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The New York State English Council

Spring Issue

Editor
Kjersti VanSlyke-Briggs

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The English Record

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Aims

The English Record publishes original peer reviewed contributions that focus on the field of English education. *The English Record* features articles on pedagogy, essays, commentaries, program descriptions, reflective narratives, book reviews and occasional student work. Please check the website *nysecteach.org* for more information.

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Identifying information should not appear elsewhere in the manuscript.

Please include an abstract on the cover page of no more than 100 words.

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The cover for this issue is by photographer Cherieth Vincent, Learning Center Teacher, Broadalbin-Perth CSD

Letter from the Editor
Kjersti VanSlyke-Briggs

As our school year comes to close, I wonder how many of us will return in the fall. Increasingly, I hear of people changing careers, taking early retirement or in the case of newly graduated certified teachers, selecting not to enter the field at all. This is a challenging time for many teachers and I find it hard to stay optimistic when hearing the reports of the struggles from the field. Several of the articles in this issue document those struggles and try to find ways in which to reclaim education and find success in the classroom. I invite you to read through the articles in this issue and allow them to reaffirm or challenge your beliefs. Allow the authors to inspire you and engage you. Allow them to help you revision your classroom or echo what you are already doing.

I also invite you to think about your own practice. What is it that you are doing in your classroom that others might want to know about? Perhaps, it is an engaging unit or learning practice that you could share with our readers by writing an article. I invite you to think about what you are reading and consider writing a book review. Or are you a creative writer? Perhaps you have a poem that reflects on the art of teaching that you could share. As English teachers, we should practice this craft of writing that we teach and we should share what we write with our peers to enhance the field. I encourage you to send us your writing for consideration in the next issue. This is your journal.

Reclaiming Our Voices: One Elementary School Teacher's Stance on the Moral Obligation to Teach

Kenneth Sider
Oneonta School District

Abstract
This text is adapted from a speech delivered on March 1, 2014, at the New York State Foundations of Education's 43rd annual conference held at Colgate University in Hamilton, New York. The article is a call for educators to become actively involved in public education on behalf of New York State's school children.

Reclaiming Our Voices: One Elementary School Teacher's Stance on the Moral Obligation to Teach

Parents and educators across New York State are currently witnessing the Board of Regents' systematic assault against our public schools and the children those schools serve. The casualties of this so-called academic reform movement (known as the Regents Reform Agenda) are clearly the students who are suffering through hyper-standardized classroom instruction with an unprecedented emphasis on high-stakes testing. As early as the first days of kindergarten, four and five-year-olds are introduced to the standardized testing that will be a dominant and threatening feature of their public school careers. Excessive assessment is not only normalized through instructional methods designed for raising test scores, but stressful high-stakes testing raises anxiety in children from kindergarten through sixth-grade.

Teachers, too, are subjected to the Regents' top-down reform movement which enforces policies and practices that

position us not as teachers, but test preparation instructors focused more on data and test scores than a child's educational wellness. With politicians standing by, and only a few taking meaningful stances to bring about needed change, the public school system has fallen into a state of domination akin to a colonial occupation with its incumbent control tactics of fear, intimidation, and threats. While teachers are still recovering from the shock of recent instructional, curricular, and evaluative changes to our profession, the defenseless victims of this corporate-labor model of education are the children. In kindergarten, many children must sit still for sixty minutes of prescribed, scripted lessons at least two to three times each day. These lessons are from the New York State Education Department's instructional modules, which require rigid conformity to a script and demand an untenable degree of physical control over children's bodies. This mistreatment of children is carried out via routine testing throughout the year and several hours of assessment in both September and June. It is not enough for educators to complain behind closed doors; teachers must take action to defend their students from a reform movement that privileges data and test scores over children's well-being and developmental needs. The faults and ill-effects of the Board of Regents' Reform Agenda are being screamed, posted, published, and printed from Buffalo to Long Island, and all points in-between, yet sane governance of our public schools remains elusive. It is therefore imperative that teachers reconsider the responsibilities we bear for our students.

A classroom is a space where learning occurs. This simple statement suggests a deeper significance that is easily overlooked, but worse, is currently deformed by educational leaders. A classroom is not merely a physical space containing desks, books, and bulletin boards, but a place where a teacher

dreams of inspiring students and students dream about what they learn. Teachers bring unique qualities to their classrooms, and as most of us know, it is this diversity of classroom cultures that enriches public schooling. Our classrooms have historically been spaces for community building, team work, meaningful engagement with content, academic challenges, and experiences in democracy. However, current reform practices in education transform classrooms to skill and drill labs where teachers follow scripts and students are reduced to skill sets that must be constantly measured and assessed.

Over twenty years ago, Brazilian educator Paulo Freire foresaw our dilemma. He advised teachers to scream loudly against enslavement to prepackaged education and instead be vehement in the quest to be critical, daring, and creative (Freire, 1998, p. 2007). As teachers, our labor itself is now threatened. Until recently, learning was imbued with loving and caring, but now those spaces in elementary classrooms and curricula that were devoted to nurturing children are disappearing. The neoliberal, capitalist, educational complex leading this assault against our schools, with its punitive ideology and blind obsession for methods, has consequences. In this, the first year so many districts have implemented modules, we know children are suffering emotionally and struggling academically. Schools are eliminating recess, cutting instruction in special areas, and discouraging play in kindergarten. We now see the destructive effects of the commodification of education, particularly as it dehumanizes the process of teaching and learning, and dehumanizes the students and teachers. Recently, a local pediatrician, speaking against the Regents Reform Agenda at an Oneonta Area for Public Education event, cited the sudden increase of cases of young children presenting with behavior problems and anxiety linked to their experiences in school. Students are not the only

casualties. Many teachers have been reduced to tears, not just because of the burden of learning the bewildering and inferior instructional system of modules, but because we have become the tools that are stripping the joy from learning.

Under this reform movement, teachers are forced to function as technicians, not dreamers. We become task masters, not artists. We need to cherish and save those things we know inspire learning and cultivate passion for life, like art, theater, problem-posing and problem-solving, service learning, student-to-student mentoring, community collaborations, music, play, intergenerational experiences, discovery, field trips, social justice projects, dance, and interdisciplinary learning.

Teachers, under threat from administrators (also under threat form their superiors) and dominant anti-teacher themes in mainstream media, have become very quiet. In fact, educators in many regions of New York State, despite having tenure and membership in a powerful union, are nearly silent. Silence is not the answer. Silence will not protect children in public school classrooms from an inferior and often-times destructive education. As teachers, we must reclaim our voices and return compassion and sanity to our classrooms. This can only be achieved if teachers are willing to take action.

I find inspiration in the work of Friere (1998) who believes we can act out to mitigate and eliminate this threatening educational culture by embracing the good intentions and dreams that originally brought us to our profession. Freire is encouraging: "I do not think educators can survive the negativities of their trade without some kind of 'armed love'" (1998, p. 40). Just as we encourage our students to find their voices and speak out, so should we. Obviously, we can't do this easily if we are ordered to teach from modules or textbooks. Armed with love, we can re-evaluate the deteriorating conditions of our labor and workplace as we

acknowledge the necessity of our own resistance. Since teaching is a political act, one that comes with an obligation to speak out for the good of our society, we need to muster our courage and adopt rebellious positions.

New York State's Board of Regents, Commissioner King, and Chancellor Tisch cannot abrogate our spirit to teach passionately. We should embrace our passions and rededicate our intellectual and emotional resources to doing what we know works for our students. We can find cracks in the new curriculum and fill them with effective classroom practices that respect students' individual needs. From the perspective of a critical educator, this idea of an "in-between pedagogy demonstrates the complexities of teaching: rather than ignore top-down expectations, the approach seeks opportunities within such mandates to engage immediate classroom participants in worthwhile curricula" (Schultz, McSurley, & Salguero, 2013, p. 54). As educators, we can supplement modules and textbooks, displace components within modules and textbooks, or simply put aside modules and textbooks. We know from bitter, difficult experiences with scripted, one-size-fits-all curricula that there are countless better ways to inspire children and improve learning.

Michael Apple, educational theorist, professor, and author, recently published a book titled *Can Education Change Society?* In it, he lists nine tasks of critical analysis that will help move educators forward. Within those tasks, themes emerge which can be presented as actions we can take right now. First, "we must bear witness to negativity," (p. 41) in order to resist the domination and exploitation occurring in our schools. Second, we can locate spaces of action for counter-hegemonic movement. Third, despite pressure to standardize education, we must fight to keep liberatory pedagogy alive, so children are inspired to live as learners who are curious about

and engaged with their world. Fourth, it is important to cast aside the fear that isolates us from our colleagues and mentor one another or work in teams to challenge the ills of current reform. Fifth, take advantage of tenure. Schooling, as a public institution, is inherently a site of dissenting voices, and that is how it should be. Those of us with tenure have an obligation to, at the very least, resist, but more importantly, rebel against what we know is wrong and damaging. If we give up on our passions, our students' best interests, and what we know works in education, we would realize what Apple (2013) refers to as "intellectual suicide" (p. 42). Rather than abandon what makes us whole as teachers, what nurtures students, and what contributes to a richer culture for all citizens, we must renew the progressive values that inspire us to teach. This can only be achieved if we take action both in the classroom and in public. We have an obligation to not only teach, but to educate our boards of education and local communities.

I gain inspiration from intellectuals like Chandra Mohanty (1994) who calls on educators to join the struggle to give meaning to what we do in our classrooms by actively creating oppositional spaces. bell hooks views the classroom as a site of resistance for the practice of freedom and John Dewey, the paragon of democratic education, recommends the "intelligently directed development of possibilities" (1938, p. 89). Teachers know too well the consequences of instruction that disregards students' needs. We know the emptiness of teaching developmentally-inappropriate content as we mouth the words of a script. We know the frustration of watching children struggle through hour-long lessons presented from a manual. We know the consternation of parents who can't help their children with unnecessarily complicated homework, even in kindergarten. However we do it, whether we work alone or in solidarity with one another, we all need to take steps, even

baby steps, to do what is right for our students. Armed with love, we can reclaim our voices, reclaim our space, reclaim our students, and reclaim our colleagues.

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Literacy Development in Urban Education

Erin Rougeux
The New Visions Charter High School

Abstract
There is a literacy achievement deficit amongst students in urban settings. These students come from their own richly cultural backgrounds, but their communities do not always value academic literacies. Although secondary teachers cannot rewind and fill in all literacy gaps, there are some practices and beliefs that can help students master the foundational literacy skills necessary for success.

Literacy Development in Urban Education

Literacy education is a fundamental base for success. In order for students to move further in their lives they need to master literacy skills.

> "Students who struggle to acquire literacies are likely to drop out of school and not take advantage of postsecondary education, have limited choices for employment, have lower incomes over their lifespan, and do not accumulate sufficient resources for retirement in comparison to their more successful peers who acquire proficiency in literacies" (Wood & Blanton, 2009).

Literacy skills are the foundation on which all knowledge acquisition can be built. For a student to be successful academically, he or she must be able to comprehend and respond appropriately to a variety of learning tasks and texts. These vital literacy skills are severely lacking in many students living in urban areas.

In some urban areas, such as Brooklyn, where I currently teach, the community discourse for children is not one that prioritizes academic literacy. The literacy young people value is often one quite different from the dominant discourse of our society. My students value the slang, trends, and attitudes of their generation. In order for students to be accepted by their mainstream culture they must walk the walk and talk the talk of *their* discourse. Doing so, conflicts with the dominant, professional, and academic discourse of today's society.

Literacy education could help urban students close this gap, while holding true to their identity. If students become literate, they will be able to manifest their cultural discourse while being able to understand and work within the structure of society's dominant discourse. According to Gee, discourses are the "*saying (writing)-doing-being-valuing-believing*" combinations (Cushman, Kintgen, Kroll, & Rose, 2001). In order to become fluent in the dominant discourse, urban students need to apply critical literacy skills to the multimodal texts that surround them daily, such as mannerisms, conversations, advertisements, or newspaper articles. Students must be able to read, comprehend, and respond in the appropriate manner to these texts in order to become successful; literacy education can accomplish this.

I teach in a charter high school in Brooklyn, New York as the ninth-grade Reading Specialist. I help students of various levels improve their literacy skills. From the data gathered through formal assessments, I have concluded that a large percentage of our students are reading and writing well below grade level. We have students reading at elementary school levels. By ninth grade, having this large gap in literacy achievement has already taken a significant toll on students'

overall education. If students cannot comprehend texts at grade level, they have a disadvantage in every subject.

Reading and writing skills are necessary in order to apply higher level thinking skills in and out of the classroom. If these students came to high school reading and writing on the ninth-grade level, we could begin higher on the ladder of thinking. Students struggle with analysis and although they have strong ideas and claims, they have difficulty expressing them in an academic form. Although I see my students creating new ideas and thinking deeply, they need the fundamental skills of literacy in order to fill in the disparities in their funds of knowledge. They are more than capable, but may not always seem it since they miss information and skill sets that require basic literacy skills to master.

As the year began, I started to look for main causes of underdeveloped literacy skills in Reading Lab, a class devoted to improving reading comprehension and critical reading skills along side basic writing proficiency. I realized that there was an epidemic of non-readers in my classroom. Very few students openly read for enjoyment, even when I probed them to consider magazines or blogs, students admitted they seldom read. This is not just a problem in my school. According to the National Endowment for the Arts in 2007, "In a typical week, 56% [of students] report voluntarily reading 0-1 hour for themselves; 30% report reading 2-5 hours" (Wood & Blanton, 2009). I know reading will not be a hobby for everyone, but I wrongly assumed that students would at least take the opportunity to read during independent reading time in class. Reading is a basis for many literacy skills, including writing skills. Strong readers have stronger vocabularies and also tend to be stronger writers. Therefore, simply reading can work as a foundation to building these vital literacy skills.

In order for students to become lifelong readers, it is important to focus on building students' reader identities. So many students, especially in middle and high school, claim to dislike reading. Teachers need to help students take ownership of their reading lives. We need to encourage authentic reading; the reading adult readers partake in. This means students need three things: choice, access, and time. Students need to make their own choices in texts and they need to have the choice to drop a book and pick up a new one if they hate it. Adults are not bound to books. If adults read a few chapters and can't get into a book, they have the right to give up; students need this right as well. We cannot create lifelong readers if teachers are forcing students into books that are not engaging or interesting. This will vary among students, so there must be a time when students can choose what they will read for themselves.

Students need access to books. They need books that match their interests and reading level. These are not "English class" books. Students want to read for enjoyment, not to find plot, character traits, or themes. When an adult reader is in the middle of a good book, they don't pause to write a book report and fill out a graphic organizer. I see the need to ensure students are actually reading, but if we want to mold lifelong readers, students need to participate in authentic reading for enjoyment, so that they can be hooked in, like so many avid readers have been.

Lastly, students need time to read. As stated in *Literacy Instruction*, "we know that students who spend more time reading are better readers" (Wood & Blanton, 2009). This is a fairly obvious conclusion; as the saying goes, *practice makes perfect*. In many middle and high schools there is time during the week that has been carved away for reading. If there is not, this needs to change. Yes, we would all love students to read at home, but chances are many students in urban settings would

rather do anything else. We need to work up to independently motivated reading by first giving students time in school to read- just read. Then, when they are hooked into a good book, they will be asking to bring it home to continue. I firmly believe this should be a time to relax with a book. If possible, schools should create a comfortable environment for reading time, even if this just means dimming the lights or having a special symbol that represents reading time. This should model an authentic reading atmosphere where students do not feel the pressure of classroom reading.

