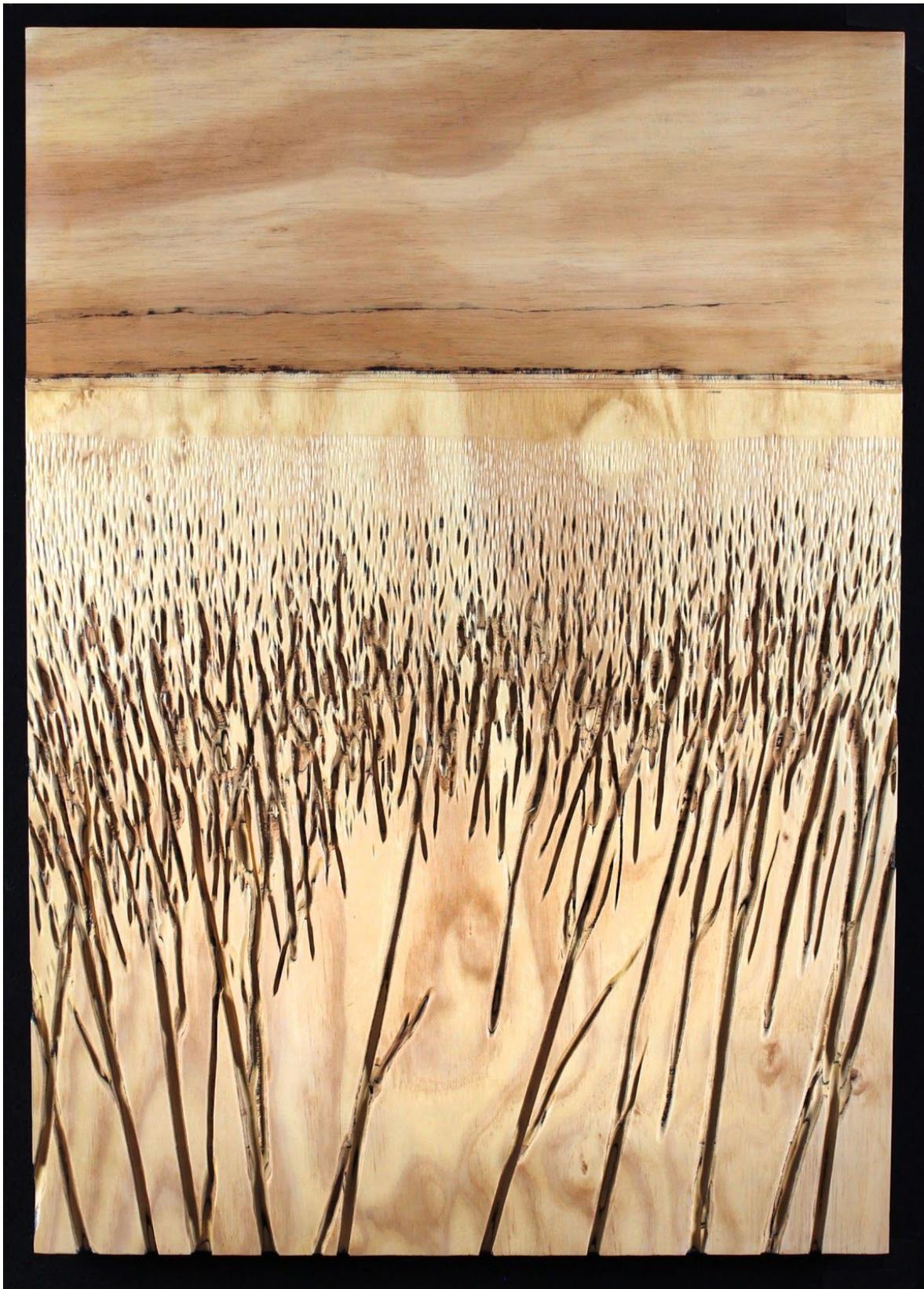


Oklahoma Council of Teachers of English

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SCAPE CXXVII (Cover Art Credit: Douglas Shaw Elder, 2019)

"Songs of Ourselves"

The Oklahoma Council of Teachers of English is an affiliate of the National Council of Teachers of English. We promote improvement in the teaching of all phases of English language arts including reading, writing, creative and critical thinking, listening, and speaking at all levels of education. We are committed to addressing current issues in literacy and language arts learning, instructional practice, and education policy, as well as research in the fields of humanities, literacy, language learning, and English language arts. We do our best to help English and humanities teachers become more effective by providing the best professional development at the lowest possible cost, sponsoring a spring and fall conference. OKCTE members work together across the state and region to support excellence in language arts learning and teaching.

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The *Oklahoma English Journal* is a peer reviewed journal, published by the Oklahoma Council of Teachers of English as an affiliate journal of the National Council of Teachers of English. OEJ publishes articles of interest to classroom teachers, librarians, administrators, and university professors across literacy studies and the humanities regardless of teaching level.

Submission Guidelines

Authors are invited to submit creative, multimodal submissions as well as traditional texts. OEJ encourages many forms of communication including poetry, prose, narrative, graphic stories, art, and photography.

- **Research Articles** should be organized around the following categories: introduction, literature review/theoretical framework, methods, findings, discussion, and implications for future research, practice, and policy.

- **Practitioner Articles** should be theoretically sound and pedagogically applicable.
- Both research articles and practitioner articles, including references and appendices, should be less than 4,000 words.
- **Reflections, Expert voices, Geographical views and Teaching tips** should be less than 1,500 words.
- **Book reviews** should be between 250 and 1,000 words, including a brief synopsis of the text, as well as possible teaching ideas, accompanying texts, and personal response.
- We welcome **P-12 student book reviews and essays**, including co-authored reviews: student/teacher, student/ student, and student/caregiver. Co-authored book reviews should explore both perspectives of the same young adult or children's literature text.
- We welcome **P-12 visual art**, especially connected to or inspired by reading.

Acknowledgements

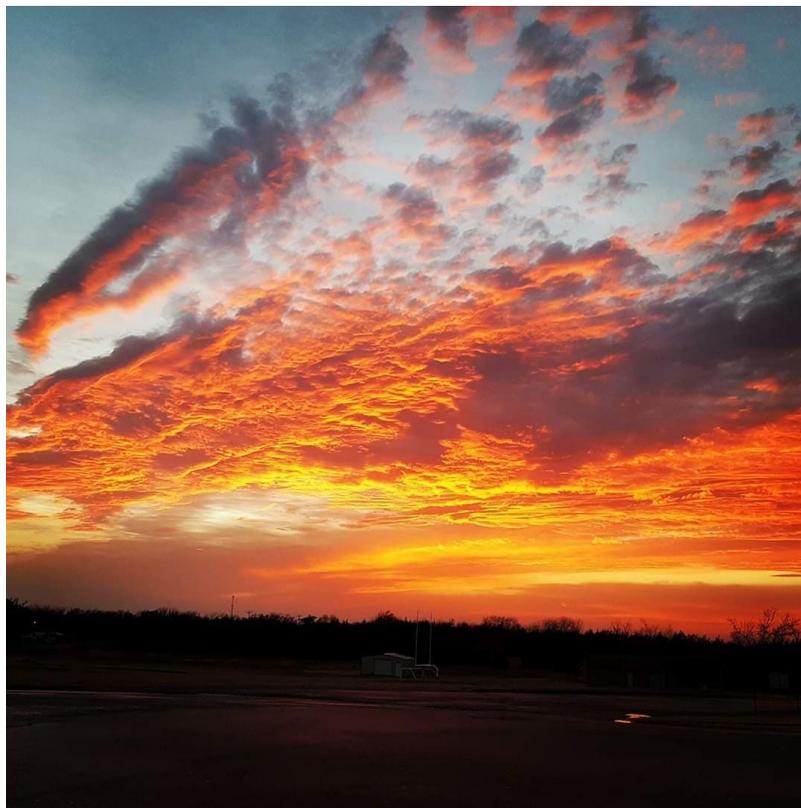
The current Oklahoma English Journal co-editors are Michelle Waters and Jennifer Williams. You can reach them at OKEngJournal@gmail.com. Michelle and Jennifer will serve as OEJ editors from 2020-2025 (5 year term).

The editors thank the following individuals and organizations for supporting the production of this issue of the *Oklahoma English Journal*:

- Manuscript reviewers
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Oklahoma Sunset (Photo credit: Michelle Waters, 2020)

From the Editors

Michelle Waters and Jennifer Williams

We have been working together mostly online for several years and one of the most common themes of our discussions has been how to convince students they have stories to tell — and they *should* use their voices to tell those stories.

This idea of centering student voices has never been more important than this year when what we have known as “school” for all of our lives has been significantly altered as a result of the ongoing pandemic. Schools closed down and switched to virtual learning in March 2020 and suddenly students could choose to login to class — or not.

A rhetorical question administrators have asked in the past is: “If students didn’t have to attend your class, would they?” We have discovered the answers to that question. The more important question now is, “How do we convince students that reading and writing are important to their lives both right now and in the future?”

The answer to this question is in *Making Stories* by Jerome Bruner (2003, p. 65): “Self-making is a narrative art.” The stories we tell about ourselves, the stories others tell about us, the stories our culture creates around us all inform and make up who we are. By exploring all of these narratives, “we constantly construct and reconstruct our selves to meet the needs of the situations we encounter, and we do so with the guidance of our memories of the past and our hopes and fears for the future” (2003, p. 64).

By learning the elements of story, learning how to craft both fiction and nonfiction stories, we learn how to control ourselves and ultimately the trajectory of our lives.

What greater purpose is there for students to show up for English class than to begin constructing the narratives of who they are?

Many of us started teaching with established ideas of what books we wanted to teach (the ones we loved) and academic writing we wanted to ensure students did. We prided ourselves on high standards and when students failed to measure up, we assumed the problem was them, not us.

One of the points I inferred from both Bruner and the John Dewey chapter of *Theory for Education* by Greg Dimitriadis is students must not only know they have a story to tell, they must have a personal stake in that narrative if either speaking or writing are going to be meaningful to them.

I know, as Dimitriadis and Kamberelis (2006, p. 10) wrote, “education must be experience-based and not externally imposed because “there is an intimate and necessary relation between the processes of actual experience and education.” Additionally, “an educative experience [is] one that broadens one’s horizons of experience and knowledge and leads in a constructive direction toward intelligent action.”

For the Fall 2020 issue of *Oklahoma English Journal*, we have curated stories featuring the writing and teaching lives of Oklahoma teachers as they help students share their stories. We have also shared some of our own stories through our photography, which features images taken both in Oklahoma and via our National Council of Teachers of English journeys.

Tara Hembrough, Ph.D., shares how she participated in a collaboration between her university and a Boys and Girls Club in which undergraduates acted as teachers and mentors to children in a creative writing workshop for the Club.

Shai Fenwick writes how encouraging students to share their stories can help them build resilience and trust-based relationships in the face of major crisis, including the COVID-19 pandemic.

Amber McMath recommends we read *Strategies that Work*, a book teaches the importance of explicitly teaching reading comprehension strategies.

Adam Crawley and Jennifer Pulliam share how stories featuring lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and/or queer (LGBTQ+) people provide the windows and mirrors described by Dr. Rudine Sims Bishop for students to see representations of themselves, as well as learn about and develop empathy for others, through literature.

Eril Hughes recommends the book *March On, Girl*, a novel by Melba Patillo Beals, a 2020 Sequoyah Intermediate List winner, that shares the author's experience as of the first African American students to attend Central High School in Little Rock, Arkansas in 1957.

Sarah J. Donovan writes how she used stories to teach her students about acculturative stress and how she learned a lesson from her students as a result.

Chong Lor shares how the best stories are sometimes not the ones our students read, but the ones they create themselves.

Julie Dawkins writes a poem about the Oklahoma Teacher Walkout and what she learned from it.

Terry Phelps shares a process for helping students better understand and remember vocabulary.

Jennie Hanna writes about how visualization is key to help students better understand what they read, even though the comprehension strategy can be difficult to teach.

Veronica Fuxa shares strategies she learned for helping students cope with the sudden death of a classmate during the school year.

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Building Writing-oriented, Teaching and Professional Career Skills through Creative Writing Workshops and Community-Learning at the Boys and Girls Club

Tara Hembrough, Ph.D.

Introduction

Recently, more writing faculty are experimenting with community learning (College Composition and Communication [CCC], 2016).

Community-learning is a type of teaching that links instruction with important community service experiences. In many cases, college faculty form relationships with non-profit organizations in order to tackle larger social issues and promote a social-justice focus for their course, as well as employing a strategy for retaining undergraduates (Mitchell, 2014). As a pedagogical design based on a form of experiential education, community-learning places college undergraduates outside of the classroom, connects them with area institutions, and assists them in participating in and learning from their locale. Within the course's community-learning component that is enacted within the classroom, undergraduates identify background information about the establishment with which they are interacting, discuss their engagement with fellow community participants at the area where they are stationed, and reflect upon their role in the partnership. As outcomes, through community-learning experiences, undergraduates can apply critical thinking skills, collaborate with others in their locale, interact with people from diverse backgrounds, and link their classroom knowledge and practices to the professional world through constructing work-readiness skills (Wade, 2000). Overall, through a community-learning model, undergraduates not only assist others but also gain valuable educational experiences that change how they view themselves and their area of residence (Stevens, Gerber, & Hendra, 2010).

