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“If you have built castles in the air, your work need not be lost; that is where they should be. Now put foundations under them.” Henry David Thoreau

This volume of the *Language and Literacy Spectrum* shares the theme of the 2010 International Reading Association convention, “Reading in Many Languages.” The term ‘language’ like ‘literacy’ has taken on connotations that reach well beyond fluency and comprehension in alphabetic-based linguistic systems. Wikis, blogs, podcasts, digital storytelling and cloud computing are becoming de rigueur in more and more classrooms. As students, educators, and administrators become comfortable communicating in the cloud, an Internet-based system as opposed to a school-based mainframe, it is important to remember the power to be found in traditional literacy. The cloud can indeed hold castles of possibilities, innovation, and social engagement; however, as Thoreau reminds us, there needs to be strong foundations to sustain these castles and that is where traditional literacy holds court.

The first two articles in this volume discuss how cloud-based literacy can enrich teachers and students. In “How Social Bookmarking Helps the 21st Century Teacher” Kathleen Gormley and Peter McDermott discuss how they use the social bookmarking tool diigo to communicate and collaborate with colleagues, as well as how they use diigo to develop online libraries. “Reading and Responding in the 21st Century: Digital Literacies and the NYSRA Charlotte Award” brings the cloud into the classroom. Pegeen Jensen, Christine Paige, Dawn Sweredoski, and Elizabeth Yanoff describe successful podcasting and wiki projects conducted with NYSRA Charlotte Award nominated books. They also explore additional digital literacy projects that teachers can use in their literacy programs.

Articles three and four look at how using digital literacy tools in the classroom can change and challenge teachers’ prior notions of sound pedagogy and practice. Joellen Maples explores a middle school English teacher’s and his students’ perceptions of the difference between online synchronous literature discussions and those conducted in a face-to-face setting. Salika Lawrence and Geraldine Mangillo report on what happened when they incorporated “multimodal technology literacy training” in their preservice education classes.

In article five Kjersti VanSlyke-Briggs provides a transition from cloud-based digital literacy practices to more traditional foundations that support language and literacy development for all learners. VanSlyke-Briggs problematizes “what counts as literacy now that literacy in no longer bound by the written word.” In article six, Rhoda Frumkin links vocabulary development with content area learning for English language learners. Peter McDermott reminds us in article seven that global literacy does not just reside in the computer cloud as he shares his work with the International Reading Associations’ Diagnostic Teaching Project in Tanzania.

We conclude this year’s edition with an article inspired by the author’s keynote address at the Central New York Reading Council’s 2010 Conference for New Teachers. Marcelle Haddix writes about “Goin’ for Broke: Reaping the Rewards of Teaching Toward Cultural and Linguistic Diversity.” This is a phrase to tuck inside our pockets as we get ready to begin a new school year. Haddix encourages us to take pause during the last days of summer vacation and reflect on how we can be “dream keepers” for all of our students. As August turns to September, we hope this volume will inform and inspire new possibilities for the year ahead.

How Social Bookmarking Can Help The 21st Century Teacher

Kathleen A. Gormley and Peter McDermott

ABSTRACT
Social bookmarking, as an important tool for connecting, organizing and retaining online information, is presented in this article. The authors demonstrate how they use diigo to communicate with others in their professional communities and groups as well as how they use this tool for developing their online libraries. Suggestions are offered for how social bookmarking can enhance classroom teaching and learning.

AUTHOR BIOGRAPHIES
Dr. Kathleen A. Gormley teaches graduate courses in literacy and digital literacy at The Sage Colleges in Troy, NY. She is particularly interested in how students acquire and use the new literacies. If you wish to join NYSRA 2010’s diigo group (social bookmarking), go to http://groups.diigo.com and search groups for ‘NYSRA 2010.’ Once you indicate that you want to join the group, she will give you permission. She may also be reached at gormlk@sage.edu.

Peter McDermott is a Professor of Education at The Sage Colleges where he teaches graduate and undergraduate courses in reading and the language arts. He previously taught in Bosnia as a Fulbright Scholar in Tanzania as a volunteer with IRA’s Diagnostic Teaching Project and Kazakhstan with Soros’ Open Society and IRA’s Reading, Writing and Critical Thinking Project (RWCT). He has a long time interest in urban education. He is currently interested in the new digital literacies and their effects in students’ literacy development.

If you’re like many teachers, you have access to computers at home and in school. Yet when saving your favorite website onto one of them, it is all too easy to forget which computer holds a specific bookmark. Sometimes you want to share a website with others and find yourself emailing hyperlinks or website addresses to them so they will enjoy the same sites. There is an easier way to use and share websites with others. Social bookmarking is one of the new Web 2.0 technologies that may be helpful to you. With social bookmarking teachers can have instant access to their favorite websites regardless of which computer they use. Social bookmarking allows teachers to create groups whose members have access to their favorite websites as well as their tags, responses and annotations about websites and online materials. If you encounter a website that you are certain someone else will appreciate, you can forward your bookmark to that person’s email. Welcome to the world of social bookmarking!

Bookmarking is a common strategy we have all used for many years. Often we use sticky notes with our classroom textbooks. Such sticky notes can be color-coded and come in a variety of sizes. The colors and sizes often mean something special to us. For example, we typically use small sticky notes for remembering key ideas in a textbook chapter, larger ones for noting what we want to share with students, and yellow (particular color is optional) ones containing questions to ask our students about their understanding of what they read. Yet there are problems using paper sticky notes, and among them are the following: (1) Sticky notes fall off and when they do, we can’t efficiently find the spot they marked. (2) Over time they look messy. (3) Books
can be heavy and cumbersome, and sometimes we even forget to bring them to class. (4) Students generate lively discussions about topics being studied and frequently they ask for other resources to help with their questions. In such cases we make notes to ourselves about resources we might share, but all too often we lose these notes, our ideas are forgotten or we can’t quite remember the source we wanted to share. In short, physical bookmarks have many challenges.

Online social bookmarking is a better idea for today’s busy teachers. It allows us to bookmark online pages, including websites, pdfs, podcasts and videos. In essence, with social bookmarking we produce an online, readily available library collection to read and share, without fear that we won’t be able to locate our resource again. Instead of having numerous books on bookshelves, we have our bookmarked materials stored in this online library. Our libraries are organized by tags, which are key concept words that allow for easy retrieval.

What makes the experience social is that we can choose to share bookmarks with others and we can look at their bookmarks too. With social bookmarking we can send our websites to others we have selected or groups we have formed or joined. Conversely, we can follow others and see what they are bookmarking—finding others with similar interests is particularly helpful today given how literacy theories and practices are changing at such a rapid pace.

There are a variety of social bookmarking systems. [See http://www.ebizmba.com/articles/social-bookmarking-websites, for a summary of the top 20 social bookmarking systems currently used (4/2/10).] Two that are very popular for educators and students are de.lici.ous (www.delicious.com) and diigo (www.diigo.com). Although de.lici.ous is more popular than diigo, we recommend the latter because it has more useful features, including annotations and tags, for classroom and specialist teachers. [diigo’s name is an acronym for Digest of Internet Information, Group and Other stuff (http://www.crunchbase.com/company/diigo).

We keep our diigo toolbar at the top of our browsers and anytime we want to remember a website, we click ‘bookmark.’ Figure 1 displays an example from Pete’s browser bar.

Figure 1: Pete’s Browser Bar with diigo

Like most bookmarking systems, diigo has an annotation feature with tags. We tend to read through and then write an annotation focusing on whatever we want to recall in a very succinct fashion.

The first annotation in Figure 2 tells us that Kay has bookmarked a PPT regarding learning online with Web 2.0 tools, which she might want to include in her online course (MTX 556—Literacy and Technology in the K-12 Classroom), while the second annotation indicates the website has what Kay perceives to be helpful teacher and Web 2.0 tools. The annotations can be concise or longer depending on the purposes.
Other features that set diigo apart include highlighting, commenting and posting sticky notes. Virtual highlighting works much like highlighting in hard copy. Kay uses ‘yellow’ for general highlighting and ‘blue’ for the nuggets that she wants to ‘pop-out’ visually. When Kay was looking for specific usage of de.lici.ous and diigo, she found ebizMBA summarized the United State’s usage of the largest social bookmarking websites ranked by a combination of Inbound Links, Alexa Rank, and U.S. traffic data from Compete and Quantcast (http://www.ebizmba.com/articles/social-bookmarking-websites), so she highlighted in yellow (see Figure 3) to show that these data are likely to be reliable.

**Figure 3:** Kay’s highlighting content using diigo
Because she was specifically interested in data on diigo and its use, she marked it in blue to show content she wants to remember as illustrated in Figure 4 (http://www.ebizmba.com/articles/social-bookmarking-websites).

**Figure 4: Kay's highlighting of diigo usage**

She can comment on particular pages by posting questions or making remarks. Frequently she shares her bookmark to a predetermined group. The group members can elect to respond to her comments or questions—thus a targeted discussion is started. Kay posts virtual sticky notes without the fear that they will be lost—she uses these notes to share questions and connections for her students and others with similar interests.

Let us illustrate with other examples of how social bookmarking might be used in school. Kay recently ‘discovered’ the new Web 2.0 tool, glogster, (www.glogster.com), an online multimedia poster, that she believes has tremendous potential for developing students’ digital literacy skills, including the integration of visual, video and audio files. She thought glogster.com would be a useful site for the courses she is presently teaching—specifically, it might be helpful to the graduate tutors in their work with children, and it might be of interest to graduate students who were designing their own multimedia projects. So here’s what she did:

Kay clicked on the diigo bookmark to save the site (glogster.com). Then she wrote an annotation about it and composed tags for the site. For her purposes, she used ‘RWL 604’ and ‘MTX*556’ as tags because she wanted to use glogster for these courses. Then, she thought about other tags that might help her categorize and ultimately retrieve this website for other purposes (see Figure 5 on next page). She included ‘Web2.0’ and ‘multimedia’ as tags with the former being a broader umbrella and the latter being more specific to include digital audio/visual/video, etc. media. These tags meant something to her, though multimedia may not mean the same to another person.

Next, Kay had choices about how (or if) she would share the glogster site on diigo. She could select private or public setting; she selected the ‘public’ option which means anyone could find her tags (multimedia, web*2.0), though it is highly unlikely anyone would search for her course numbers. She felt that Web2.0 tools may be a descriptor someone would search and, if they do, her bookmarked sites would ‘pop’ up for them to see. The bottom of figure 5 and Figure 6 show that Kay decided to share the site with pre-established groups, pertaining to the courses she teaches (MTX 556 and RWL-604 Spring) as well as a group she formed (NYSRA 2010) and a group she has joined as a member (Discovery Educator Network).
After she sent the website to her selected groups, diigo generates an email to all of the group members. The email contains her annotation (see figure 7). If she has a colleague who is not in her recipient list, she can send the colleague an email.
Kay also has the option of marking a bookmark as ‘private.’ In an online course she is currently taking, she is struggling a bit with html. So she located several sites that offer advice about how to use html codes, such as implementing the cascading system, into her online syllabus she plans to use. She is not very sure of herself at this point and worries that her annotations may not be quite on the mark. But by making the bookmarks private (See Figure 8 on next page), she can locate her ‘html’ tagged materials through diigo library and searching her tags of ‘html’ and ‘accessibility’. That way, she is the only one who can ‘see’ her diigo annotations, highlighting or sticky notes.

A great feature of diigo is following other people. Kay can identify people whom she wants to follow. They are notified that she is following them. For example, each year she attends a technology conference. The conference hosts people who consistently make engaging presentations, and Kay enjoys following their bookmarks. She follows everything they bookmark—since they share similar interests in educational technology and digital literacy; moreover, one of them follows her in return and learns from her. There is someone she doesn’t know from first-hand contact, but she likes all the Web2.0 tools he notes, so she follows him too. Once she indicated that she wanted to follow him, he immediately tapped her back and now follows her. Although she has never met him in person, he’s become a virtual colleague for her.

**Figure 8:** Kay’s private annotation
Socially constructed communities of learners such as these emerge with many connections and interconnections among the individuals. Figure 9 summarizes the people Kay follows and those who follow her.

**Figure 9:** Summary of *Kay’s Followers and Those She Follows*

Figure 10 shows an example of Kay following her co-author and what he is currently bookmarking (Figure 11).

**Figure 10:** *Example of Kay following Peter*

**Figure 11:** *Peter’s Recent Annotations*
There are many ways that diigo might be useful for teachers. Here we describe a few of these ideas:

1. **Professional Study and Research**: Much like teacher book studies, professional groupings of educators can decide to study a particular topic (DesRoches, 2009). While doing independent reading and viewing in preparation for online interaction, diigo can be used to enhance professional book clubs in schools. Teachers can easily bookmark and tag related materials and websites to be shared with their group. We recommend the ‘free’ dim dim meetings available at [http://www.dimdim.com/](http://www.dimdim.com/) for discussion of topics of shared interest.

2. **Curriculum Development**: Social bookmarking can facilitate the identification of high quality websites for this purpose. For example, fourth grade educators interested in developing curriculum and identifying high quality websites on the Iroquois could bookmark their chosen websites with may tags, such as ‘Iroquois’, ‘Seneca,’ lifestyle, ‘easy*read’, ‘video’. ‘Easy*read’ and ‘video’ might indicate that the reading requirements are less demanding for fourth graders and thus appropriate for students who struggle with reading or are English language learners.

3. **Assigned Collaborative Group Work**: Teachers can group students for particular topics of research and send out bookmarked websites for their use—allowing students to select from among the choices. One advantage from the teacher’s perspective is that the websites have been designated as trustworthy in terms of content and appropriateness, a fact that parents and principals may find reassuring. In addition, the difficulty level will have been considered as well as which multimedia options within the selections chosen might be more likely to engage learners.

4. **Collaborative Group Research**: A teacher can set up groups of older students with similar interests and have them research a topic identifying particular websites...
using their school emails (Forbes, 2004). The teacher can be an active participant making comments and providing feedback. If a learner bookmarks an unreliable resource, a discussion can occur about why a particular website/material is not the best choice. A good example is the well-known website about the tree octopus (http://zapatopi.net/treeoctopus/). It looks legitimate and reliable. It’s only with guidance that students learn to recognize the lack of appropriateness of content. In such cases the teacher is the ‘guide on the side’ making sure learners are not side-tracked and are identifying reliable sources, making good use of tags for retrieval and annotating in clear, informative ways.

5. **Challenging Gifted or Interested Learners**: Children with expertise in particular subject areas may be disinterested in grade level texts; diigo enables the teacher to send challenging and interesting websites and provide encouragement for exploration to such students. Conversations that spark and encourage learning and interaction are more likely to occur as a result.

6. **Making Recommendations to Parents**: Many parents don’t know how to encourage children to use websites for learning. A teacher might for example, want to bookmark Tumblebook Library (http://www.tumblebooks.com/library/asp/home_tumblebooks.asp), through the New York City Public library to alert parents of its benefits. Before diigo, one would have to go to the NYC Public Library home page, find ‘Resources for Children’, and search to find ‘Tumblebook Library.’ Instead by using diigo, the website can not only be bookmarked directly but the teacher can send annotations out to parents using the tag ‘eBooks’ or ‘interactive*websites’ for example. Similarly, teachers could suggest “Summer Fun” or “Avoiding Winter Doldrums” with the purpose of engaging learners in reading, writing and digital literacy activities.

7. **Book Recommendations**: There are many book recommendation websites, including NYSRA’s Charlotte Award [http://www.nysreading.org/Awards/charlotte/], which features children’s audio recommendations of the books being considered for the award. Spaghetti Club [http://www.spaghettibookclub.org/] and the LA Times [http://www.latimes.com/features/kids/readingroom/la-et-kidsun1apr01,0,2594278.story] have book reviews by children. We find that students very much like the Spaghetti Club because it is visually appealing and easy to navigate. Teachers can bookmark these on diigo so that when children are looking for good books, they can access the list of websites and be able to see what other children recommend.

8. **Online Book Groups for Students**: Ferriter (2010) notes the importance of making book clubs social. One online book club we have found that children enjoy is the Planet Book Club (http://www.planetbookclub.com/kids/booktalk.html).

The advent of the Internet means that teachers are no longer limited in what they read and with whom they connect. Through social bookmarking, teachers can organize themselves much
more professionally and connect directly with students more personally. The new Web 2.0 technologies are inherently social and provide easy access to most alphabetic and multimedia texts available in today’s world. In particular, social bookmarking provides far greater ease of storing, retrieving, sharing and interacting with texts than ever before. Social bookmarking allows teachers to expand their learning communities and participate more personally with students in small groups. Teachers can now serve more as mentors and collaborators than a givers of information. Social bookmarking in general, and diigo in particular, has the potential to make learning more engaging. We trust that teachers will find this tool helpful in their own work - please follow us on our NYSRA diigo group to see how this social bookmarking site may benefit you (http://groups.diigo.com/group/nysra-2010). We welcome your participation!

References

Reading And Responding In The 21st Century: Digital Literacies And The NYSRA Charlotte Award

Pegeen Jensen, Christine Paige, Dawn Sweredoski, and Elizabeth Yanoff

ABSTRACT
Reading projects that integrate technology engage today’s students and prepare them to be literate in the 21st century. In this article, we describe in detail successful podcasting and wiki projects conducted with NYSRA Charlotte Award nominated books. We also explore additional digital literacy projects that teachers can use in their literature programs.

AUTHOR INFORMATION

We would like to thank the 2010 and 2012 NYSRA Charlotte Award committees, the NYSRA board, and the participating students, authors, illustrators, and publishers for their support of these projects.

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Katherine Paterson, noted author and National Ambassador for Young People’s Literature, recently responded to concerns about the iPad with the question, “Are we witnessing the long anticipated death of the book?” (Paterson, 2010, para 2). Paterson’s response, with which we’d agree, was no. Books will always have an important place in our lives and can’t be replaced by electronic texts. As Gioia (2005) suggests, the reading of literature contributes to our “civic, personal, and economic health” (para. 17).

As reading rates are declining (National Endowment for the Arts, 2004) and teachers are facing ever increasing demands on their class time (e.g. Copenhaver, 2001), teachers must work even harder to connect students to literature. Therefore, we would also want to ask, how can technology support reading of books? In our work in elementary and college classrooms, we have found technologies to complement and enhance our close reading of traditional texts, and in this article we’ll present several examples of how we have used technologies to support our reading programs.

We have tried to ensure that we are using technology meaningfully and to extend students’ understandings. As Gray suggests, “technology should focus on meeting curricular goals or addressing a pedagogical problem” (Gray, 2009, p. 2). We have continually asked ourselves how technology can allow us to reach out to others and create new possibilities for our students (Vasquez, 2010).

During the 2009-2010 school year, Pegeen, Dawn and Liz have engaged students in reading for the New York State Reading Association Charlotte Award. Since 1990 the New York State Reading Association has sponsored the NYSRA Charlotte Award, which is given
ever two years to authors and illustrators of books which are chosen by school age readers. The goal of the award committee is to encourage reading and to help teachers find books that their students will want to read (NYSRA, 2010). To add to successful past practices of the NYSRA Charlotte award, we have created several new digital literacy projects to engage readers and to extend their experiences reading the nominated books. Christine, as an educational technologist, has supported our work. We will present our successes with podcasting, wikis, websites, and email as well as discuss current and future ways we can utilize digital literacy projects to support students’ reading.

Podcasting for the NYSRA Charlotte Award

What is a podcast?

Podcasting provides an authentic project for integrating reading, writing, listening, and speaking. Riddle (2010) writes that podcasting is a “morph of the words ‘iPod’ and ‘broadcast’” (para 2); podcasts are digital sound files that can be easily shared on the web. Creating podcasts requires students to flexibly use their literacy skills to communicate with an authentic audience about topics of interest. In promoting the NYSRA Charlotte award, podcasting allowed us to communicate our favorite books with other NYSRA readers and the world.

