vote for his candidate. He chose Jackie Chan as his candidate and worked hard with his partner to develop his argument and his word choices. His presentation went smoothly, even though he was nervous, and when the blind vote came through, Jackie Chan won the election by a landslide. Sandy was so proud. For the first time since he started school at Marshall, he felt confident in his ability to master the language, participate in the culture, and be a true citizen of the university. Last fall, he graduated, and just before he left to go back to China, he stopped in one final time to thank me for everything and to remind me that his most meaningful experience while here was the day he and Jackie Chan won the presidency. His experience in my class gave him confidence that yes, he could do well in an American university. He said, “If I can convince my peers to vote for Jackie Chan, then I can do anything!” For Sandy, this combined the political with the cultural with the personal.

Part V: Closing the Circle—The Final Project

McQuillan (2005) says that, “there must be trust on both sides of the empowerment dynamic. That is, if students are to become empowered, adults must trust them with real power” (p. 643).

If Project 3 is the first step in relinquishing this power to students, Project 4 completes this transfer. The fourth project, the multi-genre memoir, is the longest and most open-ended of the projects. It is also the project that reflects everything the students have learned in my class – from narrative to analysis research to self-empowerment. This project allows students to write about any person or event in any combination of genres they choose. I give students a variety of samples to analyze and use as inspiration, then I step back and let them work their critical thinking and creative magic.

This unit hands authentic power back to the students, giving them complete creative control and letting them guide the conversation – literally. My only job in this unit is to attend individual

student conferences where I let each student lead the discussion and tell me how and why he created his project. Stiggins (2001) says that, “Effective conferences don’t rely on traditional, one-way communication. Rather, they work best when teachers share both the control of the meeting and the responsibility for directing the communication” (p. 498). Cook-Sather (2002) also supports this view, claiming that students should “be authors of their own understanding and assessors of their own learning” (p. 16). In this project, and especially in these student-led conferences, both students’ verbal and written language again function as self-empowerment. This project has the personal connection of project 1, the critical thinking of project 2, the social and political ramifications of project 3, and a freedom and self-direction that allows each student to take full responsibility for his role as writer, student, and ultimately, citizen.

This project (and the scaffolding throughout the semester that leads up to it) gives students a sense of both meaningful originality and advanced achievement that, sadly, much of our education system does not. Davidson (2015) points out that:

The way you learn in formal education is remarkably different than the way you learn in almost any other circumstance, largely because formal public, compulsory education evolved in the 19th century and as a way of disciplining, selecting, rewarding, recognizing, advancing, or penalizing children. Formal education is as much about power and compliance, conformity and regulation as it is about knowledge, mastery, intelligence, ingenuity, creativity innovation, or originality. Like the penitentiary that evolves at the same time, it is about a system of social regulation, where deviation has consequences--advancement, recognition, achievement, graduation, and awards, or detention and failure.

I find myself nodding emphatically at the truth in her words. Our education system, though it means well, can be confining and stifling to students. In my class, I open up a public discourse early on by discussing Sylvia Plath’s “America! America!” as our first personal narrative example. Plath (1979) discusses the role of conformity in education and the repercussions for not following the social norms of the system. In *Discipline and Punish* (1978), Michel Foucault also compares the tedious focus on routine, enclosure, and docility in schools to the penal system. This stagnant, oppressive learning environment can do the opposite of empowering students. To combat this, we need a student-centered curriculum that invites students to control their own acquisition and application of knowledge.

In a student-centered classroom, the pupils become “students who are invested in their own learning, who take responsibility for their own learning, love their learning, work harder than they ever thought they would, and, in that process, you become a co-learner, not a regulator of their failure” (Davidson, 2015). So not only does this method help students become more empowered and successful in the classroom, it helps them become life-long learners and able citizens who can think independently.

Davidson (2015) goes on to claim the bottom line is that “in student-centered learning the prof’s biggest role is in making clear what benefit learning the subject matter will have for the student, not in obtaining a grade in the course, a requirement for a degree, or even a degree--but in being

part of [the] pathway to a better, more productive, more responsible, more enjoyable independent life beyond school.”

Personal writing, discussion, and multiculturalism become a form of social empowerment throughout the semester. In an open, student-centered atmosphere, I see not only personal but social growth in my students. Cummins (1995) mentions that power in the classroom and beyond can be generated through “interpersonal and intergroup relations” (p. 145). McQuillan (2005) adds that “with proper dynamics, power becomes more than the sum of individual parts: As students become empowered, they are more likely to help empower others” (p. 664). I am not only building a classroom for knowledge acquisition, I am building a community for action.

