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## **Fifteen Guidelines for Helping Education Faculty Get Published in Peer-reviewed Journals**

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Getting tenure at most schools of education in the United States is usually a six- or seven-year process. Typically, junior faculty are expected to demonstrate excellent teaching, to engage in rigorous committee work, and to publish books and articles in peer-reviewed journals. Our experience in academe during the past three decades suggests that non-tenured education faculty sustain incredible stress as they simultaneously strive to become savvy about university politics, cope with low entry-level salaries, and juggle university expectations. Probably, the most challenging expectation for junior faculty is getting published. This milestone is considered a major requirement for gaining tenure, and tenure is viewed as a necessary foundation for being promoted and for advancing to leadership positions.

We bring to this chapter fifteen guidelines that support faculty members' efforts to publish in peer-reviewed journals. These guidelines are based on our experiences in writing, peer-reviewing, editing, and conducting related workshops and mentoring sessions (Alvermann & Reinking, 2003, 2006; Reinking & Alvermann, 2003; Sanacore, 2006; Sanacore & Alvermann, 2006). Our suggestions in this chapter are adapted from some of our previous work designed to help faculty increase their quality and quantity of articles in peer-reviewed journals. Although we value books and book chapters, we focus on journal writing because it is a priority in many schools of education.

### **Guideline 1: Synthesize Your Dissertation and Condense It into a Manuscript Format**

Doctoral dissertations represent not only important research experience for doctoral students, but also important contributions to the education profession. They are structured, comprehensive, and sometimes packed with jargon. Rather than sit on a shelf

and collect dust, the dissertation can be transformed into a user-friendly manuscript of twenty-five to thirty pages and can be used as a published study in a reputable journal. As expected, some dissertations consist of the type of data collection and data analysis that is appropriate for major research journals. Other dissertations have greater value for being converted to several shorter manuscripts. For example, a recent dissertation focused on improving middle school students' literacy learning through interactive discussions, drama activities, and independent reading. The researcher is in the process of transforming this study (especially the comprehensive related literature chapter) into three manuscripts, each with its own introduction, related literature section, practical application, summary, and reference list. The potential for publishing these three manuscripts in a practitioner journal is increased when careful editing reflects a conversational tone, the elimination of jargon, and the avoidance of stereotyping related to race, gender, age, and ability.

#### Guideline 2: Know the Format, Content, Editorial Policy, and Audience of the Journal for Which You Intend to Submit a Manuscript.

Whether junior faculty are using their dissertations or considering other manuscripts for publication, they must be aware of different journals' individual or collective emphasis on theory, research, practice, or all the above. Familiarity with a journal usually involves reading many issues of it and knowing the instructions for authors, which are often available in the journal or a related website. For example, *Intervention in School and Clinic*, accepts submissions of the following types: (a) "Feature" articles, (b) "An Interview with," (c) "Technology Trends," (d) "What Works for Me," (e) "Books and More," (f) "20 Ways to," (g) "Spotlight on Students," (h) "Policy and Law Briefs," (i) "Diversity Dispatches," (j) "Collaboration Forum," and (k) "Behavior Management." The editorial policy indicates that the journal is practitioner-oriented and is "designed to provide practical, research-based ideas to educators who work with students with severe learning disabilities and emotional/behavioral problems" (Council for Learning Disabilities, 2006, n.p.). No extensive reviews of professional literature are accepted, and a one-paragraph introduction for the topic is considered adequate.

In comparison, the editors of *Advancing Women in Leadership Online Journal* (2006) welcome articles either reporting, synthesizing, reviewing, or analyzing scholarly inquiry concerning women's issues. Manuscripts should not exceed 30 pages. *Reading Research Quarterly* welcomes submission of research-oriented manuscripts that make contributions to advancing knowledge and understanding of reading and of literacy, broadly defined. Articles published in *RRQ* are primarily reports of original, rigorously conducted research employing diverse epistemologies, methodologies, methods, and disciplinary perspectives. Other appropriate research-oriented articles include essays of new theoretical or methodological perspectives, comprehensive syntheses of research toward developing new understandings, and scholarly analyses of trends and issues in the field. Pilot studies, and other research efforts of limited scope or duration, are not typically considered for publication (International Reading Association, 2006).

In addition to these three publications, other journals provide space for opinion or argumentative articles, and some journals designate entire issues or parts of issues for articles concerning themes. Furthermore, most journal editors maintain a policy concerning manuscript style and require specific guidelines, such as those indicated in the 5<sup>th</sup> edition of the *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association* (2001). Preparation guidelines vary in certain journals, however, with some editors requiring APA style for the references section and *The Chicago Manual of Style* (2003) for other sections of the manuscript. Before submitting a manuscript to a journal editor, prospective authors should be thoroughly aware of the editorial policy and manuscript requirements of the journal.

### Guideline 3: Realize Your Creative Potential, and Be Aware of Methods That Kill Creativity

Some academics do not consider journal articles to be creative. Granted, some articles are dense with technical data collection and data analysis, but even these contributions can demonstrate unique ways of synthesizing ideas and applying research findings to practice. Teresa Amabile has published extensively in the field of creativity, and her research has implications for industry, science, academe, and other fields (Amabile, 1988a, 1988b, 1992, 1998; Amabile, Hadley, & Kramer, 2002; Amabile & Sensabaugh, 1992; Collins & Amabile, 1999; Conti & Amabile, 1999; Hennessey & Amabile, 1999; Hill & Amabile, 1993). Specifically, Amabile discovered the following factors that undermine people's interest and creativity when they are involved with interesting and potentially creative projects:

- (a) *Expected evaluation*: People who focus on how their work will be judged are less creative than individuals who do not worry about evaluative constraint.
- (b) *Surveillance*: Individuals who are conscious of being observed while working are less creative than individuals who are not conscious of being observed.
- (c) *Reward*: Individuals who perceive themselves as working mostly for a tangible reward are less creative than individuals who are not working mainly for a reward.
- (d) *Competition*: People who perceive themselves in direct and threatening competition with colleagues are less creative than those who are not focusing on competition.
- (e) *Restricted choice*: Individuals whose choice is restricted are less creative than individuals who have a freer choice. Scientists who are engaged in creativity seem to be especially affected by choice. Specifically, freedom of choice for scientists was the most important aspect of environments that supported high creativity. Restricted choice was the most significant factor that affected low creativity.
- (f) *Extrinsic motivation*: People who think about all the external purposes for doing something are less creative than people who think about all the intrinsic purposes for doing something.

These six factors can stifle, or kill, creativity in industry and in academe, and they appear to be embedded in most universities' expectations for faculty. For example, faculty expect to be:

- (a) *evaluated* by students and administrators;
- (b) *observed* in classes and during committee work;
- (c) *rewarded* with tenure, promotions, and grants;
- (d) stressed about *competing* for tenure, promotions, and grants;
- (e) *restricted* in their choice of teaching schedules and research priorities; and
- (f) involved in tasks for *extrinsic* reasons, such as achieving tenure.

Moving beyond these external factors, the work of Amabile and her colleagues, Florida and Goodnight (2005), and others indicates that more and better creativity takes place in the context of intrinsic motivation. Common sense, therefore, suggests that faculty are more likely to produce creative, authentic journal articles when external forces are eliminated or reduced. Not surprisingly, neither university nor journal expectations represent a perfect world. Both are similar in requiring prospective researchers and authors to meet external criteria for publishing. Universities usually require faculty publications to advance knowledge, to bring prestige to the campuses, and to achieve promotions. Journal editors and peer reviewers are equally concerned with issues of advancing knowledge and of gaining prestige for the journals and the professional associations that sponsor them. Educational journals, however, provide a variety of print and electronic alternatives, offering options to prospective authors to write about theory, research, and practice. Thus, writers have opportunities to reach their comfort zone as they match their interests, preferences, and talents with journal expectations. Moving in this direction requires time to think, reflect, and imagine before we engage in thoughtful writing. Last-minute, or eleventh-hour, perspectives usually do not work well in writing thoughtfully and authentically, which are basic considerations for getting published. (For related publications by Amabile and her colleagues about creativity, visit <http://www.hbs.edu/research/index.html>).

#### Guideline 4: Become a Serious Critic and Editor of One's Own Work

Most junior faculty have strong content backgrounds concerning their specialties. Their work sometimes lacks credibility, however, because it has not been carefully revised and edited. To demonstrate credibility with editors and their peer reviewers, writers should not only generate substantive content but also read their manuscripts (sometimes aloud) multiple times, spaced over several weeks. During this process of revision, prospective authors should share their drafts with colleagues for the purpose of receiving constructive feedback that could result in more credible rewrites. We also suggest that manuscripts be edited with a careful focus on criteria, such as:

- (a) *Brevity*: Omit words that add nothing to meaning. Examples: Change "during the course of" to "during" and "few in number" to "few."

- (b) *Clarity*: Do not use vague adjectives when specific ones are called for. Do not write “We considered numerous strategies.” Instead write “We considered nine strategies.”
- (c) *Tone and style*: Make sure your words sound as if they come from a human being—not an institution. Example: Change “Further notification will follow” to “I’ll keep you informed” and “In the judgment of this author” to “I believe.”
- (d) *Variety*: Avoid starting each sentence with the same part of speech, such as a noun or pronoun. Caution: Do not try to start each sentence with a different part of speech. Just strive for some variety.
- (e) *Content*: Make your purpose immediately clear. Do not force the reader to wade through several pages before understanding why you wrote the piece.
- (f) *Paragraph strength*: Each paragraph should deal with only one topic. Including too many topics will make your reader work too hard. Also, when needed, use transitional devices between paragraphs.

These six suggestions are adapted from *When Editing Your Own Work* (2004), and they can be used in conjunction with other suggestions for revising and editing one’s work. They also serve as a reminder: “Don’t expect journal reviewers to do this work!” (McKinney, 2005, n.p.).

#### Guideline 5: Weigh the Benefits of Submitting Manuscripts to Themed Issues or Regular Issues of Journals

Another concern is whether to write for themed or general issues of peer-reviewed journals. Not surprisingly, both have merit. For example, themed issues approach an important area from a range of perspectives and, thus, provide opportunities for targeting manuscripts toward specific aspects of themes. General issues provide more topics for readers and more choices for potential authors.

In support of writing for themed issues, Henson (1995) found that 31% of articles appearing in 49 journals “were related to designated themes. The advantage of writing on a designated theme is that most journals that publish at least some themed issues receive only one-third as many manuscripts for their announced themed issues as for their general issues. Put another way, writing for a themed issue reduces the competition by about two-thirds and so can double or triple your manuscript’s potential for acceptance” (p. 803). Henson (2005) suggests that writers become aware of forthcoming themes in their target journals and prepare and submit their manuscripts before the deadline set for the target issues.

Another point of view suggests that only extraordinary manuscripts should be sent to themed issues of journals. One reason is that editors designate specific issues for particular themes, and this publishing schedule can result in a manuscript being held for review. For instance, manuscripts submitted for a theme in the May issue of a journal might have a deadline submission date of December 1. Realistically, this timeline means that the manuscripts might be reviewed from December to March and that busy editors might send rejection letters to the authors between March and April. If the authors

completed and submitted their manuscripts in September, then the manuscripts will be held for most of the academic year as the editors and peer reviewers make decisions about acceptance, rejection, or revision. Another reason is that themed issues tend to attract well-known experts in the thematic area, and their experience and visibility increase their chances of getting published in the thematic issue. Regrettably, well-known authors sometimes receive preferential treatment, even if their manuscripts are not excellent. Simply put, politics can affect journal writing.

#### Guideline 6: Select Journals That Represent Your Current Developmental Level of Research and Writing and That Your University Considers Acceptable

Becoming an effective writer for peer-reviewed journals involves developmental growth and savvy. Serious writers are continuously improving their craft by reading extensively, engaging in deep reflection, and seeking constructive criticism of their work. Savvy writers are also aware of the degree to which their manuscripts fit the needs and expectations of different journals and simultaneously fulfill the publishing requirements of their universities. Shelley and Schuh (2001) advise that “Publishing in the right journal is recommended to aspiring authors, although determining the right journals in which to publish can be a problem for the beginning writer. One method of determining what constitutes a top journal is the publication’s acceptance rate” (p. 11). According to Cabell and English (1998), manuscripts that represent significant contributions tend to be published in journals with the lowest acceptance rates. One criterion for top journals is an acceptance rate of 10-20% (Murningham, 1996).

#### Guideline 7: Consider Certain Electronic Journals as Viable Options for Publishing

Faculty are also concerned about the value of publishing articles in peer-reviewed electronic journals. E-journals are potential writing outlets, and some of them seem to be having a greater impact on their readership (Rudner, Miller-Whitehead, & Gellmann, 2002). For example, Tenopir and King (2000) estimated that a typical article appearing in an American scientific journal will probably be read about 900 times. In contrast,

it is not uncommon for an article in *Education Policy Analysis Archives (EPAA)* to be read more than 10,000 times; several articles have been viewed more than 30,000 times. The 100 articles in *Practical Assessment, Research & Evaluation (PARE)*, a more specialized electronic journal, had averaged more than 7,000 views per article as of February 2002. In September 2002, *PARE* readership reached the one million mark. (Rudner, Miller-Whitehead, & Gellmann, 2002, n.p.)

Some scholars, however, believe that e-journals are not as esteemed as traditional print journals. Non-tenured faculty, therefore, might be apprehensive about the possibility of tenure committees’ negative view of online publications. Undoubtedly, some tenure committees will underestimate the value of e-journals and not give them as much credit toward tenure. A related issue is that some e-journals might fail or “are likely to be less permanent than printed journals” (Kiernan, 1999, p. A25).

On the contrary, Rudner, Miller-Whitehead, and Gellmann (2002) believe online “journals are often as rigorous as print journals and have a much greater impact in terms of educating readers.” These researchers offer recommendations to editors and publishers of e-journals. Some of the recommendations are also pertinent for authors. These include: (a) submitting articles on current topics, (b) selecting e-journals in which articles are permanently archived, (c) choosing online journals that are indexed by *Current Index to Journals in Education* and *Education Index* (d) researching e-journals with a focus on their usage statistics, and (e) providing colleagues and tenure committees with information concerning the value and impact of certain online journals.

#### Guideline 8: Consider Presenting a Paper at a Conference, but Realize Its Pros and Cons

Chairing sessions and presenting papers at conferences are exciting activities for academics. These venues provide excellent opportunities for meeting new colleagues, solidifying friendships, and sharing ideas. Participation at conferences can also lead to authorship and co-authorship of articles, especially when the presenters are thoroughly prepared, attentive to audience feedback, and committed to transforming the presentations into manuscripts.

Preparing for and participating in conferences, however, are time-consuming and siphon time and energy away from preparing a manuscript for submission to a journal. Realistically, most conference presentations do not result in articles, book chapters, and books. From personal experience, we believe that *judiciously* getting involved in conference activities is important for both sharing and learning. We also believe that these activities have potential for supporting authorship of articles in peer-reviewed journals.

#### Guideline 9: Manage Your Busy Academic Year While Being Productive and Visible, but Not Exhausted

New faculty are often overwhelmed with the challenge and frustration of getting published in the context of other time-consuming responsibilities. They feel inundated with planning, teaching, and assessing their students’ progress; serving on curriculum, personnel, academic standing, and ad hoc committees; becoming involved in partnerships with local school districts; attending department and faculty meetings; and becoming savvy about politics. Compounding their stresses are low salaries and expenses for college loans, which can cause new faculty to teach course overloads during the academic year and summer sessions. This harried context can drain the human mind of cognitive and creativity energy, which is necessary for clear thinking and effective writing. Expecting junior faculty to be overly involved with university responsibilities and to still find time to publish substantive articles is unrealistic. As new faculty struggle to survive the tenure process, they need support, not more stress.

The stress encountered by new faculty can be alleviated in a variety of ways, such as having junior faculty choose only one committee on which they would like to serve and supporting their efforts and growth on this committee. For example, as members of

the Curriculum Committee, junior faculty might work closely with mentors to revise standards, goals, and course syllabi. In addition to committee work, mentors can help faculty publish articles. Mentors are especially helpful if they have good track records as researchers, writers, and editors. To increase the chances of matching the “right” mentors with the “right” faculty members, potential mentors should be sought and asked to list their areas of expertise. Also, new faculty who were interested in being mentored should be asked to list their research and publication priorities. This approach provides new faculty with opportunities to decide if they need a mentor and, if so, to choose a mentor closely connected to their research agenda (Kamler & Rasheed, 2006). These types of assistance will help junior faculty to be more productive and visible and less frustrated and exhausted.

#### Guideline 10: Understand the Nature of Academic Discourse as a Unique Genre

Research journals represent a specialized genre with a unique discourse requiring writers to possess a high level of expertise about the content to be communicated. As with any discourse, there are certain ways of “doing” and “being” in the world—what Gee (1996) refers to as discursive practices, or one’s identity kit—that mark a person for membership (or not) in a particular group at a particular time. The same can be said for the discourse in which academics engage when writing for research journals. In short, anticipating who the editors may assign to review a manuscript for possible publication leads a savvy author to cite or to highlight some work that may be viewed favorably and to avoid citation of other work that may be viewed less favorably.

Developing a sense of audience is critical for scholarly writing that is intended for a research journal. Although taking into consideration what research will be viewed more or less favorably is important, it is also critical that authors not overlook points of view that differ from their own. Including alternative viewpoints demonstrates at least two things that are valued in a scholarly publication: first, the author is well read; and second, readers are provided sufficient information for drawing their own conclusions about the validity of the argument being proffered.

#### Guideline 11: Write in a Manner that is Rigorous, Not Stodgy

James Boswell, the 18<sup>th</sup> century Scottish lawyer, diarist, and biographer of Samuel Johnson, reportedly observed that good writing is nothing more than disciplined talking. We believe there is merit to Boswell’s observation generally, but when it comes to academic writing—especially the kind that involves writing for research journals—we would argue that there is little resemblance between writing and talking, at least in the expository realm. Why this is so has a great deal to do with the “voice” one wishes to project through one’s writing. Although the American Psychological Association’s current style manual (APA 5<sup>th</sup> edition) authorizes the use of first person singular in reports of social science research, this nod towards recognizing the limits of a purely objective form of writing goes only so far. Voice applies to more than simply grammatical forms. Writing for research journals requires that one develop a voice of reason, and at times, even a voice of persuasion, though some might argue that writing

persuasively is a skill to be honed in schools of rhetoric, not in the sciences and social sciences.

Regardless, as Kamler and Thomson (2006) have pointed out, when writing a research report, it is advantageous to craft a text that is both scholarly and writerly. By writerly, they mean *interesting*—a term they admit is vague, though they define it as moving “away from ‘stodgy prose’, which [they] characterize as soporific slabs of writing, formulaic, over signposted, bristling with brackets, crabbed and turgid, generally just a very dull read” (p. 125). For Barthes (cited in Kamler & Thompson), the distinction was not between scholarly and writerly, but between *readerly* and writerly. To his way of thinking, a readerly text positions its readers as consumers of meaning that is fixed by the author; in contrast, a writerly text invites its readers to become co-producers of meaning (with the author). Later, this either/or thinking of Barthes would be challenged by poststructuralist scholars, such as Derrida (1978) who argued that words and texts are never fixed, and that all readers interpret them differently: thus, all texts are inevitably writerly—an idea that Kamler and Thomson support and illustrate through a passage written by the well-known Canadian writer, Margaret Atwood (2003):

The printed text of a book is thus like a musical score, which is not itself music, but becomes music when played by musicians, or ‘interpreted’ by them, as we say. The act of reading a text is like playing music and listening to it at the same time, and the reader becomes his [sic] own interpreter. (p. 44)

At the same time, because rigorous research reports are often structured to be more readerly than writerly (to use Barthes’ terminology), we tend to side with Kamler and Thomson (2006) when they write, “what is at stake...is the question of emphasis and balance between the two” (p. 127). To paraphrase Kamler and Thomson loosely, the antidote to writing stodgy prose is to maintain a readerly structure while working to acquire a writerly stance.

#### Guideline 12: Develop Precision and Clarity in Written Expression

A highly developed sense of precision and clarity is one of the hallmarks of a successful academic writer, although some writers of academic prose question that aim, and in fact test its limits, on theoretical grounds (Aoki, 2000; Lather, 1996). Be that as it may, generally, among editors of highly regarded research journals, the importance of precision and clarity in writing is a given and not open to debate. Writing with precision and clarity produces a succinctness in style that captures readers’ attention and makes it possible for them to engage more deeply with a text. Not surprisingly, scholars who have had minimal experience in writing research reports often achieve the opposite effect. They may belabor points with an endless stream of redundancies or, just as annoyingly, provide too little context.

When difficulties such as these arise, it may be helpful to stop and take stock of the situation. It could be that a mistaken notion of what constitutes precision and clarity is

the issue. For example, some inexperienced writers seem to operate on the principle that writing academic prose requires inflating ordinary ideas by using esoteric prose, often laced with jargon (Alvermann & Reinking, 2006). In their attempt to sound (and write) like a scholar, they ill advisedly subscribe to what Kamler and Thomson (2006) term the *grammar of authority*. This is not the grammar or rules for speaking and writing so-called Standard English. Rather, Kamler and Thomson use the term *grammar of authority* to refer to how people use language to make meaning differently, depending on the social context in which they find themselves. For example, consider the differences between the following two texts:

Spoken            If you revise each chapter carefully before you submit the thesis, then you're likely to get a good result.

Written            Careful revision of each chapter prior to thesis submission will increase the likelihood of a good result. (Kamler & Thomson, 2006, p. 105)

Although both texts have the same content, the first uses action verbs, and the second turns those verbs into nouns through a process known as nominalization. Individuals who understand this process, according to Kamler and Thomson (2006), have a tool for condensing speech-like text into more conventionalized report-writing text without resorting to the use of inflated prose or jargon. Of course, as with any stylized form of writing, when used in excess, nominalization "can create inaccessible prose where meaning is obscured and/or ideological meanings are hidden" (Kamler & Thomson, 2006, p. 112).

