

# **The Language and Literacy Spectrum**

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# THE LANGUAGE AND LITERACY SPECTRUM

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## Learning About the Endangered Librarian

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### Abstract

*This article describes interviews with 40 elementary school librarians conducted by pre-service and in-service teachers. The purpose of the interviews was for education students to understand the responsibilities of the librarian, how the librarian might support them as teachers, and the future of the position in today's schools. Results suggest that librarians primarily support classroom instruction and student learning, manage library facilities while offering technology instruction, and promote students' reading interests and enjoyment. The interviews revealed feelings of isolation and under-appreciation, increased responsibilities, declining budgets, and the uncertain future of their positions. Ideas are offered for librarians who want to avoid becoming "endangered."*

What do spotted owls and librarians have in common? Both are endangered species. Spotted owls face extinction because of lumbering that has removed their nesting places in the forests of the Pacific Northwest. Librarians face extinction in schools and public libraries across the country for a number of reasons. First, shrinking budgets and the rush to save tax dollars by cutting library personnel is causing their demise (Casey & Savastinuk, 2006; Goldberg, 2009; Vasilakis, 2006). Second, the long accepted role of librarians as support personnel who just manage the physical aspects of library facilities puts them at-risk (Hardy, 2010; Morrill, 1995). Third, the mistaken notion that today's students are technologically savvy and thus know how to understand the accuracy, reliability, and usefulness of virtual information suggests to some that highly qualified librarians are unnecessary (Hardy, 2010; Loertscher, 2004).

However, Krashen (2010) feels quite differently. He says "the most important factors in developing literacy are quality school and classroom libraries and the presence of professional librarians in all schools" (p. 20). Libraries and librarians are especially crucial for high-poverty areas when the school library is often the only way these students can access books. There is also "a general misunderstanding about what today's librarians do, or even what they should be called" (Hardy, 2010; p. 24). While managing facilities is part of what librarians do, they also function in roles that are critical today to the learning of students, teachers, and parents. Librarians still ensure that students and staff are effective users of ideas and information from books and paper resources (Hysten, 2004; Kearney, 2000). Today's librarians though, also provide access to materials in virtual formats. Librarians stimulate interest in reading and viewing both physical and virtual media, offer instruction to foster student competence in the effective use of printed and virtual media, and work with teachers to design instruction that meets the needs of all students.

There is much research to support the relationship between libraries, librarians and student achievement. Hardy (2010) reports that "Dozens of studies from 19 states and one

Canadian province point to the link between high-quality school library programs and student achievement” (p. 24). Foote (2010) shares several studies showing that “School libraries are a stronger indicator of student success than class size, experience of teacher, number of computers or location of school” and says, “There is strong evidence that schools with well-stocked, well-staffed libraries have higher achievement test scores” ([http://www.huffingtonpost.com/carolyn-foote/to-raise-student-achievem\\_b\\_773056.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/carolyn-foote/to-raise-student-achievem_b_773056.html)). Thus, cutting library staff because of shrinking budgets is definitely a bad idea.

Today, librarians (those not on an endangered or extinct list) are often known as information specialists, media specialists, or library media specialists (Hardy, 2010; Lehman, 2007; Minkel, 1999). This person teaches students and teachers to access the explosion of information from the Internet, assess that information for its currency, accuracy, and authenticity, and integrate this information into the curriculum. Indeed, accessing and assessing this information requires skills that differ from those needed to take information from books, magazines, and other traditional sources. Using virtual information requires the ability to remain focused as one sifts through hypertext that includes images, audio, video, and print containing links to other related and unrelated information such as advertisements and pop-ups. In the quickly expanding e-world of on-line communication and information availability, this role is a critical one for librarians to play.

### **Interviewing Librarians**

As a teacher educator and long-time library user, it alarms me that librarians are endangered or may become extinct. I teach graduate literacy courses to pre-service and in-service teachers, and I wonder if they understand the librarian’s role and the potential precariousness of the position today. It occurred to me that most of my students (32 pre-service and 8 in-service) had not been in an elementary school library since they attended elementary school themselves; for some this was a decade or more ago. I wanted these students to understand the librarian’s role, how this person might support them as teachers, and the future of the position.

I asked 40 students taking my children’s literature course to visit an elementary school library in one of several suburban and urban school districts in southern New York State. I required the students to spend time in a library, interview a librarian about his/her work, and write a paper to document the interview and reflect on what they learned. Students interviewed 39 librarians who had between four and 25 years experience and one library aide with one year’s experience. Students asked these questions: What are the responsibilities of your position? What is most satisfying about your job? What is most frustrating about your job? They were not limited to these questions, however, and could pursue other topics as well.

### **What Librarians Typically Do**

Reading the students’ papers, I looked for themes in response to each topic the librarians talked about. Three themes emerged related to librarians’ responsibilities which I shared with the class. Students found that librarians support classroom instruction and student learning, manage facilities while offering technology instruction, and promote students’ reading interests and enjoyment. The following sections discuss each theme and include related comments of librarians and student interviewers:

**Support classroom instruction and student learning.** The notion of supporting teachers, classroom instruction, and student learning was prevalent in every interview. One librarian said, “My primary role is to work cooperatively with teachers.” Another librarian said, “I help teachers find resources and even assist in planning units. I see to it that the books and library

resources support the state curriculum and standards. Overall, I try to give kids and teachers the tools for lifelong learning.” A third librarian talked about gathering appropriate materials for teachers on particular topics and said, “I do a range of things. I provide teachers with resources to help them differentiate instruction for individual students, and recently I made a bulletin board for the 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> grade wing on the scientific method. I included several book jackets and interactive websites where teachers and students could go to learn more.”

One student interviewer wrote, “I was happy to learn that this librarian works closely with teachers to incorporate what students are doing in the classroom into the weekly library lessons she teaches in the library.” Another student wrote, “Mrs. X said her official job description is to support classroom instruction. She had stacks of books ready to deliver to four different classrooms today that were on topics children were studying in science and social studies.” This student also wrote, “I find it amazing that there is so much this librarian does with teachers related to what is going on in the classroom. She goes out of her way to read stories and do projects in the library that relate to the science and social studies curriculum.”

**Manage facilities and offer technology instruction.** Every librarian spoke about developing and maintaining library holdings and equipment and “weeding” the library collection by getting rid of out-of-date materials. Many librarians said they work within tight budgets to order books, magazines, computers, software programs, and other materials. Most librarians also said they manage the technology and offer technology instruction to students and teachers. One librarian reported “Over 60% of my work is dedicated to technology. I manage two on-line catalogs, 27 desk top computers, 20 laptops, several digital cameras, camcorders, Elmo’s, smart boards, and various other computer programs.” The student interviewer observed, “She teaches Internet skills and seems to have one foot firmly planted in the world of books and the other foot securely in the land of information technology.” Some interviews suggested that managing the library’s technology was a challenge, as this student’s comment suggests. “This librarian said keeping track of all the equipment and technology in the library and making sure teachers have what they need when they need it is the most trying part of her job.”

There were a range of responses related to teaching about the virtual world. Several librarians said they work closely with teachers to incorporate what students are doing in their classrooms into the weekly library skills and virtual research sessions they teach in the library. One student wrote, “Mrs. X said she introduces kindergartners to computers including using the right vocabulary like ‘cursor’ instead of ‘arrow.’ She introduces 3<sup>rd</sup> graders to PowerPoint, teaches them how to use it, how to perform ‘safe searches,’ and use the online library catalogue. By 5<sup>th</sup> grade, she introduces Excel. I didn’t realize all this would be part of her job.” A second librarian said, “I consider myself a ‘Tech-Mentor.’ I teach classes to students about research and using Internet databases. I give classes to teachers after school in SMARTBoard software, website design, and any other technology that will allow them to enhance their teaching.” This librarian also communicates regularly with teachers to impact student learning. “I keep an updated listserv that allows a forum for questions, discussion, and delivering new information to teachers about upcoming events in technology that teachers and students can participate in.” A third librarian said she has been appointed the “technology coach” in her building. “I provide training for teachers on how to best use SMARTBoards, Senteos, Elmos, district provided software, and web resources. I teach lessons to students on safe internet navigation and I help inform decisions on software purchases. I attend training for selected programs so I can train paraprofessionals and teachers.” A fourth librarian maintains the library page on the school website. “This is where parents go to see what is going on in the school and what future events

there may be in the library. I also include many links to sites where kids can get help with homework and go to educationally fun sites.”

But, some librarians seemed to do little teaching about the virtual world. For example, one student interviewer said, “This librarian said she had little time to teach about online information with everything else she is expected to do. She said the teachers weren’t really interested in having her do it either.” Another student said, about a different librarian, “She felt her job was primarily to get kids excited about coming to the library and reading. There were no computers in the library. She said her focus was on getting students actively and meaningfully engaged in reading by launching literacy based school-wide program. “This librarian is a strong proponent of books. She believes technology like e-books will potentially be detrimental to the nature of the library.”

**Promote students’ reading interests and enjoyment.** Results of most interviews suggested that librarians see themselves first as reading advocates. The librarians said they help students find authors, books, and other resources on topics not necessarily related to school but of interest to particular students. Librarians viewed this as a big part of the role they play. One librarian said, “My favorite part of this job is working one-on-one with students when they come to the library.” Only one librarian mentioned a change in students over the past decade of her work. “Today, I see a lack of enthusiasm and willingness of many students to read. So, my main goal as a librarian is to try to instill a love of reading in my students while helping them improve their reading abilities.” Two students cited librarians’ comments that support this role, e.g., “Searching out books for kids is like treasure hunting for me. I absolutely love doing it. When I see the light in their eyes upon finding the right book, it makes my job worthwhile!” and, “I want to help students read and see books as a source of enjoyment and information.”

A few students commented on this role in their papers, saying things like, “I was pleased to see how much this librarian cares about individual students and tries to share her passion for books and reading with them, and, “When I was in elementary school, I remember our school librarian was just like this woman. My librarian was warm and caring and wanted to help each one of us find a book or an author we would love. This librarian reminded me so much of her.”

### **Some Surprises**

As well as learning about the major librarian responsibilities, students were sometimes surprised by their discoveries. Answers to the question “What satisfactions and frustrations do you get from your job?” yielded varied responses. The following section describes four themes that appeared in many answers to these questions:

**Feelings of isolation and under-appreciation.** Several librarians said they felt isolated, disconnected, and often unappreciated by colleagues. For example, “I feel unrecognized and under-valued by other teachers. They don’t see me as a teacher like they are but I teach classes and do a lot more than they ever realize.” Two other librarians said, “Many teachers in this school have never stepped foot in the library or asked for my help” and “I know my principal supports all that I do, but I feel that only half the faculty takes advantage of me and my resources, and that is frustrating and discouraging.”

