Connecting in the Cloud

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Editor's Introduction:
What "Connections" Can We Make as English Teachers?

When I first heard that "Connecting in the Cloud" would be the theme for the 2012 MCTE Spring Conference, I automatically thought of Microsoft's "the Cloud," as many of us who work with technology today often do. Or I think of St. Cloud, where our 2012 Conference was held. But I must admit my ignorance of this term as well. When I hear "the Cloud," I often think of the recent Super Bowl commercial with Tina Fey, in which she asks the Best Buy agent, "What is the Cloud? Am I in the Cloud now?"

In compiling this volume of *MEJ* (my third as editor), I decided to stop focusing so much on "the Cloud," and consider more the "connecting" aspect of the phrase. I began to think, "What 'connections' can we make as English teachers?" This volume of *MEJ*, thankfully, explores some of those answers.

The first set of articles in this volume, "Teacher-Student Connections," examines the different ways that teachers connect to their students in the classroom. Jeanette Lukowski and Rebecca Fremo both ask us to think about notions of audience—Lukowski focuses on different student audiences, whereas Fremo reminds us not to discount the role of teacher as audience for student writing. After reading these articles, I am reminded how we teachers not only make connections to students (or at least attempt to), but the students are habitually attempting to make connections to us.

Our next set of articles explores another way that we make connections: "Connecting through Writing." Mike Mutschelknaus shows how we can use discussion boards to build communities in online classes, and Carol Mohrbacher reveals how we can deepen the collaborative identity of our Writing Centers. Kim Socha even suggests, ironically, that we may use the tales of near-dead zombies to make student writing come alive. From all three articles, we learn how college writers may improve their written work in a wide variety of environments and circumstances.

Then we switch our focus from writing to reading in the next set of articles, "Connecting through Reading." First Jennifer Peterson explores the relationship between film as text and classic literature. Then Sonja Kay Olson argues for the importance of setting up a multicultural library. Greg Heinecke advocates allowing students to make their own independent choices as a means of getting them to read. Through these articles, the writers show how we can get students to connect to reading through enjoyable, entertaining means.

The final set of articles, "Connecting through Literature," attempts to get students to connect to different kinds of literature. Martin Warren focuses on Arthurian literature whereas Lindsay Noren stresses the importance of integrating poetry into everyday lessons. The diversity of materials discussed in these articles shows how literature may engage our students in innovative ways.

We also have three poems in this issue: two from Jim Brosnan, and one from Rebecca Fremo. Our poetry editors selected these three in particular because, out of all our poetry submissions, these three poems most strongly speak to the power of words and language, particularly in classroom situations.

Overall, then, this volume focuses on the connections that we English teachers can make to our students: on our own, through writing, through reading, and through literature. I'm sure there are many other ways as well for other kinds of connections to happen (such as students connecting to each other, or teachers connecting to each other). Perhaps we can hear about some of these connections that you perceive in future volumes of MEJ.

Happy Reading! And keep making connections.

Brian C. Lewis
MEJ Editor
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Teacher-Student Connections

The Greatest Job I Never Thought I'd Want

Jeanette Lukowski

In spite of growing up in a family of teachers, teaching wasn't my dream job. Life had different plans for me, though. In 2001, after more than a decade of office work, I launched myself into a new career. While a number of people might say the same thing about their own life paths, the launch was pretty catastrophic for me for two simple reasons: 1) I hadn't planned to do it, and 2) I have always considered myself to be a shy person. So how does a self-proclaimed shy, middle-aged woman jump tracks from a life of secretarial jobs to teaching college writing classes? She gets a divorce, looks in the faces of her two toddlers, fills out an application for graduate school, and then fills out a form offering an Assistantship—almost by accident.

Preparation for the first day of class came in the form of a week-long intensive workshop. A cohort of ten new graduate students, we worked on creating our individual course syllabi while talking through the outcomes and objectives for the First Year Writing course. For some reason, I had envisioned being handed a packet labeled "Your Teaching Materials," but the workshop was more organic than automated. We weren't going to spend a week practicing Student Teaching by teaching each other—we were going to learn in-the-trenches, so to speak. Some of the cohort members remembered the teacher who taught *their* FYW course, and were going to modify a few of the activities. I hadn't been in a FYW course since the early '80s; all I could reflect on were the lessons I had learned in Corporate America. The twenty-four hours leading up to the first day of class were the worst, though. I worried about talking to a room full of strangers, I wondered how I was going to fill the 50 minutes of class without a prepared script from which I could read, I worried about having the answers to the questions my students would ask.

The first day of class is a blur in my memory. The memories I am able to pull up are almost like watching a movie of someone else. I know it was a Monday, Wednesday, Friday class, but I don't remember what time of day we met. I remember walking into the classroom on the second floor of Riverview (home of the English department), and sweating in anticipation (combined with the walk up two tall flights of stairs). I remember carrying an index card with my plan for the day: 1) Write name on board, 2) Pass out syllabus, 3) Class roster, 4) Introduction circle. I remember erasing the chalkboard when I was done with the first day of class—but I don't remember a single thing I said.

The next day, Tuesday, two airplanes flew into each of the two World Trade Center towers in New York City, one airplane flew into the Pentagon building in Washington, D.C., and one airplane flew into a field in Shanksville, Pennsylvania. On my second day of class in this new role as Teacher, I entered the classroom, took attendance, asked my students to make a circle, and we just talked about September 11th for an hour. They had lots of questions I couldn't answer—but it was okay. Ultimately, many of them just needed to talk through their anxieties with someone who could remain calm, someone who could offer suggestions for a possible course of action.

My first week of teaching was the most stressful, yet most rewarding experience I recall ever having with a job. A week later, I realized I was in love with teaching. I love the hush when I enter the room each day, the chalk-dust on my fingers after writing on the blackboard, watching a student discover a universal truth during class discussion, hearing a student's voice for the first time in an essay.

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Teaching is such an honorable profession, yet too many of us will go through life unrecognized for our contributions. Writing is such a basic skill, such an integral part of daily life, such a key to career success—but, sadly, such an under-respected class by too many of our students.

"We did D.O.L.s all the time," a student in my FYW course says while justifying his absence from peer revision workshop last class.

"Then why is your paper devoid of all punctuation marks?" I want to counter. "I don't need it," another student in my Intro. To Literature class says, explaining why she, too, missed the peer revision workshop class.

"Then why would your paper light up like a glittery art project if all of the commas you randomly sprinkled in were to glow?" I am left to ponder behind the friendly smile I present, and the nod of my head.

Just like many of my Middle and Secondary level colleagues, I hear the complaints. "Why do I need to know that" or "Why do I have to take this class anyway? It's not like it matters to my job as a -----."

Perhaps. But the bulk of my teaching load entails the core writing courses most institutions require students take, to prepare them for the demands of upper-division college courses—or give

them one last opportunity to read, and talk about, a good book, play, or piece of poetry.

Most days, I enjoy the interaction I have with the students who enroll in my classes. Some of the work, however, is making me somewhat insane. For one thing, the requirement of pointing out where they are making mistakes seems so negative. I try to cushion the blow by doing all of my grading with a blue pen, rather than red, and find positive things to say about the paper whenever possible. "Good point!" I might write in the margin on page two, after writing "paragraphing" in the margin on page one. "Editing would take your paper to the next level" might appear on the bottom of a student's paper, right above the grade, rather than bleeding all over the paper with every missing comma. Too bad there's nothing to demonstrate the unreliability of auto-correct, though. Telling students about all of the papers I've read where *defiantly* appears in place of *definitely*, or *weather* erroneously precedes *or not* doesn't seem to make an impression; the reliance on technology that formerly used to help us with spelling concerns has now evolved to text messages, tweets, and blogs replete with typing errors and phonetic misspellings. Some days, I can't even remember how to spell words like canceled or modeled (*cancelled* and *modelled* in British spellings), because I've spent too many hours correcting students; some days I get exhausted explaining *why* that particular sentence is a sentence fragment; some days I feel like a broken record explaining how the lack of an introductory paragraph is keeping the reader from becoming engaged with the piece.

The student's understanding of what is "engaging" has also changed. More and more often I have to explain how insulting the language is in some of the papers, and why it should be avoided. With role models like Snooki, J-Wow, and the Bad Girls Club ladies, though, the formative respect for women in our culture has been denigrated to a level I could have lived the rest of my life without. Simply saying how such language is inappropriate for an academic paper no longer works; I now have to explain to students *why* it's inappropriate, since consideration for a more sensitive reader is no longer understood. "If they don't like it," a belligerent student might challenge, "they can just go *@#% themselves!"

"But how is that, then, an effective argu-mentative strategy?" I counter as tactfully as I can.

Some days, it's the work we have to do to keep our departmental doors open for the future students that saps me of my enthusiasm. Government cuts to funding of higher education means less operating money for the institution. As public institutions, we need to stay competitive in our costs; if we raise tuition too high, students won't come. But, are students coming to class prepared? Are they reading, or even buying, the textbooks we select? Lower enrollments mean smaller class sizes; administrators see small class sizes, and in turn cut full-time, untenured faculty and/or departmental programs; fewer faculty means fewer classes can be offered… and the snowball runs down the slope.

Other days, it is the unpredictable nature of the classroom discussion that gets to me. I have taught for a number of institutions over the years, both Public and Private, Two-Year and Four-Year, in Minnesota and Wyoming, but one semester I found myself challenged by student comments two days in a row. Although only twenty miles geographically separate the campuses, the second week of that Spring semester found me in the cross-hairs of *both* a Christian college, and a Tribal college.

The Tribal college classroom breakdown began as students were still walking in. Tuesday afternoon, just after lunch, a female student came into class and said, "I hated two of the three essays you had us read."

"Wow! I would ask you why you hated them now, but that will be a great way for us to begin discussion, if that's okay with you."

She waited—but barely.

After I took attendance, I tried to begin class four times; each time I started, another student would come in, and I would have to stop to get the student's name in the attendance roster, since the school requires daily attendance reports from each instructor.

Finally, I called the room to order. "If you would make a circle, please."

Some of the students seated in the center of the classroom wouldn't move. I repeated my request, adding the objective that no student be subjected to looking at the back of another student, only to discover the young woman who hated the essays wasn't moving at all. She looked over her shoulder, each direction, but wouldn't move her chair. Following her example, the woman in the row behind her wouldn't move either. I kept smiling, hoping they would cooperate, but didn't make it an issue. Another student even tried coercing cooperation, through the statement, "Just do what the teacher asks," but they wouldn't move. So I began discussion, and did my best to have eye contact with each student in spite of the obstacles.

Halfway through the discussion of an essay written in defense of marriage, the older female student on my right (who had tried to get the other

students to cooperate) said, "Well, for the Anishinaabe people, it's different. Am I right?" she asked her classmates. I was eager to hear about these differences, but I was also sensitive to the nature of how she made the statement. Was she attacking me, the messenger of the essay, rather than the writer of the essay? I wanted to explain how some of the essays we read during the course are chosen *because* they are controversial, thereby giving us something to analyze, but I didn't because I was already feeling a bit out of sorts going into a Tribal college, as a Caucasian woman, whose job description is "to teach students to write in acceptable English forms."

Twenty-four hours later, I was beginning discussion in the Christian college, once again working out of a textbook the administration had asked me to use (the plight of the Adjunct instructor). This time, we were talking about the topic of euthanasia, which worked its way around to the quality of life, which worked its way around to the religious aspect of death. As I attempted to wrap up the day's discussion, I was once again confronted by a non-traditional female student.

"I don't see how you can say that religion adds complexity to the discussion, because it is *all* about religion. In the Bible, when Jesus is at the grave of Lazarus, and Jesus is reported to have wept for three days, He's not weeping because Lazarus *died*, but because…."

I countered the comment with the statement of how I am trying to teach ways to address an audience that is not like-minded. "The core of Argument, after all, is Rhetoric, which we discussed last week: who is your audience, and what is your purpose."

I continued with a statement about how I find myself engaging with people from other cultures, while my feet stay firmly planted on U.S. soil, but made no specific reference to the Tribal college or other non-Christian groups of people I talk with at the university level. The student continued to challenge what I was saying to the class about how one's religion adds an additional layer of complexity to many issues like euthanasia and living wills, offering her own statement that "religion doesn't *complicate* anything—it is *the truth*."

Five minutes later, as students were shuffling out of the classroom, I noticed the woman speaking softly with another student. They got quiet when I walked past, to gather up my own materials, and got quiet again when I walked past to exit the room. Were they dissecting my credibility? Or dismissing me as a heathen? No job, nor person, is perfect.

Beginnings of semesters are usually difficult like that. Some students want all of the answers, right away, and aren't willing to understand that writing—like learning in general—is a process. They seem to think that I have nothing more to teach them, as they have been writing "just fine, thank you," since Kindergarten or first grade.

"The kind of writing you did in high school is different from the kind of writing you will do in college," I try explaining. "In college, every paper has to have a layer of analysis." If it doesn't, I want to add, you are likely to be shot down in another class. But that's more than they are willing to hear the second week of class. That's the importance of the First Year Writing course, after all. Those are the patient maneuvers that teachers of FYW classes from New York to Seattle make every day. As tedious and repetitive as teaching introductory and/or core classes may be, our students need them in order to make the successful transition from high school or home school to college.

So, what keeps me going? The fact that I'm teaching my students *more* than rules for writing; I'm also teaching my students life skills.

"I have a question, but it's a bit off-topic. I have to see the doctor about something, and I've never had insurance before. Should I be…?"

Another student, another day: "I'm having a really hard time being so far away from home right now. I miss my family…I know that if I stay, things might get better, and I have already made some friends here…"

I even get to help the student who is attending college for the first time at the age of forty. "I've heard about it, but don't know where it is. I didn't ever get a campus tour; they were giving them, but I felt so silly, because those tours were for parents who have a child attending here. *I'm* the student, not my kids, so…."

Eleven years ago, I entered the college classroom as a Teacher for the first time. I didn't know what to say, or how to say it, but my life-experiences came to the rescue. My best advice for new teachers: Be confident about sharing what you already know. There is no one-size-fits-all script for what we do, just as there isn't one type of student we will teach. Like the Kindergarten teacher who helps to acclimate five and six year olds to the rigors of formal education, I'm more than just "the English teacher," and I teach more than "The Rules" of writing.

Assumptions, Theories, and Best Guesses: Rethinking the Teacher as Audience

Rebecca Fremo

When I write a paper like this I'm torn as whether to act like my audience is the teacher, or whether it's someone who doesn't know anything about the book, so I never know how much to go into detail and how much to explain, and I don't want to over-explain, but yet I don't want someone who doesn't know anything about the book to be lost either.

--Naomi, First Year Student,
Gustavus Adolphus College

Nearly all of a writing teacher's work stems from the moment we read a student's text. It's how we learn about our students' rhetorical repertoires and literacy histories. It's how we come to know their home language practices and their facility with academic discourse. Reading students' writing can serve a variety of institutional functions as well. We may read essays to determine admission; we may read exit portfolios in order to decide who can graduate. Certainly whenever we evaluate student work, we begin with the act of reading. In my field, composition studies, much of our work depends upon our ability to read and analyze student-authored texts and then articulate our methods and reasons for doing so. These methods and reasons usually reflect our ways of naming ourselves personally, culturally, and professionally. They reflect our values and beliefs, our literacy histories, our disciplinary alliances, and our institutional positions. In short, our identities always shape our reading practices in the classroom.

Our students know this, and they write to and for the readers they assume we will be, guided by hypotheses, theories, and best guesses. They observe us in action, and they look to past experiences with former teachers, wondering if we might be different. Where do those theories and assumptions come from? How do students formulate their beliefs about who we are as readers? And what might happen in the classroom if we discussed our ways of reading and valuing student writing explicitly?

In this essay, I draw from interviews with my students at a small, private liberal arts college in southern Minnesota. Students also completed a questionnaire focused upon their experiences with me as a reader (Appendix A), but we also explored their more general assumptions about how teachers read and value their work. The interviews and written responses suggest that students observe our behaviors in the classroom, make assumptions based on those

observations, and then place those observations into conversation with past experiences with other readers. What I would argue, then, is that by providing them with as much information about ourselves as readers, by making our practices for reading and valuing their work explicit, we can help them learn to make future decisions about audience based on issues related to identity and subjectivity.

I suspect that many of us wish to avoid being the sole reader for students' work. Still, teachers are often the primary audience for most of what our students write. Rather than bemoan the "problem" of the teacher-as-reader, I suggest that we embrace it, making our own reading practices and values more explicit to students. We might help students think more critically and pragmatically about audience by reflecting upon their experiences with us, their current readers. Such reflection enables students to theorize: What do our subject positions prevent us from seeing? What do these positions clarify? In turn, students can channel the emerging trust they develop for their teacher-readers into a rhetorically constructed trust for future audiences. But for students to recognize such connections, we must first help them think in more sophisticated ways about issues of identity—both theirs and ours—and discuss the connection between who we are and how we read in the classroom.

Reading takes place when the locus of a reader's beliefs, assumptions, values, and histories—loosely termed "identity" here—intersects with the assumptions, values, and histories of the writer. That intersection takes place at a particular location: a student's text. When we discuss how we read these texts in our classrooms, we have an opportunity to increase students' awareness of how discourses come into contact with one another, enabling them to develop more control over the process. It's an opportunity to unpack a fairly complicated rhetorical situation. But how to convey that complexity to students? Unfortunately, one need only consult a contemporary first-year writing textbook to hear echoes of a too-quick interpretation of Aristotle: If students simply study their audiences, they can know all the necessary information about those audiences, anticipate responses, and construct authority for themselves. Such a position assumes that it is possible to make sweeping generalizations about audiences, who are themselves construed in simplistic ways. All of the responsibility falls to the

student writer who constructs the discourse and analyzes the audience. Such an understanding of rhetorical situation downplays the possibility for negotiation between readers and writers.

Such models also suggest that readers and writers are fairly uncomplicated beings. It's not so simple, James Berlin reminds us in *Rhetorics, Poetics, and Cultures: Refiguring College English Studies* (1996). Traditional models of audience analysis fall short for several reasons, most notably that they make problematic assumptions about a unified subject as "audience" in the first place. Berlin notes, "Members of an audience cannot simply activate one subject position and switch off all others" (83). We cannot teach our students to write for audiences based on their naive assumptions about those readers. Indeed, we don't ever really know how the particular subjectivities that constitute a reader will coalesce as she reads a text. Berlin concludes, "The result is that the responses of an audience are never totally predictable, never completely in the control of the sender of a coded message or of the coded message itself" (83). Instead, teachers need to find ways to demonstrate how subject positions shift as readers encounter their work, and teach students to read their own writing in ways that also make such positioning and repositioning clear.

When we talk with students about identity issues and subject formation, we acknowledge that acts of reading are always mediated by particular kinds of identity issues. Here it's important not to merely open a space for students to air grievances ("I failed that paper because she doesn't like my politics"). Instead, I advocate frank and serious discussion of what we mean by identity. I tell students that I define identity as the nexus of positions that we occupy by choice and by external categorization. Here acts of self-definition are placed into conversation with the categories that others place upon us. My identity, for example, may encompass any number of subject positions, from white woman in her early forties to transplanted southerner. It can be shaped by sexuality and whether I have children; it can depend upon my academic title or lack thereof.

I want my students to understand identity as highly contextualized, multiply constructed and enacted. This is a distinction made often by feminist critics drawing upon poststructuralist or postcolonial theories as a way of denaturalizing categories such as gender and race. In *Borderlands/ La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (1987), for instance, Gloria Anzaldua describes a "mestiza consciousness" to name the borderland identity that is formed at the intersection of several locations, all of which converge within/ through her and her language, including woman, lesbian, Tejana, Chicana, Mexican, American. In *Gender Trouble: Feminism And The Subversion Of Identity* (1989), Judith Butler posits gender as performed, rather than embodied. In *Simians, Cyborgs, And Women : The Reinvention Of Nature* (1991), Donna Haraway troubles the distinctions among animals, humans, and machines, imagining a cyborgian subjectivity.

In addition to understanding identity as the nexus of converging locations, it's important to help students see the role that language plays in making us who we are. But we should also remember that we aren't simply powerless in the face of language. Berlin suggests that "the subject is the point of intersection and influence of various conflicted discourses—discourses about class, race, gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation, age, religion, and the like," but he reminds us that "of equal importance the subject in turn acts upon these discourses" (78-79). In other words, subjects don't always "accommodate" the discourses they encounter. We can talk with students about agency and resistance: How often do they parody the authoritative voices they read in their textbooks? How do they shift their language when utilizing electronic media? How do they respond in the face of insulting representations of their religious groups or cultural backgrounds?

When we understand identity this way, questions related to the teacher as audience are particularly crucial: the act of reading is where discourses and selves converge. If teachers find ways to describe and analyze their own readings of students' texts, they can model this process of selves encountering other selves through language, describing and analyzing how discursive practices adapt to or resist one another. Furthermore, teachers can model how a textual moment can trigger a particular response for readers within a specific context. This modeling can help us teach students to discern what matters most in a given rhetorical situation and why. As students do this work, they learn to read their own work more critically and develop their own evaluative schemas. I believe students are most successful when they leave our classrooms feeling less dependent, not more dependent, upon teacher feedback. Although it may seem counterintuitive, by emphasizing the role of the teacher as reader in the classroom, we might help students lessen their dependence on us, enabling them to anticipate and meet the needs of diverse audiences in the future.

What Do We Already Know? Teachers as Readers and Teachers as Audience

I acknowledge that the evaluative position of the teacher always complicates the work of reading. But my goal in this essay is to focus on the teacher as reader. I want to consider students' assumptions about how we read, as well as what effects those assumptions have upon their writing. First we need to consider what we mean by *teacher as audience*—and how our students view this term as well. Are teachers considered spectators, witnesses to a rhetorical performance? Are they co-performers themselves, helping students understand "audience participation" in a new way? Are they both at once? Our students might hear us speak of audience and think of those who pay to see a film or a play; they might remember that advertisements target specific audiences in order to sell products, and therefore the "pitch" needs to be pleasant or pleasurable in order to persuade. But how many rhetorical theorists discuss the pleasures of reading student-authored papers? For that matter, when was the last time we "paid" the student for the opportunity to engage with his or her work? In fact, aren't they usually paying us?

Thinking instead about *teachers as readers* may seem equally problematic. On the one hand, students may believe that readers are simply people who encounter written texts. But think of the many ways that they engage texts each day, not to mention the range of materials that count as text, and consider how these texts compete with one another for our students' attention: students are bombarded with images, and words rarely seem to stay put long enough to be considered with care. Do teachers read students' texts in similar ways, paying fleeting attention? On the other hand, students' experiences in secondary school have taught them that the act of "reading" literary texts either objectifies those texts, keeping them at arm's length while their elements are dissected and literary terms are identified; or turns them into cozy companions, as students journal about their "connections" with literary characters--without analyzing the role of language in creating those connections. Will professors approach their texts in either of these ways, our students may wonder? Will the texts be objectified and scrutinized, or will teachers simply "respond" to what students write?

It seems impossible to separate "reader" from "audience" in this particular case. When students write in the classroom, their teachers are at once readers and evaluators; they are creators of the rhetorical situation and audience members. Lawson, Ryan, and Winterowd's edited collection, *Encountering Student Texts: Interpretive Issues in Reading Student Writing* (1989), maintains a clear focus on readers as all contributors account for their own reading processes in the classroom. Well-respected scholars in the field—including Ross Winterowd, James Zebroski, Elizabeth Flynn, Sharon Crowley, Tilly Warnock, and Jim Corder— describe how their theoretical orientations and educational histories shape the interpretive act. It is a remarkable book, the only one of its kind, and it offers sophisticated readings of students' texts. But this text's attention to hermeneutics and privileging of critical theory shift attention away from the institutional and cultural contexts in which reading occurs. In addition, while contributors clearly identify their theoretical orientations, delving richly into the intellectual reasons why they read texts as they do, they rarely reflect on other aspects of their identities: race, age, class, religious beliefs, and so on.[1]

While the book does help us understand how and why teachers, particularly those who identify themselves as members of a discipline or identify with specific theoretical approaches, interpret student texts, it clearly privileges the interpretive act itself, as well as the interpreter, leaving other elements of the rhetorical situation unexamined. Since the student writers are all but absent here, we never really learn what they think about how these teachers read their work, or what effects, if any, those readings had upon the work itself.

