



American
Reading Forum

Yearbook

2013

Ciminelli, Michelle. (2013). Breaking Away from the Script: A Process of Modifications and Support. *American Reading Forum Annual Yearbook* [Online]. Vol. 33.

Breaking Away from the Script: A Process of Modifications and Support

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Abstract

Research on talk in the classroom typically reveals that teachers dominate talk and control talk patterns (e.g., Cazden, 2001, Nystrand, 2006). This uninviting picture occurs even when teachers maintain they are promoting talk. The issue of classroom talk becomes all the more relevant to examine in light of the push for schools to adopt scientifically-based reading programs, which tend to be scripted in nature. This qualitative study examined nine elementary school teachers' decision making processes in literacy instruction while using a mandated, scripted program. Through open, axial, and selective coding, data revealed the participants were concerned that the scripted program did not meet the needs of the majority of their students. Adaptations to the scripted program were made possible through reflective practice, a risk-free environment, and support from the principal. The impact of the findings on classroom discourse is discussed as well as implications for administrators and teacher educators.

Breaking Away from the Script: A Process of Modifications and Support

In 1997, Congress commissioned the formation of the National Reading Panel (NRP), a group of 14 individuals whose job it was to determine how children learn best to read and what research says about the best way to teach children to read. Employing “scientifically-based” methods, the NRP produced a lengthy report about what constitutes reading and how best to teach it. Scientifically-based research—that which involved rigorous, systematic and objective procedures—constituted the basis for determining reliable ways to teach reading. The contents of the report have been criticized extensively by both teachers and scholars alike (e.g. Allington, 2002; Cunningham, 2002; Shannon, 2007) due to the overemphasis on isolated skills and minimal emphasis on comprehension and the notion that reading can be taught as a “prescribed, sequential formula” (Garan, 2002, p. 3). However, the NRP report remains a guiding force of federal educational mandates through the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2001.

Based on the findings of the National Reading Panel, President George W. Bush proposed the No Child Left Behind Act to Congress as a comprehensive educational reform. One component of NCLB is an initiative called *Reading First*. Reading First is a state grant program that promotes the use of scientifically-based reading research to improve reading instruction for K-3 students and to ensure that all children learn to read well by the end of the third grade. As a grant program, school districts are eligible to apply for federal funding if they adopt “proven” instructional and assessment materials that are “scientifically-based” according to Reading First, NCLB, and the National Reading Panel. Consequently, many school administrators have chosen to adopt “proven” reading programs that are scientifically-based. This has resulted in drastic changes in curriculum, including an increase in constrained curriculums (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2006).

Many of the scientifically-based reading programs are designed as one-size-fits-all solutions to reading instruction, tend to be narrow in focus, and are teacher-centered rather than student-centered, not allowing for teacher flexibility (Groves, 2002; Miller, 2002). Such controls restrict teacher agency, reducing both feelings of efficacy and teacher effectiveness (Valli & Buese, 2007). Teachers often described feeling constrained by scripted, “teacher-proof” reading programs (Brint & Teele, 2008). This lack of agency diminishes the role of teachers as professionals, whereby teachers are rarely trusted to make instructional decisions based on student needs, but rather are forced to rely on set reading programs and scripts (Haberman, 2007; McGill-Franzen, 2005). This may also result in a reduction of teachers’ desire to improve their knowledge of reading, instruction, and student needs (Shannon, 1987). Additionally, Calkins (2001) argued that when teaching reading is externally controlled, teachers simply feel that they are managing someone else’s program. These restrictive programs undermine the “funds of knowledge” (Moll, 1994, p. 184) that teachers come into the classroom with, and diminish the intuitiveness of teachers.

Research on talk in the classroom typically reveals that teachers dominate talk and control talk patterns (e.g., Cazden, 1988, Nystrand, 2006). This uninviting picture is often perpetuated and accentuated with the adoption of scientifically-based reading programs, which tend to be scripted in nature. This study examined the decision making processes of teachers who were required to use a scripted instructional program. Three research questions guided the study:

1. What decisions do teachers make about using a mandated, scripted instructional program across a school year, and how do these educators describe that decision-making process?
2. What changes, if any, occur with instruction across the school year?
3. What factors influence teachers' decision-making processes across the school year?

Theoretical Perspectives

Social constructivist theory and decision making theories guided this qualitative study. Through social constructivist theories (Vygotsky, 1978; Rogoff, 1990), we understand that learning occurs within a social context. This theory of learning and development emphasizes the social and contextual aspects of learning and the dynamic nature of cognitive processes as they occur within culturally mediated social activity. Social constructivism is a theory that focuses on the learner and the social processes that affect learning and development (Marin, Benarroch, & Gomez, 2000; Adams, 2006).

Through a social constructivist lens, the information and multiple strategies used to arrive at decisions emanate from the social and cultural experiences of the individual. Proposed by Simon (1955, 1979), bounded rationality takes into consideration the notion that due to time constraints and cognitive limitations it is impossible for humans to consider all existing decision outcomes and make complete and purely rational choices. The suggestion is that humans function rationally within practical boundaries and make choices that are good enough to suit their needs, but are not necessarily optimal choices. The term Simon used to describe this phenomenon is "satisficing" which is a blend of *sufficing* and *satisfying* (Gigerenzer & Goldstein, 1996). When faced with complexity and uncertainty, the satisficing criterion allows decision makers to find a solution that is "good enough" (Simon, 1979, p.3) among all known dimensions. These two theoretical perspectives guided the inquiry into teachers' decision-making processes while using a mandated, scripted instructional program.

Method

This qualitative study is based upon a larger data set collected during the course of a school year. The larger data set consisted of quarterly interviews and observations of nine teachers in a rural elementary school. Nineteen hours of classroom talk and sixteen hours of interview time was recorded. Data related to instructional time with the scripted program, which comprised approximately half of all data, was examined for this study.

Setting

This study was conducted over a ten month period during the 2009 – 2010 school year at Wood Acre Elementary School (all names are pseudonyms). Wood Acre was located in a rural community in the northeastern United States. As the only elementary school in the district, the school had approximately 600 students enrolled in grades pre-kindergarten through four. The average class size was 22 students.

Regarding language arts curriculum materials, the school just began implementing a new reading instructional program called Foundations for grades K through 3 as part of their language arts block. As a supplemental phonics program, Foundations was designed for daily, 30-minute lessons. All K through 3 teachers were required to teach this as part of their 90-minute language arts block. Similar to Foundations, components of the Wilson Reading System for phonics instruction was implemented in grade four during the year of this study.

Participants

The participants included nine teachers as well as the school principal (see Table 1). My intent was to include teachers that represented various years of experience and grade levels. Ultimately, nine teachers agreed to participate, and all completed the entire ten month study. Participants represented grade levels kindergarten through four, as well as various years of experience. The most experienced teacher had been teaching forty-two years, while the newest teacher had been employed three years. The principal had been working at the school for eight years.

Table 1

Description of Participants

Name	Grade/Position	Years of Experience
Donna	K	20
Maria	1; Reading Recovery	10
Claire	1; Reading Recovery	9
Becca	2	26
Karen	K-4; Special Ed	27
Stephanie	K-4; Reading Specialist	42
Allison	3	3
Sherri	3	14
Janine	4	9
Mr. Ryan	Principal	8

Data Sources

A number of data sources were collected throughout the study period. These data consisted of interviews with the principal, interviews and field notes from observations with each teacher, and additional artifacts related to reading programs and instructional practices. Participants were observed while teaching the Foundations lessons, and were interviewed about their instructional methods. Observations and interviews were audiotaped for accuracy of analysis.

Interviews. Four interviews per participant occurred throughout the school year, one per marking period, in approximately September, November, February, and May. The purpose of these interviews was to discover what decisions teachers had made in the teaching of reading, and how they came to make such choices. Interviews were conducted periodically during the

school year to determine if teachers' decisions changed over the course of the year, and if so, how and why. The principal was also interviewed four times throughout the school year. The purpose of these interviews was to explore how and why the various reading programs were implemented in the school, and the principal's perceptions of the implementation of the reading programs.

Field notes. Field notes were recorded during reading instruction observations, focusing on the instructional practices of teachers. Four observations were conducted per teacher participant. Similar to the interviews, the observations occurred over the course of the school year, approximately once per marking period in September, November, February, and May. Primarily, the observations served to support, refute, and triangulate data gathered from the interviews. Additionally, observations were used to determine if a teacher's instruction changed over the course of the school year, and if so, how.

Artifacts. Additional artifacts such as curriculum materials (e.g., teacher lesson plans, reading plan guides, materials distributed to children, professional development materials, etc.) supplemented the interviews and observations to add depth and understanding to instructional methods, decisions, and materials used by teachers.

Data Analysis

All data related to the Foundations program were bracketed and extracted from the larger data set. Data were examined for themes using open, axial, and selective coding methods (Creswell, 2007). Audio files of interviews and observations were reviewed multiple times for accuracy of analysis. Several themes emerged regarding teachers' processes of use of the Foundations program. These themes included concern with scripted teaching, adapting instruction, and supports for modifying the scripted program. Data were revisited for evidence of additional support of these themes.

Findings

Data revealed the participants were concerned that the scripted program did not meet the needs of the majority of their students. As such, teachers sought to modify the implementation of the Foundations lessons. Adaptations to the scripted program were made possible through reflective practice, a risk-free environment, and support from the principal.

Concern with Scripted Teaching

All participants expressed frustration with the newly mandated program, primarily because of its scripted nature. Karen noted, "It's a scripted program" and did not meet the needs of most of her students. Speaking about the negative effects on the students, Cindy uttered her frustration noting, "It's like drug abuse, being a scripted program." Maria acknowledged the need for a program to teach phonemic awareness, but noted that the Foundations program was extremely cumbersome:

Foundations is intensive phonemic awareness. We need a vehicle for that. A bicycle would have worked, a small little car, even a golf cart. But they got us all mastodons. We have

now this huge Foundations vehicle which is going to consume our time, consume our energy. It's not an efficient vehicle for this.

In our first interview in September, Mr. Ryan, the principal, expressed his concern with Foundations being a scripted program. Indeed, the Wilson website states that the program “provides an organized, sequential system with *extensive controlled text* to help teachers implement a multisensory structured language program” [emphasis added]. Yet, Mr. Ryan's hopes for teacher manipulation of the script were evident as he stated in the first interview,

It's a new program, obviously, and it's a scripted program. And this is what I also tell teachers, you know, anything that's scripted including a core curriculum program like you see, there's a script to it. You know there are those that are going to sit and read the script verbatim. And then there are those that are going to do it verbatim for the first few times and get a feel for it and then you're going to start to not follow the script but you're going to manipulate the script so it becomes good teaching.

A careful examination of this quote revealed that Mr. Ryan believed that scripted curriculums do not necessarily provide good instruction, as he stated, “manipulate the script so it becomes good teaching.” Therefore, he indicated he wanted teachers to make changes to the scripted program to benefit students. Even so, teachers discussed their frustrations with staying on script because they thought it was the correct thing to do to maintain the fidelity of the program. For example, Stephanie, the Reading Specialist, stated,

It is supposed to be for the, what is it...fidelity that it be done according to the manual? Now I'm sure I'm off script. I'm working very hard to get close to script and that is a problem not only with me but with other people that I have spoken with. At first I thought I was the only one who's having trouble with getting on the script properly. And there are others that are having a problem getting, you know, exactly to the script.

Janine, a fourth grade teacher, expressed that many teachers were trying to stay with the script as a result of trying to learn the new program. She anticipated that changes would be made once teachers were more familiar with Foundations:

I heard in the meeting yesterday that some people want to be very structured as far as, since this is the first year, that they want to do it to the program. And then once they have run through it for a year, then use the flexibility after that...but until they know the program really well.

The main concern teachers cited about the new program was the lack of flexibility they had while following a scripted program. The data revealed the primary pattern of discourse during the scripted lessons as one of teacher direction or initiation followed by student response. In turn, the teacher would begin with another direction, and the pattern would ensue. There was minimal evidence of student generated questions, which would have had the potential for inviting learning and teaching (Dillon, 1986). In general, lessons conducted with the scripted programs followed the typical pattern of formulaic and choppy student talk in the classroom (Cazden, 2001). Within this pattern of discourse, there was little possibility for teachers to respond in a manner contingent on students' utterances (Boyd & Rubin, 2006; Smith and Higgins, 2006).

An example of this formulaic talk can be seen during a letter formation lesson in Donna's kindergarten class in December. Each child in the room has a personal white board with four pictures and lines on it (see Figure 1). Donna was walking around the room with the Foundations teacher's manual in hand.

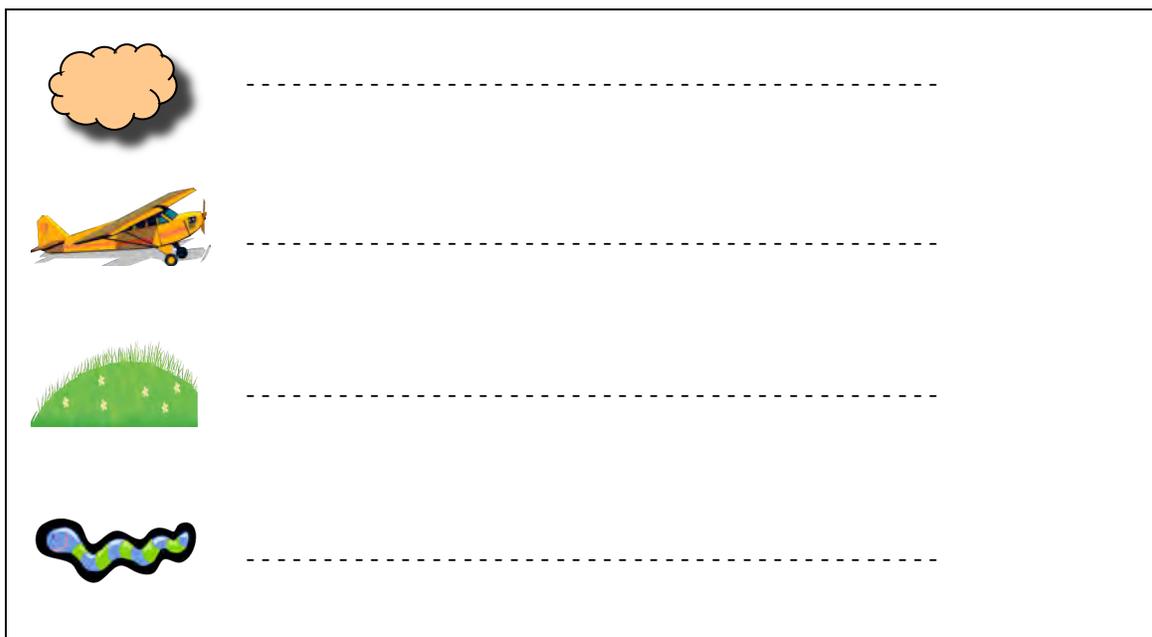


Figure 1. Depiction of Foundations Writing Tablet in Donna's class

Donna: Please put your marker on the sky line. Please put your marker on the sky line.

Student 1: Sky line?

Donna: Straight line *down* to the grass line. Stop at the grass line. Pick up your marker, go up to the...[glances at teacher's manual]...plane line...

Student 2: ...and cross.

Donna: ...and cross. Please tell me the letter you just wrote.

Students: [shouting] T!

Several talk incidences are noteworthy in the above example. First, when a student asked a question (Sky line?), the request was ignored by the teacher. Second, Donna's attention was focused on the teacher's manual throughout most of the lesson. She often glanced at it and read verbatim from the text. Finally, we see one student anticipated the next direction, saying it out

loud before the teacher does. It appears this lesson has occurred before, and the student knows what is coming next, due to the repetitive nature of the program.

Another example of the choppy discourse evident with this scripted program was seen in Becca's second grade class during a vowel lesson. Becca was sitting at the front of the classroom next to a chart with vowels and corresponding pictures. She pronounced the vowel, the word, and the vowel sound. The students then parroted back the phrase.

Teacher: Y, cry, /i/

Students: Y, cry, /i/

Teacher: Y, baby, /e/

Students: Y, baby, /e/

Teacher: I, hi, /i/

Students: I, hi, /i/

Teacher: O, no, /o/

Students: O, no, /o/

Teacher: U, blue, [hesitates] /oo/

Students: U, blue, [hesitantly] /oo/

Teacher: Those U's are so tricky! U, pupil, /u/

Students: U, pupil, /u/

This lesson continued in the same manner for a total of five minutes, with Becca reading from the Foundations teacher's manual, and the students repeating her sounds and words. This transcript provides evidence that this "interaction" was merely an echoing of the teacher. Not only was the sound repeated, but the inflections, tone and hesitations were mimicked exactly as the teacher had said them.

While above discourse patterns may provide the learner with the benefit of practicing letter formation or verbalizing vowel sounds, this type of instruction does not promote deeper understanding. If we consider that meaning making occurs through dialogic interactions (Bakhtin, 1981), we see that there is little possibility of understanding occurring in the above types of exchanges because there is no responsiveness between listener and speaker. As Wertsch (1991) noted, Bakhtin viewed meaning making "as an active process rather than as a static entity. He insisted at many points that meaning can come into existence only when two or more voices come into contact: when the voice of the listener responds to the voice of the speaker" (p. 52). While the website states that these exchanges are "very interactive," this may only be true in that there is turn taking occurring between students and teachers; yet this is not the same as truly learning through interaction. Through a social constructivist perspective, learning is a social process; one that is "created through the process of social exchange" (Au, 1998, p. 299). This process has to be responsive to be meaningful (Bakhtin, 1981), which is not what was evident in many of the exchanges between teacher and student when the Foundations manual was followed. Therefore, unless teachers chose to supplement the Foundations program by engaging students in additional dialogue about letter sounds, phonics, writing, or spelling, the instruction followed a teacher/student parroting interaction, as indicated above.

After seeing such examples, one may ask, why did the teachers follow such scripts, especially since they each voiced concern over the poor instruction that was being provided? The

data provided several reasons for this. First, teachers were trying to become familiar with the new program. As Maria noted, “It’s huge verbiage.” Teachers were literally walking around the classrooms with the teacher’s manuals so they could become familiar with the lingo of the program. A second reason was to maintain the fidelity of the program. The teachers were told that if they followed the program as designed, their students would succeed. A third reason for following the script was the perception that the administration expected it to be followed verbatim. Fourth, while participants realized this instructional practice was not necessarily the best, they were making decisions that were “good enough” given the constraints of their situation. Simon (1955, 1979) referred to this as “satisficing.”

In spite of these reasons for following the script, participants described the angst they felt about it. Becca noted, “It’s stressful, very stressful.” Becca also indicated her annoyance with the edict, describing her language arts instruction as starting “with Foundations, and that was a directive, so that wasn’t a choice.” Sherri commented, “Most of the teachers here hate it [the new program].” Claire described the conflicting feelings she had about the program, stating, “I will always do what I’ve been asked to do. Obviously, they’re my bosses. But how can I fit that in with my philosophy and my beliefs that I know is the best practice for students?”

The above feelings emerged very quickly within the first months of using the new program, and continued until mid-year. By the third round of observations and interviews, which occurred in January and February, there was a notable change in the manner of instruction with Foundations and in the participants’ attitudes about using it. Claire described the change like this:

Originally we thought it was verbatim and um, with all of the issues that I had found with it, I went right to my principal and said, ‘These are the issues I have. I’m not trying to be insubordinate but these are the changes I’ve made.’ And he’s fine with that and said, ‘Well, why isn’t everyone else doing that?’ I said, ‘Because you told us to do this program. People are going to do it verbatim.’ So, it was kind of one of those things that I finally got to the point, ‘cause it was right after Christmas when I had gone to him and said ‘Listen’...and I had told him flat out, ‘I couldn’t have come to you in September because I was so angry, you know.’

Interestingly, Karen was the only participant to state that they did not have to use the program verbatim, stating, “none of us have been told [to use the program] verbatim.” However, the majority of the remainder of the participants felt they needed to do so.

Breaking Away from the Script – Adapting Instruction

While all teachers were required to use the new program, Mr. Ryan indicated that teachers had autonomy in *how* to implement Foundations, and they could choose how to integrate parts of it into their existing instructional methods for the teaching of reading. Mr. Ryan mentioned he gave teachers agency in the hopes they would make choices that benefited the students in their own classrooms. He acknowledged that Foundations was just one component of the reading curriculum:

I don't think it's a magic pill. I don't think it's a magic dust... I just think it's a starting point...now you can start to build off that, and what it looks like now may be nothing what it looks like in the future but we can at least say it started there.

Mr. Ryan's statement of, "what it looks like now may be nothing what it looks like in the future" indicated his recognition that there would be a process of change and modifications as teachers became accustomed to the new program. In our third interview, which occurred mid-way through the school year, Mr. Ryan described "unrest" among teachers, which prompted the organization of a meeting to address concerns with the scripted nature of Foundations. In late January, a group of teachers invited the principal to attend a scheduled meeting so he could hear their concerns. Mr. Ryan recalled the events in great detail:

Well, what ended up happening was there was quite a bit of uneasiness and unrest amongst a large group of teachers. Well, they called a meeting and they invited me to go to hear their issues. So I did. And what was interesting to me right off the bat was that their perceptions of what I was expecting them to do and what I intended for them to do were totally different. Their expectations were that they thought that I wanted them to go verbatim all the way through. What I wanted them to do was to follow the program but use their autonomy that if they, for example, they use the dry erase board the day before and the kids really seemed to get it, and the program called for them to do the dry erase boards that day, they had the autonomy not to do that; to do the magnetic boards, or to do something else or to follow another component of the program. And they weren't doing that. They were just continuing to plug along and becoming very frustrated because they were not feeling as if they could make that change. Well, that's not what I had meant. You can change it. Just make sure you follow the program. So they were hearing one thing and I meant something different.

So even though Mr. Ryan was saying he did not intend for teachers to use the program verbatim, teachers still felt the need to do so. This meeting with the principal appeared to be a turning point for teachers as they began to make more adjustments to how they implemented the program. Several months later, Mr. Ryan indicated he saw encouraging results from this meeting with teachers, commenting, "I would like to say that the results of that conversation seem to have been positive." These "positive" results were most evident in teachers' attitudes about the program, timing and focus, and pacing of instruction. Indeed, teachers did go through a process of modifications throughout the school year, taking into consideration the needs of their students.

Attitude. There appeared to be a shift from a view of Foundations as being all-consuming to being just a small piece of the language arts puzzle. For example, Donna stated this clearly, shrugging her shoulders, "You know to me it's like such a little part of it. Like in some classrooms you know, it's become this big huge end all be all. But for me it's just that little part of it. So I think it's fine for kindergarten." Similarly, Karen described how she saw the process of modifications occurring with other teachers. She described, "Well, they weren't [flexible] in the beginning, but now they're...I guess I was one of the ones that always said, do what you feel your kids need. You don't have to do every piece of it. You don't have to say, you know, everything that's scripted for you. You know your kids. Do what you think is, what you know they need. So, it's a supplement." During her third interview, Donna also described "not feeling so negative towards it [Foundations]."

Timing and focus. Foundations was designed for a 30 minute block of time. Teachers described their frustration with lessons taking 45 minutes or longer to implement. As the year progressed, several participants described how they made the decision to limit this block of instruction to 30 minutes, whether or not all components of each lesson had been addressed. For example, Becca described how she changed her timing of the lessons from over 45 minutes to 30 minutes, stating, “Now I can say, ‘Okay, get up, put away, let’s go.’”

In many cases, the decision to restrict each lesson to 30 minutes necessitated picking and choosing among various options for any particular lesson. Claire described how this decision reduced her anxiety about not covering all parts of the lesson, commenting, “I have changed the Foundations, the word work, um, letters just a bit. I’m not...I follow the program but I’m not doing every single component every day...and with that, I don’t feel the stress and the angst over it.” Likewise, Donna, described how this looked over the course of a week, and how this allowed her to spend additional time “with actual reading” with her students:

I start out by the book, and the lessons are set up for a week at a time. So, on Monday I’m by the book. Tuesday, seeing what else they still need. By Wednesday, I don’t feel like I have to do every single thing the book says. If they got it, I move on. Because I really, especially this time of year, I want to have more time back here at the reading table with actual reading. That’s [Foundations] just a little building block of it.

Pacing. Many participants expressed the changes made to pacing with the Foundations lessons. Janine described her perspective on the modifications to pacing of lessons, stating,

That [Foundations] has to be presented this way. But, if it says you have to spend 45 minutes on this lesson, but your kids are not starting down here [gesturing with hand down to the ground]...your kids are beyond that. You don’t have to spend 45 minutes doing this primary lesson.

Additionally, Karen described how she made changes, particularly in the pacing of the program. She stated,

I do it a little bit differently...it’s scripted. I don’t do it exactly as it says because sometimes it moves a little too quickly for these kids so that sometimes I key it back a little bit. I add some other activities to make sure they’ve got a concept...I mean we work really hard on the trick words, which are the sight words, every day. The program doesn’t ask you to do those [everyday]. So, it’s scripted, but I tweak it to be what’s appropriate for these guys.”

Taken as a whole, these modifications and changes that participants made to the Foundations program are indicative of the adaptive nature of decision-making (Payne, Bettman, & Johnson, 1993). Reflecting on this process of learning to teach with a new program, Mr. Ryan anticipated a greater comfort level with the program with Foundations for the next school year. He stated, “I think there will be...again, with anything new, there will be a comfort level. They already know what to expect. So, I think it’ll be a little bit easier and move a little smoother.”

In the following example, we see a similar letter formation lesson as presented earlier in this paper. This lesson occurred in Donna’s kindergarten class in the month of March. Donna,

the kindergarten teacher, has asked the students to take out their writing materials. Before she begins the lesson, she encourages students to draw on their tablets. Throughout this lesson, Donna walked around the room, without the Foundations teacher's manual.

Donna: You have one minute to draw whatever you want. You can write your name on there, you can color in those clouds...color in the grass...

[Students draw pictures including one of the teacher, "love notes," decorations, spaghetti and meatballs, and more. During this time, Donna was walking around the room engaging students in conversations about their pictures and writings.]

Donna: Okay, ready? Here we go. Please put your marker on...the plane line. Straight line *down* to the grass line. Trace back up – don't pick up your marker! Trace back up, up, up...aim to the plane line...and curve around back down to the grass line...and...don't pick up your marker! Trace back up, aim towards the plane line...make *another* hump...down to the grass line. What's the letter?

Students: [shouting] M!

Donna: Tell me...Whoa – freeze – tell me the picture that goes with that.

Students: [some students glance at the letter/picture chart on the wall] Man!

Donna: I want to make sure you said the right letter. M. You should have an M...Boys and girls, make another M next to that please.

[Donna observing as students are working]

Student 1: I did another M! Can I do another M?

Donna: Just two please. Now you just wrote the name of my favorite candy. Whadja just write?

Student 2: Man!

Student 3: Marshmallow!

Student 4: M!

Donna: You wrote it right there – M and M. M and M, like the candy!

Students: Oh! M and M's!

Donna: Now take a good look at your paper, because if you're shopping over the weekend, feel free to buy me a bag of my favorite candy!

It is critical to note the differences between the two examples of letter formation lessons—one in which the script is followed verbatim and one in which the teacher infused additional comments. In the first example, the teacher was proceeding through the lesson regardless of student comments and responses. In the second lesson, the teacher was engaging students in conversation and making real-world connections with the instructional material. This happens in two specific ways in the above "M and M" lesson. First, Donna begins the Foundations lesson with one minute of free drawing. During this time, students are applying their knowledge of symbols and letters and are speaking with each other and the teacher about their products. There is no evaluative feedback during this time. As suggested by Smith and Higgins (2006), classroom talk needs to be conversational and allow for teachers to react with exclamations and personal responses, which we see evidence of in this data. Secondly, in the above "M and M" lesson, Donna extends the lesson by helping students make real-world connections to the material they are learning. She does not merely evaluate the outcome but encourages students to apply that knowledge. Rather than just forming the letter "M" and remembering it for the sake of knowing it, Donna's use of purposeful questions has the potential to lead to relevance and depth

of understanding (Wilkinson, 1970). This is an example of the teacher scaffolding understanding, which is an effective way of using traditional teacher questioning (Boyd & Rubin, 2006), and is often absent from scripted programs. What counts as knowledge is shaped by the questions teachers ask (Nystrand, 2006). Furthermore, questions which lead to stimulating thought may lead to internalization of new knowledge (Dillon, 1982). As such, this example of the adapted lesson is qualitatively different from the previous scripted lesson.

Regarding classroom discourse, the contingently responsive teaching in this second example is more effective in promoting student talk than mere recitation or question and answer as seen in the first example (Boyd & Rubin, 2002). Student talk is essential for learning, inquiry, collaboration, and assimilating knowledge. Discourse, which engages students in critical thinking and discussions, helps to create more opportunities for students to engage in higher-level thinking and reasoning (Soter et al., 2008). It is imperative for teachers to become knowledgeable in strategies to improve classroom discourse, especially in an era where more and more scripted curriculums which restrict responsive classroom talk are becoming pervasive (Gutierrez, 2000).

Supports for Modifications

Teachers expressed the desire to break away from the script in order to meet student needs. While the program was required for use in each classroom, participants began the process of modifying the script as the year progressed. This was made possible through evidence of reflective practice as well as support from the principal in providing a risk-free environment.

Indications of reflection. Within the process of modifications that teachers engaged in with the Foundations program throughout the year, participants did not specifically acknowledge that they reflected upon their practices to make changes. In fact, only one teacher, Janine, mentioned the word “reflect” during the multiple interviews conducted during the study. She did so as she was talking about considering what changes she may make for next year, forecasting, “I would say probably...but it will still take me, since fourth grade is still new, it’ll still take me to the end of the school year to go back and reflect.” When asked to elaborate on what reflection means to her, Janine replied, “How to do it better and what types of materials that I’m using and if it really worked. Did they learn what they were supposed to be learning? Did they have fun? You know, was it highly motivating for them?” Therefore, in Janine’s response, there are indications of thoughtful action (Dewey, 1933), which may result in changes to her curriculum.

Schon (1983, 1987) made a distinction between reflection-in-action and reflection-on-action. In another example, Allison clearly described the differences between these two types of reflection when she spoke of planning for language arts instruction: “I think off the top of my head because a lot of teaching is spontaneous. You can only plan so much and your plans will only go so far.” Therefore, thinking “off the top of my head” is reflection-in-action, and “your plans” is indicative of reflection-on-action.

Even though these are the only explicit references to the word “reflection,” careful analysis of the data indicated that participants were continually engaged in reflective practice while adjusting to teaching with Foundations. Dewey (1933) noted that reflection begins when

teachers experience a conflict or difficulty. Indeed, there was a plethora of evidence pointing towards the conflicts and difficulties teachers experienced with Foundations, as reported previously. When these difficulties arose, participants described how they chose to “face the situation” (Dewey, 1933, p. 102) rather than dodge it or rise above it (Dewey, 1933). In many cases, in support of social constructivist theories, teachers relied upon each other for support and were active learners (Mallory & New, 1994) in discovering how to fit the Foundations program into their existing language arts curriculum. If we consider the influences on decision-making, it is imperative to examine the overall social context of this learning environment. One factor that surfaced from the data was the fear of risk taking, and the risk-free environment of the school.