One student interviewer wrote, “From what I found, I think the librarian is an under-appreciated and under-utilized staff member.” A second student wrote, “I never knew teachers do not always value or take librarians seriously. I’ve always connected school and learning to librarians and books.” A third student offered as a partial explanation for these feelings. “Most librarians are viewed differently by teachers since librarians do not give grades or have playground or lunchroom duties,” and “Librarians may not communicate their work to others,

thus the librarian role is misunderstood and they fail to function fully as a school resource.” Many students felt a teacher’s failure to take advantage of a librarian could also be due to a lack of time. With pressures to have students meet high standards and do well on mandated tests, teachers often feel they have little time for collaboration with support staff.

**Increased responsibilities.** Some librarians seemed to have taken on increased responsibilities and broader roles that go beyond what librarians typically do. A few librarians said they felt pulled in many different directions and spread thin in their work because of increased expectations. For example, besides her regular duties, one librarian said, “I am in charge of the school’s website and I update it monthly with upcoming school events, recommended reading lists, pictures of students participating in plays, and information about book clubs, among other things.” Another librarian said, “Time is my enemy. I don’t have enough of it. I write a school newspaper, arrange for author visits, and set up book sales on top of my other responsibilities.” But, several librarians expressed job satisfaction related to their broad responsibilities. One librarian put it this way, “I couldn’t be happier to be so busy even though it seems like I am always jumping from one thing to the next. It makes me feel like a real contributor to the students, teachers, and our school.”

In this regard, several students developed a new appreciation for the librarian’s work. One student wrote, “I thought they mostly signed books out for kids and kept the library shelves straight. I’m not a teacher yet and I never realized how valuable the librarian could be as a resource for the total school.” Another student wrote, “Overall it was a good and insightful experience talking with Mrs. X and observing the range of things she does in the library. After what I’ve learned, when I become a classroom teacher I plan to fully utilize the skills of my librarian!”

**Declining library budgets.** Declining library budgets worried several librarians. They voiced concerns about maintaining collections that are up-to-date and making hard choices about what to order when there is a limit. One librarian said, “I see how popular graphic novels are with kids. Even kids who don’t like to read are coming in and asking for titles we don’t have. I’d love to order more of this type of book, like the new *Box Car Children* graphic books, but I also have an obligation to support the curricular needs of teachers. I don’t even have enough money to do a good job of that.” Another librarian with a diminished budget wanted to order some *Playaways*, self-playing digital audio books with ear buds. She felt these e-books that look like an iPod would appeal to younger non-readers and unmotivated readers. “The money was not in my budget, so I wrote a grant to add these enticing tools to our library.” A third librarian said “My budget last year worked out to \$6.25 per child, yet most children’s books cost \$15 to \$20 and, I have to buy reference materials, periodicals, professional magazines for teachers, and supplies so that doesn’t leave much money for children’s books.”

Students were sympathetic to these money woes. One student wrote what many students felt: “I think at this point, the future of libraries depends on budgets as well as smart librarians who can stretch a dollar and write grants.” Another student wrote, “With shrinking school budgets, elementary librarians may find themselves obsolete even though their role supporting the education of kids and teachers is really important.” A third student wrote about a school that had an unfilled librarian’s position “We know about the importance of early reading interest and reading success as a basis for later school success, but it doesn’t seem like this district believes a librarian can help with this. The district hired a library aide to oversee the library.”

**Uncertain future.** During class discussion, two students brought up concerns voiced by the librarians they interviewed about the uncertain future of their jobs. This concern related to

declining budgets, but also the fact that the position of elementary school librarian is not mandated in New York State. One librarian said, “Even though librarians are highly qualified educators, these positions are not mandated in our state’s elementary schools, but they are mandated in junior high and high schools.” Another librarian said, “Unlike classroom teachers who begin with a bachelor’s degree, librarians in our state must have a master’s degree in library science before working in a school library. Even though we are highly qualified, with more and more budget cuts I am afraid we are going to find ourselves out of jobs very soon.”

One student interviewed a librarian who said, “I worry about the quality of my work because I now provide shared services to two schools in one district, when previously I served only one school.” Another student interviewed a library aide who had become the “librarian” when the librarian retired. The aide said, “My salary is much less than hers was and I know of no plans to hire someone to replace her. I need and love this job, but part of me knows I don’t have the skills to do the kind of work a librarian does.”

Related to the uncertainty of the position, students wrote such things as, “I was amazed to find that the elementary school librarian is not a mandated position and I feel it definitely should be.” Another student said, “I have a big concern that schools, teachers, and kids will lose if librarians are cut from budgets. I don’t have the knowledge to do what they do, but what they do is central to what and how I will teach and what and how my kids will learn.” A third student wrote, “I was not aware of the role a librarian might play for me when I become a teacher. I feel the job is central to every school’s mission and every teacher’s success.”

### **Avoiding the “Endangered” List**

These pre-service and in-service teachers found that for many reasons, librarians are key members of school faculties. They agreed with Hylan (2004) that the library media specialist is a teacher’s best friend. One student wrote, “I believe the explosion of information on the Internet makes the librarian a valued teaching partner for teachers and school staff, not just a support person.” A second student wrote, “Even though school budgets are stretched thin, there is no way this staff member should go. The librarian is a keeper and distributor of information sources that are constantly changing. Knowing and teaching students about new technology will help her and us prepare students for future jobs we cannot even foresee yet.” A third student said, “Based on this interview, I experienced how the elementary school librarian is a tremendous asset to me as a teacher. However, it is up to each teacher to take advantage of this asset.” A fourth student added a caveat. “Librarians need to be visible, market themselves, and ‘go public’ with all that they do so they won’t be under-valued and cut from school budgets.”

Several suggestions emerged from the interviews, class discussion, and our reading of related professional articles that might offer starting points for librarians who want to maintain their positions in elementary schools. Hardy (2010) and Minkel (2002) write about the need for librarians to change the way they do their jobs in order to be key members of a school faculty. If librarians do not feel they are important people in the eyes of teachers and students, Minkel says there are many ways to collaborate and become a school’s “chief information officer” (p. 48). Likewise, Walter (2001) offers ideas “to create libraries that will meet the needs of tomorrow’s children” (p. 49). Her suggestions include more effective public relations efforts and changing library organization and policies to meet emerging needs. Other ideas include:

- 1) **Become an information specialist.** Hardy (2010) and Lehman (2007) argue that the digital age has not made the librarian obsolete. Indeed, it has made the librarian an even more vital part of the school staff. For the librarian who wants to be an information

specialist, s/he must give up monitoring teachers and equipment and do more important things (Morrill, 1995).

- Collaborate with teachers to learn about the virtual world. Post sign-up sheets on equipment so teachers can sign out their own equipment and books and be responsible themselves for reserving what they need. Explore the virtual world and new technology with interested teachers during their planning times.
- Stay up-to-date with the digital explosion and strengthen your technology skills. Attend technology workshops or courses offered by the school district, teacher center, or a local university; surf the Internet; read technology journals like [www.eschoolnews.com](http://www.eschoolnews.com); network with other librarians and teachers who are tuned in to the virtual world; and write a grant to obtain media equipment.
- Ask a teacher of upper grade students for help from his/her class to conduct a survey of students and teachers to understand their virtual IQs. Knowing students' and teachers' technology-related habits and desires can provide valuable information and ideas for reshaping your role.
- Collaborate with teachers to organize a book club for one grade level to explore graphic novels or e-books which are grabbing the attention of students (or another genre, e.g., mysteries, sports, humor, information, poetry, etc.). Take the first 20 students who sign up and offer the club for 30 min. before or after school. Help students use the Internet to find information on authors and topics they are reading about. Get student feedback at the conclusion of the club, make changes, and offer another book club with a teacher from a different grade level.

2) **Seek new collaborations.** Minkel (2002) writes about a librarian who attended an in-service workshop where she learned to reach out to teachers more often with the result that teachers increasingly called on her to collaborate on projects. The passive librarian who feels under-utilized might make new friends and offer his/her services to them. Communicating to teachers that curriculum units that make use of a librarian's skills are more likely to boost student achievement and test scores.

- Socialize with teachers and communicate directly or through e-mail to determine the units they will soon teach. Offer help with the curriculum to ensure the best use of library resources and improve student learning. If it is difficult to reach every teacher in a large school, connect with teachers at one grade level first to show the positive effect you can have in their classrooms.
- Schedule regular booktalks in classrooms to coordinate with units of study and spur students' interest in reading. Talk about books that relate to a unit of study, new additions to the library collection, seasonal or holiday picks, or a certain genre. Leave several books in the classroom afterwards to encourage student reading and future library use, and to enhance your image.
- Enlist your principal to help you convince teachers to see the library as an extension of the classroom. Make an appointment with your principal, share your frustrations and goals, and brainstorm together how to make you a more effective faculty member. The principal has a powerful voice in helping staff understand, appreciate, and use you to enhance student learning.
- Reach beyond your school's teachers and students to improve communication with parents. In communities where English is not the first language of families or where the literacy of parents is in question, start a family literacy program. Teach

parents how to select appropriate books for their children, show them how to ask questions and talk about a book's pictures and print with a child, model reading aloud for them, and encourage parents to check out these books.

- Provide in-service sessions for para-professionals who are often left out of the professional development schools offer. Para-professionals play a critical role in student achievement and learning. Help them understand how you organize books in the library and how to help students access and assess online information. You help paraprofessionals' understand how to help students learn in the physical and virtual world of the library, and thus free up some of your time for other work.
- 3. Document outcomes.** Walter (2004) believes people are generally uninformed about the public librarian's skills and services. This may also be the case with elementary school librarians. Even though librarians know they are not obsolete, clearly they need to convince others of this (Minkel, 1999). Providing evidence of effectiveness is one way to validate the librarian's critical role and dispel misconceptions.
- Send weekly or monthly emails to your principal and teachers describing your activities. Talk about how many and what kind of research lessons you taught, how many booktalks you gave, which collaborations you engaged in with teachers, and what other projects you have going on (Minkel, 2002).
  - Regularly submit an article to the school newspaper about what is happening in the library. If there is no school newspaper, offer to begin an e-newsletter. Highlight new books or software, teachers with whom you have collaborated, units you have helped with, or a class's recently completed special project. Attach digital pictures of students' activities to the article.
  - Get to know a local newspaper reporter and submit an article about your school and the learning that occurs in the library. Invite him/her to visit when you have a family literacy program planned, when you are providing an in-service to para-professionals, or when students will share such things as photo stories or movies they have created to accompany a unit of study in the classroom.

