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SCCTE Call for Articles

The South Carolina Council of Teachers of English welcomes contributions to ***South Carolina English Teacher (SCET)***, a journal that represents varied perspectives, formats, and voices focusing on the teaching of English in our state. ***SCET*** publishes teacher research, critical essays, teaching strategies, bibliographies, interviews, personal essays, short stories, poetry, and other creative works including black and white photography and drawings. We invite original artwork for our cover design.

Each manuscript should be no more than 12 double spaced, typed pages in current APA style.

SCET is a blind, peer-reviewed journal. Place the author's personal and institutional identification including an e-mail address on the cover page only.

E-mail a copy of your manuscript in Word, subject heading, ***SCET***, to mstyslin@mailbox.sc.edu.

Deadline for submission for the next issue of ***SCET*** is July 31, 2013.

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From the Editors

Amid drastic changes to standards, curriculum, and teacher evaluation, it seems that policy makers, the public, and even educators sometimes lose sight of the excellent work that teachers are doing in classrooms across the state and nation every day.

One of our greatest honors in editing this journal is the chance to provide teachers a forum for sharing their classroom practices and research with colleagues. This kind of forum allows for not only the description of quality teaching practices and the basis for those practices, but also for professional development of the best kind, where educators learn from one another.

This volume of *South Carolina English Teacher* contains several texts that richly illustrate classroom practices and examine the way these practices are informed by ongoing scholarly conversations.

In the *Literacy Invitations* section, “Finding Value in Sustained Silent Reading (SSR),” Tom Thompson explains the ongoing discussion of the role that sustained silent reading can and should play in helping students develop as readers and suggests that it can be an important way for schools to honor and encourage reading.

Meanwhile, Ashley Hope DeGarcia argues that picture books can be an important part of secondary ELA classes in “You Can’t Be Serious! Making a Case for Picture Books in Secondary School.” She examines research studies that show the value of these kinds of texts and provides ideas for using picture books effectively in middle and high school classrooms.

The *Writing Reflections* section contains articles that focus on the role of writing both for students in the classroom and as part of teachers’ professional development. Rebecca Yoder’s “Borrowing Craft, Owning Style” contains a rich description of classroom practices that provide student writers with opportunities to engage with mentor texts as they develop an understanding of craft and style and use that understanding to shape their own writing.

In “Top 5 Reasons to Try List Articles in Your Classroom,” Dawn Mitchell shares the results of a study that explored the genre of the “list article” and the role it played as a catalyst for student writing for both 3rd graders and first-year college students.

Rebecca Harper in “Reflections from a Summer of Writing Instruction” helps us understand ongoing discussions about the role of standards on teachers’ curricular choices in her description of a professional development workshop. She shows the extent to which the way teachers think about writing instruction, and even their own development as writers, is shaped by local and state-wide curricular mandates.

In our *Beyond Print* section, Julie Warner’s “Seeing Again with New Media: Using Free WWW Tools to Teach Students Revision” suggests online resources that allow writing teachers to engage students in revision, an aspect of the writing process that students at all levels often resist.

Creative Expression, the final section of this issue, contains Marni Shook’s poem, “Rain.”

As we move forward with important policy discussions regarding standards and assessments in the coming months and years, these pieces highlight the important work teachers across grade levels and subject areas engage in every day as they help students develop as readers and writers.

Matthew C. Nelson and Mary E. Styslinger

Finding Value in Sustained Silent Reading (SSR)

By Thomas C. Thompson

In 1971, Lyman Hunt offered a six-step plan to help students become better readers. Although the plan was intended for elementary teachers, middle and high school teachers adapted some of the ideas to help older students as well, and at least one of the steps subsequently found its way into South Carolina state standards up through 12th grade¹. Hunt labeled this particular step “USSR” for “Uninterrupted Sustained Silent Reading,” and one of my colleagues remembers referring to it during the Cold War era as “Russian Reading” because of the initials. Although the USSR is no longer with us as a political entity and Hunt’s acronym has been shortened to “SSR,” the idea of having students use chunks of class time for pleasure reading has endured, enjoying varying degrees of popularity through all grade levels.

This practice is not, however, without controversy. The National Reading Panel (NRP) concluded in 2000 that there was insufficient evidence to support SSR as an effective practice, and Timothy Shanahan (2006a), a member of the panel, used his position as President of the International Reading Association to warn teachers against devoting class time to SSR. Stephen Krashen (2001), however, argues that the NRP failed to consider numerous relevant studies, and that they misinterpreted some of the studies they did include; Michael Shaw (2006) implies that Shanahan simply misses the point of how SSR works.

What, then, is a classroom teacher to do about SSR? In my conversations with middle school and high school ELA teachers, I have heard about both positive and negative experiences with SSR, yet even teachers with positive experiences seem reluctant to use it in the current climate of “research-based, data-driven” practice. My goal is not to persuade skeptics to embrace SSR; rather, for those teachers who want to use SSR, and for those

who might like to give it a try, I offer a justification, based on a broader view of what should “count” as relevant research.

Defining SSR

Hunt (1971) describes the practice simply as reading for long periods of classroom time without interruption. Over the years, the range of activities referred to as “SSR” has grown, creating some confusion about what teachers mean when they refer to SSR. Shaw (2006), for example, limits SSR to “a block of time for independent reading that reinforces skills and strategies that the teacher has systematically and explicitly taught” (p. 16). Krashen (2004), however, makes no mention of explicit instruction, describing SSR only as a time during which “both teachers and students engage in free reading for short periods each day,” though he allows that “self-selected reading” – apparently not *quite* the same as SSR – could include conferences and discussions (p. 2). Siah and Kwok (2010) describe two programs, “Drop Everything And Read” (DEAR) and “Daily Independent Reading Time” (DIRT), both of which include student selection of reading material and minimal accountability, as programs that fit under the SSR umbrella. Following Krashen’s (2007) description of “old school” SSR, I will use the term to refer to the practice of using regular blocks of time – generally ten to twenty minutes per day, two or more times per week – during which students read self-selected materials with minimal accountability.

The Research Question: Is SSR Effective?

Defining a program or practice as “effective” seems relatively simple: to the extent that the program or practice achieves a desired goal, it is effective. As debates about the effectiveness of No Child Left Behind (NCLB) legislation

¹South Carolina State Standard E4-1, Indicator E4-1.8 is, “Read independently for extended periods of time for pleasure” (p. 112).

clearly demonstrate, however, attempts to measure the degree to which a program or practice achieves a particular goal can be complicated by politics and even by science.

With respect to SSR, defining an appropriate “goal” is the first point of contention. For the NRP, the goal was to improve reading – or, in practical terms, to improve test scores for reading. For many teachers, however, the goal is much broader, and admittedly more difficult to quantify: SSR can help create a culture in which reading – especially independent reading – is expected and valued, and it can help students see themselves as readers.

When Congress charged the Director of the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development with assessing “the status of research-based knowledge, including the effectiveness of various approaches to teaching children to read” (National Reading Panel, 2000, p. 1), and the NRP was created to carry out the charge, the panel focused on the more narrow goal of improving test scores. SSR did not fare particularly well in the NRP report: although the panel noted “widespread agreement in the literature that encouraging students to engage in wide, independent, silent reading increases reading achievement,” and they found “hundreds” of studies showing “the more that children read, the better their fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension,” they nevertheless dismissed these studies because correlational studies cannot show that independent reading *causes* the higher performance (p. 12). Hence, the panel actually reviewed only fourteen individual studies that sought to determine whether independent reading caused improvement in fluency, vocabulary development, and reading comprehension, and found little or no evidence of a causal relationship. While the panel offered no warnings against various forms of independent silent reading, the lack of supporting evidence left them unable to endorse it as effective. As noted above, Shanahan uses this lack of evidence as grounds for warning teachers away from SSR (2006b).

In his critique of the NRP report, Krashen (2001) identifies fifty-three studies that either meet or almost meet the NRP criteria, and he charges that the NRP report willfully ignores some of these studies and misinterprets the

results of some of the studies it does consider. Interpretive problems aside, however, he points out that the NRP generally found SSR at least as effective as traditional practices used for control groups – evidence that SSR has the same merit as those traditional practices. His argument is basically this: If SSR does not hurt (because it is no worse than what is in place), but it might actually help (because the data suggest that it might, even though we cannot say so conclusively), then it makes sense to go ahead and use SSR. In monetary terms, if we could spend \$10 and get back either \$10 (no difference) or \$15 (positive change), we would do well to spend the \$10; we could not lose money, but we might gain some. Shanahan’s wait-until-we-are-certain attitude, this argument suggests, could be depriving students of possible gains.

Teachers need not choose between Shanahan and Krashen, however, to put a value on SSR. The NRP analyzed only experimental research, the kind of research that involves manipulating a variable and comparing changes in an experimental group with changes in a control group. Experimental research might produce objective *data*, but as North (1987) points out, it is only one methodology for producing *knowledge*. Historians, philosophers, and critics, as well as non-experimental researchers such as clinicians, formalists, and ethnographers, can also produce useful knowledge; by limiting its review to experimental research, the NRP simply ignored all other sources of potential knowledge about the effectiveness of SSR. Yes, experimental research produces data that allow for numbers-based comparisons of different instructional programs, much as the “price per ounce” stickers allow for price-based comparisons of different brands at the supermarket, but any review limited to experimental research alone offers only an extremely narrow view of “effective” practice.

One kind of research ignored by the NRP report is the case study. Michael Smith and Jeffrey Wilhelm (2002) offer a case-study-based finding relevant to SSR. Through extensive interviews with over four dozen boys, they found that the literate behavior of the students they interviewed had a strong social component, and in particular was strongly

influenced by family, friends, and significant others. One boy, for example, read *Of Mice and Men* four times, in part because he engaged with the characters, but initially because his brother gave him the book. This student highlights a key influence for reading: personal engagement with the characters or the topic. Unlike assigned school reading, which tended to have little value for these students, texts recommended by friends and family, with personally engaging characters and situations, and often read in a social context, tended to have intrinsic value for the students. Mirroring this kind of self-selected, intrinsically valuable reading, SSR allows students to select their own reading materials, read together (i.e., in the same room at the same time), and make recommendations to each other. Thus, SSR provides an in-school setting in which students have an increased chance of finding intrinsic value in reading.

The NRP report not only fails to consider correlational studies, but explicitly dismisses them as irrelevant. Although such studies cannot show causality, they can offer support for a line of reasoning that strongly suggests such a connection. Kelly Gallagher (2009) looks at correlational studies that tie frequency of reading to improved scores in both reading and writing and offers a rhetorical argument (i.e., an argument based on reasonable probability) for a connection. He notes that reading tests measure not only students' familiarity with the words, but also their familiarity with the content (i.e., their "knowledge capital"). Citing a study in which scores are tied more to familiarity with the topic than to general reading ability, he argues that students need to build their knowledge capital to become better readers. Students can build their knowledge capital through life experiences – for example, learning about baseball by watching or playing baseball, or learning about China by visiting China or hosting a Chinese exchange student – but they can also build knowledge capital through reading. Schools can provide some life experiences such as field trips, but they can provide almost limitless possibilities by providing a wide range of reading materials and time to read them. Hence, if reading can build knowledge capital, and knowledge capital can lead to higher test scores, then we can

reasonably conclude that reading should lead to higher test scores. We cannot say *how strong* the connection is – that is, we cannot say that so many minutes of reading per day will lead to a gain of so many points on a test – but the important point is that one benefit of reading is an increase in knowledge capital.

Yet another kind of evidence ignored by the NRP is anecdotal evidence – stories told by teachers who have actually used SSR in their classrooms. These stories do not carry the weight of traditional research studies, but if the question is "Can it work?" (rather than "Does it work?"), anecdotal evidence merits attention. As with many strategies, SSR has generated stories of success, stories of failure, and stories of mixed results. A fairly typical story, at least in my experience, is one from Seth Mitchell (personal communication, June 24, 2012). Mitchell's high school had "tried" DEAR but, as Mitchell explains, "a lack of faculty buy-in crashed the program." When the school decided to replace a homeroom period with something else, a literacy committee persuaded the faculty to try SSR during that block of time. Mitchell describes the program several years after implementation:

Now, our building is silent for 20 minutes four days a week. Almost every person in the building (including students, teachers, office staff, and administrators) reads during this time. Now in its fourth year, the program has lost its shiny newness and has become a natural part of our routine and school culture. Though some students still grumble about being "forced" to read, they hear the message that literacy matters, and the initial resistance to SSR has lost its energy. ... Some students in my SSR group [who] openly admit that they would never read on their own time (and claim that they had read few or no books since elementary school) ... have read several novels and enjoyed them. We've also seen slight increases in reading scores in the past few years (though we cannot necessarily attribute these changes to the program). In addition, the library is enjoying much more frequent use than our pre-SSR days. I can tentatively say that we've accomplished part of our mission.

