UAB’S RED MOUNTAIN WRITING PROJECT FELLOWS’ ANTHOLOGY

A Collection of Personal and Professional Writing of the RWMP Summer Institute 2015 Fellows

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RED MOUNTAIN WRITING PROJECT
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Red Mountain Writing Project is an affiliate of the National Writing Project. The Summer Institute is an invitation-only professional development experience which focuses on teachers teaching teachers through modeling, research, and discussion of best practices. Teachers are expected to create a demonstration lesson which they present to the institute, write two personal pieces, and two professional pieces. One of each type of writing is published in this anthology.
Personal Pieces

The writing in this section of the anthology represents the personal writing our Fellows did during the Summer Institute. Fellows were asked to compose two personal and two professional pieces. The personal pieces could be in any genre, and one had to be selected to be published in our anthology. It is a frightening thing to publish writing, and our students deal with these feelings as well. Thinking and acting like writers is one of the goals of Summer Institute. Teachers who write are more effective with the teaching of writing because they are able to communicate how writers think.
“Just a Fly”

Jodi Edwards

I see the kid with his head down
constantly throughout the period.
I don’t know that he stayed up all
night in the streets selling
drugs, because that’s the only
way he gets to feed his younger
siblings; shhh….no one knows they live alone.

I see the girl secretly texting
her older boyfriend that her
mother knows nothing about.
She only wants attention that
her family can’t give…
she’s passed around from
relative to relative as her
mom works 3 jobs to make
ends meet.

I see the child who clowns
for his peers like a court
jester.
His behavior is so animated and
he loves the attention;
any attention is better
than exposing his feelings
of not being the brightest.

I see the kid in the back
corner who chooses to never
participate.
She is journaling away.. in her
own zone...she has an “F”
in the class, but her
interpretation of
life... her words...
she’s a young Maya Angelou.

I see the teacher teaching.
I hear the bell ringing…
I hear the students loudly
leave as they seemingly
break away… their freedom.
I feel the teacher shoo me
away, before I get
a chance to tell her
what I see, what I
hear. What she missed.
What I know.

But I’m just a fly on
the wall...
seemingly a pest... yet
I hold truths... the
pestilence within this
learning environment is a
hardship that goes
Unnoticed.
A Guilty Pleasure? Julie I. Paul

When I hear the oxymoron, guilty pleasures, or, more specifically, the inquiry as to what my guilty pleasure is, my mind immediately associates this with treating myself with something that I most likely do not need. However, my thoughts simultaneously jump to the one delicacy that I have a complete weakness for: Tiramisu.

This Italian dessert is the one gourmet item that I find myself struggling with to say “no” to. I believe this Achilles’ heel comes from the base of the light fluffy ladyfingers that have been soaked in coffee liqueur. Or possibly it is the top layer of sweetened dark cocoa powder that covers the rich Mascarpone cheese tiered on top of the delicate sponge cake. I think it is the combination these delectable ingredients that makes my mouth water just writing this. I can’t exactly pinpoint which constituent of this dessert is what makes it my weakness. All I can say is that Julie Paul’s guilty pleasure is Tiramisu and you should have a small slice at your quickest convenience.
That’s Why

Donna R. Jones

W.E.B. DuBois was a strong black man
A social reformer we had on hand
As an African American intellect
He strived for freedom throughout the land.
That’s why all blacks today can take a stand.

He went to college to help him do great
That’s why there should be a day to celebrate
His way of non-violence and keep-in it real
Taught blacks everywhere to put violence to a yield

When the souls of our black folk were at stake
That’s why DuBois started a movement that wasn’t fake
He started a movement that’s called today
The NAACP, I am proud to say.

The struggle for freedom was not very rare
  Human rights, civil rights
  Social freedoms and growth
  Were always there
That’s why the more things change
The more they seem to stay the same
Thinker’s writers and defenders make it plain

We hold truths of self-evidence that all men are created equal
That’s why we should hold fast and continue to extend the sequel
We hold our destiny in the palm of our own hand
For the sacrifices that have been made
Take up our inheritance and stand

That’s why.
Fatherhood

By JohnMark Edwards

Remember in the movie *Hook*, when Peter Pan, played by male actor Robin Williams, found his “happy thought?” It was his son, his first-born child, and from old Peter Pan’s perspective, it was becoming a father. Becoming a father changes everything, or so they say. I try to avoid superlatives like “everything,” but it’s got to be close to accurate in this particular case. I always knew I wanted to be a father and I remember being six or seven years-old, watching *Hook*, and knowing that one day my “happy thought” would be my own children and it would be what allows me to fly. I love the analogy, because it’s counter-intuitive. According to recent studies, I would probably be happier if I didn’t have small children in the house right now - they cost money, they defy your authority, they make unnecessary messes, they poop their pants (and sometimes wipe it on the wall and all over their crib like a monkey at the zoo), in short they just need you… And what can they practically do for you? They can’t really make money (insert your favorite child labor joke right here), they can’t read the books I love, they can’t do the things I like to do, and so on and so forth. So maybe they are right… except that in my case, they are wrong.

Most people, even people that love their children, agree that having children is like having manacles around their ankles. I respectfully disagree, not with research or statistics, just personal preference. To me, having children is liberating - it’s my “happy thought” that allows me to fly and be the person that I was really meant to be and the person I want to be. But just like everything in life, the secret really lies within one’s perspective, right? I have friends with kids who say, “I can’t do anything I love to do, now that I have kids” - really, that’s really how you feel? As the reader, you might be able to relate. I have also heard, “I’m so jealous of so-and-so, they don’t have kids, they get to do x, y, z!” Their implications are that their lives would be better without kids. I would argue that my life is far greater with kids. Let’s engage in a thought experiment with one of my favorite historical thinkers: Aristotle.
Aristotle: what makes someone a better person? Is it money?

Joe from anywhere: Sometimes I think it is, but that can’t be right, money is so temporary and its pleasures so fleeting, money will make you richer, but I can’t believe that richer people are “better” people.

Aristotle: What about the freedom to do whatever you want to do? Does that make someone a better person?

Joe: Freedom would be nice, at first, but that can’t be right either. Doing whatever you want, whenever you want is unhealthy and it certainly doesn’t make you a better person. A disciplined person is more respected than someone with little or no self-control.

Aristotle: What about having an easy life without any real challenges? Does that make someone a better person?

Joe: I like things to be easy, but I know that there is no personal growth without real challenges. So, no, an easy life would not make you better.

Aristotle: All three of these examples, are examples of self-centeredness. Are we not better off being self-centered and catering to our own needs? If selfishness doesn’t make you the best version of yourself, then what does?

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The best version of myself is not someone who is self-centered, because if I am only looking at myself then I will miss so much of what is good in this world. Without real challenges in my life, I will stagnate - without challenge there is no growth; with small challenges there is only small growth; and only with great challenge comes great growth. If I want maximum growth, I want a real challenge. I am a better person today because I have kids.

I remember it well. December first, 2009, I held my beautiful daughter for the first time, my first real challenge in life - AnnaBelle. Everything before kids, was easy in retrospect. Kids - that’s where real, significant, and meaningful growth takes place. AnnaBelle was my happy thought, and she opened up the doors for me to be the best version of myself, something I would never become without her. Think of any virtue, any life skill - I’m better today in all of them, than I would have been without AnnaBelle or Bear (great challenge #2) or Penelope (great challenge #3). By
having multiple kids, I think I exponentially multiplied my potential to improve myself. Patience - yeah, my kids give me ample opportunities to practice patience. It takes patience to deal with a child that takes 45 minutes to eat dinner. When I’m in a hurry and my kids are with me, they are a constant reminder than being anxious and impatient are counter-productive. Perseverance - having a baby will give you opportunities to practice perseverance. Penelope loves to wake up at 3:00am, just to remind me she’s the third child. AnnaBelle needs me to practice swimming with her if she is going to pass the swim test this summer - some say she is persevering… I say that parent who works all summer with that child is persevering. Self-control - you can only imagine what I wanted to do after Bear poured a paint on the new carpet, or flushed a harmonica down the toilet, or drew a picture on the wall, or touched the waffle iron while it was hot. It’s easy to have self-control when you have no kids. Honestly, what happens in your life that could possibly test this virtue like a three year old boy? Time and money management - the two staples of a successful person in the real world. Without kids, I’d spend my money on meaningless things and waste my free time investing in trivial pursuits. Having kids, has narrowed my focus; I am now more productive, despite having less time to accomplish all my tasks for work, achieving all my personal goals, and enjoying my free time. Free time? Yeah, I have that. I’m just more efficient now and choose to use that free time to engage in things that matter, like scheduling a camping trip with my kids, or praying for them and their future as parents, or reflecting on what’s most important in life - how awesome it is to be a dad.
If Only Someone…
by Kelli Singell

If only someone understood
the pain behind the eyes that could,
the flame beneath the cheeks that won’t,
the itch behind the lips which don’t.

If only someone simply read
the cuts which have never bled,
the bruises that have left no mark,
the fetters which can never spark.

If only someone took time to hear
the heart behind the silent fear,
the lungs beneath the withheld breath,
the words behind the speech’s death.

If only someone thought to speak
to the soul soft and meek.
If only someone reached out to hold
the body and soul now gone cold.

What’s My Theme Song?
Terry Harbison

Every time I walk in the room I wish ??????? song would play because….

…why is this so hard for me? I love music. Music moves me and speaks to me. Why can’t I choose a theme song? I can be overly analytical, and I want it to be the perfect song. I love music so much I don’t want to get it wrong. Do I choose a song that displays who people see? Who I think I am? When I am on top of the world? When I am in the doldrums? Who I want to be? Who I am as a teacher? A father? A husband? Just pick a song already…. I could be all introspective and pick The Who’s “Behind Blue Eyes”. I could be kind of pissy and choose “Don’t Care” by King’s X or “Something from Nothing” by the Foo Fighters. Tesla’s “Gettin Better” is probably what best describes me right now. Part of the song says,

I'm a hard workin' man, doin' all that I can, tryin' to make ends meet
Just a-makin' my way through the jungle today, it's gettin' the best of me

But it’s only gettin' better, and a change is gonna come my way
Yes it’s only gettin' better, better every day, aha yeah
A Thank You to My Book Mentors

By Susan Chaffin Goggins

One day an amazing thing happened. I looked up from the book I was reading and realized the house was totally quiet. No music—usually the Beatles or Led Zeppelin—thundered from Leah’s room. No hushed excitement from the blah-blah open golf tournament vibrated from the main television. Everyone must be napping, I thought. But curiosity got the better of me, and I put down And the Mountains Echoed and checked on the husband and daughter. (I needed more tissues anyway.)

Surprised I didn’t hear snores coming down the hallway, I found my husband sprawled on the couch, his nose buried in A Lesson Before Dying. He’s one of my best pupils. I had told him he should read it so we could talk about it, and there he was lost in Jefferson’s tragedy and Grant’s conundrum.

At Leah’s bedroom door, I paused and listened again for snoring. No sounds. When I tapped on the door, I was surprised to hear a quick “yeah.” (I figured she had those “leave-me-alone-I’m-ignoring-you” earbuds in.) But I found her, too, lost in a book—a novel for school, I think. “Just checking on you,” I said. “It was so quiet.” And she returned to her book.

As I opened my book to the dog-eared page, I realized none of us were using our E-readers or iPads. We were all lost in that lovely sensation of turning another page of our warm, musty books—probably purchased used at 2nd & Charles—rather than tapping or swiping cold plastic screens. I wondered, does this ever happen in my students’ homes? Do they find their parents reading quietly, undistracted by electronics or broadcast noise? Do they ever see their parents reading for pleasure?

I came from a home of non-readers. Yes, my parents were literate, but they were all about working—cleaning house religiously, cooking, doing the job of a telephone lineman, farming. I was never told to go read, and I do not have any memory of someone reading to me. My love of books came from internal forces not external. I found something to read. We had 1970-something set of World Book Encyclopedias. I read those. My favorite volume was “D.” I loved the section on dogs. I can still identify my dog breeds by sight—with the exception of those crazy hybrids created in recent years!

Thank God for my reading mentors! Two key reading mentors came into my life and introduced me to books other than encyclopedias and dictionaries! First, there was Aunt Jimmie Lou, subscriber to Readers Digest condensed books, who shared my love of reading. She began gifting me with paperbacks for every gift-giving occasion. I devoured Gone with the Wind in three late nights the summer before fifth grade. Catherine Marshall’s Christy fed my spirit and my mind. Then, there was my neighbor, my friend’s mom, Charlotte Bruce, who got me my first library card.
and took me there along with her own daughter every two weeks. It was heaven! As soon as I could drive, I went weekly.

Because of my childhood experience with reading, I was determined to have a print-rich environment in my home. I read to my daughters before they were born. My husband read to them as well, and then we encouraged the older one to read to the younger one. I was born to read, and so were my daughters. I think it is in our genetic make-up. However, in my seven years of teaching high school English, I have not run across too many born-to-read students like myself. For most children, reading needs to be nurtured and modeled and cultivated. With reading mentors—like I discovered in Jimmie Lou and Charlotte—the natural reader will grow and flourish, and the reluctant reader will be ushered into the joys of getting lost in another world. Reading has brought me so much joy. The least I can do is pass it on.

*Thermodynamics* by Jenise Gorman

The physics teacher could catch a bullet with his unibrow while turning liquid into gas with a single stare. He drilled with his gourd personality, and when the 13:00 bell rung and we sat at attention. His tailored stripes tucked in his denim, oxfords paced the lab; yet, his slant smile and comb-over strands traveled beneath his left brow. A tanline disced around his ring finger and wondering what went wrong. Only red pens quilled grades (vertically aligned), and everyone started with nothing better than a “C,” stapler, tape dispenser, sharpener all 90° of his desk calendar, he would demonstrate tricks lying on a bed of a thousand sharp shanks, cinder blocks stacked high while a sledge hammer bursted through, “That’s kinetic energy.” He listed key terms: heat, temperature, energy, and work.
Focus is the key! Even though, in life, we might think our main aim is to please; we have to take the good with the bad, the ups with the downs, and the bitter with the sweet. We most definitely can’t be weak.

We may get off track as we tread on shaky ground. However, we have to push past the obstacles that seek to hold us down, and we have to dodge and block the stones that are thrown by others as they try to cause us to stumble, or even worse, make us crumble.

We have to face our fears even though they may come in many different forms because we can’t allow fear to paralyze us and hold us back. We can’t be afraid of what lies before us; we have to stay the course and keep our eyes on the prize.

We can’t allow our goals, hopes, dreams, and deep desires to be thwarted by fear and doubt. We must learn to maximize our potential and utilize our powers: courage, self – will, determination, and perseverance because they lie deep within. We must encourage ourselves in our darkest hour!

We can’t be moved! We shall overcome! These should be the only cheers and cries that we hear from those who have gone before us. The voices of those that have tread on the path that now lies ahead.