### Guideline 13: Establish a Clear Focus

As editors of *Reading Research Quarterly*, Alvermann and Reinking (2006) wrote with first-hand knowledge of the editorial review process when they stated,

It has been our experience as editors that reviewers have little tolerance for manuscripts that clearly lack focus. Their frustration is understandable given the time that is required to review a manuscript and the irritation that inevitably develops from rereading a paper several times to infer an author's main purpose or intent. It is better to do the hard work of focusing up front so that a manuscript presents the data in the best and most interpretable light. (p. 79)

Individuals who take this guideline seriously will likely find that their chances of receiving an editorial revise-and-resubmit decision letter (as opposed to a rejection letter) will increase several times over. They may also find that while they have good intentions to do the hard work up front, they falter at the point of execution. Why? Quite possibly the most difficult challenge lies in making hard choices about what data to include from the start. Researchers are often involved in larger projects than they can write up for submission to tier-one research journals in the social sciences. When this happens, they

are often forced to pick and choose from among several foci. A good practice is to ask individuals—sometimes one’s colleagues who are not that familiar with the work being submitted—to read it with a critical eye, looking for slippages in establishing a clear and consistent focus.

Guideline 14: Make the Methodology Section a Logical Extension of the Paper’s Theoretical Framework and Questions

This guideline is perhaps best remembered if one thinks of a thread metaphor. The methodology section of a manuscript involves more than simply the methods used to collect and analyze the data. It needs to be connected to the theoretical framework that situates the questions and all the sections that follow, including an interpretation of one’s findings and a discussion that makes clear what the implications are for practice and further research. Consequently, if the metaphorical thread is broken or snagged in any of these sections, the paper will lack cohesiveness—a factor that reviewers and editors will likely view in a negative light.

Being explicit as to why one’s methodology fits logically within a particular theoretical frame, why that frame supports one’s guiding questions for the study, and so on, is a good hedge against the paper being generally misinterpreted. An appropriate methodology works with, not against, the theoretical framework and literature review that ground a study. For example, a study of adolescents’ multiliteracies would make little sense if grounded in a theory that views reading as an autonomous process, or one that focuses on cognitive development to the near exclusion of the sociocultural and historical contexts that embed such development.

Guideline 15: Love Your Data, but Not to the Point of Drawing Conclusions That Go Beyond the Evidence

Remembering that meanings are made rather than “found” in one’s data will go a long way toward avoiding the age-old tendency to extrapolate a study’s findings beyond the evidence. While it is the case that data sources do inform one’s results section, it is the *interpretation* a researcher ascribes to those data that will determine what eventual meaning is made of the results. A researcher’s experiential background, the theoretical stance(s) taken in a particular study, to say nothing of the historical context and numerous other factors that may come into play when data are interpreted, all point to the need to be cautious about going beyond the evidence.

Another caution worth mentioning is the need to avoid describing one’s data analysis in general (and thus meaningless) terms. For instance, stating that a study’s findings “emerged” without any concrete or systematic description of how the data were analyzed is ill advised. Editors and reviewers will expect a scholarly step-by-step process for analyzing data. Semantics aside, findings never materialize out of thin air; they are interpreted within one’s chosen theoretical perspective and mediated by the types of questions one asks (or fails to ask). Methodological choices also contribute to how valid, trustworthy, and replicable one’s evidence is judged to be. In short, drawing conclusions

about one's data is too important to bury under near meaningless phrases or to assume that readers will accept without clear evidence.

### In Retrospect

Overall, we believe these fifteen guidelines support the dedicated efforts of faculty who are committed to making scholarly contributions in peer-reviewed journals. Both junior and senior faculty need this type of support as they continue their research and publication in print and online journals. In a sense, this vitally important growth and development will increase the key players' academic empowerment through a reconceptualization of their roles as reflective, dialogical, and mindful educators (Kane & Snauwaert, 1999/2000). University administrators and faculty who embrace this culture of empowerment will benefit from their shared role in promoting the quality and quantity of articles published in peer-reviewed journals.

### Note

Guidelines 1-9 are adapted from Sanacore, J. (2006). Helping non-tenured education faculty get published in peer-reviewed journals. *Advancing Women in Leadership Online Journal*, 20. Copyright 2006 by the Advancing Women in Leadership, Advancing Women Website, [www.advancingwomen.com](http://www.advancingwomen.com); reproduced with permission from the publisher. Guidelines 10-15 are adapted from Alvermann, D., & Reinking, D. (2006). Writing for research journals. In S. Wepner & L. Gambrell (Eds.), *Beating the odds: Getting published in the field of literacy* (pp. 72-84). Newark, DE: International Reading Association. Copyright 2006 by the International Reading Association, Newark, DE; reproduced with permission from the publisher.

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## Toward an Understanding of Media Literacy

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Today's youth use laptops, pagers, instant messaging, and cell phones to connect to friends and family, as well as other persons of interest. Hagood (2003) suggests that students' uses of new technologies range from video productions, to online research, gaming and creating their own texts. Further, often educators find themselves with students who are likely to be more advanced in some technologies than they are. In the past, literacy instruction focused on the use of print materials; however, in many classrooms literacy demands now require students to not only communicate face-to-face, but also online using digital formats such as e-mail. In addition, many students now engage in various online activities such as locating and evaluating information through the Internet, completing courses, preparing reports, using presentation software, and writing for local and global communities (Brown, Bryan, & Brown, 2005).

New literacies are surfacing and are necessary to participate in today's digital world. The purpose of this paper is to explicate a small portion of the research on new literacies, focusing particularly on media literacy. The present paper is designed as a primer of literacy definitions and to introduce some relations between media literacy and multimodal literacy. Finally, the paper will explore some basic implications for teaching in a classroom of new literacies. This primer is built on 23 articles and eight book selections that were randomly found in freely available resources through the Internet using popular search engines, such as Google.

### *Definitions of Literacy*

Not only has technology revolutionized the way many youth communicate with each other, continued developments in information and communication technologies are also changing the ways in which educators view literacy and literacy instruction (Leu & Kinzer, 2000). Alvermann and Hagood (2000) assert, "Literacy is on the verge of reinventing itself" (p. 193). Heretofore, definitions of literacy were limited simply to the ability to read and write (Nixon, 2003). The New London Group (1996) write, "Literacy pedagogy has traditionally meant teaching and learning to read and write in page-bound, official, standard forms of the national language. Literacy pedagogy...has been...restricted to formalized, monolingual, monocultural, and rule governed forms of language" (p. 1).

Today, however, many definitions of literacy expand well beyond the printed page, which continues to hold a position of privilege in our schools (Hammer & Kellner, 2001). According to Semali (2002), literacy includes: reading, interpreting, producing, editing, and organizing printed texts, the popular media, and the Internet. Semali believes media texts can be manipulated (copied, pasted, excerpted, morphed, revised, annotated) to offer multiple meanings as well as additional opportunities for constructive engagement with them. Today's literacy has also been defined as the ability to use "digital technology, communications tools, and/or networks to

access, manage, integrate, evaluate, and create information to function in a knowledge society" (International ICT Literacy Panel, 2002, p. 2). Adams and Hamm (2000) explain that being literate now implies having the ability to decode information from all types of media. To be literate, then, today's students must be able to generate meaning and express ideas through a range of media.

Au and Raphael (2000) believe that the more proficient students are with a range of literacy skills, the better they can understand the world around them. According to Au and Raphael, proficiency with literacy translates to power and assert that students whose literacy education focuses only on the printed word will be limited. Technology's role in developing and advancing multiple literacies in the information age is extensive. Leu (2001) explains, "what it means to be literate will continuously change as new technologies of literacy rapidly appear in an age of information, creating both new opportunities and new challenges for literacy educators" (p. 568). According to Hagood (2003), while some literacy educators advocate for an expanded notion of text extending beyond traditional print-based reading and writing, others are resisting any definition of literacy broader than reading and writing (and speaking and listening).

### *New Literacies Defined*

Grisham (2001) explains that media have developed along a continuum that includes hieroglyphics, the alphabet, the printing press, the telephone, and the Internet. Semali (2001) simplifies Grisham's notion by defining new literacies as those literacies that have emerged in the post-typographic era. Semali argues that divisions between literacies and exact definitions may be unnecessary; however, it is important to recognize that particular literacies may require differentiated skills. Therefore, some differences are needed to distinguish between various types of new literacies. Frequently-cited new literacies include: computer, critical, cultural, diagrammatic, document, economic, environmental, film, information, mathematical, media, music, political, scientific, technical, technological, television, video, and visual. (Grisham, 2001; Hammer & Kellner, 2001; Semali, 2001). Hagood (2003) explains that multiple literacies have been conceptualized using a variety of terms such as new literacies, multiliteracies, digital literacies, and new media and popular culture.

Sefton-Green (1998) explains what is believed to be a major difference between old and new literacies, "If a fixed relation between writer and reader is the hallmark of the old literacy then an interactive dynamic is at the heart of the new literacies (p. 10). Hagood (2003) agrees that we can no longer focus on only on the reader, the text, and the context. We must conceptualize the three in a multidimensional fashion where production and consumption are a part of the equation. Selfe and Hilligoss (1994) submit, "It is not simply that the tools of literacy have changed; the nature of texts, of language, of literacy itself is undergoing crucial transformations" (p. 11).

### *Media Literacy*

Semali (2001) defines media literacy as the ability to access, experience, evaluate, and produce media products. It also includes the ability to examine various presentation formats. Grisham (2001) suggests that media literacy is an umbrella term that is usually understood to refer to

multiple literacies across the curriculum and the ability to produce multimedia. While Hammer and Kellner (2001) add that media literacy enables students to seek information and knowledge more actively, they also believe that media literacy gives students the skills they need to produce and develop their own cultural artifacts both in and out of school. Media literacy, then, involves helping students develop an informed and critical understanding of media, the techniques used by media, the impact of these techniques on understanding. In addition, media literacy includes the skills necessary for students to create their own “text.”

Because information, visual, multimodal, and media literacies are often used interchangeably (Semali, 2001), each will be defined briefly. According to the American Library Association (1989), a person must be able to recognize when information is needed and have the ability to locate, evaluate, and use effectively the needed information if he/she is to be considered information literate. Similarly, The North Central Regional Educational Laboratory (NCREL, 2003) defines information literacy as the ability to (a) evaluate information across a range of media; (b) recognize when information is needed; (c) locate, synthesize, and use information effectively; and (d) accomplish these functions using technology, communication networks, and electronic resources. Semali adds that not only does information literacy require one to evaluate, recognize, and locate information using media; it also includes the ability to create, and disseminate information.

As a result of today’s children’s and adolescents’ steady diet of television, video games, computer images, movies, and advertisements, they are highly knowledgeable about visual media. Semali’s (2001) definition of visual literacy refers to multiple abilities to read, view, understand, evaluate, and interpret visual texts (artifacts, images, drawings, or paintings) that represent an event, idea, or emotion. Muffoletto (2001) defines visual literacy as more than the ability to produce/encode and read/decode constructed visual experiences; visual literacy requires the “reader” to be actively engaged in asking questions and seeking answers about the multiple meanings of a visual experience. Muffoletto explains that visual texts require the construction of meaning through a system of codes used by the author and reconstructed by the reader. Muffoletto adds that visual literacy is concerned with the construction of meaning, the construction of sense, and the telling of stories by authors and readers. Messaris (2001) emphasizes that visual literacy includes competence in the production and consumption of visual messages. Although not detailed in providing a definition of visual literacy, Debes (1968) claims there visual literacy includes the ability to discriminate and interpret, the ability to create, and the ability to comprehend and enjoy.

### *Multimodal Literacy*

Another outgrowth of media literacy is multimodal literacy, a term that has grown in usage in recent years as educators explore traditional conceptions of literacy (reading and writing) within a larger framework of how people construct meaning. Jewitt and Kress (2003) define multimodal literacy as the ability to make meaning through many representational and communicative modes, often simultaneously. Short, Harste, and Burke (1996) explain that multimodal literacy includes *multiple ways of knowing*, and argue, “all literacy events are multimodal” (p. 17). They suggest that authoring and learning are multimodal processes because authors shift stances from reader to writer to artist to speaker during the process of constructing meaning. In a multimodal

conceptualization of literacy, students construct meaning not only in black ink on white paper, but also in other combinations of sign and symbol systems, such as art and mathematics, or in multimedia formats such as PowerPoint and digital video that provide for the addition of visual and other literacies.

While humans have always been multimodal, as evidenced by cave paintings, hieroglyphics, and cathedral ceilings (Kist, 2004), advances in digital cameras, graphics packages, streaming video, and common standards for imagery have permitted 21<sup>st</sup> century multimodal literacy practices to become more commonplace. Fehring (2001) asserts that multimodal literacy has necessitated a "massive change to...the nature of what it means to be literate" (para. 1). Kress (2003) explains the de-emphasis on writing and the emphasis on other modes of representation has evolved logically with new media forms such as computers, cd-roms, and cell phones. But more than simply offering new communication tools and media formats, Stein (2003) emphasizes, "multimodal pedagogies unleash creativity in unexpected, unpredictable ways. They *produce* creativity" (p. 134).

### *Impact of New Literacies on Teachers*

Literacy has become a more expansive and inclusive concept in the wake of the technological revolution. Leu (2001) makes it clear that literacy is "no longer an end point to be achieved but rather a process of continuously learning how to be literate" (p. 568). He adds that literacy is not static; therefore, teachers must change to prepare students for increased technology demands. Sefton-Green (1995) adds that literacy education and its educators have been slow to move from its focus on reading and writing to a focus on production and "making media."

Semali (2001) asserts that if educators are preparing students for the emerging information age, then both teachers and students must consider broader definitions of literacy - beyond print. The canons of traditional education and the curriculum will need to be broadened to include the new technologies of television, film, video, and computers. Teachers must help students comprehend and communicate through both traditional and emerging technologies. This includes understanding the programs, the contexts in which programs are transmitted, the organizations that produce them, and the technologies of production, distribution, and reception. The New London Group (Cope & Kalantzis, 2000) argue that we have to change the way we have taught literacy and what counts for literacy because our personal, public, and working lives are changing and transforming our cultures and the way we communicate.

Semali (2002) argues that the world of new media literacies poses many challenges to U.S. students where online live chat, Web casts, digital images, and movies compete in the classroom with textbooks, state-mandated standards, and high-stakes tests. Because researchers (Hammer & Kellner, 2001) believe new literacies broaden the mismatch between student experiences, subjectivities, and culture, a call has been made to make education more relevant to students' lives, to develop productive citizenry, and to motivate struggling readers (Hagood, 2003). This call to action has been answered, in part, by the International Reading Association and National Council of Teachers of English who have created multiple standards related to media and technology. According to Watts Pailliotet (2000), 48 states now have technology, media, viewing, and representing categories as well as electronic and mass media requirements within

their reading, writing, and communication curricula and standards. While national standards are in place, Semali (2001) believes that local curriculum standards are not recognizing that students need to be literate in moving images and graphics, as well as in printed text.

To meet the current trends in multiliteracies, educators will need to explore and examine ways that old and new ideas merge and clash across contexts; however, presenting literacy as an either/or situation (either print or literacy) will not be in students' best interests. Semali (2001) calls for today's literacy instruction to involve teaching traditional literacy as well as teaching how to read and produce the kinds of texts typical of the emerging information and multimedia age. Hobbs (2001) recommends that media literacy activities can be used to serve as a vital tool in helping educators connect the culture of the classroom to the larger cultural environment. Simply stated, Semali believes that schools need to develop literate citizens who are able to read, write, listen, talk, analyze, evaluate, and produce communications in a variety of media, such as print, television, music, video, film, radio, hypertext, and the arts. Messaris (2001) also agrees that students should learn to create visual meaning, not just consume it. According to Messaris, the alignment of visual images together in ways that make sense and are compelling to view is not easy. These skills and abilities must be taught and cannot be left to chance.

Classroom teachers will need to engage students in multiliteracies, which may mean re-crafting their assignments to include opportunities for interacting with and experiencing multiple media to complete an assignment. For example, in a college criminal justice class, multiliteracies are engaged in an assignment that requires students to examine policing through media/film. Students enrolled in the class examine a celebrated criminal case by evaluating the factual information related to the case (print), viewing an interpretation of the case (film), and evaluating cultural and ethical issues involved in the case. Students are given the titles of movies (i.e. *In Cold Blood*, *Gideon's Trumpet*) to begin their multiliteracies journey. Students must determine what information is needed to complete the assignment and then evaluate the information from print and film resources. Another example of utilizing multiple literacy forms is the digital essay, where students use written text (often spoken or narrated), visual images, music, and other media forms to construct an argument that cannot be achieved by simply using the mono-modality of black ink on white paper. Digital journals and video literacy biographies are other activities or assignments that engage students' multimodal literacies.

Current notions of what constitutes literacy skills may need to be re-examined and re-defined by literacy educators, reading educators, and classroom teachers. Dalton and Grisham (2001) suggest that finding and using information on the Internet is a fairly new literacy skill that requires students to know how to evaluate information "critically and competently" in an environment more complex and demanding than that of print-based books. Hobbs (2001) asserts that it is important for readers to recognize that evaluating media involves an interpretive judgment made by the reader, and not by someone else. With new literacies, the notion of what constitutes relevant literacy skills may need to be re-examined, particularly in light of the need for students to evaluate the accuracy of the sources they retrieve. Hammer and Kellner (2001) argue that it is more productive to teach students how to access and appreciate worthwhile educational and cultural media and to engage in critical analysis rather than to censor online material because they believe censoring material only makes it more appealing and seductive; their recommendation is to embark on critical engagement with media materials rather than

prohibit their use. Semali (2002) concurs that rather than banning certain sites, teachers can teach students the critical viewing, reading, and thinking skills that will allow them to evaluate media messages.

The ability to teach the new literacies to today's school population will require significant professional development for most teachers. Many of today's students move quickly and easily between multiple media and modes of communication as they participate in the global media culture (Nixon, 2003); however, classroom teachers do not have a similar advantage. Hammer and Kellner (2001) recall that in the past, teachers generally used media, primarily film and television, as a supplement or as a way for the teacher to take a break. They now observe that media literacy is rarely taught in schools, and imaginative use of media in the classroom occurs infrequently. They caution that the relationship between new and old literacies, as well as between classroom teaching and computerized teaching is not an either/or situation but an inclusive one. Educators will need intense professional development and strong support to use new media effectively. Grisham (2001) shares that she will integrate one change involving technology into her courses each year.

Educators who are floundering may want to capitalize on Rosenblatt's (1978) reader response theory as a way to begin thinking about these new literacies. Based on Rosenblatt's notion that meaning is built through the back-and-forth relationship between reading and text during a reading event, one could apply the same principle to viewing. Thus, meaning, while viewing, is derived from the back-and-forth relationship between viewing and the media form. In both instances readers/viewers are actively engaged in the event while simultaneously and repeatedly making meaning. During the meaning construction event, individuals are influenced by themselves, the media form being used, and the context of the event.

### *Conclusions*

Several issues have been presented in this primer that impact the future of literacy instruction. First, defining what we mean by literacy and the need to expand the definition of literacy well beyond the reading and writing of print seems to be a necessity for all literacy educators. Acknowledging that new literacies are here to stay and that today's pre-service teachers must be proficient with media literacy means that there will be a shift in how we view literacy instruction in undergraduate classes. However, it is essential that classroom teachers and college educators not overlook the teaching of reading. Media literacy and reading instruction are not synonyms and should not be viewed as such. It is evident that both are needed to ensure the success of today's students.

The new literacies have the potential to further widen the achievement gap. To move schools and students into a technologically-savvy world armed with the latest in new literacies will take money that many school districts and students across this nation do not have. Advancements in what it means to be literate may leave poorer school districts and students behind. In addition, literacy educators utilizing new media and technologies face concerns associated with mandated media literacy standards, institutional support, materials development, access and equity, and a host of other concerns. Although there are many challenges to moving from a print world to a

print and media world, incorporating new literacies and technologies into daily instruction will serve to bridge the gap between the world in which students live and the world in which students learn. We must ensure that we bridge the gap for all students, and not leave any students or classroom teachers behind.

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Developmental Aspects of Reading and Literacy:  
Envisioning Literacy Education as a Developmental Science

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Abstract

In this paper, the authors argue for the potential of an interdisciplinary bridge between the study of reading and literacy processes and the developmental sciences. They first present a rationale for such interdisciplinary scholarship. Then they illustrate the potential of such work and examine how the construct of *development*, as currently informed by the developmental sciences, can be articulated with both precision and fruitfulness for reading and literacy research. They end by offering a pair of graphic organizers illustrating a common heuristic for identifying theoretical frames employed in the developmental sciences.

## Developmental Aspects of Reading and Literacy: Envisioning Literacy Education as a Developmental Science

Theorists have conceptualized reading and literacy processes over decades (Ruddell & Unrau, 2004). The resulting constructs have expanded beyond earlier behaviorist objectives-based formula, through models of cognitive process, and on to include the impact of social, cultural, and economic contexts as well as affective and identitive self- and social regulation (Alexander & Fox, 2004). A similar conceptual evolution can be observed in theories of human development as articulated over the past forty years in the developmental sciences (e.g., Damon, 1998; Damon & Lerner, 2006). Notions of developmental process, in particular, have grown from psychodynamic, behavioral, and cognitive mechanisms, and the effects of interpersonal and sociocultural contexts, to include models of complex developmental dynamics grounded in bio-ecological and organicist theoretical frames (Fischer & Bidell, 1998; Gotlieb, Wahlsten, & Lickliter, 2006; Overton, 2006; Thelan & Smith, 2006). These more recent developmental perspectives have not yet been brought to bear on questions of reading process, acquisition, facilitation, and assessment.

We propose in this paper the potential of employing these more recent developmental motifs in research and scholarship on reading and literacy development, particularly as a means to frame novel research designs. Such designs would draw attention to the multiple factors that in reading and literacy education scholarship have more often been studied discretely and within distinct and often conflicting theoretical frames. With this expansion would come a complexity that requires interdisciplinary collaboration and an attendance to the theoretical challenges of such collaboration.