When students are given these basic rights of readers, they can work their way into becoming readers on their own. Many may need a push, or several, but they can get there with the support of a teacher who is a reader. The passion of reading can be passed down from teacher to student if teachers put in the effort and let passion show. This is crucial in urban schools because many students do not have a reading role model at home. This is not always the case, but many times students struggling with reading do not come from a literacy-strong background. Seeing peers and teachers engage with, and enjoying, reading can make a huge impact on a student's literacy.

Similarly, very few of my students see themselves as writers, even though they have *a lot* to say. Maybe this is an effect of the stimulation of city life, or maybe they are just exceptionally brave. In any case, all young people have a story to tell, because emotions are high in middle and high school. I believe that throughout students' search for identity teachers can help students become writers. Young people often want to talk about themselves or their ideas, so we should let them. When there is a forum in school for students to write about whatever they like, they not only feel appreciated, but also start

to take ownership as writers. This will build their confidence and, in turn, improve their writing skills.

In our school, the forum for this identity and skill building takes place in "free writing." Many days the Do Now, or anticipation activity, is simply "free write." I also accompany this with a writing prompt to inspire them to write and help students who can't immediately think of something to say. This began with students writing things like "I wish I was home" or "I'm hungry," but as the year has progressed, each day a poem, short story, rap, song, or letter is written. Even without direction, students are applying English Language Arts and Literacy skills while expressing themselves and cultivating a writing community. I believe this simple, quick exercise can make a world of difference in students' literacy skills by breaking the stigma of English class essay writing. One student in particular immediately took to free writing. Included is an example of his original poetry worked on in class and independently.

Rahkim is just one example of the many students who created thought-provoking, high quality writing in class. Many students, like Rahkim, continue their free writing outside of the classroom and are eager to share it with teachers and their peers in class. These students no longer see writing as book reports and DBQ's. These students ask to free write each day in class; they are writers now, and this confidence will carry over to more traditional academic forms of writing.

Missing Lights

As we grow older we see things much clearer
We stop blaming others for our actions, we look in the mirror
We see our light getting dimmed and insides getting dark
We all need to find ourselves, we all need to find that spark
That was there when we were kids and we all shined like stars
Every child is born an artist but as we aged we lost our art
With our imagination and creativity we all grew apart
If we had something deep to express we wouldn't know how to start
We forget the definition of words like vision
And what it means to follow your dreams and intuition
We forgot what it means to have ambition
Started fearing the repercussions of all of our decisions
Not to mention, we lost our ability to be original
Copy cats is what it is, doing us is difficult
Hov told us that everyday a star is born
That could've been a myth just like mythical unicorns
I'm not sure what to believe, can we free our shine
Or will we be consumed by the darkness over time
Van Gogh painted starry night with all of us in mind
But he ain't know that all stars light will eventually die

Rahkim/Nash
Brooklyn, New York

Students raised in urban communities, such as Brooklyn, are often raised outside the dominant academic discourse of our society. Becoming fluent in the discourse valued in society opens doors to professional opportunities. Literacy mastery is one way to work towards fluency in the dominant discourse because the capability to read all forms of texts, comprehend, and intelligently and critically respond to these texts is necessary for the societal norm of success. In order to help our students break the cycle of urban poverty they need to gain access to some aspects of the dominant discourse. Also, in our quest to create critical thinkers, movers and shakers, we need to teach students the skills necessary to analyze and respond to the discourses at play. These skills, in

their most basic forms, are literacy skills: reading and responding.

We cannot change the background and conditions of all students, but we can give them the skills to engage critically with cultural and academic texts. We can show them how to make their own choices and opportunities through literacy, rather than simply accepting the life that is handed to them. First, we must show all students that they are readers and writers, inherently, and help them strengthen these essential literacy skills.

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Sacrifice in a One-Room Schoolhouse

Paul O'Brien
Notre Dame-Bishop Gibbons School

Abstract
Events from our past can often be understood only in time. The world of the one-room schoolhouse is a memory for fewer and fewer and a mystery for most. That was the setting for the event that came to be viewed over time as a sacrifice. The issue was over a sandwich, but the action came to mean much more.

The One-Room Schoolhouse

As I approach the end of my career as a teacher, I think of T. S. Eliot's line from the *Four Quartets*, "We shall not cease from exploration, and the end of all our exploring will be to arrive where we started and know the place for the first time." For me, my formal education all began in a one-room school house on a back country road outside Troy, New York.

A one-room school house: eight grades in one room, each row a grade. As a high school teacher for most of my life, I still marvel at how one teacher could possibly teach eight grades, an entire elementary school program in one room. My memories light up especially for two moments. The first year I recall that I was the only student who couldn't look at the camera for the official school photograph: the photographer seemed exasperated at my tear-filled eyes, and my teacher turned me sideways and stuck a book in my hand. The title was *Health for Young Americans*. Grade two offered me my first existential crisis, though I didn't realize it at the time.

On a warm, spring Friday, I opened my lunch bag to the dreaded egg salad sandwich. Because we were Catholic and because it was Lent, my mother made sure that we never had meat on Friday. It seemed that her favorite Friday sandwich was egg salad. I despised egg salad -- I didn't like the way the egg salad looked, the texture of the white globs, the smell. Still I settled into the lunchtime routine: we sat at our desks eating our lunch - my sandwich lay hidden inside my lunch bag - and the rule was that when everyone was done, we were allowed to go out to the playground, the chief rewards being the swings that faced the school and the adjacent teeter-tauter.

I sat in the second seat in the second row -- thinking. I had come up with a plan to rid myself of the dreaded sandwich. When the teacher disappeared into the coat room, I popped out of my desk and dropped my waxed paper covered sandwich into the trash can next to the teacher's desk. Had she been watching me through a tiny hole? Because when she emerged from the coat room, it seemed to me that she marched directly to the trash can and stared into it. With one fell swoop, she reached down and pulled out the sandwich.

"Who did this?" she asked. "Who threw this sandwich out?" She glared at the class. "No one goes out to play until the one who threw this sandwich out confesses."

Stillness and the agony of time. And then a quiet, little voice, "I did it." To my disbelief, it was my brother John, a year and a half younger, who sat in the fourth seat in the first row.

From high on the swing outside, I could see my brother sitting at his desk in the first row with the teacher standing over him. On the walk home, once out of the teacher's listening range, I got right to the point. "You didn't throw that sandwich away." He stopped and looked directly at

me. "How do you know?" he asked. "Because I did!" He stared at me. "Why did you admit to it?" I said. "Because," he responded, "I didn't think everyone should have to stay in for what one person did." I said something like, "Boy, are you dumb! That's stupid," and we continued our walk home.

A few years later when my seventh grade class was talking about the notion of sacrifice and the idea of accepting suffering to alleviate the pain of others, I thought of my brother and this moment in the one-room schoolhouse.

Many years later, when I was well into my teaching career, I wrote a poem commemorating this moment and sent it to my brother.

A Sacrifice

She saw near the bottom
of the trash can
the egg salad sandwich
neatly wrapped in waxed paper.
"All right! Who did it?"
She roared.
"The sandwich in the trash!"
Her finger - an arrow
pointing downward.
I was frozen.

She held the sandwich
in her right hand.
"No one goes out to play
Until the culprit confesses!"
A stone too large to move.
"No one!"

Cold silence
and a burning glare.

“I did it. It was mine.
A confession.
The criminal --
A frail first grader.
“All right. Everyone outside
for play. Johnny, you will
remain in your seat.”

From high on the swing outside
I could see my brother
sitting patiently
and accepting the blame
for something
someone else had done.
He didn’t know his sacrifice
had been for his brother,
for me.

Paul O’Brien has been a high school English teacher at Notre Dame-Bishop Gibbons School in Schenectady for over 40 years. He has also taught as an adjunct at the College of St. Rose in Albany. He earned his undergraduate degree at Iona College, his masters’ degrees at Catholic University and State University at Albany, and his doctorate from SUNYA. He is a member of the NYSEC Executive Board.

ASD and Figurative Language

Brittany Santoro
Molloy College

Abstract

Individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) often experience a delay in the development of a concept called Theory of Mind. This delay makes it almost impossible to understand that other people have thoughts, emotions, interests, and desires that are uniquely different from theirs. A multitude of children with ASD have exhibited a similarly large delay in their ability to comprehend abstract, figurative language. Although rote memorization skills are useful for vocabulary building and word recognition, it is very difficult to explain *how* word meaning can change based upon the context in which it is used. By encouraging children with ASD to participate in communication (whether verbal or nonverbal), educators can help them to gain a better understanding of the use of colloquialisms in conversation, and how words are appropriately used.

ASD and Figurative Language

Children with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) often display signs of delay in the development of a concept called "Theory of Mind." This term refers to a person's ability to recognize that other people have feelings and thoughts that are different from their own. Often times, the absence of the understanding of this concept can lead to further delays in social and communication development. When individuals are unable to perceive the "hidden" messages behind people's words, those word meanings are likely to be misunderstood or

lost. Unfortunately, people with ASD frequently have difficulty with maintaining eye contact, interpreting body language, and thinking abstractly. “Autism demonstrates the crucial role of the understanding of intentions in normal human communication, both 'literal' and figurative” (Happé, 1995, p. 275). The absence of these social skills often contributes to a difficulty with understanding figurative language and some of the “abstract” ways that language can be used.

A significant body of research has been done to document and explain the connections among ASD, Theory of Mind, and the comprehension of figurative language. Idioms, in particular, are extremely difficult for children with ASD to understand because of their abstract nature. The word “idiom” is defined as “an expression that cannot be understood from the meanings of its separate words but that has a separate meaning of its own” and “a form of a language that is spoken in a particular area and that uses some of its own words, grammar, and pronunciations” (Merriam-Webster's Dictionary, 2013). A strong sense of Theory of Mind allows people to understand that words can have different meanings in different contexts. For example, after receiving a poor grade on a math test, a child might say “Oh, great,” look down, and cover their paper. Most individuals would be able to correctly interpret the sarcasm that exists behind those words because of the child's physical body language, and overall sullen tone. A child with ASD would only be able to focus on the literal meaning of the words “Oh, great,” and may completely misinterpret both the overall attitude and the grade of the child's test as something “good.”

According to Titone and Connine (1994), “idioms vary on dimensions such as the compositionality (how much the individual words contribute to a greater figurative meaning), how familiar the phrase is to the individual, and whether or not

the phrase is presented in a supportive context" (Whyte, Nelson, & Khan, 2013, p. 450). Compositionality is another skill that is greatly affected by Theory of Mind. A person will not be able to contribute a greater figurative meaning to literal words without the ability to "think outside of the box." When children with ASD are familiar with a word, they often lock on to a concrete understanding of that word's meaning. In fact, vocabulary skills and word memorization skills are often strengths of students who show higher-functioning cognitive ability. When introducing new vocabulary and figurative language concepts to these children, it is extremely important to explain the context behind the meaning of the words used. Although idioms may still sound "silly" to them because of their concrete mindsets, they will be able to address any social or communication issues in the future by having an understanding of what the expression means. In conjunction with the "hidden curriculum" in schools, these children will also greatly benefit from the explicit teaching of not only discussing what figurative language expressions are, but the reasons *why* people use them to communicate in certain social contexts. When children are familiarized with the appropriate contexts in which different idioms are used, they will be more likely to respond to them in an effective and understanding manner.

Curiously, Abrahamsen and Smith (2000) "found that classroom-based idiom interventions were more effective than computer-based instruction for teaching idioms to children with communication disorders" (Whyte, Nelson, & Khan, 2013, p. 459). Research shows that children with ASD often respond extremely well to technological gadgets and assistive technology devices. Hand-held learning devices like the iPad feature a plethora of "apps" that can address ASD deficits like difficulty with maintaining eye-contact, making transitions, and

following an appropriate daily routine. Although these devices help to decrease severely the anxiety and confusion in the life of a person with ASD, they can sometimes act as a "crutch" in their communication. Assistive programs like ProLoquo2Go actually "speak" for children, and can allow them to access their needs and wants without ever having to speak themselves. When trying to stimulate children with communication difficulties, it is important to challenge them to communicate without computer-based assistance. True communication demands the presence of repeated "open" and "closed" circles of communication, and can be fostered by the interaction of an understanding, patient person, and a child with ASD. Frequent interaction can help to significantly enhance a child's ability to complete these circles of communication independently, and ideally, communicate for themselves without the use of technology.

Good communication does not always require the use of language, but instead, a rudimentary understanding of the wants and needs of another person. According to Baron-Cohen, Tager-Flusberg, and Cohen (1993), "Theory of Mind (ToM) is one of those cognitive systems, defined as the natural capacity to attribute mental states to oneself and others in order to explain and predict behavior in social interaction" (Gavila & Garcia-Albea, 2010, p. 55). Children with ASD cannot frequently decipher the underlying meanings behind words and their intent, and therefore, will not be able to effectively explain and predict the behavior of others. Often times, these children are viewed as rude by members of society because of their social deficits. They are usually brutally honest, and would likely think it is more appropriate to tell the truth in all situations, instead of adjusting their words to meet the needs of others. An underdeveloped Theory of Mind allows them to think that all people have the same interests and desires as they

do. When “other” people make decisions that are not in agreement with the child's with ASD's mindset, confusion and difficulties are likely to arise.

Although individuals with ASD have difficulties with understanding the more “abstract” intents behind the words used by others, it is interesting to see that they can sometimes create metaphorical meanings for words themselves. Research shows that there is a tendency for individuals with ASD “to use 'unconventional and idiosyncratic' expressions” in their own thought processes and methods of communication (Gernsbacher & Pripas-Kapitb, 2012, p. 98). A study that was conducted in 1946 by Leo Kanner asked a child with ASD to answer the question, “If you were to buy four cents worth of candy, and give the storekeeper ten cents, how much money would you get back?” Instead of answering the question with a numerical “6” or verbal “six cents,” the child instead decided to draw the six-sided shape of a hexagon. Although his answer was correct, the symbol that he chose to represent his answer with was highly uncharacteristic. A “typical” person might not immediately draw the logical connection between a hexagon and the number “6,” and conversely, may misinterpret the “abstract” meaning behind the child with ASD's work.

The current Common Core Initiative states, “The standards are designed to be robust and relevant to the real world, reflecting the knowledge and skills that our young people need for success in college and careers” (National Governors Association Center for Best Practices & Council of Chief State School Officers, 2010). Many children with ASD have the cognitive ability to learn academic material, and ultimately meet or exceed curriculum standards. Their success is dependent on the careful planning that goes into fulfilling the goals that are defined in their individualized education program (IEP) goals. Often times, they have the receptive language

skills that allow them to understand and remember material. Although they may not be able to express themselves in a "traditional" sense (i.e., writing an essay, participating in a dialogue), they may be able to effectively convey their knowledge in an outlet that is more appropriate for them. A child who has an affinity for music might be able to learn better in an environment where light classical music is played. Children who are negatively affected by bright lights might learn best in a calmly lit room where the ambiance is relaxing and distractability is limited. When children are comfortable in their learning environment and able to relate material, they are more likely to be actively engaged with the person who is teaching, and essentially, communicating with them.