The “mission” in this case was to get students reading. Even without comparing before-and-after test scores of control and experimental groups – and Mitchell is careful not to attribute improved scores solely to SSR – Mitchell’s story suggests that school-wide SSR contributed to a change in culture with respect to reading. That change alone could be “worth” the 20 minutes a day devoted to reading.

The Value Question: What is SSR Worth?

Arguments about value tend to be arguments about whether the benefits justify the costs. We tend to think of benefits in terms of goods and services and costs in terms of money: Is this meal worth \$30? Is this cell phone data plan worth \$200/month? In other words, is the benefit worth the cost?

For business transactions, the “cost” side of the equation tends to be dollars (“How much do these new textbooks cost?”), but for instructional strategies such as SSR, our currency is time (“How many minutes of instructional time does this activity cost?”). The “benefits” side of the equation is not goods or services, but learning – and because today’s demand for accountability requires us to quantify learning, we tend to equate it with test scores, either in an absolute sense (What percentage of students got scores of 3 or higher on the AP test?) or as a function of improvement (What was the average gain in reading comprehension for students who participated in this program?).

Unfortunately for SSR, although the costs are relatively easy to measure – 20 minutes per day, or perhaps 45 minutes per week – the benefits do not lend themselves to precise measurement. “Finds intrinsic value in reading” is unlikely to show up as a quality measured on a reading test, especially since one need not find value in a particular text to be able to decode and comprehend it, yet common sense suggests that students who find value in reading are more likely to practice it, and those who practice it are more likely to do it well. Reading tests do not directly measure “knowledge capital,” though greater “knowledge capital” could well lead to higher test scores. No standardized test could begin to measure the culture of a school with respect to reading, yet

again, common sense suggests that a school in which reading is valued must have a different effect on students than a school in which reading is merely assigned. The mere fact that something cannot be precisely measured should not mean that it should not be valued.

Whether to Implement: Objections and Responses

So far, I have argued that experimental studies alone cannot provide definitive evidence of the value of SSR. I have also argued that evidence from other sources, such as case studies and even personal observation, can support including SSR as a reasonable use of instructional time. Still, teachers who choose to implement SSR in their classrooms need to be ready to answer those who, like Shanahan, would criticize it. I therefore offer a list of common objections to SSR, along with some responses to those objections.

One objection is that SSR doesn’t look like teaching. Tom Newkirk (in Henry 1995) tells the story of a time when a riot broke out in his high school, yet while other classrooms were emptying as students joined the riot, his students stayed in their seats to continue reading their self-selected novels. The principal was running from class to class in a vain effort to stem the exodus, yet rather than compliment Newkirk on having such good control, he told him to start teaching. Granted, the story is decades old, but my conversations with teachers suggest that plenty of people still view silent reading of self-selected materials as inappropriate for the classroom. The problem here is not with the practice, but with the perception. Few people would complain about having students use fifteen or twenty minutes of class time to take a test, write a paper, or do research on a computer, yet each of those activities is a quiet, individual activity that the teacher simply observes – exactly as is the case with SSR. We merely need to recognize that reading – just like taking a test, writing, or researching – is an intellectual activity appropriate to the classroom.

Another objection to SSR is that, since reading – and especially leisure reading – can take place at home, teachers should not spend class time on it. Why spend time in class on something we can get for free at home? The

fallacy of this reasoning is that reading need not be an only-at-home or only-in-class activity. Like any useful practice, it should occur both at home and at school. Consider an analogy from sports. Basketball players learn early how to shoot free throws, but coaches nevertheless devote a certain amount of team practice time – class time – to free throw practice. The players aren't learning a new skill, but are simply practicing an important one. To move from sports to music, consider musicians playing scales. All musicians play scales during their personal (i.e., at home) practice time, but they also play a few scales during every rehearsal (i.e., class time) with the full band or orchestra. Playing scales is something musicians do. Shooting free throws is something basketball players do. Reading is something students do. Of course they are expected to do it on their own time, but because it is so central to what they do, they also do it during "class time," in whatever form "class" takes.

Some people might object that, since SSR is generally not tested, students are likely to avoid engagement. Bryan, Fawson, and Reutzel (2003) make such an argument when they note that "simply providing students time to self-select their own books and read silently" does not "guarantee" that students will, in fact, read silently; further, some students might even "use books as a prop for pretend reading or other non-engaged reading behaviors" (p. 47, emphasis theirs). This objection actually highlights a much larger problem in education today: the fact that high-stakes testing is narrowing the curriculum. John Forster and Tom Chapin (2008) have a song, "Not on the Test," that begins with these lines: "Go on to sleep now, third grader of mine. / The test is tomorrow but you'll do just fine. / It's reading and math. Forget all the rest. / You don't need to know what is not on the test." NCLB legislation didn't create the attitude that anything not tested isn't worth doing, but it certainly seems to have intensified the practice of shrinking the curriculum to the point that "if [a subject] is not on the test, [it] has been cut from the curriculum" (Fazio, 2009, p. 105). Students recognize what is happening; they see that "untested" means "unimportant" at the curricular level, so they reasonably deduce that "untested" means "unimportant" at the

classroom level as well. SSR might actually help mitigate against this nothing-but-the-test-matters attitude, however, since students who derive pleasure or otherwise find personal value in reading will have first-hand experience with learning for its own sake.

Further, one of the goals of SSR is to teach students to engage with texts. Citing a variety of benefits that accrue from engaging with texts, Michelle J. Kelley and Nicki Clausen-Grace (2009) identify engaged reading as "a critical goal for educators to set for their students" (p. 313). We cannot fault students for not yet doing the very activity we are trying to teach them to do, so to point out a lack of engagement with texts is to point out the need for strategies that teach and promote engagement. Stories abound of students who reported that, until SSR, they had never read an entire novel. Once they have read an entire novel, they know from experience that they are capable of reading whole books, so reading chapters of content-area books can no longer be beyond the realm of possibility.

Some people might object that during SSR, the teacher is letting students read whatever they want. This objection implies that teachers who assign SSR are somehow abdicating their responsibility to teach. Few people would make a similar claim about math teachers who assign sample math problems, or biology teachers who assign lab experiments, so the problem must not be with the reading itself, but with the fact that students engaged in SSR are reading self-selected materials rather than teacher-selected materials. The important point to remember is that SSR is not about learning content, but rather is about developing and practicing a skill – the skill of reading. For teachers who use SSR every day, the goal is to make reading a daily occurrence; for those who use it less frequently but for longer periods of time, the goal is to help students engage for extended periods, to build up their endurance as readers. Neither of these goals is related to content, so the choice of texts has no bearing on the effectiveness of the practice.

Others might object that since the teacher reads along with the students, SSR is nothing more than leisure-reading time for the teacher. Actually, the teacher is engaged in an important activity: modeling good reading practice. Some

teachers use SSR time to grade papers or engage in administrative activities, but those who want to show their students the importance of reading – those who want their students to “do as I do,” not simply to “do as I say” – will use SSR time to read with students. When teachers read with their students, students can more easily share their current book with the teacher, and the teacher can recommend “this book I just finished” to a student.

Finally, ELA teachers might complain that SSR is intended to benefit students in all subject areas, but if it takes place only in ELA classes, it takes time away from a single discipline for the benefit of all disciplines. This is not an objection to SSR, but an objection to how it is implemented. Programs such as DEAR and DIRT are school-wide in nature, involving everyone from students to teachers to staff, and all at the same time – usually during homeroom or some kind of advisement period. As Mitchell’s story above illustrates, however, “buy-in” is important: for SSR to work, teachers have to be supportive of the practice. Students tend to reflect the attitudes of the adults, so unless the administration and the teachers are supportive, students are unlikely to be supportive, either. Where it lacks school-wide support, SSR is better left as a practice for individual teachers who find it valuable for their particular classes.

One Other Consideration

Most of us have heard that if you want to know what someone values, look at how that person spends his or her money. I submit that the principle works for schools, too: if students want to know what their school values, or even what a particular teacher values, they need only look at how the school or teacher spends that one resource available to everyone – time.

How much does the school value test scores? Look at how much time the school devotes to test-prep sessions, practice tests, and testing days. How much does the school

value reading? Look at how much time the school – or the teacher – spends on reading. SSR can therefore have huge symbolic value, as it lets us “put our money where our mouth is” with respect to reading.

Making the Call on SSR

Teachers interested in using SSR but needing a justification might consider the following points:

- Although the NRP declared the jury still out on SSR, they found SSR at least as effective as whatever practices were already in place, so at the very least, SSR does no harm.
- Smith and Wilhelm have shown that a strong social element can encourage reading, and SSR provides such a social element.
- Gallagher argues that even leisure reading can build knowledge capital, which in turn can improve students’ reading abilities, and SSR can help students build their knowledge capital.
- Mitchell describes a change in his school culture when SSR was implemented as a school-wide activity, so SSR can help create a culture in which reading is the norm.
- Common objections to SSR tend to be based on misunderstanding of what SSR is or what it hopes to accomplish.
- Finally, SSR can be a powerful symbol that a school (or at least a teacher) values reading.

SSR might not produce immediate gains in reading scores, but evidence suggests that it can contribute to improved reading skills over time, and that it can encourage students to read more. It might even contribute to the creation of a culture of reading. Though no panacea, SSR merits a spot in the teacher’s toolbox of strategies to help students become better readers.

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You Can't Be Serious! Making a Case for Picture Books in Secondary School

By Ashley Hope DeGarcia

The idea of using picture books in middle school and high school classrooms is often met with resistance because parents and educators may think that picture books are “too immature” for their students and are under the impression that picture books are nothing more than “simple illustrations and shallow text” (Billman, 2002, p. 48). Some educators may fear they would be insulting to older students (Kane, 2007) since picture books are thought to be easy reads with simple text geared toward young children (Tiedt, 2000). Parents and educators may fail to realize that many authors have older audiences in mind when writing their books (Billman, 2002).

Many authors create their picture books to deal with difficult or complicated topics and serious themes for older audiences (Ammon & Sherman, 1996). Eve Bunting's (1998) *So Far from the Sea*, for example, deals with the lives of the children of Japanese internment camp victims (Billman, 2002), a mature piece of history in which only older students may have the background knowledge. Another picture book example is Lorbiecki's (1996) *Just One Flick of a Finger* which deals with gun violence (Giorgis, 1999). These picture books are written intentionally for older audiences who have more background knowledge and more of an ability to comprehend complex issues (Billman, 2002) than younger students may possess. Particularly in the past decade, many “sophisticated” and “thought-provoking” picture books have been published (Kane, 2007, p. 72). Bloem and Padak (1996) write that secondary teachers across all content areas are using picture books to: enhance vocabulary growth, present the facts, theories, and background information for new topics, clarify concepts related to the content area and exemplify how content knowledge can be applied in the real world (Kane, 2007).

Specifically in English language arts, Lott (2001) finds that picture books can be beneficial in high school classrooms to: introduce literary elements, concepts, and study topics,

understand the sophistication of succinct, targeted language, practice content-area reading strategies in new and familiar pieces of literature, model writing style and genre, connect print and illustration in media literacy, demonstrate critical theory applications in literature, and compare/contrast and connect high school literature with quality children's literature.

Picture books can be engaging for high school students (Albright, 2002; Billman, 2002; Bucher & Manning, 2004; Burke & Peterson, 2007; Giorgis, 1999; Hassett & Schibel, 2007), but too rarely do teachers utilize these books as teaching resources. Educators are often unaware of the benefits of picture books with their adolescent students because the books are simply unheard of in middle and high school, unfortunately making them an untapped and overlooked teaching resource. Picture books can be and have been used effectively with older students for developing higher-level reading abilities related to high school reading requirements (Lott, 2001).

Visual Literacy: The Text and Visual Blend

The visual and text blend format shared by all picture books sets the picture book genre apart from other types of literature (Cianciolo, 1997). There is a growing amount of research contending that students' learning is positively affected by the presentation of text and illustration together (Mayer & Sims, 1994). Billman (2002) maintains that high school students who work with picture books become “sophisticated readers who must interpret the author's messages by studying both the illustrations and the text” (p. 49). Students use higher-order thinking and visual literacy skills to analyze both text and illustration. To attain a picture book's true message, students must not only decode text and image, but they are also required to analyze the multiple sign systems (or images) with complex visual aesthetic objects (Ghisso & McGuire, 2007). The

language and illustrations have the potential to challenge proficient readers and simultaneously offer reluctant readers clarity on discipline-related concepts (Ammon & Sherman, 1996). Our 21st century students are skilled visual communicators because of our nation's media-saturated society that is continuing to expand (Yeh & Lohr, 2010). Given the influx of such visually-centered media outlets like Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube, it is clear that today's students value pictorial images as tools to communicate and to express themselves (Yeh & Lohr, 2010). Picture book illustrations create another dimension of meaning that students must be able to interpret. Because of their adept awareness for visual devices, older students would likely gain great knowledge and insight from the visual and text blend common in picture books.

