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Diverse Learners—Diverse Literacies

Comments from the Editors

Kristin Rainville, Sacred Heart University
Katie Egan Cunningham and Courtney Kelly, Manhattanville College

What do we mean as a field by the term *diverse learners*? What do we mean by *diverse literacies*? Whether you are in a school that is experiencing changing demographics and you want to be able to better respond with powerful practices or you simply want to reach more students as readers, writers, speakers, listeners, and thinkers, this issue offers readers an opportunity to reflect on diversity in all of its forms and how diversity impacts literacy teaching and learning. We hope that the articles in this issue will inspire you to expand your own definitions of diverse learners and diverse literacies.

In this issue of *The Language and Literacy Spectrum*, we are pleased to include the following authors and articles:

**Research-Based Articles**

*Cheryl Dozier and Joy Stephens* explore in their article “‘My grandma is my gold.’: Learning from Young Writers in Belize” the range of ways two teacher educators and preservice teachers engaged with and learned from writers and their families in town and village schools during a faculty led study abroad experience in Belize, Central America. During this experience, the authors drew on three guiding principles: engaging in side-by-side writing communities, strengths-based responsive teaching, and honoring and valuing families.

*Ekaterina Midgette and Zoi A. Philippakos’s* research described in their article “Biliteracy, Spelling, and Writing: A Case Study” demonstrates the significance of dual literacy in early spelling and writing development and supports the New York State Bilingual Progressions Initiative. They provide practical suggestions for using online resources and for employing parental involvement to promote the use of home language in a heterogeneous language classroom.

*Mi-Hyun Chung and Barbara Keckler* explain what a reading teacher learned from working with a group of first-grade struggling readers in a series of shared-book experience classes in their article “Shared-Book Experience Using Science-Themed Books to Develop Scientific Literacy: An Interactive Approach with Struggling Readers”. In this article, the model of the shared-book experience using science-themed books is described, and questions and comments made by the children during the experiences are analyzed and discussed. The findings from the shared-book experience classes suggest that the shared-book experience, using quality science-themed books, may help students to develop scientific literacy skills such as science concepts and enhance reading and science thinking process skills.

*Zoi A. Philippakos and Charles A. MacArthur* discuss in their article “The Use of Genre-Specific Evaluation Criteria for Revision” the importance of genre-specific evaluation criteria in
revision. They explain how genre-evaluation criteria can strengthen students’ understanding about writing for different purposes and audiences, can support their ability to critically read and comprehend, can affect their confidence, and can lead students to independent evaluation.

Voices from the Field
Barbara Boroson provides an overview of the ways in which students on the autism spectrum need support with life literacy before they can reach for content literacy in her article “Autism Spectrum Disorder Today: Life, Literacy, and the Pursuit of Content”. She argues that these “life literacies” are crucial building blocks for basic functioning and necessary benchmarks on the path toward curricular learning.

Valerie Brunow shares her experience as a high school English teacher in “Authentic Literacy Experiences in the Secondary Classroom”. Her article offers a resource for fellow high school teachers considering workshop-based approaches to reach all of the readers in their classrooms through differentiated and authentic learning opportunities.

Book Reviews
Colleen Van Cura Monaco reviews Wood, Kemp, and Plester’s (2014) Text Messaging and Literacy: The Evidence. In addition to a summary of the text and critical analysis, this book review includes information about how researchers and educators in the literacy field might use this content to support instructional decisions in the classroom.

Interview
Maria Paula Ghiso graciously offers her insights on partnering with immigrant communities and ways to honor the diverse identities and literacies of English learners in an interview with Mary Coakley-Fields, Courtney Kelly, and Katherine Egan Cunningham. The transcript is included in this issue and the audiofile can be accessed through The Language and Literacy Spectrum on the NYSRA website.

The Language and Literacy Spectrum will be under the leadership of new editors for the 2017 issue. As always, The Spectrum welcomes your voices and scholarly contributions. We look forward to seeing you November 13-14 in Rochester, NY for the New York State Reading Association Annual Conference. See http://www.nysreading.org for details.

Enjoy!
“My grandma is my gold.” Learning from Young Writers in Belize

Cheryl Dozier and Joy Stephens
University at Albany

ABSTRACT
This article explores the range of ways two teacher educators and preservice teachers engaged with and learned from writers and their families in town and village schools during a faculty led study abroad experience in Belize, Central America. During this experience, the authors drew on three guiding principles: engaging in side-by-side writing communities, strengths-based responsive teaching, and honoring and valuing families. Through intentional and purposeful language, we built relationships and connections around writers’ interests and strengths. We believed instructional practices that empowered writers would also be illuminating for candidates. With clear structures in place to learn from students and a focus on possibilities, writers wrote each day, candidates grew as responsive teachers, and families celebrated their children.

AUTHOR BIOGRAPHIES
Cheryl Dozier, Associate Professor at the University at Albany and a former K-8 classroom teacher, prepares literacy specialists to become responsive teachers. In 2013 Cheryl received the IRA Jerry Johns Outstanding Teacher Educator in Reading Award. Cheryl is the author of Responsive Literacy Coaching and Critical Literacy/Critical Teaching: Tools for Preparing Responsive Teachers with Peter Johnston and Rebecca Rogers. She presents on responsive literacy coaching nationally and internationally. Cheryl can be reached at cdozier@albany.edu.

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Together, Joy and Cheryl lead a study abroad course to Belize, Central America.
“My grandma is my gold.”

This ending from Chris’s writing (all names are pseudonyms), a piece clearly written from his heart, speaks to how much Chris treasured his grandmother. As Chris shared his writing, we (two teacher educators and preservice teachers) learned the power of his grandma’s love and devotion. Chris was one of the thirty young writers we engaged with from town and village schools during two faculty led study abroad experiences in Belize, Central America.

The intentional design of the study abroad course, *Literacy in Social Contexts*, included social, historical, and cultural explorations; seminars; and writing practicum experiences in schools. To prepare for the work in schools, participants began with a community walk through the local town. Participants noted community signs including political banners, advertisements, menus, and health care options. To continue to explore literacies in multiple contexts, the group visited Mayan ruins, journeyed through jungles and caves, hiked medicinal trails, and engaged with howler monkeys and green iguanas at conservation sites. During these experiences, guides shared the centrality of storytelling as well as reading and honoring the environment in Mayan culture. Each of these experiences provided a context for working with learners and understanding students’ connections to their community and to their world. Our emerging insights led to seminar conversations about ways to connect with learners through writing engagements in both the village and town schools each day.

**Framing the Writing Experiences**

For two weeks, Belizean learners wrote about their lives while preservice candidates built relationships and connections around writers’ interests and strengths. Each day candidates, in groups of three, set out to learn from and with young writers in Standards 1 – 6 (equivalent to U.S. grades 3 through 8). In the mornings, tutors wrote with four to six students from the village school. In the afternoons, we moved to the town school to work with small groups of writers.

The practicum concluded with Family Writing Celebrations where learners shared their favorite writing pieces with an audience of family members, friends, teachers, and administrators. As writers read their pieces, their classroom teachers shared their surprise that normally reserved children had the courage to stand up and share their writing in front of a large audience. Administrators heard specific messages students shared for changes in their schools, and families were moved to tears by the power of their children’s language choices.

These moments did not just happen. To create this study abroad practicum experience, we drew on a successful practicum framework from a literacy specialist program in the United States. In both contexts, we began by asking: What writing experiences will engage young writers? At the core, we wanted to start with creating meaningful and relevant learning spaces for writers. We believed what was empowering for young writers would be illuminating for preservice teachers to grow as responsive writing teachers. We then asked: What will we learn from writers through their writing pieces in the short time we are together? How will we engage with families? To answer these questions, we designed writing engagements and processes to celebrate and to gain insights and perspectives into learners’ lives.

Our faculty-led study abroad program, grounded in social constructivism (Vygotsky, 1978; Warford, 2011), drew on three guiding principles: engaging in side-by-side writing communities (Cambourne, 1995; Graves, 2004), strengths-based responsive teaching (Dozier, Johnston, & Rogers, 2006; Dozier & Smit, 2013), and honoring and valuing families
(Kroeger & Lash, 2011; Kugler, 2010; Gonzalez, Moll, & Amanti, 2005). Threaded through all of the principles was an emphasis on intentional and purposeful language (Johnston, 2004). We drew upon these principles to ensure each learner’s success and believed every learner (preservice teachers and young writers) could and would engage. This is not to say the path was always easy. Yet, with clear structures in place to learn from students (both Belizean writers and preservice candidates) and a focus on possibilities, writers wrote each day, candidates grew in their responsive teaching practices, and families celebrated their children.

**Engaging in Side-by-Side Writing Communities**

We created purposeful writing communities where everyone—young writers, preservice teachers, and teacher educators—wrote side by side and shared, laughed, listened, collaborated, asked questions, and took risks as writers. In these side-by-side writing communities, all experimented with words and ideas and came to see writing in new and expansive ways through the feedback and responses of writing community members. These communities started with preservice teachers experiencing writing events first as learners and then as teachers (Dozier & Smit, 2013).

Evening seminars provided this space to engage as writers. Teachers wrote about the stories their hands tell (Graves & Kittle, 2005), personal treasures, a photo essay drawing on the mentor text *The Best Part of Me* (Ewald, 2002), visions for their futures based on the mentor text *Someday* (Spinelli, 2007), and wishes for a school or community change. After writing and sharing their own pieces, teachers then worked to collaboratively develop lesson plans based on these writing events.

To construct their plans, preservice teachers reflected on and examined their language choices to create successful writing spaces for writers. Teachers used both mentor texts and excerpts from their own writing in their planning. Preservice teachers tried on language with one another to use as they conferred with writers (Anderson, 2000). When teachers became stuck while preparing lessons, we asked them to consider the language we used to support them, or language they wished we had used to nurture them as writers. In these ways, preservice teachers benefitted from the parallel processes as they engaged as both writers and writing teachers (Dozier, Johnston, & Rogers, 2006). These writer to writer moments facilitated a deeper understanding of both the craft of writing as well as the vulnerability of the young writers they engaged with each day (Graves, 2004).

As preservice candidates and writers wrote together, we learned about personal treasures, the importance of families, responsibilities learners carry in their homes, cross generational relationships, wishes and dreams for futures, and hopes for a change in schools. Writers wrote about cherished necklaces, beloved blankets, favorite bicycles, much loved family pets, and treasured family members. Many writing moments took our breath away. Kieran wrote about missing his beloved uncle who recently died. Kieran ended his writing piece with his uncle’s words to him, “I miss you, too.” Juliana wrote about personal treasures in the form of a prayer and concluded her writing, “I want everyone to have every material in their bag, not only me. Amen.” When Elvin shared his description of his mom, “She hugs me with all her love,” we stood in awe. In this co-learner experience (Cambourne, 1995), engaging first as writers and then as writing teachers, preservice teachers came to understand how writers navigated both moments of success as well as challenging moments.

When preservice teachers became frustrated or moved to more tentative spaces, we coached and modeled to return to relationship building to re-engage writers (Jones, Clark, &
Enriquez, 2010). When progress seemed to stall or writers were reluctant to engage, we turned the lens on teaching: How can we come to better understand our learners? In what new ways can we support writers? On the third day with writers, we noticed Giana withdraw from conversations and the writing process. One candidate commented, “I just don’t know how to move her into writing.” We modeled questioning and coming to learn what was on Giana’s mind at that particular moment. As we worked to re-engage Giana, we learned Giana was interested in Belizean history and the flag. Drawing on this connection, Giana then wrote about her love for the flag of Belize, a piece she shared to conclude the Family Writing Celebration. Likewise, when Eduardo was reluctant to participate while writing about a personal treasure, he revealed his grandfather, a father figure in his life, had died four days earlier. Upon learning this, we asked Eduardo if he wished to write about his grandfather. Eduardo wrote with great intensity, asking his grandmother and his teacher to verify details in his piece including the exact number of grandchildren and great grandchildren in his family. We learned Eduardo’s grandfather was a working man on a farm who liked to tell stories, a loving family man who read the Bible. When Eduardo read, “His prayer life has loveliness,” we cried, too. Eduardo’s classroom teacher said this writing piece would become a family treasure. As we continued to learn about writers, the writing followed. We observed, we noticed, we asked, we engaged in side-by-side conversations, and writers wrote.

**Strengths-Based Responsive Teaching**

With each writing engagement, we expected preservice candidates to focus on the strengths of each writer and come to imagine the logic of each learner (Dozier, Johnston, & Rogers, 2006). This emphasis on strengths and what writers could do created spaces for young writers to explore their worlds through words on the page. We focused, first, on the content and voices of their writing pieces. Later, we attended to conventions and navigated approximations (Cambourne, 1995). By changing the discourse to strengths first, children learned their strengths were their anchors. Teachers’ careful and strategic noticing and naming helped writers see the beauty of their words and images (Bomer, 2010). After Martin’s tutor noticed Martin’s beautiful images of his love for his mother, Martin then built on this identified strength and continued to weave powerful imagery throughout the rest of his pieces.

Each writing session began with preservice teachers naming students as writers from the outset, “As writers, today we will…” The intentional language chosen helped nurture writers’ identities. As preservice teachers conferred with writers, they first focused on each writer’s beautiful language, articulated details, and how writers engaged their readers. As students shared drafts of their writing pieces, teachers specifically named how writers’ words impacted them as readers: “When you write so passionately about your bicycle, I understand why it means so much to you.” “Your words help me visualize the river and how important the river is to you and your friends.” “The way you explained the need for new windows in your classroom will help your principal understand why this matters to you.” Writers realized their word choices mattered.

Focusing on strengths was often new for preservice teachers and was not always easy, especially when writers resisted. Cole, an energetic, attention-seeking learner, challenged his teachers daily. Every day, we coached candidates to use language that centered on Cole’s writing strengths as they worked to re-imagine Cole first as a writer, not as a child needing discipline. Together, we focused on the beauty and brilliance in Cole’s writing (Bomer, 2010). At the Family Writing Celebration, Cole’s tutors spent time with his mother celebrating his language from a letter to children in America, “When it rains, it rains like a river.” As Cole’s
mom left the celebration, she shared, “Thank you for liking my son. I’m excited to read his writing. He loves words.” Through focusing on Cole’s powerful imagery, Cole’s teachers came to see his strengths as a writer.

**Honoring and Valuing Families**

We designed the Family Writing Celebration to come to know and understand writers and their families in new ways. To open each celebration, the principal shared a short welcome message followed by a video presentation of candid photos of writers and preservice teachers writing together. Next, preservice candidates introduced and recognized each learner. During the introductions, teachers identified specific interests and strengths of the writers with whom they worked. The specificity and language choices of the carefully constructed introductions showed families each writer was a valued member of a writing community.

Writers then shared a favorite writing piece. As the writers began to share, family members took out their devices to capture and record these moments. Cole’s mom sat in the front row to make sure she had an optimal videotaping opportunity. Carl wrote about his grandmother, describing not only her appearance but her love for service and family. After hearing Carl read his piece, his grandmother proclaimed, “That IS who I am.” Before reading his piece, Martin said, “When my mom hears this she will cry.” And she did.

After all students shared, tutors connected with families over food and conversation. Conversations initially focused on student writing pieces, and later expanded to family stories. Martin’s final line “And she will cry” took on a whole new meaning when his mom shared that Martin stayed by her bedside and refused to take her off life support for six months. In other conversations, we learned Leonora’s grandmother was a teacher, Omar’s aunt told us his mom had recently died and he adored his baby cousin, Chris’s aunt attended while his family worked at their jewelry shop. Each of these stories helped us re-imagine learners through the eyes of their families. As families came to see their children in new and more expansive ways so did we. Honoring and valuing families extended to planning for the Family Writing Celebration. During the first year, we learned to notify families in advance of the celebration. Therefore, prior to our second trip, we confirmed dates and times with school administration. We also learned the importance of formality so we printed invitations to send to families on the first day we worked with the children. When preservice teachers read these formal invitations with their writers, Martin looked up and exclaimed, “Special envelopes? You gave us an envelope!” Ceremony mattered to Raould, too. Through his writing, Raould shared he wanted to become a builder, just like his dad. We learned how much his dad’s presence mattered when Raould held up the entire family celebration until his dad arrived. As Kugler (2010) reminds us, we have much to learn from families, “We do have hopes and dreams for our children, but no one ever asked us before” (p. 32). We asked.

**Learning from Administrators and Classroom Teachers**

Both principals read the letters students wrote about possible changes for their schools. In addition to highlighting changes, children also offered solutions to the issues they addressed. Both principals told students they planned to share the letters with faculty and community members at an upcoming school community forum. We learned the work with writers moved beyond the boundaries of a two week time frame when the principals said they appreciated hearing about issues from the students’ perspectives. One commented, “I never knew they saw things this way.” In both schools, children learned their voices mattered.
In one school, the assistant principal took detailed notes of introductions during the Family Writing Celebration. In conversation after the celebration, she shared her plans to read her notes to the faculty, emphasizing the specificity with which candidates recognized each writer. By sharing the introductions, she hoped classroom teachers would come to re-imagine writers.

Throughout the practicum, administrators visited the small groups of writers and witnessed shifts in learners who were often reluctant to write and share in a classroom setting. “How did you get them to write like that?” they asked. This question led to a request to present our work with the entire faculty during an afternoon professional development session. During this professional development, we discussed our guiding principles, engaged teachers in two of the writing events we used with learners, and modeled and explored the power of language. During the session, we also shared the video presentation of the young writers engaged in side by side writing. After watching the video, we asked teachers what they noticed. Teachers commented on “learners’ engagement, intense listening, creativity, and focused interest.” We learned of possible transfer spaces when several teachers asked specific questions about writing events and borrowed the mentor texts we used during the writing sessions.

Future Considerations

From both years, we learned just how challenging strengths-based responsive teaching was for preservice candidates. Candidates shared how much easier it was to focus on children’s errors than to notice and highlight student strengths. In the second year, we were more mindful of our language choices as we described learners’, schools’, and community strengths. Realizing how entrenched deficit narratives can be, we will continue to immerse candidates in strengths-based teaching through seminar discussions and new course readings emphasizing strengths.

In the past two years, we have begun to build relationships and will continue to reflect on ways to engage with families in more expansive ways. During future trips, we plan to engage with families from the first days, just as we do during our practicum experiences in the United States. Since we eat lunch at the schools, we have the opportunity to talk with families each day when they pick up their children at lunch. As we ate more lunches at the school during the second year, we learned how valuable this time could be when former families stopped by to chat when they saw us at the school. Responding to questions during professional development sessions, we have realized the need to explicitly address how the writing the children engage in over the two weeks connects to Belize National Standards. We continue to review the Standards to show possibilities for engaged writers and alignment with standards. Questions such as How did you get students to write like this? guide us and inspire for continued collaboration in the schools.

As facilitators, we reconnected daily and asked: Are we staying true to our commitment to learn from learners - both Belizean writers and preservice candidates? In what ways do our language choices support both teachers and young writers? How can we continue to connect with and learn from families in more expansive ways? We will remain mindful of these questions, and like Kugler (2010), we will continue to ask.

Conclusion

When writing is engaging and originates from what students know, possibilities are endless. Side-by-side writing, strengths-based responsive teaching, and honoring families mattered each and every moment we worked with young writers. Preservice candidates came to recognize the power of naming students as writers, building identities (Johnston, 2004), and
positioning students as active participants in their learning. Preservice candidates left Belize recognizing how challenging, yet rewarding, responsive teaching can be and realizing how much we can learn from the stories of writers entrusted in our care.

References


Biliteracy, Spelling, and Writing: A Case Study

Ekaterina Midgette, College of Saint Rose
Zoi A. Philippakos, University of North Carolina at Charlotte

ABSTRACT
The overall purpose of this case study is to examine biliteracy and its effects on a young child’s orthographic and writing growth. The analysis of the kindergartener’s spelling development and compositional growth in reference to both language systems indicates that biliteracy had a positive effect on the student’s acquisition of English orthography and fostered a well-balanced development of composition skills in both languages. The article provides suggestions that promote biliteracy in both the classroom and home settings and encourages teachers to engage in instructional practices that value linguistic diversity. Online resources for classroom practice are also included.