In order to participate in community-learning, faculty researchers connected to writing areas (including the disciplines of composition, rhetoric, and even creative writing) have begun to discuss the option of engaging their undergraduates in literacy-sponsoring and mentoring activities involving community children (2016). Moreover, creative writing researchers,

espousing the value of composing creatively as concerned with creative literacy, are emphasizing poetic, dramatic, fictional, and/or nonfictional elements in their community-learning designs (Bartleet, Bennett, Marsh, Power, & Sunderland, 2014). Having proposed to pair community-learning formats with writing directives, including creativity-featuring ones, some writing researchers promote undergraduates' participation in designs involving children in extracurricular, educational programs. One such setting invites undergraduates' engagement in non-profit programs targeting low-income children. By instituting a community-learning design that prompts undergraduates, including those who are socioeconomically and racially/ethnically marginalized, to instruct children in similar circumstances, writing faculty have addressed larger questions involving literacy and other educational concerns. As one scenario for this community-learning design, faculty might consider generating teaching and mentoring relationships between their undergraduates and children in programs, such as the Boys and Girls Clubs, a government organization promoting citizenship, character and leadership development, and academic preparedness and access for children desiring to attend college (see Boys and Girls Clubs, 2019).

Acting in conversation with community-learning designs, the author participated in a partnership between her university and the Boys and Girls Clubs, with undergraduates acting as teachers and mentors to children in a creative writing workshop for the Club. Because the undergraduates and children possessed a low socioeconomic status (SES) and lived in a rural area, and a portion were Native American, the study's participants held these marginalizing demographic factors in common. The community-learning initiative's purpose was to formulate mutually beneficial relationships between undergraduates taking creative writing classes and child Club members. As rationales for undergraduates' study participation, they

hoped that in instructing children in creative writing and imaginative thinking they might engage in scenarios and practices assisting them in future teaching-focused occupations. In turn, the Club's children, having few models for university exploration, wished to gain greater creativity-based literacy to further their educational experiences. In establishing the study, the author posed this research question: Would the undergraduates define their workshop participation as contributing to their creative-writing-oriented, pedagogical-preparation areas, teaching skills, and instructional career goals?

Theoretical Framing

Community Learning and Writing Courses, and Preservice Teachers

Community learning promotes undergraduates' academic, psychological, and social growth and heightens their communication and leadership capabilities (Foli, Braswell, Kirkpatrick, & Lim, 2014). By including a community-learning or an experiential-education component in writing courses, teachers can address undergraduates' different learning styles and offer hands-on applications, amplifying the value of undergraduates' academic knowledge (Herzberg, 2002). Furthermore, through a community-learning design, undergraduates may strengthen their writing processes (Chaden, Graves, Jolliffe, & Vandenberg, 2002), think critically and deeply (Dvorak, Hosni, Hawkey, & Nelsen, 2011), discuss complex contexts (Johnson, 2010), participate in personal and social scenarios utilizing different writing genres (MacFall, 2012), learn valuable skills for future occupations (Conway, Amel, & Gerwein, 2009), connect with classmates and be motivated to engage in the coursework (Bamber & Hankin, 2011), invest personally in their writing (Mikolchak, 2006), and grow morally and ethically (Johnson, 2010).

“...teachers must address cross-disciplinary and cross-cultural issues...”

As part of a discussion of community-learning designs featuring creative literacy objectives and socioeconomically and/or racially/ethnically

marginalized undergraduate and child populations, the inclusion of undergraduates who are preservice teachers, as a factor, should be discussed also. Namely, within a community-learning experience, preservice teachers may interact with diverse groups, gain the skills necessary to address real classroom settings (Coffey, 2010), and comprehend their own personal selves more greatly (Pratt & Danyluk, 2017; Selmo, 2015). For instance, in two studies, undergraduates interacted with Indigenous children in a culturally-sensitive, arts-based, community-learning initiative, prompting all involved to utilize art to express their creativity and identity as valuable educational and discipline-related constructs (Bartleet, Bennett, Kathryn Marsh, Power, & Sunderland, 2016; Bennett, Sunderland, Bartleet, & Power, 2014). Nowadays, teachers must address cross-disciplinary and cross-cultural issues, and the manner in which instructors can influence students may affect the culture for generations to come (Oakes, Lipton, Anderson, & Stillman, 2015).

While these studies concerning community-learning writing courses and the inclusion of diverse populations, such as Native Americans and preservice teachers, represent important contributions to discussions of community-learning designs, a gap in the literature remains regarding community-learning literacy partnerships with a community-learning literacy configuration having a creative-writing, imaginative-thinking, and mentoring format offered via a liaison forged amongst writing faculty, writing undergraduates, and Boys and Girls Clubs' child members, with the participants possessing a low SES and rural background, and some being Native American (see Littlepage, Gazley, & Bennett, 2012; Peralta, O'Connor, Cotton, & Bennie, 2016).

Thus, through a community-learning initiative offered within the reviewed literature's scheme and based upon the study's research question, the author, a faculty member at a regional Oklahoma university, developed a partnership with the Boys and Girls Clubs. Investigating this community-learning initiative as a curricular model that might illuminate larger patterns of interest, the study's purpose was to determine whether providing Club children with a creative

writing workshop and a mentorship process with the objective of contributing to the children’s future potential college entrance would result in positive outcomes for the undergraduates themselves, including the enhancement of their creative-writing-oriented, pedagogical-preparation areas and the strengthening of their teaching-related career goals’ conceptualization.

Methods

Purpose and Participants

The research design used an exploratory case study (Cresswell, 2012) involving a university and K-12 community partnership to explore participants’ beliefs and practices regarding creative writing, imaginative thinking, and racial/ethnic diversity. Research was conducted over two summers at the Boys and Girls Club. Participants included 14 undergraduates, 34 Club child members, the English department

chair, and 2 Club co-directors and 1 staff member, who consented to participate as required by the university’s research board. Table 1 provides demographic information about undergraduate and child participants.

Research Initiative

During the Club’s summer session, the English department chair and the author, an English faculty member, presented a creative writing workshop taught by English undergraduate majors for elementary-aged children. According to an ACT National Curriculum Survey (2016), a population of first- through twelfth-grade, language-arts teachers; developmental and first-year writing, rhetoric, and literature faculty; and workforce representatives agree that their groups must be able to compose for various purposes, contexts, and audiences, including ones related to creative writing and imaginative thinking (Palmer, 2017).

Table 1.

	Undergraduates	Children
Demographic information	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • between ages 20 and 30. • have a SES at or below the poverty line. • 12 women and 2 men. • 8 Choctaw, 1 Chickasaw, and 5 Caucasians with non-legally documented tribal heritage. • all English writing majors with an appreciation for creative writing and English education, preservice teachers, and/or undergraduates with an interest in teaching college. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • between ages 6 and 9. • most have a SES at or below the poverty line. • 13 girls, 20 boys, and 1 not identifying a sex/gender. • 19 Caucasians, 7 Native Americans, 2 Latino-Hispanics, and 1 African-American.
Civic and family background	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 7 possessed tutoring experience with children. • 11 volunteered or were employed in scenarios involving these child instructional types: church events, library-reading programs, afterschool programs, and substitute-teaching pools. • 2 had parents who were English teachers, a factor influencing the former’s decision for study participation. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All reported a desire to attend college in the future.

N = 14 undergraduates and 34 Club members

(*Research Initiative* con.) Thus, to address the literacy standards that many teachers and bosses value, the study's undergraduates taught the Club's children the arts of creative writing and imaginative thinking in crafting creative texts. In orchestrating the workshop, the chair and the author identified the local Club's needs by engaging in discussions with the Choctaw co-director, who appreciated the opportunity for undergraduates, including tribal members, to lead the workshop, as community learning promotes tribal undergraduates' exploration and sharing of their identities (see Sykes, Pendley, & Deacon, 2017).

In preparing workshop materials, the undergraduates utilized lessons fashioned from their creative-writing classes featuring nonfiction, fiction, and poetry (see Bartleet, Bennett, Marsh, Power, & Sunderland, 2014). Oftentimes, teachers' curricula fail to match Indigenous pupils' needs, worldviews, and Native knowledge constructs (Munroe, Lunney Borden, Murray Orr, Toney, & Meader, 2013), yet because the undergraduates hailed from a community with a large tribal presence, and most were Native American themselves, the study countermanded this issue. As a similar case-in-point, an Indigenous teacher implemented a place-based curriculum highlighting children's daily lives and communities, utilized storytelling and creative-writing practices, and applied a culturally appropriate lens to increase pupils' related learning outcomes (Sianturi, Chia-Ling Chiang, & Au Hurit, 2018). For the workshop, the undergraduates offered class sessions daily in two-hour segments spanning two months' course, as working with the children over a somewhat longer timeline was important in building relationships (see Foli, Braswell, Kirkpatrick, & Lim, 2014).

In deciding upon their pedagogical approaches, the undergraduates formed groups of two or three to collaborate in planning the workshop's activities and instructing the children (see Bamber & Hankin, 2011), and the subject matter included the following assignments: 1) writing four-sentence fictional narratives responding to introductory statements, such as "On a dark and stormy night" and "Once upon a time"; 2) creating Rorschach ink blots, rendered through

paint splashes, with an explanation of the blots' potential meaning; 3) composing scripts and performing plays; and 4) penning haikus and acrostic and ekphrasis poetry. In instructing the children in multiple creative writing genres, the undergraduates lectured, provided handouts, and presented examples to facilitate the former's comprehension.

Materials and Procedure

An exploratory case study involves an in-depth data collection from multiple sources to provide a case description and its themes (Cresswell, 2012), and the author utilized diverse instruments to generate results, including documents, surveys, interviews, and observations (Yin, 2009). To provide for the study's background, the author viewed documents including webpages about community learning and about the Boys and Girls Clubs. The study's participants provided various data types. Undergraduates took pre- and post-surveys with Likert-style and open-ended questions; engaged in pre- and post- interviews; and discussed their experiences with the author. To provide information concerning the undergraduates' sociodemographic, academic, work-related, and community-oriented factors, they answered questions about their 1) backgrounds; 2) creative-writing coursework; 3) teaching, tutoring, and work/volunteer experiences; 4) personal, educational, and career goals; and 5) study participation rationales. Likewise, undergraduates reported on how the Club's workshop affected their conceptions of teaching and mentoring acts. In the interviews, undergraduates elaborated upon their survey answers and discussed the workshop's proceedings, including the successes and drawbacks they experienced. Besides the undergraduates, the participants included the children, English department chair, and Club staff. The children received a survey packet at the workshop's end, with a mix of Likert-style and open-ended questions soliciting their sociodemographic data, as well as information about their creative-writing interests, academic backgrounds and plans, and experiences with the Club's workshop. Also, the department chair, co-directors, and the staff member engaged in interviews concerning their workshop roles.

To provide for flexibility and adaptation, the study applied a constructivist, grounded-theory method to collect data and formulate themes linked to the research questions (Strauss, 1987). To explore the study's common strands, the researchers analyzed the data by reading and annotating documents, locating themes, generating a coding scheme, and coding the data (Bricki & Green, 2007). Within the data coding and analysis process, the researchers coded all data to create internal consistency, and the correlation coefficients used to assess inter-rater reliability within the dataset ranged from good to adequate in all areas.

Findings and Discussion

Overall, findings indicate that the workshop contributed to and enhanced undergraduates' creative-writing-oriented, pedagogical-preparation areas; subject-specific teaching and professional skills, and creative-writing-related career goals (see Bennett, Sunderland, Bartleet, & Power, 2016), as the undergraduates built relationships with their younger child peers possessing similar background features but few models for college exploration in their own circles. This finding connects likewise with the literature's themes concerning how community learning joins undergraduates' personal and interpersonal development with their cognitive and academic growth (see Foli, Braswell, Kirkpatrick, & Lim, 2014). Indeed, the workshop's community-learning format facilitated valuable relationships between undergraduates and their locale and prompted their transformative processes. By participating in the workshop as a community-learning setting, the undergraduates grew to view themselves as involved teachers who assumed the opportunity to interact with and teach others, utilized class practices consistent with multiple learning styles (see Conley & Bryan, 2009), and engaged with a curricular design presenting a Native identity awareness (see Pewewardy & Cahape Hammer, 2003). Likewise, the majority of undergraduates noted that they relied on these tenets as a set of best practices, as well as showing an appreciation for collaborative learning by working together in pairs to instruct the Club's children (see Larimore, 2000).

The study's larger finding can be discussed further. According to undergraduates' post-survey, all ($n = 14$) agreed that their Club's workshop participation "assisted [them] in addressing a set of community-learning teaching and mentoring objectives that were both appropriate and tenable," given that they desired to participate in "a short-term, but meaningful, community-learning-based, creative writing workshop over a single summer's course" (see Foli, Braswell, Kirkpatrick, & Lim, 2014). In turn, according to data from faculty and staff post-interviews and undergraduate and child post-surveys, all undergraduates, faculty, and staff ($n = 18$) and 88% of the children ($n = 30$) agreed also that the undergraduates experienced gains in their ability to act as short-time teachers and mentors in fostering the children's desire to continue with their education and attend college in the eventual future. Consequently, the study offers a major finding, with undergraduates' investment in a community-learning initiative involving a workshop for Club children having benefitted and facilitated the undergraduates' creative-writing-oriented teaching practices, fashioning of pedagogical materials, and establishment of career-related goals.

Most largely, the workshop contributed to undergraduates' creative-writing-oriented, pedagogical-preparation areas and skills (see Conway, Amel, & Gerwein, 2009) and enhanced their instruction-related, career goals. In the post-survey, all undergraduates ($n = 14$) indicated that they "enjoyed participating in teaching the Club's children," and 86% ($n = 12$) believed also that they had excelled in at least "some capacity" related to the set of community-learning principles the literature espouses (see CCC, 2016). Subsequently, when undergraduates were asked in an open-ended, post-survey question to "conceptualize [their] workshop roles in stirring the children's interests in creative writing and imaginative thinking," they described themselves as having assumed one or more of the following "identifications" or "characterizations": "teachers" ($n = 12$), "guides" ($n = 7$), and "listeners" ($n = 4$), all positive self-categorizations consistent with the community-learning literature's established goals for teaching and mentoring.