Donnalee Rubin's *Gender Influences: Reading Student Texts* (1993) provides case studies of the reading and response patterns of actual teachers, male and female. But while Rubin's study does address issues related to teacher identity, it assumes identity is something that readers can somehow circumvent as they read. Rubin argues that identity itself—gender, more specifically—is an obstacle and that pedagogy is a medium through which to overcome it. In contrast, I argue that identity not only affects or mediates our reading but constitutes it. It is never possible for teachers to overcome any aspects of themselves in order to perform a preferred kind of reading of a given student's text. Rather, teachers must study the ways that their identities shape their reading strategies and use that understanding to help them create new ways of negotiating with students' texts.

While Rubin's book imagines a pedagogical world where teachers can, somehow, read around/past/through their own identities, Lad Tobin's provocative *Reading Student Writing: Confessions, Meditations, and Rants* (2004) makes no apologies for the unabashedly subjective way in

which he reads students' texts. He also acknowledges the complexity of the task:

> Reading a student essay is an enormously complicated and multidimensional task that involves reading the words on the page; reading the words we wish were on the page; reading the words we think the student wishes were on the page; reading the affect, temperament, ability, and potential of the student who wrote the words; reading our own emotional reaction to that student and that text; reading our relationships to our colleagues, mentors, and campus administrators; and so on. (13)

Tobin seeks to persuade teachers to spend additional time reading student work critically and carefully, arguing that when we do so, "the richer the text begins to appear" (14). Moreover, teachers might begin to understand (and then question) their own complicated responses to student work, particularly work that ignites our emotions. Ultimately, he suggests, many of our challenges reading student writing stem from our own disciplinary ambivalence, which in turn leads us to create assignments that invite students to write badly—or in ways that keep us up nights.

Like Tobin, I find the simultaneous attention to both an individual teacher's ways of reading and disciplinary ways of reading student writing useful. But Tobin's book is unapologetically monologic, and it deals with the angst more than the joys of this work. I want instead to think constructively about what it means to read, and I hope to highlight as many students' voices as possible, allowing those voices to narrate their own stories about how teachers read and why it matters. I want to help students like Naomi, who I quote in this essay's epigraph, locate themselves and their work in relation to their teacher-readers more successfully.

Just as scholarly discussions of teachers as readers can enrich our ways of thinking about reception, scholarship focused on audience has troubled easy assumptions about what it means for students to imagine their readers. In his 1975 essay, "The Writer's Audience is Always a Fiction," Walter Ong takes care to note that the word "audience" may be "misleading" for writers: "More properly, a writer addresses readers—only, he does not quite "address" them either: he writes to or for them" (10-11). Thus, Ong admits, students face a particularly sticky problem. Drawing upon the old chestnut "What I Did On My Summer Vacation" essay as an example, Ong argues that students are often stuck with lame essay topics and uneasiness about their teacher-readers. The student writer in this scenario is doomed because "The problem is not simply what to say but also whom to way it to. Say? The student is not talking. He is writing. No one is listening. There is no feedback. Where does he find his audience? He has to make his readers up, fictionalize them" (10). In suggesting that students must fictionalize their audience he seems to deny even the possibility of an actual, interested reader who exists in real time and can intercede in useful ways. Indeed, Ong assumes an utter lack of interest on the teacher's part. As if from the student's perspective, Ong states that for the student, there is "no conceivable setting in which he could imagine telling his teacher how he spent his summer vacation other than in writing this paper" (11). The only strategy, he argues, is for the student writer to invent a self on paper who sounds like the literary selves he's been studying in class. "This even makes it possible to write for this teacher—itself likely to be a productive ploy—whom he certainly has never been quite able to figure out" (11). Here Ong falls into the trap that Berlin identifies two decades later: by "figuring out" which writer his teacher likes best, the student can simply write for *that* teacher-self and succeed.

Lisa Ede and Andrea Lunsford respond to many of the same issues raised by Ong in their 1984 article "Audience Addressed/Audience Invoked: The Role of Audience in Composition Theory and Pedagogy." Ede and Lunsford review the two most prevalent ways of thinking about audience in the composition classroom: audience as addressed, which emphasizes the "concrete reality" of audience (78), and audience invoked, which suggests the audience is a "construction of the writer" (82). Ede and Lunsford reject this dichotomy, arguing that both positions "oversimplify the act of making meaning through written discourse" (78). For example, pedagogies that depend upon an understanding of audience as directly addressed assume that it's both possible and necessary to know an audience's beliefs and values in order to produce successful discourse (78). More importantly, they claim, dependence upon a model of audience as addressed fails to emphasize the writer's role as a reader of her own work. Thus teachers who emphasize audience as addressed do not teach writers to create the "internal dialogue" that would allow them to "analyze inventional problems and conceptualize patterns of discourse" (81).

But the audience as invoked position is not enough, either. Responding directly to Ong, Ede and Lunsford acknowledge the importance of a notion of fictionalized audience, yet they worry that Ong

depends upon traditional definitions of rhetoric and rhetorical situation (Ede and Lunsford 83). More importantly, they fear that Ong does not do enough to distinguish the writing of fiction from other writing situations. They write, "Every writer must indeed create a role for the reader, but the constraints on the writer and potential sources of and possibilities for the reader's role are both more complex and diverse than Ong suggests" (85). In revisiting Ong's "What I Did On My Summer Vacation" example, they remind readers that the student's choice to invent both a new literary storytelling self and a fictionalized reader (a lover of literature, which he assumes his teacher to be) is as much about his actual knowledge of the teacher and what she "yearns" to read as it is about his ability to construct an audience.

Thus while "Ong emphasizes the creative power of the adept writer, who can both project and alter audiences, as well as the complexity of the reader's role," Ede and Lunsford suggest that it isn't just creativity enabling the writer to succeed here (83). Instead, that student writer has both analyzed his audience carefully, assuming that a real, living person is reading, *and* projected a new persona to meet that reader's needs. I suggest this art of projection requires students to make assumptions about fairly unknowable aspects of a teacher's identity, which may come both from past experiences with other teachers and educated guesses about what literary critics enjoy reading. Assuming Ede and Lunsford are right, our imperative is to make more of those unknowable aspects of our identities known to students, and to speak explicitly about how we read in our disciplines. The challenge is to decide which parts of our identities to reveal and how to do so appropriately and usefully.

Ede and Lunsford ultimately argue for some sort of continuum of positions (88). They are clear: we simply can't accept an easy dichotomy. It's a position that they maintain in their 1996 essay, "Representing Audience: 'Successful' Discourse and Disciplinary Critique." In rethinking "Audience Addressed/Invoked," Lunsford and Ede critique their earlier positions by questioning how "audiences can not only enable but also silence writers and readers" (170). By revisiting the locations and sources of privilege that enabled their initial beliefs about reading, writing, and schooling in the first place, Lunsford and Ede point to the political and ideological implications of audience for their students.

Both scholarly discussions acknowledge the complicated rhetorical situations that any classroom teacher must face as she prepares to read a student's work, as well as those that students face as they write

to/for/ in the presence of a teacher. But what remains to be seen is the student's position in this discussion. In other words, it's those ways of both silencing and enabling writers that intrigue me. Which students do we silence and why? How and when do we enable their communication? What do students think about how their teachers read? And what might happen if teachers addressed their students' assumptions head on?

When Assumptions Shape Writing Habits: Where Theory Meets Practice

Each fall I teach a section of First Term Seminar (FTS), a required general education class of sixteen first-year students.[2] My seminar, "Stories, Selves, and Communities," focuses on the themes of literacy, identity, and community. The class considers how members of a community decide what makes a story readable, understandable, and accessible. At the same time, students study their own literacy practices and question which narrative forms are most compelling to them, and why. Students read texts that range generically from short stories to novels to memoir. As we read, we pay attention to issues of identity, variously defined, and we discuss how the writers and/ or narrators of each text position themselves in relation to their readers. For instance, we read *Mama Day,* by African American feminist writer Gloria Naylor, which depicts two communities: a rural African American community in the Georgia Sea Islands and an urban African American community in New York City. The novel features multiple narrators, all of whom represent a particular community within the novel.[3]

Students also read one another's work regularly, discussing their own identities and home communities, their newly forming identities as college students, and their experiences as outsiders learning about the residents of rural towns in southern Minnesota. Likewise, I speak explicitly about my own values as a reader, my own subject positions, and how those positions affect how I read their work. The four formal writing assignments include opportunities for narrative writing, analytical writing, informative and research-based writing, and reflective writing. Every formal assignment includes peer response, and students share informal writing.

In spring of 2005, I interviewed five students who had completed my FTS the semester before.[4] I learned that some writers making the transition from high school to college viewed me as the only familiar figure on campus. While these students had never engaged before with "real" anthropologists or theologians, all of them had worked with English teachers. They seemed to cling

to a sense of familiarity, assuming I'd read their work just as their previous teachers had. Familiarity bred a limited sense of audience, which I wanted them to expand and complicate. By focusing my course on identity issues themselves—both in terms of what we read and what we wrote—and by talking explicitly about my reading values and habits, I sought to help them unlearn those old expectations, create trust in me, and transfer that trust to a broader willingness to construe an audience beyond the teacher.

Julie, a quiet, serious teacher-pleaser who had always been academically successful, was a young white woman from the suburbs of the Twin Cities. I learned quickly that Julie's assumptions about how I would read her work came largely from the syllabus. Julie assumed that the books I chose for class would somehow predict my reading strategies, and that the literary texts were models for students to emulate. She claimed that she initially believed I would "look for stuff in their writing" that somehow resembled what authors like Gloria Naylor or Leslie Silko could produce. She figured I'd expect my students' writing to exhibit literary skill—to be aesthetically pleasing, in particular, as well as rhetorically successful.

Even as she used explicit sources like the syllabus to make assumptions about my reading, Julie worried also about the implicit. She spoke often of "hidden meanings," a term many first-year students use to discuss literary texts. In our earliest interview, Julie mentioned her belief that I would read her work and try to "find a second purpose or story behind it" at all times. On the preliminary questionnaire, she clarified this way: "She was extremely enthusiastic about reading books that made us read between the lines. She was able to pick out a lot of hidden details than I was ever able to see." What I framed as critical inquiry Julie recast as a search for hidden meaning, the kind of meaning that's never revealed to students outright. Reading literary texts was an exercise in divining that meaning; writing analytically was about demonstrating those divining skills.

Since only I held the key to unlock that hidden meaning, Julie viewed me as the primary audience for all of her work. When I asked students to review their papers for the course and then describe the audience they envisioned for each, Julie wrote, "My approach to writing…especially the papers directly related to the novels we read, was based on the teacher's preference. The strict criteria [of the assignment prompts] seemed to . . . narrow down the audience to the teacher." Here Julie believes that every assignment prompt has a specific "answer." As the writer of the prompt, then, I was clearly the one looking for the answer, and as the keeper of literary secrets, I also was the only one who knew those answers. It seemed absurd and impractical to Julie to imagine writing to or for anybody else.

Julie thus believed she was addressing me directly when she wrote, and the rhetorical situation produced a great deal of anxiety for her. But that anxiety often stemmed from her assumptions about my former reading experiences—the Professor Fremo who she invoked. For instance, Julie felt anxious because she assumed I had read so much excellent work by other students. "In addition to being a writer herself, it was initially intimidating to think of how many amazing essays her students must have written in the past and living up to her standard would be near impossible," she wrote on her questionnaire. For me, this was the most interesting contradiction: Julie depended upon explicit information from the syllabus and assignment prompts in order to write papers that addressed me as the sole reader. But at the same time, she depended upon a variety of assumptions about who my former students had been. She also made assumptions about the "real" Dr. Fremo and how she would read those essays—not to mention her own work. This was a sort of double-layered invocation: Julie created her own version of me, as well as versions of my former students.

Julie's anxiety was rooted in contradictory beliefs about audiences addressed and invoked. She believed she was writing directly to and for her professor, but she chose an identity for me, the lover of good literature who has always taught excellent writers, writers whom she created herself. There was a tangible effect on her writing process. Julie explained that during the course she would actually exchange copies of already commented-upon rough drafts with peers, long after our peer response sessions had ended. In other words, she confessed, she and her peers used their comparative studies of my comments to determine which papers I "liked" and which ones I didn't. They could look at final grades, too, and infer a direct relationship between the rough draft comments and the final grade received.

Here, then, is precisely the problem that Ede and Lunsford identify: Julie privileged an addressed audience—but had created her own version of it— and gave that audience too much power. She visited my office constantly, always stating that she wanted to "make sure" her revisions were "answering [my] questions." She could not develop an inner sense of her own work; she was not reading that work in a way that enabled "internal dialogue" (Ede and Lunsford 81). This in turn inhibited revision—

genuine rethinking of her work was difficult. Still, Julie admitted, as a high school student she had been a terrific corrector of errors. She followed her teachers' instructions to the letter, responding to every single comment she found in the margins. Since she had been rewarded for this approach throughout her academic career, she learned to depend less on her own instincts as a writer and more on her teachers' comments, handouts, and evaluations. When she took FTS, however, Julie found that my responses mostly raised questions that might be addressed in subsequent drafts. When she couldn't get the kind of feedback she wanted from me, then, she felt she had no choice but to turn to her own peers for response, trusting them to provide the "right" readings of her work that would result in a higher grade.

While Julie had difficulty trusting me as a reader, turning instead to her peers, Linda found herself positioned differently with peers at Gustavus Adolphus College. Linda, a student of color born and raised in Guyana, had emigrated to the States with her family and attended a diverse high school in the Twin Cities. Thus she had just left a community where she did not feel like "a minority." Now, however, she faced a startling amount of racial tension in the dorms. Linda felt she had to trust my feedback because she wasn't about to trust the opinions of the mostly white, upper middle class students in the class. She based that trust not on the explicit information in the syllabus that Julie had sought, but on assumptions gleaned from observations of me. Linda noted during an interview that she had based many of her assumptions about me as a reader upon my mannerisms, my clothes, and my tone of voice, all exhibited when she first met me on "move-in day" the Saturday before classes began.[5] Linda's experiences as an immigrant in urban American public schools had taught her to read both explicit and implicit "instructions"—to pay attention to cues like a syllabus, but to look also at a teacher's body language, bookshelves, and other manifestations of a teacher's values, in order to make judgments about that teacher's expectations. What Linda noticed that first Saturday was my peasant skirt ("kinda hippie") and a "friendly and motherly" demeanor. This communicated a sense of trustworthiness to Linda.

Because she felt some degree of comfort with me, she attended many office hours, and we spoke often. This, in turn, provided another layer of information. When she studied my office, she noted that I didn't have any "one thing" on my bookshelves; rather, they reflected my eclectic taste and multiple areas of expertise: novels by African American women, contemporary poetry by American women writers, adolescent fiction, creative nonfiction, scholarly work in composition studies, and so on. This also built trust for Linda, who valued the fact that I read diverse writers, and whose interest in sociology fueled her own interest in nonfiction texts. You are what you read, she seemed to believe, and she assumed correlation between my taste as a reader outside the classroom and my practices within it. Here Linda's assumptions seem similar to Julie's. Julie, too, believed that the books I chose for the syllabus reflected my taste. But Julie then drew conclusions about my identity based on this limited knowledge. She saw only the teacher who had created a syllabus, while Linda assumed interplay between that same teacher and the scholar who filled her bookshelves with poems, essays, and fiction by African American women. Her understanding of subjectivity was more complex than Julie's.

Still, Linda required some sort of test of my trustworthiness as a reader, and she created ways to test me throughout the course. For example, Linda and Anna, the only other student of color in the room, admitted at midterm that they had actually collaborated to produce Linda's first draft response to the first assignment in the course. The assignment, linked to our reading of *The Things They Carried*, invited students to write narrative snapshots about their home communities, but to avoid easy endings and moralizing. It was up to readers to infer the community's values from the snapshots. Linda's first draft opened with an unnamed young girl in an unnamed tropical island location encountering cave drawings. She described the drawings in graphic sensual, exoticized terms; I could nearly hear the drumbeats in the distance as I read. And then it hit me. Linda wanted me to hear those drumbeats. And she was laughing in accompanying rhythm.

I called her in to my office to talk about the draft of the paper, which was intended to be rooted in specificity: a specific place, a specific character, specific experiences in narrative form. "Who is this young woman?" I asked her. "Where is she standing? Something just doesn't ring true here." Linda smiled and began to explain. She had created the scene that she thought her white classmates and teacher would imagine; she had constructed a representation of an exotic Guyana native returning to her homeland, facing the jungle images and stereotypes (jutting breasts and all) that surely inhabited their imaginations. Moreover, she said, Anna had helped put her up to it.[6] They had collaborated to write that first draft for Linda.

I then read the essay aloud, showing her the moments that had sparked doubts. When Linda saw

that I would speak candidly about how I read her narrative, addressing my own expectations as a white reader largely unfamiliar with Guyanese culture, she seemed more willing to discuss her work with me. In fact, her growing trust in me manifested itself in her willingness to show me unpolished drafts. For Linda, this was a useful opportunity that affected her writing process; the desire to produce perfect prose had frozen her in the past, preventing her from seeking help early on from her teachers. This, she believed, resulted in harsh readings of her work and lower grades for Linda. While Julie had been more than willing to talk with her previous teachers, take their comments on her drafts and "revise" accordingly, Linda had never felt permitted to make mistakes or missteps in the past. Here was a way in which learning more about me as a reader translated to a useful revision of Linda's writing process.

As Linda revised her narrative, she tested me further. This time, she told a story from the first person, painting a portrait of a traveling American character named "Brittany," a woman with a complex history of her own who needed to learn more about life in her friend, Linda's, home country of Guyana. Brittany accompanies Linda to Guyana in time for the festival of Mashramani, and the narrative becomes an opportunity for Linda to teach Brittany— and, clearly, to teach me—about the festival. Here is an excerpt:

> *"Ooh, its going to be a marvelous day tomorrow," I shouted as I sprang my arms into the air, strolling down one of the most crowded streets with my friend Brittany. She was from America and had accompanied me on my first visit back to Guyana, the place where I was born.*
> *"Linda"[7] exclaimed Brittany, "why are you so excited?"*
> *Girl, tomorrow is Mashramani. It's a festival that is held on the 23rd of February, and it signifies the day Guyana became a republic country. Many bands across the Caribbean, as well as local ones, will slide along the road in loud music. Crowds of people will be seen dancing behind each band in colorful costumes and clothing. There's going to be an overwhelming amount of traditional food: Chinese dishes, Indian dishes, African dishes and Portuguese dishes."*
> *"Don't forget the Amerindian (Native Indians) dishes," said a tall middle-aged man who stepped behind my friend and I . . . Don't mean to interrupt," he said finally, "but I could not allow you to forget about the Amerindians. Mashramani would not be the same if any one of the five ethnic groups did not partake."*

Here Linda is aware that Brittany is not the only one who lacks information about Guyanese culture and its diverse ethnic roots. Her readers—including a white teacher who had told Linda that she had never left the U.S.-- lack this information. This piece exhibits Linda's desire to teach readers about this place and its culture. When the "tall middle-aged man" teaches the two young women about Mashramani, it's hard not to flinch at the encyclopedia style language. The piece's didactic tone, canned dialogue, and infomercial snippets about Guyanese food, culture, and tradition impede my ability to enjoy the piece fully. That language stems from Linda's decision to write primarily for me, a white reader who knows next to nothing about her culture.

That first draft—cave paintings and drumbeats—allowed Linda to test my trustworthiness as a reader. By telling her explicitly what I saw and by addressing my own racial identity when I read, I invited her to trust me enough to revise the essay. This second draft acknowledged that while she would be willing to trust me, she had a thing or two to teach me as well. But these two rhetorical purposes— teaching and testing trustworthiness—are at odds in this piece. Linda clearly wrote for the Professor [X] who knew little about Guyana, but she did not seem to write for other subject positions I embodied. Was she thinking primarily about the white students in the room? About the white teacher? How explicitly should she acknowledge that we lack information about her culture?

A real shift in style, tone, and rhetorical awareness occurred, however, when she wrote her first analytical essay about Gloria Naylor's novel, *Mama Day*. The novel features two African American characters, Cocoa and George, who come to terms with their own histories. In this excerpt from her first draft, Linda wrote with real insight about George's lack of cultural understanding:

> *. . . . . To be part of a culture and not to feel close to it is like not having a culture; displacement occurs in such situations. George is a character that illustrates such displacement. He knows who he is physically; he knows his name, age, occupation and where he resides; however, these things do not provide vital information as to who he is. He needs a culture to find his true self. George longs for a place of belonging. He longs to fill a void in his heart. Therefore, he creates a structural routine in which he alone can fit into. He "hangs his shirt on one side of the closet, his underwear stacked into one set of drawers, his toiletries arranged neatly on one side of the dresser" (177). In creating this*

structure, George creates a self in which he is comfortable with.
George's behavior is understandable because there is a displacement of his true identity. Since there is this displacement, he tries to make sure that that there isn't a dislocation of his actions too . . .

This academic form enabled her to express her passion in ways that really worked. Stylistically, the prose is more sophisticated than what I read in the "Brittany" narrative. The invitation to shift to a more objective, academic stance certainly enabled Linda, who wished to study sociology and anthropology, to take on that anthropological lens as she investigated George's behavior, trying on a new voice and a new genre to boot.

This piece commands our attention, and while some of the shift can certainly be attributed to the change in genre, a more important factor is audience. Two layers of trust exist here. First, when Linda wrote about Naylor's novel, she could trust that I knew the book intimately. While I was an outsider to Guyanese culture, I was an insider to Naylor's work. Linda knew this from our many conversations about Naylor's novels in my office. No longer facing the heavy burden of teaching me about something I knew nothing about, Linda could finally have the kind of academic conversation with a reader that makes literary criticism exciting. Having her teacher as primary audience is an advantage, since she can trust me to know the book well and engage her ideas in sophisticated ways. This draft is moving in a fruitful direction, as is Linda's evolving sense of audience. What Linda does, then, is channel the evolving sense of trust that emerged during the semester with actual knowledge about who I am as a reader. The end result is that Linda addresses and invokes an audience successfully[8]

While Linda blossomed writing analytical essays, others struggled. Naomi, an independent student and a strong writer who preferred narrative to analytical writing (and who didn't always buy my argument that one didn't preclude the other), was a young white woman from rural Minnesota. Despite writing a gorgeous narrative snapshot, "Harmonica Man," as her first assignment, Naomi's analytical writing fell flat. Her critical essay about Leslie Marmon Silko's *Ceremony* was instead a summary of the novel. The paper illustrates what I came to understand as Naomi's primary difficulty with more traditional academic writing: her miscalculation of the audience's needs and expectations. She doesn't have a sense of what information is necessary or pertinent. The paper chronologically details Tayo's encounters with white people, white culture, or white

places. Each paragraph summarizes a different example, but she never explains why Silko wants her people to "let go of their hatred and resentment" of the whites. Instead, each example seems to say, "See, here's another way that white people are doing bad things."

When I interviewed Naomi, she admitted, "I had kind of a hard time writing 'The Healing Ceremony.' I could lay out the events for you, but when it comes to analyzing I have a rough time with that. I think I was thinking about the audience too much." This response surprised me; at first I couldn't see how her difficulty with analysis was a result of over-thinking audience. But Naomi explained that when she wrote the analytical essay, she was worrying most about those "who hadn't read the book." She didn't know how much "the reader" already knew. How could she move beyond merely telling readers what happened to analyzing the events? Wouldn't everybody reading the paper simply get lost? She had internalized some former teacher's admonition to "write as though your reader hasn't already read the book." This admonition denies the basic truth of the actual rhetorical situation: "the reader" is the teacher, and s/he has certainly read the book. Naomi continued:

When I write a paper like this I'm torn as whether to like, act like my audience is the teacher, or whether it's someone who doesn't know anything about the book, so I never know how much to go into detail and how much to explain, and I don't want to over-explain, but yet I don't want someone who doesn't know anything about the book to be lost either. . .