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Ekaterina Midgette, Ph.D is Associate Professor of Literacy Education at the College of Saint Rose, Albany, NY. She has taught English as a Foreign and Second Language in the United States and Russia. Her research interests include students’ cognitive difficulties in argumentative writing and writing development of biliterate children. She can be reached at midgette@strose.edu.

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Introduction
Bilingual children comprise one of the fastest growing populations in the increasingly diverse world of public education (Federal Interagency Forum on Child and Family Statistics, 2008). The number of bilingual students nearly doubled in the last 30 years and amounted to 21% of all school-age children in 2009 (Planty, et al., 2009). Research suggests that learning to read may come easier to fully bilingual children due to enhanced linguistic ability (i.e., word and
syntactic awareness) and skill transfer between languages, particularly for languages using similar writing systems (Bialystok, McBride-Chang, & Luk, 2005).

Recently, the New York State Bilingual Common Core Initiative (2014-2015) put a renewed emphasis on the value of second language learners’ linguistic knowledge and on the active use of students’ home languages to meet the Common Core Language Standards. The New Language Progressions (2014-2015) provides a framework for teachers to deliver the content at five different levels of language proficiency in response to students’ linguistic needs. In many cases, students are encouraged to choose between responding to the linguistic demands of the academic tasks in their home language or in the new language (i.e., English). However, many approaches suggested in the Progressions (e.g., use of cognates, phonetic similarities, responses in home language) prove to be problematic for teachers of the exponentially growing multilingual student population of New York State. Since students often come with home languages outside the Indo-European language family, there may be multiple languages represented in the same classroom; therefore, students cannot be accommodated in their first language due to lack of teacher knowledge of the various languages. Nevertheless, the question of what constitutes effective instructional approaches directed toward the multi-lingual student population is as topical as ever. The purpose of this article is to describe the case of a female biliterate learner who began exploring English orthography upon entering kindergarten in the United States and argue that literacy instruction should actively engage the knowledge that biliterate students bring to school, as this incoming knowledge can support students’ literacy growth in their new language.

**Background**

For clarity purposes, it is important to define the terms bilingualism and biliteracy. Biliteracy or dual literacy refers to the capacity of an individual to read and write in two languages, whereas bilingualism occurs when an individual has high oral proficiency in both languages. Although the literacy development of bilingual students in their new language is well documented in research literature, a relatively small number of studies explored the biliteracy of young children in the United States (Bauer, 2000; Bauer, 2009; Hu & Commeyras, 2008).

Biliteracy has been associated with increased literacy achievement and greater cognitive flexibility, both of which promote English schooling achievement (Proctor, 2010). As such, students who develop strong reading comprehension strategies and are motivated to read in a heritage language demonstrate the same skills and attitudes to reading in English (Jimenez, Garcia, & Pearson, 1995; 1996). Biliterate students also have higher scores on cognitive ability tests such as concept-formation tasks (Hamers & Blanc, 2000). Interestingly, studies in Spanish-English bilingualism show that biliterate Spanish speaking students have significantly higher academic achievement than the students with only oral proficiency in Spanish or little or no skills in Spanish (Haneda, 2009). In all language groups, the academic performance of children with dual literacy in reading, writing and spelling is the same or better than that of their monolingual peers (Cummins, 2000).

In the case of emergent writers, evidence suggests that students develop their spelling and writing skills without confusion between languages (Edelsky & Jilbert, 1985; Gort, 2006). Moreover, a facilitative effect occurs between alphabetic languages in early writing skills, such as, letter sound knowledge, use of upper and lower-case letters, adding a period at the end of a sentence and spacing between words (Gort, 2006; Jared et al, 2011). Spelling skills in one language allow cross-linguistic growth of phonological awareness, morphological analysis, and
knowledge of graphemic conventions (Francisco, et al, 2006). In the case of logographic (e.g.,
Korean) and alphabetic (e.g., English) biliteracy, essential writing concepts are used cross-
linguistically, such as understanding that writing is different from drawing, writing carries a
message to a recipient, different types of text are used for different purposes and that knowledge
stemming from both the heritage language and L2 sources can be used in writing to build rich
content (Shaguoury, 2009; Priven, 2010; Bauer & Arazi, 2011).

Unfortunately, little or no attention is given to the development and retention of
biliteracy, with the exception of some successful Spanish/English bilingual programs (Serna,
2009; Lindholm-Leary, 2014). In this article we describe the case of a female biliterate learner
who explored English orthography upon entering kindergarten in the United States. With this
examination we attempt to address the following questions:

1. How does literacy knowledge in one language support orthographic knowledge
   in another language?
2. How does literacy knowledge in one language support writing development in
   another language?

Further, we discuss implications and recommendations as these relate to classroom instruction
and home-to-school connections.

**Participant and Context**

At the time of the study, Vikka was a five-year old, Russian-English bilingual student
who attended full-time public kindergarten. She arrived in the United States a month prior to her
enrollment in kindergarten after a two-and-a-half year stay in Russia. Her father is a monolingual
English speaker and her mother speaks English and Russian fluently. Vikka exhibited a native
oral proficiency in both languages due to her mother’s use of Russian in oral communication
with Vikka and her father’s use of English. Vikka, during her 2-year stay in Russia attended a
pre-school program where she acquired foundational literacy skills in the Russian language.
Specifically, she learned letter sound relationships, letter formation, the spelling of monosyllabic
words and a limited number of high frequency phonetically regular and irregular multisyllabic
words. She also learned that writing served communication purposes and began to create simple
texts. When she entered Kindergarten in the U.S., she enjoyed reading and discussing Russian
books with her mother and communicated via writing with her Russian relatives in the absence
of structured Russian literacy instruction at home or through a heritage community. Particularly,
Vikka independently read kindergarten and first grade level texts in Russian several times a
week. She actively participated in daily read-alouds of fiction and non-fiction texts. Vikka also
used her knowledge of Russian written expression to exchange notes with her mother and write
cards and emails to her grandparents in Russia. Overall, the student’s disposition towards reading
and writing was positive.

Upon entering the U.S., Vikka attended a full-day kindergarten program in a Title 1
school. The school did not participate in the Common Core State Standards initiative at this time.
The class consisted of 26 children, 3 of them linguistically diverse, including the participating
student. The classroom was staffed with a teacher and a full-time special education
paraprofessional. The teacher encouraged drawing, scribbling and early writing during free-
writing activities and structured writing experiences with the use of prompts, sentence starters
and simple organizational frames. A print rich environment that facilitated self-sponsored
literacy learning was present in the room: students had the English alphabet on their desks, word
wall words were added daily and organized in alphabetical order, and the classroom library was
stocked with leveled books of various genres, as well as with wide array of wordless picture books. The school did not provide a program in bilingualism or biliteracy.

When Vikka entered Kindergarten, there was a concern on her family’s side about her ability to cope with English orthography, since there are considerable differences between English and Russian orthographic systems. Russian orthography is relatively regular, as it contains many patterns that follow a direct phoneme-grapheme correspondence (Kerek & Niemi, 2009). The English orthographic system belongs to a family of deeper orthographies. Compared to Russian orthography, the choice of individual graphemes is more dependent on larger orthographic units (i.e., sensitivity to orthographic context) even in monosyllabic words. In addition, its syllable boundaries in multisyllabic words are more ambiguous, making accurate encoding of phonological units in both monosyllabic and multisyllabic words a challenging task (Seymour, Aro, & Arskine, 2003).

**Data Sources**

The student’s responses to in-class writing tasks are the main data for this analysis. These writing samples were collected by the teacher in a course of seven months (i.e., from September to April) and sent home for parents’ review.

**Analysis.** The samples were examined based on the inclusion or exclusion of principles of correctness of English orthography using the classification used in the seminal work of Gentry (1982). Spelling refers to the accurate encoding of words; the term accurate is defined based on each language’s linguistic and graphophonemic system. In the case of English, the analysis by Gentry (1982), who built on Read’s study (1971), suggests five developmental stages. Figure 1 shows these stages of spelling development. The first three stages enumerated by Gentry correspond to the “Words their Way” stages of spelling development (Bear, Invernizzi, Templeton, & Johnston, 2008), (see Figure 1). The “Words their Way” stages are Emergent, Letter Name Alphabetic, Within Word Pattern, Syllable Juncture and Derivational Relations. In this analysis we examined Vikka’s spelling and commented using the guidelines of spelling stages.

*Figure 1. Stages of spelling development (Gentry, 1982; Bear, et al., 2008)*
The student’s one sentence responses and compositions (i.e., connected texts) were analyzed for writing focus (e.g., does a piece contain a “big idea” and consistently pertains to the same topic?), writing organization (e.g., does a text adhere to a particular genre?) and spelling accuracy (e.g., what stage of orthographic development best describes orthographic patterns found in the student’s spelling?).

A look at Vikka’s spelling. Early in her school work, Vikka showed evidence of the transfer of knowledge between Russian and English. When asked to write the English alphabet, Vikka would say her ABCs in English. Figure 2 indicates that she utilized her phonemic knowledge of the English alphabet to represent letter sounds with Cyrillic letters used in the Russian alphabet. Specifically, the fourth letter in the first line is the letter /д/ of the Russian alphabet that makes the sound /d/, and Vikka used this Russian character for the English letter D. Similarly, the sixth letter on the first line is the letter /ф/, corresponding to the sound /f/, which she used to represent the English letter F. She used a Cyrillic letter Р, pronounced in Russian as /r/, to represent the English letter R. Although not an actual writing sample, this indicates that the student did not begin English spelling from the Pre-Communicative or Emergent stage (Gentry, 1982; Bear, Invernizzi, Templeton & Johnston, 2008), and that she had already developed an understanding that letters are symbols that represent sounds. Therefore, Vikka was able to accurately record the ABCs in sequence, using Cyrillic letters instead of the ones of the English alphabet.

Figure 2. Alphabet writing in September

Within a month, Vikka began to only use English letters to represent the sounds in English words, and she began to differentiate the application of the Cyrillic alphabet. Figure 3 shows her writing and spelling after a month of schooling (October). Even though syntax was still developing, this sample indicates that within a month, Vikka was able to make explicit connections between letters and sounds and appears to understand when to use what type of letters. In response to the in-class discussion about families and communities and the teacher’s invitation to label family members, the student wrote the title “Apple Dow Not Fol” in English and proceeded to represent her family tree. Interestingly, she differentiated the language system used based on the origin of the family members: she wrote the names of her family members in Russia in the Russian language, but she used English to record the names of relatives living in the United States.

By November of the school year, she represented all the letters of the alphabet and produced a coherent message as Figure 4 shows. She accurately wrote all the letters of the
English Alphabet, both uppercase and lowercase, and proceeded to record the ABC song. In the line “now I lond my ABC’s next time won’t you sing with me” she has

Figure 3. Family Tree

correctly spelled several words. At this point in the school year, Vikka used but confused the use of the apostrophe. She had not yet mastered contractions or r-controlled vowels (lond for “learned”). She understood that I needed to be capitalized, but she did not consistently capitalize letters at the beginning of sentences. Vikka seemed to have a good understanding of high-frequency words and directionality. Although previously she had demonstrated her understanding that sentences end with a period, she chose to conclude her sentence with a heart instead.

By December, when asked to free-write in class, Vikka communicated a clear message to the reader (see Figure 5) that reflected her understanding of a temporal sequence: “We will go to the restaurant after our chores.” Vikka did not use the uppercase at the beginning of her sentence, but she had a period at the end. Also, the words were appropriately spaced and she attempted to keep them in a linear form, even if she did not use a lined paper. The word restaurant, which is a multisyllabic word, is easy for the reader to decipher even though its spelling is invented.
Figure 4. Alphabet Song

She is using but confusing the spelling of the word “chores” and seems to use but confuse r-controlled vowels (after for “after” and or for “our”). In her message Vikka communicates her intention and her plans for the day.

Figure 5. Restaurant

The participant’s messages in January were longer and demonstrated her ability to present more than one idea. Her writing (see Figure 6) in response to the prompt “Friendship” was focused on one topic and all her sentences related to it: *I have a big dinosaur that is named Alexis that has seventeen friends and she likes to play and I love her very very much.* Vikka seemed to use but confuse words with final e (VC-e) and overgeneralized the use of the apostrophe (Ha’s, fren’s, Like’s). Further, she used but confused the r-controlled vowels (Har,
varree) and she was starting to attempt to use inflected endings (e.g., naymd). Compared to her previous samples, the writing is longer. Even though she was manipulating more complex ideas, words, and syntactic demands, the student did not omit words and composed a message that was syntactically coherent. Capitalization, on the other hand, continued to be challenging for the student.

Figure 6. Alexis

By February (see Figure 7) Vikka produced a lengthier piece in response to “I am” and “I like” sentence starters: I am thinking about dinosaurs eating people. I like to run. I like to make silly faces. I am sitting. I am staring. She had learned how to spell the word “dinosaur” since it was a topic she enjoyed reading about at the time, and her fascination with them was reflected in her writing. She correctly used the –ing suffix; however, she had not captured the doubling principle, yet. The student represented plural (faceis) phonetically and also used but confused vowel teams (eeting, pepl). Focus was not present in that sample. Even though her first sentence began with the message about dinosaurs, the rest of the sentences did not connect with the topic.

Figure 7. Dinosaurs Eating People

By April, Vikka produced texts that would satisfy the writing purposes of the Common Core State Standards for Kindergarten (CCSS, 2010). She successfully composed informative/explanatory texts, opinion pieces and narratives with several events in a logical
order. Her work indicates an increase in her ability to logically and sequentially present ideas (see Figure 8) and support her thoughts and opinion (see Figure 9). Her composing and exploration of different genres persists in both languages.

*Figure 8. Story Sample: Eliza’s Birthday*

Eleza’s birthday is coming soon. Mom! Let’s get a dinosaur! Eleza opened the present after lunch Eleza saw a card when she touched it the dinosaur turned real. Eleza and the Dinosaur lived happy the end!!

*Figure 9. Persuasive Sample: Pocahontas*

I like Pocahontas because she wanted everything to be peaceful and no fighting war.
In response to the teacher’s prompt to write a story with three sequential events, Vikka wrote, *My favorite fairies are musa tekna and flora I like musa because she never gives up. I like tekna because tekna is very nice I like flora because she is caring* (Figure 10). The analysis of Vikka’s composition skills is consistent with research on bilingual students that indicates an advantage of a bilingual learner’s working memory in writing over a typical monolingual learner’s (Abu-Rabia & Siegel, 2002; Ransdell, Arecco, & Levy, 2001). Vikka did not omit words in this lengthy composition, had no fragmented sentences, and her message was fully-developed and logical. In that sample, the student’s thoughts were complete and her statements were followed by an explanation with the use of the conjunction *because*. However, with stronger composition skills, Vikka’s spelling appeared to digress and she was still inconsistent in the use of VC-e pattern (*lik*, and *givs*). In terms of conventions, she did not use capitals to indicate the beginning of a sentence or proper nouns, and also omitted several periods at the end of sentences.

*Figure 10. My Favorite Fairy*

At home, Vikka wrote the same story in Russian when prompted by her mother (Figure 11): *Мои любимые феи муза тэкта и флора мне нравится потому что она не сдается мне нравится тэкна потому что она добрая мне нравится флора потому что она заботливая*. Comparative analysis of the two compositions yields an interesting insight into the literacy development of this bilingual learner. Vikka followed directionality rules moving from top to bottom and from left to right and her words are properly spaced in both documents. However, Vikka’s orthographic and composition skills in the two languages did not follow a linear progression. The student’s newly acquired understanding of English orthography had begun to negatively impact the consistent representation of Russian graphemes and the use of conventions. Vikka used two Russian letters *йа* to represent a Russian diphthong *я /ya/* in the word *любимая /lyubimaya/*, while representing the diphthong *ю /yu/* correctly and representing *я* accurately in the same phonetic position in the word *заботливая /zabotlivaya/*. English had influenced her letter formation in Russian as evidenced by her writing the Russian letter *И* as the
English letter N based solely on their visual similarity, as they do not correspond to analogous sounds (/ē/ and /n/, respectively). In terms of conventions, Vikka’s developing understanding of the appropriate use of upper-case and lower-case letters in English had not transferred to her writing in Russian. She used capital letters in the same way she had at the beginning of the year. Her punctuation, on the other hand, transferred to this sample of writing, as evident from a period at the end of her message.

This analysis indicates that after seven months of formal literacy instruction, Vikka’s new knowledge of English orthography influenced her Russian spelling in a very similar way to that which Russian had affected her English spelling at the beginning of the year. However, whereas her learning transferred from Russian orthography to English orthography gave her a “jump start” in acquiring the new orthographic system, the transfer of knowledge from English to Russian in the absence of formal instruction in Russian orthography could be characterized, for the most part, as negative.

*Figure 11. Мои любимые феи (My Favorite Fairy)*

**Growth across time: Connections.** A look at Vikka’s spelling as it corresponds to the stages of spelling development (Gentry, 1982; Bear, &, Templeton, 1998) suggests that Vikka was able to use her knowledge of Russian to understand the principles of English orthography and experiment with different patterns through trial and error. More importantly, this knowledge seems to have supported her in moving through the orthographic stages at a quick rate.

Vikka’s composition skills in English undoubtedly advanced her writing in Russian; however, her spelling development in Russian was compromised by her progress in English. An examination of the writing samples across time suggests an increase in length and complexity of ideas, as well as an increased understanding about text structure. Her writing also indicates a cross-linguistic transfer in the use of conventions, such as spacing and punctuation. However, Vikka’s representation of phoneme-grapheme correspondences in Russian regressed from lack of formal instruction, and as research on bilingual children’s early literacy skills indicates, from lack of rich exposure to phonemic awareness practices in the non-dominant language (Bialystok, Luk, & Kwan, 2005).
Implications and Discussion

The purpose of this paper was to examine the role of bilingualism through the analysis of a young, bilingual learner’s spelling and writing development. Overall, Vikka’s writing and orthographic development through her kindergarten year is a story of success. Although the school did not participate in the Common Core State Standards initiative at the time, by the end of the year she met all of the expectations outlined in CCSS for Kindergarten Language and Writing (CCSS.ELA-Literacy.L.K.1-2; CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.K.1-3). Her literacy in another language most likely enhanced her ability to make connections with the language system of the new context. After all, it is suggested that biliterate students who enter the monolingual environment of an average public school in the U.S. have an advantage of knowing a lot about the functions of written language that they can transfer to L2 literacy (Schechter & Bayley, 2002). In the act of composing, they also enjoy access to diverse funds of knowledge through two languages and cultures (Freeman & Freeman, 2001).

Instructional Approaches That Can Help Us Support Biliterate Students

These research findings have strong classroom implications. Although it may not be feasible to interact with every child in their own language to support successful literacy development, there is a compelling need for literacy professionals to build a supportive environment that promotes a child’s diverse linguistic background as a gift for successful literacy development.

Several instructional approaches could be employed to support the literacy growth of biliterate students in a monolingual classroom. Specifically, building strong school-to-home connections prove to be effective (Shagoury, 2009). Bilingual aides or English-speaking family members can be actively involved and talk with the children about their written work in their home language and allow them to share stories that they cannot yet tell in English. Writing in L1 with the inclusion of pictures can be a great conversation starter that allows a bilingual adult to engage children in shared (i.e., recording children’s ideas and demonstrating how writing in English works) and interactive writing (i.e., taking turns in building a written message in English, working both on composition and orthography). See the Appendix for helpful websites for recruiting bilingual volunteers and establishing bilingual communication in a multilingual classroom.

The availability and active use of fairy tales that are shared cross-culturally (e.g., Jack and the Beanstalk, The Boy Who Cried Wolf) provide a context for the positive transfer between literacies (Bauer & Arazi, 2011). Many fairy-tales can be accessed on Unite for Literacy and TumbleBooks websites (Appendix). English Language Learners who are familiar with the characters and sequence of events of the fairy tale already have a considerable amount of knowledge about the story grammar that can be used to accelerate their writing and orthographic development in L2.

Further, a teacher could help students build their own contextualized bilingual dictionary of words and expressions through discussion of pictures in cross-cultural or multilingual stories. These newly acquired words could be used to create single-sentence responses to a story through an interactive approach. Students could be encouraged to write those responses in their heritage language and then work with the teacher to capture what the child is trying to share in an English sentence. The activity can gradually be expanded into summary writing using simple language frames to build on the student’s knowledge of story grammar. The same instructional sequence
can be applied as a response to structurally simple informational texts, such as life-cycles (Matera & Gerber, 2008).

