The English Record

Mary Sawyer
Guest Editor

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The English Record

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, poetry, and occasional student work. Please check the website *nysecteach.org* for more information.

Submissions

Manuscripts should be submitted electronically to englishrecord@nysecteach.org

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The English Record is looking to expand our review panel.
If you are interested in serving as a member of the review panel, please forward a letter of interest to englishrecord@nysecteach.org

Letter from the Editor
Mary Sawyer

And the point is, to live everything. Live the questions now.
—Rilke, *Letters to a Young Poet*

Welcome to a special issue of *The English Record*, featuring the Empire State Writing Project Network (ESWPN), the New York sites of the National Writing Project (NWP). We are eight sites spread across New York, with hopes for more to come, each one representing a partnership between a university and PK-12 schools in its region, and each one providing sustenance for a vibrant community of teacher-writers. Instead of having all the answers, we "live the questions" in the pages that follow, thanks to the support of our NWP colleagues and professional communities such as NCTE and NYSEC.

As NWP teacher-leaders, "we envision a future where every person is an accomplished writer and engaged learner" (nwp.org). In this themed issue, we share our joy, pride, inspiration, humility, and heartbreak as we write with youth inside and outside the classroom, working to create the future we envision in New York State. On the following page, we invite you to join us by contacting a site near you. Also, come to our NWP Northeast Region conference on May 2-3, 2020.

Empire State Writing Project Network

Capital District Writing Project (University at Albany)
albany.edu/cdwp/
Genesee Valley Writing Project (University of Rochester)
warner.rochester.edu/researchprojects/projects/GVWP
Hudson Valley Writing Project (SUNY New Paltz)
newpaltz.edu/hvwp
Leatherstocking Writing Project (SUNY Oneonta)
oneonta.edu/faculty-center/leatherstocking-writing-project
Long Island Writing Project (SUNY Nassau Community College)
longislandwritingproject.weebly.com
New York City Writing Project (Lehman College CUNY)
nycwritingproject.org
Seven Valleys Writing Project (SUNY Cortland)
7vwp.com
Western New York Writing Project (Canisius College)
Contact: Genevieve Federick gfederick@hcsdk12.org

For conference information, https://nycwritingproject.org/2019/07/writing-with-youth-inside-and-outside-the-classroom/

Swimming with Dolphins

I am swimming
in a sea of writing,
powered by
waves of memory
and topical currents.

I am swimming
in rhythmic strokes
above the water
or diving with urgency
beneath the galloping lace-trimmed waves.

Swimming
to reach a destination
or floating aimlessly,
watching things glimmer with
visual life on loan to them from sun and water.

I am swimming with dolphins –
larger than me,
writers in the same sea.
You who urge me on, stay by my side,
circling back and forth as we travel together.

But the ocean is endless
and we need to rest
in shallow water.
Sometimes we just stand (put our pens aside)
and look up at the sky.

— Grace Raffaele

Author's note: I am a full-time teacher-consultant for the NYC Writing Project working at a public high school in Flushing, Queens for students who are recent immigrants to the United States. I have co-facilitated several Summer Institutes for new fellows and helped launch a second-year fellows program to offer returning teachers an opportunity to further their role as teacher leaders. It is from one of these summers that this poem emerged.

The Summer Invitational Leadership Institutes are a cornerstone of National Writing Project sites across the country. One key component of these summers is fostering teachers as writers. Based on the belief that we teach writing best when we understand our own writing process, teachers engage in a range of creative and expository writing experiences and participate in writing groups for peer feedback and revision in a safe space. Very often, when reflecting on their summer experience, teachers speak of the "luxury" of this time to write and "be a writer." Writing in the Summer Institute gives us the space and time to explore our own writing process in order to come to a clearer understanding of what it is like and what it can do for our students.

During one of those Summer Institutes, I created a visual metaphor for my own writing process that centered on water - both my own physical presence in water (I love to swim!) and the metaphorical connection between the ebb and flow of water to the starts and stops of the writing process. As that summer continued, my writing group helped me to expand upon the metaphor to include the experience of writing in a community. As a result, I hope it conveys to the reader the joy of writing as both a personal and a collaborative endeavor.
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Leap of Faith

Elizabeth D. Biernat
Stissing Mountain High School

Abstract
Though initially utilizing more traditional, teacher-centered, direct instruction models of teaching writing, Elizabeth Biernat grew to discover writing to learn and writing to read practices through the Institute of Writing and Thinking at Bard College and employ them successfully in her classroom. Currently, she is reading, writing, and researching with the Hudson Valley Writing Project's Invitational Institute to further develop her student-centered writing practice. It is with this group (HVWP) that she has found a label for this much more progressive, engaging, authentic style, and in this piece, she grapples with that adjective, "radical," and how it might apply to her understanding herself as a learner, writer, and teacher.

Leap of Faith

I've never considered myself radical. Teaching writing to high schoolers isn't pushing the needle on the radical-o-meter; in fact, teaching has got to be the least radical profession ever. Or so I thought.

When I first started teaching writing, I was as restrictive as a corset at a cotillion. I spurned mere suggestions of subliminal ideas like student choice and squelched student voice; it was *my* voice and *my* choices in control. I was raised on the five-paragraph essay by a department chair whose expectations were only exceeded by her rigid adherence to teacher-centered methods and conformity to a curriculum. Following her like a devoted acolyte, I dutifully upheld her standards, teaching students how to assemble paragraph hamburgers in thesis driven essays devoid of

creativity and deep thought; that is, until my students and I became terribly bored.

When I'm bored, I search for a good book or someone interesting to talk to, and I found both stimulants at Bard College where I took a graduate course with my first radical teacher. The professor used writing to learn practices, such as the focused free-write, to generate close analysis and reflection, critical thinking and discussion. He had me at: "If this novel were an apartment building, who would live on the 7th floor and why?" During informal writing in class, my mind mined creative and analytical depths, enriched by others' ideas as I drew, wrote, and discussed literature: I loved it. Wouldn't my students enjoy this type of low-stakes, ungraded writing that allowed them to think on the page? Wouldn't the weakest, most frustrated writers benefit the most? But I was wary. It was one thing to be engaged as a nerdy English teacher hanging out with graduate students at an infamously liberal college. These practices might not hold up in the field, so I signed up for my first of many Institute of Writing and Thinking conferences to discover more.

What I uncovered unnerved me: *I* was a student, experiencing the writing I might employ with my students, repeatedly urged to write *with* my students. Like a bug-eyed bystander in a horror movie, I watched my former framework for teaching writing get mauled by my new learning, these practices that allowed student generated thinking to lead discussions, that encouraged student choice in writing, that included personal connections, even narratives, a place in formal writing! Though I was absolutely terrified, I also recognized myself slowly transforming into the person sitting in the front row of the horror movie, grinning and laughing at the carnage. This was *so* cool.

And it was. Each time that I learned a new practice, I tested it out with my students. Our conversations began to have more genuine depth because they were honing in on subtle details in texts and sharing insightful, personal perspectives quite willingly. After years of teaching the same texts, I was surprised

and engaged by their thinking, inspired by their increasing comfort with these practices in low-stakes, informal writing, though I still stubbornly clung to some of the last vestiges of my former knowledge of teaching writing. I still proudly provided topics and rubrics, and modeled outlines and topic sentences with aplomb. A final draft had a firm deadline: no exceptions, no excuses, and certainly no re-writes. But I felt deeply hypocritical. These old ways didn't fit my new experience with student writing. I needed a push off the platform above the wildly reckless bungee jump toward student-centered writing, so I applied to the Hudson Valley Writing Project's Invitational Institute.

Here was another bunch of radicals prodding me to release and re-wild my students through writing. Even before beginning the course this summer, we read "Speaking Truth to Power" in which authors Whitney and Johnson (2017) dropped the "r-bomb" before the end of the first page: "By centering on students and their writing experiences, a process orientation represents a still-radical view of the student as important and agentic" (p. 82). After slowly processing the noun "agent" morphing into the adjective "agentic," I revisited another problematic adverb-adjective mish-mash, "still-radical." This reminded me of the phrase "persistent debate," as in the persistent debate surrounding the effectiveness of school vouchers, but this process orientation approach to writing with students didn't strike me as such a wild method that it might be termed *still radical*. Still toxic, as in nuclear waste? Yes. Still annoying, as in a mosquito in the ear? Yes. But still radical as in focusing on student writers and their experiences? No, that seemed logical, not radical. What a problematic term, that word radical, and oh, how persistent.

Day two of the HVWP Invitational Institute had me wriggling in my seat when I read the term "radical revision" in Heather Bruce's article, "Subversive Acts of Revision: Writing and Justice" (2013). Immediately, I recognized this combination of terms from my work with Bard's IWT. I have adapted a

revision strategy from an article entitled, “Radical Revision” by Carley Moore (2009). It engages students in a multi-layered process of individual and group work that prompts them to create, eliminate, and move ideas and details in their writing. There’s no way that’s “…atypical, unique, or extraordinary…” (Haddix, 2018, p. 8), though my colleagues *may* have been whispering behind my back about my revision strategies. I still didn’t consider my revision process or the students who practiced it as being “subversive” and that our “acts of radical revision” might “…stimulate civic dialogue and move us closer to achieving inclusive pluralistic values intrinsic to democracy” (Bruce, 2013, p. 33). It’s not as if I was a leader of some fringe political group, recruiting members to join me in a revolution of ideas and details… or was I? I was reading revised writing that surprised and excited me and my students.

Shortly after Heather Bruce caught my attention, Marcelle Haddix offered an additional layer to my definition of “radical” though she carefully defines what this term describes, and what it does *not*. Much like Whitney and Johnson, her definition of radical asserts that kids are writers. What they’re writing is incredibly powerful, and teachers need to allow students to do this writing, support and encourage them, not dismiss their real instincts (Haddix, 2018, p. 8 - 9). In this permutation of the word, I was trapped: yes, authentic student writing is raw with emotion, vivid with details, exciting to read, but there’s *still* the TEST, *still* the STANDARDS, *still* the DATA. My impulse was to race recklessly into the waves of student-centered writing and flop into the water, but it was like the ocean in Maine, beautifully tempting but so bone-breaking *cold*. And what if I stepped on a sharp rock, or got nipped by a crab? So rather than seek pleasure wallowing in waves of student writing like these authors suggested, I stood in the breakers, numb from the waist down, flailing my arms over my head and hyperventilating, my feet safely in the sand. Not so radical. I told you so.

But then there's those students who come to me with writing that they do outside of class; clearly, they're seeking affirmation, an audience, approval for something they've created that's not part of the mainstream, mundane school writing. They want to show me that they're writers, and it wasn't until this year when I had a writing center that I was able to create a space for creativity and encourage the students by reading their work, talking about it, and offering ideas for revision and development. One of my regulars wrote to me at the end of the year to thank me for the safe space I'd created where she could come and write, talk, drink tea. Not so radical, really… well, maybe a little, considering she was a trans student who shared poetry about her anxiety and depression. And then there were the two students who wrote their college essays about family members suffering from addiction; the narrative of the grandmother who'd died and left a legacy of one-liners and love; the family separated by a parent's distant job; the parent's divorce; the student balancing two identities as black and Latina living in a conservative, white community; the liberal who lost a friend as a result of her outspoken position on gun control; the girl who's trying to write about a lost pregnancy without writing about the lost pregnancy. These students' stories took my breath away, so why wasn't I consistently allowing this kind of writing to flourish and grow in my classes?

Wait a minute there, HVWP workshop leaders: are you *brainwashing* me to become radical with these readings, this work?! When I started to reflect upon all the pieces we've read, the writing and discussions we've shared, almost every author is prompting readers to consider an alternative writing and teaching world where students and their thoughts, emotions, and experiences are the source of writing and the stimulus to our teaching. In the open space between teachers and students who build knowledge and relationships through writing, like Willow McCormick's civil rights letter exchange, the group also extends its thinking to stimulate public dialogue, and by extension, social

change (McCormick, 2013). That's not radical, that's democratic! But as Haddix somberly reminds us, it's radical because it's *not* a common practice and *under*valued in too many schools and communities (Haddix, 2018, p.8). Yet it produces riveting results, creates engaged students with an active awareness of their role in social movements, and most importantly, the process makes teachers and students happier. So why aren't all teachers and schools signing on the dotted line to join this party, to campaign for this practice of writing as praxis, as being and living (Yagelski, 2012)? Why wasn't I letting the writing live without limits?

So, I've read, and I've thought, and I've written, and the more I read, the more I think, and here I am writing, I feel the urge to radically revise my teaching to meet my students where they are and join them in the march towards where we both need to grow as thinkers and writers. This year, while responding to a prompt on one of the first days of school, a student asked me if she could take some of her note-like thoughts and make them into a poem to add to her writing piece. I responded, "Why not? Let's see where it takes you." And with that, I slowly swallowed my pride and leapt from the platform into the open air.

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Elizabeth Biernat has been teaching eleventh and twelfth grade English in Pine Plains, New York at Stissing Mountain High School for eighteen years. She was recently named the coordinator of the Writing Center at her high school and is a teacher-leader with the Hudson Valley Writing Project. Before moving to New York, she taught ninth through twelfth grade English in Braintree, Massachusetts at Braintree High School for two years. betsy.biernat@gmail.com

Who am I?

What am I gonna grow up to be?
What am I gonna be like?
Where am I gonna live?
Will I end up shining bright?

To be honest, I don't even know the answer to these questions.
But hopefully my time will come and ima catch some blessings.
Ima follow all my dreams.
And ima make sure I succeed.
And ima always make sure
That I get what I need.

It's time to talk about the person I am now.
I'm a 12 year old girl who has eyes that are brown.
I'm a 12 year old girl who's terrified of clowns.
And I'm a 12 year old girl who never ever looks down.

Who am I?
Sometimes I gotta think, I gotta reflect
I gotta look at my accomplishments and look at my regrets.
Think about the things that might have earned me some respect.
Think about my life think about what could be coming next.

Everything has an affect even things that can be so small
But ima never ever ever allow no one to make me fall
Because the littlest thing could honestly just change it all
So as long as I stay focused I will soon be standing tall

I’m tryna find myself, I wanna know just who I am
But it’s gonna take some time that’s what I gotta understand
Stay focused on myself, that’s my plan
Cuz I’m the only one that knows me like the back of my hand

So ima be me and ain’t no one gone tell me that I can’t
And ima say it one last time i’m tryna find out who I am.