"MacKay and Shaw (2004) discuss the varieties of figurative language with which children with autism have difficulty, including metaphor, irony, metonym, rhetorical questions, understatements, hyperbole, and indirect requests" (Persicke, Tarbox, Ranick, & St. Clair, 2012, p. 913). In a society that is so heavily reliant on the use of these figurative language devices, it is understandable that people who have issues comprehending them would undergo similar difficulties with understanding social situations appropriately. Metaphors are often used in every day conversation, and seem to be universally understood by most individuals in a given population. If a child with ASD was told, "You're a doll" as a compliment from someone, she might incorrectly interpret the intent of the person's statement. Instead of understanding the colloquial meaning of the word, the child might associate her own understanding of dolls with the phrase, and believe she is being called something completely different like "lifeless" or "fake." Irony is a literary concept that relies on the use of sarcasm. A delay in Theory of Mind generates an inability to identify whether the intent of the speaker is genuine. Children

with ASD may misinterpret ironic statements as true, and miss the actual meaning behind the expression completely. When communicating with children with ASD, it is important to be as direct and literal with language as possible. An inability to identify and recall the social contexts in which most expressions are used often creates a disconnect between the child with ASD and the person that is communicating with them.

The comprehension of figurative language is a multi-step process that demands a person to simultaneously recall a word's meaning and the last context in which it used in, and decipher how that past word usage relates to their current situation. Bernstein (1987) and Berman and Ravid (2010) highlight the idea that all figurative language shares "the common feature that the listener must go beyond what is literally said (in words and their syntactic arrangement) and remember the figurative meaning from past common usage, or create on the spot a new contextually appropriate meaning" (Whyte, Nelson, & Khan, 2013, p. 450). A child with ASD might inappropriately identify the context of a given word, and associate an improper meaning with its use in both formal and social settings. Children with language delays might have a more difficult time recalling past information, or making connections between their prior knowledge and new information that is presented to them.

It is important to highlight the difference between vocabulary and comprehension. Vocabulary refers to a child's ability to recall a previously learned word, and identify the literal definition(s) of the term. Comprehension of a word requires a child to delve deeper into its meaning, and can be influenced by a variety of external factors. "Rizzo and Stephens (1981) demonstrated that language-disabled and

non-disabled participants could easily resemble one another on the MPLI Vocabulary Test while differing by as much as 1.5 standard deviations on the MPLI Language Comprehension Test" (Gernsbacher & Pripas-Kapit, 2012, p. 95). These results help to demonstrate one of the significant effects that a child with ASD's Theory of Mind delay can have on their education. Vocabulary acquisition only requires children with ASD to work in the lower levels of Bloom's taxonomy, where knowledge and understanding of the word is required. Comprehension, on the other hand, requires a person to analyze the situational context in which the word is used in and apply the appropriate meaning to that word. In order for learning to take place, it is important for children to understand the concepts behind what they are being taught.

Thankfully, there are many ways to help children with ASD to work at their delays in figurative language comprehension. "Nippold (1991) suggests that idioms should be taught to children by presenting the idioms orally in the context of a short story and asking questions that draw their attention to contextual cues in the story supporting the idiom's figurative meaning" (Whyte, Nelson, & Khan, 2013, p. 452). When idioms are given concrete meaning, they are much easier for a child with ASD to understand and interpret. It is difficult for children with ASD to draw connections between a story's context and an idiom without clear explanation. By questioning the child, checking for understanding throughout the story, and explaining the idiom, an educator can be sure to make sure that all of the "why" questions that a child might have are answered. When students are able to make connections between their academics and their personal lives, they are much more likely to retain what they have learned and gain the most from their learning experience.

By focusing on how words relate to each other in different contexts, students can gain a more well rounded understanding of a word. “The various ways in which an individual can relate one thing to another are referred to as 'relational frames'....three relational frames are particularly relevant to metaphorical language: coordination, hierarchy, and distinction” (Persicke, Tarbox, Ranick, & St. Clair, 2011, p. 914). Metaphors require people to coordinate a series of words to describe something that is different from the proper, literal meanings of each separate word. For example, when someone is told that they have “the heart of a lion,” the words literally refer to a lion's heart. When analyzed from an abstract perspective, it is easy to connect a person's brave tendencies with the bravery of a wild lion.

Explicit teaching of hierarchical word relations (eg. “animal” to describe cats, dogs, birds, etc.) allows students with ASD to organize new words into categories, and therefore, make more appropriate word associations within different contexts. When individuals are familiarized with multiple meanings of one word, they can add to their supply of “relational frames,” and begin to generate a better understanding of more complex word meanings. Children with ASD tend to have a strict, idiosyncratic focus in regards to their life interests and activities. By relating a new concept to something that fits within their focus, they are much more likely to learn the new word. For many individuals with ASD “who do speak, grammatical and phonological development follow a normal course.... Communication on the other hand...relies so heavily on the normal human ability to 'mind read' (Happé, 1995, p. 278). An enormous amount of communication can take place between two people without words ever being spoken. Because their lives are perceived as a “series of random events,” this innate “mind-reading” ability is

not often displayed by people who are living on the autism spectrum.

In “normal” child development, a child acquires Theory of Mind around the ages of 4-5. As children develop, they experience different situations that help them to gain a better understanding of the world in a social context. Theory of Mind can be assessed using a test called the “simple false-belief task.” If a child sees that there is a blue ball under a box, the box is covered, and another person says “there is a red ball under the box,” the child will be able to recognize that that person is not telling the truth, and that others may have “false beliefs” about the ball's color. “In 1985, Baren-Cohen et al. demonstrated that children with autism, even those with mental ages well above 4 years, failed [the] simple false-belief task” (Happé, 1995, p. 277). Although these children chronologically grow in age, they can often remain stagnant in certain areas of their development (i.e., social) because of their Theory of Mind delay.

Another part of “normal” development analyzes stages of play. Children who have developed Theory of Mind are usually able to participate in pretend play. Their ability to effectively place themselves in another person's mindset allows them to assume the roles of imaginary characters, and play in a way that is socially age-appropriate. A well-developed Theory of Mind allows a person to make decisions that are both logical and socially appropriate. “Abstract reasoning is important because the use of metaphorical language is pervasive in society and plays a significant role in communication” (Persicke, Tarbox, Ranick, & St. Clair, 2011, p. 913). Pragmatic language skills can be worked on and developed to help children with ASD to organize their daily routines, and express their personal needs and wants. Unfortunately, when it comes to more “sophisticated” levels of communication, clear

divides can socially exist. Since so much of colloquial conversation relies on abstract concepts like metaphors, sarcasm, exaggeration, and body language, individuals with ASD are often unable to participate at a level that is age-appropriate.

Tager-Flusberg (1993) suggested, "Autistic children do not seem to develop the understanding that conversations ought to entail the exchange of information. This appears to be at the heart of what makes communication with autistic people so difficult" (Happé, 1995, p. 280-281). The Developmental, Individual Difference, Relationship-based (DIR) Model that is used for working with children with ASD emphasizes the importance of completing circles of communication with the child. Students are challenged to communicate at a level that is higher than their current ability level, and constantly stimulated by the repeated "opening" of circles of communication by the teacher. When a student responds, whether verbally or physically, the circle of communication is completed. Since children with ASD are often unaware of the needs or mindsets of other people, they might not see a need to have their "communication circles" closed in conversation. People with ASD may constantly open communication circles without ever paying attention to whether or not they are closed by other people.

Clarissa Willis (2009) supports the idea that "Autism isn't something a person has, or a 'shell' that a person is trapped inside" (p. 89). Instead, ASD should be looked at simply as a way of life where a person's entire mentality and way of being is defined by their condition. It may be exceedingly difficult to understand the mind of a child with ASD because of their tendency to "retreat" into themselves. Severe delays in communication skills can leave children with ASD feeling frustrated, trapped and helpless. In the case of some children

with ASD who are "mute," it was discovered that high potential for learning was still present. Children who display very basic expressive language skills have shown an expansive knowledge of words and their meanings through less conventional means of assessment that work for them. By drawing a picture, or even playing a game on an iPad, a child with ASD can show their understanding of a concept and effectively communicate without ever having to speak a word. Even though children may seem "trapped" because they are not speaking, plagued with tantrums, or acting with stereotypic behavior, they are often much more capable and much more aware of themselves than their physical words and actions may dictate.

"The best way teachers can prepare themselves and the other children in the class for a child with autism is to get to know as much as possible about the child before enrollment" (Willis, 2009, p. 87). Teachers who truly know their students will be much more likely to meet their individual needs. When lessons are based upon the personal interests and learning styles of each child, those children are much more likely to be engaged in the lesson for a longer period of time. "Forced" teaching methods like strict direct instruction do not often work with children with ASD, as the confines of a traditional school environment are often too strict for them to be comfortable in. Although individuals with ASD tend to prefer strict order, the behavioral requirements for learning that exist in schools are often too rigid for them to follow. Without Theory of Mind, rules are often hard to understand, and therefore are often broken by children with ASD.

Teachers must establish clear rules in the classroom to maintain order among students. It is extremely important not to use "absolute" language when creating rules. A rule like "Only leave the room when called on" could actually be dangerous if

there were a fire in the school, and the child did not want to disobey the rule that he or she promised to keep. Danger is sometimes not recognized by people with ASD because of their Theory of Mind delays. According to Champagne-Lavau & Joanette (2009), "Figurative language requires the pragmatic skills to process more than the literal meaning conveyed by an utterance in order to grasp the speaker's intention in a given context, and to decide whether a sentence means what is said or more than what is said" (Gavilan & Garcia-Albea, 2011, p. 55). Children with ASD often have difficulty prioritizing tasks, especially in times of stress or anxiety. To prevent a "rumble" stage or tantrum from happening, educators must make sure that their intentions for a lesson, as well as their desired outcomes from the lesson, are well understood by the child.

Many children with ASD do not perform as well as their "typical" peers academically. "Many teachers (and many people) limit expectations for students with disabilities because they subscribe to the idea that disability is a fixed, social reality instead of a label that is culturally generated and regenerated" (Kluth & Darmody-Latham, 2003, p. 532). ASD as a disorder has drastically changed over the last few decades in terms of diagnosis, terminology, treatment, and understanding. When teachers do not view children from a "person-first" perspective, they are doing a great disservice to that child's education. An "autistic child" has a very different connotation than a "child with autism." It is not the disorder that defines the person, but instead, simply just a part of their lives. Children with ASD must be challenged to work against the confines of their disability. In a rapidly changing world, there is no possibility for a completely fixed, social reality. Different social expectations that come from a person's culture can be explicitly taught and explained. ASD is an "umbrella" term that is used to

ASD describe a variety of people who function on different levels of autistic spectrum. The terms that are used to define ASD may change over time, but the presence of "symptoms" that are generated by the disability will not. It is extremely important for all children to know that their educational potential is not "fixed" or permanent!

The best way to "get inside" of the mind of a child with ASD is by allowing them to include their own personal thoughts and ideas into the lesson, and ultimately, sculpt the lesson for themselves. Kliewer (1998) reflects that, "Students with autistic characteristics are too often dismissed from the literate community.... they are often excluded from rich and meaningful literary experiences like storytelling, play-acting, journal-keeping, and writing workshop" (Kluth & Darmody-Latham, 2003, p. 533). Often times, teachers have a difficult time when they are trying to figure out how to include a child with ASD into a group lesson. Even if they are cognitively incapable of performing at the same level as their "typical" peers, children with ASD can still contribute to a lesson and gain meaning from it as active participants. "Social" literary experiences like the ones mentioned above are also very useful when trying to gain a contextual understanding of words and their meaning. Children with ASD should be integrated with "typical" children for as much as their disability will allow. It is important not to "segregate" children because of their disabilities.

"If teachers are serious about the 'leave no child behind' political mantra in the United States, we will look for abilities in all learners, and give all students access to reading, writing, listening, and speaking experiences in...classrooms every day" (Kluth & Darmody-Latham, 2003, p. 534). As previously mentioned, a delay in Theory of Mind prevents children with ASD from gaining meaning from these "social"

experiences in the same way that a "typical" child would. For this reason, educators must challenge their students to constantly immerse themselves in language. It is important to not speak "for" the child with ASD, because often times, their physical mannerisms and words might dictate a message that does not match what they are trying to say. When children are provided with an equal opportunity for learning, their ability to perform in non-academic situations will increase as well.

Since children with ASD usually view the world from a broad, "global" perspective, it may be difficult for them to understand how word meanings can change based upon context. Word-play can be a fun way for these students to experiment with language, and can help them to grow more acquainted with some of the ways that syntax can effect word meaning. For example, when using a sentence strip activity, a child could look at three individual words like "boy," "kicked," and "horse," and recognize that "The boy kicked the horse" and "The horse kicked the boy" have two very different meanings. The English language features many lexically ambiguous words like "bank" that have multiple meanings (i.e., financial institution vs. river's edge). These words must be understood by analyzing the context in which they are used. Children who are immersed in language and challenged to use it effectively are more likely to learn how to use words in appropriate situational contexts.

"The complex structure of [figurative language] requires the ability to reason abstract interpretations of one term or topic comparatively to another term or topic in order to identify non-literal, symbolic similarities between the two" (Persicke, Tarbox, Ranick, & St. Clair, 2011, p. 913). Although it is often difficult, many children with ASD are eventually capable of understanding some idiomatic expressions when the time is put aside to clearly explain the connection between the

idiom's words, their individual word meanings, and the meaning of the expression as a whole.

As children grow chronologically, their Theory of Mind develops concurrently. Similarly to a child with ASD, a young child with an underdeveloped Theory of Mind might see the use of "non-literal" words to describe literal things as a confusing and unnecessary concept. Since those without Theory of Mind see the world from their own perspectives, it is very unlikely that they will be able to pick up on the comparisons that others are trying to make through the use of abstract speech. Explicit teaching of word meanings and a constant requirement for conversation (whether verbal or nonverbal) is mandatory when working with all students. In an effort to make the world a more "safe," manageable, and understandable place, educators must provide children with the tools to analyze words in a sentence, and decipher their meanings based upon the contexts in which they are used in. All students can benefit from the use of literary strategies that strengthen Theory of Mind.

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Student Paper
Diary of a Teenager

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Abstract
Every October my students (Julene) travel through the stories and, in a way, Edgar Allen Poe's mind through an author study. His characters suffer the arabesque and grotesque. As a culminating assignment, students are asked to write a Poe-like story using elements of Poe's writing and style. Students mirror his vocabulary, his theory that every story must begin with a singular and unique mood that is to be wrought by every word written on the page. He says, "If one has not . . . . one has failed. . . ." Poe, like so many good writers, drew periodically on real life events. The following work is no different.

Diary of a Teenager

As you read into this paper, it may or may not get a little weird. All and every one of the things written in this paper have stemmed from events in the past year. Names have been changed and blacked out for their own privacy, because everyone deserves that much. This is all non-fiction, but most importantly I wish you not to worry about me or the people in this story. There is quite a time gap between the events stated in this paper and how we are now. We got help, because we wanted to get better. We're young, and there are places in the world that we've yet to go, and sights we've yet to see. People will say whatever they want to you without any regard of how it might affect you, but we refused to be those people in the

stories about the kids who everyone thought was fine until it was too late to ask them what was wrong.