They didn’t quit! They remained focused, and they unlocked all that they had hoped for and dreamed of and more. They found success!!!
When thinking of your life as a song, you must mentally browse your own personal jukebox of the tunes in your mind and your memory. Which song captures the essence of your life? Maybe part of one song, the title of another, a chorus here, a line there are the phrases, words, and feeling you get that make it stick with you forever. Deciding which one song could serve as your theme song is almost an impossibility. I think mine would be a culmination of songs mixed together.

The title of Tom Cochrane’s “Life is A Highway” pops into my mind immediately. This song is a reflection about life and where the roads you choose to take will ultimately lead you. It reminds me that we choose the path in our lives. I like the paths I’ve chosen. Each path has different possibilities, new friends, exciting adventures, and sometimes disappointment. After all, isn’t that what life is all about?

Dolly Parton’s “Coat of Many Colors” was my favorite song as a child, and I can remember listening to that cassette tape over and over, memorizing the tune and lyrics. I just liked the song when I was little, but now I understand the meaning. It reminds me of my childhood-poor and happy. A specific line stands out to me. “One is only poor, only if they choose to be.” My childhood was poor for a long time. Christmas came from donations. Food stamps came from the government. Our trailer came from my mom’s hard work and the help of my Gramma. We learned to make the best of what we had. We were happy because we wanted to be. I wanted cool things, like other kids, but I knew we couldn’t afford them, so I was happy with what I had. I learned how to be creative and imaginative. Those qualities are still a part of me now.

“Bless the Broken Road” would have to be included as well. It was the first song my husband and I danced to at our wedding. It is a song that speaks about the path that God chooses for you. It may not be what you envisioned or hoped for, but it is what God made for you! My husband and I were high school sweethearts, survived a long distance relationship for a few years, and have made it through some really hard times. I cannot imagine my life without him, and I know God made him for me and our life just for us. It may not be perfect, but it is ours.

Then, I think about my sweet baby boy. Jacob taught me a love like I have never known. He taught me how to love something that wasn’t even here yet. My love for him grew
each day that he grew inside the womb. “Speechless” by Alicia Keys make me think of him. In this song, she sings about falling for her son and how nothing else can compare to him. She sings about having no words to describe how she feels about him. I feel that way about Jacob. It is a miracle that I have him. Suffering four pregnancy losses, two before his birth and two since, I know that he may be our only child. He makes life fun and interesting and challenging and rewarding.

Of course, I would need to include “You’re My Best Friend” by Queen. I have many close friends and have had many wonderful friends throughout my life so far. The mood that this songs sets is one of thankfulness and happiness. That is how I feel about my friends.

Last, I would need to include “Settlin” by Sugarland. The message this songs brings is one of not settling for anything less than what you want. I have learned to work hard for everything I have and everything I’ve accomplished. I don’t ever plan to be settling. I will continue to set goals and persevere until I reach them. When God made me, he knew I was no quitter.

As you can tell, my theme song would be a mix and mash of various genres, artists, and messages. That is me in a nutshell. I'm different. I'm quirky. I'm a person who likes what she likes. These songs would be the best representation of me. My theme songs would be the perfect mix of what I find perfect in my life: my family, my friends, my upbringing, my career, my spirit.
Beautiful Woman

Jennifer Little

Beautiful woman…
Why can't you see?
There’s so much more to you than you realize people can see.
You have been bruised and battered, no longer scarred visibly.
However, you repeat the mistakes of your past emotionally.
Beautiful woman…
You are meant for more.
Why did you put up with things that make you sore?
He's treated me the same way over the past few years.
Yet you think it’ll be different but all you shed is more tears.
You have a great destiny ahead of you that you don't believe it's there.
I try to help you see but all I get are blank stares.
I'm sorry if I sound like a broken record but it hurts me to see you go down this road.
Sometimes I wonder how many times you must be told.
It angers me to see you live so below far below where you are supposed to be.
I wish that I can open up your head and pour it all in so that your eyes can see.
Trials and tribulations are said to come to make you strong.
But I beg to differ…I think they were wrong.
It breaks my heart to hear you wonder what you have done to deserve this.
You've done nothing absolutely nothing – your thoughts have started to go amiss.
You can rise up out of the ashes of your past –
The destructive path that you thought would last.
You have inside the power of choice.
It’s now time you that you find your voice.
I wish more than anything that you can see
What God has so created you to be.
A beautiful woman – through and through, one-of-a-kind for all eternity.
My Perspective on Death and Dying

Bernetta Smith

When asked to write about two phobias of mine, one particular phobia I chose is the fear of losing a loved one. Phobias or fears are not easily admitted and/or embraced because, in a sense, it negates my spiritual beliefs which in essence says that fear is not of God and that my faith should (always) over ride my fear. Life’s experiences and circumstances have played a huge role in my fear of death and although not always on the onset of situations, I usually evolve back to my faith as my comfort zone.

In July 2009, I lost two people who were very, very near and dear to my heart. My grandbaby, Ja’Niyah Nichole was killed at the age of one on July 1st and my step daughter, who I raised as my own, was killed on July 24. In both instances, I received phone calls notifying me of their tragic, unexpected deaths. For a long time, I experienced post traumatic stress and could not bear any of my children to be out of my sight for extended period of time. Although I tried to appear in control, my constant phone calls questioning their where abouts I’m sure gave away my fears and worries. Although I’ve gotten better, I do not think I will ever get completely over this. My faith has definitely undergirded me and I learned to trust God like never before— for fear of losing my mind.

I recently experienced the thought of “death” from an entirely different perspective. Ironically after addressing my phobia of death, mostly from the perspective from tragedy, I encountered a situation that caused me to view “death” in a different light. It was as addressing my phobia of death served as some type of premonition. While checking my Face Book page, I received a shocking message that devastated me. My childhood friend, Kim, of over 30 years inboxed be to say that she has been diagnosed with stage 4 terminal breast cancer. She apologized for resorting to Face Book to tell me but said that she could not bring herself to call and share the news. I was in the middle of a professional development session and I asked God not to let me scream as I experienced hurt, shock, disbelief, and fear—all at the same time. My tears
flowed endlessly and it took me a while to collect myself enough to walk outside, where I prayed and cried. I called my mom and she also prayed for my peace as well as for Kim. After collecting my thoughts enough to call Kim, upon her answering the phone I blurted out, “Why didn’t you tell me”? She reiterated her earlier explanation that she simply could not bring herself to do so. She went on to explain how she had learned of her diagnosis in February. An initial visit prompted by simply not feeling well in December led to a battery of tests that led to the ultimate diagnosis in February. Albeit a little tacky in my opinion, the doctor informed her in a phone call as she shopped in Wal-Mart. He shared that the cancer was in her breast, breast bone, and liver.

Kim immediately began chemo therapy treatments and immediately loss all of her hair. She was informed that radiation was not an option due to the cancer being spread too far throughout her body. When I asked about her concerns about the whole ordeal, she stated that she fears the well being of her children through the process and possible, and seemingly inevitable, death. Her thoughts and concerns for them trump any that she has for herself. Our conversation then turned to memories of our childhood. For an hour, we laughed until we both cried and shared ex-husband stories- in which we laughed some more. Especially when she shared that her ex had “come to her rescue” after learning of her diagnosis and after three weeks, her having to ask him to please go to his own house. We ended our conversation with plans on visiting the following Friday, in which we talked and laughed some more. We even attended a birthday party the next day and danced to “The Electric Slide”.

I guess I am experiencing death in a different capacity in which my childhood friends’ lifespan have been predicted to end relatively soon and conscientious decisions are being made regarding living out her last days. I know that God has the final say, and that a miracle may very well take place, but we are preparing just in case Kim’s healing takes place in Heaven.
You Better Hush That Fuss Up
Kristen Glover

Girl, you better hush
You’re chosen, destined, created for purpose

Hush
You’re the exception and not the norm. Why settle for complacency
When you were born to be you?…Exceptionally!

Hush
But shine your light.
For all the potential of God – for your life – lives in you. But not just for you.

Hush
Why complain or compare? Be courageous and care
Dare to share.

Hush
Listen with your ears and your eyes
Extend your hand – stand up – not just for you but others too

Hush
Be grateful for you’re a conduit or fountain that flows with wisdom,
  experiences, and questions waiting to be realized.

Hush
You can handle it; otherwise it wouldn’t be there.

Hush
Embrace life as a gift.
Much larger than your hands and heart can contain---
Large enough to combat this life with others
Love being the sole purpose and aim.

Hush
You’re by-passing precious moments caught up in the fuss
You better know someone is watching you…

Girl, I suggest you HUSH…
Myeshia R. Glover

I, Myeshia R. Glover, was born and raised in the historic Selma, Alabama. I am the eldest daughter of three born of my parents, Stanley and Maria Glover. Growing up, I was always captivated by all things educational; as a result, I naturally grew to be educationally inclined as I progressed from Salutatorian of my kindergarten class, graduating in the top 5% of my high school graduating class and on to pursuing a degree in education and graduating Summa Cum Laude from Alabama State University. Currently, I am a dedicated teacher at C.J. Donald Elementary School in Fairfield, Alabama where I strive to share my enthusiasm about learning to educate, enlighten, and inspire. I earned my Associate in Arts degree at Wallace Community College in Selma, Alabama. During my study, I participated and served in several clubs and organizations. I became an active member of the WCCS Thespian Society where I performed in several plays and skits under the direction of Mr. Godfrey King. I also served as an active member of the WCCS Campus Ambassadors and as Student Government Vice President. Because of my high academic achievement, I was inducted into the prestigious Phi Theta Kappa Honor Society where I served as Vice President of Fellowship. I completed the two-year degree program at WCCS in one academic year and transferred to Alabama State University where I received a full presidential scholarship. During my years at ASU, I continued seeking academic excellence while working at the campus bookstore and volunteering at local schools. During my years in undergrad, I received several honors and awards and was inducted into two honor societies, Alpha Kappa Mu and Alpha Chi International Honor Societies. I graduated in 2011 with Summa Cum Laude and a 3.9 grade point average.
Because of my personal vow to be a life-long learner, I have sought and initiated several professional growth experiences to heighten my knowledge, skills, and abilities in teaching and learning. Of the professional development opportunities I've received, the most distinguished of them is my acceptance to participate in the elite NASA Pre-Service Teacher Institute and NASA Pre-Service Teacher Alumni Institute held in Huntsville, Alabama and Fresno, California, respectively. Both institutes consisted of a rigorous two-week residential training program designed to promote pedagogical and content-based knowledge and strategies in STEM instruction. Most recently, I was honored to be accepted into the prestigious Red Mountain Writing Project Summer Institute. This has been by far, one of the greatest professional learning projects I've had the pleasure of experiencing.

As a professional educator, one of my primary objectives is to not only engage in continuous learning but to become a powerful change agent in education. My professional goals are always changing and evolving as I often meet one objective and create another. Currently, my professional goals include earning the Master of Science in Instructional Leadership program from the University of West Alabama. Upon completion of the Instructional Leadership program, I aspire to utilize the knowledge and skills acquired to be an effective leader. I am pursuing a degree in Instructional Leadership to foster my growth into a knowledgeable and proficient leader in a school or other educational setting.

My professional & leadership experiences include: mentoring future teachers on best practices in education, conducting annual parent workshops to give parents strategies and resources to support and reinforce learning and growth from school to home. I have also led sessions in faculty meetings to inform and assist colleagues in various school improvement initiatives. I am an active member of C.J. Donald Elementary School’s technology team and have served as our school’s public relations representative. On the
district level, I am an active member of the Title 1 Advisory Council and as the former kindergarten grade level chairperson this past school year, I served and collaborated with my grade level teams throughout the system in establishing objectives, evaluating our educational program, and evaluating student progress.

I believe that the art of teaching is the most rewarding, humbling, and engaging profession there is. Within the four walls of a traditional classroom lie innumerable possibilities and paths to discovery. As an educator, it is my philosophy that students should be the focal point in learning and that they should play an active role in gaining and applying knowledge. I believe that providing learning experiences based on children’s needs, interests, and identified learning styles is the most productive way to increase their desire to learn, maintain their focus, and ensure successes. My daily goal is to impact my students in a positive manner. I find gratification in encouraging, challenging, and motivating students to reach their full potential. I am a firm believer that the classroom environment should be a welcoming and inviting atmosphere where highly qualified teachers use research-based teaching methods, technology integration, hands-on learning techniques, and differentiated learning strategies to engage students. I consider passion, dedication, professionalism, and leadership skills to be exceptional characteristics of an educator. I believe the words of Marian Wright Edelman, “Education is for improving the lives of others and for leaving your community and world better than you found it”. For it is through education that I strive to do as much as I can, for whoever I can, for as long as I can to make a difference in the lives of everyone I meet.
There is nothing like sipping a glass of iced sweet tea on a hot humid August day in Alabama. If you know anything about the Deep South then you probably know that sweet tea is our state beverage coming right before state bird and state flower in any respectable encyclopedia. My husband John and I had been at some friends for a cookout and I had drunk about forty-eight ounces of this refreshing icy liquid. We said our goodbyes and began the five mile drive home. Unlike a smooth interstate, the route home was round and round winding roads up hills and down hollers. There were potholes so deep that you could lose your car.

When we arrived home I did the fifty yard dash to a certain room. One point I might add is that we had just found out that I was a few weeks pregnant, so my bladder seemed to be not only full of all this tea I had consumed, but due to my delicate condition was on overload. I proceeded to sit down on the potty. At the moment I began to "tinkle" (this is my ma-maw's word that is acceptable to use in mixed company for urinate) I felt something cold and very wet bump my right hip. I froze in panic. I jumped away from the potty and quickly found myself standing in a puddle. I started screaming. All I could think of was this story in a recent paper about a lady in New York who had a huge snake slither through the sewer and into her toilet. My husband raced down the hall. He was standing outside the door and said, "Honey, What is wrong? Are you all right?" I just screamed. I could not answer him. He became so concerned that he opened the door. I am standing there in this puddle and all I could muster out was, "I wet my pants." He tried to console me. He insisted that it was okay, and that he had heard that pregnant women have these changes and bladder problems arise. He was sure that it was just because of the pregnancy, and the large amount of sweet tea that I drank, that this accident occurred. After gaining a little composure I told him that it had nothing to do with pregnancy or any of those things, that I knew why my pants were wet, that something had bumped me in the bare hiney and that something was a snake. He looked in the toilet and began to think that pregnancy had also affected my brain, because there was nothing there but water. Insisting
that I was not crazy I bent way down and looked into the commode. At the exact moment that I was
eye-level with the toilet, a huge green bulging eyed bull frog jumped up and splashed me in the face.
It had hidden just inside the hole enough to go undetected by my husband. Immediately I thought
that someone had played a horrible joke on me. There was one of our friends that was constantly
playing pranks, and so I raced to the phone and called Gene. Well, he thought this was the funniest
thing that he had ever heard. He did not say that he did do it, but he certainly did not say that he did
not.