—Sarah Adams

Author’s note: Hi, I am Sarah Adams, a 13-year-old girl who lives in Rochester, NY. In my free time, you’ll probably find me listening to music or practicing for my step team, but you will also find me writing free verse poems and advocating for my community through my writing. I am an 8th grader at East Lower School, and I enjoy hanging out with my older sister, friends, and people I am close with in general. I recently had the opportunity to make two short films at my old school: one about racism and police brutality and another about Dr. Walter Cooper, a local activist from Rochester. This past summer, I participated in the Genesee Valley Young Writers Camp for the first time and revised many of my poems. I also experimented with the genre of magical realism.

Sarah Adams is a former student of Alexa E. Basile, a teacher leader with the Genesee Valley Writing Project. Alexa is a Literacy Specialist in East Lower School in Rochester, NY alexa.basile@rcsdk12.org

Fury

From the depths of antiquity,
Fury rises.
She breathes her fiery breath
With unrelenting vehemence.

She is the judge, the jury, and the executioner
Of every right ever wronged,
Of every offense ever offended,
And some sins not even so egregious.

She marshals a strength and pace
That leaves no room for reason,
No room for apology, no room for regret.
Her purpose is vast, but precise.

She passes in a red blur.
Anger? Fire? Blood?
It is difficult to see exactly what she brings;
It is apparent what she takes.

From the depths of antiquity,
Fury rises.
To the depths of antiquity, she retreats
Clutching bloody shards of the present to her.

— Deb Mueller

Author's note: I am a fellow of the Leatherstocking site of The National Writing Project formed and directed by Dr. Thor Gibbins at SUNY Oneonta. Joining in its first year, I experienced more breadth as a writer than I ever had before. I have participated in each subsequent institute, this year being the third. This year's Advanced Institute is the

College, Career, and Community Writers Program (C3WP), which is focused on respectful argumentation. The lessons that I learn from the process and fellow participants in these institutes is immeasurable.

I have had a lifelong love affair with English Language Arts. Originally a high school English teacher, I became a reading specialist with a desire to impart the gift of literacy to others. Also certified in Elementary education, I have taught third, fifth, and sixth grades. I have also taught both English and education courses as an adjunct instructor at two local colleges. I am currently a pre-k teacher at Stamford Central School in the beautiful Catskill Mountains of New York. Teaching literacy in pre-k is absolutely the most gratifying wonder that I have ever experienced. Students start in September, not knowing what a letter is, and by June, they know not just the alphabet, but can read sight words and are beginning to decode words. I engage them in drawings to depict vocabulary or to reinforce comprehension and write their dictated story about the word on the page. They enter kindergarten with a strong foundation to become lifelong readers and writers.

This poem was originally written at a Leatherstocking Writing Project (LWP) fundraiser in October 2018. The event was facilitated by LWP Inaugural Fellow and high school English teacher, Linda Staiber. Participants were challenged to produce work that personifies an emotion. I wanted to write about an emotion that was powerful but uncommon. I also have a passion for mythology which came from my grandmother who was a Latin teacher and lover of language. This poem is a nod to the mythological furies, and while they are three in number, my poem depicts fury as a single entity retaining the feminine gender of the Greek triad. Fury has become associated with extreme anger in our everyday parlance, but the mythological furies were avengers of crimes against the natural and moral order. For these reasons, my poem is intended to acknowledge this powerful and ancient awe-inspiring phenomenon. dmueller@stamfordcs.org

Measuring Loss: Physical Safety and Psychic Cost in the ELA Classroom

Alicia M. Wein
Guilderland Central School District

Abstract
This article articulates aspects of the emotional labor of teaching in the language arts classroom that are challenged and compounded by schools being asked to function under looming threat of violence. What of the learning climate is irrevocably lost when we must prioritize physical, emotional, and financial resources to maintain physical safety? What damage is being done to our understanding of a functional writing classroom? How can educators acknowledge this loss to each other and account for it to the general public and policymakers?

Measuring Loss

A student from my freshman class twenty years ago has recently written her memoir. She has kept in touch and we have remained friends, the dynamic shifting as she grew from a needy, motherless girl to an adult woman with children of her own, a husband, a ministry, and a deep well of spiritual insight. She is my friend, but the habits of our friendship took root in my classroom, so she continues to share drafts of her work, finally convinced that she can write to make sense of her life, a claim that she firmly rejected in grade nine, when she turned out pages of flaccid, escapist mysteries after the style of Agatha Christie. Those were only the first steps on the path that she forged to write as a means to reimagine and recalibrate her place in the world. I've responded with feedback built into lengthy conversations about abandonment, motherhood, and commas over coffee. She asked me to write the foreword to her

book and I find myself considering the teacher I was when we met, the teacher I am now, and the ways that I've had to revise my work, my purpose, my energy these decades.

There is no way to be all that students need. Their talents and deficits are so vast and so varied that any attempt to be everything to even one—much less a room filled with thirty—is inevitably doomed to fail, but without a sense of optimism, success is even more impossible. There is a near palpable feeling at the opening of the school year: "We can't do it all. But we're going to try." In that spirit, for many years, part joke, part game, I've tried in one very narrow fashion to provide every (tangible) thing that a student might need. If asked for something that I didn't have, I would make sure that I had it the next time. So I have one closet filled with tampons, band-aids, laundry sticks, duct tape, screwdrivers, hair ties, safety pins—so many wardrobe malfunctions—a random but useful assortment of doodads to evoke an "OMG! You saved my life!" If a student asks for tape, it's a point of pride to reply: "carpet, book, scotch or duct?"

Students have laughed and flattered me by saying that my room is like Mary Poppins' bag. They have also cheerfully said: "When we are in a lockdown, *this* is the room I want to be locked in!" I took it for the compliment that was intended. But now, two-thirds through my career, I want to take a step back, breathe, and let myself be horrified by the implications, and what teaching has come to include. I'd like to try to explain, especially to non-educators, what it looks like to teach against a backdrop of peril.

The day before spring break, I spent ninety minutes of designated planning time dismantling a second closet in the back of my room, removing the books stored there, then old work, supplemental materials, and eventually shelves and hardware. In their place, I put a red plastic bucket that currently contains glucose tablets and emergency blankets in case students in my care go into shock—it can also be used as a

place for students to relieve themselves should we ever be trapped in a lockdown for hours. The closet is stocked with emergency snacks and water bottles, and from my next paycheck—comfort is costly—I will purchase kitty litter (for silencing streams of urine), a camping toilet seat that screws on the bucket, and a push light to mount in the closet. I used to stock my closet with items to provide comfort; now I think about what might literally save a child's life. Or my own.

In the days that followed my closet reorganization, I awoke in the night thinking: "I should bring in old towels in case I ever need to staunch bleeding," for which, by the way, I have zero training. I drive to school thinking about which kids I will see that day, and which ones will be the most vulnerable in a scary situation. I know that no amount of prep makes you invulnerable to a weapon designed to kill people, but short of that, what will they need if there's threat of violence? On my drive to work, I used to mentally rehearse my lesson plans. Now I rehearse the "run hide fight" protocol.

I already had a shooter in class and he hated me; he wrote a scathing letter to me about my class the year before he murdered his mother as a test to see if he could commit a school shooting. Some days I think that this makes it less likely that I'll have a second student with violent tendencies; other days I see it as a sign that violence grows closer every day, inevitable in a long teaching career, and looms larger when horrific events that once lived in pockets or in the margins become widespread. When I remember Alex—not the faceless silhouette of an imagined shooter—I remember that the kids who get the guns are *also* our kids and probably will be the kids whom we have reached out to for years. In safety training, we were taught that if a student is trapped in the hall during a lockdown and they knock on the door pleading to come in, we must refuse them entry, because they might be feigning to gain access. Would I have been able to make that emotional pivot after working with Alex for a year, trying to learn his

vulnerabilities and passions, caring about his success when he was resistant, helping him unlock his writing from its stiff reserve? Would I have been able to turn away from him and register him not as a lover of history, an advocate for kids with disabilities, a much beloved younger brother and only son, but merely as a threat? It breaks mine to consider what that requires of a heart.

I once looked to mentor teachers and educational thought leaders for inspiration, but I wonder if experts on second-hand trauma and PTSD in soldiers have the more vital information for me now. At times this past spring, I considered going on anti-anxiety medicine to address my stress level. Then I thought: Wait. It's normal to be frightened of this reality. *Medicate me because I might get shot at work? Help me, doctor, because I don't want children murdered in front of me? Make me numb to my emotions because—unless I resign myself to the barbaric—I cannot function as an educator?* I used to think that it was normal to feel stress if my grades were running late or there was a student I wasn't connecting with. Now I practice mindfulness techniques to avoid succumbing to the normalization of violence in my workplace.

Teaching and learning, perhaps especially in the writing classroom, is built upon relationship; relationship-building is intellectual and emotional labor and does not—cannot—happen in a vacuum, despite the assumptions of policymakers and the market. High-quality educators have long prized classrooms as protected spaces in which teachers fuel connection and vulnerability as reciprocal forces. These emotionally resonant spaces, the tippy-top of Maslow's Hierarchy, are contact zones where understandings break open and students construct their understanding of self and culture, and these spaces are not happy accidents. They are created with immeasurable emotional and intellectual labor on the part of educators. It's not merely the supply closet that was lost for my room as my relationship to teaching shifted; the fear of

physical violence has already—and continues to—cause emotional violence. I wonder how long I'll be equipped to cope. I wonder if the loss for our profession will ever be acknowledged, much less restored.

Twenty-two years into teaching, I still treat my students with tenderness. I still remain friends with graduates. I still read their writing when it appears in the world outside of school walls. But I'm denied the opportunity to teach without fear, ever aware of this new reality that in our hands, a generation is growing up believing it's usual to live under constant threat in our public spaces. They do not—and perhaps cannot—imagine another possibility. Another year is pending, and I do not want to teach this lesson. I reject it on principle, while teaching it every day, without having a solution to offer. I'm not a lawmaker. Nor am I an EMT, critical care nurse, marksman, or psychologist. I'm not even adept at rudimentary First Aid. I'm merely an educator who used to know that I could be free to expect more than survival, to be more than a guardian of children's bodies, more than a steward of a new normal that should be anything but.

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Let’s Get Ethical: Incorporating Ethics Bowl into the Composition Classroom

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Abstract
This paper explores how the implementation of the National High School Ethics Bowl cases in the dual-enrolled freshman composition classroom can improve students' argumentation skills. The paper describes Ethics Bowl, defines “democratic deliberation,” and explains how participating in Ethics Bowl improves student discussion and student argument writing. Readers of the paper could feasibly implement Ethics Bowl in their own classrooms upon reading the paper.

The Spirit of the Ethics Bowl

On a dreary February afternoon in room 305, two teams of high school seniors sit across from each other discussing Case 7 “Love Drugs” (Dery et al., 2018). A student from Team A identifies the question that they will consider in this round: “Is it morally permissible to take love drugs to create, sustain, or maintain a romantic relationship?” A second team member declares that the team is certain about one concept—the “love” produced by love drugs is artificial; it is the artificiality of the emotion that seems to make taking the drug categorically wrong. “After all,” another team member says, “What happens to the status of real emotion if emotions are permitted to be faked? And isn’t romantic love supposed to be rare and special—achieved through the union of two like-minded individuals?” Another student queries, “If allowed, would there be any restrictions placed on how often you could take the love drugs? Or would one be allowed to fall in and out of love with as many individuals as they wanted to?” A final

student acknowledges that the team understands how one could perceive love drugs as “the greatest good for the greatest number” in the case of married couples with children planning to divorce. But he wonders, “Would seeing your parents take such drugs increase the likelihood of the children taking the drugs in the future? Would the children, in a sense, devalue love since their parents faked the emotion?”

The timer on the smartboard rings and the timekeeper invites Team B to take one minute to huddle and prepare their commentary on Team A’s presentation. The judges, a group of five students, are abuzz. Some are furiously taking notes so they do not forget their questions. Others are speaking directly to each other in an attempt to clarify their questions before the next round. The timer rings again. The clock is reset for three more minutes, and Team B begins. The first student to speak thanks Team A for their response and acknowledges that they too came to the same conclusion: Love drugs are categorically wrong. But they wonder, “Are love drugs permissible in some cases?” Another team member adds that the team is specifically thinking about people with severe depression or mood disorders. The team queries, “Are there some people for whom experiencing love is so difficult that a drug would be necessary?” One student postulates that love is a natural human emotion—an emotion that all humans have a right to experience. “If your biology keeps you from experiencing love profoundly, could you be allowed to take the drug?” In the final minute, a third student addresses Team A, indicating that they have not considered all the stakeholders. After all, how would individuals in an abusive relationship feel about the presence of a love drug? Could the love drug be abused and slipped to a victim of domestic violence so that the abuser could perpetuate the cycle of violence? The timer goes off for a third and final time. There is silence in the classroom. Inquisitive minds are surveying complicated and conflicting thoughts. And then—an eruption. The fourteen students

watching Round 1 of College Freshman English's Sixth Annual Ethics Bowl have a lot they want to say in response to Team A's presentation and Team B's commentary. For now, though, the timekeeper keeps order and gives the stage to the panel of student judges. The first judge asks, "In your opinion, Team A, is there any moral distinction between taking love drugs to create a relationship versus taking love drugs to sustain a relationship?"

Ethics Bowl: The Fundamentals

To an outside observer, it might seem as if my students had failed fantastically at debating. After all, both teams had fundamentally argued the same position on the issue—that love drugs are not morally permissible. But this was not a debate with its focus on winning and earning points. My students were discussing National High School Ethics Bowl cases provided by the National High School Ethics Bowl (NHSEB), "a competitive yet collaborative event" in which students think through current ethical dilemmas together, "as fellow citizens in a complex and moral community" (About NHSEB, 2019). A packet of cases is released for review in September, and Ethics Bowl teams have five months to analyze the cases and develop their team's position on each case's moral question. According to NHSEB:

> An ethics bowl differs from a debate competition in that students are not assigned opposing views; rather, they defend whichever position they think is correct, provide each other with constructive criticism, and win by demonstrating that they have thought rigorously and systematically about the cases and engaged respectfully and supportively with all participants. (About NHSEB, 2019)

Students on Ethics Bowl teams compete in regional competitions and are evaluated on their clear and systematic address of the moral question, identification of the central moral dimensions of the case, and the thoughtful consideration of different viewpoints, including those that would loom large in the reasoning of individuals who disagree with the team's position (About NHSEB, 2019). Students who win regional competitions may advance to the national competition hosted by the Parr Center for Ethics at UNC Chapel Hill.