### **In Conclusion**

After examining students' papers and discussing the results of the interviews in class, I realized the usefulness of this assignment. These pre-service and in-service teachers discovered the librarian to be a critically important staff member who can support them and their students in a variety of important ways. They came to agree with Hardy (2010) that "School librarians are needed more than ever now to deal with the changes in the instructional environment" (p. 23). They now understand the vital link between competent librarians and student achievement (Foote, 2010). Last, they support Krashen's (2010) notion that the position of librarian should be "protected" in the future, despite budget cuts.

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# **Do You Jing? How Screencasting Can Enrich Classroom Teaching and Learning**

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## **Abstract**

*Teachers K-16 need to integrate the new digital literacies into their teaching. Screencasting is one of these new literacies, and we believe it offers special appeal for engaging and motivating students in learning. This paper provides a rationale for integrating the new digital literacies into classroom teaching, discusses how the new literacies differ from conventional ways of reading and writing, provides examples of screencasts that our own students and their pupils have authored, and concludes with step-by-step procedures for creating screencasts. Throughout the paper we argue that all teachers need to be teachers of the new digital literacies, and these literacies must be integrated with conventional ways of reading and writing.*

## **Introduction**

The new information and communication technologies (ICT) are now part of our everyday lives. Many of today's children use these technologies as easily as they read conventional books or write with paper and pencil. Whenever they need to find a particular fact, they 'Google' it. If they want to know about the weather, they use their cell phones or look online at the Weather Channel. A large majority of them routinely use email, YouTube, Facebook, and many of them Twitter. Some even have tablet computers for listening, viewing, reading, and writing. These ICTs are so natural to this young generation that they have been called, "digital natives" (Prensky, 2005/2006, p. 9).

It seems that every few months newer, more powerful, and lighter devices become available. Only two years ago *The Horizon Report* (Johnson, Levine, & Smith, 2009), which provides information on emerging technologies, predicted that mobile devices would be used to connect online, but many of us thought that was unlikely to happen. Yet, now many of us regularly use smart phones and tablet computers to communicate, acquire information, and to view and listen to videos and podcasts. The idea of making digital videos once awed most of us, but they are now common-place as we use cell phones and Flip cameras to capture events and upload them to Facebook or YouTube. All of these technologies have become part of the fabric of our everyday lives and are called "digital literacies" (Gilster, 1997). In this paper we argue that the new digital literacies must be integrated into our methods of teaching, and that screencasting tools (i.e., a digital video recording of a computer screen with audio), such as Jing, have special benefits and appeal for teachers and their students.

## ***A Rationale for Integrating Digital Literacies into Classroom Teaching***

Throughout history literacy has changed as new technologies appeared. The makers of clay tablets must have lamented when papyrus became the preferred source for writing. Monks must have despaired when they discovered that their biblical transcriptions were no longer

needed after the invention of the printing press. Similarly, the hardcover book publishing industry probably felt threatened when paperbacks appeared in the 1930's. Today, the new technologies are ubiquitous in our lives. The demands of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century necessitate that teachers enthusiastically embrace and integrate the various digital literacies into their lessons and such that students become critical consumers, collaborators and creators using these new literacies.

State education departments and professional educational organizations have argued for the integration of the new technologies into classroom teaching. In January 2011 New York's Board of Regents adopted the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) requiring students to strategically use the "new media" (NYS SED, 2011, p.2). The CCSS explains that an important characteristic of today's successful students is that "They use technology and digital media strategically and capably" (NYSED, 2011, p. 5). More specifically the CCSS requires that:

Students employ technology thoughtfully to enhance their reading, writing, speaking, listening, and language use. They tailor their searches online to acquire useful information efficiently, and they integrate what they learn using technology with what they learn offline. They are familiar with the strengths and limitations of various technological tools and mediums and can select and use those best suited to their communication goals. (NYSED, 2011, p. 5)

The International Reading Association (2009) developed a position statement about the importance of integrating of the new literacies into classroom instruction:

The Internet and other forms of information and communication technologies (ICTs) are redefining the nature of reading, writing, and communication. These ICTs will continue to change in the years ahead, requiring continuously new literacies to successfully exploit their potentials. Although many new ICTs will emerge in the future, those that are common in the lives of our students include search engines, webpages, e-mail, instant messaging (IM), blogs, podcasts, e-books, wikis, nings, YouTube, video, and many more. New literacy skills and practices are required by each new ICT as it emerges and evolves.

For over a decade the International Society for Technology in Education (ISTE) (2000) has been recommending the integration of the new technologies into schools by explaining that education must leave industrial models of teaching and learning behind and embrace the digital world. ISTE envisions technology as transforming education with explicit standards for students (NET\*S for Students, 2007), teachers (NET\*S for Teachers, 2008), and administrators with the guiding principle of creating communities of dynamic learning opportunities.

Given that the new technologies permeate every aspect of contemporary life, and their integration into classroom teaching is now required by New York's CCSS and recommended by various professional organizations (e.g., IRA, ISTE), there should be little doubt that the digital literacies are critical to 21<sup>st</sup> Century communication and essential skill sets for students to access information. All teachers, regardless of their subject areas, must meet the challenge of integrating the digital literacies into their lessons, and their students must have the opportunity to use them in their learning activities. The integration of these digital literacies is essential if our country is to remain globally competitive and our schools are to be relevant and meaningful in the lives of our children.

### *Differences between the Conventional and Digital Literacies*

The old axiom that “every teacher is a teacher of reading” is as pertinent today as in the past, but today it needs to be revised to that of “every teacher is a teacher of the digital literacies.” (Leu et al 2009b) argue that the digital literacies must be viewed as a literacy issue rather than simply access to technology, and, moreover, that all teachers, classroom and specialist, must actively use them in their teaching. Students need to see how the digital literacies can be used as a way of thinking across the disciplines, but this will only occur when classroom and specialist teachers model their use for students to see and require students use them to compose and collaborate to problem solve.

There is increasing research about how the new literacies compare and contrast with conventional ways of reading and writing, and teachers should be aware of their differences. Reading online ( Leu et al., 2009a; Leu et al., 2009b) requires skills and strategies that are commonly used with offline reading, but it also depends on unique ones, too. Leu et al. (2009b) recently summarized some of their findings about reading online:

- Struggling offline readers may excel when reading online because of its multimodal and interactive characteristics;
- Prior knowledge may be less essential for online reading because access to prerequisite knowledge is easily found online;
- Although the digital generation may be skilled with the new technologies, children often lack critical thinking skills for evaluating information obtained online.

Coiro (2009) identified five ways that online reading differs from conventional. The first is that online reading requires new skills and strategies such as generating searches (e.g., Google), sifting through a variety of digital texts that are produced from these searches, synthesizing information among websites, and responding with an online communication tools such as emails, blogs, etc. The second difference between digital and conventional reading is that students’ attitudes and dispositions about the new technologies have great impact on their success when reading online; students who are confident and eager to use the Internet comprehend better than those who find digital reading unfamiliar or awkward. The third difference between online and conventional reading relates to its social nature; students tend to collaborate when reading online by sharing sites and interpreting information with others, whereas conventional reading is more individual, personal, and linear. The fourth difference is that online reading requires students to scroll down a computer screen to find relevant information, select from a variety of websites that are returned from an online search, and discriminate sites containing relevant and authoritative information from those that might only be opinion or propaganda. The final difference is that the processes for digital reading are constantly changing as new technologies emerge. Although new theories of comprehension have always informed our understanding of reading conventionally, the rate of change in the digital world is much more rapid than that of the conventional literacies. Thus it is important that teachers provide students opportunities to develop their online critical reading skills, which will impact their thinking and composing.

Online writing is different from composing with pencil or pen, too (Herrington, Hodgson, & Moran, 2009; National Writing Project, 2010; Wilbur, 2010). Online writing is more social in its nature than conventional writing (Knobel & Lankshear, 2006); when composing online students can easily collaborate with others through wikis, blogs, Google docs, and other technologies (Bledsoe, 2009). Online writing fosters integration of multimedia files. That is, with

a few clicks of the keyboard students can integrate audio, video, and visual texts into their writing (New London Group, 2000). Consequently, meaning construction is no longer restricted by writers' skills with spelling, grammar, and vocabulary, because today's authors can integrate their compositions with audio and video files with quick links to networks for others to respond (e.g., [Vook](#)).

Conventional writing skills and strategies are still needed in the digital world (Hicks, 2009), but the new technologies involve additional and more dynamic ways of constructing meaning. Today's digital students can easily integrate multimedia files to enrich the meaning of what they have written. Examples of integrating multimedia information into writing are the following:

- Podcasts (Davis & McGrail, 2009)
- Photography and imagery (Riddle, 2009; Zenkov & Harmon, 2009)
- Music (Rodesiler, 2009)
- Video (Ranker, 2010)
- Blogs (Wilbur, 2010; Witte, 2007)
- Digital stories (Kajder, 2009; University of Houston, 2009)

### *Screencasting in Classroom Teaching*

Screencasts are digital recordings with narration of a computer screen. Typically, screencasts, as described here, are quick, 3-5 minute videos with specific purposes—they can be used to answer questions, provide information, present a point of view, or tell a story. We have found screencasts to be especially helpful and exciting in our own teaching, and our students, graduate level and school-aged alike, enjoy producing them. We create screencasts of minilessons so that students can view at home, and we often use screencasts for online teaching to introduce students to concepts and skills that they are studying.

Graduate students in our literacy courses have developed a variety of different screencasts. In one of our courses students composed screencasts about their favorite literacy website (e.g., [www.ncte.org](http://www.ncte.org); [www.reading.org](http://www.reading.org)), including how to navigate the site and evaluate its content and use for other teachers. In another course, students composed screencasts of family stories and wrote process papers (I-search) explaining how they prepared their narratives (Lyman, 2006). In one of these narratives ([Dickey](#), 2010), for example, Lunette tells the story of her father's life as skilled machinist who specialized in making parts for rare gasoline engines (babbiter). Another student, Mark, developed a [screencast](#) (Jackson, 2010) about a near family tragedy caused by budget cuts to his community's emergency rescue squad. In both cases the students integrated the new digital literacy (screencasting) with conventional writing by preparing I-search papers explaining their reasons for selecting these topics, how they found the images used in the screencasts, the steps they used to prepare their slide shows, and the challenges and successes they experienced in completing their projects. The I-search assignment served as a natural way to integrate screencasting with first-person narrative writing. Figure 1 displays the checklist students followed to complete the I-search assignment that accompanied their screencasts.