Interactive journals are another opportunity for biliterate children to work on their writing skills in both languages. This can be done via the development of interaction and a communicative relationship with the teacher (Perrota, 1994). Communicating about everyday activities or events in school through daily journal writing gives children the opportunity to combine the use of drawings, native language, and English writing to experiment and express ideas. Further, this type of interaction provides teachable moments and modeling opportunities on the use of conventional writing. Similarly, a writer’s workshop that emphasizes a process approach to writing with opportunities for teacher-student and peer interaction about content allows a biliterate child to build vocabulary and develop knowledge of text structures that can be transferred between languages (Tuyay, 1999). Culturally Authentic Pictorial Lexicon and Google Translate online tools (Appendix) can be utilized to facilitate the aforementioned instructional routines.

English learners face a number of constraints when composing in their new language (Booth-Olson, Scarcella, & Matuschniak, 2013; 2015). Those constraints can be cognitive (Short & Fitzsimmons, 2007), linguistic (e.g., use of academic language), communicative (e.g., audience awareness and engagement), contextual constraints (e.g., culture-specific context), textual (e.g., textual demands that are genre-specific) and affective (e.g., motivation to write) (Biancarosa & Snow, 2006). Considering all the challenges, the use of writing instruction based on explicit teacher modeling and gradual release of responsibility may be necessary for English learners to develop an understanding and a better sense of writing in their new language. Strategy instruction in writing is an approach that is based on explicit teaching of procedures to scaffold learners’ writing competence and affect their motivation (Graham, 2006). For example, students may be taught a story-grammar strategy and the elements of a story for planning, writing, and illustrating their stories.

**Home-to-School Collaboration That Can Help Us Support Biliterate Students**

Parental involvement is essential in both assisting biliterate students’ writing and orthographic development and also building their self-confidence to continue to read and write in both languages (Haneda, 2009). *The Alliance for the Advancement of Heritage Language* database contains helpful resources for encouraging parental involvement in education of biliterate students (Appendix). This online database contains numerous community, university and K-12 school heritage language program profiles to facilitate the exchange of resources and ideas among heritage language schools across the United States. Parents who reside in areas that provide no or a limited access to heritage language resources can find a private, public or a community based school that specializes in promoting biliteracy and bilingualism in a particular language to connect children who share the same linguistic background by skype and email. The database also provides the opportunity to learn from other parents about most effective ways to support biliteracy at home and in the classroom and share teaching resources. *Everything ESL* is another useful website that provides information on starting a bilingual parent volunteer program to support students’ biliterate development (Appendix).

Conducting case studies of a bilingual learner’s writing development or simply keeping a portfolio of a child’s writing samples in both languages can be a motivating factor for bilingual students and their parents (Freeman & Freeman, 2001). Teacher-parent conferences provide an opportunity to present a portfolio to parents, get their insight into the heritage language
influence, and invite parents to be meaningfully involved in their child’s literacy experiences at school and at home. Any information the teacher elicits from parents about their own literacy practices at home and their ways to develop and maintain their child’s home language reading and writing is helpful in understanding what children bring to their literacy experiences in the second language. Understanding what the children write in school allows parents to also support students in generating ideas for future writing and writing together on related topics or in same genres in their heritage language. Most importantly, parents need to see the importance of continuing to read to their children in L1 and sharing stories from their heritage culture, as this rich cultural information becomes an invaluable source for content generation in writing. Encouraging L1 literacy has the potential to instill a sense of pride and accomplishment in parents who have to put considerable effort and time in building their child’s literacy skills and ultimately facilitates a child’s well-rounded literacy and social development. Therefore, a home-school connection should be encouraged.

**Limitations and Future Research**

This paper calls educators’ attention to literacy knowledge that young biliterate students such as Vikka bring to classroom and provides suggestions for instruction and home-to-school connection. Additional research could examine the benefits of such collaborations on students’ learning across subject areas and age groups. This is a case study and it does not allow generalizations. Future studies could examine early biliteracy development of a larger number of participants and potentially compare findings between the participants with biliteracy in alphabetic and non-alphabetic languages.

**References**


Appendix  Online Resources

There are a number of ways to support the reading, writing and spelling of biliterate children in a multilingual classroom, while emphasizing the value of continual literacy growth in their home language. Below we listed online resources that can be used with bilingual and biliterate learners with various linguistic backgrounds.

- **Everything ESL**: This site not only allows teachers to look at different websites, books, and other resources for use with bilingual children, but also contains articles that offer practical advice on supporting bilingual and biliterate children, such as on how to start a bilingual parent volunteer program. [http://www.everythingesl.net](http://www.everythingesl.net)

- **The Literacy Center Education Network**: Free practice work sheets that assist children in both reading and writing in multiple languages are accessible on this site. The center also provides information on the latest research about meeting Common Core requirements for educating bilingual learners. [http://www.literacycenter.net](http://www.literacycenter.net)

- **Culturally Authentic Pictorial Lexicon**: This website offers images demonstrating meanings of words and concepts (including cultural notions) in English and many other languages, making it easier for teachers to understand the cultural context of students’ writing and assist students with translation of key words in writing prompts. [http://capl.washjeff.edu/index.php](http://capl.washjeff.edu/index.php)

- **Google Translate**: There are many uses for this online tool, such as making and sending notes home to non-English speaking parents to seek their support with the student’s biliterate development. It could be used in a classroom to encourage biliterate learners to verify the translation of their home language writing to English and then recreate the piece in English using their own knowledge of the English vocabulary and spelling. [https://translate.google.com](https://translate.google.com)

- **Unite for Literacy**: This site provides biliterate students an opportunity to work with dual-language stories from a multilingual online library for young learners. Teachers can use this resource to build story grammar knowledge and cross-linguistic transfer skills through literature analysis. [http://www.uniteforliteracy.com](http://www.uniteforliteracy.com)

- **TumbleBooks**: This collection includes animated talking picture books, chapter books, non-fiction titles and graphic novels in English, French and Spanish. This collection is rich in educational resources such as lesson plans, quizzes, educational
games and puzzles related to language skills. This site is accessible by subscription or from a local NYS library website.


- The Alliance for the Advancement of Heritage Language database was built to facilitate the exchange of resources and ideas among heritage language schools across the United States. Teachers can use the search function to find a private or public school or a community based school near you that specializes in promoting biliteracy and bilingualism in a particular language to connect students via Skype and share teaching resources. www.cal.org/heritage
ABSTRACT
This paper will explain what a reading teacher learned from working with a group of first-grade struggling readers in a series of shared-book experience classes. The shared-book experience approach used a variety of science-themed books that were aligned with the first-grade curriculum and appropriate for beginning readers. Considering the readers’ ages, the reading teacher used “big books,” enlarged versions of the original books devised for early childhood reading classes. Integrating reading with science may increase science instruction time in the overcrowded elementary curriculum, and more importantly, can develop both reading skills and scientific knowledge, satisfying the learning standards for both areas (Froschauer, 2011; Olson and Gee, 1991). Other studies (Padilla, Muth, and Padilla, 1991; Rutherford and Ahlgren, 1990) agree that reading and science thinking process skills interrelate; and both require social, interactive, and communication skills to develop. In this article, the model of the shared-book experience using science-themed books is described, and questions and comments made by the children during the experiences are analyzed and discussed. The findings from the shared-book experience classes suggest that the shared-book experience, using quality science-themed books, may help students to develop scientific literacy skills such as science concepts and enhance reading and science thinking process skills.

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According to two recent Census Bureau reports (Census Bureau Reports, June 25 2015; Nov 03 2015), the United States has become a more diverse society in terms of ethnicity, gender, age, disability, and so forth, and in the New York metropolitan area, about 200 different languages are spoken at home by one third of the population. According to Westby and Torres-Valasquez (2000), there is some indication that children from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds may exhibit difficulty in learning reading, math, and science due to the lack of connection between what is taught at school and what they have experienced. Therefore, teachers must be equipped with pedagogies that can help different levels of readers who bring various types of background knowledge to the class. In addition to these demographic changes in the classroom, teachers are asked to meet the requirements set up by new standards such as Common Core Learning Standards (CCLS). In such standards, emphasis is given to teaching text structure and comprehension of informational texts as in history, social studies, science, and technology texts (Common Core Standards Initiatives, 2016; New York State Education Department, 2010).

The current emphasis on content-area literacy instruction is not new; it has always been an integral part of literacy education. For example, one proposed way of teaching science in the early years is to integrate the reading and science curriculum. This integration has been considered a means to increase science instruction time in the overcrowded elementary curriculum, which usually emphasizes reading and mathematics instruction (Plummer & Kuhlman, 2008). Combining reading and science makes sense because reading and science process skills interrelate (Padilla, Muth, & Padilla, 1991). Science is a social activity that incorporates human values and communication skills, including language or literacy skills (Rutherford & Ahlgren, 1991). Moreover, not only does integrating reading and science benefit students in gaining scientific knowledge and skills, but it also helps in learning how to read fact-based expository texts (Froschauer, 2011; Olson and Gee, 1991). According to Froschauer (2011), teachers can help children develop literacy skills by engaging them in reading, writing, and interactive discussion. In effect, using science-themed books during a reading class encourages talking about science, while enhancing both ability of reading expository texts and science process skills.

Scientific literacy refers to one’s ability to understand scientific vocabulary, concepts, and processes. Incorporating scientific knowledge, skills, and habits of mind enables people to understand and reflect on many of the ideas, claims, and events they encounter in everyday life (American Association for the Advancement of Science, 1990/2009). Today, there are growing calls for recognizing the importance of elementary science instruction (See National Science Teachers Association, 2011; American Association for the Advancement of Science, 2011). Research (See Gelman & Brenneman, 2004) emphasizes the importance of science process skills, the connection to the experiences, and the roles of communication or literacy in early childhood science education. Consequently, children need to be actively involved in learning science when they are young because it will help them develop domain-specific knowledge and skills. Despite the acknowledged or accepted importance of early exposure to science, the methods that should be used to teach scientific literacy through classroom practices and the student learning outcomes that should result are debatable (Smith, Loughran, Berry, & Dimitrakopoulos, 2012).

This paper presents a study that explored how using science-themed books in shared-book experience classes may influence children’s scientific literacy. The instructional approach in this study was the shared-book experience, which encouraged struggling readers’ oral
communication in a social learning context. During the classes, children’s comments and questions were collected to examine, because the data shed light on the students' meaning-making process. The purpose of this study was to find out the kinds of children’s questions and comments made in the context of shared-book experiences, to examine the types of scientific thinking processes revealed in the questions and comments, and to look for evidence that scientific literacy development was facilitated. Specifically, scientific literacy in this study was defined as knowledge and skills overlapping in literacy and science.

Science, Literacy, and Interactive Learning

It is a commonly held belief in content-area literacy that integrating reading and the content-area curriculum may be a way to help students experience success in both subject areas (e.g. Vacca, Vacca, and Mraz, 2014). Presently, the Common Core Learning Standards (CCLS) encourage the infusion of literacy skills into content-area subjects such as social studies, math, and science. Based on the CCLS, it appears that facilitating literacy development in early grades is essential to promoting content-area knowledge and skills children need in later grades and more importantly, to be prepared for the onslaught of scientific and technological advancements of the 21st century.

Developing vocabulary and concepts is one of the most important elements of content-area literacy instruction because readers use words to “construct meaning” from the text (Vacca, Vacca, and Mraz, 2014). Informational text comprehension is dependent on the level of vocabulary (Liebfreund, 2015), and it is widely accepted that teaching vocabulary and concepts is the key to success in the content-area learning. Literacy instruction must facilitate the development of vocabulary and concepts as the “building blocks” for scientific knowledge.

Additionally, science and literacy have many process skills in common. Making inferences, asking questions, drawing conclusions, and predicting outcomes are examples of those common skills. Armbruster (1993) wrote:

Reading and doing science are not antithetical but rather similar processes drawing on the same cognitive base. Both are interactive-constructive processes that require critical thinking and reasoning. The same skills that make a good scientist also make good readers; engaging prior knowledge, forming hypotheses, establishing plans, evaluating understanding, determining the relative importance of information, describing patterns, comparing and contrasting, making inferences, drawing conclusions, generalizing, and evaluating sources, etc. (p.347)

Padilla et al. (1991) have argued that certain scientific thinking processes, such as prediction, may be enhanced by structuring reading instruction as a problem-solving activity. Rutherford (1993) also suggests that asking questions is an important process skill that children can learn during reading.

The shared-book experience has been widely used for both narrative and informational books in order to teach different age groups (e.g. Hicks & Wadlington, 1994; Holdaway, 1982; Scott, 1994; Scheffel, & Booth, 2013). This approach has proven effective because of the social, interactive method it uses to teach reading. Other studies have illustrated the interactive nature of story reading and suggest implications for developing the use of story reading as an instructional strategy in the classroom (Cochran-Smith, 1984; Flood, 1977; Morrow, 1988). These studies also imply that reading a book to a child is not sufficient for maximum literacy growth; the talk surrounding the text is more important in developing children’s literacy development. It is the
interaction between an adult and children during learning that helps construct meaning from text (also see Dombey, 2003; Ninio & Bruner, 1978).

Westby and Torres-Valasquez (2000) argue for the demands of increasing literacy ability in the current world and emphasize the importance of “instructional conversations” to facilitate children’s “knowing, doing, and talking” science (p.105). Using a sociocultural framework supported by Vygotsky, they recommend that teachers use questioning strategies to guide students into thinking processes and constructing meaning. According to Vygotsky (1962), high-level cognitive processes can emerge through these kinds of adult-child interactions. Students acquire knowledge as well as routines for regulating their use of that knowledge. Vygotsky (1978) described intelligence as growing out of social interaction, making a strong claim for the social origins of cognition. From this perspective, the read-aloud and question-and-answer activities, as parts of the shared-book experience, ensure adult-child social interaction, with the adult serving, initially, as mediator between text and child to make or take meaning from the text. The event gives the child both a model of adult reading and a support system during the child’s transition to independent reading.

**Procedure and Shared-Book Experience**

This study was conducted in an elementary school that serves students from both suburban and urban areas in New York. A group of seven struggling readers in first grade was selected to receive remedial reading instruction using a pull-out model of instruction. The seven students scored below 25% percentile on the Metropolitan Readiness Test. The students were six and seven years old, with diverse ethnic backgrounds. Six students were considered minority students in terms of ethnic backgrounds, with four students whose home language was one other than English. There were four girls and three boys in the group. Studies on the approaches for emergent or beginning readers have found that young children can use and reveal reading strategies as they read (Mason, Peterman & Kerr, 1988; Sulzby, 1985), and that it is not necessary for children to be fluent readers in order to study the circumstances under which they become strategic readers (Elfant, 1990).

The materials used for this study were selected by a first-grade teacher, a reading teacher (one of the researchers), and an administrator who served as a curriculum specialist using the following criteria: 1) informational text 2) science-theme or topic based on a variety of science concepts from the first grade curriculum, and c) appropriated readability as Holdaway (1979) and Routman (1988) recommended.

Considering the readers’ ages, the reading teacher used “science big books” that are “easy to read oversized copies of nonfiction picture books about science with informational structure” (Sancore, 1991, p. 211). The size of the big books and their illustrations enhance engagement and student curiosity. These big books are accompanied by smaller, normal sized versions of the book used for independent reading. The highly patterned structure provides support that enables children to read themselves.

These books were read during a total of eight shared-book experiences, each lasting 30 minutes. Time was provided for discussions and questions, while taking into consideration the children’s attention span and tasks to be completed. Each shared-book experience was completed in three separate sessions, which normally occurred over a one-week period. The sequence of the three sessions proceeded as follow:

Session I: Reading the text. The group gathered together for a 30-minute session. A teacher began by showing the children the cover of a big book and discussing the illustration and
theme of the book. The aim was to involve the children and to tap their experiential background with regard to the theme. Then, the teacher continued to read the text while participation by the children was encouraged. The teacher employed the following strategies:

- The teacher introduced a big book, an enlarged version of a picture book, and positioned the book in a way that children could see the print and pictures.
- The teacher encouraged children to make predictions about the text based on the book’s cover, title, and illustrations.
- The teacher read the text pointing to each word, reading the text as naturally as possible, in order to model good reading behavior.
- The teacher stopped at strategic points to ask questions about what was being read.

Session II: Rereading the text. In the second session, the teacher provided children with the opportunity to participate in the readings; recall vocabulary, ideas, and information; as well as demonstrate reading strategies and language conventions. Students were continuously encouraged to make comments and ask questions.

Session III: Responding to the text. A normal size book, the same version of the big book used in the earlier sessions, was given to each student, and they had the opportunity to read the book independently. After the independent reading, students were encouraged to respond to the book through discussions in pairs or small groups, structured by the teacher. This exercise was conducted in order for the readers in this remedial class to have an opportunity to follow the reading behaviors modeled by the teacher in the shared-book experience.

Findings from Children’s Comments

The children’s questions and comments were collected during eight shared-book experiences presented over a total of 24 sessions in a school year. The comments were categorized using analytic techniques, including pattern-matching and time-series analysis (Yin, 2008). They were then coded modifying the systems described by Yaden, Smolken, & Conlon (1989) and by Morrow (1988). Eight different types of the children’s questions and comments were identified (see Table 1). It should be noted that Detail (49%), Labeling (16%), Interpretation (19%), and Inference (6%) accounted for a total of 89% of all the questions or comments across all the sessions. Overall, the children asked questions to build meaning based on the text and the pictures, but there were also questions connected to their prior knowledge and experiences.

Table 1. Categorized Children’s Comments

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Types</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Examples</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Real World Connection</td>
<td>Questions and comments connecting action, event, animal, nature, etc. with similar examples from children’s experiences.</td>
<td>“How come they look like Christmas trees?” “How come their feet are shaped like ducks?”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meaning of a Word/Phrase</td>
<td>Questions and comments about the meaning of a word or a phrase.</td>
<td>“What's a bog?” “What is a stream?”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Detail</td>
<td>Requests for elaboration or additional literal information.</td>
<td>“How come their tails are flat?” “How come he has a curly shell?”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Labeling</td>
<td>Questions and comments about the identity of an item, feature, action, etc.</td>
<td>“What kind of whale is that?” “What are those long points on her hand?”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interpretation</td>
<td>Requests for interpretation of an action, event, or illustration.</td>
<td>“How come the lightning is green and lights the sky?”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
“How come he is going into the water to get the fish and the leaves in his mouth are popping out of the water?”

“Can it be a monkey?”
“Is it a moth?”

“Can’t the owl see him because he has blue eyes?”
“Why does the flower look like it’s dying?”

“Can we draw the animals?”
“Who is going to read?”

Table 2 describes the frequency of children’s talks categorized as process skills applicable to both reading and scientific processes. Labeling, making predictions, interpretations, and inferences occurred more often in the first and second sessions of the shared-book experiences. The children’s talk during Session I (Reading) constituted 42% of the total number of questions asked across all sessions. The children’s talk in Session II (Rereading) and in Session III each accounted for 33% and 24% of the total number of the talks in the sessions.

As described in the procedure, the teacher spent more time in guiding students in reading the books in the first two sessions. Many of the children’s questions or comments were elicited by presentation of the illustrations as well as the teacher’s prompts.

Table 2. Frequency of Process Skills

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Number of questions and comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Session I</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Process skills</td>
<td>Labeling</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Interpretation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Prediction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Inference</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total number of talks/percentage</td>
<td>142/ 42%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In addition to coding the talks according to the types listed in Table 1, the children’s comments and questions were re-examined to determine whether there was any evidence of facilitated scientific literacy development. Some comments reflected their prior knowledge of scientific literacy, which they brought to the shared-book experience sessions, while other questions provided evidence of new science concepts that they were developing during the shared-book experience. Of the 336 questions asked by the children during the eight shared-book experiences, 138 questions were assessed as “science questions,” or directly related to the domains of science such as scientific method or procedure (e.g. senses or measurement), life science (e.g. self-awareness or animal needs), or earth science (water or weather). Table 3 shows...
the list of books used for the shared-book experiences and the areas of science that each book led
the children to explore.