Hauppauge High School has had an Ethics Bowl club for five years and has annually sent two teams of students to the regional competition at Hofstra University in Hempstead, New York. I teach College Freshman English, a dual enrolled freshman composition class in which high school seniors are eligible to get credit from Suffolk County Community College for successful completion of our class in Hauppauge High School. One of the course's objectives is to develop critical arguments and identify, analyze, and evaluate those arguments. In furtherance of this objective, the course concludes with a substantive argumentative research paper. Just as Hauppauge High School started an Ethics Bowl club, the staff began witnessing the manifestation of our country's increased polarization in the classroom. Bitter debates about gun control, immigration reform, and abortion were finding their way into hallways and classrooms across America, and our high school was not immune. In his 2017 lecture delivered at the Lowry Institute for Media Award dinner, *The New York Times* columnist Bret Stephens said:

> We disagree about racial issues, bathroom policies, health care laws, and, of course, the 45th president. We express our disagreements in radio and cable TV rants in ways that are increasingly virulent; street and campus protests that are increasing violent; and

personal conversations that are increasingly embittering. (para. 8)

Stephens (2017) calls Americans “Casanovas in reverse” (para. 15): The more we argue, the worse we are at it. Deborah Tannen (1998) argues that we are living in an “argument culture,” where “winning is more valued than “understanding” (as cited in Friedrich, Bear, & Fox, 2018). I felt it was my duty to not only teach writing but also civic responsibility to my seniors. Intrinsic to teaching argumentation is modeling for students how to navigate our dense informational world so they can take an informed stand on issues and use their voices effectively to participate in democracy. Ethics Bowl (Ladenson, 2001) “cultivates virtues central to democratic citizenship” most notably democratic deliberation. In this way, the incorporation of Ethics Bowl as pedagogical practice supports our goal of cultivating argumentation skills while promoting civic understanding. With this in mind, my colleagues and I set out six years ago to incorporate Ethics Bowl in the College Freshman English classroom as a way of teaching argumentation.

Ethics in the Classroom

Revised in 2017, New York State’s Next Generation ELA standards require students in the 11th and 12th grade to:

- Write arguments to support claims that analyze substantive topics or texts, using valid reasoning and relevant and sufficient evidence.
- Introduce precise claim(s), establish the significance of the claim(s), distinguish the claim(s) from counterclaim(s), and create an organization that logically sequences claims, counterclaims, reasons, and evidence.
- Develop claim(s) and counterclaim(s) thoroughly and in a balanced manner, supplying the most relevant

evidence for each while pointing out the strengths and limitations of both, anticipating the audience's knowledge level, concerns, values, and possible biases.

Ethics Bowl supports the accomplishment of the Next Generation standards in many arenas. The Ethics Bowl packet provides students with substantive topics including gun control in America, China's social credit system, vaccines as a cover for spy programs in Afghanistan, and de-extinction. Students must use factual reasoning to establish and support claims, and most importantly develop their claims and counterclaims thoroughly and with balance. Students are explicitly evaluated on their ability to explain the limitations of their position and the acknowledgement of the reasoning of those who oppose them. It's never about bullying or berating your opponent until they are converted to your side. And it's most definitely not about name-calling or dismissiveness. You simply cannot win the competition if you cannot articulate the position of those who disagree with your team's position and explain to the judges your consideration of opposing viewpoints in developing your own.

Our study of Ethics Bowl begins with a primer on ethical reasoning. Robert F Landenson, co-founder of the Intercollegiate Ethics Bowl, explains "The Educational Significance of the Ethics Bowl" in *Teaching Ethics* (2001). Landenson explains that ethical understanding requires both an awareness of the arguments in favor of a student's position on a moral question as well as those concerns that would motivate stakeholders in disagreement with the student's position. In other words, ethical reasoning requires students to thoughtfully consider *all* viewpoints when developing a position on an issue (p. 67). Students need not know much ethical theory to engage in ethical understanding. In fact, the NHSEB indicates on their judging sheets that students are not required to quote or name ethical theorists during competition. It does help to understand a few core principals. Landenson suggests familiarizing

students with “the major philosophical conceptions” such as Utilitarianism or “greatest good for the greatest number” and Kantianism or categorical reasoning (p. 68).

We familiarize students with the core ethical principles through viewing Professor Michael Sandel’s Harvard Lecture series *Justice*: Episode 1—The Moral Side of Murder (2009). The episode differentiates consequentialist reasoning which locates morality in the consequences of an act from categorical reasoning which locates morality in the act itself. Consequentialist reasoning is largely based on Jeremy Bentham’s concept of Utilitarianism with its aim to always produce the greatest good for the greatest number thus maximizing pleasure while minimizing pain. Those espousing consequentialist reasoning might argue that it is morally permissible to torture an individual if they have information about a bomb in Times Square. The act of torture is justified, because it theoretically could save the life of many even if it violated the rights of one. Categorical reasoning posits that humans are born with certain rights and that it is not morally permissible to use a human as a means as in the torture example previously explained. A person practicing categorical reasoning would not torture no matter the circumstance since torture itself is fundamentally wrong. To make it simple for my students, I boil consequentialist reasoning down to “the greatest good for the greatest number” and categorical reasoning to “Murder is wrong. Murder is wrong. We don’t murder.”

Students require some practice with ethical reasoning before they are ready to prepare for Ethics Bowl, and Sandel’s *Justice* provides the practice. Episode 1 provides students with two classic ethical dilemmas—the trolley car case and the lifeboat case. The lifeboat case provides a practical primer on how to think ethically. In this real-life case, a ship capsized and the captain, first mate, one sailor, and cabin boy managed to survive by escaping to a lifeboat. There was no food on the

lifeboat except for a few cans of turnips, and the survivors are stuck on the lifeboat with this limited amount of food for 20 days. Starving and fearful for their survival, the captain, first mate, and sailor decided to kill the cabin boy (who incidentally had appeared sick) and eat him to nourish their bodies. The lifeboat case poses the question, "Was it morally permissible for the captain, first mate, and sailor to murder and eat the cabin boy?" Each year my class erupts in rancorous debate and disgust over the case. Their first instinct is to consider whether it is legal to murder the Cabin Boy. My students grew up watching *Law and Order* and *CSI* re-runs. They want to know if the Captain would be exonerated in a court of law (spoiler: although he wasn't exonerated, his punishment was commuted from the death penalty to six months in prison by the Crown). But herein lies the dilemma and the value of the activity; Ethics Bowl does not ask you whether something should be legal but whether something is *moral*. The legality of the case is set aside and removed from consideration. Instead, students must ask themselves, "Can it ever be morally right to take the life of another man?" With the legal question dismissed, students are ready to play with consequentialist and categorical moral reasoning. Some will argue that it is the greatest good for the greatest number. One man was sacrificed for three lives. Others will argue that consequential reasoning doesn't apply here. Murder is fundamentally wrong, and you can never know the good that the cabin boy may have brought to the world if he had lived. Perhaps his actions could have had a greater impact on the world than the actions and lives of the three other men combined. It's fascinating to see how students try on these ideas and how, once given a focus, they naturally push beyond the two theories introduced in the lecture. Each year, someone brings up the maxim, "The captain goes down with the ship," arguing that the captain has the responsibility to protect his crew at all costs, not to murder a crewmate. Still others argue that the captain should have sacrificed himself as food for the

crew. This is usually met by an uproar. If the captain is the most knowledgeable, how could it help anyone if he sacrifices himself? The debate continues.

Michael Sandel says in *Justice* (2009) that philosophy makes the familiar strange and in doing so philosophy unsettles you. I rely on this unsettling; it is the sowing ground for critical thinking. Oftentimes students leave the classroom, announcing to me that they are still confused and do not know what to think. Although some of my students have not changed their positions from the beginning of the discussion to the end of the discussion, nearly none of the students are as certain of their position as they were at the start. I like to say that if they leave the classroom more confused than how they entered, that's a good thing. That's where the learning lives. The following day after the students have had the night to think about the case, they write an argumentative essay in response to the question posed on Day 1. Once they can identify, understand, and articulate opposing viewpoints to their position, they are ready for the Ethics Bowl cases.

Preparing for Competition

Students choose their own teams of three to five students for Ethics Bowl. They have approximately one week to read, discuss, and develop their position on the cases. I used to worry that when students selected teams that they might work with like-minded students and thus their conversations would lack complexity and richness. Over the years, I have witnessed that this is not the case. In a reflection on this year's Ethics Bowl, a student shared that she had chosen her team because she thought that everyone would have the same moral positions, but she quickly found this to be untrue. One of the reasons why Landenson (2001) first created the Intercollegiate Ethics Bowl was for its ability to generate discussion in which all students are willing and ready to share divergent viewpoints in a respectful environment. He argues that even in Socratic

seminar where teachers take a backseat and students run the discussion, a few students can dominate it (p. 68). It's much harder for a student with a minority opinion to share thoughts if there's a perceived consensus during the seminar. There's also minimal opportunity for the teacher to guide the discussion to include opposing viewpoints since the teacher's voice is theoretically supposed to be absent from the discussion.

The process of Ethics Bowl supports divergent thinking, listening, and open-mindedness. Like Ladenson (2001), I notice that my students' pre-competition discussions have two possible outcomes. The first is that deeply divergent positions narrow with further discussion of the cases; students find middle ground. When this is not the case, team members are still capable of developing a clearer understanding of each other's opinions (p. 69). Students work through two or three cases per day and are provided worksheets to help guide their thinking. The worksheets ask them to consider the following:

- What moral question will you address? (Each Ethics Bowl case is accompanied by three or four questions. Students may also write their own)
- Who are the stakeholders?
- What is your team's position on the issue? Why? List arguments in support of your position
- Who would disagree with you, and why? What arguments would those who disagree have?
- Which of your arguments do you feel the most secure about?
- Which of your arguments do you feel the least secure about?
- Which ethical theories did you consult in developing your position?

In addition to group discussion, we watch a video of a regional competition as a model for our ethics bowl discussion

(Delaware Valley High School Ethics Bowl Finals, 2015). This model prepares students for what they are supposed to do in competition and reminds them that Ethics Bowl is about dialogue, not debate.

In the coming weeks, teams compete against each other and earn points allocated by student judges for the team's performance. After a coin toss to determine which team goes first, the presenting team selects a case at random and has three minutes to discuss the case before presenting their position for five minutes. The opposing team has one minute to collaborate and three minutes to offer commentary. The presenting team then has one minute to collaborate and three minutes to respond to the commentary. This is followed by five minutes of questions from the judges. Once questioning is complete, the second team randomly selects a case and the process is repeated. All the while, the remaining ten to fourteen student observers are taking notes and responding to the following questions:

1) What comment or question stated in the Ethics Bowl round made you think?
2) What do you wonder about after watching the round?
3) Of what are you still uncertain after watching the round?
4) On a scale of 1 to 3 (3 most effective and 1 least effective), how effective do you think the presenting teams were in developing their position? Why?
5) Write a question you would have asked if you had been a judge.

Ethics Bowl Outcomes

The Ethics Bowl rounds are lively and unpredictable. They require hard intellectual labor, thoughtful listening, and effective articulation of the team's position. The easiest part is probably articulating the team's position as teams prepare for

this part for weeks. What is more challenging is responding to the opposing team's commentary and the judge's questions, because the team cannot predict what will be said and asked during these portions of the competition. It is worth noting that a team's response to questioning is worth 20 out of the total 60 points on the judging sheet. If you haven't thought about the case from many different viewpoints, you will not be able to answer the questions effectively and thus will not succeed in competition.

What I love most about Ethics Bowl is that it actively involves all members of my class. No one's voice is left out. Some students may choose not to talk during their team's competition and—according to the official rules—this is permissible. But I know that every class member has had their moment to share their opinion and refine their thinking in the safety of their group. Before we begin the official Ethics Bowl, I make each student write an essay that carefully considers and analyzes the opposing positions in an Ethics Bowl case and proposes a solution or compromise. Students on the same team must not choose the same case, but students have the opportunity to read their teammates' essays to prepare for competition.

My most memorable Ethics Bowl experience occurred not as a judge for our regional competition but in my own classroom last year. The case selected by the presenting team was "Contributing to Gentrification." (Dery, 2017). In the case, Dave, a recent college graduate, gets his first career-track job in the city. Dave cannot afford to live where he works, but there is a neighborhood close to where he works undergoing gentrification that he can afford. The case defines gentrification as "the arrival of wealthier people in an existing urban district, [which creates] a related increase in rents and property values, and changes in the district's character and culture" (Dery, 2017, Case 12). Dave dislikes how gentrification can influence established communities but very

much desires a shorter commute. The case posed the following moral questions: "(1) Is gentrification positive or negative?" and (2) "Does anyone have the right to live in a particular neighborhood? Why or why not?"

I was worried about the case. Hauppauge is a suburban community located about forty miles outside New York City. Most of my students had never heard of gentrification and had certainly never considered if it was positive or negative. During their pre-competition discussions, it seemed that the ENTIRE class was in consensus. People did have a right to live in a particular neighborhood, but that right was founded exclusively on money. If you could afford to live somewhere, you had the right to live there. Most of the class had identified the stakeholders as Dave, his boss and co-workers, and the historical inhabitants of the neighborhood undergoing gentrification. The problem for me as a teacher was that nearly my entire class of 25 students were privileging Dave's position without considering the position of the historical inhabitants of the neighborhood. Uncertain as to how to proceed, I allowed their conversations to continue without much intervention, hoping that they would be able at some point to see another position or to at least identify parts of their own argument in which they were the least secure. On the day of the competition, I became increasingly worried. The team who drew the case had earlier in the year participated in a Socratic Seminar on Lars Eighner's "On Dumpster Diving" (1992) in which they concluded that homelessness was largely the result of an individual's poor choices and therefore the government or a community had little obligation to help the homeless individual.