A recent article by Gary Gutting (2015) sums up my state of mind:

The object of education — especially liberal education — is something that endures, and that object is not usually knowledge...The real goal of my teaching, I’ve come to believe, is that my students have close encounters with great writing. If the object of my teaching were knowledge, then my efforts would be mostly in vain. My actions are successful only if their object is helping students have certain experiences: intellectual, emotional, aesthetic, even moral experiences of reading, discussing, and writing about classic works. What’s the value of such experiences? They make students aware of new possibilities for intellectual and aesthetic fulfillment — enjoyment or, perhaps better, happiness.

In another recent article, Gooblar (2015) echoes this sentiment, especially in regards to a public education system that mirrors our penal system (as discussed earlier by Davidson):

The whole logic of neo-liberal education – that it is only useful if it leads to a degree which leads to a “good” job --- is undermined when we help students figure out how to learn in a way that is personally meaningful to them. If we can inspire them to pursue knowledge because they want to, we lay the groundwork for lives spent in pursuit of yet more knowledge, more responsibility, more meaningful experience. Every student who comes out of our classrooms better equipped to live a life of curiosity, generosity, independent thinking, and self-respect is a thorn in the side of those attempting to turn our institutions into factories that produce new generations of docile workers.

As teachers and practitioners of empowerment, what better could we ask for?

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IMPLEMENTING A READER'S WORKSHOP IN A FIRST-GRADE CLASSROOM

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Abstract

Follow one teacher as she implements a Reader's Workshop in her first-grade classroom. Through a Reader's Workshop, students have choice in what they read and what they write, engaging and motivating them to continue to read and write in and out of the classroom. Students will learn the necessary skills they need to read, understand and analyze text in a variety of settings. A Reader's Workshop will also provide the first-grade classroom a safe, risk-free environment to create a community of readers and learners that supports the growth of all students.

Implementing a Reader's Workshop in a First-Grade Classroom

For the last few years I have noticed a difference in the incoming first-grade students. They have an increased with-it-ness and seemed far more advanced in reading skills. Many students are coming to first grade knowing most of their high frequency words and reading above first-grade expectations. In order to meet the needs of my students, the curriculum needed to be elevated to challenge them and at the same time motivate them to want to read. Surprisingly, many students were no longer interested in computer activities. They would much rather listen to a story and were mesmerized by read alouds.

At the same time, I began to look into the idea of Reader's Workshop. In many trainings and in some graduate courses, it was asserted that Reader's Workshop was for upper elementary, middle school, and high school. Many strategies, such as making connections, activating prior knowledge and questioning while reading, were said to be too complex for first graders. I began to try out some of these strategies in my guided reading groups and in whole group reading. I found my first graders enthusiastic about using these strategies, especially making connections. They even began to identify what kind of connection they were making, text to self, text to text or text to world. The strategies were modeled and practiced frequently. The goal was to teach my students to think about their reading.

Using these new strategies was very helpful in teaching students to read and mastering first-grade standards. With the implementation of the Florida standards comes a new way for students to show competency in reading. These standards will prepare students for college and life in the twenty-first century. They include the ability to read text closely, use critical thinking skills and

read in a way that will help them enjoy complex literature. In today's classroom, students need to be active participants in their learning. Classrooms need to be a place where students interact with text and use evidence from the text to prove their conclusions, not only in the language arts, but in all content areas. Traditional teacher directed classrooms will not prepare students for higher order thinking skills that will require them to analyze text and be problem solvers.

Teachers in all grades need to develop strategies to help students meet grade level standards. Language arts classrooms need to employ the workshop approach to reading instruction to meet these critical standards. Reader's Workshop is a way to give students responsibility for their learning and actively engage them to develop the critical thinking skills needed to master the new standards. In Reader's Workshop, students choose their reading material which gives them the time to read, explore new genres, and interact with others about their reading (Calkins & Tolan, 2010). This class structure also gives students the opportunity to work with the teacher individually, work in small groups and work independently. Students can read at their own level to develop the necessary skills to be successful. This class structure is also a way to build a community that fosters self-esteem and self-confidence as students read books at their own level and books that they like. (Allington and Gabriel, 2012).