Podcasting with college and first grade students

To begin the podcasting project, Liz’s college students chose books nominated for the primary grades NYSRA Charlotte award (see resources) and prepared for an interactive story book reading (Barrentine, 1996) with Pegeen’s first grade students. Initially the college students read the books aloud to the first graders. First graders kept notes about their favorite books and then formed small groups based on these favorites. Meanwhile, Liz and the college students reviewed podcasting scripts published online and decided to use the following format for our podcasts: introduction, plot summary, reasons for liking this book, and suggestions for who would also like this book. After we discussed the format with the students, students brainstormed ideas and decided what would be the most important information to share with listeners, practicing important comprehension and composition tasks throughout their discussions.

First grade students practiced their writing skills when they wrote the podcasts with the college students in an interactive writing format (Tompkins, 2007). Students were excited to practice their reading and speaking skills when they rehearsed their podcast. On recording day, Liz came with her laptop computer to record the completed presentations. Using Audacity, a free digital recording program (see resources), we were easily able to record and upload to a website all of the student podcasts. We celebrated our project by listening to the podcasts and students were thrilled with the final product. This review of Martina the Beautiful Cockroach demonstrates what two students able to accomplish.

College student: Salutations. Welcome to another New York State Reading Association Charlotte Award podcast. Today we have first graders talking about the book Martina the Beautiful Cockroach. Written by Carmen Agra Deedy. Illustrated by Michael Austin.
First grade student: Hi I’m in first grade at Saddlewood Elementary School. I like the book *Martina the Beautiful Cockroach* by Carmen Agra Deedy and Michael Austin. This book is about a cockroach who has to get married. She has a coffee trick. She tricks them by dripping it on their shoes. And some get mad. One doesn’t. I like it because it has beautiful pictures and it is hilarious. I think kids will die laughing if they read this book! I think kids one to ten will like this book!

College student: Thank you for that review of Martina the Beautiful Cockroach…

All of the podcasts for this project are available at [http://charlotteaward.wordpress.com/2010-nominees/charlotte-podcasts/](http://charlotteaward.wordpress.com/2010-nominees/charlotte-podcasts/).

**Benefits of podcasting for our college and first grade students**

This project allowed Liz’s preservice and inservice teachers to see literature response in new ways. Teachers experienced the thoughtful responses of young readers as well as considered how podcasting lessons could meet many of the required NY ELA standards, including emerging standards for digital literacy. The college students were also able to practice using the podcasting technology and were further inspired to try this new technology in their own classrooms for literature response as well as other curricular needs.

For Pegeen, the sense of communicating beyond the four walls of our classroom was what made this project effective. First graders have some sense of the wide reaching ability of the internet. Posting a podcast and giving the world a window to our thinking empowered the first graders. They knew their audience could potentially act on their recommendation, get the book from the library or buy it from the bookstore. Experiencing the power of words at a young age is part of laying a strong foundation for communication in the 21st century.

**Wiki Book Reviews**

**What is a wiki book review?**

Wikis also have great possibilities for literacy teachers. “Wikis are collaboratively authored, searchable documents linked internally and externally” (Morgan & Smith, 2008, p. 80), and for Dawn, a wiki book review has become basically an online database of book reviews. The wiki that Dawn created places special emphasis on the NYSRA 2010 Charlotte Award nominated books and those which are being reviewed for the 2012 nominations list by sixth grade students. This user friendly technological 21st century vehicle allows students to travel beyond the confines of the classroom and share their enthusiasm for really great books with others. Students are not relegated to just sharing their love of literature with the twenty or so peers in each individual reading class. Instead, the wiki enables and empowers the sixth grade students to share their book reviews with a global audience. Both the podcasting and wiki projects are possible within a Web 2.0 world (Handsfield, Dean, & Cielocha, 2009), a world in which we can share and collaborate in reading and writing with others.
How did the wiki evolve?

Students traditionally self-select, read and write reviews of books for outside reading in Dawn’s classroom. The reviews are handwritten on index cards following a set format that includes: the student’s name, title of the book, author, genre, description of the book, a quote from the book with the page number, and a reflective piece. Students then present their book review using the information from the index card, along with displaying their book, and showing a prop that is created to bring the book to life. In Dawn’s classroom five book reviews are shared simultaneously. Students enjoy the social interaction this type of presentation provides. However, both Dawn and the students wondered how the sharing of the book reviews could be expanded to include more people.

The dilemma is that once the book reviews are completed, what does one do with the review? Dawn was concerned that this invaluable information was being lost: index cards were tossed in the wastebasket, stored in a folder and/or placed in a file box, which was cumbersome. Dawn found that students would not take the time to look through the cards. Along with the teacher, the students had concerns such as: how can I see and listen to everyone else’s book review if they are presenting at the same time, and what are our peers, and especially our friends reading in their classes? Dawn decided that the wiki Web 2.0 tool would be a solution to these problems and also provide students with a legitimate reason to use technology for information and understanding.

Creating our wiki

As the creator of the wiki, Dawn first had to decide the purpose, rationale, and content of this educational wiki. The wiki would be and is a venue for discussions about literature, book reviews, and for promoting the NYSRA Charlotte Award books. Dawn created a wiki using PBworks (see resources and Dawn’s site http://readagoodbook.pbworks.com/FrontPage).

The next step in creating the Wiki was creating the FrontPage of the wiki which is the first page that is viewed. This page has a brief description of the wiki, explanations and directions for the wiki and an Add a Comment box which is there by default. Pages such as: Ask the Teacher, Book Review Format, Genres of Books, Novel Discussions, NYSRA 2010 Charlotte Award Ballot Books, and NYSRA 2012 Charlotte Award Committee Reviews were added to the wiki. The Genres of Books page has a table of contents with links to additional pages. Because students have their favorite genres, Dawn decided to have students place their book reviews according to the genre so that anyone accessing the wiki for information would be able to easily locate their favorite genre and read the reviews. However, the Charlotte Award pages were created allowing all genres to be placed on the pages. This would encourage students to try another genre based on their peers’ recommendations.

As the “Administrator” of the wiki, with the power to add users, Dawn’s next step was the responsibility of teaching students how to use the wiki and giving them access as “Writers.” Writers have the privilege of editing and adding new pages, adding comments, and uploading files. Students are then ready to add a book review to the wiki by following links from Dawn’s school website. At this point students decide which page is the best placement for their book review. Once this decision is made students see additional directions reminding them of the index card format they have previously used:
The following format should be used to discuss the book you have read. Enter your book review in the comment box below by clicking on Add a comment. Make sure you check your spelling and punctuation.

Student Name: First initial and last name

Title of the Book: 

Author: 

Genre: 

Description of the Book: 
A description of the book, is 25 – 50 words – Do not give the ending under any circumstances. Do not use the book jacket for this part; to do so would be plagiarism.

Quote from the Book: 
A quote from the book that you find of particular importance or interest – the quote should really give the flavor of the book or the message (theme) it is trying to convey (get across) or something that a character says that you connect with or agree with. Put the page # where you found it!

Reflective Piece: 
A reflective piece is to write about what you think of the book – it has to be more than, “I liked it.” Tell why you rated it as you did using a scale of 1-10 with 10 being one of the best books you have ever read and if or why you would vote for this book to receive the Charlotte Award. 
(http://readagoodbook.pbworks.com/FrontPage )

With their handwritten index card to refer to, the book review is then typed into an “Add a Comment” box. The last step in the entire process is to click the Add comment tab and the review is immediately posted. The amount of time allocated to this endeavor is dependent only upon the speed and accuracy of students’ typing abilities.

The wiki is continually under construction and stamped with the time and date of every addition, revision, and deletion. The wiki will continue to expand as students and the administrator of the wiki, Dawn, continue to collaborate as books are read and reviewed during the school year. The book review of the 2010 Charlotte Award nominated book Stolen Children by Peg Kehret is one example of this collaboration.

Stolen Children
Peg Kehret
Realistic fiction

Description: This book is awesome. It is about a teenager and a little girl who get kidnapped. The kidnappers want money. If they don't get what they want who knows what will happen to the two girls. This book will have you on the edge of your seat.
Quote: "Tubby be cat." (p. 58)

Reflective Piece: I think this book is outstanding. I rate this book a 10 because it is so intense. I chose that quote because I love it how the little girl talks wrong. Like instead of Tubby is a cat, she says "Tubby be cat." I would choose this book for the Charlotte Award 2010 Ballot. (http://readagoodbook.pbworks.com/NYSRA-Charlotte-Award-2010-Ballot-Books)

Benefits of using a wiki

Students of all ability levels achieve success reading a good book and sharing information from their handwritten index card book reviews using the wiki. For example, students who are reading below grade level can self select a primary Charlotte nominated book and contribute to the wiki. Additionally, the wiki provides all students with an authentic reason to revise and edit their work to make sure it is presentable for publication. The handwritten index card then serves as their rough draft. Finally, the wiki gives students the capability to upload photos, videos, and other files. It is and will always be a work in progress and as the technology advances, so too will the students.

Websites, Email, and More Reading Responses & Technology

While we are thrilled with the success of these two projects, we are continually extending our understandings of how to connect readers and enhance reading through technology.

Websites, blogs, and email

As part of the work of the NYSRA Charlotte Award committee and with the support of the NYSRA board, Liz initiated a blog (http://charlotteaward.wordpress.com/). Visitors to the site can find links to information about the books, authors, illustrators, and publishers as well as the latest news about nominees and the award. Dawn has a detailed website for her classroom (www.lacs-ny.org/webpages/dsweredoski) in addition to the wiki that also shows the potential for using websites to encourage reading. Templates such as those provided through free publishing platforms such as WordPress (http://wordpress.org/) allow for quick and relatively easy creation of websites. We would like to explore further the possibility for online conversations through our websites and blogs.

In addition, we have connected participating classrooms with nominated authors and illustrators for email interviews (http://charlotteaward.wordpress.com/charlotte-interviews/). Email allowed the young readers to gain access to authors and illustrators that otherwise would not have been possible. Young readers thoughtfully created questions that showed deep understanding of the texts and were excited to talk to published professionals. For example, students asked,

What inspired you to make this book?

*In all the pictures detailed emotion is shown. How do you show the feelings this strongly?*
Is this about your culture or have you just heard about it?  
(http://charlotteaward.wordpress.com/charlotte-interviews/)

We found that most authors and illustrators include an email address on their websites, and classroom teachers would be able to contact authors and illustrators this way as well. We also see the potential for readers to sharing reading responses together through email.

**Considering new digital literacy projects**

Christine notes interactive whiteboards are an emerging technology. Interactive whiteboards engage students in literacy learning in new ways. Interactive whiteboards are the first educational technology intended primarily for teachers (Betcher & Lee, 2009). Previous technologies were designed for the general consumer and then adapted to be included in a classroom. Interactive whiteboards allow for the teacher to interact with their class by demonstrating, modeling, and manipulating what is projected on the board by a simple touch. With the software included with the boards, audio translations can also be integrated with the visual tools portrayed on the board. This interactive technology of the interactive whiteboard allows learners to immerse in the sounds of the words they are learning. As we consider new ways to respond to literature we are considering how we might use interactive whiteboards.

We also continue to consider how to use technology to engage our struggling students in literacy. Technology such as talking story books, internet based learning resources, Voice Thread, and software programs can be helpful in reaching students who require additional assistance in literacy. Christine finds in her work as an educational technologist that technology provides motivation for students also because it is fun, interesting and always changing.

**Reflections**

We began with Katherine Paterson’s (2010) question about the “death of the book” (para 2). We strongly believe books are still relevant and important to our students. What we also would suggest, however, is that technologies such as podcasting and wikis can complement and enhance the ways our students read and respond to books. Through digital literacy projects like these students are able to connect and share with others, to learn new literacies, and be more motivated to keep reading great books, like those nominated for the NYSRA Charlotte Award. We look forward to continually finding new ways to read and write in the 21st century.

**Resources**

**Podcasting**

Podcasting essentials
http://www.readwritethink.org/classroom-resources/printouts/podcasts-nuts-bolts-creating-30311.html
Audacity (free digital audio software)
http://audacity.sourceforge.net

**Wikis**

PBwiki
http://www.pbwiki.com
Wikispaces
http://www.wikispaces.com/site/for/teachers
Authors’ Note

The winners of the 2010 NYSRA Charlotte Award were announced in May 2010 after the projects described in this article were completed. The primary book award was given to *There Is a Bird on Your Head* by Mo Willems. The intermediate grade book award was given to *Stolen Children* by Peg Kehret. The young adult book award was given to *The Hunger Games* by Suzanne Collins. Over 12,000 New York students voted.

2010 NYSRA Charlotte Award Nominees

**Primary**


**Intermediate**


**Young Adult**


References
The Digital Divide: One Middle School Teacher Attempts to Connect with His Students in Online Literature Discussions

Joellen Maples

ABSTRACT
This paper explores a middle school teacher’s and his students’ perceptions of the differences between online synchronous literature discussions and face-to-face literature discussions. Each member of this literature group participated in two face-to-face and two online literature discussions. Participants were interviewed twice to discuss their perceptions of both experiences. From these interviews, the following themes emerged: 1) Shifting Participation Roles, 2) Controlling the Discussion, and 3) Contending with Technological Obstacles to Discussion. The goal of this study is to help teachers who perceive the value of collaboration and social interaction in the learning process see the value of using computer based technologies in their classrooms.

AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY
Joellen Maples, Ph.D. is an assistant professor in the Literacy Department at St. John Fisher College. She formerly taught middle school reading and language arts for 11 years. Her research interests include exploring effective strategies for facilitating democratic dialogue and critical thinking skills through the reading of young adult literature and online discussion about literature. She can be reached at jmaples@sjfc.edu.

More and more, teachers are increasingly being encouraged to incorporate technology-supported learning opportunities into their classrooms. With the advent of Web 2.0 and students’ increased use of text messaging, instant messaging, and forums such as Facebook and Myspace, students are often times more equipped than teachers to participate in technology-supported learning opportunities. Such new Internet technologies hold implications for teachers who hope to decrease the polarization of in-school and out-of-school literacy practices and close the gap between the school curriculum and the students who are taught.

Taking into account this disconnect that exists between schools and technology and potentially even teachers’ and students’ view of technology, I designed this study to explore one teacher’s and his students’ perceptions of participating in face-to-face literature discussions and online literature discussions. I worked for a month with a first year middle school reading teacher and three of his middle school students who participated in a literature group centered around a novel that the students read in class. After participating in two face-to-face discussions, the literature group had two discussions in an online synchronous chat. This afforded an opportunity to see if the literature discussions changed through the use of technology. Crystal (2001) describes synchronous communication: “In a synchronous situation, a user enters a chat room and joins an ongoing conversation in real time, sending named contributions which are inserted into a permanently scrolling screen along with contributions from other participants” (p. 11). Much potential is in the synchronous chat medium as it affords a kind of “virtual classroom”
communicative space where teachers can engage in real-time chat with their students and facilitate discussion about literature while learning the linguistic properties of this new medium. At the same time, adolescents get the opportunity to use new Internet technologies in ways typically prevented in school. This study provides insight into the disconnect that may occur between teachers and students and their perceptions of their use of technology in the classroom. The research question guiding my study was the following: How do eighth grade inner city middle school students and their middle school reading teacher perceive literature discussions in a face-to-face literature group versus in an online literature group?

Why Talk About Literature?

Literacy educators understand the value of talk in the classroom as an important part of the learning process. Talking about literature allows for existing ideas and explanations to find voice, and thus, to be taken up, considered, and reinterpreted. As Barnes and Todd (1995) explain, “Talk is flexible; in talk [students] can try out new ways of thinking and reshape an idea in mid-sentence, respond immediately to the hints and doubts of others, and collaborate in shaping meanings they could not hope to reach alone” (p. 15). In the process of comprehending literature, talk serves as a valuable tool to increase understanding. Bloem (2004) asserts, “Children need time to talk, verbally or in writing, yet when time gets short, talk is what is pushed out of the curriculum first. But, for many of us, it is talk that leads to understanding” (p. 54). Understanding is increased by the reconstruction of existing ideas through talking to others.

Through talk, students are able to share their own interpretations of texts and broaden their ideas through others’ thoughts. As Crafton (1991) explains, “It’s tough not to assume a different perspective, achieve a deeper understanding, extend or refine an idea if there are opportunities to talk before, during, and after a literacy event” (p. 12). When students try on different perspectives and extend their ideas, they come closer to achieving what Barnes (1993) describes as exploratory talk in contrast to the presentational talk that teachers have students use. When talk is understood as an “exploratory” tool--interrelated with reading, writing, and listening--students and teachers can explore ideas, to “try out new ways of thinking…reshape an idea in mid-sentence, respond immediately to the hints and doubts of others, and collaborate in shaping meanings they could not hope to reach alone” (Barnes & Todd, 1995, p. 15). Barnes and Todd explain that such collaborative talk is necessary in the “reconstruction of existing ideas in the light of the new experiences, new ideas, new ways of thinking and understanding” (p. 24).

Talk, then, is not a final product, but rather an in-process, on-going way of improving understanding.

Why Go Online to Talk About Literature?

The effects of computer mediated communication (CMC) on teaching and learning have been researched with inconsistent and contradictory results (Im & Lee, 2004). Studies that support the benefits of CMC to education are as numerous as those that are against it. This dichotomy makes building a case for or against the use of CMC particularly problematic.

However, benefits for using CMC in the educational setting are many. From a constructivist perspective, CMC enhances social interaction between students and the instructor and creates a shift toward social learning (Kearsley, 2000; Sutton, 2001). Not only does it increase those bonds, but it provides opportunities for more students to participate. Palloff and Pratt (1999) found that creating an online community established connectedness, deeper exchange of ideas, risk-taking, and freedom to negotiate during disagreements to reach common
educational goals. This social interaction is important for creating learning experiences and increasing discussion in the CMC environments. Unlike traditional classrooms in which teachers dominate the discussions, CMC allows all voices to be heard, and even students who are shy, feel less intimidated to participate online (Black, 2005). However, some argue that it is necessary for instructors in online discussions to be more aggressive in maintaining a focused discussion, providing feedback, and posing differing views to foster thinking and discussion (Lim & Cheah, 2003). In fact, if student online participation is low, it can be related to the poor quality of guidance by the instructor, which results in ineffective learning for the students (Tallent-Runnels et al.).

Anonymity in online learners can affect student behavior, which in turn can affect the overall learning experience. As a result, some students may not be concerned about consequences for their behavior as “users are able to express and experiment with aspects of their personality that social inhibition would generally encourage them to suppress” (Murphy & Collins, 1997, p.181-182). Conversely, creating participants’ anonymity supports a more democratic learning environment for all involved. In this sense, CMC provides equitable learning experiences for students as they all have access to the floor, and the instructor is less likely to dominate (Lapadat, 2002). A shift in power for teachers and students is created by leveling the playing field. The teacher’s role shifts from imparting knowledge to helping students create meaning in a learning community (Heuer & King, 2004).

Within cyberspace, students can challenge traditional student-teacher roles and produce alternative ones. Cooper and Selfe (1990) point out that through the use of CMC, “such conferences are capable of making student-teacher and student-student exchanges more egalitarian, reducing the dominance of the teacher and the role of accommodation behavior in discussion and increasing the importance of the students’ discourse” (p. 851-852). Through egalitarian exchanges, the spirit of competition resides within ideas rather than personalities. As such, the online forum may have potential implications for the learning experience and in particular, discussion.

CMC in Middle School Literacy Practices

There is a variety of research that describes the use of computer mediated communication at the middle school level in regards to literacy specifically. Some studies examine the use of CMC in the middle school (Grisham & Wolsey, 2006; Carico & Logan, 2004; Agee & Altarriba 2009); other studies explore how CMC uses outside of school influence the new literacies within schools (Guzzetti & Gamboa, 2005; Lewis & Fabos, 2005); still other researchers try to promote the use of CMC in the classroom (Owen, 2003).

Both asynchronous and synchronous CMC have been used at the middle school level. Carico and Logan (2004) used email, bulletin boards, and online chats to enhance the teaching and learning of literature. Through this implementation of CMC, they found “broadened perspectives, increased knowledge, enhanced communication skills, and more satisfying and effective reading practices” (p. 293). Through the use of synchronous chats, the researchers discovered the middle school students were more enthusiastic and used the archived chats as a tool for examining discussion. Their findings were not unlike findings at the university level in that shyer students participated more; everyone had an equal chance to be heard; and the teacher’s role changed out of the transmission mode. Finally, they felt that using CMC in the
classroom had the promise of improving communication and exploring literature through discussions while meeting classroom objectives.