As I expected, the team's position was that Dave had a right to live in the neighborhood because he could afford to. The only requirement for admission to the community was money. They also argued that gentrification was a positive force and would help to eliminate crime in the community. The

opposing team largely agreed and added that gentrification would improve property values and the education system as well. I wondered: Do I intervene? Share an opposing viewpoint? My issue was not with their conclusion that gentrification was positive, but rather with their inability to articulate the opposing viewpoint and to explain why their position was morally correct considering the opposing viewpoint.

And then it happened. During questioning, the judges asked the presenting team, “Can you reconsider your position in light of a stakeholder you seemed to ignore—those living in the urban neighborhood? Could there be any negative consequences to gentrification?” The team was made to acknowledge that gentrification could be negative for the inhabitants if they were displaced and could not afford to live in their own communities. The bell rang. Class was dismissed. But the presenting team kept talking. One student was particularly compelled to keep going. In the final minutes, he said, “Well, perhaps the government would have to provide affordable housing within the community for those who would be displaced by Dave and those like him. Or maybe Dave, since he seems to care about the community, could work with those living there in, like, some kind of community center to help the community and those who already live there.” What struck me was the student’s sincerity. He had started the round adamant that anyone could live anywhere if they had the money to do so. No questions asked. No restrictions. Now it seemed that he wasn’t certain. Now he believed that something must be done to help all the stakeholders. He was willing (and even ready) to reach across the aisle after thinking deeply about the issue.

That’s the beauty of ethics bowl. It fosters democratic deliberation. According to Ladenson (2001), “Democratic deliberation occupies a conceptual space between bargaining, on the hand, and conversion on the other hand” (p. 74).

Whereas conversion implies winning your opponent to your side by whatever means necessary and bargaining implies gaining as much as possible politically while giving up as little as required, democratic deliberation takes (and leaves people) more or less where they are. It doesn't aim to get people to embrace an entirely new set of deeply held convictions but instead seeks to produce a change in how people think about a particular matter for public discussion through logical argument and rhetorical appeals. This kind of deliberation requires patience, tolerance, and restraint. Most importantly, it requires a willingness to listen to all parties.

In reflecting on Ethics Bowl, my students shared these thoughts:

Student A: "I learned that a lot of decisions I thought were black and white tend to fall more into a grey area."

Student B: "I learned a lot about hearing out people's opinions and respectfully challenging them. There were times when teams agreed with each other, and I learned a lot about building off each team's beliefs. While disagreeing, I learned how to handle that in a respectful manner and see the other side."

Student C: "When participating in Ethics Bowl, I learned how to share my thoughts on a certain case, while still being open to hearing the counterargument. It made me think about different perspectives and question my belief which is good."

Student D: "There are different ways of debating rather than disagreeing with others. You can agree on points and dissect the opposing team's argument."

Our work with Ethics Bowl supports the argumentative writing we do the rest of the year. In the third quarter when my students are asked to choose a research topic, they have a better sense of relevant issues they care about from viewing the Ethics Bowl cases. Ethics Bowl does not teach research skills, but it does teach the critical thinking skills required to analyze the research and to support claims while distinguishing them from counterclaims in a thoughtful manner. Our students are

graduating into a world with sizeable problems. Here are some of the questions that my students ask in class on a daily basis: How will we slow climate change? How do we keep schools safe? How will I pay for college? What jobs will be available to me when I graduate? What makes someone American, and who gets to decide? Ethics Bowl does not provide answers to these questions, but it does provide the tools to make our students productive participants in conversations to promote consensus-based change.

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“I Become a Transparent Eye-Ball”: Connecting Students to Nature and Themselves Through Sketch-based Writing

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Abstract
The authors raise concerns about teens’ social and emotional health and describe a place-based, outdoor writing experience which they designed to connect teens to the natural world in a summer writing program. Knowing how difficult it is to slow down the mind, the authors designed a sketch-based writing experience to help teens enter a meditative mind space. The authors detail their teaching process and analyze the lesson’s impact. Interviews with teen participants and qualitative analysis of the writing produced suggests the value of writing outdoors and describes how the writing functioned to help teens address the central developmental milestones of adolescence. The authors suggest that place-based, outdoor writing experiences on self-chosen topics can contribute to teens’ social and emotional well-being.

“I Become a Transparent Eye-Ball”

> And it was just so peaceful--it was just such a beautiful day. And everyone was writing around the pond. And it was just one of the most inspiring settings to write something. (Alicia, 16 years old)

“I hope you don’t fall!” I shouted, as Elena maneuvered her wiry 14-year old legs around the limb of a small apple tree and hoisted herself upward.

"I won't!" she yelled.
I watched as she settled her back against the trunk and pull out her pen from her back pocket. She had managed to climb the tree while holding her notebook, and now she was sketching and writing amongst the butterflies and birds. I sat in the grass down the hill from Elena's apple tree. Time to get back to my own writing, I thought. As I added to my sketch of the geese at the pond's edge, I noticed Sean take a photo of a mother duck followed by a line of little ones moving across the pond. Soon he, too, was sketching and writing in his notebook.

For several summers Zanyell Garmon, a pre-service teacher at the time, and I, a teacher educator, used drawing and sketching to help young people connect to the natural world and to themselves as writers. We did this work in the context of a week-long summer "Teen Writers Institute," one of the many out-of-school writing programs offered at a variety of local historical sites, parks, college campuses, and museums for young writers sponsored by the Hudson Valley Writing Project, our local site of the National Writing Project. These programs are place-based, designed to help youth use writing to strengthen their connections to the particular site where they are located.

The particular Teen Writer's Institute we describe in this article draws about 18 students each summer from the region's public and private schools, and often includes a couple of homeschooled youth. It is taught by a team (that includes NWP teacher consultants, teacher educators, and preservice interns) and is open to all students ages 13 – 18. In the Teen Writers Institute, we follow in the tradition of workshop-based approaches that embrace students as writers with valuable ideas to share. The summer program also emphasizes writing in community: Each day involves teachers and students writing together, followed by sharing and responding to writing in smaller teacher-facilitated peer groups. The final session

involves a celebratory public reading of selected work from the classroom anthology for students' friends and families.

Perspectives

Record numbers of today's teens experience depression (Federal Interagency Forum on Child and Family Statistics, 2017) and seek treatment for anxiety (Denizet-Lewis, 2017). Journalists report that the surge in the number of U.S. teens who report feeling "useless and joyless" corresponds to a rise of teens' online life (Twenge, 2017). In *Alone Together* (2011), MIT professor and social scientist Sherry Turkle writes:

> [Teens] nurture friendships on social-networking sites and then wonder if they are among friends. They are connected all day but are not sure if they have communicated. Their digitized friendships—played out in emoticon emotions, so often predicated on rapid response rather than reflection—may prepare them, . . . for relationships that could bring superficiality to a higher power, that is, for relationships with the inanimate. (p. 17)

Turkle is especially concerned that technology has the power to distort what we have traditionally called the human experience. After detailing the forces that make us prefer relationships with robots over humans and virtual environments over actual environments, she writes: "Gradually we come to see our online life as life itself" (p. 17). Technology critic Shoshanna Zuboff (2019) highlights this distortion of the traditional human experience when she speaks to young people about technology's power:

> I tell them that the word “search” has meant a daring existential journey, not a finger tap to already existing answers; that “friend” is an embodied mystery that can be forged only face-to-face and heart-to heart; and that “recognition” is the glimmer of homecoming we experience in our beloved’s face, not “facial recognition.” (pp.521-22)

Place-based education is designed to address these forces that fray our connection to each other and the natural world. Smith (2002) writes:

> The primary value of place-based education lies in the way that it serves to strengthen children’s connections to others and to the regions in which they live. It enhances achievement, but, more important, it helps overcome the alienation and isolation of individuals that have become hallmarks of modernity. (p. 11)

Though place-based education often involves extended inquiry into writing experiences and can lead to significant achievements and activism (e.g. Christensen, 2015), it can also involve the literacy experiences (reports, journals, photo albums/scrapbooks, etc.) connected to school field trips or to common classroom projects such as designing, planting, and maintaining butterfly gardens. Nature studies are a promising form of place-based education for teens because being outdoors has been shown to reduce adolescents’ stress (Korpela, 2001).

The English language arts has traditionally provided in-school opportunities for students to connect to themselves and each other through writing and response to literature, though the convergence of the Common Core Standards (CCS) with school and teacher performance assessments has limited many teens’ writing experiences in schools to responding to assessment prompts and writing to rubrics. The CCS shifted

attention away from using writing to develop teens' self-expression and using honest discussions of literature as a means for social connection, famously captured in Common Core co-author David Coleman's statement, "No one gives a s**t what you think or feel" (Coleman, 2011). Not surprisingly, many of the teens we encounter in Teen Writers Institute have sought out the camp because they have only rarely had the opportunity in school to write on a topic or in a style of their own choosing. Fortunately, the Next Generation standards place new emphasis on "using reading and writing for enjoyment and self-expression" (New York State Education Department, 2018a, p. 5), and New York State is no longer linking student test scores to teacher performance ratings.

Given our concerns for teens' social and emotional health and our commitment to place-based education, we designed a lesson that would help teens connect to the local landscape and taught it over a period of three summers which involved 45 teens total. We videotaped our lessons, observed and took field notes as teens engaged in the experience, interviewed and surveyed teens about their experience, and studied the writing that they produced. We used qualitative research methods to code emerging themes in response to our inquiry questions:

1. How do teens describe the impact of the outdoor sketching and writing experience on their own learning?
2. What do teens write about and in what genres do they write when they are encouraged to write on topics and in a style of their own choosing?
3. What purpose does this writing serve in their lives?

The Teaching Process

What follows is a description of our method, along with some variations that we have explored over the past few years. We teach the entire cycle in one 3-hour block, but the lessons could easily be broken up into three or four 40-minute lessons. As far as scheduling, we keep an eye on the weather and try to schedule this experience on a pleasant day after we have had a chance to get to know the students. For us, this is about two days into the week-long program. The day before our poetry walk, we remind teens to wear comfortable clothes and shoes for our outdoor writing experience. If students do not have notebooks with blank paper, we provide them with a clipboard and multiple sheets of blank paper.

Planning the Lesson

In planning the lesson, we turned to Ron Padgett's "The Walk Poem" (2000/2018) which provides a historical context for "the walk poem" and shares numerous examples, ranging from ancient Greek literature though twentieth century poems and essays. Padgett initially identifies "at least four basic types":

1. A poem about what the poet sees during a particular walk.
2. A poem about a walk that produces a revelation of some kind.
3. A poem whose length, style, and shape mirror the length, style, and shape of the walk.
4. A poem that reflects the way the mind works during the walk. (When we're out walking, our minds flow somewhat differently than they do when we sit at home.) (Padgett, 2018)

Taking our cues from Padgett's emphasis on the walk poem's "great many variations and blends" (Padgett, 2018), we

developed our own version of the experience by adding an explicit connection to transcendentalism and the work of Ralph Waldo Emerson. We reasoned that Emerson's writing grew out of the regional landscapes surrounding our program which could strengthen the teens' connection to this place. We also believed that even a small foothold in transcendentalist ideas—especially ideas that focused on the primacy of direct experience and nature—might serve to counteract the virtual worlds where teens spend much of their time.

We also decided to use sketching to help students enter a meditative mind space that would support careful observation as well as creativity and fluency. (All readers of this article are probably intimately familiar with the challenges to concentration wrought by our constant state of digital interruptions.) The sketching process is one that we learned from Karen Ernst daSilva (2001), who writes that "[u]sing drawing in the writing process gives me the time to question, note what I see, or connect to memories, ideas, and other texts that I have read" (p. 4). In our own writing and in writing workshops with both youth and adults, we observe how sketching helps writers unplug and slow down. As writers sketch, they notice details and develop connections which sparks creativity and generates language.

The Lesson

Studying Emerson's words. On the scheduled day, we introduce the teens to transcendentalism and the act of observation by projecting a photo of Emerson alongside this quotation from *Nature* (Emerson, 1836):

> There I feel that nothing can befall me in life, — no disgrace, no calamity, (leaving me my eyes,) which nature cannot repair. Standing on the bare ground, — my head bathed by the blithe air, and uplifted into infinite space, — all mean egotism vanishes. I become

> a transparent eye-ball; I am nothing; I see all; the currents of the Universal Being circulate through me; I am part or particle of God. (chap. 1)

We read this quotation aloud a couple times, and also invite students to read it aloud, allowing us to hear the words in different voices and providing us with the opportunity to puzzle through what Emerson might mean by phrases such as "blithe air," "infinite space," "all mean egotism vanishes," "part or particle of God," and especially "transparent eye-ball." We encourage students to feel comfortable with the mysterious and multiple notions that these words evoke rather than press for a static or common definition. Students typically suggest that becoming a transparent eye-ball implies being indivisible with one's surroundings.

Of course, adaptations to this process of building understanding of a difficult text abound. For example, we have had success in the past by following this process: Provide students with a handout of the *Nature* passage or a longer excerpt. Ask students to underline and annotate it. Prompt students with: What words puzzle you? What images stand out for you? Have you ever had an experience in nature where your daily problems were repaired? After students have had time to annotate, we provide time for class or small group discussion.

Sketching, noting, and sharing. We then project the image of the transparent eyeball (Cranch, Figure 1), and indicate that this image was created by one of Emerson's friends as a response to this passage. Teens are given pencils and blank paper (artistic sketching paper is nice) and are asked to sketch this image as a way of carefully studying the picture. As they sketch, they are encouraged to jot down any thoughts or associations that occur to them, since these might be the buds of a poem or story. We tell them to "Be of two minds" as they sketch. One mind is sketching. The other mind is observing what happens to the mind as they sketch. We model this process for them, sketching the image and noting our thoughts. Since we are not talented artists, showing students our work helps them understand the goal is not accuracy but rather focusing and relaxing the mind.

After about 10 minutes, we debrief this sketching experience, asking questions such as: "What new things about the image did you notice as you sketched it? What thoughts, memories, or associations (if any) occurred to you as you drew? How does sketching affect your own writing and thinking process?" Listening to transcripts of our classroom, we find that teens comment on how the process of drawing helps them

Figure 1

see details they did not initially notice. They also share associations (e.g., "I do this thing, people think it is weird, but I call it *people watching*," or, "Once my mother was sketching people on the subway and was then followed all day by this weirdo.").