For Naomi, difficulty with analytical writing wasn't just about a lack of familiarity and comfort with academic writing in general. Instead, this difficulty resulted from her inability to make sense of some bad rhetorical advice: to always assume ignorance on the part of your audience, even when doing so denies the truth of a living, breathing teacher who is reading the work. In effect, this advice meant that Naomi was not permitted to address a reader, and without a clear starting place in the "real," she couldn't move along that continuum to invoking one.

Only one student, Anna, came to our class with a theory of audience already in place. A young African American woman from rural Mississippi, Anna told me that she actually "envisions" readers for her work when an audience isn't really specified: "When I write something, I read it out loud as I go and I somewhat envision whoever's sitting in front of me, taking like every word I say, and, I don't know,

the people don't have faces, you know, I still see them like, their bodies, moving [while I talk] . . ." As she spoke, Anna gestured with her head and hands, sometimes ducking as if to avoid being punched. I was troubled by the image of the audience members' bodies moving, as if they had been "hit" by her words. But I was fascinated by how this concept of audience blurs the line between the invoked, imagined audience and those who are addressed.

Her desire to conjure actual bodies sitting before her suggests a need to address people—but these people are clearly products of her imagination, invoked by Anna as she considers who might inhabit those bodies that "move" while she talks. I asked her to say more about her theory of audience, and Anna replied, "When I write, I just put it out there for you. If you don't like it, well . . ." She shrugged her shoulders, trying to look nonchalant. "If…I do what I feel, whatever the topic is, that's how I do it," Anna stated matter-of-factly. She attributed this straightforwardness to her background. Raised by her religious grandmother in Mississippi, and troubled by an on-again, off-again relationship with her mother, Anna learned early on the importance of being candid and true to her own intentions. Her grandmother taught Anna, "If somebody asks me something, I should just put it out there. Oh, they'll get over it sooner or later. They can't hold it against me for the rest of their life." Anna has learned to take risks with her writing, without fearing readers' reactions. But she recognizes that readers will, in fact, react, sometimes in unpredictable ways. She knows that the responsibility for successful communication has to be negotiated—it cannot possibly lie solely with her. Thus, she has learned to anticipate multiple reactions, and to write with multiple possible reactions—and readers—in mind.

How Might We Set Ourselves Up to Find Out?: Making Pedagogical Adjustments

The students I spoke with cared about how I read their work. But their own identities and experiences shaped how they got their information. Julie, used to academic success and high grades, approached the task of learning about my reading much as she had approached all of her previous academic tasks: she studied relevant documents, considered my responses to her work, and then compared those responses to the ways in which I responded to her peers. Such a system had never failed her before. Why change it? Linda worked intuitively to discern the kind of reader I would be. A young woman who had experience negotiating

cultural boundaries, Linda took into account the multiple ways that I performed my identity in and out of the classroom. Just as she felt scrutinized by the white students with whom she lived and studied, Linda brought a similar kind of scrutiny to bear on me, using whatever information she gleaned to determine whether or not she could trust me as a reader. Naomi, the strongest narrative writer, struggled with analytical writing, depending upon misinformation and mythology about audience. And Anna's sense of audience was so well developed that she felt her readers in a visceral sense.

There seemed to be a direct correlation between how my students received their information about me as a reader and their sense of belonging to academic culture. They occupied positions on a continuum. Julie, who I deemed the most traditional academic insider—white, suburban, middle class—relied upon the most explicit forms of information about me as a reader, like the syllabus. She was also the least flexible in terms of her ability to adapt to shifts in generic expectations. But students who viewed themselves as located outside the majority culture in some way, either racially, culturally, or socio-economically, seemed able to utilize both implicit and explicit information about me as a reader, with Linda and Anna most flexible in adapting to my needs as an audience member, even when shifting genres.[9]

As I interviewed my students, I was reminded how important it is to be explicit about our identities and experiences in the classroom. From the moment we enter the classroom our students begin to interpret who we are and make assumptions about how we will read their work. Students scrutinize us in order to figure out "what we want" from their papers. They scan our bookshelves when they visit us during office hours. They make inferences based on our clothing, our hairstyles, even the music we play. They consider what our syllabus says and what we say ourselves in and out of class. They listen as we participate in conferences, peer review sessions, and other classroom activities that highlight our reading practices. While we cannot control the inferences and assumptions that students make from these experiences, we can control the nature of the experiences themselves. Why fuel the fires of miscommunication and faulty assumptions? We have countless opportunities to be explicit: we can complete reading history questionnaires along with our students; we can write literacy narratives and share them with our students; we can model how we read student authored work by reading and annotating papers in front of them using whatever technologies are available to us. We can talk openly with them

about what we do as readers and how they feel about it.

But then we have to watch their reactions and gauge the effects. It's my responsibility to know more about my students' identities and experiences before I read their work. A writer like Linda blossoms when given candid information about her teacher's reading history and interpretive approaches. First, this information gives her somebody to address; second, candor helps her to develop trust, and trust enables her to engage more fully in the response/revision cycle. But a writer like Julie, who is already overly dependent upon teacher feedback, may begin to pander if I emphasize my needs as a reader too much. When I met Julie, I couldn't predict how systematically she would study course documents in order to learn about me as a reader, and I didn't know how dependent upon written feedback she would be. What Julie needs is the space to learn to develop her own evaluative criteria—an "ear" for her own writing. She may actually find it detrimental to hear more from her teacher about what that teacher "likes" or "wants." I feel responsible for the fact that Julie never really learned much about me as a reader, and thus kept assuming what I really "looked for" would forever be hidden to her. What Julie needed was a new metaphor—a new way of understanding what it means to read that isn't dependent upon "hidden meanings" and guesswork. I don't think I provided that for her. Julie needed to learn to read more than the syllabus in order to make useful assumptions about her audience's needs. I could have done more to model my own reading strategies for her, helping her challenge her belief that meaning is "hidden" and teach her to read rhetorical cues in the text.

Had I approached audience in First Term Seminar by simply repeating the mantra, "study your audience and consider their needs," I would have emphasized only half of any rhetorical situation. Instead, I needed to tell my students to reflect on their own lives and experiences first, and then consider how to best plan for us to "meet" on paper. In short, I tried to demonstrate that identity matters professionally, personally, geographically, and culturally in the classroom for both teachers and students. Since teachers' identities matter, we must learn to work with—not against—the identities we embody, inhabit, or perform every day. That means being more explicit about who we are, what we expect from our students and ourselves, and why we do what we do with student-authored texts. By extension, and in a spirit of fairness and collaboration, this imperative also requires us to give students the opportunity to share the same information about themselves—but without dictating all the forms the "disclosure" should take.

Since our reading practices affect the writing practices of our students. It's imperative to study our own reading practices, and find ways for students to work with, as well as against, those practices. Students produce texts to meet our reading expectations, or work against or defy those expectations. They write texts to "answer" our questions or raise new questions. They write to silently challenge us. That means we need to know and understand our own reading practices, discuss them explicitly, and give students the opportunity to strategize about how to reach us as readers, as well as other audiences. It means we cannot deny that we are reading, or pretend that we are not the audience at hand.

Appendix A: Student Questionnaire

Directions: Please read through the questions below, and contact me if you have any questions or need clarification. Then, go back to your work for the course (ENG 256 or FTS 100) and reread it. You may want to look only at final drafts; you may want to revisit the whole collection of informals, rough drafts, etc. It's up to you.

Take some time to reread your work and really think about your own frame of mind when you produced it. Try to remember what it was like to write a particular essay or group of essays in the first place. Then, when you've really reflected, please respond to the following questions:

1. How did you imagine your audience at the time that you wrote this work? Who, specifically, were you writing to/for? (Feel free to talk about an individual piece of writing or a collection.)

2. If Rebecca Fremo was an intended member of that audience, what kinds of assumptions did you make about her reading expectations? In other words, what did you imagine she'd like or dislike as a reader?

3. What were your assumptions about Rebecca Fremo's reading preferences based on? In other words, how did you come to "know" her as a reader? What did she say or do in class to give you these impressions?

4. If Rebecca Fremo was not an intended member of the audience for your work, how did you let her know? Did you tell her explicitly, "Hey, you're not the audience for this work!" Or did you send signals within the work itself?

5. Where, in your text(s), do you see evidence of how you were thinking about audience? Consider vocabulary, style, voice, tone, genre, and so on.

6. Now that you've revisited this work months after you produced it, do you see a different audience than the one you intended? Why/why not?

Notes

1. Essays by Elizabeth Flynn and John Flynn do engage questions related to gender
2. Our institution does not offer first year composition courses. Instead, we have a full-blown WAC program that includes a required First Term Seminar and two additional courses, at least one of which must be Writing in the Disciplines.
3. Other books include Leslie Marmon Silko's *Ceremony*, Tim O'Brien's *The Things They Carried*, and Terry Tempest Williams' *Refuge*. We also read critical articles by writers such as Mary Louise Pratt, as well as essays by Scott Russell Sanders, Patricia Hampl, and others.
4. The students who I interviewed were all young women, but FTS only enrolled four men that fall semester, and none responded to my open call for participants. Linda, Julie, Anna, Lizbeth, and Naomi, on the other hand, were quite interested in the project for a variety of reasons. I interviewed them several months after they completed the course.
5. When I conducted the interviews, we still had an institutional tradition of meeting our new FTS advisees and their parents/ families on "move-in day." Thankfully, we no longer do this.
6. Sadly, no record remains of this early draft, titled "Mala." Linda wasn't able to locate it when I began to collect copies of student work for the project. I'm afraid you'll have to trust my memory in this case. She was, however, able to locate the file of the revision, now titled "Brittany". When she revised, she wrote a piece titled "Brittany," which introduced a fictional character who was visiting Guyana for the first time.
7. I've changed the name here to preserve the pseudonym.
8. I believe that discussing issues related to identity and culture in class, as well as Linda's ongoing reflection about her own experiences as a person of color, enriched the work. Likewise, Linda loved the novel; Linda enjoyed more "academic" writing; Linda now had really settled in to her life at [X] College and her work demonstrated that new sense of stability.
9. This seems very much like W.E.B. Dubois's notion of double-consciousness

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Letter with No Address

Jim Brosnan

I was here before,
watched you tend
the hillside garden
of purple lupine
in the emptiness
of noon under pink
tinted cloudscapes
as orange monarchs
gracefully arched
over mounds of stone
before an ink stained
sky whispered evening
over the empty village
and a gray fog enveloped
the cold granite. I study
the shadows of hardwoods—
a mental exercise to remain
alert in the solitude
of this countryside.

Soon the yellow buds
of daylilies will anticipate
daybreak, angling their faces
toward pale street light
and I without paper possess
multitudes of words to describe
these ambivalent feelings.

It was better the first time.

Writing Teacher

Rebecca Fremo

It's not about lightbulb moments
or bringing truth to the masses.
It's more like planning a party:
I decide who to invite, and hope
the conversation won't stall.
But if things get too dry, I shake it up.
Then, when they heave language up into space,
I make sure those words fasten their seatbelts.

Seminar at 7 AM

Jim Brosnan

I carry poetry into their souls:
Synder's Kyoto, Merwin's
pineapple plantation, lyrical
descriptions of Kunitz's
Cape Cod seashore gardens.

My students highlight phrases,
similes, and sensory images,
pause to check allusions
on their smartphones and laptops.

I answer questions about theme,
listen to their analysis while
watching an occasional eyelid
droop or mouth yawn wide.

At nine, they close computers,
grab knapsacks, push padded
chairs under the long oak table,
converse in native tongues
as they move across campus green,
their spirits time zones away.

Connecting through Writing

Using Rapport to Motivate Students in Online Composition Courses

Mike Mutschelknaus

It is the first day of the semester. After a morning of teaching in the classroom, I go to my office in the afternoon to check on my online students. I open my course web site. No surprise, the younger students in the class have already replied to the first getting-to-know-each-other discussion post and are writing to each other. They have formed loose coalitions, depending upon which high schools they recently graduated from. They know each other and how to converse online with each other. There are also discussion posts from the newcomer and refugee students. Stiff with formality and precision, these students address their posts directly to me, the teacher. None of the younger students has replied to these immigrants' posts yet. There are a few first messages from nontraditional students as well, an unemployed worker on a job retraining grant, and a grandma who is extremely nervous about her first online class. I open my work email to find out that two students don't have the book yet, and one student can't log in to the course. Checking my voice mail, I find out that another student will be online next week, after she gets her paycheck so she can cover her Internet bill. Not a bad start for a first day in an online course.

So, how do we, as teachers, help these students connect in our online classroom so that they can learn together as a shared community of writers? As good community college online teachers, we will certainly devise inclusive discussion posts, shared group work, and multiple methods of feedback and content delivery. Creating an inclusive course architecture, however, does not necessarily solve the underlying gaps that separate us from our students and our students from each other. There is a generation gap between us middle-aged teachers and our younger students, a gap between those students in the course who have learning disabilities and those who don't and a cultural gap between those who grew up in the United States and those who have considerable life experiences elsewhere.

I believe that building rapport with our online students is the answer to bridging these gaps. However, I also know that connecting with our online students it doesn't just happen. We, as teachers, can get better at it. For example, when Murphy and Rodriguez-Manzanares (167), from Canada's Memorial University, conducted a qualitative research study based on interviews with 42 high school distance education teachers, they discovered six different skills that online teachers can use in order to make better connections with their students:

- Recognizing the student as a unique individual
- Supporting and monitoring in order to provide effective feedback
- Being available and responding quickly to student needs
- Interacting in non text-based interactions so that the teacher and student can hear or see each other, or be together face-to-face
- Using appropriate tone in interactions to show friendliness, respect, and courtesy
- Engaging in non-academic conversations

Our goal as online composition teachers should be to move students from being extrinsically motivated to write and respond because of grades or course requirements to being intrinsically motivated to write because they feel they have something to important to say to an audience that respects their ideas. That is why teacher-student rapport building is so important in the online composition classroom. Patrick Sullivan, in a recent issue of *Teaching English in the Two-Year College,* describes this as moving students away from writing aversion towards curiosity, and even enthusiasm about exploring ideas (120-124). We can't expect students to do this on their own. Using rapport-building techniques is a way that we can guide them on that journey. Garrison, Anderson, and Archer, in their productive "communities of inquiry" model for online instruction also reiterate the importance of strong teacher student rapport in the online classroom (87-105). According to them, there are three types of presence that are needed in an online learning environment:

- Social presence: Students must be able to interact with each other and be allowed to show their personalities.

- Cognitive presence: Students must interact with thoughtful course material that is appropriately challenging for them.
- Teaching presence: Anderson et al. define this as "the design, facilitation, and direction of cognitive and social processes for the purpose of realizing personally meaningful and educationally worthwhile learning outcomes" (5).

By using rapport-building techniques, it is my belief that instructors can improve the teaching presence in their online classrooms. An improved online teaching presence will help students from different generations, different cultures, and different learning abilities develop their own motivations for writing.

Case study

  During the fall 2011 semester, I had a wonderful freshman composition class of 27 very diverse students. They were a mixture of ages, cultures, and learning styles. As a class, they worked well together and had engaging discussions. This does not always happen in my online courses, I must confess. I therefore decided to apply Murphy and Rodriguez-Manzanares's framework of rapport-building techniques in order to see which techniques worked best with which groups of students and which techniques I might apply to greater effect the next time I teach the course. Each of the students quoted in this section has given his or her permission to be in the article and has reviewed the article as well. This is consistent with McKee and Porter's (711-712) emphasis that instructors need to be sure to use student writing ethically when doing research.

Bridging the Generation Gap

  The first gap that I, as an online 45-year-old teacher, face is that I have a generation gap between me and my younger students. Let's face it, I do not know the websites, cultural references, or technologies my students are familiar with. Nor, quite honestly, do I want to invest time to learn about the latest viral sensation. My younger students are digital natives. I am a digital immigrant. In Prensky's ground-breaking analysis of digital literacy, digital natives are younger generations who have been immersed in technology since their births. Digital immigrants are older people who have had to learn digital literacy because we come from a time before the Internet (Prensky 3-4). As Prensky points out, "A language learned later in life, scientists tell us, goes into a different part of the brain" (3). In essence, I, as an older person, have the same struggles learning

digital literacies that ESL students have learning English. Digital literacy is not intuitive for older people in the way it is for the younger students who have grown up with the Internet constantly accessible. Therefore, there is a gap in the classroom between digital natives and digital immigrants that teachers need to help overcome even if, as is my case, the teacher is a digital immigrant as well.

  Three of Murphy and Rodriguez-Manzanares's skills for online teachers can help bridge this generation gap: recognizing students as individuals, responding quickly to demonstrate availability to students, and cultivating a friendly and respectful tone in interactions with students. These skills are important in order to show younger students that an older teacher can respond effectively online to their learning needs, to show older students that they are not lost in the online classroom, and to show both generations that a real person behind the course actually cares about them. I used these categories to explore the generational gap in my own fall 2011 freshman composition classroom.

Recognizing younger students as individuals

  I have to admit that the younger generation does share their personalities and emotions with each other online far more than I do. I find myself sometimes being a bit too reserved, too task-centered, and too focused on course content. I do not recognize each student's unique personality in the class, nor do I always give them enough opportunities to display their personalities, or to reveal mine. The following dyad, is a classic example of how to depersonalize an online conversation. I include my original discussion prompt, the student's reply, and my response to that student. The student, Angie, is 21 years old. I am 45, by the way.

- Original discussion prompt: Write two well-developed paragraphs exploring the similarities and differences between the "Moving Mountains" (91) article and the "Black Mesa" (117) article. Be sure to use MLA or APA style for your in-text citations. Next, find a passage in Van Jones's "License" (53) that you could use to examine issues in "Moving Mountains" and "Black Mesa". Explain what Van Jones would probably think about those two articles.

- Angie's second paragraph: "Moving Mountains" by Erik Reece and "Black Mesa Syndrome" by Judith Nies are about coal mining and the devastations they cause. The locations where the articles take place maybe different but they have

the same effect on the environment. Coal mining causes devastation to the environment by destroying forests, water supply, and animals. Coal mining not only causes the environment damage, it also hurts the people who live around the coal mining. The people who live around there have contaminated water, a constant settlement of dust, and their children have numerous health problems. A grandfather was called into pick up his granddaughter because she was sick. Reece writes "Wiley started flipping through the sign-out book and found that fifteen to twenty students went home sick every day because of asthma problems, severe headaches, blisters in their mouths, constant runny noses and nausea" (98).

- My reply to Angie: Hello Angie. Thanks for your post. You really hit your stride in your second paragraph because you used transition sentences to move effectively from one source to another. You also used creative links to explain the differences between the two articles. I liked your point that both articles deal with the deleterious effects of coal mining, even though they are in different parts of the country. --Mike

Two things are immediately apparent. First of all, I, as a teacher, wrote a discussion topic that didn't allow students to interject any of their own personality into the writing so that I could recognize them as individuals. The second thing is that I created a boring reply that did not in any way acknowledge this student as a real person. I focused entirely on the technical content of her writing, and did not display any of my own personality either. This type of response, all too common in my own courses, is definitely an example of how not to recognize a student as an individual and how to increase the distance between an older teacher, like me, and younger students.

Responding quickly to younger students

One thing I have noticed with younger students is that they expect very quick responses to their questions. I do not think this is because they are impatient or rude, however. I think these students have a different assumption about online course interactions than I do as a middle-aged teacher. They assume that my reply to their queries should be as quick and immediate as, say, commenting on a Facebook post that I get on my cell phone. I assume that my reply is like an email reply that can happen any time within the next 24 hours. The following exchange with a younger student demonstrates this

gap. This exchange occurred in the questions area of our discussion board, so there is no prompt.

- Melanie's question to me (September 4th): Can you tell me how I can quote someone else in the story who's not the author?

- My reply to Melanie (September 7th): Sure, Mallory. The basic trick is to mention one author in the author tag and the other author in the parenthetical citation. Here's an example: Smith claims that "pizza is good" (Jones 43). In this example, you would look up Jones in the works cited page. I assume you are writing in MLA style. If you are writing in APA style, let me know. I hope this helps. --Mike--

- Melanie's reply back to me (also on September 7th): Thanks, Mike. I think I understand now.

Notice the timing of Melanie's response. Melanie replies to me immediately, but I took three days to answer her initial question. In this case, she was far more accessible to me than I was to her. She was modeling the behavior that she wanted me to adopt. Of course, as a teacher I do recognize that we have far more students to reply to than Mallory does as a student. We aren't just camped out on our cell phones. Even so, if we want to stay available for our younger students, we need to do so quickly for them in order to lessen the distance of the generational gap. One way is to record voice files instead of laboriously typing out response after response. Alternatively, we can inform students that we will reply to their questions at a specific time of the day, such as during our office hours.

Creating an engaged tone with younger students

According to Murphy and Rodriguez-Manzanares (177), tone in online discussions is the emotional attitude towards the student that a teacher displays in his or her discussion replies. For example, teachers can be humorous, or not, respectful, or not, engaged, or disengaged. In examining the tone of my discussion replies with younger students, I discovered that my tone was typically respectful, yet disengaged. The following dyad shows this pattern. Kaya was also responding to my discussion prompt comparing coal mining articles.

- Kaya's response to discussion prompt: 'We survived starvation and Hitler and starvation and Stalin, and now you tell us something invisible will kill us?' These are the words of one old

women living in the alienation zone in the country of Belarus (82). Hope Burwell took a trip to Belarus (the country most contaminated by Chernobyl) in 2000 expecting to see barren land. She was a little surprised to see that it was a little closer to home. "Certainly I didn't imagine that the most radioactive landscape on Earth would make me homesick," Burwell describes her experience (79). You cannot physically see the radioactivity that has overtaken the country of Belarus, but the effects of the Chernobyl on the people of this country is definitely real.

- My response to Kaya: Hi Kaya. I thought that you did an excellent job writing this entry. Your first paragraph is written in very effective MLA style. Your works cited list is also correct. I also thought that your connection to Sauer's "Reinhabiting" and Agent Orange was very astute. You are right. We are harming the environment, and thus ourselves, in ways that are irreversible. This is tragic. --Mike

If I were to categorize the tone of my response, I would find it respectful, yet disengaged. This tone is fairly typical for me. The less I have in common with students, especially younger ones, the more I focus on surface features of their writing rather than content. My tone shows, in essence, that I read their work but that I do not engage emotionally with it. To be effective with my younger students online, I need to have an engaged tone when I write to them. All I did in my response was to tell her what she did right. I didn't encourage her to think deeply about the topic by asking her any probing questions about the subject itself.

Connecting Offline with Older Students

I have discovered a strange phenomenon. In my face-to-face classes, I connect better with traditional age college students. I still find the presence of middle-aged people in my face to face classes slightly disconcerting. They are my equals in so many life experiences, so there are power-sharing issues. I always fear that they will find my group work and peer review exercises a little bit lame because the exercises seem to work best with younger students. In my online classes, however, the converse is true. I have more difficulties connecting with younger students, and I have more difficulties keeping younger students motivated. With older students online, however, our shared commonalities allow me to interact easily with them. Also, I have many more phone calls, office visits, and other non-

text based interactions with older students. These are indicators of rapport building according to Murphy and Rodriguez-Manzanares (177).

For example, I had two nontraditional students that visited me frequently in my office during the online class: Holly and Anne. Holly is a mother of five who works full-time. She would actually take time off of work or come over during her lunch hour to work on online assignments with me. As a non-traditional student, she was initially quite nervous about doing well in the course, and the office visits helped calm her down so she could do the writing assignments. Anne, as well, was a parent who took time off work to come talk to me about her writing assignments. During our time together, I learned quite about both students' lives outside of the classroom, much like I do talking with my classroom students before and after traditional classes. I have noticed this trend in my other online courses as well. Older students make the effort to interact with me outside of the course web site, but many younger students do not. In order to improve my teaching, therefore, I need to find ways to connect online with my older students, perhaps through the use of Skype or other face-to-face technologies such as Eyejot, a video email system.