United with the undergraduates' post-survey, the author's observations of the Club site's undergraduate/child interactions and the undergraduates' post-interview shed additional light upon areas in which the undergraduates perceived, because of the workshop, that they gained pedagogical preparation in instructing children in creative-writing and imaginative-thinking subjects. In the post-survey, all ($n = 14$) reported that their "workshop participation enhanced [their] creative-writing-oriented, pedagogical-preparation areas." Moreover, responding to an open-ended, post-interview question, 93% ($n = 13$) expressed the belief that the workshop provided them with the avenue "to create and test lesson plans" that they might utilize upon assuming a professional teaching career that included the instruction of creative-writing components, while 50% ($n = 7$) thought that the workshop assisted them in designing and implementing lesson plans aimed at addressing the children's "multiple learning styles" (see Herzberg, 2002).

Besides the workshop's accommodation of undergraduates' desire to cultivate appropriate pedagogical materials and approaches, in the post-survey, all undergraduates ($n = 14$) also reported that their workshop activity "benefitted [them] in developing specific traits related to teaching creative-writing and imaginative-thinking theories and practices," including the ability to "collaborate with [their] fellow undergraduate workshop participants," "communicate with others," "problem-solve," "implement professional workplace traits linked to [their] planned involvement in teaching creative writing and/or working with creatively written texts," and "reflect" on their "worldviews" or "belief systems" (see Bennett, Sunderland, Bartleet, & Power, 2016). Likewise, in the survey, 86% ($n = 12$) reported that the workshop "benefitted [their] leadership abilities." In the subsequent post-interview, undergraduates also confirmed and described their shared perception that the workshop strengthened their pedagogically related knowledge of creative writing and imaginative thinking and heightened their instructional skills specific to these subjects.

Overall, within the realm of the undergraduates' workshop participation, they perceived that the community-learning initiative not only supported their creative-writing-oriented, pedagogical-preparation areas and skills but also enhanced their teaching-related career goals. Specifically, in the post-survey, all undergraduates ($n = 14$) reported that the workshop "affected positively their writing- and teaching-related career goals, including those tied to the instruction of creative writing" and "imaginative thinking." Furthermore, for 14% ($n = 2$) or a minority, interacting with the Club's children affirmed, for the undergraduates, their desire to "teach creative writing as a major or significant emphasis in [their] future educational career setting," and that this "subject area held special relevance" for them. Having participated in the workshop, 71% ($n = 10$) or a large number also felt encouraged "to delve further into the field's educational practices concerning how to instruct children in creative-writing and imaginative-thinking tenets," especially via undergraduates' consideration of applying eventually to a related master's degree program.

Conclusion

Through a university- and club-sponsored, creative writing workshop, a group of English writing majors and preservice teachers acted as short-term teachers and mentors for local children aspiring to increase their creative-writing- and imaginative-thinking-oriented literacy levels and to enroll later in college. As the community-learning initiative's outcomes, the undergraduates prepared creative-writing-focused, pedagogical materials; practiced subject-area teaching methods; and identified career skills and goals related to their projected teaching-oriented occupations. Similarly, within the initiative, undergraduates identified commonalities between the children and themselves regarding their shared impoverished and rural status, with a percentage of both populations also identifying as Native American. On this final point, the study's findings can be deemed important more largely because there exists little research addressing Indigenous peoples' academic outcomes at every educational level, including the post-secondary (Demmert, 2001), and it is

crucial that teachers employing assignments with creative-writing elements understand the curricular designs, including community learning, that may aid Native American undergraduates, including those who are English writing majors and preservice teachers, in matriculating from college and instructing others in creative literacy arts. Additionally, this study is also pertinent to other audiences and stakeholders, including K-12 teachers, preservice teachers, parents, and educational after-school programs. For instance, teachers and preservice teachers who participate in community-learning programs may benefit from employing their creative-writing lesson plans with local children in a fun, lower-stakes, educational environment. Similarly, parents and after-school program partners who participate with their children in creative-writing workshops can encourage them to expand their knowledge of creative writing for personal, cultural, and educational purposes.

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Lake Hefner at Sunset, Oklahoma City (Photo credit: Jennifer Williams, 2019)

Toward Supporting a School-based Trauma-Informed Social-Emotional Curriculum in the Upper Grades

Shai Fenwick

On January 8th 2020, I walked into my senior English classroom prepared to share a Sandy Hook Promise video presentation with my students which addressed uncertainty about reporting and seriousness of potential school shootings. Our school district is unusual in that it is one of the most trauma-informed districts in the country. Moore Public Schools (MPS) is the Oklahoma school district which had been directly impacted by the massive F5 tornado on May 20, 2013. Damage included two elementary schools, a junior high school, and the administrative complex. Since then, the district has rebuilt to include storm shelters, implemented trust-based behavioral training for all teachers, and placed Licensed Professional Counselors (LPCs) throughout the district to assist students in coping with ongoing trauma-related concerns. MPS also implemented trauma-informed training for all new hires—teachers and assistants—who had direct student contact. Our administration is among the best in the state of Oklahoma at keeping mental health in the frame when making decisions about students, teachers, and the larger community.

Schools introduce specific cognitive stressors and traumas into children's lives as a result of their role as a hub of the community, as do all such large groupings tied to a physical location. Churches, families, friend groups, even event memberships introduce these elements into children's lives through natural cycles of birth, death, and events that occur normally over time. These cultural spaces provide children with processes and skills on how to understand and contextualize life events through ritual, direct explanation by community leaders, and modeling by those further in the process of enculturation such as older peers, as well as models for how to act and work through their emotional impact in a community of others who share concerns, emotional injury, and recovery processes. Those models are typically leaders and facilitators within those spaces.

Despite demonstrated capabilities, MPS training for potential shooter situations was shocking, even to adults. In addition to the Sandy Hook

Promise video excerpt included, the potential incident reporting chain excluded teachers as a streamlining of the response-capable information pipeline. The reasoning given for this omission was that the faster a student can report concerns to an administrator who is able to act on the information, the more effective such reporting will be. Although this makes sense from an efficiency perspective, teachers may be one of few trusted adults who are mandatory reporting points of contact between administrative staff and students. Leaving them out of the reporting chain is likely to be less effective in the long run. Teachers are on the front lines of contact with students, develop long-term deep trust relationships with them, and are constantly checking in with them regarding their productivity, well-being, and intellectual and emotional growth. Part of the responsibility of every professional in the school building is to stand *in loco parentis*, in the place of the parent when the parent is absent. That is a duty of care to the holistic well-being of students, which must include mental health not just for the immediate moment but also long-term and for future generations' health and mental health outcomes.

Oklahoma has one of the highest rates of adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) in the country and has been at the epicenter for multiple mental health crises, including the opiate abuse and meth crises. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), the long-term health consequences of ineffective mental health are profound and pervasive, directly affecting quality and length of life.

“Mental disorders are an important cause of long-term disability and dependency. WHO's 2005 report attributed 31.7% of all years lived-with-disability to neuropsychiatric conditions: the five major contributors to this total were unipolar depression (11.8%), alcohol-use disorder (3.3%), schizophrenia (2.8%), bipolar depression (2.4%), and dementia (1.6%).⁴ However, the interaction between mental disorder and disability is more complex and extensive than the

WHO report suggests,” (Prince et al., 2007, p. 860).

The germinal Adverse Childhood Experiences study was conducted by Kaiser-Permanente and the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), incorporated data from over 17,000 individuals, and has implications for education, public health, and social policy. The study found deep connections between exposure to traumatic stress in childhood and adult morbidity.

“Disease conditions including ischemic heart disease, cancer, chronic lung disease, skeletal fractures, and liver disease, as well as poor self-rated health also showed a graded relationship to the breadth of childhood exposures. The findings suggest that the impact of these adverse childhood experiences on adult health status is strong and cumulative,” (Felliti et al., 1998, p. 251).

The group of disorders both mental and physiological, can reduce lifespan up to twenty years (Jiang et al., p. 2), and was originally ascribed to coping mechanisms for trauma. According to Felliti, “mechanisms appear to center on behaviors such as smoking, alcohol or drug abuse, overeating, or sexual behaviors that may be consciously or unconsciously used because they have immediate pharmacological or psychological benefit as coping devices in the face of the stress of abuse, domestic violence, or other forms of family and household dysfunction,” (Felitti et al., 1998, p. 253).

Subsequent investigation has linked additional mechanisms such as epigenetics and Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), contracted (in childhood or adulthood) after prolonged ongoing traumatic stress experiences without the de-escalation needed to allow the body to return to homeostasis. Research suggests epigenetic changes in the body of those suffering from PTSD have a low to moderate chance of manifesting in subsequent generations of those with high ACE scores and PTSD (Jiang et al., 2019, p. 2).

These changes do not necessarily remove gene sequences, but instead turn their expression on or off. Piaget’s constructivism positions the child

as an individual, a learner in the process of constructing meaning and acquiring information, blending that new information with existing knowledge into schemata of learning. Survival, trauma, and ongoing toxic stress affect what is known by a learner, and affects how knowledge is incorporated or viewed, in addition to the psychosocial development of the child. As early educational theorist Alfred North Whitehead said, “The mind is never passive; it is a perpetual activity, delicate, receptive, responsive to stimulus. You cannot postpone its life until you have sharpened it,” (Whitehead, 1949, p. 6). Although Whitehead was writing in the 1940’s, the epistemology was as active a factor in the classroom of his time as it is now, particularly when students are filtering academic curriculum through the lens of traumatic experiences.

“Survival, trauma, and ongoing toxic stress affect what is known by a learner...”

The ACE study was groundbreaking in that it linked physiological morbidity to psychological and emotional damage in childhood. In the United States, many states began some form of mapping their populations’ ACE scores and implanting a range of redress measures. Those measures have also been implanted as harm preventative and reduction, usually after a traumatic event of some kind has been experienced by the school population. Typically, these measures are designed to be implemented after an event and students who have already been exposed to traumatic stress or who are undergoing it receive the triggering event as an additional concern layered atop existing harm. However, similar measures implemented as part of an upper-grade curriculum designed to promote resilience and socioemotional skills may be prophylactic against traumatic stress experiences. Early childhood education practitioners respect and perceive that school is a group experience which orients the child to learning in a unique environment, and center a social-emotional curriculum (SEC) which actively teaches the skills to navigate the school experience, not only as a redress against harms which may occur outside the daily normal of school.

Resilience is the field of study which explores the mechanisms of survival and thriving through trauma and difficulty. Analogous to grit, persistence, determination, these characteristics help underscore the heart of resilience. In the clearest and most accessible terms, resilient people fall, but they don't give up. They get back up and work toward thriving. Elaine Miller-Karas defines resilience as "the ability to identify and use individual and collective strengths to live fully in the present moment and to thrive while managing the tasks of daily living," (Miller-Karas, 2015, p. 6). This skills-based definition provides the grounds for schools to develop curriculum to teach skills which support and comprise resilience, just as they teach knowledge and skills to function in other areas of human endeavor. The evidence for group learning of resilience supports community connection as a strong element in successful mitigation of trauma from traumatic community events or individual experiences. "Briefly stated, community psychologists share with field biologists the view that organisms live (i.e., survive, thrive, or decline) in interdependence with their environments," (Harvey, 2012, p. 2). Similarly, when tragedy struck the Utoya school in Norway, the impact of community connections in the recovery process was significant and positive two years after the traumatizing event. Although students' grades and memory were worse during the year after the trauma, they improved significantly the year after that. "The findings underscore the importance of keeping trauma-exposed students in school and providing support over time," (Strom et al., 2016, p. 6). The community resilience model (CRM) suggests that community interactions support neuroplasticity through the stimulation of new neuron connections throughout the brain. Miller-Karas suggests a holistic wellness component be incorporated in general to benefit all persons, particularly those who have experienced trauma. "In the immediate aftermath of natural and man-made disasters, it is difficult to assess who will be resilient and who will not. We believe wellness skills can greatly help those who have difficulty recovering from a traumatic event. For individuals who are naturally resilient, the wellness skills will be additional tools to enhance their resiliency," (Miller-Karas, 2015, p. 8).

Schools are part of citizenship and community membership training for young people and are present in some form in every society. Schools also serve as a community hub for neighborhoods, and adults with and without children hear and see one another frequently in the area around a school. With the advent of the ACE-study, schools are aware of children undergoing likely injury, either in or out of school, without a process for redress or harm reduction. If a school or any public institution introduces harm without redress, then it reduces its social "goodness" and becomes more likely perceived as a social ill, reducing its function to introduce and incorporate the shared social contract and ultimately contributing to a more fractured society. This harm is actively reduced in elementary school grades with a rigorous SEC which provides a socialized vocabulary within the school space and beyond for students to express, explain, and explore their emotional development.

As students perceive intensifying and myriad complexity during the maturation process, the need for a commensurately complex vocabulary increases, despite the lack of similar complex SEC. As students age, a rigorous school-based age-appropriate SEC seems indicated as a prophylactic against trauma and an enhancer of resilience in community processing. As all students are required to take an English class throughout high school until graduation, and social-emotional affect is embedded in the curriculum materials, English classes seem a natural hub for such a curriculum to be sited within the school. Other subjects such as social studies, mathematics, and elective classes also have significant potential to explore in these community-building roles.

I formed these concerns over my responsibility to introduce and discuss a school safety video however, the subsequent events of our school year made my original issue almost negligible. On Monday February 3rd 2020, at 3:30 in the afternoon, a drunk driver sped over 75 mph on the road next to our student parking lot and careened into our school's long-distance running team. Over two hundred students were present and witnessed the accident.

One student died at the scene, and three others were transported to a local hospital. One of these students died on February 4th, her death was announced over the PA system at school. The third lingered in a coma for two weeks and died in the ICU, and several other students are facing long recovery periods from their physical injuries. Our senior students are required to complete a CPR and first aid certification test prior to graduation, and our senior students had received their certification trainings during the last week of January, only a few days before the accident. Our students provided first aid, CPR, retrieved an unconscious victim from a nearby pond, secured the perpetrator and confiscated his keys. Although this is thankfully an unusual scenario, our students are absolutely a trauma-affected community of people, tied together by experience and response, and they took ownership of their own responses in the moment of emergent crisis to act as a community and strengthen each other as they could, where needed.