We have also had success by following the same basic process as above, but instead of having teens sketch the transparent eyeball image, we have had them choose a natural object to sketch from a table that has on it a variety of things we've managed to gather: pine cones, pebbles, nuts, flowers, bark, sticks, leaves, small vegetables or fruits, etc. In another adaptation, we have placed these natural items in "secret envelopes" that students pick from a box. Imagine teens' delight when they open these envelopes to discover an acorn, or— in the case of an envelope marked "Danger!"— a tiny cactus.

Examining mentor texts. If we have not already studied poetry in previous lessons, we take a few minutes before going outside to read two or three poems that serve as mentor texts. These texts provide us with writing craft moves to "notice and name," following the traditions of writing workshop (Ray, 1999). We have had good success with "Trees" by W.S. Merwin and "Milkweed" by Mary Oliver. Since we do not want to dictate the topic of their writing, we might have them read "In a Cafe" by Richard Brautigan, emphasizing that they can write very simply about anything they might choose to carefully notice during our walk, such as snatches of conversation, a woman sitting on a park bench, or workers fixing a sprinkler system. Younger students may benefit from studying Valerie Worth's *All the Small Poems and Fourteen More* (1996), illustrated with Natalie Babbitt's simple sketches.

Reminding. Before we leave the room to go outside, we encourage teens to sketch what they see since the process can help them view it more deeply and can also help them

unearth their own words. We remind them: "Remember the experience you just had when you thought you had nothing to write? What happened when you started to sketch? Instead of looking for the words, the words found you, right? Trust that the words will come as you sketch." As we walk out the door, we remind them to think of themselves as transparent eyeballs and to experience the world with a fresh perspective: "Be a transparent eyeball! Remember, you are indivisible with what you see. You might be something small-- a drop of water on a leaf-- or big— the clouds in the sky."

We allow teens to use their phones to take photos of things they are writing about, especially if they run out of writing time. However, we still encourage them to use sketching as a method for enriching their writing, even if they sketch from the photo. (Even though we have not had any problems with teens being distracted by their phones, in the future we will ask them to leave their phones behind in order to prevent possible distractions and to heighten awareness.)

Writing outdoors. At the college campuses where we have taught the Teen Writers Institute, there are many beautiful places—formal gardens; ponds with geese, frogs, and woodlands; and grassy knolls, dotted with small trees and winding paths. The writers are presented with options of where they might venture, and we split into smaller teacher-led groups to go to each location. As we walk, students are reminded to be "transparent eyeballs"—to stay present, aware of, and indivisible with their surroundings. Once we arrive at our chosen area, writers are prompted to sketch, write, and, if they wish, to photograph. We spend about 45-60 minutes outside before returning to our room to share some of our budding pieces in small writing groups.

Returning to the classroom. Again, in the tradition of writing workshop, group members are instructed to carefully *listen* to what each writer shares and respond with the help the writer seeks. (This process builds community as well as more

linguistically attuned writers.) These groups remain "on-task" for the most part since teens know they will need a piece for publication in a classroom anthology at the end of the week.

Analysis of the Lesson

We have been pleased by this place-based sketching and writing lesson both in terms of the quality of writing that the teens produce and the high level of engagement that the teens exhibit throughout the process. Below are the findings from our inquiry.

Writing Outdoors

In small group interviews, teens called attention to the role of the outdoor environment in stimulating their writing and sparking their creative flow. Although our indoor classroom had spacious writing surfaces, sleek new computers, and oversized windows looking onto greenery, one 14-year-old writer commented:

> It is kind of hard to get inspired when you are sitting in a computer lab—where everything around you is all contemporary and you see all this technology. You can be [inspired] but—I don't know. I feel like it was easier when we went out[side]. And it was a really calm setting. And I wrote a poem, but I had so many ideas just from being there. (Jelisse)

Another teen agreed, "I really liked the walk, because I can't ever do anything, especially when it's super loud—especially in a computer lab." This same writer gained not only inspiration, but also a sense of agency from the setting, which resulted in a piece about feminism:

> I wrote about something that I felt really strongly about—it had nothing to do with nature, but I think it

> was just such a peaceful setting that I was, like, I am going to do this! Because, yeah! And I did. (Alicia)

The effect of being outside stimulated not only the teens who were avid writers but also the teens who found it difficult to generate ideas or focus on writing. One such teen commented, "I felt like [when we went outside] was one of the times I wrote the best."

Writing Genres and Topics

Examining the writing of 45 teens over three summer programs, the majority (80%) wrote poems, while a few wrote fictional pieces or nonfiction prose. Much of the poetry focused on nature itself—its beauty and transience (see Figures 2 & 3), though a few pieces had nothing to with nature at all, such as the paean to feminism and a few pieces that featured the outdoors as a setting for some action, such as the discovery of a body inspired by a boardwalk that meandered through a swampy overgrown area.

The Purpose of Writing

When teens are encouraged to write outdoors on topics and in genres of their own choosing, what purpose does this writing serve in their lives? Our analysis shows that many teens (70%) used this writing experience to address the developmental challenges of adolescence, with the natural world serving as a metaphor. For example, in a poem titled, "Just a Flower," (too lengthy to be included here), the writer seems to explore the feelings involved in becoming more independent from one's parents: "My mother let me go into the wind when I was just a/little seed./She said, you are a wonderful child and I am sorry to let you go, but it is your time./ I did not want to go,/ but I knew it was right…" A number of teens wrote about stepping into unknown worlds and leaving behind all that is safe and familiar; their writing

allowed them to imagine the new freedoms afforded by their growing independence. In "Shackles" (see Figure 4), the writer imagines stepping out into a storm: "She let out a laugh, loud and uninhibited and hysterical, and she spun slowly, letting the rain attack her, too. She was free—she was unleashed—she was one with the storm, and together they challenged the world." In her reflection following the poem, the writer notes how she did not act on her impulse to stand in the pouring rain ("my mom would have killed me") but the writing allowed her to imagine this freedom.

In other pieces, the writers explore a central developmental question for teens: Who am I? The poem, "A Frog's Lament" (see Figure 5), can be understood as a metaphorical approach to identity and social acceptance: "Many see me as ugly or repulsive, but I don't care/I like being different from the everyday music of life." In her reflection following the poem, the poet writes, "I hope that readers/listeners [will understand] that [it is okay] to be different and that it's natural to still envy other people too." In "My Mind" (see Figure 6), the water of a pond becomes a metaphor for the writer's thoughts that "move in a way similar to water/In the form of currents, eddies, and swirls" and which "can never be calmed by force." In "Schitzo McGee" (see Figure 7), the experience of mind is made urgent by its beat: "Heart stops beating brain starts bleeding/Ectoplasmic ghosts in my head won't stop breeding." In his reflection following the poem, the writer explains that the poem is about "a regular guy like me that over analyzes everything so his head is clouded with all these conflicting voices." This writer shares that he has "some dark thoughts," but he also recognizes that "it's all good because I can express it in a pretty cool way."

Adaptations and Challenges

While we were fortunate to have access to beautiful natural landscapes, we have also had success in modifying this outdoor writing experience for an urban environment. Even a single leaf, an insect, or blade of grass can provide opportunity for sketching and wonder. We have also had success with the lesson even when we had to reduce the amount of outdoor time to only 10 minutes due to a heavy rain. One challenge is helping teens who are uncomfortable with the creative aspects of this experience and fearful of "writer's block." Besides encouraging sketching, we tell such teens that simple descriptions of what they see are a great way to get the mind moving ("I see an ant crawling into a crack"). We purposely do not place high expectations on the writing that the teens produce. The experience is meant to be fun, and any writing produced is enjoyed. On more than a few occasions teens have attempted to climb trees and even to write while sitting in trees. The light-hearted nature of the activity is captured in "Connecting with Nature" (see Figure 8). The writer, known for her dallying, amused us with this poem, which was her response to our dictum to "connect with nature."

Final Reflection

> I went to the woods because I wished to live deliberately, to front only the essential facts of life, and see if I could not learn what it had to teach, and not, when I came to die, discover that I had not lived. (Thoreau, *Walden*, 1854/1947, p. 343).

According to recent studies, the average teen spends nearly nine hours a day consuming media (Tsukayama, 2015). If this is living, it is a distant cry from traditional notions of the human experience. Thoreau invokes us to live deliberately, but many teens—and they are not the only ones—can only live distractedly amidst the continual beckoning of

their devices and the allure of digital relationships and virtual worlds. After several years of teaching the English language arts under the weight of the CCS, New York's English teachers have the opportunity to re-commit to creating pleasurable and personally meaningful literacy experiences for their students. They are supported in this effort by the New York State Education Department's Next Generation Standards and by new resources for supporting Social and Emotional Learning (SEL), defined as "the process through which children, youth, and adults acquire and effectively apply the knowledge, attitudes, and skills necessary to understand and manage emotions, set and achieve positive goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain positive relationships, and make responsible decisions" (Collaboration for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning, cited in New York State Education Department, 2018b, p. 6). The place-based literacy experience we describe in this article supports SEL by connecting teens to the workings of their own minds and the expressions of their own voices. As teens share their writing, they develop empathy for others and are connected in visceral ways to the local landscape. They sketch, they write, they share, they belong.

We hope that this article will inspire readers to take advantage of favorable weather to help young people use sketching and writing to connect to the natural world and to themselves. Our own experience leads us to believe that sketch-based writing in nature helps teens give voice to their emotions and work through developmental milestones. In this experience, teens developed an understanding of the transcendentalists' notion that we are connected, perhaps indivisibly, with the world around us, "part or particle of God" (Emerson, 1836). Today we might call this "place-based education," but our literary forebears might have simply called it "living."

Note: All student names are pseudonyms.

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Appendix

Note: *Teen writers and their parents provided permission for their work to be published under their own names in the anthology; however, their names have been changed to protect their privacy in this research.*

Figure 2

Geese on Sunset Lake

On the lake, full of
Tadpoles, fish, and plants
White, wild, and graceful
Only the geese stand out.

Waddling around for
A place to cool off
They slowly enter and
Drift through the water.
The water sparkles
As they float in it
A little baby
Parts from the group,
Leading a flock away
In pursuit
Slowly they travel
To the other side
On the bank they nibble
in the short grass
Then they journey back.

Allan, 14

Process: *On our Transparent Eye walk, I went to Sunset Lake. I saw a flock of geese on the path, and they were entering the water one by one. As each one entered and caused a ripple, I began to think about writing a poem about them. The geese traveled through the water and*

then went onto the shore. I was lucky enough to observe them eat before I was chased away by one of the clearly irritated geese!

Figure 3

Expanse

Expanse. Blue sky.
No clouds, just cohesive color.
I turn my head left,
And view the life giving sun,
Spew its white-gold
Rays that warm my face.
I look down and
See the life it gave to the flowers
And geese. The light
Plays a visual song on the water.
Shadows and light
At odds, but in harmony.
And balance.

Diminish

Lessen. No green.
No wildlife, where did my friends go?
I look right
And view the waste of my world.
Drunkards leave
Their mess behind for the wild.
The gift is not
Well received. Homes of beings,
That belong to the sky,
Massacred to build them anew.
One they do not call
By such a name. Nor did they ask.

They dismantle our air.
But when lungs tighten and gasp
We will choke for our
Harmony. And balance.
Alicia, 16

Process: *I wrote these poems when I went to Shakespeare's Garden at Vassar and saw how beautiful the sun was shining on all the plants. Then my group and I made our way to a lake/pond. Where I saw a flock of geese swimming. My friend and I sat on a bench, taking it all in, content with our small walk. And then she reached beside her and found an empty bottle of Heineken.*

Figure 4

Shackles

Rain attacked the pavement with a vengeance. Waves of rainwater washed across the parking lot and pooled in potholes. It was minutes to midnight and the entire street was vacant, save for the occasional car trying to wade through the growing flood. She stood atop the threshold of the convenience store, and she could feel her hair getting frizzy from the mist. Behind her, the store was quiet. There was someone in the back—she could hear clanking noises and the occasional cough. In front of her, the world was chaos, trees bending and swaying violently in the wind and angry clouds blotting out the sky.

She felt calm here, strangely. The two extremes kept her in balance. The air smelt like anticipation. Lightning seared the sky, making the scent irresistible. Almost without thinking, she stepped forward into the storm.

She was soaked immediately. Her hair gripped her face like plaster, and she didn’t bother pushing it back. She let out a laugh, loud and uninhibited and hysterical, and she spun

slowly, letting the rain attack her, too. She was free—she was unleashed—she was one with the storm, and together they challenged the world.

She danced. She twirled. She skipped, jumped, splashed. She relinquished her shame to the wind, and gathered rainwater in her hands. When she grew tired, she sat on the flooded pavement and looked up, blinking raindrops out of her eyes and watching lightning paint pictures across the sky.

The pattering of rain against asphalt became her anthem, the smell her perfume. She let beat within her nature's drum, and she danced to the sound.

Her shackles were gone, and she'd never wear them again.

Jelisse, 14

Process: *On Tuesday, my mom and I went to the laundromat. Out of nowhere, it started pouring. I stood at the very edge of the doorway for a few minutes, tempted to stand in the rain, but I decided not to, partially because I was afraid I would look like a weirdo, and partially because my mom would have killed me. But it made me feel a bit shackled, and I imagined the story of someone who would've gone into the rain, which is where this piece came from. I write easiest through experience, so writing this piece was relatively easy. I hope readers can see the storm through my writing as I did through experience.*

Figure 5

A Frog's Lament?

I penetrate the wind with my tenor voice
While the wind sweeps away all other noises
Birds try to sing songs in their soprano voices
But many cannot hear their beautiful music
I croak out my tunes in the murky water that I call home

I am a nuisance to most
But a comfort for some
Many see me as ugly or repulsive, but I don't care
I like being different from the everyday music of life
To me, it's easy being green.