Table 3 Scientific Concepts Elicited from the Books

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Book</th>
<th>A Beaver Tale by Rebel Williams and Illustrated by Philip Howe</th>
<th>Creature Features by David Drew</th>
<th>Hidden Animals by David Drew</th>
<th>Grumbles, Growls, Roars by Elizabeth Savage</th>
<th>City Storm by Rebel Williams</th>
<th>What will be the weather like tomorrow? by Paul Rogers and Illustrated by Kazuko</th>
<th>Living Things by Judith Holloway and Clive Harper</th>
<th>Animals Born alive and well by Ruth Heller</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Scientific Concept</td>
<td>Senses</td>
<td>Measurement</td>
<td>Classification</td>
<td>Classification</td>
<td>Classification</td>
<td>Classification</td>
<td>Classification</td>
<td>Classification</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Earth Science</td>
<td>Self-Awareness</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Families</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Animal Needs</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Plant Needs</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total number</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*There were a total of 138 science concept questions. Twelve comments were coded into more than one category, making a total of 150.

The number of questions and comments regarding scientific concepts varied among the eight books from a low of 6 to a high of 40 with a mean of 18.75. The greatest number of questions was asked during the reading of Animals Born Alive and Well, followed by City Storm with 27 questions. The children were particularly responsive to the animal families and baby animals featured in the book. In these two books, the children responded to the realistic illustrations portraying animals and elements of weather and engaged in conversation regarding them. As previously explained, the books used in the shared-book experience were chosen because the theme of the book dealt with either one or two specific science concepts covered in the first grade curriculum, and the children’s questions followed the science concepts highlighted in each book. Most of the children’s questions did not deviate from the science themes presented in each book.

These results indicate that children’s comments of scientific concepts were heavily related to the topics or the themes of the books. There was no significant difference over time in the number of total questions asked per book, or in the number of questions asked in any of the categories. Rather, the number of questions varied depending on the topics and illustrations of the books.
Conclusion

This paper presented an instructional approach, the shared-book experience using science-themed books, to promote scientific literacy at early ages. This paper analyzed the types of questions first-graders asked during the shared-book experiences. Based on the analyses, the findings of this study suggest the following:

First, a quantitative analysis revealed that the children’s talk incorporating scientific concepts closely followed the theme of each book read during the shared-book experiences. Careful selection of books with a variety of scientific themes and motivating illustrations in connection with the science curriculum can provide opportunities for integrated curriculum practices. Current Common Core Learning Standards (CCLS) support the importance of having children “use illustrations and details in a text to describe key ideas” as they read informational text (NYS P-12 Common Core Learning Standards for English Language Arts & Literacy, 2010, p. 20).

Second, the results of this study suggest that Session I of the shared-book experiences was most productive in inducing children’s talk regarding scientific process skills, whereas Session II was least productive. In the classes of Session I, the teacher modeled how to read a book and prompted students to generate more questions based on the text and illustrations. Consequently, adding more structured guidance to Session III may induce more children’s talk on the books and therefore facilitate more scientific literacy development.

Implications

This paper shows one way of teaching science in a reading class. The process and results from the study shared in this paper can contribute to the formulation of instructional practices that facilitate scientific literacy development in struggling readers and other student populations. While this study was conducted with a group of first-grade struggling readers, the shared-book experiences may be used for any age or with a whole class (Hicks & Wadlington, 1994; Holdaway, 1982; Scott, 1994; Scheffel, & Booth, 2013). However, more research needs to be done involving children with above average achievement levels.

Additionally, more activities may be added as an integral part of the shared-book experience to strengthen Session III. For example, prior to the independent reading in Session III, the children may keep a science logbook to record scientific information. Children can then, with teacher guidance, use the log as a springboard for discussion. Other follow-up activities which are connected to the book children read to reinforce the scientific concepts and process skills can be developed as part of Session III.

A scientific inquiry begins with a question. Children, no matter their reading level or background, possess inquisitive minds that have to be nurtured. Teachers can encourage students to explore scientific vocabulary, concepts, and process skills from early ages with quality books using an interactive instructional approach such as the shared-book experience.

References

American Association for the Advancement of Science (2009). Benchmarks for Science
The Use of Genre-Specific Evaluation Criteria for Revision

Zoi A. Philippakos, University of North Carolina at Charlotte
Charles A. MacArthur, University of Delaware

ABSTRACT
Revision is a challenging step of the writing process and students often focus their attention to mechanics or grammar instead of making organizational and meaning changes. It is important for students to critically read and independently evaluate their work when revising. This practitioner article discusses the importance of genre-specific evaluation criteria in revision. Knowledge about genre-evaluation criteria can strengthen students’ understanding about writing for different purposes and audiences, can support their ability to critically read and comprehend, can affect their confidence, and can lead students to independent evaluation. Similarly, teachers can use the same evaluation criteria to give feedback to students and grade their work. Preparation for teaching and teaching procedures are explained.

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Introduction
“Revising is basically checking your work, making sure everything is nice, clean, all the punctuations are where they’re supposed to be.” Nelson*, Fourth-grade student
“Revising is spelling changes, punctuation changes, and I’m not using words that repeat on and on and on. That’s too much of it. I use different words. Like instead of using “awesome” “awesome” “awesome” or “good” “good” “good”, I’d say “great” “nice” “amazing”.
Jordana, Fourth-grade student. (All names used are pseudonyms.)
The comments made by Nelson and Jordana offer insights into their understanding about revision. When they are asked to revise, students often emphasize changes in punctuation, word choice, mechanics, grammar, and addition of details (Fitzgerald, 1987; Bereiter & Scardamalia, 1987; Chanquoi, 2001). Their troubles with revision on the level of ideas, organization and content may stem from a lack of understanding about the task and a lack of strategies on how to evaluate writing (Hayes, Flower, et al., 1987).

Much research on revision processes is guided by cognitive models of writing and revising (Bereiter & Scardamalia, 1987; Hayes, 1996; Hayes & Flower, 1980; Hayes, Flower, Schriver, Stratman, & Carey, 1987; for a review see MacArthur, 2015). All these models share some common characteristics. First, they view revision as a problem-solving process, which can be activated at any time during the writing process and can lead to changes of the written text and of the writers’ writing plans. Second, revision greatly depends on the writers’ critical reading ability, purpose, knowledge of structure, and self-regulation. Hayes’ models (Hayes, 1996, 2004; Hayes et al., 1987) emphasize the role of reading for revising. Evaluation and revision require more cognitive effort for the readers than reading comprehension (Roussey & Piolat, 2008).

Reading to comprehend text differs from reading for evaluation in order to revise. Reading comprehension can take place even when there are problems with the text, as the reader can apply inferential skills and overlook challenges with text-construction problems (Hayes et al., 1987). However, when reading to evaluate and reading for revision, the reader needs to apply critical-thinking processes and utilize a larger set of goals (Hayes, 2004). Hayes et al. (1987), as well as Hayes (2004), also point out that reading to evaluate can lead to discovery of opportunities. Simply said, the reader in the process of revising the text may locate problems but also discover opportunities to make substantial changes to the content and meaning of the written text.

Several instructional approaches have been studied in an effort to identify specific methods that can support students’ evaluation processes and improve their revision practices. The use of procedural facilitators (e.g., De La Paz, Swanson & Graham, 1998), the practice of observing readers (e.g., Moore, & MacArthur, 2012) and the use of goal setting procedures (e.g., Graham, MacArthur & Schwartz, 1997) have all had positive effects on revision (see MacArthur, 2015 for a review). A commonality among them is the use of specific-evaluation criteria as a guide for revision. A recent meta-analytic review of research on writing assessment (Graham, Hebert, & Harris, 2015) found that teaching self-evaluation had a positive effect on the quality of student writing.

The purpose of this article is to provide specific guidelines for teachers about how to support students when they evaluate to revise their work. The term “evaluate to revise” is purposely used instead of the term evaluate and revise. This is because critical evaluation is done in order to lead to effective and specific revisions. The use of clear evaluation criteria can guide students’ cognitive effort and help them manage the complexity of the revising process. We recommend teaching genre-specific evaluation criteria rather than general analytic criteria because the more specific criteria provide more support for students’ evaluation and revision, and, thus, are more likely to help students learn to self-evaluate, which is critical to the development of independent writing ability.
Evaluation: Using Elements of Genre

Instruction in evaluation begins with some set of evaluation criteria. These criteria can take the form of questions, a checklist, or a rubric. Students learn to apply the evaluation criteria as they read to evaluate their own work or their peers’ work during peer review. Learning evaluation criteria is a key way in which students learn the characteristics of good writing.

Evaluation criteria can be general or genre-specific. General criteria can apply to any type of writing. For example, typical analytic rubrics examine ideas and content, organization, voice and tone, word choice, sentence fluency, and conventions (Diederich, 1974; Culham, 2003). These criteria can be applied to narrative, persuasive, and informative text, even though these papers serve different writing purposes and have different organizational structures. However, students may have difficulty applying these general criteria because the meanings are not specific enough to guide their attention. Studies that have examined the effects of instruction in general analytic criteria on writing quality vary in their results and significant differences are not consistently found (for a review, see MacArthur, 2015). Perhaps, the best-known analytic rubric for writing is 6 + 1 Traits (Culham, 2003); a recent meta-analysis (Graham, Hebert, & Harris, 2015) found no significant effect of the 6+1 Traits program in four studies. Use of such general criteria may be a challenge for students who may need more specificity in their efforts to evaluate their work.

One way to make evaluation criteria more specific is to base them on specific genre elements. Genres are types of writing that have specific organizational structures and are written to satisfy different writing purposes (Meyer, 1985). For example, a story has a beginning that introduces and describes the characters, the setting, and the problem, a middle that includes actions to solve the problem and complications, and an ending that solves the problem and may discuss the emotions of the character (Philippakos, MacArthur & Coker, 2015). In contrast, a procedural, “how to” paper has a beginning that introduces the importance of learning the task and the materials for it, a middle with steps in order, and an end with a conclusion that evaluates the completion of the task. Such genre-specific criteria can be easier to understand than general ones. For example, the question, “Is the organization clear for the reader?” is less clear than, “Is there a clear introduction that describes the characters, the time and the place? Is there a logical problem?”

Explicit instruction on genre elements, or text structure, is an important part of most strategy instruction in writing, an approach with strong evidence of effectiveness (Graham, 2006; Graham & Perin, 2007). In studies that taught students genre-specific evaluation criteria as part of peer review or revision, students produced better-quality revised drafts (e.g., Midgette, Haria & MacArthur, 2008; Philippakos & MacArthur, in press). Genre-specific criteria can provide direct guidance to students on the organization of the genre and on the genre’s expectations. For example, in persuasive writing, the evaluation questions can be very specific for each element. Additional evaluation questions that refer to other quality features of writing could be included (see Table 1 for an example).

How to Teach Students to Use Genre Elements in Evaluation and Revision

Because evaluation and revision can be vague processes to students, teachers need to make the process clear and visible to students.

Preparation

Prior to instruction, it is important for teachers to clearly identify the genre and its elements, create a rubric that would include those elements, and select writing samples...
that will be used for evaluation. We encourage teachers to do this preparation collaboratively (in grade-level teams), but they could also work independently.

**Identify genre elements.** First, teachers should identify the genre that they will focus on, the elements of the genre, and the evaluation criteria. For example, Table 1 shows the elements and related evaluation criteria for persuasive writing without an opposing position. Teachers may consider organizing their instruction around genre to better support students’ writing and evaluation (e.g., units on opinion writing, on stories). **Create rubric.** Second, teachers create a rubric with those elements. Additional evaluation criteria could be added that would be relevant to the genre and grade-level expectations. For example, in persuasive writing, questions could be added regarding the use of transition words, or the use of appropriate tone to the reader (see Figure 1; adapted from Philippakos, 2012; Philippakos, MacArthur & Coker, 2015). The rubric should include a scoring system, so writers can assign a score per element. We recommend a simple scale of 0, 1, 2 (see Figure 1) for ease of use by students, but a different-point scale can also be used. In our own professional development (PD) practice, teachers tend to assign half points or explain to students how an element may be a “low 1” or a “high 1”.

**Figure 1. Sample Persuasive Rubric for Evaluation**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Element</th>
<th>0</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Beginning</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Topic:</strong></td>
<td>1. not there</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. So-So</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3. Amazing!</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Position:</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Opinion:</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Middle</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Reason 1:</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Evidence:</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Reason 2:</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

---

**Table 1. Elements of Persuasive Writing**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Beginning</th>
<th>Topic: What is the topic and why should the reader care about it?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Position: What is the writer’s position on the topic? Is it clear?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle</td>
<td>Reasons: Does the paper have clear and convincing reasons that explain the writer’s position?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Evidence: Are there examples and evidence that support each reason?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>End</td>
<td>Restate Position: Does the paper have a conclusion that tells the reader the writer’s position in different words?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Think: Does the paper leave the reader with something to think about?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>End</strong></td>
<td><strong>Restate Opinion:</strong> Did the writer restate the opinion?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Think:</strong></td>
<td>Did the writer leave the reader with a message to think about the topic?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Other!</strong></td>
<td>Is there a title that clearly refers to the information of the paper?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Is the paper’s tone appropriate for the audience? Was the writer respectful to the reader?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Are there clear and appropriate transition words used throughout the paper?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Philippakos, MacArthur, & Coker, 2015, *Developing Strategic Writers Through Genre Instruction: Recourses for grades 3 to 5*, Guilford Press, Adapted with permission of Guilford Press.

**Select papers.** Teachers identify sample papers that will be used for modeling and student practice. These papers need to represent a range of quality and can be from previous classes or from other teachers’ classes. Student identifying information should be removed and papers could be assigned a number or be identified by their title.

**Teaching**

The teacher will model the process of evaluation and explain why an element is clearly presented or not and how it could be improved. With the use of think aloud modeling provided by the teacher, students will be taught the scoring and evaluation process and the thinking process that the teacher uses to determine 1) if an element is present, 2) if it supports the overall quality of the paper and the overall writing purpose, 3) if it requires revisions, and 4) what revisions could possibly lead to improvements. After the teacher-led think aloud, teacher and students collaboratively repeat the process. At this stage, student participation will be higher and the teacher should encourage students’ involvement. The teacher will facilitate the process, but the goal is to engage students in the identification of the elements, in discussions about the quality of those, and about suggestions for effective revisions. Students could also work in smaller groups to collaboratively evaluate. Finally, students will work independently. Overall, the process of instruction is based on the gradual release of responsibility model, which supports students’ transition from novices to experts. In this model, the teacher is the knowledgeable other (Vygotsky, 1978) and functions as a model for the practice that students are expected to independently apply. Students are given
the opportunity to practice the same approach as a group with the guidance of the teacher, to work in smaller groups or attempt the approach with teacher support until they are able to independently apply the approach (Fisher & Frey, 2007; Pearson & Gallagher, 1983). This release of responsibility does not need to be completed within a class period. The modeling and collaborative practice can be completed in two class sessions of approximately 35 minutes each. The process is explained in the following section.

**Discussion.** The teacher discusses with students the purpose of the specific type of writing and explains the elements of the genre. For example, if the focus is persuasion, sample questions might be, “Why do people write persuasively? What does it mean to persuade? What is a convincing reason? What is evidence?”

**Modeling.** At the modeling stage, a range of papers that vary in quality should be used. In our work we usually include a well-written paper that represents the goal for students’ performance for the end of the year and a weak example that is missing specific elements (e.g., a first reason or a conclusion), or it has poorly developed elements (e.g., a conclusion that ends by saying The end).

The teacher models the application of the elements for evaluation by thinking out loud. During evaluation, the teacher reads each question, underlines the information in the paper, and labels each element (see Figure 2 for an example from the evaluation of a fourth-grade weak example).

Then the teacher assigns a score for each element using the rubric. The important aspect of this step is that students are given an explanation about how and why the teacher assigns a specific score. It is also important to provide suggestions for improvement (see Figure 3 for an example).

If the paper has received a low score (zero or one), the teacher writes suggestions for changes and notes (e.g., The reason is not that clear, and I was confused. Perhaps if you want to say _____, you could write, _____; It would be helpful to have a transition in this paragraph. Perhaps you could say ______).

It is also important to show to students how to overcome challenges and to model that the use of the rubric can help them guide their attention. Therefore, during the modeling process, the teacher uses the elements as a map to guide attention and effort. For instance, the teacher may seem confused after reading a section. Instead of quitting the task, though, the teacher can look at the rubric to confirm what element s/he was looking for and return to the text to decipher its complex meaning.

Finally, the teacher selects an element that has received a low score and models its revision. It is important for students to observe how to make a revision (see Figure 4). For this task the teacher can use sentence starters and frames to guide students’ sentence production (e.g., A second reason that _____ is _____).

**Collaborative and guided practice.** Teacher and students evaluate papers together and negotiate ideas about the scoring and suggestions to the writer. The teacher will read each element, ask students for their score and for an explanation. The teacher should ask “why” questions and ask students to refer to the text to explain their reasoning. The teacher should also ask for suggestions for revision and teacher and students could work together to make a few revisions.
Figure 2. Sample Evaluated Paper with Elements Underlined and Labeled

Schools in June? A bad idea!

Education is very important. Our parents and teachers always tell us that we need to be very good in math, reading, and writing to finish.

Elementary school, go to Middle school, High school, and College and get a good job. But it is not easy to be that good in all subjects. We were recently told that because we are not doing that well in math, there is a discussion among our teachers that we would need to come to school in June and July. I think that we should not come to school in the summer and that schools should be closed in June and July.

R1 We are kids and we need to rest. We all work so hard all fall, winter, and spring and we learn so much. I do not understand why we would need to go to school in the summer, too. If we do go to school in the summer, we will be so tired in the fall and we may get bad grades.

R2 Teachers need to rest, too. They work hard all year and they need to take time off from work. They have families, too.

R3 I did well in math and I have high grades. If there are students who need to go to school, teachers should work with them. Why should we all go to summer school?

?Think: No way!

No Restate.
Figure 3. Sample Completed Rubric with Suggestions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name:</th>
<th>Date: 9-30-14</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>0- not there</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>1- So-So</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>2: Amazing!</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Topic:</strong> What is the topic and why should the reader care about it?</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Opinion:</strong> Is the writer’s opinion clear?</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Middle:</strong> Reason 1: Is the 1st reason connected to the opinion and is it clear and convincing to the reader?</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Evidence:</strong> Is there enough evidence to support the reason?</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reason 2: Is the 2nd reason connected to the opinion and is it clear and convincing to the reader?</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Evidence:</strong> Is there enough evidence to support the reason?</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reason 3: Is the 3rd reason connected to the opinion and is it clear and convincing to the reader?</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Evidence:</strong> Is there enough evidence to support the reason?</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>End:</strong> Restate Opinion: Did the writer restate the opinion?</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Think:</strong> Did the writer leave the reader with a message to think about the topic?</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Other:</strong> Is there a title that clearly refers to the information of the paper?</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Is the paper’s tone appropriate for the audience? Was the writer respectful to the reader?</strong></td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Are there clear and appropriate transition words used throughout the paper?</strong></td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Comments:</strong> Clear and well developed!</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Good job setting it up and very clear!</strong></td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Perhaps use a transition word and rewrite this sentence!</strong></td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Perhaps use a transition word and rewrite this sentence!</strong></td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Perhaps give specific examples? Say that they read and grade homework and that they work many hours?</strong></td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Perhaps say that this educational need is not for all students?</strong></td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Instead of telling only what you do, generalize to other students too.</strong></td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Philippakos, MacArthur, & Coker, 2015, *Developing Strategic Writers Through Genre Instruction: Recourses for grades 3 to 5*, Guilford Press, Adapted with permission of Guilford Press.

Figure 4. Sample Completed Revision for Reason 2

| Original: Teachers need to rest, too. | Revision: A second reason why schools should remain closed during June and July is that teachers also deserve to have a vacation and time away from school. |
Later, students in small groups practice the same procedures. Grouping students can be a challenging task and teachers often ask us how to do this. We suggest that they form groups that vary in writing performance. Some students may be poor writers, but they can still express their thoughts verbally with clarity. Also, student interactions can better support students’ understanding about the elements. Teachers could also differentiate instruction and work with a group of students that struggles significantly. During students’ collaborative work, teachers give feedback on the application of the rubric, both on the scoring and on the clarity of the comments. It is very important that students are given multiple opportunities to practice how to give feedback and also receive feedback from their teacher on their work.