Most adolescent students have a highly-developed aptitude for pictorial and nonlinear works (Ammon & Sherman, 1996), and since the idea of successful and effective communication is no longer limited to the traditional left-to-right, linear reading pattern (Seglem & Witte, 2009), picture books are a practical and accessible method to relate to today's students since they read picture book text and view images in a nonlinear manner. With this in mind, it would do well for teachers to include visually-stimulating instructional strategies like the use of sophisticated picture books in their classrooms to hone students' visual literacy skills. By invoking visual literacy in the classroom, teachers stay up to date with the ever-changing world of education. Petterson (1993) draws from the International Visual Literacy Association's fourfold definition that defines visual literacy as a) vision competencies that individuals can develop by seeing while at the same time integrating other sensory experiences, b) the learned ability to interpret the communication of visual images and to create visual messages with visual images, c) the ability to translate visual images into verbal language and vice versa, and d) the ability to evaluate visual information in visual media (Yeh & Lohr, 2010). Those competencies involve higher-order critical thinking skills that can be practiced and improved with the use of picture books as supplementary classroom resources.

Exploring the use of picture books with

middle and high school students as a resource to teach concepts and themes with pictures and words could generate meaningful learning, and in turn enhance critical thinking skills in adolescent students. Picture book reading lends itself to active engagement because students would be expected to analyze both the images and textual language within a literary piece. Hill (2003) writes that "comprehending and interpreting any image requires an active mental process that is driven by personal and cultural values and assumptions" (p. 113). A student's prior knowledge about his/her sense of the world comes into play when critically analyzing and interpreting meaning from picture book texts. The image-text relationship moves away from the idea that students "receive" meaning from texts that "contain" information and shift toward the idea that students *produce* meaning through "active negotiation, conversation, and communication of individual values and thoughts" (Hassett & Schieble, 2007, p. 63).

Picture Books in Practice Literary Concepts

The use of literary devices like satire, irony, dialects, impressionism, and visual puns is ubiquitous in quality picture books (Cianciolo, 1997) and may only be perceived by older students who have prior knowledge of these literary concepts. When using picture books to teach literary concepts, it is imperative for teachers to carefully select picture books so that the purpose of the picture book is clear for students. To introduce students to satire and parody, Van Zile and Napoli (2009) recommend using *Terrific* by Jon Agee (2005) and *Romeo and Drooliet* by Nina Laden (2005). In *Terrific*, Eugene, the main character, travels to Bermuda and becomes shipwrecked. He experiences a series of calamitous situations and reacts to each with humorous sarcasm. With a scowl on his face, furrowed brows, and arms tightly crossed around his chest, Eugene shouts "Terrific!" during the mishaps that take place on the island. Young readers may not comprehend Eugene's sardonic tone. Adolescent and teenage readers with more reading and social experiences can gain a better sense of the story's witty nature and have an easier time grasping the concept of satire evident in the picture book. Van Zile and Napoli (2009) share

a lesson plan instructing students to collect political cartoons and identify the cartoonist's purpose. The satiric techniques of exaggeration, irony, sarcasm, and reversal as well as the use of political cartoons are more age-appropriate for secondary students to learn and apply in their own writing.

In *Romeow and Drooliet*, Laden (2005) uses the familiar ill-fated story of Shakespeare's (1993) *Romeo and Juliet* as the framework. In her picture book, she parodies the original Romeo and Juliet characters by using personification to chronicle the love story between Romeow, a cat, and Drooliet, a dog. For young readers, the story appears to be a simple, comical love story, but more advanced readers can uncover the deeper layers involved. Adolescents and high school age students who have read the classic drama understand the deeper levels of the story and have a basis for comparison to understand the concept of parody. Van Zile and Napoli (2009) suggest that teachers show clips from the 1968 movie version of *Romeo and Juliet* and then have students compare and contrast scenes from the movie with scenes from the picture book. Even further, high school teachers whose students have already read or been exposed to the original *Romeo and Juliet* drama can have students reflect on the drama and compare it to the picture books. Because Shakespeare's famous drama is a required read in most high schools, *Romeow and Drooliet* would be a suitable picture book to teach high school students the concept of parody since they would already be familiar with the drama.

Writing Style and Genre

Students are often overwhelmed by writing assignments in their English language arts classes. By exposing students to different writing styles via picture books, their reservations about writing may dissipate. Picture books may also peak their interest in writing. The nonfiction picture book, *Scrawl! Writing in Ancient Times* by the Geography Department of Runestone Press discusses the survival of ancient literature by going through the early writing systems of the Middle East, Mediterranean regions, China, and America (Tiedt, 2000). *Scrawl!* can be used as an interdisciplinary text because it not only suits English language arts content, but also fits nicely

into students' social studies and history classes due to its rich depiction of varying writing and language structures from around the world.

Lott (2001) suggests using multiple picture books by various authors to highlight a range of writing styles. Specifically, she names authors like Eve Bunting and Maurice Sendak for their distinct writing styles. Bunting, who writes books for children and young adults, has authored several picture books dealing with mature social issues like homelessness in *Fly Away Home* (1991) and the aftermath of war in *The Wall* (1992). Her writing style is beautifully unique in that she is able to develop a story while covering heavy concepts so that readers are left reflecting on her books' message. Her use of imagery and dialogue emphasize the importance of character relationships in each of her books. Adolescent readers can identify figurative language and emulate her style in their own writing. Sendak (1988), known for his popular picture book *Where the Wild Things Are*, uses rhyme and exaggeration to discuss modern, social topics (Lott, 2001). His creative and whimsical approach combined with his use of onomatopoeias and illustrations would work well with units involving poetry, folktales, and/or fantasy.

With their limited space for text, picture book authors must be meticulous in their word choices and sentence structures. It is common for children's book authors to fill their language with multiple meaning since each word and each phrase carry a large amount of weight to give the story meaning (Lott, 2001). Picture book authors are like "poets" who search for and select "concise, spare, evocative language" that encapsulates characters' emotions with specific and intentional descriptors and phrases (Wolfenbanger, 2007, p. 279). Lott (2001) provides the example of Mem Fox's (1989) picture book, *Wilfrid Gordon McDonald Partridge*, which is full of social connotations when a young boy tries to help his ninety-six year old friend, Miss Nancy, regain her memory. Language in picture books often takes into account its illustrated counterparts so meaning erupts from both limited text and illustration. Older readers understand that the process of reading picture books requires "an active experience of creating routes of reading that account for the tension between words and images" brought about by the text

(Wolfenbanger, 2007, p. 278). These students must use higher-order thinking skills to analyze the symbolism of the images.

Critical Thinking

Picture books can also be useful for improving critical thinking skills and understanding literary criticism. In her article comparing two picture books with different perspectives on social order, Israeli (2011), an educator and researcher, supports the idea that picture books can be used to develop critical thinking skills. When her students at the Academic College of Education in Israel compared the picture book, *The Ugly Duckling* by H.C. Andersen (1999) with a Hebrew picture book, *Raspberry Juice* by H. Shenhav (1994), they revealed layers of deeper meaning involving social order (Israeli, 2011). Her students developed better critical thinking skills when they compared, contrasted, and scrutinized characters using their prior knowledge of democracy (Israeli, 2001). She encouraged students to translate the hidden social messages in both stories into graphic organizers and examine the disparities between the two. The comparison students made between the two picture books required them to apply cognitive skills to interpret, analyze, evaluate, and infer social meaning from context clues.

Adolescents and high school students are familiar with using inferencing and analytical skills in their classes. Picture books give students opportunities to expand their viewpoints as they read and critically evaluate picture book texts. Lott (2001) provides examples of applicable picture books useful for critical perspectives ranging from mythic criticism to feminist criticism. Picture books like Gerald McDermott's (2001) *Raven: A Trickster Tale from the Pacific Northwest* (Lott, 2001) and David Passes' (1993) *Dragons: Truth, Myth, and Legend* (Ammon & Sherman, 1996) could help students understand mythic criticism. Likewise, Anthony Browne's (1990) *Piggybook* deals with gender roles and can help students understand feminist criticism.

Presentation of Picture Books

Teachers play a significant role in students' classroom attitudes and behaviors, therefore it goes without saying that the way a teacher presents a picture book to a middle or high school class can influence the way students react to it. Giorgis (1999) finds that teachers who have an apologetic attitude towards bringing picture books into the classroom will make students feel insulted by the texts, resulting in students not taking the learning seriously. If picture books are presented as inferior texts made for young children, adolescent and high school students will encompass a negative attitude towards the experience (Giorgis, 1999). Teachers must exemplify an open-minded attitude when utilizing picture books with adolescent and teenage students. Kane (2007) believes that if teachers provide students with a positive aesthetic experience and respect the idea that picture books can be effective resources in their classroom, students will follow suit.

Parents and educators alike should re-envision the picture book genre as accessible resources that have the potential to present complex ideas and concepts to middle and high school students (Tiedt, 2000). Cianciolo (1997) suggests that the label "Easy Books" should be changed to "Everybody's Books" (p. 2) as some libraries have done. When secondary students are reintroduced to picture books, the themes, literary devices, cultural depictions, and often poignant illustrations they are exposed to can help them understand English language arts concepts and appreciate aesthetic literature. Picture book reading to help literacy growth should not stop after elementary school because students' appreciation of picture books continues on past elementary school (Ammon & Sherman, 1996; Benedict & Carlisle, 1992; Cianciolo, 1997; Lott, 2001). Fortunately, the stigma that picture books are only for children is somewhat fading (Van Zile & Napoli, 2009) as some teachers, librarians, and parents have been or are beginning to use picture books with older students (Ammon & Sherman, 1996).

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Borrowing Craft, Owning Style

By Rebecca Yoder

When I was a kid, I loved Lloyd Alexander books. I would read his books for hours and hours, sitting on my front porch, reclined on our old cast-iron glider, my gaze fastened to the words on his pages. He introduced me to so many things: fantasy, strong female characters, adventure, Gaelic myths and legends, and books in a series. He's the one who really taught me to find inspiration from books and to see the connection between reading and writing. As a teacher of literature and writing, I know how important it is for students to make the connection between these two skills. However, many students do not see this connection, and they do not know how to connect the dots between the two elements of literacy on their own.

As educators of English, we are charged with finding and teaching strategies that allow our students to become more literate in our rapidly changing world. We must select the best and most appropriate activities that engage our students and prepare them to be better consumers and writers of informational and fictional literature. The development of literacy skills in reading and writing will lead to increased understanding and improved communication, which will make our students more competitive in college and in the workplace.

Literary borrowing is one strategy that could prove useful in writing classrooms. With this strategy, individuals use mentor texts to get ideas for inspiration, to get a framework for appropriate structure, and to get a feel for interesting literary craft. Many successful and notable writers, some of whom we study in our classrooms in our current curricula, have borrowed ideas from existing literature. These writers include literary giants such as William Shakespeare and Thomas Pynchon as well as contemporary authors such as Rick Riordan. By teaching these writings to our students and encouraging them to read these authors, we are sending them the message that this kind of literature is what they should consider "good" literature. If the authors of this "good" literature borrow ideas from other literature,

then it seems feasible to assume students can practice literary borrowing as well.

By using literary borrowing, we can help students understand how to develop their own writing styles, resulting in new life within their writing. When I used this strategy in my classroom with my students, though, I noticed there were other benefits. One of those benefits was that students made more intentional craft choices. The other was that students appeared to have a better understanding and stronger connection between reading and writing.

What is literary borrowing?

Literary borrowing is not an uncommon phenomenon amongst writers, although it is sometimes labeled with a different term. James Hirsch conducted a study in which he examined Elizabeth Barrett Browning, Samuel Clemens, and Eugene O'Neill and how they used "appropriations," in which these well-known and revered writers took ideas and structure from Shakespeare's plays. He goes on to say, "At least some important features of the psychology and methodology of appropriation have been shared by poets, novelists, and dramatists, by male and female artists, and by artists living in diverse cultural contexts" (2007, p. 65) which suggests this kind of borrowing is practiced widely amongst writers from all backgrounds and used in multiple ways.

Other writers and researchers may label this idea with terms such as "intertextuality," "alluding to," and even refer to texts "speaking to each other." This connection between texts is obvious to mature readers and writers because they have been taught, either formally or informally, to notice how one text influences another. Many students, however, lack the ability to make this connection on their own. Instead, they see reading and writing as two different skill sets, two different subjects. Therefore, we must find some way to help them connect the two so they can become more mature readers and writers. Literary borrowing is one way that can help students see the dependency of reading and writing upon each other.