Another study analyzed the implementation of CMC with the use of asynchronous threaded discussion groups to discuss adolescent literature (Grisham & Wolsey, 2006). Benefits from this experience for the middle school students were that, “they were able to create a community through which they had control of the conversation, the meanings they jointly constructed, and the connections they wanted to make to their own lives and worlds” (p. 649). Grisham and Wolsey saw the use of CMC as valuable for students especially at the middle school level for which the accountability movement dictates the curriculum and its pacing. CMC gives students a chance to escape tightly constrained teacher-centered classrooms while still learning. Through their analysis of transcripts, the researchers found that students had deeper responses to one another in the asynchronous discussion threads than in paper journals or face-to-face interaction.

Another area for research of CMC in the middle school studied outside uses of CMC and how those literacy practices affect the classroom. Guzzetti and Gamboa’s (2005) research is a case study of two middle school girls and their use of online journaling outside of school. The researchers believe that CMC activities must be studied outside the context of schools before implications for instruction can be made. Furthermore, they contend that understanding adolescents’ outside literacies provide information about how students develop and practice their communication abilities. If teachers understand this relationship, they can tailor meaningful literacy events in the classroom. The two participants in the study did not believe personal aspects of online journaling had a place in schools. Rather they believed that teachers should be aware of such CMC technologies and be able to direct students to appropriate sites. Although Guzzetti and Gamboa do not recommend using online journals in the classroom, they do recommend that students have the opportunity to write in alternative styles and less traditional forms of expression. Also, literacy practices in CMC provide an opportunity for teachers to reconsider what constitutes writing in the classroom.

Another study examined instant messaging in which five of the seven participants were middle school students (Lewis & Fabos, 2005). Lewis and Fabos acknowledged an influence to do this study was the lack of research on instant messaging (IMs) and chat rooms that focus on educational or literacy-related topics. Their findings revealed that the social identities and subject positions found in IMs were important factors when considering adolescents and their literacy practices. Like Guzzetti and Gamboa (2005), Lewis and Fabos do not recommend the use of instant messaging in the classroom, but rather suggest how to apply the literacy practices to school instruction. Teachers can focus on the different types of writing, and students can discuss the concept of audience, shifting topics, writing style, and voice found in IMs and their applications in writing itself.

Finally, Owen (2003) recommends using blogs in several ways in the classroom because they have great potential as an extension to the traditional classroom. Students could use them as personal journals, bulletin board discussions on literature or writing, and even as an electronic portfolio of written work. CMC provides opportunities for student-centered learning at the middle school level. Articles like Owen’s provide rationale for educators to consider implementing CMC into the classroom. This study serves to add to the literature on using CMC with literacy practices.
Motivation for the Study

The purpose of this study was to explore the perceptions of a middle school teacher and his students. I was curious if the teacher-student discussion dynamics would differ between participation in two face-to-face literature discussions and two online literature discussions, as the students might be more tech-savvy than the teacher in the online forum. Also, I wanted to discover if the discussions were different in other significant ways. Technology can provide a promising forum for fostering dialogue, increasing interaction and collaboration, and enhancing learning for marginalized students (Gambrell, 2004). A literature group served as an appropriate platform to observe how students socially and cognitively construct meaning, and much knowledge can be gained from looking at the online experience itself from the perspective of the participants.

Context of the Study

The context for this study was twofold as it involved the face-to-face reading classroom and the online synchronous chat space. Both contexts were accessed at an urban school in the southern United States. The first context, the reading classroom, was comprised of a four person literature discussion group (one teacher, three eighth graders). The group was originally formed by the teacher to review stories read in the class to improve student comprehension. The discussion group members were assigned by the reading teacher, Mr. Knight (all participant names mentioned are pseudonyms). His class was a low achieving reading group and all students were below at least one grade level. The class met the last period of the day (2:40-3:25). This discussion group worked together at various times during the school year deemed appropriate by the teacher. However, for the purpose of this study, they were observed for one month as they read the novel *The Chronicles of Narnia: The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe* by C.S. Lewis. Each classroom discussion was audio-taped and transcribed.

The online chat space was comprised of the same four person literature discussion group who continued to read *The Chronicles of Narnia: The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*. I used the chat tool in Moodle, a free online course management system which instantly archived the chat transcripts. This same group met online the last period of the day and was observed for one month. The number of chat sessions was equal to the number of face-to-face sessions. The opportunity to participate in an online discourse community provided a socially and academically inclusive space for students typically excluded from discursive knowledge-building opportunities.

Context of the Face-to-Face and Online Literature Discussions

As the focus of this research article is to present the perceptions of the participants in regards to the experience of the face-to-face and online literature discussions, it is important to give some background information regarding the two types of discussions to add context to the interview data. Both types of discussions were focused on the novel *The Chronicles of Narnia: The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe* by C.S. Lewis. As part of their reading experience, the students also went on a field trip to see the movie production of this text. In the face-to-face discussions, the students did not initiate topics to discuss about the novel and did not ask questions to the teacher or each other. Mr. Knight would initiate the topic and/or question, illicit a response from a student, and then evaluate the student’s answer as either right or wrong. This type of discussion pattern is an example of the I-R-E (initiation/response/evaluation) three-part pattern of classroom discussion (Mehan, 1979). Cazden (1988) refers to this model as one that best fits the transmission of facts and routinized procedures. The types of questions that Mr.
Knight asked the students about the novel revolved around the following: plot questions, vocabulary questions, characterization questions, and a discussion about alternative endings to the story. Mr. Knight seemed to lead the discussion through a New Criticism lens. New Criticism is a form of literary theory that focuses on literary elements and assumes that the meaning of a text is found solely within the text.

During the online discussions, which happened after the face-to-face discussions, a change occurred. Unlike the face-to-face discussions in which Mr. Knight initiated all of the questions and determined the topics, the students began to initiate questions and topic changes in the discussion. The students asked questions of everyone in the group, shared personal experiences, and initiated topics about the book. This level of interaction and participation was different from the face-to-face discussions. In the online chats, the teacher controlled the topic minimally and there was a shared ownership between him and his students regarding questions and topics. However, Mr. Knight asked the students the same types of questions about the novel as he did in the face-to-face discussions whereas the students seemed to ask each other questions that stemmed from a reader response lens (Rosenblatt, 1978). The students compared and contrasted the book with the movie and made personal connections to the novel. Mike, one of the students, and asked his group if everyone had a closet like the one in The Chronicles of Narnia: The Lion, The Witch, and The Wardrobe, where would their personal closet lead to. In addition to discussion about the book, there were references to the technology itself and misspellings that occurred as a result of the typing. These references appeared to be an obstacle to the fluidity of the discussion.

Participants

The face-to-face and online discussion groups consisted of three eighth graders and one first year reading teacher. The three students were two Caucasian males and one Caucasian female, and all were 13 years old. Their instructional levels in reading were all compatible (below one grade level) as well as their technological skills. The three students had experience using email, chat rooms, and instant messaging outside of school daily. The students had been in middle school together for three years and in class together since August of that year. The teacher who was a Caucasian male in his early 30s had experience in emailing and did not participate in chat rooms or instant messaging. However, he did text on occasion on his cell phone. He was a first year reading teacher with a Master’s degree. Having an online discussion was a new effort on his part as he had never used online technology in a pedagogical way.

Methodological Approach and Rationale

A qualitative interview study was used to understand the research question of how eighth grade inner city middle school students and their middle school reading teacher perceive literature discussions in a face-to-face literature group versus in an online literature group. Each participant was interviewed twice, and all of the interviews were approximately an hour in length. The interviews were semi-structured based on a set of guiding questions that covered the following topics: participants’ roles in the literature discussions, the relationships with one another in their respective roles of “teacher” and “student,” and the constructed meaning of the online experience. The focus of the interviews was to capture the participants’ perspectives on the experience of taking part in face-to-face and online literature discussions. All interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed. Pseudonyms were created to protect the participants’ identities.
Data Analysis

The interview data were analyzed typologically. This type of analysis involves “dividing everything observed into groups of categories on the basis of some canon for disaggregating the whole phenomenon under study” (Hatch, 2002, p.152). Hatch (2002) suggests that this type of analysis is appropriate for interview data and artifact data that are collected with a specific purpose. For the interview data, I identified typologies to be analyzed. As I read the data, I marked entries related to the typologies. I looked for patterns and themes within the established typologies, deciding if those themes were supported by the data. Then, I selected data excerpts that supported the themes that emerged out of the interviews.

Trustworthiness was the main evaluative criteria used to ensure the validity of the study; meaning how well the realities of the participants were presented. Trustworthiness of the study was maintained in several ways. The data reflected the constructed meaning of the participants. The interviews were verified by the participants through a member check to make sure their meaning was accurately portrayed. Also, during the interviews, the participants were questioned about their terminology to obtain accurate definitions. The findings are supported with the participants’ words reflecting the specific context of their online and face-to-face experiences. As findings are reported below, data excerpts from the interviews are used to support the themes presented. Each excerpt includes identification of the speaker of the quoted material using pseudonyms assigned to the participants.

Findings

This findings section reports themes that held up across the data for this middle school literature group, and data excerpts were selected that represent the perceptions of the group. This section presents a set of descriptive findings regarding this literature group and their individual perceptions of discussing literature in both a face-to-face and online context. From the interviews, the following themes that represented the participants’ perceptions of the face-to-face discussions and online discussions emerged: 1) Shifting Participation Roles, 2) Controlling the Discussion, and 3) Contending with Technological Obstacles to Discussion.

Shifting Participation Roles

Within their literature group, there were certain acceptable roles and forms of discourse that both students and teachers “tried on” and acted out. However, different roles and procedures revealed themselves in the different discussion contexts. The common type of discourse represented within the literature group was School Talk. When asked about what the classroom discourse community looked like in the face-to-face discussion, the students’ and teacher’s perceptions were in agreement:

The typical classroom setting is where the students read a book and you have a discussion either while you’re reading or discuss the thing after you read it just as a group. The student raises his hand; the teacher calls on him; the student gives his opinion, and the teacher either corrects you or encourages you. Then the teacher goes on to the next person [Mr. Knight]

The teacher asks us questions and we answer them. [Beth]
We’re the students and some teachers might not care about our opinions and how it goes. Once the teacher hears the right answer, they don’t want to hear nobody else’s point of view. The teacher is the only one that asks all the questions, and he corrects us if we’re wrong. [Mike]

These roles are not uncommon in the traditional classroom. In this type of classroom, the teacher is the authority and controls the discussion. As Thayer-Bacon & Bacon (1998) point out, the role of the teacher in this environment is “the model of authority and wisdom and as an instrument to help the individual child obtain success” (p. 9).

However, these accepted participation roles were challenged and blurred in the online chat space as both the teacher and students shared in their interviews. Initially Mr. Knight described himself in the online chat in the following manner:

I felt like a moderator who was trying to keep them on task and remind them that, Hey we’re in this chat room to talk about a book. [Mr. Knight]

Later in the same interview, Mr. Knight changed what he called himself in the chat room.

I felt like a babysitter online. I was having to constantly remind them what they were supposed to be talking about. [Mr. Knight]

Not only did the he notice these changes in his role online, but he also noticed a change in his students’ roles which he described in the following excerpt:

In an online chat, people don’t see you they see who you’re trying to portray. You can put on a mask and call yourself Billy Jo or whatever and people don’t know that it’s you but there’s no fibbin’ it in person. I think that so many people that are completely 100% introverted can get into a chat room and be Superman and talk about whatever they want. But you’re not seeing who that person really is. You’re seeing the person that they’re putting out over the internet. I’ve not heard of too many stories about people that are truly themselves deep down when they get on the internet. It’s like when they get behind that computer screen they can be whoever they want. And like I said about my kids I mean they weren’t the same kids in that chat room as they are in class everyday. [Mr. Knight]

Mr. Knight perceived his students as not being themselves online, but the students suggested in their interviews that they were more like themselves. Perhaps what might have happened was the students were not playing their role of “student” online as Bill and Mike suggest in the following excerpts:

Online you feel like you’re being yourself. You go online and it’s like you’re just talking to your friends. [Bill]

When you are online, you feel like an open book. Being online, I’m invisible. I can be myself and say what I want to say. [Mike]

**Controlling the Discussion**

Another theme that emerged was the idea of control within a discussion. Mehan (1979) found that the structure of classroom discussions adhered to an initiation-reply-evaluation (I-R-E) pattern. The teacher initiates a question; the student responds to that question; and then the
The Digital Divide

teacher evaluates the student’s response. Mehan used these aspects of talk to further explain the various functions of the teacher initiation. The I-R-E pattern serves not only to structure the classroom lesson, but also to frame the interactional control the teacher possesses in the classroom. Students must follow the implicit classroom order of discourse to participate in the classroom community. This type of normative order is understood as a product of the institution of school. As Mehan (1979) points out,

Students must orient their behavior to the procedures for gaining access to the floor in order to appropriately engage in classroom interaction from the point of view of the teacher. If students deviate from this normative system, sanctions are imposed by the teacher, and sometimes by other students (p. 124).

As Mehan’s (1979) study shows, the I-R-E pattern of discourse is significantly different from everyday conversation. In the classroom, the turn-taking is invited or required by the teacher, who is in control of the discourse. By controlling the turn-taking, the teacher not only controls the focus of the lesson but also the interaction within the classroom. In the face-to-face discussions, Mr. Knight seemed to control the discussion by determining the topics and asking the questions. He described the control he had in the face-to-face discussions:

I could steer them in the right direction if they were starting to bring up too many things about their own lives and not relating it to the experiences of what they were reading. You just bring back up the book or a character and then it kind of just reminds them, “Oh yeah. We’re talking about a book here.” And they kind of got right back on it without me really having to prod them a whole lot. [Mr. Knight]

Mr. Knight then described what he perceived the students thought that their roles were in the face-to-face discussion:

They might have felt like their position in the group was that they were supposed to respond to questions. I might have asked 90% of the questions but I felt like their dialogue controlled most of the conversation. I would give them something to talk about and they kind of took over for a minute and then I’d give them something else to talk about then they’d kind of do their own thing. [Mr. Knight]

He perceived that the students’ dialogue controlled most of the conversation, yet he also pointed out that he controlled what the students talked about. If they did not talk about his predetermined topic, then the students were steered and prodded. Furthermore, his description reaffirmed his role as the topic decider as he “gives” them the topics to discuss rather than co-constructing the discussion with them.

However, in their interviews, the students expressed the threat of getting in trouble if they resisted the teacher controlled face-to-face discussion. Beth described her feelings about what would happen in a face-to-face discussion if she wanted to share her feelings or extend the discussion further:

I feel like if we try to express our feelings that Mr. Knight or whoever is in the classroom will get mad and send us to the isolation desk or if we have something else to say he won’t call on us. [Beth]
I followed up with Beth and asked what she thought might happen if she asked another student a question during the face-to-face discussion and she replied, “Teachers say it’s interrupting the discussion or disturbing the class. In face-to-face, we have to watch our p’s and q’s.” Her perception confirmed the formulaic discussion that Mehan (1979) and Cazden (1988) discuss as a dominant discourse pattern. The students’ perceptions of the control teachers have in face-to-face talk might relate to the I-R-E (Initiate, Respond, Evaluate) model of classroom discussion in which a teacher controls pacing, topic, and student response (Cazden, 1988).

On the other hand, this teacher’s pacing and control of the discussion was disrupted in the online space. Mr. Knight had a harder time controlling students’ behaviors or the discussion itself. In the online chat, the students participated more and the teacher less, and the students controlled the momentum of the discussion. Mr. Knight expressed his perceived loss of control in the chat room:

I felt like I had less control than in the face-to-face discussion. I wonder if I had told them, “This is a classroom and talk just like you do in the discussion there.” If I had told them something like that if they would have behaved differently in the chat room than what they had. [Mr. Knight]

When I asked him to describe what he meant by how the students behaved in the chat room and to describe what he saw happening in the chat room, he explained:

Online there were multiple conversations going on all at once rather than one conversation. If I asked Beth a question, Bill and Mike would see that as their opportunity to ask each other a question or what they were typing wasn’t pertaining to what Beth and I were trying to talk about; or if I would ask Beth a question, Bill and Mike wouldn’t just sit there, wait to hear the answer, and do their own response. It’s like there were so many different things going on at once that there was just no pattern or rhythm to any sort of one conversation. In the face-to-face discussion, there was one common conversation going on simultaneously throughout. Whereas in the online discussion, it just seemed like everybody was all over the place the whole time and I was sitting there trying to say, “Ok! Look! This is what we need to be talking about. Who can tell me this?” and meantime they’re all having a different conversation. [Mr. Knight]

Yet, Mr. Knight’s description of what was going on in the chat rooms seemed to represent an authentic discussion. Multiple discussions were occurring, students were asking one another questions, and no one participant determined the topic or the pace of the discussion. Turn-taking rules were not regarded..

When I asked Mr. Knight why he thought the discussion had changed and why his students were different in the online chat versus the face-to-face discussion, he responded:

Online the students build a little wall around them and put themselves in a little cubicle and when they’re on that computer, they feel like they have privacy. They can talk about what they want to and they can say what they want to and it’s their buddy on the other end of the line. You know they don’t feel like they’re face-to-face with an authority figure kind of thing. You just feel kind of invincible and that you can talk about whatever you want and you have this identity that people don’t see. [Mr. Knight]
While Mr. Knight felt a loss of control in the online environment and wanted to integrate traditional classroom discourse rules into the online chat, the students expressed a feeling of freedom. With this came an empowering sense of control. Even though they were not anonymous to one another, the disembodiment created by the computer fostered their freedom. Because bodies disappear in online environments, inequities related to gender, class, race, and other socially constructed categories can be eliminated which can provide a safe space for marginalized students (Wade & Fauske, 2004). The students expressed how they experienced their freedom and control in the online space:

We can type and express our feelings without getting corrected or not being able to express our feelings and how we feel about the book or how we feel about whatever we’re doing in class. [Beth]

You don’t have a teacher to call your shots. In the face-to-face discussion, Mr. Knight called our shots about what we talked about. Online we called our shots to what we talked about and we stuck to what we had to, but we just opened the door to more options that we could talk about. [Mike]

Online we could talk about the book, but change the way that we talked about it. We can actually express the way that we feel. We can change the roles of who gets to ask a question and who gets to answer it. [Beth]

The students felt more control over what to talk about, and they felt that anyone could ask questions, not just the teacher. The disembodiment gave them the opportunity to feel free to share their true feelings about the book.

Contending With Technological Obstacles to Discussion

The final theme that emerged from the interview data was the technological obstacles to the discussion. Certain obstacles arise in online chats that do not occur in face-to-face discussions simply because of the technology. When technology is involved, obstacles to discussion can occur if participants cannot operate the technology or if their skills are lacking. For example, Bill participated solidly in the face-to-face discussion, but his participation dropped significantly in the online discussion simply because of his typing skills. All of the participants revealed in their interviews how the technological aspects of the online chat adversely affected the discussion. Mr. Knight described what he perceived as impediments to the online discussion:

Unlike a face-to-face discussion, where I could ask a question and get an immediate response, I’d ask a question and the kids would be trying to figure out who said what and they’re looking up 10 lines above to try and remember what somebody’s answer was to a previous question and I’d have to repeat the question over and over again. Or I would actually have to say, “Bill, who was your favorite character?” You didn’t have the eye contact where you can just look at somebody and ask them the question. I think online was a bit overwhelming trying to keep track of who said what and by the time it scrolls half way up the screen it feel likes that conversation took place 10 minutes ago whereas
Bill struggled with the typing which negatively affected his participation:

Some people might not be so good at their reading, typing, and knowing how to work computers. Everyone typing at the same time means you got messages popping at every second and I mean you just gotta read every one of them. You might fall behind. [Bill]

In the discussion section that follows, these findings are examined in terms of the existing body of literature.