Bridging the Cultural Gap

Students from many different cultures take my online class, just like they do regular courses. In the fall 2011 online course, I had a non-traditional student from Somalia, an international student from Korea, and a woman from Ethiopia. All of these students were excellent cross-cultural ambassadors. I chose to interview these students because I realized that up until this point in my online teaching career I had not acknowledged how cultural differences might affect the way online students communicate with each other and with me, the instructor. One of these students emphasized four key elements of Murphy and Rodriguez-Manzanares's rapport building techniques for online teachers: availability, tone, recognition and monitoring. At the time of our class, she had been living in the USA for 9.5 years. This was her first online course. Her interview responses are a primer for being an effective cross-cultural online teacher. I have condensed her responses for the sake of brevity, but she talked at length on each issue. The interview was open-ended. In other words, I didn't ask her specifically about any particular issue. Rather, I just let her tell me her thoughts about the course.

Being available for cross-cultural students

The student made a contrast between effective online teachers, who urge students to ask questions, and ineffective teachers who are aloof. Availability is important. Also, she pointed that I, the teacher, answered questions promptly. She valued this responsiveness.

Using an appropriate tone with cross-cultural students

The tone of our teacher/student interactions was perhaps the most crucial element of rapport building for the cross-cultural student I interviewed. She found my supportive and encouraging comments to be just as important, if not more so, than my content comments in our discussion board and constructive criticism comments on her essays. She was unsure of herself (this was her first college writing class ever) until she got her grading comments back on her third essay about seven weeks into the course. She liked both regular comments on her essays, which she would print off and look at, as well as voice file comments on her essays, which she would listen to over and over again. She also liked voice file comments on her essays because she could hear the tone in my voice. She also appreciated it when I would make video comments to the entire class because she could hear my voice and see my facial expressions.

When she read an "I'm so pleased with you" comment I made in one of her essay grades, she had an epiphany that she was a good college writer. Another breakthrough moment was on her explanatory synthesis when I wrote "Please remember how you wrote this essay. You can write like this for college and graduate school." She said that at that moment she realized she could use the same writing process over and over again. Furthermore, she could see improvement in her essays because I, as the teacher, gradually moved from error corrections to supportive comments as the essays progressed over the course of the semester.

Appropriate recognition of individual students was also important for this cross-cultural student. For example, she would read all of my teacher reply comments to other students in our class discussion posts. When she found a reply where I was really impressed (the "wow" posts), she would then read those students' posts. She also developed favorite students that she followed in the course and read their posts. She paid more attention to those students than others in the class. She also sometimes felt too recognized in the course. She said, "Because of my name, I could feel I was the only foreigner. At first, I was singling myself out from the course." She

was talking about a video post I had made encouraging the class that they had all done a good job. She felt that the video post didn't apply to her, that I was just too polite to say in a video to the entire class that she wasn't doing a good job. As the class went on, however, she began to feel like she was an actual participant of the course.

Monitoring cross-cultural students

When I interviewed this student, she said that she was very unsure of her English writing skills when she started the course. She liked her essay feedback on the first two essays, which she did very well on, but she didn't quite believe it. She commented that in other courses, she had received perfect scores on assignments, but with no feedback as to why she got those scores, thus making those perfect scores useless for her. It therefore took her a while to begin to believe in the monitoring that I was providing her in my essay comments.

Bridging the Learning Disability Gap

One student in my class had a short-term memory learning disability. Examining our teacher/student interactions over the course of the semester shows a narrative arc, driven for the most part by the student, in which we developed mechanisms for recognizing each other as individuals, built in support systems, synched our tone of interactions, established ways to be available to each other and discovered each other through non-academic interactions. These interactions worked because the student was proactive and sought out the necessary pedagogic support from me, as her teacher. In reflection, I wonder how many students with learning disabilities I have let fall through the cracks over the years because I have not been proactive and reached out to them. Next time, I will take these valuable lessons that the student taught me and be proactive with students with learning disabilities, instead of waiting for them to come to me.

Recognition of students with learning disabilities

Susan always replied to any post I wrote her, sometimes in depth, sometimes with just a few words, to show that she read my post. Here is a typical discussion thread between us in response to Kristof and WuDunn's excellent book *Half the Sky*:

- Susan's initial post: In the book "Half the Sky" I was appalled with what was happening. I found that respect for females in other countries was nonexistent. Young girls were forced into prostitution. If these young ladies did not comply

they would be beaten or drugged. I had heard stories or watched movies dealing with such matters like sex trafficking. But it was a mere fiction in my eye. I had no idea that there was truth to things like that.

- My reply to Susan: Hello Susan. Thanks so much for your post. First of all, I can tell from your very detailed synopsis that you read and thought about these stories a lot. That always makes me happy as a teacher. I liked the stories about the women that you related in the second paragraph. Perhaps you can use some of that stuff in your next essay. Finally, I liked your main point in your third essay. The stuff that Kristof and WuDunn wrote about is horrific.
- Susan's response to me: Dr. Mike, Thanks for your comments. I appreciate the feedback both good and bad.

I am not sure what Susan meant by "good and bad." Perhaps she was letting me know that I had been too critical of her in previous discussion post responses. In my courses, perhaps because of the way I set up my discussions, students do not normally respond to me once I critique them. By responding as she did, Susan was showing me that she recognized I was an actual person behind those discussion posts. She wanted me to recognize her as a real person too.

Support systems for students with learning disabilities

Students with learning disabilities need strong support systems in their courses in order to succeed. With Susan, I was able to support her through focused feedback on her essays and intensive office visits. I did not do a good job of providing her with support systems other than me. Our college does offer online tutoring, a writing center, and a plagiarism-checking web site. I did not teach Susan how to become self-sufficient in the use of those resources. I should have made her more aware of these resources so that she developed more self-sufficiency. Instead, we learned a lot about writing and about each other during our office visits that focused on revising her papers. I could not have done that type of one-on-one help with every student, though, because I would not have had enough time to do so.

Interactive tone for students with learning disabilities

Susan continually made efforts to interact with me personally, and I continually pulled back and

talked about boring stuff, like punctuation and author tags. I often did not reply to the personal level of her content, or the intellectual matter of her content. The following exchange about maternal mortality, once again from *Half the Sky,* is a typical exchange between us:

- Susan's post: Maternal mortality is when a woman passes away either during or after giving birth to a child. A classic example of maternal mortality would be that of a young woman by the name of Prudence Lemokouno. Prudence's story began in in a hospital in the southeastern part of Cameroon, Africa. "She went into labor at full term, assisted by a traditional birth attendant who had had no training. But her cervix was blocked, and the baby couldn't come out" (Kristof and WuDunn 109). According to the authors Prudence's uterus had ruptured which was caused by the birth assistant while jumping up and down on the woman's stomach, in belief that this would help her child be born (Kristof and Wu Dunn 109). Prudence died three days later (113).

- My reply: Hello Susan. Thanks for your post. In your first paragraph, you write well. You have a clear topic sentence that you then support by narrating Prudence's grim story. In that paragraph, you have a quote with no author tag. You always need some kind of author tag with your quotes.

In gathering the data for this article, I have to admit that I was shocked at the rather didactic tone I adopted with Susan, and with other students too, when talking and writing about the very moving moments in *Half the Sky*. Quite often, I disregarded the emotional content of students' writing in order to focus solely on issues of correctness. In the example above, Susan is clearly moved by the tragedy that happened to young Prudence. My response has no warmth whatsoever. I should have acknowledged the emotional content of her answer, instead of just correcting her errors.

During the second half of the semester, I began using voice recordings to respond to students because it was a change from typing all the time and because I hoped it would provide a more personal tone for the students. Upon listening to my comments, though, I discovered that I often, once again, just talked about correct usage and grammar, ignoring student content and ideas.

To be sure, issues of correctness are important in writing. After all, this course was freshman composition. There is a difference, though, between face-to-face courses and online courses. In a classroom setting, for example, I can talk with a student about the content and ideas of her paper directly, so she knows that I read it and reacted to her ideas. In an online course, I, as a teacher, neglect that part of teaching and focus too much on surface features. Why is that? I think it is because it is easy to write and comment on surface features, and fast. Plus, it makes me feel like I am doing my job—what a writing teacher is supposed to do. In my next iteration of the course, though, I have to build a more interactive tone with my students in their discussion posts. Susan and I, however, did have a good interactive tone, but this was due mainly to her frequent office visits, not because of my pedantic discussion posts.

Availability for students with learning disabilities

Nothing upsets online students more than instructors who are not available, who don't reply to their emails or discussion posts in a timely fashion, who aren't in their offices or available by phone during their scheduled office hours. I have always prided myself on being as available for my online students as I am for my classroom students. It was a bit of a shock for me, therefore, to discover that I, too, was occasionally unavailable to my online students. What follows below is a discussion post from Susan comparing two articles about the environmental impact of coal mining. The goal of the assignment was to get students to use two different academic sources in order to make a valid, grounded point about an issue. Here is part of Susan's post:

In Lopez's "The Future of Nature" the author incorporates articles from different authors who have similar interest in our eco system. Authors "Erik Reece and Judith Nies" both have articles with similar views on the mining industry. Erik Reece wrote "Moving Mountains (91)" Reece describes the torment that protesters endured for the sake of fighting against mine stripping in the Appalachian Mountains. In the moving mountains, "Reece" speaks of an activist, Sarah Shapero, who, in an act to save the environment, chained herself to a vehicle. According to Reece, "they then towed the vehicle while Shapero was chained to it, causing her to become bruised"(92). Reece implies "Only from the air, can you fully grasp the magnitude of the devastation" (93). "Black Sea Mesa Syndrome." Author Judith Nies (117). This article is a great example of why they tend to go as they call it

"Postal". Black Mesa according to the author is land in Northern Arizona. This land was believed to be the "largest coal deposit in the United States (117). The land belonged to the Navajos and Hopi tribes. In the words of Judith Nies " Black Mesa has suffered human rights abuses and ecological devastation; the Hopi water supply is drying up; thousands of archeological sites have been destroyed; and unbeknownst to most Americans, twelve thousand Navajos have been removed from their lands _____ the largest removal of Indians in the United states since the 1880's" (117).

Susan's response is thoughtful, handles sources well, contains original critical thinking, and does make a point. It has a few MLA errors, but they could have been corrected easily. The discussion post deserved a thoughtful comment from me. What did she get for her hard work? Absolutely nothing. I gave her full credit for the post in the grades section of the course, but I didn't write one word of commentary.

This breach of availability, of trust, really, happened early in the semester. I was unaware of it, but through Susan's continual efforts to connect with me online and in person afterwards, I think she gave me a second chance to repair that breach of trust. In essence, she forgave me for my lack of civility.

What would have happened, though, if Susan had not been so generous of spirit? She could just as well have written me off, stopped putting effort into her assignments, and not done so well in the course. And if she had, I would have just assumed that she was yet another of those unmotivated students who, semester after semester, quit, drop, or fail my online courses. I would have blamed her for a lack of motivation rather than realizing that it was I who had not been available.

I think it is much easier to repair trust in traditional face-to-face classrooms. A student comes to me and points out a mistake that I made. I apologize, correct the error, and all is well. It takes about two minutes. The same transaction online, however, can involve three or four messages, each of which the student can read over and over again, arriving at a variety of misinterpretations. As online instructors, we need to be sure that we have trust-repair mechanisms built into our courses as well. In our course syllabi, for example, we might specify how long it takes us to reply to questions or explain our procedures for resolving mistakes.

Non—academic interactions with students with learning disabilities

When we think about our favorite professors, I can almost guarantee that we are not

remembering the particular eloquence with which they espoused literary criticism or carefully delineated calculus for us. Rather, we remember the times they shared something personal with us. With Susan, near the end of the semester, we shared our views on parenting, the fire in her house, her new job, etc. All of this was done in the context of office visits, though, not online. In reviewing our coursework together, I also discovered that I did interact with her in a bit more personal way when I used sound files rather than typing. Almost all of my typed discussion replies with her, though, were pedantic, didactic, and downright boring. Once again, Susan overcame my reticence with her own willingness to come forward and share first.

Recommendations

So, if we take all of these things and put them together, what recommendations might there be for building rapport with students from different generations, from different cultures, or with different learning abilities? I will let Anne, a student in my class, offer the necessary advice:

Personally, I think a lot of what sparked the interaction was the example that you set. Granted, it was my first course of its kind (discussion type, not science book type) and first online course... but the other courses I have had concurrently or since, had a very low "bar" set by the teacher. The teacher did not require follow ups to posts and rarely if ever commented on students' posts (much less in a time period that allowed for responses). Many of the teachers close the discussion thread on the due date, which doesn't allow for discussion to continue; particularly when students are posting at the last minute (I'd say 90% of students post within the last 12 hours). In the other courses that I have taken there has been virtually no student-student interaction. There was none required, and thus none happened. Once it starts, and students get to know each other, it seems to snowball (at least it did in our class). So perhaps, in your next class, focus on time periods for posting an initial post, a teacher and fellow-student response, and an answer to the response. Also, the teacher should post something other than "thanks" or "good thoughts". The responses should not simply be affirmations ("good job" or "I like when you said....") but should provoke an answer ("what did you mean when you said....?" or "if what you say is true, then how does it affect...").

I think what Anne says is true. To some extent, interaction between students and between teacher and student must be required, at least for the first half of the semester, or else it won't happen. I might also point that in order to do so, lots of time is necessary in my opinion. Four to five days to reply to an initial discussion post. Four to five days to reply to other students. Three to four days to respond to students who replied. Plus, teachers have to be very specific in how they want their students to respond.

Here is an example of an effective discussion prompt from the course we have been examining so far:

First post (due by midnight on Friday, September 16th) Write two well-developed paragraphs exploring the similarities and differences between the "Moving Mountains" (91) article and the "Black Mesa" (117) article. Be sure to use MLA or APA style for your in-text citations. Next, find a passage in Van Jones's "License" (53) that you could use to examine issues in "Moving Mountains" and "Black Mesa". Explain what Van Jones would probably think about those two articles. This should be at least one paragraph.

Reply (due by midnight on Wednesday, September 21rst) Evaluate the responses of three students. Reply to each student individually. Choose students first who do not have any replies yet. In order write your replies, do some quick Internet searching and find out a few facts about the recent Chilean miners rescue and the recent West Virginia coal mine explosion that happened in April 2010. In your replies combine your thoughts on these two tragedies with your thoughts on what each of the three students wrote.

Responses (due by midnight on Friday, September 23rd) Respond to each student that replied to your post, telling each student what you thought of his or her ideas.

As this discussion post shows, establishing rapport in an online course doesn't just happen. It needs to be an integral, built-in part of the course. It takes work to build rapport with those students from a different generation, a different culture, or a different ability set. The effort is worth it, though because online teachers then come across as real people to their students. Real connections are forged, and deep learning takes place. For example, andragogy theory asserts that adult students need to connect their learning with real-life experiences

(Knowles, Swanson, and Holton 4). Online rapport between teachers and adult students, therefore, should help those adult students learn more efficiently. As for multicultural students and students with learning disabilities, by building rapport with them, we provide them with many opportunities to learn how to write in an accepting environment. Even the most well-designed online course will not serve learners if students cannot connect on a personal level with the instructor. We need to show our online students our real personalities, not just our digitized ones, in order to build rapport and make learning possible.

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Deepening the Writing Center's Collaborative Identity

Carol Mohrbacher

Writing center identity is complex. At its theoretical core, it is sensitive, non-judgmental, collaborative and non-directive. At its metaphorical surface, it is experiential, practical and often puts its feet up on the coffee table and laughs with gusto. However, writing center theory is not easily separated from practice, so pedagogical practice should reflect this messy integration. In her article, "Using Tutorial Principles to Train Tutors," Muriel Harris maintains that to avoid training tutors to be generalists who don't consider rhetorical complexities, one should "open up the training to let in some of the muddy reality of tutoring, the exploratory discussions that may, indeed, lead down unexpected avenues" (302). One way to motivate explorations of the writing center's untidy mix of theory and practice and to train a new generation of writing consultants[1] whose approach is creative and complex is to bring in the experts—the experienced consultants themselves. But first, some background and a story.

In about 1976, I began work as a longshoreman, a job that I held for over six years. The waterfront and all it represented was foreign to me. All I knew about it was from the braggadocio of a few longshoremen friends, from Marlon "I coulda been a contender" Brando in *On the Waterfront*, and from Eric Hoffer, "longshoreman philosopher" and author of *The True Believer* and *Reflections on the Human Conditions*. From these sources I gleaned that the waterfront was a male bastion of an extreme sort. Because it was the 70s, I expected to be challenged, as I would be one of the first women ever to work for Local 1366. In the parking lot outside the union hall, I questioned my ability to get through the day with people who scared me. I was anxious and worried, but fortunately, Barney, a veteran longshoreman, mentored me that day, introducing me to the guys, instructing me about the work, and making my entry into that culture less painful than it would have been on my own. He helped make my abstract knowledge real. Now here's the big leap. New writing consultants experience similar anxieties as they consider entering the writing center. They perceive a community that is not totally open to them, a community of discipline-specific codes and practice. Over the past six years, the Write Place[2] staff and I have developed an approach to teaching new writing consultants, whereby, experienced consultant/mentors help flatten the learning curve and ease the acculturation process.

In the spring of 2005, my first year as a writing center director, I taught my first undergraduate writing center course. I originally planned this 4-credit, semester-long course, titled "Introduction to Writing Center Theory and Practice" to be conducted like a graduate seminar with students reading, responding, and discussing scholarly articles. I used other writing center directors' syllabi as models and asked for advice from these kind colleagues frequently as I created the course, syllabus, and assignment sheets. In preparation for the semester, I neatly divided my syllabus into the following units:

- History of writing centers in the United States
- Survey of key scholars
- Survey of theory
- Basic tutoring practice (including modeling and practice sessions)
- Tutoring underrepresented groups
- Tutoring ESL students
- Ethics and professionalism in the writing center

However, I began to realize that, while this seemed a solid plan on paper, the messiness and artistry of tutoring was not effectively conveyed through the guided discussion sessions and role playing. Several issues emerged not too far into the semester. Students worried about their grammar skills, struggled with the idea of a non-directive approach, and grumbled that role-playing sessions felt false. Moreover, they were terribly apprehensive about tutoring international students, and wondered how to answer questions about idioms and how they would explain grammatical rules they weren't comfortable with or didn't know. No matter what I said about not needing to know everything, and reassuring them that there was always someone around to assist them, they expressed anxiety. About mid-semester, I was in the writing center watching a consultant's antics as he acted out a student's paper to illustrate the importance of logical progression. He waved his arms and moved around the table as he transitioned from point to point. This scenario reminded me of other instances where writing center staff members had gone outside the bounds of textual material and traditional tutoring approaches—

walking with students, drawing pictures, and calling on other consultants for help until there were three or four people helping one student. Then it hit me like Homer Simpson. DOH! Why not use their talents to teach prospective writing consultants how to navigate daily tutorial contexts, those that went beyond course readings and exercises!

What were missing were concrete examples and illustrations of creative practice that my staff could supply. In a delightful essay in the *Writing Center Journal,* "Portrait of the Tutor as an Artist: Lessons Now One Can Teach," Steve Sherwood addresses the artistry of the experienced tutor, dividing artistry into four elements: "(1) surprise, (2) circumstance, (3) improvisation, and (4) flow" (53). Sherwood explains that an effective tutor/artist is much like a jazz musician or beat poet with the ability to deal with surprise and changing circumstance, while being able to improvise solutions and maintain the continuity or flow of a productive session. Although tutoring is based in rigorous and thoughtful scholarship, instruction, and modeling, the artist/writing consultant eventually begins to trust intuition based in his or her own experience. While textbooks offer practical taxonomies, concrete description, and theoretical grounding, writing center consultants could "flesh out the information and theory," make it real, talk about the wrinkles and the exceptions and the rhythms of tutoring.

The Write Place has been fortunate to have a number of these artists with expertise in specific areas like working with non-traditional students, sorting through a graduate thesis, motivating an original literary analysis from the novice, making progress with developmental students, working with ESL students, or calming the frazzled writer. It seemed a natural evolution, considering our much ballyhooed collaborative foundation, to make use of this artistry to train the next generation of writing consultants in our writing center.

Today, consultants collaborate in our current training structure in several ways. First, they visit the "Introduction to Writing Center and Theory" class as subject matter experts on specific topics that correlate with our unit topics. They speak for twenty minutes to an hour depending on how engaged the class is. These talks begin at the beginning of the term and go once a week for about four weeks. The consultants talk about themselves, their background and their real experiences in tutoring—approaches that work, some that don't.

For example, several non-native English speaking consultants at both the graduate and undergraduate level have spoken about their own experiences as non-native speakers struggling to learn idioms that made no logical sense. They talked about knowing when to be directive in tutoring non-native speakers. Other consultants, who have worked in the writing center for three or more years, act as an institutional memory calling up many tutoring stories from the past—some of them passed down from other staff members. A few have been especially effective in working with non-traditional students and those with learning disabilities because they have had similar challenges themselves. Also, I always ask consultants in the middle of their first year in the writing center visit the class to talk about their first year of tutoring. They often address things like what it is like to be the new person in a very bonded community, how they got past the big mistakes they made early on, what it was like to do their first synchronous online tutorial, or how it was to work with disengaged students who are required to make appointments at our center. Several have spoken about pitfalls like their own inclination to be directive when it isn't warranted. Students are pleased to hear that both undergraduate and graduate consultants struggle at first, and that no one is perfect or knows all the answers.

The second way that consultants collaborate in training is through a system of observations in the writing center. Briefly, students observe experienced writing consultants once or twice (their choice) and are given a chance to ask questions and talk with the tutors after the tutorials. Before or after the tutorial, consultants show the students our electronic resources, how to operate our online scheduler, and how to write up client notes. Before the observation stage, students are instructed that they are there to observe, not to interrupt unless asked a question by the consultant or writer. In the first year of this collaboration, I didn't anticipate that this would be a problem until an incident where two students interrupted a session in progress in ways that were appreciated neither by the experienced consultant nor the writer.

During the next step in this collaborative training process, students tutor a writer while the experienced consultant looks on. After the tutorial, experienced consultants offer feedback and later debrief me. Experienced consultants have been instructed to allow the novices to take control of the tutorial, to allow for silences, and only to jump in if asked or if the tutorial is absolutely road-blocked. The final part of the three-part practicum is a solo experience. Students take over an experienced consultant's tutorial without the consultant present.[3] Upon completion, the consultant assists the student in writing client notes[4] for the session. Then they discuss what happened in the tutorial. The students

are required to give an informal oral report of their experiences in observing, being observed, or tutoring solo in class. Their experiences often become subjects for the type of "exploratory discussions" Muriel Harris refers to earlier in this essay (302).

A collaborative training environment is in line with our writing center's social constructionist practice and offers a number of advantages to everyone involved, including myself:

Consultants

- Become more invested in the writing center. They take more ownership in the physical and professional environment.
- Reflect on their own practices more, especially since they are required to answer student questions and to debrief students after observations.
- Become more confident in their knowledge base and tutoring practices because I have invited them to participate in training as the experts.
- Build an ethos among their peers and the next generation of consultants.
- Develop and become more aware of their individual tutoring identity. Students frequently remark that they are surprised at the variety of tutoring styles.
- Have a voice in the hiring process, which means chances of dysfunction are lessened.
- Can use the mentoring experience on their résumés or vitas.