A risk-free environment. Moroye and Uhrmacher (2009) stated, “Risk taking refers to venturing into the unknown” (p. 85). In the current study, we see evidence of the unknown occurring as teachers faced the mandate of adopting a scripted program. Research indicates that teachers are more likely to engage in greater innovative efforts and change their classroom practices when they perceive that experimentation is encouraged and anticipated (Berman & McLaughlin, 1977; Little, 1982). Additionally, a climate of experimentation and risk taking provide empowering opportunities for teachers to shape the educational environment (Lightfoot, 1986).

Mr. Ryan mentioned his attempts to establish a risk-free environment for his faculty. He explained how this was one of his goals since the time he became principal, stating, “One of the things that I have tried to do since I’ve been in this building is to create an environment where people can take a risk and not feel as if they’re going to be reprimanded or in some way, shape or form, yelled at...for their mistake.” Recalling the meeting that teachers organized to discuss their concerns with Foundations, Mr. Ryan expressed his disappointment that teachers thought they would get in trouble for making adaptations to the program:

I go back to the meeting that we had. You know there was this idea that if they didn’t do it exactly the way that it was written that there would be ramifications. Well, okay, what ramifications did you see that would cause you to believe that there would be ramifications? Did anybody get written up? You know, was I standing in the room, you know, writing memos to them about what they did or didn’t do?

He reiterated what he perceived to be his non-threatening demeanor again when he recalled how teachers thought they needed to teach the Foundations program verbatim:

There was still this concept in people’s minds that no, it’s got to, if I don’t do it exactly the way it said, I’m gonna get in trouble for it. Well, no. You not saying it verbatim according to the book is not going to be something that I’m going to come in and hammer you about.

Data from participants indicated that teachers did indeed feel like they were free to do what they wanted in their classrooms regarding reading instruction without fear of repercussions. For example, when talking about making changes to the Foundations program, Becca stated, “It’s not the end of all ends and it is something that I don’t think any police are gonna come get me if I don’t do it that day.” Likewise, Maria stated, “No one comes in to see what you’re doing.” However, Janine indicated that there was some accountability as she commented, “As long as [the kids’] scores keep going up and there’s growth and they do well on the tests, the district doesn’t

care what you use.” Therefore, we see an atmosphere in this school where teachers are encouraged to be autonomous and take risks, yet they are held accountable for the progress of their students.

Discussion and Implications

The results of this study have the potential to provide insights into a variety of areas in the field of education, including classroom discourse, administration, and teacher education.

Classroom Discourse

Classroom discourse is essential to consider because it has the potential to enhance reading comprehension instruction and literacy development, and it helps shape student learning (Nystrand, 2006). As the data indicated, the primary pattern of discourse during the Foundations lessons was that of teacher direction or initiation followed by student response. In turn, the teacher would begin with another direction, and the pattern would ensue. There was minimal evidence of student generated questions, which would have had the potential for inviting learning and teaching (Dillon, 1986). Within the pattern of discourse during the Foundations lessons, there was little possibility for teachers to respond in a manner contingent on students’ utterances (Boyd & Rubin, 2006; Smith and Higgins, 2006) unless the teacher broke away from the scripted instructional plan. It was only when a teacher infused her own instructional practices into the Foundations lesson that she was able to estimate “what students know and what they don’t know...steering the discourse in particular directions and exploring alternative interactional trajectories in the course of action” (Lee, 2006). It was at this point that the space for teachable moments occurred as the teacher deemed necessary. Otherwise, the discourse of Foundations was representative of the typically formulaic and choppy student talk in the classroom (Cazden, 2001).

As noted above, each daily Foundations lesson was designed to be presented in a 30 minute time frame. It may seem trivial to consider the discourse that occurs within this short period of time; however, if we consider that a typical school day in the United States is seven hours long, the Foundations lesson accounts for one fourteenth of the daily interaction. More significantly, if the entire language arts block is 90 minutes altogether, one third of this time is lost for the opportunity to make meaning through dialogic interactions (Bakhtin, 1981). Of even greater concern is the impact that a second 30 minute block of time would have on students designated for additional academic intervention services when they receive a “double dose” (according to Stephanie) of this instruction. Therefore, the findings related to classroom discourse during Foundations lessons indicated the need for teachers to have the knowledge of how to adapt the program to make it meaningful by engaging students in authentic dialogue.

Understanding the value of student talk was an area of need that emerged from the data. There was no mention of this type of professional development available to teachers, nor was there any mention of being consciously aware of classroom discourse. According to Soter et al. (2008), discourse which engages students in critical thinking and discussions helps to create more opportunities for students to engage in higher-level thinking and reasoning. It is imperative for teachers to become knowledgeable in strategies to improve classroom discourse, especially in an era where more and more scripted curriculums which restrict responsive classroom talk are becoming pervasive (Gutierrez, 2000).

Implications for Administration

Results from this study provide insights for how administrators may assist teachers in their decision making processes in reading instruction. These insights are applicable under conditions when administrators allow choice in material and instructional methods and/or when particular reading programs are mandated. The implications relate to the climate of the school, choice of programs, and the need for a literacy expert.

School climate. According to Short, Miller-Wood and Johnson (1991), a climate of experimentation, which is essential for change to occur in schools, involves risk taking. Likewise, Barth (1990) noted, “Considerable research suggests that risk taking is strongly associated with learning” (p. 513). Therefore, for teachers to learn and make changes to their instructional practices, they need to feel secure enough to experiment and take risks in their classrooms. We see evidence at Wood Acre that Mr. Ryan intentionally established a risk-free, punitive-free environment. While he mandated the use of Foundations, he did not regularly monitor the implementation of this program, but trusted that teachers would make sound instructional choices.

Interestingly, even within this risk-free atmosphere, teachers were initially hesitant to make changes to the Foundations lessons. This could be due to the hierarchical structure of the principal/teacher relationship—one in which teachers perceived the need to obey authority without question. An explanation for the change in attitude about Foundations among teachers could be attributed to Mr. Ryan’s explicit reassurance during the January group meeting that teachers could modify the program as needed. This affirmation may have allowed teachers to truly believe they were permitted to question what they assumed to be the original mandate of teaching Foundations verbatim. Therefore, administrators may have to actively seek to establish a professional orientation (Tschannen-Moran, 2009) within their school environment, which gives teachers autonomy to use professional judgment in response to the diverse needs of their students (Hoy & Sweetland, 2001).

Choice of reading programs. In an era of increased accountability for teachers, administrators and schools, and in an age when “scientifically based” reading programs are becoming so prevalent, it is imperative that administrators choose new reading programs with caution. Administrators may view such programs as magic bullets to improve student performance, as if “materials can teach students to read” (Shannon, 1987, p. 308). However, one-size-fits-all programs which limit teacher autonomy and effectiveness should be avoided (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2006; Groves, 2002). What works for some students may not be appropriate for all.

Additionally, when considering the adoption of new programs, it is imperative that administrators defer to experts in the appropriate field of education. If a new math program needs to be adopted, seek assistance from math experts within the school; if the music program is being revamped, it would make sense to confer with the music specialists in the school. Likewise, when a reading program is under consideration, the school personnel most versed in literacy should be consulted for advice. This was not the case at Wood Acre. The decision to adopt Foundations was made without the advice from faculty who were experts in literacy. This propels us to the need for literacy experts in the school.

Utilizing literacy experts. Elementary school teachers have the responsibility to be knowledgeable in a multitude of subject areas. While reading is considered a foundational subject, the average teacher receives just two reading courses in their undergraduate preparation (Lyon, 1997). Therefore, this points towards the need for school personnel who have received extensive training in literacy to support the continual learning of colleagues in the school. Ironically, at a time when literacy experts are needed for support, we see a diminishing role of such specialists at Wood Acre.

Implications for Teacher Education

The findings of this study add to the body of knowledge in teacher education in two important ways. First it is imperative that preservice education programs address the multifaceted aspects of literacy, speaking to both content and pedagogy. Second, teachers need to be prepared to understand how educational policies affect programming, and how they can teach effectively in such a system.

Comprehensive literacy. The teaching of literacy is a multifaceted undertaking. There has been an ongoing debate about how best to teach reading that spans well over half a century (Flesch, 1955; Smith, 1965; Snow, Burns, & Griffin, 1998). This debate revolves around the role of phonics instruction in the teaching of reading. On the one hand, scholars believe there should be a heavy emphasis on phonics; on the other hand, there are proponents of meaning-based or whole language approaches to teaching reading. Those who advocate the phonics-based approaches contend that children cannot learn to read without stressing phonics and decoding. Those who support meaning-based approaches argue that the ultimate goal of reading is comprehension, and without comprehension, you end up with children who are word-callers with no understanding of what they have read (Cramer, 2004). Specifically, preservice teachers need to be aware that reading is more than a set of discrete skills as implied by many of the “scientifically based” reading programs.

The position of the International Reading Association (2002) clearly indicates the need for a variety of evidence-based reading instruction that employs effective strategies from both ends of the reading continuum: “There is no single instructional program or method that is effective in teaching all children to read...it is the convergence of evidence from a variety of study designs that is ultimately scientifically convincing” (p. 1). Several scholars refer to such an approach, in which a combination of phonics instruction is imbedded within a meaning-based program, a balanced literacy approach (Cramer, 2004) or a comprehensive approach (Vacca, Vacca, Gove, Burkey, Lenhart, & McKeon, 2009). However, according to Lyon (1997), in preservice teacher education programs, “teachers are frequently presented with a ‘One Size Fits All’ philosophy that emphasizes either a ‘whole language’ or ‘phonics’ orientation to instruction” (p. 8). Therefore, preservice teachers need to be well versed in all aspects of literacy.

Teaching in today’s world. In this study of teacher decision making in reading instruction, we see evidence of what Wills and Sandholtz (2009) referred to as “constrained professionalism” – a condition “in which teachers retain autonomy in classroom practices, but their decisions are significantly circumscribed by contextual pressures and time demands that devalue their professional experience, judgment, and expertise” (p. 1065). Teachers at Wood Acre experienced autonomy in their own classrooms, but with the addition of the Foundations

reading program, they underwent a process of decision making that was influenced by the additional contextual pressures and time demands. It is crucial that preservice teachers be prepared to work under such conditions. This can be assisted by an awareness of issues surrounding program adoption and knowledge about best practices.

Conclusion

At Wood Acre Elementary School, we see teachers who are navigating the challenges of teaching with an unfamiliar mandated reading program. We also see a principal who respects his faculty as professionals, and thus allows them to maintain autonomy in their classroom instructional practice. Yet, the data indicated that teachers needed supports to modify the scripted program to meet the needs of their students.

As Shavelson (1983) noted, it is important to examining the decisions of teachers because these choices directly influence teacher behavior which therefore impacts the education students receive. This study confirms that decisions are not made merely by rationally weighing all possibilities, but rather, choices are made which are “good enough” given the multitude of factors of the circumstances at any given time. Additionally, this study adds to the body of knowledge of teacher decision making as it illuminates the supports necessary to assist teachers’ literacy instruction. The presence of the aforementioned supports is imperative for improvements in instructional practices, particularly with the challenges of highly scripted “scientifically based” programs. This study provides an encouraging example of how teachers navigated the adoption of a scripted program, and adapted instruction to meet the needs of their students.

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Appatova, V. & Hiebert, E. H. (2013). Reconciling college and career readiness with lifelong reading. *American Reading Forum Annual Yearbook* [Online]. Vol. 33.

Reconciling College and Career Readiness with Lifelong Reading

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Abstract

This article argues that the current emphasis on college and career readiness by high school graduation fails to recognize the dynamic needs of adults in reading development across the lifespan. A model for college reading programs is designed, drawing on evidence that reading development continues beyond college and career readiness levels. It is proposed that the content of such programs should emphasize elements of reading such as metacognition, critical analysis, multimodal reading, creative thinking, and flexibility with electronic forms of reading. Opportunities to develop such capacities would serve both college students and other adult populations in acquiring the literacies required for professional, social, and personal well-being in the 21st century.

Reconciling College and Career Readiness with Lifelong Reading

College and career readiness at the time of the high school graduation is the central focus of the Common Core State Standards (CCSS; CCSS Initiative, 2010). The concept of college and career readiness has recently attracted more attention of researchers and practitioners than literacy proficiencies sufficient for the students to succeed later in college life and the workplace. The common definitions of “college and career readiness” concentrate on some ultimate level of accumulation of knowledge and experiences that prepare students for college and jobs and embrace such aspects as competence, proficiency, and understanding of required content with reasonable accuracy (Greene & Foster, 2003; Maruyama, 2012).

The predominant emphasis on the preparation for college and career takes away attention of the researchers and policy-makers from the concept of the further growth of literacy skills beyond the entry point to the academe or the job market and throughout the following lifespan development. In particular, in the area of reading, the underlying assumption manifesting itself in the policy arena is that high school graduation represents a final stage in instructor-guided reading development, after which the responsibility for further growth lies with the individual. The lack of studies concerned with post-secondary reading development of proficient readers contributes to this assumption. More than a dozen state systems (Jenkins & Boswell, 2002) and many colleges and universities in other states have eliminated developmental reading courses in four-year state institutions. Moreover, few campuses offer advanced reading courses designed to benefit college students as critical readers, especially to promote the professional, social, and personal growth in literacy required in the 21st century.

Although post-secondary and career-level literacy needs have been studied in the past, it appears that the peak of interest in this subject matter occurred about ten years ago and has faded away since then, giving way to the discussion of college and career readiness. At the beginning of the 21st century, researchers focused on instructional needs of bilingual students (Huerta-Macias, 2003), effective practices in adult literacy instruction (Purcell-Gates, Degener, Jacobson, & Soler, 2002), a separation between literacy instruction in the schools and the literacy needs of competent citizens (Venezky, 2000), as well as workplace basic-skills programs and the further expansion of developmental education instruction at community colleges (Comings, Sum, & Uvin, 2000). Although all of the above aspects remain significant in the context of the second decade of the 21st century, a new step has to be made in piecing together a more comprehensive, larger-scope vision of post-secondary reading development.

In this paper, we explore a dynamic view of reading across a lifetime and argue that the reading development after the high school graduation requires closer attention in light of theory and research on literacy across the lifespan. The existing definitions of reading seem to be static rather than dynamic. The earliest mechanistic definitions of reading were followed by what can be called communicational definitions since the latter ones were constructed from the viewpoint of communication theory: reading was defined as the process of constructing meaning through the dynamic interaction among the reader's existing knowledge, the information suggested by the text being read, and the context of the reading situation (Snow, 2002; White & Dillow, 2005; Wixson, Peters, Weber, & Roeber, 1987). The past two decades have also brought sociocultural definitions of reading which view reading as “the competence to exploit a particular set of cultural resources... [It] is learning to use the resources of writing for a culturally defined set of tasks and procedures” (Olson, 1994, p. 43). The most recent definition by the National

Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) states that “[r]eading is an active and complex process that involves (i) understanding written text, (ii) developing and interpreting meaning, and (iii) using meaning as appropriate to type of text, purpose, and situation (Reading Framework for the 2013 NAEP, p. 2), and it can be referred to as a functional definition since it focuses on the functions embraced by the reading process, but does not explain the process itself. Neither of these definitions reflects a dynamic nature of reading manifesting itself in continuous transformations within a person’s lifespan or resulting from the technological advances in the whole society.

We are defining reading as a constantly evolving process, which draws profoundly on the reader’s background knowledge, including the knowledge gained from acting in the world and having the world act upon one. Our goal is to envision what support and instruction for literacy might look like in colleges and beyond when adult reading development moves from the realm of remedial instruction. The driving question is: How can we help *all* adult learners progress to higher levels, irrespective of their current reading level?

Views of Reading in Adulthood

Most of the existing research on reading development across the lifespan is limited to the young age of learners. As seen in Figure 1, Common Core State Standards do not address the progression of text difficulty beyond the high school level. The levels of texts in Chall, Bissex, Conard, and Harris-Sharples’ study (1999), as depicted in Figure 1, show the growth of Lexile levels for benchmark texts up to grade 16 (i.e., college graduation). It is reasonable to assume that growth continues beyond the undergraduate years.

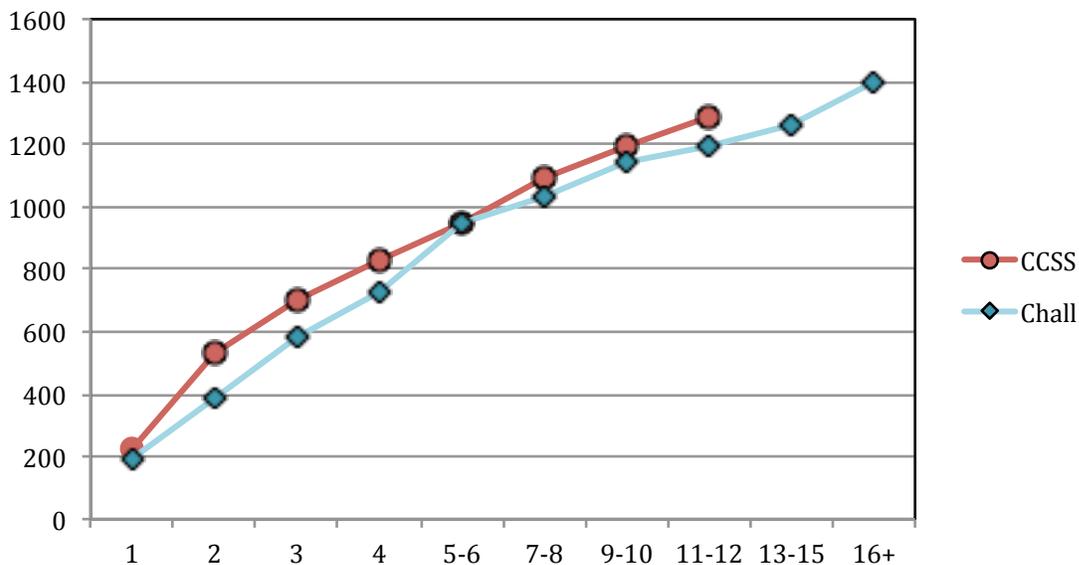


Figure 1. Comparison of Trajectories of Quantitative Levels of Text Exemplars for Grades 1 through 16+: CCSS and *Qualitative Assessment of Text Difficulty* (Chall et al., 1999)¹

¹ Note. From *Contrasting views of how to increase capacity for complex text: The Common Core State Standards and Jeanne Chall* by E. H. Hiebert, April 13, 2012. Paper presented at the annual conference of the American Educational Research Association, Vancouver, Canada. Copyright by E.H. Hiebert. Reprinted with permission.

The field of adult literacy has been focused almost entirely on establishing basic standards of literacy in the 21st century, identifying the portion of population that does not meet these standards and then designing and providing instruction for this portion of the population. In 1992, the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) identified five literacy levels (since reframed as performance levels in 2003) based on test performances: non-literate, below basic, basic, intermediate, and proficient (Kirsch et al., 2001). The International Adult Literacy Survey (IALS) used a set of five fairly similar levels in their 1994-1998 survey. The 2003 National Assessment of Adult Literacy (NAAL) identified a range of adult literacy tasks from a purely functional perspective (i.e., how well adults perform basic tasks with printed materials) such as filling out a job application, interpreting a chart in the newspaper, and using written instructions to operate a voting machine (White & Dillow, 2005).

A view of literacy across the lifespan addresses the needs of all adults, irrespective of literacy deficiencies rooted in the school years. Such a view needs to address both the mechanisms and the content for ensuring continued literacy growth for academic, job-related, social, or personal purposes. Within this view, all adults, regardless of job or educational context or point in the lifespan—are regarded as lifelong learners in the field of literacy.

A Dynamic Rather than Static View of Reading

According to the Rand Reading Study Group (Snow, 2002), reading comprehension consists of three elements: the *reader*, the *text*, and the *activity* of reading. This three-way interrelationship occurs within a larger socio-cultural *context* that also interacts with each of the three elements iteratively. None of these variables is static. The reader changes over time, so the experience of reading different text types and genres can vary over the reader's lifetime. The reading activity is probably the most variable element of the reading process, changing with the reader, text or the context. Contexts are defined by many factors, such as community, workplace, and income, and the demands of these contexts can change enormously over time and in combination.

The reader also brings to the act of reading a set of cognitive capabilities (e.g., attention, memory, critical and analytic abilities, visualization skills), affective components (e.g., motivation, purpose for reading, interest in the content, confidence in reading ability), knowledge (e.g., vocabulary and topic knowledge, linguistic and discourse knowledge, knowledge of comprehension strategies), and finally, a life history (Cunningham & Stanovich, 2001). These attributes vary considerably among readers, and they can also vary within an individual reader over time and according to the text being read, the reading conditions, and the context for reading.

The dynamic nature of reading lends support to the argument that reading development does not or should not stop at the high school graduation level. First, additional development is needed to cope with text complexity that continues to increase after high school. The ACT (2006) study showed that “the clearest differentiator in reading between students who are college ready and students who are not is the ability to comprehend *complex* texts” (p. 2). As evident in Figure 1, Chall et al. (1999) stages show changes in the reading level beyond high school and through four years of college. Moreover, grade 16+ implies potential development after an undergraduate degree is earned.

Second, the tasks of college and work environments require a higher level of metacognitive reading abilities (e.g., setting purpose, self-questioning, and monitoring comprehension) than those resulting from high school preparation (Autor, Levy, & Murnane, 2003; Hunter & Hunter, 1984; Mikulecky & Drew, 1991). The level of difficulty in technical texts can far exceed high-school level texts. Workplace reading activities are task-related, and involve performance goals as opposed to learning goals. In professional environments, literacy and computational skills may be combined for a greater challenge (Levy & Murnane, 2004). Also, reading skills do not always transfer smoothly from an academic setting to a professional one. For example, comprehension of a literacy text does not guarantee capability in understanding and applying the knowledge in a technical manual. Further, reading skills in one job context (e.g., medical aide) does not necessarily transfer to another context (e.g., dental aide). Even within a job context, reading skills may not transfer from one task to another (Mikulecky & Kirkley, 1998).

Third, adulthood holds the promise of richer and more complex reading proficiencies. Secondary school students, for the most part, tend to trust the information about life presented in texts or media because of a lack of background knowledge. As people age, prior experiences accumulate to transform and enrich the processing and interpretation of text. Thus, there is an opportunity to develop more critical and richer literacy proficiencies in adulthood than is possible during the high-school years. Enriched literacy proficiencies can benefit the quality of individuals' lives and their families and local communities. In addition, however, society has a stake in the continuous intellectual growth of its citizens. Adults need advanced critical thinking skills to make informed decisions that affect society (e.g., voting), family (e.g., parenting), or personal lives (e.g., marriages and partnerships). It is not incidental that 2003 NAAL test questions covered such topics as home and family, health and safety, community and citizenship, consumer economics, work, and leisure and recreation (White & Dillow, 2005). Society benefits when citizens commit to lifetime learning and the development of advanced reading skills.

Finally, the technological transformation of literacy requires constant learning of new reading skills. The technological metamorphosis of the reading process has not only been extremely rapid, but also revolutionary in its essence. Fifteen years ago, the claim was made that electronic reading had prevailed over print reading, as evident in Reinking's (1998) statement that "the conventional library [...] may be viewed as a nostalgic anachronism" (p. XIX). Today, after so many new forms of electronic reading have emerged, we can wonder at the prescience of these words. The last decade has brought a host of work defining new literacies and exploring new skills needed to read and learn information online (Coiro, Knobel, Lankshear, & Leu, 2008; Goldman, Wiley, & Graesser, 2005; Leu et al., 2005; Rouet, 2006).

Frameworks for Reading Development over a Lifetime

Once young people are done with their last reading test—likely a high school exit exam or a college entrance exam—the emphasis shifts to functionally determined aspects of reading. For those who immediately join the workforce, questions arise: Which reading materials are important for obtaining the necessary qualifications and job requirements? Will I be able to understand those materials well enough to apply the knowledge and information they contain? For those who enter college, questions are essentially similar: What are the implied reading expectations for my next college course? Will I be able to handle the readings as I move into

advanced courses? Will I be expected to read more and comprehend faster once I reach the graduate level?

The NAAL identified reading success as an interaction of text characteristics with readers' skills in the context of a task (White & Dillow, 2005), a definition similar to that of the Rand Reading Study Group (Snow, 2002). To increase readers' success in using texts for various tasks requires attention on various levels. First, readers will need to have had experiences with texts that represent domains of use such as reading to learn procedures in a workplace or reading to glean critical concepts from research articles in college courses. Texts differ across domains in text structure and genre (including graphics), specialized and challenging vocabulary, and style and purpose (Biber, 1988). Second, readers need to develop numerous proficiencies with different text types, including comprehension monitoring strategies that enable transfer across domains and tasks and information retention skills. The last decade's debate over the critical differences between content area literacy and disciplinary literacy emphasizes the need of exploring, researching and teaching discipline specific reading strategies as opposed to generic study skills that enhance learning in any discipline (Moje, 2008; Shanahan & Shanahan, 2012).

Readers need to be adaptive in their proficiencies as they encounter texts in the tasks of the workplace and academia. In the digital-global age, this adaptiveness often occurs in digital settings. Presumably, as the skills of electronic reading are taught throughout students' school careers, possibilities are increased substantially for students' independent learning. Electronic reading in the digital age where texts are available 24-7 and to everyone with digital access offers opportunities that were not possible with the more static sources of previous decades. Not only are informational sources constantly available, but the filters of arbiters who decide what society members can and should learn are no longer applicable (Lemke, 1998). The mandated curriculum has been replaced with an interactive learning paradigm where individuals can access and read the texts that they require as the need arises. This paradigm shift has its upside: we can learn what we want when we want to learn it. At the same time, the ability to process text in digital contexts is essential to thrive in the digital-global era. Curricular learning paradigms will probably be de-emphasized and interactive learning paradigms, rooted in independent learning, will be prioritized in the future of education, a phenomenon already evident at the turn of the century (Lemke, 1998). In particular, readers require a strategic stance as they negotiate the task of using texts on the Internet such as deciding what to learn and how to learn it (Reinking, 1998). An electronic text, with its linking opportunities, may contribute to difficulties with attention—a recognized, but not yet researched affliction of the new technological generation of learners. However, reading focus can be improved by teaching learners how to create and pursue meaningful directions as they explore the tangled web of Internet.

Bolter (1998) has described hypertexts as less stable and predictable than typical printed texts. Readers require support in learning to adequately interact with hypertext, including adding to or changing web information (through wikis, blogs, online chat rooms, remixes, etc.). This feature of reading in digitized contexts calls for guidance and instruction in making choices while reading multilinear, multidirectional discourse.

Teaching critical thinking skills for the self-supervised, independent evaluation of Internet sources is another facet of a metacognitive approach. In both academic and job contexts, individuals need to collect, select, categorize, critically evaluate, analyze, and synthesize online information. As individuals search through millions of online sources, they become their own

librarians (Lemke, 1998). Learning to take critical perspectives on digital content—especially when it increases exponentially yearly—would seem an ideal focus of college reading courses.

Rooted in the nexus of critical thinking and metacognition, often referred to as “21st century skills” (National Research Council, 2012), are other necessary elements of both electronic and typographic reading such as questioning the validity of a text, understanding and questioning the author’s point of view, detecting subtexts, and, ultimately, synthesizing the acquired knowledge to construct the reader’s own meaning. Taking these stances is a challenge, especially for young adults who are forming life views (Britt & Aglinskas, 2002; Simpson, Stahl, & Francis, 2012; Stahl & Hynd, 1994).

The digital-global age leaves little doubt that multimodal literacies acquire a stronger instructional focus (Alvermann, 2011). Essential cognitive, metacognitive, and self-regulatory processes that include selecting, summarizing, organizing, elaborating, monitoring, self-testing, reflecting, and evaluating (Nist & Simpson, 2000) become as vital for processing multimedia objects and presentations as for processing verbal information. It is reasonable to assume that, in addition to metacognition and critical thinking, multimodal literacies may trigger and accelerate the third aspect of higher-order thinking skills: creative thinking, another cognitive competency identified as a “21st century skill” (National Research Council, 2012). Reading and processing a multimodal discourse requires the synthesis of knowledge from overlapping media – a level of thinking where creativity becomes possible. Thus, a multimodal reading experience may be used as a first-step, a synthesizing warm-up for creative assignments in many areas beyond art, music, drama or writing; it may be equally applied to generating a unique solution in the social sciences or an original experiment design in natural sciences. Because multimodal reading demands metacognition, critical thinking, and creative thinking, which are also elements of successful problem solving (Askov & Bixler, 1998), multimodal reading development could offer learners an important advantage in future job environments (Levy and Murnane, 2004).

Moreover, new literacies are not only multimodal (a static descriptor), but also mutating (a dynamic descriptor) (Mackey, 2003). The challenge of teaching constantly-mutating literacies lies not only in identifying and developing new elements of reading or modifying traditional skills; it also implies the need to preserve those traditional skills that are still valid in the new technological context, while at the same time eliminating elements that are no longer necessary.

We look at the frameworks for the reading development over a lifetime as a basis for our vision of college reading courses and programs as it is aligned with a social practice view of literacy, “to be best understood as a set of social practices associated with different domains of life that are purposeful and embedded in broader social goals and cultural practices” (Purcell-Gates et al., 2002, p. 70).

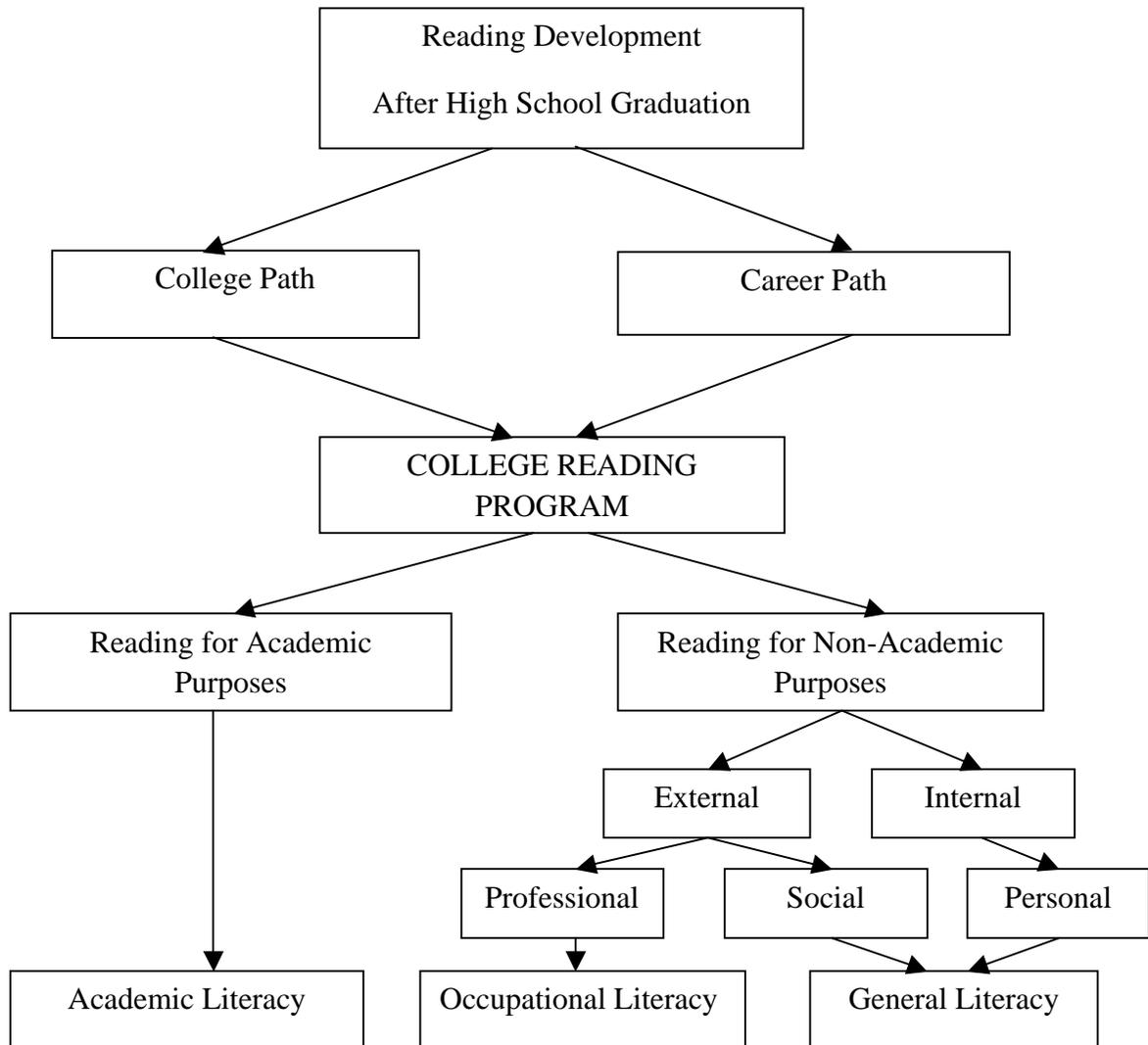
A Vision of College Reading Courses/Programs

What are Reading Related Tasks after High School Graduation?