Do students practice literary borrowing?

In 1997, Peter Lancia wanted to discover whether or not his second-grade students' writing was influenced by the texts they were reading in class. He examined their writings at the end of the year, and he found many similarities between the texts they were reading and the ones they had written themselves. These students borrowed independently, without direction from Lancia, incorporating plot and character development from pieces they read in class. He concluded that after reading these mentor texts, "Literature inspires, influences, and instructs young writers by providing the examples needed for effective learning" (p. 475).

The impact of direct instruction with mentor texts on student writing was also examined in Great Britain. Roy Corden wanted to find out the degree to which these mentor texts had influenced student writing by analyzing student writing scores before and after mentor texts were used in the classroom. He concluded, "[students] were able to integrate the stylistic and organizational features of [the] mentor texts into their personal repertoires and use them successfully in their own writing" (Corden, 2007, p. 279). He also found improvements in scores where mentor texts had been used to support student learning, suggesting that students had become more aware of how to use what they were reading to influence their writing.

What did I notice?

I taught advanced and gifted and talented eighth grade students in an Upstate South Carolina school district. The students tried really hard (most of the time), cared about their grades (all of the time), and tried what I asked them to do (usually). My students, like many others, also tended to see reading literature and writing literature as two separate entities. This disconnect between these two processes, two processes which should depend on each other rather than exist apart, had an impact on their writing styles. I wanted their writing styles to *engage* their readers, not create distance between their writing and their readers.

Part of the dilemma was due to their own writing habits. Like many other students, my students became comfortable with their trusty

academic style of writing, a style that appears to naturally create a barrier between the reader and the writing. I wanted my students to move beyond this barrier and create a connection with their readers. This required them to attempt something different in their writing, which meant they had to first become aware of their current stylistic writing choices as well as good stylistic writing choices from other authors. Dorfman and Capelli (2009) tell us in *Mentor Texts: Teaching Writing Through Children's Literature K-6*, "Mentor texts help students find ideas and breathe courage into their writing by helping them take risks and think outside their 'writing box'" (p. 8). The use of mentor texts, I believed, was the perfect solution to our dilemma. I wanted my students to take these risks and write outside their "writing boxes" as Dorfman and Capelli suggested. I believed this would allow them to become aware of their own writing styles and how their stylistic choices affect their readers.

How do they make the connection?

In *Study Driven*, Katie Wood Ray examines classrooms in which teachers used mentor texts to help students lay the foundation for their own writing projects. Ray found that "[the student] inquiry had that wonderful sense of urgency that writers who are expecting to write something know so well" (2006, p. 6). I believed this feeling of importance, achieved through examination of mentor texts, was necessary to help my students make the connection between reading and writing by showing them how important it was to closely examine how the author's craft affected them as readers.

Teachers of writing know that using mentor texts is a critical part of helping students learn how to write in a particular genre. The use of genre studies implies that teachers believe that students, if they are to become writers, "teach themselves, simply by doing it" (Spandel, 2005, p. 45). Students do learn best if they are given this power over their own learning. I wanted to take this idea a step further, though. I wanted to help my students become more aware of how they use these ideas in their own writing, thus showing them the connection between their audience and their writing. How else would they a) make

connections between reading and writing and b) enhance their writing styles if they could not recognize techniques they used in their writing and articulate why?

How do I frame the lesson?

The first part of my process was to define the most important lesson I could teach to my students about mentor texts. Lucy Calkins tells us, “What is most important is that we and our students are moved by a book. Only then do we return to the book to ask, ‘What did the author do to affect me in these ways?’” (2004, p. 278). Therefore, I knew my students needed to select texts with which they found some kind of personal connection. Initially, I gave my students the freedom to choose any text they wanted. The only requirement was the text must be inspirational in some way or have a writing style they thought was interesting. Then, students were to try some of what they observed within these mentor texts in their own writing.

When asked to try literary borrowing on their own, however, my students were hesitant. They did not make those courageous moves I thought they needed to exercise their writing styles and become more independent. In fact, several students believed I was asking them to plagiarize by simply taking authors’ ideas and writing styles and calling it their own. This student concern supported my belief that students did not understand how reading and writing influence each other. To address their concerns about plagiarism, I presented quotes from famous and notable authors, such as Stephen King, who openly admit that writers do engage in literary borrowing. In fact, Stephen King tells us, “You may find yourself adopting a style you find particularly exciting, and there’s nothing wrong with that. [. . .] I wrote stories in my teenage years where all these styles [Ray Bradbury, J. M. Cain, H.P. Lovecraft] merged. This sort of stylistic blending is a necessary part of developing one’s own style [. . .]” (2001, p. 99). Hearing this kind of support for literary borrowing helped them begin to understand the difference.

I showed them several examples of literary borrowing, including a poem I created using craft from two other poems, “Root Cellar” by Theodore Roethke and “Looking Up At Leaves” by Barbara Howes. Using think-aloud strategies, I modeled how I chose interesting

author craft I liked from these two poems; then, I modeled how I used the craft in my own poem to create meaning for my readers. For example, I explained I liked the idea of being between two worlds and spending time contemplating this idea, one of the themes of “Looking Up At Leaves.” I said I wanted to do this same kind of thing with my poem, so I wanted to focus on two different worlds with my son. Thus, I decided to focus on the idea that my son will always be my baby, no matter how old he is. I also liked the way Howes used ellipses in lines four through seven:

*This great trunk holds apart two hemispheres
We lie between ...Like water lilies
Leaves fall, rise, waver, echoing
On their blue pool, whispering under the sun;*

I explained I liked the placement of the ellipses because line five, at first glance, appears to be one complete thought. However, according to the punctuation, it is not. I wanted to use this in my own poem to emphasize the connection between the two worlds of my son:

*You looked up at me
With those baby blues
And smiled. . . . A toothless grin
Now filled with little pearls.*

Following my think-aloud and modeling, my students practiced literary borrowing on their own.

My students then began using the strategy by selecting a poem with which they felt some kind of strong connection. After finding this poem, students interacted with the text by identifying elements of the author’s craft they liked, such as striking words or phrases and unusual grammar or structure. My students also wrote why they liked those parts of the poem, explaining the effect it had on them. Next they used a minimum of two techniques from the poem and composed original poems. After writing their own poems, students annotated their own poetry, identifying the techniques they had “borrowed” and explaining why they used those techniques in their poems. They completed the project by mounting both pieces, the original poems with their notes and their poems with their annotations, beside each other on large construction paper. The finished projects were displayed on a wall, and students read each others’ projects and made comments on them

with sticky notes. The purpose of this strategy was so students could see the influence of their reading on their writing.

What did students learn?

When my students finished their pieces, I examined their work, focusing on the craft they chose to use in their own poems. I noticed their finished work tended to fall into two categories. The first category consisted of students who tried multiple craft and even the structure of their mentor poems. These students did not consider themselves to be excellent writers. Instead, they were only beginning to see the possibilities of crafting their own style, because so much of their own writing was similar. The second category consisted of students who considered themselves writers and wanted to try two or three techniques they found in their writing because they thought those techniques would improve their writing. These students already were aware of their own developing writing styles; their poems were less similar to their mentor poems.

What surprised me, though, was that my students, whether novices at developing their own style or experts, were far more reflective and purposeful in their decisions to use specific craft in their writing. For example, one of my students, Ellen, who did not consider herself a very good writer, explained that she liked how the author used parallelism in the poem she chose as a mentor poem. She also noted how the author used questions because they kept the reader in suspense. Even though Ellen did not consider herself to be a good writer, she decided to use questions in her own poem because she liked the way they were used in the mentor poem. However, she decided to answer her question instead of leaving the reader hanging. Ellen's comments about the mentor poem indicate that she can see how the reader connects with writing. She then took this craft and made it her own by changing the effect she wanted to have on her own readers. The explanations show that she is making the connection between writing craft and readers.

An intermediate writer, Mary, identified several author's craft choices from the mentor poem she liked. One was the structure and rhyme scheme of the poem, which ended every other line with one word. She enjoyed

the playfulness of the rhyme and diction of her mentor poem. She also liked the imagery evoked by the figurative language. She used both of these in her own poem, explaining that she used the rhyme scheme and structure because playful rhymes make readers laugh and she used figurative language because it reminded her of a silent magician. Comments she made about her poem indicate she made purposeful choices in her writing to create some kind of an effect on the reader. This shows Mary is more aware of how reading and writing affect each other.

Irene, a more advanced writer, liked the effect a dash created in the poem she selected. She said the pause created suspense for the reader. In her own poem, she also used a dash to create a similar effect on her readers. Another craft Irene liked from her mentor poem was using a defined rhyme scheme. She liked it because the rhyme scheme affected the tone of the mentor poem. She tried using the same rhyme scheme, but with different ending sounds in her own poem because she wanted to experiment with how it affected her poem's mood. Irene's thoughts show she is becoming more sensitive to the connection between the effect that author's craft has on the reader, thereby showing she is beginning to understand how reading and writing depend on each other.

Could this strategy be adapted for different student needs?

This strategy can be adapted easily in a number of ways. Younger students or students who have not used mentor texts may need more focused direction by giving them a short paragraph and completing the activity together before doing this activity on their own. They also may need help explaining why they chose to use particular craft in their writing. More advanced students may want more freedom in their choices of mentor texts.

What are implications for student recognition of how reading influences writing?

My students' thinking impressed me with how they were beginning to understand the complex idea of how reading shapes their writing and how decisions they make as writers affect readers of their writing. I was proud of

my students for making this connection. If, after this one activity, students are beginning to make sense of the connection between the complex relationship between reading and writing, then further practice of this strategy can make students even more aware of how reading and writing influence each other. This could lead to improvement in literacy, helping students to become better readers and writers of texts.

Mentor texts are “valuable simply for modeling

the possibilities open to writers” (Fletcher and Portalupi, 2001, p. 81). By allowing students to see these possibilities, students will not only become better writers, they will also become better readers. We want our students to become better readers and writers so they can learn and retain that knowledge for a lifetime. By helping them to see the connection between reading and writing, we are helping them take steps toward that goal.

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Top 5 Reasons to Try List Articles in Your Classroom

By Dawn Johnson Mitchell

What is a list article? In two different writing workshops, one with third graders and their teachers and the other with a group of college freshman who were enrolled in a remedial reading course called READ 100, we worked on answering this question in the first genre unit of study this past fall. We began with a stack of magazines I had gathered based on their interests with tabbed examples of list articles bearing titles such as, “Ten Super-Foods to Try” or “Top 5 Fashion Finds for Fall.”

If you’ve read a magazine lately or done any internet browsing, I’m sure you’ve seen many list articles like the ones I chose for my students. They are quick and informative to read, and they utilize a variety of text features to grab and keep the readers’ attention. Ray (2006) describes this genre as follows:

20 Quick Family Getaways. A Roundup of Hot DVDs for Children This Holiday Season. Eight Books to Carry You Through the Snow Days. Seven Reasons to Be Thankful in the Thanksgiving Season. 5 Video Games Worth Sore Thumbs. You know these kinds of articles; they’re very, very common. In them, writers present readers with a list of possibilities inside a particular category of possibilities. (p.230)

My third graders were enthralled with the list article dig I had immersed them in. I sent them off with directions to find the tabbed list articles and write down what they noticed about them in an attempt to help name and define the genre (Ray, 1999). Students made comments like, “I can’t believe we get to read this in school,” and “These are cool to read because you can skip around.” Students noticed non-print text features such as graphics and visual aids that the writers used to enhance the pictures. They noticed additional information such as websites and prices, and they discovered that the writers’ purpose was to teach and inform the reader about a topic.

In my college class, students were not as verbal in their dig, but they were just as

engaged with this text set. They completed an interest inventory prior to my list article dig activity, and I purposefully gathered list articles with their interests in mind. One student, a college baseball player, immediately chose a list article that proved to be a mentor text for his own in a *Sports Illustrated* magazine I chose on guess what? Baseball! Immediately, he was hooked. His definition of a list article that culminated out of the discovery dig was, “A list article is a kind of writing that makes sense to me because the paragraphs are organized by a list, usually numbers that are all about the same topic.” I thought that his definition was accurate, and as a class, we began with his and added to it as we progressed through the unit.

Are you wondering why I choose list articles as a genre study? Are you asking yourself, what can I teach with these? Can students write them? Are they beneficial? Do they meet standards and interests? Well, let me show you through a kind of list article of my own. Below you will find, “Top 5 Reasons To Try List Articles.”