The next day, teachers were briefed in an early morning meeting, and were requested to help mediate the processing of the situation with our students. Although massive mental health resources were mobilized to assist us from the entire state, teachers were on the front lines, using student-centered knowledge and processing skills to assist our students and support our peers. We leveraged our community-building skills and relationships with students to provide structure, an emotional language for grief, and convey institutional 'permission' for grieving. The incident happened in our school, and affected each person in the school differently, but we all mourned and reacted in a community of people. As professional teachers and learners, we were called upon formally and informally to provide modeling of grief along with the other behaviors of adulthood, and help students map their process and skills for emotional processing as we do with other skills used in academics, collaboration, and citizenship.

“...we were called upon ... to provide modeling of grief along with the other behaviors of adulthood...”

The COVID-19 pandemic has added to the increase in online education and distance learning. System-wide, the distance between teacher and student is growing, resulting in student contact with fewer and fewer trusted adults in a position to provide resources and modeling for students. There are also implications for public safety in homes with ACES, as COVID-19 quarantines and other psychological and economic stressors have significantly increased negative effects in most American households. The dangers of these narrowing student horizons translate directly into a more homogenous world of “adulthood” for students. Diverse adult lifeways as modeled by teachers, administration, and staff in plural and inclusive school environments provide a language of the possible for students. If students do not experience modeling of plurality, they are less likely to have an ability to imagine differences in their own possible futures. Non-school communities frequently do not permit the formation of strong, plural, peer-based community structures. Each community comes fraught with its own dangers, and communities with unique characteristics do not substitute for one another. Students need meaningful contact with plural communities of adults and peers in order to develop a robust and complex understanding of how to be an adult. ¹⁴ High school students are social learners who need peer and adult modeling across a variety of modes of being as well as peer-to-peer interaction to process academic concepts and develop emotional health and resilience.

The role of upper grade students in their school community is profound. They share responsibilities for school function, take leadership roles which affect all learners, and assist adults in administrative tasks. Resonating back and forth between their initial receipt of information, adult and peer feedback, reconciliation and synthesis between the pluralities gives older students a way to craft and tell their own story of self as they grow into

adulthood with their fellows. The school community is a platform and environment that allows for safe exploration of that messy process, is changed by each subsequent class of students, and preserves the site-history of those maturation processes in the community. Throughout their lives, students will return to the area for special events, celebrations, mourning rites, and the school site triggers those coming of age memories for them and their peers.

In English classes, the stories we tell help connect students to the knowledge and experiences of the past. They help teachers deliver curriculum and explore the world through the eyes of others in different circumstances to promote academic learning, but also to increase connection with other people's experiences both near and far. The power of stories is by no means limited to stories told by the world to students, but also applies to those narratives shared by students to each other and the world. Teachers know students experience all the things adults do, but process at their level of socioemotional development. English teachers know the power of the written word and have the mandate to call upon and assist students in "thinking on the page," not just seeing written work as product, but also as process. As English classes necessarily and implicitly include writing, the opportunity to include a writing-based socioemotional curriculum is not only possible, but opportune. Just as the aims of education itself are not only vocational, the aims of writing education are not solely a method for better papers and emails but from the beginning of a powerful epistolary relationship with the self, and a potentially life changing process of cognition and recovery.

Students are not homogeneous, but all students want to belong to a community where they feel supported and can thrive in school and beyond. Using that natural community inclination to enact

a socioemotional resilience-building writing curriculum has the potential to expand engagement and promote trust-based relationships in the classroom and beyond. Adding the consideration of a structured social-emotional curriculum consideration in high school can help scaffold students' exposure and engagement with the adult world. Although no adult can completely shield a child from all harm, the known need for resilience-building serves as a clarion call across curriculum and community for all of us to do all we can to help. We owe it to our students to give them the tools they need to navigate the world's slings and arrows with courage, capability, and resilience.

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Memory of Baltimore, NCTE Conference 2019 (Photo credit: Jennifer Williams)

Book Recommendation: *Strategies That Work*

Amber McMath

Some professional books are a one-night stand, satisfying your initial craving, meeting the temporary need of a weak spot in your pedagogy. Or maybe just a sexy cover and clearance price? They soon find themselves wedged under your uneven keyboard as the solution to a more practical classroom need.

Some professional books develop into long-term relationships, signified by highlighting, underlining, notes in the margin. These are the books you squeeze into conversation, hoping everyone will concur, “Oh yes, what a crucial text for all practitioners.”

But only one professional book gets the final rose. This marriage-material book comes with lifelong vows. It is the steadfast extra 1.7 pounds in your bag. It has seen you through all the reading “programs,” that awful textbook adoption, a handful of principals, and every passing trend. At just the right moment, its words flow out of your mouth effortlessly because they’re buried deep in your teacher soul. It is your measure for every professional book forevermore. Colleagues joke that you’ll be buried with it, but you’re not laughing. This book is your canon.

Strategies That Work and I just celebrated our 8th anniversary. We commemorated the occasion with an intimate cover-to-cover re-read.

Obviously the S-word made me leery at first. I’d kicked to the curb plenty of *Strategy* books. As a new middle school reading teacher, I was desperate for my students to comprehend. I agreed to let a mutual friend set us up, and it was love-at-first-chapter. Harvey and Goudvis read my mind, spoke my language, and promised me answers. I was intrigued! Mid-paragraph I’d stop reading to open my lesson plans and make changes for the following day. I tested these strategies, cautious of being swept up in artificial short-term gains. What sorcery was this *Strategies That Work*?

- Explicitly teach students how to understand what they read.
- It’s crazy enough, it just might work.
- Spoiler: it worked.

The professional text is equal parts heartwarming teacher stuff, practical lesson plans, and solid problem/solution pedagogy, all topped with a heap of research. The book originally debuted in 2000. Thankfully it’s in its third and most glorious edition. These esteemed authors served as former teachers and now find themselves deeply rooted in the narrative that is best practices. In this book they challenge teachers to reexamine simple strategies that make the work of reading real and doable for any student. They format the book in three parts: the foundation of meaning, strategy lessons, and comprehension across the curriculum.

Part one is the manifesto, the tattooable material you’ll find yourself rereading on days your students unintentionally crush your spirits with, “I hate reading...Do we really have to read today?...I’m never going to need this anyway.” The opening chapter reframes reading as thinking. Reading is thinking. “Our kids need to be thinking whenever they read, listen, or view, and they need to recognize that thinking is what reading is all about” (Harvey & Goudvis, 2017, p. 5). After reading this I immediately made a giant *Reading is thinking!* banner for my classroom. When I confer with students as they read, they know I will ask, “What were you thinking about as you read today?” Harvey and Goudvis employ research as well as their own reflections on teaching to drive home the cruciality of this connection between reading and thinking.

They go on in part one: “So because kids are already thinking, what can we actually teach them when it comes to thinking? We can and must teach them *about* their thinking. We can teach them to do the following: Be aware of their thinking, Think strategically, Recognize the power of their own thinking” (Harvey & Goudvis, 2017, pp. 5-6). These three doctrines set the stage for the practicality of part two and three.

Practical is too mild an adjective. Efficacious? Masterful? Potent? Rather than just prescribing canned lessons, they offer seven chapters of sensible strategies for comprehending any text. They begin with a revelation that comes as a surprise to many students: readers talk to themselves while they read. What do they say? Cue the strategies!

- Activating, Connecting, Building: This reminds me of...
- Questioning: I wonder...
- Visualizing: I can picture...
- Inferring: I conclude...
- Determining Importance: It seemed important when...
- Summarizing: What just happened was...
- Synthesizing: I used to think...but now I think...

Each chapter focuses on a strategy that must be explicitly taught. In case you forget the importance of explicitly teaching comprehension strategies, you can return to chapter one for a hit over the head with all the research that supports reading is thinking, which means teachers are in the business of revealing to students the importance of having strategic thinking.

Harvey and Goudvis accompany these strategies with actual lessons they’ve used in the classroom. Their ideas are so applicable that you can take a picture book and chart they used with first graders and do it with your middle school students. The strategies know no age level or genre; they are for all!

Five stars, three cheers, two thumbs up, a standing ovation for *Strategies that Work*, a book aptly titled with a bold claim and the chops to back it up. May this review be a meet-cute to your professional text soulmate that’s sure to win your heart.

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Amber McMath teaches language arts at the Owasso Seventh Grade Center. Her husband and four-year-old find it difficult to ignore the stacks of books and piles of student papers around the house, but they love her anyway because she does the best voices for all the *Captain Underpants* characters. In the rare moments her mind is not lesson planning, it is writing a book about her mom.



Simple Beauty (Photo credit: Jennifer Williams)

The Availability of Rainbow (List) Stories in Elementary and Middle School Libraries:

An Exploration of One District

Adam Crawley and Jennifer Pulliam

Introduction

We – a former elementary school teacher and current literacy teacher educator (Adam) and a former middle school teacher and current elementary library media specialist (Jennifer) – are passionate about stories, a term we use broadly for a range of oral, written, and illustrated texts across formats and genres. Not only do we appreciate how various stories have enriched and continue to enrich our own lives, but we also know stories provide vital windows and mirrors (Bishop, 1990) for youth to see representations of themselves as well as learn about and develop empathy for others. While we value stories of various cultural groups – including but not limited to race, ethnicity, language, social class, dis/ability, religion and their intersections – we are particularly interested in stories depicting lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and/or queer (LGBTQ+) people. Publication of such stories for youth in the elementary (PreK-5) and middle grades (4-8) is increasing (Möller, 2014; Naidoo, 2012), and resources such as the Rainbow Book Lists curated by the American Library Association (ALA) annually showcase many currently released stories for readers to explore.

With media reporting various stakeholders' (e.g., parents, community members) support and pushback to LGBTQ+ stories in PreK-8 schools (e.g., CBC News, 2019; Schmidt, 2019) and knowing that educators frequently express concern about stakeholders' potential responses if such books are available and used (GLSEN, 2012; Meyer et al., 2019), we wondered which stories may already be available in Oklahoma schools. Specifically, we were curious about Tulsa Public Schools (TPS) – a district with which we're both connected; serves the second largest student population in the state; and whose nondiscrimination policy includes sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression as protected categories for employees, students, and members of the public (<https://www.tulsaschools.org/nds>). Thus, we

conducted a study guided by three research questions: 1) How many PreK-8 schools in TPS own Rainbow List books in their collection, and to what extent? 2) How many Rainbow List books are in the PreK-8 school library inventories? 3) Of the existing stories, which titles and representations are most prevalent?

Literature Review

Scholars advocate for including and reading LGBTQ+ stories in elementary and middle schools (Möller, 2020; Ryan & Hermann-Wilmarth, 2018), and there is a growing body of scholarship describing the actual use of such stories with youth in PreK-8 classrooms (e.g., Bentley & Souto-Manning, 2016; Crawley, 2020; Ryan & Hermann-Wilmarth, 2018; Schall & Kauffmann, 2003). However, there is a lack of these stories in PreK-8 schools writ large as reported by youth nationally (GLSEN, 2012; Kosciw et al., 2018) and Oklahoma specifically (GLSEN, 2019b). The shortage is further evidenced in school and classroom library inventory analyses. For example, Hardie (2011) listed eleven books depicting diverse (i.e., same-sex headed) families and searched for their existence in 58 elementary school libraries across New Zealand, finding only three of the titles existed and in only eight schools. Crisp and his colleagues (2016) analyzed the classroom library inventories of pre-kindergarten and Head Start sites in metropolitan Atlanta. They found that of 1,169 books across all classrooms combined, only one page in a single book was devoted “to families that include lesbian females or gay males (p. 35), and no book depicted transgender individuals. In contrast, 217 books depicted heterosexuality and 565 books had cisgender^[1] characters (p. 35-36).

¹Endnotes

^[1] Cisgender people are those whose gender identity aligns with the sex they were assigned at birth. The Trans Student Educational Resources website provides additional, helpful guidance about this and other terms: <https://www.transstudent.org/definitions>

Although additional studies detail the availability of specific LGBTQ+ stories in public libraries both in particular U.S. cities and abroad (e.g., Howard, 2005; Spence, 2000), limited current research explores PreK-8 public school libraries' collections in the U.S. Such studies are important not only to ascertain LGBTQ+ stories' availability in various contexts but also to help allay educators' hesitations about books they may want to include in their classrooms, not realizing they may already be available in their building. In addition, the scarcity of LGBTQ+ stories in library collections is concerning given that libraries – both school and community – are charged to promote academic freedom and avoid censorship (American Library Association, 2017; National Council of Teachers of English, 2019).

Many public schools and districts purport to serve all youth and their families. For example, mission and vision statements frequently emphasize valuing diversity; preparing students for a pluralistic society; and/or supporting students' academic, social, and emotional needs (Slate et al., 2008). Further, districts – such as TPS – increasingly include sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression in their non-discrimination policies for school communities. Similarly, although more limited in number, some states have also developed policies protecting LGBTQ+ individuals in schools (GLSEN, 2019a). The statements and policies of schools, districts, and states matter, and one place to see if and how inclusive statements and policies are being enacted is via the school library collection.

Theoretical Framework

Various critical, social justice frameworks informed our study. Relative to the metaphor of stories as mirrors (Bishop, 1990), culturally responsive pedagogy (Ladson-Billings, 1995) calls on educators – whether classroom teachers, school librarians, or others – to reflect, honor, and engage students' identities and lives in their teaching and resources. In connection to stories as windows (Bishop, 1990), culturally expansive pedagogy “builds from awareness of children's own cultural identities to consider points of view that go beyond their own” (Short

et al., 2018, p. 171). Providing representative stories is an initial but central component of such pedagogies. While the terms culturally responsive and expansive pedagogies are often used in conjunction to race and ethnicity, such practices can also be connected to additional cultural groups (e.g., Darrow, 2013; Lundgren & Lundy-Ponce, n.d.).