Abigail, 14

Process: *My poem is about a frog that likes to be different from everyone else but still secretly envies the birds. I was inspired after seeing the innocent tadpoles in the pond on Wednesday. I found that writing this poem was fairly easy because there was so much for me to write about. I hope that the readers/listeners that after reading the poem is to be different and that it's natural to still envy other people too.*

Figure 6

My Mind

When I look into the water
I see myself
But not just my reflection
I see my mind
The eddies and swirls
The ripples and currents
Are a reflection of my mind

My thoughts move in a way similar to water
In the form of currents, eddies, and swirls
With ripples along the surface
As new thoughts emerging from the water
Further distorting the turbulent surface

This lake can never be calmed by force
It is calm during sleep when it is frozen

Hardening the surface and dulling the undercurrents
And it is calm during a cease of thoughts
When the source is dry
And I am gone

Stuart, 14

Process: *My piece is about my mind in relation to a lake or other body of water. What inspired it was our walk around the pond. Just observing the pond, and allowing me to look at the philosophical aspect of it, gave me access to multiple comparisons. Something that was hard about writing was getting to a state of calm to observe the pond properly. I hope the readers get the relationship between the water and the mind.*

Figure 7

Schitzo McGee

Heart stops beating brain starts bleeding
Ectoplasmic ghosts in my head won't stop breeding
Drowning in sludge the more I thrash the worse it gets
My throat is clogged I don't get any help from my selfish assets
Devouring a naked lunch my pale thoughts start to crack under the weight
I want to feel something new no longer do I wish to prate.

Aaron, 16

Process: *My piece is about a regular guy like me who over analyzes everything so his head is clouded with all these conflicting voices. What inspired this piece was the post-punk and gothic music of groups like Joy Division and Bauhaus. Something hard about writing this piece was finding rhymes that weren't obvious to me. What I hope readers will get about me is I have some dark thought, but it's all good because I can express it in a pretty cool way I guess.*

Figure 8

Connecting with Nature

I'm on a tree
Late too
But nature doesn't keep time
And I didn't pay attention
Branches their leafs,
Bugs…
Is getting bitten connecting?
Sylvie, 17

Process: *I wrote this on our nature walk. After we split and got a chance to walk around and explore, I found a really climbable tree and managed to get up there in flip flops. My skirt caught the wind in a pretty way when I was up there. This is literally just observations.*

Zombie Fiction, Fan Fiction, and Reanimating Genres

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Abstract
This article argues for an effective if unlikely genre approach to facilitate the transfer of writing skills from a college sophomore-level professional writing class to the post-college workplace. The article briefly surveys scholarship in rhetorical genre theory, maps it against classroom experience, and explores how the gory zombie stories written by Max Brooks in his *World War Z: An Oral History of the Zombie War* serve as a heuristic for students' future professional writing. By creating fan fiction stories from this book, students develop a "community of practice" based on this genre, modifying it as they use it to achieve their ends. Reflective writing assignments, lectures, and interviews with expert writers in the student's field help these undergraduates further develop a rhetorical approach to workplace genres.

Zombie Fiction, Fan Fiction, and Reanimating Genres

On the first day of our introductory sophomore-level class in the Professional Writing major, I ask my students to write briefly on "What job are you going to have in five years?" Everyone has ideas, so many, in fact, that our discussion blossoms into a speculative paper (the "Job Project") which occupies several weeks of drafting and workshop. I find their emerging essays fascinating. The drafts reveal my students' major concerns (salaries first!) and help me understand their deeper motives for being in school and being in my class. I get a better sense of how each student sees

himself or herself fitting into the world after college. These papers are often heartfelt, brimming with enthusiasm for finding and succeeding at work after college (and some real anxiety, too). Students embrace the opportunity to picture themselves free of school and making money as white-collar professionals.

Happily, these writers often imagine their career as a site of meaningful work. Future audiologists anticipate comforting nervous elderly or infant patients; future lawyers look forward to making persuasive arguments about justice to a jury. These pre-professional writers create active, animated images of themselves working—but strangely, despite all the detail, and despite the injunction that students connect to professionals in their field to ask them about writing, despite the work we did in class drafting, workshopping, and commenting on one another's drafts, professional writing is completely elided. No future self is presented as spending mornings or afternoons drafting and revising a defense, a lesson plan, or an intake evaluation. Notes and summaries don't appear. Even email is missing (a future many of us would embrace). This absence has its corollary: their future selves do not, as a rule, collaborate with others, and for a good reason: Colleagues and co-workers are rare. With the exception of patients/clients, early drafts of the Job Project are almost entirely depopulated. The various roles that writing plays in a workplace—to evaluate clients, document a process, propose ideas, obtain grant funding, update interested parties, meet legal requirements, respond to insurance claims, or write comments on student papers—have yet to be imagined. The papers' silences are revealing.

There are probably many reasons why writing evaporates out of their research. One explanation is that students simply have another story to tell, an aspirational story of their ascent into a new community that displaces everything else. In this much-anticipated world, their narratives, shot

through with possibility (and debt), carry scenes of slightly heroic individual activity (speaking to a jury, for instance). More mundane acts, such as writing a brief, a summary, or even a bill, can't compete.. But it is more than the allure of a good story that backwaters their writing. As Bartholomae describes in his study of writers on the threshold of a new community—in his case, basic writers entering college—newcomers must imagine and invent themselves

> within the discourse of a particular community, within a set of specifically acceptable gestures and commonplaces...the...set phrases, rituals, gestures, habits of mind, trick of persuasion, obligatory conclusions and the necessary connections that determine the 'what might be said' and constitute knowledge in their new community before they before they know what they are doing, before they have a project to participate in (1985, p. 26).

In the paper I assigned, students are trying to represent themselves as insiders legitimately and actively participating in the "rituals, gestures, habits of mind" of that community before arriving there. Yet according to Bartholomae, to be a full participant means to enter into these conventions, using them effectively, which means to use them in ways recognized by others and for ends that fit with the community's purposes. In terms of my own students, I find they have acquired discipline-specific terminology but have little knowledge of how one writes there. They lack the larger and purposeful "gestures and commonplaces" of professional discourse connected to the workplace projects they will be called upon to participate in. Without these projects to organize their work and without the "common" and shared gestures for making claims (what would be called *topoi* in rhetoric), a newcomer has quite literally no place in that community. Perhaps it is not mysterious that

writing is absent from my students' early drafts on their professional future: the assignment encourages them to position themselves as newcomers to The Job, and they act accordingly. They are respectful, excited, and verbal. They don't portray themselves as writers. Writing on the job may play just as much of a gatekeeping role in the professions as it does for Bartholomae's newcomers to academic language; conversely, learning to write as a professional, inhabiting that discourse, may be a key to the privilege of being a fully enfranchised member.

Miller's well-known and widely influential essay "Genre as Social Action" (1984) gives us a larger framework to examine in professional discourse. She claims, "We learn to adopt social motives as ways of satisfying private intentions through rhetorical action"; that is, genres coordinate social and individual motives in various shared genres such as the "letter of recommendation, the user manual, the progress report, the ransom note" (p. 155). She argues that a "rhetorically sound definition of genre must be centered not on the substance or the form of discourse [as in poetry vs. drama] but on the action it is used to accomplish" (p. 151), emerging over time by repeatedly providing a useful response to the needs of the discourse community, thus becoming standardized and recognized. These structures take shape, quite literally, from the social context that calls for it. She is arguing that the form of an institutional text, whether the placement essay Bartholomae studies or a progress report, always has a *functional* relationship to a situation. It helps the community recognize that something needs doing. It serves to help us recognize the community and our role in it. Our "rhetorical education" (p. 165) is enhanced by the study and practice of genres because "what we learn when we learn a genre is not just a pattern of forms or even a method of achieving our own ends. We learn, more importantly, what ends we may have: we learn that we may eulogize, apologize, recommend one person to another, instruct

customers….We learn to understand better the situations in which we find ourselves and the potentials for failure and success in acting together" (p. 151). She ends with this powerful claim: "for the student, genres serve as keys to understanding how to participate in the actions of a community (p. 151).

While we are working on this draft, I share my own experience as a newcomer to a community. I mention in class that when I first took a position at my college, I had to learn a whole spectrum of new genres. Turns out, minutes are hard to write well. The people I work with depend on them to be accurate. Furthermore, we do some things in our department minutes that no textbook could anticipate: you can make fun of people a little, often by constructing a humble-brag that responds to one of their accomplishments. A bit of wit is legal. I learned these local quirks as well as the "basic" conventions by reading our minutes but also (and more deeply) by writing them for a very public and eagle-eyed audience. I acknowledge that writing comments on papers is a big part of my week. I ruefully admit that email takes up about 25% of my working day, just juggling details and information about events and working on committees. There are other situations, too, where I write to a wider and less-immediate community of peers about such topics as professional writing. Even in my "creative" writing, I'm working within and sometimes against a set of styles and strategies that I have studied carefully by looking at the work of successful authors who preceded me. Writing is how I get my work done. It's not just a means to an end; often, it is the end itself as with documents that outline our program's learning goals or a syllabus. Yet each of these major genres sheds another shower of genres: the syllabus gives rise to daily agendas, student papers, and a procedure for reading those papers via the rubric contained within the syllabus. In all these forms, writing is a large part of how I understand my job (and how others understand my contribution). Actively working

with certain specific genres helps me establish my identity and also internalize the things we value in my department, institution, and discipline. Continuing to work at the college depends on my ability to become proficient in the workplace genres mentioned above and a whole slew of others, all interrelated. By writing minutes, for example, I become part of the conversation about our ever-changing goals and policies. Minutes, cut accurately, are a powerful gear in the bigger machine of our department and college, and they mesh with other genres — proposals, summaries, statements of purpose, reflections — all of which generate more email.

Studying workplace genres explicitly, even in a field far removed from their own, potentially provides my students with a practical and realistic introduction to the genres and audiences, motives and problems that structure work. Because genres are at the intersection of audience, action, and motive, they are likely to be a rich source of information about the future workplace my students are struggling to imagine. Genres are in a sense how a community animates itself and how a student would come to share in the professional life of the community's concerns. As Bazerman put it, "Genre are forms of life, ways of being" (1997, p.19). Genre knowledge—rhetorical, practical, and shared—is part of how a professional identity is formed.

Yet in class we often struggle to ground our work in the actual genres from their students' future workplaces. Despite contacting at least two professionals who work in the field, often examples of the genres my students seek are hard to find or confidential. When we do find them, students struggle to interpret their format, intention, and utility for the community from which they emerge. Of course they would: the ability to interpret site-specific genres is partly what defines one as being an insider, and my students have just begun moving in that direction.

Some researchers have claimed that genre knowledge is impossible to achieve unless one is actually on site. Genre theorist Freedman (1994) suggests it is simplistic to assume that merely teaching the “forms constitutive of genre...will result in appropriate [workplace] texts” (p. 63). Freedman goes go further, claiming that explicit teaching may actually be harmful to the learner, preventing “our students from enacting what they know tacitly. Acquisition itself is achieved through the intuition of rules at levels below the unconscious” (p. 199). Business-writing consultant Jamie MacKinnon argues in her eloquent study of newcomers’ writing development in a Canadian Bank (1993) that writers necessarily become competent “in context,” learning how to recognize and recreate local and specific writing genres (p. 42). She notes that their “rhetorical” ability, that is, their “ability to move the world through written language” is “determined largely by the specific characteristics and demands of the work context in which [writing] occurs” (p. 42). Freedman and Medway assert that classroom work on workplace genres simply doesn’t transfer to the workplace: "School writing may imitate and adapt features of working genres but cannot be those genres; it is doomed, whatever its transparent features, to remain school writing, a solution to a quite different set of exigencies" (1994, pp. 13-14).

Yet other scholars conducting empirical research have found that practicing and studying genres in school can support writing growth. In their recent study, Driscoll, Paszek, Gorzelsky, Hayes and Jones (2019) find a positive correlation between the study of genres and writing development in General Education Writing courses. Genre awareness—“how genres work rhetorically” is “significantly correlated with change” across the entire semester for these students (p. 5). Ives, Gokhale, Barott, Pere, and Embry-Riddle (2019) conclude in “Sprinting Toward Genre Knowledge” that graduate students also benefit from studying genres for the

traits Miller identified: “what purposes [genres] are meant to accomplish and for whom” (1984, p. 17). Genre awareness in that study was further enhanced by students giving “short biweekly presentations leading up to the final paper” (p. 23). Other studies have tried to emulate workplace genres in class. Artemeva, Logie, and St-Martin (1999) reflect on a project in engineering where the communication (writing) course is linked to an engineering course. Students there wrote in various genres to defend their choices, justify the technical topic they will write about, track their progress, and summarize the experience in a final analysis. Students wrote in specialized genres (the proposal, report, letter, progress report), shared it publicly like the students mentioned in Ives et al. (2019), and are evaluated on their ability to write and revise to specification. The goal of this arrangement is to create writing situations as close to real-world profession-specific use as possible in genre, purpose, and form, and it is reported by Aremeva et al. to “successfully facilitate [students’] transition to the workplace” (p. 314).

Yet perhaps achieving such a close parallel between academic and workplace genres is not necessary for professional preparation. Bazerman (1997) claims that “once students feel part of the life in a genre, any genre that grabs their attention, the detailed and hard work of writing becomes compellingly real, for the work has a real payoff in engagement within activities the students find important” (p. 26). Taken as a whole, this research suggests that the biologists, criminal justice majors, fitness instructors and English majors in my classes benefit from beginning to develop a rhetorical awareness in school about the effects and strategies of workplace genres. Just looking for how these genres are used and revised is promising. Rather than looking for the form alone—dutifully copying its surface features—growth seems to be expressed most vigorously when the writer intentionally seeks to understand the audience, purpose and situations that

genres coordinate and to reflect as Driscoll et al. (2019) suggest. Approached as an index to the "knowledge that practice creates" (Miller, 1984, p. 155), developing a rhetorical inquiry into workplace genres even in the classroom can provide the "keys" (p. 165) to a future professional community at threshold moments of entry into and between different communities of practice.

The Zombie Genre paper

As they revise their Jobs Project paper, I ask students to locate and interview two experts in their particular field, asking direct questions about the professional's writing. In addition to the challenges of finding accessible documents, often my students find that professionals can be uncomfortable talking about their written work (does it ever end?) and generally do not see themselves as "writers," a term they perhaps feel is better left to novelists. To find a way into workplace writing, I provide my students with a list of questions to ask their experts (see Appendix 2). Whenever possible, I also invite professional writers in to class to talk about the genres and rhythms of their writing and revising, document cycling, and the nitty-gritty: typing, printing, re-reading, using track changes, etc. The first draft of the Jobs Project paper was personal, about the worker; the revision of this paper redirects students' focus to the textual work supported and required in their workplace, the genres and processes that emerge in the workplace.