Word about my frog invasion traveled around our circle of friends like a mosquito buzzing
around the lake on a hot humid August day in Alabama. (The mosquito is the state bird). Gene played
games with my mind. He kept gigging me making me think that he had planted the critter. Every
time I used the bathroom during the next few days I checked the potty meticulously to make sure
that there were no uninvited guests.

A week to the day from my first attack I made a dire rush to my bathroom. After my thorough
inspection I sat down, but at the moment that I began to "tinkle" I felt something on my right hip
again. This time it was not a cold wet bump but rather a warm sticky feeling. I jumped up and once
again had an accident in the floor. I screamed this time not from fright but from absolute terror. I
looked on my right hip and there attached to my body was a green warty tree frog. I started jumping
up and down trying to shake it loose. It was glued to my hip and did not budge. I tried shaking my
hips but still the frog stayed adhered to my skin. I will never forget the feeling of the sticky
amphibian as it was attached to my body. Being a country girl, I had baited my own fish hook with
green Catawba worms, had killed chickens and gone through the entire process of fowl preparation,
had attended a hog killing and none of these gross things had ever bothered me, but this sensation
of a wet sticky gooey frog stuck to my butt was absolutely the grossest experience of my life.

I was so distraught and all of this gyrating was to no avail, so I made a split second decision
to slap the frog. I knocked him so hard that he bounced off of the ceiling and then pasted himself to
the wall beside the commode where he slowly slid all the way to the floor. By this time my sweet
concerned husband appeared at the bathroom door. "Honey, what's wrong? Are you all right?" I just continued to scream. He tried to console me, and was begging me to tell him what was wrong. "There is another frog," I said. I told him what had just happened, and he began to look for the frog. There was no frog to be found. This was a tiny bathroom. He looked everywhere and it was as if it had vanished into thin air. I was beside myself. My husband, who had been so supportive of my "froggy" situation, made a fatal mistake. He said, "Now honey I don't see a frog. Do you think it is possible that you were just remembering last week's episode and imagined a frog?" Being now a week further along in the pregnancy and morning sickness, which in my case was all day sickness, had set in. My hormones were way out of control and for him to insist that there was no frog and that it must be my imagination infuriated me. I told him that it was not my imagination that the frog had planted its sticky gooey claws onto my bottom and would not get off. Explaining the dilemma in graphic terms I insisted that this was not like the previous bump and splash of the first frog. I just knew that Gene had planted another frog in my toilet.

This time I made my husband call him. John told Gene that if he was joking with me that he had better come clean. Gene realized that this was no longer funny and assured my husband that he had nothing to do with either incident, and that now he was sorry that he messed with me all week trying to make me think that he did. Gene gave my husband the name of a plumber to call for an inspection.

My husband came back and told me that he would contact the plumber first thing in the morning. "In the morning," I said. I am not sleeping in this house until you find that frog!" We then began a four hour frog hunt in a four foot bathroom. We looked and looked. We opened every cabinet and drawer, but we still found nothing. By midnight my husband was exhausted. He talked me into just going to bed and assured me that he would get to the bottom of this first thing the following day. I hesitantly went to bed. The next morning I got up first and went into the bathroom to get dressed for work. I flipped on the light and there sitting like a ceramic piece on one of those soap dishes, next to the sink, was the frog. He sat perfectly still and was glaring at me with those bulging eyes. I
screamed and my husband rushed to the door. He grabbed the frog and soap dish and dashed to our
garbage can on our back porch. He came back in and told me that he had taken care of the frog. I
then felt at least a sense of satisfaction that I was not crazy and that we definitely had a problem. My
husband made the call to the plumber.

After a lengthy inspection he discovered that there was a beautiful oak tree that had branches
extending over the roof on the end of the house where this bathroom was located. There was a vent
pipe that was covered by a screen with a small tear. The plumber was convinced that these frogs
were in the tree and had somehow managed their way through that torn hole and down the pipe into
my toilet. He repaired the screen and assured us that this should take care of our problem.

We were all relieved realizing that it really could have been a snake or squirrel or any number
of other animals that could have attacked my hind quarters. I was so glad that this mystery was
solved.

Those friends that know me best still offer reminders of this episode. I sometimes go to the
mail to find a picture of a frog in an anonymous envelope. I have also received plastic frogs, glass
frogs, rubber frogs and various other examples of this creature. Every time I see a frog it is a sort of
symbol. I am not only reminded of this hilarious tale, but also am reminded of a great time in my
life; the first few weeks of my first pregnancy, the sweet support of my husband, and the great
pleasure of friends. There is nothing like the south; the understanding of southern humor, oak trees
in summer, hot humid August days in Alabama and especially lots of icy cold Lipton. I would almost
be willing to bare my bottom for a frog today to have the pleasure of spending an afternoon with
friends sipping a glass of icy cold sweet tea.
Walking Among Giants
Sofrina Shepard

Red Mountain Writing Project...not really that big of a deal, right? It’s just another professional development session. It’s just another room of teachers who are all over the place sharing a barrage of strategies and ideas that are as scattered as we’ll be in whatever room we find ourselves placed. It’s just more facilitators tag teaming one another in the usual overly-energetic manner which will probably be a little too excessive for a summertime professional development session. More of the same old same old. Red Mountain Writing Project. No big deal, right?

It is perhaps during the noisy times when everyone is engrossed so deeply in expressing their thoughts, making connections to our assignments and our profession, that I realize that maybe this might just be a really BIG deal after all. Red Mountain Writing Project, oh, boy! They seem to have it all figured out. It's like I’m walking among giants, trying to keep pace with strides beyond my cocky little gait. But I can’t seem to keep up. Ideas are being flung from one side of the room to the other. If only I could just catch one of them maybe I can know what they have already seemed to have figured out.

For the first time in a long time, I feel inadequate. But not the kind of inadequacy that makes you want to shrink into a tiny ball and slip through a crack or draw up the shades, turn off the lights, and hide under the bed. It’s the kind of inadequacy that makes you want to cipher every ounce of knowledge in their brain and harness it for the good of teacher-kind everywhere--like they do in the mad scientist movies, but this time it’ll actually be for good and not evil.

Yes, maybe that is a bit graphic, even over board. But, that is the awe with which I’m struck as I find myself surrounded by the sequoia trees of education root deeply in schools of the Greater Birmingham Community. Red Mountain Writing Project ….not a big deal? What was I thinking?

While I feel that I am always in a constant clamor to put “it” (whatever “it” is) all together, I find myself in a constant frenzy: jotting notes on sticky notes, starting binders for research, and
buying book after book only to be overtaken by the whirlwind of organized chaos that seems to swallow me whole and leave me just as befuddled as I was to begin with. How on earth did they ever figure “it” all out, and why haven’t I got “it” yet (whatever “it” is)? But here I sit with those who have taken my professional heart and pumped new life into it.

Now, although my gait is a bit narrower than the giants, I have found myself running this course as I never have before—trying desperately to keep pace. Like never before, I’m trying to soak up the knowledge that has helped them grow so full of purpose and so grand. Red Mountain Writing Project...no big deal? What was I thinking? How did I find myself planted among giants? Honestly, this whole idea of Red Mountain Writing Project has me feeling slightly overwhelmed and somewhat perplexed; but, I must say, I consider it an absolute honor to be walking with those who seem to me to be giants.
Holding On

Tamera Carter

Every day that goes by, I try to hold on to what little I have left of you. A smiley-faced cherub who reached out and caressed my face every morning, across the cool bed, as the sun crept through the thin sheets that served as curtains in our bedroom. I wanted to keep the light out, but you ushered it in. You were my savior then. What I thought was a mistake, you grew into my greatest accomplishment. You would turn, curly lashes framing those sable eyes, and say, “Hi.” I sniffed in your Baby Magic skin and devoured your every move. I would talk to you as if you were my twenty-two year old equal, never using baby talk or considering you less than a little person who was my friend.

When we finally moved away from my mom’s house into our own apartment, I tried to hold on to your baby teeth and hair, although at three years old they were already drifting away like tufts of dandelions in the wind. You wanted a big boy bed, so I borrowed an oak bunk bed and covered everything in Teen Titan decorations. That first night alone, you slept all the way through while I climbed in the bed beside you. I know those times wouldn’t last.

When you came to me saying you wanted to play football, baseball, basketball, whatever, I wanted to hold on to the boy who sang Frankie Beverly and Maze songs with me. I knew you needed the influence of a man, so I relented. When they piled on top of you on the field, I had to be restrained. When you ran down the court the wrong way and hit your first shot in the opponent’s net, I cheered louder than was acceptable. When you missed the last pitch at the championship game and a parent cussed at you, I fought. You were here for me to protect, to cherish.

I held you close every time you came to me crying from the window-sill, waiting for your father to pick you up. He never came. I would make up excuses for him, the man whose image was all upon your face. I would tell you how strong and brave you were. I spoke blessings over your life, and plead the blood of the lamb over you. We spoke confessions:” I am the head and not the tail. I am
above and not beneath. I am a lender and not a borrower. I am blessed coming in and going out. Every need in my life is fully supplied and met by my Heavenly Father.” I held on to the belief that it would be this, and not your Earthly father’s heathen influence that would take reign over your life and structure your being.

Then, I realized how far away you are when you did not deign to even leave your room when I came home from work. I would sit on the edge of your bed and watch you shoot man after man, soldier after soldier with a precision that would land you at the head of the marksmen class in military. You slashed through each screen, implanting knives into your opponents’ skull with a frenzy and joy I never see any more, expect when you are connected to the screen. I hear voices coming through the headphones, constantly attached to your head. Antlers to this steed I create, but can run with no more.

You’re leaving in two years. I have so many hopes and dreams for you. There is so much I want to teach you, but you no longer hear me. If I tried to hold your hand in public, my skin would burn from the speed in which you extracted yours from mine. I try to hold to the idea that one day you’ll be back here with me. We’ll be like my mom and I, once enemies, now respected colleagues in this shared life. Not ashamed to be seen with me. Not afraid to hold on.
Dear Mama and Daddy,

I miss you all so much. Not a day goes by that I don’t yearn to hear either one of your voices. Daddy, you’ve been gone for five years and I am learning to deal with it. I know that I will always be your little girl and I have been and always will be the sunshine of your life. I know I wasn’t always thrilled about being the “preacher’s daughter,” but I am so thankful that you showed me what a Godly man is. You are the reason I have always been picky when it came to finding a boyfriend. I have been looking for a man just like you! That is an impossible task because you were one of a kind. I have found someone who looks at me the way you looked at Mama and he tries so hard to make me happy. You and I both know that is a near impossible task. Thank you for loving me before I even got to this earth. I know you are happy that you are reunited with Mama. I tried my best to take care of her the way you would have wanted me to. Mama please tell Daddy how I tried to make you happy but you really only wanted him. I am so glad that before you went on to heaven you told me that sometimes when God heals a person he takes them to heaven. It has been so hard for me to accept that but I know you were right. The last week you were here on Earth was the hardest thing for me to watch. I know you were hanging on for me. I am so glad that we spent so much time together before hospice came. It is so hard to believe that you have been gone for three months. Coco is adjusting to living at my house; it was so hard for her to understand that you were gone. I guess I am the same way. Whenever I go to the house I open the door and I want to yell, “Hey my Daddy and Mommy - where are you? I am trying my best to keep my promise of going back to school (see you didn’t buy me the MacBook Pro for nothing)
just waiting for the acceptance letter, then Ed.S here I come. Timmy is being the best big brother he has ever been. We are not arguing and we are trying to be there for one another. I know it sounds silly but I feel like an orphan. I know I am too old to say that but very few people my age have lost both parents. I lost both of mine before I turned forty. I know it is in God’s plan and I don’t know who I may be helping. I just miss you all so much. So many times I have picked up my phone to call you all to get advice or just to talk because you all have been my best friends from day one. I hope I am making you proud. I try my best to live the way you all taught me. I take joy in knowing that Daddy is no longer suffering from Parkinson’s Disease and Mommy is no longer suffering from Cancer and that both of you are in the arms of Jesus. I love and miss you both terribly. See you in my dreams and when I make it to heaven.

Your Loving Daughter,

Kristyn Lanette Robinson (Krissy, Ladybug, Krissy Mae)
Professional Pieces

For many of our fellows, these pieces represent a first attempt at writing professional articles. Teachers focused on personal passions, current best practice, and research to find topics for these articles. The goal of most people in academia is to publish in a scholarly journal. The professional writing in this anthology represents a step toward this goal.
A Place for Purposeful Puzzles
Susan Chaffin Goggins

All right, teachers, time for complete honesty here. Raise your hand if you have used a word search or crossword puzzle in class. Now, wipe that guilty look off of your face. Science says puzzles have their rightful place in the classroom. It is true that puzzles and games often get tossed into the pile of “poor teacher practice.” However, like any instructional strategy (and, yes, puzzles and games qualify as instructional strategies!), when used purposefully, puzzles and games are not only effective in improving learning they are also engaging to students.

Marzano and Pickering address classroom games in *The Highly Engaged Classroom*, writing that “game-like activities” are engaging to students because they “help trigger situational interest and provide a foundation for maintained social interest” (9). Use of puzzles/games in the classroom is supported by the psychological principle of clozentropy, which “states that the human mind will naturally attend to situations that have missing details” (9). In other words, humans are compelled to “fill in the blank.”

According to Dave Moursund in *Introduction to Using Games in Education: A Guide for Teachers and Parents*, “Your mind/brain learns by developing and storing patterns.” Moreover, Moursund asserts that most puzzles involve use of “logical thinking,” “problem-solving skills,” and “strategic and creative thinking.” This research is not new. Another educator worked with children he described as “brain-damaged” in Italy in the 1980s. He discovered that practice with scrambled words quickly improved their writing and reading skills (Danesi). The implications for the classroom are clear: Puzzles have the capacity to help our students learn how to learn. One of the most difficult tasks for a teacher is teaching students how to think and monitor their own learning. Puzzles also facilitate the teaching of communication skills—especially reading, which teachers know is critical to unlocking all content learning.

So puzzles are engaging, and they require higher thinking skills, but how can the teacher utilize them purposefully in the English language arts classroom? Puzzles are perfect for introductory activities. Their engaging nature makes them ideal for sneakily luring the student into the content. For example, use a word search with the character names of Macbeth to introduce the Scottish surnames and titles before reading. Teach
diction by creating your own “Mad Libs” activity by omitting key words and giving clues for students to fill in their own substitutes. Find out what students already know or activate prior knowledge with a crossword puzzle. Puzzles also work for review activities. Rather than matching words and definitions, use the definitions as clues to words hidden in a word search or filling in a crossword puzzle. Research in Kenya demonstrated the effectiveness of crossword puzzles for teaching vocabulary to English as a second language. Students found the puzzles “less intimidating” than traditional exercises. Researchers discovered that “Learners get to enjoy learning the target language because they are involved in their own learning” (“Crossword Puzzles”).