Specific to sexual orientation and gender, queer theory also informs our inquiry. Queer theory argues that inclusion is not enough (Tierney & Dilley, 1998). Instead, heteronormative institutions need to be questioned, challenged, and disrupted (Sullivan, 2003). While having LGBTQ+ stories in school libraries may seem to emphasize inclusion, such presence can be a vital, initial step to disrupt schools as heteronormative sites. Further, our analysis of which titles and representations are most prevalent, if any, explores how particular representations – even within those that are LGBTQ+ inclusive – are reinforced. This analytic focus connects to queer theory's concerns about privileging dominant groups and normativity (Sullivan, 2003; Warner, 2012).

Methods

Our data sources included the ALA Rainbow Book Lists, book vendors' online catalogues, and the online library catalogues for all TPS elementary and middle schools.

As stated on the ALA's Rainbow Books website, “the Rainbow Book List presents an annual bibliography of quality books with significant and authentic GLBTQ^[2] content, which are recommended for people from birth through eighteen years of age” (glbtrt.ala.org/rainbowbooks/about). We used this source to develop our corpus because the stories were vetted by a committee. In addition, many of the books are recognized as exemplars in scholarship (Möller, 2014; Naidoo, 2012; Ryan

²⁰ This acronym is written on the Rainbow Book List website. We use the acronym LGBTQ+ as it's the more current acronym. Using “L” as the acronym's first letter is responsive to the historical and frequent privileging of gay (often white, middle-upper class) men, thus foregrounding the importance and contributions of lesbian women. The “+” acknowledges the many ways others might identify relative to sexual orientation and/or gender such as two-spirit, pansexual, or non-binary.

& Hermann-Wilmarth, 2018) and/or received honors (e.g., Lambda Literary Award, Stonewall Book Award). Further, lists curated by reputable sources often inform school librarians' purchasing (Mardis, 2016; Rickman, 2015). When launched in 2008, the Rainbow List included books published since 2005. We used all Rainbow Lists through 2020. Thus, our corpus included 2005-2019 publications.

We documented all Rainbow List books designated in the board books, picturebooks, and middle grades categories. In addition, we included books from other categories (e.g., young adult, graphic novels) if the site designated a PreK-8 intended audience. For example, *Girl from Mars* (Bach, 2008) was specified for seventh grade and above, so we included it in our list. This initial step resulted in 308 titles.

“...we qualitatively explored representations across the most prevalent stories ... to identify which representations – if any – appeared more often than others.”

Next, we searched the 308 titles' availability through the district's three permitted book vendors (Follett, Permabound, and Scholastic). If a book was available from one or more vendors, it remained on our list. This reduced our list to 263 titles. We then searched the online catalogues of the 63 elementary and middle schools in the district (50 elementary schools and 13 middle schools). In a spreadsheet, we listed – per book – the number of copies per school. We documented all copies, including translated versions and alternate formats (e.g., e-books, CDs). Translated and alternate formats were rare, and we noted these instances in our spreadsheet.

We calculated totals of each title across the district as well as the number of Rainbow List stories per school. Realizing that some schools may have multiple copies of a particular story, we also calculated the number of unique stories per school and unique schools across the district. For example, Jennifer's school had three copies of *And Tango Makes Three* (Richardson

& Parnell, 2005). Of the 25 Rainbow List stories in her library collection, three of these were the same book. Similarly, there were 23 copies of *Tango* across the district, but three of those copies were in Jennifer's school. By calculating unique stories per school and unique schools across the district, we determined that Jennifer's school had 14 unique stories (*Tango* and 13 other stories) and that 20 unique schools included *Tango* in their collection. For this study, we counted a story regardless of its current library checkout status. Analyzing the circulation of LGBTQ+ stories can be problematic (Downey, 2013) and was beyond our scope.

Following the quantitative analysis, we qualitatively explored representations across the most prevalent stories relative to format, genre, LGBTQ+ focus (i.e., sexual orientation and/or gender identity), characterization, and other aspects to identify which representations – if any – appeared more often than others.

Findings

Our methods led to results answering our three research questions. We describe those in the subsections below.

School-Specific Results

Relative to our first research question, all 63 schools owned at least one Rainbow List story. Of the 63 schools, 49 owned multiple copies of at least one title, totaling 1,242 books across the district. When considering the total number of books, elementary schools averaged 10.5 books (1 to 36 books range) while middle schools averaged 55.3 books (13 to 129 books range). The increase of titles in middle schools compared to elementary schools is not surprising considering how some may perceive LGBTQ+ topics as inappropriate for, unrelated to, and/or more controversial to share with younger children (Meyer et al., 2019) – stances with which, we should note, we strongly disagree.

When considering unique titles per school, four schools had only one title. Alternately, 48 schools included five or more unique titles. When disaggregating the data by elementary and middle schools, elementary schools

averaged 7.1 unique titles per school (ranging from 1 to 19 titles) while middle schools averaged 38.7 unique titles per school (with a range of 7 to 110 titles). While the gap between the average number of Rainbow List stories in elementary and middle schools may appear closer when considering unique titles compared to total copies, the elementary average remained 18% of middle school collection averages. In other words, middle schools – on average – had nearly five times as many

Rainbow List books as elementary schools.

Book-Specific Results

Relative to the second and third research questions, 185 of the 263 Rainbow List titles existed across the schools. When considering how many schools owned a particular title, six titles were most prevalent. Table 1 lists the titles along with other representational attributes.

Table 1: Rainbow Books Most Prevalent Across the Schools

Book	Format	Genre	Primary LGBTQ+ Focus	# of Schools	% of Total Schools
Drama (Telgemeier, 2012)	Graphic novel	Realistic fiction	Sexual orientation	50	79%
Magnus Chase and the Gods of Asgard: The Hammer of Thor (Riordan, 2016)	Chapter book	Fantasy	Gender	41	65%
The Hidden Oracle (Riordan, 2016)	Chapter book	Fantasy	Sexual orientation	35	56%
Red: A Crayon's Story (Hall, 2015)	Picturebook	Fantasy	Gender (implicit)	26	41%
Ivy Aberdeen's Letter to the World (Blake, 2018)	Chapter book	Realistic fiction	Sexual orientation	22	35%
The Cardboard Kingdom (Sell, 2018)	Graphic novel	Fantasy	Sexual orientation and gender	22	35%

As we show in Table 1, *Red: A Crayon's Story* is the only picturebook among the most prevalent stories. While the other books listed are more explicitly LGBTQ+, *Red* – a story about a red crayon who can only color blue – is more implicit and can be interpreted as a metaphor for gender identity and expression.

Although less prevalent than other chapter books and graphic novels, Table 2 lists additional picturebooks most prevalent across the district.

Table 2: Additional Most Prevalent Picturebooks Across the Schools

Book	Genre	Primary LGBTQ+ Focus	Type of Protagonist	# of Schools	% of Total Schools	% of Elementary Schools
And Tango Makes Three (Richardson & Parnell, 2005)	Creative nonfiction	Sexual orientation	Animal	20	32%	40%
Julián is a Mermaid (Love, 2018)	Realistic fiction	Gender	Human	11	17%	22%
A Family is a Family is a Family (O'Leary, 2016)	Realistic fiction	Sexual orientation	Human	6	10%	12%
In Our Mothers' House (Polacco, 2009)	Realistic fiction	Sexual orientation	Human	6	10%	12%
Dogs Don't Do Ballet (Kemp, 2010)	Fantasy	Gender	Animal	5	8%	10%
Pride: The Story of Harvey Milk (Sanders, 2018)	Nonfiction	Sexual orientation	Human	5	8%	10%

Unlike *Red*, each of these picturebooks more explicitly represents LGBTQ+ characters or topics. However, the second most prevalent picturebook to *Red* (*And Tango Makes Three*) also includes non-human focal characters. As indicated in Table 2, books with human depictions (i.e., *Julián is a Mermaid*) were nearly half as prevalent as *Red* and *Tango*, thus making realistic LGBTQ+ representations less available to youth. In addition, the majority of picturebooks in Table 2 involve narratives centered on families, thus reinforcing and privileging homonormative representations aligned with mainstream values rather than increasingly queer representations.

Discussion and Implications

We are heartened every school library in TPS included a Rainbow List story and that 185 of the 263 titles were in inventories. That said, the results – whether one or 100+ books per school – are low and pale in comparison to the thousands of books in library collections. For example, while Jennifer’s school at the time of the study had 25 Rainbow List books (with 14 of those being unique titles), her entire collection included 11,132 physical books (with 9,507 being unique titles). Thus, Rainbow List stories were less than 1% of the collection, and her school was one of the larger Rainbow List book owners compared to other elementary schools. While we realize LGBTQ+ stories other than those from the Rainbow Lists may exist in school library collections, such additional books would be undoubtedly slim in number. In addition, we recognize how the stories we found most prevalent across the libraries privilege and reinforce particular representations, and further inquiry into the prevalence of particular genres, formats (e.g., board book, picturebook, chapter book, graphic novel), and intended audience age is needed. All of these representations warrant further critical analysis.

Despite the limited amount of Rainbow List books across TPS, we assert the presence of LGBTQ+ stories in elementary and middle school libraries is a vital step for including future texts and their direct use by teachers and librarians. This study provides a snapshot of one school district at a particular time. However, the

results could help TPS librarians assess their collections in comparison to peer schools. Our methods can also be replicated by other districts – both in Oklahoma and beyond – to assess their library inventories, especially as a means to ascertain if their inventories reflect their inclusive-affirming goals and policies along with providing students vital windows and mirrors. Additional quantitative and qualitative research of districts’ collections would be beneficial, as would exploring school librarians’ purchasing decisions, use and promotion of texts, and experiences with stakeholder response, if any.

Knowing LGBTQ+ stories are already available in elementary and middle school libraries in Tulsa is important because it informs others that such stories can and do exist in PreK-8 schools, including in the U.S. South³¹. Educators who want, but hesitate, to include LGBTQ+ stories in their contexts may benefit from knowing they are already available as evidenced here. Knowing which stories are – and are not – already available also informs future library collection growth both in quantity of books and the types of representations included. Such inquiries help educators of all types be increasingly responsive to and expansive of their school communities.

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³¹ Sources categorize the states in U.S. regions differently. For this article, we use the following source to identify the region in which Oklahoma is located: <https://williamsinstitute.law.ucla.edu/lgbtdivide/#/ethnicity>

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Spring has Sprung (Photo credit: Jennifer Williams)

Book Recommendation: *March On, Girl*

Eril Hughes

March On, Girl by Melba Patillo Beals. New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2018. 197 pages. [This novel on the 2020 Sequoyah Intermediate List is a prequel to the best-selling *Warriors Don't Cry* (1994), which focuses on the author's experiences as a member of the Little Rock Nine who became the first African American students to attend Central High School in Little Rock, Arkansas, in 1957. The Little Rock Nine were awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor in 1999.]

Shouts of "Go home to Africa" greeted Melba Patillo and eight other African American teens as they walked up the steps of the all-white Central High School in Little Rock, Arkansas, in 1957.

The Little Rock Nine, as they came to be called later, punched a hole in segregation. This short walk must have lasted an eternity for the Little Rock Nine, but the effect of this one event also had a long-lasting effect on Little Rock and on the nation.

March On, Girl recounts how Melba grew up to become a person with the moral conviction and bravery to become a member of the Little Rock Nine. At an early age, Melba wanted something different from Little Rock: she remembers the hours she spent in her red wagon wishing that the stork would whisk her away to a safe place. The stork made a mistake and put her in the wrong place (54)! When she was nine, she saw her younger brother Conrad look angrily at the Santa in a department store, because somehow he wasn't good enough to sit in the lap of a white Santa (120).

These formative experiences cause young Melba to "wish that the white people would disappear in a puff of smoke somewhere forever" (7). Miss Lisa was one of Grandma India's employers who helped create this statement. When only five years old, Melba is

locked into a pantry for hours because this "lady" of the house did not want Melba to be seen by white visitors. Then at age 14, Melba has a narrow escape from assault by KKK members. These events, which helped build her conviction to right wrongs, will stick in your memory after you finish this book.

Melba's dreams and grit are also memorable and poignant. Long before that critical year of 1957, Melba has an interest in Central High School. Not only was it a magnificent building to her, but there is also one entire floor devoted to music education. She wanted to sing in musicals there and learn to play the xylophone and the organ. Little did she realize how Central High School would be a part of her life in 1957.

Melba is not the only memorable character in this novel. Melba's devout grandma always lovingly encouraged her as she grew up, proclaiming that Melba was "like a baby warrior" and told her to "march on," as the title of this work commands (4). However, it was Grandma's heart-warming and patient comments to an often angry Melba that kept her grandchild stable in a world surrounded by African American restrictions such as the signs reading "whites only" at the lunch counters.

For some readers, this book can be an impactful look into an important time in American history, while other readers will reflect back on memories they share with Melba of the times when two races walked together up the school stairs for the first time. Don't miss the experience that this book provides with its historical insights into a pivotal change in education! The fact that Melba is an inspiringly brave character who played a significant role in this change and bravely made a difference certainly adds to the book's appeal. Some books are unforgettable, and some should not be forgotten. This book is both.

Dr. Eril Hughes, a long-time advocate of Young Adult literature, is a professor of English at East Central University in Ada, Oklahoma.



Dewdrop Necklace (Photo credit: Jennifer Williams, 2020)

Please, Apologize to Me

Sarah J. Donovan

“What is your favorite game?” I ask as we begin Thursday’s English class.

“Fortnite.”