A couple of other notes might be helpful. I teach at the college level, which might imply that this is an abstract or specialized project. It's not. The fact that I have college students doesn't necessarily mean they have much experience writing and revising. Much of what I suggest here could be scaled to work at just about any level. Secondly, this project doesn't lead to a research paper or a persuasive argument,

though it could, as Devitt, A., Mary Jo Reiff, M and Bawarshi, A. (2004) explain in detail.

My students need something concrete and public (social, competitive, with a shared purpose) in order to fully visualize genre as shaping meaning rather than just containing it. Some years ago while on vacation in the Adirondacks, I picked up my sons' copy of *World War Z by* Max Brooks (2006), a zombie apocalypse thriller. It was great. There is plenty of danger, suspense, and running from the monsters (not everyone escapes!) and the book presents each chapter as if it were written by a different survivor of the apocalypse. This approach puts pressure on Brooks to create a new voice and situation every ten pages or so while also being sure each character's experience maps onto the general plotline. What emerges over the episodic novel is a chorus of experiences: there is a lot of vocal activity in this book—the premise is that each chapter is a transcription of a live interview with a survivor, recorded after the apocalypse, which makes the language close to speech and accessible—but each chapter is also tightly constrained by a textual event that *acts* to produce suspense and horror—a genre. Episodes in the Brooks' book is structured with some heavy formal cues. Each chapter starts with an abstract that gives a sketch of the survivor's dilemma and identity, hinting also at any unresolved or ethical issues we might look for in the narrative that follows. In the narrative that follows, each character talks about his or her personal experience in great detail, directly addressing the personal strategies used for surviving the great war for humanity's survival. The interviewer, putatively doing research on the survivors, often interjects with questions meant to further reveal the character and nudge the plot along. Not uncommonly, the interviewee describes being oblivious to the upcoming tragedy, and we as readers enjoy the dramatic irony of knowing what the character does not. Yet we as readers, given cues and expectations by these various textual features of

the genre, are still ignorant of the character's individual story, one which reveals various levels of personal honor, treachery, ignorance, madness or cunning. Again, there is an interplay of creative options against the backdrop of the genre's formal features.

I introduce the Zombie Genre project and present the premise we are working under: Let us imagine that Max Brooks lost twenty or thirty chapters of his book—left them on the subway or deleted them from his computer. Our job is to recreate those chapters, making each one original, but effective to the same end and degree as the originals are. We are trying to enter into this specialized genre to experience Brooks' style of writing, but also to understand how to put a genre together after disassembling it and discerning what it does for people and how it works.

It is important to help my students see the formal features in the story as more than a backdrop. We start with what students know. I often ask them what written genre would be the very worst vehicle for getting news that your Significant Other were breaking up with you. Graffiti on the highway overpass comes in pretty high on the list, as does texting—seen as a cold and cowardly way to dump your S.O. The best and recommended approach is to have a face-to-face talk and then follow up with a note. I haven't had the courage to ask students to write such a note yet, fearing campus-wide misery, but we talk about the formal features of what such a note would contain (this could also be shifted to a note to get out of class due to illness, a genre many students feel they could be proficient in). In either case, the stakes are high and the form of the note or letter (or text) vividly reveals genre as "the visible realization of a complex of social and psychological dynamics" Bazerman (1997, p.23). Genres are actions, not merely containers. They are "forms of life, forms of being" (p. 19): prosaic, but serving to animate our actions together.

My students sometimes struggle with the term "genre" though they are pre-reflectively fluent in them. To make genres visible, I ask my students to compile a list of all the written genres they use and return with a page that contains no more than a hundred items—a stipulation they are happy to comply with. From there we create a spectrum of genre forms. That is, in our next class, small groups type into Google Docs a non-repeating master list of their group members' key genres. Each group puts in bold what they found most commonly used by their members. They also highlight the genres they found most surprising or unusual. Together, we sometimes come close to listing a hundred items, something that seemed impossible to achieve individually. We look at both ends of the compiled spectrum and often write briefly on the "complex social and psychological dynamics" a particular genre navigates and actualizes (they pick one from the list). What's individual and social about texted breakup or a wedding invitation or a comment on Reddit? How does the genre limit and enable what you can say? What are the conventions that make the genre distinct and useful? What work does it do, and for whom? The goal is to have a sense of the scope and function of a specific genre at the beginning of the project.

We soon turn to a chapter from the Brooks book to get our hands dirty. Students are assigned a one-page analysis of the formal features of a particular *WWZ* chapter, something along the lines of "What makes this chapter suspenseful?" In class, we talk about the options open to Brooks as he tries to build suspense. To start, I often ask, "Where is the suspense located?" Students often misidentify gore as the climax in the story, where there is a crisis exploding on the scene, but I didn't ask about the climax. I asked about suspense. In discussion we generally come to suspect that a gory jolt is only startling in the context of the calm that preceded the storm. Anxiety is suspenseful; gross injuries are not. In other words, in this genre the entire chapter, all its parts, is contributing to

the suspense. There is a form and development to the genre that Brooks was aware of. Development matters. My other question is just an extension of the first, and also their next assignment: "Revise your one-page analysis to go deeper into how this chapter is built—how the interview, storyline, details, lulls in the action, etc.—all these work to create a suspenseful story." The analytical beginning to this project is interesting to us all as the structural elements of the genre become more visible, less abstract, and more functional as the tools or levers that provide context, anxiety, suspense, and relief. It is important at this point to zero in on specific moments in the text. I have included here a short excerpt from the Brooks book (p. 12):

METEORA, GREECE

The monasteries are built into the steep, inaccessible rocks, some buildings sitting perched atop high, almost vertical columns. While originally an attractive refuge from the Ottoman Turks, it …. [catered] to the growing influx of both pilgrims and tourists. Some seek wisdom and spiritual enlightenment, some simply search for peace. Stanley MacDonald is one of the latter.

The cave entrance was easy to find. We'd tracked it back from the blood trail leading to the caravan. Right away we knew something was wrong. There were no bodies….The only corpses we found were the pack mules. They'd been brought down, not shot, by what looked like wild animals….We guessed it had to be wild dogs. Packs of those damn things roamed the valleys, big and nasty as Arctic wolves.

What was most puzzling was the cargo, still in their saddlebags, or just scattered about the bodies. Now, even if this wasn't a territorial hit, even if it was a religious or tribal revenge killing, no one just abandons fifty kilos of prime, raw, Bad Brown, or perfectly good assault rifles….

1. Bad Brown: A nickname for the type of opium grown in the Badakhshan Province of Afghanistan.

The genre conventions are plain, inescapable and consistent. As students might note, an explicit place name locates every section, emphasizing the world-wide effect of the catastrophe

and at the same time, by leaping into exotic terrain, serving as a sort of dystopian travel literature. You can almost imagine the brochure. We look at how the introduction creates a character in a very economical fashion, using a sort of film noir language: “Some seek wisdom and spiritual enlightenment, some simply search for peace. Stanley MacDonald is one of the latter” (p. 12), folding in the character’s name with his (unattainable) mission: to find peace during a zombie apocalypse. In the introduction we are presented with an active character and an immediate problem he or she must puzzle out in the section following, often while in great peril. We note the faux attempt to maintain the “authentic” language of the speaker by pushing an explanatory footnote further down the page, a curiously academic move. These textual features are not just “rules”: they are strategies that combine, when done well, to heighten the dark delight each section promises. Genre is not an inert collection of correct moves but an active and creative “site” for the production of knowledge—in this case, knowledge about how to create suspense.

The first tentative draft often misses the mark. Sometimes the short chapters are pure gore and no suspense. Creating an interesting character, someone we care about, is important to this genre, but it’s not easy to write. As each student begins drafting, this is a good time to read Anne Lamott’s short essay on “Shitty First Drafts” in *Bird by Bird* (2014, pp. 31-34) and assume that even Max Brooks had to draft and revise his chapters to make them emotionally engaging and believable. I also have come to expect that a number of students will struggle with the basics of the genre at this point. The interviewee, for example, can’t have died in the struggle; he or she would no longer be available to be interviewed! Likewise, in the logic of this book at least, there is no immunity to the disease, the revenants are not affected by being submerged in water (you can’t drown them), and they can’t run very fast (some other versions of zombies are quite

fleet). The act of writing the fan fiction highlights where the student did and didn't successfully appropriate the conventions of the text. To respect the conventions is not enough, though. Students must develop a storyline that is believable and engaging. Writing merely gory stories, or ones that strictly follow the layout conventions of the genre without understanding how to use them to create suspense, means the version isn't working.

By this point, students are coming to understand their audience (each other), their personal motives, as well as the motives baked in to the genre itself. We spend two weeks writing and revising the Zombie Genre papers, sharing them and presenting them orally as well. When read aloud, students can hear what is working and what is not, giving us all more data to work from as we continue to revise.

A series of workshops and semi-public readings ensues. I try to invite other students to the class to hear the story drafts unfold and have held an open "Halloween Reading" on campus, which is a perfect venue for this genre. My goal all along is to help students grow in their awareness of how a genre functions for a writer and reader, respecting the power of the form and their role "on the stage" of a social interaction. Picturing students as post-college writers composing instructions, memos, letters, summaries, recommendations and a hundred other genres, I hope that they will leave my class familiar with the process of finding examples of the workplace and academic genres they will inevitably be asked to compose, knowing how to read them critically for clues as to their overall purpose and audience, and successfully forward their own intentions when they compose for their future communities.

Through this process students are introduced to genres as a "key" (Miller 1984, p. 165) students can use to imagine their future work, interact with colleagues, achieve their purposes and conduct close readings of the texts that structure

their community. They will have developed a genre awareness that will help them discern the rhetorical activity and practical power imbued in working genres. By examining and sharing genres, both verbally and in writing, they will get a sense of "what ends we may have...and the potential for failure and success in acting together" (Miller, 1984, p. 165).

Finally, to make it fully realized, we take the "Lost Chapters" students finalized and bind them in an informal book, creating an archive of their best attempts at becoming insiders to this discourse community. The uptake of these interwoven projects and revisions is practical: students will be better able to recognize how genres work for a community, and they will also be better able to produce and revise their own genre-based writing in a community of practice. These students have had the experience of working with genres that are ways of acting together; in this case, creating suspense and developing a character, while following the tightly prescribed conventions of the Brooks genre. Finally, there is some satisfaction to watching students learn to write, revise and hone their own expertise in the subject matter —they seem know rather a lot about how zombies work —and do so because it matters to them personally and collectively to get the genre right.

Appendix 1: Jobs Project Assignment

We wrote four short papers that will give you the foundation you need to compose the first major piece, the Job Project paper. The final paper assignment asks you to show a solid understanding of your future white-collar (writing) career. You can tell us about yourself (what skills and abilities make you want to enter this career). You can talk about the myths: What are some of the common misperceptions of the work? What are

some things we probably don't know about this job? Here are some questions from our discussions and writing in class:

- After research (talking in class, web research, and contacting actual workers in your field) what are the realities of the job?
- What surprises did your research hold?
- What kind of a contrast can you make between your job and somebody else's?
- What kind of writing takes place in your field?
- In what ways are you ready to compose in the sort of genres, for the audiences, for the purposes and situations professionals actually use as part of that job?
- How are you ready?
- How are you not ready?
- What's next? That is, what research or people can help make you become more informed about the kinds of word-work you'll be doing as a professional, and how can you prepare for those new writing challenges?
- What concrete steps will you take to prepare for the textual demands of that particular job? It is important to be specific about your strategies.

Our earlier in-class writing and short out-of-class papers were these:

• Personal writing audit: how does your personality make a good fit with the job you are envisioning?
• Web research: looking online, what do professionals in your career say about their job and the specifics of the job?
• Contact two actual humans on the phone or in person who work in your field. What do they write?
• Explain the reality of your job vs. the myths.
• Your three minute oral report: Why should **you** go into the career? What are some of the myths?
• What will you write there? What writing tasks will you be challenged by? What writing tasks are you ready for?

APPENDIX 2: Jobs Project *revision*

The final revised paper should be at least 25% shorter. It should be focused on writing at work in your future job. Web research is not forbidden, but the main source of revision will come from the professionals you contact.

You can *briefly* tell us about the skills and abilities that make you want to enter this career. You can *briefly* talk about the myths and common misperceptions of the work (one misconception is that you won't write much!)

In this revision, double down and carefully discuss the nature of the genres that you will be writing in your future job. What clues do they give you about the workplace of the field as a whole? What do these professionals really worry about in their writing? What do they just assume is obvious? Talk about how you're ready (and how you're not) as you think about writing for **that** job.

The revision must involve dialogue from at least two (2) professionals you hold a discussion with over email or the phone. These sorts of questions are a good starting place:

- "When you first started in your position, how did you learn what you were expected to write? Can you give me a story of a genre that was hard for you to learn when you were new?
- What is one thing you write every day a work?" What function does it have for you and others?"
- "In what ways are the style and content of your work writing different from the writing you did in college?"
- "What advice would you give a person who was just starting to write on the job?"

- "What are your work-related emails commonly about, exactly?
- "Who is your audience for the emails and memos and updates and reports you write?"
- "How do you know when you should start a writing project -- is it intuition or do you get assigned work?"
- "When there is a problem to be solved by writing at work, how do you know what genre of writing to use?
- "How do you insert your own thoughts and goals into a piece of writing at work?"

APPENDIX 3: Zombie Genre Key Issues from our conversation:

What the Introduction does for us as readers =
Character's flaw =
Most suspenseful section =
Character's setting =
Character's goal (other than to just survive!) =
How this character matures =

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Jean

Her eyes are clear and untroubled. They are the richest, cleanest brown, and ringed with a thin iridescence of electric blue, they are translucent, set off by the clarity of her skin and the red-orange sheen of her lipstick. It is the only makeup she wears - the only makeup a 94-year-old woman ever wears, and it is worn with grace and fortitude, with purity of purpose and meaning. She means to be alive, presenting herself even to the small task of dragging her garbage to the bottom of the driveway below. She is in the middle of cutting her hair, she says, and it hangs straighter than I've ever seen it, uncurled from her usual pinwheel and Bobby-pin formed curls. I've tried to replicate them, but I can't. Something about her form, her age, her style - just right on her, all wrong on me.

She is the grandmother I wish I'd had, though that feels wrong and hurtful to say.