In this paper, we will argue for the potential of such an interdisciplinary bridge between the study of literacy processes and frameworks in the developmental sciences. In making this argument, we begin with a rationale for such interdisciplinary scholarship. Then, we illustrate the potential of such work and examine how the construct of *development*, as currently informed by the developmental sciences, can be articulated with potentially greater precision and fruitfulness in reading and literacy research. We set forth two charts illustrating a widely employed heuristic from the developmental sciences as a possible starting point for such an interdisciplinary articulation.

### A Rationale for Connecting Disciplines

Theoretical coherence is arguably the foundation for scholarly research (Kuhn, 1969; Pepper, 1948; Popper, 1980; Reese & Overton, 1970). Theories act as heuristics, that is, as conceptual structures that provide categorical guidance, delimit what is thought to count as phenomena, frame questions for scholarly examination, and inform interpretation of data. Theories are then modified by the results of the research and interpretation they foster, generally on behalf of more fruitful and satisfying constructs (Rorty, 1989). Crossing disciplinary boundaries poses challenges to the need for such theoretical coherence in research, as different disciplines and fields often prefer particular theoretical frames of reference (Lerner, 1998). When theoretical lenses conflict, coherent understanding of a phenomenon is often stymied. New, adapted, or hybrid theoretical frames are then required (Overton, 2006). This is precisely the requirement we shall address in this paper in hopes of fostering an expanded articulation of the multidimensional nature of reading and literacy development.

We suggest that collaborations between reading/literacy education and the developmental sciences have the potential to provide theoretical coherence by way of integrative theoretical constructs (i.e., theoretical frameworks that incorporate assumptions and grounding metaphors from two or more fields of inquiry). Such collaborations could demonstrate how education scholarship on reading and literacy development could be better informed by the broader study of human development, particularly at the level of working theory and investigative methodology. Likewise, insights from studies of reading and literacy development could inform research on growth and adaptation processes by scholars in the developmental sciences. Hence, theoretical foundations and methodologies provide areas in which cross-disciplinary collaborations might first bear fruit.

Questions prime for such collaboration can be drawn from cognitive, social, affective, and phenomenological aspects of literacy development. The importance of theoretical foundations for grounding research questions, designs, and methodologies, and the potential dangers of a possible disjunction between literacy development research and the developmental sciences on theoretical grounds further warrant cross-disciplinary conversations. The benefits may include both an expanded understanding of core reading and literacy processes as well as of the development of more comprehensive and coherent programs of developmental research.

Consider the case of reading comprehension. Research on reading comprehension over the past few decades has generally been framed by theories of cognitive processes or sociocultural formulation, and sometimes both (Gaffney & Anderson, 2000; Pearson & Stephens, 1994). The active role of the reader using skills germane to both oral and written language before, during and after the reading process is understood to encompass affective as well as cognitive processes. However, extending these insights further with a developmental perspective, we can conceptualize comprehension as a dynamically recursive process involving the re-adaptation of multiple scales of systemic co-regulation to new (actual, virtual, or potential) contextual surrounds that leaves a series of structured traces conceivable as the legacy of development. This developmental trace *at any given point in time* facilitates and constrains behavior and future development, as a child can only grow forward from where the child is at that point in time, but *over time* such traces demonstrate on-going modification toward functional response to immediate and distal contextual factors (Fischer & Bidell, 1998; Tomasello, 2003). Theory in the developmental sciences has been particularly useful when seeking theoretical explanations for such system dynamics, whether at a neurobiological, behavioral, symbolic, socio-cognitive, or cultural scale of operation.

Similar potential could be suggested when comprehension is examined in emergent literacy learners. Examination of comprehension in emergent literacy research has occurred through a focus on storybook reading (e.g., Sulzby, 1985), on children's development of strategies known to be used by effective readers, such as inference (e.g., Bartsch & Wellman, 1995), and on the role of background knowledge (e.g., Chi & Koeske, 1983). Although this research has provided insightful and foundational information about emergent literacy development, incorporating theories and research from the developmental sciences would open avenues of investigation equally as insightful and foundational. To illustrate, for decades researchers in the developmental sciences have examined the nature, the quality, and the influence of young children's relationships with others and how these relationships bear on their overall development. Only a few literacy researchers have incorporated a focus on relationship

quality in investigations of emergent literacy (e.g., Bus & IJzendoorn, 1995; Pelligrini & Galda, 1998). Emergent literacy researchers, particularly those interested in children from birth to age five, would be richly rewarded if they extended their investigative reach to include theories and research in the developmental sciences. We would argue that most relevant are theories and research related to the role of attachment in learning (e.g., Bowlby, 1982), how children come to share and understand others' intentions (Tomasello, Carpenter, Call, Behne, & Moll, 2005), and children's symbolic development (Namy, 2005; Tomasello, 2003).

An example from Matthews and Cobb (2005) demonstrates the potential to invigorate conceptions of children's behavior in a familiar literacy context: collaborative literacy events (CLEs, literacy events in which children collaborate with classmates without the teacher immediately present). Building on the research of Matthews and Kesner (2000; 2003), they created a CLE model informed by sociocultural theory (e.g., Rogoff, 1995), Expectations States Theory, (Berger & Wagner, 1966), and theories and research from developmental psychology related to attachment (e.g., Bowlby, 1982) social cognition (e.g., Damon & Hart, 1988), and young children's cognitive development (e.g., Piaget, 1970). Three components constitute the model: child, classroom, and CLE event. Interdisciplinary influences are most evident in the child component. To understand a specific child's behavior during a CLE, users of this model consider the provisions (i.e., supports) children possess in three domains: literacy knowledge, social behavior, and cultural affordance. Crossing disciplinary boundaries enriched the authors' conceptualization of the model, which in turn, broadened the interpretive lens of the users of the model.

As the CLE model demonstrated, expanding research in reading and literacy development into the arena of developmental science addresses the challenge of envisioning comprehensive theoretical framing that can enhance the study of cognitive, social, cultural, and physiological correlates to literacy ability. Such cross-disciplinary excursions could potentially generate avenues of exploration heretofore only alluded to in current multi-dimensional conceptions of reading/literacy processes. Furthermore, addressing these and related issues could have profound implications for future developmental research on efficacious instructional interventions for improving reading and literacy in and out of schools.

In short, cross-informing disciplines in the developmental sciences and reading/literacy education has the potential to fill the gap between conceptual assumptions of development employed by reading/literacy education researchers with those employed in the developmental sciences. Although widely used by reading and literacy scholars, the construct of *development* as typically employed lacks the conceptual clarity found in the developmental sciences, as we will argue in the following section.

#### Conceptual Clarity: A Benefit of Cross-Disciplinary Excursions

The term *development* has been used by reading/literacy education scholars over the years to indicate a diverse array of scholarly foci. Emergent reading, early reading, clinical reading intervention, remedial high school reading, college reading, and adult reading have all been the locus for claims of *reading/literacy development* or *developmental literacy/reading* scholarship. Certain scholars have specialized in studying the development of decoding ability, fluency, vocabulary, or comprehension. More recently, scholars have called attention to the development of literate identities and efficacious literacy practices within community settings.

Reading disabilities researchers have often employed the adjective *developmental* to indicate innate tendencies, a usage ill supported by current developmental science. Throughout it all, the vernacular use of *development* as an atheoretical synonym for apparent change in subject populations has been vexingly commonplace. In many cases, *reading development* seems to be a simple synonym for *reading ability acquisition*.

This overly loose use of the term *development* makes formal theory construction regarding developmental process in literacy difficult. Unfortunately, in addition to this seemingly unconstrained breadth of application, the theoretical assumptions about development employed in reading/literacy scholarship have arguably been obscure, inconsistent across foci, or possibly even anachronistic in relation to the broader domain of the developmental sciences. Even across reading and literacy research constrained by particular grade level, theoretical assumptions about change in learners and readers have often proven paradigmatically incommensurate.

To illustrate, it was once popular for reading scholars to propose programmatic instructional approaches that assumed steady, linear ability progression based on normative population averages (e.g., Witty, Freeland, & Groberg, 1966). Subsequently, scholars began to emulate the early work of Piaget (1970) with stage models of reading development (Chall, 1996), even as others resuscitated Vygotsky's (1978) emphasis on the impact of socio-historical context (Cole, Engeström, & Vasquez, 1997). Other scholars of literate development have variously presumed computational models of recursive elaboration (e.g., Kintsch, 1998). Various related to idioms in developmental research spanning the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, all of these perspectives, among others, are current in reading/literacy education research today.

Perhaps the most dismaying consequence about the unfettered use of the construct of *development* is that these diverse reading/literacy perspectives often do not seem to relate to current mainstream theoretical motifs within the broader developmental sciences, at least as such motifs are indicated in the handbooks and major reference texts of that domain (e.g., *Handbook of Child Psychology*; Damon & Lerner, 2006). Many of the mainstream theoretical idioms from current developmental psychology on the study of children's learning, as evidenced in that field's mainstream journals, are absent from the reading/literacy development literature. Unlike in the developmental sciences, where such theoretical rifts as nature vs. nurture or structure vs. function have largely been superseded, researchers within the reading/literacy education field continue to parse whether reading is an *unnatural* activity or not, or whether research conducted within the theoretical framing of organic co-regulation of structure and function is inadequately "scientific" due to fallacious, specifically teleological, reasoning.

Development in the developmental sciences, by contrast, is articulated with much greater precision than vague assertions of change over time. Unfortunately, these theoretical perspectives are numerous, and reviewing them in detail would be beyond the scope and intent of this paper. (However, consider the cursory review in Figure 2.) But we will here define what we mean by *developmental science*, as many reading and literacy educators may not be familiar with the use of that term as an alternative to *developmental psychology*.

*Developmental science* is a broad domain taking together fields within the natural and social sciences focused on the nature of systemic change in humans and other organisms. It encompasses such other disciplines as genetics, epigenetics, developmental cytology, developmental neuroscience and neuroendocrinology, ethology, evolutionary psychology,

neuropsychiatry, social neuroscience, social psychology, developmental linguistics, clinical psychiatry, and developmental psychology, including psychobiology, ecological or bio-ecological psychology, situated cognition, virtual life systems research, and dynamical systems development theory, along with philosophy of biology and of mind (Damon & Lerner, 2006). Developmental psychology itself has been much transformed as a result of this interdisciplinary association over the past four decades. , Today's developmental psychology is very different compared with developmental psychology of past decades. However, many of the advances in developmental psychology have not yet appeared in the reading and literacy research literature.

In the broader domain of the developmental sciences, development is articulated through precisely formulated theoretical constructs. Notorious historical debates about nature vs. nurture, the social vs. the natural, the cognitive vs. the emotional, or structure vs. function already have been largely finessed in that domain as a coherent, multivocal conversation. The cohesive interrelationship of theoretical constructs in the developmental sciences is arguably the consequence of meta-theoretical analysis (Lerner, 1998; Overton, 2006). This has led to the identification of appropriate methodologies and theoretical justifications for scale-specific constructs of development (see description in the following section), and has made possible research conducted on the nature of child predisposition and plasticity and the influence of proximal and distal systemic factors. We are inspired by these developments to suggest that there may not be a position within reading/literacy development research – from the study of cognitive processing of symbolic signifiers, to the observation of the socio-affective dynamics of classrooms, to post-positivist critiques of “developmentalism” – that could not be invigorated by clearer association with the current interdisciplinary domain of developmental study.

We take a topic, cultural symbols, of interest to researchers in both disciplines, to demonstrate this potential. For emergent literacy investigators, Western children's understanding of the alphabetic principle consolidates most of the investigative attention related to symbols. To become a successful reader of English print, a young child must intellectually discern how oral, aural, and graphic symbols interlace to represent a meaningful unit of printed text. Many reading scholars view this process as the lynchpin of reading acquisition, hence explaining the attention it garners from researchers. In contrast, developmental scientists focus their investigative attention on the social, cultural origins of symbolic development (Rakoczy, Tomasello, & Striano, 2005). Essentially, current research in symbolic development situates that development within young children's basic need to affiliate with the important others in their lives (Rochat & Callaghan, 2005). This need motivates the young to mimic and ultimately appropriate the meanings the significant others in their lives ascribe to the symbols in their environment. They strive to be like those about whom they care and on whom they rely. Although the two domains share an interest in children's understanding of symbols, research informed by the respective disciplines has occurred along parallel paths. Consider the potential if these lines were to merge. Emergent literacy researchers might garner significant insight into how to use children's symbol knowledge gained via their early personal relationships to support their understanding of the alphabetic principle. Researchers in the developmental sciences might advance understanding of symbolic development by examining its development within practical contexts, such as preschools, kindergarten and early elementary classrooms.

Theories are often described as lenses for focusing the object of a researcher's inquiry. Scholars expect conceptual clarity from theories. By their nature, formal theory restricts and thus limits a scholar's attention during investigative pursuits. When such restriction is acknowledged and set forth in a study's literature review and methodological rationale, readers

of these reports can interpret researchers' work within the proper limitations of the theoretical frame fully aware that additional avenues or perspectives are possible. Absence of such acknowledgement may lead less informed readers to inappropriately reify a theoretical construct as a comprehensive description of reality. For trained interpreters, an absence of theoretical caveat can lead to warranted concern about a scholar's claims and the quality of thought behind them.

### Charting Novel Developmental Vocabularies

The developmental sciences have a strong tradition of parsing theoretical debates by the light of higher-order theoretical frames. Drawing inspiration from Pepper's model of world hypotheses (Pepper, 1942), Reese & Overton (1970) posited three world hypotheses that pertained in developmental psychology: mechanism, organicism, and contextualism. This tripartite categorical system for grouping theories into families of analogical assumption continues to be widely employed in mainstream developmental science handbooks and textbooks (e.g., Bornstein & Lamb, 2005; Damon & Lerner, 2006; Lerner, 2002; Shaffer, 2002). We suggest that acknowledging this orienting system within the developmental sciences and considering its application to developmental stances in literacy research could be a useful first move in constructing an interdisciplinary bridge.

As Figure 1 indicates, these three world hypotheses (Pepper, 1942), or worldviews (Hermans & Kempen, 1993; Shaffer, 2002), rest on a central assumption of a root metaphor or analogical assumption about the nature of a phenomenon that then guides question formation, choice of methodology, and interpretation of research results generated by research on that phenomenon. In *mechanism*, the root assumption is that the phenomenon in question operates like a simple machine where the structure of the machine can be taken to account for its function. In *organicism*, the root assumption is that the phenomenon operates like some sort of living system, where multiple levels of structure and function co-regulate and develop across time in response to environmental influences on behalf of functionality. Finally, in *contextualism* the root assumption is that the phenomenon operates as it does due to its unique and non-replicable relationship to its situation-in-context and related temporal contingencies. Were each of these positions to be personified by a major Western thinker, the respective line-up might be Newton, Hegel, and Foucault.

Hybrid formulations across any two of these three worldviews are also possible, and from an instrumentalist perspective (Caccioppo, Semin, Bernston, 2004), worldviews might be deliberately selected for particular research targets. Thus, mechanism would be the preferable worldview for researching the structural organization of a phenomenon at any given scale of spatio-temporal organization. Organicism would allow for the study of complex system dynamics over time and the coordination of structure and process across spatio-temporal scales. Contextualism would reinforce the unpredictable persistence of variability in individual cases and caution constraint on assumption of predictive precision. However, Pepper (1942) warned against mixed metaphors in worldviews because of the conflicting assumptions about causation each presume and the confusions this may generate.

Extending this coordinating system of worldviews to reading or literacy development research, we would suggest several immediate observations. First, it might be argued that some light can be shed on the current distinction between *reading* research and *literacy* research. Most *reading* development research seems to have been conducted within an unacknowledged mechanistic worldview (as reviewed, say, in the National Reading Panel report, NICHD, 2000). Most *literacy* development research, by contrast, (as well as post-positivist arguments against

developmentalism, see Lesko, 2004), may have been conducted within an unacknowledged contextualist worldview. (For an example of acknowledged use of contextualist framing by postmodernist developmental psychologists, see Hermans & Kempen, 1993.)

On the other hand, there does not seem to have been much reading or literacy work conducted within a precisely articulated organicist worldview. This could be problematic for interdisciplinary conversation, because most developmental science theory today resides in an organicist or organicist-contextualist framework (Overton, 2006). But, instead of such work, there has been a good deal of literacy scholarship related to motivation, engagement, as well as scholarship involving critical analyses of the stances at work in policy debates. This scholarship is arguably situated in a worldview unknown in the developmental sciences, which we here call *intentionalism*, predicated on the root metaphor of willful agency. From the standpoint of literacy education theory and scholarship, it may be reasonable to assume that individual agency is a factor driving learning and development in the classroom. But it is likely scholars and theorists from the developmental sciences would shy away from this framework, because the development of willful agency would be precisely the sort of phenomenon many would identify as being in need of explanation. A bio-ecological or organicist framework is the more probable approach on this topic one would expect in the developmental sciences (Damon & Lerner, 2006). Nonetheless, historical appreciation for humanist psychology (Rogers, 1992), and more recent proposals for a positive psychology (e.g., Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000; Seligman, Steen, Park, & Peterson, 2005) may warrant inclusion of the framework of intentionalism into the developmental canon.

Drawing on and extending a graphic organizer by Schaffer (2002), we apply these categorical worldviews to a sample of perspectives on human development from the developmental sciences, including the newer perspectives alluded to above (see Figure 2). We admit, however, that the value of these categorical distinctions for bridging between the developmental sciences and reading and literacy development study is highly conjectural.

### Concluding Thoughts

A coordination of perspectives within the reading/literacy community might be one benefit of an interdisciplinary conversation with the developmental sciences. Beyond the traditional cognitive/sociocultural divide and its many ancillary branchings described above, humanistic theories of reading comprehension have described the transaction between reader and text in fundamentally phenomenological, psycholinguistic, or pragmatist terms (Rosenblatt, 1978, 1994; Goodman, 1994). Also, ideological accounts have emerged that attempt to broaden scholars thinking about the cultural dynamics of meaning-making involved in both traditional print and newer media text forms (Kress, 2004; Street, 1995). These aforementioned perspectives offer valuable insights and rightfully remain strong as research foci and theoretical orientation. Broadening our investigative resources to also include research and theories in the developmental sciences may, as an example, deepen our understanding of the importance of emotional cueing, or affect, in the readers' relationship to reading acts and texts, enriching a grain of analysis often overlooked in the mainstream sociocultural literacy literature. Although the structures, processes, and immediate functions of development at any particular temporal or spatial scale of organization are unique and specific to that scale, and there is no hard argument to be convincingly made on behalf of privileging a prime cause or condition at any one level, the *dynamics* of development reiterate across and coordinate scales. In this way, cohesion of scales, processes, functions, and theoretical constructs across previously fractionated literacy domains

can help us envision reading, language, and sociality in complex and dynamic ways (e.g., Hruby, in press; Jordan, Schallert, Cheng, Park, Lee, et al., 2007; Lieberman, 2006).

Researchers in reading/literacy and the developmental sciences share an interest in human development. This shared interest, as we have argued in this paper, could provide a strong foundation for building integrated research agendas as well as fostering fruitful cross-disciplinary conversations. The potential benefits could be many, not the least of which might be the cohesion of the theoretical lenses applied to examining reading/literacy processes. A rich theoretical and investigative history exists in the developmental sciences as well as in reading and literacy education research. Researchers who thoughtfully bring together these histories stand to gain an investigative stronghold on understanding the complexity of developmental processes behind the emergence of readers and communities of literacy practice.

	<b>Mechanism</b>	<b>Contextualism</b>	<b>Organicism</b>	<b>Intentionalism</b>
<b>Central Analogy</b>	Machinery	Change & Chance	Bio-ecological Systems	Agency
<b>Scholarly Object</b>	Structural Mechanics	Circumstantial Situatedness	Generative Dynamics	Intentions & Values
<b>Causative Assumption</b>	S -> F	Causatively Indeterminate	(S<->F) <-> (Dev<->Evo)	F -> S
<b>Preferred Method</b>	Experimentation	Description	Systems-modeling	Critical Analysis
<b>Best Application</b>	Operative Mechanisms	Novel & Historical Perspectives	Complexity & Emergence	Human Goals & Determinations
<b>Result of Mis-application</b>	Reductionism & Over-simplification	Relativism & Egocentrism	Vitalism & the Naturalistic Fallacy	Anthropomorphism & Teleology
<b>Typical Example</b>	“Minds are information processors”	“School administration is like sailing on a tempest-tossed sea”	“Learning is systemic growth”	“School policy is an act of social and political will”
<b>Problematic Example</b>	“Brains are wet computers running mind-software”	“Predictive claims of research are pointless for practice given the unpredictable variability of life”	“School success is ‘survival of the fittest’”	“Functional structure in nature is evidence of Intelligent design”

Figure 1. Categorical distinctions between three traditional theoretical frameworks and an additional potential framework for developmental scholarship. F = function; S = structure; Dev = developmental process; Evo = evolutionary process. Note that problematic examples apply a category's central analogy to an unlikely phenomenal match.

<b>Theory</b>	<b>Worldview</b>	<b>Person</b>	<b>Development</b>	<b>Nature/Nurture</b>
<b>Romantic Humanism</b>	Intentionalist	Active	Discontinuous	Nature
<b>Behaviorism</b>	Mechanistic	Passive	Continuous	Nurture
<b>Piaget’s Cognitive Development</b>	Organicist	Active	Discontinuous	Both
<b>Vygotsky’s Sociocultural Development</b>	Contextualist	Active	Continuous	Both
<b>Psychoanalytic Perspective</b>	Mechanistic-Organicist	Active	Discontinuous	Both
<b>Information Processing Perspective</b>	Mechanistic	Active	Continuous	Both
<b>Sociobiological Perspective</b>	Mechanistic-Organicist	Passive	Both	Nature
<b>Ethological Perspective</b>	Organicist	Active	Continuous	Nature, or Both
<b>Postmodernist Perspective</b>	Contextualist	N/A	N/A	N/A
<b>Positive Psychology</b>	Intentionalist-Contextualist	Active	Both (depends on time scale)	Both
<b>Dynamical Systems Development</b>	Organicist	Both (causative aspects often at work above and below the level of the agent)	Both (depends on whether measuring individuals or populations)	Both
<b>Bio-ecological Perspective</b>	Organicist-Contextualist	Active	Both	Both
<b>Developmental Neuroscientific</b>	Organicist	Both	Both (depends on which aspects are being measured)	Both
<b>Current Linguistic Development</b>	Organicist-Contextualist, Intentionalist-Contextualist	Active	Both	Both

Figure 2. Common and current developmental theories and select characteristics of each. (Adapted from Shaffer, 2002, p. 64.)