“What? I don’t have a cell phone. Soccer. It’s the *only* game.”

“Does four-square count? I used to love playing that when we *had* recess -- before we got to junior high.”

“And what are your favorite snacks?” I ask.

“Takis -- I love the hot chips.”

“Yeah, any kind of chips-- salt, for sure.”

For the past two week’s students have been reading novels with their book groups that depict various immigration experiences. In *A Step from Heaven* (Na), Young Ju and her family come to America from South Korea. The memoir *Of Beetles and Angels* (Asgedom) is Mawi’s remarkable journey from a refugee camp to Harvard. A verse novel, *Inside Out and Back Again* (Lai) is about Hà, a girl who has only known Saigon’s markets, traditions, and friends but to flee the Vietnam War, boards a ship to America. From El Salvador to Chicago, *A Journey of the Sparrows* (Buss) follows Julia and her brothers Oscar and Tomas’ journey to escape violence but must live in secret. In *Lupita Manana* (Beatty) and *La Linea* (Jaramillo), characters cross from Mexico to America. Kimberly Change and her mother emigrate from Hong Kong to Brooklyn in *Girl in Translation* (Kwok). By day, Kimberly is an exceptional student, but at night she must work in a Chinatown sweatshop with her mother to make ends meet. Celiane, in *Behind the Mountains* (Danticat), keeps a journal to chronicle the stark contrast between her rural, mountain village bombings in Port-au-Prince, and poverty in New York City.

In class today, my plan is to build on the lives of the students and their reading experiences to

explore an immigration term: acculturative stress, stressors associated with an immigrant confronted with and trying on values and customs different from their own, keeping their own culture while they are navigating a new culture. Because students are reading different books, we will watch an excerpt from a short film, *Immersion* by Richard Levien, and discuss acculturative stress with this shared “text.”

I explain to the twenty-five junior high students in my class that I am asking these questions because they relate to our study of immigration. The places we eat and shop, the holidays we celebrate with friends, the games we play, the language we use to have conversations are all part of a culture. This culture, if it is what we’ve always known, is within our comfort zone because we have become accustomed to have access to certain places, products, routines, and experiences.

And then I shift the conversation.

“Now, what would have to happen in your life, in our country, for you and your family to move to another country — to migrate to a very different culture and abandon your comfort zone?” I pause, knowing that some of my students or their parents have had to do just that. “People are pushed from or pulled to a place with different foods, clothing, homes, holidays — and, of course, languages. Whether it is fleeing war or accessing opportunities, immigrants are immersed in a new culture sometimes with no support or guidance in how to navigate, and this can cause stress — *acculturative* stress. They need to find ways to *assimilate* or fit in while still honoring their own culture. Let’s talk about stress. What does stress feel like? What does stress do to you?” I ask.

“Headaches.”

“My heart races.”

“I get a twitch in my chin.”

“I get irritated with everyone.”

“I shut down.”

I listen carefully and note all the eighth grade heads nodding and a few heads down tolerating my questions. I explain that I tend to shut down when I feel too stressed and that I’ve been immersed in another culture a few times.

“Once, I went to Israel and stayed with a family who spoke Arabic. They not only spoke a very different language, but *how* they communicated was very animated and loud. Sometimes what I thought was arguing was just a conversation about tea, and in some places we visited, the women had to wear a scarf over their hair. I observed carefully and did my best to fit in — doing what I saw the women do. But I was stressed. And over winter break, I am going to Iceland. Just thinking about the language, food, and even bathroom differences makes me a little stressed,” I say trying to offer examples of acculturative stress.

I see heads nodding, so I walk around the room with sticky notes and ask students to write, privately, if they have experienced acculturative stress or if they can recall a time the character in their novel had, whichever they feel comfortable thinking about.

“I hope she doesn’t come back from Iceland,” Sergio mumbles after I place a sticky note on his desk. (All names are pseudonyms and dialogue is reconstructed.)

And then I hear Roberto reply, “Me, too.” Roberto catches Sergio’s eye, and they smile at one another. They crumble their sticky notes and shoot them toward the blue recycle bin near the door. One lands in. One doesn’t.

“Sergio and Roberto,” I say in a strained whisper. “Please go into the hallway.”

As Sergio and Roberto quickly stand and depart, I continue with my lesson about acculturative stress but can feel my heart racing and my voice beginning to quiver. I walk to my laptop and ready the clip of *Immersion*, but all I can think about is Sergio and Roberto and what I am going to say in the hallway.

I press play, turn off the lights, take a deep breath, and go into the hallway to talk to Sergio and Roberto. Only I don’t really talk. I don’t ask them what’s wrong or what’s happening with them today. I don’t invite a conversation as some teachable moment.

“Please, apologize to me. Please,” I begin with a quiver in my voice.

“I’m sorry,” Sergio says, looking at the carpet. Roberto is turned away from me, kicking at the wall with his brilliantly white Converse.

What could he say? He has a teacher standing in front of him who has all the power. The tears are coming, and the boys noticed -- how scary must that be for two thirteen year old boys to see their old teacher cry. I can’t stand in the hallway another second without losing it, so I return to the classroom, which is dark because of the film, so no one can see my flushed cheeks and red eyes.

I try to pull myself together as I watch an excerpt from the film *Immersion*. The movie tells the story of Moisés, a Spanish speaking immigrant in the US, who has been immersed into the public school system of which the target language of instruction is English. Moises, the main character, is about to take a state test in math, only he can’t read any of the word problems because he has just arrived in California from Mexico and doesn’t speak or read English. The school has just moved from a bilingual program to an immersion program for their English Language Learners. Moises uses his dictionary to write a note to his teacher asking for the test in Spanish. His math teacher recognizes Moises’s math skills and asks her principal for the test Spanish, but he refuses. Moises continues to study his math, carries his dictionary everywhere he goes, and tries to join in with his peers in a game of kickball, only to find out the rules change daily. Another student notices Moises’ frustration and suggests Moises skip the test by asking to go to the bathroom and then sneaking out to go get some ice cream. (You can watch the film to see what Moises chooses.)

As I watched that film, I almost couldn’t believe the irony. I like to think my classroom is a safe

space, that I offer support and encouragement to every student hoping they will eventually feel our classroom to be like a home of sorts. But despite my efforts, there are students who still feel like unwelcome guests in the world of reading I create. They reject the work, and they reject me. And in this case, I validated what Sergio and Roberto thought about our class and me by unwelcoming them.

I ask the students to discuss their film sticky notes with a shoulder partner as I bring my laptop into the hallway for Sergio and Roberto. I want them to see the film. I actually chose this film because of Sergio, knowing how much he prefers listening to reading. They are sitting on the carpet now, after ten minutes of being in the hallway.

“This is the film I wanted to share with you today. I hope you like it,” I say as I set the laptop on the carpet between them. They are sitting right where I stood moments before, in my tear puddle. I don’t make eye contact, but as I turn away, the boys scoot beside one another and start the recording. I stand in the doorway. I see students on both sides sprawled on the carpet. Some are reading their novels, some trading sticky notes, one eating Taxis, and two on their bellies watching *Immersion*.

The boy with the ice cream advice in the short film learned to cope with his acculturative stress by avoiding, sneaking out, finding alternatives like ice cream (who wouldn’t prefer ice cream to a state test). Sergio and Roberto, well, they resisted with negative comments that day, but generally, their acculturative stress manifests as avoidance, anxious laughter, and class disruption.

“...for so many more of our students, we represent a country that has rejected them at some point in life...”

As English teachers, we embody all that is English, but the connotation of that word, that symbol, depends on each student’s past experiences with reading and English class. For some students, we represent peace, discovery, and joy, but for so many more of our students,

we represent a country that has rejected them at some point in life. We represent a place into which they were immersed without support, made to feel dumb or slow. We represent that person who put a number or letter on their ability and then asked them to sit still with a book with muddled symbols. We represent that dreaded logging of reading time, red marks on their papers, big zeros or “F’s” scrawled next to their names. We represent an impossible or unappealing way of being in school and beyond.

I was wrong to banish Sergio and Roberto from my classroom for those 20 minutes, and maybe it was wrong to show them my hurt, to ask them to apologize to me when I was the one who was out of line. The classroom door was essentially an immigration wall that I built that day. I had work to do in helping students see their place at the metaphorical table, so I began with an apology to each of them.

The next day, students had their immigration book group discussions. I joined Roberto’s group and read with them to clarify the ending of *La Linea*. Roberto helped explain a few Spanish phrases to me. He translated the phrase “canas,” and I showed him my gray hair. While Sergio was writing his group discussion reflection, I kneeled beside his desk to tell him that I was sorry for removing him from class and should have handled it privately. He accepted my apology and said, “I’m sorry, too. This class is actually fun. We ate chips during our book group.”

The immigration unit was an opportunity for every class member to learn about the social forces that push and pull us out of the lives we have known and, beyond politics, the very real ways human beings navigate the process of holding on to their home culture while adjusting to new values and customs. In many ways, it is about belonging, and so many of our students feel like outsiders in America, in our schools, in our classrooms. We know words hurt and have the power to peel back your protective layers to expose your heart and even old wounds of failure and insecurity. Let some of that pain spill onto the already stained carpeting in your school. It will blend in, just not at the expense of our students’ hearts. The hurt may be a sign that we need to rethink plans or be more responsive

than reactive. When students show their stress in words, apathy, anger, avoidance, disruption -- they need us in ways we may not have been trained as an English teacher. I was at a trauma training recently where the facilitator shared this mnemonic: QTIP, quit taking it personally. Sometimes resentment toward teachers is a form of acculturative stress, and sometimes it is deserved. Look at the situation and see what part is external acculturative stress and what part must we own and do better.

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Winter Wonderland (Photo Credit: Jennifer Williams, 2019)

The Best Stories

Chong Lor

Stories are vital to the English Language Arts curriculum. They are more than just words on a page. Each letter, syllable, and line encompass life lessons that the characters transfer from the page to the reader. Students need to read and learn about *The Tragedy of Romeo & Juliet* to understand how a play so old can still transcend time and remain relevant today. Students need to read and learn about *The Odyssey*, so they can understand how a common man can overcome the insurmountable odds I see my students face every day in my classroom, they will face once they leave my classroom, and they can overcome due to what I give them in my classroom. Sometimes, the best stories are *not* the ones we read, but they are the ones we create.

Creating stories help create authenticity in the classroom. My students get their first chance at creating authenticity by writing a Narrative Essay. I give them my example, so they can learn about my struggles and accomplishments. They type up *their* essays that pertain to *their* struggles and accomplishments and email them to me when they are finished.

Teaching is not a job. Teaching is a profession. As a teacher, I am expected to be a professional with my students at all times. The line gets blurred whenever I teach, for I have found that teaching is so personal at times. Sharing my own essay about my own struggles and accomplishments is personal. It allows my students to see me, not the teacher, in a different light. When I read their Narrative Essays, it allows me to see *them*, not the students, in a better light. They see a teacher who is not always right, and they see a teacher who struggles and perseveres just like they do. I see students who may not always be as passionate about the English Language Arts as I am, but they are passionate about other things. They should be. The stories we create and share with one another allow us to be authentic with one another: these stories are the best ones.

In a world where we get bombarded with images that may not always represent life accurately, it is important that teachers be as authentic with their students as much as possible. Our classrooms may be the only place where students engage with authenticity. Creating stories and sharing them with one another allow us to be authentic. When we create our own stories with conviction, we not only teach, but we inspire.

Mr. Chong Lor is scheduled to teach in South Korea in February. He plans to teach ESL to children in the Korean public school system and leave his footprint there as he continues his odyssey.



Oklahoma Teacher Walkout
(Photo credit: Jennifer Williams, 2018)

The Oklahoma Teacher Walkout, as Told Through Things I Learned

Julie Dawkins

1. I learned the way to the Capitol:

how Lincoln Boulevard shoots straight to the bronze
gleaming atop the dome, practically an invitation. I learned
how to jaywalk across four lanes of traffic
and where to park—a couple blocks away on grass
amongst cars painted in support.

2. I learned that some years the Arts Festival arrives

twice. Once with sculptures and oils, the scent of fried food simmering
low with the photography and live music;
this time it arrived with lawn chairs and bullhorns. The white
tarps hiding the construction on the Capitol building that
those within refused to apply to the education department
acted as background for the canvases of posterboard
bought by teachers for their overcrowded classrooms,
catchy puns and Mary Fallin's face pasted
upon Toy Tyke cars. Protests hummed in brassy notes as
the band kids and former band kids-turned directors gathered, *we're
not gonna take it, no, we ain't gonna take it, we're not gonna take it
anymore.*

3. I learned my state districts; I learned I am scared of

confrontation, even with state reps who vow to never raise
taxes and who with a general aura of condescension preach
consolidation and procedure. He left us to the overpowering
scent of lemon and an end table of thank you cards, signed by
constituents grateful for taxes left low. I learned regret at
things left unsaid; I learned term limits and reelection dates.

4. I learned the kindness of people. Free hot chocolate on the

days where frigidity huddled the masses tighter into
scarves; free sno cones on the days a week later when the sun
beat into the grass and shorts too short for school dress code
dotted the lawns. Sandwiches
given out, candy sold by kids. Voter registration booths.

5. I learned numbers. SB1023; \$5 hotel tax,

\$800 million in funding, 72 Republicans, 27 Democrats,

day 1, 2, 3, 9,

“as long as it takes”

49th in education

49th

49th

Thank God for Mississippi.

Julie Dawkins is a freshman at the University of Oklahoma and the 2019 National Student Poet for the Southwest Region of the United States. Her poetry has been awarded nationally in the Scholastic Art and Writing Competition, and she is an alum of the Oklahoma Summer Arts Institute for creative writing. Julie believes writing can change the world for the better, and she wants to be a part of that change however she can.

Imaginative Vocabulary

Terry Phelps, Ph.D.