### **Figure 1:** *Checklist for Essay about Your Digital Narrative*

Write a descriptive essay about your digital narrative. This essay should address the following issues:

1. Why did you select this topic and who do you think would be interested in viewing it?
2. Describe the images used in the digital story, e.g., Did you find them on Google, did you take your own photos? Did you edit the photos?
3. Describe the processes (steps) you went through in composing and completing the digital project. Did the steps used vary from what your instructor suggested? Where did the content for the project come from? What items in the project changed from the early stages of selection through completion? Any other information you would like to share about this project?
4. Discuss the major challenges in creating this project and how you overcame them.
5. Discuss the most significant things you learned from completing the final digital storytelling project.
6. Discuss how you might use digital storytelling in your own teaching.
7. Include attribution for all images, quotes, etc.

In another course new teachers prepared screencasts of mini-lessons that their middle and secondary level students could view at home. The topics of their screencasts included historical issues, such as World War II, the Eisenhower years, and the history of Rome. English language arts teachers prepared screencasts of book talks, author introductions, and strategies for storyboarding. Art teachers prepared screencasts about principles of design, the illustrated works of Eric Carle, and the steps for composing online comic pages by using one of the new Web 2.0 technologies. Math teachers prepared mini-lessons on the Pythagorean theorem and greatest-common-multiples. These are just some of the countless curricula topics that can be turned into screencasts for making school curricula interesting and engaging for students and their families.

Classroom teachers can produce their own screencasts to explain new content, elaborate on difficult lesson concepts, and for helping parents work with their children on nightly homework. Screencasts can be linked or posted onto school websites for students and parents to view at home. Ultimately, students can learn to create their own screencasts for other students to view.

We have successfully used screencasting with elementary students who were participating in an afterschool literacy program. These children were struggling readers and writers, but they found the digital literacies and screencasting to be motivating and engaging. Below is a sampling of the screencasts that these children prepared with the help of our graduate students who were completing their masters degrees in literacy education:

- First grade students recording retellings of books they have read with their own drawings to represent the beginning, middle, and endings of stories.
- Second grade students developing multimedia acrostic poems, which included a word and image for every letter in a targeted word (e.g., Alaska) that are then developed into Power Points, which are captured via screencasts.
- Third graders presenting images developed from an online paint program to illustrate their responses to reading and then recording their thoughts digitally using a screencasting program.
- Fourth grade students creating comics using online comic generators and then recording the characters' narrations as they zoom in on each comic panel while capturing through screencasts.

- Fifth graders developing interactive whiteboards that incorporated digital animation, video, audio that was captured and explained to the audience via screencasting.

The specific examples are not as important as the overarching point that these were struggling students, often reading 1-3 years below level, and yet they were actively engaged in purposeful development of multimedia literacy projects to showcase their knowledge through the use of screencasting.

### *Screencasting Tools*

Screencasting has tremendous potential for teachers and students alike. Making a screencast while narrating a Power Point is an easy way to begin. The University of Houston (2009) posts an excellent resource about [digital storytelling](#), and its website offers many examples for composing, recording, and evaluating screencasts.

There are two kinds of screencasting tools: The first involves use of Web 2.0 technology to compose and store the videos, and this is the one we recommend to classroom teachers and their students. Users of this kind of screencasting create and store their videos into online accounts in Jing, Screencast-o-matic, or other screencasting sites (e.g., Screenjelly). These online storage accounts are part of the new cloud technology, which circumvents the need for large storage space on a personal. Cloud technology is often free for basic storage space, although fees are charged when extensive space is required.

The second kind of screen-casting tool are those that convert a screencast into a QuickTime movie or Flash video that can be stored on personal computers and/or posted to a website. ScreenFlow, a paid software program, is an example of this kind of screencasting. The advantage of this kind of screencasting tool is that the actual video is stored on one's computer or disk drive, and the video can be edited and reworked again and again for many purposes. On the other hand, creating too many videos will stretch the memory capacity of most computers and an external drive might need to be purchased. One way around such challenges is to use free cloud storage for videos; we particularly like Dropbox, which provides 2Gb of space for no cost. Regardless of choice of screencasting tool (we like both), we recommend that classroom teachers learn Jing because it is free for up to five minutes of recording time and easy to learn.

### *Steps in Making a Screencast*

The steps in preparing for screencasting are straightforward. First, prepare visual content to appear in the screencast - this is where a PowerPoint might be used. The teachers with whom we work usually prepare PowerPoint slides containing some amounts of text that are integrated with images, photos, and graphics. Second, narratives for each of the slides are rehearsed or written. Third, they create a Jing account by entering an ID and password (<http://www.techsmith.com/jing/>).

The actual recording process begins by opening the PowerPoint slideshow, turning on Jing's recording button, and narrating each of the slides in the show. Background music and sound effects can be added as the producer become more skillful with screencasting. There are [videos](#) posted to YouTube that may be helpful in learning more detailed information about Jing, but the specific steps for creating a Jing screencast are the following:

1. Become a member of Jing by entering an ID and password. Then download the program onto your computer. The program installs a "Sun" image onto your computer.
2. Select the Jing image (sun), click the "capture" button, and you are ready to start.
3. Then select the "capture a video" icon in the Jing window that appears on your desktop. Next a countdown timer appears on your computer screen and the recording begins!

4. When finished, click the stop button in the Jing window and save the screencast by clicking on the Screencast button. Save the URL to insert into your document or hyperlink on your website or learning management system (e.g., Blackboard, Moodle, etc.). We prefer saving to screencast.com because the link (URL) can be selected at any time for later use. It is also possible to save the Jing screencast on the computer.

#### Summary

Throughout this paper we have recommended that the digital literacies be integrated into our teaching, and this should be done in K-12 and college/university classrooms. Screencasting is one of the new literacies that offers many exciting ways to engage and motivate elementary and secondary students in learning. Our work is consistent with Sylvester and Greenidge's recent findings (2009) who reported success in using digital storytelling to motivate and scaffold children's literacy learning. Screencasting presents information in both audio and visual form, and its multimodal framework may be particularly helpful at motivating and engaging students with learning difficulties. The integration of the new digital literacies into classroom teaching is needed if students are to see relevance and meaningful connections between how literacy is used in and out of school. We would like to think that whenever students from our teacher education programs are asked, "Do you Jing?," they would be able to enthusiastically say, "Yes, and we love screencasting and how it engages and motivates our students in learning!"

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## **On line instruction: An opportunity to re-examine and re-invent pedagogy**

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As a literacy educator, I rely on schema theory (Anderson, 1977) to understand the basic building blocks of learning. The simplest model of effective instruction, I tell my graduate students, is to identify what a child already knows and then determine how to best connect what you are trying to teach to their already established understandings. This streamlines the process except when what you are trying to teach directly contradicts what children already know. Then it is important to understand that you will need to convince as well as to instruct.

Schema theory can be used to explain my own reluctance to explore on-line instruction and the reluctance of many veteran college teachers who have not yet tried it. Before I taught my first hybrid, on-line graduate course, my opinion of on-line instruction was framed not by what it is not. My schema for the in-class experience I tried to provide for my graduate students where they could “live in the moment of discussion” and arrive at new levels of thinking would not be available to them on-line. My question in discussing on line formats was always, “Where is the joy in this model?” I could not imagine what instruction could be like if it did not include the instructional elements that I knew worked for me. Through the years, I had developed a fairly standard approach to graduate instruction. The formula involves assigning the most worthwhile reading I could find on the topic to be discussed, providing a certain perspective on the topic in what I hoped were fairly thought provoking, interactive presentations, having students work in groups to apply the new learning and then engaging in a more critical discussion of the topic. Although small group discussion where students reported back discoveries to the whole class were an integral part of my classroom, my role in facilitating knowledge construction was central. I decided on discussion topics and I commented on whatever insights emerged from these discussions.

One of the reasons I agreed to teach a hybrid, on-line course last summer was specifically to either challenge or confirm my negative perceptions about on-line instruction. In order to continue to be an outspoken critic whenever administrators encouraged developing on-line courses for what I assumed were pecuniary considerations, I needed to understand on-line instruction from the inside out. The course, an elective in a Literacy masters’ level program, was designed to introduce students to the range of materials available to teach K-6 language arts and to show them how to establish criteria in selecting and using such materials. The course was designed to fit into a three week summer immersion framework. We met three times on campus and students were assigned to participate in nine on line discussion sessions to process the assigned daily “readings.” The class consisted of twenty graduate students in education.

I am pleased to report that my experience in teaching this course confirmed my original perception; it was nothing like the instructional model I had been practicing for many years. What I could not predict based on my old schema was that effective on-line instruction is something brand new. In doing the research to prepare for the course, I began to realize that if I had tried to replicate the in-class formula, the course would have probably been as dismal as I feared it would be. The opportunity to review pedagogical issues that I had taken for granted through the years was the first of many unexpected benefits I encountered through this venture. In order to orchestrate a successful learning experience for my students on-line, I needed to re-think what my role as the teacher in such a course would be, what kinds of interactions with information would sustain students at their keyboards and how they could share these interactions in discussion that would stretch their level of thinking, largely without a lot of direction from me.

I became a proponent of on-line instruction and I would like to share ten discoveries I made about it that were beyond my field of vision when I viewed it through my in-class lens. The first four points reflect discoveries I made by reviewing the research before I taught the course and were reflected in the course design. The last six points reflect discoveries I made by assessing the course both during and after its implementation.