Most high school graduates choose between the college or career paths. The literacy requirements for the two paths may differ, but both paths involve literacy tasks (see Figure 2).

Figure 2.

Trajectories of Post-Secondary Reading Development: College and Career Paths



College students need reading competencies that will allow them to function in more advanced courses, while employees have literacy requirements related to job training or certification requirements. Policy-makers typically recognize the demands of college and career, and it is true that these demands require immediate attention. Social and personal goals for literacy development, however, may be as compelling as these immediate needs and often fall under the radar of policy-makers.

Traditionally, work-training programs focus almost entirely on professional literacy. Non-job related applications of adult education (such as social and personal enrichment) are not commonly included among after-college educational opportunities, and general literacy improvement has not been shown to be a noticeable direct by-product of job training programs. However, an over-emphasis on the purely functional, job-related approach to literacy development in adults may result in limited critical thinking skills. In its definition of reading, NAAL emphasizes a broader approach: the use of written materials to function adequately in various external contexts—academic, professional, social—and as an individual (White & Dillow, 2005). Therefore, the role of college-based reading programs should be to provide well-balanced opportunities for development in all four areas: academic, occupational, social, and personal.

How Can Colleges Help Students Develop More Sophisticated Levels of Reading?

The old misconceptions that post-secondary reading development is an individual task and “sophisticated reading” is only for intellectuals or academicians are clearly not accurate. The development of the reading process over a lifetime should be actively promoted in society as an expectation and necessity and supported by an adequate choice of reading courses on the college level.

Such an initiative is not without precedent. About twenty years ago, colleges and universities recognized the need for an advanced writing course at the college level, and such a writing course became a common general education requirement. The demands of reading in the digital-global age make it timely for a similar commitment to an advanced reading course. The types of advanced reading classes that colleges might offer for credit could address a variety of academic and non-academic needs. Quantitative literacy, designed to improve students’ ability to analyze statistical data, is already being offered on many campuses and is included in the requirements for some majors. Adults of all ages and educational backgrounds might appreciate a course in financial literacy. Technology and new forms of electronic reading could be addressed as well as related approaches for research and learning online. Accelerated reading comprehension could serve as an advanced version of what used to be known as speed-reading, combining the skill of rapid reading with new findings in literacy research that can be translated into more efficient comprehension (see, e.g., Radach, Vorstius, & Reilly, 2010). Multimodal literacy could be incorporated into any composition or oral communication classes. Advanced reading competencies could be offered in any technically intensive discipline (e.g., reading for law, business, or medicine) guiding students to think in a discipline specific manner and thus promoting a deeper understanding and generating of sophisticated ideas (Moje, 2008; Shanahan & Shanahan, 2012).

Another focus could be to understand political messages in written and oral forms, such as listening to political speeches or reading legislative bills. A reading workshop may offer a multi-genre overview of best contemporary writers to generate appreciation of good books beyond a school setting. Ultimately, college reading programs can develop an array of reading courses that would make sophisticated reading less intimidating and more enjoyable.

College courses might also be developed in coordination with local industries that have particular needs (e.g., reading in the chemical industry). Such courses would combine the best academic practices of college reading courses and successful practices of effective workplace literacy programs. These courses could be directly linked to the specific job environment by

using job-related reading materials, simulating job demands, and solving real-life job problems (Mikulecky & Drew, 1991). Such courses would more directly meet the needs of employers who, according to the Association of American Colleges and Universities' survey, rely on significant degrees of engagement and supervised experiential learning opportunities rather than test scores (Donnelly-Smith, 2011).

What Qualities Should a Successful College Reading Program Possess?

As the goals of college reading courses crystalize, the criteria by which their success can be assessed also become evident. Successful college reading programs, first, should support college students to hone their reading competencies. Second, programs should address the reading proficiencies needed for life and careers, not simply the demands of standardized tests (Simpson, Stahl, & Francis, 2012). Third, effective programs should set high standards for students' achievements, offer credit and accreditation, and provide opportunities for further study (Basic Skills Agency, 2000). Fourth, these programs should offer a quality experience with multiple opportunities for engaged learning rather than an emphasis on a certificate that is based on a requisite number of hours (Donnelly-Smith, 2011).

Occupational and general literacy courses require a unique design different from typical academic literacy courses. Concluding that adults' literacy learning in typical literacy courses has been modest, Brooks (2011) identifies reasons such as low participation rates, low starting points, substantial portion of non-native speakers of English, as well as age-related decline in the literacy learning curve. Instructors in adult education are likely to be working against limitations in students' time and energy, which are a function of their adult responsibilities, in addition to age-related deceleration in literacy development. Consequently, we cannot always judge the effectiveness of a reading program catering to adult learners based on the immediate progress measures of pre- and post-testing. Evaluations of such courses should include qualitative measures, such as student satisfaction, long-term knowledge acquisition and application, and enhanced personal and social functioning (Boylan & Bonham, 2009). Brooks (2011) proposes that the modest progress of adults in traditional adult education might be, at least in part, explained by insufficient attention to effective teaching strategies. Professors of reading on college campuses, equipped with research-based pedagogies (National Research Council, 2012), may help boost the modest progress of adult students to substantial progress.

Implications for Research and Practice

If the society recognizes the need to support and promote the lifelong reading development of its citizens beyond the concept of college and career readiness, then higher education institutions, scholars and practitioners will face a wide new array of research questions to explore and policy-related decisions to make. The following positional statements may be considered for discussion in the field of adult literacy:

1. *Patterns of reading development after high school graduation, both in and out of academia, should be explored.* The foci of the future research may include, but should not be limited to the following:
 - a) elements of reading which continue to grow over a lifetime and those which slow down in the course of the human life;

- b) elements of reading that adult education instructors should focus on in academic and non-academic settings;
 - c) components of reading which should be emphasized with below-standard, proficient and advanced adult readers;
 - d) effective approaches to help adult learners develop creative thinking and problem solving skills in school and professional environments.
2. *A new pedagogy for electronic literacies is needed in the following aspects:*
- a) traditional reading skills that should be preserved as we move into the domain of electronic reading;
 - b) different perception of multi-modal discourse by adult learners compared to younger students;
 - c) impact of new electronic forms of reading on adult learning compared to younger students;
 - d) effective instruction in electronic reading skills with different populations of students (e.g., elementary school students, secondary students, and adults);
 - e) effective instructional reading and learning environments for online readers not enrolled in formal online courses;
 - f) metacognitive approaches with learners practicing independent online reading;
 - g) instructional approaches with multi-directional reading of hypertext: how to teach attention, focus and concentration, methods for selecting reliable sources and relevant ideas; identify various perspectives on a topic; as well as analyze and synthesize various viewpoints;
 - h) effective ways of integrating traditional instruction with the new electronic literacies in order to ease adult learners' resistance to technology.
3. *Assessment mechanisms' for adult literacy in academic and non-academic contexts should be developed.* The suggested criteria are student satisfaction, long-term knowledge acquisition, length of information retention, ability to practically apply knowledge, growth of metacognitive skills, professional development in the job environment, and enriched personal and social choices. The institutional assessment of college reading programs serving adult learners should also include these alternative criteria.
4. *Colleges should advance reading programs that would develop academic, occupational, and general (social and personal) literacy to serve both in-college and out-of-college populations for credit and accreditation.* In addition to developmental reading courses, college reading programs will develop a variety of college-level reading courses for academic (e.g., reading for art history majors), occupational (e.g., reading for professionals in the chemical industry), social (e.g., financial literacy), and personal (e.g., reading workshops or book clubs) purposes. An advanced college reading course may be considered as part of a general education requirement. Agreements with local industries can be established to meet their needs in occupational literacy and involve both native and non-native learners.

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Primerano, S. L. (2013). Engaging text for dynamic discussion: Student discussion of *The Hunger Games* in the secondary ELA classroom. *American Reading Forum Annual Yearbook* [Online]. Vol. 33.

Engaging Text for Dynamic Discussion: Student Discussion of *The Hunger Games* in the Secondary ELA Classroom

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Abstract

This study took place at a sizeable northeastern suburban public high school. The study participants were enrolled in a college credit-bearing textual studies course taught in a high school, replacing a more traditional senior-level English course. The focus of the course was analyzing the role of texts in culture, with challenging theoretical texts as the analytical lens for current popular texts, like *The Hunger Games* (Collins, 2008). Data consisted of participant observation fieldnotes, student written reflections, student formal papers and practitioner observations and critical reflections. Fieldnotes were collected and transcribed to record student discussion and subsequent teacher reflections. The analysis yielded several categories related to dynamic interactions with texts, both in oral and in written responses, chief among them was evidence of gendered interpretations of the text, a previously unseen depth of analysis, both for fictional and academic texts, extreme fluidity in making connections between texts and a demonstration of ownership and agency with both the texts and the class discussions.

Engaging Text for Dynamic Discussion: Student Discussion of *The Hunger Games* in the Secondary ELA Classroom

Adolescent literacy and concerns over skills and shortcomings is arguably a hot topic in the realm of education on all planes, ranging from public, private to government concerns, and many opinions abound over possible solutions and best pedagogical practices. One of the repeating tropes of the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) (2010) is to increase student exposure to rigorous, challenging, complex texts, measured qualitatively and quantitatively in literature through complex layers of meaning, complex or unconventional structure, increased use of nonconventional or figurative language, and the exploration of sophisticated cultural and literary themes (Common Core State Standards Initiative, 2010). The quick, or rather *common* and *core* answer to this increased demand for text complexity is to turn to the canon, to the tried and tested classics of history, ranging from Sophocles to Shakespeare, Twain to Fitzgerald. While these texts certainly rate high on the text complexity scale, are they truly the only answer to supporting and increasing adolescent literacy abilities? As schooling becomes more challenging and sophisticated, so does the literature adolescents are expected to read, and many students are lost, either through lack of interest, ability, or both. One of the many prevailing arguments about how to best help teen readers is to meet them at their current level—with literature designed to meet their motivational, emotional and developmental needs. Young adult literature, an ever-growing genre devoted to literature for and about adolescents, is part of the discussion, yet seemingly is not yet fully embraced in schools by any group other than teens themselves.

Perspectives and Related Literature

This study is conceived through a social constructivist lens, drawing from Vygotsky's (1978) construct that emphasizes the importance of the social construction of knowledge. Dynamic text discussions prompt more individual meaning-making amongst adolescents, prompting them to focus on their own thoughts and opinions rather than simply anticipating the "right" answer or the response the teacher is looking for (Lapp & Fisher, 2009; Ruzich & Canan, 2010). Further, such discussions engender emotional responses and allow students to make self to text connections that encourage reflection on one's identity and can provide opportunities for adolescents to explore issues of agency (Polleck, 2010; Smith, 2000; Twomey, 2007; Vyas, 2004).

Arguing that secondary students are ready to become more critical and to examine the historical, social and political framework through which texts are created, Knickerbocker and Rycik (2006) advocate teaching young adult novels through the framework of critical literacy in order to help middle and high school students explore their own developing identities, roles, and moral direction. Unlike much traditional literature, contemporary adolescent novels are comprised of a wider array of social and cultural issues, especially race, culture and class, which make these texts more viable vehicles for the guided reflection, discussion and writing that a critical framework requires.

Another recommendation for incorporating engaging literature in the ELA classroom comes from Knickerbocker and Brueggeman (2008), who argue that as postmodern novels become more central in contemporary literature, they have a rightful place in the secondary curriculum through the means of a variety of postmodern adolescent literature. Postmodernism, with its defining themes being those of “distrust and disbelief” is a natural companion to young adult literature and its intended audience, as teens are notoriously suspicious and wary, especially of information that doesn’t fit into their developing worldview and realm of experience (p. 66). Furthermore, the authors argue that a thorough investigation and understanding of the divergent and challenging characteristics of postmodernism will make for an easier transition to understanding other literary time periods and genres. Also, postmodern literature and young adult literature are a natural connection in that they both “engage the ‘multiple literacies’ that are expected to characterize the 21st century” (p. 71).

Bean and Harper (2006) advocate using contemporary young adult literature, especially those works set in sites of international war or conflict, to provide students with an avenue to critically question not only issues of global importance but also of ideological importance, like the true definition and complexities of freedom. Reading these young adult novels through a critical literacy framework allows teachers the opportunity to scaffold critical discussion that moves beyond a traditional discussion of stereotypes and conflict and instead really challenges the historical and social context of the text and the situation it describes, the positioning of both the author and reader, and further questions agency and power as it exists in the text and in the context in which the text is being read and discussed. Using globally positioned young adult texts in this critical manner encourages students to become more involved in questioning the geopolitics of our global society.

Gender and sex, along with all of their attached connotations, expectations and limitations, are an integral part of the adolescent search for identity. Harper (2007) argues that young adult literature, due to its popularity with adolescents and focus on teen issues, is a better starting point for critical discussion of gender expectations and masculinity than traditional canonical texts as adolescent literature allows students a better opportunity to “think through the ways in which masculinity (and indeed femininity) is, and might yet be ‘storied’ and ‘performed’ in texts, and in life” (p. 512). Harper (2007) argues that, “recognizing and acknowledging a diversity of masculinities, including female masculinities, in text and in life challenges norms and expectations associated with traditional masculinity, destabilizing gender hierarchies that limit human potential” (p. 511).

Her study analyzed a selection of contemporary young adult novels featuring female protagonists for their overt and covert portrayal of masculinity as it is displayed by males and females alike. She found that young adult novels, at least the selection that she studied, discuss and in many cases champion alternative or unconventional masculinities, ranging from a rejection of traditional definitions of gender roles to cross-dressing. Thus, the author advocates studying such texts with teens as a way to “open spaces for students to read against the grain of traditional masculinity” (p. 526).

Disrupting traditional curriculum and pedagogy allows both the teachers and students the potential to view the content through a different lens, to engage in a literacy-rich examination of

content by engaging in a shared reading of a text. This purposeful, literacy-focused text selection can be seen as “negotiated-hybridity” (Christianakis, 2011, p. 1154): it meets the literacy needs of the students, the demands of school reform and content demands, and makes cross-curricular connections to language arts, a seemingly successful negotiation. Secondary English Language Arts (ELA) classrooms are the meeting points at which the needs of students and the expectations of external and internal standards (local, state, and national) converge. What better site, then, for an exploration of how students navigate, through reading, writing and discussion, a variety of texts, those championed by the CCSS and those overlooked? The study seeks to explore the connection between engaging texts and dynamic discussion.

Purpose and Method

This study is conceptualized as engaged scholarship through teacher research (Christianakis, 2008; Klehr, 2012; Shagoury & Power, 2012) using the author’s classroom as the primary research site. The study took place at a sizeable northeastern suburban public high school (approximately 2,265 students). The school is comprised of predominantly white students, with non-white students making up about 15% of the population. Eighty-three percent of graduating students go on to college (43% go to four-year colleges, 40% go to two-year colleges). The study participants were enrolled in a college credit-bearing textual studies course taught in a high school, replacing a more traditional senior-level English course. The focus of the course was analyzing the role of texts in culture, with challenging theoretical texts, such as selections from Foucault’s (1979) *Discipline and Punish*, or Althusser’s (1971) “Ideology and the Ideological State Apparatuses” as the analytical lens for current popular texts, like films and advertisements. In this study, the anchor text was *The Hunger Games* (Collins, 2008), a best-selling young adult novel set in a futuristic, post-apocalyptic Panem, featuring a debased society in which the government encourages the annual slaughter of children, in the form of the hunger games, as penance for a previous rebellion.

The study centered on the following research questions:

1. What is the connection between engaging texts, defined in this study as contemporary young adult texts, and dynamic discussion in the secondary ELA classroom?
2. How do secondary honors ELA students, enrolled in a college-level course, engage with contemporary Young Adult texts, namely *The Hunger Games* trilogy (Collins, 2008, 2009, 2010) in conjunction with more traditional academic texts and theories (Althusser, 1971; Foucault, 1979; Hegel, 1977) as evidenced through student-led class discussion?

Data consists of participant observation fieldnotes in the author’s secondary ELA classroom (2 classes, N = 47 students) of discussions centering around Collins’ (2008) young adult novel *The Hunger Games*, student written reflections, student formal papers and practitioner observations and critical reflections. Fieldnotes were collected and transcribed to record student discussion and subsequent teacher reflections. The data was gathered and analyzed for common themes, outstanding and underlying characteristics, then coded using discourse and content analysis into themes reflective of both the topics and characteristics of the discussion and subsequent writing. The topical codes included discussion of romance or love in the text, application of course theories (psychoanalytic theory, Hegel’s master/slave dialectic, the

panopticon), and real world/cross-curricular application either to other subjects in school or to the world outside of school. The characteristic codes included student interaction, both with each other in the discussion and interaction with the text in writing, demonstration of agency, student engagement and fluidity of discussion and/or writing.

Findings

The analysis yielded several categories related to dynamic interactions with texts, both in oral and in written responses, chief among them was evidence of gendered interpretations of the text, a previously unseen depth of analysis, both for fictional and academic texts, extreme fluidity in making connections between texts and a demonstration of ownership and agency with both the texts and the class discussions.

Gendered interpretations

The discussion yielded some significant gendered interpretations—yet another set of ideologies for students to confront. Though it was not the first subject broached in the class dialogue about the text, once the romantic aspects of *The Hunger Games* (Collins, 2008) was broached, gender lines were drawn reasonably quickly. The consensus among many of the female participants is that the love story (the Team Peeta versus Team Gale, the central romantic choice of the text) was a necessary aspect of the series. While many female participants acknowledged that the love story made the text more appealing overall, several were quite adamant that the text acknowledges the female “desire to be desired,” making Peeta, and his love for Katniss, that much more endearing.

The general male perspective was that the romantic aspects of the story were far from essential, and many expressed a preference for having the two star-crossed lovers simply be pitted against each other, especially given the violent overtones of the novel, effectively ending any romantic intentions. Interestingly though, there was also a clear division amongst males who felt that the “author did a poor job” in creating the love story, for it was “painfully obvious” that Peeta’s love, however true, was unrequited, while others argued that, like Katniss, they too were unsure of Peeta’s true intentions, which “was pretty cool.”

While the differing perspectives were by no means clearly divided on the basis of gender alone, there were moments in the discussion that when a “female” reading of the text was pitted against a “male” one, many students who hadn’t spoken up previously were suddenly vocal, seemingly urged on by the safety in numbers concept, wanting to champion their view. Further, given the increased volume of discussion when gendered perspectives arose, both in number of speakers entering the conversation and in the actual volume of noise generated as students talked over one another, laughed, and engaged in small side conversations, the gendered perspectives garnered the most engaged participation in discussion.

Increased Depth of Analysis

In their application of theory, the students demonstrated a previously unseen depth of analysis, both for fictional and academic texts. Their use of key academic vocabulary from the

text was one of the best indicators of their nuanced understanding as the students seamlessly integrated the theoretical terms from their challenging texts, applying them both to the shared young adult text (*The Hunger Games*) and to real world examples. Taking on Althusser's conception of what it means to be a "subject," and to experience "subjectivity" in her writing, Kate aptly observes that "Gale and Katniss, of course, understood this from the beginning, it was woven into their subjectivity, they didn't help the fleeing girl because they knew the consequences – *that* is created out of a social context, a paralyzing social fear, out of a culture, not out of an individual belief, and that's what makes it subjectivity." Likewise, during the class discussion, Luke asserts that Katniss and Peeta "are dually subjects and objects – subject to the power of the capital, but subjects with identities that are spotlighted by the capital through the parades and interviews."

In conjunction with subjectivity, the students also read a variety of core psychoanalytical texts, especially from Freud and Lacan. Their psychoanalytic criticism of *The Hunger Games* is clear in their use of the term "unconscious," or other related terminology, such as this observation about Peeta's unique approach to the Hunger Games: "Peeta says he doesn't want to lose his identity, his superego speaking – even when he had to kill to stay alive, he can't change his moral values." While discussing the range of power present in the novel, Laura asserts that,

Katniss had power in her family, power to defy the rules of her district, she goes into the games knowing she has that power/potential to break the rules – unconsciously. She has the desire for power – connected to Lacan – which is why she hunts and provides for her family, and this desire for power prompts her to volunteer and take Prim's place.

Nodding in agreement, Steve adds that "Katniss inspires the desire/possibility for rebellion in others – her unconscious realizes she has some power," a clear demonstration of a true psychoanalytical critique that goes far beyond a simple understanding of the plot of the novel and its use of characterization.

The most repeated theoretical lens through which the students analyzed *The Hunger Games* was that of the "panopticon," demonstrating a clear understanding of Althusser's (1979) chapter from *Discipline and Punish*. Kate again offers that

Our individuality is stripped away from us, not only by the idea of a panopticon but by the virtue of subjectivity itself. We are not one of a kind, but one of a million who share the same culture, the same beliefs, fears, and morals. We are all subject to the same laws, the same judgments, we are all mostly the same at the core, no matter how profusely we deny it. The more strongly we feel the presence of a panopticon, the more clearly we are stripped of our individuality.

Kate's classmate Steve, however, offers an equally powerful counterargument, demonstrating just as strong, though different-minded application of Althusser.

People cling to privacy in the modern world because they associate it with power over oneself... This fails to account for the power of being observed... it is difficult to objectively state whether the pros outweigh the cons of being under observation, of

existing within a panopticon, but it is equally impossible to reach an objective decision on the topic without considering that there are benefits of being the subject of a gaze. As in *The Hunger Games* the subject of the gaze could easily find that they hold a great deal of power simply by being labeled important enough to be its subject

Perhaps the most impressive application of theory to the novel, in writing and in discussion, was the frequent reference to the “master/slave dialectic.” Arguably challenging for the average well-read college student, Hegel’s (1977) *Phenomenology of Spirit* discusses the power dynamic present in any master and slave relationship. Olivia’s nuanced application of Hegel demonstrates her understanding as she muses, “It’s funny how a small spark can set a whole society on a rebellious fire to take over the people they were once so terrified of.” Incorporating other psychoanalytic terms as well in her analysis of the end of the first novel, she goes on to explain that

With a handful of berries comes the symbolized realization that there is, in fact, something to be done and the possibility put out that the Capitol may in fact need to be taken over. The suppressed ego of Panem pushes on their conscious masters to receive total control. The struggle for power is endless, but in the end the true master reveals itself: the people.

Increased Fluidity

Students demonstrated incredible fluidity in making connections between the central young adult text (*The Hunger Games*, Collins, 2008), the challenging theoretical texts (Althusser, 1971; Foucault, 1979; Hegel, 1977), and real world examples as well, both in discussion and in writing. The introduction to Kate’s paper perhaps reveals this the best:

Think about your secrets. Think about who you tell them to. Think about how mortified you would feel if you weren’t allowed secrets, if every emotion you felt was broadcast on a loudspeaker, a television screen, a marquee – how would that change you? In a way, this is how our society is set up, to remind us that someone is always watching. Why do we cover our mouths with our hands as we whisper a secret to a friend? Why do we feel so threatened by the idea of a *security* camera when their job is only to ‘keep us safe’? Why do we feel no shame dancing in our room only to turn bright red when we realize our blinds are open and the neighbors *might* have seen? We all want our privacy because we are afraid of what we will become subject to otherwise, whether it’s shock, imprisonment or ridicule. Our subjectivity is then formed by how freely we give in to these panopticons, how accepting we are of the fact that we are indeed always being watched, and *that* is how individuality is formed. There is no text that demonstrates this more clearly than *The Hunger Games* by Suzanne Collins, a book in which a hierarchy of panopticism changes the subjectivity of its characters.

Just as any discussion naturally has it ebbs and flows, the class seminar discussion spanned a great range, starting with some valid, though reasonably simple analysis, like Aaron’s observation that “Each district is socially separated, almost like the upper, middle and lower classes of today’s current society in America,” and McKenna’s connection that “Today people are subject to a society that finds reality television entertaining, much like the tributes are subject

to a society ruled by the Capitol that finds the Hunger Games entertaining.” This application of theoretical texts, namely Althusser’s (1971) take on ideology, to our current society and to Panem, our futuristic fictional counterpart in Collins’ (2008) *The Hunger Games*, resulted in some increasingly complex assertions as well, including this interjection from Kevin:

By giving an institution, such as a church or school the power to inject a specific mindset of ideology, immense power is given to them. And because this power is so great, it makes the followers believe that their ideas and beliefs are justified and morally correct, when clearly they’re not. This can be seen in the case of Panem, as civilians are dying of starvation; not being given the necessary requirements to live.

At the end of her paper, Emily takes on the current (and historical) Ideological State Apparatuses of heterosexuality and religion, and the strong interpellative pull they often have on adolescents. Using Katniss as an example of adolescent rebellion, she yields an excellent conclusion,

Therefore, it is possible for one to have some control in their fate because they are not forced to conform to the ideologies that they are subject to. Despite the fact that a person is born already subject to ideologies, they have the power to go against them. While peer pressure hinders this reality, a person will be the most content when they are cooperating with their inner panopticon and holding the ideologies that they personally wish to hold.

Engaging texts, Engaged Students

Student engagement and comfort with the young adult core text fostered willingness to engage with the more demanding theoretical texts, as it gave them a malleable canvas on which to work with challenging ideas. The culminating class discussion was fluid, academic and entirely dynamic, as were the resulting papers. As a result of their comfort with and affinity for *The Hunger Games* (Collins, 2008), the students demonstrated ownership of and engagement with both the texts and the class discussions. In their end-of-unit reflections, many of the students praised the relative ease of reading *The Hunger Games* (Collins, 2008), as it aided their application of the already challenging theoretical texts: “Had it been a ‘higher level’ book, I think I would’ve focused less on the concepts and more on trying to understand the book,” and “because I enjoyed the book, I was much more excited to analyze it.” Several students also admitted to continuing on to read the remaining two books in the series (*Catching Fire*, 2009, *Mockingjay*, 2010), which was proven in class, for when given time to work on their formal papers, more than half the class instead pulled out copies of the sequels from their bags and read intently instead.

Just as the engaging text led to engaged students, so, too, did student engagement lead to a more dynamic discussion. Students again revealed in their reflections that their enjoyment of *The Hunger Games* (Collins, 2008) actually led to their enjoyment of the “complex,” and “interesting” class discussion and even the ever elusive comment for English teachers: “This was honestly the most fun I’ve ever had writing a paper.”

Given the far-reaching nature of the theoretical and thematic concepts from each of the texts in this unit of study, it is no surprise that students’ analysis reached beyond the scope of

English class alone. Using engaging texts to engage students in discussion, to make them active participants in their own learning (teaching students as opposed to “teaching” a book) also has the potential to motivate them to actively critique and discuss their own education outside the ELA classroom. As Steve proudly bragged, “Not only did *The Hunger Games* spawn useful discussion in this class, but also in other classes. In AP European History and Current World classes, we used your use of *The Hunger Games* as the launching point for a discussion of education and how reading (and at what level of books) should play a part in it.”

Likewise, the following list of reflective comments is perhaps the best illustration of the power of a dynamic young adult text in a secondary classroom:

The *Hunger Games* shows...

- “how having a powerful elite can destroy a country”
- “to stand up for what you believe in”
- “the struggle of poorer people in society”
- “thinking about ideology in *The Hunger Games* helped me to understand how ideology takes its form (through interpellation, ideological state apparatuses etc.) in real life”
- “Ever since *The Hunger Games* I’ve been noticing aspects of panopticism in real life.”
- “*The Hunger Games* is applicable to oppressive regimes in today’s society and attempts to break free from them (i.e. Arab Spring).”
- “It is also an interesting case study in the increased acceptance of violence in media targeted at children and teenagers.”

Cross-curricular connections that the students make themselves allow them to draw on prior knowledge, in and out of school literacies and use this expertise in the classroom to make further meaning. Their expertise is valued in discussion. The text allows for multiple threads – all equally important – instead of being constrained by literary devices or authorial choices in a text.

Discussion

These findings suggest the need for students to read engaging texts, that student interest and engagement is a crucial component of dynamic discussion and that engaging texts facilitate opportunities for students to enact agency, to make connections not only across the curriculum, but to make necessary and beneficial social connections with each other through discussion.

The reliance on teacher-selected classic texts meant to challenge students may arguably do more harm than good, as it often creates teacher-centered classrooms rather than student-centered spaces that take into account the interests and needs of the students. Just because the content demands become heavier after middle school does not mean that the high school student is any less deserving of relevant, responsive literature. Nor does it mean that high school teachers are absolved from student-centered curriculum decisions.

Especially with the advent of the CCSS and the push for “rigorous” titles, it is essential for researchers and practitioners alike to keep students at the center of curriculum planning and

instructional design (and related research), without sacrificing student interest and engagement to historical documents and canonical texts. Combining the teaching of critical literacy skills with the reading of an issues-based adolescent novel allows teachers to broaden the scope of traditional literature instruction to both motivate, interest and support student needs while helping students to cultivate a more open worldview.

Offering opportunities for secondary students to read engaging texts provides multiple ways to enact agency; agency for students to take ownership of their course material and to make connections drawing on background knowledge, out-of-school literacies and cross-curricular learning. This is not only empowers students, but teachers alike, as reading engaging texts can help breathe new life into standardized curriculum, all the while promoting critical literacy through dynamic discussion.

For as stand-out student Kate will tell you, the importance of awareness and engagement in one's society cannot be understated.