Mental illness is something that many people don't understand, or may try to self-diagnose or medicate. Don't. Get help for yourself from someone who has studied and knows how to help you in the best way. That bottle of pills isn't going to end the pain, but it will end the chances of anything getting better. The scars are permanent, and one day you might regret them. Take care of yourself, always. Be good to your mind and body and soul. Sit in the quiet for a bit. Read your favorite poem over and over until you fall asleep. Drink some tea or coffee and just think. Are you really worth it? Yes. You really are. Don't let the monsters under your bed migrate into your mind. They'll try, but I believe in you.

The elements found within my writing throughout the past year have been considered to be arabesque. Suffering through depression, triggers, attempted suicide, heart ache and loss were all pieces to my mental suffering. I physically suffered only a small amount, because the cuts on my skin healed quickly. I never went too deep. I figured this related some to Poe's writing, because it went into the mind of someone who had suffered, but it came out a bit reversed because obviously, as you can see, I am very much still alive and I intend to stay that way.

I am stronger than the monsters inside of my head.

3/4/13

Hi. Journal, tonight I am sad. Very sad. Broken. Hurt. Dead.

The alcohol should kick in soon, because tonight I'm drinking myself to sleep. I've but something t aide my sleep into the vodka I poured for myself, and I just want to sleep.

If perhaps I don't wake up tomorrow morning, I want you to tell ******* that I love her, and ****** too. Tell ******* that she was the best girl that God ever gave me, but that she couldn't save me this time. Tell my parents that I'm sorry, but that I'm angry at them too. How could they not see the scars on my wrists? I count them 1, 2, 3 . . . more and more. If they really loved me, they'd see past the smile on my face. They'd look at my eyes and tell me that they were sorry, too.

I want my friends to know that they didn't do anything wrong, but that I'm just sad, and I've lost my way. I don't feel the will to go on sometimes, because the people that I want to care don't. I'm bullied and I don't know why. I'm confused, because I don't know what I did wrong. Though I try to be kind and patient, they don't seem to care. Tell ***** that I really did like him, but I'm sorry that I wasn't good enough. I can feel the alcohol start to kick in. I feel better and I'm starting to forget. I'm just tired. I'm sorry I wasn't good enough for this life. I tried to be strong, but you can only hold yourself together for so long before your mind gets tired and everything falls out of place all at once.

Maybe this isn't goodbye. Even if it isn't, I'm still tired. Goodnight, Journal.

You were my best friend, and I told you everything. . . I'm just sorry I couldn't be that honest with myself.

Much Love,
Kaylee Bryn

Date Unavailable

"You're drowning."

"I was going through some personal health issues."
- Third Quarter, Tenth Grade. P.H

I had never been able to sink, nor have I ever been the strongest swimmer . . . figuratively speaking. I heard the voices, but not the ones in my head. The ones escaping the lips of the children around me. Not really children now though, were they? Perhaps when I met them in the summer of 2009 they had once been children. Smiles and laughter beaming from their bodies as if they were the sun and those were their rays. Grown now, four years past and minds that could kill you.

We all started out the same, but as time passed we drifted apart and became our own people with our own identities and personas. We all became ourselves. Some of them even became like me. We were sick, and we got help. Some are still sick, and thy fight with the monsters in their heads.

I fight with mine. It doesn't like it when I talk, and it tells me I'm stupid and will get the answer wrong every time. It tells me to stay quiet, even when I have so much to say. My monster mocks the way I cross my "T" and dot my "I". My monster was me once, but now he's dying inside of me, and I'm getting stronger. I get better every single day. I'm not crazy, and I'll never be.

She lives with hers. It keeps her awake at night and when she can't sleep she blames the LED screen that she holds so close to her face, reading the random blobs of text or holding the section of the screen to let the world know she thought that photograph was rad. I wish it would let her sleep at night; she's beautiful when the dark circles under her eyes are lighter and her words aren't slurred with sleep.

He escapes from his. He smiles every time he presses the stainless steel to his pale skin. He cries at night, I held him

while he cried once. He came to school with bruises, but he graduated with strength he didn't have before. He survived the worst that life threw at him.

Our monsters didn't kill us . . . but they almost did.

My one friend shakes with the bottle in his hands. He takes another pill to end the pain that started a long time ago. It doesn't really end it though, it just numbs the feelings he held on to. "Just one more. Just one more." He chases the pill with a gulp of Gin and lays his head down to sleep. His head rests against the pillow and he slowly forgets what made him take the first pill, then the second, and finally the third, fourth, and fifth. As he drifts off to sleep he feels okay for now.

She looks in the mirror and doesn't feel pretty. Face covered in powders and creams to make her skin like the ones she sees in the magazines. Black charcoal written in circles around her deep brown eyes, and flecks of red powder cross her cheeks. She looks down and sees the bulge on her lower abdomen. She thinks to herself why it hasn't gone away with the miles and miles she has put under her feet. Running. Running. Running. She looks down even lower and examines the space between her thighs. "Not wide enough." she thinks to herself. She heads for the bathroom, tying her hair up with an elastic band, and shuts the door. She comes back, tooth brush in hand rubbing away the acid that just passed through her mouth.

He sits with the letter rested between his fingertips. He traces lightly over the paper, touching where the pen was held too hard, causing indents in the letters scrawled across the pale page. "I don't love you anymore." She had written to him. He could feel the warmth under his eyes begin to grow, and the dampness the tears made as they began to flow out of his eyes. "I still love you." He spoke quietly to the paper as if he was looking into her blue eyes. He asked himself why she didn't

love him anymore. He could feel the chambers of his heart tearing at the seams.

Journal, I hope I never get as bad as my friends have gotten. I have monsters, but theirs are a lot bigger than mine. Theirs are killing them slowly, mine are taunting me, but they haven't made any perpetual wounds quite yet. I've held on for so long. I'm tired. I don't want my monsters to kill me. I've made room for them to live here in my head with me, but I've saved some space for my own thoughts and my own mind. This is *my* body and *my* mind. No monsters allowed.

My monsters didn't kill me . . . but they almost did.

A Day in March

"Dear Kaylee,

Please don't give up on yourself. You're beautiful. You're smart and you have so much to live for. Even though you may feel down at times, just remember that the future will be brighter. I love you, okay. Just, don't give up.

Stay Beautiful.
Love, *****."

3/14/2013

"Can I chew on your dreams?
SHEEEP. Okay. Stay positive and keep breathing. You're Beautiful, okay?
Read this when you're sad. Be happy about your own pulse.

Sorry for my s***** handwriting…

Love, ******."

"Hi love you, you're amazing. Listen to ******, she's smart. Enjoy my panda.

*******."

3/19/2013

I didn't think about killing myself today, so that's a plus. Hopefully tomorrow will be better.

5/27/2013

Why do authors always leave a blank page at the end of a book? Is it so people can create their own ending? I'd like to know.

**** and I did separate.

He wants to remain my friend, so I'll let that happen. I can't afford to lose him completely again. 7:07pm.

On that day, 5/27/2013, I remember feeling so much heart ache. I was so upset and so sad. It had been ten days since the split, and I had lost the one that I thought I loved. The old feelings of rejection and neglect came back and I was triggered to cut again, but I stayed strong. There were people I needed to be there for, like my babies. The ones who told me to keep breathing even when I didn't want to. ******* said to listen to ******'s advice because she was smart, and she was right so I did. I listened to my babies, because they looked up to me, and believed that I could do it. I live for them, and for the love I

found last October. They're my heartbeat, and I breathe because they need me to. I had to prove them right.

Kaylee Bryn is currently sixteen years old. She notes that, " I never thought I'd be someone that had been in the position that I was, but this is a time of change and everything is subject to it. I've known for a while that I've wanted to help people, because as the cliché goes, everyone is fighting a battle that you don't know about. This is an autobiographical piece, with excerpts taken from a journal I kept at the age of fifteen."

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Stories at the Core

Maria Baldassarre Hopkins
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Abstract

This essay serves two purposes: 1) to inform educators about the standard setting process that led to low proficiency levels across the state after the first administration of the Common Core assessments in ELA, and 2) to shed light on the powerful role that stories play in literacy development, as well as the deleterious effects of allowing empirical data to supersede them in our Common Core culture. I reflect on the role of story in college students' literacy development and contrast that to the ways stories were ignored during the standard setting and the ways that teachers feel pressured to eliminate them from their classrooms.

Stories at the Core

As a faculty member in the literacy program at Nazareth College, I value a good story. We connect with one another through stories, and we learn through stories—our own and others'—and learn best when we have the opportunity to reflect on the stories we share. That being the case, the most important piece of writing that our students—future literacy specialists—complete is a literacy autobiography in which they are asked to narrate the stories of their literacy development. For this assignment, students reflect on the significance of various literacy events during their lives that they believe have made them more literate people. My favorite part of this assignment is reading the stories of their earliest literacy experiences. Most of them write about being read to as children, while others describe memories of the storytelling or music that permeated their childhoods. Almost always, literacy

during childhood is synonymous with comfort, love, bonding, and creating good stories with their families through interactions around texts. I read words like "bonding," "security," "excitement," "joy," and "quality time." Time and again, they credit these emotions associated with their learning for their future academic success.

What teachers and students are experiencing during classroom instruction today rarely resembles the affective qualities of learning my students describe. Under the new Common Core State Standards in this first year of full implementation, many teachers are feeling local pressure to teach to the standards with fidelity to curricular "modules." These modules, developed by educational companies contracted by the state, attempt to cover large amounts of material in short periods of time. Some parts of the modules were only released to schools days before the school year commenced, leaving teachers with precious little time to familiarize themselves with what they were expected to teach. Students who are beginning the more rigorous work of the Common Core in the middle of their academic careers are often not equipped with the necessary pre-requisites needed to learn new content and skills. Teachers are decrying the loss of the "teachable moment" in which they veer slightly off-course to share a personal story to contextualize instruction or simply to build relationships with their students. They cannot afford to be seen as wasting a moment of instructional time on what can be perceived as frivolity.

But they also can't afford to lose these moments. My students, described above, epitomize what it means to be college and career ready. And they got their start on steady diets of literacy through relationship-building. To be sure, not all school children benefit from the same kinds of language-rich home environments that imbue them with a love for the

kind of learning that happens in schools. For this reason, it is critical that our public schools remain as spaces where stories are shared and relationships are built around the curriculum.

Sadly, teachers feel limited by fear catalyzed at the nexus of the standards and new teacher and principal evaluation protocols. Although curriculum writers emphasize their intentions to offer materials that teachers can use or modify at their discretion, the sudden shift to the Common Core has left schools feeling lost at sea with curriculum modules as their only flotation device.

This fear was palpable last summer when I was invited to Albany by Pearson and the New York State Education Department to take part in a standard setting panel for the maiden voyage of the Common Core assessments for English/Language Arts (ELA). Panel participants were convened after students had taken the tests to determine "cut scores"—the minimum score they would need to earn in order to be considered "proficient."

The process of determining the cut scores was rigid, tightly constrained by a process known as "bookmarking." The most critical part of our work was to place bookmarks in test booklets where items were ordered from easiest to most difficult. Participants placed bookmarks on the last question we believed students at a particular level of proficiency should be able to answer. Before placing bookmarks, however, we were provided with data detailing the percentage of students that answered each question correctly. We were also provided with "benchmark" data with which policy-makers believed proficiency levels should be aligned. Educators in the room raised issues with problematic aspects of the bookmarking methodology, interrogated the impact of the cut score decision on teacher and principal evaluations, and pushed back at the reality that the cut score decisions could actually diminish the

quality of education students would experience on a daily basis. Ultimately, most concerns went unaddressed since psychometricians, not policy-makers, were facilitating the process. And since we were required to sign non-disclosure agreements at the outset, our hands were tied when it came to airing our concerns afterward or bringing public attention to a process that felt a bit like a rigged game.

An obsession with empiricism during the standard setting made it difficult to attend to the stories of real people. And there were many stories. Educators described the tearful reactions of students when unfinished tests were taken from little hands still diligently writing. They described the frustration of students as young as eight years old forced to sit in one place for several hours at a time for several days in a row. They described the helplessness their students expressed when presented with the unprecedented difficulty of the tests. They also expressed fear at what the cut score decision would mean for the students. Would students have to give up music or art to make time for extra remediation? What would happen to motivation to learn when a student who previously did well was now labeled as a sub-standard "level 2?" What about students with disabilities and English language learners who already lacked confidence – would this be yet another blow to an already diminished sense of self-efficacy? The people I sat with during the standard setting both told and lived important stories as educators that the bookmarking process was not designed to capture. The teachers were afraid, not for themselves but for their students. These fears were well placed, but with no "evidence" or "data" to support their claims and concerns, educators' voices would not be heard.

Despite educators' concerns, the outcome of the cut score setting process was that the bar was set extraordinarily high. In line with the state education department's

expectations before we even began our work, only 31 percent of students in New York State met or exceeded proficiency for ELA in grades 3-8 (New York State Education Department, 2013).

It is a sad day when the emotion most clearly perceived coming out of classrooms is fear, especially when it is joy and security that are associated with some of the most important learning experiences of successful college graduates. I emphasize with my students that we have a lot to gain from rigorous standards that hold students to high expectations, but we also have a lot to lose if standards are allowed to sterilize and depersonalize the artful and affective nature of good teaching. For John Steinbeck, teaching represents "the greatest of the arts since the medium is the human mind and spirit." As with any art, teaching is powerful when it is replete with a passion that both reflects and engenders our humanness—humanness that comes in the shape of stories. And those simply cannot be standardized.

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Project-Based Learning and the Common Core: Struggles and Opportunities

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Abstract

This paper explores Project-Based Learning (PBL) and the benefits offered by implementing PBL to Common Core Learning Standards. Benefits of PBL are explored including 21st century literacy skills, cooperative learning, development of self-regulation skills, and deeper content understanding. Project-Based learning and its relationship with the Common Core are discussed, specifically difficulties posed in implementing the PBL for use with the Common Core. These problems relate specifically to ambiguity of the Common Core State Standards (CCSS), lack of knowledge of CCSS assessment materials, and lack of time available for teachers to implement new strategies. Through the closing discussion suggestions for teacher support to integrate PBL with CCSS is presented. A background of the creation of the Common Core State Standards is also provided.

Project-Based Learning

Today's students face exciting new territory for learning in a technically advanced society. Although fifteen years ago basic comprehension of printed text could allow a student to be literate and knowledgeable in American society, current demands of communication require students to not only engage with a variety of information sources, both digital and print, but also with oral and image sources. As the ways students take in knowledge is changing, it is likely that the

ways they will desire to express their knowledge will change as well. Because of these changes it is important to find assessment methods that will allow students to share their knowledge in the discourse of 21st century literacy. One of these assessment methods is project-based learning.

Project-based learning meets a variety of students' learning needs. Chen (2010) stated project-based learning is "a student centered pedagogical strategy that is focused on helping students not only learn the content but also make meaning and establish personal relevance with the subject matter (as cited by De La Paz & Hernandez-Ramous, 2012, p.2). Project-based learning has also been encouraged due to its ability to engage students. Barak and Raz (2000) found that it motivated students and supported them in developing a greater retention of the material they learned (as cited in Cackicki & Turkmen, 2013, p.9). One reasons for this is that project-based learning places emphasis on student work and learning. Instead of the teacher being the deliverer of knowledge, these activities allow students to be the creators and architects of their knowledge. The learning is student-centered (De La Paz & Hernandez-Ramous, 2012).