#### **What I learned from the research:**

- 1) One of my first discoveries in setting up the course was that I needed to be much more critical in the decisions I made in choosing the texts students would be examining. Since most of their class-time was to be spent interacting with these texts independently, I gave them access to a much wider range of materials in terms of both form and content. For example, instead of having them read a text book about best practices in using literature in the classroom, I had them watch videos of teachers ([www.learner.org](http://www.learner.org)) actually using literature and had them critique these models. Our review of beginning reading programs involved comparing individual publishers' web-sites with <http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/>, a government clearinghouse that reviews the research on such programs. These on-line assignments did not serve as a pale imitation of what would have happened in class (reading descriptions of instructional strategies and materials and commenting on these 'secondary documents'). They essentially changed the nature of the instruction by giving students access to documents that were more primary in nature and also giving students opportunities to directly interact with and evaluate them.
- 2) I also realized that the discussion board and the blog entries now constituted "class time" so I spent much time researching how to best structure the requirements for both. It is in this area of computer mediated communication that the research is currently exploring the real potential of on line instruction. In his research review, Luppicini (2007) concludes that there are partial advantages in CMC formats in terms of student writing, task focused discussion, collaborative decision making, group work and active involvement in knowledge construction during group interaction. Specifically, Chou & Liu (2005) reported higher levels of learning in a web-based environment when compared with a traditional environment. Orr (1998) reported that CMC extended the depth and quality of

discourse opening up new areas of discussion. Based on the research, students in my class were divided, somewhat randomly as suggested by Pimental (1999) into four groups and these groups remained stable throughout the course according to Bernard & Lundgren Cayrol's (2001) advice. After experimenting with synchronous postings, we decided to relax the time constraints and post asynchronously.

- 3) I re-examined the role I would play as the instructor. Although I still provided information and guided learning through several media-streamed lectures, my role was much less central to the daily transactions students made with the resources designed to establish their knowledge of course content. I found that much of my "instruction" occurred before the actual course began as I structured the learning experiences students would have. My role during discussions on discussion board took 'teacher as facilitator' to a whole new level for me. I rarely participated except to introduce the discussion topic and to synthesize what had transpired toward the end of every discussion. It should be understood that students were aware that I was "lurking" about the discussion board but I did not intrude on their collaborative efforts at meaning making as they worked their way through daily topics. What I did instead to support their discussions with additional information and clear up areas of confusion was to establish a separate forum, "Ask the Professor." They were asked to check it regularly and certain students were personally invited to check it.
- 4) I carefully established accountability measures for every aspect of class participation. Choi, et al., (2005), and Pimental, (1999) both suggest that specific guidelines be established to maintain a standard of academic rigor and student accountability in on line discussion. Therefore, students in my course understood that they were required to contribute at least two substantive postings each evening and that these would be evaluated with a rubric in terms of their comprehensiveness, relevance, analytic content and effort to respond to other postings.

#### **What I learned from teaching and reflecting on the course:**

- 5) In reviewing the posts to the discussion board, I was soon impressed at how tenacious students seemed to be in their joint construction of meaning from the tasks I had assigned. I therefore engaged in an analysis of their discussion board posts using a coding system grounded in the data itself (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) to determine emerging patterns of idea sharing and building. The fact that I was interested in idea construction rather than discourse patterns is based on Marshall's work, (1989) where discourse is categorized into discrete idea units and then classified according to the purpose they serve (direct, inform, question, respond to previous remarks). It is a form of open coding (Strauss & Corbin, 1990) where descriptive notes are taken on the transcripts and categories are formulated that are then organized and reduced. My basic research questions were, "What are students attempting to accomplish in their discussion board posts?" and "Is there evidence of joint construction of new understandings through this discourse?"

Previous studies of discourse analysis of on line discussion were helpful. Liu, C.C. & Tsai, C.C. (2008) categorized student contributions into nine possible types (issue, position, argument, group development, response, acceptance of response, objections to responses, conflict, support, request. Ikpeze, (2007) developed the following categories: elaborated responses, reflection, questions, propositions, argumentation and off task. Booth & Hulten (2003) coded contributions as participatory, factual, reflective and learning. Perhaps most helpful was Gunawardena, Lowe and Anderson (1998) who analyzed the cognitive level of student discourse in an online discussion by using a format with the following categories: sharing and comparing of information, discovery and exploration, negotiation of meaning and co-construction of knowledge, testing and revision on ideas, and awareness of newly constructed knowledge.

I limited my analysis to two of the discussions by all four discussion groups. In the first discussion, students were comparing information on early reading programs using publishers' web sites and <http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/>. The second discussion required them to respond to models of instruction using literature in elementary classrooms by watching videos on [www.learner.org](http://www.learner.org)

My coding system established six categories that could be used to describe students' posts in terms of what they were trying to accomplish. These simple categories were probably influenced by my many years as a reading specialist trying to decide just what K-12 students did in response to texts. The six categories found to be broad enough to describe all the posts were:

**Inform:** These were posts in which students responded to the assignment and basically reported back on information they had found.

**Connect:** Students made connections between what they discovered from the assignment and their own experience.

**Question:** Students expressed the need for more information on the topic.

**Analyze:** In these posts, students attempted to train a critical eye on the information presented by either comparing it to information from other sources to identify discrepancies or to interpret it in terms of factors not mentioned in what they had read. It was noted whether students provided evidence upon which they based their criticism.

**Evaluate:** Students expressed either positive or negative opinions of what they had read. It was noted whether they provided evidence for these opinions

**New Ideas:** Students' comments reflect that they have synthesized the information and have come to a conclusion or that their reflection has produced an original idea. It was obvious that these were the posts that took the discussion to a new level.

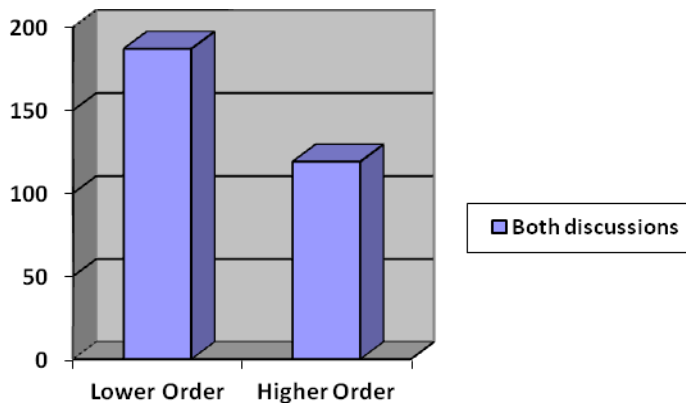
The following chart broadly describes the number and proportion of ideas that were exchanged by each category for both discussions.

Category	Inform	Connect	Question	Analyze	Evaluate	New Ideas
# of Ideas:	123	43	21	42	34	43

By aligning these idea units with Bloom's Revised Taxonomy (Anderson, et.al, 2001), an instructor can easily recognize that the categories, 'inform,' 'connect,' and 'question' involve what are characterized as lower order cognitive skills. Students making these contributions were

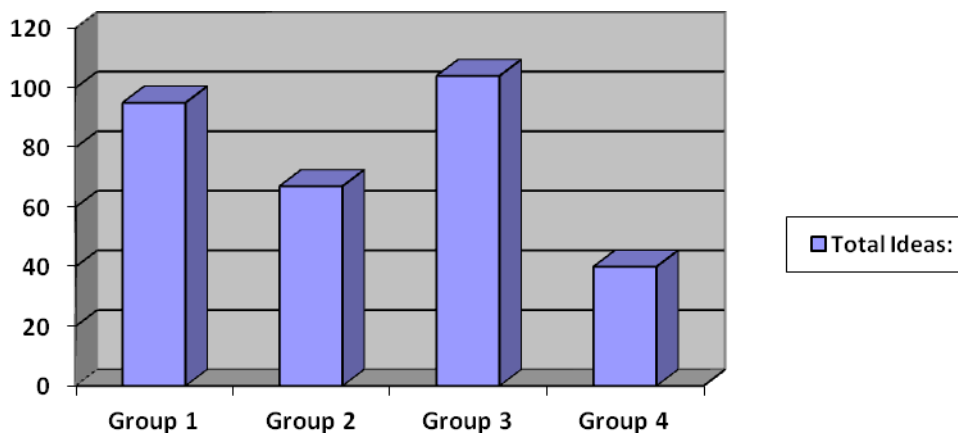
attempting to remember and comprehend the topic assigned. A total of 187 idea units in both discussions provided evidence of lower level cognitive skills. Units designated as ‘analyze,’ ‘evaluate,’ and ‘new ideas’ correlate with what Anderson, et.al (2001) categorize as higher level cognitive skills where students engage in more critical and creative responses to the topic. In both discussions 119 idea units represent evidence of higher order cognitive skills. Visually representing the ideas transacted in on line discussion can serve as a valuable tool in both formative and summative assessments of the course’s effectiveness. Frankly, I am quite satisfied with both the number of ideas generated per student in these discussions and the fact that 39% of the ideas exchanged involved students engaged in higher level thinking skills.

<b>Ideas</b>	<b>Lower Order</b>	<b>Higher Order</b>
<b>Both discussions</b>	<b>187</b>	<b>119</b>



- 6) This exercise convinced me that the ability to review a written transcript of the ideas generated by each discussion topic within a course is itself an awesome pedagogical opportunity. Questions like, “What topics generated the most ideas? And “Which groups formulated the most new ideas?” have enormous potential to inform subsequent instructional decisions. If I were to teach this course again, I might reflect on the fact that Discussion A generated 30 contributions that were categorized as ‘new ideas’ whereas Discussion B produced only 13. I might rethink the fact that the group with only four participants (group 4) produced a total of 40 idea units as compared to the other groups of 5 members who produced 95 (group 1) and 67 (group 2) ideas respectively. Group 3 which had 6 members produced 104 ideas.

<b>Group:</b>	<b>Group 1</b>	<b>Group 2</b>	<b>Group 3</b>	<b>Group 4</b>
<b>Total Ideas:</b>	<b>95</b>	<b>67</b>	<b>104</b>	<b>40</b>



- 7) The analysis also underscored the fact that universal participation is a requirement for an on line course. Although I understood, in theory, that students would be required to contribute two substantive posts per discussion, I was overwhelmed by the sheer number and length of the posts in terms of the ideas exchanged. The idea analysis revealed that 149 idea units were exchanged in Discussion A and 158 in Discussion B. This means that each student contributed a mean of 7.5 ideas in Discussion A and 8 ideas in Discussion B.
  
- 8) I also became aware of the fact that having a written transcript of ideas can be used instructionally across sections and across semesters. I definitely intend to further study the ‘new idea’ category to try to identify when and how analysis spins itself into something new. What I will certainly do whenever I teach on line again will be to integrate examples of “new ideas” from past courses into future discussions. As a matter of fact, students would be well served if they were presented with the opportunity to analyze a creative response from the past to the topic at hand and tried to understand what kind of thinking led to the response.
  