Even in the safest places we are subject to others; even our thoughts are tainted by the ideas of 'normal' and 'abnormal.' As we grow up, we learn what is acceptable in our culture, what we should and shouldn't do-believe-think-say-want-need-feel, we learn that our slightest moves are under the close watch of *something* or *someone*. In some lives that may be that's God, in others perhaps it's the idea of Karma, for Katniss, it was the ever-present Capitol power. We are never really safe to be individuals, we are all these socially constructed creatures who know that a wrong move can land us in isolation, metaphorically or literally. Think about some of those secrets again, how do you choose who to tell them to, which ones to tell, and which shouldn't even be acknowledged as true thoughts? How do you know when the watchful eye of the panopticon is upon you? And when you think the eye didn't catch you, how do you know it's not just holding back its power to enforce?

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Williams, E. (2013). Hitchhiking on the information highway: A reaction to natives, immigrants, tourist, and aliens: Two case studies. *American Reading Forum Annual Yearbook* [Online]. Vol. 33.

**Hitchhiking On The Information Highway: A Reaction To Natives,
Immigrants, Tourists And Aliens: Two Case Studies¹**

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¹ This paper was editorially reviewed and serves as a response to “Natives, Immigrants, Tourists and Aliens: Two Case Studies” as presented at the 2012 American Reading Forum Conference.

Hitchhiking On The Information Highway: A Reaction To Natives, Immigrants, Tourist And Aliens: Two Case Studies

Based on Prensky's (2001) concepts of "digital natives, digital immigrants, digital tourists and digital aliens," teacher educators in higher education likely would fall into the categories of "immigrants or tourists." Meanwhile, current students enrolled in teacher education programs/courses would be more closely aligned with the category of "digital natives." Consequently, a digital gap could exist between the higher education faculty and the students they teach. To narrow the digital gap, it is important for teacher education faculty (whether immigrants or tourists) to become more familiar/experienced with the new technologies being used fluently by their digital native students.

This article chronicles two case studies where higher education faculty explored ways to become more fluent/experienced in digital technology. The first Case Study reported on the experiences of a teacher education faculty member who promoted a Burger King approach to required readings in her course. The "Have it your way" option for text purchases (e-book, textbook, 3-ring paper version) allowed students to select whichever text they deemed appropriate in meeting the reading needs of the course. Case Study Two described the experiences of three higher education faculty in teacher education who compared their personal experiences by engaging in literacy activities using a variety of e-book technologies (Kindle, Nook, iPad, and hardback).

In both case studies, the ultimate goal was to achieve success in literacy and learning. In both case studies, it was confirmed success in literacy and learning could be achieved through the use of a variety of technologies. In both case studies, it was confirmed the choices for teaching tools/technology types was a matter of personal preference. In both case studies, the participants (higher education faculty in teacher preparation) became more fluent/aware of their own personal experiences using a SYOD approach (select your own device, a takeoff on the BYOD approach described earlier). These case studies provide a potential approach for faculty in higher education to engage in activities to narrow the digital gap between faculty (digital immigrants or tourists) and the students (digital natives) they teach.

Implications/Applications

The journey to becoming literate has many routes...but all roads lead to the same destination...a literate individual. The sojourners on the trip start their trek with a variety of travel experiences related to navigating the digital technology highway. Some are well traveled (digital natives) and some have less travel experiences (digital immigrants and tourists). To enhance communication between those who are experienced travelers on the digital highways and those who are less experienced in digital highway navigation, it is important for immigrants and tourists to increase their travel experiences with digital technologies. Implications/ applications derived from the two case studies reported in this article include the following:

1. Higher education and P-12 teachers should embrace a mind-set casting themselves into the role of a tour guide leader for their students on their journey toward literacy. Teachers don't impart learning, but rather facilitate learning.

2. Teachers at all levels need to be aware of the level of experiences of their students as well as their own personal experiences related to the use of digital technology in the quest for literacy. Teachers may be digital immigrants or tourists, while their students are likely to be digital natives. The immigrant or tourist teachers should use the student natives to their advantage in the literacy journey.
3. All teachers should be cognizant of the preferences of their students. Preferences and attitudes not only play a role in which digital routes a learner may select, but also in how much time learners will stick with the journey when the going gets rough.
4. Flexibility in allowing students to choose what technology is best suited for their literacy needs and development should be embraced by all teachers at all levels. Adopting a SYOD (Select Your Own Device) or BYOD (Bring Your Own Device) Policy could very well prove to be the passport students need to guide their own literacy development.
5. It is important for teachers to be aware of a continued, and perhaps even more widespread, digital divide among their students. Not all students will have equal access to all new forms of digital technology.
6. Future conversations regarding the digital divide not only includes the haves and the have nots, but also between the natives, immigrants, tourists, and aliens, between wireless and dial-up, and between those with old technologies and those with new technologies. As schools consider BYOD, this gap could widen significantly.
7. Teachers, whether elementary, secondary or college/university level, should engage in digital technology activities designed to enhance their own skills/attitudes/ understanding toward the greater/more effective use of digital technology in their teaching. With more technological experiences and administrative support, tourist teachers could move to digital immigrant status; likewise, digital immigrant teachers could move closer to the students in the digital native status. Using a buddy system might enhance the teachers' journey from tourist to immigrant.

Students of the 21st century are immersed in a world of learning through a variety of digital technologies. Teachers of the 21st century need to better understand the learning world and use of digital technologies for the 21st century students. Developing a mind-set promoting the infusion of digital devices as part of teaching methodologies is the future of teaching. A guide on the side, advocating the teacher as a facilitator, is an essential concept for tomorrow's teachers to grasp if they are to be effective in helping each student reach his/her potential. Toledo (2007) reminds teachers, "The propensity to immerse oneself in technology, to create a technology-rich educational environment, and to take advantage of the strengths of technology in the classroom are all functions of exposure and interest, not age" (p. 91).

Twenty-first century teachers in higher education and P-12 are all engaged in the quest for student learning and literacy. The roadmap to literacy can be traversed through a variety of digital devices. Students of the 21st century already have their passports (digital knowledge) to gain access to a literacy destination. The big question remains: Where are the teachers of the 21st century? Do they have their passports? Are they in line? Or, are they watching to see who gets in line before they step forward?

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Wilson, N. S., Koss, M. D. (2013). Is there a middle grades canon? A survey methodology. *American Reading Forum Annual Yearbook* [Online]. Vol. 33.

Is there a Middle Grades Canon? A Survey Methodology

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Abstract

Along with the development and implementation of the Common Core State Standards comes confusion on what texts middle grades teachers are supposed to use to support students' learning. Discussions on the existence of a middle school canon are inconclusive. To examine this issue, a survey was implemented asking English/Language Arts middle grades teachers to identify common literary titles they use in their classrooms. This article discusses the identification of the population, the survey design and data collection techniques used to collect data from a large sample of middle grade teachers, and the challenges faced in the administration and initial analysis of the survey. This articles hopes to inform and assist other researchers who plan to complete similar studies.

Is there a Middle Grades Canon? A Survey Methodology

Along with the development and implementation of the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) (Common Core State Standards Initiative, 2012) comes confusion on what texts middle grades teachers are supposed to use to support students' learning. Are they supposed to follow their existing curriculum and infuse the CCSS into what they already teach? Are they supposed to analyze their curriculum and currently used texts to be sure they provide a balance of informational and fictional texts? Should they replace their current texts with the suggested or guiding exemplar texts listed in Appendix B of the CCSS? The CCSS propose a 50/50 split between informational and narrative text in the third grade moving towards a 70/30 split in the tenth grade with 70% of the suggested texts being informational. In January 2013, Gerwetz stated, "some English/language arts teachers are finding themselves caught in a swirl of debate about whether the new standards require them to cut back on prized pieces of the literary canon to make room for nonfiction" (para 1). Others, including Pimental & Coleman, authors of the CCSS for English Language Arts, have stated that the literary canon is a staple to teaching the CCSS standards, and that canonical novels are listed in Appendix B (Gerwetz, 2012; Pimental & Coleman, 2012) as suggestions of exemplar texts. Others still provide commentary on the middle school canon and suggest possible books to rethink and books to swap (Hudson, 2012). These statements all imply that there is, in fact, an accepted middle grades canon, but whether or how to include canonical titles is still up for debate. This confusion leads to the following questions: a) What books are currently being used in English/Language Arts middle grades classrooms identified as grades 4-9? b) Is there an accepted middle school canon? and c) Do these books fit the English/Language Arts text complexity requirements stated in the CCSS?

In order to begin answering these questions, we administered a survey asking English/Language Arts middle grades teachers to identify common literary titles they use in their classrooms. The survey was first distributed during the summer of 2012 through a purposeful national sampling. This article discusses the identification of the population, the survey design and data collection techniques used to collect data from a large sample of middle grade teachers, and the challenges we faced while administering and initially analyzing the survey. In sharing these challenges we hope to inform other researchers who plan to complete similar studies.

Literary Canons: An Exploration

According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, a canon is "a body of literary works traditionally regarded as the most important, significant, and worthy of study." Titles in a canon, often used in education, are typically collected works and authors who have approval by those in academic and cultural circles such as professors, scholars, teachers, and administrators. These texts represent the significant literary works within a "national literature and/or historical period" (Beach, Appleman, Hynds & Wilhelm, 2011, p. 64). Canonical texts are those that everyone is expected to read and appreciate and that will ultimately provide a well-rounded view of literature and a common knowledge base. Canonical texts are considered significant to our cultural heritage and are highlighted and/or referred to in a variety of contexts beyond the walls of the classroom. For instance, themes and key words from Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* are repeated in many pop culture texts, such as Disney television shows aimed at Tweens (A.N.T. Farm, episode replicANT, season 1, episode 8), the *Twilight* series aimed at young adults,

(Meyer, 2005), and an accepted classic, *West Side Story*. However, literary canons are not formally written down, but rather a group of accepted titles known to many and considered of high quality and merit. The canon is always changing, and often parallels ongoing trends in a field (Bloom, 1994; Pryor, 2003).

It has long been believed that there is a Western literary canon (Bloom, 1994) and that canonical texts are being taught in high school classrooms (Bushman & Haas, 2006; Crowe, 2001; Santoli & Wagner, 2004). Over the years there has been continued debate over the proper content of the high school English curriculum. Scholars have argued that many canonical texts have been authored by White European males, thereby marginalizing women and people from other cultural backgrounds, and that the range of titles taught needs to be expanded (Bennett, 1988, & Hirsch, 1987, in Applebee, 1992). Others have argued that tradition is needed in education and adding additional texts will dilute the common American knowledge base (Bennett, & Hirsch, in Applebee, 1992). In order to confirm the texts actually being used in high school English curriculum and to see if texts being used had remained largely the same or had changed over a period of 25 years, Applebee (1989; 1992) conducted a survey in 1988 replicating a survey conducted in 1963 by Anderson (1964). Applebee's study showed that the traditional canon of classic literature remained solidly situated in the high school English curriculum with numerous titles remaining unchanged, such as texts authored by Shakespeare and Dickens. He found that relatively few authors represented were female or from a non-White cultural background, and that few recent titles were added over the years, resulting in titles growing more consistently dated. The study also suggested that the range of titles reported were fewer and more narrowed rather than increasing and potentially diluting the sample. Overall, the range of titles decreased, but inclusion of diverse authors showed a very slight increase.

Some recent studies confirmed Applebee's findings that traditional canonical texts remained in English high school classrooms (Hale & Crowe, 2001; Herz, 1996, in Knickerbocker, 2002), but it was also noted that since 1989 there has been an increasing number of young adult literature titles included (Bushman, 1997; Hale & Crowe; Moore, 1997, in Knickerbocker, 2002). Alternatively, two more recent 2010 studies found little consistency in the texts used in high schools across the U.S. and concluded that there is no longer a consistent high school canon (Stotsky, Goering, & Jolliffe, 2010; Stotsky, Traffas, & Woodworth, 2010). They found that although there was minor overlap on key texts, each school and even each teacher appeared to be teaching in isolation without consistency within and across schools.

These studies all focused on high school, grades 9-12, and suggest that traditionally accepted canonical texts are changing and being supplemented with additional texts. Is the same true for the middle grades? Is there an accepted middle grades literary canon? What titles are currently being taught in American middle grades and are they a consistent body of work? Do these titles overlap the exemplar texts as featured in the CCSS's Appendix B? The survey described in this paper explores and attempts to answer these questions. With the survey, we sought to analyze the responses of middle grades English/language arts teachers to discover whether or not there are common texts taught across the middle grades and if such texts could be considered a literary canon. This article will describe the procedures and processes used to develop and implement the survey, as well as explore the issues that arose as we tried to answer the question, "Is there a middle grades canon?"

Determining Methodology

The first question to ask when conducting research is, “Which methodology is most appropriate for answering the research question?” We chose survey methodology because, according to Wallen and Fraenkel (2000), a survey is the most suitable design for obtaining information “from a group of people in order to describe some aspects or characteristics” (p. 376) of a group, and allows researchers to reach out to a large predetermined population. It was appropriate for this study because the data needed to answer our primary research question “Is there a middle grades canon?” required that a large number of participants share the texts that are part of their middle grades classrooms, and that the responses to the survey questions reflected a large range of teachers. Specifically, a national cross-sectional survey was conducted by the researchers because the data collected would provide information about a specific population at one fixed point in time (Lavrakas, 2008). Schools and teachers have periodic opportunities to purchase and implement new texts in their schools and classrooms, therefore the data collected during this study only reflects the texts teachers had at the time that they complete the survey. Cross-sectional surveys allow for a variety of data collection procedures (Lavrakas, 2008). Thus, the choice of this methodology allowed for flexibility in the techniques used for data collection.

The initial step in designing the cross-sectional survey was to define the participant population. For this study, the population surveyed was teachers who implement full-length texts in the middle grades. First, we needed to identify what age and/or grade span makes up the middle grades. Then we reviewed techniques for identifying teachers of the middle grades to be sampled.

Determining the Population

In determining the makeup of the middle grades, both the common definition of middle grades as defined by state teaching licensure programs and the intellectual development of the identified age span were considered. According to the Association for Middle Level Education, the middle grades include young adolescents, typically children ages 10 to 15. Adolescence begins as children experience rapid growth similar only to the growth that occurs during infancy. During this time, children undergo rapid physical and intellectual changes. Caskey and Ruben (2007) discuss the growth spurt that occurs in the brain as the period of “pruning,” when some neurological connections or pathways in the brain are strengthened and/or disconnected. The connections lead to changes in thinking. These intellectual changes include the physical structure of the brain and how young adolescents conceptualize their world. Middle grades students are also moving from concrete to abstract thinking (Piaget, 1970); as they become more proficient in grasping abstract problems they also begin developing the ability to think about their thinking. Understanding these cognitive changes is critical when considering the population and creating the curriculum for adolescents, in that development does not occur simultaneously.

Due to the variability between students during this developmental period, the range of grades considered middle grades is delineated differently across states according to their teacher certification and licensure requirements. State requirements are not consistent across America. For instance, Ohio, Maryland, Washington, and Nebraska have middle level licensure for grades four through nine; Louisiana, Georgia, Connecticut, and Alabama include grades four through

eight; and, Florida, Kentucky, Michigan, and New York include grades five through nine (McEwin, n.d.). Table 1 provides an overview of middle grades licensure patterns across the United States.

Table 1. Summary of Licensure Patterns by State

Grade Level Bands	Number of States with Licensure in Band
4 to 8	9
4 to 9	3
5 to 8	14
5 to 9	13
6 to 8	3
6 to 9	1
7 to 8	1
7 to 9	1
N/A	5

*Data compiled based on (McEwin, n.d.).

Based on the information in Table 1, it was determined that the widest range of grade levels identified as middle grades was grades 4-9. We used this range in our study to best capture the range of text used across middle grades across the country.

Once the definition of middle grades was determined, we next had to consider which teachers of this population might teach full-length texts that could comprise a middle grades canon. There was a wide range of possible teacher participants, from self-contained fourth grade teachers to ninth grade English teachers. Within this range, there are reading teachers who instruct middle grades students in courses specifically designated as reading and middle grades teachers teaching Language Arts blocks. To capture the variety of classrooms in which full-length literary texts might be taught, teacher participants surveyed included English teachers, Language Arts teachers, Reading teachers, and self-contained teachers who teach across grades 4-9.

Survey Design

In order to remain consistent with seminal canon survey methodology, this study sought to replicate some of the guiding survey questions used by Anderson (1964) and replicated by Applebee (1989). Additionally, although the previous studies focused on literary works used in high school classrooms, it allowed us some basis of comparison to texts that have been used in the past.

The current study included a total of eight demographic questions and three open-ended questions. The demographic questions sought to discern the context of the respondents' schools, grade levels, years of experience, school contexts, and teaching positions. The three open-ended questions were:

- 1) "List for each grade in your school the book-length works of literature which all students in any English/Language Arts class study" (Applebee, 1989).

- 2) List any books that you think students in your school should read but that are not a part of the previous list.
- 3) Are you able to add books to the list of books taught at your school? If so, please describe the process in order to do so.

As mentioned earlier, the first question is directly from the Applebee study and was used to assure that the information uncovered followed the parameters of prior research. The second question was designed to see if there were books teachers believed should be a part of their teaching but that they did not have access to or that were not currently a part of their school curriculum or approved list of titles. The final question was exploratory and aimed at determining if teachers had a role in choosing full-length texts for their classroom and/or school.

Data Collection

A central part of this study and key focus for this article was the process utilized for collecting the data. After determining the population and writing the survey, we reviewed methods of data collection that would assure a nationwide sample could be collected. First, we compiled a list of listservs and professional organizations that target middle grades Reading and Language Arts teachers, as defined above. Then we considered finding teachers who may not be active in professional organizations and concluded that the most efficient way to contact them would be through email. The process for collecting the email addresses is described in detail below. Potential participants were contacted using two techniques: sharing a web link to the survey and email.

The web link was shared primarily through organizations focused on reading education. The Middle School Reading Special Interest Group of the International Reading Association posted a web link to the survey on their website and in their Fall 2012 newsletter, *Reading in the Middle. Reading Today*, a monthly publication of the International Reading Association, shared the link in their October 2012 edition. Finally, the web link was posted and shared on the middle school literature yahoo group listserv. When sharing the link the following message was included:

“Calling all Middle Grades English/Language Arts/Reading teachers: We want to learn what books your students are reading in your classrooms. Please take a moment to complete a brief 10 question survey by going to _____ to participate.”

Contacting teachers through email invitation was a more complex endeavor. In order to contact the teachers, a list of middle grades English/Language Arts teachers with publicly accessible e-mail accounts was compiled. The list started with an alphabetical listing of all fifty states, including the District of Columbia. Then an analysis of the public school districts was conducted within each state to assure that there were urban, suburban, and rural districts represented. Finally, a Google search of the school districts was conducted to determine if the teachers’ email addresses were publically accessible. If the addresses were accessible, emails of teachers identified as meeting the population criteria were added to an Excel worksheet according to state. If there were no publically accessible email addresses, a new district from the same state meeting the same criteria was chosen. In order to assure that teachers in private and

parochial schools also received invitations to participate, a secondary search for schools and email addresses was also conducted. The private school search utilized the website private school review (<http://www.privateschoolreview.com/>). This website lists private schools by county, size, and population. Private and parochial schools with at least 200 students who met the population parameters were included in a Google search to determine if the teachers email addresses were publically accessible. If the addresses were accessible, the email addresses were added to the spreadsheet by state. This sampling was conducted to assure that teachers from a variety of settings and geographical considerations were included. This technique assured a combination of simple random sampling and complex sampling procedures. The hope was that utilization of both techniques would generate a wide range of responses.

Once the email addresses were collected, the addresses were imported into Survey Monkey and Survey Monkey sent the invitation to potential participants. The following was the email sent to potential participants:

To: [Email]

From: researcher's email via surveymonkey.com

Subject: Calling all Middle Grades (4-9) English/Language Arts/Reading teachers

Body: We are conducting a survey, and your response would be appreciated. The Middle School Reading Special Interest Group of the International Reading Association wants to learn what books your students are reading in your classrooms. Please take a moment to complete a brief 12 question survey by going to <https://www.surveymonkey.com/s.aspx> This link is uniquely tied to this survey and your email address. Please do not forward this message.

Thanks for your participation.

Please note: If you do not wish to receive further emails from us, please click the link below, and you will be automatically removed from our mailing list.

<https://www.surveymonkey.com/optout.aspx>

Challenges We Encountered

Email Collection and Response Rate

Sheehan (2001) discussed issues of response rate and the effectiveness of email surveys for gathering data. In her discussion, she reviewed issues that affect response rate including survey length and follow-up requests. In designing our survey, length was taken into consideration since the results of Sheehan's meta-analysis demonstrated that length was a dependent issue with variable results. A shorter length survey is more likely to have more respondents. Sheehan's meta-analysis of follow-up requests was more effective in obtaining responses to the survey. She found that multiple follow-up requests are more likely to lead to higher response rates with email surveys. No follow-up requests were sent during the initial course of data collection reported in this study because of a concern regarding the privacy of the participants. Sheehan also found that as emails surveys become more prevalent, response rates have dropped over time. The use of email as a source for collecting responses has the lowest response rate when compared to traditional mail methods, emails that include web links, and a

combination of methods (Kaplowitz, Hadlock, & Levine, 2004). Based on this information, we used a combination of methods including emails with web links embedded and the posting of the web link in newsletters, mailings, and on listservs.

One major challenge of this study was the process of searching and identifying email addresses. This process was significantly time consuming, an average of 16 hours per state, and ultimately limited the number of emails we were able to send out. A minimum of 500 emails were collected for each state according to population; more populated states having more than 2000 email addresses collected. A total of 21 states and the District of Columbia was surveyed using the methods described above. This large sample was determined adequate because it included states with significant populations, i.e., Florida and California, as well as more rural states, i.e., Alaska, Colorado, and Idaho. Emails were sent to over 13,000 addresses. A small percentage of the emails, 3.6%, bounced back and 1% of the email participants chose to opt out of the survey once receiving the email invitation. This left a pool of 12,518 potential participants presented with the web link via email. However, from this significant pool of participants only 4.7%, or 671, responded. Not all of the participants who responded to the email completed the survey, dropping the response rate to 3% for email respondents.

In addition to the survey requests sent out via email, the web link was shared with a total of three groups, readers of *Reading Today*, *Reading in the Middle*, and the middle school literature yahoo group listserv. These participants accessed the web link independently and the response rates were reviewed separately from the group of email respondents. There were a total of 355 responses to the web link from this population; however, only 50% of those who accessed the web link completed the survey. This group of respondents made up close to one-half of the total responses to the overall survey data collected.

Overall, 760 people accessed the survey, but of those 760 only 548 completed the survey in its entirety. This leads us to believe that revisions need to be made to both our initial means of recruiting participants, including finding ways to gather more emails and identifying additional publications and organizations to distribute our web link, and revising our survey to encourage survey completion.

Question Phrasing

The types of responses received to the three qualitative questions question whether the participants understood what we were asking. In reviewing responses collected, it was clear that a significant number of respondents did not understand the first question: “List for each grade in your school the book-length works of literature which all students in any English/Language Arts class study.” Specifically, approximately 14% of all respondents (email and web link) who answered this question replied with some form of confusion or explicitly stated that they did not understand the question. Some in this group responded to the question by providing a series of page numbers or chapter totals. It can be inferred that they interpreted the question as asking the total number of pages or chapters read by students rather than titles of books. Other respondents included the titles of basal reader series as part of their full-length texts. In designing the survey, we defined full-length literary texts as texts read in their entirety as originally published. This would include short stories, novels, and informational texts that teachers use as part of their

curriculum and not selections found in basal readers. However, it is evident that the phrasing of the question may have made our definition difficult to understand and thus minimized our analyzable responses.

Although the purpose of using the question as asked by Applebee was to assure content validity, the confused responses of 14% of the respondents indicate that the question needs revision. In future iterations of the study it will be important to rephrase this question to identify what is meant by full-length texts while still preserving the integrity of Applebee's question. Presenting the question with a definition of full-length texts or including key terms such as novels and/or trade books could accomplish this. In replicating this study, researchers may want to write a series of questions for this topic and engage in full validity and reliability analysis to determine the best question for the desired results.

Excel[®] Formatting

The initial review of the data collected involved both quantitatively and qualitatively analyzing demographic and open-ended questions. The demographic questions were straightforward; respondents' answers were closed and analyzing the data did not provide any issues. The open-ended questions presented a more difficult task. When exporting the open-ended responses a number of issues arose.

The first was the format of the responses. When writing the questions, we were unclear in how we wished participants to format their responses. Thus, participants listed the texts in a variety of ways. Some separated texts by writing each text on a new line, some used commas or semi-colons between each text, and others did not use any punctuation between the texts. Therefore, before being able to review the texts we had to organize them into a common format. Each response needed to be hand coded and separated by commas in order to use the sorting features of the Excel[®] program.

The second issue was consistency in how titles were entered. Again, our instructions were unclear. Some titles had spelling and/or capitalization errors, others were abbreviated, i.e., 451 vs. *Fahrenheit 451*, and others were included with or without articles, i.e., Giver vs. *The Giver*. When using a computer program such as Excel[®] to analyze data, it is important that the data be entered consistently to assure that counts conducted are accurate. Therefore, each title and response again had to be individually reviewed and altered for consistency. Once the formatting of all responses to the three open-ended questions was completed, the list became the 'codebook' for the data. The data was reanalyzed using the codebook to assure that each title entered followed the required formatting. This process required additional repeated reviews of the data. We recognize that repeated analysis is common in survey responses, but the process would have been less unwieldy had our instructions been clearer.

In replicating this study it is suggested that the questions be phrased in a manner that could assist the researchers in analyzing the data. This could be accomplished by describing to the participants how to enter their responses. For instance, asking the participants to separate titles by commas and not to include beginning articles such as 'A' or 'The' when listing titles.

Next Steps

The survey creation, data collection, and data cleanup has been completed and initial analysis is underway. Our next steps are to continue analyzing the data, revise the survey to clarify our questions and desired responses, and send out additional surveys in order to achieve a higher response rate.

We began our analysis by sorting data through Excel[®] for percentages of titles provided. The most frequently listed titles have been identified and sorted by number of responses. This will help us explore our question of whether or not there is a middle grades canon. We are also in the process of further analyzing the titles both in terms of the text complexity requirements provided in the CCSS Appendix A and identifying the gender and cultural backgrounds of the texts' authors. Additionally, we are further sorting the data by grade levels and will ultimately cross reference grade level titles to specific CCSS grade level standards, separating our data into more defined grade level bands.

We will be following the suggestions above to revise our survey based on our initial results. First, we will alter our phrasing of the open-ended questions to make them more understandable and provide instructions for our desired formatting. Two additional open-ended questions will be added to further tie our survey to the CCSS. Since the impetus of this study was concern over the effect of the CCSS on texts chosen for use in the middle grades classroom, we wish to ask teachers if a) there were any texts added to their classroom curriculum, or b) removed from their classroom curriculum, as a result of implementation of the CCSS. Prior to sharing this question with the large group of respondents, it is important that we conduct reliability and validity analysis to assure that the question generates desired responses.

Lastly, we will continue to work on finding alternative methods of distributing the survey web link and acquiring more email addresses. Additional emails will make our results more reliable and generalizable.

Initial Findings

Initial responses indicated that no one text was identified by a majority of the respondents (See Table 2 below) and that there was no apparent middle grades canon. The texts documented were varied, although there was some overlap. Two texts, *The Giver* and *The Outsiders*, were mentioned more often than other texts, with *The Giver* mentioned 107 times and *The Outsiders* mentioned 92 times. The reported numbers dropped after those two, with the following 8 titles mentioned only between 30-60 times. In addition, two of our top ten responses were "none" or "basal." This indicated that some teachers do not use full-length texts in their classrooms. The combination of "none" and "basal" received 100 mentions, the second overall highest number of responses.

Table 2. Top 10 Reported Titles

Title or Program Reported	# of Times Reported
The Giver	107
The Outsiders	92
Basal Reader	62
To Kill a Mockingbird	55
Romeo and Juliet	47
The Diary of Anne Frank	47
None	38
Night	36
The Hunger Games	32
Holes	31

Analysis by grade-level bands (grades 4-5, 6-7, 8-9) may provide more overlap and present a clearer picture of titles used in classrooms; titles reported for grades 4-5 cannot be compared to grades 6-7 or 8-9 as the developmental levels and reading levels vary quite a bit over this range. Once additional responses to our survey are collected, titles will be analyzed across grade-level bands to identify if higher percentages of titles within bands are reported.

We chose to analyze our most frequently reported titles to look for apparent patterns for use in future analysis. For this step we included all titles mentioned a minimum of 20 times, not including “none” or “basal.” Nineteen titles fit this criterion. Of the 19 titles, 18 were published prior to 1990, showing that few newer texts have been added to the curriculum, which fits the definition of a canon and ascribes concerns about the relevancy of texts being shared with students. Only one text in this grouping, *The Hunger Games*, was published within the last 10 years. All of these 19 texts were narratives, with only two falling into the nonfiction category. Both of these two were autobiographies, showing a significant lack of informational text. We also noted that 13 of the 19 books had Lexile levels lower than 1000, strongly indicating that books used are not meeting the CCSS text complexity quantitative requirements.

Conclusion

In presenting the techniques and initial findings used in our survey design and data collection, we hope to share with readers more than simply methodology but what we have learned and challenges we have faced using this methodology. By describing the steps we took and our issues with email collection and response rates, question phrasing, and Excel[®] formatting, researchers can become aware of and address these issues as they design their own surveys for future research. Additionally, we share our next steps to continue providing guidelines and suggestions in the purpose and analysis methods used.

In addition, our initial findings present a unique look at the texts used in the classrooms of our participants. It appears that although there is not a strong middle grades canon, the adoption of newer texts is not commonplace. Furthermore, the responses provided may cause some concern about the use of the existing texts to meet the CCSS.

Overall, this study has demonstrated that collected data regarding a middle grades canon is a complex process. The findings presented here are significant because they not only demonstrate issues of methodology, but highlight the variety of texts used in the middle grades.

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Soboleski, P., Thomas, A., Hendricks, C., Cochran, L. (2013). Natives, immigrants, tourists and aliens: Two case studies. In *American Reading Forum Annual Yearbook* [Online]. Vol. 33.

Natives, Immigrants, Tourists and Aliens: Two Case Studies

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Abstract

There are significant numbers of readers who have not taken the plunge into the world of e-book reading, including university professors. This article describes two case studies where the professors experimented with the use of e-books. Case study one involved the integration of e-books into college classroom use. The focus of the investigation was to determine whether students assigned to the classes would purchase a hardbound paper copy of the book, a loose-leaf paper copy, or rent access to an e-book copy, and to determine their reasons for doing so. The author concluded students selected e-Books for multiple reasons. Case study two was designed to experience fiction and non-fiction e-book reading through various electronic devices. Mixed methodologies including focused questions via researcher-developed questionnaires, journaling and recorded book discussions were used. The researchers concluded not all students enjoy the electronic reading experience and should not be forced to switch from print to e-book. Thinking back to the first grade studies, we learned there isn't one best way to teach all children to read, and, using today's vernacular, not all children are going to learn to read using the same technologies.