The research gives you permission, teachers, to dust off that puzzle-maker app. Consider the content. Consider the purpose. And use the engaging fun of a puzzle to bring your students to the lesson.

References


A Teacher’s View on Curriculum

Kristyn Robinson

No effective curriculum can be generated unless it is based in philosophy. Philosophy is important in curriculum design because, “the relationship between philosophy and the other criteria-is the basis for determining school purposes” (Ornstein, 2007, p. 7). Philosophy will provide a foundation for the type of students we as teachers want to send out into the world, “philosophy gives meaning to our decisions and actions” (Ornstein, 2007, p. 10). In this day and age curriculum seems to change too frequently as research boasts over and over again that there is a set way to instruct students. Having a philosophy will prevent school systems from falling into that trap, “in the absence of philosophy, educators are vulnerable to externally imposed prescriptions” (Ornstein, 2007, p. 10). The philosophy of reconstructionism focuses on reconstructing society in order to attain reform. This is the most effective philosophy because it encourages active learning, a focus on how one can improve their society and the fact that the teacher is an aide in learning not only the facilitator. Once a school system has decided on a philosophy they will then be able to develop an effective curriculum. Beliefs on curriculum led to their support of standards embedded curriculum and curriculum based on universal design.

The Significance of Appropriate Goals and Objectives

After deciding on a philosophy for a curriculum the next step is deciding on goals and objectives. The goals and objectives of the system, program, course and instructional level must all be aligned in order to be effective. Goals 2000 created new goals for educators across the country that required curriculum to be standard driven and incorporated high stakes testing into the learning arena. High stakes testing has created goals in the classroom that focus on covering a wealth of material regardless of whether or not students have a complete understanding of the topic at hand. Standards based curriculum led to high stakes testing which is destroying our educational system, “we seem to have lost sight of the more significant purpose of teaching and learning: individual
growth and development” (Rakow, 2008, p. 45). The problem with Goals 2000 is that the ideas behind it are not clear enough to understand on the classroom level, “goals are frequently not stated at the appropriate degree of generality-specifically for each level of educational responsibility” (Brandt & Tyler, 2007, p. 19). In planning curriculum ensure the writer will ensure that goals and objectives are clearly stated and useful to the educational environment, “the criteria for judging goals and objectives are their usefulness in communicating educational purposes and their helpfulness to teachers in planning educational activities” (Brandt & Tyler, 2007, p. 20).

The Usefulness of Curriculum Designs

Curriculum designs can be very useful in planning curriculum for a school system if they are based on the appropriate philosophy, have specific goals and objectives and if the curriculum design is actually effective. If the writer was given a chance to design a curriculum for your school it would be based on the standards embedded curriculum design or understanding by design. The standards embedded curriculum design would be chosen because, “learning is contextualized and connected, demonstrating both depth and complexity” (Rakow, 2008, p. 47). This is important because it shifts the focus of education from high stakes testing and to the needs of each student. Unlike a standards based curriculum where the focus is narrow the standards embedded curriculum allows room for full learning of each topic, “requires a variety of more open-ended instructional strategies and materials that extend and diversify learning rather than focus it narrowly” (Rakow, 2008, p.48). The role of the teacher in this type of curriculum setting is, “to design curriculum units and instructional strategies that engage students with challenging content” (Rakow, 2008, p. 49). The writer is also an advocate for understanding by design created by Carol Ann Tomlinson and Jay McTighe. The writer is an advocate of understanding by design because it provides educators with a springboard for creating effective curriculum, “UbD and DI provide structures, tools and guidance for developing curriculum and instruction based on our current best understandings of teaching and learning”( Tomlinson & McTighe, 2006, p. 3). The form of curriculum design ensures that the students needs remain at the focal point as curriculum planning takes place.
The Tension Between Aesthetics and Current Goals of Education

There is a clear difference between the aesthetics of education and education’s current goals. The current goals include students demonstrating competency in certain core areas, an increase in the graduation rate, and to establish a framework from which standards would be created to name a few. Those goals alone do not reflect what is actually taking place in classrooms across the country. Many teachers including the writer have been forced to revamp lessons to focus solely on the standards and therefore real learning is tossed to the side, “we are accustomed today to adopting a framework of thought whose fundamental premise is scarcity” (Martin, 2007, p. 40). For our aesthetics and goals to match we need to eliminate the scarcity of teaching and learning.

The above detailed information outlines a position on curriculum today. Curriculum design must be based on the reconstructionism philosophy with clear goals and objectives. The next step is to change the focus of education from standards driven to standards embedded and lastly to have aesthetics and goals line up according. Effective curriculums must have balance. The writer is equipped to design a curriculum that keeps in mind that, “rational decision making in the curriculum is a must” (Ediger, 2007, p. 378). Curriculum design is the foundation of our educational community and therefore the task must not be taken lightly.
Works Cited


Making Changes in My High School Classroom to Increase Parental Involvement
Angela McMath

The world is in a constant state of change and in the area of education it is no different. Greek philosopher, Heraclitus said, “Change is the only constant in life.” Education reform has been in constant change since the 1960’s, and much of it has failed. According to Michael Fullan (2007) in his book, *The New Meaning of Educational Change*, even through these “aborted and confused attempts at reform… it is clear that one of the keys to successful change is the improvement of relationships” (p. 4).

After teaching for over twenty-two years in early childhood, elementary, and secondary classrooms, I have noticed that as the child grows older parents are seen less often participating in school-day activities. Several factors may contribute to this including difficulty in level of curriculum that often intimidates parents, students making parents feel that their presence is “uncool,” and teachers that do not make parents feel needed or welcomed in their classrooms. “You can no longer get the job of education done unless you combine forces” (p. 188). This is as true with adolescents as it is with younger children. Fullan says, “Teachers and principals need to reach out to parents and communities… educators have to go out into their communities with empathy…being professional can no longer mean remaining isolated in the schools” (p.190). In reflecting over my own practice, when I was a kindergarten and elementary teacher I did a better job of developing relationships with parents by inviting parents to participate in school-day activities due to the fact that there were more hands on activities that the children were unable to do for themselves. Parents were often needed to assist with these tasks, but while in the classroom, were also able to interact with the students and to observe the lessons being taught. These duties allowed parents to be participants in their child’s learning. Communication was also more frequent in the early childhood classroom and took on many forms such as reading logs, stickers for a job well done, and more parent teacher conferences were conducted to discuss the successes as well as
failures of a child’s performance. At the secondary level, I have not extended the invitation to parents to visit the classroom as often, and I certainly have not created any need or task for parents to perform. Although I have tried to make communication positive, most parental contacts have been to rally support because a student has fallen behind. Research conducted over the last forty years indicates, “The closer the parent is to the education of the child, the greater the impact on child development and educational achievement” (p. 189). In order to reach out to parents and “combine forces” that will positively impact the educational performance of the students, I am proposing a change project for my classroom that will address two of Epstein’s suggested types of parental involvement: communication and volunteering (cited by Fullan p. 195). By limiting my focus to these two areas, I hope to make sustainable changes. Often the dilemma with educational change is that we try to make too many changes too quickly without the support needed to sustain these ideas. As Fullan says, “Change is a process not an event” (p. 68). I want to make my plan to increase parent involvement incremental, and so my goals for the next year are to open lines of communication in a greater way and to offer opportunities for parents to come from “out there to in here” by participating together with students in the classroom. Kanter requires four kinds of action in developing collaboration: getting connected in new ways through conversation, carrying out important work jointly, communicating respect, and demonstrating inclusion (that everyone is part of the picture) (cited by Fullan p. 53). I have designed a plan that will include conversation, opportunities to work together, respectful communication in an inclusive classroom environment where the love learning is shared between teachers, students and parents.
Proposed Plan for Implementation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Proposal</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Timeframe</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Parent Involvement Survey</strong></td>
<td>Parents will complete survey through survey monkey asking them for 1) Email address or preferred contact. 2) Would you be willing to come to volunteer in classroom? 3) What is your occupation? 4) How do you use written and oral communication in your job? 5) Would you be willing to share this world connection with students? 6) What would be best dates and times for you to visit the classroom?</td>
<td>At registration in July</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Contact Each Parent by email</strong></td>
<td>Begin communication through initial email contact (or snail mail if they do not have email) explaining: 1) Website as central hub for classroom communication 2) “Week at a Glance” will outline what is happening in class. 3) Point out sections of websites ex. resources, handouts, videos and spotlighted student work and blogs. 4) I will include my home phone number and my expectation that if there is any concern that I want them to call me.</td>
<td>August- September</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Open House</strong></td>
<td>Invite parents to either 1) “Brown bag lunch” or 2) “Happy Hour” for parent education where I will provide demonstrations and explanations of course goals and objectives including specific ways that they can support what is going on in the classroom at home. (Will also email and post on website )</td>
<td>September</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>“Brown Bag Lunch”</strong></td>
<td>Will share resources and texts so that parents can read along and participate in discussion with their child at home.</td>
<td>1 Daytime event in October 1 Evening event in October-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>“Happy Hour”</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Parents as Teachers</strong></td>
<td>Parents will visit class and share with students how they use writing and oral communication in their job. Students will then create a post on social media commenting on a take away from parent visit.</td>
<td>October-April</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Gotcha</strong></td>
<td>I will make contact with each parent either by phone, email or written note about a positive gotcha concerning their student.</td>
<td>August-May</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Annotated Bibliographies that Support Proposed Change


This online article offers suggestions as to how teachers can “bridge the gap” by providing twelve activities that promote parental involvement along with ten tips for involved parents. This article contains additional resources embedded within the text for a monthly suggestion for classroom teachers to consider along with a linked article with further information.

This article would be most helpful for the classroom teacher and provides very specific easy-to-follow guidelines for creating a plan that addresses the need for more parent involvement in today’s classroom. The article ends by suggesting additional resources for yet even more suggestions for implementation.

This article discusses the need for more parental involvement in the education process and specifically addresses how that technology can be a positive tool in helping to achieve more parental involvement. Through technology parents can be more connected through the use of websites, phone calling systems, online curriculum et al. The article also makes the point that technology aids in parents in being able to monitor daily progress by using digital grading systems. This article cites research data that proves that “emerging technologies can facilitate better parent-teacher communication and parent engagement.”

This resource would be most suited for teachers and administrators as they consider ways that technology could assist in better communication and parental involvement in their own schools.


This online article discusses Ohio’s House Bill 1, which requires the Ohio Department of Education to make public research-based best practices that will foster parent involvement in their children’s learning. The examples given are based on Joyce Epstein’s framework of the six types of parental involvement including: welcoming climate, teaching parents skills, establishing effective communication, creating supportive learning environments at school and at home, engaging parents in volunteering, and connecting families to community resources for support. The article provides specific examples for each of these six categories that could be used in an effort to create greater parent involvement.

This article is best suited for teachers because it will be the teacher’s responsibility to create a plan that employs the suggestions given. The article concludes with an additional link to a
database used by Ohio school districts that offer additional evidenced based parent involvement strategies.


This digital booklet is a compilation of results from a 2009 parent involvement questionnaire distributed to over 1000 parents, teachers, and administrators throughout the state of Virginia by a Virginia Department of Education stakeholder group. This booklet outlines strategies that have been used to create partnerships with parents to improve student achievement.

The data collected from the survey would be beneficial to teachers and administrators as they work to design programs to increase parent involvement. These strategies focus on communication, activities, and environment providing excellent ideas for educators.
Interactive Notebooks Ignite Student Learning

By Brittney Hallmark

Educators are always looking for ways to encourage interaction with and among students. Often, some students fear interacting orally because they worry about answering incorrectly or simply for being too shy. Interactive notebooks could be the solution to these problems. “An interactive notebook can be a powerful instructional tool, allowing students to take control of their learning while processing information and engaging in self-reflection” (Waldman & Crippen, 2009). Interactive notebooks can create increased collaboration for students, improve students’ responsibility and engagement, and positively impact overall learning for students.

In order to better understand the positive influence that interactive notebooks can have, one must first understand what it is and how it is used. These spiral-bound or composition notebooks are a valuable scaffolding tool, used to help students grow in their thinking and writing by using a variety of activities. Set up in a specific format, the pages are organized and used for student reflection and academic content knowledge. For example, the pages on the left can be used for drawings, predictions, questions and other student reflections. On the right, students may jot notes from readings or discussions, paste in news articles, or complete vocabulary exercises (Waldman & Crippen, 2009). This type of set up in the interactive notebooks makes this tool valuable because it becomes a timeline of student work over the course of a the school year, showing content knowledge gained and student reflections strengthened. It also becomes a way for teachers to see if students need further instruction. “Interactive notebooks are a tool for students to make connections prior to new learning, to revise their thinking, and to deepen their understanding of the world around them” (Marcarelli, 2010).

Collaboration is becoming increasingly more important and beneficial in today’s classroom. Interactive notebooks serve as a way that students, parents, and teachers can
collaborate and work together academically (Carter, Hernandez, & Richison, 2009). Promoting communication, interactive notebooks allow students to capture experiences in the classroom through observations recorded on paper. Students are then able to share these experiences with others through the facts, their reflections, and their questions (Marcarelli, 2010). One of the most valuable effects that interactive notebooks can have on students is during group discussions. Students can work together to engage in collaborative inquiry tasks and assignments, using interactive notebooks to track their thinking and progress. When students have differing viewpoints and opinions, they can reflect and learn to respectively share their thoughts (Waldman & Crippen, 2009).

Self-reflection, self-engagement, and responsibility are often improved when interactive notebooks are utilized in classroom instruction. “Emphasizing student reflection affords students the opportunity to identify weaknesses in their understanding and to establish the personal relevance of ideas presented in activities” (Waldman & Crippen, 2009). As students work in their interactive notebooks, they begin to build pride and claim ownership of their efforts. Their work becomes unique and individualized. As they build their interactive notebooks, students gain an awareness of their own learning. As they gain knowledge, they feel more empowered and confident. Reflection throughout the interactive notebook builds a habit for students to use to engage in thinking about their own thinking (Waldman & Crippen, 2009). The interactive notebook serves as a safe place for students to write, draw, and refer to during discussion. This process provides students a way to visualize and demonstrate their learning and thinking. Teaching these organizational skills to students helps them explore their own learning and make connections, furthering their process to become active learners (Carter et al, 2009).

Interactive notebooks impact students positively and improve academic achievement. Teachers can use interactive notebooks to direct student learning. “Positive relationship between student notebook scores and final course grades for a group of
students over one quarter of instruction” (Waldman & Crippen, 2009). Interactive notebooks can be used for assessment purposes. Teachers can analyze students’ work in the interactive notebooks to determine how students come to conclusions, what connections they are making, and what they still need further instruction (Carter et al, 2009). Interactive notebooks serve as a record of evidence. Students can refer back to find their documentation and reflections about content, engage in group conversations, make connections, and build on existing ideas. (Marcarelli, 2010).