Along the idea of students being the architects of their knowledge, project-based learning encourages students to take a constructivist approach to their learning. Constructivism places emphasis on individuals "constructing" knowledge through interacting with their environment (Zafirov, 2013). As every individual will approach project-based learning from their own prior knowledge and complete it to develop their own understanding of subject-matter through its completion project-based learning allows every individual to construct their knowledge differently (Zafirov, 2013). Instead of merely recalling the information that students need in order to perform well on tests and lower taxonomy essay questions students are

allowed to investigate, discuss, and engage with the content information (Zafirov, 2013).

Benefits of Project-Based Learning in 21st Century Education

Although there are possibly endless benefits to project-based learning, the emphasis of this paper is to address the advantages of project-based learning in reference to 21st century literacy and education. In reference to these skills, three benefits of project-based learning are the ability to engage in new literacy skills (such as a variety of media sources and collaboration with their peers), the ability to be a self-regulated learner, and for students to develop and demonstrate deeper understanding of content.

New Literacy Skills: Source-Variety and Cooperation

Current educational reforms include the Common Core, which is being integrated not only to ensure a consistent set of learning standards, but also to ensure that students will be able to meet the demands of post-secondary education life. Individuals will need to do more than have the ability to read memos and manuals or communicate via phone calls and face-to-face. They will need to be able to collect information from digital articles, databases, videos, images (charts), and audio recordings. These will be the real-world application of skills students use in schools. Project-based learning and assessment allows students to use the skills they will need in order to succeed in post-secondary academic and career environments (De La Paz & Hernandez-Ramous, 2012). When creating a project students can research information from a variety of sources that are available through digital and non-digital formats. They are able to create authentic projects that relate to

their own lives using the large variety and quantity of sources at their disposal (Zafirov, 2013). New technologies have created new ways of obtaining information. It is not that non-digital sources should be excluded, however, students need access to all the information they will need to locate and manipulate for use in their everyday lives.

Cooperation will not only be imperative to success for students in their professional and academic environments, but for their ability to develop self-efficacy skills and navigate their everyday lives. One of the truths about new literacies is that it allows for communication regardless of geographic locations. This has lead organizations to value collaborative work structures and this will be a necessary skill for many future workers. Project-based learning encourages collaboration in many forms including "small groups, student-led presentations, or whole-class evaluations of project-results" (Zafirov, 2013, p. 300). These forms of projects allow students to experience and master not only the positive of collaborative work but also develop coping strategies for dealing with the negative aspects of such interactions. An example of these negative experiences is *social loafing*. Karau and Williams (1993) described social loafing as, "the phenomenon of people exerting less effort to achieve a goal when they work in a group than when they work alone" (as cited by Lee & Lim, 2012, p.214). Cooperative projects allow students to master navigation of difficulties like encountering social loafing and provides students with effective tools to deal with such issues in the workplace.

Student Regulated Learning

Another important requirement that is already and will continue to be important for students is their ability to self-regulate. Self-regulation of learning is needed in order for students to complete a variety of skills. Zimmerman and

Kitsantas (2005) stated, "self-regulated learners are able to set goals, plan a courage of action, select appropriate strategies, self-monitor, and self-evaluate their learning" (as cited in English & Kitsantas, 2013, p. 129). Self-regulated learners also are intrinsically motivated to learn (English & Kitsantas, 2013). The positive attributes of self-regulated learners can not only be seen in their approach to academic work but in the results of their work as well. Zimmerman (2013) found that self-regulation is also highly predictive of a student's academic performance. Developing the ability to self-regulate may not only improve his/her academic success but also allow the student to master many abilities that will be valued in the workforce.

Interestingly self-regulation has been expressed as one of the difficulties to implementing project-based learning. As noted by Mergendoller et al. (2006), "to effectively engage in PBL (project-based learning, students must become responsible for their learning and actively participate in the process of constructing and making meaning" (cited in English & Kitsantas, 2013, p.129). For student-centered, inquiry-based approaches to learning to work students must be able to shift from their role of passive learners to active learners who develop self-regulated learning skills (English & Kitsantas, 2013). Although the limited ability students have to self-regulate is listed as a reason why project-based are difficult to implement, these projects could actually assist students in developing the self-regulation ability.

Project-based inquiry recognizes students' drive to learn as well as their need to be taken seriously by placing him/her at the center of their learning process (Zafirov, 2013). It is a model that involves students in problem-solving tasks and allows students to actively build and manage their own learning. Instead of the curriculum providing the force behind

learning, students become the navigators of their own education. Chang and Lee (2010) found that project-based learning is an excellent method of instruction which encourages self-learning of students. This is especially true when students are able to investigate topics which they find interesting (Cakicki & Turkmen, 2013).

Deeper Understanding of Content

Project-based learning not only allows students to regulate their own learning, but according to Moursund (2003) promotes higher learning skills such as critical reasoning and creative thinking (Lee & Lim, 2012). It allows students to engage with the central concepts and principles of a discipline and the project work is a primary aspect of the curriculum (Zafirov, 2013). Anderson et al. found that project-based learning engages learners with higher order cognitive processes of Bloom's taxonomy of educational objectives such as "analyze", "evaluate", and "create" (as cited in Huang et al, 2012, p.368). In-depth inquiry is also a focus of project-based learning. It can lead students to deep exploration of authentic and important subject matter (Zafirov, 2013). Through project-based learning students take on the role of researchers who investigate a topic. The Bick Institute for Education (2003) describes project-based learning as "a systematic teaching method that engages students in learning knowledge through an extended inquiry process structured around complex, authentic questions and carefully designed products and tasks" (as cited in English & Kitsantas, 2013, p.130).

The authentic, or real world, problems addressed in these projects further encourage students' deeper understanding. Students begin by "asking open-ended questions, designing and conducting an investigations, researching problems, gathering information, drawing

conclusions based on the findings and reporting results" (Cakicki & Turkmen, 2013, p.9). By encountering real-world issues through these steps students are learning the skills they will need for many decisions later in life. An example of such real-world research would be completing a math project during a unit on percentages in which students go house-hunting. Not only do students look at the houses and locations they like but also the mortgages of the houses they would like and the interest rates of these mortgages. In such a lesson students are not only learning about percentages but also about the process of buying a house which many of the students will eventually encounter.

Common Core and Possible Difficulties for Project-Based Learning: Common Core Background

The Common Core State Standards were written by the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) and the National Governors Association Center for Best Practices (NGA) in an attempt to address concerns about United States student achievement (Liebta, 2013). This has not been the first attempt to repair what is considered, by some, to be a struggling education system. Standards based education reform began in 1983 due to the U.S. Department of Education report *A Nation at Risk*, which warned that something needed to be done about America's failing schools (Liebta, 2013). The 2001 No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) used the recommendations from the reports to reform education practices although its implementation has brought about questionable success (Liebta, 2013). Although there were admirable intentions behind NCLB some individuals have described this programs as a failure as students became fixated on passing mandated tests over content knowledge and development of learning skills (Liebta, 2013) For some students the external success of

passing the test became more important than an internal drive to learn.

Although the federal government is not forcing states to implement the Common Core State Standards, it is definitely encouraging states to do so. In 2009 President Obama's economic stimulus package the Department of Education granted $330 million to two consortia of states in order to develop tests that would be aligned with the common core (Hess & McShane, 2013). So far, 46 states have adopted the standards and there are already a variety of products, for teachers and students, available for educators implementing these standards. However, it should be noted that as the Common Core States Standards are implemented standardized testing continues to be the assessment approach for students and this assessment method is not favored by many Americans. In fact, a Gallup Poll revealed that more Americans feel that these tests hurt rather than helped the performance in public schools (Gallup, 2008).

The Difficulties of PBL Implementation

From a review of current literature on the Common Core there developed a pattern of difficulties that would occur with using PBL during the early period of Common Core Standards implementation. These difficulties included the ambiguity of the standards, limited availability of CCSS assessment content, and lack of preparation time.

Ambiguity of Standards

U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan (2010) stated that the Common Core assessments would "be an absolute game changer in public education" (Hess & McShane, 2013). As stated on the Common Core State Standards Initiative (n.d.) website the standards are:

> a clear set of shared goals and expectations for the knowledge and skills students need in English language arts and mathematics at each grade level to ultimately be prepared to graduate college and career ready. The standards establish what students need to learn, but they do not dictate how teachers should teach. Teachers will continue to devise lesson plans and tailor instruction to the individual needs of the students in their classrooms.

It has also been emphasized that the standards are not a curriculum. The curriculum has already been created by the schools and the role of the schools to align them with the new standards (McLaughlin, 2013). Other explanations of the Common Core standards include changing the focus of the standards from the "proficiency" standards of NCLB to the "college and career readiness" standards of the Common Core (Hess & McShane, 2013). These and several other descriptions of the Common Core provide a very clear image of what the standards are not.

Although the creators and supporters of the Common Core have plenty of descriptions of what the Common Core is not and does not do, there appears to be limited information as to what the Common Core is, or more specifically, what specific ways the standards should be implemented. There has been an emphasis on the freedom the standards offer teachers, allowing them to implement the standards in the most appropriate way for their students. What has not been emphasized is exactly what skills will be on the test. The actual questions that appear on the standardized testing are not able to assess all the material that is covered in a subject over the assessed period of time. It is inspiring that there may be so much freedom in standards implementation, but students still need to pass the corresponding tests in order to show they are

competent in their subject matter. It is true that the Common Core will require states to make many changes to curriculum, test, and teacher training (Hess & McShane, 2013.). What is not provided by the standards are what exactly are those changes supposed to be.

If teachers do not know what the standards are explicitly asking students to do they can't effectively create PBLs to focus on the exact skills the Common Core assessments will ask them to demonstrate. For example, the New York 6th Grade Common Core Standards for Writing include Standard 3b. under "Text Types and Purposes" asks students to "Use narrative techniques, such as dialogue, pacing, and description, to develop experiences, events, and/or characters" (New York State Department of Education, 2011). How does a 6th grader demonstrate pacing? What is expected from this student in reference to dialogue? Without clearer expectations a teacher can't create an effective PBL, or possibly any other learning/assessment strategy, to have their students meet the standards.

Limited Availability of CCSS Assessment Content

Similar to the difficulty of ambiguous standards another difficulty for teachers who would like to use PBLs with their students is the fact that there is not much information in reference to the way CCSS assessment material will be structured nor the skills that will be included on the assessments. Whenever a new strategy or approach is implemented it is expected that there will be some uncertainty as to the actual execution of it. However without knowledge of what types of questions will be on the assessment, instructional alignment cannot occur (Hess & McShane, 2013). This creates a situation where if poor test results occur a differentiation between whether the students were taught what they needed to

know but didn't learn it or if they simply weren't taught what they needed to know (Hess & McShane, 2013). Without knowing what the assessments look like it will be impossible to tell whether differences in testing is due to classroom learning, prior knowledge differences between students, or some other cause. It is known that assessments will include questions formatted as multiple choice, short answer, fill-in-the-blank, matching, completing a map of diagram, all aspects of the authoring cycle, extended responses, and other unique performance tasks" (Mahurt, 2013, p.24). What is not known is what information and through which type of response students will have to demonstrate their knowledge.

These issues present a few difficulties for teachers who would like to use PBL in their classes. First, without knowing the content students need to demonstrate on the tests, as well as the way in which they need to demonstrate this knowledge teachers will not be able to structure PBL tasks in ways that will not only engage the deeper learning experience mentioned earlier but also prepare students for the mandated tests. Without samples or explanations of assessment rubrics teachers may assess their students differently than the ways they will be assessed through the testing. There are likely additional issues in creating PBL tasks for students without understanding how they will be assessed by the state. The NGA and CCSSO (2010) emphasize "The Standards will define what students are expected to know and be able to do, not how teachers should teach" (McLaughlin, 2013, p.2) But without a clear understanding of what "students are expected to know" and "be able to do" it will be difficult to create open-ended activities such as PBLs to prepare students.

Lack of Preparation Time

One of the biggest challenges for educators is the lack of time to prepare their students for the CCSS assessments. This is not only due to a lack of time to spend with students practicing skills they will need to demonstrate on the standardized assessment but teachers have also had limited time to prepare for integration of the standards. It is somewhat surprising that educators have not been given more time for implementation and that testing will occur as early as 2014-2015. It has been noted if that Common Core fails, which it is more likely to do without proper preparation, there is a risk that it will increase doubt about the U.S. Education system among the public as well as waste large amounts time and money (Hess & McShane, 2013). With all this pressure for a successful program hurrying the implementation of CCSS will not create the faith of the American people in the U.S. education system. Like anything that is rushed the only thing that can be hoped for is a Jerry-rigged structure that will continue to educate students in a similar fashion to their current experience.

Another limitation of the quick implementation of CCSS is that many schools do not have the financial means to support the development of an altered curriculum as well as the materials, possibly including computer equipment that will be needed. According to Ellerson (2013) 45% of more than 500 school administrators surveyed stated that due to budget cuts their districts were delaying technology purchases (Hess & McShane, 2013). Some schools will also have difficulty purchasing Common Core-aligned materials due to financial difficulties. Time is also a factor in this issue because as the Common Core integration is still occurring and there is limited knowledge about it many companies are creating Common Core-aligned materials which educators will have to wade through in order to find which ones actually contain relevant

materials (Hess & McShane, 2013). Any company can call products such as textbooks, professional development modules, or supplemental resources Common Core-aligned whether or not they are (Hess & McShane, 2013). For schools that are struggling financially it will be difficult to hire any extra support for material research and teacher support as these schools barely have the resources to buy new materials in the first place.

In reference to PBLs, these tasks are usually not only time-intensive for teachers to create, but also to support students while they complete the tasks. They also take longer than other learning methods to assess. As seen before PBLs offer students an engaging way to develop several important academic skills including a deeper comprehension of content knowledge. If teachers are to provide effective and rewarding tasks for students which will also align with the CCSS teachers will need to have time to create them. Teachers also need the resources in order to created PBL assignments and one of these resources are computers. Computers engage students in research through 21st century literacies and projects created with computers will allow students to engage in a variety of important literacy skills as well as cooperation and reading practice with a variety of materials. Not only do teachers need time to develop PBL tasks but schools need the time to purchase the tools necessary to support such activities.

Discussion: Teacher Strategies for PBL

With the difficulties listed so far it can seem overwhelming to integrate student-centered learning experiences such as PBLs into the classroom. In fact many educators will likely be struggling to alter current lesson plans and activities that will not only ensure student success on the Common Core Regents but will also engage their students'

interest and higher cognitive skills. While teachers may feel overwhelmed, there are some areas of influence they have in implementing these standards. There are also actions teachers can take in order to feel supported and confident that they are effectively meeting their students' needs.

Collaboration with Colleagues

Although there are many educators who are confused and nervous about the implementation of the CCSS there is something to be said about strength in numbers. Humans like to feel part of a group and knowing that they are not the only teacher nervous and unsure about how to handle the Common Core Standards can have quite the therapeutic effect. Secretary of Education Duncan has encourage the use of collaboration for teachers through co-teaching and it has also been found that there are many professional development opportunities through such activities (Graziano & Navarrette, 2012). According to Achinstein (2002) "collaborative practices have been defined as central to professional development because they further opportunities for teacher to establish networks of relationships through which they may reflectively share their practice, revisit beliefs on teaching and learning, and co-construct knowledge (Musanti & Pence, 2010). Collaboration not only provides teachers with the ability to feel supported but also to learn new teaching strategies and share what they have learned.