Top 5 Reasons to Choose List Articles #1 – What You Think Counts

A list article begins with the writer’s opinion – what you think counts! The writer is the “expert” on the topic of the article and chooses which items to include in his/her list article. For example in the article, “5 Best Family Biking Getaways” Melissa Klurman writes, “For my family, riding bikes on vacation is like sprinkles on an ice cream cone: the finishing touch that makes it perfect” (Klurman, 2011, p.37). This author establishes herself as someone who not only rides bikes, but rides them on vacation often and has enough experience and credibility to inform us on the best places in our country to ride bikes. This creates the naturally informative and persuasive tone of list articles that immediately creates trust with the reader.

Melissa Klurman makes you want to grab your bike and go to Acadia or Portland or Santa Monica. I encouraged my third graders who

were given the charge of becoming an expert on a topic of interest in their region of choice in South Carolina (we integrated our list article unit with our SC regions unit in social studies) to not only inform their reader about that region, but persuade them to come by and try it out themselves; whatever “it” was to them. These third grade students did their best to inform and persuade their readers to come and snowboard in the Blue Ridge or swim in the Outer Coastal Plain.

Another element of choice that students enjoyed about the list article genre was that the author chose which items to include on the list. After given the direction to consider what topics of interest they knew a lot about and had personal experience in, one of my READ 100 students decided that he wanted to write a list article that focused on ways to save money. He shared with the class that he is living on his own and paying his way through college and had learned a lot about how to save money in order to be self-sufficient. Not only did he choose his topic, but he also had the opportunity and the responsibility of choosing which of the items on his brainstorm list would make the top 5 for his list article. This was a process for him to think through, but he engaged in the process because of the ownership it provided and because it gave him an opportunity to validate and then share a topic that he knew something about.

#2 - They Are Everywhere!

I chose this type of writing as a genre study because I wanted to help match the kind of real-world writing that was found in magazines, in picture books, and even online with what was being done in the classroom. The genre of list articles not only brought the real world in all of its vibrancy with graphics, visual aids, and print styles, but it also brought with it accessibility. The list articles were typically short reads, most ranging from one page or even one text box in length to no more than four pages spread out across a publication. I had no problems finding multiple examples of list articles.

I literally built my text set for both classes – third grade and my college READ 100 students – in one weekend. I combed through my stack of magazines at home, and armed with a list of titles and topics my students were interested in,

I headed to the periodical section of my local library and checked out ten (the limit at Middle Tyger in Spartanburg) and then proceeded to check out my husband’s ten and my mother’s ten. This gave me a milk crate full of *Vogue*, *Sports Illustrated*, *Muscle Magazine* and everything in between. There is an abundance of these types of articles online as well that enables you to start or supplement the search from your own home.

This accessibility allowed my students time to work through all the processes that writers go through; learning about the genre, conceptualizing an idea for their own product, reading lots of mentor texts as examples, and writing, revising, and publishing. In today’s age of accountability and standardized instruction, I want to make sure that my students are learning what they need to know in a manageable time frame, but in a way that is actually applicable to the society in which our students will be reading and writing now and in their future. List articles are prevalent in today’s publications. This makes mentor texts accessible in a wide variety of topics and interests.

#3 – Length/Depth Can Vary But Structure is Similar

List articles have a very familiar structure. List articles can be short and sweet – think one page or a sidebar in your favorite magazine that enhances a feature article or the overall theme of the publication. List articles can also be the feature article – think actual articles that use the list article structure and have extensive information and additional features for each component of the list. In creating the text set for both classes, I purposefully gathered a variety of different list articles so that students could see the possibilities for variation within the genre. Instead of mandating that each list article be a certain number of pages, I had my students pick models from the text set that they wanted to emulate in terms of structure. Many of my students who were more fluent writers, gravitated toward the feature article type list articles. My students who were more concise, and/or who liked to focus more on the text features than the actual text, gravitated toward the shorter list articles and chose to enhance the meaning of their text with more features. All students were involved in the creation and

application of a noticings chart (Ray, 2006) that we created in a close study of the list articles used in the text set.

As we read and studied the examples, we made a list of the components that we found in the list articles that we wanted to include. This noticings chart became the checklist we used when we began to write our own. An example of something we found in our noticings regarding the structure of list articles is that many are structured by numbers that accompany the headings, but some are not. A recurring example of a list article that does not utilize numbers that you can find every month in *Martha Stewart Living* magazine is her “Good Things” section. In this two to three page spread you will find a list of several good things the magazine chooses to highlight. Each item on the list has a heading, a photograph, and occasionally some will even have a diagram, a how-to list, or another additional text feature that enhances what’s on the list.

We found that while numbers weren’t necessary in a list article, the list-type structure where a reader can pick and choose which items he or she is interested in reading is a necessity. From our reading, we noticed that the list article items were structured around a particular topic, and there was usually a unified structure to present the list to the reader. Many times this cohesion was achieved through the use of print styles and/or graphics or even the crafting of the headings. The items were introduced with a catchy title and sometimes a short introduction, but the structure allowed them to be read together or separately, unified by the topic/theme and layout. This was one genre that my students did not struggle with organization because the structure was very familiar. How many of us have made lists? Once we engaged in the close study from Ray’s framework (2006), we were able to see the possibilities for the structure of our list articles, and most students chose to the numbered list format.

#4 – Research and Revision are Real

To inform the reader, real-world research is required. I wrote my own list article with my READ 100 students and modeled for them the process of choosing my own topic of interest. After all topics were chosen, we worked on

our articles together. My list article focused on informing my reader about the must-have and must-not items to purchase for pregnancy and infant care. I knew from reading several list articles in the text set that price, availability, and pictures mattered to me as a mother and to many of the other mothers I knew, so I wanted to make sure that I did my research and included in my list not only the name of the item and why it made the list, but also a picture and the price and purchasing information.

My students also utilized real-world research in their list articles, but many didn’t equate what they were doing in finding information to support their topic as research. I believe this was partly because they enjoyed it and partly because our process was individualized and not given a step-by-step order or process. Isn’t that a criterion we want for units of study in the classroom – that research be so much a natural part of the writing process that our students see it as a necessary part of informing their reader?

Once a topic was chosen, we found that as writers we had to create and then cull our list. This requires revision that has a real purpose. For example, my list of items for my list article titled, “Belly, Babies, and Beyond” began with a long list of items that I considered for the top five. After considering which items would make the cut, I was able to eliminate those that I didn’t have enough support for or couldn’t find enough information about. With my third graders who worked in collaborative groups to write their list articles, each group chose their topic and then collectively decided what each student would include as their item. One group of students chose to focus their SC regions list article around fun things to do in the Piedmont region. After much discussion and a conference with their teacher, students culled their list to their top 4: The Children’s Museum, Frankie’s Fun Park, Hatcher Gardens, and the local water parks.

#5 – Leads and Looks Matter

One of the characteristics that my students in both third grade and college noticed immediately and wanted to implement in their own list articles were the aesthetics of the piece. The creative and catchy headings and subheadings that stood out because of the print styles and color schemes were eye

catching and appealing. Catchy leads really work in this genre and can make or break the reader's decision to buy in and actually read the list. Editors in the magazine industry know that they have to make the most of the space they have to enhance the readers' experience so they will enjoy the reading enough to renew a subscription. Layout and looks matter in this genre – the reader can use the colorful, bold headings to skim and scan and choose which lists to read. Use of graphics and images and supportive text features like text boxes, labels, and diagrams enhance the meaning of the text and make list articles visually appealing.

Students of all ages enjoy being able to create meaning beyond the text. Using pictures and illustrations to inspire or enhance writing isn't just for early childhood; it's part of the multi-media age we live in. Why confine that to recreational reading and writing? I believe because it is an authentic part of a real-world

genre that is widely read and published, that it also has merit for classroom use. The multi-media aspect of the list article adds an extra element of creativity and enjoyment that helps motivate even the most reluctant writer.

Any genre that you like to read can now be a genre that you can write. The process of close study (Ray, 2006) or reading like a writer (Calkins, 1994) isn't a secret at all, but a common practice in writing workshops that take place in classrooms and wherever authors write. Reading examples with the expectation that you want to write one of your own makes you read differently and helps you look for what, specifically, the writer is doing to create that particular piece in that particular genre (Ray, 1999). List articles are everywhere! All kinds of authentic real-world writing is out there, too, just waiting for us to be brave enough to try it. Our classrooms will be more creative and fulfilling for students and teachers alike if we do.

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Reflections from a Summer Writing Instruction

By Rebecca G. Harper, Ph.D.

I did not have writing courses- I am that old, when I was in school we had reading, writing, and arithmetic, but writing was handwriting. My first writing course was Writing Across the Curriculum course here at the university. I felt I had been out of education for a while and I needed to know the new terms that they were teaching now. I noticed in my room that I called transition words logical indicators, and one of the new teachers said, 'Oh, we call them transition words not logical indicators,' so I needed to learn the new terms that they were using. I learned these things that I was not abreast of like RTI. If you are a certain age, you have to make sure that you keep up with the new technology and the new vocabulary of the times. (Patricia, May 26, 2010).

The National Commission on Writing (2003) reports in *The Neglected R*, that most pre-service teachers in the United States receive little instruction in how to teach writing. In fact, only a few states require courses in writing for teacher certification. Writing professional development for teachers is minimal, and in some cases, non-existent. Graves (1978) found evidence of this lack of professional development regarding writing when, after surveying teaching colleges and educational departments around the country, he found 169 courses offered on the teaching of reading and only two regarding writing. Yet despite this lack of preparation, teachers are faced with pressure to ensure that their students perform well on the standardized tests which often contain writing components.

Because of this deficit in writing instruction for pre-service teachers, I designed and implemented an advanced writing course for graduate students, modeled closely after the National Writing Project's Summer Writing Institute. The goals were to provide the pre-service and practicing teachers with strategies and best practices regarding writing, which hopefully would alter their beliefs regarding writing and how it should be taught. Much like Lieberman and Wood (2003) observed when they studied two NWP sites over a two year period; the purpose of the course was to move teachers from "teaching as telling" (p.26), to teaching as designing a community of practicing writers. The vision and purpose of this program was to allow teachers to experience how writing should be taught by living the life of a writer in class, and then transfer this experience back into the classroom to positively influence students. Another goal was to promote self-reflection through an examination of the teachers' own personal experiences with writing and allow them to consider the outside factors that influence writing instruction in the classroom. In short, the objective was to not only provide them with the opportunity to experience life as a student

writer, but also for them to gain insight into just what constitutes best practices in writing instruction through discussions and opportunities to transact with relevant writing theory and research.

The graduate class gleaned much from the National Writing Project's Summer Institute format and was designed so that the participants took part in activities much like their students would. They experienced writing through the process model, one that involves active engagement in the act of writing, involves relevant topics, and genuine audiences and purposes (Daniels & Zemelman, 1985). In other words, they experienced a process-oriented model of teaching writing which they could replicate in their own classrooms. In addition, the goal was for the students to see the big picture of writing, understand the complexities of composition, and realize that writing wasn't about teaching writing standards; it was about teaching writers.

The experimental writing course was taught in the summer of 2010, and by all accounts went extremely well. Through observation it was evident that the students were taking part in active learning. A close examination of their class presentations and activities clearly demonstrated learning on the part of the students. Exit slips revealed students were thoroughly enjoying the content, the community, and the class itself; from students stating that the class had been the most beneficial that they had ever taken, to one who said the class had given him hope.

But as the class progressed, it became evident that the students were concerned with the standards-based curriculum required by their districts. This was not the first time that the standards-based curriculum had surfaced. In initial class discussions, most participants described typical lessons as standards based. They detailed how they opened lessons as they introduced the standards, read the essential question, and then proceeded into the lesson, so it was evident that

the standards played an important role in their classrooms. However, during the last week of class, conversations about the standards began to dominate the class discussions and exit slips. While the students readily acknowledged that the instructional methods used in the class were best practices, they were unsure of how to tie the activities they had completed in class with the standards. Their focus on the state standards forced myself and my co-instructor to realize that the course wasn't as successful as we had hoped.

When we asked our students questions about how to better improve the class for next time, we received comments like, "I should learn how to relate the different activities to the different standards." "I think we should focus a little more on grammar in writing since this is a part of our standards as well." Students had questions about the logistics of writing. "How do I set up writer's workshop? How should I assess a writer's workshop?" These questions, coupled with the daily discussion regarding standards, were intriguing because they continued to lead us to doubt our success in teaching this course. While we had attempted to create a course in which the students were immersed in the writing workshop, actively took part in engaging writing lessons, and explored best practices in writing instruction, our students were having trouble juxtaposing the best practices in our course with the mandated state curriculum at the center of their own classrooms. While we were aware of the importance of the standards in today's classrooms, we weren't quite prepared for the fact that, according to these teachers, the standards were the center of their classroom universes, and they were simply in orbit around them. After all, we had not included standards instruction in our course design as we were certain that once our students were privy to best practices in writing, they would easily see how the standards and best practices meshed. Yet the questions and comments raised by the students continued to cause us to doubt our practice.