“A baseball player has to lower his body to slide into a base, and *abase* means to lower the body.” I still remember this sentence from one of my high school students more than forty years ago as a mnemonic aid for remembering one of our vocabulary words. Students relished opportunities to invent mnemonics. Here are other sentences I remember from those students:

- Someone who gets a bash on the head is confused; *abashed* means confused.
- If you put bait on a hook and put it in the water, the bait will lessen as a fish eats it; *abate* means to lessen.
- Instead of going around a river, you cross a bridge to shorten the distance you travel; *abridge* means to shorten.

How do I remember these after four decades? I guess the mnemonics worked, huh? Actually, this was the final step in a process I used in class for a dozen or so vocabulary words per week, tapping students’ imaginations instead of the standard rote memory. Let’s look at the whole process.

The first step is to give the students each word in sentences that enable them to infer the meaning from context. For example, ask what *abase* means in the following sentences:

- The nun humbled or abased herself before the crucifix.
- The knight would abase himself before the king, then rise after being knighted with a sword.
- She kneeled and bowed her head to abase herself.
- He abased himself like a wilted flower.

When students determine that *abase* means to lower, the teacher can make the process metacognitive by asking how they figured it out so they can repeat the process with future words. (If you didn’t already know the term *metacognitive*, could you figure it out from the context of the previous sentence?) Discussion

should lead students to see that context may provide synonyms, antonyms, definitions, and similes that reveal a word’s meaning.

The exercise brings to a conscious level the contextual process that everyone has been using to learn words since early childhood. Likely a very small percentage of anyone’s vocabulary comes from looking up words in a dictionary. An article by William Bintz citing considerable research says, “Vocabulary learning is a continual process of encountering new words in meaningful and comprehensible contexts. . . .the popular practice of requiring students to find definitions of words and write those words into sentences before reading appears to have little impact on the word knowledge and language use” (43). So why not tap into the way we naturally acquire new words?

The most enjoyable, creative part of the process, though, is having the class invent mnemonics. Some words lend themselves more readily to mnemonics, such as the *a* words above. But sometimes the most difficult are the most creative and memorable. For example, after considerable pondering of the word *truculent*, one student cracked up the class with this mnemonic: “A big guy loans me his truck, and I accidentally wreck it. I call him on the phone and say, ‘I wrecked that *truck you lent* me.’ He might be truculent.”

This collaborative approach gives all students opportunities to create, regardless of their skills or areas of interest or knowledge.

Finally, instead of writing definitions, have students write their own sentences using words in context, reinforcing the meaning and tapping into their imaginations. Then it makes sense to assess by giving matching tests with a list of the words to fill in blanks in sentences with context clues. Another test option would be to have students compose their own sentences with context clues.

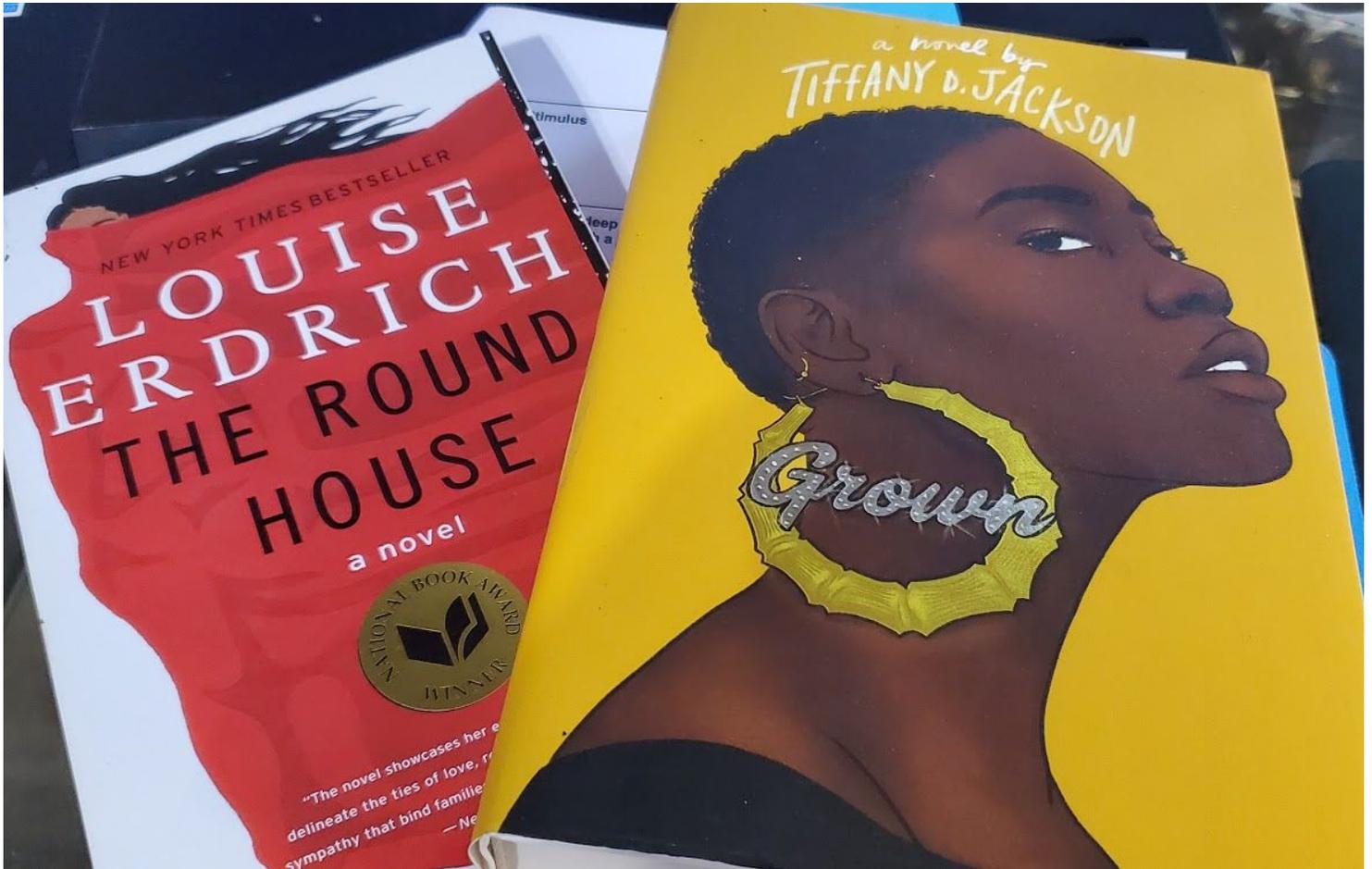
The ultimate test, of course, is to see if students use the vocabulary words in their papers, discussions, and conversations. Entering our school building one windy day, I was elated when a student grinned and flaunted two words we'd covered earlier in the year: "Hey Mr. P,

your coiffure is askew."

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Book Gifted by New Online Friends (Photo Credit: Michelle Waters, 2020)

Visualization While Reading: A Review of the Comprehension Strategy

Dr. Jennie Hanna

Reading comprehension is a complex, linguistic, cognitive ability, which makes it difficult to not only understand but teach (Horowitz-Kraus, Vannest & Holland, 2012). This may be why most reading strategies focus on text-based processing as opposed to visualizing while reading (De Koning & van der Schoot, 2013). Even though it may be difficult to teach, studies show the ability to visualize while reading outweighs the effort needed to teach it.

Visualization – the ability to create pictures in the brain based upon written or spoken words – is one of many strategies to aid in comprehension. Gambrell and Bales (1986) expand this definition to include the ability to organize and store new mental images to form or draw conclusions from later. Despite the fact students are consistently surrounded by visual images in movies, television, video games, computers, and cell phones, most are passive consumers, which does not necessarily translate into the development of visualizing while reading (Gorman & Eastman, 2010; Hibbin & Rankin-Erickson, 2003).

Visualization is key to making the learning experience more dynamic and transformative, but teachers should not take for granted that visualization is a strategy students automatically possess (Manning, 2002; Wilson, 2012). As such, this is a strategy that needs to be introduced at a young age and consistently modeled for students during reading to help aid in understanding and comprehension throughout their education.

A Theoretical Look at Visualization

A few theories have been developed to illustrate the importance of visualization, but none has been more cited by researchers than dual-coding theory (Paivio, 1971; Sadoski, McTigue & Paivio, 2012). Dual-Coding Theory (DCT) explains that both verbal and nonverbal cognition are represented and processed in different but interconnected subsystems (Gambrell & Jawirz, 1993). While the verbal system deals with language and is ordered a

logical manner with sequential processing, the nonverbal system focuses on the representation and processing of objects and events and is organized in a more holistic manner. According to Paivio (1991), both subsystems are capable of functioning independently of one another, but they can also work side-by-side, influencing one another. To illustrate, when one hears or reads the words hot dog, they can verbalize what it is, such as something eaten in a bun and served at baseball games, but can also produce nonverbal pictures including olfactory images concerning the way hot dogs smell or contextual visual images that relate to personal experiences eating hot dogs (Hibbing and Rankin-Erickson, 2003). These responses – both verbal and nonverbal – can happen independently of one another or at the same time according to DCT.

Beyond DCT, Wittrock's Theory of Generative Learning and Rosenblatt's Transactional Theory have helped to provide insight into the roles imagery and visualization play in comprehension (Gambrell & Jawitz, 1993). Under the Theory of Generative Learning, imagery aids comprehension as the reader connections prior knowledge to text through mental visualization. Likewise, Transactional Theory looks at the relationship between the reader and the text but instead focuses on how the reader plays an active role in their own comprehension as they live through the experiences of the characters in the text. In this sense, the visualization arises from the students placing themselves in the context of the story within their own mind and imagination.

Each of these theories provides some insights on how imagery relates to the process of reading comprehension. That meaning from literature is not always what is literally printed in the text, but a result of the "constructive processes that the reader brings to bear on the message" (Gambrell & Jawitz, 1993, p. 266). As such, it is clear to see that these theories, and the research that has utilized them, seek to better explain the ways that readers respond to literature in order to comprehend it.

Visualization as a reading-level dependent skill

Learning how to better visualize while reading can be highly beneficial to students not only in terms of academics but in life beyond school. However, research also shows this strategy comes easier for some students more than others because good readers naturally respond to the text and adjust their comprehension strategies to suit their needs (Gorlewski, 2009).

Beyond reading level, there are other important factors that can affect a student's ability to visualize while reading. Gambrell and Jawitz (1993) state the construction of mental images activates prior knowledge about the text. While this can help some students master visualization, this can be extremely problematic to those students who don't have much prior knowledge to reflect upon. Manning (2003) echoes this sentiment, stating that a lack of background knowledge can hinder their ability to visualize during reading. This means that teachers need to use this skill in conjunction with engagement and offer experiences during the reading instruction.

These findings all illustrate how a student's reading-level can impact their ability to visualize as a part of reading comprehension, so this skill is a must within the classroom to help students find success in reading and reading comprehension.

Different application beyond reading comprehension

While visualization is an important strategy to aid literature comprehension, it is not the sole reason why mastery of this skill is important. Being able to use mental imagery is vital because it helps to aid in the engagement of students. According to Park (2012), visualization during reading is something that can connect students in a social way as they share while reading. As the world continues to become more diverse and multicultural, any way a teacher can help to bridge the gap between students is always a plus.

Pressley et al. (1989) points out that there are two different approaches to constructing images:

representationally, where students create an image that directly matches the description, and mnemonically, which is used when the literature doesn't lend to easy representational imaging so our brains seek connections between previous understanding to create a mental image. For example, in the sentence "Mr. Woloshyn put the flyer on the windshield of the antique car," one can create a representational image for just about everything in the sentence, except for Mr. Woloshyn, so a mnemonic image for the word is created based upon basic understanding and visual representations of an everyday man.

Visualization, as it pertains to recall, helps not only with narrative passages but with cross-curricular reading as well (McGlenn, 1985). This is especially important at the secondary level where English teachers are no longer teaching students how to read, but how to comprehend and apply the texts to different areas. As one can see, visualization is more than just being able to enjoy literature, but a skill that can connect readers on a social level and help them in other areas of learning.

Instructional implication of visualization for educators

Following Rosenblatt's transactional theory, reading can be characterized as both aesthetic and academic – both of which are always present when a student is reading (Parson, 2006). The problem occurs when teachers erroneously believe they must favor one purpose over another. Parsons points out that while "comprehension makes visualization possible, visualization is essential to engagement," which should be the ultimate goal of the teacher (p. 499). As such, it is important to remember that metacognitive skills can be taught and students can be trained to use them to help aid them in their learning (Chan, Cole, Morris, 1990).

The teaching of comprehension reading strategies, visualization included, is not something that should be taught independent of actual reading (Scharlach, 2008). For skills to make sense, students need to be immersed in them as a part of their everyday learning. As such, visualization should be explicitly taught, modeled, and scaffolded for students

(Gorlewski, 2009; Scharlach, 2008; Wilson, 2012).

It is better to first model how to use imagery with fiction in order to make it easier to transfer that skill to nonfiction texts (Wilson, 2012). The first and most common method of teaching mental imagery and visualization is the notion of thinking of a movie playing in a reader's head as they listen to or read a story (Hibbing & Rankin-Erickson, 2003). The use of drawings and illustrations, both teacher or student made, can also help increase visualization ability. Likewise, creating opportunities for students to discuss what they are reading opens more opportunities to improve visualization skills because students are exposed to multiple viewpoints on the same text (Manning, 2002; Park, 2012).

Reflection as a part of visualization can reduce the challenges that come with reading comprehension and can relate back to the reader's individual identity and the roles they have in the world (Park, 2012; Rader, 2010). In addition, teachers can also use the skill of visualization to help bridge the gap between reading comprehension and critical literacy. By allowing students to read about other cultures and people in the world, the skill of visualizing the people or events in the story can help the student grow more as both a student and a human being (Park, 2012).