Overall, teachers can benefit from introducing interactive notebooks to students. Teachers may see an increase in the overall academic climate in their classroom when students embrace the idea of interactive notebooks and the process that accompanies them. By providing opportunities to challenge students and push their thinking, teachers should look for concrete evidence of improvement and growth in students.

References
“UNDERSTANDING THE ROLE OF AN INSTRUCTIONAL LEADER”

Bernetta Smith

I have always considered myself as being an intelligent person. Over time, my definition of intelligence has somewhat evolved into a new definition. I once considered intelligence as making good grades, being articulate in conversations, and other conventions in which I, myself, was the central focus. While those factors are still somewhat relevant, I have incorporated more factors that also define intelligence—such as being considerate of, as well as incorporating, other people’s worth, values, and contributions. Being a single mother of three children has often times called for autonomy when making decisions. While this particular trait has been valuable to me, I now view it as somewhat a flaw.

In the new age of education, gone are the days of walking into your classroom and doing your own thing—or being autonomous. Collaboration is the core of successful classrooms, schools, and communities. In a sense, autonomy and collaboration can almost be categorized as an oxymoron. As I approach the task of leading teachers to improve practice, collaboration will be my central focus and approach as much as possible. As discussed in class, there are certain instances that are non-negotiable such as safety, legality issues, and violation of policies of procedures. Otherwise, I will have a collaborative approach.

According to the Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISLLC) Standards, an instructional leader is defined as an educational leader who promotes the success of all students by facilitating the development, articulation, implementation, and stewardship of a vision of learning that is shared and supported by the school community. In other words, school leaders must be student focused, visionaries, and able to get others on board with their plans—collaboration at its best.

In order to be an effective instructional leader, I think it is important for me to know myself. Daresh (2006) states that “as a beginning principal, a critical skill is developing a strong sense of self-awareness” (p. 132). After taking the Meyers-Briggs Personality Test and the
Supervisor Beliefs Inventory, in addition to learning new things, what I already know about myself were confirmed and expounded upon. The Supervisor Belief’s Inventory confirmed my collaborative personality. I tend to guide problem-solving processes and am continually an active member of a collaborative approach. The Myers-Briggs results yielded my temperament as a “SJ” (38% Sensing and 78% Judging) - in which fifty-six percent of high school principals share this temperament.

As an instructional leader it is imperative to be aware of the different types of personalities incorporate those personalities in the collaborative model at my school. A recent encounter as lead teacher of my department has really made me realize the importance of keeping a poker face even when I really wanted to ask, “Are you really serious?” but now realizing that this person did not share my SJ temperament. I plan to utilize such an awareness inventory at my school and would be remiss if I did not encourage my staff to understand themselves better so they can work more collaboratively together.

Finally, while realizing the many facets of being an instructional leader, my role is making sure the staff understands the importance of why we do what we do- or the business of our business. This can be accomplished through self-awareness, collaboration, being data-driven, and always keeping students as our primary focus. Marzano, Waters, and McNulty (2005) proposes a five-step plan for effective leadership- developing a strong leadership team; distributing responsibilities throughout that leadership team; selecting the right work; identifying the order of magnitude implied by the selected work; and finally matching the management style to the order of magnitude of the change initiative (p. 98) - all of which can only be accomplished by knowing yourself and knowing your staff.
References


Collaboration: What Good Is It?

Tamera J. Carter

With the adoption of the Common Core State Standards in almost every state, the bar has been raised as to the expectation of what students must master to be prepared in an increasingly competitive world. Educators are now challenged in teaching fewer standards than previously required in most state standards, but are now expected to cover skills in greater depth. The tide has turned to a focus on critical thinking and problem solving skills. In order to integrate these changes into our curricula, teachers must be purposeful in planning in order to effectively incorporate these new demands in our practice. One method of is to increase students’ opportunities to engage in practicing a myriad of 21st century competencies, such as communication, collaboration, inventive thinking, civil literacy, and global awareness. Designing lessons with authentic assignments to engage learners in academic and social growth. Teachers who are allowed to collaborate can create these kinds of lessons. By partnering with colleagues in intra- and interdisciplinary units, students be exposed to carefully crafted units that are more meaningful and relevant. However, there is little information on how instructional leadership can play a role in increasing the effectiveness of these collaborative pairings. Instructing teachers on how to collaborate and providing additional administrative support and coaching throughout the collaborative process may cause more teacher participation, effectiveness, and increase student achievement.

Several studies have found that collaborating would be beneficial to both the teachers and students, engaging both in a more meaningful learning experience. According to Bronson and Dentith (2014), “Collaborative teaching practices, in general, are thought to facilitate stronger teacher communication and collaboration, greater instructional innovation and, in some cases, positively change the professional and interpersonal dynamics of schools. Collaborative teaching structures enhance professional skills of teachers because they learn from one another” (p.507). By delegating tasks in the planning process, teachers can avoid becoming overwhelmed by sharing responsibility and assembling separate assignments into one cohesive lesson plan. Teachers in
collaborative and partner pairings may also gain cross-content knowledge that may benefit their practices, and have a more bonded relationships with their co-horts leading to increased teacher satisfaction. Riveros (2012) discusses what leads to effective collaboration in his study on PLCs:

Supportive leadership, shared authority, shared vision focused on student’s learning, collaboration among teachers … and applying what they have learned to … address students’ needs; supportive environment … that foster collaboration; shared accountability for the achievement of students; structured time to allow teachers to work together, assess their students’ learning, adjust practices, and continuously improve their students’ results (p.605).

These principles can generally be applied to collaborative planning, including partner and co-teaching.

A strong leadership presence is essential in establishing the standard for this cooperative culture. Having administrative support and modeling in cooperative learning sets the expectations to teachers to consider the importance of the endeavor and set expectations on how to interact within the group. Administrative support can boost teacher productivity and improve retention. By being more motivated to engage in the process,

Students should be informed of the cross-curriculum collaboration that takes place in the designing of the lesson. This modeling of relationship management is often missing in the classroom. However, students should be aware that teachers collaborate as well. Seeing the connections teachers have made results in a collaborative culture that is a part of students’ everyday lives. For example, students, as well as some teachers, have an understanding that writing should only be taught in the English class. However, the era of Common Core has ushered in a change in the ways that writing instruction should be delivered. All disciplines, including math, science, and social studies, are now required to have a writing component integrated in their lessons. In discussing integrating strategies throughout the disciplines, Ellis found, “Teachers can facilitate student understanding and intentional use of effective thinking and problem-solving cognitive processes, or "cognitive literacy," in the context of facilitating acquisition and mastery of
content-area subjects.” This may seem daunting, but through collaborative and co-teaching efforts, teachers will be more readily able to integrate writing instruction while strategically focusing on their content’s subject matter. Through collaborative teaching and explicit instruction, students who engage lessons created with these precepts in place will be more likely to meet all learning targets having gained skills they need to apply to other disciplines and writing assignments.

Reference List


Helping Struggling Readers

Sofrina Shepard

When students struggle to read proficiently, it is often assumed that the difficulty lies in the inability to recognize words accurately and automatically. In such case, traditional phonics instruction is provided. Usually such instruction occurs in the early elementary grades to facilitate students in “break[ing] the code and learn[ing] to match speech to print” (Baker & Ivey, 2004). When older students struggle to match speech to print or struggle to read words they encounter, phonics and spelling instruction should be provided in an age-appropriate manner (Baker & Ivey, 2004). By focusing on this area of weakness, students who struggle in reading are given the critical support that is necessary to build word recognition abilities (Baker & Ivey, 2004; Pressely, 2006). However, phonics instruction is not the only means by which to support students who struggle to read proficiently.

Since the ultimate goal of reading is comprehension, phonics instruction alone in assisting readers who are struggling is insufficient (Pressley, 2006; Tovani, 2011; Beers & Probst, 2013). Cummins (2013) posits that the lack of teaching comprehension strategies is a critical factor contributing to poor reading performance. As a result of ineffective comprehension instruction, students persist in “mindless encounters with the text” (Cummins, 2013, p. 69). Consequently, they are not able to synthesize the message in the text because they do not recognize when there is a lack of comprehension. Since comprehension is not a “natural by-product of word-recognition, and fluent reading, educators must be intentional in teaching students to accurately recognize words, read them fluently, and explicitly teach comprehension with self-monitoring strategies (Dougherty, 2012; Lipson, 2003, p. 2; Cummins, 2013; Wanzek & Roberts, 2012). This becomes increasingly crucial as reading instruction permeates into content area reading (CCSS, 2010).

Therefore, when supporting struggling readers, factors such as students’ interests and choice, text complexity, and consideration of the reader and task must also be considered (Tovani, 2006; Dougherty, 2012; Beers & Probst, 2013). With respects to text complexity, Beers and Probst
(2013) recommend the consideration of qualitative and quantitative measures of text. Major areas of qualitative measures include considering language conventions (vocabulary, sentence patterns, style, and register) and the knowledge demands of the texts; whereas quantitative measures which determine the complexity of the text (Beers & Probst, 2013). Blending literacy instruction within the content areas as recommended by Common Core State Standards (2013) allows teachers to expose students to a variety of interesting, complex text (Dougherty, 2012; CCSS, 2010). Selecting text that support the content areas also avail teachers to many opportunities to instruct students on language conventions including word attack skills which contribute to overall comprehension (Baker & Ivey, 2004; Pressely, 2006). So, scaffolding literacy assignments into purposefully, organized, manageable tasks supports the whole spectrum of literacy development (Dougherty, 2012).

There is a glaring need to provide students who struggle to read with balanced support which includes age appropriate phonics instruction (Pressley, 2006; Beers & Probst, 2013; Boykin & Noguera, 2012). However, there should also be instruction that consistently and explicitly teaches strategies that will bolster students’ comprehension through active and personal interaction with texts (Pressley, 2006; Beers & Probst, 2013). When reading instruction is presented in this way, there are more opportunities for students to gain meaning from the text; and, thereby, helping them “grow as readers” (Baker & Ivey, 2004).

References


Urban Educators: We are the Catalyst

Jodi Edwards

Sometimes, it saddens me to think that there may be students in my very own classroom who feel they are worthless, nothing and simply have no need to succeed…. I still want to teach them, strive to be their motivation and assure them they are equals with the equal chance to strive for education and knowledge. The reality of Dorothy Allison’s article, “A Question of Class,” really hits an emotional note for educators of low income students; sometimes education will not be the student’s concern.

In Allison’s article, she highlights her own experiences to show how class distinctions affect the lower class. To feel unequal and unwanted is hurtful, painful and so negative to the point that it may make a student feel that is where he or she belongs--in a lower state. That state goes beyond finances. The individual may feel they do not belong in a place of greater opportunity at all.

According to Allison, this is a very dangerous mindset that most lower class people may adapt. In turn, those individuals dismiss the positive opportunities and take on negatives instead. Those negatives include jail, street life, violence, self-hatred, etc. Considering an additional stressor, those students with such negatives embedded in their minds can also have to fight the battle of a tattered home life--often those of lower socioeconomic status come from broken homes. Frequently, the situation includes a single mother attempting to be the sole provider for her children. With raging divorce rates, this scenario is becoming more common. Even if the mother is educated, there is a possibility that her income alone is not sufficient enough to be the sole provider and raise the children alone due to discriminatory wage gaps.

In “The Wage Gap and Its Costs,” the author notes that “a young woman graduates from high school… and goes straight to work at $20,000 a year… she will make $700,000 less than the young man graduating with her” (Rothenberg 376). The truth of this statistic must help urban educators realize that education must offer more. Our classrooms must offer hope--that hope must
percolate throughout the mindset of the child, and that same hope should slowly trickle its way into that child’s household. That is the effect that a teacher must have on a student in such a situation. In such predicaments, the teacher has to realize “I am the catalyst to start the impact.”

If a teacher is to effectively be a catalyst for a low-income student’s success, he or she has to realize the importance and power of words--be careful to not label students. Oftentimes, the students may not realize the opportunities such as grants for higher education are available for those who want to make the best of their situation. In Herbert Gans’ “Deconstructing the Underclass,” he discusses the dangers of negatively labeling members of a socioeconomic status. He states that “while it seems inoffensively technical on the surface, it hides within it all the moral opprobrium Americans have long felt towards those poor people who have been judged to be undeserving” (104). Therefore, urban educators must disseminate words of encouragement; tell the students that they are achievers, intellectual scholars, and give them the knowledge in the classroom to convince them that it is true--they can overcome. Help them to realize that their education is key to conquering their struggles.

Allison effectively puts the reader into the shoes of one who grows up with less and what it means to feel like an outsider. What is most haunting is how she mentions the way people of a higher class embrace the lowliness of the lower class, only to make their status seem greater. Labels--it is a sad but true reality to deal with, but the urban educator must aid in the defeat of those negative thoughts. It is our role to ensure the students and their families that they are important. They are the force of the future. Most importantly, they have the power within to cause a rippling change within their own communities. Urban educators, essentially, are the catalyst that create catalyst.
References


Personal Technology in the Classroom: Where Do We Draw the Line in the Sand?

By JohnMark Edwards

Not long ago, I had a conversation with a concerned parent. She asked me if students were allowed to have cell phones in the classroom at my school. I told her that the current policy was fairly strict: if you get caught with a cell phone out at the wrong time, it will be confiscated and your parent has to come up to the school to retrieve it, and a second offense will land you an automatic one day suspension from school! But, I continued, noticing an almost satisfied look in her eyes, this archaic policy is very difficult to enforce since a cell phone fits in a pocket and almost every middle school student at my school owns one. Lastly, I informed her that despite a seemingly strict cell phone policy, at any point a teacher could allow cell phones, or any other personal electronic device, in his or her classroom for educational purposes. And that’s when this concerned parent became the outraged parent. She told me her “horror” story, the single event that placed her firmly in the camp of: No personal electronic devices in the classroom. An incident happened at the affluent public school where her son attends: While a young female teacher in a skirt was working with another student, an adolescent somehow angled his smartphone to get a completely inappropriate picture. This disturbing image sealed the opinions of this outraged parent and many like her, their conclusion: since bad things are inevitably going to happen when you mix smartphones and middle schoolers in a classroom, let’s just make sure they are never allowed to enter. I sympathize with her concerns, her anecdotal evidence used to argue her point brings up legitimate concerns - and I have no doubt the student who abused his privilege of using a cell phone in class is neither the first nor the last to do so. I also know that the parent I was talking to, as an educated, successful, business woman and mother, virtually uses her smartphone every day. An all-out war against cell phones in class hardly seems practical or desirable considering this is the technology that students will be using until something better comes along. A better question for teachers and schools creating policy would be how do we utilize and manage the
phenomenal increase in personal technology? And where are we going to draw a line in the proverbial sand? When does that technology become too much, too destructive, or too distracting?