Natives, Immigrants, Tourists and Aliens: Two Case Studies

Teachers must think carefully about the modalities they have available for use when they are engaged with children in the teaching of reading. In preparing students to live in a global world, the use of technology as a teaching tool is no longer an option. McKeon (2010) writes, “Using electronic text as a literacy tool has become increasingly important for students as we embrace a technologically global world” (p. 246). Further, according to Rainie, Zickuhr, Purcell, Madden and Brenner (2012), the rise of e-books in American culture is part of a larger story about a shift from printed to digital material. Marino (2012) reports 43% of Americans ages 16 and older read extended text such as magazines, journals, and news articles on a digital device (e-book readers, tablet computers, regular computers, cellular phones). Marino adds only 21% of adults polled in February 2012 had read an e-book.

Nowhere in the United States is the range of knowledge, skills, and dispositions regarding the digital revolution and new literacies as pronounced as they are in our nation’s schools: elementary, middle, junior high, senior high, two-year and four-year colleges and universities. These emerging technologies require an entire new vernacular. For example, throughout the country, schools across the grade span are requesting students BYOD (Bring Your Own Device). Textbooks, assignments, note taking and other traditional pen and paper activities are replaced by whatever device the student has available. BYOD and other terms describe the new state of affairs in today’s classrooms. The following section describes the various stages of development relative to new technologies and new literacies today’s teachers may find in their classrooms.

Natives, Immigrants, Tourists, and Aliens

Prensky (2001) introduced the term “digital natives” to capture the unique composition and needs of our P-12 students immersed and surrounded by digital technology from birth. Like previous generations, students in the 21st century embraced their own styles, fads, music, and entertainment. However, Prensky argued, “The arrival and rapid dissemination of digital technology in the last decades of the twentieth century” (p. 2) has molded current students neurologically, psychologically, socially, and emotionally in unprecedented ways. Their use of technology for learning, communication, and entertainment is native to them. This submersion has caused our students “to think and process information fundamentally different” (p. 2) from previous generations because the skills required to process the technology are different from those used to ‘hunt and gather’ information. Much of the information presented digitally has already been collected, thus eliminating the searching, identifying, organizing, constructing, and testing used prior to the advent of instantaneous digital information. Emerging research suggests this cognitive shift has resulted in physiological and neurological changes in the anatomy of and neurological processing in the brain (Greenfield, 2011). Unlike many of their P-12 teachers, these students have been either surrounded by or immersed in technology from birth; they are natives of the digital world.

“Digital immigrants” (Prensky, 2001) have adapted to the technology demands of the 21st century. Prior to immigrating, these individuals approached learning, communicating, and entertaining themselves very differently than the digital natives. Printed materials were the

primary sources of information most usually found in books, periodicals, and encyclopedias. They received instruction in face-to-face classrooms among their classmates. Communication was primary via talking either face-to-face or by telephone. And, their entertainment involved spending time physically with other people; they are natives of a very different world. It is likely their involvement in technology was slow and incremental, but over time they have become comfortable using the devices. Although they are capable of using the devices effectively, many of our current P-12 teachers are digital immigrants. They have moved into the digital era, but this is not their native language.

Another group of digital users are the “digital tourists” (Billington, 2011). Much like tourists who travel, these individuals have no intentions of packing up and immigrating to the digital world; they are very content living in their native, pre-digital world. Their engagement in the digital world falls along a spectrum, from the use of touch-tone phones to using Skype to engaging in on-line social networks. Most tend to visit the technologies as opposed to moving in and adopting the way of the 21st century. Many of our P-12 teachers are digital tourists trying to teach digital natives. The challenge facing P-12 teachers and teacher educators is learning how to teach immigrants and tourists to effectively instruct natives.

One additional group of digital users, “digital aliens,” are described as mostly older “pre-DOS folk who think bandwidth is the size of the orchestra and a hard drive is the I-5 through the Grape Vine [sic] when it’s icy” (Alderman, 2013, para. 6). Digital aliens are outsiders in the digital arena, or engage the new technologies on a minimal level. They may have some basic skills, but adapt slowly with the fast-paced changes in the world of technology. There are a limited number of classroom teachers who would be considered total digital aliens as most have beyond minimal skills with computers and other technological devices. However, some may not use Smartboards, read from e-text or consider integrating technology into their instructional repertoire. These teachers would likely be digital aliens. It seems logical, however, the infectious nature of technology would naturally move classroom teachers to a higher level of digital technology citizenship status.

New Literacies

The changes in new digital technologies produce changes in the way readers read. Reading on a screen is a different type of activity than reading from a printed text. E-reading may also affect the way students view reading as the new technology may serve as a halo effect for reluctant readers. Lankshear and Knobel (2003) refer to “new literacies” and believe students need engagement with these new modalities. Fears of a digital divide with the haves and the have nots (with various levels as described above) lead to concern about social and economical inequities that may emerge as a result of issues with access and availability to technology within and among classrooms throughout the United States.

Semali (2001) argues teaching literacy to today’s children requires teaching traditional literacy as well as “...how to read and produce the kinds of texts typical of the emerging information and multimedia age” (para 1.). He further argues, that “electronic texts are destabilizing previously held conceptions of literacy and are requiring students and teachers to examine assumptions about reading, writing, books, and what we know—and think we know—

about curriculum practice” (para. 2). By helping students comprehend and communicate through both traditional and emerging technologies, they will be better prepared for the information age.

Rationale for Case Studies

In spite of all the news regarding the popularity of electronic devices for reading e-books, there are significant numbers of readers who have not taken the plunge into the world of e-book reading. Their reasons for not embracing the e-book revolution vary widely. Among the numbers of non-e-book proponents are readers of all ages and occupations, including university professors who teach courses to undergraduate and graduate education majors. Through a series of informal discussions, four university professors realized they (a) were not engaged in the e-book reading revolution, and (b) were not effectively teaching their undergraduate and graduate teacher education candidates how to e-read using e-books.

Armed with the knowledge good modeling is one of the most effective ways of preparing future teachers, including reading teachers, it dawned on the professors they needed not only to talk about using e-books, but they, themselves, needed to experience e-books so they would be able to integrate them successfully in their university courses. Thus, the e-book via electronic device journey began.

This manuscript describes the journeys of four professors who threw caution to the wind and began to head straight in to the technology revolution. The article describes two case studies where the professors experimented with the use of e-books. One professor engaged in using e-technology with three sections of a university course, while the other three professors began at the novice level, choosing to read via e-book to experience what new learners might experience. What follows are their stories of e-book integration.

Case Study One

Case study one involved the integration of e-books into three sections of a university course. In an attempt to transition e-books to college classroom use, three sections of one course used an online e-book as part of a packet for an introduction to special education class. The class was an introductory special education course requiring students to read from the book entitled, *Exceptional Children: An Introduction to Special Education* (10th ed.) (Heward, 2013). The focus of the investigation was to determine whether students assigned to the classes would purchase a hardbound paper copy of the book, a loose-leaf paper copy, or rent access to an e-book copy, and to determine their reasons for doing so.

Participants

The population used in this investigation consisted of 138 digital natives or immigrants who were enrolled in three sections of an introductory special education course during spring semester 2012 at a four-year regional public university in the Midwest. The instructor self-identified as a digital tourist. The university focuses primarily on undergraduate education and began as a normal school; it maintains its reputation as a teacher preparation institution. Roughly 87% of the students were Caucasians, 3% of African descent, and the remaining 10% were either

mixed or did not identify themselves by race. Students enrolled in the class were primarily sophomores or juniors, so they had experience with taking courses on campus with both large and small group class sizes. Students enrolled in the classes were mixed in terms of academic majors; there were 62% early childhood, middle childhood, adolescent/young adult (secondary), intervention services (special education), business/marketing, world language, physical education, music, and art majors, while 38% were intervention services (special education) majors. Because more than half of the students in the class were not majoring in special education, they believed the book was only needed for the semester and did not plan to keep the book for the future. Table 1 identifies the demographic information about the class.

Table 1

Participant Demographics by Section

Section	Total Students	Special Ed Majors	Other Majors	Female	Male
1	31	9	20	23	8
2	89	35	55	64	25
3	18	6	13	11	7
Totals	138	50	88	98	40

Methodology

The first step in this investigatory process was to introduce the students to the e-book idea and to explain the perceived advantages and disadvantages of the e-book options. The investigator noted several advantages to integrating the e-textbook into the college classroom and pointed these out to the students. First, e-texts were physically easier for students because they did not have to carry an additional textbook. They could move about buildings and campus sites without carrying heavy-laden book bags or carryall. In addition, they were able to access content from multiple sources and location through different websites (i.e., Google, publishing companies, etc.) without regard to size or location of site. Third, some of the presentation could be set up in the same layout as print textbooks with single page (portrait/landscape views) and dual page (landscape). Fourth, the material could be integrated directly into the PowerPoint presentations, study guides, and chapter tests.

One additional advantage included facilitating the studying and learning of new material, which could be accomplished with the new e-books. Teachers could choose to highlight text options to focus student learning more effectively during reading. Important vocabulary, key points, major viewpoints could be identified for those students needing special attention and assistance. This could serve like post-it notes from teacher to students, asking questions, directing the students in their note-taking directly into pages or chapters for later study. Improved multitasking would allow students to quickly return to the last page they were viewing using features such as “Go To Page, Zoom, Next / Prev” page navigation. Students could also search online texts and histories within a title or topic of interest.

Available features, such as the Bookshelf, Table of Contents, a Notes Manager and Rich Audio Options including synchronized highlighting of text and multilingual glossary (in certain titles) could be beneficial to students' comprehension and retention of the material. Other available features included Help, Hotspot links to web-based media and dual platforms for Mac- or Windows-based e-Text. Study groups could also be created allowing students to share notes with friends via the iPad's Bluetooth connection or in the same WiFi hotspot. Many of these advantages were not unique to students using e-books; however, the instructor thought it was important for students to realize some of these features and advantages were not unlike those of a paper text, or the duplicated materials.

Along with positive aspects of e-book learning, the course instructor pointed out the negative aspects to e-book learning for students. For example, each student would need to be concerned with security and the need for authentication via usernames and passwords. All information kept in electronic form would be open to hackers and clever students seeking to override teachers' plans.

After students learned of the advantages and disadvantages of reading the e-book, they selected whether they wanted to purchase a hardbound paper copy of the book, a loose-leaf paper copy, or rent access to an e-book copy. Once the students had identified their choices, they were asked to respond to a survey regarding their selection and to identify reasons for their selections.

Results

The options for instructional text for the semester were: (a) a hardbound paper copy of the book, (b) a loose-leaf paper copy, or (c) a rented e-book copy. Given these options, approximately 49% (68 students) chose to rent the e-book, while 46% (57 students) selected the bound, 3-hole punched copy. Very few students (5%; 13 students) chose to purchase the hardbound copy. Table 2 identifies the textbook options by section.

Table 2

Textbook Options by Section

Section	Total Numbers	E-books	3-hole	Hard bound
1	31	17	11	3
2	89	42	38	8
3	18	9	8	3
Totals	138	68	57	12

E-book option. The second purpose for this investigation was to determine why the students chose the versions they did. The first, and most frequently reported response from those who selected the e-book option, was ease of use (no books to carry, accessible from multiple locations). Students valued their time and the ability to access the class readings from multiple locations met their needs. Another frequently cited reason for the e-book preference was the direct connections made between the PowerPoint presentations, the study guides, and the chapter

tests. Students found this information helpful. Students also enjoyed the post-it notes from the teacher, the highlight options from the teacher, and the note taking they were able to do directly into the pages or chapters of the text. The students appeared to want access to the book at all times, and preferred the teacher to continue to provide assistance to them while they read.

Three-hole punched version. For those students who chose the bound three-hole punched copy, their primary reason for selecting the paper copy was cost. The bound book was cheaper and could be placed in a binder purchased separately at lower cost than the hardback. The students would only need to bring those sections required for notes to class on individual days. Some special education majors chose this option rather than the hardbound copy. They did not believe the electronic version was an option because they wanted to access the material later. This also had the additional feature of being lighter when put in their backpacks.

Hardback version. For those students who chose the hardbound version of the text, the most frequently reported reason for doing so was desire to keep the book after the class was over as a referent. The permanent nature of these books appealed to some students.

Reflections at the end of the semester. Toward the end of the semester, the instructor asked the students to reflect on their book choices. Students were asked to respond whether they would make the same choice again, or whether they would choose a different option. The results were:

E-book option. Of the 68 students who originally selected the e-book option of the text, all indicated they would make the same choice since they were all non-special education majors. In an informal discussion with the students who used the e-book, some of the reasons for these choices include: those reasons listed above (ease of carrying laptop which they tended to bring to classes anyway, least expensive cost of a book they were not planning to keep or need in the future, and access to electronic resources online while reading).

Three-hole punched version. Of the 57 students who selected the three-hole punched version of the text, 41 indicated they would make the same choice while five said they would select the e-book option and the remaining 11 said they would select the hardback version. In an informal discussion of students who selected the three-hole punched version, some of the reasons for these choices include: the special education majors did not realize the need for a more durable copy of the book they could keep to study for state-required testing and the non-special education students thought this might be a book they would want as a resource later.

Hardback version. Of the 12 people who selected the hardback version of the text, 10 indicated they would make the same choice and two said they would select the three-hole punched version. In an informal discussion of the students who selected the hardback version, some of the reasons for these choices include: this copy would provide resource material and would have cost less than the hardbound.

Summary

Students see the value of a temporary copy; the ease of access online, and the computer/iPad version of the book made the e-book reading more mobile. To encourage the use of e-books, publishers have reduced the financial commitment for students by pricing these less than the paper versions. In conclusion, e-Books have multiple reasons for their use: light weight for mobility, and decreased costs. Technology can bring students and teachers toward future electronic media. The uniqueness of these electronic books or e-books is where teaching is headed, and faculty need to be prepared to embrace the changing media.

Case Study Two

The primary focus of the investigation for case study two was to experience e-book reading through various electronic devices using both fiction and non-fiction e-books. Each participant read adolescent fiction and non-fiction (selected to focus on the e-reader, not so much the content of the book) on a Kindle, NOOK, and an iPad, as well as traditional print, and recorded logistical, efferent and aesthetic reactions (Rosenblatt, 1994) to the experiences. Specifically, then, the purpose of this investigation was to examine first-time users' reactions to various electronic devices for fiction and non-fiction e-book reading. Incidental explorations included identifying skills specific to e-reading, identifying potential difficulties associated with e-reading, and identifying teacher biases toward print and e-readers.

Participants

Three participants were involved with the investigation: Allison, Carol, and Paula. Allison's primary teaching responsibility was with middle school pre-service teachers. Her primary teaching area included language arts methods and classes related to phonics and the role of phonics in the reading process. She thought of herself as a digital immigrant; she was eager to explore and implement new technologies in her personal life and in her teaching. Carol's teaching responsibilities were primarily with graduate students teaching theories and foundations, as well as assessment courses. Likewise, Carol viewed herself as a digital immigrant. Both Allison and Carol used PCs and Macs, Smartphones, iPads/iPods, engaged in social networking, and experimented with emerging technologies; however, prior to this study, neither had read an e-book. Paula's teaching responsibilities were split between graduate and undergraduate classes; however, she taught intervention and assessment courses at both levels. She saw herself as a digital tourist. Although she learned how to use many of the same tools as Allison and Carol, she chose to remain in the world of print and face-to-face relationships.

The participants' pre-study attitudes toward using e-readers were mixed. Allison (the younger of the three) was more willing to plunge into unknown waters. She expressed her eagerness to try several devices. Carol and Paula (both the same age) seemed willing but a bit apprehensive. Carol's familiarity with an iPhone made her a bit more comfortable with the navigation of similar devices. Of the three, Paula was more reticent in her approach to the study. Although she understood the significance of personal experience with using e-readers, she was the least technologically prepared participant.

Participants' identification with digital immigrants propelled their participation in the study. Each professor understood the digital divide between themselves and their students and the importance of closing the gap to provide timely, appropriate instruction for digital texts in P-12 classrooms; each recognized the growing numbers of e-readers in their classrooms, and each realized it was time to enter the world of e-reading so as to be better prepared personally to address appropriate pedagogy and challenges faced with reading digital texts. Allison was very excited to embark on the use of e-readers. As a reader, she wanted to understand the reading process and experience from a personal perspective. Carol, too, understood the importance of being able to speak about e-reading from a personal experience. She was eager to try several different devices and was very interested in the pedagogical implications. Paula's motivation to join the study stemmed from her desire to more appropriately prepare her classroom teachers to use e-readers in their own classrooms. Like the other two participants, she was a voracious reader.

Methodology

The investigation used mixed methodologies including focused questions via researcher-developed questionnaires, journaling and recorded book discussions. Over the course of three months, each participant read one-fourth of the fiction book and one-fourth of the non-fiction book using each format. Table 1 provides the rotation schedule used for reading, with the same process used for both fiction and non-fiction. Recorded book discussions were held immediately after each book was completed.

Table 3

Reading Rotation Schedule

PARTICIPANT	KINDLE	NOOK	IPAD	PRINT
A	2 nd	3 rd	4 th	1 st
C	3 rd	4 th	1 st	2 nd
P	4 th	1 st	2 nd	3 rd

The fiction e-book, *The Grimm Legacy* (Shulman, 2010) was read first, followed by the non-fiction e-book, *Left for Dead* (Nelson, 2002). The participants thought it best to use easy reading material so the focus could be on the reading experience, rather than vocabulary, sentence structure, etc.

Participants completed questionnaires before and after reading the text on each device, and journaled about their experiences. After analyzing the questionnaires, journals, and book discussions, the participants believed their experiences should be shared collectively, rather than individually. Several significant findings seem to emanate from this investigation that deserved to be shared and discussed. We have formulated them into logistical experiences and aesthetic experiences from individual and classroom perspectives.

The logistical experience. The first thing that comes to mind in this category is, "How many reading professors does it take to download a book onto a Nook, iPad, and Kindle?" With

unclear directions, credit card security issues, and other logistical problems, downloading the books quickly emerged as a significant problem in moving this investigation forward. One participant commented, “Purchasing the book was rather entertaining because I didn’t have a clue how to do it.” Another lamented, “I have been trying for two days to register this device. I can’t get a signal so now I have to go to the store.” Once the books were downloaded, participants began the reading experience. This difficulty would not likely be a concern in the teacher education or P-12 classroom because working with digital devices is native to most students; however, it was a reminder ‘how-to’ guides are important for scaffolding digital tourists’ and immigrants’ migration.

Cost was another factor identified as part of the logistical experience. One participant began the study with quite an attitude about e-books because she never buys books. She wrote, “I think what is really bothering me with the e-readers is the fact that I have to buy books. I’m so used to borrowing them from the library (for free) and I tend to be quite stingy with my money so that is really the only downfall I am seeing from these e-readers.” All her reading outside work was completed with books borrowed from the library, so paying for downloads quickly became a negative aspect of e-book reading...until she discovered her local library had e-books available for borrowing, and there were sites on the Internet providing access to books available to download for free. Later, after waiting two hours for an appointment and experimenting with a download, she wrote, “I decided it was quite convenient not to have to order the book online and wait for it. Something about instant gratification (and no shipping costs) really fit the bill today and I thought nothing of spending \$15.99 on my new book.”

Acquisition of the books for schools is very similar to personal acquisition. Many of the classic pieces of literature can be downloaded free from sites such as www.free-ebooks.net, www.gutenberg.org, www.kobobooks.com, www.amazon.com, www.barnesandnoble.com, and www.bookboon.com. The purchase of downloadable books for P-12 schools is very similar to the purchase of printed materials. Gift cards for Amazon, Barnes and Noble, and iTunes allow schools to purchase multiple licenses to upload on devices with very little security risk. However, the price per e-book is considerably higher than the cost of a paperback book.

Features of the e-reader devices were also considered in the logistical experience category. Perhaps because participants did not struggle with the text, perhaps because they were pressed for time, or perhaps because they were occupied with just being engaged with the text, they ignored exploring the various features of the e-reader devices, designed to make them appealing. Participants largely ignored the highlighting, underlining, vocabulary assistance, and note taking features of the e-readers. During one of the book conversations, it was noted by the participants they did not use any of the features on the e-reader. The participants (perhaps, because of their ages), enjoyed they could increase the size of the text for easy reading without reading glasses.

Features included on the e-readers such as highlight, bookmarking, dictionary, and thesaurus can be used very effectively in reading teacher education courses by instructors teaching reading methods, content reading, language arts methods and materials, and reading assessment and intervention courses. Students in populations with exceptionalities may find changing font size and color or screen brightness to be very suitable modifications. Likewise, P-

12 classroom teachers can use these features to augment vocabulary instruction across content areas. Some devices can even determine the reading level of the text to help teachers and students determine the appropriateness of the readability.

Measures of progress were noted by participants as positive aspects of e-books, similar to the print version. Reading to the end of a chapter, seeing page numbers, or percent of book completed were viewed as positive aspects of the e-readers. However, participants were a bit particular about which measures they preferred. One participant wrote, “There wasn’t a page number but a percent. That made me frustrated because I track pages.” Bookmarks were also mentioned in a favorable light. As one participant explained, “Love the bookmarks. You can’t lose them like you can with real books.”

The aesthetic experience. One of the participants was very excited about the iPad and the aesthetic experience achieved during reading: “I’m pretty excited about the iPad simulating page turning. I like that it feels like turning real pages.” Later, the same participant commented, “The thing I discovered was when I turned the iPad from vertical orientation to horizontal orientation, it appeared more like a real book. I liked that!” Another participant referred to one of the e-reader devices as “...a cold hard plastic device in my hand.” However, after spending time with the device, she wrote, “My thoughts obviously changed from a bit of fear (apprehension) to actually enjoying the experience and wishing I didn’t have to pass it on for...next week.”

These digital immigrants found it took several encounters with the devices before the experience became more “natural.” Certain features helped the participants bridge their skepticism with the “cold hard plastic devices,” such as horizontal, dual page presentation (iPad), the swipe of the finger to reflect the flipping of the page (iPad and NOOK), and the gray-tone look of a book page (the Kindle). Becoming familiar with these features will enable reading professors to coach resistant students through the acclimation of using a digital device. Likewise, classroom teachers can emphasize these features for students whose previous literacy experiences have been solely with printed materials.

Pictures (or the lack of pictures) led all participants to express their displeasure about their reading experiences. The non-fiction book had pictures of all the people in the story as well as artifacts relevant to the story line. Once each participant had her turn with the print version, immediate dissatisfaction was noted as the e-book versions did not have any of the pictures included in the print version. One participant commented, “An immediate comparison from the iPad to the book may lead to an unfair evaluation of the iPad, but I’m not sure. I was mad about the pictures...the book had pictures and the e-books did not. I felt cheated not to have the pictures in the e-books.”

The absence of pictures on these particular devices could foster some frustration with our digital natives, who seem to be very visually stimulated and engaged (Greenfield, 2011). Many of our PreK-12 natives have grown accustomed to surfing on the internet, which is heavily laden with graphics, as are their electronic handheld games and console video games. Reluctant readers are often engaged by illustrations, photos, and graphics, so the absence of such may not be enough to lure them into the device. Likewise, they have grown accustomed to audio-enhanced and augmented games and websites. In some respects, the digital e-readers may not be as

engaging to these students. Reading professors need to address these potential pitfalls with future teachers and work to develop appropriate modifications or pre-teaching to prepare the PreK-12, at-risk, or reluctant students for this element.

For one participant, her aesthetic experience with the e-books does not compare to the euphoria achieved with a real book. Her frustration was evident when she wrote, “That’s it—I feel detached from the book!!! Clicking buttons is not at all like turning pages.” When it was her turn to read the print version, she wrote, “Ah! I have the book! I am looking forward to flipping pages, curling up to read, and smelling the essence of words.” She continued to be disenfranchised with the e-readers. While she was reading from the iPad, she wrote, “I am still feeling very detached from the book and story; I ended up spending hours playing the games rather than reading.”

Teachers of reading are sure to be faced with those students who just have to have a “real” (print-based) book, and they must creatively find ways to lure these readers to, at the very least, explore the world of digital texts. Current pedagogy still relies on the use of printed books in the classroom; this practice must move closer to the inclusion of digital devices for more than just games. As the participants concurred, reading e-readers requires a different skill set. Reading digitally requires the reader to know how to operate the device, access the support tools, read digital text, and minimize distractibility, especially in devices offering functions other than reading (iPad, NOOK, Kindle Fire). Professors of reading need to provide their pre-service teachers with guidelines for best practices in reading using e-readers to help classroom teachers effectively use devices across the content areas.

The notion of cuddling with the book was the focus of several participants’ comments related to their aesthetic experiences. About the book, one participant wrote, “It was wonderful cuddling up with this book because I had the print version.” Later, after experiences with all three e-readers, she wrote, “I think I’m really starting to like this over print. I didn’t expect that to happen at all. I can indeed ‘cuddle up’ with this iPad unlike I previously predicted. Sweet!” Another participant wrote, “I had no trouble cuddling up. I actually found it easier because it is lighter in my hands and less bulky.”

Students who have experienced ‘cuddling up’ with their handheld devices may find this transition to be bizarre; however, this may not be the case with many of their classroom teachers. As Rosenblatt (1994) noted, the sensual experience is part of how the reader constructs and interprets the reading experience. It is important for reading professionals to understand some readers may not be able duplicate the sensual experience of touching aging pages and sniffing fragrances found only in older books when reading with an e-reader. Nor does this mean only digital tourists or immigrants may have this infinity for printed text. Likewise, it is important to acknowledge some digital immigrants, such as two of our participants, can find comparable pleasure and delight from cuddling up with their devices. Perhaps, the challenges facing professors of reading is how to provide and support classrooms where explorations with both approaches are encouraged, and how to collectively develop guidelines for best practices for using e-readers in reading instruction.

Conclusions

This investigation featured the exploits of three readers experimenting with print books and e-books using a Nook, iPad, and Kindle. Logistically, it was difficult to get started with some of the devices. While improvements may have been made in various systems for getting started with these electronic devices, less determined readers may have just quit and opted out of the e-reading experience. Educators need to be aware difficulties may be experienced during the initial start-up of the electronic reading device.

A variety of financial obstacles impede full implementation of electronic readers into today's classrooms. From the costs of the devices to ordering books, maintaining devices, and keeping the batteries charged, educators need to be aware of the obvious costs for implementing electronic classrooms, but also the hidden costs such as batteries, buying books, and charging stations.

Many of the unique features of the Nook, iPad, and Kindle were largely ignored by the participants in this investigation. This was due, we believe, to time constraints. It takes far more time to explore the features of the various e-readers and become proficient with them independently, than it does to be shown how to use them. Teachers should be aware students will struggle to use the features or ignore them completely. Had the participants in this investigation selected text to read at their instructional or frustration levels, they may have been forced to use more of the unique features. Both positive and negative reactions to forced learning may have presented themselves. Significant research needs to be conducted with students to determine what features they are using, how they are using them, and whether the features can be used more effectively.

Aesthetically, two of the three participants actually viewed the e-reader devices in a positive light. These readers became converts, so the fallacy you can't teach an old dog new tricks applies to them. One of the participants wrote, "I'm now packing for our trip and I am packing the Nook; however, I know I will still throw in a print version of a book or two. I can't see myself going on a trip without a copy of a book in my bag." A second of the participants began exploring the reading of e-books on her smart phone and continues to read on the smart phone.

The final participant clings tightly to the print versions of books. A quote from by Ray Bradbury, accurately expresses her feelings: "A computer does not smell...If a book is new, it smells great. If a book is old, it smells even better...And it stays with you forever. But the computer doesn't do that for you. I'm sorry" (Weller, 2010, para. 113).

An unexpected outcome of this study is the dialogue it created at college-level, departmental, and informal meetings. Each of the participants acknowledged the value of wrestling with the devices, learning how to read digital texts, and struggling with unexpected difficulties throughout the study. The value of the study extended beyond learning how to use and read with an e-reader; it placed each participant back in the seat of the learner. It reminded us of what it means to learn something new in a short amount of time. We were disconnected from our pre-service and graduate students and discovered engaging in digital reading has merit,

inside and outside of the classroom. We also realized we more intentionally needed to include the use of e-readers in our courses to help classroom teachers implement the use of digital readers in their classrooms. Several districts in our area have building-wide iPad or notebook distribution, so their teachers need to know how to effectively use them in their reading instruction. Finally, we confirmed the importance of experiencing the same challenges facing our PreK-12 pre-service and in-service teachers; this allowed each of us to include authentic discussions about the benefits and challenges of implementing the use of e-readers.

There is much to be learned from all participants in this investigation. Educators must remember the participants herein were willing risk-takers. They were willing to put their print versions down and experiment with the e-books. Not all readers will be willing to do this. As stated earlier, these readers seemed to adjust well to the change, but, if they were struggling with the text, the results may have been very different, so the happy ending may not have been so happy if difficult text would have been used. It is also important to note none of these readers selected the same format to continue their e-reading experiences. Educators should be aware even among e-reading devices, there is great diversity among preferences. From our final reader who is still not reading e-books, educators should be reminded print versions of text, along with e-books and e-readers are a matter of preference. Not all students will enjoy the electronic reading experience and should not be forced to switch from print to e-book. Thinking back to the first grade studies, we learned there isn't one best way to teach all children to read, and, using today's vernacular, not all children are going to learn to read using the same technologies. Some will prefer low tech such as print, while others may prefer much more sophisticated strategies. Rainie et al., (201) summarize it best, "In a head-to-head competition, people prefer e-books to printed books when they want speedy access and portability, but print wins out when people are reading to children and sharing books with others" (para. 16).

Conclusions

Because numerous reports suggest e-book reading is on the rise, it is important for teacher educators to understand which devices are being used and to understand who are the e-book readers. Marino (2012) notes only 29% of American adults own a personal e-book device such as a tablet or reader. She writes Baby Boomers (ages 50-64) are more likely to own an e-reader while Generation Xers (30-49) are more likely to own a tablet and Millennials (under 30) are more likely to own a smart phone. The conclusion she draws is older adults are more likely to own and read from devices designed specifically for reading while younger people read from a more multi-purpose device. As to who engages in e-book reading, Rainie et al. (2012) write:

Those who have taken the plunge into reading e-books stand out in almost every way from other kinds of readers. Foremost, they are relatively avid readers of books in all formats: 88% of those who read e-books in the past 12 months also read printed books. Compared with other book readers, they read more books. They read more frequently for a host of reasons: for pleasure, for research, for current events, and for work or school. They are also more likely than others to have bought their most recent book, rather than borrowed it, and they are more likely than others to say they prefer to purchase books in general, often starting their search online. (para. 3)

Marino's infographic (2012) suggests readers who own an e-reader device tended to read more books in a year than those readers who did not own a device. Through numerous market studies, Owen (2011) concludes: "Today's e-book power buyer—someone who buys an e-book at least once a week—is a 44-year-old woman who loves romance and is spending more on buying books now than in the past. She uses a dedicated e-reader like a Kindle instead of reading on her computer" (para. 1). Further insight into readers of electronic books might be gained with some data regarding perceptions of the advantages and disadvantages of e-book reading. Marino (2012) reported (according to a survey of e-book readers) of those who had read an e-book in the last year, 45% reported it was easier to read an e-book in bed; 53% said there was a wider selection, and 83% cited the ability to get books quickly as pluses for e-reading. On the negative side, 81% said a regular book is best for reading with a child, and 69% said regular books were best for sharing with others.