Discussion

There are several benefits to increasing the skill of visualization within the classroom. First, developing these skills helps to aid in building a strong foundation to assist in comprehension of difficult text often found in the textbooks of other subjects. Furthermore, building up this skill, especially at a younger age, helps at the secondary level where reading ability and study skills are assumed and expected in order to be successful in all subjects, not just in the English classroom. In addition, since modeling and discussion is needed to help foster the skill in students, this creates a bond between the teacher and students and also between the students and their peers. Likewise, disengagement is a huge problem, especially at the secondary level, so finding a way to bring

students in through a shared visualization and excitement for reading is another avenue for engagement. Finally, developing a strong mental imagery ability during reading can help to foster a love for reading among students, which can result in more reading for pure enjoyment purposes in the future.

Whatever reason educators choose to include visualization practice in their classroom, it is important to remember that students need to see a good, viable model of the comprehension strategy within their teacher: "Reluctant readers will not miraculously begin to visualize the story world; it is up to us to help them learn how to do so" (Parsons, 2006, p. 499-500).

More to Explore Sidebar

Brain Movies

Edutopia has a recent blog about how to help readers picture story elements during instruction for helping readers move from the text to the creating a "movie" in their brain. The blog offers some steps teachers can implement immediately in the classroom.

<https://www.edutopia.org/blog/brain-movies-visualize-reading-comprehension-donna-wilson>

Reading Rockets

Geared more toward the elementary level, Reading Rockets offers an overview of visual imagery, how to use it, various resources, video examples, even some children's literature to help teach the skill to students.

https://www.readingrockets.org/strategies/visual_imagery

Guided Comprehension

NCTE has a plethora of resources concerning visual literacy and guided comprehension. While many of them are geared toward younger audiences, the skills and techniques could be used at any grade level.

www.readthinkwrite.org

CSI-Literacy

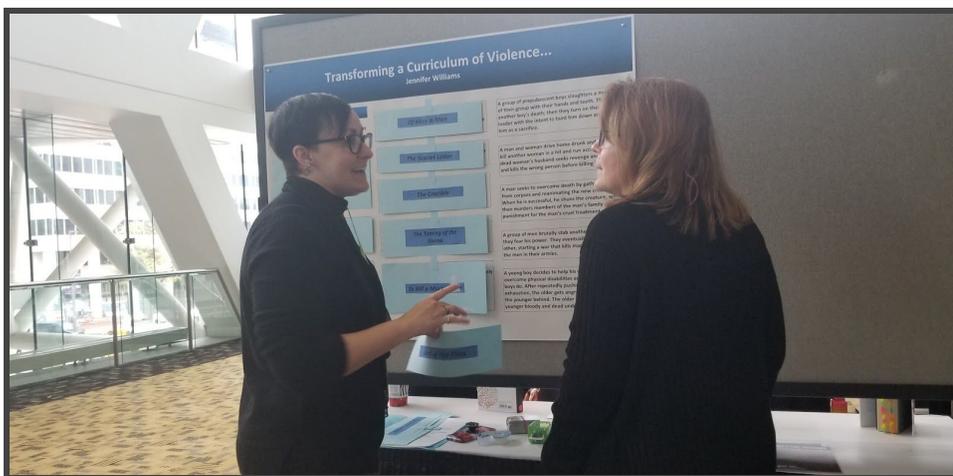
This site offers an array of resources that are fun and easy-to-use to improve literacy skills. In addition to reasoning and evidence concerning why this visualization while reading is important, the site provides helpful tips and techniques to help teach the skill to students.

<https://www.csi-literacy.com/blogs/blog/reading-strategies-visualizing#:~:text=Play%20a%20%E2%80%9Cso undscape%E2%80%9D%20and%20have,them%20to%20visualize%20while%20reading>

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Jennifer Williams presenting at NCTE 2019 (Photo Credit: Michelle Waters, 2019)

A Test I Did Not Study For: How to Handle Sudden Death in a Classroom

Veronica Fuxa

Abstract

When students experience a significant loss in the family or even from their friend group in school, it has a major impact on their mental and physical health. Sudden deaths that occur during the school year can affect a student's ability to perform in the classroom and their ability to comprehend their emotions. As educators, it is important to take action and care with these situations and try to remain positive and resourceful during this time period. Strategies to help students cope in the classroom as a result of a sudden death include being mindful of the emotions students may be experiencing, communicating to the school community about possible actions and events, providing access to counselors and public speakers, paying close attention to at risk students to prevent suicide clusters, and avoid glamorizing the sudden death. Educators who take the necessary, immediate steps to address sudden death in the classroom will promote positivity in mental health and demonstrate care and understanding for all students and families in the school community. This paper addresses a narrative perspective of a student teacher learning from experience how schools handle sudden death in the classroom and how to properly react in a similar situation.

Key words: *suicide awareness, mental health, teaching strategies*

On a cold Wednesday in February, I walked into my mentor teacher's 4th hour class and expected bright, smiling AP Language juniors looking back at me. Instead, I experienced blank masks held by quivering students. Every hour, I received the same shocking, hollowing expressions from my typically high strung, hyper classes. I watched the class clowns barely speak, and the debate students silently did their work with their earbuds in. I noticed the girls had red rimmed eyes framed by messy hair. The baseball players did not bother anyone and kept their hands to themselves. I watched in amazement and confusion; what happened to my students? Did they get in trouble for something? When asked

to do his work, one of the baseball players, the leader of the group, angrily stood up and stormed out of the classroom, and my teacher did not do anything to stop him. This behavior was completely out of character, and my teacher's response did not make sense either. Finally, after the last student solemnly left the classroom, I let my questions flood out like helium rushing from a balloon. My mentor teacher explained to me that a student committed suicide on Friday morning before school started. He was a young man, popular, and played on the baseball team. The news reached campus that day, and they did not have school on Monday for professional development, and Tuesday brought bad weather. Today was the first day back, and it was very hard for students to cope with their missing classmate.

Her words triggered a flashback to when I was in high school, and a young girl committed suicide. The news hung over us like a heavy blanket, suffocating all positivity. We couldn't divert from anything but the girl. Her name still haunts me. I remember looking at her photo while I worked in the library and trying to remember the last time she checked out a book. Trying to focus on anything became a daily goal for everyone. The teachers tried to keep everyone on task, but it was almost impossible not to have someone break out crying in class and have to leave. After a few days, another girl tried to commit suicide, and fortunately, someone found her before she could do it. That was the last straw, and our school dedicated two days to discussing mental health. They brought counselors and therapy dogs, and assignments were postponed or cancelled. In the following weeks, we had assemblies about mental health, online bullying, and loving oneself. It was hard not to think that we were getting all this support because of the two girls, but it was really because the administration and teachers did not want to see another student, family member, or their own child, become the name on the news.

The most difficult part is moving on. Where do their desks go? What do we do about graduation? Should we take their pictures down?

Do we call their names out when they walk? Schools have to deal with these difficult questions, and the families and friends also struggle with seeing the empty bed or desk. It is important to address what to do when a student passes away because many adolescents have not dealt with losing a loved one yet, and the grieving process is difficult for everyone to go through. According to the “Guidelines for Responding to the Death of a Student or School Staff” from the University of Southern California, “most children are not ‘over a loss’ in six months or a year” (1). As teachers and mentors to these students, we need to provide a safe environment where they can express their feelings; they may not have anywhere else to go. School should be the safe space for all students.

When students experience a significant loss, it has a major impact on their ability to focus and learn in the classroom. According to a review article on stress’s effects on the body, Habib et al. found that structural changes occur in the brain due to chronic stress and have long-term effects on the central nervous system (1058). These effects also take place in different functions of the body such as memory, the immune system, cognition and learning, the cardiovascular system, the gastrointestinal system, and the endocrine system (1058-1066). When a sudden death occurs and disrupts a student’s life, chronic stress manifests in these areas and can inhibit a student from properly learning in the classroom. Since they will struggle to effectively learn while dealing with this particular kind of stress, it is important for teachers and administrators to be mindful of how a loss affects students’ mental health and take appropriate actions to help their students recover.

It is important for the school to come together as much as possible; however, it can be difficult to discuss the issue without getting into full details of what happened. The family members might not want information disclosed about their child. On the other hand, some might want people to know, so rumors will not mask the memory of the child. There are several steps that should be taken when a student has passed away: identify those who are at the greatest risk of mental health distress, educate about possible warning

signs and information on support services, and avoid glamorizing the suicide.

Identifying the students who are at the greatest risk of mental health distress is crucial in preventing suicide clusters. According to Mercy et al. in the *American Journal of Epidemiology*, their research shows that clusters typically occur among teenagers and young adults, and most attempters have a family history of suicidal behavior, such as depression or alcoholism (120). These are the students that may be triggered by the sudden death and decide to take action on their suicidal thoughts or behaviors. Educating students, parents, and faculty members about mental health and support services allows everyone in the school to come together on the issue. For example, the school could have an assembly and bring in speakers to work with students in groups and give them a space to voice their feelings and receive help. Involving the parents also makes the students feel safer and reminds them that their families and teachers deeply care about them. The most impactful step is to avoid glamorizing the event. Mercy et al. found that media exposure monitored over a 30-day interval had the highest impact on suicidal behavior immediately after the event took place (126). Although we should recognize the deceased student, we should minimize the media coverage and avoid using phrases that might make the action sound more appealing to students. There are multiple examples of the glamorization of death in the media such as hundreds of bouquets of flowers and elaborate tombstones that might look appealing to students who greatly desire attention.

A few days later, the classroom environment changed back to its normal state. Mid-terms, pre-spring break activities, and fundraisers have filled many of the students’ minds, but I know they have not forgotten about their classmate. I know I will never forget that day, but I’m glad it happened. It made me reflect on this difficult issue and the experiences I had in high school. In a perfect world, this kind of event would never occur again; however, I feel more prepared to handle issues like this in the modern classroom. This issue is tough to discuss, but knowing how to talk about these topics to students is an

important part of being a good teacher and role model.

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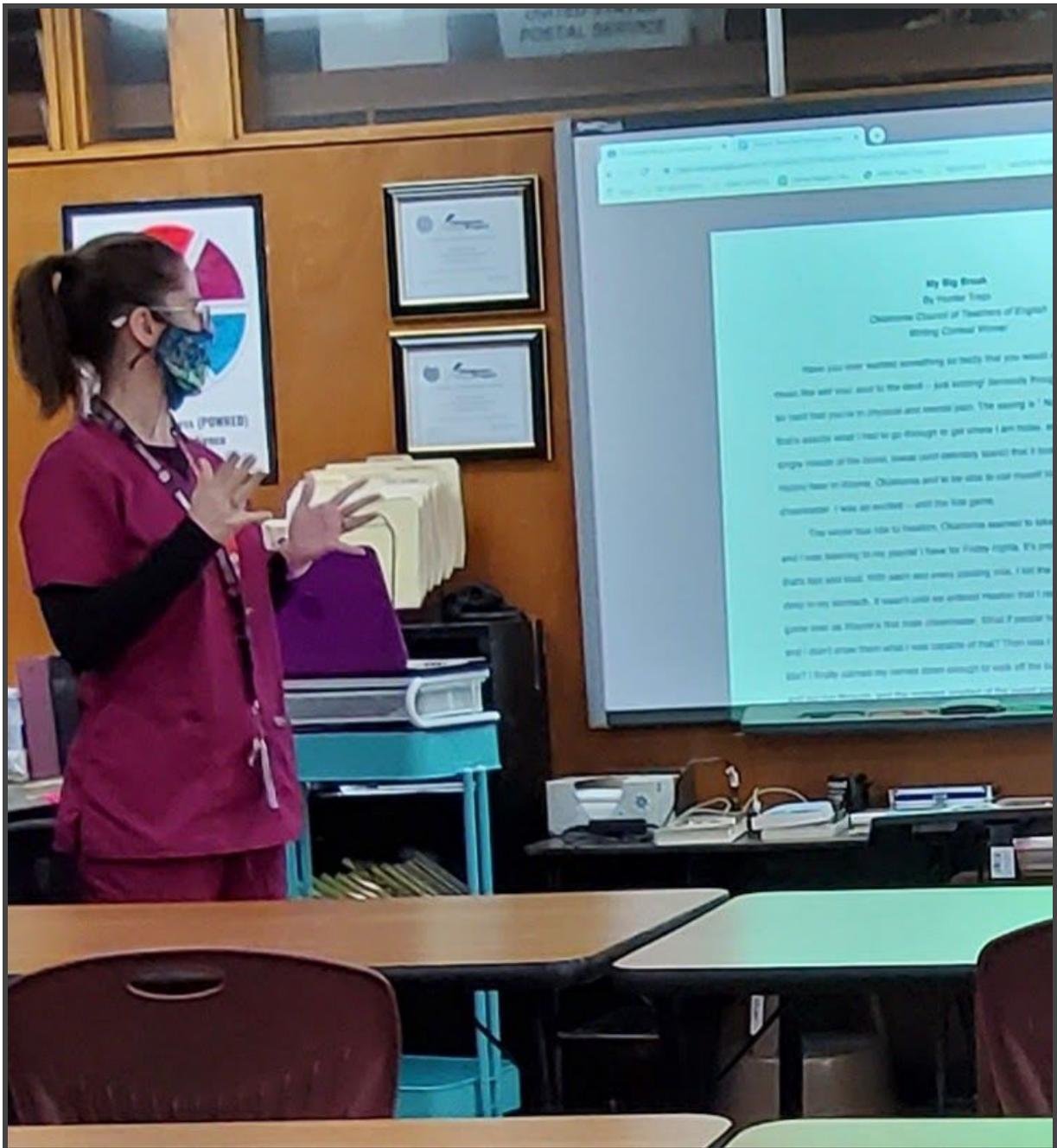
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Teaching in Oklahoma During a Pandemic (Photo credit: Michelle Waters, 2020)