Students

- See concretely that there are many approaches to tutoring issues and problems.
- Begin to understand the collaborative/social constructivist nature of the writing center—that we are all there to help, so no-one needs to fear not knowing an answer. One student remarked in her analysis that when she got stuck on an APA rule, the experienced consultant brought in another consultant, and eventually, got me out of my office to help.
- Become more confident as they work through the low-risk mentoring process.
- See the practical side of tutoring up close.
- See theory applied to practice—one of the most frequent comments. I make a conscious attempt to connect the two in our classroom discussion about their practicum experiences.
- See the humor, the rhythm and the personality of our own writing center.
- Develop a sense of community with the staff and an ownership of the space.

Writers/Clients

- See that our training is rigorous, but humane as they witness our training in action.
- Consider taking "Introduction to Writing Center Theory and Practice" after they have taken part in the practicum.
- In addition to the consultant-in-training, they have the benefit of a well-trained consultant, who has been exposed to a variety of tutoring contexts. They get two for the price of one.

The Director

- Gets a richer picture of the applicant because of consultant feedback. Immediately after their encounters with student consultants, staff members offer their opinions about how well they think the specific students would do as a member of our very close family. Their concerns might signal that the applicant needs mentoring or additional training.
- Has a better-trained staff, one that is more prepared for the muddy extra-textual experience of the real writing center.
- Has a staff that is more invested in the excellence of the writing center.
- Initial oversight and orientation of new consultants diminishes.
- Class time is energetic as students and consultants interact or as students relate their observation experiences.
- Builds an ethos with consultants and students because of willingness to include everyone in training and hiring. Shows that the director is not just paying lip service to the idea of collaborative methodology.

A final, but no less important, method I use to bring peer experts into the writing center training course is to offer teaching internships to graduate writing consultants. These grads often serve as assistant directors in the writing center and would like a career in the field. They receive graduate-level teaching internship credits for the internship, which fulfills a pedagogy requirement. During the classroom experience, they learn about managing a class, evaluating writing, developing lesson units, and guiding discussion. This experience also gives them a teaching component for their résumés or CVs. In return, they offer anecdotes and examples from their experience in the writing center, providing a connection between theory and praxis. Their names are listed on my syllabus, along with their own office hours. They form close relationships to "their" students, and if they are in the center the following

semester when their students begin their work in the writing center, they serve as mentors to them.

My end of semester course evaluation asks students to comment on texts, the three-part practicum, and the in-class discussions with consultants. They consistently give the highest marks to the interaction with the writing center staff. Although I conscientiously choose books and readings that, I believe, will be relevant and timely to students, textual material has its limits. Muriel Harris explains, "[W]e can open up training to possibilities that our ocean of scholarly literature and training manuals are useful, but limited because reality can be quite different" (302). Veteran peer writing consultants fill the gap between text and experience, providing a real window into the everyday messiness of the writing center through their passion and their stories.

Notes

1. At our writing center, we call our tutoring staff *consultants* because the assignment has become more complex as we have moved from our core activity, face-to-face tutoring, to group tutoring, group facilitation, online consultation, workshop presentations, and the development of traditional and digital support materials. In this essay, the word, *consultant,* is used when referring to the Write Place staff. When discussing articles that refer to writing center staff as *tutors*, I use that term for the sake of consistency and to avoid confusion.
2. The Write Place is the name of St. Cloud State University's writing center.
3. Students are only assigned to tutorials that they can handle at their stage of experience. For example, students are never placed with graduate students. We also don't allow them to tutor our "regulars," who have ongoing appointments with the same consultant.
4. These are summary notes of what was addressed in the tutorial. Sometimes these notes are sent to instructors per student request. They must be error-free and judgment-free.

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Zombies in the Classroom:
Using the (Kind of) Dead to Enliven Student Writing

Kim Socha

During the Fall 2009 semester, Normandale Community College in Bloomington, MN started planning for what has become a yearly event: The Normandale Writing Festival. It is a day of concurrent writing workshops for students and the community, and it includes a talk and reading by the author of our campus's common reader. At a department meeting in 2009, faculty members were asked to write down ideas for workshops that we could offer during the one day festival in February 2010. For reasons not yet clear to me, I scribbled something down about using zombies as a pathway to teaching students about essay writing. Much to my initial anxiety, the planning committee responded with excitement to the idea, meaning that I would have to come up with something of substance to connect what appear to be disparate topics: composition and zombie fiction.

As we look ahead to our fourth Festival in Spring 2013, I have now offered a successful workshop presentation on zombies and composition three times at Normandale. Students have responded positively, as have my colleagues who report their students applying presentation concepts to their writing. The PowerPoint and video presentation explores the following topics: patterns and creativity, introductions and conclusions, context, paragraphing, audience, plagiarism, and revision. Interspersed with this exploration are excerpts from zombie literature and film. The following is an overview of this presentation for others in the field who can adapt it as needed. As educators know, students become more engaged when we can incorporate their interests into lesson plans, and if those interests correspond with faculty interests—as is the case with my affinity for zombies—then all the better. I encourage others to borrow this lesson plan for exploration over one or two class periods, either in high school, pre-college level, or college level composition classes.

Patterns and Creativity

In a typical composition class, instructors teach students using essay patterns and rhetorical models dating as far back as ancient Greece. This continuing trend elicits the question students have posed to me in different ways: "Why do we continue to use these same patterns to write about topics that have been written about so often before. (For example, if you are a Freshman Composition teacher, consider how many papers you have read about abortion, the death penalty, and marijuana.) In response, I defer to Eugene Garver's insightful introduction to Aristotle's *Rhetoric*: "Rhetoric is a liberating force […] fighting against the irrationalities of entrenched privilege" (7). There *is* power in the patterns of rhetorical modes, especially in terms of argument. However, there are also dangers therein. To wit, many students are taught the classic five paragraph essay format that, if followed too rigidly, completely negates potential for the creativity and critique that are essential to dynamic writing (Wesley 57; 60). Thus, I encourage my students to question and rework the patterns they have been taught and to see each writing moment as an opportunity to put his or her creative mark on an old formula in a way that no one has before, as is the case with successive tales of the walking dead.

Attendees at my workshop are almost always fans of the zombie genre. Therefore, my opening questions are met with ready answers: "What are some popular zombie movies?" and "How do their storylines usually unfold?" From the lists created through student responses, we quickly learn that, with some notable exceptions, zombie movies follow nearly identical plot lines; they start *in medias res* and follow a group of individuals, seemingly the last remaining non-zombie humans, as they try to remain uneaten. However, even though the plots are similar, people remain fascinated by cinematic, literary, and now even televised (i.e. *The Walking Dead* on AMC) zombie iterations because each screenwriter, director, and author puts his or her unique mark on what is, in fact, an exceptionally cliché formula. Thus, patterns should not be seen as stifling, but as opportunities for augmenting established formulas into distinctive final products that can engage successive audiences and offer what previous iterations cannot: the individual writer's inimitable style and insights.

Introductions and Conclusions

Unlike most zombie films and book, academic-style essays usually do not start *in medias res*; rather, they need enticing introductions and satisfying conclusions; students know that these are important elements of any good piece of writing, and therein follows insecurity about developing skills that draw readers in and leave them feeling the paper finishes with clarity and purpose. In my anecdotal experience, while both elements of essay development cause student anxiety, it is usually conclusions that stymie them the most.

I address the issues of introductions and conclusions on a handout with three opening paragraphs from zombie literature. The first comes from Richard Matheson's influential 1954 novella *I Am Legend*: "On those cloudy days, Robert Neville was never sure when sunset came, and sometimes they were in the streets before he could get back" (13). (Astute workshop participants will know that *I Am Legend* is about vampires; however, as Matheson's story has inspired zombie writers and filmmakers, I include it in the workshop.) The next opener is from contemporary horror writer Brian Keene's *The Rising*: "The dead scrabbled for an entrance to his grave. His wife was among them, as ravenous for Jim in death as she'd been in life. Their faint, soulless cries drifted down through ten feet of soil and rock" (5). Finally, students read the introduction from Stephen King's *Cell*, a genre rewrite (and sharp social commentary from a writer who does *not* own a cell phone) in which a pulse transmitted through cell phones turns people into zombie-like creatures: "The event that came to be known as The Pulse began at 3:03 p.m., eastern standard time, on the afternoon of October 1. The term was a misnomer, of course, but within ten hours of the event, most of the scientists capable of pointing this out were either dead or insane. The name hardly mattered, in any case. What mattered was the effect" (3).

When asked what these introductions have in common, students note that while they all provide some information to give the reader a feel for the story's topic, they also leave out just enough information to "hook" the reader, thereby making him/her want to continue on. Students are then prompted to imagine a horror novel that begins with the following sentence (which also subtly critiques the three point thesis that goes along with the five paragraph essay): "The purpose of this story is to tell you how zombies ate a lot of people, how the remaining people tried to avoid being eaten, and whether or not they survived." In effect, this sentence gives the same sense of content as the more creative ones, but it is bland and unimaginative. The lesson here is that there *is* room for creativity in academic writing. Even a paper on the dangers of, for instance, government corn subsidies, can benefit from an engaging opening paragraph that leaves the audience eager to read more.

However, as much as students can learn from creative writing, I also note limits via *Cell*'s conclusion. The novel ends somewhat ambiguously, as King suggests that his character Johnny Riddell, who had been "zombified" during the novel, may have been transformed back into a regular human. However, King does not come right out and tell the reader that the transformation occurs. This led to criticism from his fans. *They wanted answers*. In response, King, somewhat acerbically, replied on his web page: "Based on the information given in the final third of *Cell*—I'm thinking about the reversion back toward the norm of the later phone crazies—it seems pretty obvious to me that things turned out well for Clay's son, Johnny. I don't need to tell you this, do I?" In a work of fiction, perhaps an author does not need to offer a distinctive conclusion (though some of King's readers evidently disagree). In contrast, when writing an academic paper, there should always be at least one closing paragraph giving the paper a culminating sense of import and purpose—to answer the classic "So what?" question that scholars must consider when finalizing their work. The final paragraph should offer the audience a genuine sense of closure on the essay's topic and a sense of "Where do we go from here?" The lesson: like King's readers, your readers want answers too.

Context

As a composition teacher for the past nine years, I have found myself asking student writers for "more context" enough times that I eventually created an interactive PowerPoint presentation on the theme, explaining that as writers, we have a responsibility to contextualize material for our audiences, filling them in on necessary historical, cultural, and sometimes definitional meanings of words, phrases, ideas, and concepts. For example, I have read papers for and against abortion in the United States that do not even allude to, however briefly, the history of abortion in America (i.e. *Roe vs. Wade* gets nary a mention).

Fortunately, the trailer for the 2002 British movie *28 Days Later* provides an interesting lesson about context. With atmospheric sounds and flares of light through the darkness, the following words flash upon the screen: "Exposure, Infection, Epidemic, Evacuation, Devastation." Then, we meet the film's hero Jim as he wakes up from a coma and begins

traversing post-apocalyptic London. The remainder of the trailer includes hints at his cinematic exploits as he and his companions attempt to escape being infected with the "rage virus" by once normal humans. I ask students why the creators of the trailer chose to flash those five words before exploring the film's substance. The answer, as one can easily surmise, is that the words provide necessary background/context for the narrative that is to follow.

What would become of the trailer if those words had been left out? We would have much less of an idea of what led up to Jim's curious predicament, making for an incomplete content trajectory. In other words, the trailer's creator knew to provide context, that all important background information that sets the stage for the main action. So too in essay writing. The *28 Days Later* trailer emphasizes the need for relevant, succinct, and substantive background to support an essay's topic and thesis, a point to be addressed later through audience consideration.

Paragraphing

Of course, in between the introduction and conclusion and after context is established, students are expected to write focused, substantive, and well-supported paragraphs. Once again basing my workshop on problems observed in my own classes, I considered the number of times I have made comments on essays such as "You are trying to take on too many topics in one paragraph" or "The purpose of this paragraph is unclear." To address this, I rely on a novelty book and a strategy I developed that I have found useful in the classroom.

Returning to the handout, students read a passage from Ibrahim S. Amin's *The Monster Hunter's Handbook: The Ultimate Guide to Saving Mankind from Vampires, Zombies, Hellhounds, and Other Mythical Beasts*. The passage I include is actually two distinct paragraphs that I've forged into one, and attendees are given two tasks: 1) decide where the break in paragraph should be and 2) title each of the two paragraphs. Students identify the shift from zombie history to information on how easy they are to hunt, as "they are slow-witted, and their shambling forms lack the dexterity and quickness that might provide a challenge" (132). The titling, therefore, is relatively easy; the first paragraph could be titled "The History of Zombies" and the second "Hunting Zombies." Part of the lesson here is for students to be able to title their own paragraphs when they write essays. If students cannot summarize the purpose of their paragraphs in a few words, they may have too many topics packed into one bloated section.

I then offer a few caveats. First, these titles will not make it into the actual essay. Second, some topics are broad and multifaceted enough that they cannot and should not be confined to one paragraph. However, the strategy I teach them, called "silent titling," helps students write more focused paragraphs so that their audience is not confused. This technique also fosters sensible paragraph order. When students make a list of their paragraph's "silent titles," they can see a ladder of topics that will either represent a sensible progression of ideas or will look like a ladder with rungs in all the wrong places. They can then revise as needed.

Audience

As my students and I begin the first paper of the semester, I asked them to imagine their reading audience. Invariably, they will say it is me, the professor, with some adding that other students are their audience too, in the case of peer review. Although it is hard to get them to think differently about audience, as they are in a general education course and some think that they'll never have to write in the "real world," I am always challenging them to imagine their readers as a "general audience of people like themselves who are reasonably intelligent and interested in what they have to say" (Ackley 5). This imagined group that makes up their audience is not filled with experts out to criticize, but of individuals eager to learn.

I complement audience consideration with a clip from George A. Romero's 1985 film *Day of the Dead*. In this particular scene, two characters interact: the scientist Dr. Logan and his test subject Bud, a zombie. I use these two different character types—an erudite researcher and a simple but curious individual—to challenge student perception that the teacher is always their audience. Such assumptions lead to deficient background data and unexplained connections amongst ideas. (It could also read to essay statements such as, "In the book we had to read for class.") As I explain, composition writing is not an exercise in being "close enough" to clarity, and students must do away with the presumption that their reader "will know what I mean" even though the content is jumbled. In sum, when an instructor is viewed as the know-it-all scientist, rather than as someone who has something new to learn, student writing can be uncontextualized, underdeveloped, and, therefore, incomplete.

In contrast to Dr. Logan, I pose Bud as the more efficient model of the writer's audience. Bud is not completely without intellect (though ostensibly brainless). He has basic knowledge of the world around him, but he needs assistance to be pushed

toward greater knowledge. For example, he knows to put a phone to his ear, but someone must help him with the finer points of telecommunication. He lacks the proper contextual, historical, and connective data to complete the act of making a phone call. Obviously, this is an exaggerated image of the vacuous audience, but students readily see my ultimate point: your audience is not the lone authoritarian figure in the white lab coat who seems to have all the answers; rather, think of your readers as those with basic knowledge of the world, but for whom you must provide enough information to set the stage so they can come to better understanding of your paper topic. On quite a few occasions, students have told me that they still think of Bud the zombie when contemplating an audience for their essays.

Plagiarism

Within my approximately eight years of teaching at community colleges, online institutions, and four-year universities, I am sorry to report that I have not facilitated a single semester without an incident of plagiarism (and I'm loath to think of those stolen passages that I have missed). My experiences seem to mirror nationwide trends, as new studies are reporting that plagiarism on college campuses has increased rapidly over the years, mostly due to easily accessible material on the World Wide Web, of course (Cofsky). Therefore, I am sure to make note of it during the workshop. In fact, plagiarism is one of the easiest topics to integrate into the presentation.

George Romero is a horror film auteur who, despite the existence of pre-Romero cinematic zombies, can rightly be credited with creating the genre as we know it today. Consequently, successive zombie fictions of all genres owe deference to Romero, as their plots often unfold in the same ways as do his early classic films. Thus, I explain the difference between plagiarism and homage to workshop attendees. The former is cheating, for it entails taking someone else's work and claiming it as your own. In contrast, homage is a respectful tribute acknowledging that another before you has contributed to the topic you are working on, be it a screenplay, novel, or five-page paper for a composition course.

We next watch a brief interview with Romero in which he explains that even his seminal work was inspired by Bela Lugosi, early twentieth-century actor and star of 1932's *White Zombie*, and Richard Matheson of *I Am Legend* fame. In kind, I note that King's *Cell* is dedicated to Matheson and Romero. These attributions are the artists' way of saying that although they are not claiming to have invented new ideas out of a vacuum, they believe that they have something inventive to say about an established idea, as there are still new paths to discover even in well-trod territory. This lesson serves as an apt response to students feeling that they have nothing innovative to add to issues they are expected to write about in English classes. It also helps to offset the nascent writer's tendency to patch together quotes from "experts" instead of finding their own "writer's voice." Rather than merely repeating what someone else has already done, writing classes offer opportunities to build on past scholarship in a way distinctive to new generations of readers. To wit, King may be telling an old story in *Cell*, but he tells it in his own way, and he acknowledges his "research" through the book's dedication.

In the interview, Romero also explains that he never made money off of his classic 1968 film *Night of the Living Dead*. Despites the movie's lasting success and undeniable cinematic influence, he and the rest of his production crew had sold all rights to the finished product to ensure its distribution. When I ask students how they would feel if they could never profit from something that they produced with their own ingenuity, time, and hard work, they are unsurprisingly indignant at the thought. The lesson here, I explain, is that plagiarism *is* stealing someone's else's efforts, and it is not acceptable in any situation. However, giving credit (aka recompense via citation), is appropriate and could, in the long run, save a would-be plagiarizer from disciplinary trouble.

Revision

A basic lesson that most English teachers want their students to learn is that writing is a process. Thus, we scaffold assignments and ask for one or more drafts to avoid essay submissions quickly written the night before they are due. As I also work as a writing center director and tutor, I have met with students who have just written a paper, hoping that it can be quickly edited because it is due in an hour. The concepts and importance of drafts and revisions are lost in such situations. Leigh Ryan and Lisa Zimmerelli even caution writing tutors that student "[w]riters do not always think of their papers as drafts, and [. . .] they may not be immediately receptive to [. . .] advice" (58). With some students holding this mindset, I end the workshop on the topic of revision, emphasizing that a piece of writing is never really done—even after being returned with an "A" and a smiley face on it. Rather, any writing project can benefit from review and revision.

The previously mentioned interview with Romero took place in 1994, and in it he explains the

reasons he remade *Night of the Living Dead* in 1990, twenty-two years after the original. Simply, and aside from the financial loss noted earlier, Romero remade the *Night of the Living Dead* because the characters needed revision. To wit, in the newer version, the character Barbara is much stronger, more determined, and no longer reliant on men to save her. This new Barbara is reflective of the transformation that women have had in the global scene over the last several decades, and her self-reliant character is based on the new model of a woman. As writing students are often expected to do, Romero used the most up-to-date information (research) to make his work relevant to a contemporary audience, and he learned from past errors to grow as an artist. Thus, revision must be unmoored from negative connotations of drudgery and seen as an opportunity to take part in an activity that is progressive and encouraging.

Romero's remake leads to two final questions that we answer as a group: "Why are there approximately *600* zombie movies and hundreds of zombie books?" and "What does this ultimately have to do with academic writing?" To the first question, zombie movies have been integrated into a never-ending cultural conversation that takes a basic story arch and revises it based upon a new writer or director's vision. Zombie films offer both blatant and subtle comments on the cultures that produce them, factoring in themes of gender, race, class distinction, etc. Similarly, academic writing uses well-established structures and formulas to find new ways of looking at the world, and we must never cease investigating issues of gender, race, class distinction, etc., because our fast-changing culture demands that we amend our views and assumptions based upon historical and societal shifts.

This lesson matters because students sometimes believe that "everything has already been said" about a given topic, and, thus, writing is futile. Further, everything seems to have been said by published authorities, and composition students rarely feel like experts. I usually respond to this contention by asking where we would be if early nineteenth-century Americans had felt that "everything had already been said" about race, or if contemporary Libyans felt that Muammar Gaddafi had "already said everything there is to say" about liberty. On a lighter note, if zombie manifestations had stopped at Romero's *Night of the Living Dead*, zombie fans would not have enjoyed his sequels, nor *Army of Darkness*, *Fido*, *Zombieland*, *The Walking Dead*, or the upcoming Summer 2013 release: *World War Z*. Again, college writing is a way to introduce students to the inexhaustible intellectual conversations that allow for progress, whether in lofty terms of human emancipation, mainstream popular culture, or both.

Conclusion

The writing lessons learned from zombie fiction can certainly spring from any popular culture genre, from vampire and werewolf trends and even to romance novels. And while the comparisons are not flawless, they are often apt and, most importantly, engaging to students. I have even surprised myself with the success of this workshop, but more importantly, I have come to believe in the rhetorical connections explored therein, although the idea was initially formed without much thought or contextual backing. While every composition class can't be a day at the movies, a dip into popular culture here and there is, as I have learned, a way to revive seemingly lifeless rhetorical modes and to have some fun while doing it.

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Connecting through Reading

An Inquiry into the Application of Learning to Read Film Texts and Its Effect on Understanding Classic Literature

Jennifer Peterson

When I'm asked why I became a teacher, my answer is simple —because I love to read. In fact, my fondest childhood memories are of reading *The Berenstein Bears* before bed each night with my mom. As soon as I was old enough to go to school, I discovered a new place to bask in my love of reading, especially because early on I was labeled an "advanced" or "gifted" reader. My teachers loved me, and I loved school. But somewhere along the way, reading for the love of reading fell to the wayside as the reading demands for school became more rigorous and controlled by my teachers. Opportunities for leisure reading became few and far between in order to make room for the required texts.

This was my introduction to the world of classic literature, beginning with *To Kill a Mockingbird* by Harper Lee during my freshman year in high school. *To Kill a Mockingbird* is heralded by high school English teachers for being an essential piece of our collective cultural literacy. Unfortunately, since the novel was published more than 50 years ago, countless students, including myself, have suffered through the reading assignments, wondering why they were reading an "ancient" text they had no meaningful way to connect to, dutifully taking a long multiple choice test or writing an essay at the conclusion of the novel, and likely spending a week or more in class watching the movie version of the book as a "reward." This experience seemed to become the recipe for studying most literary texts in high school, with the exception of the literary themes courses I took during my sophomore and junior years of high school. Mr. Erickson, who was a bit of a maverick in the English department, introduced his students to Northop Frye's Theory of Archetypes, but didn't rely solely on the printed words to show the phases of the hero: he combined stories from the Bible, *Star Wars*, and films with actors like Robert Redford to make it real (and really accessible) to every student in his class. It was engaging, it was fun, and it worked as a way to learn to really read and comprehend literary texts— even the non-print ones.

During the 2010-2011 school year, I found myself back in ninth-grade English, but this time as a teacher at Apple Valley High School. AVHS, known for its academic and co-curricular achievements, is one of four comprehensive high schools in ISD 196,

with an enrollment of 1,746 students. Its student population is comprised of .5% Native American students, 6.2% Asian students, 7.7% Latino students, 15% Black students, and 70% white students. Not wanting to repeat my own experience as a student reading *To Kill a Mockingbird*, and knowing that my students had even more diversions competing for their interest and engagement while reading than I ever did (specifically, cell phones with the capability to text, tweet, Facebook, take pictures, record videos, and, oh yeah, talk, too), I knew I would have my work cut out for me to ensure all of my students could read, relate and deeply comprehend a novel like this in our über-digital world. Because my students are exposed to many types of media on a daily basis, and recognizing the importance of integrating multimedia texts in the English classroom, I embarked on an inquiry utilizing film as more than just the dessert for finishing the hard work of reading literature. I wanted to know what happened when students approached film as an elevated medium rather than a second-class filler. I explored the question: What happens to reading comprehension of a classic work of American literature when I combine Kelly Gallagher's strategies for teaching deeper reading comprehension through "second-draft reading" with Alan B. Teasley and Ann Wilder's strategies for using film in the classroom?

What Does the Literature Say?