The various features of e-books could possibly be used to support adolescents' reading development (Lefever-Davis & Pearman, 2005) as well as improve their attitude and motivation for reading. According to Tompkins (2002), children are excited about these emerging technologies, including e-books, and are enthusiastic about experimenting with all the technologies have to offer. Leu, Kinzer, Coiro, and Cammack (2004) conclude

The new literacies...include the skills, strategies, and dispositions necessary to successfully use and adapt to the rapidly changing information and communication technologies and contexts that continuously emerge in our world and influence all areas of our personal and professional lives. These new literacies allow us ...to identify important questions, locate information, critically evaluate the usefulness of that information, synthesize information to answer those questions, and then communicate the answers to others. (p. 1572)

Teachers must be prepared to move from digital alien or tourist, to digital native, if they are to be successful in preparing our digital natives for the future.

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Woodhall, C., & Zygouris-Coe, V. (2013). An exploratory study of science teachers' instructional challenges and disciplinary literacy. *American Reading Forum Annual Yearbook* [Online]. Vol. 33.

An Exploratory Study of Science Teachers' Instructional Challenges and Disciplinary Literacy

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Abstract

Teaching secondary science in today's fast changing technological economy requires science educators to integrate literacy development and skills in their science instruction. This need can be accomplished with professional development that is grounded in research-based strategies and content, relevancy and support. This study explored types of instructional challenges 62 secondary school science teachers identified and worked on as part of a 14-week long online professional development in reading in the content areas. Results showed that participating in professional development that builds teachers' knowledge about literacy development and instruction, and that is consistent, authentic, relevant, and discipline-specific helps teachers to (a) apply knowledge from the online experience to their instructional challenges; (b) better understand the literacy demands of science reading, teaching, and learning; and (c) reflect on and monitor, their own instruction and students' learning as they implemented instructional changes. More research is needed on disciplinary literacy professional development for secondary school science teachers.

An Exploratory Study of Science Teachers' Instructional Challenges and Disciplinary Literacy

This article speaks to the teaching experiences of the first author who taught secondary science for ten years in a small Ohio high school and who then moved on into a doctorate program, using those experiences to guide her research. The second author is the developer of the statewide professional development that provided the context for this study that is discussed in this article. The authors collaborated in the design and implementation of the research study and also in the analysis of data.

I remember the day it dawned on me just what the problem might be with my students who seemed to be having trouble comprehending any of the science material I was attempting to present. I was teaching ninth grade earth science and many of my students were not getting ideas and concepts that I thought were pretty basic. One day, driven by frustration, I instructed my students to read a passage that described the layers of the earth and then sketch out what they had read. But as I walked around, I found that 65% percent of them could not draw what they had just read. Obviously, they could not read and comprehend the text well enough to do the necessary illustration of the concept(s). Was this my job as a science teacher? Was I trained and hired to teach reading or science? I did not know what to do and had no help in the building I was teaching in to assist me to augment my students' reading and comprehension skills. Furthermore, as a second year teacher, what would asking for help imply about my teaching ability? My approach as a novice teacher was to keep the challenge to myself and somehow try to figure it out on my own.

That year was 1997, but the scenario remained firmly embedded in my thoughts throughout the rest of my teaching years. I did not have knowledge about how to integrate literacy strategies or instructional tools in my science instruction to augment my students' comprehension of science texts and concepts. I did not think that I even needed to assist my students with "unpacking" sentence structure in science texts, or thinking about specific ways to help them firmly understand scientific vocabulary. Additionally, most if not all, the professional development I received in science revolved around adding inquiry and hands-on activities into the classroom. To some extent, I found that inquiry activities helped at various levels. Students were able to overcome some of their reading comprehension problems when the kinesthetic and visual application of a topic was added in addition to the collaborative setting that labs offer. However, I was troubled that I really had no tools or understanding to deal with students' reading and comprehension problems and I worried about the students' future in postsecondary and/or job endeavors.

Ten years later, just prior to starting my doctoral studies in science education, I changed jobs from teaching high school science to working in the private sector as a field geologist developing underground water resources in the state of Florida. As I learned to do this technical work, I occasionally thought about that day and the frustration of seeing so many of my students unable to engage in and comprehend challenging, technical reading and writing. After all, that's what my geology job entailed. All of the fieldwork was technical in nature. Because much of the work dealt with the drilling of deep-water wells, I was sent into the field with a book to learn all

of the technical parts of the drilling rig, the drilling process, and water quality testing procedures. My job was to make sure that the driller was following all of the specifications that were laid out in the contract with the city for which we were building the well. After my work in the field was done, I was responsible in part for writing a technical report on all of the technical aspects of the building and testing of the well. As I went through the learning process that enabled me to do this job, I often thought of my past students and how perhaps I should have asked a different question: 'What is it that we need to help students comprehend science?' I broadened my thought process with additional questions such as: How in the world would they survive in this job? And furthermore, how was the United States going to stay on top of technical development and technical services, if our students could not read technical writing in order to perform technical work? How were we going to help and motivate students to develop a deep understanding of science, continue to learn more about science, and follow a career in science, especially, as the world turns more digital, more technically orientated, and as the availability of information increases? The downturn of the economy and the loss of my job prompted me to return to school and work on a Ph.D. in science education. Naturally these questions remained in my mind as I began my studies.

Perspectives

Why do so many students have difficulties with reading and comprehending scientific texts and learning science? You may be thinking, "So what makes science reading so special"? In its basic form, science is a unique discipline in that it attempts to explain natural phenomena and events through rational explanations that are derived from objective observations (Krajcik & Sutherland, 2010). The very structure of science is guided by the nature of science, which is basically skeptical and cloaked in a healthy disrespect for authority. Within this structure, every person has the right to bring new ideas to the "table" as long as the same regimented procedures are followed in gathering and presenting data (Matson & Parsons, 2006). It is in this arena that scientists evaluate each other's data, compare and argue evidence, ultimately substantiating outcomes before arriving at a consensus of what theories can be produced. Because of this procedure, theories can often change depending upon the narrative of the evidence available at a given time. It is upon these theories that laws develop and change over time. This fact—that science can change over time as we add or subtract details—makes science very distinctive as a discipline.

The teaching and learning of science is unique because of the scope of the subject matter, the impact of the philosophy of the nature of science on the discipline (i.e., "What is the argument?" and "Where is the evidence?"), and the variety of technicality that each branch of science contributes. For clarification purposes, we can see that the specialty of biology is based on structure and function (in addition to the basics of physics and chemistry) and therefore necessitates much memorization in order to be learned. Very much in contrast, the physical sciences demand much knowledge of mathematical operations and demand the mental ability to work with abstract concepts. The earth sciences, which draw from both disciplines, capitalize on both memorization and mentally working in the abstract. The variety of subject matter and the inherent use of distinct cognitive domains make science teaching and science learning demanding. Additionally, because of the technical nature of science in combination with dense, technical, and complex text, reading comprehension in science remains thorny for many

students. According to Snow (2010), “The focus on details, the exclusions of ambiguous interpretations, and the complexity of the vocabulary all present the reader with challenges different than those found in fictional texts.” (p. 450).

What Makes Science Text Difficult for Students to Read and Comprehend?

In addition to the basic format of the discipline of science, students need to be shown that science has its own convention in terms of text structures and style that is very different from other disciplines or the way language is used in an everyday context. For example, words in science can take on different meanings depending on the context. For instance, the word *medium* in our everyday world usually takes on a meaning that refers to a size that is in the middle of the grouping of sizes, e.g., a medium sized drink. In science however, the word may take on a meaning that refers to something that has molecules in it that allows wave energy etc. to move through it, like water or air. Additionally, science words are frequently nominalized (i.e., verbs transformed into nouns), and science text can have an extraordinary amount of content words that are rooted in clauses (Fang & Schleppegrell, 2008; Shanahan & Shanahan, 2008). These linguistic problems are compounded when concentrated in short chunks of text, thereby exacerbating reading difficulty with comprehension problems. According to Fang (2010), this typical text feature is referred to as “lexical density,” (defined as a high number of content-carrying words like nouns, verbs, adverbs, and adjectives per non-embedded clause) and is the very structure of science text. Further, heavy use of modifiers used to describe nouns, very often found in long strings, add to the informational density and the intricacy of unraveling the meaning (i.e., The long, thin, heavily haired, flower stem...). The use of modifiers as descriptors before and after nouns, necessitate visualization in order to complete the picture of the condition of the noun. In addition, students need to be made aware of clauses within clauses and how they relate to the whole meaning of the sentence. Thus, this type of text, which is much different than the spoken word, makes this reading highly complex, technical, and remote to readers. Moreover, in the present educational climate, grammar and sentence construction education is marginalized in U.S. curricula to make room for other subject matter, making it additionally tough for students to deconstruct sentences and construct meaning from scientific text.

Science reading is based on a sequence of factual understanding which requires critical thinking and conceptual reasoning (Gunning, 2012). The addition of mathematical thought processes, add increasingly higher level thinking skill to the reading task at hand and is common in science text. Consider the example below from a recent high school science textbook:

Residence time is the average length of time that matter in a system remains in a given reservoir. This value is estimated when there is no long-term change in the system. Residence time is calculated from the mass of the material in the reservoir, divided either by the total flux in, or the total flux out, for the reservoir. Remember that flux has units of mass per time. You can also use volume if you remember that mass is related to volume by density (Biological Sciences Curriculum Study, 2008, p. 531).

The student here is asked to not only remember and use specific vocabulary terms presumably learned in prior learning sessions, but is also asked to comprehend the text and then

perform mathematical manipulations that are pertinent to the concept of “residence time.” The reading and subsequent comprehension of this paragraph takes close reading in order to understand. It is a good example of why specific training for teachers with an eye toward helping teachers to mitigate difficulties in science vocabulary and science text structure, could possibly lessen student stress, increase comprehension, and actually motivate students in the science classroom.

Reading Comprehension

As introduced above, the difficulty in comprehending science text can be directly related to the readers' inability to transact the syntactic structure, the content and context of science reading, and/or the text's technical approach (National Institute for Literacy, 2007). “Good comprehension in science” means that students have been implicitly taught how to assimilate meaning across grammatically difficult text and text that is augmented with mathematical and graphical representations of scientific information. “Good comprehension in science” infers that science teachers must not only be conversant in content area subject matter, but also need to possess a range of explicit instructional strategies that can move students of varying ability levels through science content and teach them how to monitor their own comprehension. Strategies and tools that “coax” the student into organizing information that is presented via text or other media in science, moves the student toward visualization, which in turn, can promote comprehension of the subject matter. Use of a variety of effective vocabulary strategies increases the student's engagement with scientific vocabulary learning, and propels the student into a higher level of understanding, since vocabulary is at the core of science comprehension.

In conjunction with this, the Common Core State Standards developed by the National Governors Association Center for Best Practices, Council of Chief State School Officers (NGA & CCSSO, 2010) demand a high skill level in terms of comprehension and are not reflective of the typical rote memorization style of learning that is still used in several science classes. This type of competency standard will require teachers to teach at a higher level, use various strategies to creatively prepare all students to be able to engage at this level, and demand that teachers engage students with multiple text experiences to enhance students' skill with informational text.

Teacher Professional Development

The multiple dimensions of science teaching in terms of text interpretation, vocabulary skills, clarification of mathematical and graphical data, and inquiry method makes the dispensation of science content knowledge difficult for students to obtain. Because science teachers must understand all aforementioned text and science-learning dimensions, professional development in vocabulary and comprehension instruction as it relates to student learning, can be especially beneficial to them. Banilower, Cohen, Pasley, and Weiss (2008) recommended that effective professional development is a viable channel for providing science teachers with opportunities to extend awareness of how students construct concepts and offer strategies with which to help students advance and improve their own instruction. Closing the science discipline literacy gap requires high quality continuing professional development which necessitates teaching professionals to view themselves as learning professionals (Heller & Greenleaf, 2007).

This change in science teachers' mind-set about science specific reading instruction in addition to the delivery of high quality training in some form, could be the change factor that could alter perfunctory science education into a vibrant learning experience for students.

Methods

The Study

The economic downturn of 2008 realigned my learning and work goals. As I began my doctorate degree, these thoughts followed me into my studies. As a result, I chose for my dissertation study to look at a convenient group (Creswell, 2007), of 62 secondary school science teachers who had voluntarily participated in a 14-week statewide online content area reading professional development course in 2010 in their effort to learn more about how to support students' literacy needs and provide them with improved science instruction that incorporated reading development and instruction

My main objective was to better understand the instructional challenges of secondary school science teachers and see if they had the same thoughts and challenges that I had in my teaching experience. Perhaps things had improved since I changed jobs. Another objective was to see whether long-term professional development centered on reading in the content areas, could help science teachers feel better prepared to help students with their science reading and comprehension--something I felt I could not do when I was teaching.

A statewide online professional development project was developed as one avenue to meet the reading professional development needs of state educators on a large scale in an online environment. The project was funded by the State Department of Education (DOE) and was housed at a large US South Eastern Metropolitan University's, College of Education. The development of the online professional development was a collaborative undertaking between state's DOE, college of education faculty at the US South Eastern Metropolitan University, state and district level literacy leaders, school district administrators and teachers, technology experts, and professional organizations.

Certified state content area teachers registered for the 14-week professional development course on a voluntary basis; the Florida Online Reading Professional Development (FOR-PD) was offered for free to all 67 state school districts. Content area teachers who enrolled in the 14-week course wished to learn more about the role of reading/literacy in the various content areas. The FOR-PD course was updated frequently as new research became available, as educators' needs changed, and feedback from participants and other stakeholders was carefully considered. FORPD used a WebCT/Blackboard platform, which allowed for safe discussion board postings, course mail, and synchronous and asynchronous meetings. FOR-PD also used this learning management system for lesson content, assessments, tutorials, and other resources. It operated on a large scale with an average of about a hundred sections running concurrently each semester.

The course addressed essential elements of reading (reading development, vocabulary, fluency, comprehension, engagement and motivation, reading and writing, reading in the content areas, reading for English language learners and striving readers, differentiated instruction,

Response to Intervention, assessment, and literacy leadership). Participants also learned how to analyze and assess their classroom environment with emphasis on their instruction and student learning, how to reflect on their own instruction, how to create supportive and engaging learning environments, and how to use assessment to make instructional decisions. All participants were given several authentic opportunities to share their experiences about instructional improvements and other decisions. Communication, collaboration, authentic assignments and experiences, support and feedback from qualified online facilitators, and a plethora of resources on reading and related topics were constant components of the FOR-PD project.

The 62 teachers, who represented 16 counties throughout the state of Florida, included 25 middle school and 37 high school science teachers. The teachers represented all subjects of science that are typically taught in the schools and some outlier-type courses such as Agricultural Sciences and the Marine Sciences. The two largest groups of teachers came from the Orlando and the Miami-Dade areas. These areas represent very diverse and large school districts in which English is very often not the primary language spoken in the home. This language barrier represents an additional instructional issue that can be mitigated by the correct application of reading strategies in the science classroom (DeLuca, 2010). Seventy-three percent of these teachers had taught for less than three years, while only three teachers had taught for 21 or more years.

Data Sources

According to research, for teachers to implement what they learn during professional development, they need problem solving experiences and opportunities to analyze and reflect on instructional practice and student learning (Garet, Porter, Desimone, Birman, & Yoon, 2001; Heller & Greenleaf, 2007). For the purpose of this study, we chose to analyze one of the major professional development assignments, *The Reflective Assignment: Looking Back, Looking Forward* (Zygouris-Coe, 2010). This long-term assignment (i.e., 14 weeks) was designed to promote teacher reflection, offer an authentic learning opportunity, and give teachers an opportunity to make effective instructional improvements that will facilitate student learning.

All 62 participating teachers were required to write a Reflective Assignment (Zygouris-Coe, 2010) as their major assignment in this course, which involved reflecting on the main challenges they observed and experienced in their own science classroom. First, teachers were asked to reflect on issues of teaching and learning (see Part I of the Reflective Assignment). Then they were also asked to use what they were learning from the professional development course, so they could choose and describe an instructional course of action they would take in order to improve or mitigate learning issues in their classes (see Part II of the Reflective Assignment).

Description of the reflective assignment. Part I: Identification and Description of an Instructional Challenge. “Please select a challenge you are experiencing with reading and learning issues of either a specific student or a group of students. As you go through this course, select what is real and relevant to you, what needs fixing, or what keeps you up at night. Sample instructional challenges include the following: Teachers at my school need help with building students vocabulary; how can I assist them? In what ways can I help my struggling readers with

vocabulary, or comprehension? Several of my students cannot read at grade level; what can I do to help them? I teach science: how can I help develop my students' vocabulary? How can I get my students to read their textbook? How can I help my students to read with understanding? How can I engage my students with informational text? Help! How can I get my students to read?

Part II: Implementation of a Plan of Action, Reflection, and Next Steps. In this section, please (a) describe the development of your plan of action; (b) describe and briefly discuss results, thoughts, observations, and questions related to the implementation of your action plan; (c) reflect on decisions and changes you made in your instruction or work with students in your classroom or school; and, (d) discuss the next steps that will follow the implementation of your plan of action and what you have been learning in this course. You may even raise additional questions as you plan for future steps.

Procedures and Analysis

This study employed grounded theory as the approach to best answer my questions about literacy issues in science classrooms. The grounded theory process demands constant comparative analysis, inductively sorting and analyzing data (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). In order to help provide clarity about the findings from the teachers' reflective assignment, we conducted three levels of analysis. The first level was simple independent word searches to help provide context for the more in depth second and third level of data collection. The second level involved the reading of the Reflective Assignments and applying analysis in terms of category coding as is specified in grounded theory research. The third level of analysis involved the emergence of the themes from the Level II categories. For this paper, we will present and discuss only the findings of the first level investigation, the cursory word searches. For me, my original question remained foremost in my mind; would these issues mirror my issues in my classroom or had adolescent reading skills improved over these years?

Results

Teachers' Thoughts about Their Instructional Challenges

This first analysis of the participating science teachers' reported instructional challenges was completed with an eye towards the overall feelings and mindset the teachers possessed when they thought about their teaching and learning issues in their classrooms. It was conducted after a cursory reading of approximately 30 of the 62 reflective assignments. This preliminary reading provided us with information about the teachers' thinking. Following the preliminary reading, the Level I analysis was done using NVivo, a qualitative data analysis software. The analysis resulted in 11 common categories relating to what the teachers chose to include as their classroom issues. Table 1 below displays the results of this analysis.

Table 1

Teacher Challenges Found by Word Search

Searched Words/Phrases	Frequencies of Searched Words in Reflective Assignments (RA)	
	RA I	RA II
FCAT	69	34
Lack of time	97	203
Wasted time	74	181
Lack of vocabulary	217	352
Reading problems	577	971
Lack of comprehension	76	187
Lack of prior knowledge	67	191
Lack of print-rich environment	39	93
Increase incentive to read	250	424
Adapt lesson plans	41	92
Discipline problems	9	16

It is interesting to note that the most frequent instructional challenge teachers repeatedly mentioned and discussed, was the category, “reading problems” which registered 1,548 mentions in total. The fact that it was mentioned 394 more times in the second part of the reflective assignment is important, because it was this part of the reflective assignment that related to how teachers grapple with their classroom challenges. Thus, this could be construed to mean that this was a poignant topic that was addressed by the teachers in their attempt to mitigate instructional challenges in their science classrooms. The reality that student “reading problems” was the most prevalent problem for teachers in this cursory analysis is important because reading issues trigger many other educational challenges. As shown in Table 1, the second largest issue reflected in teachers’ writings was, “how to increase incentive to read.” This fits appropriately with the previously discussed “reading problems” and with the next most mentioned problem, “lack of vocabulary.”

It is worthwhile to note that the fourth most mentioned challenge dealt with teachers’ “lack of time” and it was often talked about in conjunction with “wasted time” and “High Stakes Assessments,” which in these cases were the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test (FCAT). The fact that those pressures can often drive how instructional and learning time is spent in the classroom may explain why these issues were sometimes mentioned in the teachers’ writings with the perceived underlying emotion of frustration. Another interesting finding was the last challenge namely, “discipline problems.” “Discipline problems” registered only a total of 25 mentions in comparison to the 1,548 “reading problems” and 569 “vocabulary” declarations.

Teachers' Feelings About Teaching Science

The next word and phrase search in teachers' written assignments that was executed concerned the teachers' feelings about teaching. As shown in Table 2, only two words and one phrase were utilized for this search.

Table 2

Teachers' Feelings About Teaching

Searched Words/Phrase	Frequencies of Searched Words in Reflective Assignments (RA)	
	RA I	RA II
Stress	2	4
Frustration	4	5
Students don't know what to do	876	2,297

The results showed a very low count for two words that we occasionally heard in discussions about the teaching profession in general, by other teachers in the field. But as evidenced in these teachers' reflections, they were not often addressed in the Reflective Assignment. The two words, "stress" and "frustration" were counted only six and nine times total, respectively. More challenging to the teachers than these words was the phrase "students don't know what to do." This taxing phrase was counted 876 times in Part I and 2,297 times in Part II culminating in a total of 3,173 mentions. This count of 3,173 mentions is incisive as to how these teachers perceived their classrooms, instructional issues, and school culture. Students who "don't know what to do" in the classroom, specifically in terms of reading and comprehension within their science classrooms, cause a foundational breakdown in the relationship between science text, laboratory procedures, and general comprehension and learning. This phrase can explain much in terms of the gap between student skills and teacher expectations and can be quite illuminating in terms of the level of critical thinking skills that these teachers saw in their students. Additionally, the problem of students "not knowing what to do", is consistent with what other researchers have found in terms of critical thinking skills and the ability to extrapolate existing knowledge from text and science experiences (American College Testing [ACT], 2006; Bybee & McCrae, 2009; Wagner, 2008). This could be an indicator of what seems to be missing in secondary classroom science instruction in relation to how adolescent students evidently need help in building reading comprehension in science and what professional development teachers may require in order to be able to augment student comprehension and learning.

Conclusion

As McTighe and Tomlinson (2006) note, professionals in all fields distinguish themselves by concern with up-to-date knowledge about the field and how to best serve their clients. This should be true about our relationship to our students. A teacher's job is to connect the curriculum to the needs of the student. In terms of this, it is our job to shape our teaching

around the variances of the students. In science, this needs to take various forms since science reading and comprehension is by nature difficult.

According to Zygouris-Coe (2010), “disciplinary literacy highlights the complexity, literacy demands, and differentiated thinking, skills and strategies that characterize each discipline”(p. 5). It can be argued that science content area teachers are in need of good quality professional training that is focused on the structure, content and literacy demands of science, and builds an ongoing content pedagogical knowledge base. With this knowledge base, they can infuse a variety of literacy and comprehension strategies that can be applied to their different discipline areas and reflect their self-imposed analysis of what is needed in their own teaching (Dillon, O’Brien, Sato, & Kelly, 2010). Although we cannot draw any generalizations from this study due to its nature and inherent methodological limitations (e.g., sample selection, data sources), the results are insightful in terms of guiding science teacher professional development and experiences that will promote instructional improvements.

Well-planned and administered professional development can build confident and well-equipped teachers who can blend literacy instruction with their unique content area, thus implementing effective teaching (Heller & Greenleaf, 2007). According to McTighe and Tomlinson (2004), this is responsive teaching—using personal knowledge of students combined with useful professional development and training, that produces a functional outcome for each individual student. After all, this is the goal of education: to endeavor to enable our students to engage with our present and future technical economy—to the good of our country and the welfare of each student. Upon reflection on the analysis of the 62 science teachers’ perspectives about instructional challenges and student learning, I changed my question to “What do I need to learn to help my students read, learn, and do science?” The “problem” was not necessarily with my students; it was with my lack of knowledge of the literacy demands of science and ways to support students’ comprehension of science texts and learning. I would have certainly benefited from professional development on reading and reading instruction in science classrooms. Contemporary and future training in science education must integrate discipline-specific literacy understanding and skills into the science educators’ repertoire in order to enhance student comprehension and uptake of science content. In our opinion, a move towards this goal should be taken up in our teacher training institutions and extend as professional development outreach into our secondary science departments across the nation.

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Gann, R. R., Sharp, L. K., McIlquham, S. (2013). Textbook aliteracy in teacher education: Information everywhere, but how much do they read? *American Reading Forum Annual Yearbook* [Online]. Vol. 33.

**Textbook Aliteracy in Teacher Education:
Information Everywhere, But How Much Do They Read?**

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Abstract

This article explores the problem of textbook aliteracy, i.e. the failure to read assigned texts despite the ability to do so. Constructivism is its theoretical frame. Teacher education students at a medium-sized university in the Southern Appalachian Mountains were surveyed on their textbook reading practices. Ninety percent of the 116 students completing the survey reported studying instructors' power points in preference to completing assigned readings, at least some of the time. All were readers, though a majority (68%) reported at least some difficulty reading assigned texts. Often, they appeared to be avoiding the challenges posed by demanding text. The authors undertook various strategies to compel and encourage precise reading of informational text, with mixed results.

Textbook Aliteracy in Teacher Education: Information Everywhere, But How Much Do They Read?

Students are expected to enter university with considerable reading proficiency and are presumed capable of handling complex texts in their majors after two years of general coursework. Recently, however, we began to question how well our teacher education students read the texts we assigned them, and we suspected they might be approaching their textbooks with strategies more suited to Internet and SMS technologies. At times, we questioned whether they were reading at all. Two of us (Gann & Sharp) are teacher educators at an open access university in the Southern Mountains. We are joined in this report by McIlquham, a graduate student in our college at the time of this study and Gann's graduate assistant. The article utilizes constructivism as a theoretical frame for the understanding of reading. It is written in Gann's voice.

Examining the literature

Contemporary Understandings of Reading

Teacher educators must attend to contemporary understandings of literacy in preparation for the classroom. The Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts stress students' ability to read text closely, to analyze its structure and underlying premises, to integrate its content with previous understandings, and recognize its underlying argument (2010). Its approach is distinct from that of the National Reading Panel (2000) which has powerfully influenced reading education for over a decade, conceptualizing reading as a discrete series of skills: phonemic awareness, phonics, vocabulary, fluency, and comprehension. The Common Core State Standards are more compatible with holistic conceptions of reading grounded in constructivism.

Constructivism and Reading

Constructivism is rooted in the work of Piaget and Vygotsky who conceptualized learning as a complex and non-linear process where students engage in creation of meaning (Fosnot & Perry 1996). It is influenced by Thorndike's notion of reading as reasoning (Stanovich, 1994). In Constructivist reading practice, students are encouraged to engage with text in order to absorb and critique its ideas. The stress is on eliciting students' thinking rather than on transmitting a particular understanding of text. Admittedly, this is difficult to accomplish in the reading classroom, since many students believe reading should happen easily and are thus unwilling to engage with inconsiderate text (Beck & McKeown, 2001). Nevertheless, proponents of Constructivism argue that reading is meaningless without constructive thought (McKeown & Beck, 1999). But Constructivism means different things to different people as Elkind notes (2005). Baines and Stanley are critical of Constructivism for fostering teacher passivity and mandating "a doctrinaire insistence on collaborative learning in the absence of teacher expertise" (2000). Such practice, in our view, is a distortion of Constructivist reading practice and its possibilities. We hold with those theorists and practitioners who see Constructivism as a recursive effort to understand the world as knowledge is acquired (Fosnot & Perry, 1996).

Literacy and Aliteracy

As noted in the Common Core State Standards Language Arts curriculum, effective reading in our era involves an ability to sort through staggering amounts of information and thoughtfully engage with text while utilizing cogent reasoning (2010). But in the past two decades, a number of authors have noted the disinclination of literate persons to read. In *Endangered Minds* Healy (1990), defined *aliteracy* as the avoidance of reading by people who are actually able to read. Healy contended that American literacy was declining, particularly among young people, who were overexposed to television. The data used to support this position were anecdotal and the analysis speculative, but other students of literacy have echoed Healy's ideas. Beers (1996) identified several types of literate non-reader: dormant readers who claimed they would read if they had enough time; uncommitted readers who found reading a chore, although they could process print; and unmotivated readers who thought reading entirely unpleasant and made little connection with print. Referencing Guiliano & Sullivan's (2007) perception that students at Chestnut Hill College required a "Bridge" program between high school and college, Anderson & Kim (2011) speculated that college students now read less proficiently because of television, video games, and the Internet. Blaming the Internet for promoting aliteracy is not entirely logical, since users of the web are actually reading. However, recent studies suggest that reading on digital devices may affect reading speed, and satisfaction in reading, Connell, Bayliss & Farmer (2012); Hsiu-Ping et al. (2012), Wright, Fugett & Caputa, (2013).

In contrast, Krashen (1993) argues that basic literacy has actually risen in the United States over the past hundred years. The problem, this author argues, is that our economy demands a level of literacy skill which much of the population currently lacks. Recent evidence seems to refute Krashen's point; literacy rates do appear to be dropping. Citing 2003 statistics from the National Center for Education Statistics, Britt (2009) concluded that 32 million US adults are functionally illiterate, i.e. unable to read newspapers or simple instructions. While Britt's article is journalistic rather than scholarly, the national statistics lend credibility to the author's point (National Assessment of Adult Literacy, 2003). However, it is important to avoid oversimplification and without common definitions of literacy (Ahmed, 2011), it is difficult to determine if literacy rates have actually declined.

Literacy and the Construction of Meaning

Literacy involves the ability to read carefully and critically. Electronic literacies have enabled information exchange and altered the way many of us read, but the use of such media in no way obviates the need for discriminating processing of text and the construction of meaning (Monin, 2008). To read well, minds must use language reflectively and persistently as solutions to problems are sought. Students may learn to decode written text, but without the construction of meaning, reading is a hollow exercise (Healy, 1999). For readers to evaluate the merits of varying positions, close attention to textual argument and perspectives is required (Fox, 2009). Careful reading involves extraction of meaning from text and relating new ideas to existing schema. Otherwise reading is experienced as taxing, consuming, and ultimately meaningless

(Pressley, 2002). Recognizing the importance of evaluation and synthesis of ideas to reading of all types, the Common Core State Standards Language Arts curriculum places high emphasis on the use of complex reading, both fiction and non-fiction (National Governors Association Center for Best Practices & Council of Chief State School Officers, 2010).

Aliteracy and Teacher Education

Dramatic shifts in contemporary literacy challenge our understanding of reading instruction (Tan & Guo, 2010). Whether reading proficiency has become lower, or if the general public simply reads less, teachers themselves must be expert readers. Educators will be pressured to raise standardized test scores in the name of accountability, and their professional competence will be questioned often. Teachers can expect to be micromanaged and denied the freedom to make requisite changes to outmoded methods of instruction (Duke & Pearson, 2002). If educators are to argue for autonomy in literacy instruction, their own expertise in reading must be unquestionable. Educators are often reluctant to depart from familiar modes of reading instruction. Gupta (2004) found that when pre-service teachers' beliefs about literacy were incongruent with those expounded in university classes, the majority preferred to teach as they themselves were taught. These findings are consistent with the work of Richardson, Anders, Tidwell, and Lloyd (1991) who found that following in-service training on reading comprehension, teachers in two Southwestern school districts, failed to incorporate the new strategies into their teaching. But Kropiewnicki (2006) found that with repeated modeling and direct instruction, pre-service teachers were able to identify and describe new comprehension strategies and incorporate them into instruction.