It is hypothesized that students who are instructed in a Reader's Workshop will develop the higher order thinking skills necessary to master the new Florida standards, have deeper comprehension, are able to analyze text, and have the skills necessary to be successful in college and the twenty first century. Reader's Workshop is more prevalent in middle and high school. For this reason, it is important to implement a Reader's Workshop for the primary grades.

The Role of Reader's Workshop

Components of Reader's Workshop

Reader's Workshop encompasses a lot more than independent reading. The workshop is divided into four parts; mini-lesson, shared reading, independent reading and closure. Shared reading is usually achieved with picture books or poetry that the teacher reads aloud. During shared reading students interact with the text through discussions for comprehension, authors' purpose, genre, fluency and vocabulary development. In addition, when students listen to a fluent reader they will increase their own comprehension and fluency (Atwell, 1987, Trelease 2001). They will also expand their vocabulary, background knowledge, and text structure (Wu & Samuels, 2004). The read alouds are also an opportunity to model reading strategies as they use a strategy called Think-Aloud. In this strategy teachers say out loud what they are thinking as they read (Wilhelm, 2001).

Mini lessons are precise teacher directed lessons, usually abiding about five to fifteen minutes. They are used to teach a skill or reading strategy students can apply to their independent reading (Orehovec & Alley, 2003). Teachers can assess this application during conferencing and through the written responses to their reading. Assessment in Reader's Workshop is continuous and ongoing (Fall, Webb & Chulkosky, 2000). Nancie Atwell divides the mini lessons into four categories procedural, literal/craft, strategies, and skills (Atwell, 1987; Calkins & Tolan, 2010).

Teachers can plan mini lessons through what is gleaned from conferencing with individual students, small groups and whole groups.

During independent reading students choose what they will read. The research on self-selected text is abundant and conclusive. Students who select their own reading material read more, will comprehend what they read and will continue to read if they can choose their own book (Atwell, 1987; Allington, 2009; Allington & Gabriel, 2012). A good way to entice students to read different genres is through book talks. Teachers and students alike can do a book talk. A book talk includes a brief description of the book and a short passage that is read to hook the students. Research also indicates that conversation about text, especially with peers, improves comprehension and engagement (Cazden, 1988; Ivy & Broadus 2001). During this independent reading time the teacher circulates and has brief conferences with students. These conferences include checking for comprehension, monitoring fluency and vocabulary development. The teacher should conference with every student, every day and keep ongoing anecdotal records for each student (Atwell, 1987; Calkins & Tolan, 2010). Allen suggests that sitting down next to a child has a lasting impact on children to listen, learn and remember (Allen, 2009)

At the end of class everyone meets together to review the day, discuss homework and check the status of all students. This time can be used for students to ask questions or share thoughts and opinions. In addition, this meeting time is a time for community building where students freely discuss opinions and share ideas. Both teacher and students will use this time get to know each other and build interpersonal relationships.

Nancie Atwell suggests that assessment be based on three parts, how the student followed workshop procedures, the quality of the student's written responses, and the student's progress toward goals that have been set collaboratively by the student and the teacher (Atwell, 1987; Fall, Webb, & Chudowski, 2000).

Benefits of Reader's Workshop

It is harder to close the achievement gap when all students are given the same instruction in reading on the same level book (Allington, 2009, Hewitt, 2009). Students will learn more when they are actively involved in their learning. The benefit of Reader's Workshop is that students are actively involved in choosing what they read and applying the skills they have learned to books they want to read.

Reader's Workshop is also the perfect environment for teachers to differentiate instruction in both process and product through differentiated activities (Ankrum & Bean, 2007; Richardson, 2011). Students will be able to read on their own level to complete activities and show they can master the skill at that level.

This self-selection component of Readers' Workshop helps students in a number of ways. Students are more motivated to read when they choose what they read. They will be more motivated to decode unfamiliar words, read longer and understand what they are reading. Students will also read more when they are interested in what they are reading. This will help to increase vocabulary, fluency and word automaticity.