**Discussion**

The aim of this study was to explore a middle school literature group’s perceptions of participating in an online literature discussion versus a face-to-face discussion. Perhaps one of the most exciting aspects of using online discussions is its potential to shift and rearticulate traditional teacher/student roles, as it alters the roles of “teacher” and “student,” and troubles traditional notions about how to talk about literature in school contexts. This change helps to level the playing field. The teacher’s role shifts from imparting knowledge to helping students create meaning in a learning community (Heuer & King, 2004). As Wade & Fauske (2004) point out, “In peer-led discussions the teacher’s authority is decentered, and students’ voices govern the nature of the dialogue. This does not eliminate power relations, but it changes them” (p. 137). For some teachers, this change can be uncomfortable.

The traditional beliefs about teacher authority and teacher/student roles during classroom discussions, the social conventions and conversation norms of face-to-face discourse dictate that “school talk” will be linear, moving from teacher to student, and then back to the teacher. The teacher-as-expert asks most of the questions and may expect well-thought-out, well-planned, well-articulated responses that resemble more formal speech. Discussion doesn’t overlap, as one person speaks at a time; students are not encouraged to talk to each other about the topic at hand while the teacher or another student is talking. Thus, turn-taking rules are explicit, with students usually raising their hands to get permission to speak (assuming the teacher allows students to bid for the floor).

In such talk, students don’t interrupt one another (and certainly not the teacher), and little topic decay occurs as the teacher determines the topic through the questions he/she poses, and reclaims the floor or stops discussion altogether if talk moves “off-topic.” Talk is symmetrical, neat, and tidy, overwhelmingly dominated by teachers, who have a range of tools available to them to monitor and control student participation. In traditional face-to-face classrooms, students have little power to resist teacher expectations and social conventions associated with literature discussion; it is difficult for students not to respond to teacher questions in some way, whether in words or in gestures. Too, teachers can demand student response “through physical maneuvering, verbal demands, and ultimately, banishing students from the physical classroom” (Anagnostopoulous et. al, 2005, p. 1703).

In online chats, however, traditional face-to-face classroom discourse rules and roles do not apply because the multimodal nature of the online medium requires new rules and, thus, new roles in talking about literature. Finally, much of the literature discusses the space in an online environment and how the anonymity affects the experience. In this study, many of the changes in
control were due to the disembodiment the students felt online. After all, they were not anonymous to each other, and used the computers in the same room with one another. As a result, they were not concerned about consequences for their behavior and did “develop communication habits that might be disruptive to an instructional setting” and protected by the disembodiment of the computer medium, and with few social context cues to indicate ‘proper’ ways to behave, “users are able to express and experiment with aspects of their personality that social inhibition would generally encourage them to suppress” (Murphy & Collins, 1997, p.181-182). The students’ disembodiment allowed for them to feel freer to express how they really felt and to determine what topics would be discussed about the literature. Disembodiment causes some unusual tensions not seen in a regular classroom.

Other research about online environments discusses the hindrance of the technology itself in having clear discussions. The findings confirm and further expand this aspect of the literature. Mainly studies reflect Greene’s (2005) idea about the pace of the chat as a difficulty to overcome. Not only does the pace hinder communication, but the format of chat rooms can affect discussion as well. Lapadat (2002) found that the chronological record of discourse can be frustrating to users because of the incoherence in the sequence of the discussion. As a result, speed is needed by the user both in typing and reading of the screen. The students in this study expressed difficulty adjusting to these obstacles. Other research examines the need for substantial typing skills and also considers the affect of the short wait time for participants’ to responses to a discussion thread (Murphy & Collins, 1997). These obstacles were present in this study and confirm what the literature states.

Implications

Although the study is limited due to the experience itself, some of the findings are confirmed in the existing literature as well as contribute new findings to help expand the literature. It is acknowledged that these findings are representative of the students and the teacher and their experiences within an online environment and are not representative of every secondary classroom. The findings can lend support to the existing literature on the identities and roles that exist in online discussions, the difference in who has control, and the technology element of the discussion.

Overall, online environments with secondary students need further investigation by scholars. They are an important educational setting for teachers, parents, and students. The implications for education are for teachers to acknowledge that shared power can form a partnership between students and teachers where both have a stake in the learning. The online chat room offers a new space for students to think divergently, disagree, and resist the institution with their own language. Online technologies provide a place for student writing and talk that often does not occur in traditional classrooms due to the dyadic relationship of the omniscient teacher and the passive role of the student. Students can challenge traditional student-teacher roles and produce alternative ones while taking control of their learning. Furthermore, when teachers and students enter discussion together, students can make connections between their out of school learning which can only enrich their overall learning. Finally, the online space provides a place where students can feel belonging and are able to share and construct knowledge together with their teachers.

References


Using Multi-Media Projects to Foster Teacher Candidates’ Multiple Literacy Skills

Salika A. Lawrence
Geraldine Mongillo

ABSTRACT
This article describes the strategies used to incorporate multi-modal technology literacy experiences into a graduate level course for literacy specialists. The candidates created a multi-media project in response to literature. Their projects revealed that the teacher candidates used a variety of sources to create the project but the Internet was most often used to embed (download and insert) music, images, and video clips into their I-movie video narratives. Creating media projects fostered opportunities for teacher candidates to use multiple literacy skills, needed for 21st century learning and communication: multiple and diverse sources of information, multiple viewpoints, and diverse content to express and communicate ideas to a viewing audience. Teacher educators should provide opportunities for teacher candidates to create their own media. Using media literacy projects is one way to enrich the literacy experiences of learners, and enhance their interaction with text and their responses to text through use of technology.

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Teacher quality continues to be an issue explored by teacher researchers. Research shows the issue of teacher preparedness cuts across programs and content areas. Recently the impact of teacher content knowledge and pedagogical skills on K-12 student learning is of particular importance (National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education, 2006). In our rapidly changing, technology driven society, teacher knowledge of technology has emerged as an important issue concerning teacher education and public school education (Jones & Moreland, 2004; Kay, 2006; Mims, Polly, Sheperd, & Inan, 2006). At first glance it might appear that technology teacher-educators bear the burden of preparing teachers to use technology for teaching and learning in K-12 contexts, but there are implications for teacher educators across content. The Partnership for 21st Century Skills (2004), suggests all teaching and learning in the 21st century requires that both students and teachers have subject specific knowledge, learn
skills, use 21st century tools to foster learning, teach and learn in the 21st century context, connect learning to the real world, and use assessments that measure 21st century learning.

Today literacy practices connect technology to many aspects of our lives through multiple modalities. Brandt (1998) might agree that the literacy needs of the current generation largely differ from those of its predecessor particularly the “multidimensional” literacy needs of global citizens in the 21st century. Due to the wide spectrum and varied layers of literacies encountered today, New Literacy Theory (New London Group, 1996) combines with Gee’s (1996) assertions to redefine literacy. In this way a new term, multiliteracies, accounts for “the context of our culturally and linguistically diverse and increasingly globalized societies… [and] for the burgeoning variety of text forms associated with information and multimedia technologies (New London Group, 1996, p.60).

Technology has impacted literacy practices on a global level to the point where 21st century literacy practices include the ability to:
- work collaboratively, online without any face-to-face contact (Leu & Kinzer, 2000)
- evaluate extensive amounts of information, select that which is most relevant and accurate, and be effective online communicators and collaborators (Leu & Kinzer, 2000)
- master new authoring skills in a nonlinear environment in order to interpret and represent knowledge (Brunner & Tally, 1999)

The increased emphasis on technology has overshadowed the importance of information literacy (Horton & Keiser, 2008). This is problematic because technology and information literacy are interconnected and has significant implications for in education contexts where today’s teachers and students should be using technology as a teaching and learning tool (Partnership for 21st Century Literacy, 2004). The interconnectedness of technology and information literacy magnifies the current global transformation that is shifting literacy “from traditional literacy to twenty-first-century multiliteracies—and reflects the impact of communication technologies and multimedia on the evolving nature of texts, as well as the skills and dispositions associated with the consumption, production, evaluation, and distribution of those texts” (Borsheim, Merritt, & Reed, 2008, p. 87).

Additionally this broadened definition of literacy, acknowledges both the cultural and linguistic variations of individuals as well as the multiple modalities in current use, and can be used to inform contemporary literacy pedagogy. “This shift [also] has important implications for teachers and teacher educators because…although the shift is clearly technological, to prepare students for full and equal participation in public, private, and work environments of the twenty-first-century, it must also be pedagogical” (Borsheim, Merritt, & Reed, 2008, p. 87). To foster teacher candidates’ literacy proficiencies in information literacy and technology, media literacy education needs to be integrated with media production (Adams & Hamm, 2000). The conflict as stated by Hobbs (1998) is the controversy regarding the ways in which individuals learn media literacy—learning solely by deconstructing videos or by creating their own videos. Today, videos are a prevalent form of text that often merges print and non-print media. Interacting with this form of text often requires learners to use multiple literacy practices (Leu & Kinzer, 2000; New London Group, 1996).

Borsheim, Merritt, and Reed (2008) found that “teachers who employ a multiliteracies pedagogy offer their students ample opportunities to access, evaluate, search, soft, gather, and read information from a variety of sources and invite students to collaborate in real and virtual spaces to produce and publish multimedia and multimodal texts for a variety of audiences and purposes” (p. 87). For example, teacher educators have used wikis and blogs to provide “teacher
candidates [with opportunities]... to reflect on and learn about technology’s role in the multiliteracies of their lives and those of their secondary students” (Borsheim, Merritt, & Reed, 2008, p. 88). Using wikis and blogs helped the teacher educators to model pedagogical uses of the technology, provided a virtual common space for ongoing mentorship of the teacher candidates and fostered opportunity for collaboration between candidates, and helped to increase teacher candidates’ confidence with the technology (Borsheim, Merritt, & Reed, 2008).

As teacher educators, we wanted to see what would happen when we incorporated multimodal technology literacy training into their education course to introduce candidates to the benefits of using technology to promote students’ interaction with authentic literature. This article is a report of our instructional decisions and how it impacted technology and literacy practices of candidates in our teacher education programs. Because technology is a broad area to explore, we wanted to focus on what would happen when we asked candidates to create a media literacy projects as a way to respond to literature. Specifically we wanted to know:

1. How does the multi-media project support teacher candidates’ use of media and technology, and support development of their information literacy skills?
2. To what extent did completing the multi-media project foster candidates’ interaction with and interpretation of authentic literature?

Fostering Teacher Candidates’ Interaction with Children’s Literature

As university faculty members (the co-authors) worked with 69 candidates enrolled in three of their Masters level courses during spring 2006, summer 2006, and summer 2007. Two of the courses were elective literature courses in the Masters Reading Program and the other course was a required literacy course in a graduate alternative certification program. Candidates either taught in or had a field placement in both urban and suburban school districts. Candidates were predominantly Caucasian females in the 25-45-age range, with three Caucasian male candidates in the alternate certification group.

One overlapping project in all three courses—the literature circle assignment—provided the teacher candidates with many opportunities for connect technology with authentic literature while fostering students’ informational and technology literacy skills. Below is a description of the courses and the assignment candidates completed, which required their use of technology.

Course 1 and 2: “Reading and Study Skills in Secondary Education” and “Literature for Adolescents” were both taught by the same instructor. The former course was a required course in the graduate alternative certification program, and the latter was an elective course in the Masters in Reading Program. The student learning outcomes in both courses included a group assignment where the students were instructed to create a culminating project representing the novel they read during Literature Circles (Daniels, 2002).

The assignment required that candidates complete a presentation in which they responded to literature using media. The excerpt below which was obtained from the course syllabus indicates that candidates were given a wide range of choices to create and produce their presentation.

Candidates will read several selected Young Adult novels and participate in Literature Circle groups during class. Candidates will create an alternate book report based on one text read during literature circles that reflects an important theme/topic/issue presented in the text. As a group you will negotiate the theme, topic, or issue that you will focus on during this 5-10 minute presentation. Consider this a brief advertisement for the book based on the discussions held in your group. Candidates will also discuss and decide
upon the method and design of the presentation. The use of technology must be incorporated in the presentation. (Course Syllabus, 2006, p.4).

In her reflections, the instructor indicated that she “strongly encouraged” the students to create an I-Movie.

Course 3: “Advanced Inquiry into Literature for Children and Youth” was taught as a 5-week summer session course at the university. The class met for 3 hours, two evenings per week. There were also online sessions using Blackboard. This course is an elective course in the Master’s Reading program. It provides the opportunity for candidates to closely examine and discuss literature, and identify instructional strategies teachers can use to engage students in critical examination of texts across genres.

Candidates were expected to complete an individual literature circle project. The assignment sheet and rubric indicated that they were expected to be “creative and appropriately use visuals and/or technology.” They were to demonstrate that they had integrated “multiple visual and textual elements to focus on one aspect of the book” they were discussing and be able to explain the “processes used to create” their multimedia project. The assignment sheet (Figure 1) indicates that successful candidates would connect the content of critical literacy and media production to examine the intertextual elements of text and critique the text. It provided a list of possible media to be used to create the project. The project was also evaluated on the basis of creativity and the technology used during the presentation to discuss and present the text.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Literature Circle Project Assignment Sheet</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Upon completion of the literature circle meetings, prepare and present a project about one of the following. Intertextuality – common themes across the books</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Your experience as a reader and member of the literature circle as you interacted with the text on a deeper level</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Issues and themes that emerged in your book</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Critique the text and/or the author’s purpose.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Examine the literary elements in the text.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Present two different interpretations of an event or an issue in the book.</td>
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<tr>
<th>Criteria</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Focus on one of the areas noted above.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Include technology (e.g. I-Movie, Powerpoint, video</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Use creative strategies to combine print and non-print text (e.g. art, visual images, text written by you or others.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. 20-30 minute presentation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Use an organized format for the presentation (e.g. your presentation should introduce your project, discuss the processes used to come up with a topic/focus for the project, and how you used technology to create the project).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Use your imagination and be creative!</td>
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</table>

**Possible projects (not limited to)…**

1. Create a television commercial for the book.
2. A video-taped dramatization of a scene in the book or TV critic’s review of the book
3. A board game or trivia game based on the book.

Figure 1: Assignment sheet for literature circle project
Technology Use Fosters Teacher Candidates’ Information and Technology Literacy Skills

Teacher candidates provided faculty with feedback via a self-evaluation reflection on their experiences while creating the literature circle project. Results revealed that teacher candidates used a combination of strategies and technology skills to create their media project to respond to the book they read. Candidates that previously created I-Movies in others courses eagerly shared their knowledge with novices in their groups. In one course, candidates’ remarks suggested they enjoyed the process particularly learning the technology as a hands-on experience scaffolded by more experienced peers in their assigned groups. One candidate stated, “I didn’t know how to embed my piece into the movie but Katie made it easy…we met as a group in the computer lab and she showed us …it wasn’t hard at all and I’d try it again.”

The candidates previewed video clips, pictures, and digital software while looking for online resources for their literature circle project. Products demonstrated the candidates researched their topics via the Internet accessing multiple sources for information. This was evidenced in the choice of factual information, visual images, video clips, and music embedded in their final movie presentation.

Results also indicate that the teacher candidates used a variety of sources to create their project, namely web streaming, Internet images, music, and print media. The candidates used the Internet to embed (download and insert) music, images, and video clips into their I-movie video narratives. Candidates reported using web streaming most often to download and incorporate images and music into their presentations. Survey responses revealed that Internet search engines provided many of the graphic images in the I-Movies, collage, poster, and brochure. Print media resources (i.e., text from the novel) were incorporated in both the I-Movie and the scene dramatizations.

Responding to Literature Promotes Interdisciplinary and Multiple Literacy Connections

Teacher candidates also used different formats to respond to the texts they read. There were a total of 7 different products teacher candidates created to respond to the novels they read - I-Movie production, PowerPoint, board game, dramatization, poster, collage, and brochure. There was overlap in how technology was used to create the products and/or used during the presentation. Therefore, the frequency with which technology was used to create the products or present their response projects varied: I-Movie production (N=26), PowerPoint (N=28), board game (N=1), dramatization (N=2), posters (N=2), collage (N=1), and brochure (N=1). Most candidates, 28, prepared a PowerPoint slide show, and I-movie was used 26 times as a response project. Table 1 identifies the books teachers used to create the different products. Each presentation fulfilled the assignment requirements demonstrating the candidates’ ability to respond appropriately to a theme or topic based on the text. The I-movie required that candidates use all four sources (web-streaming, Internet images, music, and print media), while the other products—dramatization, poster, collage, brochure, PowerPoint, board game—required usage of one or two sources. It is interesting to note that only the I-Movies and the scene dramatizations included text quoted directly from the novel they were presenting. This is significant because the integration of the words from the text is crucial to an authentic response to the literature. This shows meaningful referential connections to the text while representing the teacher candidates’ reflections and perspectives of the text they are presenting.
Table 1: Young Adult Novels and Teacher Created Projects

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Novel</th>
<th>Products</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>PowerPoint Board</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The First Part Last</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Secret Life of Bees</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>House on Mango Street</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ask Me No Questions</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cut</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My Brother’s Keeper</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Book Thief</td>
<td>X</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Table 2: Content Areas Emphasized in Teacher-Created I-Movies for Each Young Adult Novel

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Novel</th>
<th>Subject Content Areas</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>English Language Arts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The First Part Last</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Secret Life of Bees</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>House on Mango Street</td>
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<tr>
<td>The Book Thief</td>
<td>X</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

For example, content analysis of the candidates’ multimedia I-Movie created for *The Secret Life of Bees* (Kidd, 2002) focused on the period’s historical issues by embedding seminal video speeches made by Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and Lyndon B. Johnson highlighting their contributions to the Civil Rights movement in America. Similarly the I-Movie for *The First Part Last*, the story of a sixteen year-old father, included video interviews of teen parents obtained
from the web. Factual information on the incidence of teen pregnancy in the United States and the serious health issues involved in teen pregnancy were also researched and included in the production. The media production for *The House on Mango Street* posed crucial questions (“Have you ever felt different? Lonely? Ashamed?”) while integrating multiethnic photographs to symbolize these questions. A rendition of “Over the Rainbow” played as background music and passages from the text were lifted and cited to connect the questions, images, and music. All of the I-Movies used images, namely pictures or artwork to represent themes encountered in the young adult novel.

The candidates who created the I-Movie also successfully connected literature and technology by using the media to present critical insights about the book. The feedback provided by instructor on the rubric for one candidate who read the book *Cut* by Patricia McCormick, stated

This was a well organized and meaningful presentation. A clear rationale and focus were evident throughout the presentation. Effective use of questions to guide the audience through the presentation...keeps the audience engaged and prompts the audience to consider their preconceived notions about some of the issues being addressed...and hopefully change those perceptions by the end of the video. Effective images were used to communicate diverse perspectives of the issues in the book and beyond the book. It moves “literacy” to...[the] idea of critical literacy – beyond the text to a stance where readers examine ideas of social justice and social action in the world through interrogation of social practices. Outside research was integrated throughout the presentation...this provides an example of how students can use a self selected text to springboard into a research project about something they learned in the book and subsequently share that with the class through a multimedia presentation (where they talk about the research and other processes used to create the project along with what they inferred from the novel.) Once again...moving beyond the book. Very well done.

Feedback on another media project provided to another candidate, who read the book *Ask Me No Questions* by Marina Budhos was

Very creative and well organized presentation. Effective use of first person to tell the character’s story. Also effective to use a central element of the character’s heritage – the scrap book – and modify it through use of the media. Images were used to depict the character’s traits and development through the narrative rather than emphasizing themes of hidden messages being communicated by the author.

Faculty also provided feedback to candidates which offered recommendations on how they can enhance their use of media during their presentation. On one rubric the faculty member wrote

1. The words (text you wrote) could have faded in and out to save time and move the video along faster. Although it was clear that the timing was integral to allow the “audience” enough time to read the text, it was rather slow at times. Also although you focused on 2 characters, because of the integral connections between characters (based on your summaries) a list of characters at the beginning of the presentation might have been helpful...to enhance the meaning and significance of the video.