To prepare for this inquiry about what happens to reading comprehension for Honors ninth grade students when classic texts are framed through film texts, I reviewed literature in the following areas: reading engagement, comprehension, and critical film analysis theory.

Reading Engagement and Comprehension

"Comprehension requires transaction between the text and the reader's prior knowledge" (Alvermann and Phelps 195). Understanding a text is a higher-order skill, and skillful readers not only recognize words, but make personal connections to the text (Wood et al). Students' comprehension may be increased when they have the opportunity to interact with other students. According to Wood et al., "When students are encouraged to say and defend

what they think—frankly and openly—in discussions with others, their responses grow deeper, richer, and more complex."

According to Gallagher's book, *Deeper Reading*, deeper reading comprehension is achieved through multiple readings of a text. "First-draft reading" is like writing a first draft of an essay—it is the draft to get the basics down, and the second-draft is the draft to read and comprehend more deeply. The final important step in deeper reading comprehension is leading students to meaningful reflection. In other words, students must discover relevance and meaning beyond the teacher's appreciation for a great story or the author's literary skill. Beginning with the self and expanding to others, students can understand a text more deeply by connecting its context to their lived worlds.

Film in the Classroom

In *Reel Conversations: Reading Films with Young Adults* by Alan B. Teasley and Ann Wilder, the authors claim several reasons for including film in the standard curriculum—and not as the "dessert" after finishing the book. They identify the following reasons: students have prior experience with film, film is already used in the classroom, film is an art form, film viewing provides opportunities for discussion and writing, and film is a form of non-print media from which students gain information. Their rationale complements Gallagher's work. Because students are already familiar with film, viewing a film clip in the English classroom provides an immediate experience that catapults students into multiple readings of a text.

According to Teasley and Wilder, film is comprehended or "read" on three levels: literary, dramatic, and cinematic (15). The literary elements of a film are the same as a written narrative—plot, characters, setting, themes, point of view, recurring images, and symbols. They recommend helping students recognize these similarities by brainstorming how a movie is like a book. The dramatic elements of a film are the same as those of live drama—actors with dialogue, costumes, makeup, and sets that contribute to the sense of place of the film. The cinematic elements of a film are those that make a film different from a novel or a play—cinematography, sound, editing, and special visual effects. The authors recommend several familiar film clips to demonstrate the literary, dramatic, and cinematic elements of a film. Once students are proficient at identifying and using the language of film, they are ready to view a full-length film to gain background information and insight about their lived worlds.

Viewer-Response Approach

The viewer-response approach is based on the reader-response theory of literature. According to Louise Rosenblatt, comprehension is constructed by the reader through a "never to be duplicated transaction" with the text (quoted in Appleman 27). The reader brings his or her background, experiences, and reactions to his or her interpretation and understanding of the text, resulting in different responses for that text. This theory can be applied to reading a film text. According to Teasley and Wilder,

> When we read a text (or a film), we 'decode' the visual (and, in the case of film, auditory) cues, simultaneously giving the words (images) meaning and creating a coherent and satisfying interpretation. The broad, long-range goals of literary (film) study is for students to continue to read (view) long after they leave school and for them to take responsibility for comprehending increasingly sophisticated texts (films). (49)

One of the greatest advantages to using this approach is it motivates students to be active viewers by paying attention to details, discussing their interpretations with their peers, and supporting their opinions with evidence—all necessary skills for reading and deeply comprehending print texts.

Lights, Camera, Action!

Although my ninth-grade Honors English classes weren't going to read *To Kill a Mockingbird* until after winter break, our preparation began four weeks earlier at the beginning of the second trimester. To raise students' awareness of the comprehension strategies they already use, I used Gallagher's "second-draft" reading lesson (80). In this lesson, Gallagher illustrates the importance of second-draft reading for making correct inferences by using three separate texts of increasing difficulty: a description of a hospital waiting room, the nursery rhyme "Humpty Dumpty," and Dr. Seuss' *Yertle the Turtle*. After the first reading of each text, he discusses with the students what literally happened. Then he asks them to infer what is really happening by returning to the passages and finding facts to support their conclusions.

I extended this lesson by applying Teasley and Wilder's research using film to extend the students' learning of inferential thinking. Using Teasley and Wilder's film terminology, I taught my classes the language we would use to read and discuss film texts. I then used a familiar film clip from the movie *Up* (2008) to teach the students how to understand how meaning is constructed through

multiple readings of a text. The clip that I chose was the four-minute segment in which the entire life story of the movie's protagonist Carl and his wife Ellie is conveyed solely through dramatic and cinematic elements—without dialogue.

Although it is easy to understand the gist of the story as you see it unfold, it is necessary to notice the subtle cinematic and dramatic elements in order to truly gain a deeper understanding of the literary aspects of the text. For example, the symbol of the balloon becomes a motif throughout the opening scenes of the movie, first being carried by Carl on his way home from the movie, which eventually leads to his injury inside the house when he meets Ellie. The sound of the balloon popping, a cinematic element of a sound effect, is superimposed on a camera bulb flash to signal the beginning of married life, where it is revealed that Carl works as a balloon seller. Carl is frequently seen with balloons, even at his wife's funeral. This would certainly be noticeable to a typical viewer, but the critical viewer should question the significance of this particular symbol. Doing so leads the viewer to make logical predictions and inferences, attaining a deeper and more satisfying understanding of the text. The dramatic element of the balloon as a prop not only represents childhood innocence and playfulness, but literally serves as a vehicle later on in Carl's adulthood when he finally embarks on his journey to Paradise Falls. Being able to dig deeper into this film text, I hoped, would motivate my students to approach their required school reading with a critical eye and feel rewarded for digging into the greater complexities of literature.

The day we watched this clip, I didn't just push play and ask the students to tell me what they thought. As teachers, we know how important it is to build anticipation and ground our activities in a purpose. So, at the beginning of class, I shut off the lights and explained that we were going to start class by listening to a song. At the end of the song, I wanted the students to name the emotion they felt from it. In actuality, I was playing the video clip—I just wasn't *showing* it yet. This was easily accomplished with my computer and an audio connection to the LCD projector. Anticipating that some students would recognize the song from the video clip, I asked students not to reveal the source if they knew it, but just share how it made them feel. After listening to "Married Life," the students shared the song made them feel "happy" and "uplifted" during some parts and "sad" and "depressed" in others. When I asked them to explain what gave them this range of emotions, they pointed out how the speed changes from fast at the beginning to slow in the middle before slowing to a complete stop.

They also pointed out how the number of instruments and volume during the upbeat parts were greater than the slow and sad ones. I then showed the clip and asked the students what was really happening in the story and what evidence from the text showed their interpretations were correct. Students identified the plot line and used examples such as the upbeat tempo of the music with the shapes of babies in the clouds to explain that Carl and Ellie wanted to start a family, then the slowed tempo and the scene of a saddened Ellie and Carl in the darkened doctor's office to interpret they couldn't conceive. We watched the clip again in order to confirm this interpretation. Being aware of the cinematic influence of the music to convey mood and the dramatic elements of the use of dark colors and depictions of the character's emotions allowed the students to gain awareness of this text on multiple levels, as well as appreciate the benefits of "second-draft reading."

For the next two weeks, my students practiced applying their new skills of reading a text on multiple levels and second-draft reading to film texts including the 1989 film, *Batman*. They discussed the techniques that were used by the director to influence how we regard the characters, particularly with regard to who has power and who does not, as well as the overall view of society's obsession with beauty. Motivated by the depth of understanding they attained, several students made connections between this film and the newer take on the Joker's character in 2008's *The Dark Knight*. The next day, a student brought in the video, and we chose the ferry boat scene to watch in order to compare and contrast the portrayal of the Joker in both films. As we delved into the film's literary, cinematic and dramatic aspects, we made some important discoveries. In this scene, the citizens of Gotham are being evacuated from the city. The Joker has rigged two ferries with explosives. One boat contains civilians while the other holds prisoners. He offers both groups a chance to live if they destroy the other boat. After reading the film on the literary level, we discussed it on the dramatic and cinematic levels by sharing our observations about the characters' costumes and the props used in the scene as well as naming the camera angles and shots that were used to depict the action. It occurred to me in the course of the discussion, as we noted the majority of the civilians were white and the majority of the prisoners were people of color, that a deeper message existed. By carefully noticing the artistic choices used by the director through repeated viewings of the same part of the text, the viewer could uncover a lesson with important societal implications as relevant today as it was 50 years

earlier when *To Kill a Mockingbird* was published. The question: Are all people truly treated equally regardless of race?

Without meaning to, I stumbled upon my entry into *To Kill a Mockingbird*.

In the days leading up to beginning to read the novel, the students engaged in discussions surrounding this question, and one of the major themes of the novel. Having already identified the issue's relevance in a film text, we read the September 2010 article from the *Santa Monica Daily Press*, "Primetime racial divide still exists." The author of this article examines the fall primetime television line-ups and points out how some networks exclude people of color in their programming or portray them in stereotypical, subservient or criminal roles. After reading this article, I asked the students to choose a TV program to watch that night and report back the next day on its portrayal of people of color. I expected this activity to elicit lively discussion, possibly even move my students to take action against this injustice.

What I discovered was they couldn't have cared less.

Not that my students believed people of color should be marginalized in the media; they just didn't see this as an issue. When asked to respond in writing to the question, "Should the media strive for racial balance in representing people of color?" on an exit slip, students responded with variations of: "It's not so much a matter of racial discrimination as it is a matter of choosing the better actor or actress for the role," and, "It doesn't really make a difference to us, we feel like we are making a big deal out of nothing." In essence, the consensus was I was making a big deal out of nothing, because there was already racial fairness and equity in the media.

These early discussions revealed that an overwhelming majority of my students believed that to recognize racial differences was to be, in effect, racist. Wanting not to be perceived as racist, very few students were initially comfortable discussing race in the classroom. However, by the conclusion of our novel study, all of the students reported an increased awareness of how discrimination and prejudice exist within every single person. Examining the issue using a variety of texts read on multiple levels through second-draft reading allowed the students to reach a deeper level of understanding of something that affects all of us.

For the duration of our novel study, students were placed in collaborative focus groups. One of the most effective focus group activities, that required the students to critically examine a piece of text on multiple levels through purposeful second-draft reading and consider dramatic and cinematic aspects of storytelling, was role-playing the trial of Tom Robinson in chapters 17-21. Six scenes were chosen to depict this part of the novel:

- Heck Tate's testimony
- Bob Ewell's testimony
- Mayella Ewell's testimony
- Tom Robinson's testimony
- The jury's deliberation
- The verdict

The jury's deliberation is not actually written out in the book, so the group that volunteered to perform this scene needed to infer from the text how it would have played out. These students needed to understand how their characters likely thought about the case, and needed to convey the significance of the length of time the jury deliberated, in order to achieve a deep understanding of the story. Through purposeful second-draft reading and storytelling with dramatic and cinematic elements, the students gained a clearer understanding of the flaws in Bob Ewell's testimony as well as deeper empathy for Mayella Ewell. One student said, "I was put in one of the juror's shoes so now I understand why they took so long. They were brought up to be racist but they knew Mayella's testimony was fishy but they couldn't go against how they were brought up." Most students reported a positive experience, noticing how this activity helped them visualize the story, which led to greater understanding of the events surrounding the story. As one student said, "*I had trouble really understanding what was happening in the book and the role plays helped me understand better.*" It also helped the students relate to the characters, helping them better understand the characters' motivations, which also led to a deeper understanding of the text. Another reported: *It really made me understand the racism in this town on a new level. I saw that some people in this town hated him [Tom Robinson] just because the color of his skin, so that helped me understand the racist parts of the book. It also made me realize why the trial ended the way it did.*

Our final discussion centered on the identity of the mockingbird. By now, unless students had completely blown off the reading, they figured out that Harper Lee's book isn't, as at least one student predicted initially, a hunting manual. I adapted Gallagher's technique of teaching metaphorical thinking by having the students create their own similes for this final discussion (143). This lesson was introduced with the quote written on the board:

"Life is like a box of chocolates. You never know what you're going to get." Nearly all of my students recognized this quote from the 1994 movie, *Forrest Gump* right away. As students came in, I handed each a piece of paper with one word written on it: love, life, shopping, school, sports, and animals. Students were instructed to write a simile for their word by filling in the sentence: "_____ is like _____ because…" Students shared and then discussed why metaphors are used and what they do to our understanding. Their list included: make descriptions more interesting, puts things in another perspective so more people understand it, used to explain the moral of the story (walk around in someone else's shoes). Students then discussed the question, "Which character(s) is/are the mockingbird? How do you know? Find an example from the book." I wrote their responses on the board:

Boo Radley—he is misunderstood by the townspeople of Maycomb, he is the person Heck Tate is referring to at the end when he says to let the dead bury the dead because it would be a sin to put him on trial

Tom Robinson—he was convicted of a crime he was innocent of committing

Bob Ewell—people are not born evil, but experiences make them that way

All people—everyone is misunderstood/discriminated against at some point

This was an engaging activity that revealed new understandings about the characters in the novel.

After critically reading the novel and engaging in class discussions, students demonstrated their understanding of the novel in two ways: a final comprehension test given to all ninth graders upon completion of the novel and a written analytical essay identifying one theme from the novel and investigating how that theme is relevant in a film text and in the real world. The test provided one source of data to determine that 31 of the 33 students in the sample achieved reading comprehension of 60 percent or better, while the analytical essay served as a critical reflection that resulted in meaningful reading where the students recognized the relevance of the novel's themes in media and the world. Both revealed that my goal of framing this classic text as a relevant text today was successful as all students were also able to identify today's "mockingbirds," society's victims of discrimination. Students were able to relate to discrimination by ultimately noticing

how "everyone" (a.k.a. teenagers) is judged for being misunderstood, which is one way to reinforce the relevancy of this novel today.

By the end of our novel study, the students reported being more aware of the presence of prejudice and discrimination. They no longer considered it to be something of the past or in another place, but something that still pervades our society. This was achieved through novel, dynamic activities that emphasized critical thinking and discussion over basic comprehension: learning to "read" a film and meaningful second-draft reading opportunities.

But aren't we going to watch the movie?

It wouldn't be a class novel without hearing this question, and considering the attention we paid to film study prior to reading *To Kill a Mockingbird*, totally fair. Yes, we did watch the 1961 classic starring Gregory Peck. But no, it wasn't the "dessert" for all of the hard work from the previous weeks (nor was it a week free of planning or grading essays for me). Because we owe it to ourselves and our students to purposefully frame all of our teaching activities, including the use of film in the classroom, I framed the viewing of the film with the question, "Which text conveys the theme better: the book or the film?" Students created a simple t-chart to compare/contrast a theme that they chose from the book and collected textual and film evidence to arrive at a conclusion. Of the 29 students who turned in this assignment, 26 believed the book conveyed the theme better. One student explained:

In my opinion, I think the book portrayed the theme better overall. For one, it was more detailed and gave more events that weren't in the movie. By giving more details it actually helped you understand the theme better. Though in the movie, it was somewhat easier to visualize because you had an image right in front of you. It made it more real. But the book actually allowed you to step into their mind and see things from their perspective more clearly. I could more fully understand the personality & feelings of the characters, so I actually <u>could</u> see things from their point of view. It made the message more clear.

Another said, *"I think the book definatly [sic] conveyed the themes better, because the movie left so much out. I didn't get all the emotion I received from the book, I just didn't feel the movie connected to hearts."*

The Bottom Line: Implications for Teaching

A few years have passed since this inquiry began. I am now back in a middle school setting and no longer teaching *To Kill a Mockingbird*. It may be

several more years before I have the opportunity to teach this text again, but the lessons I learned from the inquiry makes it all worthwhile. So much of what I've learned about using film texts to teach literature has already influenced my teaching of my middle school classes. I taught a new film elective for eighth graders, in which students learned about the language of movies, learned about cinematic aspects from the movies, and learned how to create a film message by making a movie. My students were able to recognize the allusions to Homer's *Odyssey* in the Coen brothers' film, *O, Brother, Where Art Thou?* After completing a mini-movie unit prior to studying *The Diary of Anne Frank* and reading Mildred D. Taylor's novel, *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry*, my seventh graders were able to more easily make inferences in printed texts.

As more and more non-print media infiltrate our culture, more attention will need to be paid to understanding how non-print texts can be integrated into a traditional literature curriculum to teach the critical thinking skills necessary for close reading and deeper comprehension. Teaching critical thinking using film texts is an effective strategy for guided practice because it's an immediate experience and bridges the gap between the real world and literature. Learning how to read film texts is a valuable approach for critical thinking, a skill transferrable to improving reading comprehension for all students.

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Reviews and Questions for a Multicultural Classroom Library:
Empowering Your Students, Raising Reading Scores, and Having Fun Doing It!

Sonja Kay Olson

Alejandro's infectious energy made everybody smile. No matter how I arranged the seating chart, he would make friends with the student next to him and start cracking jokes. Alejandro loved school, not homework or his GPA, but he loved his wrestling team, the girls, and the fact that if he wore a giant neck brace for an entire day, people would ask him questions and listen to every word he said. Unfortunately, Alejandro was only doing enough in my class to stay eligible for wrestling, and he needed to finish his independent book report before the end of the quarter. He wasn't the only reluctant reader I'd had since I started my first year at an urban school in 2007, and even though my bag of tricks had grown since I started teaching, I still didn't have a text that challenged him and held his attention. I tried to give him a book by a Mexican author about a famous soccer player, but since Alejandro didn't play soccer, and wanted to avoid overt displays of his Mexican citizenship at school (he didn't have a visa), he looked at the cover, then discarded it to flip through a magazine.

A multicultural classroom library has the potential to improve a student's literacy dramatically. I couldn't just let Alejandro slip by without reading. Not only did I believe (and still do believe) that reading is the gateway to the rest of education, my tenth grade class was preparing him for his MCA reading test in the spring. My classroom library should be the place for all my students to find books in which they find genuine connection, and therefore, a greater appreciation for reading. Alejandro couldn't just idly pass the time.

One Friday, I began with independent reading, pulled four books, and walked over to Alejandro to try (once again) to get him to read. "Listen to this one. You don't have to read it if you don't want to," I said, and I started reading *We Were Here* by Matt de la Pena, a coming of age novel about a Mexican American boy in the California legal system.

> "I'll put it to you like this: I'm about ten times smarter than everyone in Juvi. For real. These guys are a bunch of straight-up dummies, man. Take this big black kid they put me in a cell with, Rondell, [. . .] three

> nights ago he stepped to me when I was writing in my journal.
> He said: 'Yo Mexico, wha'chu writin' 'bout in there?'"

Alejandro started listening when I read the part about feeling smarter than his peers, and by the time I had read a section of de la Pena's spot-on dialogue, Alejandro took the book, saying, "Okay, lemme see that."

Alejandro embraced this book. We would exchange a few words during passing time about how neither of us believed the narrator when he said that he was in Juvi for stealing a bike, or I would agree that it was pretty messed up that the narrator's grandpa wouldn't talk to his grandson. Alejandro's constant talking came in handy when he started selling reading to *other* kids, turning my day into a perfect 10 when I overheard him saying, "Dude, books are like little movies playing in your head!"

Alejandro's story embodies the best parts of a dynamic multicultural classroom library. He raised his reading level by more than one grade level at the end of my class. He saw a multi-faceted representation of his culture. He found success in a class where he had previously struggled. He had space for a positive conversation with his teacher about content. He even helped to make my classroom a place for students to discuss books with passion and excitement. It is incredibly challenging to find genuine ways for all students to enter a meaningful text and connect it with their lives, yet these high ideals of opening the world to our students are at the very core of our calling as English teachers.

We know that the movers and shakers of the world must be able to read, connect, and respond to texts. While the MCA Reading test indicates a student's proficiency on skills such as summarizing, comparing, and decoding vocabulary, in order for students to put these skills to work, they must have a personal drive for literacy. Colleges are looking for students who have high-level skills in connecting what they read with the problems and solutions that they see in the world around them (Burke).

Classroom libraries are the best tool for growing literacy. In his book *Readicide* as well as his other writings, Kelly Gallagher wants students to gain real-world skills without killing the love of

reading. A culture of reading is one that surrounds students with texts, a culture that finds books with which students connect (Warren-Gross). Warren-Gross's goal of a reading culture is in tandem with Danalyn Miller's *The Book Whisperer.* Miller advocates matching kids with books that they are personally motivated to read, and while it takes longer to find the right book, students don't usually need to be reminded to read. Miller's work lines up exactly with my classroom experience; during reading time, I can recommend a stack of books to a student, and he or she may reject them within minutes. While still in my classroom, I can immediately recommend another round of books for this student. This instant response forces me to listen to my students, know their strenghts, their weaknesses, and especially their interests, so that I can do my best to recommend a book to them. While listening closely to students, one consideration is their racial and cultural self.

The rhetoric of respect that all teachers talk about in their classroom can be affirmed or voided by the materials provided. Authors of color need to be on our shelves (Meyer 23), even if they are harder to find (Endo 236), or non-traditional and outside the literary cannon (Lujan 18). Wayne Au, editor of *Rethinkging Multicultural Education* implores teachers to not provide diversity for diversity's sake, but to provide a multicultural classroom because it validates a major part of a student's identity: "Multicultural education should be grounded in the lives of students, not only because such a perspective provides a diversity of viewpoints, but also because it honors students' identities and experiences."

High school is often a time when students develop their racial identity (Tatum 97). Unlike a student's choice of music, or favorite sport, race cannot be altered at a moment's notice, and racial identity carries with it a long history that contains sterotypes, expectations, cultures, and privileges. Isolating race, instead of the hundreds of other things that make up a student's identity, allows the student to "authentically recognize the intersection of race and other aspects of human diversity and culture" (Singleton 88). I choose books and authors specifically on the racial make-up of the author or characters, not because it's the only important thing, but because race affects so many other aspects of human culture.

This vicarious exploration of race through characters and authors is a safer way to process race instead of becoming vulnerable. For example, while I sometimes find a frank conversation about race with my Asian American male students hard to come by, I have given *American Born Chinese* to similar students, and they often read it and respond to the themes of race and dominant American culture in a written book report, instead of a conversation that involves more people.

Students who read about cultures different from their own also benefit from a broad multicultural library (Boyd 481). Books from unfamiliar cultures give students a chance to see differences in a positive, relatable context. (Landt 691). Instead of potentially awkward or hurtful face-to-face conversations about differences, reading allows humans to experience a different culture with no risk of embarrassment. If a student isn't ready for a different culture, he or she can try a new book. Students who wonder about a culture can prepare a few intelligent questions through reading a few books. As McIntosh and Style first wrote, our curriculum is both a window and a mirror. A classroom library should reflect the lives of students back to them, while also showing them a world beyond their neighborhood.

Questions to Ask of Your Classroom Library:
These are some questions that I ask when I start shopping, along with my reviews of some books that my students love.

Who in my classroom is missing from my library?
I teach in St. Paul, and I have a lot of Hmong students in my classroom, but when I started, I had zero books with Hmong protagonists. If you have students who aren't represented on your shelves, add voices like theirs to the library! This is a great way to show them that they belong in your classroom (and academic spaces as a whole). If I'm not sure about a book, because I haven't read it or I don't know much about that culture, I'll ask my student to read the book for me and tell me what he or she thinks. Students have never turned down the chance to be experts on their own culture. Sometimes they don't finish the book, but it's never a negative experience for the student or me.

> *Bamboo Among the Oaks: Contemporary Writing by Hmong Americans*
> by Mai Neng Moua
> Moua both edits this anthology and contributes to it, doing both jobs well. The stories in the book range from the adrenaline-filled "Mrs. Pac Man Ruined My Gang Life" to the introspective "My Dad the Mekong and Me the Mississippi," to the funny "Hmoob Boy Meets Hmong Girl." I've had many students check it out of my library, but I've also pulled stories from it to compliment my curriculum.

Are the non-white characters in the books I'm choosing relegated to the role of a sidekick, or similarly, is there a white "savior figure"?