Over the last decade, there have been incredible leaps in accessibility to cell phones and tablets as well as the technology embedded within each device. The devices are becoming cheaper, easier to obtain, and more technologically advanced. Most important, however, is that these devices are becoming the norm in our society resulting in more of our students owning these devices. These trends can be witnessed in classrooms around the US, as well as my own. Only a generation ago, the number of students with their own personal electronic devices was so minuscule as to be insignificant to the learning experience, especially for the average student. But over the past decade the number of students not just owning such devices, but bringing them to class, has exploded exponentially, even in lower-income communities. This creates a plethora of opportunities as well as challenges for teachers. According to Liz Kolb in Learning and Leading in Technology, many educators are rejecting cell phones altogether, “considering them destructive and distractive toys.” The challenges to schools and teachers vary depending on the policies in place, but the trend is clearly heading toward utilizing the technology rather than outright restriction (Kolb). The technological devices can, likewise, cause a wide variety of issues within the class as well as the school – easy access to cyberbullying, easy access to inappropriate websites and/or text messages, cell phones ringing and disrupting the flow of the class, students using the phones for non-educational purposes during class time, and organizing inappropriate classroom behavior using social media. I have witnessed an increase in all of these behaviors at the middle school level. To tackle these issues, schools must deliberate an electronic device policy/action plan to proactively stay ahead of the technology that will continue to evolve. Solutions to these issues should be taken individually as well as collectively. Because the vast majority of students, according to Anita Charles’ research in American Secondary Education, will routinely break strict cell-phone rules and policies – flexibility and relevance should be essential features of any comprehensive electronic device policy. One possible solution would focus on perpetually
refining the policy/action plan making it both flexible to account for changes in technology as well as being clear and concise – something that is easily understood and reasonable in the mind of a student (Charles). Another solution would be to require teachers to take upon the responsibility of teaching their students the appropriate ways to use technology, the dangers of cyberbullying or sexting, and when it is okay to use the cell phone or tablet for personal use. Personally, I have enjoyed the challenge of incorporating the technology in the classroom. As a solution, allowing students to use their technology in an educational setting helps them understand the potential that the technology has; it also gives them examples of when to use that technology and the good it can do. Cathleen Noris from the University of North Texas even goes so far to say that it is the best solution to close the technological divide, specifically a solution to the one-to-one computer issue (Pascopella). In my own classroom I have assigned students to use their cell phones to take pictures on field trips documenting our field experiences in Montgomery and the Civil Rights Institute. I have required various students to use cell phones to take video footage for documentary assignments and to record their community service activities. Students have been able to use tablets and smartphones to research during class time – an activity that required the computer lab my first year of teaching. The potential of this technology in the classroom is almost limitless and something to be harnessed rather than feared or ignored. This is an opportune time, according to Cynthia White’s dissertation on the topic, to use the new technology to teach 21st century skills and help students make connections between the class and the real world.

Bibliography


Annotated Bibliography for Sociocultural Diversity and its Effect on Student Achievement

Kristen Glover

After researching multicultural diversity and its effect on student achievement, it is clear that many students are being under-serviced and misrepresented due to a large gap in not only academic achievement but in cultural awareness. In order for teachers to effectively impact students and create a classroom environment that is conducive for all, they must promote the acceptance of diversity and include multicultural instruction in the classroom. Educational practitioners often consider “getting to know students” as a key factor in student achievement, but viewing diversity as the missing piece to many students’ success is often overshadowed.

As Alabama continues to flourish in implementing the College and Career Readiness Standards and improvement of state assessments, it is crucial that stakeholders consider the unique differences of students that so largely impacts how they perform within the classroom and socially throughout the school. Learning disabilities, language barriers, and overall comprehension concerns are better addressed after assessment has been completed on the framework of each student—composed of his or her ethnic, cultural, racial, language, and socio-economic differences.

All of the peer-reviewed articles researched were published during the years 2010 to 2014. All data is still current and useful for today’s learners and educators:

Annotated Bibliography


This article focuses on the importance of being a culturally responsive teacher but presents it from a physical education classroom viewpoint. Luz Cruz and Susan Petersen (2011) state, “Today’s diverse classes challenge physical educators to encourage student participation and learning while respecting cultural differences” (p. 22). In this brief but very informative article, data and statistics are given about cultural connections to physical education and its impact in the physical education classroom. The article also gives strategies to help, not just physical education
teachers but all teachers combat the cultural marginalization that is too often a reality in classrooms.

Although this article is geared towards physical education teachers, it is applicable for any classroom teacher because of the strategies included. Tips for “interacting positively” with the following varieties of students are included: “different genders,” “different religions or political beliefs,” students who are “gay, lesbian bisexual or transgendered (GLBT),” “different races and ethnicities,” and students apart of “adapted physical education.” The influence of physical education teachers and the impact on how accepted students feel throughout their school years is often taken for granted. However, being that these educators see most all students in the school, the physical education class is a great place to focus on positive interactions and culturally responsive teaching practices to alert content teachers and administrators of concerns and differences within the school.


The idea of critical consciousness in the classroom is analyzed and researched in this article. According to Erin Godfrey and Justina Grayman (2014), diverse classrooms/students must be exposed to social conditions in order to empower young learners to act/change those conditions (p. 1801). An educators goal should be to catapult a global citizen mentality that is not only academically sound and knowledgeable but also socially aware. Throughout this article the concept of open dialogue in the classroom is examined as an approach to building critical consciousness amongst students. An open dialogue based classroom is suggested to help both students and teachers learn to respect all opinions by discussing controversial issues openly.

As classrooms become more diverse and society changes, classroom teachers will have to assume an additional role beyond content teacher. Educators will have to join parents and other key community influencers in mobilizing students, as young citizens, by teaching inclusive, tolerant
practices to foster an appreciation for all people. The researchers approached the concept of critical consciousness through three components: critical reflection, sociopolitical efficacy, and critical action. Considering that students spend a large amount of time at school, it is appropriate to set up this open classroom climate to build relationships and break spoken/unspoken barriers. Addressing social issues with varying populations of students can lead to an exploration of acceptance and understanding of different ethnic, cultural, and socio-economic backgrounds.


The focus of this article is Response to Intervention (RTI) for students with diverse backgrounds. The researchers layout in a detailed manner the origin of RTI and gives details about the tier-by-tier purposes, benefits, and limitations. Also, author Maria Hernández addresses the need for culturally responsive eligibility assessments when considering what culturally and linguistically disabled (CLD), learning disabled (LD), and English learning (EL) students need. To support this claim data is collected and analyzed from a study of Latino students. It is suggested in the article that a re-evaluation is needed of how individualized education plans (IEPs) are being implemented for EL students. Once students are given an IEP they are officially apart of that state’s special education program services. However, this article suggests that too many students are being improperly assessed and are being mislabeled due to their cultural differences that are not being carefully evaluated and addressed through RTI practices.

The article includes RTI strategies, websites, and additional resources that would be beneficial to the classroom and special education teacher. Prior to reading this article I never thought of RTI and IEPs as strategies tailored to the cultural needs of a student but only his or her academic needs. However, I now understand that in order to reach a student academically there must first be a realization and acceptance of their cultural/social differences.
Conclusion

My research has concluded with me feeling empowered to meet the needs of my diverse students. I realize that the strategies, tips, and data presented in the articles will not completely fix all issues that will arise with my students. However, I do feel better equipped to facilitate a culturally responsive classroom that celebrates diversity and actively imbeds the versatility of my students and their learning styles/abilities. I believe that the future of this nation can be molded by educators that are willing to “go the extra mile” to cultivate the minds of exceptional learners that have so much individuality and culture to bring to the overall learning experience.
Appreciating Your Students’ Backgrounds
Julie Paul

A language is a means of written or spoken communication. A dialect of a language is a particular form of a language specific to the area in which it is spoken. It is very common for dialects and the vast amount of different languages spoken by migrating students to be overlooked by teachers due to misconceptions. As the demographics of the United States become increasingly multicultural and multilingual, it is essential for educators to become, not only cognizant of this matter, but also prepared. This paper will provide insight into demographic shifts in the United States, language and student background generalizations, and instructional approaches as educators.

Scholar Fry (2008) asserts between 2000 and 2013, the percentage of the 33.2 million English proficient Hispanics of the ages 5 and older in the U.S increased from 59% to a new record of 68%. Fry further suggests that the Hispanic population in 2005 was 14% and is projected to increase to 29% by 2050. Therefore, it is apparent that the English Language Learning (ELL) community is going to increase and educators must become aware of their students’ native languages. Language misconceptions are becoming exceedingly common with the Spanish language due to the number of indigenous tribes in Central and South Americas with native languages. Scholars Samway & McKeon affirm that many migrants to the United States […] come from parts of Mexico and other Central American countries, such as Guatemala, where an indigenous language, not Spanish, is the native language (pp. 20). Assuming that the entire continents of South and Central America speak Spanish comes from lack of knowledge. If a child spoke very little English, but was able to indicate to the teacher that he or she was originally from Peru, it may be assumed that the child's native language is Spanish. However, Peru has two additional official indigenous languages, Quechua and Aymara. Therefore, there would be a possibility that the child's native language is not Spanish. Research further suggests that the number of languages listed for Mexico is 287. Of
these languages, 283 are living and 4 are extinct (Lewis, Simon, and Fennig, 2015). Additional indigenous languages of South and Central Americas include: Maya (Guatemala, Mexico, and Belize), Náhuatl (Mexico), and Guarani (Paraguay, Argentina, Brazil, Bolivia). With this being said, classifying all students from Spanish-speaking countries as “Spanish speakers” is inaccurate.

Educators must become aware of a student’s background for several reasons: the teacher may be trying to communicate in Spanish when the student actually speaks an indigenous language, a student’s background is an entry into his or her learning style, and knowing their background will build a stronger connection between the teacher and student, and the student will feel valued. This could be achieved through a meeting with the parents at the beginning of the school year, individual meetings with each student, and a simple “Icebreaker” activity. Scholars Ovando & Combs (2012) affirm that parents or caretakers are the primary language models for first language learners (pp. 67). Scholar Ramirez (1991) affirms that providing students with substantial amounts of instruction in their native language does not interfere with or delay their acquisition of English language skills.

Moreover, promoting cultural awareness in the classroom facilitates a welcoming environment for students from a culturally and linguistically diverse background. One approach to this is incorporating multicultural literature across the curriculum. Criteria for selecting multicultural resources for language minority students should entail texts with a simple structure, meaningful theme, interest-provoking title, creative illustrations, and challenging vocabulary for the students (Khodabakhshi & Lagos, 1993, pp. 52). Additional strategies to promote a culturally welcoming classroom include: using folktales and myths that originate in the student’s cultures, selecting literature written by authors from students, and using authentic problems and real-life situations (Herrera & Murry, pp. 335-6)

Generalizing a student’s background can be misinterpreted as a handicap or correlate
to believe the other misconception that ELLs do not speak English nor their native language well (Samway & McKeon, pp. 22). It is easy for educators to assume that if an ELL student does not speak up in class they do not speak their native language or English well. Although, many times ELL students do not speak up in class because it is very intimidating to be in a classroom of native speakers. There are nonstandard forms of a language, which can also be classified as different versions of a language. This should not lead to the assumption that this is an inferior version of a language (Samway & McKeon, pp. 22). As professionals, it is essential to embrace each student’s unique background by allowing them to embrace his or her background and accept it as part of his or her unique identity.

References


Relevancy in Math Classrooms

Kelli Singell, 2015

Although mathematics students can be full of difficult questions, perhaps the most dreaded is in the form “When will I use this?” This inquiry might be met with references to daily additions, diversions to separate topics, reminders of upcoming tests, or promises to return with more information. None of these approaches address the heart of the issue: how can mathematics be presented as relevant to students? While references to addition and subtraction might be appropriate for lower level classes, how can a high school student be expected to find value in quadratic equations or logarithmic functions? Without relevancy, such topics quickly lose value and can become intolerable for weaker math students.

References to job applications, however, are not always appropriate either. Students can be told that trend lines are used to forecast and make business decisions, but interest in such careers is not necessarily all inclusive. Furthermore, technology often eliminates the need to carry out calculations manually or apply formulas to ‘crunch’ numbers. While learning about real-life applications is certainly important, answers like these tend to convince very few students that what they are learning is valuable.

 Likewise, there exist many incomplete and / or disguised applications in the form of textbook problems. Such assignments present realistic scenarios but only require students to plug numbers into given functions. Learners are expected to accept such functions as having meaning and are not led to question their derivation. These assumptions invalidate the authors’ attempts to provide purposeful exercises. In fact, students can easily provide solutions without ever reading through such word problems. Due to the nature of these tasks, “Students currently find little relevance in typical textbook problems and classroom mathematics. Culturally relevant instruction … can motivate marginalized students to learn mathematics… [S]tudents with such learning
experiences will then make informed judgments in the larger society in which they live and even act as change agents” (Provost).

Finally, referencing future tests in order to establish value is a passive-aggressive approach to avoiding students’ curiosities. Most students will not be taking traditional pencil and paper tests as they progress through adulthood. By insinuating they should learn the material to satisfy such an immediate goal, teachers remove the idea of future potential for the skills students should be mastering. Aside from minimizing the worth of the content, such responses can be demoralizing in their dismissiveness. Students should feel as though their opinions are worth consideration, and furthermore, valuable beyond classroom settings. If they are made to feel that their questions are valid, they are more likely to speak up on future occasions and to be comfortable with seeking clarification to further their education.

If none of these methods are particularly strong answers to the question “When will I use this?”, how should teachers approach the topic of relevancy? One possible approach (perhaps surprisingly) has very little to do with numbers, formulas, and calculations. Instead, the focus of the issue should be on the development of logical reasoning and pattern recognition. Since logic and patterns are used universally, it is important to consider that “all of the processes, formulas and concepts work to create order through patterns. The task of those who teach math is to convey this language of pattern and order in ways that show its relevance to everyday life” (Bafumo). The progression of critical thinking skills transcends all levels of mathematics and even beyond the classroom. Trouble-shooting and decision-making will be faced by any person on a regular basis and should thusly be viewed as mathematical motivators. Whether students are completing simple operations or simplifying complex algebraic expressions, they will be applying and improving their logical thinking skills. If students could recognize the value in this exercise, they would likely appreciate their lessons.

This paradigm shift is not an easy one to make, however. From early education, students are given the impression that ‘math’ is synonymous with ‘numbers’. Such emphasis is placed on
getting accurate answers that little focus is placed on processes. While calculations are integral, they are impossible without appropriate reasoning skills. If teachers wish to create a sense of relevancy in the mathematics classroom, they should first adjust what and how they assess assignments. Students should not be encouraged to memorize steps and regurgitate them with the goal of arriving at a single and specific answer. In a study of Brazilian vendors which had no formal mathematical education, it was discovered that ‘regular’ school routines would confuse sellers and cause them to incorrectly assess financial situations. Without schooling, dealing with the same every day demands was not as daunting of a task. The research concluded that schools “encourage memorization and repetitive practice, whereas at work street sellers solve problems through mental computation, using flexible strategies they develop and efficiently apply to achieve their selling goals. These mental computation strategies are based on an understanding of basic logicomathematical relations” (Carraher and Schliemann, 2002).