2. Recording the narrative as a voice over might have been even more meaningful.
Benefits of Using Media Literacy Projects with Teacher Candidates

The media literacy projects generated interest and engagement, included research and writing components, encouraged group discussions, and required multiple literacy skills. Each faculty member assigned a similar assignment that yielded varying levels of sophistication in products created by teacher candidates because it warranted different degrees of critical, technology, and information literacy skills. In addition, using media literacy projects develops problem solving and interactive collaboration skills among students and enhances learning, where learners worked together to increase peers’ understanding of technology software.

Creating media projects fostered opportunities for teacher candidates to use multiple and diverse sources of information, multiple viewpoints, and diverse content to express and communicate ideas to a viewing audience. To successfully complete this assignment, teacher candidates evaluated electronic resources to select appropriate media to represent the themes and issues in the text. While interacting with different sources, teacher candidates engaged in literacy practices such as note taking and synthesizing information from a variety of sources, cut and paste pictures and other media from the Internet.

The media literacy projects created by teacher candidates identified interdisciplinary ways to connect a central topic through art, music, and literature that is embedded in the media. We found that the teacher candidates used various literacy practices when interacting with similar products, namely make inferences through pictures, art work, and cartoons.

Similar to findings by Jones and Moreland (2004), we learned that the teacher candidates’ use of technology was influenced by their knowledge of technology. Those teacher candidates’ with prior knowledge of technology and knowledge of creating media projects (whether they knew about the tools prior to entering the teacher education program or through coursework and assignments in the program) played an important part in their use of technology. The sources used to create the literature circle products varied and required teacher candidates to use a variety of technology skills. Products developed by the teacher candidates in the three courses suggest that K-12 teachers would have to know how to teach their students information literacy skills, be able to help K-12 students search the Internet for resources, and help K-12 students use I-Movie and PowerPoint software.

Conclusions

First, teacher candidates should learn how to engage students in a variety of literacy practices through the use of I-Movie technology. For example, completing an I-Movie requires that learners conduct research via the Internet to examine a wide variety of sources, make judgments about the appropriateness of those sources, and subject disciplines in order to express their personal response to the text. By creating I-Movies learners can adopt a critical stance, through their selection of certain material and have the opportunity to share their perspectives about issues encountered in text by using this medium to respond to literature.

Secondly, teacher educators should provide opportunities for teacher candidates to create their own media. According to the Partnership for 21st Century Skills (2004) 21st century tools such as technology should be used to foster learning. When learners create media literacy projects such as an I-Movie, they are being challenged to share their views on the books they read and use media to talk about the issues and themes that emerge in the books. The projects created by teacher candidates can be used as learning objects for K-12 students. Teachers can use their work created in teacher education courses as models for their K-12 students. In addition, media literacy projects such as those created by our teacher candidates can be used to
supplement discussions about literature and can replace traditional forms of book reports so that learners are now required to use multiple literacy skills, namely technology, and media. For example, this kind of assignment will require that learners use PowerPoint, music videos, and/ or I-Movie to create an oral presentation about a self-selected or group text. To prepare students for this assignment, teachers should provide students with a tutorial on how to use the software. If the teacher does not feel proficient in the software he or she can call on students in the class who are proficient in the software to provide the class with a tutorial.

Using media literacy projects is one way to enrich the literacy experiences of learners, and enhance their interaction with text and their responses to text through use of technology. It also fosters opportunities for learners to use technology to develop critical and information literacy skills through meaningful learning experiences (Berrett, 2006). A review of previous research suggests a natural link between media literacy, and teacher education that come into play when technology is used as a teaching and learning tool. Research suggests that merging these areas is one way teacher educators can foster technology literacy in their courses (Kay 2006; Mims, Polly, Shepard, & Inan, 2006). Through their use of technology, the teacher candidates and university faculty transitioned from consumers of knowledge to producers of knowledge by creating their own media literacy products. Although media literacy projects should be integrated into the curriculum at all education levels as stipulated by state standards, using these kinds of media literacy projects might help K-12 teachers improve their basic understanding of video production techniques so they can use the media and technology more effectively in their K-12 classrooms.

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Every semester I teach a course entitled Adolescent Literacies to undergraduate secondary education students. We usually begin the semester with a discussion of how best to define the term literacy. Most students stick with the more traditional view, which limits literacy to reading and writing. Others, perhaps tipped off by the use of the plural term literacy in the course title broaden their definition to include digital technology.

I prefer to think of literacy in terms of the various modes of communication in which we participate. Listening, reading, writing, speaking and viewing are the communication skills most often associated with literacy development. It is these skills which I ask my content area pre-service teachers to consider integrating into the curriculum and it is these skills which NCTE and our own state considered when (re)writing the standards. These modes of communication connect to many different types of “text”. I use the term text to refer to any material which can be interpreted using the modes of communication. Therefore, a website is a digital literacy which utilizes the modes of communication such as reading, viewing and in some cases “listening.” In a case where a student is posting her own podcast for instance, the website includes speaking and writing. By the end of the semester, we come to understand that literacy is more than print media alone and we include other forms such as digital literacy and media literacy. During the course, we also come to understand a variety of other forms such as critical literacy and socio-cultural literacy. We easily employ terms such as multiple literacies and multimodal literacy. The one element that each of these has in common is communication.

Harste (2003), in his article “What Do We Mean by Literacy Now?” examines exactly what we discuss in my course, that literacy is no longer bound by the written word. He engages the term multiple literacies and examines literacy as a social practice and “ways to mean” (p. 8). Collier (2007) continues this conversation by examining the changes that have taken place in classrooms as teachers consider the impact of technology on literacy and our understanding of communication. This technological shift includes such practices as text messaging and blogging.

While admittedly, each author makes excellent points with which I agree, I have begun to wonder when we will draw the line on the ever-expanding definition of literacy. When will
our use of the term literacy become so burdened that it will be unable to sustain all that is intended by the many meanings we assign it? The most encompassing definition includes the belief that literacy is the knowledge held in a particular field or subject while the traditional definition focuses on literacy as the ability to read and write.

An additional complication is the overuse of the term by those who view literacy as content knowledge. It seems as though by adding the word literacy to any topic, this new term suddenly has authority and must be attended to. Each semester, I ask students to write a short article critique about the role of literacy in the public school system. Although I cover specifically what I mean by this, inevitably, at least one student returns to me with articles that evidence the expansion of the term. Topics such as mathematical literacy, scientific literacy and numerous others are common. Less typical, but even more problematic are articles which center on topics such as environmental literacy, ocean literacy, health literacy and even financial literacy. Such overuse of the term erodes its meaning and reduces it to a cliché. How long will it be before bowling literacy emerges as an important academic topic? Perhaps the physical education instructor, afraid of being left out of the literacy game, will add field hockey literacy to a curriculum outline.

Turning on the television during the last Presidential election, I encountered the term “voter literacy” – an indication that even the popular media are picking up on this trend of using the word literacy. The discussion was not about an individual’s reading ability as it would apply to voting, but more about one’s knowledge of content and the ability to be informed before going to the polls. Now that the media have added literacy to their lexicon, it won’t be long until before Lady Gaga literacy appears.

Literacy has now become a popular key word on the Internet as well. A recent Google search of the term yielded 46,600,000 hits. A search a bit over a year ago revealed 26,300,000 hits – an amazing increase in such a short period of time. Not surprisingly, many of the listed results use the term to indicate knowledge of a specific content area.

Not fully in jest, I sometimes wonder if asking my adolescent literacy students to widen their definitions of literacy beyond traditional reading and writing have added to the problem. Could this request somehow fuel their desire to concoct ever broader extrapolations of this very tired term? Some students have gone so far as to try coining their own terms. One student wrote her mid-term paper on “gaming literacy” - the understanding of various games such as the math puzzle Sudoku as a potential literacy practice. This was obviously not where I had intended the papers to go, but it was hard to argue my case with her when she had a works cited page which included multiple sources she had found through a simple online search, one of which was scholarly (thank you, James Gee).

One may believe that this is simply a philosophical argument and that it has no true impact on the classroom, but indeed it does. The push for literacy inclusion in all content areas has created a sense of uneasiness in many teachers outside the field of English Language Arts. This literacy saturation leaves many wondering about its true meaning. At the school where I teach as well as at other colleges and universities, the New York State Department of Education requires secondary education students take six credits of adolescent literacy regardless of content area. Often students are concerned that as content area teachers, they need not take such courses as they will not be teaching reading. It usually only takes a class or two to convince them otherwise, especially in light of aspects such as the literacy knowledge needed to be successful on the state exams.
The increased focus on literacy has emerged in state testing across content areas in New York. Math for instance now asks students to write the explanations to solutions. The history exam also requires short writing tasks. Several other exams ask students to read and respond to various forms of text including prose, graphs and other visual forms. Arguably, the Global Studies exam tests more forms of literacy than some years of the ELA exam in that it considers not only traditional print text, but multiple tasks with viewing as a necessity to interpret text (political cartoons, maps, charts etc.).

Currently, New York State is undergoing a standards revision and ELA is the first area to be examined. Considerations for this review include the Common Core and more importantly, the Standards Review Initiative draft, which takes into account 21st century literacies. I am glad to see a proposed emphasis on multimodal literacies. It is expected that other content areas will also consider the impact of literacy in the standards. While I support all these updates to curriculum and standards setting, there is still confusion among new and pre-service teachers. Many are unclear about what literacy is. Without more guidance in sorting out what counts as a legitimate literacy form for classroom instruction, newly minted teachers will be set adrift unable to focus on key needs (especially those which are not test-driven, such as digital literacy). The risk is instruction which is devoid of focused attention on literacy or one so scattered that students receive no true support for literacy development.

New teachers and pre-service teachers become confused thanks to the widening of the term. They wonder which “literacies” are legitimate and therefore worthy to bring to the classroom and which are pandering to an oversensitive field of education and an administration conscious of state mandates. A balance and clarity need to be established to guide these fledgling teachers.

Harste (2003) notes “in order to change anyone’s definition of literacy, the social practices that keep a particular (and often older) definition of literacy in place have to change” (p. 8). Perhaps I’m just not ready to transition to this more global use of the word literacy as it applies to activities, process and knowledge claims. I do not think I am alone. Rather, I think we need to be wary of loose interpretations and preserve the term literacy for those elements of our understanding which relate to meaningful forms of communication.

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Students who are English learners have a tough job. Not only must they learn what their classmates are learning, but they also must learn English. They need English to talk with their friends on the playground, to understand the teachers’ directions, and to ask for a straw for their milk at lunch. However, this kind of English is not enough. In addition to learning to speak and comprehend in a new language, they also need the academic English that enables them to participate with their classmates in learning grade-appropriate curriculum (Goldenberg, 2008).

Since much academic content is learned through reading, it is important to examine the relationship of reading ability to content acquisition. All students need to learn to read, as well as read to learn. For English learners, the ability to read in their new language is a key to learning in other content areas.

Some aspects of learning to read pose fewer challenges than others. For example, when the language demands of reading “are relatively low” (Goldenberg, 2008, p. 22), as in the early stages of reading when students are learning letter-sound connections, decoding, and word recognition, English language learners can make progress comparable to that of their English-only peers as long as they are given focused, clear, and systematic instruction (Goldenberg, 2008).

However, as students advance past the beginning reading stages, vocabulary knowledge becomes more important for continued reading success and academic achievement (Goldenberg, 2008). In fact, according to Nagy and Scott (2000), vocabulary knowledge is essential for understanding written text. Adequate reading comprehension requires knowledge of between 90 and 95 percent of the words in text (Nagy & Scott, 2000). Knowing 90 percent of the words in
text makes understanding likely, and increases the probability of learning new words from the text. Conversely, knowing fewer than 90 percent of the words interferes with learning text content and reduces the likelihood of learning new words from the text (Hirsch, 2003).

Since a strong relationship exists between word-meaning knowledge and the ability to comprehend passages which include these words (Anderson & Nagy, 1992), “explicit attention to vocabulary development—everyday words as well as more specialized academic words—needs to be part of English learners’ school programs” (Goldenberg, 2008, p. 23). In addition, strategies used for vocabulary instruction for English learners must take into account language limitations which may make vocabulary instruction more challenging.

As a professor of education in a small, private liberal arts college, I teach undergraduate teacher candidates literacy strategies appropriate for instructing students from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds. Often, the strategies I emphasize, while designed initially for all students/EO students, can be modified readily to increase their efficacy for English learners. With this in mind, I reviewed literature about vocabulary development for English speakers and for English learners in preparation for planning my course sessions.

I read with great interest Blachowicz & Obrochta’s (2005) article, “Vocabulary Visits: Virtual field trips for content vocabulary development,” and noted that this strategy is consistent with many research-based practices that are effective for working with English learners. I identified supplementary research-based practices which, when added to Vocabulary Visits, produce a comprehensive strategy for increasing English learners’ knowledge of concepts and vocabulary. This new strategy is called Vocabulary Plus.

**Vocabulary Visits and Vocabulary Plus**

**Vocabulary Visits** (Blachowicz & Obrochta, 2005) are virtual field trips which use visuals and books for developing concepts and vocabulary. Teachers put together thematically-related text sets which feature a repeated related vocabulary. They create a chart or locate a visual enlarged to chart size to stimulate discussion of the sensory experiences students have during an actual field trip. Teachers involve students in brainstorming to activate their knowledge, active listening to content-related books, and creating a display of conceptually-related words. As they listen, students signal when they hear new words, and can add words from other text-set books to the chart. Students participate in follow-up sorting and writing activities. **Vocabulary Visits** motivate students while providing opportunities to develop oral and written vocabulary (Blachowicz & Obrochta, 2005).

**Vocabulary Plus** is a comprehensive strategy for vocabulary instruction which was designed specifically to support the vocabulary development of English learners. Building on the virtual field trips and thematic read-alouds used in Vocabulary Visits, Vocabulary Plus uses content-area themes linked to grade-appropriate state standards for core subjects as the focus for instruction, and incorporates instructional practices found to be beneficial for English learners. When using Vocabulary Plus, teachers identify a theme matched to grade-appropriate content-area standards, choose motivating non-fiction texts, and use a tiered system of importance to select target vocabulary appropriate for both language development and content area learning from within these texts. They create graphic organizers and other visuals to illustrate relationships among target vocabulary words to structure discussion. Students listen actively to read-alouds, and participate in follow-up activities based on the interactive read-alouds to reinforce their understanding and retention of valuable vocabulary and concepts. **Vocabulary Plus** can be incorporated readily into ongoing classroom activities for both classroom activities
for both English learners and their English only classmates. Figure 1 summarizes the sequence of steps for planning and implementing *Vocabulary Plus*.

**Figure 1 – Steps for Vocabulary Plus**

1. **Identify grade-appropriate content-area standards and select related themes as the focus of instruction.**

2. **Select informational books that are consistent with the standards–based content area theme to create a read-aloud text set.**

3. **Explore the set of thematically-related books to identify core content-area vocabulary.**

4. **Use a graphic organizer to create a poster which provides a visual introduction to core content-area vocabulary and the interrelationships among these words.**

5. **Use poster to engage students in instructional conversation about the interrelationships among core vocabulary.**

6. **Engage students in interactive read-alouds and subsequent instructional conversations and activities using core vocabulary.**

**Implementing Vocabulary Plus – A step-by step guide:**

1. **Identify grade-appropriate content-area standards and select related themes as the focus of instruction.**  
   
   In many of today’s schools, instructional content is influenced greatly by state-level instructional standards. All students are expected to meet challenging state standards for academic achievement. One objective of the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act (2002) is to “ensure that children who are limited English proficient, including immigrant children and youth, attain English proficiency, develop high levels of academic achievement in English, and meet the same challenging State academic content and student academic achievement standards as all children are expected to meet” (p. 266). Academic instructional content must be consistent with these standards and must be cognitively demanding as well as grade appropriate, and should not be “watered down” (Peregoy & Boyle, 2005, p. 79).

   Teachers can design content area instruction which corresponds with state-mandated standards by focusing instruction around standards-based themes. For English learners, thematic instruction provides opportunities to use academic English for content area learning in sustained content over a period of time (Peregoy & Boyle, 2005).

   This yields multiple benefits. First, the use of themes creates predictability. Students know in advance that instruction will focus on a target subject. As a result, they often begin to think about the topic outside of the lesson itself, thus bringing to mind relevant background knowledge. Next, thematic instruction increases opportunities for reinforcement. Since the content of each lesson is related, subsequent lessons build upon earlier learnings. Each lesson calls to mind the content of previous lessons, and, accordingly, incorporates review and application. As vocabulary is incorporated into multiple lessons, it is repeated naturally in
different situations. “(S)tudents learn new words better when they encounter them often and in various contexts. The more children see, hear, and work with specific words, the better they seem to learn them” (Armbruster, Lehr, and Osborn, 2003, p. 36). Third, teachers can organize instruction around themes based on “big questions” (Freeman & Freeman, 2006, p. 63). This helps teachers to link thematically-related materials and to connect the curriculum to students’ lives and interests. Last, the use of thematic instruction provides opportunities to differentiate instruction by varying activities and assignments to involve students at all levels of English proficiency. While instructional content and vocabulary remains consistent, instructional processes – activities in which the student engages to master the content, and products – culminating projects through which students rehearse, apply, and extend what they learned (Tomlinson, 2000), can be varied to match students’ abilities.

To begin the preparation and planning for Vocabulary Plus instruction, teachers select specific standards from the range of grade-appropriate standards for a particular content area and identify a corresponding theme for study. Then, they establish content-area objectives within the structure of the unifying theme (Peregoy and Boyle, 2005).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Figure 2 – State standards, theme, key ideas, and objectives</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Science Standard 4: The Living Environment</strong> – Students will understand and apply scientific concepts, principles, and theories pertaining to the physical setting and living environment and recognize the historical development of ideas in science.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Theme:</strong> Interrelationships within the living environment of the rainforest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Key idea:</strong> Plants and animals depend on each other and their physical environment.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Objective:</strong> Describe how plants and animals, including humans, depend upon each other and the nonliving environment.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Key idea:</strong> Human decisions and activities have had a profound impact on the physical and living environment.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Objective:</strong> Identify ways in which humans have changed their environment and the effects of those changes.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2. **Select informational books that are consistent with a standards–based content area theme to create a read-aloud text set.**

Well-crafted informational trade books are an effective resource for content area instruction for English learners because they provide a clear pattern of organization, are rich in content in the areas that are interesting to children, and are written in child-friendly language. When selecting texts for content area instruction, teachers select books which are well-written, have accurate content and illustrations, and are suited to students’ age level (Moss, 2006).

Teachers combine texts to create a text set: a collection of five to fifteen texts that are related conceptually through similar themes, text types, or topics (Short, Jerome, & Burke, 1996). The use of text sets provides students with sustained content, resulting in a systematic buildup of content knowledge from multiple sources and different perspectives (Stoller, 2002).

Text sets also provide opportunities for vocabulary learning. As students encounter vocabulary across multiple texts, they begin to generalize meanings. They use and extend new
As students encounter a word repeatedly over a period of time, they become more comfortable with using the word, and their knowledge about the word expands (Lubliner & Scott, 2008). According to Shanklin, 2007, if children are to understand a word clearly, they need to consider the word in context, and then try the word in different contexts. As they encounter the word in a variety of contexts, they build up information about the word (Lubliner & Scott, 2008).

Vocabulary Plus uses engaging informational trade books linked together into a text set as the focus for thematic content-area instruction. Books are used as interactive read-alouds, and, accordingly, provide English learners who may have not yet mastered grade-appropriate word identification skills with grade-appropriate content while their word identification abilities are developing. Read-alouds foster both content area and language learning; they serve as a model for fluency and expressive oral reading while conveying thematic information and vocabulary.