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**Corresponding with a New York City Cabdriver**  
**Chet Laine**  
**University of Cincinnati**

My presentation focuses on what we sometimes call authentic writing. The remarks that follow are personal stories that I tie to literacy research and what I see when I visit schools. Like most of you, I spend many hours each week in schools observing teachers and helping novice teachers apply what we know about teaching and learning. I have done this for over a quarter century, since I first began as a Penn State graduate student in the late 1970s. And like many of you, I have never seen such a focus on testing and assessment. In fact, when I return to schools in January all of my interns teaching English in Cincinnati high school classrooms will be helping their students prepare for the Ohio Graduation Test. The curriculum, already sidetracked throughout the autumn, will now be completely derailed during the early months of the year.

Hardly a day goes by in the United States without talk of testing students to higher standards as a means to improve our education system. In *The Testing Trap*, George Hillocks (2002) puts this logic to the test. Through interviews with over three hundred teachers and administrators, Hillocks examines whether state writing tests in Illinois, Kentucky, Oregon, New York, and Texas do what they are supposed to do: improve education. Ultimately, Hillocks argues that the majority of existing tests actually have a harmful effect on the way we teach students to write.

In his book, Hillocks (2002) demonstrates how the structure of assessment is responsible for the low level of thinking encouraged and reinforced in classrooms. It is his contention that although politicians call for excellence, the tests that are created to support their rhetoric, and the formulaic writing they accept as measures of achievement, are actually intended to produce mediocrity. In this way, bureaucrats achieve their objectives and our children suffer the consequences.

With this, I begin my story about evoking authentic writing, or in other words, writing for genuine purposes. It is a story in three acts.

**Act I: Mrs. Brett and the Death of Peter Fechner**

Do you recall teachers in your school years who made a difference? Mrs. Brett, eleventh grade English, Altoona High School, made a difference in my life. She wrote with us and created assignments that mattered. One of her most memorable assignments was asking us to consider the death of Peter Fechter.

It was early in my junior year and Mrs. Brett pulled us out of our oblivion to world affairs by telling us the story of Peter Fechter, a bricklayer from East Berlin, who at the age of 18 became one of the first victims of the Berlin Wall's border guards. I had turned 16 that spring and the story she was telling came alive for me. I could relate to this young man who was just two years older than I was then.

Some of you perhaps remember the story and the headlines. In August 1962, Fechter bled to death at the base of the Berlin Wall in what was called the "death zone" (a strip of land running between the main wall and a parallel fence). Guards shot him in the back as he tried to escape. Although bystanders in the West tried to rescue him, men with guns prevented them from giving Fechter aid. The East Germans designed the Berlin Wall to prevent East German citizens from escaping into West Berlin and seeking political asylum. Armed border guards, under shoot-to-kill orders, manned the wall.

About one year after the construction of the wall, Fechter, with his friend Helmut Kulbeik, attempted to flee from East Berlin. Their plan was to hide in a carpenter's workshop near the wall in Zimmerstrasse. After observing the border guards from there, they hoped to jump out of a window into the death zone, run across it, and climb over the six-foot wall topped with barbed wire into the district of West Berlin near Checkpoint Charlie, which was a well-known crossing point between East and West during the Cold War.

Peter and Helmut scaled the wall and the guards fired at them. Helmut succeeded in crossing the wall, but Peter, still on the wall, was shot in the pelvis in plain view of hundreds of witnesses. He fell back into the death-strip on the Eastern side, where he remained in view of Western onlookers, including journalists. Despite his screams, he received no medical assistance from either the East or the West side. After about an hour, Peter had bled to death.

Hundreds of people in West Berlin formed a spontaneous demonstration, shouting "murderers" at the border guards. Mutual fear resulted in a lack of medical assistance for Peter. Western bystanders feared the guns and did not assist him. A second lieutenant in the U.S. Army received specific orders to stand firm and do nothing. Likewise, the head of the German Democratic Republic border platoon was afraid to intervene, because of an incident just three days earlier when an East Berlin soldier had been shot by a West Berlin soldier. An hour after he had fallen the East German border guard retrieved Peter's dead body.

The incident made the cover story of *Time* magazine on August 31, 1962. I remember seeing it at home and vividly how Mrs. Brett held it up in my class that autumn afternoon. Some of you might remember the cover. It showed a hand and arm, up to the elbow, reaching over a stonework wall. You see Peter's arm, with rolled up sleeve, inserted between the top of the wall and a tangle of barbed wire. Peter's other hand is gripping the barbed wire. The cover is in blacks and grays with the word "The Wall" written in small white print and the top of a pink wreath at the bottom of the picture (Cover image available online:

[http://img.timeinc.net/time/magazine/archive/covers/1962/1101620831\\_400.jpg](http://img.timeinc.net/time/magazine/archive/covers/1962/1101620831_400.jpg))

Mrs. Brett shared the cover with us and read the following excerpt from the article:

In flat, open country within the city's northern boundary, the land to the west is checkered with brown wheatfields and lush, green, potato gardens. Eastward stretches a no-man's land where once fertile fields lie desolate and deathly still. They could be in two different worlds -- and, in a sense, they are. Even the countryside outside Berlin is divided into East and West by a vicious, impenetrable hedge of rusty barbed wire and concrete. As it snakes southward toward the partitioned city, it becomes the Wall... (p. 20)

There he lay, moaning "Hilfe, Hilfe," while a growing throng of horrified West Berliners stood gaping on the other side of the barrier. As the minutes ticked past, photographers, cops, even a couple of U.S. military policemen, edged gingerly up to the Wall's western side to have a look at the hideous sight. One conscience-stricken U.S. second lieutenant could stand it no longer, picked up the "hot line" telephone to Major General Albert Watson II, the U.S. commandant in West Berlin. Back came the order: "Lieutenant, you have your orders. Stand fast. Do nothing." Not knowing the reason for the Americans' inaction, an agonized crowd swirled around the command post crying: "For God's sake, go get him." When a German reporter asked why the American troops did not rescue Fechter, one G.I. replied, "This is not our problem." (p. 21)

As Mrs. Brett finished reading, she passed the magazine around the classroom. The *Time Magazine* article included a photograph of Peter Fechter lying in a trench. The photograph, taken through a tangle of barbed wire, included the caption, "Peter Fechner lies dying after being shot by East German border guards." Another photograph included the caption, "Peter Fechter, laying shot in the no-man's land between the two sides of Berlin Wall for nearly one hour, screaming for help, before he bled to death." The last photograph showed helmeted guards lifting Peter's dead body over barbed wire. The caption read, "East German border guards took Peter Fechter away from the Berlin Wall near Checkpoint Charlie when he was dead." (Image available online: <http://www.zeithistorische-forschungen.de/ZF/images/default/fechter1.jpg>)

By responding to Mrs. Brett's writing assignment, I began to imagine what it would be like to want freedom so badly that you would risk your life to get it. I became the eighteen-year-old, hopes and dreams, just beginning to coalesce, and with higher education, family, and career still in the faint future. I began to think about why people fought wars and revolutions and defended peace to protect liberty. I thought that Peter Fechter knew how precious freedom was and why he risked his life to get it.

Days later, I remember reading my own essay to the class and recall hearing those of others, in particular, a young man, Gino Simonetti, whose essay was as passionate and beautifully written as the article in *Time*. This writing assignment evoked something very honest and authentic from me. This assignment and the many others that Mrs. Brett assigned that year convinced me that I wanted to teach English. This brings me to Act II of my story.

**Act II**  
**Salzman's *True Notebooks: A Writer's Year at Juvenile Hall***

This afternoon we will continue an American Reading Forum tradition, Call to Forum. David Bishop and his group selected two provocative books, Jonathan Kozol's (2005) *The Shame of the Nation* and *True Notebooks* by Mark Salzman (2003). For those of you who have not had a chance to read Salzman's book, I encourage you to read a few chapters before David's session this afternoon. In this book, Salzman reflects on volunteering to teach creative writing at Central Juvenile Hall, a Los Angeles County detention facility for "high-risk" juvenile offenders.

The authentic writing of these young men draws me to Salzman's book this morning. Many of these under-18 youths, charged with murder or other serious crimes, would end up in a penitentiary, some for life. Sister Janet Harris, of the Inside Out Writers program, convinced Salzman that in spite of his reservations about teaching writing, about being a "white liberal offering art to darker-skinned ghetto boys," these young men needed to be encouraged to express themselves in writing instead of acting out, needed to feel they mattered to someone. As a result, Salzman started coming twice a week to meet with three boys, although the numbers of the group quickly grew. He tried to structure each session with a half hour for writing followed by each boy reading his work aloud. Although their writing themes are somewhat predictable-their anger and violent impulses, their relationships with parents and gangs, plus a tedious dose of sex, bullets, and beer -- the writing is often personal and honest.

I want to focus for a few minutes on one young man from the book, Carlos Bours, who writes about "why he writes." Carlos writes the following on his first day in Mark's class. He explains before reading his piece to Salzman and the rest of the group that he used to hate writing, but that changed after being locked up. "Now I got a different view," he says. "So today I decided to write on why I write."

There are many reasons why I write. Some are unexplainable, others I can explain are my way of expressing emotions, my way of getting free, my mental vacation, my way to vent anger, my way to throw emotional blows without using my physical ability, a way that no one gets hurt, a way to get through life and keep the peace. It's my joy, my shining light. If I had not pencil and paper my mind would fail, with no real vocals top express myself it would overload my brain. My writing is how I maintain. (p. 315)

The writing that Salzman evokes from young men like Carlos is authentic. His assignments were very different from many of those I observe in the classrooms that I visit.

Throughout the book, Salzman (2003) struggles with a question. Why does he spend time working with these young men? Why does he volunteer at the detention center? He comes to realize that it is not because he enjoys it, not because his students

enjoy it, but rather, because it was a good thing to do. Mark's goal was not to save the boys, to improve them, or even to get them to take responsibility for their crimes. "I was there because they responded to encouragement and they wrote honestly" (p.322). This brings me to the final Act of my story that I foreshadowed in the title of this essay, and my most recent and personal example of evoking authentic writing.

### **Act III - Corresponding with a New York City Cabdriver**

In the autumn of 1999, I lost my mother. My father had died several years earlier. One crisp autumn afternoon, filled with grief and a growing sense of my own mortality, I climbed the steel bleachers at the local high school football field, looking forward to watching my 15-year-old son play soccer. I had also gone through a divorce several years earlier and was dealing with the awkward difficulties that come along with shared parenting. As I passed my ex-wife, she handed me a plain brown envelope. This was a common way of keeping each other informed about child related issues such as medical insurance, grades, and field trips.

I literally sat on the envelope during the first half of the soccer game. It was good protection from the cold aluminum seats of the high school grandstands on that cold October evening. At halftime, I pulled the envelope out from under me. The return address indicated that it was from a man named Ray in Brooklyn, New York. The envelope included a short handwritten letter, a plastic card and a photocopy of a handwritten note. In the letter, Ray began:

Dear Chester [No one calls me "Chester" but my great aunt and my brother and sister!] On the reverse side of this page is a copy of a note found in my mother's safe deposit box after her passing away in August of 1998. Rebecca was in her 95<sup>th</sup> year but, as a young professional woman, was once a girl friend of and much in love with Paul Laine.

That was my father's name. I turned the page and found a copy of a handwritten note:

Send word of my death to:  
Paul Mondon Laine  
c/o Great American Tea Company  
Chestnut Avenue  
Altoona, PA  
Also send duplicate notice to same person at  
RFD Box 187, Altoona, PA

If "Great American Tea Company" and "Rural Free Delivery" are meaningful to you, you are dating yourself. By the way, for those of you who do not know, Altoona is an old railroading town in west central Pennsylvania. I turned the sheet of paper over and finished reading the short letter from Ray:

I was born in 1941 and was about 40 before my mother let me know the last name of my natural father. It wasn't till this past year, after my mother's passing, that I found this note with just enough information to find your father's obituary in the Altoona paper.

Ray went on to explain the circumstances of his birth and finished the short letter by saying:

I don't want this to be disturbing news to you or anyone in your late father's immediate family. Such a possibility could, of course, be avoided by my not sending a letter but it would be nice to know more about Paul Laine. . . . This is mostly to close a chapter than to open one and I understand that there are no obligations involved here. I'll be 58 this December and that's me in the expired hack license.

Sincerely,  
Ray"

I pulled the pink plastic card, a New York City hack license, from the envelope. I often saw these attached to the visor just above a taxi driver or chauffeur's head.

I sat back and stared into space. It took some time for this news to sink in. I read and reread the note and stared at the expired hack license many times during the soccer game. I drove home thinking about the notion of an older brother. When I got home, I read the letter several more times to Missy, my wife. Then I called my younger sister in the northern tier of Pennsylvania and younger brother in Albuquerque. Both were surprised and excited. My sister, tongue in cheek, said, "Oh no, not another brother! Why not a sister!" I read the letter several times to each of them. They wanted to learn more. Ray wanted to know who our father – his biological father – was. Perhaps we had stories we could share. This began years of very authentic writing.

Of course, our level of familiarity changed as the years went by, but, in the beginning, before meeting and getting to know my new brother, I had expectations triggered by what I did know. Ray, a veteran New York City cab driver, born and raised in Brooklyn, triggered expectations for me and my brother and sister. What did I know about New York City taxi drivers? I was born in Manhattan—born on the first day of spring in 1946 at Flower Fifth Avenue Hospital—but, my father and mother moved from Manhattan to Homer's Gap in the foothills of the Allegheny Mountains when I was still an infant.

What did I know about New York City taxi drivers? Of course, I knew the television series *Taxi* that aired in the late 1970 and early 1980s. Was Ray anything like the handful of New York City taxi drivers who worked for Louie De Palma's Sunshine Cab Company? Danny De Vito played Louie. There was the Judd Hirsch character, Alex Reiger. Alternatively, I thought of Jim Ignitowski, the aging hippie minister burnt out

from drugs, played by Christopher Lloyd. On the other hand, there was Tony, the boxer with a losing record, played by Tony Danza.

On the other hand, I knew the Martin Scorsese film, *Taxi Driver*, the gritty and controversial 1976 film that made stars out of Robert De Niro and Jodie Foster. I remembered Travis Bickle, the character played by DeNiro. He is an alienated, isolated, depressed ex-Marine who suffers from chronic insomnia and consequently takes a job as a nighttime taxi driver in New York City. I pictured a haggard guy driving around aimlessly through the shadiest neighborhoods of the five Burroughs. I visualized the film's most famous scene when Travis, looking in a mirror, practicing his quick-draw technique says repeatedly, "You talkin' to me? You talkin' to me? You talkin' to me? On Ray's part, I am sure that Chester Laine, a college professor, living in the Midwest, and growing up in rural Pennsylvania, must have triggered expectations about his new brother. He and I needed to write more about this.

Soon after receiving the letter and sharing it with my younger sister and brother, I made a call to Brooklyn and spoke to Ray's wife. Ray was working. I talked with his wife for seven or eight minutes and came to understand that cab drivers work at night. Ray followed up with a telephone call and we talked for an hour. I shared some stories from my childhood in foothills of the Allegheny Mountains. Ray told me the little that his mother and aunt had told him about his biological father. He also explained how he located me. Ray told me that the previous July, while traveling to spend time with his aunt in a Michigan nursing home, he visited the old railroading town where I grew up. While there, he searched the newspaper morgue at the local paper and found my father's obituary. He visited the funeral home and talked briefly with the funeral director, but the funeral director was busy with a client. Before leaving the area, he visited the little country church mentioned in the obituary and drove past the graveyard near the church.

When Ray returned to Brooklyn, he decided to send a letter to one of his biological father's surviving children, but he did not have much to go on. To complicate matters even more, he was not facile with the Internet. He located a friend who "Googled" me. He found an address for me, but in one of those strange occurrences that happen in cyberspace, my address was the address of my ex-wife's new husband. In any event, the letter got to me.

From my telephone conversations, I learned that Ray, trained as a chemist, had worked as a taxi driver for 32 years. He and his wife had been married for 35 years. I learned that his wife was from Peru and they had two grown boys. In one of those remarkable coincidences that occur in life, I learned that, without knowing the name of his (our) father, Ray and his wife named their second son "Paul," my father's name.

I learned that Ray's mother and my father met in New York City in the 1930s. Ray's mother, a chemistry teacher in Manhattan, who did not become certain about her pregnancy until June of 1941, took a hurry-up leave of absence from her teaching position while my father arranged for her to stay at a home for unwed mothers run by the Salvation Army in Hillsborough County, Florida. Most of the women at the facility were

from well-to-do or upper middle class families. Ray says that his mother knew that it was over on that day in September when my father waved goodbye from the top of the steps as she descended to the platform to board the Pennsylvania Rail Road's Silver Meteor to the west coast of Florida.

Ray was born on December 7, 1941. At the time of this writing, he was celebrating his 65<sup>th</sup> birthday. The telegram about his birth arrived on December 8 at the Brooklyn residence of Ray's aunt and uncle. Ray's aunt did not even know that her sister-in-law was pregnant so the telegram must have been quite a surprise. Ray's uncle took the next train to Tampa to see his sister and new nephew. After a few weeks, Ray's mother returned to New York to resume teaching at the start of the spring term. Ray stayed in the Tampa facility until the following Easter, when an aunt and uncle moved him to a Brooklyn Salvation Army orphanage in the spring of 1942. When Ray's Brooklyn cousin no longer needed his crib, Ray's aunt and uncle took him from the orphanage and put into the empty crib in their home. As an unwed mother, Ray's mother feared losing her teaching job in New York City. She eventually married the man who would serve as Ray's adoptive father.

Ray indicated that my father wanted to maintain contact with his son, but his mother Rebecca refused. She did not want this man in her son's life. Her over-riding concern seemed to be a fear of losing her teaching position if the truth of Ray's parenthood ever emerged. What must it have been like for her? She was alone in a strange place. Her son was born on the day that the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor. She was a single woman in a non-traditional teaching field, who found herself pregnant, fearful that she might lose her job, lose her livelihood. Years later, in her 80s, when her social security check did not arrive on time, Ray says that his mother worried aloud, "They must have discovered my secret."

Ray explained that he never heard the last name, "Laine," until some time in the 1980s. He was surprised one day when, on visiting his mother at a small home on Staten Island, she pointed to a man in a magazine advertisement, an advertisement for Beefeater Gin of all things, and said your father looked like the man pictured here and his name was "Laine" spelled with an "i" as in the French style. Up until that time, in his family, no one ever spoke the name "Paul Laine," at least not within Ray's earshot. Very few people, maybe only his Brooklyn aunt and uncle, knew the name. His mother's story, even among her extended Pennsylvania Dutch family, was that she had adopted Ray. As Ray looked quite a bit like his mother, he does not think that this story fooled many but it probably stopped questions. Ray has no idea what moved his mother to speak of his natural father at that time. The aunt in Michigan told Ray that her first memory of my father was when he helped Ray's mother remove an old steamer trunk from a sixth floor apartment in New York. Ray's aunt told him that the story of Paul and Rebecca's relationship was *verboden* among the members of the family. No one ever talked about Ray's natural father. Ray did not learn my father's first name until he was 40 years old. Ray's mother always referred to him as Mr. Laine.

What followed was an extraordinary period of authentic writing for my younger sister, my younger brother, and for Ray and me. I spent the next week writing down everything I could remember about my childhood. I searched through old albums for any photographs that might give Ray an inkling of his biological father. I chronicled every bit of medical history that I could remember. Of course, simultaneously, my younger brother and sister did the same. Moreover, in one of those strange experiences some of you may have had, we compared our letters and found that we often remembered very different childhoods. How could three siblings, born within a span of four years, remember things so differently? In a particularly poignant closing in one of Ray's early letters to me, he says, "One thing that I found moving in your letter was at the very end where you say 'your brother.' I feel somewhat in uncharted waters but, here goes, your brother, Ray." As I talked to others, including some of you at the American Reading Forum, I was startled to find out how many people had similar experiences to share.

Of course, the sharing went both ways. Ray began to dig through more of his mother's papers. He wrote and shared photographs, documents and memories. He added some texture to the lives these two must have lived in the 1930s, truly a fascinating story. This has continued during the intervening 6 years from October 1999 until the present. We dug up old genealogies, photographs, and letters. My younger brother, sister, and I shared newspaper clippings of my father's assorted adventures as a professional actor and wing walker. These included stories of the time when he and his older cousin crashed their Jenny biplane at the Steuben County Fair and lost most of his teeth. The site of a plane was so unusual at the turn of the century that fair goers left him bleeding while they took bits of the plane for souvenirs. There was the old yellowed newspaper clipping with the headline: "Young Canisteo Native Shipwrecked off Florida Coast." The news story that followed told of my father's near drowning while traveling with professional actors.

I discovered that Ray earned a Bachelor's degree in Chemistry from the University of Rochester and a Masters Degree in Physical Chemistry from Rutgers University. Before becoming a cab driver, he worked as an R&D Chemist in lower Manhattan. He felt that he would never escape the academic world if he got his Ph.D. His uncle was a mathematics professor and Ray did not want to go into that profession. Ray's first day as a taxi driver was October 12, 1970. In 1974, Ray did what he never envisioned. He bought a taxi medallion. That made his calling official.