Jean is happy to be alive, happy to see me happy, happy to watch her TV, to talk about her objection to the current political state, shocked as she is by the farce and irreverence of those who adhere to and advocate for increased hate. Yet she's not eager to exit, not hoping for an end despite the pain in her hip and the loss of her license. She's happy to look at the river from her driveway or front door, and though sad she can't see it from her upstairs bedroom window anymore, she never fails to enjoy it, or to tell me stories. She points to Marymount across the span, and notes she's *still* annoyed at the nuns for selling out. Her daughters went there too, she adds, and then there is a new, old story about Bud. Tonight's is how he broke his kneecap taking "the girls" ice skating in Memorial Park. She describes the video footage she has, and precisely how in it he hiked his pant leg to show off the cast. She admits that her skates probably *still* look brand

new. “They’re in your attic somewhere, aren’t they?” I tease, and her eyes sparkle with a guilty, unapologetic smirk.

She tries to show me her teaching plan book but can’t find it. “Jean...Oh my gosh, I bet you have them all, don’t you??” Another endearing grin, another I’m-not-making-any-excuses shrug of her delicate shoulders, and her smiling right eyebrow rises up, letting me know she knows that yes, it *is* silly, but so be it. She doesn’t care. Her “joie” for her own “vivre” is so palpable that I want to remain forever in that wooden chair, drinking hot, grainy Folgers from her mismatched cups, dust slowly invading from encroaching corners, soaking up her aliveness, her love of herself, her acceptance of who and what and why and how and all that she is. She is ahead of her time, has been mindful since before mindful was what we all should be. She brings me to a time when only being mattered, when love governed the day, when the pace was slower, the work less encompassing, the living more outdoors.

The conversation shifts to missing her grandson Jeff who’s gone to Oklahoma for a job, and her, “I’d like to meet that hussy” betrays her suspicions while lightening her sadness. She pivots to her frustration with the current grandson who, though nice enough, comes and goes with or without “the girlfriend.” Her affection is belied by her refusal to urge him to go, unabashedly vexing the daughter who’d like to insert her will in the situation. “Ha!” Jean laughs, “Wait ‘till they find out who’s getting the house!”

She is not afraid to be alone, not afraid to be strong, not afraid to be clear.

She motions to the clutter they would all like her to be rid of, but the gleam in her eyes and conspiratorial whisper of delight in ignoring them tells me that she will live on her terms, in her way, with her stuff, and she won’t be worried about it. She has no need of my offer to help her go through it, and though I’d bet her whole married and mothering life is in that

attic, it's clear it brings her joy even if she can't get up there to see it.

I wonder if the saving turned invasive only after Bud's death.

She recalls watching him in his sailor's uniform come to her door, how she was struck, and I notice her cheeks' enduring glow as she tells me he told his friend, "I'm going to marry that girl someday."

I am reminded of the story of his passing, how he asked her in their bed as she sat with him that final night whether he believed in "death do us part," and how she soothed him, "You know how I feel. It's ok. You can rest now."

I am overcome, always.

I love her in the way neighbors are free to, not clouded by judgement or efforts to curb or control or change. I love her as she is, with the ease of an observer and the affection of an admirer, an honest devotee of her uncomplicated outlook on the beauty of life and love and being alive. I love her zest for the simple excitement of clipping two versions of tonight's TV lineup and mapping her evening: "Did you know *Bohemian Rhapsody* is on at 8? Have you seen it? That's what I'm watching tonight. It's 7:35, so I have time to talk for another few minutes. Did you know I…?"

—michelle g. bulla

michelle g. bulla is a 20+ year English teacher at Monroe-Woodbury High School at the foot of the Catskills in New York, where she also serves as 9-12 Department Chair. She serves on the Executive Board of the New York State English Council in several capacities, including editor of the "Voices of NYSEC" blog. She's also a Hudson Valley Writing Project teacher-leader. She'd love to hear from you to talk teaching, writing, reading, and figuring out how to do it all and still sleep, too. mbulla@mw.k12.ny.us Twitter: @china93doll #TeachersWhoEvolve

Teacher's Introduction

For the past sixteen years, I have been a high school English teacher at Hamburg High School, in Hamburg, N.Y., just south of the city of Buffalo. Just after I was hired for my current position, I was lucky enough to be accepted as a fellow for the Western New York Writing Project (WNYWP) in 2004. The work that I did for the WNYWP from that point forward has informed my pedagogy. To that end, writing is the center and focus of everything that we do in the classroom. As the year progresses, we move fluidly from creative writing to argument writing to literary analysis to writing business letters to the principal--even TedTalks are on the table. This piece, written by Dominic Manzella, who is now a senior, represents the final writing assignment of English 11: the Common Application essay. After spending a year focused on refining the writing process, considering the importance of precise diction in the development of individual style, and tweaking the "flow" of each piece, at the end of the year students write a college entrance essay designed to illustrate their unique selves. Dominic, a three-sport athlete and a standout student, writes here about his love of close-up magic. His piece is full of voice and reveals a little about his true personality. **-**
Genevieve Federick gfederick@hcsdk12.org

What I Learned About Truth Through Misdirection

Dominic Manzella
Hamburg High School

Everyone has a different reaction when something that they expect to be impossible becomes reality; some are amazed, some become scared, others just sit and wonder how it happened. When I first began learning card magic, I was part of the "amazed" group. I began learning card magic after an event in my life that is now relatively unimportant but at the time was a large emotional hardship for me. I wasn't happy, and I knew

that if I didn't find a way to either occupy myself or change my thoughts it would become a problem. So, I decided to pursue something that I always found to be interesting—cardistry and card magic.

When I first started, I would sit around and manipulate a deck of cards, only half paying attention to whatever else was going on around me. Which was great, for it took my mind off of my troubles, just like I'd hoped it would. But then it became about more than that. I thought, "If this is giving me solace and comfort, even happiness, why not others?" At that point, I decided to incorporate moves and tricks that I could perform for other people. I immediately realized what a double edged sword this was— by learning magic tricks, I then knew how they worked and they didn't have the same effect on me any more when others performed them. If I didn't know a trick, I would sit and think about how they were done. I could still appreciate the showmanship and skill of others, but the "wow" factor just wasn't there for me. It was like a light got snuffed out in my life.

As slightly depressing as this was, it was completely offset by the other side of the coin— the pleasure that others received, and visibly would show. Not everyone would react the same, but every reaction was just as rewarding as the past. The feeling of giving people that happiness will make my day—and that's not an exaggeration. That feeling encourages me to spend even more time learning and perfecting the craft, to the point where I do lose track of time. I regret not learning magic earlier for this reason.

I don't perform magic for every person that I see, nor do I approach people and ask to show them magic. I let people come to me and ask, because those are the people who are most interested and have the best reaction. They watch, waiting to detect the sleight of hand or lie that I am weaving them, and when they don't see it they have the best reactions of all. Magic is not about blatantly lying to your audience. It is about using

the truth to fabricate a lie, which they don't see because that truth is the misdirection. What I realized is that the magic is not the trick—the magic is being able to bring out that happiness or wonder or amazement. Magic is an art, just like painting, music, poetry, or any other conventionally thought of subject. What you can do to someone with a simple deck of cards is sometimes equal to the most moving piece of music or thought-provoking poetry. Once you begin learning magic, it becomes a part of you; it changes how you think, how you watch, and how you listen.

Dominic Manzella is a high school senior at Hamburg High School in Hamburg, New York, a suburb of Buffalo. He is a member of the Academy of Finance, a three-sport athlete, and an honor roll student.

Watch Out, Fish!: Using Humor in the Classroom

Maya Projansky
Earth School

I believe in humor in classrooms.

Each September, I find myself having a similar conversation with my class about laughing. Let's say I trip over a bench in the classroom. If I laugh, people are welcome to join me in laughing at my clumsiness. However, if I don't laugh, and other people do, then they are laughing at me. We explore the feelings I would have in each of those scenarios as part of the process of creating norms for our community. The difference between "laughing with" and "laughing at" someone is important. Our feelings matter in our classroom community. Laughing is wonderful, but the context and intent matter.

The notion that learning is a social activity, that we learn from the people we are in various "clubs" with, is one that I learned from Frank Smith's *The Book of Learning and Forgetting* as part of his definition of the "classic" view of learning. He distinguishes learning naturally from the people with whom you keep company from "The Official Theory" which views learning as hard work. If you are able to laugh with someone, you are part of the same club. You are "in" together. You can learn from one another. I would never want a student to feel as if they were outside of our community—to feel separated from the group, pushed away from the hearth. The emotional distance that creates in a child—or anyone—leads to the construction of walls of separation, to bitterness, to resentment, to further isolation from the group. This is not conducive to learning.

Many years ago, early in my career, a father joined our class on every single field trip that we took. On a trip to Philipsburg Manor, we were eating lunch next to the millpond

after the program. The education staff had told the students rules for the picnic area, which included not throwing anything into the pond. The students happily ate, sharing food and laughing, as they moved around the graveled space. I sat with this father chatting on a picnic bench. We were facing the water. It was a cold day in the late fall, and there was ice floating on much of the pond.

Suddenly, I realized that a couple of children were throwing small rocks and sticks into the pond. Yikes! I quickly walked over to them. The father had followed me over to the kids. He watched as I spoke to them about throwing things into a pond despite being told at the outset that they were not allowed to do so. I was quite serious and intense with them, using my recently developed “strict teacher” voice. They looked appropriately chastened. I then joked that if they did it again, I was going to throw them into the pond. “Picture the poor fish that’s swimming along and gets hit on the head by you two!” It was such an absurd idea that the dejected looks left their faces and they laughed. They dropped the stones in their hands and returned to eating their sandwiches at the tables.

The father turned to me and said, “I notice that every time you discipline a child, you follow it with a joke. Why do you do that? What’s the philosophy behind it?”

I had never noticed this before. I wasn’t even aware that I did it regularly.

“I do? I’ve never noticed that.”

“I assumed it was something you did on purpose, like that you’d been taught to do it in your teaching training. It’s pretty cool.”

“Huh. I’ll have to think about that. You’re right that I do it, but I’m not really sure why. It just feels right.”

I’ve thought about that conversation a lot over the years. I came to realize that I do it for a good reason.

Central to my beliefs about teaching is that students are humans and it's my responsibility to honor and support that in every interaction. Being human is a tricky business. Humans make mistakes; that is how we learn. Humans also have emotions that are connected in part to our sense of belonging. Belonging is important. In every interaction with my students, I try to hold these two beliefs central to the choices I make about how I respond. Whether we are celebrating a piece of work a student has done, giving suggestions about how to improve something, or redirecting a child who is throwing rocks into an icy pond, I am conscious of their humanity.

When I make mistakes, I want to be seen as more than just my mistake. I want the mistake to be seen in the context of all that I am as a person. This does not dismiss the mistake—I still need to acknowledge it and take responsibility for it. But I am more than my mistake. Students also want to be seen this way. Humor helps as all remember our fullness as humans, no matter what.

A 2011 review of the use of humor in educational settings (Banas, Dunbar, Rodriguez, & Liu, cited in Weimer, 2013) looked at 40 years of research. According to Weimer, the researchers found that:

> Humor in educational settings serves a variety of positive functions beyond simply making people laugh. Humor builds group (as in class) cohesion. People respond more positively to each other when humor is present. It brings them together. Humor can facilitate cohesion by softening criticism. Research also establishes that humor helps individuals cope with stress. It relaxes them. (2013)

Humor can facilitate cohesion by softening criticism. I was not taught this is my teaching education program, but I could have been. Had I known this research that day by the pond, I would

have answered that father differently. But the research doesn't really matter: My heart tells me that it's good to laugh together. It keeps us human. And, it keeps us an "us."

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Maya Projansky has taught fourth and fifth grade in a dual-age classroom at Earth School, a public school in New York City, for fifteen years. She also works with the Hudson Valley Writing Project at SUNY New Paltz. Maya holds a master's degree from Bank Street College of Education. maya.projansky@gmail.com

The course to be run -- hopefully

With a foot firmly on the   Brake?

Teacher as reader:
pages through that text and
repeats that illuminating metaphor
that has satisfied before   As if

Teacher as wizard:
retells that story that
paints that portrait of possibility and
establishes credibility   'Hey, I walked through the snow'

Teacher as thinker:
takes a pen to that prompt,
writes as students write to
model engagement   while withholding doubts

Teacher as co-learner:
pushes back the chair
reads fresh writing aloud from a legal pad as if
vested power doesn't reduce   Vulnerability.

Derailments:

Breathe

Don't simply re-write or re-cite something safe

Listen

Invite contradiction

Take note

Acknowledge questions

Peel away the front-facing mask,
Set free

back stories and narrative details
that

Reveal concealed edges, the unsavory parts of a life in teaching,
the underbelly of pain,
sadness and disappointment
of the yearning protagonist

Own complicity in school's perpetual socialization
conservation of class,
systemic racism,
capitalism crushing,
damaged democracy

Un-cover stories of resistance and advocacy

Relinquish some power, but never **Hope**.

— Tom Meyer

Author's note: I am a co-founder and Director of the Hudson Valley Writing Project at SUNY New Paltz. Over the years, I have taught courses related to teacher leadership, action research, curriculum studies, literacy, and writing. Before coming to New Paltz, and after my third year of teaching English at a public high school, I attended an Invitational Institute sponsored by the Bay Area Writing Project at UC Berkeley. meyert@newpaltz.edu

"The course to be run-- hopefully," was born from an effort to revise an essay after an editor sent back challenging feedback from three

blind reviewers. The editor assured me that the revision would be worth it and encouraged me to focus more on the second and third reviews rather than the first! I sought out articles and some authors suggested by the second and third reviewers. Before returning to the revision, as a way to gather my thoughts, one day I drafted a poetic version of the essay.

The poem, like the essay I was revising, reflects enduring questions I have about being a "teacher-learner." At Writing Project sites, we regularly push ourselves to 'write as students write,' to model ourselves as learners. And although I do that, I noticed that some of my public learning was rather safe, staid, and even stale. I had cloaked some of the existential difficulties of teaching and learning from my students, future teachers. In the spirit of the essay, which focuses more on storytelling as problematic pedagogy, the poem incorporates some of the double-daring, inner monologue pushing the speaker/teacher toward more vulnerable learning— for instance, "Don't simply re-write or re-cite something safe." In the end, *derailing* may make for richer and more hopeful curriculum.

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