3. **Explore the set of thematically-related books to identify core content-area vocabulary.**

Content area vocabulary is often identified as a common obstacle for students who are English learners (Watts-Taffe & Truscott, 2000). According to Peregoy and Boyle (2008), English learners must develop a vocabulary that includes both general high-frequency words and academic content words which occur less frequently, but are essential for learning subjects such as math, science, history, and literature. According to Saville-Troike (1984), “(v)ocabulary knowledge in English is the most important aspect of oral English proficiency for academic achievement” (p. 216), and that, accordingly, vocabulary instruction for English learners should be closely related to students’ subject area classes. For students studying English for academic purposes, academic vocabulary can be viewed as high frequency vocabulary (Nation, 2001).

When teaching English learners, teachers cannot provide instruction for every content area vocabulary word. In today’s classrooms, since instructional time is divided among a myriad of curricular demands, selecting vocabulary words for English learners requires careful consideration. It is important to focus instruction on vocabulary words which students are likely to encounter often in oral and written language, but which are difficult for them to learn independently.

To help determine which words will be the most useful additions to English learners’ vocabulary repertoire, teachers can use the idea of levels, or tiers, as a lens for looking at words (Beck, et al., 2002). For English learners, Tier 1 words often express concepts that are familiar in their primary language. However, although the concept is known, the English label may be
unfamiliar. Often, these words can be taught by pointing to a picture (e.g., of a “butterfly”), or by demonstrating (e.g., “walk”). Cognates which are high frequency words in English and Spanish (e.g., family/familia) are Tier 1 words, and can be clarified readily. Tier 1 words, however, including those which are difficult to illustrate or demonstrate (e.g., “uncle”), multiple meaning words (e.g. “march”), everyday expressions (e.g., “once upon a time”) or idioms (e.g., “make up your mind”) require greater explanation.

Tier 3 words are often domain-specific and are found mostly in content area texts. Tier 3 words, (e.g., “peninsula” or “isotope”) can be selected for instruction based on their importance for understanding the texts students are reading, and are best explained as needed at point-of-contact (August, Carlo, Dressler, & Snow, 2005).

Tier 2 words have particular importance. Because these words are increasingly prevalent in written texts as students move through the grades, knowledge of Tier 2 words will have an impact on students’ text comprehension and, accordingly, should be the focus of most vocabulary instruction. Tier 2 words are more complex than those in Tier 1, and are often words for which students understand the overall concept but lack the knowledge of words to use to describe the concept specifically and precisely (Beck, et al., 2002). Many can be used across varied contexts.

When choosing words to use as the core vocabulary for *Vocabulary Plus*, teachers read through the informational texts selected as part of the thematic text set. They identify both high-use Tier 2 words and Tier 3 words which will enhance students’ listening comprehension and which have utility specifically for ongoing content-based discussions about the topical text.

### Figure 4 – Sample vocabulary

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>huge (Tier 1)</th>
<th>crowns (Tier 2)</th>
<th>forest floor (Tier 3)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>cover (Tier 1)</td>
<td>bromeliads (Tier 3)</td>
<td>layers (Tier 2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>decay (Tier 2)</td>
<td>canopy (Tier 2)</td>
<td>emergent layer (Tier 3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>understory (Tier 3)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4. Use a graphic organizer for creating a poster which provides a visual introduction to both the instructional content and the interrelationships among core vocabulary words.

Graphic organizers help English language learners to understand grade-level text while keeping the meaning, academic, and cognitive levels of the content intact. They modify difficult text so that content is illustrated in a meaningful way (Calderon, 2007). For English learners, graphic organizers serve as a visual link between language and content. They provide a visual display for illustrating concepts and the interrelationships among these concepts within a text (Armbruster & National Institute for Literacy, 2001), and help English learners to learn concepts without depending solely on language for understanding (Diaz-Rico, 2004). Graphic organizers assist all children, especially those who are English learners, in recognizing essential information as well as its relationship with supporting ideas. The use of graphic organizers reduces the amount of text for English learners while retaining lesson concepts.
Graphic organizers also assist English learners in understanding concepts while reducing the short-term memory concept load. When concepts are displayed visually, English learners can focus more on language learning. Graphic organizers often form a connection between students’ prior knowledge in their first language by linking content and language. The use of graphic organizers for teaching concepts effectively engages students in discussion and enables them to use meaningful context for vocabulary learning (Alberta Education, 2007). Using organizers facilitates access and recall of information through rehearsal (the presentation again or reformulation of information to either oneself or to others) – by requiring a “deeper level of processing information” (Peragoy & Boyle, 2008, p. 368).

The patterns of graphic organizers used include:

- **Hierarchical** organizers - linear organizers that include a main concept along with levels of subconcepts;
- **Conceptual** organizers - made up of a central idea with supporting examples and/or characteristics;
- **Sequential** organizers - arrange events in a chronology with a specific beginning and end, problem and solution, cause and effect, or process and product;
- **Cyclical** organizers - display a series of events in a circular format in continuous or successive sequence with no beginning or end (Calderón, 2007).

In *Vocabulary Plus*, teachers use graphic organizers to structure and illustrate relationships among target vocabulary and concepts. This organizer is a visual representation/overview of key topical ideas. For example, for a *Vocabulary Plus* unit about the rainforest, the names and locations of the various layers are important for understanding the ecosystem. Teachers construct a graphic organizer for the central idea of “rainforest,” which depicts the sky-to-ground locations of the layers, i.e. canopy, understory, shrub layer, and forest floor. They place core vocabulary words and pictures strategically on the poster to indicate their relationships to one or more of the rainforest layers. As students begin to learn about the rainforest, this visual displays of knowledge facilitates discussion and sharing of information as they make connections among their prior knowledge and the new information.
Figure 5 is an example of a conceptual graphic organizer for use with the rainforest theme.

**Figure 5 – Graphic organizer**

5. **Use the poster to engage students in a conversation about the meaning of and interrelationships among core vocabulary before they engage in read-alouds.**

Vocabulary knowledge can have a significant impact on students’ comprehension. “Preteaching unfamiliar vocabulary enhances children’s comprehension of ideas related to the vocabulary (Wixson, 1986, p. 317). As Nagy (1988) suggests, “(v)ocabulary knowledge is fundamental to reading comprehension; one cannot understand text without knowing what most of the words mean…“(p. 1).

Preteaching or front loading (Dutro & Moran, 2003) can prepare English learners for future learning by developing background knowledge and vocabulary related to the content they will encounter (Roit, 2006). By front loading target vocabulary, teachers help English learners to generate a feeling of familiarity about the content, develop a sense of success (Roit, 2006) and create a belief that they will be able to understand and participate in discussions about content material.
As teachers focus attention on the *Vocabulary Plus* poster, they guide students in using visual cues and the organizational structure of the graphic organizer for identifying the relationships of target words to each other and to the larger topics before the students listen actively to read-alouds. They also guide students in learning vocabulary by connecting familiar examples in context to less familiar examples in thematic context. In this way, English learners use their background knowledge as a foundation for learning topic-specific word meanings. This front loading enables English learners to better use text context, increases their focus on new vocabulary, and strengthens their content area listening abilities.

When introducing a new meaning for a target word during *Vocabulary Plus*, teachers pronounce the word, and then ask students to repeat it. This familiarizes students with the sound of the word and provides the auditory clues to enable students to notice the word when it occurs during read-alouds. Teachers present the word first in a meaningful and familiar context, and then in a content-specific context. See Figure 6 for an example based on the rainforest theme.

**Figure 6 – Introducing a new context for familiar word**

**Teacher:** Say “floor.”

**Students:** Floor.

**Teacher** – (familiar context): When we talk about a floor, we mean the part of the room we walk on. We look down to see the floor.

**Teacher** – (thematic content area context): In the rainforest, the floor is the bottom layer. Let’s look at our poster of the rainforest layers. The layer down at the bottom of the trees is the forest floor.

### 6. Engage students in interactive read-alouds and subsequent instructional conversations and activities about the read-alouds using target/core vocabulary.

**Interactive read-alouds**

Listening as adults read aloud to them is an effective way for English learners to learn vocabulary (Antunez, 2002). By reading aloud non-fiction books, teachers expose English learners to varied texts which range across content areas and include illustrations and photographs to support textual content (Cappellini, 2005). Both text and visuals within the book provide a rich context for discussing the meanings of target vocabulary.

English learners make substantial gains in vocabulary simply by listening to read-alouds (Elley, 1997). However, although listening to adults read aloud fosters children’s learning of word meanings, verbal interactions expand their knowledge. Children learn word meanings best when the read-aloud is interactive, i.e., when the reader pauses to define unfamiliar words during reading, and engages children in text-based conversations. The discussions that enhance English learners’ knowledge of topical vocabulary go beyond simple conversation. Conversations that are structured and focus on relevant academic content strengthen English learners’ comprehension and help them to learn the words needed to participate in class discussions.

In *Vocabulary Plus* instruction, teachers and students participate in interactive informational read-alouds in which they connect each book to their own experiences, to other texts, and to their knowledge of the world. Teachers model the ways in which expert readers make sense of the
During each read-aloud, teachers highlight a limited number of words so that they can help English learners to learn target words at the deeper level of understanding needed to sustain vocabulary growth. Some researchers suggest that teachers present seven or fewer words with which students can work for a relatively long time period (Gersten & Baker, 2000). To strengthen students’ vocabulary knowledge, teachers and students engage in conversations about the meaning of and interrelationships among words. They identify the theme of the poster as the focus of discussion, and students share related background information and experiences. The teacher refers to the organizational patterns of the poster to provide students with visual cues for noting the connections among words and the ways in which words are linked to the focus topic. Teachers guide students’ use of text visuals, including pictures, diagrams, and charts; and context clues. Teachers use explanations in student-friendly language, synonyms and antonyms, and gestures and facial expressions. Students and the teacher participate in a conversation about word meanings and the ways in which core vocabulary words relate to the overarching topic and to each other. They respond to what others have said, and build upon each other’s ideas.

Reinforcement activities

Following the interactive read-aloud, teachers engage students in activities designed to reinforce and expand their understanding of target vocabulary. Opportunities to work with the words within a variety of activities provide repeated exposure and active engagement in multiple contexts. Activities for reinforcement incorporate varied modalities, since as children hear, see and work with specific words, their learning seems greater (Armbruster, Lehr., & Osborn, 2003).

Knowledge of vocabulary includes breadth, or knowing the varied uses and meanings in different contexts of words, and depth, or understanding fully the meaning of the word (Peregoy & Boyle, 2008). In Vocabulary Plus, teachers engage English language learners in reinforcement activities to increase their familiarity with instructional vocabulary. The following are examples of activities that can be used after read-alouds:

Sentence stems. English learners may benefit from scaffolding to assist them in formulating oral responses. Using sentence stems (Hickman, et al., 2004) limits task demands by allowing English learners to complete partially finished sentences rather than generate the entire sentence (Gray & Fleischman, 2004). This activity may increase English learners’ participation by enabling those with more limited English proficiency to contribute to conversations along with their more proficient peers. For example, when students are discussing the layers of the rainforest, the teacher says, “Let’s think about the layers of the rainforest. The layer at the top of the rainforest is the _____ (canopy). The layer at the bottom of the rainforest is the ____ (forest floor).”

Questioning. English language learners can use target vocabulary by answering “engagement questions” (Blachowicz, Fisher, & Watts-Taffe, 2005) such as the ones listed below. Responding to these questions accurately requires receptive understanding and a minimal “yes” or “no” expressive response. To increase opportunities for students to use relevant expressive language, teachers can ask students to explain or justify their responses.

1. Do plants decay on the forest floor?
2. Do seedlings grow in the emergent layer of the rainforest?
3. Does the understory protect the canopy from strong sunlight?

Concept sorts. Concept sorts (Bear, Helman, Templeton, Invernizzi, & Johnston, 2007) require students to divide a set of pictures or words into related groups. For example, for the
rainforest unit, students can sort pictures or word cards (with pictures on the back if desired) for the following: *bromeliads, crown, canopy, understory, seedlings, forest floor* into categories of *rainforest layers* and *rainforest plants*. Students need not label each picture expressively to complete the sort. They can verbalize the English vocabulary they do know and request assistance for naming the rest. As students describe their sorts, teachers can assess their vocabulary knowledge. Performing sorts capitalizes on participation and sharing (Helman, 2004), and provides opportunities to enhance students’ topical knowledge and oral language.

**Vocabulary word wall.** Teachers and students can create a thematic word wall using word and picture cards for the target vocabulary. The word wall can serve as a reference for oral and written language activities. Teachers select the words that are most important (Cunningham, 2004) for the current topic, and can use students’ input to decide periodically about which words and pictures are no longer needed on the wall (Echevarria, Vogt, & Short, 2009). The removed cards can be kept for future reference.

**Graffiti boards.** A graffiti board (Short, et al., 1996) is a motivating way of using pictures and words for unstructured brainstorming. Students work in groups with each group member taking a portion of a large piece of chart paper to draw or write her thoughts (Gilmore & Day, 2006), and connections about the read-aloud and target vocabulary. Then, group members share their graffiti with one another. This activity enables students to discuss ideas in a small group setting which may be more comfortable for some, and learn from one another.

**Vocabulary role play.** Vocabulary role play (Herrell, 2000) connects English language learners’ prior knowledge, current content area learning, and target thematic vocabulary that is new or being used in a novel way. After students have worked with the target vocabulary through front loading and interactive read-alouds, they use the vocabulary in context through role-playing. Students work in groups to create and perform skits during which they use and demonstrate vocabulary. Frequently, several groups receive the same vocabulary words but develop different skits, demonstrating multiple uses of the same set of words in different contexts. Through vocabulary role plays, English learners have an opportunity to see and experience the vocabulary in different contexts, and to compare and contrast these contexts.

**Conclusion**

For English learners, the ability to read and comprehend in English is key to acquiring grade-level academic content. Their ability to read and understand English text is influenced by their knowledge of vocabulary. Accordingly, learning English vocabulary is essential for academic learning.

When learning English vocabulary, students benefit from participating with peers in motivating, multi-sensory activities that emphasize oral language. *Vocabulary Plus* involves students in actively listening to and discussing engaging informational trade books focusing on grade-appropriate content area themes. As students participate in a wide variety of pre-reading,
during reading, and post-reading activities, they use target vocabulary repeatedly in varied contexts.

*Vocabulary Plus* is a productive strategy for active vocabulary learning within the context of familiar classroom practices. This strategy provides an effective link between language and content learning, while promoting the peer collaboration essential for classroom success.

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Teaching with IRA in the Mwanza Region Of Tanzania

Peter McDermott

ABSTRACT
This is a descriptive self-study of my experience participating in IRA’s Diagnostic Teaching Project in Tanzania. The paper describes the teacher educators with whom I worked, their responses to IRA’s curriculum, and what I learned about Tanzanian people, culture and education. Data are derived from a Likert survey, an open-item questionnaire, and my own observations in teaching a curriculum based on constructivist theory and classroom-based assessment. I found participants to be very receptive about the literacies theories and practices presented, and I describe some of the cultural challenges I faced while teaching there. Although there are enormous obstacles to educational reform in this beautiful country, with such motivated people as those I met in IRA’s project, there is much hope for a better future.

AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY
Peter McDermott is a Professor of Education at The Sage Colleges where he teaches graduate and undergraduate courses in reading and the language arts. He previously taught in Bosnia as a Fulbright Scholar, in Tanzania as a volunteer with IRA’s Diagnostic Teaching Project, and in Kazakhstan with Soros’ Open Society and IRA’s Reading, Writing and Critical Thinking project (RWCT). He has a long time interest in urban education. He is currently interested in the new digital literacies and their effects in students’ literacy development.

Introduction and Purpose
Tanzania is a long distance from New York, but the opportunity to teach there was one I would never refuse. So in spring of 2006 when the International Reading Association (IRA) invited me to teach for two weeks that summer in Tanzania with its Diagnostic Teaching Project (International Reading Association, 2006), I eagerly agreed. I had previously participated in another IRA project, RWCT in Kazakhstan1 and found that experience extremely rewarding and enriching for me as a teacher educator. It certainly broadened my own thoughts about teaching and learning, and I would like to believe my work there contributed to Kazakh educators’ thinking about classroom teaching as a participatory and democratic process. I believed the opportunity to teach in Tanzania would be equally stimulating and beneficial.

The Diagnostic Teaching Project is a professional development program in literacy education. The United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO)

1 The RWCT project (Reading, Writing, Critical Thinking) was a highly successful project funded by the Soros Open Society Institute. The project provided constructivist approaches to teaching and learning in former Soviet countries. Originally funded for three years, the Kazakh project received two additional years through US AID. I had the opportunity to travel and teach there nine times through the course of the grants.
funded it, and the International Reading Association (IRA) developed the curriculum, identified and sponsored teacher educators, such as myself, to present it in several regions throughout Tanzania. The rationale and goals for the project were to provide professional development in literacy education to selected groups of teacher educators and to stimulate development of a national literacy curriculum (Chediel, 2005; Chediel et al., 2005; International Reading Association, 2007).

In this paper I describe and explain my experiences with the IRA/UNESCO project. In particular I pose answers to the following questions:

1) What were the educational characteristics of the Tanzanian teacher educators who participated in the Diagnostic Teaching Project in Mwanza?

2) How did African teacher educators respond to this project and its teaching strategies?

3) Which cultural issues were most striking to me as an American teacher educator in Tanzania?

Background

Historians widely acknowledge that European colonialism exploited Africa, its people and natural resources (e.g., Gordon & Gordon, 1996; Oliver & Atmore, 1994). African children, who were fortunate enough to receive an education during the colonial period, learned European ways of thinking and acting in the world but little about their own cultural traditions and ways of knowing (Abdi, Puplampu, & Dei, 2006).

Post-colonialism has been equally devastating to Africa. Instead of foreign states exploiting the continent, multinational corporations and corrupt governmental officials now exhaust its human capital and mismanage its natural resources. Many African countries, despite independence, are as poor and desperate today as they were under colonialism. Recent events in Kenya (e.g., allegations of a rigged election and ethnic killing) provide continuing evidence of the extent of how political corruption easily undermines these fragile African republics.

Globalization is having few positive effects on Africa. While many parts of India and China are becoming increasingly prosperous, African countries remain the poorest in the world. Suarez-Orozco (2001) wrote that globalization consists of three main components: 1) the use of the new information and communicative technologies; 2) the growth of global markets, and 3) unprecedented levels of immigration and displacement. Sadly, African countries only experience the third component of globalization where many of its people, particularly those from northern African countries, are migrating to Europe and other parts of the post-industrial world. In Africa’s sub-Saharan region there is large scale migration to cities even though the electricity in these urban areas is undependable, the communication technologies are irregular, and there is little employment and few economic opportunities. Despite passionate appeals for the richest countries to invest in the education of the world’s poorest children, little of consequence is being actually being done (Levine, 2005). Education, which should offer hope for new generations of children, suffers from inadequate funding, poor classroom materials, and under-prepared teachers (Piper, 2007)

Tanzania’s Educational System

Tanzania’s educational system relies on policies enacted during the colonial era. The most striking similarities to that historical period are the current policies pertaining to school structure and the language of instruction. The Tanzanian system is based on a British model of schooling in which there are seven years of primary education, four years of lower secondary, two years of upper secondary, and three or more of university.
There is controversy about the language of classroom instruction (Arthur, 2001; Bgoya, 2001; Brock-Utne, 2007; Roy-Campbell, 2001). Currently, Kiswahili is used in the elementary grades with English taught as a separate subject. The reverse occurs in secondary education where English becomes the language of instruction, and Kiswahili becomes one of the subjects of study. Arthur (2001) argues that this issue of instructional language is very complex and is closely tied to the value Tanzania’s place on social success in their society—namely, English fluency, not Kiswahili, is the passport to economic advancement in Tanzania. This language policy, which occurs in other African countries, such as South Africa, restricts children’s access to secondary education, and for many it is a sad remnant of the colonial era (Arthur, 2001; Bgoya, 2001; Brock-Utne, 2007; Roy-Campbell, 2007). Many students, because they lack proficiency in academic English, fall further behind in their knowledge of the subject areas (Brock-Utne, 2007; Roy-Campbell, 2001) and are unmotivated to continue their education after seventh form. Compounding the problem with the English language requirement is that of tuition fees that make high school attendance prohibitive for most Tanzanian students (Sailors, Hoffman, & Matthee, 2007). Arthur (2001) claims that only 11% of Tanzanian adolescents actually attend secondary schools.