The reading process is complex. Different textual genres require a range of reading strategies, and capable readers automatically adjust (Duke & Pearson, 2002; Neufeld, 2005). Reading, notes Healy (1990), is not equivalent to word-calling, segmenting phonetic sounds, or even recognizing strings of letters that are not phonetically decodable. Comprehension, the ultimate purpose of reading, is an active process including extraction of meaning from text and connection to experience. While proficient readers find the encounter with text satisfying and productive, low comprehenders find reading consuming, and frustrating (Pressley, 2002). Comprehension is an unobservable mental process and therefore difficult to teach and assess. Accuracy, decoding, sound segmentation and reading rate are more easily measured. While myriad standardized tests assess comprehension via questions about short paragraphs, evidence suggests that comprehension instruction may be getting short shrift. The work of Durkin (1978) and Pressley (2002) suggested that in many classrooms, comprehension receives minimal time. Ness (2009) found that only 82 minutes or 3% of a total of 2400 minute observation were spent on reading comprehension.

Connections to Teacher Education Practice

We wondered if aliteracy was seeping into teacher education. A recently exposed conspiracy involved teachers hiring surrogates to take the PRAXIS in their place (New York Times, February 2, 2013). Had reading problems had factored into the decision to commit fraud. We were starting to think our teacher candidates been educated in classrooms where comprehension was underemphasized. Most were well under thirty and utilized digital media

with aplomb. We wondered if our students' reading instruction had made sufficient connection to literacies they already possessed. Was textbook comprehension beyond them, or did they simply choose not to read? None of the professional literature documented aliteracy in teacher candidates, so this suggested itself as an area for productive study.

An Illustrative Incident

I (Gann) had been noticing a certain shallowness in class discussion. Though the posted weekly assignments specified reading, the students seemed relatively unfamiliar with the material in class discussion. Sharp was having a similar experience. A colleague with whom we discussed this problem had stopped posting power points on the class website entirely, believing that when she did, the students read nothing else. The practice of posting power points was well nigh universal in our college. Pictures were often embedded into the power points, since most of our students described themselves as "visual learners." Our colleague's strategy seemed rather extreme. But a few days later, I was attempting to discuss an assigned reading with students in elementary education, most of them upper Juniors. The textbook was user friendly, loaded with lists of key terms, pictures, concept maps, sample step by step lessons, and connections to standards. The topic was vocabulary development. Posing a basic conceptual question, I inquired what, in the view of the authors, was the connection between subject area knowledge and vocabulary development. There were blank stares. A trifle perplexed, I asked how the authors viewed the relation between experiences, concepts, and words.

The students thirty some odd students shifted in their seats, sipping Cokes and bottled water. A few reached down in their book bags and tried to surreptitiously text. Finally, a curly haired student named Lacey (a pseudonym) ventured that knowing words is important. The response made me hopeful. When pressed to say more, she responded that you had to sound out a word in order to read. I agreed this was one way children identified words. Then I asked what the reading said about vocabulary and comprehension. The room grew extremely quiet.

This was not a bad class. These students liked working with children. They had experience in after school programs and summer camps. They were good at crafting imaginative hands on projects, and they danced rings around me when it came to using the classroom Smart Board. But were they reading? We had pretty good rapport, so I inquired about my suspicion, careful to keep my tone nonjudgmental. "I get the feeling that many of you are not reading. Am I correct?"

A blonde haired woman in her late twenties responded that few students actually read the book. Tracey (pseudonym) was what we call a 'non-traditional' student. The mother of two elementary school children, she was organized and serious about her goal of becoming a teacher. Tracey's grade on the midterm exam was the highest in the class. When asked how she had accomplished this without reading the book, the student explained that all needed information was on the power points. Several classmates agreed.

I asked if they were using the book at all. "If I have questions, I sometimes look in the book," said Kevin (pseudonym), a thirty year old Veteran attending school on the GI bill. "But sometimes, I just use websites to find what I want."

It seemed that my students were simply hunting around for facts they thought they would need while I was assigning information text to foster the construction of knowledge on the part of perspective teachers (Healy, 1999). How would they evaluate materials and methods for

classroom use if they were not reading themselves? How would they teach their students to read critically if they themselves were avoiding it? Or was I overstating the problem?

Additional Evidence

I wondered if my graduate assistant, McIlquham, had encountered this problem. A middle-aged candidate for the Masters of Arts in Teaching, his background was in business and computer science, so his was a different perspective. Did McIlquham have classmates who avoided reading?

Early in his program, McIlquham had taken a course in middle and secondary reading instruction where most of his classmates were undergraduates. On the first day of class, the professor inquired how many students read for pleasure. Only four hands in this group of thirty went up. Some of the students bragged they had never read nor even purchased a textbook in college, because they relied on the Internet, power point slides, and subject related videos. For McIlquham, the real shock came when the professor asked the students to identify their majors. Nearly half the students planned on becoming English teachers. If future English teachers were not reading, what hope was there that a new generation would develop a passion for literature?

Sharp was experiencing similar difficulties with an early literacy course required for Seniors in an Early Childhood education program the semester before student teaching. She and I had taught youngsters in public school. Both of us had assumed our pre-service candidates were skillful readers. Now, we feared that perspective teachers' discomfort with informational text could cascade through the schools of our region if it went unaddressed. Can a person coach soccer without knowing the rules of the game? Our students were Juniors and Seniors in college. What had gone wrong in their education, and how could we correct it?

My own students claimed they could read the texts but preferred not to. I thought this was largely true. Sharp's students were different. Many struggled with comprehension, and this was reflected on quizzes. Sharp would inquire if the students had read the chapter. Many responded they had but had not understood it. After many such interactions, Sharp asked her students if they knew how textbooks should be read differently from novels. They reported reading material straight through, and in their effort not to miss anything, they missed almost all the key points. Paradoxically, a surfeit of information was quite literally at their fingertips. These students owned iPads, smart phones and laptops; most had more than one such device. There were computer labs all over campus. But despite her students' ability to use these technologies, the process of critically examining text was eluding them.

The Common Core State Standards require high levels of critical literacy at all stages of reading development (National Governors Association Center for Best Practices & Council of Chief State School Officers, 2010). How could our students help children develop deep comprehension and the ability to infer if they did not possess these abilities? It would be like hiring lifeguards who could not swim and then blaming them for not saving those who struggled in water. Obviously, students should learn to peruse and evaluate informational text well before college, but it appeared that many did not. As university educators, we felt responsible for addressing this deficit.

Studying the Problem

The evidence that our students were failing to read was anecdotal at this point. Since no earlier studies examined student self-reports of aliteracy, we undertook to explore the problem systematically in the Spring of 2012. Sharp and I work in a college of education, but in different departments. My students were teacher candidates in elementary education, 40 in a Junior level course in the teaching of reading, 19 in a Senior level course in reading assessment. Researcher Z. was serving as my graduate assistant. Sharp's 76 students were teacher candidates in an Early Childhood education program. Not all candidates in this program apply for teacher licensure, and the PRAXIS exam was required only for those who did. In both departments instructors are encouraged to post power points.

We used different texts in our courses. The upper Juniors I taught were assigned a textbook on reading instruction, while the Seniors in reading assessment used a collection of articles and an assessment manual. Sharp assigned a textbook on early literacy instruction and a series of related articles to her Early Childhood education students. Some of the assigned readings were dry or at times repetitive, but they were linked to our students' professional objectives, and both of us drew what we viewed as clear connections between text and the students' goals. It was evident, nevertheless, that some students were eschewing the textbook in preference for websites and power points

Methodology

To ascertain more information, we developed a Likert scale questionnaire which inquired into students' study practices. Participation in the anonymous survey was voluntary. The questionnaire was administered by MacIlquham, and the instructors were not present during its completion.

Survey Results

A total of 125 students took part in the survey. The questionnaire and its results are given in Table 2. On cursory examination, we saw that fully 22% of our students admitted to always reading power points instead of the textbook; 68% reported they did this sometimes; only 10% claimed never to engage in this practice. Only 13% of our students informed us they never skimmed assigned readings; 68% conceded that they sometimes did this, and 6% confessed that they always studied this way.

Table 1

Self-Reported Study Practices

Study Practice	Never	Sometimes	Always
I buy the assigned Textbook	0%	42%	58%
I read assigned material thoroughly	2%	83%	15%
I make notes on my assigned readings	9%	68%	23%
I underline or highlight assigned readings	11%	62%	27%
I only skim the assigned class readings	13%	81%	6%
I study course power points instead of using the textbook	10%	68%	22%
Rather than use a course textbook, I study from websites	51%	47%	2%
I think reading the textbook is a waste of time	35%	65%	0%
I think textbooks are boring	7%	76%	17%
I cannot understand most textbooks	32%	65%	3%
I use the assigned textbook, but only to locate information	12%	76%	12%

We organized the data into three categories: optimal reading practices likely to encourage critical engagement with text, alternative (and less desirable) reading practices likely to foster memorization and shallow thinking, and students' perception of textbooks. These are discussed below and presented in Figures 1 through 3.

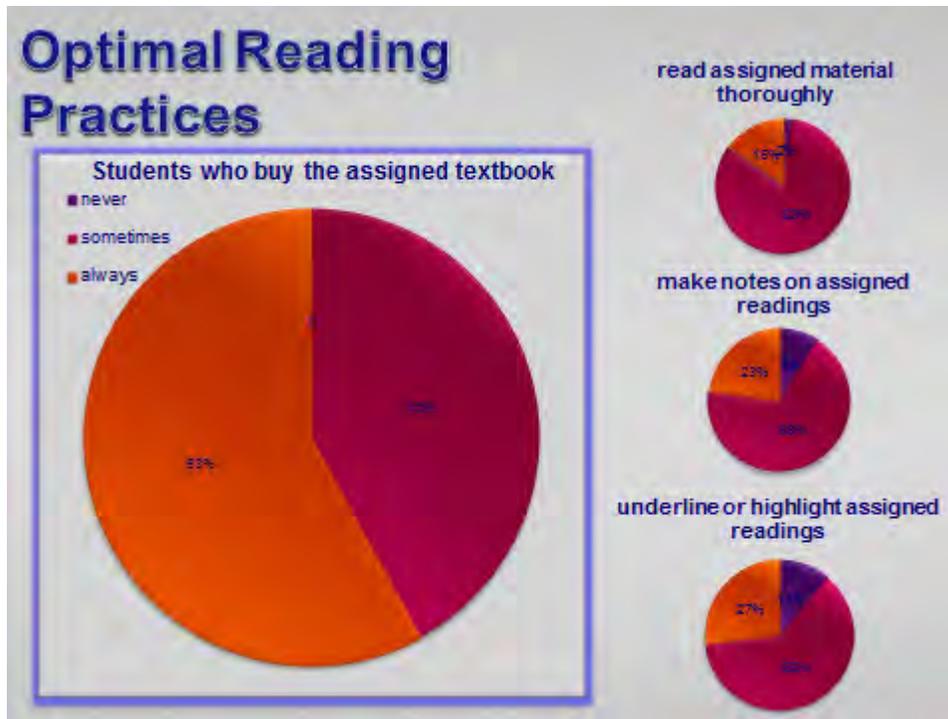


Figure 1. Optimal reading practices. Percentages of students who engaged in optimal study practices: purchasing course textbooks, making notes on assigned readings and underlining or highlighting readings.

More than half our students (58%) said they always purchased course textbooks; but 42% said they did so only sometimes. A minority of our students (15%) said they always read assigned material thoroughly; 83% said they did so sometimes; while 2% admitted they never did. All students practiced underlining and highlighting, with 58% saying they did so all the time and 42% sometimes.

Alternate approaches to reading.

There was considerable evidence that students bypassed conventional reading of text and engaged in reading practices unlikely to promote deep engagement. The overwhelming majority of the students admitted they skimmed assigned texts instead of reading thoroughly, with 6% saying they always did this and 81% sometimes. Only 13% of the students completing our survey denied skimming academic texts. The use of power points in preference to academic reading was also widespread: 68% said they did this some of the time; 22% reported they always did so. Only 10% told us they never did this. Using websites in preference to textbooks was somewhat less common with 2% of the students saying they always did this; 47% saying they engaged in this practice sometimes; and 51% stating they did not do this at all. Over three quarters of our students (76%) used the textbook to look things up; 12% said they never did, and an equal number said they did this all the time.

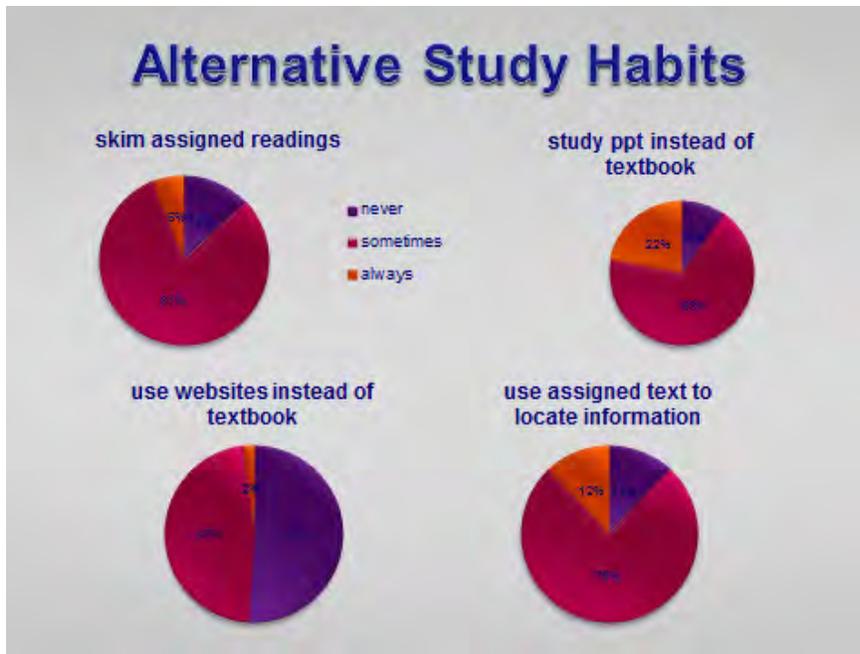


Figure 2. Alternative reading practices. Percentages of students who engaged in alternate study practices not involving close reading of the assigned textbook: skimming assigned readings, using websites instead of the textbook, studying instructor's power point instead of the textbook, and using the assigned textbook simply to locate information.

Students' perception of textbooks.

Despite their tendency to avoid reading textbooks, students did not believe that reading them was always waste of time. But 65% of the students said it was a waste of time "sometimes." Only 7% of the students thought textbooks were never boring; 76% said they were boring sometimes; and 17% believed textbooks were always boring. A majority of the students reported difficulty in reading textbooks, with 65% saying this happened sometimes, and 3% acknowledging that they always had trouble. Approximately a third of the students or 32% said they never had difficulty understanding textbooks. Thus, for nearly a third of our students, the problem was textbook aliteracy, not incomprehension. This result, while troubling, is consistent with the findings of the *National Survey of America's College Students* (2006). In its study of literacy levels among 1,827 randomly selected college students at 80 different institutions and utilizing the same testing materials as the National Assessment of Adult Literacy, only 37.5% of those tested scored at a "proficient" level consistent with college level reading; 55.5% were at the "intermediate" level consistent with middle and early high school; 7.5% were at a "basic" literacy associated with simple, everyday tasks, and 1% were unable to read at the even the most basic level. These levels, while considerably higher than those in the average adult population are cause for concern.

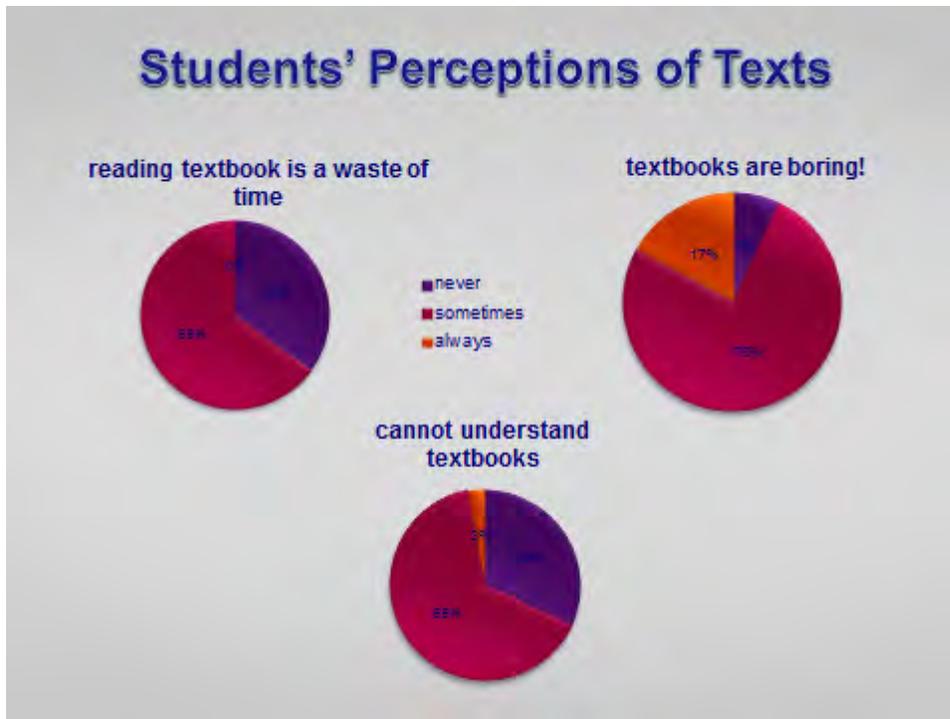


Figure 3. Students' perception of textbooks. How students experienced textbooks: percentages who understood them, found them boring or did not use them at all.

Discussion

Undeniably, teachers need to be proficient readers themselves; thus the findings of our survey are troubling. In this study 65% the students had difficulty reading textbooks at least some of the time, and 3% acknowledged that they always had trouble; thus while all were able to read, we do not believe they are fully proficient. The astoundingly widespread use of power points in preference to academic reading may have been a compensatory strategy for some of these less than proficient readers. It is disconcerting that 68% relied on this method some of the time, and 22% reported they always did so. Clearly, the students were reading, but their preference for an electronic outline to engagement with challenging writing attests to textbook aliteracy. Troubling too is the number of students who admitted to skimming class texts instead of reading thoroughly, 6% conceding they always did this and 81% sometimes. We question such students' ability to engage in a Constructivist process while reading, and the failure to engage deeply with also comprises textbook aliteracy.

Addressing the Problem

Two approaches.

Because our classes were dissimilar, Sharp and I developed differing strategies for ensuring that students would read. I (Gann) believed my students could do the required reading if compelled to, provided there was adequate scaffolding. Sharp, on the other hand, estimated that

only half her students were capable of reading the textbook independently. Sharp demonstrated strategies for reading non-fiction: summarizing; identification of text structure; not of main ideas and supporting details. She guided them in the preparation of structured summaries, pointing out that information from all levels of Bloom's taxonomy was necessary for text comprehension (1956). Both of us took time in class to demonstrate the identification of main ideas and the interpretation of graphs and charts. We also made ourselves available to students who struggled with informational reading. Sharp felt she had made real, but limited headway in helping her students become better readers.

Both of us had both been posting power points weekly and were concerned that 90% of our students studied them in preference to reading course textbooks at least some of the time. Feeling that many students would struggle without the scaffolding of power points, Sharp elected to continue the postings; I (Gann) opted to cease this practice, though I did make power points available for review the week before final exams. To ensure that students were reading, I administered short multiple choice quizzes every week. The bulk of the questions were inferential. I saw the practice as necessary, though my feelings about doing this with university Juniors and Seniors were decidedly mixed. Since I could not be confident every student could study the readings without support, I provided study guides and graphic organizers to accompany readings. I also assigned frequent essays requiring interpretation of text. These procedures made students unhappy, and early in the semester I issued multiple academic warnings. There were complaints to my department chair, but in time the quiz grades improved, and it was evident from class discussions that reading had increased. Clearly most of my students could read informational text at least at the literal level. There remained a few students who could not extract main ideas, and I encouraged them to meet with me weekly to work on reading development. Until then, my office hours had been under-utilized except when projects were nearly due; now they were filling completely, and I scheduled additional time. During these meetings, students and I worked on vocabulary, the identification of main ideas, and the drawing of inferences. Some students tried to persuade me to alter my teaching strategies. Often, they claimed to suffer from "test anxiety," which resulted in poor performance on quizzes. Only one such student had an actual phobic response to testing, though I am sure the quizzes upset students who had not prepared. Some attested the quizzes did not fit their "learning styles." When we explored this, I noted they found the textbook unenjoyable. Those who regularly attended my office hour showed great improvement.

Limited success.

I (Gann) was delighted with the method I was using, though I thought it a bit draconian. I believed our project had not only pinpointed what was wrong with our students' reading, but that long lasting ways of addressing the difficulty had been developed, ways our students would carry with them that would enhance their ability to benefit from later education, and which in time, they would pass on to students of their own. I flattered myself that students would use these methods to construct understanding of text in subsequent courses. Alas, not. In the Fall of 2012, 40 of the students from our original study were assigned to my Senior level reading assessment class. I assumed they knew the program we would follow: the readings, the quizzes, the study guides, the essays. I looked forward to reaping the fruits of my earlier labors, now that these students possessed the tools for constructing meaning from text. But early in the term and to my

great consternation, there were struggles around reading the textbook identical to those of the preceding term. It was as if the earlier semester had never occurred. Students resisted reading, whined when I would not post power points and complained to my chair. Once more, I sent out academic warnings, and once again, coercion worked. However, my predictions about what I accomplished were less grandiose.

Implications for Teacher Education

We have noted that our students are extremely savvy in the use of electronic data (Agosto, 2012), but less so in evaluating quality of information and drawing comparisons and connections between ideas. Our project documented widespread avoidance of textbooks among our students, sometimes because they found such reading difficult, but also because they simply chose not to do it. Unwittingly, we aided and abetted non-reading of textbooks by posting our power points. Beers (1996) distinguished between unmotivated and unskilled readers; among our students, there were some of each type. Since we did not utilize a random sample, the results of our survey are not generalizable; but our work suggests that teacher educators and others in higher education should be aware of textbook aliteracy. Our attempts at addressing the problem were partly effective, but appeared not to be long lasting. Coercion works, but it has limitations. Working with literacies teacher candidates bring would be preferable, but this goal is elusive. This would be a direction for further inquiry.

In an age of information, it is vital that we emphasize informational reading in teacher education (Barksdale, 2013). Otherwise, teacher candidates will be hobbled in their ability as reading instructors, and societal literacy will suffer. As a profession, we are subject to scrutiny by politicians and captains of industry. These outside critics will be justified in claiming we have not fulfilled our responsibility if those we purport to educate are not themselves fully literate. If we wish to retain control of reading education, we will need to insist that our students know more than the basics of reading.

There is a more profound reason to be concerned about our students' textbook aliteracy and their avoidance of connected text. For a democracy to thrive, its citizens must be adept at evaluating complex information; they must be critical readers who can construct meaning from text (Barksdale, 2013). Teacher candidates carry the rights and responsibilities of citizenship. In addition, they bear a profound responsibility to the next generation. The teachers we educate will shape future citizens of our Republic, who as participants in a democracy, must read to understand the events around them (Adams, 1865). Whether the information is read from a newspaper, a laptop or tablet computer is not important. For a democracy to function, its citizens must read and read well.

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Cameron-Standerford, A., Bergh, B., Edge, C., Standerford, N.S., Reissner, L., Sabin, J., & Standerford, C. (2013). Textualizing experiences: Reading the “texts” of teacher education practices. *American Reading Forum Annual Yearbook* [Online]. Vol. 33.

Textualizing Experiences: Reading the “Texts” of Teacher Education Practices

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Abstract

The authors embarked on a year-long journey with the intention of learning to textualize their experiences, reading them as one reads written texts (Edge, 2011). The goal of the study was for each author to improve her instructional practice through deeper comprehension of that practice, becoming more intentional in making decisions. This self-study used autobiographical writing, reflection on critical incidents, and discussion among critical friends, resulting in deeper comprehension of our teacher education practices. The collective findings of the study explored (a) tensions between personal and professional lives and their influence on instructional decisions, (b) textualizing experiences is a valuable way to improve teacher education practices, (c) growth in knowledge and agency occurred through serious and collective examination of critical incidents, and (d) using a similar process with students can show them the power of praxis as a means to continued professional learning.

Textualizing Experiences: Reading the “Texts” of Teacher Education Practices

A group of seven female teacher educators conducted a self-study of their teacher education practices with the guiding question of: “What can we learn about our teaching by critically discussing the texts of our teacher education practices?” We defined *text* in a broader sense to include the idea that experiences once written could then be shared, reinterpreted, and analyzed (Edge, 2011). Integral to our process was the use of a collaborative conference protocol to guide our data collection and analysis. Through discourse and acting as “critical friends,” (LaBoskey, 2004, p. 819) we challenged and pushed boundaries as we analyzed our “textualized” experiences (Edge, 2011, p. 330).

Collectively, we learned that our decisions were influenced by an array of personal and professional tensions stemming from critical events. The identification and examination of the critical events led us to understand the broader context of these events as periods of personal uncertainty or “wobble” (Fecho, 2011, p. 53) that set the stage for each person to search for answers and new ways of understanding. We learned that our teaching experiences could become engaging texts open to multiple interpretations leading to new discoveries. Our culminating take away was a renewed commitment to model for teacher education students how to textualize, share, and grow from their own and each other’s experiences.

Perspectives or Theoretical Framework

Educational reforms of the 21st Century have set higher standards for learning, more focus on test scores and data-driven instruction (U.S. Department of Education, 2009), and greater responsibility for student learning placed on the shoulders of classroom teachers (Cohen, 2011). Teacher educators strive to provide learning opportunities that develop educators who are inspired, respected, and engaged in learning across their careers (Cohen, 2002). Inspired educators develop a “teaching practice” that is both attentive and deliberate and that seeks to connect teaching to student learning (Cohen, 2011, p. 26). Such teachers create “educative” experiences (Dewey, 1938/1998, p. 44) by choosing to “add the passion, energy, and commitment that make education happen” (Cusick, 1991, p. 216). Likewise, they have a transactional (Dewey, 1938/1998; Rosenblatt, 1978/1994) relationship with their experiences as they read and make sense of their daily practice, much as they read and make sense of any text.

Thus, the purpose of this research was to offer the authors opportunities to reflect on our teaching practice with the goal of studying our own teaching (Schon, 1987). This purpose was guided by a theoretical framework situated in two complementary epistemological perspectives: feminist communication theory (Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, & Tarule, 1986; Belenky, Bond, & Weinstock, 1997; Colflesh, 1996) and transactional reading and learning theory (Dewey, 1938/1998; Dewey & Bentley, 1949; Rosenblatt, 1978/1994; Rosenblatt, 2005).

Feminist Perspectives

Teaching is “intimate work” (Bruner, 1996, p. 86). Professional learning that makes a difference in classroom instruction offers educators opportunities grounded in the complex

environment of practice while supporting and nurturing reflections and discourse on their developing knowledge, often termed praxis. From a feminist perspective, care and understanding are at the center of teaching and learning (Noddings, 1984). Like the typically female role of a midwife who helps draw new life from the mother, a teacher recognizes that knowledge is created within and drawn from the learner. Such a theory of knowledge creation is a departure from the more traditional and often male perspective of a banker who deposits knowledge within the learner (Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, & Tarule, 1986).

Expanding the feminist focus on care and understanding, a framework for women's ways of knowing grounded our research. Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, and Tarule (1986) advocate for women to become constructivist knowers who see knowledge as actively constructed by all human beings. Constructivist knowers move beyond silent receivers of knowledge and act with a sense of agency. To act with agency, women must gain confidence and skill in using information from a wide range of sources to form their own understandings (Colflesh, 1996).

Belenky, Bond, and Weinstock (1997) describe spaces within which women learn together and move toward constructivist knowing as "public homeplaces" or places where "people support each other's development and where everyone is expected to participate in developing the homeplace" (p. 13). In public homeplaces, participants feel safe enough to express their thoughts and envision possibilities beyond their current situations. Much as in Close and Langer's (1995) ideas on "envisionment building" (p. 3) when reading literature, as members of a "public homeplace" textualize and share their lived experiences, they begin to "explore the horizons of possibilities" (p. 3). When reading for information, Close and Langer (1995) suggest that the reader "maintains a point of reference" (p. 3) while:

...their envisionments are shaped by their questions and explorations that bring them closer to the information they seek and that help them better understand the topic. As people read, they use the content to narrow the possibilities of meaning and sharpen their understandings of information. Using information gained along the way (combined with what they already know) to refine their understanding, they seek to get the author's point or understand more and more about the topic. (p. 3)

As the researchers in this study, we read our experiences as texts so that we could explore possibilities and let our questions and explorations help us better understand those experiences and sharpen our interpretations of those experiences.

The researchers used extended dialogue to wrestle with ideas. We listened to each other's ideas carefully and spoke our own emerging ideas, knowing that dialogue allows ideas to clarify, change, and expand. Participants in a public homeplace develop self-respect, confidence, and a sense of agency through this process. Textualizing experiences helped each researcher develop skills of constructivist knowers as we read our experiences, created new interpretations, and incorporated new insights constructed with critical friends (Edge, 2011). One can learn to become a constructivist thinker in a public homeplace where such thinking is valued and modeled; a public homeplace offers a learning environment in which all members become one among equals and where power is shared among all. Educators who are constructivist thinkers are more likely to see their students as capable of thinking and constructing new ideas (Belenky,

Bond, & Weinstock, 1997) and to enable their students to see learning as a dynamic, symbiotic, and transactional relationship.

Although these ideas are not exclusively female ways of thinking, in the greater society much has been written about the differences in male and female approaches to knowledge, communication, and leadership (Gilligan, 1982; Sergiovanni, 2000). Women more often define power as “power to” whereas men typically define power as “power over” (Sergiovanni, 2000, p. 282). Males tend to focus on the individual and on feeling in control of their situations; whereas, females tend to emphasize relationships and see power as a means to shared goals (Sergiovanni, 2000). However, in all groups a time for building trust is required before communication reaches a level of expanding knowledge.

Transactional Perspectives

In transactional theory, learners are in a state of transaction with their environments including their own knowledge and experiences, sources of knowledge beyond the self, and with other learners. According to Rosenblatt (1978/1994), as readers interpret texts, they are changed by the texts as well as changing the texts through their interpretations. So learning occurs both from within the learner and from shared interpretations that expand the reader’s questions and insights. The researchers saw parallels between these two bodies of research and used both perspectives to frame this study.

Teacher learning that improves teaching practice requires not only new knowledge and skills, but also new ways of thinking and of seeing oneself. As teachers become confident knowledge constructors, they learn through praxis or trying new practices while seeking to understand why those practices work or do not work. Thus, teachers become researchers who learn new ways to think about and to carry out their work; they become more deliberate and attentive to their instructional decisions (Cohen, 2011). Teachers with a well-developed sense of agency build theory grounded in classroom practice (Bruner, 1996). Through inquiry, they actively formulate questions of importance to them, direct their own investigations, and communicate their newly constructed ideas, thus improving their practice in the process (Liston & Zeichner, 1991).

Transactional theory also suggests that learning occurs when people consider, discuss, and inquire into problems and issues of significance to them (Dewey & Bentley, 1949; Rosenblatt, 1978/1994; Rosenblatt, 2005). Based on this framework, the goal of professional learning for educators would be that they become constructivist thinkers and knowers through reading their own experiences, sharing their interpretations, and expanding those interpretations within a trusted community with the intent of improving their teaching practice.