- 9) As a professor of writing, I could not help but notice that the writing students did in electronic forums (both posts and blogs), knowing that their classmates would read and respond, seemed to be better articulated expressions of their thinking than I had received in more formal papers directed to me in other courses. There is a comfort level that students seem to experience in expressing themselves in an on line environment. The following is a typical, clearly written, yet spontaneous post:

One reservation that I had after comparing these two websites and scrutinizing the findings is that neither addresses what happens after the intervention is discontinued. Do the students maintain the gains they have made, or after some time, do they fall behind again because they are missing that one-on-one tutoring? Is there follow up so that the students can successfully transition out of the program? This is just one question that was not addressed that I, as a reflective future educator would be concerned about.

10) What is perhaps most exciting is the opportunity this kind of reflection and analysis affords instructors to collaborate. Having the ability to document students in the process of forming their ideas will help us to discuss and compare our efforts in nurturing these ideas. In a word, these new technologies can help us get back to basics; to examine and articulate how ideas happen.

In conclusion, my experience in teaching in an on line environment convinced me that my schema for college instruction was circumscribed by the four walls of my classroom. I now understand that there are exciting opportunities to facilitate student learning in environments beyond the here and now.

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## Focus on Inclusion: Young Adult Literature

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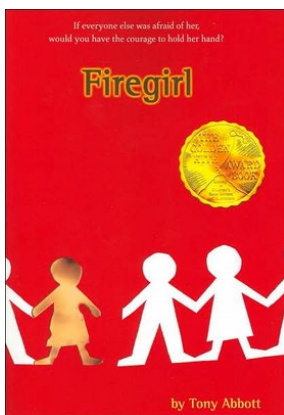
A considerable amount of attention has been drawn to acknowledging and embracing diversity in our 21<sup>st</sup> century classrooms. Rapid movement and relocation of people coming from nations across the world has become the norm due to an ever-changing competitive global economy. Much of the focus on diversity has been directed to ethnicity, culture, and gender. There are numerous opportunities provided throughout the school year that teach to and celebrate the changing landscape within our individual schools and communities: National Mix It Up Day, international dinners, and diversity days that showcase authentic ethnic foods, dance, clothing, and customs, are just a few examples.

Inclusion represents another layer of diversity that equally deserves the same recognition. The composition of any given classroom today is comprised of students with unique learning styles and needs, many of whom have known academic, social, and physical disabilities. Reading young adult novels and stories creates occasions for middle school readers to learn about and begin to define and understand the challenges faced by people with disabilities. Further, this enables students to engage in conversations that will lead them to develop the necessary social skills and strategies they will need to build positive relationships with their peers and the adults in their lives.

Popular contemporary young adult authors such as Tony Abbott, Leslie Connor, Cynthia Lord, and Wendy Mass skillfully craft realistic characters and situations that reflect authentic issues impacting the lives of individuals with disabilities and their families. They also masterfully weave in societal perceptions and fears associated with various disabilities and the role that plays in how these people are treated, as well as the degree to which they are accepted in our culture.

Abbott, T. (2006). *Firegirl*. New York, New York: Little Brown Books for Young Readers.

### Summary:



*Firegirl*, by Tony Abbott is a poignant story about a 7<sup>th</sup> grade boy, Tom Bender, who struggles to reconcile his conflicting feelings for a new student. Jessica, a severely disfigured burn victim, has moved into his community to seek special medical attention. Mrs. Tracy, their teacher, tries to prepare the students prior to Jessica's arrival, however despite her best effort, the students are quite shocked and reactive to Jessica's appearance. Out of fear and their inability to make sense of this situation, the class immediately begins to construct and spin rumors about how their peer actually sustained her burns. The turning point in the story begins when Tom is asked by his teacher to deliver homework to Jessica, who lives just down the street. Reluctantly he accepts his teacher's request, a decision that positions Tom to experience something that will change his

life forever- a friendship with Jessica.

**Annotation:**

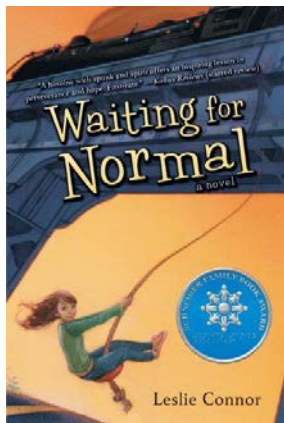
The story of *Firegirl* certainly both challenges and inspires its readers to look beyond a person's exterior and limitations, realizing that the true essence of a character comes from deep within. Tom is a wonderful role model; many readers will find an easy connection with him. The author meticulously captures the evolution and development of Tom's thoughts and feelings to the extent that young adult readers will also experience the tension, sensitivity, and maturity it takes to be able to look beyond the situations and people we fear or do not understand.

**Awards:**

Recipient of the 2007 Golden Kite Award for fiction.

Connor, L. (2008). *Waiting for Normal*. New York, New York: Harper Collins Publishers.

**Summary:**



Leslie Connor, the author of *Waiting for Normal*, portrays a touching account of a young adolescent girl's efforts to maintain some stability and happiness in her life while living with the unpredictable; her mother suffers with bipolar disorder. The protagonist is also dealing with a challenge of her own, a learning disability called dyslexia that makes it difficult for her to read books and music. Addie is a brave and optimistic twelve-year-old. She longs and waits for the time when she can visit with her loving stepfather, Dwight, and twin sisters, who she has been separated from since her mother's (Mommer's) divorce. The effects influenced by Mommer's untreated illness have also driven other family members to keep a distance as well, including Addie's grandfather, Grandio. Despite these circumstances, Addie remains hopeful that her mother will eventually be well enough to provide a "normal" life for her

family. Elliot and Soula, a couple who manage a gas station / convenient store across the street from Addie's trailer, take notice of her frequent trips to purchase food. They sense something is not quite right and quickly step up to provide the one constant she was sorely missing, love and support.

**Annotation:**

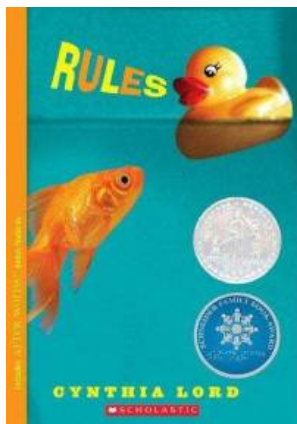
Addie's family dynamics are a common phenomenon in many households today where kids have not only taken on the responsibility as caregivers for themselves, but in some cases for their disabled parents. Leslie Connors demonstrates the positive impact that caring adults, like Elliot and Soula, have on a child who lacks familial support and direction. Addie's strength and perseverance to independently weather the tumultuous times with her mother are to be commended. Young children and adolescents still need strong role models to rely on when their families are in crisis and should be encouraged to turn to a trusted adult who can help them to manage and nurture their social-emotional needs.

**Awards:**

Recipient of the 2009 Schneider Family Book Award.

Lord, C. (2008). *Rules*. New York, New York: Scholastic Inc.

**Summary:**



Older children are often called upon to be caregivers for their younger siblings, periodically babysitting while their parents are working or running errands. Catherine, the main character in *Rules*, by Cynthia Lord, spends most of her summer vacation watching over her brother, David, who unlike other children comes with exceptional concerns; David is autistic. Additionally, the young protagonist serves as his teacher. David has difficulty reading and understanding social cues, a trait hallmark to people identified with the autism spectrum disorder. He requires constant supervision and prompts to follow the rules that govern appropriate social behaviors, particularly so not to embarrass his sister in the company of her peers. When Catherine’s parents are present it seems that most of their attention is consumed by David’s needs and demands,

such as weekly visits to the clinic for occupational therapy and daily visits to the video store. Catherine rarely has any time to herself when she can engage in the ‘normal’ activities that adolescent girls find exciting. She loves art and longs for a friend to share her time and interests. The main character’s world begins to change when Christy, a girl her own age, moves into the house next door, while at the same time, an unexpected friendship begins to unfold with Jason, a nonverbal paraplegic, who she has met at the clinic. Catherine finds herself conflicted by Christy’s persistent attempts to have her ask Jason to the community center dance. Her neighbor, however, is completely unaware that he is disabled and wheel chair-bound.

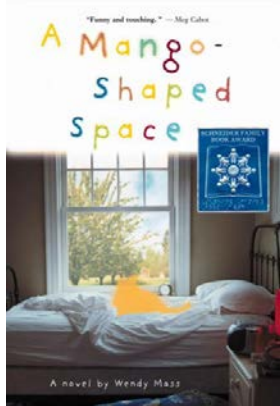
**Annotation:**

Cynthia Lord genuinely depicts the physical, emotional, and social impact that having a child with special needs can have on an entire family. Catherine is a believable character; twelve-year-old girls will certainly identify with many of the issues she faces. True to her stage of psycho-social development, the protagonist wrestles with a longing to be accepted by her peers and the responsibility she feels to protect her brother, David, from those who do not understand his quirky behavior. This novel offers its readers an understanding of many common behaviors and characteristics that children identified with autism spectrum disorder often present. I personally found this book to be a wonderful choice to use for book clubs and / or to read as a whole-class shared text because of its multiple perspectives.

**Awards:**

- Recognized as a Newberry Honor Book in 2007
- Recipient of the 2007 Schneider Family Book Award

Mass, W. (2003). *A Mango Shaped Space*. New York, New York: Little, Brown, and Company



**Summary:**

Thirteen-year-old Mia Winchell, the main character in *A Mango Shaped Space*, by Wendy Mass, has been keeping a secret from her family and friends since the third grade. It was at this point when Mia first discovered that all letters, numbers, and sounds had a specific color associated with them. Through a series of painfully unsuccessful public

attempts to solve math problems, Mia realized that she was the only one in her class who perceived the world this way. Mango, her beloved cat, was named for the colors, varied shades of orange and yellow, that his meowing produced in Mia's mind. The protagonist's quest to conceal her unusual and what she feels to be "freak like" abilities becomes increasingly more difficult in middle school. One day, while grocery shopping with her mom, the main character strikes up a conversation with a young boy named Billy, who after introductions, announces that he sees Mia's name as orange and purple stripes. Surprised by this comment, she begins to wonder if there might be others who experience the world through a similar lens. Failure to make any passing grades on her math quizzes and tests is what moves Mia to finally share with her parents what only she has known about herself all a long, colors govern the way she interprets text and sounds, making it difficult for her to read and learn. Mia is thrust into a world of medical examiners eager to explain her unique sensory perceptions, a rare neurological condition known as synesthesia. Through a series of turbulent interactions with family, friends and new faces, Mia is able to reach an understanding of what friendship, growing up, and other issues surrounding life and death means to her life.