The historical background to Tanzania’s educational system begins in 1961 when the country obtained its independence. At that time President Nyerere restructured the education system to be based on an agricultural model in which practical aspects of daily living, such as farming, were emphasized at the expense of the academic subjects. Initially, primary and secondary education were fee-based until 1973 when all tuition was dropped. In 1986 tuition was reestablished, and the near 90% participation rate in schooling dropped to less than 66%. Since 2002 there has been free Universal Primary Education for all children, but secondary education remains fee based at about $10 per month. Today, most Tanzanians have not gone further than seventh grade.

A recent government report provides the following information about Tanzania’s educational system (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2001). In 2000 there were 11,600 primary schools and 927 secondary schools of which half were privately operated. The World Bank (1997) reports the literacy rate at 76% of the population with only 31% of its students going beyond 7th form. Tanzania’s Ministry of Education and Culture (2001) further reports that half of the country’s primary teachers are under-prepared to teach, and that there is a severe shortage of secondary teachers.

**Research on teachers’ professional development.** The International Reading Association identifies on-going professional development as an important goal for all literacy educators. This concern is seen in its *Standards for Reading Professionals* (IRA, 2003) that require all institutions seeking NCATE accreditation to integrate ideas for on-going professional development into their curriculum for new teachers. Among IRA’s recommended practices are that all literacy teachers participate in on-going professional development (Raphael, Florio-Ruane, Kehus, George, Hasty, & Highfield, 2001), and that they should receive opportunities for coaching (Moxley & Taylor, 2006), study groups (Lefever, Davis, Wilson, Moore, Kent, & Hopkins, 2003), and learning collaboratives (Parish, 1995). Professional development is viewed as a process where teachers regularly examine issues of teaching and learning in their own school communities and classrooms (Robb, 2000).

A country’s future depends on having a well developed and comprehensive educational system. India may serve as a model for how education can contribute to social reform. During the 1950’s Nehru established math and science technical institutes throughout country, and now
only a few generations later India has become a model country in these subject areas. It is successfully reversing its agricultural economy into a high tech workforce that is the cutting edge and even the envy of many well-developed countries.

The goals of the Diagnostic Teaching Project are to improve literacy education throughout Tanzania and stimulate movement toward a national literacy curriculum. UNESCO’s efforts for teachers’ professional development are clearly linked to economic and social reform. Reasonable people would agree that social and economic reform in the 21st century can only coincide with a literate and technically skilled populace that can effectively participate in the global economy. The Diagnostic Teaching Project focuses on teachers’ professional development with the assumption that it will improve literacy teaching in the selected regions and stimulate discussion for the development of a national literacy curriculum.

The Workshop

This descriptive paper is based on my experience with the Diagnostic Teaching Project I ran in the city of Mwanza. The project was designed to be delivered through a series of three two-week workshops in the 2006-2007 academic year. My workshop took place in August 2006 and simultaneously other workshops took place in two other regions, Morogoro and Iranga. Zanzibar was scheduled for another time. Subsequent workshops by other facilitators were conducted as late as February 2008.

Thirty-five teacher-educators from the western region of Tanzania participated in the two-week workshop that I conducted. All of these teacher-educators were affiliated with either teacher training institutes, universities, or the ministry of higher education. A few were novices with limited teaching experience, but the great majority had extensive educational experience, some had even traveled to Europe and the United States on other UNESCO projects.

The City of Mwanza

Mwanza is located inland on the southern shore of Lake Victoria. It is a city of nearly 3 million people in it and the surrounding area. Paved roads extend about ten miles from the downtown area, but then become gravel or packed dirt. It has some three and four story buildings but most of its businesses and dwellings are one floor cinder block or modest wood structures. The urban region extends for miles in all directions. People travel by foot for the most part. Mwanza’s large bus depot occupies a full city block near the city’s main open-air market. Colorful long-distance line the block waiting to convey riders to other parts of the country. My first impression of the city was of the great numbers of colorfully dressed people walking in all directions and on both sides of the roads. There are some cars and minivans, but almost all of them bear signs indicating that they are private taxis, owned by mining companies, or by United Nations officials. Very few Tanzanian private citizens actually own cars.

Teaching at Butimba Teachers’ College in Mwanza. Butimba Teachers’ College, where I taught, was built by the British in the early 1950’s. The college is located on a rise on the eastern shore of Lake Victoria. It hosts a lab school for elementary and secondary students with many of the secondary students living on the grounds. When driving up the dirt road to the main entrance the school displays a metal casing of a bomb that Idi Imin had fired at the school during the Uganda-Tanzanian War of 1978; no damage was done, but the school kept the casing as an historical marker of that egregious event. Figure I displays a photograph of the main entrance to the school.
The Diagnostic Teaching Project

The Diagnostic Teaching Project consists of curriculum in theories of literacy processes and assessment. It was piloted in Zanzibar and Dar es Salaam in 2005. The project design was to have a Western teacher educator co-teach the workshops with an African. In my case, I co-taught with a Tanzanian teacher educator, Robert (pseudonym). At the time that Robert and I presented our workshop in Mwanza, other teams of Western and in-country facilitators presented the same workshops in two other cities in Tanzania. IRA’s and UNESCO’s expectation was the workshop participants would later incorporate the theory and methods of the curriculum into their own educational practices.

The Diagnostic Teaching Project is based on constructivist theory and emphasizes the use of classroom assessment data to inform teachers’ literacy instruction. Interactive and collaborative approaches to teaching and learning are emphasized throughout it. The framework for the uses a three-part lesson structure consisting of what teachers do before, during, and after a lesson. The curriculum topics address ways to assess and teach oral reading, vocabulary, comprehension, writing, as well as model metacognitive strategies such as think-alouds. Other teaching strategies included “Every Pupil Respond” techniques, holistic writing assessments, classroom rubrics, questioning strategies, and many others. In the first week of the workshop Robert and I presented demonstration lessons from the curriculum. In the second week we observed and coached the participants as they presented similar lessons to elementary or secondary children from the lab school.

Data Sources

A variety of sources provided the data for this paper. On the first morning we collected background information about the participants’ years teaching experience, their levels of education, and their prior coursework in literacy. We administered a 20-item Likert survey that was previously developed by IRA pertaining to literacy theory and methods; this IRA (2006) survey contained nine topics pertaining to participants’ ability to define literacy concepts (word recognition and phonics, fluency, vocabulary, comprehension, motivation, grouping practices, instructional adaptation, assessment, instructional adaptation, materials) and their perceived professional strengths and goals. Participants completed daily “exit cards” that identified what they learned from the day’s lessons and what questions they had about them. At the end of the two-week period participants completed a final questionnaire, that Robert and I developed, about the overall effectiveness of the workshop. It contained five Likert items and three open-ended
questions and asked participants to rate the workshop, the effectiveness of the facilitators, respond to whether they had expanded their knowledge of literacy, learned specific diagnostic techniques, and learned models and prototypes for inclusion in their work in their own regions. The open-ended items asked them to identify the most and least valuable parts of the workshop, and what they would like to learn more about in the future.

In addition to these data I kept a journal of my observations of the workshop and the participants’ demonstration lessons. I took numerous digital photos of our workshops and their lessons. The initial background questionnaire, the pre/post literacy surveys, the daily exit cards, journal and photographs provided the data for this paper. As an example of the kind of data I gathered, Figure 2 is a photograph of children waiting for one of our lessons in the second week.

**Figure 2: Children wait for the beginning of one of our lessons**

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**Findings**

**Educational Characteristics of the Tanzanian Teacher Educators who Participated in the Diagnostic Teaching Project**

In this section, the participants’ backgrounds and previous study of literacy are first described. Then I share their perceptions about the strengths they bring to teaching and their overall responses to the two-week workshop. Next I present anecdotes and incidents that relate to cultural ways of thinking and teaching in Tanzania. In particular, I share events that challenged or surprised me as a Western teacher educator. I describe how the participants established their own system of organization and feedback for the workshop, and how a single classroom incident revealed the participants’ thoughts about social change, particularly those pertaining to women’s rights. I conclude by discussing their great sense of collegiality toward one another, my experiences co-teaching with Robert, and the children’s eager participation in our lessons.

**Participants’ educational experiences.** Nearly half of the participants indicated that they had 26 years experience or more. In fact, eight of the participants indicated that they had 31 years teaching experience. Table I (see next page) identifies the participants’ years of teaching. An interesting aspect of the participants’ life experience and knowledge is that many of them indicated that they had previously participated in a variety of professional development programs. Most of these programs were offered through UNESCO and included such topics as “Participatory Education,” “Teaching Kiswahili,” “Teaching Adult Learners,” the “Reading, Writing, Critical Thinking Project,” and “Cooperative Learning.” All of the participants had a teaching certificate, even the administrators who had joined us. The participants’ subject areas were Kiswahili, English, history, mathematics, home economics, and physical education.
The teachers indicated they had little formal education in teaching literacy. On the second day of the workshop I asked them to complete the Likert survey about their understanding of teaching literacy. The participants were so conscientious about the survey that it seemed to take them forever to complete it. After about 20 minutes, I asked them to hurry and respond more quickly to each of the items. Most of the their answers indicated that the participants perceived themselves in the middle of the Likert survey, ranking themselves a 2 or 3 on the 4-point scale. The one exception to this were the two items where they felt they had excellent knowledge of instructional materials but little knowledge of how to adapt instruction for learning differences. Table 2 illustrates the participants’ responses to the pre-survey.

Table 2
Participants’ Responses to the Pre-Survey

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>0 No Answer</th>
<th>1 No confidence</th>
<th>2 Some confidence</th>
<th>3 Quite a lot</th>
<th>4 Excellent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Decoding</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fluency</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vocabulary</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comprehension</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Motivation</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grouping for instruction</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assessment</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adapting instruction</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Materials</td>
<td>7</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>11</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Participants’ perceptions about their professional strengths. The final item of the pre-survey asked participants to identify their strengths and goals as teacher educators. It seemed that their responses could easily have been written by American teacher educators. For instance, Augustine wrote her strengths were “ability to learn from others, a good university education, participation in various in-service seminars, and ability to use some of the participatory techniques.” She said her goal was to learn “language teaching techniques and use of various (interactive) learning techniques.” Luke wrote that his strengths were in “preparing academic documents (scheme of work, lesson plans)” and that his goals were to learn “teaching methods,
reading skills, assessment and evaluation skills.” Emanuel, our chairman, said his goals were to “improve my professional strengths as a teacher …and to learn more on participatory methods rather than lecture methods.” Paulina indicated that her strengths were in knowing “teaching materials and learning, students, classroom desk, tests and quizzes, examinations.” Her goals reflect the challenges of teaching in Tanzania because they reflected the pressures she felt with the lack of resources. Some of Paulina’s goals were to have “100% of supply of learning/teaching materials, sufficient desks, and friendly examinations.” Others wrote about their goal for “teaching reading properly,” “ability to facilitate primary teachers,” “large classroom management skills,” “methods of teaching,” “modern teaching techniques,” “make my class more interactive,” “how to adapt for instructional differences.” Several teachers still wrote about “computer literacy” as one of their professional goals.

**How African teacher educators responded to this project and its teaching strategies**

On the last day of the workshop Robert and I asked the participants to complete a final survey, which we prepared, containing five Likert and three open-ended items about their responses to the two-week workshop. The three open-ended items related directly to the workshop goals of using Diagnostic Teaching in their own work in their schools and universities. The first item asked them to rate the overall workshop, and with this item 90% of them ranked it either a 4 or 5. The second asked them to rate the facilitators on this question, and 89% indicated good or excellent. The third item asked whether they expanded their knowledge of literacy, and here 79% indicated good or excellent. The fourth item asked whether they learned specific diagnostic techniques, and 84% again indicated good or excellent. The final question asked whether they had developed models and prototypes to incorporate into their work at home, but here only 63% indicated agreement. Table 3 depicts the participants’ responses to the Likert Survey.

**Table 3: Participants’ Evaluation of the Workshop**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Poor</th>
<th>Not so good</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Good</th>
<th>Excellent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rate the Workshop</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>17</td>
<td>15</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rate the facilitators</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>13</td>
<td>19</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I expanded my knowledge of literacy</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>17</td>
<td></td>
<td>11</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I learned specific diagnostic techniques</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>15</td>
<td></td>
<td>15</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I learned models and prototypes for inclusion in my own teaching</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>16</td>
<td></td>
<td>7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

On the open-ended items participants indicated that they wanted to learn more about Cloze strategies, questioning (QAR’s), and Think Alouds; each of these strategies were demonstrated in at least one of our lessons. The participants expressed displeasure about the money they were paid to attend (there were conflicts about full and half-day payments), calendar scheduling issues (particularly with early notification of the workshop dates so that they could plan ahead), and the general timetable for arriving and leaving (apparently there were difficulties over the availability of public buses to Mwanza). Figure 3 is a photograph of one of the participants helping high school students participate in cooperative learning groups.
3) Which cultural issues were most striking to me as an American teacher educator in Tanzania?

There was a formality to the workshops that I had not anticipated but increasingly learned to appreciate. One of the participants, Emanuel, was identified by the group as their workshop “chairman.” Apparently this happened as participants arrived and prior to my beginning the first workshop session. I learned that Emanuel’s responsibility was to call each day’s meeting to order, attend to business issues such as attendance, daily schedule, payment for participation, and daily reports about the previous day. Emanuel often wore a grey fedora hat and a sports jacket. He initially seemed quite serious about his responsibilities, but later his easy-going nature and good humor kept everyone entertained as he introduced each day’s activities.

On the second morning Emanuel told Robert and I that we needed to present a specific schedule on chart paper that contained the exact times of each of our lessons. Although on Monday we had listed what we planned to do on chart paper, the participants apparently wanted more detail. They wanted to have specific times for the beginning and ending of each lesson, the time of the tea breaks, lunch, and dismissal. So I learned that time was pretty important in this culture. Even though we had ended morning and afternoon sessions within times we had announced, the participants wanted to see it in writing and know exactly when breaks would occur. Certainly it was not an unreasonable request and we gladly obliged.

The “daily reports” took place in the following way: At the end of each day the chairman appointed a pair of participants to present a formal report for the next morning that summarized the topics and activities that were covered the previous day. These reports were quite formal and presented in both oral and written form. Promptly each morning the chairman would stand, announce that the workshop would begin after they received the report about the previous day. The two reporters would stand, distribute hard copies of their summary to everyone, and then read it aloud to the group. Sometimes the reporters appeared anxious about the accuracy of their summaries because apparently everyone viewed the reports as a serious responsibility. The reports were often very specific and detailed. The report for August 17th, for example, contained the following entry:

“The first session started at 9:20 am with warm-up from Group 4 and the chairman introduced three tutors from Katoke Teacher College. After the chairman introduced the new participants, we hear a report presented by Bunda Teachers College; some corrections were made by participants.
Later on the facilitators began to give response to the exit card which were given the day before, for example: (1) the difference between taboo and customs. (ii) Word knowledge/ vocabulary techniques (its importance) in teaching. Moreover the facilitators said …”
(Excerpt from summary of August 17, 2006, Day Four).

The chairman then asked if there were any questions or revisions for the reporters. He asked whether the group accepted and approved of the report, and only then could we move forward with the day’s lessons.

**Equity for Women**

The most remarkable event of the workshop for me occurred after we had taught a reading comprehension lesson about “African taboos.” The text that we had read pertained to African cultural customs in which women were viewed as sex objects. According to one of these customs, the “Hyena” practice, a man could pay a family to have sex with a virgin daughter, and this could even happen even if the man were HIV positive. After discussing this and other traditional practices, Paulina stood up and challenged the group. She said, “We need to stop this practice as well as others. Tanzanians need to respect women and practices such as these do not give honor to their natural rights.” Immediately everyone in the room enthusiastically applauded her remarks.

As a Western outsider this incident surprised me because I thought the women’s treatment was very cultural and unlikely to change. In fact, however, I learned it was already changing. During break, I spoke with Paulina and asked her about the ideas that she had shared. Paulina said that several years ago she had spent two weeks in Chicago at a UNESCO conference on women’s rights. That conference, she said, helped her develop a voice about the rights of women. Through this incident I realized the influence ideas in bringing about social change - once an idea takes hold it has the potential to grow change occurs.

**Tanzanian Collegiality**

Tanzanians are exceptionally collegial and respectful of one another, far more so than one would find in the United States. The participants often referred to one another as “mother” or “father,” which I gathered is a term of fondness and/or respect. Participants often called the older participants by these terms. When leaving a classroom during a lesson, participants momentarily paused at the classroom door and bowed toward the presenting teacher.

During the second week, participants co-taught the demonstration lessons to students at the Butimba School. In one of these lessons a male and female teacher co-taught together. The lesson went well enough but it was curious, at least to me, as to why the young female teacher only stood to the side throughout the lesson and never interacted with her co-teacher or children. When it was time to critique the lesson the participants commented on its various strengths, offered questions about it, but no one mentioned that the young woman had not contributed to its delivery. After the critique and when the presenting teachers sat down, as with the other lessons, everyone applauded. They seemed to smile more than they did with the previous lessons almost as if they were aware of what was left unsaid. When I asked my interpreter (the lesson was presented in Kiswhalli) about the group’s inattention to the woman’s lack of participation, he explained that she was young and shy, and her co-teacher tried to compensate and protect her because he was more experienced. The interpreter said the male co-teacher did not want her to be embarrassed, and everyone understood his rationale. They admired and appreciated his generosity and kindness.
As a visitor to Tanzania there were many events and activities that required an insider’s interpretation to what was happening. Cultural knowledge involves understanding the many nuances involved in verbal and non-verbal communication. Connotations involved with vocabulary choice, tone and intonation are all indispensable when trying to interpret a cultural event that is not one’s own. Certainly I was always dependent on the frankness of my interpreters and hosts in sharing their interpretations of events that I had observed. Without their interpretations I may not have understood what I had seen.

Co-teaching

Robert was an affable and collegial person to work with, but one the most challenging aspects of teaching in Tanzania pertained to my learning to co-teach with him. In my own work in New York, co-teaching works best when my model of instruction is similar to that of my co-teacher. Typically we know and respect one another’s knowledge and styles of teaching. Usually we have carefully planned lessons that contain agreed upon goals, activities, and time frames. Typically, there is a shared trust and respect for one another’s insights and opinions. Co-teaching with a stranger, when there is little time to plan together and little understanding about each other’s model of teaching, would be difficult at home. It is much more challenging in Africa where cultural views about education might be entirely different.

The Diagnostic Teaching Project was designed to have a Western teacher educator co-teach its curriculum with an in-country teacher educator. The idea is to develop local trainers who would continue the project long after funding had ended. I first met my co-teacher in the Dar es Salaam airport while we waited for the gate to open for our flight to Mwanza. Robert was taller than me, large framed, and always seemed to have a broad smile on his face. He was driven to the airport with his teenage son. Robert said he lived near his college which was about two hours drive from the airport. From this initial meeting to the day I left Robert was always gracious and friendly with me and the participants. The year before he had been involved in the project during its pilot run before UNESCO funding. He introduced me to his teenage son who seemed equally friendly and curious about the American his father would be working with for the next two weeks.

When we landed in Mwanza a driver from Barima Teachers’ College met and took us to our hotels. I was not initially sure as to why Robert did not stay in the same hotel as I, but later inferred that it was probably because of cost. Although my hotel was only $13 a night, Robert paid much less in a motel-like building that was near the college. My hotel was several stories high and contained a walled courtyard that separated it from the dirt street. The courtyard contained a restaurant where one could order a variety of dinners, including fried, baked, or boiled tilapia, chicken, and stews made with sweet potato or bananas. Serengeti and Kilimanjaro beers were plentiful and only about 30 cents a bottle. Throughout the two weeks that we worked together, and with the exception of a weekend and our final nights in Mwanza when we socialized, we lived in different parts of the city and could not easily meet and collaborate in planning. Although we tried to sketch our plans before I left the college campus each evening, Robert waited for my lead as to how the lessons were to be taught. I felt uncomfortable assigning him a lesson to teach, and he seemed hesitant to volunteer responsibility for teaching one. Although I tried to be open and allow opportunities for him to take the lead for any lessons that he wanted, he did not do so. He might have held an expectation that I would be the lead teacher, and his role would be to support me. On the other hand, I inferred that there might be cultural differences about my role, an outside Westerner, in teaching the workshop. Regardless of the reasons, for the first week I served as the primary teacher. The only exception to this pertained to
the morning warm-ups, business issues, and lesson critiques where Robert often seemed eager to lead. His relaxed manner, broad smile, and friendly manner worked very well with the participants.