Ray told me in a short note that he often rereads our letters and looked at the pictures "in quiet amazement." He notes the resemblance between a picture of our father and his own high school yearbook picture. All of us visited the Canisteo Historical Society on Main Street in tiny Canisteo, New York, a sleepy little town in the southern tier of upstate New York, where my father was born. I never had a desire to visit my father's birthplace; nor my sister or brother. It was not until Ray came into our lives that we made this trip. Imagine the poor elderly woman who tended to the collection, sitting for weeks on end without a single visitor and suddenly, out of the blue, seven visitors enter her little storefront museum and spend the next two hours pouring over old ledgers, diaries and newspaper clippings.

One summer, we even visited the home where my father started a new life with his new wife and raised my younger brother and sister. I do not know if you have ever done this. You knock on the door and tell a perfect stranger that you use to live in this house and ask if you can wander through the old place. Of course, for Ray it was all new.

We learned some very interesting things about our new taxi-driving brother from Brooklyn; our naive expectations fell away as we became a part of our lives. I discovered, for example, that when Ray parked his car in rural Pennsylvania, he engages the ignition lock and places a club on his steering wheel. My sister never had the heart to tell him that she often leaves the house unlocked and never locks her car doors when it is sitting in her driveway. I learned that Ray owns an 80-pound pit bull named Dante. I had heard all of the urban legends surrounding the Pit Bull – their jaws remained locked even in death, they are resistant to pepper spray, they continue to attack even after being lethally shot, and they often ‘turn’ on their owners without provocation. Over time, spending time with Dante, I have come to believe that Pit Bulls make good family pets. Dante is no more or less likely to be aggressive than any other large dog. In fact, when Missy and I visited Ray’s family in October, Dante wanted to climb up in bed with us when we went to sleep.

The writing that has occurred since Ray came into our lives is perhaps the most authentic writing I have ever engaged in. For Ray, he was trying to learn about the father he never knew. My younger sister, brother, and I captured all the memories that we could of the father that we knew so well.

### **Recommendations for Instruction**

I bring this three-act story to a close by encouraging you to evoke the authentic voice, engage your students in writing tasks for real audiences, and work with your prospective teachers to create a space for genuine, purposeful writing in the midst of our ever more test oriented classrooms. Allen (1976) suggested that the basic question is not whether we teach writing, but whether we deal directly with communication experiences.

As Hillocks (2002) and decades of researchers before him have shown, teachers, in their passion for good writing, place too much early emphasis on the mechanics of writing while failing to meaningfully interact with the writers’ content. Thus, in closing I offer points that I think captures how to create such meaningful interactions:

1. First, put emphasis on the content of writing
2. Learning the conventions of the language is critical, but honest writing, writing that is interesting and purposeful is more important.
3. Write with your students.
4. Share your writing with your students.
5. Reveal your multiple drafts.
6. Give students writing tasks that are meaningful.
7. Make students more comfortable while they are writing.
8. Give more frequent and concrete illustrations of progress in writing.

9. Model and point to examples of the enjoyment, appreciation, relaxation and gratification that we can gain from writing.
10. Share your enthusiasm about writing.
11. Attempt to publish your students' writing.
12. Help your students form and work in writing groups.
13. Use, value, and make useful what your students have experienced, listened to, heard, and said.

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## **Lessons Learned in Online Reading Classrooms**

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### **Introduction**

“This is my first on-line course and I am coming into this with mixed feelings of anticipation and dread. Hopefully the dread part will be unfounded☺” – NMU Graduate Student

We are all anxious about things that are new to us. The feelings this graduate student had about an online course are probably similar to those he had walking into his first course at the university or upon entering his first teaching experience. Many teacher educators when asked to develop and deliver a new course or material via a new modality may share the same feelings. From our view, it is the obligation of teacher educators to create learning experiences that relieve dread of new things and produce learning through sound pedagogical practice (Paez, 2003).

Public schools in the United States have long been expected to create a well-informed citizenry to participate in decisions of local, state, and national importance (Shannon, 1992). This purpose is often achieved through classroom experiences wherein students become active members of classroom cultures and school communities (Bruner, 1996). The advent and increasing use of online courses for delivering instruction requires us to redefine our purposes. Developing online classroom-learning communities requires a commitment to the norms of the community and to the development of caring relationships among its members (Noddings, 1984, 2003). These aspects of the learning community are often developed and sustained through social interactions among teachers and students. As a result, learners of all types are acculturated into communities as they observe, imitate, question, and become like those with whom they spend time; this is what Smith (1988) called “joining the club.” As courses move more to online formats, can such interactions and commitments to the learning community or club be developed and sustained?

In the following narrative, we reflect on anecdotal lessons learned in three online graduate reading courses. Through our experiences as teacher educators and reading methods instruction experts we explore the development of online course environments and instructional support and students’ needs for online learning in this evolving era of new communications technologies (Lankshear & Knobel, 2003). The goal of this article is to explore opportunities of online environments. In following pages, first we reflect on literature in online teaching and learning that we believe are critical in fostering authentic online learning communities. Then, each author shares specific anecdotal experiences with online courses in higher education. That is followed by a synthesis of our experiences and implications for future education practice.

## **A Brief Review of the Literature**

To develop and plan the delivery of online courses, we used a research review of online teaching as a touchstone (Tallent-Runnels, Thomas, Lan, Cooper, Ahern, Shaw, & Liu, 2006). This review provided us with rich ideas and discussion as we planned online learning experiences during the 2005-06 and 2006-07 academic years. Based on this review, key components of online course management were used to develop and reflect on our teaching and perceptions of student engagement in three online graduate courses.

### ***Online Community Development***

Knupfer, Gram, and Larsen's (1997) results of faculty member surveys of graduate students' reactions to online teaching demonstrate the need to establish community. This can be done through the development of study groups, book clubs, project based learning, and instructor modeling of effective communication. The literature review made it clear that a critical component of instructor modeling was to challenge student thinking in the online environment. Ideas presented in the online environment that went unchallenged "provided little negotiated meaning or new knowledge construction" (Kanuka & Anderson as cited in Tallent-Runnels, et al, p. 96). The initial role of the instructor in an online environment is similar to that of an instructor in a traditional classroom setting. The instructor must moderate the group allowing for the formation of a community as determined through the sharing of personal and professional experiences. Questioning and support of the group is critical (Knupfer, Gram, & Larsen, 1997; Winograd, 2000).

Another key factor found in the literature was the need for direct guidance from the instructor. This guidance is necessary to set the foundation for the encouragement of higher level thinking in student responses (Anderson & Karthwohl, 2001). This need was a major focus for us in the course design in the area of community building. To develop camaraderie, support, and warmth (Knupfer, Gram, & Larsen, 1997) we deemed it necessary to model or moderate initial online introductions or discussions. Winograd (2000) supports even a low level of instructor engagement in this area as a positive support of community building in the online environment.

Knupfer, Gram, and Larsen's (1997) research stressed the importance of recognizing students' emotions in the online environment. This was critical in the preparation of our courses as we worked to balance the need to clearly organize for clarity and collaboration with individual student needs and expectations. The graduate students they surveyed stressed a failure in this area when courses were developed. The literature was clear that the online exchanges facilitated in our courses should model and develop the characteristics necessary for positive discussions (Ahern & El Hindi, 2000; Davidson-Shivers, Tanner, & Muilenburg, 2000; Mikulechy, 1998) if a supportive online community was to be developed. In particular, our courses would need to foster descriptive presentations, thoughtful responses to fellow students, synthesis of new thoughts, sharing of professional experiences, and debate or questioning.

## *Online Instructional Support*

Berge (1999) found that the instructional design of online discussions and interactions affect the quality of a course more than any particular delivery system. Instructors in the online environment must provide clear and direct guidance to encourage the synthesis and evaluation of course material. Material for online courses should not be viewed as mere electronic versions of the text and class lectures. Instead, this material should be viewed as an opportunity by the instructor to model, initiate, and support online discussions (Im & Lee, 2003/2004) in both synchronous and asynchronous formats. Clear online directions and support identifying the specific tasks required of students in developing these discussions is integral to the social advantage an online experience may provide (Sullivan, 2002). Student reflection on course expectations through instructor-developed questioning and “real-time, back-and-forth discussion with their instructors” (Tallent-Runnels, et al, 2006, p. 97) would help to promote more refined discussions and student work.

Scaffolding would be necessary to support cognitive understanding (Greene & Land, 2000) of complex course expectations. When learners are distracted with understanding the tasks necessary to navigate an online environment, understanding of complex concepts is hindered (Mayer, Heiser, & Lonn, 2001). Christel (as cited in Tallent-Runnels, et al, 2006) recommends that pedagogically crucial content be delivered via video and in a separate electronic component of the course. This might mean online course designers develop rooms around specific tasks or content for their online courses so as not to overload the learner in any one area at a time. Video support was not the only means of accepted instructional support. Student access to timely announcements, lectures, supporting documents, web links, online tutorials, and chat support (Bee & Usip, 1998; Cooper, 1999) improves student achievement in the online environment. Likewise, Mayer and Chandler (2001) recommend learner interactivity when a multimedia presentation is utilized to promote deeper learning of content material.

Discussions among the three of us prior to the development of this online teaching project reflected on the increase in enrollment in online courses of study at the graduate level. In fact, online enrollment in the United States is increasing at a rate of 33% per year (Pethokoukis, 2002). Discussions and surveys of graduate students in our programs noted convenience and self-pacing of course content as a possible reason for taking online courses. Schrum (1995) noted positive response from students who were afforded the opportunity to move through a given course at their own pace. Other research findings (Hantula, 1998) supported our predictions that more successful, task-oriented students displaying a higher degree of self-management would move through the courses at a faster pace than less successful students. The literature suggested our course designs might allow for some of this self-pacing to occur.

We were not able to assume all of our graduate students had participated in an online course prior to this one. We believed it appropriate to review the literature on undergraduate online courses to explore the research on developing a comfort level for students who may be new to this environment. Faux and Black-Hughes (as cited in Tallent-Runnels, 2006) found that 47.1% of students were uncomfortable in their online course. Students noted the need to have more immediate instructor feedback on their work. Interestingly, they noted the absence of the instructor’s voice as a missing component in promoting their understanding of course content.

Kanuka and Anderson's (1998) work suggests ways to alleviate this lack of feedback through a predictable and consistent process. They purport the use of a five-stage process to support and promote in-depth reflection and conversation on the course content. Stage 1 facilitates the sharing of information and opinions. Stage 2 is a forum for the exploration of dissonance and inconsistency in those opinions. Stage 3 provides opportunity for negotiation of meaning and the creation of new knowledge. Stage 4 develops and modifies this new knowledge as participants are tested and challenged. Stage 5 requires participants to construct in-depth responses and statements about their new knowledge. We now turn to our experiences and reflections on delivering the online courses.

### **Initial Reactions to the Online Environment**

#### ***Class Context – Standerford***

In the following, the second author describes experiences of a graduate online course "Improving Reading Comprehension," which is a required course in two reading masters degree programs. The course was taught in the winter of 2006 and included 25 students from reading teacher, reading specialist, elementary education and learning disabilities masters degree programs. WebCT, now Blackboard, was used as the course site and students interacted in an online environment through various ways throughout the semester. The course was organized on a weekly basis and provided a schedule of detailed instructions for each week of the semester, including deadlines for online postings and assignments. Students were required to log in to WebCT synchronously for one evening every other week. Additionally, the website was used for asynchronous independent postings and student-arranged small group chats during the semester.

The course was organized around two different literacy approaches: a literature focus unit on one young adult novel and a variety of book clubs on non-fiction professional books and literacy instruction. During the literature focus unit, students used both asynchronous discussion postings and synchronous chats. Assignments included written responses and visual creations such as quilt squares and book box items. Students also used web resources such as author websites and a MediaSite Live lecture by the professor. Book clubs developed presentations of new strategies for developing reading comprehension and demonstrated those strategies interactively. These were shared and discussed using the asynchronous discussion posting board.

#### ***Nature of Conversations between Instructor and Students – Standerford***

The second author found that conversations with students were usually either content related or involved requests for logistical clarifications. Most conversations occurred individually between the instructor and one student. Although many of these conversations were posted for the entire class, few students ever responded to my comments unless the comments were directed to them.

The content related conversations were intended to expand student thinking and to correct misconceptions. At times a student might seem to have constructed a simplistic view of a concept and the instructor used discussion postings to try and help the student go further in their

thinking. Additionally, at times the instructor posted whole class responses to issues that surfaced with a few students to help the entire class think further on these issues.

Logistical conversations were usually clarifications of directions for assignments. One student struggled to understand course requirements and it took five pages of written conversations to help her successfully complete the course. Logistical conversations were time-consuming and made it clear that providing extremely clear directions is an area for improvement in my online teaching.

Occasionally, students would send “out-of-class” comments to the instructor via email. One interesting strand of conversations occurred with a student who was more familiar with online teaching and learning than the instructor was. This student acted as a cheerleader and mentor via email side conversations to support the instructor’s learning and to encourage her to try new ideas. This was a rich part of the instructor’s learning.

### ***Class Context – Lubig***

In this section the first author describes his online use of a required reading masters program course, “Teaching of Reading for Secondary Teachers.” The course was taught in the fall of 2006 with seven students enrolled. WebCT (Blackboard) was used for the course delivery. Students were required to use asynchronous discussions to contribute to the class and to meet the course requirements. At no time were synchronous discussions required for the course. The course was labeled as a Directed Study due to the low enrollment. Student interpretation has traditionally defined Directed Study as a course made up of independent work, which was a concern.

The course was organized into three distinct components or assignment groupings. Each grouping was built around a 30-day deadline. Assignment Grouping One was utilized for online introductions and to develop and engage in discussions on the philosophy of teaching reading. Online responses in this group of assignments were optional but encouraged as a vital part of getting to know one another as course participants. Assignment Grouping Two required online interaction in response to developed lesson plans and resulting student work in reading instruction. Additionally, each student was required to post a book review for class critique. The professional book chosen had to relate to course objectives. Assignment Grouping Three was used to reflect as individuals and as a class as to what constitutes effective reading instruction at the secondary level. This final grouping also challenged students to provide evidence from their practice and from the course about how the course objectives were met.

### ***Nature of Conversations between Instructor and Students – Lubig***

The quality of assignments from all seven students enrolled in the course was impressive. All deadlines were met and the content of the work was excellent. However, the quality of the student work did not relate to the instructor’s satisfaction of the course overall. The level of discussion among students in online discussion boards was lacking and elementary at best.

Nonetheless, the email conversations and phone calls supporting student learning between instructor and individual students were rich. The dialogue on specific aspects of the book review and lesson planning were especially engaging as the instructor was able to link the student to specific studies and examples online. Subsequently, two students challenged the review and lessons the instructor modeled. They did this via email and not on discussion boards. The posting of these critiques of the instructor's work was encouraged. The students chose not to do this, perhaps because they felt the dialogue was finished or they were simply uncomfortable doing so.

The instructor made several assumptions with the timelines for the assignment groupings that probably contributed to the low level of student engagement. The deadline for the posting of the assignment coincided with the deadline to respond. This left no time for quality responses. Further, as deadlines approached much time was spent responding to logistical questions about requirements for posting responses. The posting of the instructor before deadlines did not remedy the lack of student response. For example, in an introductory session, the instructor posted a public response to every student introduction and received two student comments in return. Student comments of the course reflected their concern over lack of peer engagement.

### *Class Context – Hendricks*

The online graduate course created and evaluated by the third author was “Literacy: Theories and Foundations.” Like the other two classes mentioned earlier in this article, this is a required course in the Master of Education in Reading program. It is the first course that students typically take for the advanced degree or for the Ohio Reading Endorsement. The course was taught summer semester 2006 and included 25 students. Blackboard was used as the course site. The course was developed using weekly modules. For example, week 1 addressed the history of reading instruction and week 2 focused on theoretical aspects of reading instruction. Within each module were four folders: knowledge, discussion, application, and assessment. The knowledge folder contained readings and PowerPoint presentations. The discussion folder contained the topic for the asynchronous weekly discussion. The application folder contained an assignment related to the topic under investigation and the assessment folder contained a brief quiz that highlighted the basic points from the readings. Students were required to participate in asynchronous discussion groups by posting at least two responses per week.

Each student would begin the week with the readings and reviewing the PowerPoint. Once that was completed, students would move to the next folder, which required them to respond to the discussion topic. Once they had completed their response, they were required to respond to at least one other classmate's posting. The next activity was to complete the assignment. The assignments included: (a) completing a study guide, (b) creating a home-school connection brochure, (c) implementing vocabulary instruction, (d) evaluating textbooks, and (e) writing a philosophy of the teaching of reading. Students completed the assignments and submitted them via the Blackboard. After assignments were completed, students took the brief quiz to demonstrate their understanding of the major topics for the week.

## *Nature of Conversations between Instructor and Students – Hendricks*

The initial contact by the instructor to the students was through an email welcoming the students to the online classroom and providing basic information about the website. The instructor also used the announcements feature of the Blackboard to provide students with an in-depth introduction to the website and the online navigation buttons. Each button was explained and students were told where the buttons would take them. Once the initial orientation was completed, conversations between students and instructor were limited to assignment clarification, discussion board responses, and logistical issues via telephone and email.

Of all the conversations between the instructor and the students in the class, the majority involved course assignments and assessments. Students also had questions about technological issues and about the course in general. Interestingly, students took time to reflect on assignments and the values they thought the assignments held for them. For example, one student wrote, “This assignment really opened my eyes to what I believe is necessary to be a good teacher.” Another student proclaimed, “I enjoyed the assignment - it was helpful to recall how I learned, and to see how my children and others learn. Thanks.” Finally, a third student commented, “Nice exercise to explore and compare and contrast the approaches. I wasn't sure how to approach this at first but once I got moving it wasn't that bad.” Additional comments related to assignments focused on grades, information contained in the Power Points, and late work.

The other category of interaction between students and the instructor that was noted frequently included questions related to the assessments for the class. While most students asked questions about what was on the quiz, several students challenged the questions and provided explanations as to why their responses were appropriate and should be considered correct. A number of students wrote to ask for clarification on a particular quiz item so that they could “learn from their mistakes.”

The contacts between students were particularly noticeable in the online discussions. Students would chat with one another about the topic and how the topic related to their classrooms and teaching. Many of the class members provided suggestions, ideas, resources, telephone numbers, and other forms of support. This was a highlight of the course because students were actually talking “reading” with each other and sharing experiences. Initially, the instructor tried to stay out of the conversation (similar to what would be done in a face to face class); however, opportunities presented themselves for probing students to think beyond their own classroom experiences, which allowed the discussion to move to another level.

### **Lessons Learned**

Reflecting back to the quote at the beginning of this article it is easy to see what a student might want and need in an online environment. We believe the needs are similar to those of students in a face-to-face class: to lessen anxiety and to set expectations through negotiated meaning within the context of the course and those involved.

## *Community Building*

In one of the graduate courses the instructor required the posting of introductory information similar to the format used in traditional classroom settings; name, interests, reasons for taking the course, and what should be gained from the course. The instructor only required the posting of the responses from the students. The assumption was that a whole class conversation would evolve much as they do in a face-to-face setting with participants sharing similar experiences, commiserating, and supporting one another. The instructor modeled the response to the posting and commented on each student posting and encouraged others to do the same. Students did not look beyond their own posting and instructor responses despite clear modeling. The interactions remained strictly between instructor and student for this exercise. In this instance, the instructor did not clearly develop and communicate the purpose of the introductions from a learner point of view. Even though a high level of presence and action was employed by the instructor (Blignaut & Trollip, 2003) students did not take the opportunity to communicate with others in the classroom.

Conversely, in another online graduate course students were sent an initial contact for the course through snail mail. The letter engaged students with the format of the course, how to access the course online, and provided phone or on-site support for students who may be apprehensive about using the online format. In this course, students were required to post a photo, a short narrative, and symbols to represent who they are as people and professionals to an online discussion board. The use of these varied responses allowed for the course participants to read and view the responses of the other students. The initial assignment had a requirement for students to synthesize and respond to the introductions through asynchronous discussions by creating a visual that linked members of the class in various ways. These postings were supported by feedback from the instructor as well in the same format. Rich visual representations posted by students provide evidence of these positive characteristics.

The use of asynchronous discussion combined with the varied forms of text required for students to tell about themselves may have provided positive results as students had more time to craft more thoughtful responses. In addition, the individual teaching style of the instructor may have aided in the facilitation of this positive first experience for this particular online course. The instructor for this particular course benefited from the initial snail mail contact made prior to any online engagement. This may have allowed the students to view the online environment as a significant supplement to traditional learning. Street (2003) writes that literacy focus is “not so much on the acquisition of skills, as in dominant approaches, but rather on what it means to think of literacy as a social practice” (p. 77). The instructor moved from a familiar form of social practice, the introductory paper letter, to an electronic version. Utilizing a medium familiar and safe to students and transferring it to this electronic environment demonstrated a respect for all members of this online community. The learners in this environment were supported in changing the meaning of how a quilt square could be defined as a literary tool (Leu, Kinzer, Coiro, & Cammack, 2004). This was accomplished by applying the tool to personally relevant text that all students had to read.

The instructor in the third online course described in this article noted the positive comments from students as evidence of a positive sense of community. Comments such as, “Course format provided interaction between the students and among students,” and “Communication with other students enhanced the class” are evidence of this. It is interesting to note other words used by the students in this course from the evaluation. Words like “exchange,” “incorporate,” and “interaction,” language that demonstrates a commitment to the development and use of caring relationships (Noddings, 1984, 2003).

The use of the asynchronous discussions facilitated in all three online environments support in-depth communication. As our narrative illustrates, the in-depth communication was not always student-to-student. Clearer directions to support student expectations in this area must be communicated. The asynchronous discussions were similar in scope and depth to those in a traditional setting. These findings are consistent with the review of research that guided our project (Tallent-Runnels, Thomas, Lan, Cooper, Ahern, Shaw, & Liu, 2006).