Because the students in the class were clearly engaged in active learning, yet were struggling to relate their learning to the mandated state curriculum standards, I began to look at the data acquired from this course to help me understand why these issues about the standards continued to dominate discussions and our class content. As a teacher educator, I needed to understand just what was preventing these students from implementing writing best practices in their own classrooms and what overarching factors and influences impacted

their instructional decisions. Upon review of the class data – including interviews, observational records, and artifacts collected from class – I came away with a number of insights regarding their instructional practice which would transfer into implications for my own practice.

Insights

Throughout the course of the class, several themes began to emerge through discussions, documents, and observations. Data analysis and coding allowed for the grouping of data into two distinct categories: The State and Self. The State category encompassed state mandated curriculum standards and standardized assessments as well as county-wide curriculum initiatives. The Self category encompassed the students' past experiences regarding writing. The Self category was further broken down into two sub categories including School-Related Writing Experiences and Personal Writing Experiences.

The State

On numerous occasions, students described the challenges and mandates handed down from the state and county education offices. The influence of the state was evident in conversations regarding chosen texts, programs, and the heavily emphasized standards-based instruction occurring in their classrooms. Many students expressed concerns about the programs that the teachers were required to implement. One student detailed her frustration with being required to implement a school-based writing curriculum with no notice and training. Her lack of comfort with the mandated program and the short amount of time given to get up to speed caused her to become frustrated and discouraged. In a later interview, she stated that her writing instruction was guided by America's Choice, the curriculum that her district was requiring teachers to fully implement in the fall of the coming year (<http://www.americaschoice.org/literacy>). On several occasions, students asked how they could incorporate writing lessons with Culham's (2003) 6 +1 Traits program the districts were requiring.

Students described typical writing lessons that were heavily influenced by the standards and the state curriculum. Robert, a high school English teacher, described a typical lesson in his class:

Now that we are so standards-based, I always show the significance of the standard and what I want the students to learn and what I expect them to accomplish at the end of the lesson. But, I like my lessons to be hands-on. I don't

like the lecture. I like lots of things the students can do to motivate themselves to complete what I want. (May 25, 2010)

Robert later described his writing lessons in a follow-up interview as “multi-genre lessons guided by Ridgeview County” (June 7, 2010).

Patricia described her lessons in a similar manner. “We are all on the standards-based. They (the students) come in and the topic is on the board.” She elaborated and described a structured classroom environment with small group instruction as well as various assessments they used in class including Dibels, a reading assessment tool (May 26, 2010).

Cord discussed how he incorporated rap and hip hop into a writing lesson, yet the writing lesson was in preparation for the state administered test:

I got a particular piece for the ABC (testing name) pledge. I had them (the students) come up with a rap to help them remember the pledge and feel it more. We rapped it every day in class so they could feel that they could pass the ABC. (June 7, 2010)

Although Cord was attempting to make the assignment, in his words, more engaging and motivating, the entire lesson centered on the need for the students to pass the ABC test. Similarly, Laura described how her writing instruction and delivery changed during the time preceding the state test. “We started out sharing our writings on Fridays, but towards testing time, it got to be once a month” (June 7, 2010).

These teachers could clearly articulate that one of the driving forces behind their instruction was the state and the required curriculum developed by their county. In fact, although Robert expressed that teachers needed to show excitement about writing and model what was expected, he followed this comment by stating that it was important that he teach specific genres because the standards required him to address each genre by the end of the ninth grade. Cord, Robert, and Laura all acknowledged the need to make assignments relevant for the students, allow sharing time, and demonstrate their own personal excitement about writing in general, but in the end, the standards tainted this as well. Cord’s rap was developed just for the test. Laura’s sharing time was dramatically reduced prior to testing time. Robert was showing excitement for genres which the county required him to cover. The state and the required curriculum’s influences were clearly affecting the writing instruction of these teachers.

Self and School

The data indicated that each student associated many of their writing experiences with school and academic related settings. Though many of them struggled when asked to recall writing lessons in school because of the rarity of them, what they remembered completing in school were academically rigid assignments that took the forms of research papers, critiques, and analyses.

When asked to write about their best and worst writing experiences, all of the participants listed academic types of writing as their worst writings, and they described these experiences with words such as: “had to write, required, could not relate, and hated the topic.” Their worst writing experiences were school-related, academic types of writing where they were given mandates, not choice. Cord explained, “My worst writing experience was when I had to write my interdisciplinary essay in my humanities class. I didn’t understand anything about the disciplines. I had a hard time connecting all of them together” (May 26, 2010).

Cord’s lack of background knowledge and comfort with the assigned topic made the assignment more challenging and frustrating. Another student recounted a writing class where she was “required to read and write about boring authors,” (Kiwi, May 26, 2010). Many expressed their dislike for a topic or their lack of understanding as a reason for categorizing an assignment as their worst writing experience.

Robert recalled writing narratives in school. “I remember lots of story writing – writing stories and poems, making poem books, drawing pictures with books and with poems. I don’t remember different genres. I just wrote many stories in school” (June 7, 2010). While Robert remembered frequent story writing in school, Kiwi stated that she did not remember writing much in grade school, but she remembered many lessons on how to pass the Sophomore Professional Exit Exam. These lessons included information on how to use a variety of sentences, transition words, and an appropriate closing. This academic experience mirrored those discussed by the teachers regarding their current curriculum and standards. Like Robert, Cord, and Laura who felt the pressures of testing, one could speculate that this pressure was also prevalent in Kiwi’s sophomore English class which focused on the passing of the exit exam.

Patricia, the oldest student in the class, explained that writing instruction, meaning composition, was non-existent in her time as a student. The only writing she recalled from her school days were

handwriting lessons that focused on print and cursive, but no lessons in actual writing instruction. As a teacher, she had seen writing instruction evolve, though she admitted in an interview that she wasn't sure just when writing composition emerged. However, she elaborated and explained the differences between writing composition and conventions, but stated, "when you study writing you must know proper English" (June 7, 2010). Though Patricia could not recall explicit writing lessons, at some point, her views regarding writing, the fact that one can't write without knowing proper English, developed through some means. Her comments regarding proper English reiterate what many of the other students in the class discussed in their own recollections of school-based writing. They recalled lessons where they were required to know the grammatical structure of writing, how they were asked to read their work backwards in an effort to identify more grammatical errors, and lessons where groups wrote compositions together, with one person responsible for each component of the essay (topic sentence, climax, and conclusion). Their school lessons were often met with dread. Kiwi wrote, "I dreaded writing class because I didn't like the rigid topic selection and teaching styles, a bit mundane. Therefore, I felt limited and unable to openly express myself in my writing class" (June 9, 2010). Kiwi explained that while she dreaded many of her past writing classes, she began to feel more able to openly express her thoughts and ideas when she came in contact with a professor who allowed her to write about any subject or topic.

Personal

Each student's personal experiences with writing were examined throughout the semester. There was a clear dividing line between their school experiences with writing and their personal ones. In many interviews, when asked what personal writing they completed, many initially said none. After pausing and thinking, many made comments such as, "Well, I text. Does that count?" Students struggled to give credence to less academic forms of writing like texting, to-do lists, and journaling. Upon first talking with Laura, she explained that she did not write at all, but after talking for a half an hour in her interview, she stated that she did, in fact, write. She detailed letters to God, journals, and notes to herself. However, in the interview she stated, "I guess I use my cell phone to take notes to myself. I don't consider parts of daily life as writing. You know lists and stuff. I mean, I just don't sit down and write a story" (June 6, 2010).

Laura's view of what was considered writing could clearly have been influenced by her experience in school. She described several instances where she was writing on a daily basis, but this was devalued in lieu of sitting at the table writing stories. Much like Robert recounted in his memories of schools, Laura equated writing in school with narrative stories, something she did not currently do in her personal life. At the end of the course, in her goodbye letter to the instructors of the class, she explained that she had learned to expand her own writing and planned to use many of the ideas, including jotting notes in a writer's notebook, in her class.

Students' best writing experiences had to do with writing activities that were more personal and connected to their personal lives. The participants described these best writing experiences as times when they were given choice and had opportunities to write about topics that were pertinent to them. Participants described these writing experiences with words such as, "created, allowed, and opportunity." Robert described his best writing experience with these words: "My best experience was a teacher who allowed us to write on different topics instead of one particular topic. We even went outside and wrote about the world around us. Writing became a hands-on experience for me," (May 26, 2010). Robert had earlier detailed his struggle with writing on a specific topic and the difficulty he had encountered when being told what to write. This experience with a teacher who allowed him the freedom of choice gave him the opportunity to experience writing in a new realm with new possibilities.

Patricia described her best writing experience as one that actually took place in her classroom: "My best writings have been my letters to President Obama and Michelle. My class received a response and we had a celebration and the paper came and took pictures of the celebration reception," (May 26, 2010).

Both Patricia and Robert described an experience that allowed them to access their personal interest inventory. Both were allowed choice and were not boxed into a mandate by a teacher or curriculum. Their experiences were similar to their classmates' who wrote about writing activities that offered flexibility, choice, and freedom.

Students wrote about their posts on Facebook pages, text messages, personal diaries and journals, emails, poems, and lists. One student even explained how she dealt with people who had hurt her feelings by writing what she would say to

them, only to later tear the paper up. Many students recalled seeing members of their families write. Kiwi reminisced about her mother and grandmother:

My mom always doodled while she was on the phone. She wrote about what she was talking about on the phone. My grandma wrote notes and extensive grocery lists. I don't know why she wrote grocery lists; she went down every aisle even though she had a list. (June 7, 2010).

Their best writing experiences were reminiscent of their descriptions of an ideal writing teacher, whom the students described as someone who felt there was no right or wrong answer, one who allowed students to write freely, and was creative. A close examination of the activities they conducted in our writing class showed that they were influenced by their best writing experiences. Some of their presentations for their class logs, a requirement of the class, which entailed the participant creating a brief recap of the previous day's material, included media such as a medical treatment form, a potluck recipe for effective writing, and a jail report. Each artifact highlighted the participant's creativity and personality as some participants even chose to dramatically act out their logs, complete with costumes and music, all of which centered on some aspect of writing.

Yet, an examination of the writing lessons they were assigning in their classes found that they were much like the ones they described in their worst writing experiences, an analysis of the film *Roots*, reader responses to literature, and writing in four assigned genres required by the state standards. Their personal writings turned in at the culmination of the class also took no academic form. There were no term papers turned in, no analyses of movies or books, no reader responses. Instead, they completed tributes to their mothers, uncles, and grandmothers, poems about their aging parents, excerpts from personal journals, and letters of advice to themselves. Their workshop demonstrations presented were on a range of topics, from peer editing where one participant dressed in drag as part of a skit, to a presentation on pirates, complete with costumes and booty. While their personal experiences had seeped into our class presentations and writing requirements, they had not permeated their classrooms in the past, classrooms which were already saturated with the influences of the participants' past school experiences and the state mandates.

Discussion

The goal of the course was to change the way our students viewed writing in the classroom, and

while in some ways it was successful, in the end, the standards spoke louder than best practices. Evidently the participants were learning; their exit slips and conversations indicated that they were gaining knowledge, but they had not mastered the skill of being able to apply the standards to the best practices shown in the class. Even when we asked the students to identify ways to improve the class, their academic language prevailed. Kiwi wrote as one of her suggestions, "Have a more focused lesson plan, i.e. have a daily focus and all activities according to that focus. FYI, I've learned 30 things to implement in my class from this class in a short period of time" (June 9, 2010). While she noted that she was learning important lessons that she could, in fact, incorporate in her classroom, she still reverted back to the traditional classroom structure and the need for a detailed lesson plan. Obviously, the class was still succeeding without a daily structured lesson plan according to her exit slip, yet she still suggested the use of one.

Robert stated that he learned that writing could be fun, but he was still concerned about the standards:

The most important thing that I have learned is that writing can be fun. I had begun to lose my zest because I was just burned out, but now I want to teach writing again. I would only change one thing-I just need to know how to work with the standards more. (June 9, 2010)

Although we were well aware of the students' concerns regarding implementing best practices with the standards-based curriculum, in the end the standards were never officially addressed in the course content. However, it was clear that the students wanted the standards to be part of the course curriculum. They asked if they could bring a copy of the standards to class one day and then figure out which ones tied to which activities. While we agreed to build in some time to discuss the standards, by the end of the last day, we realized we had never discussed the standards. I was thrilled, but the students were visibly apprehensive. After all of the instruction, the model lessons, and best practices, they were still unsure of how to mesh the standards and best practices.