In the second week the participants co-taught lessons to the Butimba children. On that Monday Robert offered to facilitate discussion of the demonstration lessons. It was very clear that he had the respect of the participants, and he was very knowledgeable about teaching. He seemed to enjoy summarizing and emphasizing key learning points contained in the lessons.

I do not know why it took so long for us to reach the point where Robert felt sufficiently comfortable taking over the role of co-teacher and not deferring to me. Perhaps the nature of critique, in which response and reaction was required, suited his thinking about his role in the workshop. Looking back on all the teaching I had done in the first week, we would have been a better team if we had shared the teaching more than we did. This may have been my error not to be more direct and frank with him. On the other hand, it takes time to construct mutual trust and respect. It might have been part of his cultural way of thinking to step back and let the outsider share information. Two weeks in Tanzania certainly did not give me sufficient time to answer this question validly.

**Children’s Participation in Demonstration Lessons**

Analyses of my experiences of teaching in Tanzania would be incomplete with describing the children’s level of participation in the demonstration lessons. An American educator would be jealous to see the intensity of students’ attention, respect, and eagerness to learn. A number of issues were particularly surprising to me: 1) The extent of their politeness and respect for one another and the adults at the school; 2) Their ability to sit in uncomfortable seats for long lessons without becoming inattentive or disruptive; 3) The eagerness with which they actively participated by contributing to discussions and showing their work; 4) The conditions in which their classrooms lacked regular electricity, books, and learning materials. Figure 4 displays a photo of children as they participated in one of the demonstration lessons.

**Figure 4: Children Sharing Seats during a Demonstration Lesson**

**Discussion**

Certainly the experience of teaching in Tanzania has broadened my understanding of education in this beautiful country. I learned that Tanzanian education is in great need of reform and has changed very little over the decades. Few resources are being invested in it, and many of their classroom teachers are under-prepared to teach literacy. The majority of children do not attend school beyond the seventh grade. Schools lack literacy curricula, and their teachers have
not studied theories and practices for teaching it. Despite many natural resources little of the income derived from it ever is used to support Tanzania’s educational system. The lack of strong national leadership for education, inadequate funding of schools, and poor structural resources such as dependable electricity and highways, are limiting Tanzania’s participation in the globalized world. It is no wonder it remains one of the poorest places in the world.

Despite all of these challenges, one could not find a more eager group of people to work with than the group I taught in Mwanza. The participants expressed appreciation for the workshop, and they eagerly completed tasks and engaged in the classroom activities.

I found it frustrating to see the very limited educational opportunities children received in Tanzania. While social, economic, and educational opportunities are improving for many children in India and China, little is changing in Africa, and certainly not in Tanzania.

When I previously taught in Kazakhstan I saw the effects of extensive Soviet investment in its educational system. The Soviets placed tremendous pride in educating its young, and their math and science curricula, in particular, were rigorous and demanding. Sadly, the educational opportunities in Tanzania bear no comparison with the former Soviet states. It is frightening to think that with the great wealth in many other parts of the world, there are so many Tanzanian children who are only receiving an elementary education. This situation offers little hope Tanzania when other children throughout the world are benefiting from extensive and richer educational opportunities than their children receive.

The Tanzanians with whom I worked were very knowledgeable about European history and culture, and less so about the history and culture of the United States. The geographic distance between our two countries serves as a significant communication barrier between it and other parts of the world. For instance, one day the principal of Butimba Teachers’ College spoke to me about terrorism in the United States. He could not name the World Trade Center or Pentagon sites, but he knew there was an attack in America. His lack of specificity surprised me, but later I discovered that I could did not recall that there was had been a terrorist attack on the U.S. embassy in Tanzania, either. So there remains much to be learned about one another.

The Tanzanian teacher educators with whom I worked were remarkably positive and eager to learn. With such motivated people, who are eager for educational and economic reform, initiatives such as the Diagnostic Teaching Project may eventually trigger social change in Tanzania.

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Let’s begin by saying that we are living through a very dangerous time. Everyone in this room is in one way or another aware of that. We are in a revolutionary situation, no matter how unpopular that word has become in this country. The society in which we live is desperately menaced…from within. So any citizen of this country who figures himself as responsible—and particularly those of you who deal with the minds and hearts of young people—must be prepared to “go for broke.” (“A Talk To Teachers,” James Baldwin, 1963/1985)²

I take a deep breath as I stand before a room filled with new and beginning teachers. Everyone’s eyes are on me. Deep down, as I prepare to talk about meeting the literacy demands of an increasingly culturally and linguistically diverse student population, I anticipate that I will be met with some resistance. This nervous anticipation is cultivated by the echoes of voices of various K-12 teachers and administrators that I have met along the way as a student, a parent, a teacher, and a community activist in urban contexts in the United States: “These kids come to us with nothing”; “Speaking like that means that they aren’t intelligent”; “I can’t stand listening to the way they talk.” Sadly, in more recent times, I have heard these kinds of comments and observed teaching and classroom management behaviors from K-12 teaching professionals and leaders that ignore and silence the cultural orientations, values, and performance styles of linguistically and ethnically “different” students; that maintain low expectations; that blame the students and their families; and that ultimately attribute academic


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failure to what students of color, what the economically disadvantaged, what English language learners, what students with disabilities, what “you fill in the blank” don’t have or can’t do.

As a teacher educator who works with both preservice and inservice teachers, I consider it my responsibility to unearth and address the tacit ideologies that persist around linguistic and cultural differences that teachers bring to the classroom experience and help them to be confident, effective teachers for all children. Teaching is more than just methods and strategies; it is also very much about the mindset that one brings to the profession. It is about the preconceived ideas that an individual holds about his or her students, their families, and their communities. I consider it my duty to remind teachers that our task must be to support the academic achievement of all students while at the same time capitalizing on and validating their cultural and linguistic identities and not devaluing or erasing them. We’ve lost too many students to cultural and linguistic terrorism (Anzaldúa, 1987/1999), where our words and our practices essentially ask them to repudiate who they are in order to become successful in schools and other dominant contexts.

So, when I stand on many occasions to deliver a talk with teachers, I channel my inner James Baldwin. In 1963, Baldwin delivered “A Talk to Teachers” and acknowledged up front that he himself was not a teacher and that he had never taught in schools. But, he felt it his duty, as a member of society and a citizen of the United States, to articulate his angst with the prevailing system of educating African American children. My task, like Baldwin’s, is to impress upon today’s audience of new and practicing teachers that there is a lot at stake. For too many, education is a matter of life or death (Haberman, 2004).

In this article, I recreate my “talk with teachers” and call for literacy educators to be prepared to “go for broke.” “Go for broke” is a gambling term meaning to risk everything to reap substantial reward (urbandictionary.com). When literacy educators commit to “go for broke”—that is, to do all that we can to ensure that our words and our practices support the educational needs of all children—we stand to make great strides in the educative experiences of those we serve. In the end, my hope is that my words will not just inspire teachers but impress upon them the urgency of creating classroom spaces where all of our children believe they belong and where they believe they have the right to participate and engage fully.

**Beginnin’ With Where I’m From**

When I begin my talk with teachers, I am nervous because, as always, I am not sure how the words that will come out of my mouth will be understood. As a Black woman scholar and teacher educator, I am usually one of the few persons of color in the room while the majority in the audience is predominantly White, middle class, monolingual, and female, reflecting the current teacher demographic (Godley, Sweetland, Wheeler, Minnici, & Carpenter, 2006; Gomez, 1996; Sleeter, 2001; Žumwalt & Craig, 2005). In my introduction, I am explicit and upfront about how my own identity and background shape what I will present, how I think, and what I believe. I share visual images from my social and cultural upbringing; I talk about how I grew up as a Black child from a working class background in the 1970s; how I am a proud speaker of African American Language (Smitherman, 1999) and why I sometimes choose to drop my ‘g’s; how I identify as a member of the hip hop generation; and how I am a part of the revolution to improve the educative experiences of all children, and in particular those who have historically been underserved by the public education system in the United States. I do this because it is impossible for me to ignore the dynamic interplay of race, language, and class in this space—what it means for me, a racial and linguistic minority, to work with and present to those who are “different” from me. If students, like the teachers in the audience, are to learn from me, they
must know who I am and where I am from, a primary premise for multicultural education and practice (Banks, 1995).

I also do this to model a practice of teaching that is about building relationships and not establishing distance and difference. Instead of emphasizing cultural and linguistic mismatch and disconnect between teachers and students, we must aim to find ways to bridge connections between all of our heritages and experiences. Relationships should be reciprocal, so it is essential that every literacy educator share a part of his or her history and identity. In schools today, it is not uncommon for teachers to have students reflect on and report on their respective cultural and linguistic heritages. From multicultural fairs to cultural expos to the observances of ethnic holidays, we ask students to bring in cultural artifacts or to share stories from their family traditions. With these activities, we ask students to put their cultural and linguistic backgrounds on display, oftentimes positioning their background as aberrant or ‘different’ from the mainstream culture of Whiteness and monolingualism (Haddix, 2008). Rarely are teachers asked to do the same. Instead, such activities should be led by teachers’ own interrogation and inquiry into their cultural and linguistic locations to think about what it means to be ‘American’ and who can claim this identity.

This transparency also means sharing our literacy interests and personal investments within and beyond the school walls. I self identify as a writer. I am a writer who writes for many purposes and who uses multiple discourses (see Gee, 1996). First and foremost, however, I view my practice as a writer as a political act; I write for social change and movement. I write to give voice to the collective experiences of those who came before me who were once silenced. To illustrate this point, I share my “Where I’m From” poem:

...I’m from 3rd Street and Martin Luther King Drive
I’m from Black Cows, Charlie Chans, and Lemonheads
I’m from peach ice cream on the sidewalk at the Juneteenth Day Parade
I’m from 25 cent pop and lazy days in the shade
I’m from blue ribbons in the sky and flyin’ high
I’m from beat street and white lines...

I share this poem to show that it is important to elucidate an intimate part of my literate identity; to show my passion for writing; and to claim that I am also a member of this learning community. Too often we ask students to participate in reading and writing in school and expect that they do so out of school, yet I frequently hear literacy educators exclaim, “I’m not a writer” or “I don’t like to write” or “I don’t read unless it’s for work.” How can we expect our students to do something that we ourselves do not do? How can we expect them to foster a love for reading and writing when we lack such sentiments? Teachers are very much a part of the classroom of learners. When I teach, I learn who I am.

Checkin’ Our Worldviews and Attitudes about Language

Whenever I have attended talks by Dr. Cornel West, African American studies scholar and philosopher, he usually declares to members of the audience that he hopes to say something that will “unhouse you, unsettle you, make you realize that everything you were taught to believe in rests on a pile of pudding.” I co-opt this opening from Dr. West in my talks because I intend to say something that will challenge the members of my audience to question their assumptions and worldviews. Critical self-reflection, or the consideration of our own worldviews, is a first step to understanding that different epistemologies exist and that none of us has cornered the
market on rightness or truth. Being a critically reflexive practitioner means realizing that what we hold as "truths" are not necessarily truths for everyone else. Dr. West talks about how often times students' entrance into college is the first time that their beliefs are challenged. It is the first time when one realizes that all that their parents, communities, churches, and friends have taught them can be turned upside down and viewed from a completely different perspective. In my own experience teaching literacy from this praxis, I have witnessed moments where my own ideologies conflict with those of my students. There are moments when students unpack “truths” that are venomous and potentially harmful to others, and as the teacher, I have to decide when to allow multiple perspectives to co-exist and when to challenge perspectives that expose racism, classism, sexism, and other oppressive ideologies. This conflict is inevitable when you are encouraging students to be critically engaged in literacy events. Students are "in process" of becoming free, critical thinkers and we as teachers are also "in process”, but we can leverage these conflicts for powerful teaching and learning outcomes for both teachers and students.

I rely on this critical self-reflection framework to consider the role of teachers’ attitudes and ideologies toward language diversity in literacy instruction for a growing culturally and linguistically diverse student population. Though attitudes toward linguistic diversity are socially constructed and notions of language superiority are arbitrarily determined (Gutierrez & Orellana, 2006; Wolfram & Christian, 1989), prejudice toward linguistic pluralism pervades the schooling process and impacts learning outcomes for students. Further, the language of schooling serves as a means for evaluating and differentiating students (Schleppegrell, 2004). It is a means for separating the haves from the have-nots, the “pulled-out” from the included, the sheltered from the general education, the advanced placement from the remedial, the college-admit from the high school dropout. Because educational research on student achievement and closing the achievement gap categorizes data on the basis of race and language, White, monolingual students are positioned as normative indicators of school performance (Hilliard III, 2003). In this way, any linguistic difference that deviates from this assumed norm is viewed as “deficient” and treated as a viable explanation for the academic failure of students of color and students who speak languages and dialects other than mainstream American English.

Historically, students of color and speakers of non-standard forms of English and other languages are framed and conceptualized in dominant paradigms of inferiority, cultural deprivation, and diversity (Souto-Manning, 2010). In educational research and practice, there remains an underlying ideology that all students need to assimilate to becoming fluent and frequent speakers of a standard form of English in order to succeed in this society. Such ideology suggests that assimilation happens at the expense of the student’s native language and culture being devalued, erased, and eradicated. Further, the current context of standardized and standards-based educational reform presents a dissonant relationship with pluralist views of language use and linguistically rich classrooms (see Genishi & Dyson, 2009).

It is also important to note that the interplay of these ideologies is most often at play in the context of urban schools where the cultural and linguistic gap between teachers and administrators and the students and families that they serve is steadily widening (Morrell, 2007). Educational researchers continue to question how to best address the educational needs of an increasingly, linguistic and culturally diverse student population (Ball & Farr, 2003; Godley, et al., 2006), a concern magnified by the fact that the growing majority of culturally and linguistically diverse students are placed at risk of educational failure, and a dominant view is that languages and dialects other than mainstream American English are the main obstacles of educational achievement. Linguists, educationists, and researchers across academic disciplines
have worked to explain the disproportionate failure among linguistic minorities in schools, arguing against a conclusion that students’ home language is the culprit (see Perry & Delpit, 1998; Zentella, 2005).

Deficit treatment of differences in students’ cultural and linguistic backgrounds in the classroom shows that negative and uninformed attitudes toward these differences by teachers can be counterproductive and even harm student performance (Schleppegrell, 2004; Wynne, 2002). Teachers’ attitudes toward language difference can either support or block marginalized students’ access to literacy. When teachers view languages other than mainstream American English as having lower status, this belief underscores the idea that languages are defined politically, not scientifically, and that standard languages are “dialects with an army and a navy.”

This is why it is imperative that transformation of teachers’ attitudes about language diversity commences at the preservice level. Classroom talk between teachers and students is the major medium of instruction, and the power of these interactions is in the hands of teachers. So, more time, effort, and attention must be given to raising teachers’ awareness about their assumptions and worldviews about language diversity. Teachers’ attitudes and ambivalence toward different languages and dialects can impact curricular initiatives and school policy that have proven to support these students (see Brisk, Burgos, & Hamerla, 2004). Re-conceptualizing the goals of teacher learning can have positive consequences for students whose racial, linguistic, and ethnic identities have been relegated to lower status in our society.

**Representin’ Multiple Discourses and Languages**

What we believe about language diversity and pluralism will inform our practice as literacy educators. When I hear teachers tell bilingual Spanish and English speakers, “no Spanish in here. English only,” I hear English language dominance in that message and a declaration that Spanish does not belong in schools. If we believe in mainstream American English dominance, it will show in our every day talk and engagement with our students. This belief pervades our schools today and fails many children. However, when we recognize that, “always and forever, the standard variety will be indispensable to upward mobility, and always and forever, one of the main places children acquire comfort and fluency in the standard variety will be in school” (McWhorter, 2000) and that “the job of the school is to add a new layer to a child’s speech repertoire, not to undo the one they already have” (McWhorter, 2000), we acknowledge the power of language and we become better equipped to support our students’ acquisition and access to multiple languages and discourses.

Instead of treating language diversity as the cause of educational failure, educators, policymakers, and scholars alike must realign their attitudes concerning language use with the realities of the changing population and challenge normative methods that “subtract” students’ language and culture (Ball & Farr, 2003; Valenzuela, 2002). Some children come to school with a linguistic advantage because the socialization contexts in which they have participated have prepared them well for the ways in which language is used in school tasks (Schleppegrell, 2004). Schleppegrell (2004) points out that many teachers are unprepared to make the linguistic expectations of schooling explicit to students and argues that schools need to be able to raise students’ consciousness about the power of different linguistic choices in construing different kinds of meanings and realizing different social contexts. Delpit (1995) also advocates for explicitly teaching all students how to appropriate mainstream or dominant languages for

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3 This concept is long part of oral tradition among sociolinguists. However, Yiddish linguist Max Weinreich is often credited with its origination (Wardhaugh, 2002).
strategic social, political, or economic advantage. By bringing the features of school language to the attention of students, teachers can help them understand the functionality of particular linguistic choices for reading and writing texts within and beyond the school context.

**I’m Goin’ for Broke, So Are You Gatekeepin’ or Keepin’ Dreams?**

Despite public and scholarly debates about the validity and utility of nonstandard languages and dialects, it is critical that all children feel a sense of value and pride in their cultural and linguistic heritages. Rather than viewing multilingualism as a barrier to literacy achievement, teachers can leverage the linguistic styles and ways with words of their students to boost student learning in the literacy classroom. Teachers can capitalize on the cultural and linguistic strengths of their students to scaffold to instruction in other literacy practices. Valuing linguistic difference extends beyond merely providing instruction in dominant discourses but to nurturing multiple forms of linguistic and literate expression.

As literacy educators, we can either take the stance of a “gatekeeper” or “dreamkeeper” (Ladson-Billings, 1994) for our students’ access to and opportunities for success in literacy and language learning. When teachers draw on the combined linguistic resources of all members of the classroom community, they create more linguistically inclusive and academic successful learning environments for all students. Culturally relevant and responsive pedagogies validate students’ racial, cultural, and linguistic backgrounds; foreground language diversity as a resource to enrich learning experiences for students; and bridge the gap between language usage in the home culture and in the school culture. Being culturally relevant and responsive teachers (Gay, 2000) also means setting and maintaining high expectations for all students; taking interest in our students’ lives in and outside the classroom; listening to and hearing what our students have to say; observing what our students are doing; diversifying and differentiating instruction; and making learning relevant. When we fail to do this, we become the “gatekeepers” of dominant discourses and keep many students on the periphery of our schools, and by extension, the larger society.

Nearly 50 years after Baldwin’s “A Talk to Teachers,” the current state of education is facing “a dangerous time” (Baldwin, 1985). Many students show up to our schools every day, yet many remain underserved academically. Children come to us speaking many languages. Our task should not be to erase the cultural and linguistic knowledge that they bring but to add a new layer to it. How are we harmed or wronged when students use their languages to express their ideas or when trying to get their ideas out on paper? When teachers correct students’ use of their native tongues in their writing by saying that the usage is “wrong” or “incorrect,” the message is that who they are is “wrong” and “incorrect”.

So, I end this article like I end many of my talks with teachers, declaring that it is not the most efficient use of our time to focus on policing students’ home languages and cultures when our goal is to help them be confident and effective users of academic English in its oral and written forms. I proclaim that it is time for an education revolution. Our role as literacy educators is critical; we have an investment in ensuring the academic successes of all of our children. It is time to “go for broke” because the future of all of our children depends on it.

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