### ***Online Support***

With intentional planning by the instructor, students share information and opinions at the initial stage of discovery and move along a continuum to phrase explicit arguments and to apply new knowledge. Feedback from students in the area of instructional design were positive, such as (a) “Format was user friendly,” (b) “Assignments were helpful in understanding the course,” (c) “Instructor explained and followed grading policy,” and (d) “I am not much of a surfing fiend, but I really enjoyed investigating all of the different reading strategy sites.” These comments are consistent with the instructor’s perception that the instructional design, which “Encouraged students to think critically, to engage in reflection, and to apply knowledge.”

We discussed how critical an orientation to the online classroom would be to successful student engagement with course material. Managing how students engage with course material is critical to success. These factors should not change in the online environment and they were viewed as opportunities to teach or develop new teaching techniques for the graduate students in our courses. We believe it is important to develop the courses in a way that move beyond mere chapter reading and answer sessions.

Using the asynchronous model for the design of discussion board conversations allowed for the learner to control the pace of the conversation and of the lesson which in turn increased student levels of satisfaction and engagement (Roblyer, 1999). One instructor noted a substantial improvement in the quality of assignments and discussions from a grouping of assignments that allowed for this individual pacing. A student from one of the three courses commented that they saw “Working at own pace during the week” as a positive experience.

One instructor in particular noted the value of a synchronous sidebar conversation with a student about online teaching. The instructor noted the value this real time conversation had to help refine particular aspects of the course as well as to help frame the costs and benefits of online teaching from a pedagogical perspective. Students in this particular course noted the necessity of having the instructor accessible so she might provide individual attention to each student. This need was recognized by all of three of the authors as they provided clear support

for students through face-to-face discussions and phone conversations to rehearse ideas prior to posting them in the online classroom. This use of offline support coincides with Kist's (2005) view of the many possibilities or iterations of new literacy classrooms. The strategy of supporting the online environment with print and nonprint support has been proven successful (Alvermann, Hagood, & Williams, 2001; Alvermann, Moon, & Hagood, 1999; Luke 1998) in this project. Our reflections lead us to believe that using the familiar to move into the unfamiliar added to the level of confidence demonstrated by the students.

### **Considerations for Possibly Assuring a Positive Online Experience**

Hansen and Gladfelter (1996) assure us that online instruction must support an environment that is respectful and safe if it is to promote the high level of engagement and collaboration necessary for substantive learning to occur. Students in the three courses were consistently more successful when online instructors provided concrete examples of assignments and clear directions. This is similar to what we know works in a face-to-face classroom environment. It would be inconceivable for teacher educators to allow an entire course to go by in a traditional classroom setting where students did not call on each other by name. Nor would it be appropriate to create a traditional classroom setting where meaningful debate structured around open-ended questions, personal experience, and well-researched content was absent. The online classroom should be no different.

Our experiences in these online graduate courses support the instructor taking a purposeful role in challenging student thought through direct guidance to encourage higher level thinking and interaction (Anderson & Krathwohl, 2001). Consistently, when the presenters adhered to a protocol whereby students were asked to engage with new material at their own pace, explore the opinions of others on the same information, co-construct knowledge, modify that knowledge, and then apply it, students were much more likely to have a positive experience with the material and with the course in general. One graduate student noted that she "... enjoyed investigating all of the different reading strategy sites" while another "... found the assignment challenging." To ensure these types of responses we believe that future course design must provide clear directions, purposeful tasks/questions, and a real-world application of knowledge.

A key problem facing the online structure of the courses described in this article was the tendency for students to do assignments at the last-minute. To remedy this situation we recommend the use of two sets of deadlines. One deadline would allow for the research and construction of initial knowledge. These assignments or projects would be posted as a part of the course in a public forum such as Blackboard. Next, we would recommend setting another deadline for students to engage in online discussions where they co-construct and challenge this new knowledge. This co-construction should be explored through the use of online discussion or webcams. Giving students time to reflect on the spoken and written ideas of their peers will increase ownership and depth of understanding. Providing clear examples or tutorials for the use of these two response formats will be critical to their success. By spreading this response process out in manageable chunks we will allow for individual thinking and research to occur on a particular topic. It will also allow the instructor to provide effective and moderate amounts of interaction to promote deeper learning (Mayer & Chandler, 2001). We believe instructors should also engage in the discussions to provide some level of cognitive drama and scaffolding for the

students in groups or as individuals. Having the material analyzed and synthesized by each student prior to these discussions is critical if the discussions are to truly facilitate the application of new knowledge to individual students and groups in the course. Creating the online experience so students can collaborate over these shared experiences will help them refine their thinking as related to the course and their profession (Greene & Land, 2000).

Instructors must consciously facilitate understanding for teachers in the environments in which their students learn (Alvermann & Hagood, 2000). Learning how to design online courses to read the “body language” of student comments so this learning occurs will only happen if instructors are provided with the support necessary to do so. Ultimately, it is the responsibility of the online instructor to structure the course to benefit students’ learning the same as it is in the face-to-face classroom environment. Structuring questions to students in the online classroom must reflect the need for students to have appropriate wait time before a quality response is expected.

### **Concluding Thoughts**

Online teaching is changing the level of engagement and opportunity in education. Many institutions are encouraging faculty to teach courses online for economic reasons. Increasing enrollment with limited outlay of capital and human resources are leading reasons for this change. However, most of us have yet to confront how online teaching and learning is changing the educational experience and outcomes for faculty and students. We believe educators must continue to provide a forum for considering how the economic and educational goals of a university may conflict. As well, we believe educators should continue to explore how to minimize conflicts by working toward better understandings of how online courses can be used effectively in whole or part to provide sound educational experiences. A challenge is to apply the same level of expectation and critique developed in face-to-face classroom experiences to online teaching and learning experiences.

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## **Expanding our Notion of What Counts as Appropriate Material for Reading (and Writing)**

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Contemporary reading and writing instruction tends to be dominated by narrative and expository texts (Daniels, 1990; Reutzel, Larson, & Sabey, 1995; Shanahan, 1990). Our lives are stories and we find great satisfaction and insight in reading the stories of others. Moreover, we live in a time when enormous amounts of information and new knowledge are added to the human experience; reading and using this growing information is an important aspect of many people's lives.

However, while narrative and informational text take on primary roles in the school literacy curriculum, the uses of other text forms have declined. For example, during visits to schools I find less use of poetry, song, oratory, scripts, jokes, riddles, and other text forms than in my past school experiences. These text forms were staples that made my schooling enjoyable and memorable. Thus, in this essay I make a case for expanding the central corpus of current school literacy material beyond narrative and expository texts. Further, I argue that these other text forms offer learning experiences not easily acquired with texts that currently dominate literacy instruction.

My awakening about the use of other forms of language texts came through my career involvement in reading fluency, which I have come to believe not only means reading with automatic word recognition, but also with appropriate expression (prosody)

so the text sounds like real language. Fluent speakers are those who bring their voices to the meaningful messages they deliver. Volume, emphasis, tone, phrasing, dramatic pause, and speed (slow as well as fast) have the potential to add significantly to one's interpretation and appreciation of texts.

Texts that lend themselves to reading with expression are written with voice. In fact, voice in writing is the flip side of prosody in reading. In such texts, readers should "hear" the author's voice while engaging with the material, and they need to appropriately recreate the author's voice in their reading.

All text forms have potential for being written with voice. However, some text forms are more likely to manifest the sense of voice than others. Informational text, for example, is less likely to be written with voice than other text forms. Further, Informational text is often written in third person, which limits a sense of author voice. The goal of informational text is to convey information to a reader, not to translate the aesthetics of an author's voice.

Ironically, despite the limitation of voice in such texts, informational passages tend to be the dominant form of reading in most commercially developed reading fluency programs. The reasoning behind the use of informational texts comes from the need of students to acquire new knowledge at every opportunity. Unfortunately, through the use of informational texts for nurturing reading fluency, students' opportunities to read with voice (and prosody) becomes severely limited. Indeed, the employment of informational text in fluency instruction programs, with the specified and primary goal of the fluency activity to read the informational passage at an ever faster pace, has led to corruption of the whole notion of fluency – one that will, in my opinion, eventually result in fluency

being demoted once again to secondary or tertiary status among the components of effective reading instruction.

On the other hand, narrative material usually carries strong voice characteristics and is a good choice for fluency instruction. Narratives, however, are sometimes lengthy and thus do not always lend themselves to repeated readings, a central instructional activity in fluency development. Thus, brief passages pulled from lengthier narratives can be used quite effectively for fluency instruction.

### ***Increasing the Palette of Text Types for Reading Instruction***

Besides informational texts and narratives, however, lies a full range of texts that manifest strong voice and are usually brief enough to allow for repeated readings and developing fluency. Among these other texts are scripts (e.g., readers theater), dialogues, monologues, poetry, rhymes, song lyrics, jokes and riddles, speeches, letters, diaries, and journal entries. A growing body of research has demonstrated the positive effects on reading fluency and overall reading achievement from the use of these voiced texts for fluency instruction (Martinez, Roser, & Strecker, 1999; Griffith & Rasinski, 2004; Rasinski & Stevenson, 2005; Biggs, Homan, Dedrick, & Rasinski, in press).

As I have become more involved in the use of these alternative text types for fluency instruction, it has become apparent to me that these texts offer advantages that go far beyond the opportunities for simply developing reading fluency. Perhaps the most obvious advantage is that the uses of these voiced texts provide a much richer array of reading materials that teachers can use in their literacy curriculum. Uses of these texts mean greater variety in language, format or structure, length, and topic. Further, greater variety means that teachers have more opportunities to accommodate the wide interests in

reading and writing that are present in their classrooms. For example, some students are more drawn to poetry, song, or scripts than they are to narrative or informational text.

The uses of these various text types allow teachers to tap the interests of these students.

### ***Studying and Appreciating Language***

Voiced texts allow for deeper explorations of language and how meaning is made and communicated in other written forms. These voiced text forms, such as speeches and songs, provide opportunities to explore and appreciate the richness of the language and ways in which writers use written language to express meaning. Word choice, rhythm, rhyme, alliteration, assonance, imagery, metaphor, simile, word play, emphasis, and, of course, voice and prosody, are just some of the ways in which writers of voiced texts express meaning. Moreover, they do so in texts that are often compact and at the same time packed with exemplary elements of writing style.

### ***Exploring Comprehension***

In addition, reading comprehension can be taught in greater depth using these other text forms. For example, the exploration of textual images and the interpretation and creation of metaphor and simile are sophisticated comprehension and thinking skills that are found in state reading curriculums. And yet, imagery and metaphor can be difficult to teach because they are not often found in school textbooks. However, authors of poems, songs, speeches, and scripts often create images and metaphors in relatively compact texts that afford many opportunities for analysis and classroom discussion.

For instance, Walt Whitman's "Oh Captain, my Captain..." or Emily Dickenson's "There is no frigate like a book ...," or Langston Hughes, "Well son, I'll tell ya, life for me ain't been no crystal stair..." are metaphors or similes often easily

accessible for students to comprehend, discuss, and to use as springboards to create imaginative texts of their own. Recently, for instance, I observed fifth-graders read Hughes' "Mother to Son" in which the author uses climbing a flight of stairs as a metaphor for life. After having made a graphic "T chart" to facilitate comparisons between life and climbing a flight of stairs, the teacher had students name other typical events in life. The Super Bowl, cooking supper, and making a cross-country trip were volunteered. The teacher then asked students to arrange themselves into small groups and discuss how such events could be used as a metaphor for life. Finally, after brief discussions in which analyses were made, the teacher asked students to write, rehearse, and perform their own metaphorical poems in the style of Langston Hughes.

### ***Varied and Authentic Response***

Response to reading is another way to deepen one's experience in and comprehension of what is read. Louise Rosenblatt (1978) noted that there are two types of responses to text: efferent (academically oriented responses) and aesthetic (artistic) responses. Both forms of response are important and both should be nurtured in the classroom. In reality, however, with increased attention given to information acquisition, efferent responses seem to increasingly dominate the classroom scene.

Voiced texts, because they carry the voice of actual human beings, tend to lead toward aesthetic responses themselves more than informational texts. I think all of us can remember listening to a song, a poem, a speech, or a play that moved us to tears, sent a chill down our spines, or initiated a response that was felt as much from our hearts as it was from our heads. Allowing students to respond to texts in such aesthetic ways is important; it allows students to make connections to themselves and others – the feelings,

fears, and fantasies that humans possess – and not simply making a textual experience a means for adding information to one’s mind. In sum: “There’s something about reciting rhythmical words aloud. It’s almost biological... It has the ability to comfort and enliven human beings” (Pinsky as cited by Keillor, 2004).

### ***Creating Common Purpose – Unity in the Classroom***

Not only do voiced texts have the power to touch the heart, they have the ability to unite hearts and minds. I often ask teachers and students why we have patriotic songs and poems and frequently hear grand speeches made by politicians and others on national holidays? One answer, of course, is to inspire. Another answer is to unite. Voiced words have an ability to pull together people who share sentiments expressed in texts.

That sense of unity is not only important for the citizens of a country, it is also important for students in school. Students need to learn that they are part of a larger whole, such as members of schools, communities, and their country. Songs and other voiced and rhythmical texts can nurture that unity. This is another reason that legitimizes and underscores the need for placing such texts in classrooms. The rituals behind the Preamble to the Constitution, singing a patriotic song, or reciting the Pledge of Allegiance help bind students to a larger community in service and support.

### ***Cultural Celebrations***

Voiced texts have the ability to recognize and celebrate differences between us – our cultural and ethnic backgrounds. Cultures often mark themselves through song, poetry, script, and rhetoric. These texts can be used, then, for recognizing and celebrating the various cultures that reside in our classrooms.

For example, being of Polish descent I vividly recall my parents teaching my siblings and me songs that reached back into their childhood while growing up with immigrant parents and my family's ethnic and cultural roots. When we sang "Sto lat, sto lat..." we were not simply wishing one another happy birthday, we were touching base with who we are and where we came from. These texts are part of my personal and cultural identity, of which I take pride.

Further, I am able to share with my students the Polish folk songs that I grew up with and know. I teach them about my background and what I know about these songs and texts, and then, I ask my students to do the same for me and for their classmates. Students of Irish, Italian, German, Jewish, African, Hispanic, Chinese, Japanese, Iranian, and other backgrounds and cultures can find similar texts by talking with their parents or grandparents and can bring these texts into class to share and teach. As a group, we learn, practice, perform, and, perhaps most importantly, celebrate the cultures and backgrounds that students bring with them to the classroom.

### ***Writing with Voice***

Voiced texts are, by definition, written in such way that a reader can internally (or externally through oral reading) hear the voice of the author while reading. Arguably, this is one of the most difficult elements of proficient writing to teach students.

As in reading, however, the types of writing that tends to dominate school curriculum are narrative and various forms of exposition or informational writing (e.g. term papers). While not denying that these forms are important and need to be emphasized, other forms of writing, such as voiced texts, should also be taught and nurtured.

I feel that the best way to learn to write narrative and informational text is to examine the best forms of these texts available to students and encourage them to emulate those forms in their own writing. An important part of the analyses of such texts is through repeated readings, so that students can deeply examine text forms and structures.

Students should, however, also be given opportunities and encouragement to write the voiced texts that are the subject of this essay -- poetry, song lyrics, scripts, speeches and the like. When we ask students to examine such texts, we are asking them to inspect the sense of voice embedded in them by authors. At the same time, when we ask students to write in the style of Langston Hughes or Martin Luther King, we are asking them to write with a voice similar to one that the original author used. For instance, Elizabeth, a fourth grade student, reported that when she writes she tries to “hear the voice in her head” and put that voice on paper. It is likely that Elizabeth learned to write with voice by first learning to read with voice because writing is a more difficult task. And it is likely she learned to read with voice through readings of texts that were rich in author voice.

In our reading and writing program for struggling readers at Kent State we invite and encourage students to write their own versions of voiced and rhythmical texts that they practice and perform. These can be as simple as a playful version of Yankee Doodle written by Harry, a student in our summer reading clinic:

Yankee Doodle went to town  
Riding on a tired duck.  
Although it tried, the duck couldn't fly.  
So now he rides in a fire truck.

Or, they can be as sophisticated as writing their own metaphorical version of Whitman's *Oh Captain, My Captain*. An additional point is worth mentioning when it comes to writing. One of the most challenging aspects of writing to master is voice – writing in such a way that a reader can see the face and hear the voice of the author, a style of writing that makes texts readable, personable, and engaging.

Finally, I'd like to mention a consequence of practicing and performing voiced texts that I have observed repeatedly with students who engage in repeated and assisted reading of rhythmical texts meant to be performed – confidence. Most of the students I work with are struggling readers – students who have little confidence in their own ability to read. Moreover, this lack of confidence bleeds into other curricular areas and into other aspects of their lives. These students begin to believe that they do not have the ability to accomplish what needs to be accomplished in and out of school.

In reading, this lack of confidence often presents in not only slow and halting reading, but also in what I refer to as “mumble” reading, in which students curl their bodies inward, put their hands in their pockets, cross their legs or sway or lean against a wall if standing, and fail to make eye contact with whomever may be listening to their reading. Moreover, once this lack of confidence begins to manifest itself in students, it often becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy in which students meet with less and less success in their academic endeavors.

Repeated and assisted practice, especially when that practice is aimed at a performance for an audience can be a remedy for lack of reading confidence. Indeed, when students can take justifiable pride in a reading performers it can be a wonderful solution to the loss of confidence that comes from repeated episodes of public disfluent

reading, such as oral round robin reading, which remains an unfortunate staple in many of today's classrooms.

Through repeated and assisted reading, less fluent and struggling readers learn that they can read as well as their more fluent classmates, they just need to practice a bit more. And, when these readers perform for an audience, even an audience of one, they can receive affirmation of their efforts and praise. As one young reader who engaged in a reader's theater curriculum during a rehearsal stated, "I never thought I could be a star, but I was the best reader today!" (Martinez, Roser, & Strecker, 1999).

Literacy is more than the ability to read and enjoy a story; it is more than gaining meaning through informational passages. Literacy involves reading aloud as well as reading silently, literacy involves appreciating language for its own sake, reading serves other purposes -- to delight, to unify, to differentiate, to touch the hearts of those who read. These purposes are legitimate ones for reading and writing and have a legitimate place in the school curriculum. The texts highlighted in this essay lend themselves well to these other purposes. These texts, too, have a legitimate and necessary place in the school literacy curriculum. It is time that we, as literacy professionals, allow these other text forms to take their rightful place in what we ask children to read in school and home.

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Email Interactions of Preservice Teachers and Adolescents with Special Needs

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There are approximately two million people in the United States who use augmentative and alternative forms of communication (AAC) because they have severe communication impairments (American Speech-Language-Hearing Association, 2004). These include individuals with a wide variety of special needs such as cerebral palsy, autism spectrum disorders, intellectual disabilities, or traumatic brain injury. People using AAC communicate in both symbolic and non-symbolic ways. Non-symbolic forms of communication include gestures, vocalizations, and facial expressions, while symbolic forms of communication include sign language, pictures, icons, and traditional orthography. Because of concomitant disorders, people with severe communication impairments often communicate slowly, in idiosyncratic ways (e.g., using sign language approximations), or in ways unfamiliar to classroom teachers and the general population. The literature suggests that students with severe communication impairments are passive participants in classrooms who seldom comment or ask questions, typically are asked only for yes/no or labeling responses, and rarely initiate communication (e.g., Beukelman & Mirenda, 1998). As a result of their communication difficulties, these individuals typically develop a very limited set of social relationships restricted to family members and professional service providers.

Literacy learning difficulties are widespread in individuals with severe communication disorders with perhaps as much as 90% of this population reading and writing at levels substantially lower than nondisabled peers (Koppenhaver & Yoder, 1992). Specific struggles include every aspect of written language learning from letter-sound correspondence to vocabulary meaning, reading comprehension, and writing (Smith, 2005). Because of their communication impairments and concomitant disorders, these students often receive very limited opportunities to compose text in school (Koppenhaver & Yoder 1993; Mike, 1995).

While the *No Child Left Behind* legislation has meant that the literacy learning needs of such students are receiving renewed attention, in-service and preservice teacher preparation is a significant concern. Few reading professionals are equipped to address the needs of children who cannot speak (e.g., Erickson & Koppenhaver, 1995). Likewise, few speech-language pathologists or special educators have the training or experience to address written language, particularly in children who cannot speak. A single organization, the Center for Literacy and Disability Studies at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, offers the only undergraduate or graduate level courses worldwide specifically addressing literacy assessment and instruction with students who require AAC.

Preservice teachers are ill-prepared for the task of educating the student with severe communication impairments. Because of their inexperience, undergraduate students often have limited views of literacy, beginning reading processes, teaching, and technology, and “literacy optimism” (Lloyd, 2006). That is, they believe the “needs” of children with significant special needs are different than those of other children and do not believe these students are capable of literacy learning, at least in comparison to their typically developing peers. At the same time, many of these preservice teachers are not avid readers themselves and consequently conceptualize reading as a task that is learned in school and engaged in only when required by others (Applegate & Applegate, 2004). Writing is often viewed in the same vein and as something to be avoided.

In response to some of these points, the third author of this paper initiated an email partnership three years ago between beginning level readers with a wide variety of developmental special needs and undergraduate students in elementary and special education. The partnership was conceptualized as a motivating experience for improving written language of students with special needs and a chance for undergraduate students to learn firsthand about the capabilities and learning characteristics of students with special needs. Email seemed that it might offer an accessible communication medium for both sets of students.

In this study, we report on our initial explorations of the impact of email on the attitudes and skills of two adolescents with severe communication impairments and the undergraduates in a teacher preparation program who were their email partners. In the following sections of this article, first, we outline methods used during the study. Then, we share results, followed by a discussion of our findings that include implications for classroom practice.

## METHODS

### *Participants*

*Adolescents with severe communication impairments.* Two adolescents with severe communication impairments participated in the current study. Both experience significant difficulties in face-to-face communication and receive speech-language services from the third author. Krissy (a pseudonym) now 17 years old, has been identified with autism spectrum disorder and was served in a self-contained classroom for similarly labeled children until the age of 13. Then, she began receiving services with other students who have severe communication impairments in a junior high school. Prior to her arrival in that program, her face-to-face communication was limited to use of the Picture Exchange Communication System (PECS, Bondy & Frost, 2006) for the purpose of making requests. She now uses a *DynaMyte* (DynaVox Technologies) communication aide, which is a dedicated communication device with dynamic display and picture-based communication symbols on the main screen. The screen is linked to a keyboard with six word prediction buttons. When Krissy types a letter, the words she most commonly uses and the most commonly used words in the English language appear in the word prediction boxes.