Empower ALL your students to be strong leaders, not sidekicks, in the field of their choice. While a blend of cultures is wonderful, far too often students of color are tokenized. A quick look at the back of the book or the illustrations can usually give you a clue. Instead of picking *The Blind Side*, a story that tells of a wealthy White family in Tennessee taking in a homeless black teen, choose *I Beat The Odds*, the same story written by Michael Oher, the teen who went from homelessness to the NFL, with lots of help along the way. Better yet, buy both books and let the football player in your third hour compare the two.

> *47* by Walter Mosley
> This book is part fantasy, part historical fiction, it takes place in the South, pre-civil war, and is told from the perspective of a young African-American boy. While it's not for everybody, those who enjoy it appreciate how the themes of science fiction and slave revolts combine for a dynamic social commentary. The audio version is spot on.

Does the book that I'm considering perpetuate stereotypes?

Look for books that undermine stereotypes, not reinforce them. This can usually be solved by having several different types of stories. As I began to expand my collection, I worried that the stories in my library featuring African American males were all about life on the street. While they were often popular, I knew my selection needed to be broader. I asked a basketball coach for a list of books that my students would like--or at least a list of current stars, so I could buy their biographies. I found a story on positive peer pressure, instead of negative: *We Beat The Street*, a non-fiction story about a pact three young African American men make to become doctors.

> *We Were Here* by Matt De La Pena
> This fast-moving novel set in California shows de la Pena at his best. He lets you really get to know the intelligence and emotions of the main character, and you're over halfway through the novel before you find out what landed him in Juvi (unless you're good at foreshadowing). The dialogue is slangy and filled with swearing, using a journal format to let the narrator to be as emotional as he needs to be. Two secondary characters, Rondell and Mong, add a fuller picture of incarcerated teens.

Is this book written by someone with an intimate knowledge of the culture?

Good writing shows nuance, relies on details, and records authentic dialogue. These things are really, really hard to portray in a borrowed culture. Yes, it is harder to find multicultural books when I narrow my search to books written by members of that culture, but it's worth it, because the books are better. This derth of books published by minority authors is all the more reason we need to empower our multi-cultural students to read, write, and publish their work.

> *Game* by Walter Dean Myers
> With age comes wisdom. Myers was born in 1937, and at times this book acts like a big brother passing along important stuff about life. So, if the cultural references aren't up-to-the-minute, forgive him and look instead at the subtlety, often about how race may or may not be affecting a situation, how family and dreams can make all the difference in this game of life. Myers writes a plot-driven novel, detailing the main character's basketball season. Myers doesn't rely on any romantic relationships, but deftly draws secondary characters in a little sister, an assistant coach, neighbors, and teammates.

Is the book I'm choosing historically accurate?

Reading should inform students, not mislead them. Check to see who's telling the story, or from whose perspective the book is told. A disenfranchised group may have a different narrative about a topic that is often discussed. Look for those stories. Try reading Louise Erdrich's story *Game of Silence* back to back with Laura Ingalls Wilder's *Little House In The Big Woods*, and look for the differences that two young girls see when they hear their fathers talking about life after 1850. As an Anishinabe writer, Erdrich is a wonderful author to look into when teachers are looking for materials that will match with the MN Common Core English standards that ask specifically for literature from Minnesota American Indian writers.

> *Down Garrapata Road* by Anne Estevis
> This quick read about the Mexican immigrant families of Garrapata Road is small but sharp! Each section is about a different family, and then within those sections are several short stories. Some are funny, some just give you a snapshot of life, and at least one made my eyes well up.

Are the stories on my shelves relevant?

When looking for books that empower a specific cultural group, the first thing I usually find is non-fiction (Often a How We Came To America story) or historical fiction. I had two books, both by Korean authors with Korean narrators on my shelf. One was Linda Sue Park's book *A Single Shard,* a story about a 12th century Korean potter, the other was An Na's book *The Fold,* a story of a Korean American with a major crush and the possibility of plastic surgery. Guess which book is beat up and worn out because it's been passed around to so many backpacks? Well, it's not about 12th century pottery. Historical fiction is GREAT! Quality, contemporary fiction can be just as thought provoking and stimulating.

> *The Fold* by An Na The first page shows us the main character popping a pimple and wondering how to get her crush to sign her yearbook. The book ends with much bigger issues, such as coming out in a Christian community, plastic surgery to make eyes open wider, and the differences between first and second generation immigrants.

Will this book work for the ages of my students?

While it's important for books to be available in a broad range of reading levels, the content needs to interest the age level of your students. Even though *Bud, Not Buddy* by Christopher Paul Curtis passed every other question on this list, my students didn't read it, because the main character was too young for them. Even the kids who were reading at a low enough level to be challenged by the book didn't pick it up. It's equally important to find challenging books for high-level readers, even if they're not interested in college-level themes.

> *Flight* by Sherman Alexie
> While the Lexile level is a managable 550, the themes of death, destruction, and disenfranchisement make this a book for a high school aged reader. The narrator's background could make readers feel sorry for him. Instead, Alexie weaves in Native American history and respected adults to show that the narrator is not someone to pity, but someone to listen to, learn from, and respect.

Does this story empower my students?

It's not enough to avoid being racist. Your classroom library at its best can break down barriers, raise up leaders, and give students not only the reading skills for their future, but the vision that it takes to achieve their greatest dreams. Genocide, war, slavery, marginalization, and other tough truths should be balanced by biographies of great inventors and athletes, love stories, graphic novels, and other texts that show life being lived well.

> *My Life as a Rhombus* by Varian Johnson
> This protagonist likes math, and she's really good at it. In fact, she tutors other kids. Rhonda has some past choices that still haunt her; high schoolers will quickly recognize the choices of alcohol, sexuality, and responsibility. Math and academic language pepper this story of an African American female. Maturing relationships are demonstrated on several levels: parents, friends, and romantic relationships.

Should I take any books off my shelves?

If you want your classroom library to be THE place where kids can find terrific books, cut out the deadwood. I finally took out my yellowed copies of *Julie and the Wolves* and *Walk Two Moons*. I wanted to hold on to them--they were classics, stories that had strong Native American characters, and were easy enough for a struggling reader to get through. But after another semester of students passed the books by, I realized I needed to save my shelf-space for the best books.

If you're ready to make your classroom library realize its potential, start browsing in your favorite bookstore! Get help financially if you can. Print some research and ask your principal first, with today's tight budgets, try writing a grant or using a website like Donors Choose. I've even asked the alumni club for money. If you use personal money, remember to save your receipts, because the money is tax deductible, up to $250 per year. Ask your librarian if he or she has any resources like book reviews, access to cheaper books, or barcoding technology. Sites like the English Companion Ning or like listmania on Amazon are great places to get ideas. I've found my local bookstore often strikes the best balance of being prompt, cheap, and helpful.

It's hard to get a good classroom library, and harder still to keep it up, but I contend that it is worth every dollar spent, every minute used for organizing, every meeting to fit independent reading into the curriculum. I have personally found this experience very rewarding. It teaches me about my students, and opens unexpected conversations with them. It lets me spend time browsing in bookstores, and libraries, or my colleague's shelves. It works for the students too! I've had many students say that independent reading is their favorite part of the class.

Alejandro's reading level jumped way up in my class, and he passed the state reading test in the spring. Happy reading!

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Independent Reading:
The Importance of Choice and Time for Student Learning

Greg Heinecke

A few weeks ago I read with interest the Minneapolis *Star Tribune*'s article on a metro school district's decision to remove books from their school library. I wondered, "*What kind of crazy idea is that?*" It intrigued me enough to keep reading. Upon doing so, both to calm my initial reaction and gain insight regarding this decision, I found that the leaders of the school no longer wanted to try and "duplicate what area public libraries offer" (Louwagie). The referenced books were what the Common Core calls "informational texts." Teachers were to focus their efforts on educating the students on how to find reliable information electronically.

While students and teachers, principals and districts – even the State of Minnesota with the new MCA-III – have to face these types of decisions transitioning to the Common Core standards, there has been an overwhelming response to what many feel is the lost presence of literature. Recently I was at the Department of Education, listening to Charon Tierney, English-language arts Education Specialist and president of Minnesota ASCD. A group of social studies teachers and curriculum specialists were discussing literacy. Ms. Tierney clarified for the group that while informational texts – literary nonfiction pieces, including "biographies and autobiographies; books about history, social studies, science, and the arts; technical texts, including directions, forms, and information displayed in graphs, charts, or maps; and digital sources on a range of topics" (Minnesota 45) – are important, it is expected that literature is still taught. What may be different now, or at least new to some, is that literature needs to be taught – it is more effective and valuable for learning – *in conjunction* with informational texts.

As a curriculum specialist, part of my work is in helping fellow educators with this balance of literacy, so I was pleased to hear the comments as they confirm the work being done in my district. The comments also help to shift the debate away from whether the text is informational and focus instead on the importance of reading. What matters, what needs to be different, is that students are given time to read. Our work has found that when students are provided some choice and independent reading time their learning increases.

A little background

As former English teacher of eighteen years, I still love a good story. When I began my career I knew that not all of my students would love stories (literature) the same way I did, so my ultimate goal was to help them at least appreciate it. Robin Williams's character John Keating in 1989's *Dead Poets Society* quotes Henry David Thoreau and "sucking the marrow out of life" as literature and poetry move beyond the page and into these young boys' lives. To inspire my students in a similar fashion would be so wonderful.

Flash forward to 2010 with my school district in the midst of its Response to Intervention (RtI) work. One of our first responses was in creating a course called Reading Plus. This class assists students who are at risk of not achieving state standards in reading and may not meet the designated performance levels on the State reading assessment. Taught by reading specialists for both sixth and seventh graders, this course offers the opportunity for students to receive focused instruction and assistance in reading

Specifically, Reading Plus students meet every day as a "tier 3 intervention," having received regular language arts instruction but then getting a "double dose" of literacy instruction the same day. It is expected that the students are provided with literacy skills and strategies that will help them meet both district and state reading standards. Among their resources, the Plus instructors use social studies topics and informational texts in their instruction, but what teachers have found as their best tool is literature.

Our approach

In 1987 Nancie Atwell wrote *In the Middle: Writing, Reading, and Learning with Adolescents*, still a great resource on how to set up a class with reading and writing workshops. In her book, she describes how her direct instruction comes in the form of mini-lessons and how a majority of the class time is spent on authentic writing and reading. Her "workshop" approach helps make the class a student favorite because it provides time "where they routinely collaborate with other students and the teacher, where they have some degree of ownership

of the educational product, and where they can be active. Learning is more likely to happen when students like what they are being asked to do" (Atwell 38).

Flash forward again, now to 2009 when Donalyn Miller wrote *The Book Whisperer*. About 25 years after Ms. Atwell invited teachers to provide their students with choices in reading and writing, Ms. Miller cites Atwell's key components of a reading workshop (Miller 16) and expands on it, creating a great resource on how to get students reading:

> Reading changes your life. Reading unlocks worlds unknown or forgotten, taking travelers around the world and through time. Reading helps you escape the confines of school and pursue your own education. Through characters – the saints and sinners, real or imagined – reading shows you how to be a better human being. (Miller 18)

Many of my colleagues have heard Donalyn Miller speak. Her book has been purchased for both individual reading and as a book study at one high school. In my district, her approach has become a means by which multiple classroom teachers go about their daily and weekly business with the obvious outcome of students reading like they never have before.

The experiences Ms. Atwell references and Ms. Miller continues to reference have provided me with specific information that has impacted my ideas, actions, and instruction. Having now had my own experiences, I began to help develop the Reading Plus program, using Atwell and Miller as the basis for the contributions.

The major qualifier for students to participate in Reading Plus is a score below the designated performance levels on the State assessment in reading. Reading Plus students lack basic reading skills, such as oral reading fluency, reading comprehension skills, adequate vocabulary knowledge, the ability to obtain information from nonfiction texts, and retention of content. Once a part of the course, as mentioned, they receive their English-language arts standards in one class along with daily literacy instruction in another. Specifically, this literacy instruction is to monitor progress in fluency as well as comprehension. Each student is to increase her/his MCA reading score by three points each year while showing growth in vocabulary and comprehension skills. The goal is to increase oral reading fluency by twenty words per minute by the end of the school year.

The specific resources Reading Plus uses are Sopris West's *The Six-Minute Solution: A Reading Fluency Program* (Intermediate Level 2007), the Read Naturally program (in some schools), Sopris West's *Rewards* (also in some schools) and classroom choice independent reading libraries (in all schools), which includes social studies supplemental texts. These libraries are high-interest books of various genres and reading levels. Both fiction and nonfiction are included with graphic novels among the offerings. Students who did not like reading, who struggled at reading, who often times did not even own a book, have been given the choice of titles and the time needed to read.

Reading Plus specifics

Each Reading Plus teacher purchased books by going to bookstores – Borders going out of business *did* have a benefit for us – scrounging garage sales, and working with a national publisher like Follett Educational Services and local groups like Kubitz Educational Services in Hamel and Custom Education Solutions in Champlin. Books were chosen for both student interest and reading level. These libraries have been developed and refreshed with current titles each year.

Reading Plus provides students structured reading practice that helps improve oral and silent reading fluency and comprehension skills. Teachers initially administer a formative assessment to access the student's reading level and then use record-keeping charts and graphs to guide both large group and individualized instruction. Reading strategies are taught to improve comprehension with formative and benchmark assessments done throughout the year.

Beyond the Plus classroom

In 2010 the English-Language Arts curriculum review cycle concluded with new textbooks and novels for the classrooms. At that time it was determined that whole-group instruction on the same novel would occur only one or two times a year. Time working with literature would be in Literature Circles and independent reading.

The Book Whisperer advocates student choice, the availability of texts – best if within the classroom and/or home – and time to read in order to create the necessary volume to achieve higher levels of comprehension and thinking. We have found if not provided choice or time, students do not read. The ability to offer time to students is a huge challenge for high school instructors, especially as they feel the pressure to not only cover a large amount of content but also to prepare for district, state, and (often) national tests.

Yet many teachers have taken on the challenge of increasing literacy across disciplines. In addition to the required reading time during a certain day of their advisory/homeroom periods, middle-school students carry books with them to all their classes. When done with their daily work or completion of an assessment, students read. For some – this has become a great problem to have – students either hurry through coursework in order to get to read or are reading secretively like under a notebook or on a lab and thereby not paying attention to the lesson at hand. Positively, students discuss books, share copies of books, and check out books – one high school, built in 2003, reported last year that more books have been checked out than ever before. Teachers post what they are reading on their doors and in their email signatures. There are book studies and book "commercials" (like an oral book review). And in another high school, teachers used some of their funds to purchase books that mirror the different disciplines. So in an art classroom, there were both literature and informational texts based around art ideas and concepts. Reading has become the "thing" to do, and teachers are acknowledging its importance. For the students that rarely read, they now are being taught how each discipline's texts "work," and for those that once did read but had lost touch with it, now they are reveling in the opportunity of independent reading time.

Observations and findings

Last June Scholastic promoted summer reading. Their mantra of "reading requires practice" was supported with tips on how to assist in this endeavor. It is interesting to see that their number one tip is about choice:

• Don't underestimate the POWER OF CHOICE. According to the recent *Kids & Family Reading Report*, 91% of kids say they are likely to finish a book they have picked out themselves. Help your child find a book that matches her/his interests. Building on a student's interests can stimulate an interest in reading, even among reluctant and struggling readers.

• Make books ACCESSIBLE. Having books all around the house or while traveling in the car are great ways to encourage your kids to pick one up and read. Audio and eBooks are great options too!

• READ EVERY DAY: Children who read widely and frequently are higher achievers than students who read rarely and narrowly. As kids spend more time reading for fun, their reading achievement increases.

• Most of all, summer reading needs to be FUN for kids. (Scholastic)

While not told to follow these tips directly, the Reading Plus educators follow this "process" that aligns with Scholastic's tips. Along with their direct instruction, they have put these tips into practice. Anecdotally, the students are responding like never before, especially from this particular group. They are excited to be in the class and to see their progress. They say, "Our classroom library has better books than the media center." Reluctant readers have become hooked on graphic novels, and all the students truly do not want to stop reading. While unheard of before, these students not only are reading texts they have chosen, they also have the next book in mind that they want to read. One student even asked the teacher, "Do we have to stop reading today? Can't we just read the whole hour!"

As the district gathers "hard evidence" (fluency and comprehension growth) through benchmark assessments, the teachers are having the same reactions as the students. "My students get so excited to open up a new book and smell it. There are students who are not even in my class who want to check out the books from my library." The instructional opportunities above and beyond the regular English class have increased student self-efficacy of reading both informational and narrative texts. A class of reluctant readers is now reading thousands of pages and 20-plus books a year.

Yet again, it is not just in the Reading Plus classroom. In April 2012, two of my colleagues, Shaunna Roberdeau and Michael Zeman, decided to answer the question: *In a co-teaching classroom, how do independent reading, frequent assessments, and regular interventions lead to students becoming engaged and motivated scholars?* Many of their findings are fascinating, but what stands out is their data that illustrates the importance of independent reading in a student's life:

We collected data for two months in our English 10 team-taught classes. Students were chosen to be in these classes because they were at risk for failing the MCA-II Reading test from the state of Minnesota. They are students who came into our classes in September thinking that they were not readers and they did not like English class. Our primary goals were to get books into students' hands, get them reading, and see

how their grades and attitudes changed. Our study took place at a high school that is in the western outer ring of suburbs of Minneapolis. All research was completed in seven weeks in March and April. Research tools used were book tests, daily work tests, practice MCA reading tests, observations, student surveys, and student interviews.

Students in our co-taught English classes are currently scoring about 79 percent on daily work tests. These tests are mainly on comprehension of short stories, plays, literary terms, etc. Standing alone, that fact means relatively little. However, when it is compared to scores in September on the same kinds of skills and reading it means much more. In September these same students were scoring an average of 62 percent on daily work tests. There is only one variable: independent reading.

(Roberdeau and Zeman)

While wonderful, what may be even more exciting are the results these students had with their Minnesota Comprehensive Assessments practices. In the fall these students had a class average of 52%. After their year of co-teaching, regular interventions, frequent assessments, and independent reading, the same students scored 77% in the spring: an increase of 25%! The best part – as if that were not enough – is that the time committed to that choice, independent reading was only ten minutes each day.

Questions and challenges

While impressive, this data does not excite everyone, and not enough teachers have put this to work in their classrooms. Not everyone sees the impact reading can make but instead remain focused on the pressure to cover so many standards and to prepare students for so many standardized tests. Time to read is a luxury it seems, so the debate over whether it is literature or informational texts does not seem to matter. How can it matter if students are not reading at all?

And if they are given the time to read, is there such a thing as "simply reading"? Is time spent reading in school "wasted time"? Must information be given directly by an instructor a majority of the time, or can the majority of the information be drawn from a text or inferred by a student critically reading and thinking? While these questions may be rhetorical, it does seem important to know the benefits gained in "reading a good book." Entire books, articles, and volumes of research (the

November issue of *Educational Leadership* was dedicated entirely to reading) have been done on this subject matter. There certainly is data available. But even when that data is at one's fingertips, are educators empowered to truly give class time to reading? Can the benefit of both guided reading instruction and independent reading be seen?

It is not as simple as just providing students time. Setting up and managing reading workshop does require planning, effort, and skill to "do it right." Positive results are not always immediate, and many abandon the practice before those results are seen. But purposeful planning and the opportunity of time is a great first step that we continue to develop and monitor closely. It has changed the culture of our buildings, and the strong emphasis on literacy across the disciplines is most definitely making a positive impact.

"If students are not making strong progress, they need no less than 50 minutes of reading each day at school and more at home," says Jennifer Serravallo, teacher, author, and literacy consultant. Reading Plus is making this happen, and while a single teacher typically cannot offer these minutes alone, when a group of teachers makes this effort to support students, the outcomes are promising. If students have books, if they are given the choice of which ones to read, and if they are actually given the time to read them, whether in a Reading Plus period or a regular social studies classroom, wonderful results will occur.

Conclusion ~ hopes for the future

In 2005 – eight years ago already – a "tipping point" occurred as students aged 8-18 in the U.S. spent more time reading online per day than reading offline: 48 minutes per day vs. 43 minutes per day (Kaiser). In contrast, back at the metro-area high school, a senior female said that while she was fine completing her research on-line, she preferred reading her novels and popular titles on paper. "That's apparently true for others, too. When sophomores [at that same high school] had to choose a book to read over winter break, only two out of nearly 60 chose e-books" (Louwagie). While the debate plays out over electronic or paperbound, whether literature or informational texts, what educators, administrators, parents, and community members alike should act upon today is in figuring out how to best offer reading time and choice to kids.

Students are reading for the teachers in my district that have built this opportunity into their lessons. A good book is wonderful, but what is more wonderful is that we are finding real value behind the opportunity of choice and time to read a book.

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Connecting through Literature

Filling in the Template:
King Arthur as an Exercise in Answering a Generation's Questions

Martin Warren

Why is it that an obscure medieval king, who very possibly might never have existed, has, over the centuries and in various countries, inspired works as diverse as Malory's *Morte Darthur*, Wagner's *Parsifal,* Tennyson's *Idylls of the King,* Marion Zimmer Bradley's *Mists of Avalon,* the movie, *Monty Python and the Holy Grail*, and the graphic novel, *Camelot 3000*? That question about King Arthur has intrigued me for years. In spring of 2011, I taught an undergraduate class centered on that question – and a possible answer.

The answer I offered to the students is as follows: the legend of Arthur acts as a template into which different generations can insert questions about their own time and society, using Arthur and his cohort to provide answers. Other older literary texts are unable to do that because they are too historically specific. For example, take the medieval French *Song of Roland*. Roland and the remaining characters are tied so explicitly to the events of Charlemagne's failed conquest of Spain in 778, specifically the massacre of the rear guard of Charlemagne's army on August 15, 778, that it is difficult to free Roland from the event. Arthur, on the other hand, has mysterious origins. We know next to nothing about him. He, perhaps, led the defense of Britain against the Saxons in the early sixth century. The lack of historical specificity leaves Arthur rather "empty". In Arthur we have an outline with little detail, i.e. a handy template for each generation to use.

Throughout the semester the class applied the "template theory" to the various texts we read such as the medieval *Arthurian Romances* by de Troyes, the Victorian *Idylls of the King*, and twentieth-century short stories such as Shoaf's "The Romance of Arthur, Vortigern's Daughter" and Zelasny's "Last Defender of Camelot." By the latter part of the semester, with various texts under their belt, students could appreciate how over centuries the character of Arthur had evolved and was employed by de Troyes, Malory, and Tennyson to address cultural and social issues in twelfth-century France, and fifteenth- and nineteenth-century England. That was great! But what I wanted to do was test and assess how well the template theory worked. A standard end-of-semester paper was an option. A more intriguing option was for students to perform

the task of working with the Arthurian template and then reflect on that exercise.

What follows in the remainder of this article is the overall description of the high-stakes assignment, a description of the supporting exercises and conclusions about the assignment: "Filling in the Arthurian Template."

Filling in the Arthurian Template:
the Art and Craft of Character

Example has more followers than reason. We unconsciously imitate what pleases us, and approximate to the characters we most admire.
> *--Christian Nevell Bovee*

Overall Goal: This assignment is intended to have you consider the concept of character and how character reflects the author's/audience's evolving worldview.

Context for the assignment: When creating a character, how in-depth do you delve into their motives for doing what they do? How far should you? What is the author trying to achieve in having the character do what he does and say what she says? How does a character express the worldview of the time? In our class on Arthurian literature, we are looking at how the character/trope/motif/purpose of Arthur or Lancelot, etc. has been developed, interpreted, reinterpreted, and used over the centuries. The Arthur/Lancelot/Guinevere/ Mordred of the graphic novel, *Camelot 3000*, is very different from that of Tennyson's work or that of de Troyes. The Mordred of Stewart's *Wicked Day* is more "sympathetic" than that of Malory. Each era develops the Arthurian material to suit its own purposes, teaching the lessons the era deems appropriate. In this assignment, you will take one of the characters of the Arthurian corpus and develop the character to express what the character means to you in 2011.