**Independent practice.** This would be the last stage of the training process. Students apply the evaluation rubric independently. This may extend to self-evaluation and peer review. For example, teachers could ask their students to meet and evaluate each other’s work using the same genre-specific rubrics that they had previously used to practice learning about evaluation criteria for that specific genre.

**Reflection**

It is important for student growth that they have opportunities to reflect on the overall task and on their learning and carefully think about information they can transfer to other situations. For example, now that they know what the elements of persuasion are, what do they think that the elements of a cause-effect paper would be? These discussions could involve the whole class or they can be in small-groups. Students may also respond in journal entries and teachers could review them to address challenges that students face. Questions to lead those discussions/responses could be:

- What was helpful to you as a reader/evaluator and writer? Why? How did it help you?
- What can you use now? What can you use again in future tasks?)

**Beyond Paper-Pencil Practice**

The instruction and students’ practice do not need to be limited to paper and pencil applications. Instead of limiting students’ ability to participate by only providing one medium, the use of technology can enhance students’ involvement and also improve their understanding. Technology and its applications could be especially important for diverse learners and learners who may struggle with transcription skills, who may lack motivation, and who may not be comfortable to orally express their thoughts.

Therefore, teachers could complete the modeling and collaborative practice via the use of Interactive boards and color code the identification of elements. In our practice we have also encouraged teachers to consider the use of Voicethread as a way for their students to evaluate papers and to conduct peer review. Voicethread is a web 2.0 tool that allows the provision of comments via audio, video, and text. Users can access a document, make marks on it (on different colors) and make comments. Teachers could ask students (e.g., in pairs) to each evaluate a paper and then each student to listen to the comments of their peer and contribute or add or initiate a discussion. This specific approach can support students who struggle with handwriting or spelling but have stronger speaking skills. Through technological affordances such as the ones provided by Voicethread, individuals can still express their thoughts by typing or talking and recording their comments. That way, they can still participate in class activated as equal members of the learning community. This same approach could be used in peer review.

**Remember Nelson and Jordana?** After Nelson and Jordana received instruction and practice, and after they revised their paper, they were asked to comment on the process they used
The Use of Genre-Specific Evaluation Criteria for Revision

to revise their work and on what they had learned (data from Philippakos, 2012). Nelson’s response shows growth in his understanding about text structure. He is able to identify the parts of a persuasive paper and comment on the importance of them. Also, his response demonstrates an increased sensitivity to the needs of the audience.

“Yes. I learned that I had, like, you have to add more details in your sentences and in the beginning, state what the person thinks, and state why the person thinks [that] and a conclusion. A juicy beginning because if you don’t have a juicy beginning, people don’t want to read it so you have to suck them into it. And the rubric helped me because it brought attention to things I never really looked for and it helped me because sometimes it [an element] wasn’t really there and I wasn’t looking for it.

Similarly, Jordana’s response suggests a shift in her view of what matters in writing in general and persuasion in particular. Her response shows a thoughtful view of the need to write for readers, engage and intrigue them but also address their different ideas in an informative manner.

A really good persuasive essay is when you have 3 clear details and a hook at the beginning that grabs the readers’ attention so they want to read on. And also some things that others think and why you say they are wrong and you are right. When Jordana was asked about the advice she would give to another student about how to revise, her response suggested a balance between surface-level changes and genre-related changes.

I would first see if he had any spelling errors. Then I’d read the beginning twice so I could understand the piece and then I’d tell him to correct any spelling errors and the beginning stuff too. Some people don’t even give 3 details and if they do, sometimes [it is only] for the first detail. Sometimes they don’t add details to their writing. And then with the other people, if he doesn’t have that many things about the other people and telling why they’re right and he’s wrong, I’d ask to give examples. [Also,] don’t use the same exact transition words because if you use the same words throughout, it gets boring!

Overall, both students seemed to benefit from this practice and this process changed their view of revision. Instead of treating revision as an editing task, they viewed it as a genre-related task and an opportunity to address the readers and their needs as those related to the rhetorical task.

Parting Words

Overall, the use of genre-specific criteria in evaluation and revision can be beneficial for students and their teachers. First, for students this practice can strengthen their understanding about writing purposes and increase their sensitivity about audience awareness (Common Core State Standards, 2010). Second, knowledge about discourse elements and genre can guide their comprehension and critical reading. Third, this approach can help them set their own goals for improvement, monitor their progress, and reflect on their learning— all important aspects of self-regulation (Zimmerman, 2001). Finally, if this approach is used in preparation for peer review, the use of evaluation criteria can guide students’ comments so students can have targeted discussions. For teachers this practice can better guide their comments during conferences. Also, they can use the same criteria to develop their own grades. That way they will be better able to communicate with students and students will be better able to understand their suggestions.

Revision is a challenging task (Fitzgerald, 1987) but one that is necessary for writers to develop in order to effectively communicate with readers. The use of genre-specific evaluation
criteria can improve their revision practices. Most importantly, though, it can promote students’ independence - making them strategic, self-regulated writers.

References
De La Paz, S., Swanson, P. N., & Graham, S. (1998). The contribution of executive control to the revising by students with writing and learning difficulties. Journal of Educational Psychology, 90, 448-60.


Autism Spectrum Disorder Today: Life, Literacy, and the Pursuit of Content

Barbara Boroson

ABSTRACT
We hold this truth to be self-evident: Students on the autism spectrum need support with life literacy before they can reach for content literacy. This article provides educators with an understanding of the interplay between life and content literacy in the classroom, as well as strategies to maximize success for these diverse learners. Students on the spectrum arrive in the classroom with pervasive challenges related to emotional and sensory regulation, socialization, and engagement. These “life literacies” are crucial building blocks for basic functioning and are necessary benchmarks on the path toward curricular learning. Only once we have alleviated anxiety, regulated regulation, soothed the senses, supported socialization, and enhanced engagement can we explore new avenues for pursuing content assimilation and, ultimately, our collective goal of literacy and independence for all.

AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY
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We all know that the pursuit of content literacy has gotten more challenging in recent years, but that’s not only because of Common Core. Today, with one in every 68 children being diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), general educators face an influx of students who come with a whole host of challenges that stand in the way of achieving content literacy. Before we can even consider approaching curricular content and standards with students on the autism spectrum, we’re going to need to break through obstacles in the areas of anxiety, regulation, sensation, socialization, engagement, organization, and more. In other words, we have to reach for life literacy before we can teach content literacy. This article describes some of the common challenges educators encounter with students on the spectrum and provides practical strategies for mitigating those challenges and maximizing learning potential.
Inside/Outside ASD

We’re going to need to differentiate more than ever as we work to move these uncommon kids toward “Common” goals, especially since every student on the spectrum is composed of a unique jumble of strengths and challenges.

Some wear their challenges on their sleeves. Their external, repetitive behaviors, like hand-flapping, noise-making, or rocking in place, may cause these students to appear to be “low functioning.” But be careful not to underestimate these kids: Behind those busy hands and beyond those incessant noises, lots of innate cognitive ability may be lurking, coherent concepts developing covertly just below the surface.

Other students on the spectrum may present as highly articulate and well-versed in certain subjects, impressing us at first as “high functioning.” But do not overestimate these kids: That extraordinary knowledge base is likely to be narrow, rigid, and rote. Inside, their cognitive, social, and adaptive skills may be extremely limited.

Life Literacy: The Anxiety Factor

Underlying these important individual differences, anxiety is a common denominator. Given their pervasive challenges, exacerbated by minimal coping skills, students on the autism spectrum have reason to be anxious. This is why they tend to avoid new experiences that might require improvisation or spontaneity, and instead immerse themselves rigidly in known entities, such as lining up toy cars, memorizing state capitals, or reciting the dates of TV premieres. This kind of rote information is completely knowable: It’s orderly, predictable, and throws them no curveballs.

But at school, curveballs come from all directions in the form of pop quizzes, fire drills, absent teachers, rearranged desks, assemblies, bullying—even a change in the lunch menu or the introduction of a new curricular topic or a group work assignment. Anything unexpected, unscripted, or unfamiliar may be enough to trigger severe anxiety.

Easing Anxiety

With anxiety always elevated, students on the spectrum need us to reduce potential anxiety triggers whenever possible. Plan ahead and make those plans known to and understood by students on the spectrum through the use of visual schedules. Lay out the structure of the day in a way that is accessible and comprehensible to students. Tens of thousands of graphic icons exist in both tangible and digital form to help make the day predictable. Use icons to create a daily visual schedule for these concrete, anxious learners. (Have a look at barbaraboroson.com to find links to resources like these.)

Trust that the extra investment of time and planning involved in organizing visual schedules is worthwhile: It serves to pre-empt lots of bigger struggles down the road. If we do not take the time to mitigate anxiety triggers, we end up facing anxiety reactions. And because students on the spectrum struggle to regulate their reactions, anxiety reactions can be highly distressing—for them, for the rest of the class, and for us.

Life Literacy: The Regulation Factor

Anxiety reactions are particularly difficult for students on the spectrum to control because of a pervasive challenge known as executive dysfunction. When the executive function system works well, it helps to regulate our responses as needed, enabling us to shift gears, stay calm, modulate our moods, consider context, think before we act, learn from our mistakes, think about thinking, and manage many other interactive and adaptive responses. The absence of such skills has significant repercussions in all areas of functioning. Executive dysfunction manifests as
impulsivity, inflexibility, impatience, inability to read between the lines, and obliviousness to the
needs of others, all of which severely compromise social functioning. Executive dysfunction also
limits aptitude for updating and assimilating information, generalizing and summarizing (or
getting the “gist” of) ideas, and evaluating another person’s intent or bias, all of which cause
content competency to become elusive.

**Regulating Regulation**

Executive dysfunction can be an intractable challenge, but some students on the spectrum
may be able to learn to consider their thoughts and reactions and ultimately insert a stop-and-
think moment before impulses take over. Start off by encouraging them to examine causes and
effects in the natural environment: *Why do you think we can’t go outside for recess today?* Or,
*What might have happened to the pencil sharpener in Mr. Dawat’s room that is causing his
students to use ours?* This is a kind of debriefing that is crucial in making overt the links between
actions and reactions. Guide students to reflect on the results of their own past behaviors in order
to consider how they might respond differently next time. (And be sure to clarify for these
concrete thinkers that by “next time” you do not mean *only* next time; you mean *every* time!)

Eventually, we can try to help some students on the spectrum begin to generalize these
new thinking-about-thinking skills to meet the lofty meta-cognitive expectations of today’s
curricular standards, but it’s a long way from here to there and plenty of other fundamental ASD
factors will need to be addressed first.

**Life Literacy: The Sensory Factor**

Many behaviors that may seem impulsive or meaningless are, in fact, serving a sensory
function—they actually help students regulate their capricious sensory systems. Ninety percent
of students on the spectrum have sensory systems that are, essentially, calibrated differently than
others, letting in either too much or too little sensory input. When the sensory system lets in too
much sensation, busy visual fields, certain noises, smells, tastes, textures, positions, and
movements can be perceived as overwhelming and unbearable. Guarded against unexpected
sensory assaults, a student may try to avoid sensory input any way he can by covering his
ears, hiding, or refusing to wear clothes of certain fabrics, eat foods with certain offensive
textures or smells, or participate in activities that require tactile interaction with certain materials
or physical interaction with other students.

On the other hand, when the system lets in too little sensory input, a student is driven to
seek more sensation any way she can, by stomping her feet, chewing her hair, tipping her chair
back, poking, hugging, or biting others, turning upside down, bumping into walls and furniture,
and resorting to other input-seeking behaviors.

Many of these kinds of behaviors are known as *stims*, or self-stimulating behaviors. They
are the ways that students on the spectrum strive to achieve sensory equilibrium. Stims comprise
a complex and sometimes paradoxical picture. Behaviors like flapping, spinning in circles,
rocking back and forth, humming, and making other noises often help to rev up and energize a
student who is lethargic. But surprisingly, those very same behaviors can also calm a student
whose senses are overwhelmed. Refocusing his attention on his own familiar behaviors can
actually enable a student to tune out other overwhelming sensations. Because of this, it can be
difficult to determine whether a student’s behaviors are reflecting overstimulation or
understimulation.

To complicate the picture even further, any source of sensory input can be perceived as
overwhelming or underwhelming by any student at any time. So while the sound of the dismissal
bell might send a student ducking under her desk and crying, that same student might not even notice when a whole pile of textbooks goes crashing to the floor right behind her. And the very specific combination of triggers and reactions we see from one student today, may be inside-out and upside-down from that same student tomorrow.

**Satisfying the Senses**

Due to their complicated and unpredictable nature, the sensory systems of these students need to be handled with care. To do this, we must first acknowledge that, regardless of how peculiar they may seem, sensory reactions, like other behaviors, serve a critical function: They are all forms of communication. They are symptoms of a deeper problem; signals to us that something is amiss. So, much as we might wish difficult behaviors would just go away, simply extinguishing them will not suffice. Extinguishing a behavior by using a token economy or other classroom behavioral system fails to address the underlying function of the behavior. Just extinguishing these behaviors is akin to giving someone only a cough drop when he has strep throat. That cough drop will certainly ease his discomfort for the moment, but if that’s all we do, then we allow the underlying problem to worsen and intensify. Instead we need to dig deeper and address the symptoms at the level of causation. This means learning to anticipate sensory and other triggers and adapting the environment to relieve the impact of those triggers on our students.

The best way to head off problematic situations is to learn from those who’ve been on the receiving end of a student’s reactions before. When possible, tap the knowledge of teachers who have worked with this student in the past. And better yet, ask the parents and caregivers. By being open to learning from families, we not only benefit from years of hard-won wisdom, but we open the door to productive, two-way collaboration. Consider sending home a family questionnaire that reaches for this kind of information: What tends to set this child off? What makes the situation better? What makes it worse? (Help yourself to a reproducible questionnaire at [barbaraboroson.com](http://barbaraboroson.com).)

Once we know what some of the common sensory triggers are, sensory adaptations in the classroom can take two forms:

First, we can make changes to the classroom environment so that it is more sensory neutral. Turn off some of the lights, minimize decorations, set up a sensory corner that includes an assortment of soothing and stimulating options, and create clearly organized classroom spaces—all of which will ease the sensory strain on students who have ASD.

Second, in addition to the accommodations and modifications mandated by the IEP, we can offer sensory supports to individual students to help settle their specific sensory imbalances. Bumpy seat cushions, weighted vests, fidget toys, chewy snacks, and noise-cancelling headphones are student-specific tools that support students’ sensory needs. (For lots of great sensory tools and ideas, consult with your school’s occupational therapist or take a look at [barbaraboroson.com](http://barbaraboroson.com).) Once the classroom has provided a student with finely tuned sensory supports, she should have no more need to seek to regulate her own sensory environment with behaviors that are disruptive and socially alienating to others.

**Life Literacy: The Social Factor**

Indeed, those unchecked impulses and surging sensory reactions do students no favors socially. The social landscape is, in some ways, the most treacherous terrain in inclusive settings for students on the spectrum. They tend to remain grounded in concrete. Their play and conversational skills rarely make the same developmental leap from the concrete to the abstract
that others make around third grade. This means they may not be able to read between the lines of social innuendo, make conversational inferences, or differentiate sincerity from sarcasm or cruelty from kindness.

These students also struggle with mindblindness, a challenge that limits their ability to take the perspective of others. This can cause students on the spectrum to interrupt, to push ahead in line, and sometimes even to laugh when someone gets hurt. Mindblindness is often, quite understandably, mistaken for an absence of empathy. For example, when a student continues chattering to a peer about the number of electoral votes his favorite presidential candidate has earned even when that peer has suddenly begun vomiting, it would be easy to view that as an absence of empathy.

But the fact is, individuals on the autism spectrum can be very empathetic. What gets in their way is that they often do not recognize the signs that call for empathy and may not know how best to demonstrate empathy. Like so much else for students on the spectrum, empathy and social savvy need to be scripted and taught.

**Enhancing Empathy**

We need to teach these students how to read a room and how to respond: *When someone starts coughing, you need to stop talking!* Or, *when you enter a room and find that everyone is quiet, you need to be quiet, too.*

We need to teach them how to read the feelings and how to respond. Teach them what hurt looks like, what tears mean, and what they can do to help. We need to guide them to consider what sad feels like in their own experience in order to help them understand how it feels for others. We need to teach them what impatience sounds like. The fact that the teacher is suddenly speaking loudly may not intuitively be recognized as a signifier of impatience unless we teach these students to make that connection. Since these thought processes may not occur spontaneously, scripting empathic recognition and empathic responses helps draw out the empathic instincts that so often get lost in translation.

**Streamlining Socialization**

As hard as it is for students on the spectrum to make sense of their typical peers, it’s equally hard for their typical peers to make sense of them. Typical students need to go more than halfway to forge a friendship with students on the spectrum, and most are either unwilling or unable to do that. It’s just easier to be friends with someone who gets your jokes, takes turns, reads your feelings, and is flexible in choosing activities. This often leaves students on the spectrum left out, rejected, teased, and bullied—an atmosphere that causes them to retreat even further into the repetitive, predictable comfort of their inner worlds.

Try to model inclusive behavior for your students: Publically emphasize strengths. Single out a student on the spectrum for what she can do rather than for what she can’t. Is she the best schedule-follower? An authority on historical dates? Show the class that you rely on and value her.

Choose books for your class that exemplify and celebrate all kinds of diversity—whether race, religion, ethnicity, gender identification, or ability. (Find a list of recommended books featuring all kinds of diversity, organized by theme and reading level at barbaraboroson.com.)

Point out that we all have challenges: Some of us struggle to see—we wear glasses. Some of us struggle with reading or math—we get reading support or a tutor. And some of us struggle to sit still, take turns, stay calm, get along with others. Remind students that we are all in school
to learn and that each of us is working on developing different skills. As a class, we must all help each other learn and grow.

**Life Literacy: The Engagement Factor**

Given the combined effects of sensory dysregulation, executive dysfunction, social rejection, and resultant anxiety, it’s no wonder that students on the spectrum need us to address and accommodate these challenges before they can pursue curriculum. But even once the day is scheduled, anxiety abated, reactions mitigated, senses sated, socialization scripted, and classmates on board, students on the spectrum will still tend to withdraw from the academic curriculum. By definition, everything we teach is new to them—that’s why we teach it. And anything new can cause these students to retreat deeper into their comfort zones to what they know and to what feels safe.

**Activating Engagement**

In order to engage these students in curricular learning, we need to make lessons feel familiar and unthreatening. We do this by finding a hook.

A hook is a metaphorical link between the curriculum and a student’s special area of interest. Whether a student on the spectrum is preoccupied with airplane engines, iPhones, pizza, or SpongeBob SquarePants, there is always a way to hook a special interest into any aspect of the curriculum at any level. For example, a quick Google search of SpongeBob episodes yields topics that include pineapples, fast food, sea life, camping, labor strikes, roller coasters, and many other themes that can be linked to the curriculum. Hook students into math lessons by having them calculate the cost or the nutritional value of a meal at SpongeBob’s Krusty Krab Restaurant. Hook students into ELA by having them write about a time they themselves had an underwater adventure or went camping or to an amusement park, just like SpongeBob. Hook students into social studies by having them investigate the labor laws that might have protected SpongeBob when he walked off his job. Hook students into science by considering the composition of the ocean floor or the physics at work during SpongeBob’s dreaded roller coaster ride.

**The Pursuit of Content**

Now the class can move forward together, shifting away from SpongeBob to pursue the intended lesson.

Be sure to offer plenty of organizational supports along the way. Students on the spectrum often learn information in solid, immutable chunks that do not blend with or modify prior knowledge. In fact, these students do not necessarily make any contextual connections between new and prior knowledge, so information is rarely filed into meaningful contexts or retrievable mental categories. Instead, chunks of new information tend to float, untethered, throughout a cluttered, cognitive sea of randomly strewn concepts.