Today there are more opportunities to collaborate with teachers than ever before. There are in-school opportunities such as co-teaching or meeting with a colleague to share ideas. However, there are also vast opportunities online for further collaboration. Social media like Facebook makes staying in touch with classmates from college education programs easier. Contacting these individuals and sharing knowledge not only opens up a world of information from their teaching practice

but may also help recollection of relevant topics from college courses that could be helpful with the Common Core. There are also many opportunities via forums to connect and share ideas with other teachers. Speaking with other educators and reviewing the Common Core Standards may assist teachers in seeing they have a better understanding of the common core than they originally believed.

Research PBL Common Core Strategies Online

It is understandable that as a survey completed by the National School Supply and Equipment Association found that the average amount of money spent by teachers for classroom supplies was $945 (more than half of that spend on instructional supplies) that some teachers will be concerned about how much money they will have to spend on supplies while integrating the CCSS (National School Supply and Equipment Association, 2013). This can be especially alarming as there are a variety of products for sale to assist teaches with Common Core Standards yet there has not been enough time to review these various materials to understand which will include the most relevant content. Although it may be wise to purchase a couple of professional development and instructional products to assist with the implementation of the Common Core until more research can be done on these products it might make sense for teachers to focus on free resources offered online. These resources will not only offer teachers strategies they can begin to implement now but will allow educators to begin to practice differentiating between reliable and unreliable sources.

A Google search of "project based learning common core" will turn up numerous sources for using Project-Based Learning with the Common Core. In fact, many sources emphasize the importance of PBL for accurate evaluation as to

whether or not students are meeting these standards. Intel Education has introduced the "K12 Blueprint" (www.k12blueprint.com), which offers a variety of information about the Common Core Standards and advice to using PBL to meet these standards. Various webinar opportunities are also available specifically focus on PBL. An hour researching on the Internet will provide a variety of sources for educators that can help them begin the process of integrating PBLs with the Common Core in mind.

Stay Up-To-Date with Common Core State Standards News

Perhaps one of the strongest criticisms of the Common Core is the lack of information and resources that have been made available to educators from the creators of these standards. In many ways it seemed that the CCSSO and NGA created these standards, released them on their websites, and then expected teachers to interpret these standards in whichever way they would. There was a lack of clarity as to what is really being expected from educators and how teachers are supposed to deliver these vague results. Although it would be wonderful for educators to get more support, especially in the form of professional development materials, from the CCSSO and NGA the lack of currently provided materials suggest that this is not realistically going to happen. As unfair and poorly organized as the Common Core process may seem it is up to educators to advocate for themselves and their students and to obtain the information they need to make the Common Core State Standards work.

One of the best ways for educators to stay on top of Common Core Standards is to consistently stay up-to-date with news about these standards. There have already been various alterations as how these standards are being implemented and each state, school district, and classroom. Teachers also need to

make sure they understand the way their administrators expect them to address the standards within different disciplines. Here collaboration may also be an effective tool. While chatting with colleagues ask if they have heard any recent news about the CCSS. Unfortunately the lack of communication between the overseers of the standards and the implementers (teachers) has created a situation where teachers are not only responsible for normal classroom duties but also understanding the requirements of the Common Core creators. Teachers need to protect themselves and their students in order to understand what is truly expected from them both. Staying informed is the way to do this.

Closing Thoughts

By offering each other support and remaining open-minded on ways to implement PBL teachers may find this period of implementation filled with exploration for ways to effectively engage learners. Regardless of one's feelings of the Common Core Standards there are ways to integrate it with your current classroom curriculum. Stay informed and speak with colleagues in order to obtain appropriate support. Be creative and ways to meet your students' needs through PBL and other activities will make themselves available.

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Live Online Chat on the Topic of NYS ELA Assessment in a Graduate Education Course

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Abstract
The following transcript is an excerpt from a live online chat that took place on November 24th, 2013 (and revised afterwards to clarify and enhance the dialogue) as part of an assignment in the hybrid graduate education course at Molloy College in Long Island, New York, titled, *Writing Techniques for Diverse Adolescent Learners. The topic was Assessment. In a previous assignment, the students of this course—pre-service English teachers— were asked to examine three New York State exams—the ELA exams for grades 7 and 8 and the English Regents exam for grade 11—and analyze the writing tasks. In addition, they were asked to design test questions for a mock Regents exam.

Instructor
VG: Dr. Vicky Giouroukakis
Students
JE: John Elliott
JF: Jennifer Finney
NJ: Natalie Johnson
AQ: Alexa Quill

How to Prepare Students for the ELA Exams Replicating the Format of the Exam

VG: How do we teach students what test words mean and how to answer test questions successfully?

JE: Follow the questioning format and use the same language (as the ELA exams) when you create your own assessments (after teaching any necessary vocabulary, of course)…use the same structure on your short essay and multiple-choice questions. It is dull and repetitive, but seems like the only way to acclimate students to the exam.
JF: I think it's hard to teach students these words. It kind of reminds me of the SAT's. The answer can be so simple to someone who doesn't read between the lines, but for others, it might be much more difficult.
AQ: I know one tactic that helped me answer multiple choice questions is crossing off the wrong answers right away, eliminating them. You are then left with two, most likely, and that way it helps to narrow down your choices.
VG: I remember a presenter once speaking at an ELA meeting about multiple choice answers on the NYS ELA exam containing at least one plausible answer but only one correct one.
NJ: And I did find that to be true on the handful of questions I answered--a plausible answer. I think a lot of students don't know the meaning of some of the typical exam words, and also that they don't even realize that they are sometimes doing, for example, analysis or making inferences when they answer text-based questions. Also, I was reading up on word chunks, including teaching Latin and Greek roots, prefixes, and suffixes so that students, especially ELLs and struggling readers, can decode more words more accurately. Not all students pick up the meanings coincidentally. I suspect ELA teachers (and those of us who want to be) love language and literature and tend to absorb meaning like sponges, but I see not all kids do. Teaching roots and such can be done like a game, with manipulatives, for example, so that it doesn't have to be learned solely through rote memorization.

AQ: I think having students answer these questions as a do now/an exam will prepare them, and they will be used to the structure by the time of the exam.

The Dangers of Teaching to the Test

VG: The criticism is that teachers are now teaching to the test. Most of a teacher's instructional time is spent on preparing for the test...And you know how I feel about teaching to the test—the research of which has been my life's work—that it negatively affects teaching and learning and crowds out other important curricula. Yes, familiarize students with the format of the exam but teach lifelong skills that will serve students well on exams as well as in life. I was told by a Social Studies teacher recently that covering the curriculum and teaching to the test are more important than teaching creatively and for enduring understanding.

In a past interview, Kelly Gallagher asked the rhetorical question, what good is it if a student receives a good grade on a test but cannot read in depth or write with deep thought? At the NCTE Convention, I heard him say that kids should be reading high interest books. In his 2009 *Readicide* book, he argued that testing, limited reading experience, and the over-teaching of literature have contributed to students' lack of interest in reading. Both he and Carol Jago argue that good readers are good writers and vice versa.

NJ: Yes, I remember *Readicide*. Since the exams are focusing more on close reading, I wonder if that will make a difference, that is, allow for depth rather than breadth? Or will we have "close readicide" as a result of test prep? On a general note, there is also high-low reading for ELLs and students with learning disabilities.

Skills Necessary to Do Well on the ELA Exams
Reading Skills
JE: Even before teaching the skills necessary to answer test questions, the most essential aspect to students' success is having high reading comprehension
AQ: Definitely. Reading comprehension is very important in order to take these exams and do well.
JF: I agree with Alexa. Reading comprehension is very important, but if we have children who have not grasped the concept of reading comprehension, it will be that much harder to expect them to answer questions about what they just read. What about making the readings more interesting and appealing to the students?
JE: And certainly that is true for any written exam (higher reading comprehension suggests greater opportunity for success), but we've all expressed apprehension about the level and type of text provided on these particular exams.

What Constitutes "Reading"
NJ: I think recorded books should count. Students will be at different levels, or have a disability such as dyslexia, and independent reading should reflect that.
VG: Poems, magazine articles, cereal boxes, like Natalie wrote in her posts...Anything that is text…including graphic novels? As long as students are reading?
JF: Absolutely, graphic novels should count. I would think that anything a student can read should count as reading. Even if the teacher can assign them to read a magazine article that sparks their interest, or a section of the newspaper, or an article online, this expands their vocabulary as well as helps their reading comprehension times five!
NJ: Graphic novels should count, too.

AQ: I think as long as students are reading, their vocabulary will increase, which will then help them on exams.
NJ: The handouts from a couple of weeks ago also mentioned magazine articles.
JE: I agree. Expand your definition of "text" and what we should "assign." The common core allows for several definitions of text; we can see an example in one of these exams (a supplies chart.)
VG: I believe in teaching students great literature as well as high interest texts.
AQ: I don't think it matters what they read (cereal boxes, poems, graphic novels, magazines) because it all increases brain function.
NJ: Brain function and critical thinking. I think that's what the Common Core State Standards are trying to get to. At least in part. In fact, those readings in the 7th and 8th grade tests were essentially articles.

Literary Analysis Skills
JE: Did any of the test questions reflect standards that included: recognizing/analyzing metaphor, simile, characterization etc.?
NJ: Yes, there were questions that required using knowledge of recognizing/analyzing metaphor, etc.
VG: Yes. For example, part three of the Regents asks students to analyze how a writer uses a literary technique or rhetorical device to develop a central idea in the text.
JF: I think the Regents Exam is a different species all in itself, as opposed to the ELA exams, grades 3-8. It pertains to reading that the students have done throughout their high school levels, right? I feel that the Regents Exam definitely explicates more of the central ideas of text along with similes and metaphors as John mentioned earlier.
VG: Do you agree with Jennifer?

AQ: That is true. The Regents does relate more to the curriculum than these tests.
JE: Looking it over now, I'd say that the Regents exam is more concerned with the topics and skills that we would consider ELA.
NJ: But some of the multiple choice did require thinking about word choice, connotation and such. On p. five of the 7th grade test, the question was "What does the meteorite [from the passage] mainly represent to David [the main character]?" This requires making an inference, since it's never flatly (explicitly) stated in the passage. However, the short answer and essay were very much focused on supporting one's argument, which is the main focus of the Common Core.
Developing and Supporting Argument Skills
VG: Yes, indeed, argument and evidence-based responses are the foci of the CCSS.
AQ: I do like that they have students support their argument. I think it is an important skill to have.
NJ: I like that, too.
JF: I agree with Alexa. I think it's important that students can support their argument also. It helps for writing their thesis statements for their own research papers.

Divergent Thinking Skills
JF: I think it can be difficult because not all students are divergent thinkers and not all students are convergent thinkers. Students learn at their own pace and can feel frazzled if we are going to push them to do something they are not strong in.
NJ: Agreed, but aren't we trying to teach them to think at least a little differently from the way they usually do? I'm a divergent thinker, and in my observation lessons, I learned that I had to find a way to include the convergent thinkers.

JF: I just feel that these passages should pertain to more questions based upon what students are learning in the classroom: themes, genres, etc. Asking them to choose the "best" answer just doesn't really seem like an ELA type of question to me.
NJ: I think that's a fair point. I think students need to be able to go a least a little beyond their usual thinking.
AQ: I agree, Jen. The tests don't seem to relate to what students are reading in the classroom. I always wondered why they did that. Especially with the Common Core, aren't we all reading the same novels?
JF: Alexa, I think the main difference is the level that each school district is in. The state tests may be the same, but in one district, students might not be reading the same texts as in another district. I found this difference when I was observing in Uniondale [Long Island school district] and how much different their reading list was from my own school district's. If they need to go beyond their usual thinking to answer test questions successfully, then the curriculum must develop students' divergent thinking skills.
AQ: Which is essentially the teacher's job.
NJ: Also, there is definitely an art to test-taking. I'm a good ELA test-taker, but not math test-taker. So I'd really want a teacher who could get around my math anxiety and help me understand math in a way that my thinking can stretch toward. For short answer questions and essays, I also think it's important to provide students with an exemplar and examine as a class how it meets the requirements of the rubric and how it answers, fully, the question. Advice often heard in writing classes is to read the "greats" and learn from them. Why not show students the best of what we're looking for?

The ELA Exams and Diverse Learners

VG: One last question: How do we help our diverse students (English language learners, students with special needs, struggling learners, etc.) succeed on the ELA exam?

NJ: There is definitely an element of unfairness to focusing so much on exams. I think the Found Poems activity might be helpful, as well as allowing assignments that are not just writing, but podcasts, videos, illustrations. Encouragement would probably be a big help, too. Adolescents are self-conscious by nature, and ELLs and LDs know they already stand out, and they wouldn't want to stand out even more by making an effort that might not match the success of the rest of the class. ELLs in particular often get ignored in the general classroom. Perhaps we can emphasize their progress.

JF: I agree with Natalie. It is unfair to our ELLs and LDs to learn at the same pace as other students. I even know some school districts on Long Island that have done away with RS (Regents Skills), which can be detrimental to them if they are having a more difficult time absorbing the information as a Regents level class.

JE: Unfortunately, I think you focus even more on the vocabulary of the test and the structure of question and expected answer. I think those students will benefit most from a comprehensive understanding of a structured response. There is an implied way to answer those types of questions and ELLs may not know that by simply reading the text of questions. In short, spending time on how to take the test by structuring your own (questioning, assessments, and vocabulary) to mimic the test.

VG: Diverse learners need to know the format of the exam, what the test is asking them to do, how to address each task using appropriate strategies and so on. Essentially, they need the teacher's guidance and support through modeling,

scaffolding, and other strategies to develop vocabulary, background knowledge, fluency that will enable them to comprehend texts in everyday situations as well as those on exams.

Conclusion: VG's Reflection

The preservice teachers in this English methods course upon entering the field of education will face tremendous challenges that include assessment and accountability. This transcript reflects the voices of these future teachers as they are trying to make sense of these challenges and how to deal with them in accordance with state standards and within state and institutional constraints while maintaining the passion they have for teaching English. They realize that Common Core-aligned state tests are here to stay and that they need to find ways (while avoiding the dangers of teaching to the test) to help all of their students succeed on these exams. These ways include replicating the format of the exam in their instructional materials as well as teaching skills—such as reading comprehension, literary analysis, argument, divergent thinking—lifelong tools that will prepare students for the exam as well as, and more importantly, serve them well in their careers and lives.

* Students in this semester-long methods course engage in readings, assignments, and discussions about teaching writing and making writing accessible to all students. They explore multiple strategies and multimodal methods for teaching process writing to diverse learners. Like the students they will be teaching, they also engage in process writing throughout the course including producing multiple drafts of different types of writing and peer responding to each other's work. Techniques and topics that are explored include: the writing process;

narrative writing, informative writing, and argument writing; responding to literature, grammar; and assessment.