Another benefit of Readers' Workshop is the time students spend reading in the classroom. Research indicates that students spend less than ten percent of their reading block actually reading, eyes on text reading (Allington, 2012). In the Reader's Workshop model, students will spend at least fifty percent of their time reading. This additional reading time has shown to increase both decoding skills and comprehension in struggling readers (Atwell, 1987; Calkins & Tolan, 2010; Hewitt, 1999). The extended reading time has also shown to positively affect attitude towards reading which increases motivation to read. Many researchers believe that the greater impetus to read will combat what has become known as the "Matthew Effect" of the richer get richer. The good readers get to read and get more opportunities than poor readers, increasing achievement for good readers. (Allington, 2012; Atwell, 1987; Calkins & Tolan, 2010).

The Reader's Workshop model will also build a class community of readers as students share and talk about their books. A community of readers will create a safe environment for learning and taking chances that will build on students' strengths and uniqueness. Children will not only learn to read but will learn what reading is about.

Potential Challenges of Reader's Workshop

As with any instructional model, there is potential for challenges. One such challenge is providing support for all students to be successful. Teachers will need to differentiate instruction, process and products for students who may need extra support or remediation of skill (Ankrum & Bean, 2007; Richardson, 2011). Teachers will also need to be able to help students to apply instructed strategies to different texts. This will take time and training for teachers to appropriately scaffold students until they can work independently and successfully (Allington, 2012).

Another challenge is classroom management and the environment. Teachers may not have the space needed for students to spread out to read, conference independently with students and the area to meet in small and whole group meeting times. Teachers will also need to have an extensive classroom library to accommodate the varying reading levels or the ability to visit the library as needed. The library will need to have the resources to help the students on an individual basis throughout the day (Atwell, 1987).



English Language Learner students' support may also be a potential challenge. The instruction will also need to be embedded with pictures, real objects or video clips to support the language acquisition of the English Language Learner. (Barone & Xu, 2008, Echevarria, Voght, & Short, 2008, Fay & Whaley, 2004). They will also need to include books that connect with students' lives, culture and setting (Allington, 2011). This may prove difficult with the diverse needs represented in classrooms today.

Implementing Reader's Workshop in a First-Grade Class

I began the process of implementing Reader's Workshop asking myself what I wanted it to look like. First, I wanted not only more time spent on reading but also enjoying reading. For a long time I noticed my first graders were more interested in being done with their work, than what they were

doing. I wanted to hear students talk about what they were reading. Frequently, students would leave the guided reading table, talking about what they would be doing on the playground or afterschool. Center work was often sloppy, with little thought or effort given to the process. We taught our students to recite the goal to anyone who asked, but did they truly understand why they were doing the work. My goal was to engage children in meaningful learning.

Next, I began to create an environment that would support Reader's Workshop. I leveled all books into guided reading levels. Then I divided books into two sections, fiction and informational. I then created a sequence of mini lessons in three categories, Introducing Reader's Workshop, Literature and Informative. A poster was made to introduce each mini lesson that could be displayed and referred to by students.

<p>Leveled books</p> 	<p>Books were leveled so students could choose a book at their level. This also help student make short term goals.</p> 
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Introducing Reader's Workshop:

1. What does a good reader look like? (see appendix A for Poster)
2. How to choose a just-right book. (see appendix B for poster)
3. Keep track of reading. (see appendix C for poster)
4. Good readers think about their reading (see appendix D for poster).
5. Good readers ask questions (see appendix E for poster).
6. Good readers visualize. Students can draw pictures in their reading journals (see appendix F for poster).
7. Good readers make predictions. Students write predictions in their reading journals (see appendix G for poster).
8. Good readers make connections. Students write connections in reading journals (see appendix H for poster).

Literature

9. What do I do if I don't know a word (see appendix J for poster)?

Look at the picture

- a. Say the sounds
- b. What makes sense?
- c. Chunk it
- d. Flip the vowel
- e. Skip and go back.

- f. Use other words to help.
- 10. Identify the characters and setting (see appendix K for poster).
- 11. Identify the problem and solution (see appendix L for poster).
- 12. Compare and contrast (see appendix M for poster).
- 13. Identify Cause and Effect (see appendix N for poster).