**Annotation:**

Wendy Mass's sensitive portrayal of Mia's search for an understanding of what is 'normal' is true to the appropriate developmental journey that we all begin to experience around that age. This writer effectively weaves several coming-of-age issues into the story, such as, Mia's first kiss, the intense emotions she has over the death of her grandfather, and the responsibility and guilt she feels when her cat, Mango, passes on. The author was able to clearly articulate, through the thoughts and actions of the main character, a working definition for synesthesia, a comingling of sensory perceptions. While this story has a positive outcome, I would strongly recommend this book be reserved for more mature middle level readers.

**Awards:**

Recipient of the 2004 Schneider Family Book Award

The following websites offer additional information about the disabilities presented in the novels:

*Firegirl*

[www.shrinershospitalforchildren.org](http://www.shrinershospitalforchildren.org)

*Waiting for Normal*

[www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov](http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov)

[www.nami.org](http://www.nami.org)

*Rules*

[www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/autism/links.html](http://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/autism/links.html)

[www.cec.sped.org](http://www.cec.sped.org)

*A Mango Shaped Space*

[www.wendymass.com](http://www.wendymass.com)

<http://faculty.washington.edu>

## **Book Review: *Anything But Typical***

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Literature for children and young adults has begun featuring more major characters who are individuals with disabilities. One children's book award that honors authors who feature individuals with disabilities in their texts is the Schneider Family Award, first presented in 2005 along with the other American Library Association (ALA) children's literature awards. Three Schneider Family Awards are presented annually to authors and illustrators portraying characters with disabilities in texts for young children aged 0 to 8, middle grades children aged 9 to 13, and teens aged 14 to 18. The award honors fiction or nonfiction books that contain a primary or secondary character with a physical, mental, or emotional disability, depict the character engaging in a full, realistic life, and present accurate information about the disability. Nora Raleigh Baskin's story about twelve-year-old Jason Blake was the winner of the 2010 Schneider Family Middle School Book Award (American Library Association, n.d.).

In *Anything But Typical*, Jason Blake is a young adolescent male who has been diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). The story is told in first-person point of view by Nora Raleigh Baskin, allowing young Jason to describe his life with ASD to his readers: his early struggles in elementary school, his diagnosis in third grade, and his continuing challenges to live among non-handicapped individuals ("neurotypicals" as he calls them) who have difficulty understanding his autism. Jason writes about the various physical symptoms that characterize his autism (i.e., eye blinking, hand flapping) as well as the social implications of his condition (i.e., lack of eye contact and social interaction, need for an orderly environment and routine, little outward display of emotion). For the first time since his diagnosis, Jason is attending his classes without the support of an individual aide. Jason describes not only the obstacles he faces in the public school setting with his sixth grade peers but also the challenges he experiences at home with his father, mother, and younger brother.

Although he has difficulty with verbal expression and social interaction, Jason has an exceptional capacity for learning vocabulary words, and he is a very accomplished writer. For Jason, writing offers a safe mode of communication. He states, "When I write, I can be heard. And known. But nobody has to look at me. Nobody has to see me at all" (p. 3). As a result, Jason enjoys his language arts class because he has his best grade in that class, the students seek out his assistance, and his teacher, Mr. Shupack, provides a comfortable, supportive space for him. Jason is also a regular visitor to the online Storyboard site where he publishes his stories and chats with other aspiring authors, and it is through this site that a writer identified as PhoenixBird contacts Jason. Later he learns that PhoenixBird is actually a female named Rebecca who has been a fan of his stories. As a reward for his school progress, Jason's parents give him the opportunity to travel with one of them to the Storyboard convention being held in Dallas, Texas. Jason's first reaction is excitement at the prospect of being able to attend the writing workshops at the convention, but he becomes increasingly agitated as he imagines meeting Rebecca and witnessing her response to his autism. Jason successfully faces many challenges on his trip: flying in an airplane, being in crowds of people, and meeting a female who might become a friend. His encounter with Rebecca, although awkward at times, does end

on a friendly note when she expresses her desire to continue communicating with Jason through the Storyboard site. Following the convention, Jason writes the conclusion to his current online story, resolving his character's conflict as well as some of his own.

*Anything But Typical* points out how students can potentially benefit from alternative forms of literacy such as the Storyboard website described by Baskin (2009). First, Jason illustrates how some students with ASD might feel more secure and more motivated by reading and writing in an online environment. Jason's social networking with his online community allowed him to publish his writing, read other people's stories, and engage in chats with other authors. The Storyboard website provided Jason with the anonymity he desired and allowed him to be judged on the merits of his writing skills and knowledge rather than the characteristics of his autism. Second, writers publishing on the Storyboard website could solicit feedback for their stories, and this type of peer review can help young writers develop their literary skills in a forum that is less public and uncomfortable for them. Rebecca was able to contact Jason for suggestions on her writing, and she revealed to him later that she had received an A on the story with which he had helped. Examples of online writing communities include sites such as Writing.Com (<http://www.writing.com>), WritersCafé (<http://www.writerscafe.org>), and AuthorNation (<http://www.authornation.com>). Fanfiction sites also allow writers the opportunity to publish works based on popular texts such as Harry Potter (<http://www.harrypotterfanfiction.com>) and Twilight (<http://www.twilightarchives.com>).

Although the anonymity of the Storyboard website allowed Jason to showcase his writing expertise, it also created a near-crisis situation for him when he realized he could no longer conceal his disability from Rebecca when he met her at the convention. This scenario provides a cautionary note for those readers who may be chatting with unfamiliar people via the internet—just as you are able to conceal things about your identity, so are the others with whom you are communicating.

In *Anything But Typical*, Nora Raleigh Baskin has presented middle school readers with contemporary fiction that acknowledges their interest in social networking and also provides them with a glimpse into the thoughts and feelings of a young adolescent male with ASD. Two other texts featuring characters with ASD that could be read in literature circles with *Anything But Typical* include *The London Eye Mystery* (Dowd, 2007) and *Rules* (Lord, 2006). The juxtaposition of these titles provides students with texts that portray the wide variation of characteristics among individuals with ASD and demonstrates why autism is referred to as a "spectrum disorder." As portrayed in *Anything But Typical*, Jason represents an individual at the high end of the spectrum, requiring very little support in school and exhibiting strong skills in written communication. However, Jason does require instruction from his parents and occupational therapist in order to learn proper social interactions and to prepare for new situations. Ted, the main character in *The London Eye Mystery* (Dowd, 2007), also portrays an individual at the high end of the spectrum. He functions fairly independently and has exceptional ability in mathematics, but he is socially awkward and displays an intense interest in numbers and meteorology. In contrast to Jason and Ted is David, the younger brother of 12-year-old Catherine in the book *Rules* (Lord, 2006). David screams when he cannot find the words to express his thoughts, flaps his hands when excited or agitated, and quotes lines from *Frog and Toad Are Friends* (Lobel, 1979). Catherine, sometimes responsible for supervising David, often becomes embarrassed by his behavior and has devised a set of rules to help him cope with everyday situations, rules such as "A boy can take off his shirt to swim, but not his

shorts” or “No toys in the fish tank.” These three texts present middle school readers with characters who are young adolescents like themselves as well as individuals with ASD.

Middle school students can also be challenged to examine the portrayals of the characters with ASD in these texts by comparing and contrasting their characteristics with information on ASD. Two websites providing facts on ASD are Kids’ Quest on Disabilities and Health (<http://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/kids/autism.html>) and Kids Health—Teens Health ([http://kidshealth.org/teen/diseases\\_conditions/learning/autism.html#cat20167](http://kidshealth.org/teen/diseases_conditions/learning/autism.html#cat20167)). The Kids’ Quest site provides students with a Web Quest that includes a Fact Checkup and also supplies readers with additional facts and websites related to ASD, a profile of a student with ASD, movies and books related to ASD, and information about Autism Awareness month which is observed in April. The TeensHealth website displays an article on autism, but students can choose to read or listen to the information. Once students have learned about ASD, they can read *Anything But Typical* (Baskin, 2009) with a more critical eye, considering questions such as these and supporting responses with evidence from the texts and perhaps from their personal experiences.

- Which characteristics of Jason presented realistic and accurate portrayals of an individual with ASD? Which did not present realistic and accurate portrayals?
- Which parts of Jason’s family life were presented in a realistic and accurate manner? Which parts may not have been as realistic and accurate?
- Which parts of Jason’s schooling (i.e., classes, teachers, and students) were presented in a realistic and accurate manner? Which parts may not have been as realistic and accurate?
- Respond to chapters 24 through 32 that describe Jason’s trip to the Storyboard convention. What parts seemed believable? What parts may have seemed contrived or unrealistic?

Encouraging students to read for authenticity would apply not only to texts featuring characters with disabilities, but also to texts that feature multicultural characters, historical fiction, or science fiction.

*Anything But Typical* presents the story 12-year-old Jason who hones his writing skills in an online writing community, publishing his own stories and reviewing the work of other authors. As they read about Jason’s experiences, middle school readers become acquainted with some of the possible advantages and disadvantages of participating as a member of an online social network such as this. In addition, the readers also have the opportunity to view the world through Jason’s experiences as a young adolescent with ASD.

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## ***The Rights of the Reader: A Reaction***

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### Abstract

*What is one person's reaction to Daniel Pennac's book, *The Rights of the Reader*? There are 10 specifically chosen rights each reader has, including the right to not read, the right to be quiet, the right to read anywhere, and the right to dip in. These rights generally take students at the college level by surprise. Each semester, Professor Jampole's students, in the first of two undergraduate literacy education classes, must read this book, reflect on it, and answer a set of questions.*

Every semester, undergraduate students in my Reading and Language Arts I class have to read and respond to Daniel Pennac's (2008) *The Rights of the Reader* (translated by Sarah Adams and illustrated by Quentin Blake). These are students who are taking their first education class and may be taking it as a "stand alone" course or taking it in conjunction with other education courses. As this is their first course in education, and most of the undergraduates are 18-21 years old, they do not recognize that they are privileged by being able to read, period, let alone where and what they wish or in choosing to not read. In addition, they struggle with the idea of giving students some of Pennac's rights, such as the right to dip in or the right to skip, and say they'd never give children these rights.