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Creativity Counts: Writing Workshop as a Means to Student Engagement Success

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Abstract

Engaging in practices that allow students autonomy and creativity with regard to writing would be a truer reflection of student learning than the models for assessment and classroom instruction that are being presented to educators by the framers of the Common Core Standards. Research based on my experience teaching 7th and 10th grade during the 2013-2014 school year supports this argument. Comparing, in particular, the Writing Workshop model (Atwell 1987) of writing instruction to the current state assessments and instructional "modules" illustrates how the workshop model provides students with better potential to grow as writers and learners.

Creativity Counts: Writing Workshop as a Means to Student Engagement Success

> Do people know the two most popular forms of writing in the American high school today? It is either the exposition of a personal opinion or it is the presentation of a personal matter. The only problem, forgive me for saying this so bluntly, the only problem with those two forms of writing is as you grow up in this world you realize people really don't give a sheet about what you feel or what you think. What they instead care about is can you make an argument with evidence, is there something verifiable behind what

> you're saying or what you think or feel that you can demonstrate to me.
>
> --David Coleman. "Bringing the Common Core to Life."

Contrary to Coleman's beliefs, now more than ever, students need to feel that their opinions on personal matters count and can, in fact, effect change. I contend that a student-centered classroom, such as the Writing Workshop approach, is a viable alternative, one that challenges the teacher-centric approaches to the Common Core Standards such as the modules available on New York State's "engageny" website. With the teacher acting as a guide, mentor and facilitator – and even sometimes as a writing peer – students in a Writing Workshop environment take charge of their learning. Indeed, they did when I experimented with Atwell's Writing Workshop approach to instruction in my 7th and 10th grade English classes.

For those unfamiliar with Atwell's fantastic book, *In the Middle*, it's an approach to teaching and learning that privileges student ownership and autonomy. Students write every day in class, on any topic, in any format that they choose, for a sustained amount of time. The teacher acts as a guide and facilitator in this process, at times writing with the students. The dedicated time for student writing is prefaced by mini-lessons that are initially teacher-driven, but which eventually are inspired and even run by the students. The mini-lessons focus on aspects of the craft, on issues inspired by student writing pieces, or on pieces of writing intended to inspire future student creations. Sometimes, I share my own writing with the students, and they give me feedback. Dedicated student writing time culminates in a sharing of work by students interested in feedback from teacher or peers.

The space within the dedicated writing time is not devoted to structured activities. Students are able to converse with each other or with the teacher. Student movement is not restricted. Students are encouraged to use the Conference Corners in the room which have been established for peer-conferencing and editing or the table which has been designated as "No Man's Land" for the writer who wishes, with her back to the room, to write in complete solitude. As the teacher/mentor, I circulate, conferring with writers about their pieces in progress – encouraging, listening and offering advice.

Prior to trying Atwell's approach with the 7th grade, I actually had used a variation on this model with success, briefly, in my 10th grade classroom during our yearly research paper process. When I was able to squeeze the time for conferring into my 84-minute classes -- after making time for the bellringer, activities, smooth transitions and closure required of my lesson plans -- one-on-one conferences worked beautifully. Not only was I able to meet students where they were with regard to their writing ability, I quickly realized that no classroom situation worked better for building teacher-student trust than a writing conference. Writers were truly engaged when I talked to them about their own pieces. Rarely did I end a day of writing conferences with 10th graders and feel that I had accomplished little; on the contrary, they were some of the best days of teaching that I had.

I decided to implement Atwell's workshop approach, on a regular basis, with my 7th grade class. (I was only responsible for one 7th grade class, as this was a particularly large 7th grade group, and as one of the high school English teachers I had been asked to "cover" a section.) I started out by sharing with my students some potential story ideas that I had percolating, and they listened, interested. They then

brainstormed some topics of their own, and I gave them time to write. And they did – with gusto! As Atwell predicted, I saw lots of imitation. Many of the kids ran with the same topic that I had shared. But as our days together progressed and we brainstormed fresh topics, they broke away from my influence and started taking ownership. Fiction emerged. Poetry followed. Personal reflections on friendships, on the importance of family relationships were common. Book reviews were a popular format. At first.

But most remarkable to me was the attitude of the students. On about the fourth day of class, my student teacher and I found our students waiting outside the door of our classroom as we approached. They asked eagerly, "Are we writing today? Are we writing?" When told that we were having an assembly that day and would have to postpone Writing Workshop until next class, we were greeted with expressions of disappointment. I don't think I'd ever heard kids groan at the prospect of an assembly postponing class before.

Almost as exciting as the feedback from the students was the feedback from the parents. One parent wrote to me and said that our class had "earned the highest praise" her daughter "had ever dished out for English."

"I can't believe I actually like English," she told her mother. "Who knew?"

At the close of the first quarter, I gave the students a self-evaluation. It asked that they reflect on their writing and on their role as writers. I had given them a similar questionnaire at the beginning of the year. One set of responses in particular resonated with me. I had asked the students to reflect upon what a person needs to become a writer. At the beginning of the year, one of my students had answered, "Inspiration." Now, at the mid-year point, his

answer had changed to "Faith in yourself." I loved seeing the empowerment that the kids were starting to feel as budding writers.

Our Writing Workshop has become a place where the kids come in and turn into writers. They share their work with each other, laugh over it, critique it. One student chose to photocopy a piece for the entire class, and we had a session in which he received terrific substantive and respectful feedback. This process, of course, did not occur without some fine tuning. We worked on role-playing what effective feedback looks like and how a productive Writing Conference should run. Writing Workshop is not without its bumps along the way. Nor is it a panacea for resistant writers. In fact, that has been my biggest challenge so far. I have a couple of students who are very resistant to writing. "I don't like to share my feelings," they say. "I don't have anything to write about." And, frankly, it's tough to find the time to address these issues. Critical components of the Writing Workshop process have gotten lost along the way as I've had to make room for reading and test prep within our 84-minute window. Those great mini-lessons that started out so promising have shrunk in number and length. The wrap-up at the end of Workshop which is crucial to helping students develop a respectful and productive dialogue with other writers? It has become phased out as I discovered that there was no way that we'd "cover" all the other curriculum work that I had to get them through if they remained. I also soon discovered that there was no way that the students would be able to negotiate the obscure and confusing questions that the 7th grade ELA posed without some experience with the questions first. So less modeling has resulted in less student autonomy; workshop has suffered.

So exciting was this experience with the 7th graders, in fact, that I decided to implement a similar structure with the

10th grade classes. The results have been surprising. Workshop has helped me tap into previously untapped potential from students who had seemed apathetic about writing and has worked particularly well with students with IEPs (individualized education plans). One such student who usually struggles with writing wrote a beautiful personal narrative about two family members to whom he was close, and this has since opened the floodgates for him with regard to writing – even with regard to his prescribed class essay writing. As a result of our connecting and building trust over his writing, he has been more eager to write and receive feedback. Another student – also a student with an individualized education plan – began to regularly seek me out for feedback on his writing shortly after we started workshopping in class. He recently shared a story with me about a piece that he had written, on his own, after we'd started writing in our class, for a deceased and beloved family member; he told me that his parents were stunned and moved by it.

My experiment with Writing Workshop continues for another few months. I am eager to see how this journey ends as the year approaches its conclusion. At this point, though, I would have to say that it's been quite successful. Enthusiasm for writing is high. Creative energy is a constant presence in class. The kids are becoming critics of their own and of each other's writing. My seventh graders are actively discussing whether they should be using a colon, a dash or a semicolon (not to mention learning about issues like purposeful and sophisticated sentence structure). Each student has an editing journal that boasts of his strengths and tracks her weaknesses, and which will follow each student into eighth grade.

Voice is finding its way into their pieces -- a priority of mine, as I've seen such a woeful lack of it in the high schools in recent years. Writing seems like an onerous task to them

instead of something fun and worthy of effort, time and care. Writing seems to my middle-schoolers, as it did to many of them in elementary school, a fun and exciting way of expressing themselves. This, I believe, is the benefit of Writing Workshop. It gives a voice to all students and allows me to meet each student at his or her level and work with him from that level. I mentioned earlier that some students started out with lots of personal narrative pieces, with books reviews, with character sketches of friends. At this point in the year, however, they have moved out of their comfort zones. Students are experimenting with writing metered poetry, with writing fiction from different perspectives, with purposeful mood and word choice, with letters to the local newspaper, with writing advertisements. They're so eager to write that when I recently had a substitute teacher in and my plans didn't make it to her, the kids took charge of the class, running Writing Workshop themselves, "as if it were just what the doctor ordered," said my sub. She was bowled over by their enthusiasm and initiative.

Once the class began to practice with some test preparation for the upcoming Common Core-aligned ELA 7 exams, it was evident that all of that time spent writing and conferring had paid off. Students were making noticeable progress with regard to their essay writing skills, and it was obvious to me that the skills that they had been honing in Writing Workshop were now being applied to our class essays. Students were incorporating voice into their ELA essays – asking rhetorical questions, using strong and purposeful word choice to express an attitude about a topic, using sentence length purposefully – and, as a result, their essays were a pleasure to read, illustrating that the Common Core Standards and Writing Workshop don't have to be mutually exclusive.

In fact, although I was initially inspired by Atwell, I was interested to discover that Writing Workshop has recently been adapted by Lucy Calkins for use with the Common Core Learning Standards (Teachers College). Thus, even teachers who are constrained by the demands of the CCLS may find inspiration in the work of Calkins' Writing Workshop approach to class, which would be a more freeing and empowering alternative for students than the CCLS work contained in units such as the new "EngageNY" modules. The new reading and writing modules that the state is publishing on its "EngageNY" website, while not wholly without merit, will accomplish only part of the job that a Writer's Workshop does with regard to improving students' writing. In truth, the modules and Common Core activities will tend to bleed time away from experiencing substantive conversations about writing. From scripted and repetitive "interest catchers" to worksheet activities that seem to exist solely for the teaching of evidence-gathering, these module-based activities do not immerse learners in a world of ideas. They do not encourage engagement with the subject to be read or written about. They do not motivate students to infuse passionate, committed, and creative voice into their writing. Students, instead, write in a carefully controlled, teacher-directed environment. They "respond" to "prompts" instead of creating, regurgitating textual evidence on worksheets.

Despite the state's presentation of the modules as cutting-edge, they are, in actuality, hardly different from the books of worksheets that accompany our present classroom textbooks. Worse, they lack (and, actually hinder) the ability to foster the type of personal connection that I've forged with my teenage writers as the result of our Workshop Writing. These worksheets don't build relationships; teachers do.

Ultimately, the aim of writing is to transform the writer, the reader, and, by extension, hopefully, the world at large. We attain this transformation by not only relying on evidence to support our arguments, but by using our language creatively, passionately and persuasively. To develop this expertise, writers need room and time for experimentation and regular, quality feedback from an interested teacher or peer. In any classroom environment, the Workshop's juxtaposition of freedom and structure could be a boon – a comfort to students in its routine and a safe place for self-expression if the teacher establishes structures that demand respect and models these, and a place where autonomy will clear the way for one-on-one quality conversations with students about their writing and allow learners to take charge of their learning.

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The Chunking Vocabulary Strategy: Finding Big Meaning in Small Words

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Abstract
This article will introduce the author and her past experiences with vocabulary in the content courses. Then a literature review of both supplemental and empirical literature will discuss how implementing vocabulary strategies in the science content area classrooms can be beneficial for students. The Chunking Vocabulary Strategy (CVS) will be introduced and a detailed description of its usefulness will be addressed. Lastly, this article will provide an in depth description on the author experience with the Chunking Vocabulary Strategy (CVS) and ways it benefited students tier 3 vocabulary knowledge.

The Chunking Vocabulary Strategy: Finding Big Meaning in Small Words

Who remembers writing definitions every Monday for new vocabulary words for their science, English, or even history class? I remember loving Mondays because it was a time where my brain could take a "time out". Where I could just complete the robotic task of copying vocabulary definitions from the glossary. Well, I can honestly say that I do not remember many vocabulary words from history or English. Science was the exception, because it was a passion of mine and it seemed to be the class were everything fell nicely together for me. History and English on the other hand, were torturous for me. I often found myself during history lectures spending more time thinking about words I did not understand

than the content being presented. Reading in English was pleasant as I was an avid pleasure reader at home. However, I was not the student who would look up unknown words while I was reading. I often would skip them or make up a definition; similar to just changing a person's name in a story that was hard to pronounce. It was not until college where I learned of different strategies and teaching techniques that I saw a link to all the vocabulary that I was robotically writing about or skipping over.

For the past four years, I've had different experiences educating in the sciences, from tutoring for the Earth Science Regents, teaching summer school, substituting, and implementing studies in science classrooms. From those experiences I've drawn one particular conclusion about science teaching; one of the main problems affecting literacy in secondary science classrooms is the rich amount of terminology. Therefore, this article will give a deeper understanding of the Chunking Vocabulary Strategy (CVS) and how it can build skills while also teach students new vocabulary in the science content areas. Hey, why not hit two birds with one stone? (Note: no birds were harmed in the research or construction of this article).

Literature Review

Various studies and academic articles were reviewed to provide background information for this article. The supplemental literature review showed that vocabulary knowledge is imperative in order to comprehend a text successfully, especially in the content area courses. This is mainly due to the construction of the text and the tier 3 vocabulary used. Tier 3 vocabulary terms are low frequency, specialized words that may appear in specific fields or content areas (such as science or social studies) (Hutton, 2008). There

are many forms of vocabulary strategies, Misulis (2011) states that word chunking can help students understand that parts of words can help us determine the meaning of the whole word. Particular examples of chunking shown were ‘bio’ meaning ‘life’ and ‘ology’ meaning, ‘the study of’. Therefore, a student can determine that biology is the study of life based on the meanings of its word chunks. Word chunking involves the breaking of words into meaningful 'chunks' to sound out or find meaning. ‘Chunks’ or also known as morphemes can be prefixes, suffixes, or roots that hold a particular meaning or value (Misulis, 2011). Greek and Latin roots can a useful tool when learning new vocabulary, as they often give a clue of the word meaning. Many teachers are reluctant when asked to teach students Latin or Greek roots because some feel that their complexity can discourage students. However, Cunningham (2009) states that teachers need to be aware of the roots and pick the root relationships they believe will be helpful to their students. Learning about particular root words like ‘struct’ or ‘spec’ can help students determine word part meanings for many different words in the future.

Misulis (2011) also advises teachers to provide students many opportunities to practice using the words during class time. This idea of giving the students opportunities to practice will help reinforce meanings, strengthen working knowledge, and help activate prior knowledge. In another article, Cohen’s (2012) reinforces the relationship between science, teaching vocabulary in science, as well as the use of imagery to enhance vocabulary instruction. Science vocabulary instruction is extremely important in the science classroom. Before students can comprehend a text, they first need a deep knowledge of the terminology used in the text. Students must be able to connect the vocabulary words to the concept the vocabulary word is trying to convey. This can be extremely

difficult for students. Cohen (2012) expresses that in order for students to learn complex scientific material, they must understand the terminology. By understanding the tier 3 vocabulary students will be able to communicate understanding using the language of science (Cohen, 2012).

Robinson and McKenna, (2008) recommends teachers pay special attention to vocabulary and comprehension instruction that help students to be successful reading different types of texts. Direct and incidental vocabulary instruction that activates prior knowledge, imagery, and summarization are the keys to helping students' comprehension (Robinson & McKenna, 2008). In addition, when presenting reading strategies to students, it is important the students understand where, when, and how to apply the strategy, in order to fully develop their comprehension strategy arsenal (Mraz, Rickelman, & Vacca, 2009).