When she began working with the third author four years ago, Krissy had a sight word vocabulary of 150 words, and her writing program consisted entirely of copying tasks. Now, she uses written language as a means of processing oral language (i.e., communication partners write their questions or comments, and Krissy reads them in order to understand what they are saying before she responds orally or with her *DynaMyte*). To assess her reading abilities, Krissy was administered the *Basic Reading Inventory* (Johns, 2001) four years ago when she entered the junior high school program. Her word identification abilities on word lists were assessed at first grade level, and she was unable to reach criterion during listening comprehension or silent reading assessments. Four years later, similar assessments placed her at a sixth grade level for word identification and silent reading comprehension, and at a primer level for listening comprehension.

Davy (a pseudonym) is 17 years old and has Down syndrome with mild/moderate cognitive delays and severe communication impairments. While Davy is able to speak, his speech is very difficult to understand; his speech is approximately 40 percent intelligible to familiar listeners in known contexts as assessed by the third author using informal measures. While he has an AAC device with voice output, he is reluctant to use it. He seldom initiates communication and instead uses initial letter cuing (i.e., pointing to the first letter of each word he is speaking as he speaks it) to successfully clarify communication when prompted to do so. Upon arrival at the junior high school four years ago, Davy received instruction with sight words and his writing instruction was limited to copying tasks. Results derived from *Basic Reading Inventory* (Johns, 2001) placed him at pre-primer level on word identification, and like Krissy, he failed to meet criterion during silent reading or listening comprehension assessments. In fall 2006, Davy performed at second grade level during word identification assessments and at first grade level during silent reading comprehension, and listening comprehension assessments.

***Teacher preparation students.*** Email partners for the adolescents with special needs were undergraduate students in introductory reading methods courses that the second author taught during four consecutive semesters at two universities. These students were elementary education and special education majors, typically in the third year of their baccalaureate degrees, and would be student teaching during one of the two semesters following the reading methods courses. Each semester a new undergraduate student was partnered with the adolescent participants with special needs.

### ***Procedures***

***Directions to participants.*** Permission letters were sent to the parents of the adolescents with special needs explaining that the students would be emailing with undergraduates preparing to become teachers. The purpose of the study was explained in the letter: to improve the adolescents' written communication skills. It was also explained that the third author would monitor all emails and that printed copies of all the emails would be shared with the parents. Parents signed permission forms allowing their children to participate in the study. The Appalachian State University Institutional Review Board approved the permission forms, as well as the administration of the participating junior high school.

The adolescents initiated the email exchange with a letter of introduction each semester. The adolescents were taught by the third author to: (a) begin their emails with a greeting, (b) answer any questions their pen pal had asked them in previous emails, (c) provide new information about their activities or interests, (d) ask at least one new question of their pen pal, and (e) conclude the email with a closing and their name.

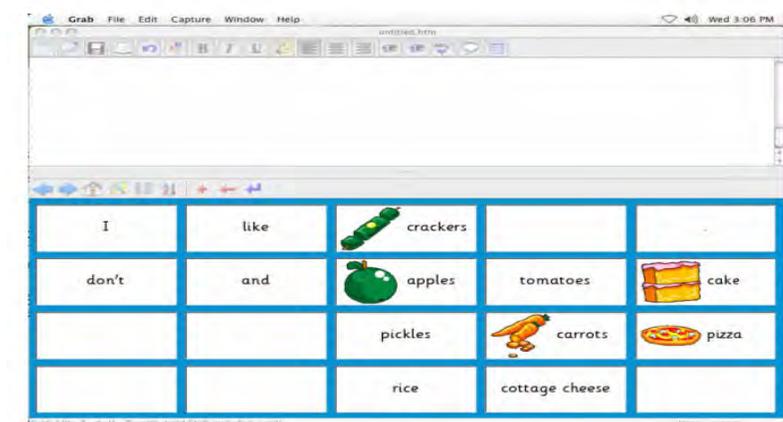
At the beginning of each semester, the undergraduate teacher education student participants were informed of the email project and the purpose: to help them get to know an adolescent who struggled with literacy through email exchanges. They were instructed to: (a) reply to all emails received from their partner within 24 hours, (b) ~~they could~~ initiate emails to their partner at any time, and (c) observe their partner's email letter closely and write back at approximately the same level of sophistication, (d) click "Reply" to each email, so that their partner's original message was linked to their response. This last directive was intended to

enable teachers supporting the adolescents to have the necessary context to assist them with any reading and writing difficulties. Undergraduates were told also that they needed to get to know their partner, not just to understand the literacy struggles and special needs of adolescents who struggled with literacy, but also because they would be creating a personalized, digital multimedia text for them. The undergraduate teacher education student participants were provided no further information about their adolescent email partner.

**Student writing.** Again, Krissy and Davy were taught a specific structure for their pen pal correspondences: begin with a greeting (e.g., “How are you?”); answer the pen pal’s questions; ask the pen pal a question; and close with a salutation. For the first semester of the email project, Krissy used *Clicker 4* software (Crick Software) grids created by the third author and Krissy’s classroom teacher. *Clicker* is a multimedia software tool and writing support that enables the user to write with whole words, sentences, or pictures. *Clicker* presents students with an onscreen keyboard consisting of combinations of pictures and/or words. When a key is selected, it produces text in an onscreen word processing window. Krissy’s grids were organized in what speech-language pathologists refer to as “Fitzgerald Key,” with the grammatical written structures of subject/action/object or question/action/object, which were in columns matching oral language structure. Krissy’s grids consisted of 20 to 24 structural choices.

To complete an email interaction, Krissy had to complete multiple grids. Her first grid allowed her to choose from six or seven greetings in addition to making a choice of a follow up question. Next, Krissy would use a second grid to create a statement about an event in her life. Specific procedures were created to assist Krissy in composing this portion of the emails. Krissy’s mother would email the third author and discuss their family’s activities. The third author would later show a written question to Krissy about their activities. For example, Krissy would choose a subject for the sentence (e.g., I, we, she, he), choose an action (e.g., went, traveled), and then choose from a selection of objects (e.g., swimming pool, store). As Krissy became familiar with the process, a follow-up grid to her initial statement was created to prompt Krissy for additional information. For example, if Krissy chose to write, “I went to the store,” the follow up grid would consist of a connector, such as, “and bought” with a list of four to five choices for Krissy to choose from. Figure 1, below, shows a grid that Krissy used to write about the foods that she liked and disliked.

Figure 1. Sample *Clicker* Grid



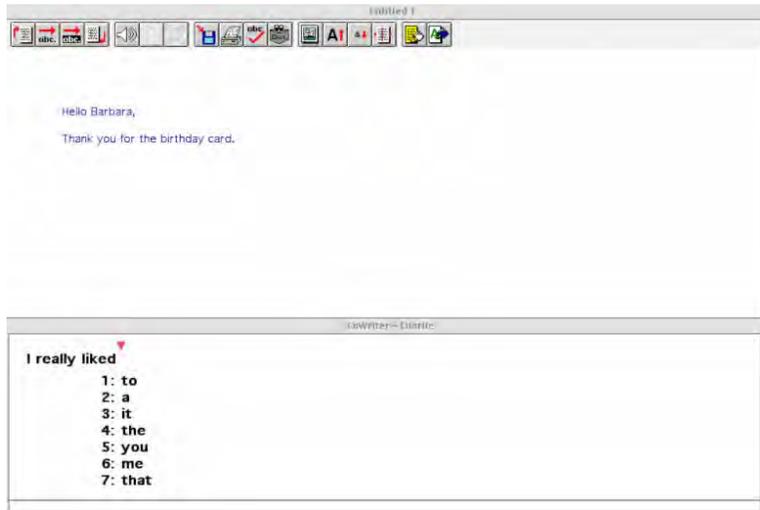
Krissy would then continue to another grid consisting of up to five questions and select one question to pose to her undergraduate pen pal. Once the salutation was selected from a list of choices, Krissy would then copy and paste the resulting text message into her email.

During the email project *Clicker* was gradually phased out, and Krissy began making selections from a handwritten list of approximately five sentences and questions, which she then typed in *Write:OutLoud* (Don Johnston, Inc.). This software is a talking word processor that reads the writer's text aloud. Through communications with Krissy's mother, the third author was informed of the family's weekend activities and would write a question to Krissy about her weekend (e.g., "What did you do this weekend?"). Krissy would read the question aloud to herself. The third author would then provide a sentence stem such as, "This weekend I . . ." and then provide a list of written choices, such as: friendship club, gymnastics, the grocery store, and shopping for shoes. Next, Krissy would circle her response(s) on the paper. The third author then combined the responses in sentences such as, "This weekend I went to Friendship Club, gymnastics, and shopping for shoes."

Krissy would also choose from a list of questions to ask her pen pal provided by the third author. Krissy learned to complete this process of combining with a verbal prompt from the third author such as, "Write this to your pen pal" without having to copy the written model. Krissy began typing the greeting, asking the pen pal how s/he was, and the salutation into the word processing document without written or oral prompting. Over time, Krissy began to read the written list of questions and statements silently rather than aloud. The third author also introduced Krissy to the cloze procedure with *Cloze Pro* software (Crick Software). Krissy was asked to read and complete the cloze statements, which was a way to check her comprehension and support her growing understanding of written syntax.

Davy also used *Clicker 4* (Crick Software) grids created by the third author and Davy's classroom teacher for the first year of the project. Similar to Krissy's grids, there were 20 to 24 pictures with words and isolated words on the grid. Although Davy had a sight word vocabulary of approximately 50 words, he nonetheless benefited from the picture support of the *Clicker* grids to get him started with writing concepts. For example, to write a sentence to his pen pal, he would choose from the subjects (e.g., I, we, he, she), choose a verb (e.g. like, have) and then choose an object (e.g., horse, dog, cat). Davy was taught to copy and paste from the *Clicker* word processing window into email. Likewise, when he received emails, he pasted them into *Clicker* to have the emails read aloud to him by the software's voice output feature. Davy chose to customize his greeting to his pen pal with the use of the Spanish word for hello, "hola." In addition, Davy enjoyed telling and hearing jokes. The third author would provide Davy with a list of approximately five jokes to choose from. Davy would select a joke and then type it into his email.

By the end of the second year of this project, Davy began using a combination of *Clicker 4* and *Co:Writer* (Don Johnston) and finally *Co:Writer* exclusively to compose his emails. *Co:Writer* is a spelling prediction software. When the first letter of a word is typed, the program provides a list of up to nine words for the student to select from. With a second keystroke, the student can then choose the word rather than spelling it. Davy chose from a list of seven words. This provided Davy enough support that he could write emails independently toward the end of this study. A *Co:Writer* sample is provided in Figure 2 below.

Figure 2. *Co:Writer* Support of Email Composition

### ***Data Collection***

Undergraduate participants forwarded a blind copy of each email they sent to the adolescent participants to the second author. This was originally planned as a means for protecting both the adolescents with special needs and the undergraduate email partners should any ethical or privacy questions arise. This procedure also yielded a rich data source for analysis of the communications. The second author electronically saved each email, named the resulting file the date it was sent, and filed each in a folder labeled with the first names of the members of each email dyad.

### **Data Analysis**

Burbules (1993) proposed that teaching is a form of dialogue that exists along two dimensions: situations and partner attitudes. Situations can be either divergent/convergent or inclusive/critical. Convergent situations assume a single correct answer while divergent situations assume multiple possible interpretations. Attitudes of partners in a dialogue can be either inclusive or critical. Inclusive attitudes require partners to: (a) view each other as equals, (b) assume truthfulness in their interactions, and (c) to work toward a goal of consensus through their interactions. When one or more partners are critical, then there is a questioning attitude, or an attitude of skepticism. Authority influences the resolution of questions when partners have critical attitudes; in other words, the partner with the most power relatively (e.g., a teacher in a classroom discussion) is viewed as the authority. By crossing these two dimensions, Burbules proposes that there are four prototypes of pedagogical dialogue, which he identifies as conversation (divergent/inclusive), inquiry (convergent/ inclusive), debate (divergent/ critical), and instruction (convergent/critical). Thus, a *conversation* could be characterized as a social experience with mutual understanding among participants. Further, *inquiry* involves asking and responding to specific questions in a cooperative, tolerant, and social environment. *Debate*

involves a skeptical, questioning attitude by one or both participants that challenges the dialogue partner. *Instruction* is outcome-oriented and leads to a single, specific, correct conclusion.

An earlier study by Trathen and Moorman (2001) demonstrated that Burbules' model might be applied as an analytical framework. Trathen and Moorman had studied listserv interactions as a form of pedagogical dialogue. In similar fashion, we conceptualized the email interactions resulting from our project as another form of pedagogical dialogue, because undergraduates preparing to teach were engaged in written dialogue intended to help them get to know junior high and high school students more broadly as people before they are learned about their special needs.

We applied Burbules' (1993) pedagogical dialogue model in coding each topic of conversation within each email. In order to engage in this coding, we first assembled each email and arranged them chronologically by dyad and semester. Two raters then independently coded each message from each partner and then compared codes. Interrater agreement was calculated by dividing the number of agreements by the sum total of agreements, disagreements, and omissions. A percentage of agreement was calculated overall and for each of the four pedagogical dialogue types. Reliability coefficients were .99 overall, 1.00 for conversation, .99 for inquiry, and .67 for instruction (only three instances identified). No examples of debate were identified in participant email exchanges across four semesters. Word counts were also conducted as an estimate of relative participation in the dialogues.

## RESULTS

Krissy and Davy, with the third author's support, and both of their email partners engaged nearly exclusively in conversations (i.e., divergent and inclusive pedagogical dialogues) and inquiry (i.e., convergent and inclusive pedagogical dialogues). All partners engaged in a greater percentage of conversation, talking about interests and activities and relating them to one another's similar shared information, than in inquiry. Davy had the greatest range, a low of 39.6% inquiry to a high of 58.5% conversation. No examples of debate were identified in either dyad across four semesters (see Table 1).

Table 1  
Percentage of Dialogue Prototypes Identified in Emails

	Conversation	Inquiry	Debate	Instruction
Krissy	54.5%	45.5%	0.0%	0.0%
Partner	51.2%	47.6%	0.0%	1.2%
Davy	58.5%	39.6%	0.0%	1.9%
Partner	55.4%	41.0%	0.0%	3.6%

A word count was performed of the email messages to assess the relative balance or imbalance of each partner's contribution to the dialogue each semester. A striking difference was

identified between these written dialogues and face-to-face interactions, in which speaking partners have been found to dominate conversations with individuals who use AAC systems (von Tetzchner & Martinsen, 1996). In these written dialogues each semester, the undergraduate email partner contributed more words per email and a greater percentage of the words in the overall conversation, but the adolescents with severe communication impairments contributed substantially to the dialogic interactions with the multiple supports provided by technologies, the third author, and the email communication environment. The contribution of the adolescents ranged from a low of 30.9 words per email to a high of 44.7 words per email and a low of 23.8% of the dialogue to a high of 40.5%. The range in Krissy's email was 31.6 to 44.7 words per email and 23.8% to 35.3% of the dialogue. The range in Davy's email was 30.9 to 38.7 words per email and 26.9% to 40.5% of the dialogue (see Table 2).

Table 2

Average Words Written Per Email and Percentage of Total Email Exchange Represented Across four Semesters.

	Sem #1	Sem #2	Sem #3	Sem #4
	W/M (%)	W/M (%)	W/M (%)	W/M (%)
Krissy	34.0 (23.8%)	40.2 (35.3%)	31.6 (35.2%)	44.7 (35.1%)
Partner	108.8 (76.2%)	73.7 (64.7%)	58.2 (64.8%)	82.5 (64.9%)
Davy	38.7 (40.5%)	36.6 (26.9%)	30.9 (27.1%)	
Partner	56.8 (59.5%)	99.7 (73.1%)	83.1 (72.9%)	

W/M= words written per email message

%= percentage of the dialogue

To assist the reader in better understanding what these codes, word counts, and percentages mean, a transcript of one email exchange between Krissy and one of her partners and between Davy and one of his partners is provided below with codes marked as follows:

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Sample #1

Krissy,

[Hi, hope your week is going well! No, I have never been to Minnesota, but I am sure I will make it there one day. ID] [Have you ever been outside of Minnesota, to another state? IC] [My favorite place to visit in North Carolina is the zoo. It is located in my hometown so my family and I go often. I just love animals so the zoo is the perfect place to go. ID] [Have you ever been to a zoo? IC] Take care and have a great week!

Your Friend, Diana :)

Hi Diana,

[I like zoos, too. We have two zoos close to us. The Minnesota zoo is big and Como zoo is small. Last year I went to Arizona with my mom and my brother Robbie. I have been to Disneyworld in California. I like to go to my grandparents' cabin. ID] [What do you like to do in the fall? IC]  
Your friend,  
Krissy

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Sample #2

Hola Barbara, [My favorite subject is math. I really like baseball. I like playing with my dog Buster. ID] [Do you have any pets? IC] [What did the hot dog say when it won the race? I'm the wiener! ID]  
Adios Davy

Hey, Davy, [I laughed out loud in the computer lab when I read your email. I like to sit with my cat, Shadow. I wish I could think of something funny. Oh! I have a joke for you. Why didn't the skeleton cross the road? He didn't have the guts. ID][ "Hola" and "Adios" are Spanish words aren't they? I only know how to count to ten in Spanish, but I would love to know more. Why don't you write me a joke in Spanish and then in English, and I will try to learn some new words. I look forward to your emails. Adios mi amigo (is that right?) CC] Barbara  
Hola Barbra [Knock Knock. Who's There? Boo. Boo Who? Why are you crying? It is only a joke. I like your joke. It was funny. ID] [Nino means boy in spanish. Nina means girl in spanish. CC] Adios! Davy

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ID= Inclusive/ Divergent (conversation)

IC= Inclusive/ Convergent (inquiry)

CC= Critical/ Convergent (instruction)

CD= Critical/ Divergent (debate)

## DISCUSSION

Across two very different adolescents with severe communication impairments and seven different communication partners, a dialogic pattern of inclusivity was created and maintained. Both the adolescents and their undergraduate teacher education email partners shared information about their interests and activities and inquired about one another in open and non-judgmental ways. The inclusivity of the written dialogues was observed not only in the dialogic patterns, which were primarily conversation and inquiry, but also in the substantial and substantiative contributions of both email partners to the total dialogue.

The most striking finding of this study is that email provides an apparently more leveled playing field than face-to-face interaction environments. Since the groundbreaking study of Harris (1982), it has been observed that speaking partners in general, and teachers in classrooms specifically, dominate interactions with individuals who use augmentative and alternative communication (AAC). Students who use AAC seldom initiate communication, rarely ask questions, communicate infrequently and when they do, it is typically to label something or provide an answer to a yes/no question (see, e.g., von Tetzchner & Martinsen, 1996). It has been proposed that this persistent interaction pattern is a major contributor to the limited narrative

skills and novice writing qualities observed in adolescents and adults who use AAC (see, e.g., Smith, 2005).

In the current study, however, two adolescent participants with severe communication impairments engaged in extended and extensive written dialogue across multiple semesters. With technologies and teacher support, they initiated communication, asked questions, elaborated responses, and, while not equal partners in strict word counts or previous characterizations of the writing process, were substantial contributors to the ongoing success of an elaborated written conversation. It appears that written language environments, in this case email exchanges, offer supports to communication often not available in face-to-face interaction. With assistive technologies that aid spelling or message construction and significantly reduced time pressures (i.e., “listeners” are willing to provide almost infinitely longer “wait time” in written dialogues than in face-to-face interactions), these adolescent students who used AAC seemed more able and willing to communicate their thoughts. The long-term impact of such interactions, not just on written but also face-to-face interactions, has yet to be explored, but it is reasonable to surmise that substantially increased opportunities to engage in motivated written communication exchanges may lead to more advanced oral communication skills.

One of the participants, Davy, was able to transition from the highly structured supports of Clicker to more independent composition with Co:Writer spelling support. In doing so, little decline in the quality, quantity, or nature of his email composition was noted. The augmentative communication literature suggests that picture-based communication systems support comprehension but not word identification or spelling (Bishop, Rankin, & Mirinda, 1994; Rankin, Harwood, & Mirinda, 1994). While picture-supported writing is widely used with children who have severe communication disorders, it is important for professionals to continually explore supports that might transition such students to more independent communication of their own thoughts in their own voices.

Email was an effective method to motivate communication in this study and should continue to be explored by educators as a regular component of the writing curriculum, particularly for struggling learners. Websites such as Gaggle.net (<http://www.gaggle.net>) offer student email accounts in a safe environment. Audio email and video email, and many other motivating and free information communication technologies, are available that can further enhance learning opportunities for all students: blogging (audio or video); instant messaging, Internet telephone, and audio and video conferencing. Technology environments in some cases may offer a more leveled playing and social environment for students with special needs.

### **Implications for Research**

The current study suggests a promising application of email technology in enhancing the written communication skills of adolescents with severe communication disorders. However, given that the results are reported from just two such students, a good deal of research is required to explicate just how and for whom and in what ways email and assistive technologies may support written language learning and use. The current study explored the nature of written dialogue between the participants. It is important to also investigate the scaffolds that may be supportive in enhancing the writing of either partner. Is, for example, the assumption that

undergraduates would interact in richer, more normalized ways by not knowing the nature of the students' special needs supported by data? Would teacher preparation students perhaps be even more supportive if they knew their partners had severe communication impairments, or would their messages take on more of a didactic tone or structure? Would a didactic structure be more or less supportive of motivation to write or progress in learning how to write? These are questions deserving further investigation.