Pennac is a French writer, formerly a teacher. In *The Rights of the Reader* (2008), he writes about "the bodies and souls of these youngsters whose school records show academic failure" (Doria, 2009). Pennac was one of those students and he states in *School Blues* (2010) that while we cannot do anything about unemployment or poverty "we can do something about ... the loneliness, the shame, of the student who doesn't understand, lost in a world where everyone else does. We can help him and her out of that prison..." (p. 27).

That is what I want my students to do when they become teachers – recognize those students who have "academic frailty" and "dive in" (Pennac, 2010) over and over to help those students understand and know that literacy is attainable. One of the purposes of the assignment is to make my students realize that they come from a position of privilege, not every student they teach will feel this way, and that teaching students to read is a very complex process requiring a great deal of knowledge of children, their development, and of reading itself.

The assignment is that students must read *The Rights of the Reader* (Pennac, 2008) and respond to: 1) Were your reactions to the novels you read in junior high/high school the same as the ones as the students Pennac's books? (You may not understand the references to all the novels he mentions in the book because you read different novels. Substitute the novels you had to read from elementary school through high school.) 2) How did the illustrations help you understand the chapters (or did they not help)? 3) What did you think of Pennac's style and

why? 4) How did Pennac's book transport you back to your childhood, your school years, or both? 5) Is Pennac correct about the rights readers have, or is he off base? Why do you think he's right or off the mark? Give specific details to back your thinking. 6) What (and why) made the book appealing or not appealing to you? 7) What rights, if any, do you have, as a reader, that you didn't realize you had, until Pennac pointed them out? Are there other rights that readers have; if so what are they? What rights do you allow yourself, and if applicable, your own children? What rights will you allow your students when you are in the classroom? 8) Is Pennac speaking of "pleasure reading," "academic reading," or both, and why do you think this? 9) If you have other thoughts or ideas about his book, please share them with me.

The following is the reaction one student had to the work.

Daniel Pennac's (2008) *The Rights of the Reader* was a quick, fun, easy read full of clever vignettes and valid points concerning the techniques of teaching children to love or to hate reading. There was much I could relate to when I look back upon my high school reading classes. I can also draw on my own experience giving the gift of reading as a mother and substitute teacher. The only thing that I found difficult to understand were the French phrases and the references to works I have not read nor even heard of. When discussing reading, Pennac refers to making it pleasurable again, like when children listen to bedtime stories. All his references are to novels. One might believe that Pennac is only talking about pleasure rather than academic reading. However, when students read novels for school, reading becomes academic. What Pennac is driving at is that by giving the reader these rights, we can actually make academic reading pleasurable.

The simple ink drawings Quentin Blake produced for the beginning of each chapter assist in creating the mood for the chapter. The scared, bewildered look on the boy's face as his stern-looking father demands of the youngster, "Go to your room and read!" (Pennac, 2008, p. 3) is in stark contrast to the picture at the beginning of chapter three in which the mother is telling a content child a bedtime story. One is full of fear and dread; the other, warmth, comfort and happiness as he enjoys the tale. The picture of the drowning boy tied to a heavy tome in chapter six reminds me of how weighed down I felt plugging away through several Shakespearean plays. Whereas chapter forty-one's drawing of the young teacher with her eager "students" around her, begging to be told stories is easy to relate to. It is just like story time at the end of the day in elementary school. Most children I have had the privilege to teach absolutely loved being read to.

Pennac offers a valid explanation as to why children do not like to read as well as a way to remedy that: reading aloud to children, even those of high school age as illustrated in chapter forty-three. Pennac speaks of reading out loud as a "gift." His metaphor of the parent reading a book to a child as the Trinity sanctifies that intimate act (Pennac, 2008). Parent, book, and child: The three together become something very special, revered, and sacred. I actually found myself crying when I remembered the connection I had with my own children at story time. I am surely grieving its loss. It was cozy, intimate, and secure. The bedtime story was a sacred ritual. I often relived my childhood in the books I shared with my children. I was magically transported back in time as I marveled at Eric Carle's colorful illustrations and Strega Nona's enchanted pasta pot. I am convinced that my children loved reading because I so enjoyed sharing that gift with them.

Religion receives another reference when Pennac (2008) says "Reading matters." That phrase becomes dogmatic. Reading is no longer pleasurable. It is learned much in the way religion is sometimes learned. Religion has rules. It has constraints. It has "musts" and "shoulds" and "don't-you-evers." Some religions do not give the believer any wiggle room. This

is the reason behind the author's reference to dogma. "Reading matters" is constantly drummed into the student's head just as dogma is drilled into the head of the religious follower. Like a preacher in a pulpit, the teacher tells his/her students what to read and when to read it. He or she commands them to think about what they read, dissect it, analyze it, and then write about it. Next, the weary students must be tested on it. What good, after all, is reading a book if there isn't a test that follows? Everything worth learning has a test, like a ball and chain, attached to it. Reading is no longer fun. It becomes a chore, or worse, a cross to bear.

Several points Pennac makes were important to me. "...their reading will get better and better, the more they enjoy the experience" (Pennac, 2008, p. 50). It is no secret that if something is enjoyable, the more a child will want to do it. In my experience, the students who did well in reading enjoyed it. They read on their own. They wrote stories. They raised their hands and volunteered to read. Those students who had difficulty reading tended to either not enjoy it or were indifferent to it. Unfortunately, when forced to read, willing readers can become reluctant readers.

My youngest son loved to read. He is gifted intellectually and musically. He has always been an A student. We read all the time. In order to push reading comprehension, the schools in our area instituted Accelerated Reading. The student chose a book within his or her reading level, denoted by a colored dot on the spine, read the book, and proceeded to take the corresponding AR test. Many of the books my son liked to read were not available as AR books. Consequently, my son became turned off by reading while he was still in elementary school. I believe this lends credence to Pennac's argument about turning kids off to reading by making it into a chore. "Let's go back. Let's start again. And again. And again. So what did you just read? What does it mean?" (Pennac, 2008, p. 38). Reading is no longer pleasurable when the child is constantly questioned and quizzed.

I relished Pennac's explanation of why children fall away from reading. It is because "...they'd forgotten what a book was, what it could offer. They'd forgotten, for example, that a novel tells a story first and foremost. They didn't know a novel is meant to be read like a novel: to satisfy our thirst for narrative" (Pennac, 2008, p. 109). When read as an assignment with book reports and quizzes to follow, the novel is no longer a narrative. It becomes just another homework assignment. It is merely an entry on the "to do" list.

I found myself relating to the reluctant reader in the beginning of the book; the procrastinator with most of the book to read and the book report due in the morning. Most of the time, I enjoyed reading the novels selected for the class to read. I even liked reading on my own. I recall reading *The Pearl* and *To Kill a Mockingbird*. Although they were books and they were required reading, they had interesting plots and well-developed characters. I got lost in *The Outsiders*. S.E. Hinton's book struck a chord with me because I felt like an outsider growing up. I was defiant like Ponyboy and wounded like Johnny. Robert Frost's poem, "Nothing Gold Can Stay," referenced in the book, remains with me to this day. However, not every book pulls me in in the same way. Enter Shakespeare, stage left.

Literary buffs will want to stone me, but I abhorred Shakespeare. I exercised my right not to read much of *King Lear* and *Troilus and Cressida* long before I knew that was my right. Asking a teenager such as I was to read Shakespeare is like asking her to read Homer's *Iliad* in the original Greek. It must be tediously translated into English before it can be read and understood. I admit that Shakespeare was a genius. His sonnets can move me to tears. I feel ashamed that I never truly appreciated the Bard's iambic pentameter, but, honestly, who can understand it? At the risk of committing literary blasphemy, I firmly believe that Shakespeare's

plays would be so much more enjoyable if they could be understood by ordinary lay people like me. Sure, a lot would be lost in the translation if they were put into modern English. But then Shakespeare could be enjoyed because it would finally be *understood*.

Another right that I did not know was mine is the right to be quiet. I exercised this right, too, when I was in a college poetry class. I wish I had also exercised my right not to read. We read "Picture of a Nude in a Machine Shop," by William Carlos Williams. I felt "icky" after reading it, feeling ashamed and embarrassed at what I *thought* the poem was about. It couldn't possibly be about *that*, could it? Sure enough, it was. Masturbation. I was shocked. Fresh out of twelve years in Catholic school and we were talking about masturbation in my college poetry class! Actually, the professor was talking about it. Not surprisingly, many of the other students were invoking their right to be quiet as well. The "discussion" was more like a monologue delivered by the professor, sweat characteristically pooling beneath his armpits as evidenced by the dark spots growing under them. I always thought he was a bit questionable, but now it was confirmed. The poem and the sweaty professor conjure up an image I want sandblasted from my memory. Oh! How I wish I had exercised my right not to read this one!

Other rights I took advantage of were my right to not finish a book when I found it dull or beyond my comprehension; rereading books I enjoyed; and reading anything, even including the back of cereal boxes at the breakfast table. I believe the reader also has the right to get excited about a book, an author that s/he loves, and conversely, to reject a book and all others by an author s/he does not particularly care for.

I believe Pennac is on base with the rights he outlines for the reader. Perhaps if we were to enlist these rights instead of insisting that children read and regurgitate information, more children would want to read. If reading were fun, children would want to join in. Nobody likes to be left out of a good thing. In theory, this sounds good. But in the classroom, it could be difficult to fully institute.

When it comes to the actual practice of these rights in my own classroom, I am not as confident. I realize I will be tied to curriculum and much will be demanded of me and my students. I want to instill the love of reading into the hearts of my students while also ensuring I will continue my employment. That being said, I will give my students every opportunity to read how and where they want to. I will have reading areas set up around the classroom. I will even be open to letting them sit underneath the furniture if that is where they want to read. I will read aloud to them every day and not just out of the basal reader. I will make them "telephones" out of PVC pipe so that they can listen to themselves read out loud while not disturbing their peers who may wish to read quietly. I will provide many different reading materials so that they can read anything they want. Lastly, I will allow children to be quiet if they are uncomfortable reading in front of the class, while encouraging them to read to me or in a small group setting.

*The Rights of the Reader* has given me plenty to think about and to put into practice when I begin teaching reading to a class of students. It made me realize how important it is to be enthusiastic about reading myself so that I can project that attitude to my future learners. I want to give my students "reading as a gift" (Pennac, 2008). I want them to want to read; for pleasure or to satisfy curiosity not just to pass a quiz. I do not want to be a purveyor of reading. I want to be the giver of a gift; I want to be the one who help students out of the "prison of not understanding" (Pennac, 2010, p. 27).

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