Support meaningful assimilation of information by guiding students to file new concepts in sensible contexts for easy retrieval: *Now that we know why the colonists wanted their freedom from the British, let’s look at the steps they took to obtain that freedom.*

Guide their thinking as they demonstrate their knowledge by providing templates that help them to visualize new concepts in relation to other concepts, such as timelines, sequencing grids, Venn diagrams, cluster maps, concept webs, and character trees. Offer options to maximize output. Whenever possible, let students have the choice of writing, typing, singing, dancing, pantomiming, painting, sculpting, collaging, montaging, podcasting, powerpointing, and videotaping. Let them capitalize on their strengths to show what they know.
And while they’re busily showcasing their new knowledge, be on the lookout for praiseworthy moments. Keep in mind that these students meet with more than their fair share of frustration and failure across most aspects of their lives. Try to catch them in the act of doing well, doing the right thing. Whether they are waiting quietly, working carefully, writing neatly, listening patiently, planning ahead, taking turns, using manners, making eye contact, or being flexible, try to note and honor that fleeting moment of positive effort. If you wait until the task is complete, then a less-than satisfactory outcome may overshadow the tremendous effort expended along the way and the opportunity for praise will have vanished.

Look closely for those elusive moments and celebrate them. Without a doubt, these challenged and challenging students need all the positive energy they can get in order to keep trying and believing. And without a doubt, so do we.
Authentic Literacy Experiences in the Secondary Classroom

Valerie Brunow, Millbrook High School

ABSTRACT
This article is a resource for educators looking to offer personal instruction and literacy opportunities to secondary students. It provides a thoughtful and in-depth look at the workshop model in a high school setting. It offers methods and suggestions for setting up the workshop model to methods and strategies for diverse learners. The information will provide teachers with approaches to authentic and differentiated learning opportunities for all students in any secondary classroom.

AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY
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Literacy in the Secondary English Classroom
For nine years I have been working as an English teacher. I have served in a number of capacities teaching grades eight through twelve, honors courses, remedial courses, reading support groups, and electives. I am humbled everyday by my students’ lives, insights, and my experiences in teaching them. Every teaching year is unique. The students constantly challenge me to bring new opportunities and material to the classroom. With the great onset and use of technology, this has become a necessity to reach young learners. As a teacher, I am constantly fine-tuning my craft, often looking for the next exciting resource to bring literacy to the fingertips of eager students.

Approximately five years ago, I began to see the significant shift in learners and a genuine need to transition my own thinking and methodologies. Year after year of handing students books that I loved to read and teach, like To Kill a Mockingbird, I began to notice students were not as excited as I was hoping. I could not imagine a student who was not enchanted by Boo Radley or could not be captivated by Atticus’ stoic demeanor. This left me wondering – how do I get them involved in this book?
I tried a variety of tactics and techniques to get students engaged in the text. Some of these activities included creating original art, connecting songs to text and acting out scenes, but nothing was working. The disheartening realization came when a student finally helped me to grasp what I had been missing all along: “Mrs. B, this book is old and I don’t like the way they talk.” I was taken back and a little saddened by my students’ inability to connect with this classic. I have grown to love these texts and believed I would teach them for the remainder of my career. As I stewed over the comment, it became obvious what the problem was – the personal pronoun “I.” I loved these classics. I wanted them to see what I was guided to see so many years ago. I wanted them to read and fall in love with the characters as I finally did. “I” is not what my students needed – they needed their own experience. The next question became – how do we, student and teacher, work together to give students an authentic learning experience?

After struggling to find an answer and further prodding my administration, I arrived at Reading Workshop. The elementary and middle school teachers in my district were in the preliminary stages of a program from Columbia University, Teachers College Reading and Writing Project. I asked if I could join, hoping that maybe I could find an idea that could help. After some in school training sessions and a trip to Columbia for a week during the summer, I was overwhelmed by the new information I had been given. I was excited and ready to begin, except all of the materials, advice, and information were geared towards elementary and middle schools. I was still at a loss for what to do. The origins of the workshop are more formatted for the elementary school setting. More flexible access and time with kids is a highlight of allowing students to progress in materials at their level. Progress monitoring and student selected materials are the most binding agents of this model. Working in the high school setting and only having forty minutes per day in an average class of twenty five -- I felt the odds were not in my favor. However, I knew I needed my students’ investment in a program that had their interests and abilities in mind and so I set forth on my journey of research.

I began searching for a book or website that could offer guidance on how to run workshop-based instruction at the high school level. I found some incredible authors who give overviews or directions about how to manage various aspects of the process. The author, Chris Tovani (2003), of I Read It, But I Don’t Get It: Comprehension Strategies for Adolescent Readers, coined the term “Fake Reading.” Fake reading is what we see many students doing with books: flipping the pages, talking, changing books or saying they don’t like it. Tovani not only acknowledges the idea of “fake readers,” but offers ways to address it. She clarifies how often poor readers learn to avoid reading and lose the meaning of the text. This happens because many readers believe reading is purely the decoding of words (Tovani, 2003). Often students read for answers and to regurgitate information. Authentic reading practices push students to read as writers. In this expectation students not only evaluate the text for information, but for author style, choice and exploration of ideas. Sometimes texts that we put in students hands are beyond their reading ability level. If this is the case, students are simply decoding and not building comprehension or deeper reading skills. Students do not need to engage in “fake reading” when texts are on their reading level. The reading experience is more personal, meaningful and rewarding.

Another author who looks critically at the way literature and reading is being taught, specifically in high schools, is Kelly Gallagher (2009), author of Readicide: How Schools Are Killing Reading and What You Can Do About It. Gallagher has discussed, at length, the importance of putting literature into students’ hands and teaching them how to read it, instead of
reading it to them. He states “...Shouldn't schools be the place where students interact with interesting books? Shouldn't the faculty have an ongoing laser-like commitment to put good books in our students' hands? Shouldn't this be a front-burner issue at all times?” (Gallagher, 2009, p.30). Fostering meaningful literacy practices is essential for student engagement and interest. Offering students an opportunity to choose texts and teaching how to approach texts helps to support reading investment. The workshop model blends personal interest with approaches to reading and writing that are differentiated to meet the needs of a variety of learners. I found these qualities and opportunities to be essential next steps for me and my students. Culling my newfound information and about twenty texts in my Amazon shopping cart, I began my journey into what my students may need and away from what “I” was used to teaching.

In my first attempt at the Reader’s Workshop in my own classroom I was excited by the possibility of choice. However, this initial excitement also gave way to the overwhelming feeling of loss of control. I began to question how I would manage one hundred different students with, quite possibly, one hundred different books at one time. While many successes happened, there were still many kinks to be worked out. Some students became instant success stories, finishing books before I could schedule a conference to discuss the reading. Other students abandoned book after book or continued on their road of fake reading. It was important to me that every student have a positive experience with this process.

The “over-readers” were the most exciting and rewarding part of the workshop. These readers were finishing books so quickly I had a hard time keeping up with their pace. These readers are what most teachers yearn for, however, they were resistant to slow down their reading to implement practices, lessons and strategies. Helping students to find a good book was not the challenge here, but helping them invest in the learning that complements the reading could be a challenge. Modeling these strategies as a teacher leader and teacher reader helps to strengthen this relationship with students who are avid and excited readers. By showing students how you apply your practices supports students understanding and investment.

The next reader I encountered was the regular reader. This is the reader who feels comfortable choosing books and often will complete tasks suggested or lesson application. They tend to grow the most within the workshop model as readers and thinkers. They will help to model lessons and share their ideas. Regular readers thrive with opportunities to reflect on their ideas and often enjoy conferring and book talks. Engaging students who read regularly in one type of genre often benefit from series book recommendations or supporting them with new and interesting genres.

The most challenging readers, and often in the end the most rewarding are the book abandoners or continuing “fake readers.” These students often have a hard time committing to reading for a number of reasons. Many times the actual process or act of reading is daunting. When a student is a reluctant reader their reading skills: speed, decoding, and comprehension are often lacking. This makes the physical and mental process of reading more challenging. Most of these students have been “fake reading” for years. The first step with a student like this is to find out personal interests and look closely at television shows or movies that they enjoy. Many times bridges can be gapped by finding similar characters from film to print. Another great option for these readers is to utilize graphic novels. These often support the desire for imagery mixed with text. There are wonderful graphic novel options for the secondary classroom. If the problem is specifically abandoning books - which I do let students do - then there are a few steps you can
take. I have students bookbrowse regularly. I also ask them to make a list of five books they are interested in so we are not looking blindly. I am also sure to meet with students who abandon and I follow many of the tactics listed above to help students invest in their reading. For students who do not normally read they feel incredibly accomplished when finishing their first book, whether graphic novel or short novel, these accomplishments pave the way for reading goals and expectations. It is rewarding to see a student go from reading reluctance to experience reading success.

Starting the workshop took a lot of time, patience, and reading, but I was able to get almost all of the students into books. Truthfully, there are always a few students that may not read completely and this case was not any different. However, a lot more authentic reading happens within this model.

I came to understand how important structure, planning, and consistency are in a workshop model. There are a few key elements of the high school Reading Workshop model that help to develop regular reading and success. One of the most significant elements of this workshop model is it allows for differentiation. It allows the teacher to support and employ a program that meets the needs of all students. It offers the opportunity to utilize varied methods of teaching for a diverse population of students.

**Literacy and Diversity**

We must honor students as unique individuals in the process of learning -- it is essential to understand that every student is diverse and comes equipped with a diverse literacy background. The definition of literacy itself has changed significantly over the last ten years. What was simply deemed reading and writing has taken on a new life. Simplifying literacy to the discrete skills of reading and writing is a framework that does not account for the needs of learners who do not have the same linguistic abilities or background knowledge.

According to the National Council of Teachers of English in their Definition of 21st Century Literacies position statement (2008):

> Literacy has always been a collection of cultural and communicative practices shared among members of particular groups. As society and technology change, so does literacy. Because technology has increased the intensity and complexity of literate environments, the 21st century demands that a literate person possess a wide range of abilities and competencies, many literacies. These literacies are multiple, dynamic, and malleable. As in the past, they are inextricably linked with particular histories, life possibilities, and social trajectories of individuals and groups. Active, successful participants in this 21st century global society must be able to: Develop proficiency and fluency with the tools of technology; build intentional cross-cultural connections and relationships with others so to pose and solve problems collaboratively and strengthen independent thought; design and share information for global communities to meet a variety of purposes; manage, analyze, and synthesize multiple streams of simultaneous information; create, critique, analyze, and evaluate multimedia texts; and attend to the ethical responsibilities required by these complex environments.

This definition has given new meaning to the process and understanding of literacy because it respects and honors that literacy has moved beyond the origins of literate and illiterate. It certainly does not allow for the learner to be reduced to such simply stated terms which can carry significant life-long implications. Rather, this new definition illuminates possibilities for the
learner and the ways in which information is acquired. The new definition reflects a diverse twenty-first century learner group.

Acquisition of information and learning take on different forms at different grades levels. In the middle and high school years, these distinctions can be stark and uncomfortable for students. While ability gaps, background knowledge, race, and socioeconomics are not necessarily terms young adults and teens would use -- these are the markers for students that may make their learning experiences and achievement markedly different. That is why it is essential for education to offer experiences that embrace diversity, honor culture and individuality, and promote the growth of individual students in a classroom community environment. There are many ways in which we can reach students through diverse literacy opportunities.

As a teacher, it is essential to know your students. It is essential that teachers understand their students background knowledge and needs both as a person and learner. The Reading Workshop model in a secondary setting accommodates the array of reading level and abilities that students may bring to the classroom. By allowing students to access texts that are personal it can allow students to find texts that are culturally and personally important. It helps students to make greater links to themselves and the world around them. In using a workshop model it requires the teacher to meet in a conference setting with students. This helps to build trust in the classroom and show that reading and sharing ideas and information is a practice that all people are a part of and invested in on a personal level. Since students will be working in pairs and groups to talk about their individual books, it fosters a community of literacy and literacy practices. It helps students to forge relationships that connect ideas and experiences beyond the book. Most importantly, it affords the opportunity to build respect and community for students’ growth and success. It allows students to collaborate over more rigorous mentor texts while still feeling success with independent appropriately leveled books. These expectations and principals of the workshop model value the individual reader while investing the classroom community in greater experiences and expectations as a collective group.

The Mini-Lesson

The mini-lesson is a crucial part of the workshop model. This is a short lesson, approximately seven to ten minutes in length. This lesson should be carefully planned around a specific unit or topic related the current area of focus or study. Topics are selected by the teacher and based on student need or curricular areas. The mini-lessons should help students to develop greater meaning and understanding of their individual texts. Mini-lessons can vary from focuses on reading skills and elements, to writing skills and expectations and can evaluate any aspects of reading or writing. Often, when choosing a mini-lesson set there should be a goal or theme that will work cooperatively to create a larger context in a unit. For example, learning to evaluate concepts of narration and perspective can be connected with the elements of tone and voice. Therefore, the mini-lesson can address the use of narration and can further suggest deeper meanings the author may have intended. Ultimately, you choose a mentor text that can be read as a class with support from the teacher. Working through the piece of reading, as a class, sharing the ideas you are trying to prove and guide students in the mini-lesson. After evaluating and synthesizing the text students will move to independent practice. In doing this, students will use partners as a resource, reflect on their texts and utilize new knowledge. Students show evidence and application of their mini-lesson in their reading journals. These serve as great sources of conversation for conferences and evidence of thinking for grading.
Mentor Texts

A mentor text can be a book, short story, poem, or any piece of writing used to teach reading skills and strategies. Additionally, it can be a video, podcast or audio materials. The text is used with the entire class as a model for a specific purpose. The mentor text is valued as the center of the lesson which will model a specific skill or strategy. A teacher should use texts that contain valuable examples for the mini-lesson or skills they would like to model. For example, a teacher may model a comprehension strategy showing how to make inferences based on the information provided in the text. Mentor texts should be rigorous to read and require deep thinking skills. The mentor text should be fairly short in length, but accessible for discussion and thought provoking dialogue. Kelly Campbell (2007), author of Less Is More, uses her experiences in the classroom and the power of short thought provoking texts. She offers excellent examples of how short texts, which can be used as mentor texts, can engage students in meaningful reading as a class. Campbell offers a variety of text references in various formats to help teachers find meaningful resources.

Choice as a Powerful Tool

Allowing students to read across a variety of genres and authors exposes them to literature in a plethora of forms and settings. Students can abandon a book in search of a text with greater interest and comfort. They should not abandon books constantly, but when given mini-lessons on how to choose appropriate books this may limit the issue. Classroom libraries are helpful and aid in book choice. Additionally, school and public libraries are great places to find books if resources are limited. Students can access texts via the web, which allows exposure to alternative texts and may help to meet the demands of budgets which may not allow for classroom libraries. Public libraries will offer aid and resources for students as well. Allowing students to use technology such as iPads, smart phones, iPods, Kindles, and Nooks may help to spark interest in and access to books.

Purpose – Making Reading Meaningful

In the Reading Workshop process every student should work towards defining him/herself as a reader. This provides the opportunity for students to read voluminously while still being exposed to mentor texts. Mentor texts have greater complexity and require a more demanding reading experience. By using the mentor text to model the learning process, students then venture off on their own to take their new knowledge and apply it in their own reading. This process of application creates an individual experience which engages the student in their area of interest and at their own reading level. Louise Rosenblatt (1938/2005) states, “The reader brings to the work personality traits, memories of past events, present needs and preoccupations, a particular mood of the moment and a particular physical condition. These and many other elements in a never-to-be-duplicated combination determine his response to the text” (p. 30-31). The mentor text creates an opportunity for students to be exposed to more demanding texts in a safer environment. Thus, allowing students to shift new knowledge to their independent reading level and apply instructional methods. Rosenblatt’s statement suggests student history can influence future experiences. Therefore, if a reader encounters a text that is too complex independently it may be a negative experience. However, if a students is supported in a more difficult process and given the support to be successful independently the future applications it will be positive. By making reading an experience for each individual it will change the reading experience for the student. Additionally, it allows for a more purposeful and rigorous experiences overall. It requires students to create work, develop and offer their insights as to how
they arrived at this place of understanding. Therefore, this system of supported practice and independent application is making the independent reading experience more valuable and comprehensive.

**Reading Inventory Assessments – What Students Need**

In an education world filled with testing, the last suggestion I want to make is to test students more. Nonetheless, by understanding how to match individual students with leveled books, we are enriching their learning experience. This can turn “fake” reading into “real” reading. There are many programs and books that can be purchased to assess students’ reading levels. There are many programs and methods by which teachers can evaluate students. Scholastic Reading Inventory, The Qualitative Reading Inventory, and Teacher’s College Reading Workshop Running Records are all possible avenues to explore. The information detailed below explains some of the qualities and options these programs afford the teacher and student.

**Scholastic Reading Inventory**

The Scholastic Reading Inventory (SRI) is a computer and web based program that can be purchased and administered to students. According to the Scholastic website the SRI is more specifically defined as: “Scholastic Reading Inventory (SRI) Enterprise Edition is a reading assessment program which provides immediate, actionable data on students' reading levels and growth over time. SRI helps educators differentiate instruction, make meaningful interventions, forecast growth toward grade-level state tests, and demonstrate accountability.” The SRI is a program a school district must purchase along with licenses to administer it. Completed on-line the passages are smaller and the students choose a multiple-choice answer that reflects; inferences, comprehension, or contextual ideas a student assesses based upon the reading passage. While the passages are short, the task is more daunting as there is no predicted finish time and the test responds to the testers responses. The questions and passages are regulated by the online system. One of the drawbacks of this program is that the results are based solely upon student response. It does not allow for teacher discretion or interpretation. It also relies on student investment to the task for accurate scoring. At the conclusion of the administration the students and teacher are delivered a Lexile score. The SRI program has some notable benefits on the secondary level, including: ease of access for students and teachers, multiple testing at one time and built in data tracking.

**Qualitative Reading Inventory**

The Qualitative Reading Inventory (QRI) is a rigorous reading assessment tool. According to the QRI Pearson website this assessment text offers the following: “The QRI-5 has long led the field in offering students and teachers alike a reliable and easy-to-use informal assessment instrument. This Fifth Edition continues to emphasize authentic assessment of children’s reading abilities, from the most emergent readers to advanced readers. One of the keys to the success of the QRI-5 is that it contains narrative and expository passages at each pre-primer through high school level” (Leslie & Caldwell, 2010). The QRI is a means to measure some parts of reading ability or lack thereof. The QRI has many benefits; it is an intensive investigation of the student as a reader. The QRI gives information about fluency, decoding and comprehension. These insights are gained specifically by the tester. The major drawback is its limits for assessing the secondary level student. The QRI testing materials only offer generalized grade level option. These specifically evaluate: sixth grade, upper middle school and high school. Developmentally speaking, a ninth grader is different from a twelfth grade reader and this book
does not reflect those bands of reading ability. However, the passages choices in the book are interesting and varied. The QRI does require some intensive self training for the teacher. One of the greatest elements of the Qualitative Reading Inventory is its cost effectiveness for the teacher as no subscription is required and it contains a CD with reproducible materials.

All assessment tools offer great opportunity to gain insight about students’ abilities. However, the best way to assess students is to use a mixture of tools and recognize your students’ needs. Students are constantly being tested -- often they do not understand why or what for. By building a relationship with your students and sharing your reading life, students develop a deeper understanding and appreciation for the information you gain about them. Regardless of the assessment used, it is essential to share your students’ results with them. Making students a part of conversation about their progress presents them with the opportunity for reflection and growth. Working at the secondary level, I collaborate openly with my students and together we build a realistic plan for their reading lives. Tools like the SRI and QRI work well when combined with conferencing and interest inventories -- it can build a thorough picture of who a student is as a reader and what they need.

Leading by Example

The greatest tool a teacher can use is their own experience. If a teacher uses a mentor text and models their own thinking, it helps students to grasp concepts more thoroughly. Also, while mentor texts are generally shorter, they also tend to be more complex. This helps to expose readers to more rigorous texts in a safer environment. When a teacher models their own reading and the decisions they make as a reader, they can help their students make a greater connection to the text. If teachers create and use their own reading journal, it is a great tool during conferences and to share with the class. By crafting a reading journal, the teacher can create a resource directly connected to the teaching they hope the student learns. My reading journal contains evidence of thinking and mini-lesson strategies I have applied in my own reading. The journal is most useful if you are working in conferences. It is a quick resource that can be referenced and set expectations in guiding a student’s practice. A teacher needs to make time to read as well. By modeling reading - quietly and purposefully engaging with a text - it helps students to see what this should look and feel like. If a teacher follows this expectation they will be able to share more with their students through their own experience. By reading regularly and responding in a reading journal it helps teachers to better understand and model the thinking we hope to see students use. Reading grade level texts will also give the teacher a wealth of ideas and books to suggest to students.