At the completion of our class, our students were still struggling with just how to take what they had learned and incorporate it into a standards-dominated classroom. While this came very easily to me, it was apparently not something that came naturally to everyone. In their initial interviews, many students detailed their beliefs about writing and the lack of compatibility of these beliefs with

the state. Robert stated:

I believe that writing is anytime pencil touches paper. Anytime you have the ability to let words flow, lists, directions – anytime this occurs this is writing. However, school is not well aligned with this belief. The English Language Arts curriculum says writing is a formal thing. They don't want to value it unless it is formal. Too many times the school system is looking at pieces for the writing folder-these pieces do not define a writer. (May 25, 2010)

Robert was not the only one who saw that the school boxed teachers and students into a prescriptive writing mode. Laura echoed his sentiments.

Writing is an expression of your thoughts and feelings. School is not aligned with this belief. The school says writing is too rigid, too rigid of a format. Students must write five paragraphs with an opening, middle, and end. If I have to write on a specific topic, what if I do not care about the subject and don't want to write about it? (May 25, 2010)

While both students held very strong beliefs about writing, beliefs that echoed the components they celebrated in their best writings and the characteristics they respected in their best writing teachers, they identified the school as a barrier for best practices. According to the students, school was not constructed to embrace writing best practices. In fact, it was the very structure of school that inhibited it.

Implications

The big question now is just how do we get teachers to the point where they are able to take a lesson that clearly utilizes best practices, and determine which standards apply? Apparently, this was not something that the participants in this class were able to do independently at this time. Perhaps part of this was due to the lack of professional development the participants have had in the past, something that was evident in the literature (Abbate-Vaughn, 2007; Gallavan, Bowles, & Young, 2007; Kelley, Hart, & King, 2007; Yagelski, 2009;). As Patricia articulated in the opening vignette, the lack of professional development in writing was definitely a reason for her to enroll in the course, as was later expressed by many of the other participants. This lack of experience in the area of teaching writing certainly could serve as a reason why many of the participants struggled with determining just how to implement quality writing practices in their own classrooms.

As the instructor of the course, I have begun to thoughtfully examine just how to scaffold the participants so that they are able to go out in their own classrooms and identify the standards that addressed through best practice lessons. When teaching this course again, I plan to build in time for the standards. Though I was initially reluctant to discuss the standards in class, my role as a teacher educator is to provide quality instruction that meets the needs of teachers, and explicit instruction regarding standards correlation is obviously something needed. I believe that by demonstrating how the standards can be part of best practices, the students will be better able to utilize the knowledge gained in the graduate course for lessons in their standards-driven classes. I plan to focus on backwards planning so the students can see that the lesson is constructed first and the standards are applied once the lesson idea has been created (Pitner, 2009).

Clearly, many of the participants in this course were struggling with defining their role as a teacher. While we were providing them with practices that were effective and engaging, many of them did not mesh well with their idea that a teacher is viewed as the expert in the classroom, one whose job and role is to provide information. While the students were experiencing optimal learning in our classroom in a loose environment that celebrated student choice and experience, they had trouble juxtaposing this experience with what they viewed their role as a teacher to be. In the future, additional research into teacher's identities and roles as teachers of writing should be considered. Closer examination of just what it means to be a writing teacher could provide additional insight into writing instruction, practice, and theory.

Because the standards seemed to be a prominent concern for these teachers, more research on the definition of a standard is necessary as well. I believe that many of the participants in this class had a very fixed definition of what constitutes a standard and what its purpose is. However, because this was not the focus of this study, not much is known about how the students perceived standards. I can assume that based on the number of times the standards were brought up, they are an integral part of teaching and learning, one that could be described as static and inflexible, but more research is needed to understand just what relationship teachers have with the standards.

In addition, many of the students had somewhat narrow views of what constituted writing. In initial and follow-up interviews, many of the participants

stated they weren't really writers, but upon further examination, they listed items like journals, letters to God, lists, and other everyday types of writing. It seemed that they initially associated writing with academic writings, five paragraph essays and the like, and only after additional questioning did they begin to list everyday types of writing, almost as afterthoughts, as though they did not count, as part of their writing activities. Just what constitutes writing and teachers' varying definitions of such could provide additional insight into the writing classroom.

While this inquiry left many questions still unanswered, it did offer insight into those factors that serve as influences on writing instruction. Although more work is needed to explore just how much these factors impact teaching, as well as what other potential elements influence instruction, it is evident that writing instruction is a multi-faceted entity, one that is shaped by each teachers' life experiences as well as systems of power and authority.

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Seeing Again with New Media: Using Free WWW Tools to Teach Students Revision

By Julie Warner

In our fast-paced, networked, and digitized “right now” society, it is no wonder that our students proclaim that they hate to revise. After all, why would you want perform a task that is already “done” in the age of multitasking and on-to-the-next-thing? Thankfully, teaching revision in an age of computing, we, as writers and teachers of writers, are actually well-positioned with a variety of free web tools that can help writers move beyond simple surface editing to meaningful revision.

As new technologies become ubiquitous, touching every facet of our lives in the 21st century, communicative tools and modes are increasingly digitized. Ways of teaching and learning and “spaces of education [must] group and expand to accommodate this evolution” (Vasudevan & Hill, p. 5). In addition, we know that students are writing all the time outside of the classroom in digitally-mediated writing environments (Lenhart, Arafeh, Smith & Magill, 2008). As a teacher, I look to harness these passions to help young writers achieve success within the classroom and in their social futures (New London Group, 1996).

From Resistance to Revision

Often, writers stumble with revision because of proximity: the writer is too close to their own draft to recognize the potential for positive change. “It’s done!” my students proclaim when I urge revision. For this reason, I emphasize the importance of another set of “eyes,” be it those of a peer or a web tool that can help “re-vision” their draft. In addition, revision reluctance stems from the lack of tools and concrete strategies to aid in the process. Many writers simply do not know how to even begin to revise (Dethier, 2004).

How do we transform our “revision vision” in the words of Georgia Heard (2002)? Thankfully, a variety of free tech tools are available to help writers to reconfigure their writing to see with new eyes and offer starting points for jumping into the next draft.

Re-visioning: Seeing Again

Many writers tackle the problem of proximity, or being too close to a draft, by putting a piece of writing away and coming back to it at a later time. This strategy relies on the passage of time and isn’t feasible for students working under a teacher’s deadline. To work within these temporal constraints, student writers can employ some free technology tools to help them see their draft in new ways.

Word Clouds

Wordle (www.wordle.net) is a free, web-based tool that allows a writer to cut-and-paste the text of their draft into a text box so that the site can create a “word cloud” based on the text. The word cloud (see fig. 1) correlates the frequency of use of the words within the draft with the size. That is to say, the words that are used more frequently in the draft appear larger. Figure 1 represents a word cloud generated after I pasted the text of an article draft on a research study around new literacies:

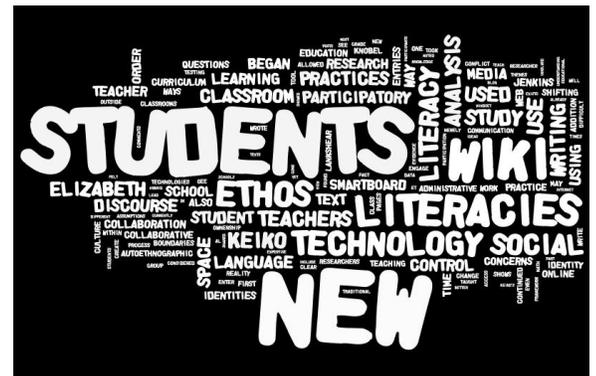


Figure 1. A word cloud of paper draft created with Wordle

I can see from the word cloud that the word “new” is the most oft-repeated word in my draft, with “students” coming in a close runner-up. Major themes include “literacies,” “technology,” “social,” “wiki,” and “ethos.” Using this information, I can decide if I want to change

out some of the repetitive words and phrases for something more unique or if the cloud is reflective of the themes of my writing as I had envisioned them.

Using Wordle can provide writers a new view on their text and help them eliminate redundancy or repetitive language if that is a concern. One student remarked in a reflection, “By seeing my word cloud, I can visualize what a reader might take from my paper.” Another student observed, “After seeing my word cloud, I saw some of the main ideas of my paper come to life.”

Readability Calculator

The Document Readability Calculator, available for free (http://www.online-utility.org/english/readability_test_and_improve.jsp), calculates the readability of a draft based on several tests, including the Coleman Liau index, Flesh Kincaid Grade Level, Automated Readability Index and SMOG test. These tests are all based on different formulas that “calculate readability.”

Writers can paste their text into a box on the site, hit “calculate,” and the document’s readability (according to these tests) is instantly available as the “number of years of formal education that a person requires in order to easily understand the text on the first reading” or grade level of the writing. In addition, it scores for the “Flesch Reading Ease” score, represented as a numerical value that translates to “very easy to read,” “plain English,” “a little hard to read,” or “very hard to read.” The site maintains, “in general, these tests penalize writers for polysyllabic words and long, complex sentences. Your writing will score better when you: use simpler diction, write short sentences.” Finally, the readability score report includes a list of sentences that, according to the formula, should be considered for revision. It is of note that the calculator does not require that you download anything to your own computer; the draft can be pasted into the website for analysis, and there is no limit to the number of documents you analyze.

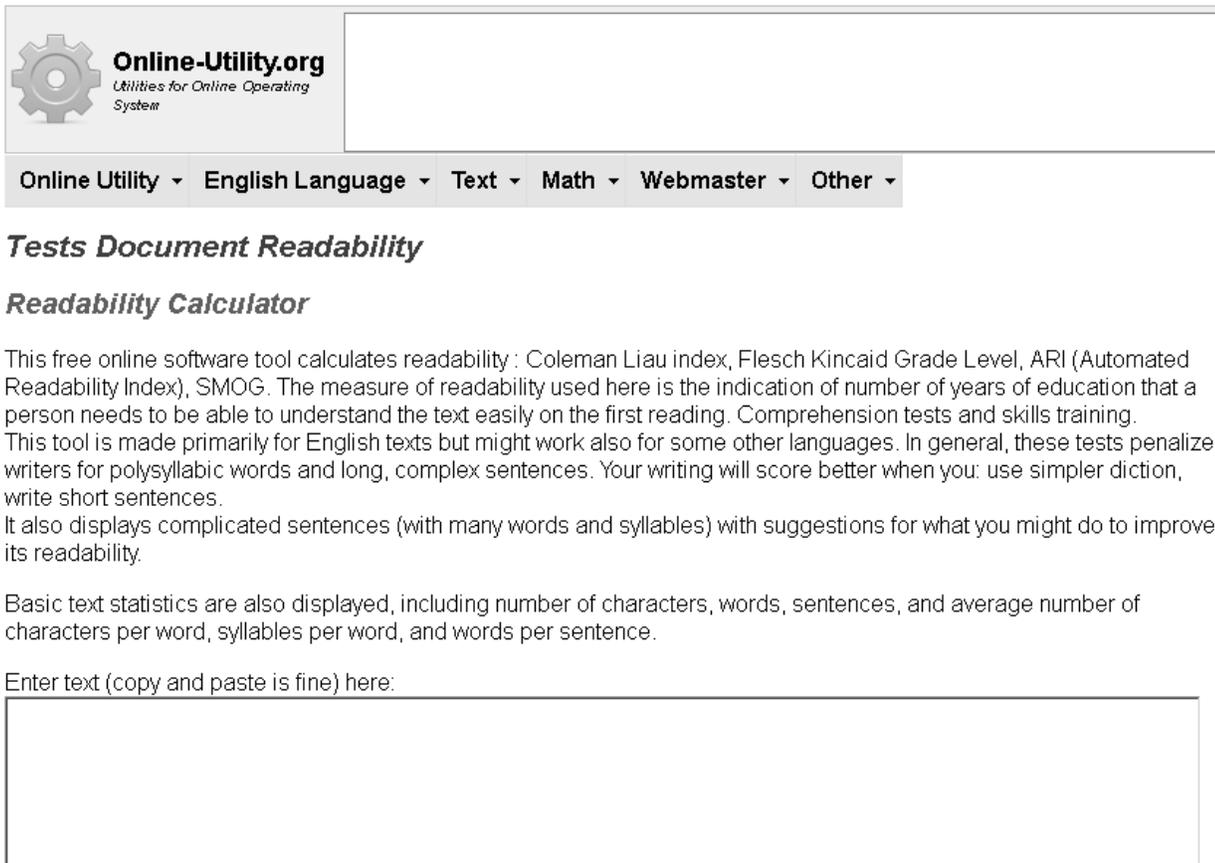


Figure 2. The Readability Calculator interface.

Obviously, what a mathematical formula tells us about good writing is limited at best. However, the test facilitates writers seeing their draft with new eyes and heightens their awareness of the link between sentence structure, word choice, and a draft's readability as well as the grade level of the writer (good for teaching audience awareness).