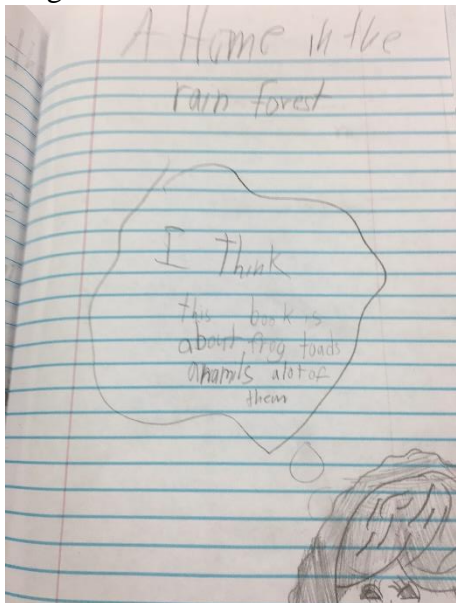
Informative:

- 14. Preview books (see appendix O for poster).
- 15. Activate prior knowledge
- 16. Pay attention to headings and key words (see appendix Q for poster).
- 17. Identify the main idea (see appendix P for poster).
- 18. Compare and contrast (see appendix M for poster).
- 19. Identify cause and effect (see appendix N for poster).
- 20. Get information from text features (see appendix Q for poster).

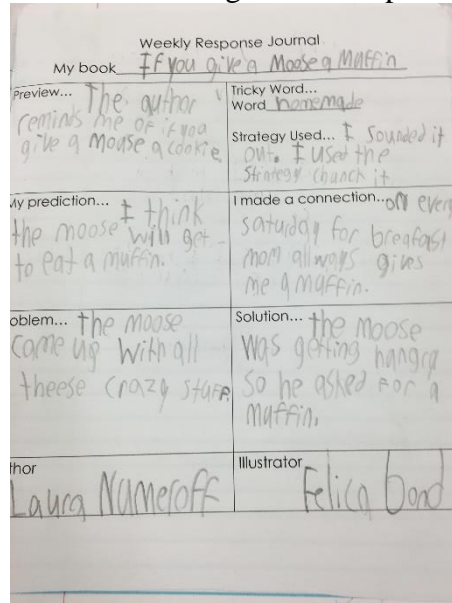
I was then ready to begin. I wanted students to learn what a good reader looks like and what a good reader does. The key to success was to set up routines and teach the process explicitly. Students were taught how to choose a book and how to tell if it is the right level book. It is important that students read books that are not too easy or too hard a level that will frustrate them. During the switch to Reader's Workshop it was noted that when students chose their reading material they would choose books a bit hard and work through them with little frustration.

When beginning Reader's Workshop there was still need for direct instruction in phonics phonemic awareness and grammar. We began our day with the direct instruction then we would read a book to introduce the mini lesson that we would the focus of the week. I would model the focus daily and allow for discussion and practice. Students would make journal entries for the weekly focus. Questioning seemed to cause difficulty with many students. With increased modeling and practice, most students were easily able to acquire the skills of questioning and through authentic opportunities to apply questioning techniques to their chosen books.

Journal entries were very simple in the beginning.



Journal entries became more advanced as students learned strategies for comprehension.

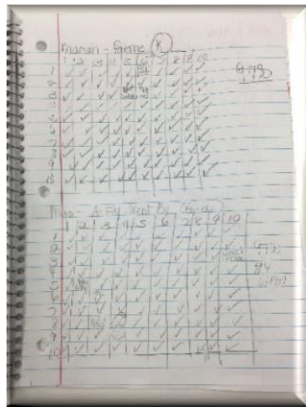


Students enthusiastically began to explore their books for interesting characters, and determining problems and the solutions in the stories they read. Students particularly enjoyed explaining the character traits that were demonstrated by the characters in their stories. They used their new knowledge to look for new books that would interest them. It was an easy jump to teach students to compare and contrast characters using character traits, authors and stories. They enjoyed exploring illustrations to determine the author's purpose and the illustrator's choices by using evidence in the text to support their conclusions. This led to the ability identify cause and effect within the stories they read.

Students were then prepared to delve into nonfiction books with many skills that would help them identify the main idea. We then learned about text features to further enhance their comprehension. They were easily able to support their conclusions with evidence from the text.

The final section in Reader's Workshop was independent reading and conferencing. Students chose a book to read and I rotated around the room to conference with individual conferencing. During conferencing students would read to me as I did informal running records. And take notes that could later be used for assessment and plan for instructional needs. I created a Reading Log to keep my notes. This reading log continues to change as my Reader's Workshop evolves. My goal was to meet with struggling readers daily and advanced readers every other day. I also needed to do one running record on each student every week. During conferencing we also explored vocabulary, discussed their book, and set goals.

Informal Running Records helped keep track of student growth and plan for instruction.