Studies have shown that explicitly teaching a vocabulary strategy to students will affect their comprehension in the content areas. A study by Shook, Hazelkorn, & Lozano (2011) explored how a cooperative learning strategy called Collaborative Strategic Reading (CSR) effected vocabulary instruction in a 9th grade inclusion biology classroom. A pilot study of this strategy was implemented for thirty minutes for three consecutive days. This was done to familiarize them with the CSR strategy. A larger study was conducted on Tuesdays and Thursdays for thirty minutes for eight weeks. Around twenty vocabulary words chosen and flashcards were made. In the CSR strategy, the students have particular roles where they each have a job. The assigned jobs were helpful when the students used the four different strategies when reading about a topic. The four different strategies were preview, click/chunk, get the gist, and wrap up/ review (Shook, Hazelkorn, & Lozano, 2011). A vocabulary quiz was given week after the

CSR sessions. The quizzes consisted of twenty fill-in-the-blank questions where the definitions words were provided along with a word bank.

The results of Shook, Hazelkorn, and Lozano's (2011) study showed the use of the CSR strategies in the inclusion classroom caused students' vocabulary scores increase. The students' social skills also increased as a result of the implementation of the CSR strategy. Shook, Hazelkorn, and Lozano (2011) found that the CSR strategy did not take away from instructional time. In fact the CSR strategy cause the "instructional time increased as students were able to understand concepts more quickly (Shook, Hazelkorn, & Lozano, 2011).

In another study by Lara-Alecio, Tong, Irby, Guerrero, Huerta, and Fan (2012), they evaluated the effectiveness of a literacy-integrated science intervention on ELL student's science and reading achievement on accountability-based state assessments. This study was implemented on a total of one hundred and sixty-six 5th and 6th grade students. Throughout this study, there was on-going professional development for the teacher-researchers participating. The professional development consisted of intense training of specific instructional science lessons with inquiry-based learning, direct and explicit vocabulary instruction, integrations of reading and writing, and enrichment components. (Lara-Alecio, Tong, Irby, Guerrero, Huerta, and Fan, 2012). Data was collected in the fall and spring of school year 2009–2010. A science benchmark test was administered to each student every six weeks during the school year with a total of six tests, testing a different topic area. In addition, data from DIBELS were collected at the beginning and end of school year (Lara-Alecio, Tong, Irby, Guerrero, Huerta, & Fan, 2012). The results from this study showed a positive intervention effect in favor of the treatment

students as reflected in higher performance in district-wide curriculum-based tests of science, reading, and standardized tests of oral reading fluency as well as benchmark tests in science.

This literature review shows that explicitly teaching vocabulary strategies does benefit students in science courses learn vocabulary and comprehension science concepts. In addition, the studies discussed in this review were in the age group or just shy of the age group where students are introduced to tier 3 vocabulary in their classes.

The Chunking Vocabulary Strategy (CVS)

The Chunking Vocabulary Strategy (CVS) is used to help students understand word meaning on a deeper level. Its was designed based on the ideas of Harmon, Wood, and Medina's (2009) and Cunningham's (2009) key word method and strategies for teaching polysyllable words, but was simplified so that students could constructed a CVS chart at any time. It is a three-column chart used to help break down vocabulary words into meaningful chunks to help students relate the word to its definition. The first column is for the vocabulary words, the second it for word chunks and memory aids, and the last column is for the definition of the vocabulary word.

Figure 1 is a student copy of the CVS for a chapter in a living environment class. Figure 2 is an example of the same CVS with different word chunk and memory aids filled in. Figure 2 would be the copy the teacher would use as a reference to help model the use of the strategy to the students.

Chunking Vocabulary Strategy

Name: Chap 5 Vocabulary

Vocabulary	Memory Aids & "chunking"	Definition
ATP (Adenosine TriPhosphate)		The substance used by cells as an immediate source of chemical energy for the cell
Autotrophic		_____- _____ organism that obtains energy from inorganic sources (ex. Plants)
Cellular respiration		The _____ that uses _____ to create ATP for energy use
Heterotrophic		Organism that obtains its energy by _____ on _____ _____ ___ (ex. Animals)
Organic		Substances found in _____.
Inorganic		Substances that allow _____ to take place; substances that are cycled between _____ & _____.
Photosynthesis		Process that produces _____ & _____ in the presence of _____.

Figure 1

In Practice

For my Master's thesis, I implemented Chunking Vocabulary Strategy (CVS) on a classroom of 9th-10th grade students enrolled on a Regents Living Environment classroom. During this six-week study, I would introduce their new vocabulary for the week using CVS every Monday. This took about 15-20 minutes of class time. I saw improvements within the first week of introducing CVS. The students were engaged and contributed during class by making connections. Throughout the study, found that many students found it useful

Chunking Vocabulary Strategy Ch 5 Vocabulary

Vocabulary	Memory Aids & "chunking"	Definition
ATP (Adenosine TriPhosphate)	*Adenosine Tri Phosphate*	The substance used by cells as an immediate source of chemical energy for the cell
Autotrophic	*"auto" meaning SELF* *"Trophe" meaning NOURISHMENT/FOOD*	**Self-feeding** organism that obtains energy from inorganic sources (ex. Plants)
Cellular respiration	*"ation," meaning "action or process respiration=breathing=oxygen*	The **process** that uses **oxygen** to create ATP for energy use
Heterotrophic	*"hetero" meaning different* *"Trophe" meaning NOURISHMENT/FOOD*	Organism that obtains its energy by **feeding** on **other living things** (ex. Animals)
Organic	*who has organs=living things* *"ic" meaning pertaining to*	Substances **found in living things.**
Inorganic	*"in" meaning NOT or "the opposite of"* *who has organs=living things* *"ic" meaning pertaining to*	Substances that **allow chemical reactions** to take place; substances that are cycled **between living things & the ecosystem.**
Photosynthesis	*"Photo" meaning light* *"synthesis" to put together*	Process that **produces chemical energy and water** in the presence of **light**

Figure 2

to use words parts to help them. For example, one student was able to connect the suffix 'tion' to 'respiration' to the word 'digestion'. This connection helped the students understand that both words were a process. This strategy also helped students make personal connections to new vocabulary words; these were recorded on the CVS sheet and used as memory aids. Another student noticed the word 'alveoli' looked and sounded a lot like 'ravioli'. The definition of alveoli is 'a tiny sac of air in the lungs' and the student connected both words by stating they were both tiny sacs, but of course one was a meat or cheese filled sac while the other was air filled.

There are recommendations that should be considered when implementing the CVS. First, keep the vocabulary words

to a 4-6 word maximum on each sheet. During the study, I found that student's comprehension decreased the weeks when 8-9 words were introduced verses 4-6 words. In addition, I found that during the week that I have more than 6 words, I would lose the engagement of the students after awhile. Furthermore, for a vocabulary strategy to be practical, it should not take up full class periods. That leaves little time for integration, reputation, and meaning use of the words. Students need multiple opportunities to use newly acquired vocabulary in reading writing and discussion to really help put it to memory (Kinsella, Stump, & Feldman, 2002).

If the CVS does not strike your fantasy and you want a strategy that has a little detail and activity to it, than Harmon, Wood, and Hedrick's (2006) Key Word Method may be your strategy. The Keyword Method helps students learn new vocabulary using a mnemonic approach that targets different types of learners (Harmon, Wood, & Medina, 2009). It consists of five columns; word, definition, key word, explanation, and image. The teacher introduces a new word and asks the students to think about other words that sound familiar to the vocabulary word. The students will then write the words they brainstorm in the 'key word' column. Then the students write out their explanation of the key word followed by drawing a picture of what defines the vocabulary word. This helps the students make connections in many different ways while in turn helps them create memory aids for the new term.

As I have had first hand experience with CVS, and I can honestly say that it was helpful for the students. Towards the end of my study, I even had students tell me that strategy helped them remember more words for a longer period of time! My education and experience has taught me that no one strategy is the answer and the CVS would be a valuable tool in any content area teachers' arsenal for vocabulary strategies.

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Reflection of a Retiree

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Many of us have said goodbye to colleagues who have retired from long, successful careers. They move on to new endeavors, such as travel, time with friends or perhaps grandchildren. Yet, as life moves forward and we continue on with our routines, we are left with their legacy and pearls of wisdom, if only we take the time to uncover it. For many years, I taught English 8 and Maria taught English 9 in the same district, and although the effort was always made to articulate between grade-levels and transition the students to the high school, I really never knew what took place up there…until now.

I first asked Maria what she felt has been the biggest change in education from the beginning of her career until now. She told me that when she entered the classroom in 1979, she immediately felt a kinship with the parents of her students. Most saw her as a professional, more than capable of doing her job. Rarely were Maria's teaching strategies or grades questioned, or her approach to "unruly" students challenged. Her assumption was that her actions were trusted because she was the teacher, the professional in the room. She believes she was viewed whole-heartedly as doing her job with expertise. She added that teachers were respected in their role, and that their words were honored. So, when was there a shift in perception?

Within the past 10 years or so, the perception Maria shared had changed. The trust and respect for teachers diminished, and somehow the profession was belittled. In the "old days," Maria claimed the administration supported the

teachers and did not bow down to parents who had axes to grind or lawsuits to pursue. When she first began teaching, her principal at the time was 100% supportive of his teachers. He would discuss what he felt needed improvement, but was behind his teachers all the way.

When involved in situations with disgruntled parents and students, he supported his staff. He trusted their decisions because like he always said, they were the experts in the classrooms. Unfortunately, as the years progressed and new administrators took the helm, the trust in teachers seemed to fade. When this happened, staff morale declined significantly. In her 35 years as an educator, Maria believes the environment to some degree became somewhat combative between administrators and teachers. The spirit of mutual respect and cooperation seemed to have vanished.

Over the years, Maria witnessed an escalating disrespect towards teachers and what she refers to as weak-willed administrators. In her opinion, teachers were no longer viewed as professionals who knew what was best for students.

In an effort to remind Maria of why she entered the teaching profession in the first place, I asked her what lesson she would teach if given the opportunity to return just for a day. This was a tough one, according to Maria, because she said that now that she's retired, she dreams about one more chance in the classroom. Since she often chose literature to covey the various social and political aspects of the human experience, she is confident that she would once again introduce the students to the insights of Elie Wiesel.

"The reason I taught *Night* was because it showed the kids how and why people often become combative, hateful, cruel, and "evil." In doing so, it was my wish that through learning about Wiesel's experiences and how the above behaviors of such fellow human beings could be, to a degree of

course, things the kids experienced both as those in power as well as the recipients. Children must be made aware of our shameful pasts in order to hopefully create a more Earthly existence."

As an English teacher, the literature Maria chose for her students always focused on "moral" issues. Given the chance to teach just one more day, such instruction would continue.

The next question I felt compelled to ask was what would a teacher miss most about teaching on the secondary level?

"I miss 'my kids' very much." Maria asserted that there was not one day in her career that she walked into the school and was not excited to see the students. She mentioned enjoying the morning greetings most of all. Over the years, her classroom was often the meeting place before homeroom, and it was not uncommon for her to have 20 kids gathered around her desk all trying to tell her something "very important." She now misses the sounds of the school...especially the laughter. It was what she called her "background noise" for 35 years. She says it was an incredible blessing to be a part of such joy, as mornings are now silent and her days are so quiet.

Every educator has a different opinion on what makes a student difficult. I asked Maria if the most difficult students were in some ways the most intriguing, and whether or not she learned anything from working with them.

To Maria, teaching was more than academic instruction. It was in her nature to want to know about the lives of "her kids" outside the classroom and how their experiences may have inhibited their learning. So many kids entered her classroom angry, sad and forgotten by their families for a myriad of reasons. They were "difficult" to reach as they felt betrayed by the adults in their lives. Realistically, why would

they embrace another adult, their teacher? “There has to be mutual respect between teachers and students for valuable learning to take place in the classroom.”

Furthermore, Maria shared that the "difficult" students taught her the importance of setting the stage with compassion, an open ear, second, third and fourth chances, and understanding that for many children, school is not their only focus. They taught her the importance of viewing each of them as unique beings and not just names on a class roster. “For the record, I was told that my style was outdated and that there is no place for "a heart" in the classroom.” She then went on to share the following story.

“About 9 years ago, a new kid to the district entered my classroom. He was late to class and I told him to be on time from that point on. I did not yell at him, of course. He proceeded to get in my face, swear at me and told me to shove my rules up my behind. The whole time he was yelling, I could not help but see his beautiful blue eyes as they welled up with each angry word. I gave him his time to vent and then said to him, ‘Are you finished because I have something to tell you?’ He became quiet and probably expected me to blast him. I said, “I have one thing to tell you. You have soulful, beautiful eyes." He had no reply. I told him to sit down and never talk to me like that again.”

All teachers have their unique style and effective strategies to de-escalate troubled students. Sometimes a gentle word is the most effective. This student became very special to Maria. They would often talk at lunch and he shared information about his life at home. More times than not, he came to school hungry. “He was a lost soul who yearned to be noticed and honored.”

One of the reasons why I chose to interview Maria was because as she said, her teaching career was never about nouns

and verbs. It was so much more than that. When each child entered her room, especially the "difficult ones," she wanted to reach out to not only their young minds, but their hearts as well. She firmly believes that teachers must be more than transmitters of facts. Next to family, teachers are the connection to the world for many children. In closing, she shared that she truly loved her "difficult" students the best of all, as they taught her empathy and compassion.

Finally, I asked Maria what advice she would you give to a novice teacher entering the profession today? Her reply was honest and pure.

"My heart goes out to new teachers. I have spoken with many and am upset that at 23-30, they want out of the classroom. With all the new demands on teachers, they find themselves exhausted, afraid of the chopping block, and disillusioned by the teaching profession. What can I really tell them, Michelle? Do I whitewash their words and tell them to just "play the game?" Do I give them the "teaching is noble" speech? I refrain from telling them to fight the system because they are young and have financial concerns. I met a young woman at the post office last week. The line was long and we chatted for awhile. She asked me what I did for a living and I told her I was a retired teacher. Immediately, she asked for my advice. Should she go into nursing or become a teacher?

Maria struggled arriving at an answer, but provided the following:

To the novices in the classroom..... Remember why you chose to become a teacher, try to be the teacher you need to be, honor the children above state mandates.

"They won't remember what you said, and they won't remember what you did, but they will always remember how you made them feel." ~ Maya Angelou

I believe that this quote relates to what Maria's goals were as an educator. Although she has only been out of the classroom for 6 months, it is clear that she has had time both on her own and via this interview to reflect on how education has evolved through the years and what has remained close to her heart.

This interview raises a number of questions for reflection.

1. Although every building and district is different, how has the role of the administrator changed over the years? With the pressure of new mandates and testing, has there been too much standardization and not enough personalization?

2. As far as teachers entering the profession, is the profession itself being marketed accurately? Will the strengths they bring to the role be enough?

Every retiree has a story to tell. Some left their careers because they were ready to begin something new. Others left or are leaving because they feel their hands are tied and that the changes do not align to their philosophies and beliefs. Nevertheless, it is my hope that teachers entering the profession read Maria's words and are inspired to care for students and mold them into the good citizens we need in our world.

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