Merging the two broad areas of research, feminist and transactional theories, provided the theoretical framework of our study. This framework created space for each of the authors to grow and to learn personally and professionally both individually and collectively.

Methodology

There is energy stemming from an existing established practice of self-study at our institution (Anderson, Imdieke, Lubig, Reisner, Sabin, & Standerford, 2010). The researchers saw a connection between the conference call for dynamic text discussions and self-study methodology. Self-study is rooted in post-modern and feminist thinking (LaBoskey, 2004). The purpose of this methodology is to both inform the researchers and to generate knowledge that can be shared in the professional discourse community. Self-study moves beyond empirical evidence to include consideration of underlying values and beliefs (Cochran-Smith, 2002). Rather than prove answers, self-study helps the researchers to explore and to challenge their assumptions with the purpose of improving their understanding and practice of teaching (Bullough & Pinnegar, 2001).

Much of our data came from written and oral stories we shared from our personal and professional experiences. Narrative knowledge which is “concerned with the explication of human intentions in the context of action” best characterizes the knowledge of teaching (Bruner, 1985, p. 100).

Stories are powerful research tools. They provide us with a picture of real people in real situations, struggling with real problems. They banish the indifference often generated by samples, treatments, and faceless subjects. They invite us to speculate on what might be changed and with what effect. And, of course, they remind us of our persistent fallibility. Most important, they invite us to remember that we are in the business of teaching, learning, and researching to improve the human condition. Telling and listening to stories can be a powerful gift of regard—of caring—for one another. (Witherell & Noddings, 1991, p. 280)

In telling stories about our textualized experiences, the researchers found this self-study helped to broaden and deepen our knowledge of teaching and learning and of ourselves as women teacher educators. Dyson and Genishi (1994) suggest:

The storytelling self is a social self, who declares and shapes important relationships through the mediating power of words. Thus, in sharing stories, we have the potential for forging new relationships, including local, classroom ‘cultures’ in which individuals are interconnected and new ‘we’s’ formed. (p. 5)

Modified Collaborative Conference Protocol

This group of seven female teacher educators conducted their self-studies over one year during bi-weekly meetings using a modified collaborative conference protocol (Seidel, Walters, Kirby, Olff, Powell, Scripp, Veenama, 1997). This conference protocol included textualizing a lived experience by putting it into writing (Edge, 2011), reading the text in the public home place, responding to the text by offering personal and academic connections that provided additional lenses from which the text could be considered, hearing the author’s response, and composing the learning through written reflection.

Textualizing an experience. The researchers wrote stories about critical events from their teacher education practice contextualized within their personal autobiographies. Individually, each participant analyzed how her own beliefs and values influenced the choices and decisions she made as she re-read and reflected on those experiences.

Reading the text. Critical events from each professional autobiography were read aloud within the homeplace; the shared readings served as a means of identifying research questions for each individual.

Responding to the text. After each story was read aloud within the group, the author-researcher listened and took notes while the critical friends offered observations, personal connections, connections to existing literature, and questions for the group to consider.

Hearing the responses. After hearing the responses, the author-researcher joined the conversation and offered clarifications, affirmations, questions, and points of disagreement.

Composing the learning. Finally, each author-researcher reflected on her own learning and these take aways were later shared with the group as part of the on-going exploration and knowledge construction.

The data collected included field notes of bi-weekly meetings of the entire panel, reflective journals of each member, written feedback participants provided to their own students as illustrations of decisions made, documented decisions during class sessions, conversations with critical friends who challenged and pushed our thinking, and written artifacts from our teaching and learning experiences. We considered each emerging theme through multiple data sources and from the perspective of each researcher as we defined our collective themes across the year of the study.

Findings

In this study we sought to better understand and to improve our teacher education practices. By critically reading and analyzing our individual narratives within the public homeplace, we collectively identified four themes about our practices (a) personal and professional tensions influence the decisions we made in our teaching, (b) our ability to stretch our understanding was accomplished through interpreting our experiences as texts, (c) our growth was rooted in critical incidences and moments when we felt our convictions wobble (Fecho, 2011), and (d) by modeling the process of textualizing our experiences, we will provide learning environments and opportunities for our students.

In the section that follows, we first provide a description of the theme as understood and collectively defined through an analysis of all of the texts of our teacher education practices. Each researcher selected a theme that best illustrated what she learned about her teaching by critically discussing the text from her teacher education practices.

Personal and Professional Tensions

One common theme that emerged throughout the study was that each researcher felt an array of personal and professional tensions that influenced her professional decisions. Many of these tensions can be directly attributed to the classic female roles combined with the expanded female roles of women since the feminist movements of the late 20th Century, such as the growth of mothers who work outside the home. The women in this group all felt that they were expected to have it all and do it all with no excuses for less than perfect performance. In other words, the women felt they were to fill both traditional female and male roles at the same time and to fill all these roles expertly. Demands of home and work often conflicted, and each member of the group felt that she was often unable to do her best in either place. Yet, each believed that in resolving these conflicts, growth occurred and she became stronger both personally and professionally.

Laura's Personal and Professional Tensions. I have been an educator for nearly 20 years and became a mother two years ago. How have my personal and professional identities changed as I seek to merge these two important roles? As most women, I had felt that I would someday meet someone with whom to create the traditional marriage and family. However, over the years that did not happen, and I realized that I could create my own family. So, two years ago I became the mother of beautiful twin boys. Before I became a mother, I felt that balancing these two full-time roles would be quite possible and I set high expectations for my performance in both contexts. Although I would absolutely not eliminate or trade either role, I have come to realize that it is not possible to be near perfect in two consuming roles at the same time. I find that I am always feeling guilty about shortchanging either my sons or my students. I realized from my critical friends that all of us have experienced these same guilty feelings at different stages in our lives.

From these guilty feelings, new learning emerged, although the process of this learning has been especially challenging due to the commitment of time for such insights to occur and evolve. Fitting the additional reading, writing, meeting, and reflecting into my already overloaded schedule produced even more tensions and guilt. I frequently arrived at the next meeting scolding myself by thinking, "Great. One more thing I haven't gotten done." However, in a public homeplace, my oral insights were welcomed and the conversations helped me bring my learning to new levels. I gradually came to understand that I cannot control everything in life and to accept that as okay.

I realized that the tensions and inadequacies that I often felt were similar to those my students felt as they balanced multiple roles in their lives and tried to be the best future teachers they could at the same time. Students today are usually holding jobs and carrying full-time credit loads in their university programs. On top of work and classes, they are expected to volunteer time outside of the program to become more familiar with the needs of students in special education that go beyond classroom walls. And, they are expected to make sense of the complex world of teaching students in both general and special education while remembering the content from both professional fields.

Becoming a mother has brought a shift in my thinking that has enabled me to become a better learner, caregiver, teacher, and mentor. I realize that each of us moves through stages in

our lives, and depending on the stage in which we find ourselves, the way we frame the world and our beliefs about what is important and how to relate to others will vary. Our personal experiences shape who we are at specific points in time and influence how we interact with one another.

We know that women can have it all; they can balance many roles, but they may find doing it all at the same time is challenging and riddled with tensions (Slaughter, 2012). It is true that men face similar tensions and challenges, but it appears to be more prevalent for women. Women tend to be more open to sharing stories with each other as well (Belenky, Bond, & Weinstock, 1997). I find that now I tend to use my personal and professional stories as a primary way of teaching my students. My stories of tensions and struggles can help students accept their own challenges as growth experiences. They can accept that roles will change and become more and less important as stages of life come and go. Learning through stories is a powerful approach to learning (Dyson & Genishi, 1994; Witherell & Noddings, 1991). Sharing my stories supports my students as they become part of the public homeplaces that I create in my classrooms and encourages them to reflect, share, and learn from their own and each other's stories.

Jan's Personal and Professional Tensions. My self-study grew out of concern over the rapid, unexpected and ongoing changes in my role as a public school teacher. Throughout my professional life, I have diligently tried to make sense of the various professional hats I have worn; however, I lacked a group of critical friends to support my learning from my experiences. The one constant during all of this professional change has been my personal ambition to further develop my teaching practices in the area of writing and to support other teachers in raising the quality of writing in their elementary classrooms.

My critical incident arose from assumptions and expectations. While my public school colleagues focused on teacher-directed products, I expected to continue having shared professional experiences through dialogue about the process. Participating in a collaborative conference protocol in a safe public homeplace has broadened my constructivist approach to thinking.

The self-study group modeled how to step back and let others arrive at their own understandings, as they are ready. Connecting the shift in my thinking to Langer's (2011) process of envisionment building helped to strengthen this new understanding. As additional ideas emerged, I questioned previous assumptions and practices. I realized that my personal and professional tension was rooted in the difference between my values and what I thought was the expectation of my job. My thinking had shifted from a problem-solution frame to one that was willing to make meaning from understanding the perspectives of others. In the same way we read a story to understand, I read my students and co-workers experiences as stories so we could co-construct meaning rather than look for quick fixes.

Stretching through Interpreting Stories

The second theme that we identified was the power to learn through sharing our own experiences as texts that could be interpreted. Within the safety of the public homeplace, each member developed the trust to share stories that went straight to the heart of her as a person and

a professional. We began by sharing oral stories of the questions that were spinning in our heads. Written professional and personal autobiographies were then composed and shared across our months together. Some members had conducted self-studies together previously and were more comfortable with sharing early in the process. Others needed time to become comfortable with this type of reflecting and sharing. Through laughter and tears, the authors came to know and trust one another. As this trust developed, so did the depth of the stories and the ability to share interpretations, questions, and disagreements. We truly found ourselves engaged in a literary community as we read the texts of our experiences. Those texts were as powerful as any we have read before.

Bethney's Stretch. As a member of this self-study team, I struggled to share publicly my experiences and as I wrote this final piece, I continued to struggle. When I came to the study as a new assistant professor in the School of Education, I found myself among the *greats* whom I had admired both as a former student of the school and as a professional in the field. As my colleagues began sharing their stories over the weeks and months that we met, I knew eventually it would be my time to share.

As a former teacher, guidance counselor, school leader, and now an assistant professor of educational leadership, I have spent a significant amount of time trying to understand why I saw my educational practices and beliefs to be a bit different than many of the professionals around me. I recognized that quite possibly it was the elements of my story that made me see things differently. I connected strongly with the work of Robert Starratt (2004) and thought that by just *knowing* my story and holding it close, I was honoring it and allowing it be an authentic part of my practices.

There is a tacit moral imperative to be true to oneself. To not be true to oneself would be to miss the whole point of one's life. Since I am a unique being who will exist only once in the whole history of the universe, my originality is something that only I can discover, author, perform, define, and actualize. Only I can realize the potentiality that is solely my own. If I refuse this most basic human privilege and opportunity then I violate my destiny and myself. (p. 66)

For as long as I could remember, I felt I was conscientious to the idea of authenticity and the role it would play in my life and work. Although I may not have always had the words for naming it, in reflecting back on my young mind, I recognized the elements of authentic-based ideas to have been present in my thoughts. As I began to progress further into this self-study, I drew stronger connections between my story, my professional experiences and the literature, until finally, the question emerged: How do I continue to grow in my own authenticity and encourage students to grow in the understanding of their authenticity and its necessity as a foundation for ethical leadership, while working in a field that often pressures us to do otherwise? Through the support of my critical friends in our public homeplace, I recognized the next step I would need to take. To be authentic, one must recognize, accept, internalize and externalize their story (Starratt, 2004). It was the externalization, the textualization piece that I was missing (Edge, 2011).

I had a story inside me, but had never textualized the experiences that comprised my story. To do so, would be to put it in a format that would become public and open to the interpretation of others. As I became more engaged in the self-study process, hesitantly, I began to textualize, and place written words to the events that I believed made me into the person I was today. Although I had my story written, on several occasions, I passed by stating that I would be ready to share the next time. In between meetings I would re-write and insert a bit more information into my document. With each meeting I became more and more comfortable working amongst my critical friends (LaBoskey, 2004) in our public homeplace. As an individual who recognized that my story grew daily and changed with each new experience, I had always guarded it from the possibility of misinterpretation - of one not understanding it in the exact form that I did. I held my story close, feeling strongly that no one would ever see it in its true form which can only be found in the original, first-hand experience. My story began before I was born and has continued to develop into its current state of which it is found today. I believed in my story; it was my interpretation of the life surrounding me and my foundation for carrying authenticity forward in my beliefs and practices. To share this story would be to open it up for the interpretation of others, who might see it differently than I did, and this I feared would change its meaning.

I opened myself up to the process and through the support of my critical friends, I externalized my story by textualizing my experiences. Immediately, I recognized a transformation that had occurred, a weight that have been lifted, and a true sense that others not only understood my story, but they supported it. Through textualization, I recognized my story in a new light and saw an even stronger connection between my beliefs and practices, my desire to be authentic in my teaching, and the literature that I so often turned to as a professor of educational leadership. By sharing my story and listening to the interpretations of my critical friends, I became empowered to strengthen my practices. Evans (2007) shares that, “When asked about their origins of their philosophy, people invariably point to their experience—their experience as an adult, as an educator and as a student, and primarily to their early experience growing up” (p. 147). I had previously thought that to know my story myself was enough to recognize where my philosophies, beliefs and sense of authenticity was founded. Through the process of self-study I learned that by letting others into my story it became lifted to a new level, and my story was empowered to do the work that our experiences are intended to do.

Growth from Critical Incidents and Wobble

The members of our team each shared thoughts on feeling “wobble” (Fecho, 2011, p. 53)—that is, moments when we felt we were wavering between what we previously thought or experienced and what we were in the process of thinking or experiencing. Through wobbling, we came to understand Piaget’s ideas of equilibrium and disequilibrium (McLeod, 2009) at a personal level. As we confronted and reflected on situations where our deepest beliefs failed to guide us as expected, we began to wobble about those beliefs. We questioned what we were doing and wondered if there were better ways. It was in this state of disequilibrium when we truly began to learn. Although the feelings were uncomfortable, they pushed us to search for new ideas and beliefs. We came to recognize periods of wobble as critical incidents to examine. It was in sharing and discussing these critical incidents where the most learning occurred for each of us.

Abby's Critical Incident. Wobble occurred for me as I sought to answer the question: How do I balance my personal belief that teacher candidates must be supported and nurtured while honoring the integrity of our profession? This question emerged from the critical incident of dismissing a teacher candidate from the program. In textualizing my personal and professional experiences as a public school teacher for 12 years and now as an assistant professor, I explored my wobble in response to this critical event. Through conversations and connections with my critical friends and the sharing of literature, I began to further examine my beliefs about learning and thinking.

Bruner's (1986) two modes of thinking emerged as pertinent influences in this study. A paradigmatic view of learning and thinking is rooted in a formal, mathematical system of description. A narrative view of learning and thinking focuses on human interaction and seeks to demonstrate how personal experiences help to shape our stories. Within education, there is a heavy reliance upon the paradigmatic paradigm as evidenced by the use of measures such as grade point averages, course grades, and performance upon tests. This leaves much to be desired when our students demonstrate dispositional issues that are better suited to a narrative view of assessment. To tell and know the complete story of ourselves and our students, the paradigmatic and narrative paradigms must be utilized as complementary modes of thinking. The wobble for me came as I realized that in spite of analyzing and striving to understand and support the teacher candidate in terms of both views, the difficult decision to dismiss the student from the program was necessary.

This realization resulted in me questioning my deep rooted belief that growth, learning, and change can occur given the right opportunities and when marked by authenticity, trust, and reciprocal care (Hickman, 2010; Noddings, 1984). As a woman, a special educator, and an educational leader, my belief in the ability to inspire others to achieve goals through collaboration, relationship building, and empowerment had been shaken. It was through the process of textualizing the experience about the unsuccessful teacher candidate that I realized despite belief, empowerment, and care, some are not meant to be educators.

As I worked through this time of disequilibrium, I searched for new ideas and ways to understand this critical incident and similar ones to come. At the onset, this critical incident began for me as a question of power. Who gave me the power to stand in the way of another's dream to become a teacher? I saw myself in my new role, the Director of Field Experiences, as a gatekeeper and felt uncomfortable with that power. Often female leaders are thought of as providing the *power to* rather than the more masculine view of the *power over* (Sergiovanni, 2000). Interpreting my role as the person initially charged with addressing situations of student concern and in essence ordained with a "power over" (p. 282) who continues in the program or does not, represented an internal struggle for me. My natural leadership style sought to assist others to achieve their goals by providing the "power to" (p. 282). Through the process of making connections and ongoing envisionment building, I made meaning from my experiences in order to inform my practice.

I now see my role as not the power over keeping those out of teaching, rather it is the power to help my students realize professional pathways to their true calling, be that teaching or

some other career. From this perspective, the power to achieve is given freely and with care. This new way of seeing allows me to balance my innate belief in our students and my desire to protect the integrity of the teaching profession. This required me to seek a balance between the belief in the potential of my students to become effective teachers and knowing when that belief is better served in helping my students to see what true strengths they have and the potential to build a career from those strengths.

Modeling the Process of Textualizing Our Experiences for Our Students

Finally, the original goal of our study was to improve our teaching practice, through critically discussing our teacher education practices. As we experienced the power of learning from textualized and shared experiences, we each renewed our commitment to provide such learning environments and opportunities for our own students.

Christi's Experience. I learned the importance of empowering teacher candidates to become active meaning-makers of their lived experiences *as* texts after pondering: Why do I encourage teacher candidates to use artifacts and writings about their own experiences as texts from which to learn? As a doctoral student and then as a teacher educator, I had repurposed many literacy strategies meant for print-based texts in order to guide teacher candidates to make meaning from their teaching and learning experiences. Students often shared with me that they felt an increased sense of confidence and metacognition as a result of critically reading their textualized experiences (Edge, 2011). However, as I participated in one of these very strategies alongside my students by listing recent experiences in my journal and then sketching a symbolic interpretation of them, I felt, not confidence, but wobble (Fecho, 2011). By textualizing my teaching experiences as a new assistant professor, contextualizing them in my broader life story, and discussing them with critical friends (LeBoskey, 2004) in our public homeplace, I was eventually able to re-envision my professional practice and personal place with increased awareness, confidence, and purpose.

The inciting incident in my self-study happened as I sketched a symbolic interpretation of my lived experiences—a literacy strategy called Sketch to Stretch (Beers, 2003; Harste, Short, & Burke, 1988) that I adapted to help the teacher candidates extend and reflect on the meaning they were making from teaching and learning experiences in a field-based literacy course. Before sketching, I asked students to gather their thoughts by listing encouraging and challenging events from their semester. Yet, when I lifted my pen to skim the long list of recent events from my life, I found myself staring at my collected thoughts, and wobbling (Fecho, 2011) as I acknowledged all the newness in my professional and personal life—I was a new assistant professor teaching new courses with new colleagues in a new university which had a different culture than where I completed my doctoral work; I was in a new state, a new city, a new home, and had another new baby on the way. Like the beginning teachers I had studied as a researcher, and like my own students who were transitioning from being students to becoming teachers through their field work in schools, I found myself in a liminal space (Meyer & Land, 2005). Would textualizing my experiences help me too as I transitioned? I decided to become a student of my own teaching practice and formally study my process.

In the initial stages of my self-study research, I was able to put my finger on my feeling of wobble and recognize that moving across the country and taking a new job marked critical

events (Webster & Mertova, 2007) in my ongoing professional and personal life story. By informally writing about my lived experiences in my journal and then sketching an interpretation of them, I began textualizing critical events from my lived experience; placing the events on paper meant that I could take them out of my ongoing stream of consciousness and set them aside—like a photograph that captured a moment in time. As a result, the wondering I felt as I stared at my journal page was no longer just a nebulous shadow of doubt hovering in my mind but rather repositioned as *something* to set outside my present self, to take a step back from, and to consider thoughtfully in the context of extant literature as well as my own and others' lived experiences. In our public homeplace my critical friends (LeBoskey, 2004) listened to my description of this moment and encouraged me to explore my beliefs about teaching and learning.

As an educator, my practice is situated in a transactional paradigm (Dewey & Bentley, 1949) and guided by connections between the tenets of Rosenblatt's (1978, 2005) transactional theory of reading and Dewey's philosophy of experience (Dewey, 1938/1998). I view students and teachers as active meaning-makers who have rich reservoirs of language and experience that they bring with them into classrooms—reservoirs that guide the meaning they make of new teaching and learning experiences. However, I also recognize that a persistent problem in teacher education (Hammerness, Darling-Hammond, Bransford, Berliner, Cochran-Smith, McDonald, & Zeichner, 2005) has been what Lortie (1975) called an “apprenticeship of observation” (p. 61), the limited vantage point that comes from observing teaching from a biographical rather than pedagogically-oriented perspective for sixteen or so years before teaching. Because of my beliefs, I view part of my role as a teacher educator to include designing learning experiences that can help teacher candidates to develop a kind of dual consciousness about teaching and learning (Cohen, 2011; Standerford, Sabin, Anderson, Edge, Lubig, & Cameron-Standerford, 2012). To facilitate this dual consciousness, I have used literacy strategies, such as the Sketch to Stretch (Beers, 2003; Harste, Short, & Burke, 1988) to help the largely invisible process of learning to become more visible to teacher candidates so that they may attend to the process of learning from personal, social, and pedagogical perspectives as they develop “classroom literacy” (Edge, 2011 p. 28).

Examining my beliefs allowed me to contextualize my wobble and the critical events it evoked within the theoretical and professional knowledge base from which my beliefs stem. However, it was when I contextualized them in my life experiences by writing the story of how I originally came to learn about the symbolic sketching strategy--first as a teacher, who sought to help students make meaning from print-based texts, and then, as a teacher educator, who recognized an opportunity to re-purpose the strategy to aid prospective teachers who appeared to be struggling to read classroom events during their field work in schools—that I began to fully textualize the experience in a way that led to re-envisioning my teaching.

When I wrote my story, my attention was drawn to clear images that took me back to, as it turned out, another time when I felt very aware of my liminal position as a professional and as a woman. I wrote about my first official day as a doctoral student, about walking out of the classroom I knew and thrived in as an English and reading teacher and walking into the university classroom as a new mother and a full-time student. I wrote about entering the methods of teaching reading class that I was supposed to co-teach as a part of my teaching assistantship

with the university, and discovering the sketching strategy as a teacher of reading. I wrote about reentering that class as the sole instructor a year later and discovering the sketching strategy as a teacher educator. As I wrote, I constructed metaphors that allowed me to see parallels to my present situation; however, my seeing was still blurry. Later, when I read my story aloud to my critical friends, then listened as they offered observations, connections, and questions, I took a step back from the lived experiences and my memories of them in a way that lent clarity to them. I re-considered them from a position outside of myself—through the connections and observations of others, much as a reader of a printed story might suspend her interpretation of that story in order to consider others’ thoughts, interpretations, and personal connections before considering her own interpretation once more. As a result of this discussion of my textualized experiences, I approached my own story with new insights and with confirmed interpretations as well. In the take away writing I composed after reading and discussing my story with the group, I likened the liberating feeling of re-seeing my story to a breakthrough experience I had as a do-it-yourself home renovator—when my husband put a sledgehammer through a crooked wall that I had, with great frustration, tried to remove wallpaper from, smooth over with joint compound, sand, sand, and sand some more in order to paint the still-warped wall. He saw my frustration from a different position and through a frame of knowledge and experience I did not yet have. When he casually walked up to the wall and wacked a hole right in the middle of it, I took a step back in surprise. I did not feel anger, but a sense of “Oh!” in discovering an option I would have never thought to consider. Distanced from the wall, I saw it and my situation differently. This re-seeing was liberating, and together, we removed the warped drywall and made the wall anew. Similarly, the experience of textualizing my critical events into story and then discussing it with critical friends in our public homeplace, I could distance myself from my story and my situation enough to be able to see it differently. A shift in power had taken place. I was no longer in my story; I was the constructor of my story. I was no longer alone in my construction; I had knowledgeable allies and new vantage points from which to make meaning.

As our study progressed and we considered our research for purposes of sharing it with others, I had the opportunity to step back even further from my wobble, critical events, and the story I composed about them. Reflecting in light of the study as a whole, engaging in continued conversation, reading professional literature, re-examining artifacts from my self-study, and composing the meaning I made allowed me to both broaden and deepen my understanding (Langer, 2011). By textualizing and critically reading and discussing my personal and professional experiences, I was in a position to re-envision my practice and to construct an understanding of it anew.

In the semester following the completion of our study, I approached my courses with a kind of confidence and purposeful attention that I admit I, like my students, find difficult to put words to; however, in artifacts of my teaching and my students’ work, I see evidence of it, like fingerprints on glass. I hear it in my students’ voices. I read it in the subtext of students’ written comments on course evaluations: “This class has had to be one of the most valuable course I have ever taken...I am walking away feeling more confident in myself and my future career.” I, we, live it.

Suzanne’s Experience. My self-study led me to examine feelings of never quite fitting in in my autobiographical writing and in reflecting on my critical incident. As a result of the

study, I felt stronger in my philosophy of teaching and learning and affirmed in my approach to grading student work in my online graduate courses by providing lengthy narrative responses. I decided to continue my approaches to assessment and believe it serves as a strong model for my own students as they consider issues of assessment and responding to students.

I was raised in a traditional, religious, and conservative family in the Midwest during the 1950's and 60's. In this culture men were seen as the breadwinners and women's roles were centered in the home. However, my mother was a strong-willed woman who had internal struggles with these limitations and took a job outside the home, an unusual move for women of that era. Although my mother felt confined by women's roles, she perpetuated the expectations by telling me it was more important for my older brother to go to college. Although my mother pushed at the edges of women's accepted roles, she communicated her acceptance of those roles for me. Yet, I did not accept or fit it with this narrowed view of my possibilities in the world based on my gender.

My wobble (Fecho, 2011) began early as I entered and excelled in school, earning multiple offers of scholarships. My high school and college advisors encouraged me to pursue careers such as engineering; however, I chose teaching with great enthusiasm and optimism. My older brother struggled in school, never completely recovering from feelings of failure, and I witnessed many friends who believed they were not smart because of negative experiences in school. I set about my career with hopes of helping all children succeed, thereby, changing the world.

As I began teaching, I found my work often directed by policies and decisions from beyond the classroom. Teachers' practical and professional knowledge was seldom valued or trusted. Entering this type of profession exacerbated my wobble about the role of females in society.

In my role as a teacher educator, I developed the habit of writing lengthy narrative remarks to my students in response to their assignments. Although these narratives take enormous amounts of time and effort, my philosophy of teaching as caring and supporting learners does not align with the practice of assessing students' efforts with a simple numerical score. I believe narrative responses demonstrate my value of students' ideas and expand their thinking. Such responses also develop stronger relationships with each learner. I use these narratives as formative assessments that nudge the learner to take the next step in his/her unique learning journey. Analytical rubrics accompany the narratives for each assignment, but both my students and I find the narratives more valuable as teaching, learning, and assessing tools.

My critical incident occurred the semester before this study began when a graduate student contacted me to express displeasure with her grade on an assignment. After offering the opportunity for revision and averaging the new grade with the earlier one, the student was even more discouraged because it would not enable her to retain an A in the course. I felt wobble. What is the purpose of assessment? Did the grade really matter to anyone but this student? In the end I decided to have the student redo the assignment; I re-graded it and assigned the new grade.

After this incident, my questions became more focused for this research: Why do I feel it necessary to write lengthy narratives in response to student assignments if the final grade is really all that matters to them? Do my narratives serve the purposes I have set for them? Within these questions were a complex set of issues such as the time and energy drain on my personal life, the myth that teacher education usually gives inflated grades, my core beliefs about the purposes of assessment, my understanding of the learning process, and my feelings of being out of step with the current trends in education reform that reduce assessment of students' learning to a single numerical score.

Through the self-study, I came to know and accept my personal guiding beliefs that caring and relationship are at the center of teaching and learning. I define teaching as a public service profession. My philosophy is strongly supported by both feminist and male authors.

In the United States the mainstream culture has developed around a more patriarchal view of life and males are disproportionately represented in Congress and in top management positions in the private sector. As we move through the 21st Century, the purpose of education has been re-defined from a public service within a democratic society to an institution that prepares students for jobs to sustain America's strong position in a global economy.

My view of education as a caring space within which each student and teacher finds his/her own possibilities and is mutually supported in achieving those possibilities does not fit with current trends in education. Competition leads to winners and losers rather than creating confident, powerful citizens. Competition can cause unwillingness to cooperate and share ideas (Kohn, 1986). Learning takes time and happens differently for each person. I do not believe there is some specific amount of factual information that everyone must know. New knowledge must connect to what a person already knows to either be assimilated or accommodated (McLeod, 2009). Knowledge is rooted in and constructed from our experiences. Critical incidents bring about wobble and as we reflect on the felt dissonance, we search to resolve unsettled feelings, hopefully, improving our knowledge and actions through this process. Learning happens from within and occurs through praxis or acting and then reflecting to understand your actions. In essence, we build theory grounded in our experiences (Bruner, 1996).

As a result of my self-study, I was able to better articulate my beliefs and philosophy of teaching and learning as grounded in both feminist and transactional theories and developed through my personal and professional experiences. My self-study affirmed my beliefs and gave me a renewed sense of urgency and agency or "taking more control of your own mental activity" (Bruner, 1996, p. 87). I realized that forcing my assessments into simple numerical scores goes against my beliefs in the power of relationship with and caring for my students as learners and as human beings. I accepted that the personal costs were worth the benefits to my students by both affirming their efforts and nudging them to think in new ways. I believe students who experience the power of feminist pedagogy in their own learning will choose to provide similar learning opportunities for their students. Based on over 40 years as an educator, my students of all ages have consistently supported my beliefs and actions in their evaluations of my teaching; their long-term relationships with me that last long beyond our time in the classroom together; and both my students' and my success as educators and mentors. I have accepted that standing firm

on one's beliefs despite not fitting in is possibly the best gift I can give to others in all of the personal and professional roles that I fill.

Conclusion

Through the self-study process, this group of seven teacher educators focused on exploring the question: "What can we learn about our teaching by critically discussing the *texts* of our teacher education practices?" By defining text in a broader sense, we were able to give our experiences a tangible structure that could be shared, reinterpreted, and analyzed. Through discourse guided by the use of a collaborative conference protocol and responding as "critical friends," (LaBoskey, 2004, p. 819) we were able to challenge and push the boundaries of how we can learn from reading, analyzing and discussing our textualized experiences as educators. (Edge, 2011, p. 330).

Together, we learned that our teaching practice was influenced by tensions that stemmed from personal and professional events. By identifying and examining those events like texts, we were better able to understand ourselves and the nature of our work. Key in this process was the creation of a safe homeplace that allowed for multiple insights from our critical friends. We learned that our teaching experiences could become engaging texts open to multiple interpretations leading to new discoveries. Our culminating take away was a renewed commitment to model for teacher education students how to textualize, share, and grow from their own and each other's experiences.

Teacher effectiveness stems from educative experiences that can promote growth through disequilibrium. In order for this to occur, teachers need ways to critically examine their practice in safe places. This study demonstrated (a) the transactional nature of professional conversations deepen understanding and (b) the powerful way that, by valuing multiple perspectives, feminist communication theory can broaden understanding. Together, these reinforce the need for public homeplaces to foster critical conversations within and across our professional contexts through care and understanding.

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