Digital Idea Maps

Sometimes called "reverse outlining," one revision strategy involves creating an outline or a bubble map based on a draft. There are

several free, cloud-based (there's nothing to download) programs writers can use to represent their writing as a bubble map, paring down the writing into the main ideas and support – and making apparent the points of emphasis and the relationships between ideas. Once writers see a draft in the bubble map format, imbalance, gaps in the writing, and organizational mishaps become more apparent. I have used Bubbl.us (<https://bubbl.us/>), Mindomo (www.mindomo.com), Glify (www.glify.com), and Mindmeister (www.mindmeister.com), all of which are free.

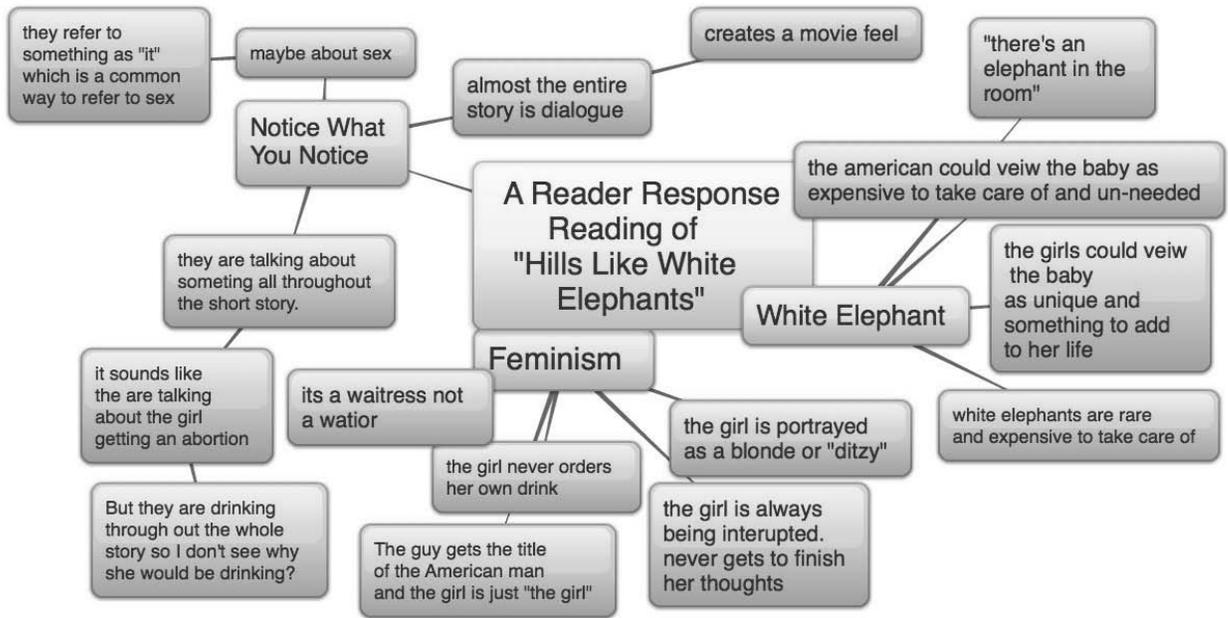


Figure 3. A student's digital idea map, made with Bubbl.us.

The Multimodal Draft

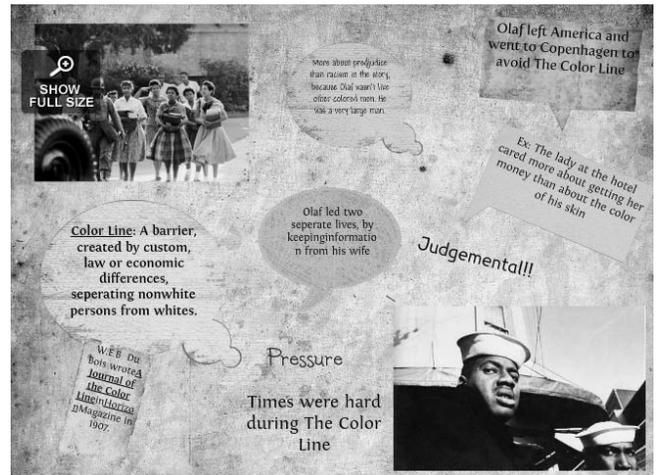


Figure 4. Two student multimodal drafts made using Glogster

A useful tool for tapping into the affordances of other modes outside of the linguistic to expand thinking from draft to draft is the multimodal composition. Multimodality refers to two or more representational modes (linguistic, visual, audio, spatial and gestural) working together toward communication (New London Group, 1996). Using a free tool such as Glogster (<http://glogsteredu.edu.glogster.com/>), students can easily reconfigure their linguistic draft into a multimodal draft using images, text, video and sound. In students' reflections about the experience of translating linguistic drafts into multimodal drafts, they talked about the power of the image: "Images help to describe something better. They make you think," said one student. "The process was making the writing vivid in my head," said another. More than one talked about having to revisit ideas in new ways through the multimodal translation: "Images can be good for clarifying." Hicks (2003) asserts, "[multimodal essays] offer students a chance to compose with both images and words, thus encouraging them to economize on words and think carefully about how they want individual images, as well as the order of images as a whole text, to work to create a mood and make a point" (Hicks, p. 63). When writers are suffering from the "I'm done" attitude, the multimodal draft can stretch thinking as it forces the writer to engage with the draft beyond the linguistic text.

Cliché Cleaner

The Cliché Cleaner (<http://www.cliches.biz/clichecleaner/>) is a paid program that offers a free demo that will scan up to 20 drafts, which is often enough for a school year's worth of writing assignments. The program's authors claim that the program "helps you write better, by highlighting passages in your text that are either clichés, other overly-used common expressions, or phrases of your own that you have repeatedly used within the same document." The program scans a draft for 7000 unique clichés and common expressions. The Cliché Cleaner must be downloaded to your computer. Once installed, you can type directly into the program's text box or open a file stored on your computer. Select "scan for clichés and repeated phrases" and the program highlights them:

My brother is one in a million. If given a responsibility, he never falls asleep at the wheel. When others fail, he is not one to make a mountain out of a molehill. To make a long story short, throughout high school I have tried to emulate my older brother, and I credit him with many of my own successes.

Figure 5. A draft run through Cliché Cleaner

The program can show writers where they are using boring, tired phrases, repeating the same words, and can be a catalyst for discussion about "show, don't tell." It highlights places in the writing where we can practice "cracking open sentences" (Heard, 2002). I have also used the Cliché Cleaner with student writers as a way to identify places in the text to employ Barry Lane's "explode a moment," "thoughtshot," and "snapshot" strategies, described in *After The End* (1993).

Conferring/Feedback

To offer a "real" second set of eyes, there are a number of freely available tech tools to facilitate meaningful peer review. In addition to supporting writers' audience awareness which we know is a feature of good writing (Atlas, 1979; Berkenkotter, 1981; Cohen & Reil, 1989; Flower & Hayes, 1980a; Flower & Hayes, 1980b; Fountaine, 1988; Rafoth, 1985; Reinking, 1986; Roen & Willey, 1988; Rubin & Rafoth, 1986; Shanahan, 2006) peer reviewers benefit from reading and commenting on others' writing. "By reading what others have written, they gather ideas both for their own writing as well as different elements of the author's craft that can help make their writing better. The process of commenting on others' work can help writers identify what works, and what does not work, when thinking about creating their own pieces" (Hicks, p. 83).

Podcasting

Peer review often falls short of our hopes and dreams because students are reluctant to critique the writing of peers. I've found a good solution to these problems is through the use of digital voice recording software (called podcasting if the audio file is hosted online). Vocaroo is a quick and easy tool. Peer reviewers can go to www.Vocaroo.com, plug an external

microphone (available for under \$8 wherever electronics and sold) into the microphone port on the computer, and begin recording comments for the author. The ease with which they can offer comments often breaks down the reluctance to offer feedback. After peer reviewers finish their recording, the Vocaroo site generates a link that can easily be emailed that contains the audio of the feedback. I use Peter Elbow and Pat Belanoff's "11 kinds of responses" from their *Sharing and Responding* (2000) to offer students suggestions for focusing their feedback.

Vocaroo can also be used to record audio drafts. Writers can "speak" a draft in a sort of vocal act of composition. Ed tech writer Troy Hicks asserts, "podcasts create an audio composing space that offers writers unique opportunities for expression" (p. 65). By using alternative modes of composition, writers can tap into resources for meaning-making beyond those of print texts (Kress, 2003).

Email

E-mail might be the original social media, but don't overlook it when tapping in to the power of the peer for computer-assisted revision strategies. E-mail can be paired with Microsoft Word's "Insert Comments" and "Track Changes" features for conferring. In my classroom, I pair students randomly with a peer reviewer. The identities of the students are not revealed to offer a "blind" review process. Students email their electronic draft to the email address of their anonymous assigned peer, and in turn another peer emails that student a draft.

Using the Insert Comments and Track Changes features in Microsoft Word, students can work intimately with a draft. When they want to comment, they point the mouse, highlight a selection of the text, and they are allowed to insert a comment. As one student admitted, "Peer review using this method was closer to editing or reviewing my own paper. I could click, type, and presto! My comments would be there."

While face-to-face peer review often falls flat, the response to computer-assisted peer review is overwhelmingly positive. In their writing reflections, students noted that they valued the freedom they were afforded. "I liked doing it on the computer because telling someone to their face is somewhat intimidating." "I like digital review because I do not like being critical face-to-face because I feel like I am insulting

the person in a way." "By using the digital peer review, you avoid the looks of hurt and dismay that may show when you cut out one of the writer's favorite parts."

Similarly, a common theme in reflections on computer-mediated student peer review was the feedback was more "honest," and they talked more than once about censoring themselves because of their peer's anticipated reaction. "For me anyways, the feedback I wrote increased because I wasn't really thinking about the person maybe getting defensive or hurting someone's feelings which allowed me to ultimately be a little more helpful." The anonymity that the technology afforded aided their freer responses, according to one student: "I found it was easier to critique a work if I didn't know the identity of the person whose work I was editing." While it is often difficult in face-to-face peer review sessions to keep track of all reviewer's comments and to refer to specific places in the text when giving or receiving feedback, the computer-mediated peer review afforded students a written record of the peer review that was attached to specific places in the draft. "I like being able to concretely see what my reviewer was saying," said one student. "You are able to keep your critiques better organized for your peer to see," noted another.

Finally, in their reflections, many students talked about being rushed in face-to-face peer review, whereas they had time to read and formulate a response using the computer-mediated peer review. "When I typed a response I had more time to think about what I was going to say. I wasn't pressured to give an immediate response, I had plenty of time to look for the author's main idea," asserted one student.

WWW Tools and Writers

It's no wonder that students are reluctant to revise their writing when so much of the writing they do in the classroom is decontextualized or "pseudotransactional" (Petraglia, 1995) with the only "real" audience being the teacher. By creating an environment of collaborative knowledge building and production using computer-mediated peer review, students can find a reason to write. Furthermore, giving students the tools to revise their own writing and employing a variety of modes (thus supporting a variety of student competencies) shifts the balance of power in the classroom to empower young writers.

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Rain

By Marini A. Shook

“Rain”

Smooth, salty, just a touch of anticipation
the breeze blows mildly as clouds gather overhead
a rumble or two...it begins
soft and sweet
pitter patter...drip drop...plop plop
the first journey from sky to shore

Summer's storms bring brief respite from heavy
oppressive heat
white and fluffy morphs to grey and gloomy
Zeus' thick dark covering blankets all
dropping a deluge complete with his signature
bolts to split the sky
as those below leave behind park swings,
playgrounds, and pools
sudden to begin, sudden to end
sparse puddles of moisture and heavy layers of
humidity
covering the land in a smothering hold
are all that remain

From the bounty of warm summer showers change
brings forth cooler sprinkles
crops burst forth and the bounty of Demeter's
efforts are rewarded
the cycle of earth brought forth by the cycle of
liquid life
moonlit walks through high pastures
evenings of romping with the ghosts and ghouls of
spirits past

enhanced by the drizzle of earthy, nurturing
moisture
covering the land in a gentle glaze
scents of cinnamon and spruce lingering

Cool autumn sprinkles give way to the cold clutch
of winter's grasp
still and silent, bitter and biting
the harshness of the element's core exposed
riding wooden time machines sweeping adults
back into childhood
exchanging soft crusty blows with the frozen tears
of Poseidon
the soft steel grey from above sends soft powder
white below
covering the land in a careful dusting
peaceful and white

Frigid winter snows lose their grip on the land to
spring's soft caress
bright and blooming, serenely scented
hope and promise once again springing eternal
Aphrodite and son meddle in the lives of the
lovelorn
drizzling drops of heaven to bring them closer
meandering long country roads in gentle showers
swaying side by side on house long porches
covering all in glorious green
scents of seed and growth and all to come
lingering...in the rain

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