The Art of Scheduling

The schedule of the workshop may vary from day to day, but the elements should be consistent. Students should be prepared to understand that there are formats of the workshop that may vary from day to day. Students should have anywhere from twenty to thirty minutes to read in class each day. Students will have time to discuss book experiences and choices with a partner. Students can work on writing about reading in their reading journals during their reading or at the conclusion of the reading sessions.
Two Schedule Options (based on 40 – 42 minute classes):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mini-Lesson (7 – 10 minutes)</th>
<th>Read aloud and discuss – Mentor Text (about 15 - 20 minutes)</th>
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<tr>
<td>• Independent Reading (about 20–25 minutes)</td>
<td>• Independent Reading (about 20 minutes)</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Lesson Reminder/Interruption (10 minutes into independent reading)</td>
<td>• Teacher conferences with small groups or individual students.</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Teacher conferences with small groups or individual students.</td>
<td><strong>For either model: Students should be journaling during various moments during independent reading.</strong></td>
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Partner Share (about 3 – 5 minutes)  
Class Share (2 – 3 minutes)

Class Share (2 – 3 minutes)

The schedule options can be alternating or used in a variety of ways throughout the week or the unit.

**The Reading Journal**

In order to build towards students defining him/herself as a reader, they must be able to reflect on their reading journey. By using a reading journal, students will keep track of mini-lesson notes, reading, and reflecting about their individual texts, insights and evidence of thinking during reading. Teachers should plan on crafting their own reading journal as a tool for teaching. The journal can be any kind of notebook. It is ideal to have a notebook where you cannot lose the pages easily. Since this should track students’ learning, the various sections can be divided by post-it notes or paper clips. The reading journal can also be a great opportunity for self-expression. By allowing students to decorate the cover of the journal, it can reflect who they are and hope to become as readers. The reading journal also offers a great opportunity for assessment. I create rubrics that look at various elements of their reading journal. Focusing on an appropriate points range and looking for the following measures: neatness, evidence of thinking, evidence of mini-lessons, application of ideas, original thoughts and depths of applications. Students should have evidence of how they are utilizing the lessons taught in class and applying them to their independent practice. Additionally, these notes and insights provide and opportunity for students to create charts, reflections, and more formal pieces of writing about their reading.

**Writing about Reading**

Writing about reading is as important as reading itself. Students must understand that there is a difference between writing about reading for assessment and understanding versus enjoyment. Students must avoid simplistic responses about plot and basic elements of a story. The use of close reading strategies help students to complete these tasks more effectively. Douglas Fisher and Nancy Frey (2012) state “The primary objective of a close reading is to afford students with the opportunity to assimilate new textual information with their existing background knowledge and prior experiences to expand their schema. The challenge is
in not becoming so focused on background knowledge and prior experiences such that we end up spending little time on the textual information” (p. 179). This suggests that by utilizing the mini-lessons and accessing the text through close reading students become authentic readers. Prompting students to move away from summarizing and towards analytical thoughts and practice. They must begin to look at the craft of writing as opposed to just writing about what they have read. These individual opportunities help students to develop more critical analysis skills because they must theorize independently. When using engaging mini-lessons and mentor texts, students can begin to understand the critical examination of literature. Once taking part in reflective writing in their reading journals, students have the opportunity to facilitate their thinking in reading. Students can also take their writing about reading into small group discussions. Writing about reading is also a great tool for assessment in the workshop model. Student can be both formally and informally assessed when writing about their reading. When students share general thoughts and insights about their reading, I generally give feedback but that is an informal assessment that helps me to understand my student better as a reader. With formal assessments in mind, I often use longer written responses; essays, reflective journal entries and application of lessons to grade students.

**Individual Expectations and Experiences**

Every student has an individual reading level and reading rate. Lexiles are a commonly used reference tool for rating reading level with book levels. A Lexile reading level can be evaluated through assessment. A reading rate is reading speed. The reading speed can be a fairly easy calculation. From my experience in meeting with a student in a conference, you can see approximately how much or how many pages can be read in one minute. This calculation may vary from book to book, but can be a base standard for the student. If it takes the student longer than one minute to read a full page, the book may be too difficult or the content may be too complex. If this is the circumstance, you should have a short discussion with your student about the book and have them read the same page aloud to you. This will help to assess some simple ideas about students’ fluency and decoding. When students are struggling with contextual words or phrases, you may prompt the student to explain what the text is about. If they are continuing to struggle to build meaning, it may be a good idea to talk to the student about abandoning the text for a more meaningful and relatable selection. The information about reading rate expectations cannot be pinned down to an exact number; however, there are many resources and valid information about reading expectations.

Student expectations should change frequently in the workshop model. Since the student is reading more frequently and exposed to voluminous amounts of text, their reading speed and level should increase and naturally the reading expectations should as well. Setting expectations should be a collaborative decision made by the student with teacher support. Working towards individual goals to meet student needs is the key. For some students this may be setting a specific number of books to others it could be to set a number of pages. Students should look at their reading endurance and fluency and make a decision based on their experience and hopeful expectations. Students ought to create a book list for future reading so that they are prepared to move into their next text with ease.

**Rigor in Reading**

Working in a workshop model enables a teacher to differentiate for each individual student. Additionally, scaffolding can be built into the workshop model rather naturally. Being able to create a rigorous and individually meaningful experience is the hope of any teacher. Since
students are working in texts that are uniquely aimed towards their skill set, it helps them and the teacher to create meaningful expectations for their reading. There have been various schools of thought on the various levels where students should be reading. The levels where students read: Instructional, Independent and Frustration. At the Independent level students are reading with 95% or better accuracy and the texts comprehension is easily understood for the student. At the Instructional level the reading poses more of a challenge but is understood by the student and read with approximately 90% accuracy. A Frustration level text is problematic and difficult for the reader with an understanding of less than 90% accuracy (Poirier, 2009). With research and evolution theory there are various opinions on what students should be reading at what levels. With the onset of the Common Core State Standards the suggestion is that students spend more time in rigorous texts. Shanahan, Fisher, and Frey (2016) state, “This is in contrast to most past discussion of this topic, which emphasized how overly complex text may impede learning. Such discussion therefore focused on developing various readability schemes and text gradients to help teachers determine which books might be too hard for their students. The new standards instead propose that teachers move students purposefully through increasingly complex text to build skill and stamina” (p. 58). For many secondary level students their textbooks are written at the frustration level. As Shanahan, Fisher, and Frey write:

Gone are the days when text was judged as difficult solely on the basis of sentence length and syllable count. We now know that many factors affect text complexity. With this increased understanding, teachers do not have to rely on intuition to figure out which books their students can handle. Instead, teachers can select texts worthy of instruction and align their instructional efforts to ensure that all their students read complex, interesting, and important texts” (p. 62).

In my experience it is a careful balance of texts that entice young and impressionable readers. It is essential that readers grow for successful reading in the future, however having the student invested in what they are reading is equally important. Mentor and group texts that are rigorous or Frustration level reading are best utilized in a setting that offers support, but encourages growth and risk. Quickly moving through texts in the Independent to Instructional ranges is key. Students benefit from reading these texts independently. The optimal environment will expose students to Frustration level texts with support and lessons to disseminate these texts. Learning methods to approach more complex texts in the Instructional level texts will help students to gain confidence in the process. By exposing students to a variety of levels and texts they will have a more authentic learning and reading experience. Additionally, by conferencing with other students and the teacher, it enables students to get one-on-one reading discussion experience. Students, over time, will learn to set goals based on their own growth and development as a reader.

Conferences – Making Greater Meaning

Conference time is one of the greatest assets of the workshop model. It affords teachers the opportunity to work one on one or in small groups with students. In his book How’s It Going?, Carl Anderson (2000) states, “Conferring is not the icing on the cake; it is the cake.” In a traditional teacher-centered classroom, one-on-one time with students can be difficult to schedule. By giving students independent time to read and practice the skills, they have discovered in a shared text or a mini-lesson there is now time to work one-on-one or with student in small skill groups. A one-on-one conference with teacher and student should have a variety of focus points which can include: book discussions, mini-lesson development, individual reading
goals and reflections. Group conferences or strategy groups can target areas of weakness or strengths in a small group of students with similar needs. Meeting in strategy groups can help both students and teacher to help develop a skill further or to re-teach a lesson. Simply stated the conference is a lot like a conversation about a topic. Some basic established guidelines will help students to be prepared for conferences. For example, having students come to the conference with a question or something they would like to share is a great place to start. You want your conference to be purposeful. Give students guidelines and expectations for what conferences will focus on and offer next steps for them to move into more independent practice.

Anderson’s book *How’s It Going* is an unparalleled resource for any level teacher. It offers practical and accessible advice on conferring in general. The book often suggests to keep the process simple and the function of the conference clear. You want to establish the baseline, discuss information, answer questions, provide positive remarks and offer students guidance for what their next steps should be. It often helps if a conference is modeled for students to understand what their role is and what it looks like. I record samples with other adults and often play them for students. Helping students to create goals, in writing, they hope to accomplish is a great method for student achievement. By giving students the opportunity to set the objectives of their conferences and goals it puts students in a position to be an active participant in directing their learning. Often, one of the largest concerns among teacher is the classroom management aspect. If you are conferring with one students, how are the others held to task. I often utilize a working agreement system with my classes. In collaboration we brainstorm and compile the expectations and qualities of a workshop classroom. It is a working agreement that all students are a part of and in that are more invested in. Many times if there is failure to comply students will see that reflected in their participation grade. However, it is my experience that students like the workshop and the independence that comes with it. To that end, they are very respectful of our working environment.

**Partnerships – Come Together**

Collaboration is a quintessential component of the Reading and Writing Workshop model. Students should be working in reading partnerships throughout various units and lessons. These partnerships can last the length of books, semesters, or units of material. Partnerships are an indispensable component of the workshop model. Students can be partnered in a number of ways -- interest in genres, reading level, student or teacher selected partnerships. The partnership is a way to help students engage in conversations and material about reading and lessons. Typically a partnership can be a pair, but can also be a group of three or four. It is a constant and consistent relationship that helps to grow interaction and sharing knowledge in reading. When students engage in meaningful discussions about books it changes the way they value their own personal reading experiences. It affords them a more authentic experience with books and the ability to discuss them in meaningful ways. The teachers can help to facilitate the role of partnerships through modeling. Having another teacher to demonstrate or a student who feels comfortable modeling are great ways to share these interactions. Additionally, sample conferences can be recorded at another time and played for students. These offer the ability to replay them conveniently and post them on a classroom website. As teachers, our greatest goal is to prepare our students for the future. Having students make choices, discuss content and ideas employs a more practical real world experience. Partnerships can be chosen by the students or the teachers. The role of the partnership can be modeled in a mini-lesson for students. By
allowing students to discuss texts we give them greater meaning. It teaches students that we value books and the ideas and information we gain from them.

**Assessment – How to Get the Grades**

Rubrics are a natural ally in a workshop model. They work towards holding the teacher and student accountable and setting standards for the whole group. Since rubrics allow for growth and change, they are an excellent way to give students opportunities to set higher goals and develop skills. Rubrics can be used for the reading journal and overall participation in the workshop. Students should be directed that their journal writing will be the basis for more developed pieces of writing. Showing growth and having students engage in reflection can become meaningful pieces of grading in the workshop. The more basic elements such as reading speed, completed texts, and well-developed responses are all helpful to the grading process. Having students set their own goals and standards is an important part of this process as well. Specifically, I look to assess students in a number of capacities. Student engagement and commitment as participation is a great place to start in the assessment process. When students see that you value effort as an integral part of the workshop it offers an opportunity for success that they are confident is within their control. Additionally, writing about reading is a formal opportunity for assessment in the workshop model. I utilize the conferences as opportunity for grading as well. Students who come prepared to conferences with their materials and ready to engage show their commitment and understanding of expectations. Students often look forward to conferring and they are invested in this process. Finally, the reading journal and writing generated from lessons and notes are also assessment items. The journal itself receives a grade focusing on the following measures: neatness, evidence of thinking, evidence of mini-lessons, application of ideas, original thoughts and depths of applications. Finally, formal written assessments such as: essays, reflective journal entries and application of lessons can be great ways to measure student learning and progress.

**Common Core Learning Standards**

The Common Core Learning Standards website states: "The Standards set requirements not only for English language arts (ELA) but also for literacy in history/social studies, science, and technical subjects. Just as students must learn to read, write, speak, listen, and use language effectively in a variety of content areas, so too must the Standards specify the literacy skills and understandings required for college and career readiness in multiple disciplines." The workshop model not only supports these activities, but helps students to complete these with more independence and greater exposure to text. The overarching goal of the Common Core is to get students to a place where they are “college and career ready.” The standards further describe people who are college and career read as those who can: think critically, communicate effectively, collaborate, to create and innovate. The workshop model not only embraces independence, but helps students to grow and learn in ways that are specific to their learning styles and needs. The Common Core Standards have created a new set of guidelines for many educators and the workshop model helps to meet many of these new changes. The workshop facilitates the use of best practices and methods such as scaffolding and differentiation.

**Ideas for Lessons and Engagement**

If students feel like a teacher respects and invests in them - the investment will be returned. During this process of overhauling my reading and writing curriculum, I came to understand more about students and how they learn. I also came to the realization that the teacher must meet the needs of their individual students not just the standards. I always aim to saturate...
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my planning with student-centered activities and differentiated instruction. However, I am constantly adapting and adjusting my planning to find new ways to teach material more meaningfully. Every year, every class, every student is different and that means the teaching needs to be different. I make it a point to give students a voice in their learning and to give them active and engaging roles in their learning. By pushing myself to use more innovative techniques and approaches, I hope to meet the needs of the students and better prepare them for the future.

To bring in an element of technology into the workshop, students will “Tweet” about what we are reading. Every Tuesday in our classroom is “Twitter Tuesday.” Students are given the opportunity to bring their electronic devices to class. At the end of class we “Tweet” about the application of our mini-lesson, current book recommendation or criticisms, and any comments students may want to make to bolster the discussion. Students may compose a “Tweet” at any time we use #brunowbooks to keep all students connected to the thread. It offers a unique way for every student to voice their ideas and opinions about class and their individual texts. Students who may not have access to technology can use my computer or pair up with a partner and they simply sign the “Tweet” with their initials or name. I offer a live stream of these “Tweets” on the SmartBoard so we can view our discussion thread as a class. Giving students the opportunity to read texts and make applications in their own interests offers truly individual learning experience.

Conclusion

Readers Workshop is a rewarding and unique framework that helps to serve the needs for diverse learners. While the concept and organization can be a bit daunting to some, the results make the work very rewarding. Teaching is about building a program for what students need without sacrificing expectations. Readers Workshop affords this opportunity in the secondary classroom. As teachers we have the ability to provide students with opportunities for growth and evolution. As students’ lives become more complex, it is crucial to not be comfortable and complacent, but strive to create meaningful and engaging lessons. I have taken risks in my teaching and try to provide authentic and significant opportunities for my students to learn. The outcomes have been rewarding, and at the same time have also helped me to grow and learn. By valuing students as a group of individual and diverse learners we can provide them with authentic experiences in models like the workshop.

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Review of *Text Messaging and Literacy: The Evidence*


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**ABSTRACT**

The media suggests that text messaging has adverse effects on literacy development. Wood, Kemp, and Plester (2014), however, state that there is not enough evidence to support these assumptions. In *Text Messaging and Literacy: The Evidence*, Wood et al. (2014) organize preliminary research conducted about text messaging and literacy. The authors also present findings to demonstrate how text messaging can possibly influence literacy development. In addition to a summary and critical analysis, this book review includes information about how researchers and educators in the literacy field might use this content to support instructional decisions in the classroom.

Keywords: book review, text messaging, literacy, literacy development

**AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY**

Colleen Van Cura Monaco is a literacy specialist at Glendaal Elementary School in Scotia, New York. As a doctoral student at the University at Albany in the Department of Literacy Teaching and Learning, she has presented at the New York State Reading Association Conference and Oswego Writing Institute. Her research interests focus on digital and new literacies as well as response to literature as it relates to comparisons between digital and printed texts.

Text messaging is a prominent mode of communication. While the media suggests that text messaging has adverse effects on literacy development, there is not substantive data to support these assumptions. In *Text Messaging and Literacy: The Evidence*, Wood, Kemp, and Plester (2014) draw on their backgrounds as psychology professors and researchers to organize preliminary research conducted about the impact text messaging has on literacy development. The result is a book that presents initial research supporting a range of opinions related to the controversy surrounding this ubiquitous form of communication.
Situating Text Messaging: Historically and Socially

Wood et al. (2014) provided the historical context of texting, beginning as early as 1876 with the creation of the telephone. This pivotal invention allowed people to communicate without being in the same physical space. More recently, text messaging has changed phone communication in terms of time. Messages can be sent and/or received at different moments. The book authors even referred to text messaging as ‘convenient messaging’ because users can decide when or if they want to read and respond to messages.

In the book, the authors explained how text messaging has developed at a varying pace across the world. Europeans have been using text messages to communicate since the mid-1990s. Some American readers may find this surprising. Text messaging only became a popular means to communicate in the 2000s as a result of Internet improvements in the 1990s. By 2010, individuals in developing countries began text messaging as well. Texting is an affordable way for people in isolated regions to remain connected with others (Wood et al., 2014). In fact, Nokia has created inexpensive cell phones specifically for consumers in developing countries. One model, the Nokia 105, costs just $20 (Boone, 2013). Another advantage of this economical tool is the potential for development of literacy skills. Wood et al. (2014) discussed the Mande people in West Africa and how the “ability to text in their own language [gave] people a powerful reason to learn to read” (p. 17). It is helpful that the authors situated the research historically and socially because context plays a critical role in how texting continuously shapes and re-shapes the world.

Textspeak: A Whole New Language

William Safire (2009) stated that “no tradition is more time-honored than rebellion against linguistic tradition”, and there is currently a “rebellion” against Standard English via texting (Wood et al., 2014, p. 17). The outcome of this “rebellion” is a new language called textspeak. One of the first studies to describe the nature of texts occurred over a decade ago when Thurlow and Brown (2003) examined 544 text messages. They found common characteristics of textspeak to include: shortenings with letters missing (e.g., bday for birthday); acronyms (e.g., omg); letter/number homophones (e.g., cu l8r for see you later); misspellings (e.g., due to typing quickly and not editing); unconventional spellings that respect Standard English phoneme-grapheme rules (e.g., nite for night); regional dialect (e.g., afta for after); and symbols/emoticons (e.g., :) ).

In a more recent study, Turner, Abrams, Katic, and Donovan (2014) analyzed the type of digital language (i.e., digitalk) 81 adolescents used while instant messaging, text messaging, and posting on social networking sites. Unlike Thurlow and Brown (2003), Turner et al. (2014) did not find that adolescents frequently omitted vowels (e.g., tmrw) and used numbers to represent sounds (e.g., I g2g). Rather, Turner et al. (2014) found that complete sentences (97%), end period not used (96%), and non-standard capitalization (94%) were the most prevalent conventions. The comparison of the two studies shows that language continues to evolve over time.

Throughout the book, Wood et al. (2014) stressed that texting is an entirely new language and portrayed textisms as ‘unconventional spellings’ as opposed to ‘incorrect spelling.’ However, ‘unconventional spellings’ is not an appropriate phrase. As a separate language, textspeak would not adhere to Standard English conventions. It would follow that textisms are conventional spellings for textspeak.
Text Messaging and Literacy Skills: The Research

Wood et al. (2014) remained firm in their stance that the observable data available are too minimal and inconsistent for the media to declare text messaging as harmful to literacy development. The authors included research with participants who are children, adolescents, and adults in chapters three through seven, offering readers a comprehensive perspective about how text messaging influences literacy development across multiple age groups.