Instead, students should be allowed to explore, derive, and defend. John Dewey, and educational reformer, “felt that teachers must purposefully structure learning to allow for exploration, questioning, and making connections between subject matter and real life” (Sanders, 2013). Once students shift their understandings on the purpose of mathematical procedures, answering the question “When will I use this?” should become a simple task. Students will need to reason every day, and exercising the brain is similar to exercising muscles. Through practice and application, logical reasoning skills can only strengthen and increase students’ potential to succeed in all walks of life.
References


Universal Language Change Project
Jenise Gorman

I have been a teacher for four years and have noticed the need for “Universal Language” in classrooms, and throughout schools. Universal Language means to have the same vocabulary used in all content areas. Students encounter many words within each content area; these words have different meanings depending on the class they are in. There are a variety of avenues to learning new vocabulary that is effective, and teachers need to incorporate engaging and meaningful strategies for students to have a more inclusive understanding of words. As students expand their vocabulary, they will achieve higher academic success in all content-areas, assessments, and real-world situations. Teachers need to explain the relationships of vocabulary words, especially in different contexts (see figure 1.2). In Content-Area Vocabulary: A Critical Key to Conceptual Learning, Janis M. Harmon and Karen D. Wood state,

Science classes studying the causes and effects of earthquakes will more than likely encounter other related terms such as tremors, seismic waves, Richter scale, and magnitude. In mathematics, understanding how to solve linear equations involves having a knowledge base about factors, variables, equality, and coefficients (1).

This example conveys how words and their meanings are correlated, and the importance of understanding multiple definitions for vocabulary words. My goal is for all classrooms in every content-area to use the same language when it comes to instructional strategies, as well as explicitly teach the relationship of vocabulary from one class to the next. The meanings of words will become deeper as students are exposed to more vocabulary in different contexts, while actively applying their knowledge. Students will have a more profound understanding of words the more they read, write, listen, and speak.

Michael Fullan speaks about educational changes in his book, The New Meaning of Educational Change. Fullan’s book has helped me grasp a better understanding of the dos and
don’ts of change, especially when he discusses closing the gap. Fullan states, “We need to remind ourselves that it is not just a matter of being aware of the gap goal, but working on it diligently day after day, monitoring progress, and taking corrective action” (44-45). He talks later on in this chapter about how the gap is not getting closer, it is getting wider and teachers need to be making it a goal for this not to happen. Also, he says that closing the gap cannot be a slogan, but something that educators are constantly working toward (Fullan 44). This chapter influenced my plan on implementing a universal language in my school.

The flowchart below (see figure 1.1) breaks down when I will be implementing this plan. Fullan discusses the importance of the “buy-in” and clarity, which has influenced this new plan. He states, “When teachers want to improve some areas of the curriculum or improve the school as a whole, the adopted change may not be at all clear about what teachers should do differently” (Fullan 89). When introducing this plan, I need to be clear about goals, approaches, monitoring progress, and reinforcement. Also, I need teachers and administration to “buy-in” on this plan by listing the benefits of universal language (explained above).

Teachers must stay away from the mundane lecture approach for teaching new vocabulary, i.e. copying down definitions from the dictionary and memorizing. This only allows short-term memory and students do not understand the correlation of words used in different contexts. I will provide alternative and more interactive strategies for teachers to use. For example, teachers can pre-teach target words before a lesson and explain how they are used in different contexts. Also, use a pre/post-assessment for these words. This step assesses students’ background knowledge of terms as well as allowing them to evaluate his or her learning (see figure 1.3). After assessing the meaning of words, teachers can have students be proactive in their understanding of vocabulary by having them complete meaningful activities. Teachers can have students use new words in their writing, discussions, and higher-order questions. This will create higher-order thinking for students, which will result in academic success in their grades, assessments, and will help them be
“college and career ready.”

Teachers can use a variety of activities, such as cubing, to stimulate cognitive thinking amongst students, which will help with reinforcement. This will increase understanding of vocabulary while reinforcing it in their writing. The cubing activity requires students to understand a word in multiple ways by describing, comparing, associating, analyzing, applying, and arguing for or against it (Harmon and Wood 5). By allowing students to participate in more engaging activities, they reinforce what they have learned and create long-term memory for vocabulary words.

I will start with a small group to launch this pilot by having a teacher from each content area represent their department. I will present my idea and have a conversation with these teachers about common language in our subjects. Then, we will make a master list of words that we want to cover in our classes and how to strategically teach vocabulary with multiple meanings to students. Teachers will pre-assess (content area rubric) target words before the semester to gather data. Teachers will use strategies such as cubing, vocabulary maps, and word walls to teach vocabulary, and have students actively engaged on learning new words. Teachers will reinforce vocabulary by having students write, use Quizlet, and play games such as bingo or swat the wall. Teachers will use the same pre-assessment for a post-assessment to see student growth. Teachers will be able to analyze this data to plan for the next semester. Also, teachers will use this data to extend to more classes, and eventually the school.

Closing Remarks:

This proposal presents the need for universal language in classrooms as well as a few approaches. I have attached a flow chart for the timeline of this change plan and some examples. These strategies can be utilized in every content-area classroom to improve the understanding of vocabulary in different contexts.
**Flow Chart of Change Proposal Timeline (Figure 1.1):**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Month</th>
<th>Activity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>May</td>
<td>Talk to principal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>June</td>
<td>Plan to present change to department heads</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>July</td>
<td>Present “Universal Language” to department heads and administration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>August</td>
<td>Department heads meet with their department to train/discuss “Universal Language”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>September-May</td>
<td>Teachers implement “Universal Language” in their classrooms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>November, February, and June</td>
<td>Informal/Formal Assessments on “Universal Language” with support/coaching, reinforcement, and tweaking</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Figure 1.2**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Word:</th>
<th>English</th>
<th>Math</th>
<th>Science</th>
<th>Social Studies</th>
<th>Other</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sentence</td>
<td>Grammatical unit of one or more words that expresses an independent statement, question, request, command, exclamation, etc.,</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>The punishment itself; ter</td>
<td><strong>Music:</strong> A complete idea, usually consisting of eight to sixteen measures;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Current</td>
<td>Popular, present, new</td>
<td>Electricity, electric current</td>
<td>A body of water that flows such as a stream, or river</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Harbor</td>
<td>To conceal; hide</td>
<td></td>
<td>A body of water having docks or port facilities.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weasel</td>
<td>Sneaky person</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Solution</td>
<td>Explanation or answer</td>
<td>An answer to a mathematical problem</td>
<td>Homogeneous, molecular mixture of two or more substances.</td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Pharmacology:</strong> Also called liquor. A liquid, usually water, in which a medication is dissolved. <strong>Medicine/Medical:</strong> The termination of a disease.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Content Area Rubric (Pre/Post-Assessment)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Word (or term)</th>
<th>I know this word (or term). It means…</th>
<th>The word (or term) looks familiar</th>
<th>I do not know this word (or term).</th>
<th>New Information from the text</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
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</tbody>
</table>

Figure 1.3 Knowledge rating scale

**Term: Market Economy**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Describe it.</th>
<th>Compare or contrast it.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A market economy is one type of economic system. An economic system is the way in which a country manages its money, materials, and labor. A market economy allows the people to freely choose what to buy and sell.</td>
<td>A market economy is similar to capitalism and free enterprise. A market economy is different from a planned or command economy in which the government decides what to buy and sell and at what price.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Associate it.</th>
<th>Analyze it.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I think a market economy allows people the opportunity to earn more money by opening their own businesses.</td>
<td>There is competition in a market economy, and this can keep prices down. The producers of goods and services listen to the wants and needs of the consumers.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Apply it.</th>
<th>Argue for or against it.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Every time I go shopping for a new video game, I can be grateful for the market economy in America. If it wouldn’t be for this type of economy, I think the selection of games would not be as wide as it is at the stores.</td>
<td>I support a market economy. It gives me many choices when I am looking for things, and it gives me the opportunity to open my own business if I like.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Figure 1.3 Cubing (Bean, Readence, & Baldwin, 2008)

Works Cited


Diverse Populations
Donna R. Jones

In the light of many challenges such as PLAN 20/20, Common Core Standards, etc., the 21st century administrator should focus on a number of important aspects. We must make the commitment to acknowledge and embrace differences and to create educational spaces within where all children can learn. As the notion of social justice within education has been evolving, certain students, particularly those who have a low or high incidence level of exceptionality, have been forced to accept some inequities within schools.

Helping students learn and grow should be a goal of every school. The goal is an understanding of how to work with special populations of children. Gifted and talented education encompasses the expertise needed to properly identify and serve not only the students who demonstrate high achievement, but also those who have the ability to achieve at high levels. The term also covers the specific services and programs offered as well as the teacher training necessary to provide the academic guidance gifted students need in order to thrive. Gifted and talented education, then, is the system by which districts recognize and serve this special population of children. This paper will provide some historical background on NCLB and gifted education in the United States, the disproportional training for administrators and educators in gifted programs, and the impact on our nation’s best and brightest students.

The federal definition of gifted and talented that appears in the new No Child Left Behind Act is as follows: The term 'gifted and talented', when used with respect to students, children, or youth, means students, children, or youth who give evidence of high achievement capability in areas such as intellectual, creative, artistic, or leadership capacity, or in specific academic fields, and who need services or activities not ordinarily provided by the school in order to fully develop those capabilities. (Section 9101(22)) (Page 544). Most states utilize some form of this federal definition in their state definitions.
History of No Child Left Behind (NCLB).

The NCLB Act was an attempt to implement more rigors into school systems by punishing those whose students did not pass standardized tests. However, it has had unintended consequences for high achievers. This law originates from the 1954 landmark case of Brown vs. the Board of Education when the term "separate but equal" was determined to be unconstitutional (1954). In 1965, a year after the Civil Rights Act was passed, the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) became law (2001). The NCLB Act is the updated version of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, signed into law by President Lyndon B. Johnson in 1965. This is the primary federal education law that describes federal requirements for the nation’s public schools. The NCLB Act was passed in 2001 with bipartisan support and signed into law on January 8, 2002 by President George W. Bush.

While discussions support the idea that our nation is on the move and that our schools and students are making progress, it is disappointing that progress of gifted students were not a topic of concern. The U.S. Department in Washington, D.C. has published a new resource called the National Dashboard that shows how each state is doing on key indicators, such as graduation rates and achievement gaps (2008). Will this data guide help educators, policymakers, and parents better understand how the best and brightest in their states are doing? The dropout crisis in our nation's high schools is as relevant for gifted students as it is for lower achieving ones. Approximately 5% of both populations drop out of school. Up to 20% of students, who drop out, test in the gifted range according to the recent Handbook of Gifted Education (2002). The accountability movement must strengthen and improve education for all students, including our most able learners. The tendency to misunderstand and overlook gifted students is historically evident.

The No Child Left Behind federal mandate (2001) did not intend to leave any children behind, nor was it designed to curb the progress of those at the top of the learning curve. However, since this law was passed, it is apparent that the focus of many schools in the United States has shifted toward providing time, attention, resources, and policies in the direction of
students scoring under the 40% level of achievement in reading and mathematics. This focus is necessary in order to avoid governmental sanctions impacting school funding and parental choice to choose a different school if their child is not achieving at this level of competence. According to the Four Pillars of NCLB this law will result in stronger accountability, more freedom for states and communities, proven educational methods, and more choices for parents (2004).

Since the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) legislation2, education policy makers have focused on students at the lower end of the achievement spectrum, specifically those struggling to meet standards, particularly in reading and mathematics. However, those who are considered gifted have been increasingly underserved, at the expense of high incident ability learners in the United States. When the No Child Left Behind law was enacted in 2001, it forced schools to deeply subsidize the education of students performing below grade level. As a result, gifted programs have suffered.

**Administrators and Educator Training.**

Gifted and talented students learn differently than other students. Teachers trained to recognize these differences and who can adapt instruction using an array of strategies that are well researched can help children soar. It's crucial that all teachers have a basic understanding of how to work with gifted students and not to just teach to the middle. Farkas & Duffet explains that nearly two-thirds (65%) of teachers in a national sample reported that their education courses or teacher preparation programs focused either very little or not at all on how to best teach academically advanced students. Nearly six in ten (60%) also said that they have had no professional development over the past few years that specifically focused on teaching these students (2008).

Archambault, Westberg, Brown, Hallmark, Emmons, & Zhang clarify that sixty-one percent of approximately 7,300 randomly selected third and fourth grade teachers in public and private schools in the United States reported that they had never had any training in teaching gifted students. The major finding of this study is that classroom teachers make only minor modifications
on a very irregular basis in the regular curriculum to meet the needs of gifted students. This result was consistent for all types of schools sampled and for classrooms in various parts of the country and for various types of communities (1993).

Westberg, Archambault, Dobyns, & Salvin, states that systematic observations conducted in 46 third or fourth-grade classrooms with two students, one high-ability student and one average ability student, found that little differentiation in the instructional and curricular practices, including grouping arrangements and verbal interactions, for gifted students in the regular classroom. In all content areas in 92 observation days, gifted students rarely received instruction in homogeneous groups (only 21% of the time), and targeted gifted students experienced no instructional or curricular differentiation in 84% of the instructional activities in which they participated (1993).

Reis, Gubbins, Briggs, Schreiber, Richards & Jacobs research was conducted in 12 different third and seventh-grade reading classrooms in both urban and suburban school districts over a 9-month period. Results indicated that little purposeful or meaningful differentiated reading instruction was provided for talented readers in any of the classrooms. Above-grade level books were seldom available for these students in their classrooms, and they were not often encouraged to select more challenging books from the school library. Talented readers seldom encountered challenging reading material during regular classroom instruction. Even less advanced content and instruction was made available for urban students than for suburban (2004).

Moon, Tomlinson, & Callahan, explains that teachers and principals admitted that academically diverse populations receive very little, if any, targeted attention in their schools. Teachers report the use of little differentiation for gifted middle school students. Both principals and teachers hold beliefs that may deny challenge to advanced middle school students, as the overwhelming majority believes that these students are more social than academic. Half of the principals and teachers believe that middle school learners are in a plateau learning period when little new learning takes place—a theory which supports the idea that basic skills instruction, low
level thinking, and small assignments are appropriate (1995). Not only is this evidence of deficiency in the education of gifted students, but also disproportional training for administrators and educators. With special education being one of the most litigious issues that school leaders must confront in their daily practice, stronger accountability for results must be addressed. Stronger accountability means that under NCLB, the states are working to make sure all students achieve academic proficiency with highly qualified teachers (HQT). If they do not make adequate yearly progress (AYP) after five years, there will be sanctions on the schools. Such measures may involve staffing changes that include firing teachers and administrators.