Once the students were ensconced in Reader's Workshop, I began to notice a switch in student attitudes about reading. I watched as students began to talk about what they were reading to both adults and friends. They were able to recommend books to their friends and knew where to find books written by familiar authors. They began to make comparisons about authors. Their center work became about reading. My students were growing as readers and I was growing as a teacher. I was truly able to meet the needs of individual students in my class and see tremendous growth.

Students loved to find a quiet place to read.

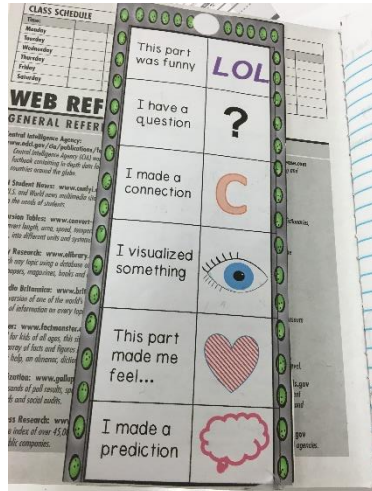


Evaluating Reader's Workshop

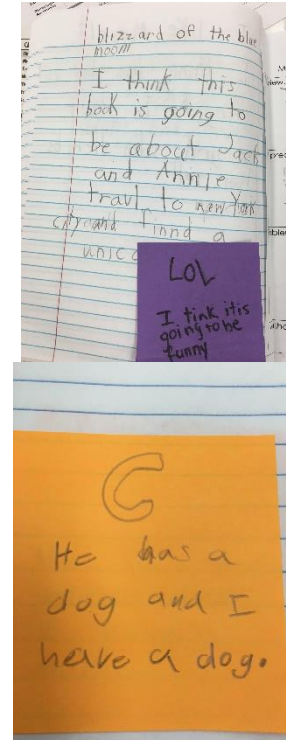
Although I had used a new approach to teaching first-grade readers, my class was still assessed quarterly on grade level benchmarks. Before Reader's Workshop most of my students were meeting quarterly benchmarks. By the end of the year, most students far exceeded first-grade expectations. They all knew all 220 high frequency words and were reading between an "L" and "P" Fountas and Pennell level book. First expectation is for first-grade students to read a "J" level book by the end of the year. I also noticed a marked improvement in writing. Students were able to write independently using correct conventions, grammar and spell high frequency words.

Parents reported an increase desire by their children to visit the Public Library where they were more equipped to choose their own book independently.

Centers began to be about reading. This list was glued in the front of students' reading journal.



Students used sticky notes to add notes to their journal.



Summary

Reader's Workshop helps student engagement and achievement. When students can choose what they read and what they write, they will be more motivated to continue to read and write in and out of the classroom. This does not mean that students should never read a book given to them by the teacher. It does mean that students will learn the necessary skills they need to read, understand and analyze text in a variety of settings. Reader's Workshop should be held at a separate time from content areas, giving students ample time to focus on the job of reading. The most important part of implementing the Reader's Workshop is to conference with every student every day (Allen, P., 2004; Allington, 2009; Atwell, 1987; Calkins and Tolan, 2010). Teachers will need to develop a record keeping system to keep accurate records of student goals, progress and growth. These detailed records will help teachers provide appropriate mini-lessons and acquire necessary materials for students.

Students with disabilities and English Language learners will also benefit from the Reader's Workshop because it is the opportune time for teachers to differentiate instruction and meet the needs of individual students. They can help match text to student and give them the support they need to be successful. It will also give teachers the opportunity to provide a safe environment and create a community of learners that supports the growth of all students (Fay, 2004).

Conclusion

Although most teachers and principals know the results of reading research of the last forty years, they continue to support big publishing reading programs that are exactly opposite of what will increase students achievement. Students today who leave school without strong literacy skills will not have a job waiting for them. Now is the time for a new vision of reading instruction (Calkins & Tolan, 2010).

Today's students need to become independent thinkers and problem solvers to master the new Florida standards. They will need to be able to analyze text, have deeper comprehension, and back up their conclusions with support from the text they read. The Reader's Workshop is a way for teachers to help students reach these goals. The one size fits all curriculum will not help students achieve the higher order thinking skills that will be required to master the goals or do what is required of them in college or the twenty first century. Teachers will need to have a new way to look at the curriculum that includes a student selected text and student directed classroom instead of a teacher centered classroom of textbooks written at a level that may be written above most of the students understanding (Calkins & Tolan, 2010).