End Product: In this assignment, you will practice evolving a character from the Arthurian corpus. The character will be placed in an episode of your own creation in which you make the Arthurian corpus relevant to our time.

How will you do this? See the process below.

Process for the assignment:
1. In a supporting exercise, you will practice how writers bring their own degree of understanding of the human psyche to their characters.
2. In a second supporting exercise, "Developing Critical and Analytical Thinking about Literary Characters," you will explore how an Arthurian character has evolved through various iterations.
3. Create the episode in which you will offer a new iteration of an Arthurian character as a way of making the Arthurian material relevant to today.
4. Write the accompanying and important cover letter in which you reflect on the whole exercise.

You should hand in a product that includes:
1. **Cover Page with:**
   • A title for your project
   • Your name
2. **Cover Letter:**   Write a cover letter that addresses the following questions:
   • Why did you select the character that you did for this project?
   • What particular issue (philosophical, spiritual, cultural, or political) did you want to explore through the Arthurian character you have taken and adapted and evolved?
   • How did your prevailing worldview influence your approach to the topic?
   • How does the episode you created make the Arthurian corpus relevant to our time?
   • What seemed particularly difficult or interesting from this assignment?
3. **The   episode   you   have   created**.

How will we get to this final product? We will use "supporting" exercises upon which we will build our knowledge base for the assignment. (See above.) These exercises will take place in class. **See the Supporting Exercises document.**

Grading Rubric: See separate document.

Beyond the fact that the students had to create an episode in which they offered a new iteration of an Arthurian character as a way of making the Arthurian material relevant to today, what was equally important was the cover letter (see details above) in which students had to answer such questions as: "What particular issue (philosophical, spiritual, cultural, or political) did you want to explore through the Arthurian character you have taken, adapted and evolved? How did your prevailing

worldview influence your approach to the topic?" Here is where I discovered what students had learned about the significance of the Arthurian material and the dynamic at the heart of how distinct generations had drawn on the Arthurian material to explore their own political, religious and social questions. To get to the major assignment, the class participated in two supporting exercises.

The first supporting exercise was a simple "game" in which students practiced "seeing" characters. As the lesson plan below makes explicit, working in groups students had to study an assigned photo from which they had to create a character. Since two groups worked with the same photo it became very interesting when each group shared its creation. Very different characters were created from the same image. The two photos used in class appear at the end of the lesson outline. The photos are from Google Images.

Filling in the Arthurian Template
Supporting Exercise 1: Seeing Characters

In this supporting exercise to the final assignment, you will practice how writers bring their own degree of understanding of the human psyche to their characters. How will you do this? See below.

1. Open the Groups Folder to discover which group you will be working with.

2. Gather together as a group and examine the photo you have been assigned. The photos are found in the Supporting Exercise 1 folder. Two groups will work with the 1930s photo, and two groups with the photo from the 1940s. If you have the "1930s Family" photo, work specifically with the boy.

3. Writers give their characters a personality, or ideas, corresponding to the requirements of the plot. Also, writers endow their characters with different functions in a work. Apart from possessing a psychological dimension, characters may represent a certain social type, or they may fulfill a philosophical function by defending or attacking ideas that the writer has set out elsewhere in the work. Sometimes the reader is inclined to judge characters critically, sometimes to identify with them. The author can attempt to control our reactions by the way the author presents the characters – introducing positive or negative comments from a narrator or other characters, or by involving them in certain kinds of action, revealing their inner thoughts and so on.

4. Look at your assigned photo. Keep in mind what's written in the previous paragraph. Create a character from the image in the photo. We will compare creations from each group to see how we are able to create very different characters from the same image. This should help you consider what you need to do for the final assignment.

1930s family (www.infomercantile.com)

Woman Aircraft Worker
http://www.flickr.com/photos/library_of_congress/2179930812

At the end of the first supporting exercise, the students expressed their surprise at how their readings of characters from the photos were poles apart. The photos acted effectively as templates through/in/from which the students created fascinating stories. As discussion of the distinctive interpretations continued, class members gradually understood how their character creations and readings of the photos reflected their own worldview just as Tennyson's use of the Arthurian template, for

example, reflected his concerns about nineteenth-century Britain.

Having succeeded in provoking students to grapple with how characters reflect the worldview of the author, it was time to move to the next supporting exercise for the final assignment. The purpose of the exercise was to help students map qualities and traits of their chosen Arthurian character and uncover how they were causing the character to "evolve" from earlier iterations. See the outline below.

Supporting Exercise #2: Developing Critical and Analytical Thinking about Literary Characters

OVERVIEW
Word maps/concept maps can help us represent and analyze the various feelings, thoughts, and actions of a character in a story. In this class session, you are asked to take a character from an Arthurian text from class or from elsewhere. With the use of a word map, identify the character's qualities or traits based on her or his actions. Note the character's feelings and actions, reflecting upon these in the word/concept map. Use the map to uncover how the author has caused the character to "evolve" from earlier iterations in other texts.

STUDENT OBJECTIVES
Students will
✓ Use a word map as a strategy for better understanding the characters in a story
✓ Analyze the many aspects of a character's life, problems, situations, feelings, and actions
✓ Begin to plan your high stakes assignment, i.e. what episode will you create using your chosen Arthurian character.

DIRECTIONS
1. Choose the character you wish to examine.
2. Working from your reading of the text, note the character's feelings and actions.
3. What does the character's feelings and actions reveal in the context of the specific text you are working with? In other words, do they reveal an underlying agenda of the author? How would you characterize the agenda? Is a specific worldview or philosophical, spiritual, political viewpoint being proposed or brought to life through the character?
4. On your map, make note of what predictions you would make about the character?
5. **Keep this map**. Think about how you wish to re-imagine your chosen character. What message, worldview, or philosophical, spiritual, political viewpoint do you wish to convey

through your own creation of an episode involving your chosen Arthurian character? Answering this question becomes important, not only to the piece you will create, but in the letter which will accompany the creative element.

Working on the second supporting exercise in class was most helpful as it allowed me to listen to any concerns students had pertaining to (a) the Arthurian character the student was using, (b) which aspects of the character to develop, (c) how to read their iteration of their chosen Arthurian character in the light of de Troyes, Malory, and the other authors we had studied, and (d) whether their developing character really expressed the rhythms and concerns of 2011 American society. Most of the conversations at this point were about which genres to work in. Once this stage was completed, the class moved into the first part of the final assignment itself, i.e. creating their Arthurian episode.

While success varied in the actual episodes that students created, each student's cover letter demonstrated that they had come to a much deeper understanding of how the Arthurian template provided opportunities to explore contemporary issues. Here follow sample statements from students' cover letters in which they explain how the Arthurian template helped them explore contemporary issues important to them. The first student addressed the lack of religious tolerance in contemporary American society, particularly in reference to Westboro Baptist Church:

Using Galahad and Percival's religious affiliations, and the stories, settings, and history of Arthurian lore, I was able to address a current issue that is truly important to me. I was able to represent my dislike of religious schism and superiority, and my desire for peaceful resolution of these issues.

The second student used the Arthurian template to explore her belief that the mania people of 2011 have with documenting their lives via social media is ridiculous:

My intention was to exaggerate the comic faults of each character, specially Gawain, in order to drive home my point, which is that the people of 2011 are obsessed with documenting every facet of their lives and making it public. My goal was to place Gawain, and other Arthurian characters, in the prime example of modern stupidity by making them the stars of their own reality T.V. show: The Real Knights of Camelot Country!

While having the students create a new iteration of an Arthurian character was essential, I was not so much concerned as to whether a student succeeded in crafting a brilliant new piece of Arthurian fiction. What was paramount was the reflection students engaged in in the cover letters. There I could see how they had come to an understanding of the concept of the Arthurian template with which we had grappled throughout the semester. The students' reflections revealed their understanding of how the Arthurian template worked. Their newly created Arthurian episodes substantiated the validity of the Arthurian template concept.

Growing Readers Who Love Poetry: Incorporating Poems into Everyday Instruction

Lindsay Noren

Rolling eyes and groans were always the reaction I got when I told my fifth graders that we would soon be studying poetry.

"Man, I hate poetry!" at least one student always interjected into our discussion.

"It will be fun," I'd respond. "You'll like it." But I wondered if I would ever find a way to make my statements come true?

I regularly stuck to the units of study provided by my district and taught the short mini-lesson that was slated for that day regardless whether or not it seemed interesting and engaging. My students' previously-developed zest for independent reading time, which I had spent months building, was suddenly zapped with the introduction of this subpar poetry unit. I would leave school with a sense of defeat for those "poetry weeks." My personal experiences matched what the research shows us - that students enter school feeling positive about poetry and somewhere along the way lose interest before they are able to develop a lifelong appreciation for it (Ford 3).

Time for a change

Determined to do things differently, I spent one summer figuring out a way to avoid teaching poetry in an isolated format and instead to integrate it into my daily literacy routine. I figured more exposure to a variety of poetic formats, poets, and styles would help make my reluctant fifth graders more comfortable with reading poetry and eventually writing their own poetry. After all, research has determined that embedding poetry in instruction across the curricular areas is highly beneficial (Collins, 1). This idea was strengthened for me when changes in state testing mandated the testing of poetry and figurative language. I needed to improve not only how I would approach the topic of poetry but also how I could make this genre appealing to my readers.

The biggest struggle for me was finding a way to teach poetry thoroughly and enjoyably without compromising too much of my limited class time. I found myself teaching reading, writing, spelling and grammar to each of my three classes in an 80-minute period. There simply wasn't time to teach a full poetry lesson daily amidst the other curriculum standards I was hastily trying to cover.

The breakthrough for me came when I decided to use poetry as part of the daily warm-up routine in my classroom. After all, warm-ups were a practical part of my schedule which immediately got my students working in the morning. Each week, I selected a poem of the week which served as a springboard for our discussions and study.

I picked poems which were short, had an easy-to- follow pattern or rhyming scheme, often employed humor or narration, and were of high interest to my group of students. These poems fit especially well into my weekly plan:

The Armadillo, Eric Ode
Messy Room, Shel Silverstein
I Dreamed I Was a Snowman,
Eleanor Dennis

The set-up in my fifth-grade classroom was simple. I provided copies of the poem for the initial reading. I projected the poem onto the board for easier reference when we dived into our discussions. Each child had a notebook which served only for poetry work and responses. Excitement and enthusiasm are catching, so my own excitement and enthusiasm about setting up the poetry notebooks had my students eager to participate, even with our very first poem.

The weekly schedule

I formatted our study of poetry the same way every week. On Monday, students independently read the poem and responded to a few open ended questions I wrote on the board. They wrote the date and name of the poem on the top of a new page in their notebook for the new poem of the week. I started at the very basic level with questions like, "I like/dislike this poem because…" and through the year graduated to more advanced question stems. After the warm-up period was over, I would either read the poem myself or have a volunteer read it aloud, and then ask students to share their answers to the questions posed on the board.

Each Tuesday, I asked my students to draw their interpretations of the poem in their notebooks. The first few times that I asked them to do this, they were almost shocked that their poetry assignment was to draw! Needless to say, this was a favorite activity related to poetry. At the end of the time, I asked a

few students to talk about what they drew or to show us on the document camera. Just as with the question stems, their drawings and interpretations began as very basic interpretations at the surface level of the poem. But sometimes during discussions, they picked up on some of the subtleties and applied a deeper sense of comprehension. For example, after reading Kenn Nesbitt's humorous poem, "Please Don't Read This Poem," one student drew a picture of a poem with a red x on top of it. "That's a nice drawing," another student said, "But you missed the point of the poem! It's a joke to not read it but you keep reading anyway!"

By Wednesday of each week, we were ready to move onto different skills related to the poem. I always had students practice their fluency by reading aloud the poem to themselves, a partner, or their table group. Although this step was repetitive, it was important to show my students that poetry is meant to be read aloud and listened to. Also, repeated readings of poetry have been shown to improve reading abilities among all students, but especially among learning disabled students (Staudt 1).

Shel Silverstein became a favorite poet of my class. His poem "Peanut Butter Sandwich" led them into an appreciation of rhymes and word play:

> A puff of dust, a screech, a squeak-
> The king's jaw opened with a creak.

When the kids picked up on a particular wording or rhyming scheme, it would lead the class into a new area of discussion.

In the early part of the week, I was careful to hold back my opinions or interpretations of the poem. I didn't want to share what I thought right away-- for fear that my students might then view their answers and ideas as wrong. But by the end of the week, we would get into the "nitty gritty" of the poem and discuss format, style, and other elements such as figurative language. When there was a concept I was trying to teach, such as alliteration, then I would select a poem such as "Betty Botter" which contained this alliteration, "Betty Botter bought some butter." Then during that week, I would be able to talk about and later reinforce the concept.

Anchor charts and binders

I added any ideas or discoveries about poems to an anchor chart so students could access the vocabulary and concepts with a quick glance. This was probably my most referenced anchor chart of the year! By December, I could quickly ask if a poem was written as free verse or if it contained alliteration and get a verbal answer from the class right away.

This was a very helpful tool in our study, as the state test mandated that students must understand figurative- language terms.

At the end of the week, I took copies of the poem (and others that were about the same topic or used the same format) and placed them in a binder. I kept the binder at an accessible spot in the classroom where students could voluntarily select it to read during their independent reading time. My students were actually picking up poetry and liking it! I was thrilled when I would see the poetry binders being read and reread. Also, the poetry basket in my classroom library began to be visited at a much higher rate. When it was time for our writing poetry unit, they jumped right in to writing poems with an ease that suggested expertise.

For me, it was exciting to watch their transformation over the course of the year. The key was abandoning an isolated approach to poetry and finding easy ways to integrate it into my everyday schedule. I didn't have to put an extended amount of time or effort into making this change. Just spending ten minutes per day on poetry and teaching in short bursts made a world of difference. Now I have no more rolling eyes and groans from my fifth graders when I say, "It's poetry time."

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Addenda

LIST OF CONTRIBUTORS

Jim Brosnan

Jim Brosnan, Ph.D. (Boston College) is a full professor at Johnson & Wales University in Providence, RI where he teaches Poetry, Drama, Introduction to Literary Genres, English Composition, Advanced Composition, and Communication Skills. He is the adviser to *The Maze*, the university's literary magazine, and to the Weybosset Hill Writers, a student creative writing group. Jim has been a five-time finalist (2nd, 2010) in the New England Association of Teachers of English's Poet of the Year competition. He is currently serving as the President of the Rhode Island Council of Teachers of English and is the director of the 73rd Writers Conference at Ocean Park (Maine). Jim's current project is assembling his fifth chapbook of poems accompanied by his original photography.

Rebecca Fremo

Rebecca Fremo is Associate Professor and Chair of English at Gustavus Adolphus College, where she teaches courses including Academic Writing, Creative Nonfiction, and First Term Seminar. Originally trained in Rhetoric and Composition, Fremo now splits her intellectual time between scholarship and poetry. Her essays have appeared in journals including *READER: Essays in Reader-Oriented Theory, Criticism, and Pedagogy; Composition Studies*; and *Writing Lab Newsletter*, and her poems can be found in journals including *Water~Stone Review*, *The Tidal Basin Review*, *Poetica*, and *Naugatuck River Review*. Her first chapbook of poems, *Chasing Northern Lights*, was published by Finishing Line Press in 2012. She's currently working on dual projects: a study of the revision practices of multilingual students and a poetry manuscript titled *The Last Good Day*.

Greg Heinecke

Greg Heinecke is currently a curriculum specialist and Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID) trainer for the Elk River Area school district in Elk River, Minnesota. With a background in English education, he collaborates with district colleagues on embedding literacy strategies into their instruction. A secondary focus has been in helping establish online learning opportunities for the district's high schools. Future plans lie in the work of grading and assessment and how to best report, support, and increase student learning.

Brian C. Lewis

Brian earned his Ph.D. in Critical Studies in the Teaching of English from Michigan State University in 2004. He is now a full-time instructor of both English and Women and Gender Studies at Century College in White Bear Lake, MN. At Century, he teaches composition, American Literature courses, and Introduction to GLBT Studies. His primary teaching and research interests include gender and sexuality issues, American Literature before the Civil War, composing in digital environments, and writing center pedagogy. In addition to serving as *MEJ* editor, he earned Honorable Mention for the Diana Hacker Award from TYCA in 2009 (for his work with Century's Online Writing Center) and was named one of MnSCU's Outstanding Educators in 2010. This year, he is teaching a course called "Graphic Narratives: Comics as Literature" for the first time.

Jeanette Lukowski

Jeanette Lukowski is currently teaching a wide variety of writing classes at Bemidji State University, and overseeing the work of the campus' writing center. The semester she shares in this essay took place on the heels of completing an MFA in Creative Writing--a personal reminder about how the paths of writing and teaching intersect in very empowering ways. *Heart Scars*, Jeanette's memoir of survival, will be released by North Star Press of St. Cloud on June 1st.

Carol Mohrbacher

Carol Mohrbacher is a professor of English and the writing center director at St. Cloud State University. She earned a B.A. in French and an M.A. in English at SCSU and completed her PhD in Rhetoric and Professional Communication at Iowa State University. Her dissertation concerns the Digital Millennium Copyright Act and its effects on student and faculty authorship. Beyond an ongoing interest in digital copyright issues, her current research involves a study of Generation 1.5 student writing and synchronous online tutoring. In addition to academic writing, she writes fiction, poetry, and memoir. Her most recent creative writing project is a series of vignettes about her six and a half years working as a longshoreman titled, "Brandoland."

Mike Mutschelknaus

Mike Mutschelknaus teaches English courses at Rochester Community and Technical College. He recently was recognized as one of MNSCU's Outstanding Educators for 2013. He is currently working on helping students receive credit for prior learning. Feel free to contact him at mike.mutschelknaus@roch.edu.

Lindsay Noren

Lindsay Noren is an upper-grade elementary teacher in Houston, Texas. With a master's degree in Curriculum and Instruction, she plans to become a reading specialist to work with both students and teachers. She also documents her experiences in the classroom at her blog, *My Life as a Third Grade Teacher*.

Sonja Kay Olson

Sonja teaches tenth grade English (and, occasionally, other interesting classes) at Johnson High School in Saint Paul. She earned her MAEd from Hamline University with an emphasis in Urban Education. She would like to thank her writing group and the 2012 Minnesota Writing Project cohort for their insight and collegiality. Sonja believes she has the best of both worlds by living in exciting, biker-friendly Minneapolis while teaching in the bookish, referendum-friendly Saint Paul.

Jennifer Peterson

Jennifer earned her B.A. in English and M.Ed. in English Education at the University of Minnesota, where her interest in adolescent literacy led to the study of the role of motivation and engagement in reading comprehension. Since completing her M.Ed degree, she has earned her K-12 Reading Specialist license, and most recently, the Teaching Writing and Critical Literacy graduate certificate in conjunction with the Minnesota Writing Project at the U of M. She is currently an English/Language Arts and Strategic Reading teacher at Dakota Hills Middle School in Eagan.

Kim Socha

Kim Socha, Ph.D., is an English instructor at Normandale Community College. She has journal publications in the areas of social justice pedagogy, surrealism, and Latino/a literature. She is the author of *Women, Destruction, and the Avant-Garde* (Rodopi, 2011) and co-editor of *Confronting Animal Exploitation* (McFarland, April 2013). Her next book—about animal advocacy and secularism—will be published by Freethought House in 2014. Aside from her love of zombie books, movies, and television shows, Kim is also an activist in the areas of animal liberation and juvenile justice.

Martin Warren

Martin Warren is an associate professor of English at the University of St. Thomas in St. Paul, where he has taught for 14 years. He is a medievalist who, besides teaching medieval literature, enjoys teaching speculative fiction, introductory linguistics, and literary theory. He is the author of *Asceticism in the Christian Transformation of Self in Margery Kempe, William Thorpe, and John Rogers,* which is published by Edwin Mellen Press. An example of his scholarship in speculative fiction is: "Is God in Charge?: Mary Doria Russell's The Sparrow, Deconstruction, and Theodicy," published in the *Journal of Religion and Popular Culture*. He is presently working on a new edition and translation of the Pearl poet's text, *Patience*.

ANNOUNCEMENTS OF 2013 MINNESOTA CONFERENCES

MNWE CONFERENCE
NORMADALE COMMUNITY COLLEGE
BLOOMINGTON, MINNESOTA
APRIL 4-5

We have a great conference on "Writing Culture" and many other practices and ideas waiting for you April 4-5. You can register at the door at Normandale College in Bloomington, Minn., just southwest of Minneapolis. This is our fifth annual conference. We expect 150-200 people, and we have scheduled more great breakouts than ever before. They feature short presentations of new practices coupled with plenty of discussion in small groups. In addition, we have two plenary sessions at 9 am each day: "The State of Writing in the Upper Midwest" on Thursday, and "Creative Writing in the Upper Midwest" on Friday.

This year's lunchtime keynotes likewise feature pedagogy and writing on Thurs., and creative writing on Friday. Thursday's keynote is by nationally well-known and respected cultural composition experts Bruce Horner & Min-Zhan Lu from the University of Louisville. Friday's keynote is by recent American Book Award poet Ed Bok Lee of Metropolitan State University in St. Paul, Minnesota.

The conference is within fifteen minutes' drive of the Mall of America, downtown Minneapolis, and the Minneapolis-St. Paul Airport. Mall of America, the largest indoor mall in the United States, offers many family and individual entertainment and restaurant options, as does the area just north of Normandale College near I-494. For more information or to register, please go to www.MnWE.org.

Questions: e-mail David Beard,,
UM-Duluth, **dbeard@d.umn.edu**.

MCTE SPRING CONFERENCE
AIRPORT HILTON
BLOOMINGTON, MINNESOTA
APRIL 11-12

Urban, rural, struggling, gifted, suburban… Somali, African-American, Hispanic, German, Euro-American . . . gay, straight, Christian, atheist, Muslim are but a few of the adjectives that might describe our diverse Minnesota students. How might we connect with them all as we consider the Common Core standards and meaningful education? Join us April 11 and 12 at the Airport Hilton in Bloomington as we grow in our understanding of students, national standards, and promising classroom practices.

Thursday

- **Workshop: Linda Christensen**
  author - Reading, Writing, Rising Up ~ Teaching for Joy and Justice

- **Lunch: Ed Bok Lee**
  poet - *Whorls*, winner of the 2012 American Book Award for Poetry

Friday

- **Workshop: Richard Beach & Amanda Thein**
  authors - Teaching to Exceed the English Language Arts Common Core Standards

- **Lunch: Wing Young Huie**, visual artist & **Dessa,** spoken word, hip-hop artist, singer

CALL FOR PAPERS:
2014 *MINNESOTA ENGLISH JOURNAL*

Please consider submitting an academic article, a brief teaching tip, a letter to the editor, a hypertext, a multimedia presentation, or a creative work (such as a poem, short fiction, or play) for the next issue of *Minnesota English Journal*. We have no required number of pages or words for our submissions, but if you cite academic sources in your work, please do so according to *MLA Handbook for Writers for Research Papers*, 7th edition. Please also keep in mind that we are a peer-reviewed journal with an editorial board. Our acceptance rate is approximately 50-60%; therefore, we cannot accept all submissions. Most importantly, before you submit to *MEJ*, keep in mind that *MEJ*'s audience primarily consists of teachers from the elementary to the college level who want to learn more about effective teaching techniques.

We will publish on all topics for English teachers of all age groups. However, preference in publication will be given to these three topics, all of which need more representation in MEJ:

- ➢ Classroom technology.
- ➢ Classroom diversity.
- ➢ Elementary (K-6) pedagogy.

DUE DATE FOR SUBMISSIONS FOR 2014 ISSUE: DECEMBER 15, 2013.
(The 2014 issue should come out by April 2014.) Authors should be informed of the status of their submissions by January 15, 2014. If you have questions, comments, or concerns about the next issue of *MEJ*, please contact the current *MEJ* Editor,
Brian Lewis, at **brian.lewis@century.edu**.