The current study did not explore written language instruction but rather a particular and apparently supportive writing opportunity. The types of instruction that may increase the quantity and quality of individual writing or rate of improvement in writing skills in this environment remain to be explored. Likewise it will be important to study the kinds of technological, material, and interactive scaffolds that will be optimally supportive of enhanced writing, and, particularly given the individual diversity of individuals with severe communication impairments, to consider frameworks or systems of scaffolding. It is particularly important to explore ways of increasing the more independent and less structured supports that will give struggling students greater access to their own ideas and voice. Danny's transition to greater independence suggests one method worthy of further exploration.

Finally, the current study was conducted by engaging undergraduate teacher education students in email exchanges with adolescents who have severe communication disorders and beginning literacy skills. Whether such a structure and technology might work equally well with younger students or other populations require careful examination. Whether other technologies that incorporate written language (e.g., listservs, blogs, instant messaging, text messaging) might be more or less supportive in increasing learning or motivation is a subject worthy of study.

What we learned from the current study is that email as a written language technology was easily incorporated into frequent and regular authorship opportunities. These opportunities were motivated by the responses of a real audience. The nature and quantity of the resulting written products suggest the importance of incorporating this and other purposeful writing into the curriculum of adolescents with severe communication impairments. The email communication environment afforded the students in this study was supportive and productive and worthy of further exploration by teachers and researchers.

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# **The Role of Literacy in Tilting the Balance from Vulnerability and High-risk Behaviors to Resiliency and Sustainable Behaviors**

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Many of today's students are labeled as "at-risk," "disadvantaged," "vulnerable," and/or "underprivileged" and do not meet literacy standards. Meanwhile, in many of these students' neighborhoods, low-literate parents bearing similar labels enroll in community-based family literacy programs to help their children develop educational skills for academic success and seek to improve their own reading and writing abilities.

Engagement in reading may substantially compensate for low family income and educational background and engaged readers might sometimes overcome obstacles to achievement (Guthrie & Wigfield, 2000). Further, students engaged in reading achieve more when they have self-efficacy or confidence in how they read to learn (Guthrie, 2004). The foundation for such learning requires positive human relationships and when "students feel disconnected, they won't succeed" (Santa, 2006, p. 467). Even so, the challenge of overcoming obstacles to develop a sense of self-efficacy may be formidable. Many students and their families carry burdens of poverty that often include histories of violence, abuse, and neglect and in many cases they are disconnected from a sense of community that nurtures learning.

In this paper, we examine additional resources and strategies that may be effective in creating programs to address challenges facing secondary and adult literacy educators. Our guiding questions are: (a) What role can literacy instruction play in assisting youth and their families cope with challenging school, family and community situations, (b) within the confines of our role as literacy educators how might we assist those who endeavor to tilt the balance of student behavior from vulnerability and high-risk towards resiliency and sustainable behaviors, and (c) what aspects of teacher preparation—specifically, what knowledge, skills and dispositions on the part of those who teach reading and writing—might lead to increased student success?

To address these questions, in the following sections we first offer a brief overview of childhood and adolescent vulnerability. Second, we summarize the literature of childhood resiliency and related pedagogies to provide insights into adaptive factors and methods that lead to social and academic competence. Third, we explore the role of literacy in fostering sustainable resiliency among participants of two types of programs: coping skills and community based family literacy.

## **At-Risk and Out of Balance**

There is a considerable body of data indicating that many U.S. students live in a culture of familial and societal violence and suffering. Juveniles and young adults are the most

victimized age group in the United States. Juveniles experience non-fatal violent victimization (e.g., rape, sexual assault, aggravated assault; robbery) at a rate 2.5 times higher than adults (Snyder & Sickmund, 2006). Further, children are the victims of 2/3s of forcible rapes (Kilpatrick, Edmunds, & Seymour, 1992). Additionally, homicide and suicide are leading causes of death for adolescents. For example, in 2002, homicide was the fourth leading cause of death for children ages 1 through 11 and the third cause of death for youth ages 12-17. Further, instances of adolescent suicide, an indicator of suffering, isolation and despair, have shown significant increases in the last two decades (Snyder & Sickmund, 2006).

Attempts by young people and their families to restore balance to their lives after victimization are often hindered and sometimes compounded by challenges of severe poverty. In the United States, where we have the highest rate of childhood poverty among developed nations (Berliner, 2005), nearly one third of working families have incomes below the amount needed to meet basic needs (Allegretto, 2005). And, poor populations are often impacted by natural catastrophes most acutely, as witnessed after Hurricane Katrina (Metz et. al, 2005).

What are young people to do? Those who live in families that mistreat them, who live in dangerous neighborhoods, and who attend school with hostile and delinquent peers cannot choose to leave. It is this absence of choice over people and environments that increase juveniles' vulnerability to victimization and consequential participation in related high-risk behaviors (Berman, Kurtines, Silverman, & Serafini, 1996; Hashima & Finkelhor, 1999). The consequences can be devastating. Problems that may result include health and educational issues, including poor self-esteem, depression, attachment, personality and sexual disorders, and reduced academic performance (Kilpatrick et al., 2003; Van der Kolk, Perry & Herman, 1991).

And, what are educators to do? Literacy teachers are generally only trained to teach language-based communications. What are they to do when academic performance and learning is disrupted by violence, suffering, isolation, and despair? We begin to address these questions in the next sections of this paper.

### **Crossing Disciplinary Boundaries for Insights and Strategies**

The desire to teach in a manner that enables children to more effectively cope with stressors in their lives has led some educators to adopt a restorative pedagogy grounded in "childhood resiliency," a body of research that calls for a shift in thinking from established pedagogies of what is "wrong" with "problem" children to the study of what is "right" with them, that is, what it is about children and their social environments that enables them to adapt and in some cases thrive despite traumatic stressors in their lives (Benard, 2004; Werner 2006; Wright & Masten, 2006). Longitudinal studies of populations from urban, suburban, and rural communities have been conducted with the resilient offspring of psychotic parents, alcoholic parents, abusive mothers, divorced parents, teenage parents, and with children raised under conditions of extreme poverty, detailed subsequently. Further, cross-cultural universality of individual and protective factors may be found in anecdotal narrative studies of the resiliency of abandoned, orphaned, and refugee children who survived war horrors (Ayala-Canales, 1984; Hemmendinger & Krell, 2000; Heskin, 1980; Moskovitz, 1983; Rachman, 1978; Rosenblatt, 1983; Sheehy, 1987; Werner, 1990).

These studies suggest that resiliency is primarily a process. The dispositional characteristics associated with resiliency (e.g. internal locus of control, positive self-esteem, autonomy) and the coping skills needed to adapt to stressors (e.g., assertiveness, anger control, self-reflection, problem solving and positive attitude) can be modeled, learned, and supported (Benard, 2004; Fox, 1995; Sesma, Mannes, & Scales, 2006).

One of the most important factors associated with effective coping is the support of “kith and kin” (families, alternative caregivers, communities, peer groups, and schools) that often play significant roles in providing external support to foster resiliency. Conclusions from Werner and Smith’s (1992) 30-year longitudinal study of resiliency in high-risk children emphasized the critical function of having a bond with at least one adult in the family or with one adult in the community. While the mother is often the most significant adult in early childhood, safe passage through the tumultuous years of adolescence is often attributed to bonding with significant non-parental adults such as teachers and school staff (Smink, 1990; Taylor & Thomas, 2002). Thus, schools may be in an ideal position to provide students and their families with the social processes and mechanisms that might foster intrapersonal and interpersonal competence.

In addition, the literature of resilience provides educators with several examples of restorative instructional methodologies that require teachers to always empower, never disempower (Herman, 1992), embed instruction in the “spiritual qualities of the heart – courage, commitment, belief, and intuitive understanding” (Katz & St. Denis, 1991, p. 28), model the conviction that life makes sense despite the inevitable adversities each of us encounters (Salzman, 2003) and teach and learn in ways that are mutually transformative (Fox & Serlin, 1996; Wolpow & Askov, 1998, 2001).

This being the case, how can teachers help their students tilt the balance from vulnerability to resiliency? To see how these may be actualized, and to illustrate the potential role that literacy plays in such a process, in the following sections of this paper we examine a coping skills program in a rural community and the movement towards community-based family literacy programs in urban areas.

### **Teaching Coping Skills to At-Risk Adolescents**

Approximately 1,800 students attend Mount Vernon High School, located in a rapidly developing rural community of northwestern Washington State. More than twenty years ago, aware of the growing numbers of students who returned to the high school after involvement with Juvenile Court, Child Protective Services, in-patient drug and alcohol centers, and other community agencies serving the needs of fractured families, the Mount Vernon School district instituted a Coping Skills Program. The program takes the form of a class of fifteen to twenty students that meets daily. The class is facilitated by a certified secondary teacher who is also a qualified drug and alcohol counselor with more than 30 years experience working with “at-risk” populations. Its curriculum meets Washington State standards in reading, writing, communication, health, and social studies. Students who maintain membership for a semester earn credit comparable to any other social science elective. A longitudinal qualitative case study of this program revealed significant decreases in substance abuse, arrests, and pregnancies, with concurrent increases in school attendance, academic performance, family resolutions, and healthy

peer relationships. More than forty percent of students who enroll in this class graduated from high school (Fox, 1995).

The learning objectives of the coping skills class include: “To teach the skills necessary to cope with an ‘at-risk society’; to learn alternatives to participation in our national epidemic of violence; to offer coping strategies to students experiencing the struggle to forge intrapersonal meaning and social competency; and to provide a daily, therapeutic forum within which students learn to cope with dysfunctional selves, families, and schools.” The curriculum is designed to help students identify and practice basic skills that tend to foster personal resiliency. These include practice in “feeling management skills,” especially fear and anger; critical and creative problem strategies, personal learning and teaching skills, ways to recognize and alter self-destructive behaviors; bonding and trusting exercises – especially with drug independent peers; and instruction in “fair-fighting,” leadership, internal control, and effective communication.

### ***The Role of Literacy in Teaching Coping Skills***

Although the instructional methods employed in this class most closely resemble a therapeutic “support group” with encounters and discussion, there is a strong literacy component. Upon entering the class, students are instructed that they each already own the textbook. Their text is the story of their own lives and the task of the course is for them to learn to read and rewrite their life text. As with the reading of most literary texts, readers can understand their own stories best through insightful interpretation of the language used by the writers. The coping skills teacher encourages students to listen carefully for word choice and models judicious use of literary devices, especially metaphor, when attempting to make meaning. For example, when students say, “I don’t know” they are encouraged to dig deeper for words to explain the “dragon with which they are wrestling.” One student, resigned to separation from an absentee parent, spoke of this relationship as “a quiet wasteland, dry without the rain of any positive expectation.”

Much of the reading and writing done by students involves keeping journals in which they monitor “life support” inventories. Specifically, students are required to examine and write about what they have done each week to maintain or improve their physical fitness, nutrition, sleep and rest, assertiveness skills, centering and solitude, fun, meeting of goals, support given and received, and creativity. In so doing, they provide themselves and their teacher with “. . . detailed operationalization of propositions regarding positive changes in relation to self, family, and education” (Fox, 1995, p. 150).

Discussion of life-support inventories heightened student awareness of the role they play in creating their own vulnerability and/or resiliency. Literacy skills, especially those involved in keeping a personal journal, play a key role in assisting the development of the dispositional skills of assertiveness, anger control, self-reflection, and problem solving. The following are a few examples from journals shared by students:

When I am feeling hurt, angry, hate, resentment or disappointment. . . taking the time to review anger-filled interactions . . . writing out the dialogue which invited my angry response [enables me] to identify when I gave up assertiveness and chose hostility.

I'm growing; using the power of my choices not to make things worse . . . [I've learned that] assertiveness is better than madness.

I'm learning how to fair-fight, how to reprogram my vocabulary to help me achieve better and higher goals . . . . I'm learning how not to be derogatory toward myself . . . I've learned how to eat, you know, when you're doing a lot of drugs, you don't eat . . . . Believe me, I eat now. I exercise every day. I only have 17% body fat and I do have a positive feeling about myself.

(Fox, 1995, pp.167-182)

***The Role of Literacy in Teaching Non-Violent Communication and Social Competence***

The lives of “at-risk” students are full of crisis and drama – parents who use drugs and abuse their children raise young people with anger and distrust. Students often enter the coping skills classroom near rage or implosion due to parent or teacher actions that are perceived by them as unjust and/or threatening. At these times, students benefit from instruction received in Rosenberg’s (2003) “Giraffe Talk,” a paradigm for non-violent verbal and written communication. This metaphor is derived from the facts that giraffes have the largest heart among mammals and assertively stick their necks out to get what they need. As illustrated in the following table, giraffe talk requires students to first name what they have observed, then state what they are feeling, to then explain that feeling, and finally to make a request.

*Giraffe Talk*

When I observe . . .	Describe events without using evaluative judgments, labeling, or name-calling. What events triggered your response? What did you see, hear, or witness?
I feel . . .	Name the feelings that were stirred in you. Was it fear, sadness, anger, hurt, curiosity, rejection, excitement...?
Because I . . .	A statement of what I think you are thinking (or believe) about me. (For example: Because I imagine you think I am dumb. Because I imagine that you think it is funny when I am hurting. Because I imagine that you don't care about me...etc.)
I want (Would you be willing	A request for concrete,

to) . .	specific actions that the other person can do to help you meet your needs. The request needs to be positively framed and should not be a demand, threat, or guilt-shaming manipulation. The listener to this request has the right to say “no.” If you don’t get your needs met, move on.
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The first author of this paper has observed dozens of examples of “giraffe talk” used by coping skills students and ways in which teachers incorporated literacy to help students reconcile difficult problems. In one such instance a teacher had humiliated Mariposa (all names presented in this chapter are pseudonyms), a female student. Mariposa was dealing with struggles at home – most recently her mother’s alcoholic live-in boyfriend (who she described as someone “who couldn’t manage to take his morning shower without a beer in hand ... the empty bottle from which seemed to inevitably fly in my direction”).

Mariposa had managed, for the first time since entering high school, to attend consecutive weeks of classes, including her 7:30 AM biology class. Mariposa considered this a significant accomplishment. Inspired and encouraged by the comments of other coping skills members, she studied hard for a biology test. Mariposa arrived the day of the test with “sharpened pencils for bubbling-in the Scantron answer sheet” in hand, as she reported. However, she was a bit shy on sleep because of what she described as the “drunken scream fest” between her mother and her boyfriend late into the night before the exam.

Mariposa, however, missed the teacher’s instructions to bring a pen for writing an essay on the exam. On the morning of the test, she sensed a derogatory tone in her teacher’s voice as she reminded the class they had been told to bring a pen and a pencil to class. Thus, Mariposa decided not to ask for a pen and completed both portions of the exam in pencil. When her graded exam was returned all the multiple-choice questions were marked correct, but her essay earned zero points because she had not used a pen. She received an overall grade of “F.” Mariposa was prepared to fly into a rage, the kind of rage that landed her father in prison – the kind of rage that her mother’s boyfriend consistently used to bully people to do things his way – the kind of rage that had resulted in previous school suspensions.

To make a long story short, after nearly an hour of coping group debriefing and discussion, Mariposa wrote the following note to her teacher:

Dear Mr. Jones:

When I saw my paper with its failing grade, I felt embarrassed, hurt and angry. This is because I thought you were like my father, that you wanted to see me fail. I did study and I was able to answer each of the multiple choice questions correctly. After talking with others, I realize that I am at fault for not following your directions. I used pencil and this was reason to not give me credit for my answer. Would you be willing to read my essay and tell me if I answered it correctly? I realize I don’t deserve credit, but I would appreciate any feedback or encouragement you might provide.

In this case, dispositional characteristics associated with resiliency (e.g. internal locus of control, positive self-esteem, autonomy) and coping skills needed to adapt to stressors (e.g., assertiveness, anger control, self-reflection, problem solving) were modeled, learned, and applied. Literacy played a significant role in this process. Despite the inevitable adversities Mariposa was encountering, by putting pen to paper, this student was empowered to make sense out of her life.

We think that it is fortunate for “at-risk” adolescents, such as Mariposa, to have opportunities to participate in programs that help them to learn coping skills needed to forge what “intrapersonal meaning and social competency,” as was the case in the coping skills program described in this section. Children in this program were fortunate to have a daily, therapeutic forum where they could learn to cope with “dysfunctional selves, families and schools.” But what of the low-literate adolescents who are not afforded this opportunity? In light of the literature of childhood resiliency, in the following section we re-examine family literacy programs for low-literate parents and the potential of these programs to help children and parents adjust to violence and poverty.

### **Family Literacy to Foster Resilience**

In her review of two decades of investigation into models, methods, and data about resiliency, Masten (2001) concludes that resilience is made up of ordinary rather than extraordinary processes. She refers to “ordinary magic” as the unexceptional factors that give children resilience against poverty, low-literate parents, and so forth. One such factor that leads to resilience, according to Masten is parenting:

Effective parenting...also appears to be protective with respect to antisocial behavior...Again, it is not clear what processes might be involved, including genetic covariance. However, experimental intervention designs that demonstrate a change in child behavior as a function of changes in parenting behavior...support the conclusion of resilience investigators that parenting quality has protective power, particularly against antisocial behavior in risky environments. (p. 6)

The goal of family literacy is to enable low-literate parents to help their children develop literacy skills while also improving their own academic abilities. Through the process of strengthening literacy among family members, these programs promote resilience by strengthening bonds among family members, strengthening dispositional skills such as positive self-esteem and autonomy, and modeling appropriate coping skills such as self-reflection and problem solving.

#### ***What is Family Literacy?***

Family literacy programs provide services to families who have an adult with an educational need and who also have a child ranging in age from birth to eight years. Family literacy, as defined by the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, Title I is unique in that it is composed of four instructional components: (a) parenting education so that parents become their child’s first teacher and full collaborators in the education of their child, (b) interactive literacy

activities between parents and their children, (c) adult education so that parents may become economically self sufficient (adult basic and secondary-level education and/or instruction for English language learners), and (d) age-appropriate early childhood education so that children can experience success in school and life (U.S. Department of Education, 2003). Family literacy programs are based on the concept that families need to receive a combination of services to make lasting changes in their lives by improving their level of literacy.

Together, these four components aim to improve the literacy and basic education levels of parents, help them become partners in the education of their children, and support children in reaching their full potential as learners. In addition to academic gains, parents strengthen their dispositional skills of positive self-esteem and autonomy. They become more self-reflective and learn problem-solving skills needed to help their children succeed in school.

The children benefit in terms of their language and literacy development through frequent parent-child book reading (Bus, van Ijzendoorn & Pelligrini, 1995; Lonigan & Whitehurst, 1998; Senechal, LeFevre, Thomas, & Daley, 1998). Regardless of socio-economic status, Hart and Risley (1995,1999) found that parents who talk with their children influence the development of their children's language use, vocabulary development, and learning. Further, Darling and Westberg (2004) found through a meta-analysis of the impact of parent involvement on reading acquisition of children kindergarten to grade three, that training parents with specific strategies about how to teach children to read produced positive results. In addition to these academic gains, children who spend time bonding with their parents and books also benefit from greater emotional and social growth that fosters attachment, assertiveness, and many of the resiliency factors necessary for their development (Werner, 1996; Powell, 2004; Pianta, 2004).

### ***Community-Based Family literacy***

The National Center for Family Literacy is attempting to implement family literacy programs in non-traditional settings, such as the Boys and Girls Clubs and the Salvation Army. Several issues arise when implementing family literacy in community organizations. First, the primary purpose of community organizations, such as the Salvation Army, is not literacy development. Fostering resiliency and social competence among children and families, however, is a major goal. In this vein, community workers involved in family literacy organizations are usually not trained teachers.

Second, although national legislation authorizing family literacy requires "sufficient intensity in terms of hours, and of sufficient duration, to make sustainable changes in a family" (U.S. Department of Education, 2003, p. 2), this may be a problem with community programs that are operating with other goals. Typically, these programs foster resiliency by providing a safe and nurturing environment for youth that is removed from factors such as gang violence and drugs. The vision is that these programs can provide their usual services and also strengthen bonds among parents and children through literacy and thereby foster the resiliency of the family as a whole.

The following steps in program implementation were derived from analyzing these issues. First, the family literacy model was introduced to community organizations. Second, staff analyzed the needs of their organizations in regard to family literacy. From these self-analyses, program goals were derived, leading to written implementation plans. For example, although an

Atlanta Salvation Army program operated an adult education program under special grant funding, it needed to make the program permanent with state funding. In comparison, Louisville sites did not have adult education programs (except for a small volunteer program operating in one site for special needs individuals). None of the programs had the other components of family literacy, especially the parent-child interactive literacy component. To implement an effective family literacy program, the crucial role of the parent-child interactive literacy component needed to be understood and implemented (see Grinder, Askov, Longoria Saenz, & Aldemir, 2005).

## Discussion

In this paper we briefly reviewed literature that illustrates how some U.S. children and their families live in a culture of isolating familial and societal violence and suffering, which influences negative educational outcomes. However, the literature on resiliency supports the notion that despite extraordinary hardship some students and their families who show deficiencies in intrapersonal and interpersonal competency can achieve levels of personal and social resiliency. These skills can be modeled, taught and learned, and literacy skills play a significant role in the process. In this respect we think public schools and community-based organizations are in excellent positions to provide environments, curricula, and opportunities for students and their families.

While this paper presents potential roles of literacy in fostering resiliency in coping skills and family literacy programs, it does not address the role of the literacy educators in preparing future teachers to make meaningful contributions in this area. Anecdotal conversations lead us to believe that most literacy teachers are not aware of resiliency research and its relevance to their practice. Although family literacy programs are not required to adhere to national standards, and staff probably does not know resiliency research literature, these programs do have the goal of strengthening the family and deserve additional attention by educators.

Finally, we believe that if a part of literacy educator preparation concentrated on the knowledge, skills, and dispositions necessary to foster sustainable resiliency it would perhaps lead to improved teacher performance in all areas of teaching. Literacy plays an important role in tilting the balance from vulnerability and high-risk behaviors to more hopeful life choices.

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