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Good Readers:

- ✓ Find a quiet spot
- ✓ Select a Just Right Book
- ✓ Choose an interesting book
- ✓ Think about their reading
- ✓ Stick with a book

Good Reader's Don't:

- ✓ Choose any book
- ✓ Talk to friends
- ✓ Keep switching books
- ✓ Flip through books
- ✓ Read books too hard or too easy

A Just Right Book:

Look at the cover:

Is it interesting?

Look inside:

- I can read most of the words.
- I understand what is happening in the story.
- I want to keep reading.
- It is not too easy or too hard.

Appendix C

My Reading Log

Name _____

Date	Title	Level	Pages

Appendix D

Good Readers:

Think about their reading

Make predictions

Make connections



Appendix E

Good Readers:

Ask questions



Appendix F

Good Readers:

Visualize



Appendix G

Good Readers:

Predict

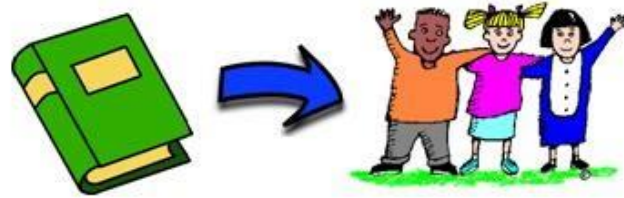


Appendix H

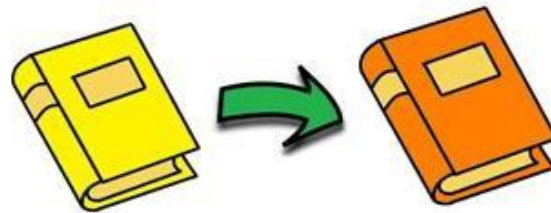
Good Readers:

Make connections

Text to Self



Text to Text



Text to World



Appendix I

Book Title _____

My prediction
My connection

Book Title _____

My prediction
My connection

Appendix J

If I don't know a word I can.....

Look at the Picture



Use your Phonics



What makes sense?



Chunk it



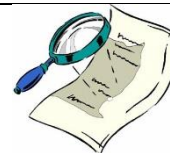
Flip the Vowel



Skip and go back

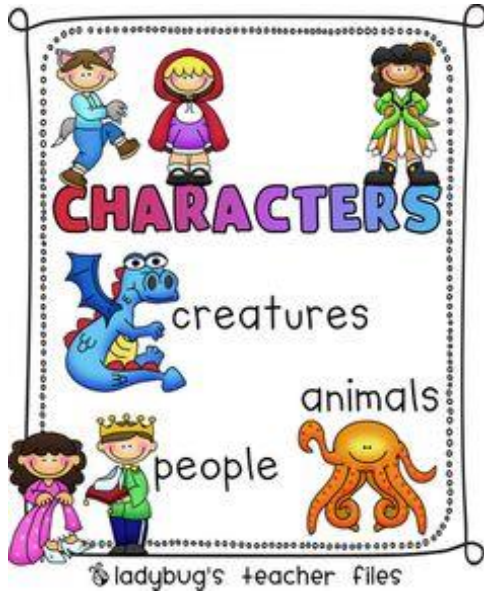


Use other words to help.



Good Readers:

Identify Characters and setting.



Good Readers:

Identify problem and solution.



Good Readers:

Compare and Contrast



Good Readers:

Show Cause and effect



Good Readers:

Preview Books



Look at the front and back cover.

Does it look interesting?

Look at the headings and pictures?

What can I learn from this book?

Appendix P

Good Readers:

Identify main idea

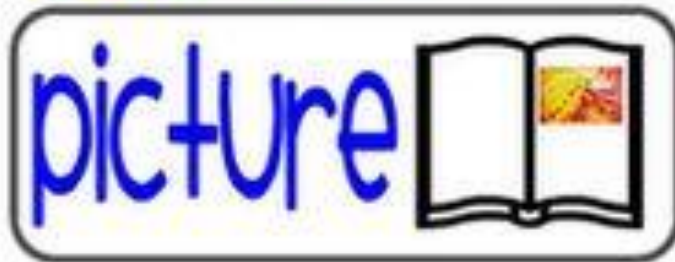


What are the important details?

Appendix Q

Good Readers:

Get ideas from text features



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