**Impact on Gifted Students.**

Gifted students are overlooked and underserved. In the face of unequal, inadequate resources for gifted learners, adequate learning is compromised in multiple ways. America’s teachers are distributing time and energy to serve required needs of those at the other end of the learning spectrum. The need to focus on underachieving students at the expense of high ability student’s means teachers are unmotivated and unrewarded to provide for their most gifted students. Therefore, impact on gifted learners includes, but is not limited to, the following:

1. Vast amounts of time, money, and energy is focused on meeting the NCLB mandates in many states and districts, at the expense of developing curriculum for gifted learners.
2. Lack of planning time, faculty development, and physical space for gifted education.
3. Gifted students academic performance and test scores are declining.
4. Curriculum is watered down and unchallenging as gifted students are forced to review concepts they already have mastered.
5. Not enough in-classroom time for enrichment of high ability students.
6. Teacher reluctance to release students from class or pre-test material for mastery.
7. Districts lack of concern for gifted teaching because these students reach average proficiency.
8. Teachers are so overburdened with additional NCLB testing, preparation for testing, and
paperwork that they are unmotivated and unrewarded to provides more for gifted students. In summary, administrative and instructional focus is on lower achieving students as growth in both performance and opportunity declines for gifted learners. Unfortunately, gifted students are expected to be independent learners, a myth we continue to perpetuate.

Summary.

Stronger accountability means that under NCLB, the states are working to make sure all students achieve academic proficiency with highly qualified teachers (HQT). More freedom for states and communities allows each states and school districts flexibility in how they use federal education funds. This flexibility allows districts to use their funds for their needs whether it is hiring new teachers, increasing teacher pay, or improving training for teachers. Proven education methods implement scientific research to determine which educational programs have proven to be effective. Federal funding is specifically targeted to support specific programs and different teaching methods that have been proven effective. The difficulty with this approach is the variation of what is effective for student learning. More choices for parents mean that if a school has not met the state standards for two consecutive years, it is a school in need of improvement. Parents have the option of transferring their children to better performing schools within their district.

Since the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) legislation, education policy makers have focused on students at the lower end of the achievement spectrum, those that are struggling to meet standards, particularly in reading and mathematics. However, those who are gifted have been increasingly passed over at their own expense. The United States must learn from nations whose top students perform well and take steps to ensure that high-achieving American students compare favorably with their counterparts around the world.
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http://www.nagc.org/index.aspx?id=533


When entering into one of today’s classrooms, it is inevitable to witness some sort of technology or technology tool. Schools in this day and age seem to be surged by the growing demand of technology. From smart boards to iPads and clickers, there is no doubt that we are amidst the ever-evolving 21st-century schools and classrooms in a global, digital society. Schools are shifting away from thousands of paper copies for school registration, announcements, and flyers to offering online registration and sending electronic reminders, school casts, and Remind 101 texts. Teachers are implementing new and innovative ways of teaching and learning through technology. Students are constantly seeking fun ways to communicate and share through technology. The newest technology trend in schools is the collaboration of students and teachers to learn, share, interact and communicate through social media. When thoughtfully planned and used correctly, social media can be a very useful learning tool in classrooms.

According to LinkedIn.com, 9.8 million teenagers between the ages of 13-17 used Facebook and 74 million used Instagram in 2014 (Brodzky, 2014). With this staggering demographic, it is undeniable that social media is what engages today’s youth. With this knowledge, incorporating social media use in classrooms can create a platform for more engaging, relevant, and culturally diverse learning environments. It is important to investigate this parallel to understand the bridge between social media and technology in the classroom and how effective social media use can be in facilitating student engagement and academic success. Ultimately, both students and teachers are beginning to transform how they perceive the role of social media in academics. Although personal blogging, posting, and networking might be the top priority of students, harnessing the immense reach of technology for academic purposes might be a close second (Owens, 2014). Teachers are beginning to establish the urgency for this new type of social media usage, and are starting to encourage the excitement, creativity, and passion of their students.
to drive it forward. Because of this compelling information, investigation is needed to review and analyze the mechanics of this globally diverse technological advancement in education.

In my opinion, student engagement occurs when students are actively engaged in their learning. When students are processing and retaining knowledge and using higher order thinking skills, a higher level of engagement and learning is taking place. In connection, if students are actively engaged using social media in classroom, students have a greater chance of excelling. When instructors plan and incorporate learning activities that promote active engagement, they are strengthening and supporting students’ acquisition of knowledge, maintaining student interest and focus, and making learning relevant and engaging for all learners (Lorain, 2010).

Social media as described by Nations (2015) is a social instrument of communication. Social media can be considered a two-way street as it pertains to obtaining information. In traditional forms of media like a newspaper, information can only be received. Social media on the other hand, cannot only be received, but can allow for responding, sharing, and collaborating. Social media can range to be a broad spectrum of media outlets: social bookmarking, social networking, social news, social photo and video sharing, and wikis are all examples of social media. This understanding is very important in justifying the use of social media in educational institutions.

Lastly, social media use in classrooms can help to facilitate student engagement by allowing an active method for students to collaborate, share, and learn using readily available technologies and applications students are already apt to use. Combining the knowledge of how student engagement is perceived, and the endless possibilities of learning and engaging through social media all work together to provide justification of the essential necessity for this study.

Implementing new strategies to increase student engagement is a common theme in many classrooms and educational institutions in the 21st century. Efficient and effective methods to
enhance an educational experience and maximizing student learning and engagement are current themes in education today. Because of this, social media use has caused an interest of schools, colleges, and universities to provide higher learning opportunities for student growth and engagement through social networking. Studies show that learning institutions can create a higher level of student engagement by offering diverse programs and active learning opportunities. There have been several studies that have found a relationship between technology use and student engagement. Based on the results of such studies, information pertaining to the correlation of student engagement and social media has surfaced (Junco, Heibergert, & Loken (2010).

In a review of literature, research shows that social media provides educators with the opportunity to connect with students in way that continues to trigger discussion and contemplation within the classroom setting. The use of social media encourages students to interact with one another and may increase engagement and interest in the course content (Abe, P., & Jordan, N. 2013).

References


Learning for Life
LaTeesha Binder

At the 2015 Mid-South Reading and Writing Conference, I heard award-winning author Jacqueline Woodson say that reading is a window into a world that students might otherwise miss, and that books allow them to see themselves on the page. I agree with this statement because as a child, I always loved reading books because they allowed me to go to places that I would never have been able to go, and I could read stories about people that faced some of the same situations that I faced. As a result, I saw reading as an integral part of life. However, many students never make that connection; they do not see the importance of reading, and they definitely do not have an interest in reading for pleasure. As an educator, it has been my desire to help students develop a love for reading by starting a student-led book club. A student-led book club is a dynamic way to promote literacy, life-long learning, and personal well-being while encouraging students to read for pleasure.

A student-led book club will promote literacy. According to Fullan (2007), literacy is not just about reading words on the page; it includes comprehension and the skill and joy of being a literate person in a knowledge society. A student-led reading club will encourage students to read more, and hopefully, help students improve their vocabulary, communication skills, comprehension skills, critical thinking skills, and writing skills. A student-led book club, provided that it goes through the entire change process, can bridge the gap for some students as they transition from high school to college if they develop a habit of reading for pleasure. According to Trelease (2013), as students go on to college many are failing or dropping out because they cannot read well enough to do the assigned work. These student leaders, because they are avid readers, will also have access to more books, and they may find it easier to understand more difficult texts, which might increase their reading comprehension skills and help them with college level reading and writing.

A student-led book club, will also promote literacy and life-long learning. By allowing students to participate in various book club activities, such as book talks and book displays, they can share their love of reading with other students, and as they share this information, they will
promote literacy. These types of activities are designed to help them develop a love for reading, to understand that reading is a key component in all subjects, and that it is essential to life and personal growth. Reading is the heart of education. The knowledge of almost every subject in school flows from reading (Trelease, 2013). As the students read various books, they will become knowledgeable about different subjects, and they will take that new knowledge back to their classrooms because students who read widely and frequently are higher achievers than students who read rarely and narrowly (Guthrie, 2008). As a result, they will have a wealth of knowledge to draw from as they explore different subjects through book club reading assignments.

A student–led book club will also help students in the area of well-being because the book studies will help them to become globally aware as they deal with themes, cultural issues, and social issues within the text. They will also be able to express their feelings about themes discussed in the text, and relate them to their personal lives through book discussions. This type of club will also help students build relationships with other interesting people as they meet to talk and discuss literature. The student–led book club will also help students to improve communication and public speaking skills because they will be able to learn how to communicate with others during discussions. Some will gain skills as they take turns facilitating the book discussions, and others will enhance their skills through book talks.

The benefits of a student–led book club are numerous, and it is great way to promote literacy, lifelong learning, and personal well being while encouraging students to read more. As we all try to make sense of our world we should encourage our students to be avid readers because as Kofi Annan, the former Secretary-General of the United Nations says, “Literacy unlocks the door to learning throughout life.”

References
The Case for Educating the Whole Child

Jennifer Little

At the very beginning of my teaching career, I was so excited to finally enter the adult world and to have an actual career. When I first stepped inside of the classroom, I thought about the fact that I would be impacting the academic lives of students. Even though I was trying to survive my first few years and rely heavily on textbooks, manuals and whatever else my coworkers strongly encouraged or told me to do, I wanted to make a difference. I tell people that teaching in my 1st school was a culture shock for me. I taught in the system that was primarily composed of one race and one socioeconomic status. What I was now seeing as a teacher was vastly different from what I experienced as a student. Once I grew out of my naivety, I began to realize that students must be taught more than just Reading, Math, Science, and Social Studies. Neil Noddings states in “What Does It Mean to Educate the Whole Child?” that “even when educators recognize that students are whole persons, the temptation arises to describe the whole in terms of collective parts and to make sure that every aspect, part, or attribute is somehow “covered” in the curriculum.” As we begin to make strides toward these changes, this temptation will lessen.

According to the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, "brain science tells us that the more faculties, the more parts of the child’s brain we can engage, the more likely material will be retained and truly internalized." They strive to support policies and practices that prioritize the following:

1. Each student enters school healthy and learns about and practices a healthy lifestyle.

2. Each student learns in an environment that is physically and emotionally safe for students and adults.

3. Each student is actively engaged in learning and is connected to the school and broader community.
4. Each student has access to personalized learning and is supported by qualified caring adult.

5. Each student is challenged academically and prepare for success in college or further study and for employment and participation in the global environment.

Teachers encountered students on a regular basis who are hungry when they arrive to school especially if they awoke late in order to take advantage of breakfast. The other side of that is that today there are an increasing number of students with health problems due to illnesses, poor eating habits, lack of physical activity, etc. Others have severe mental or emotional disabilities in which a counselor may be of help. I believe that if schools counselors cannot efficiently do their job then there needs to be agencies in place in order to service students. Students need to be taught social skills in order to relate properly to people and how to handle with challenges experienced in relationship with others. Creatively and artistically, students need an outlet. Sometimes they who may be the best academically but they can feel successful in other ways. They can have some glimmer of hope. It has been commonly believed that if there are budget cuts then the arts programs are immediately effected. During junior high school, I didn't realize how crucial was to my holistic development until I began teaching.

Sean Slade states in the article “Taking a Stand for ‘the Whole Child’ Approach to School Reform” that “the true measure of student success is much more than a test score, and ensuring that young people achieve in and out of school requires support well beyond effective academic instruction. The demands of the 21st century require a new approach to education to fully prepare our nation’s youth for college, career, and citizenship.” It is time for school districts to realize that we are preparing students for the future and not for a test. We must act now to in educating the whole child!
References


“From Memorization to Mastery: the Goal of Education”

Terry Harbison

When choosing an electrician to work on a house a person does not just want to choose someone who simply knows some information about being an electrician. The person choosing an electrician wants a master electrician. If a person needs to have brain surgery that person is not going to simply choose any type of doctor. That person needing surgery wants to choose a master brain surgeon to perform the surgery. Whenever someone is required to perform a task, whether it be rewiring a house or rewiring a brain, most people want a person who is a master in that particular field. In education, however, the end goal is often times designed to determine whether or not a person has memorized material. The end goal of education should be to create students and graduates who are able to master a variety of subjects instead of students and graduates who just randomly spout out memorized facts.

Mastery of any subject or any skill requires constant exposure to, and experience with, that skill. Typically in education educators give tests, while at the same time decrying the use of standardized tests that simply ask students to memorize and regurgitate information. While these tests are obviously much easier to grade, many times these same tests are not challenging to the students, and these tests do not even do a great job of assessing the students’ intelligence or their achievement.

For a student to demonstrate mastery of a subject he or she must demonstrate the knowledge, or content, of a topic as well the skills to apply that knowledge in a variety of settings which will then create a “cycle of learning” (Dougherty 10). With the
majority of testing that has occurred in education, the students are asked to repeat material that has been memorized whether it be vocabulary words, dates, or parts of the skeleton. While there are times when memorization may be necessary to move on with a topic or initially introduce a topic or concept, for instance in science one has to memorize the muscles or skeletal bones before one can move on to higher complex learning, the challenge is how to either turn that memorization into some type of activity the requires mastery or to have assignments that allow the students to demonstrate mastery after the initial memorization phase has occurred.

Instead of just memorizing and labeling bones or muscles on a test the student should have to explain which bones or muscles work together, how they work together, or why certain muscles are thicker or thinner. The types of assignments that force the student to work in more synthesis and analysis will lead to the student mastering a subject or a skill instead of just memorizing the information for a short time to get through a test. This type of performance based assessment would be more effective in truly assessing student knowledge, and this type of assessment would better prepare the student for the work environment where employees are not judged or graded on what they have memorized (Badgett loc 1836). Employees are judged based on how they perform. Assessing students in this real world format would also lend more credence to the assessments. While future employees may have to pass a basic written aptitude test the real measure of an employee’s worth comes from his or her day in and day out performance which would require both content knowledge as well as the skill to apply that knowledge. The skill to apply that knowledge over long periods of time is only made manifest through mastery of a subject or trade.
True mastery of a subject also requires testing multiple times but in a variety of manners. As quoted in educational leadership Bloom states that once a student has been taught a skill that student should be tested on the skill using one set of problems, and then the student should be tested again using different problems that would require him or her to demonstrate the same types of skills that were taught initially (Guskey 52). Being able to explain or perform a skill in only one way demonstrates that a student has memorized that one way to do the specific task; however, if a student can come up with multiple approaches to solve a task then that student demonstrates the ability to identify the problem and that the student has a deep enough understanding of the problem to be able to problem-solve a variety of solutions. That students has shown that he or she has truly completed the educational learning cycle previously mentioned by Dougherty.

If educators are to engage the whole student, and for that matter every student, then educators have to move beyond giving tests and tasks that simply allow the student to demonstrate his or her ability to memorize material. Not every student will be able to memorize well or quickly. Educators need to prepare and train students who are problem solvers, and, to be a problem solver, those students have to have mastered a skill or content area that they can then go and use in a variety of possible of situations in order to successfully compete for jobs in the global economy of the 21st century.