Children

The media often claims that texting has adverse effects on children’s spelling. To investigate this, Wood et al. (2014) referred to several studies on the relationship between spelling in Standard English and spelling in textspeak. Bradley and King (1992) as well as Powell and Dixon (2011) found that frequent use of textisms did not inhibit conventional spelling in other contexts because it is quite dissimilar to Standard English (e.g., including numbers, omitting vowels). In another study, Ehri, Gibbs, and Underwood (1988) asked primary students to spell pseudo-words, which are comparable to textisms because both rely on similar, but not exact, phonetic rules of Standard English. They discovered students were still able to spell words using Standard English conventions in other contexts. Furthermore, Wood et al. (2014) stated that “children who demonstrate the greatest knowledge of text abbreviations (textisms) also demonstrate better knowledge of conventional spellings” (p. 32). Many textisms can be read phonetically (e.g., nite). It would follow that individuals using textisms would understand letter-sound correspondence rules so that their audiences are able to understand messages.

Additionally, the authors summarized studies on a variety of literacy skills. For example, they indicated that “children who appeared to be highly-dependent phone users also tended to be the children with strong text processing skills and rapid phonological retrieval abilities” (Wood et al., 2014, p. 62). Wood et al. (2011) discovered a positive correlation between textism use and phonological awareness/phonological processing skills during a longitudinal study with 119 children. The book authors synthesized the studies to suggest that “textism use appears to be contributing something positive to reading performance above and beyond factors such as memory, vocabulary, and phonological skills” because users need an understanding of language conventions in order to read and write textisms (Wood et al., 2014, p. 32). However, Wood et al. (2014) noted negative correlations between the number of different people a child texts and scores on phonological awareness assessments. The data demonstrated that exposure to a wide range of textisms may affect orthographic development of Standard English because it could be confusing to see multiple spellings of the same word.

Adolescents and Adults

Similar to research with children, Wood et al. (2014) mentioned the media’s proposal that text messaging has negative implications for adolescents’ and adults’ Standard English spelling. Yet, inconsistencies across data are even more prevalent with this population. Massengill-Shaw, Carlson, and Waxman (2007) inquired if more frequent texting was associated with poor spelling. They found no significant difference between self-reported texting amounts and spelling. On the other hand, Drouin (2011) found a positive correlation between the amount of self-reported texting and spelling. Among 61 undergraduates in Australia, Kemp (2010) discovered no significant differences in language skills between those who texted often and those who texted less frequently. Grace, Kemp, Martin, and Parrila (submitted) calculated negative correlations between the number of text messages sent every day...
and scores on an un-timed word reading task in a study with 150 Canadian and 86 Australian first-year university students. Furthermore, Turner et al. (2014) found that five conventions in the top 50% of digitalk samples aligned with Standard Written English. Adolescents used complete sentences 97% of the time, question marks 74% of the time, standard capitalization 72% of the time, end periods 59% of the time, and apostrophes 54% of the time. Given such varying data, can the media claim that textspeak has adverse effects on Standard English literacy development?

Connections to the Classroom

The focus of Text Messaging and Literacy: The Evidence was research, but educators can draw on data in this book when designing lessons. Children and adolescents use textspeak to communicate with friends and family outside of school. Yet, children and adolescents continue to use textspeak during more formal academic work in school. Teaching students the appropriate contexts for textspeak could be a way to diminish the argument that texting is the cause of poor spelling and grammar. Educators can facilitate language awareness by implementing lessons related to code-switching (i.e., the process of altering “one’s language and register to meet the needs of audience and context”) (Turner et al., 2014, p. 165).

One specific idea Turner (2009) outlined is the “Flip the Switch” lesson. Students engage in contrastive analysis between textspeak and Standard English, sort examples of written language into categories of textspeak or Standard English, and determine appropriate contexts for textspeak and Standard English. Finally, students can translate to the opposite code. For example, the sentence “Hello. How is your day?” might become “hey how r u.”

Considerations

Wood et al. (2014) dedicated chapter nine as a space for summarizing their book so readers can make connections across major ideas in a reflective manner. Although the media reports potentially harmful consequences of text messaging, Wood et al. (2014) attempted to quell any worries educators and families may have by presenting research representative of both sides to this argument.

However, Wood et al. (2014) could have incorporated a broader range of topics in their book. First, the book authors only discussed how text messaging in English influences literacy development. Yet, individuals speaking other languages utilize textspeak (Nuessel, 2010). Additionally, new forms of communication (e.g., SnapChat, Instagram, Vine) allow users to send messages with a variety of modalities, such as pictures, videos, words, and symbols. It is important to address how communication with multi-modal, emerging technologies impacts literacy development.

Wood et al. (2014) have published a text that is a great start to disseminating research around text messaging and literacy. Hopefully, this book will inspire others to conduct studies related to this timely topic so the field can build a sizeable, balanced database before making decisions about the effects text messaging has on literacy development.

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**NOTE: A revised version of this paper has been published as Grace, A., Kemp, N., Martin, F.H., & Parrila, R. (2014). Undergraduates’ text messaging language and literacy skills. *Reading and Writing*, 27, 855-873.**


An Interview with Maria Paula Ghiso

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Manhattanville College

ABSTRACT

On April 6\textsuperscript{th} three members of the Manhattanville College Literacy Department, Mary Coakley Fields (MCF), Katie Cunningham (KC) and Courtney Kelly (CK) interviewed Maria Paula Ghiso (MPG) of Teachers College, Columbia University about her work with Emergent Bilinguals. Included below is a transcript of the conversation. The audio file is available the Language and Literacy Spectrum website.

AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY

María Paula Ghiso is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Curriculum and Teaching at Teachers College, Columbia University. Her scholarship investigates literacy in multilingual and transnational contexts. Through collaborative inquiry with teachers and students, María Paula strives to support schools in being more attuned to children’s linguistic, cultural, and experiential knowledge in the curriculum. María Paula is a former New York City dual language teacher and has facilitated professional development on language and literacy learning in a range of contexts. She has published in venues such as \textit{Journal of Early Childhood Literacy}, \textit{Teachers College Record}, \textit{Research in the Teaching of English}, \textit{Language Arts}, \textit{Harvard Educational Review}, and \textit{Journal of Literacy Research}. She is a co-author of the forthcoming book from Teachers College Press, \textit{Partnering with immigrant communities: Action through Literacy.}

MCF: We are here with María Paula Ghiso, Assistant Professor of Literacy at the Teacher’s College at Columbia University. Thank you for agreeing to do this interview with us.

MPG: Thanks for having me

MCF: I am Mary Coakley-Field

CK: I’m Courtney Kelly

KC: And Katie Cunningham

MCF: The three of us are from the Literacy Department in the School of Education at Manhattanville College. We so enjoyed your presentation on learning from immigrant students and families in the literacy curriculum at Manhattanville College’s Changing Suburb Institute Annual Educational Forum a few weeks ago. I’ve heard from so many of my colleagues at the college as well as teachers and principals how helpful they’ve found it. So many expressed that
they felt urgency and momentum to get started implementing practices that honor and support emergent bilinguals. We thought our readers would also like to hear about your research and insights, so thank you again. Some of your recent work centers on supporting immigrant children in the literacy curriculum. Could you tell us a little bit about what led you to pursue this line of inquiry?

MPG: Sure. I think a lot of my work with thinking about education and equity in relationship to language learners and emergent bilinguals was sparked in part from my own childhood experiences as a Latina immigrant to New York City public schools. When I first came to the US, I was in an English only pull-out classroom where I received ESL instruction because I had been labeled as “limited English proficient.” And I also attended an Argentinian school on the weekends where I was seen as someone who qualified as being “advanced.” There was a real disconnect between the two contexts. In one for example, the southern hemisphere had a history and intellectual tradition; we read a lot of literature from the region and studied Latin American history. In the other context my background was an obstacle to overcome in pursuit of school achievements. So for me, moving across these two worlds really sensitized me very early on to the situated nature of curricular practices and content. The differential readings of my ability underscore to me how whether students succeed or not is not only a function of an individual’s aptitude but more about how the learning environment is organized to value and learn from a range of intellectual and cultural identities. It was moving across these two worlds, what Walter Mignolo might call “border thinking”, that enabled me to see both contexts through a comparative lens. I was as bilingual teacher for a few years before I got my doctorate, and as an educator I felt that disconnect as well. I was very lucky to be in a dual language school that valued children’s multilingual practices. At the same time, some of the programmatic demarcations of the bilingual program didn’t fully align with the more fluid language practices of the children. And I felt that even for myself, I had to reign in some of my bilingual capacities based on whatever the language of instruction was for the day. It made me think about how bilingual schools are designed to protect the minoritized language, but that can sometimes exist in tension with what students are bringing, their multiple languages, their multiple cultures and identities. Ultimately, it’s important for schools to have a robust understanding of community knowledge and interests.

MCF: Great.

CK: Hi, Maria Paula, this is Courtney. When you presented a few weeks ago at Manhattanville, you shared with the audience about a photography project with emergent bilingual students that you worked on recently. Can you tell us about the goals of this project, how did you set it up, and can you tell us about what you found?

MPG: This project stems a bit from a dissonance of practice. I was doing professional development in a school and the children were writing non-fiction texts, and they were invited to write about something they were experts in. The teachers, good teachers, provided some models that were already there in the curriculum. The children seemed to take it up in what originally felt like a superficial way, and they weren’t producing the kind of work that teachers imagined students would produce. And then there’s the dominant discourse around the learning of immigrant children, that they’re “lacking background knowledge.” So there was a tendency to say that the children didn’t have anything to write about, and I knew based on my own experiences and my relationships with the children that there was a lot that they had to write
An Interview with Maria Paula Ghiso

about. Yet I didn't know what a much better quote “writing model” might be, that that would inspire the children to do their own writing and tap into their experiences and expertise.

The project was designed to learn more about what the children were doing outside of school and think about creating a space within the day-to-day curriculum where they could utilize that knowledge, where they could bring those topics and interests to the forefront of the curriculum. I was very lucky to partner with a professor here at Teacher’s College, Patricia Martínez-Álvarez, who works with bilingual education, and also with a bilingual teacher at the school the school principal, who over the years created the space for us to collaborate with them on the project. They were very open to that work, to say, ‘How might we make the parameters of writing instruction a little more permeable to what children’s own topics of inquiry are?’ For students who are acquiring English, photography seemed like the perfect way to represent what else they knew. The main goal of the project was really to center their knowledge in the curriculum, including their bilingual literacies.

One of the characteristics of most bilingual programs is that the children are working with one language for a particular time of the day or week and then switching to the other language in order to give the minoritized language a lot of focus and status in the classroom. But this project invited children to use all the languages and all the modes of literacy they knew: they could draw, they could do more traditional print-based writing, there were some digital pieces, and they could write in any language. Dr. Martínez-Álvarez and I designed the instruction, and so we followed the language of instruction—when the language was English we would facilitate in English and when it was in Spanish we facilitated in Spanish. The children knew we spoke both languages and we encouraged them to speak in any language they wanted, and to add multiple languages within a single piece. One of the interesting findings was that it invited a lot of critical discussion about language use, language proficiency, and language hierarchy to help children think about what they know about these two languages, who speaks what language, how might you be judged for speaking a particular language and to really think about the use of being bilingual in their neighborhood and the larger world.

I think for me, the other big finding of that work is what I wrote about in one piece I called the “Literacies of Interdependence,” making visible about all the literacy work that is happening in out-of-school spaces in these neighborhoods that we could characterize as “transnational local”, a term used by José Saldívar. Children from many parts of the world, from various histories, who navigate many different borders, are coming together in the US both in classrooms and in those out-of-school locations we might think of as apart from learning, that we might not even know children are spending all this time in, but which actually are resources of cultural knowledge and also of multilingual literacy practices. One example would be the neighborhood Laundromat. All the work that is happening there with children contributing to the daily labor of keeping the family going, but also all the literacy work that is taking place, the cultural maintenance, the transnational knowledge that children foster in these places that teachers often times don’t know students are visiting or what they’re doing there. I count myself in that category of needing to know more about children’s out-of-school experiences. These transnational local places are meaningful to the children and could also become a site of inquiry, could become a topic that they write and read about. They are not usually found in the school curriculum, but are a rich source of knowledge for children.

CK: Thank you, Maria Paula, for a such thorough and thoughtful answer that will really give our readers and listeners insight into the ‘hows’ and ‘whys’ of blending in school and out-of-school
literacy. In this issue, we’re considering the complexity in how we define diverse learners. What are some of the complexities to consider when working with diverse immigrant students in the literacy classroom?

MP: I think that one of the things that my research has taught me is that what is happening outside of school is vitally important to teachers when they’re thinking about creating curriculum for immigrant children in the classroom. A lot of the families that we work with are enduring conditions of precarity. They are very vulnerable to social, economic and even educational inequities in the larger system. For immigrant families, that’s also exacerbated when they have undocumented immigration status. Some of the families that we’re educating do. These were topics that the children really brought into classroom curriculum, but that we don’t often talk about in schools. It’s important to know that they’re dealing with those things that they also know a lot about that.

Some of the things to consider when working with diverse learners is being mindful of the category of the category of language learner, the category of emergent bilingual is a constructed category that actually holds many, many different histories and experiences together and many different language varieties and language proficiencies. And we need to learn about that diversity. Just because we know somebody is from an immigrant background: Where are they coming from, what’s their history, what are their day-to-day lives, what are the things they’re concerned about, what’s the advocacy that’s happening in communities that we need to learn about because often that might get missed. There is a lot of activism that is already going on. They are many ways in which families are advocating for educational access, even at the time that they’re very vulnerable to certain policies.

For example, thinking about the previous educational history that children and families bring: one of my students, Estrella Olivas-Orellana, is doing her dissertation on the testimonials of students who have been labeled as “SLIFE,” students with limited or interrupted formal education. And she really has troubled that term by putting it in a global context. We may think of it in terms of “interrupted schooling” when youth come here to the United States, but they may not have opportunities because of educational and economic issues to study beyond a certain grade level. So families may come to us and not have a certain skill that the schools would want them to have in order for them to participate in the ways that are valued in school. There may also be different cultural models of participation. I think that understanding all of that is important, but also knowing that we want to be mindful that these understandings don’t shade into the dominant deficit framing of students and families. Families may have not have had the privilege of going to school in their home countries or having particular literate practices valued in school, having graduated from a certain grade level, for example. They also bring very valuable knowledge, such as rich oral practices that are actually not in opposition to school but very much related to it. Children, for example, engage in translation practices for their families, and scholars have written about how that mirrors the academic work that is happening in schools. I think learning about all these issues and the complexity of immigrant students and emergent bilinguals’ lives and not seeing them as a monolithic block—that’s essential. And then thinking about what are the ways that I might invite this particular student, this particular family to really participate and be honored in the literacy curriculum in my own classroom and in my school.

KC: Thank you so much. I think that is so incredibly helpful for our readers and listeners. We were delighted to see that your new book, Partnering with Immigrant Communities: Action
through Literacy, is coming out this month from Teacher College Press with Gerald Campano and Bethany J. Welch. Congratulations on that wonderful work!

MPG: Thank you so much!

KC: We were hoping you could tell us a little bit about the book.

MPG: The book is based on a research partnership that is now in its sixth year in Philadelphia, in an area that has a lot of immigrant families and also a long-standing African American and Irish community. The African American community was very influential in desegregating the schools and the church. Gerald Campano from the University of Pennsylvania have been partnering with a Catholic church that has a school and a community center. Bethany Welch is the director of the community center there. I think that one of the aspects that drew us to this site was the way that even though we hear a lot about strife and conflict in diverse neighborhoods or among different groups, this was a place, when Gerald and myself first got involved with it, where people were working across, cultural and linguistic boundaries, institutional boundaries to think about a vision of educational justice and immigrant rights. In the project, we’ve worked to develop processes of partnering that honor the knowledge of community members and strive to “research with” rather than just conducting research “about” on “on” them. We’ve created a number of nested inquiries, in partnership with the input and interest of community members at the parish, which a number of doctoral students from the University of Pennsylvania’s Reading/Writing/Literacy Division have helped facilitate, and which are described in the book. Along with doctoral students I taught and researched a class with Latina mothers and young children where they were learning language but also investigating critical issues and co-designing curriculum. Gerald Campano and I are currently involved in a study there that is bringing together representatives from all of these cultural and linguistic communities to think about what are the strengths that they draw on in advocating for their children's education, what are some of the obstacles they experience, and what we may do to take action on that. It’s brought to light a lot of the ways that families are already advocating for their students, the networks that they have and build, and also the obstacles they are facing, as well as the idea that we can take action on those things. One inspiration is about democratizing research processes. Appadurai talks about the right to research, that everyone has a right to research their own inquiries, situations, questions, and so research is not something that should only come from the outside, from universities, it’s not just knowledge manufactured elsewhere, but it’s built with community members, with schools, with teachers, with community organizations. I think that one of the interesting things for me has been that even though this research takes place outside of school, there is so much of what you might consider “school” learning that is happening outside of school. We can’t think of school and the community as so dichotomous—there is a lot of movement across different advocacy communities and different contexts as people mobilize language and literacy for social justice ends. We’re partnering with folks at the site to continue that work and we’ve been very blessed to learn from and with them.

KC: Thank you so much. Partnership is a major component of what we do here at Manhattanville and is a big priority I know for many New York communities, both within cities and in suburbs, so thank you for those wonderful insights. Just as a final question, we were hoping you could synthesize some main considerations that you’d like readers, especially teachers, to consider when planning literacy curriculum that honors and supports immigrant students. Or in other words, what are your hopes and dreams for teachers and children in their classrooms that you’d hope listeners aspire to?
MPG: Well, I think that teachers and schools already have a lot of strategies and ideas about how to support immigrant students from the curriculum. We know a lot from bilingual education about different strategies to support how students access the content even while they’re still learning the language. How can you diversify the curriculum to have more visuals or to be more performative and more interactive so that we just don’t depend on students’ verbal proficiency to understand what they know and to help them engage with the content? Teachers and schools already have so much of this knowledge there, and for me it’s about mobilizing those strategies or those approaches that we already have to help include children in the curriculum and to make their knowledge feel valued in the classroom and be visible. How might we help in small or big ways to have children from immigrant backgrounds or who are emergent bilinguals be a vital part of the class, someone who is seen as an expert and not just someone who needs to be remediated? That could include, for example, helping that student teach a lesson in their own language, as one of the fifth grade teachers that I worked with in an inquiry group did so that other children can see the student not just as someone who doesn’t know the language but as someone who knows much more and could teach us a lot about the world and about other languages. How could we make all the languages and experiences of our students more visible in the classroom space, whether its diverse books or featuring writing in different languages, the way you might label areas of the classroom in an Early Childhood setting? And then how can we modify or adapt the curriculum so that child is not left out, but is an integral part. Even if they’re very emergent in their language proficiency, helping them be seen as part of the class and not kept aside. Their language proficiencies will grow in English and we also want to maintain whatever languages they’re coming with, which may be more than just one additional language, it may be others. But cultivating a classroom or a school where children see themselves in the curriculum, where they see their languages, where they see their cultures, and where their families and ways of knowing are present. That could work a lot of different ways, and that can happen even when teachers have a particular curriculum that they need to teach. Because it can happen in the cracks of the curriculum, it can happen in the environment, it can happen in the transition time, it can happen in adaptations to an existing curriculum, so that we’re bringing in slightly different texts or we’re inviting kids to bring in images from their lives or texts from their lives. So I think it doesn’t involve, necessarily, a complete revamping. I would love for that to happen, and I think teachers, together in communities of inquiry can think about what might be changed or what might be redesigned in our schools. But even from day one, teachers can even just ask about students’ histories, about their lives, about their languages and find out a lot more that may be under the surface. Also challenging ourselves to know that whatever we might see on the outside of a child is not the whole child. However they’re performing themselves to be in that particular classroom isn’t the totality of their existence or their experience or their knowledge. Knowing always that there are other things there and going on a quest to find out what some of those things are help build relationships. Teachers already have this orientation and know a lot about what approaches they can put in place to learn more about their students so this is just an extension of that.

MCF: Thank you so much for these amazing insights and ideas about honoring the experiences and knowledges of emergent bilingual students as we create and implement a literacy curriculum. We have so enjoyed getting to talk to you, thank you so much for your time.

KC: Thank you Maria Paula!

CK: Thank you!
MPG: Thank you all for speaking with me. It's wonderful and inspiring to be in conversation with great educators such as yourselves. Thank you so much